

Sunday School Program

Grade 12

Class of St. Philopateer



PREFACE

This is the translation of the Sunday School syllabus set for youth in high school. The Youth Services Committee of the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate has published it in Arabic. The Committee is compiling a new syllabus for Ecclesiastical Education presided by H. H. Pope Shenouda III.

Obviously, there are enormous differences in the context of Egyptian and American life. This is true when we compare the quality of life, the education system, media facilities, as well as cultural differences. Such considerations urge us to revise and improve upon this syllabus to select what is appropriate to the American context.

It is truly a source of joy to know that H. H. Pope Shenouda III has actually initiated the efforts to produce a unified syllabus for all our churches abroad. We hope the result will see the light soon and become the final reference for everyone concerned.

My thanks go to all who have contributed towards this translation which will be used temporarily, yet it rills a deep need for a guiding handbook.

May you all be blessed through the prayers of our beloved Pope and the most blessed holy fathers of the Church.

May the Grace of God be upon you all.
His Grace Bishop Moussa
Bishop for Youth

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(1) The Functions of the Church: Martyrdom as One of the Church's Functions

Aim

To develop the spirit of martyrdom in a Christian manner, devoid of any extremism or fanaticism

Verse

Revelation 12:10

Introduction

A historical account of the various ages of martyrdom:

1. Ever since St. Stephen offerings have been presented to express love to Jesus Christ. Even until today war is declared between the kingdom of the Lord and that of Satan.
2. The word "martyr" means a person whose blood has been shed on account of faith. It also means someone who declares his faith and preaches the Word of the Holy Bible. Moreover, it means testifying through the observation of God's Commandments.
3. The church has adopted the 284 AD, which marks the start of the tyrannical Diocletian reign, as the beginning of the Coptic Calendar year (the Nayrouz Feast).
4. To escape death Christians were required to do two things:
 - a. Consider the emperor a god and worship him.
 - b. Bow to idols and offer incense, if only by appearance, without truly believing.

However, Christians rejected such conditions for two reasons:

1. In Christianity, the inner core and the outward appearance are one and the same thing (Romans 10:9,10). To the heathens however, interest was on outward appearances, devoid of any belief. That is something that Christianity condemns as hypocrisy (Matthew 23:25-28).
2. In Christianity, the individual is granted freedom in its widest sense. As a Christian, an individual worship the Lord because he fully desires to do so. It is not because he has inherited that religion or because law forces him to.

The First Question

What are the most important reasons for the outburst of persecution?

1. The strong widespread of the Christian teachings were considered a threat to the heathen Roman Empire: Because the early Christians were fervently jealous in spreading the good news of the Bible, their teachings became widespread. This news and the great power in which the Christians transmitted to the world aroused the anger of the heathens.
2. The proclamation that Jesus Christ reigns as King over all hearts: The heathen world did not understand that the Lord Jesus said, "My Kingdom is not of this world" while at the same time He said, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Luke 20:25). This was considered a rebellion against the authority of the state, even though Christians prayed for the Emperor and his governors.
3. The conflict between good and evil: Christianity is the religion of truth and evil always resists truth, (Luke 12:11,12; Luke 21:14; Matthew 18:18).
4. The clash between Christianity and heathen philosophy: St. Paul considered that the ignorance of preaching (God) is wiser than the wisdom of men and the philosophies of the world. He clarified that faith in Christ does not need worldly philosophy but the

simplicity of heart and surrender of oneself to God with a deep sense of the need for Christ's salvation.

The Second Question

What is the deep motivation for Martyrdom through the shedding of blood?

1. The Cross is a sign of Christian pride, the secret of its strength and glory, and bear the Cross a condition for discipleship (Matthew 16:24).
2. Christians live with a deep sense of indebtedness to God, who has sought, with love, to suffer in order to save His loved ones from the grip of death.
3. Pain has become a spiritual gift, (Romans 8:17; Corinthians 1:24; Philemon 1:29; Philemon 3:10).
4. Pain has become a spiritual pleasure, and death has been transformed from a dreaded enemy into a beloved friend (I Peter 4).
5. If Christianity is love, then death on its behalf is the peak of love and sacrifice): The church servant should read to the youth the letter of St. Ignatius to the Church of Rome, He wrote it on his way to be thrown to the wild beasts. Commentary of the letter: Christians have experienced the meaning of death with Christ and the resurrection with Him as a result; death does not frighten them (Romans 8:36; 2 Corinthians 4:10-11).

The Third Question

How do we view Martyrdom? How have martyrs faced persecution?

1. Martyrdom is a passion, a gift, and a joy (Philippians 1:29; John 16:22). One of the ministers of Nero testified to that when he saw the martyrs singing while they stood in the hungry lions' den, the arena of martyrdom. The minister shouted at the tyrant king, saying, "My Lord you can tear their flesh into pieces, but you cannot tear away their joy".
2. Martyrdom is courage: St. Caprianos, bishop of Carthage, wrote, "The condemned were far more courageous than their oppressors, for their beaten and torn bodies overcame the instruments used for torture".
3. Martyrdom is a means of preaching. It has led to thriving and development of the church: The scholar, Tertullian, says, "The blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church". History, too, testifies that those who have believed due to the sufferings of martyrs are more than those who have believed as a result of preaching. This is true on account of the miracles that accompanied the death of martyrs, and their display of steadfastness, tolerance and patience.
4. Martyrdom is proof of the truth of Christianity (Luke 21:12-17; Isaiah 54:17): The Historian Chaff says, "we do not know of any other religion that has withstood the test of time like Christianity: three centuries have passed during which it has constantly endured fanaticism and yet has not depended on any material means for support" (John 16:33; John 10:19; Mark 16:17-18).
5. Martyrdom is a practical proof of Christian virtues: The pain and deep suffering could not cause martyrs to abandon their Christian virtues. The following are examples of such virtues:
 - a. Steadfastness and long suffering: Tertullian the scholar, addressing rulers and judges said, "many of your writers have encouraged long suffering and death, but your words have not recruited followers, as has happened in Christianity".
 - b. Meekness: Even though there were many Christians subjects they never rebelled

or threatened; some were soldiers, leaders and rulers. An example of this is the Tibetan legion, which consisted of six thousand soldiers, all of whom died as martyrs.

- c. Loving the enemy: Martyrs loved their enemies in obedience to the commandment of their teacher (Luke 6:27-28). St. Stephen prayed for those who stoned him: “Lord, do not charge them with this sin”.
- d. Parity and Chastity: One of the cruelest punishments inflicted on men martyrs was putting them in brothels. They could have preferred to be beheaded rather than lose their chastity. The story of Butamina, the pure virgin, testifies to that.
- e. No worldly interest: Martyrs despised the world in all its aspects, their wealth was taken and they were dismissed from their jobs and from public life. Many of them lived in the enormous Roman catacombs.
- f. Eternal love: Living their life in heaven while still in the flesh. Martyrs have longed for eternity and life in heaven, and with their great desire for eternity they saw the heavens open up and there were crowns ready for them while undergoing indescribable torture (Matthew 25:34).

The Fourth Question

How can we, as youth, testify to the Lord?

We have observed how our fathers faced death and as we study their lives we feel embarrassed and wonder, “Can we become martyrs?” St. John Chrysostom replies to that and says: “Do you think that crucifixion on the cross is the only way of martyrdom? If this were true, we deprive Job of his crown”.

Some landmarks of the road to martyrdom:

- 1. Testify to the Lord to counteract sin: Daniel, who was exiled to a distant country, could be the best example of testimony. He protected his heart from being enticed by the pleasures of the court. For as much as he considered himself dead to these passions the Lord strengthened and saved him from the jealousy of the envious, and from the lion’s den. The apostle calls us opponents or fighters against sin even until blood (Hebrews 12:4). St. Pachomius taught disciples, saying, “fatigue due to constant worship and bowing constitutes martyrdom”.
- 2. Testify to Christ to overcome your own body: When you joyfully deprive your body of the pleasure of food and control it to stay up late and pray, in this, you become martyrs (Romans 13:1; I Corinthians 6:20). Therefore let us begin to face our bodies so that we may offer them as a holy offering to God (I Peter 4:1).
- 3. Honesty in keeping the commandments: In our practical life we often face the difficult choice of either observing the Lord’s commandments in spite of any joyful suffering involved or of breaking them so as to be relieved of their burden. The Lord’s commandments imply material loss, whereas their disregard implies eternal loss. Examples of such stressful choices are:
 - a. Honesty in family life;
 - b. Honesty during examinations; and
 - c. Honesty in helping others.
- 4. Testify to the Lord before your friends (I John 2): Youths in high school often face pressure in their family life, at school, in the street, and especially among friends. They

either give up to influence of their group, attracted by their evil habits, or they successfully may observe the way to repentance. In choosing the latter attitude they live in inward peace and progress internally towards forming a personality that is both psychologically and socially mature. How much do our alienated friends, who are far from the Lord, need strong models of the victorious life!

5. Testify to the Lord before the children of this world: Everyday, we meet people who have different principles. In fact, we see the same principles shaken and confused in the twenty first century. Principles dissolved and crumbled before the wave of pride, extreme freedom, materialism, immorality, and atheism. Isaiah the prophet realized, through the spirit, such a condition (Isaiah 4:3,4; Ephesians 4:17,19; Ephesians 5:7,8,11). Let us not join them in dishonesty, laziness, and deceit, nor agree to wrongdoing.
6. Testify to the Lord before the world: An honest youth is dead to the world, for the world no longer glitters before his eyes. He finds no joy in material gain and, consequently, is not saddened by loss. Rather, he thanks God at all times; he struggles and perseveres at school or at work. He does so not on account of worldly ambition or evil competition, but for the glory and satisfaction of the Lord (I John 2:15).

Exercises

Write out these verses and your meditation upon them:

1. Testimony against the body and the world: Romans 8:8-14; Galatians 5:24; Galatians 6:14-17; I John 2:15-17; I Corinthians 6:12-20.
2. Testimony in crucifying the self: John 12:24-26; Mark 8:34; Luke 14:26-27; Matthew 10:37,38; 2 Corinthians 1:9-10.
3. Testimony by suffering: Romans 8:18-25,36; Hebrews 11:32-39; Psalms 116:12-13; I Peter 5:1; Philemon 3:7-11; 2 Corinthians 4:10,11; Acts 5:41; 2 Corinthians 5:1-9; Philemon 1:18-23; 1 Peter 1:6,7; Hebrews 10:32-34.
4. Testimony by preaching: Mark 16:5-18; Luke 10:19; Acts 1:8; 2 Corinthians 5:11-14.

Questions

1. Mention the causes leading to the outburst of persecution.
2. How does the Church prepare its children for martyrdom?

(2) Worship: Living Membership in the Church **(The Liturgy and the Union with Christ in the Eucharist)**

Aim

The Liturgy and the Eucharist constitute the practical realization of fellowship and communion with God and with believers.

Verses

Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-26; Luke 22:17-20; John 6:48-58; Acts 2:42; 1 Corinthians 10:15-22; 1 Corinthians 11:20-31; Hebrews 13

Introduction

The church servant reads (1 Corinthians 10:15-22) and focuses on the following:

1. The Liturgy and the Eucharist constitute the participation in the mystery of our union in Christ.
2. The Liturgy and the Eucharist constitute participation in the unity among believers.
3. How do I practice the prayers of the Liturgy and the Eucharist?

At this stage the Church servant clarifies to his children how the collective, national, and ritual worship (Liturgy), that lead to communion are not simply a church function. Rather, it is its life.

Main Points

One: The Liturgy and the Eucharist constitute participation in the mystery of our union with Christ.

1. Steadfastness in Christ: This means full attachment to Christ, forming deep ties with Him and originating through Him (John 6:56; Matthew 26:26). As we unite with Christ, we take on His image and likeness and become partners in the Divine Nature (II Peter 1:4; Ephesians 5:3; I Corinthians 6:17; I Peter 1:12). The Eucharist is the peak of the Liturgy through which we offer the sacrifice of praise to God (Hebrews 13:15).
2. The Eucharist is holiness and parity: The priest begins the prayer of sanctification from the Liturgy. This indicates the mysterious efficacy of the Eucharist through which the partaker's heart is granted light and receives resources to conquer evil (Romans 8:37). St. Macarius the Great says, "With this mystery, you are protected against the enemies. Moreover, anyone who underestimates this mystery is overpowered by the forces of darkness". Our Lord has prepared this awesome table as stated in Psalm 23:5 and Psalm 43:5. By this mystery we obtain forgiveness of sin for sin cannot be forgiven without the blood of Christ. The mystery of the Eucharist is the constant offering made on the Cross. This offering is made to wash away the sins of the world. At this point the church servant indicates the relationship between the purity attained by the believers through communion and that attained by Isaiah when a live coal taken from the Altar touched his lips.
3. The Eucharist is life and resurrection (John 6:48-58): We draw the following thoughts from these words.
 - a. Christ is the source of life (John 14:6; John 11:25).
 - b. Manna, which was eaten by the Israelites in the wilderness, was a symbol of the Body of Christ. However, it could not satisfy the hunger of the body. In contrast, the Divine Liturgies are adequate spiritual food.
4. The Eucharist is fruitfulness and goodness (John 15:4,5): Our fallen nature cannot bear fruit to the glory of God. There is no way of reforming the soul without union with the person of Christ. Similarly, there is no hope for a bad tree to bear good fruit, unless that tree is cross-fertilized by another that is good. The Church servant, here, relates this text with the Lord's words concerning the Holy Communion: it achieves complete steadfastness in His Holy Person (John 6:56). When our life in God bears fruit, we testify to the virtues of Him who has called us from darkness to His wondrous light. Our whole life and behavior proclaim His wonders.
5. The Eucharist is interaction (sharing and living or dwelling together) and joy: The Church servant focuses here on the aspect of meditation and joyful feelings experienced by a person who has received communion from the Holy Mysteries. There is nothing more wondrous than God's love toward us and His humbleness. It did not suffice Him to

die on our behalf, but He also found pleasure to offer His Body and Blood to be our food (Psalms 23:5; Psalms 116: 12; Zechariah 9:17).

Two: The Liturgy and the Eucharist constitute a participation in achieving unity among believers.

Upon gathering around the holy offering, all believers become united as one in spirit and thought and also in body (Acts 2:42; 1 Corinthians 10:17; Ephesians 5:30). These means are stressed by the apostles in many parts of the Bible (Romans 12:4-16, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4:1-6). Not only do believers share the Liturgy prayers with those still alive in the flesh, but they also join and share with those living in heaven (review the prayer of blessing recited on preparing the incense offering, and the prayer of the Council in the Holy Mass).

Three: How do I practice the prayers of the Liturgy and the Eucharist?

1. The various ranks of priesthood and the whole congregation should join together: This is necessary as no mass can be observed without a priest, a deacon and a congregation.
2. The necessity of observing both the inner and outer elements of worship: The Orthodox worship is not mere lip service or jests, it is concerned with the heart and thought which are lifted up to God. Prayer is offered for the total sanctification of the human being. It is within the unifying framework of prayer that believers have come together at all times and throughout the ages.
3. The necessity for spiritual and mental preparation:
 - a. It is clear that the road along which the Church accompanies her children is a very long one. Through the prayers of the Liturgy, the Church prepares their hearts and thoughts to be pure and focused on heavenly matters. They are finally enabled and qualified to enter the heavens themselves during the Holy Mass.
 - b. The Liturgy includes also the glorification of the saints. If the prayers are to be effective and the intercession of the Saints achieved, then the worshippers need to be spiritually and mentally prepared before offering prayers of glorification.
4. The responsibility of the Church towards the world:
 - a. A believer is a priest serving the whole creation and the Church is founded in the world to sanctify, rescue, and save it from its evil trends.
 - b. When a Bishop is anointed to serve a parish, he is entrusted to serve both Christians and other residents as well.
 - c. The offering presented on the Altar is prepared by the whole creation, including man, animal, air, and water. This is significant as all the creation is sanctified through this mystery.

Instructions

1. The Church servant guides his children to the importance of preparation as a prerequisite to participation in the Liturgy and the Eucharist.
2. Students need to be trained in practicing and observing the Liturgy and the Eucharist regularly. In this way they can become fruitful, steadfast members developing and growing out of the press of the vine.
3. Students also need to be trained in experiencing such worship in groups as well as individually.

Exercises

1. Form a choir of deacons to train students to sing hymns and praises.
2. Attend Mass with due spiritual honor, prayer and participation in communion.
3. Invite far away stragglers to come and experience the beauty of Orthodox worship. Thus the Church becomes a haven for worship.
4. Spend a spiritual day in Church. Begin by attending Mass and receive Communion with the rest of the congregation.

(3) Fellowship Among Believers

Aim

The integration and unification of the whole body is achieved by the fellowship among members.

Verses

Acts 2:42-47; Acts 4:32-37; Romans 12; 1 r 12; Ephesians 4:1-16,25-32.

Introduction

Read 1 Corinthians 12 or Romans 12. Discuss with your students what the text is about (Fellowship among believers and ties with members which form one body; that is the Church).

Main Points

1. Communion with believers is the participation in the body of our Lord Jesus Christ: Draw a parallel between our relationship with Him and that of the vine with its branches. Jesus is the origin of the vine and each true believer a live branch fixed in the origin and drawing from Him, the elixir of life. As long as the believer is steadfastly rooted in the vine he will, consequently, gain fellowship with the other branches, fruit, and leaves.
2. The early Church experienced communion life (Analyze Acts 2:42-47; Acts 4:32-37):
 - a. The disciples regularly joined together in one spirit for prayer and supplication. The women, Mary the mother of Jesus, and His brothers were also there (Acts 1:14). They all joined as one soul, one existence, and one heart (Acts 2:1,46; Acts 4:32).
 - b. Communal worship and communal doctrine (Acts 2:42,46,47).
 - c. Witnesses joined in faith (Acts 4:32).
 - d. Witnesses gathered around the holy offering of the Eucharist (Acts 2:42).
 - e. The Aghapi (sharing a meal) table (Acts 2:46).
 - f. Spontaneous sharing of money and possessions (Acts 4:32,34-37): “they had all things in common” (Acts 4:32).
3. Characteristics of the Fellowship among believers “Canonika”:
 - a. Its basis and main role is to achieve steadfastness and unity in God.
 - b. A communion achieved through faith and belief: “One God, one faith one baptism. One God and Father of who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Ephesians 4:5). The wisdom of the Church in reciting the Creed of Faith in a loud voice is to inculcate the basis of our faith. It ensures the isolation of heretics and contrivers and their banishment from the Church (Thessalonians 3:10; 2 John 1:10,11).

- c. Fellowship demonstrated is holiness and chastity: It is a communion among saints living in purity and rejecting the way of the world and its uncleanness. They seek to live according to the way of the Lord (Hebrews 12:12-16). The Church used to eliminate its ties with the wicked, the immoral, and the adulterers (1 Corinthians 5:9-13).
- d. Fellowship achieved through worship and rejoicing:
 - i. The Church has its communal prayers such as those of the Holy Mass and its communal praises, such as the Psalms, the Psalmody and the prayers of the Coptic month of Kiahk.
 - ii. The Church also observes general fasting periods in which everybody participates to create an atmosphere of ritual of worship, and of purity. This allows the Church to rise above physical bonds and all the earthly lusts they involve.
 - iii. The whole Church joins in the offering of the Eucharist announcing that “we may be one body and one spirit, and that we may have a share and an inheritance with all the Saints” (Holy Mass).
- e. Fellowship based on Love and Sympathy:
 - i. Divine Love in the Church gathers everyone in reciprocal love. Each one places his brother before himself in the place of honor, as it is stated in the Book (I Corinthians 12:25,26).
 - ii. Fellowship of love in the Church is beyond slander and seeks to promote the exchange of sympathy to limitless giving (1 John 3:18; Acts 3:15; 1 John 3:17). Therefore the first Church lived in the spirit of sharing (Acts 4:34; Romans 12:9-13).
- f. Fellowship achieved through integration and cooperation: St. Paul, the apostle, speaks in Romans 16 and Corinthians 12 about the integration in the one Body of Christ, made up of various members. In spite of the diversity of their functions all members work together, harmoniously, for the well being of the body (I Corinthians 12:14-25). In the same way, there are multiple talents just as there are multiple members (1 Corinthians 12:4-7). Moreover, the tasks and services are numerous and each of us should stand in the appropriate post assigned to him/her by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (I Peter 4:10).

4. Our spiritual life originated and formed through the life of fellowship in the Church: The Church servant discusses with his students the extent of which they respond to the life of fellowship with believers; through which communal prayers gain greater efficacy and strength. The wonderful power of communal worship and its support to the spiritual life of each person: the efficacy of communion of the Holy Mysteries, the general fasts the sermons and the spiritual (retreat) days, the fellowship of the Saintly fathers as they sustain our struggle by praying and interceding on our behalf communal life of the Church and how it enriches, discovers, and guides our talents so that they may be used for the glory of God and the expansion of His Holy Kingdom.

Sayings of the Fathers

If you have been born in Christianity, then everyone else born in Christ is your brother. Consequently, if you love yourself more than your brother, this does not arise from Christ (a spiritual elder). The younger member adds brightness to the elder, just as the simple eyelid is the

beauty of the eye. Therefore a person, who resists his younger brother, resists himself. Moreover, harm does not fall upon the person resisted, but rather it reverts to and harms the initiator, in a greater degree than that caused to his brother (St. John the Chrysostom).

Exercises

1. Discover some of your talents and use them for the benefit of the Church.
2. Spend a vigil of prayer in the Church.
3. Join in providing the needs of the saints (brothers in Jesus): Offer clothes, covers, or food. Contribute to the education of needy colleagues. Visit an orphanage and donate some gifts.
4. Pray for the weak, the stumbling, and the fallen.

(4) Church Service: The Deacon

Aim

Church service is the practical part of a living membership in the Church.

Verses

Matthew 20:25-28; Luke 11:23; John 12:26; Acts 20:17-38; Romans 12:6-11; I Corinthians 12:4-11

Introduction

Read the chapter specifically on the vine and its branches (John 15:1-11) analyze it and discuss the topic: How can a believer be a fruitful member in God's vine?

Main Points

1. Church services are a positive indication of a loving Member in the Church: Real believers are members in the Body of Christ (Ephesians 5:30), and the real believer is born out of the womb of the Church. For example: baptism, steadfastness, faithfulness, and activeness for the glory of God. But how do we make firm our membership in the Church? It is not sufficient for a person to be baptized or to be recorded in the Church register, but he must do something that is needed and show an active presence through his participation in Church services, and practical love towards his fellow believers. The Lord clarifies that there is no place for an inactive member (John 15:2). It is a barren Church, with no ability to conceive children, if she cannot offer to help the poor, the needy, and the stragglers. Hence, negativity is completely rejected in Christianity (Luke 11:23; James 4:17).
2. Church service is communal love to Jesus Christ and to fellow brethren: "Do you love Me, feed My Lambs" (John 21:15). Thus love is a debt we should pay back to all in return for what Jesus has paid on the Cross (Romans 13:8). Any service done without love is unacceptable (I Corinthians 13). This is what St. Paul expressed towards those he served (I Thessalonians 2:8; 2 Corinthians 12:15.16; Galatians 5:13; Galatians 6:12).
3. Your attitude towards Church services: Here the church servant discusses, with those he serves the numerous areas where they are expected to help, such as delivering sermons, publishing, helping the poor and orphans, and providing medical care (I Corinthians 12:4-

6). When a person gives all his heart to the Lord, he can develop sensitive ears that acquaint him with the kind of service the Lord God invites him to do (Acts 9:6). Then, he must obey (Isaiah 6:8). God has created us with natural inclinations. If we come to Him, in prayer, so that He may touch them with the spirit of holiness, these inclinations can be blessed “talents” which we can trade with on behalf of the Lord.

4. The true believer, living in the blessed Body, does not stand as a neutral person or a spectator.

- The true believer is a light to the world and light should not be hidden under any bushel.
- The true believer is the salt of the earth and salt should dissolve to avoid its damage.
- The true believer is like yeast and it should be mixed with the flour so as to pervade and ferment the whole batter.
- The true believer is a message that cannot be folded or rolled up.
- The true believer is a pot of sweet ointment and it should be opened up to the world.

5. The Lord Christ is our ideal in Church service: When our Lord Jesus came into our world, He did not come as God or as the Worshiped One. On the contrary, He came in the form of a slave. He came to minister to us salvation and to offer the service of reconciliation (Matthew 20:28). He rejoices, like a Shepard when He finds His lost lamb and carries it on His shoulders (Luke 15:5). Therefore, the Lord has illustrated before us the road of Church service? (John 4:32-35), and it is this pleasure to see the fields white and ready for harvest. How much has the Lord suffered towards our salvation? It is not, therefore, only appropriate that we follow the steps of our Master and Lord. Since we consider the Lord the origin of our work and the means, then He should be our ultimate goal also. Hence, any task which does not lead souls to God is foreign to the spirit of the Church (John 15:5).

6. The Position of the Church Service and Servants: Church service is a blessing in which we participate with God in order to form and build His Kingdom and build it up (1 Corinthians 3:9). There is no greater than to work with Christ.

- The Church servant is an ambassador of Christ. Therefore, he bears the Divine features and characteristics (2 Corinthians 5:20).
- A servant is honored by his heavenly Father; therefore, a person who honors him honors God (John 12:26). How great will the heavenly reward be to the honest servant (Matthew 25:23)? Service to the most humble is a service to the Lord Himself (Matthew 25:40). Just as the Lord in the old times, forbade strange offerings or incense from being presented on the Altar, it is only appropriate that we realize that the task of the deacon is not too far removed from the priesthood or the Altar. In fact, Ecclesiastical deacons are not separated from either the offering or the priest. Moreover, they carry a rank that specifies their role.
- A Church servant needs to display a comprehensive spiritual insight so that he will not be deceived by the appearance of a service instead of its inner essence. He will ultimately be concerned with both its inward and outward value.

Instructions to the Servant

- In this lesson, there is scope to implant the spirit of Church work in the congregation, and

to arouse spiritual desire to minister the Word.

- The servant needs to get acquainted with those he serves, and understand their psychology to direct them to the services relevant to their tendencies.
- The servant should train his students to follow up on and attract souls to Christ.
- It is beneficial for the servant to lead his students to read about the lives of the many righteous people who have devoted themselves to God and His service.
- The servant needs to stress the relationship between deacons and “Canonika”.

Exercises

1. Ordain all those involved in ecclesiastical education, those who serve and are training to be servants, as sub-deacons, after the Church confirms their spiritual and ecclesiastical readiness.
2. Use the office of social work as a center for spiritual activity.
3. Coordinate spiritual and educational services in such a way as to get large numbers of believers involved in one service or another, while united together and strengthened by prayer.
4. Encourage those training to be servants to taste the blessings of service. Thus, new recruits are enabled to follow the same system.

(5) The Tabernacle of Meeting and Its Spiritual Symbols (Part I)

Aim

The explanation of the spiritual symbols of the tabernacle and their continuity in the Church of the New Testament

Verses

Exodus 35-40; Lev 1-10

Main Points

1. The importance of studying the tabernacle of meeting

It is the symbol of the presence of the Incarnated God and which indicates His presence in the Church and His unity with her members. The tabernacle is a symbol of the Most High Dwelling, that is the Son of God Incarnate. Divine inspiration has devoted to this topic about twenty chapters in the books of Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers in the Old Testament. In the New Testament it is mentioned in the Epistle to the Hebrews where it occupies two complete chapters. God Himself designed the tabernacle and filled the craftsmen with His Spirit. This indicates the extent to which He is concerned about the salvation and embellishment of our souls.

The Divine Word, speaking through the mouth of St. Paul in the Epistle to the Hebrews, gives us the explanation to the symbols of the contents of the tabernacle and its parts. It mentions the following: Jesus Christ, “being come as a High Priest of good things to come”, through the greatest dwelling (in the state of incarnation) and the most Perfect not man-made: “neither was it made of ram or bull blood, but with His own Blood, that He entered once into the Holiest of All (Heavenly) and offered eternal redemption...for Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, but into heaven itself” (Hebrews 9:11). In the same spirit of inspiration, the Church has

interpreted the contents of the holy place (the sanctuary) and the most holy (the holiest of all) as being God, Jesus Christ being made Incarnate and coming from the Virgin Mary (refer to midnight prayers recited annually on Sundays and during the month of Kiahk).

2. The history of the tabernacle of meeting

There was a meeting tent mentioned in Exodus 33:7-11 which Moses had erected outside the camping place of the people of Israel, but there are no details about it. When Moses went into that tent, all the people came out and stood, each at the door of his tent. They would watch the pillar of cloud as it rested at the entrance of the tent of the meeting while God spoke to Moses. Then they would fall on their knees. When Moses returned to the camp, Joshua, the young son of Nun, remained inside the tabernacle and never left it.

As for the tabernacle of meeting, which is the topic we are studying here, which God designed and described, it was set up by Moses in Sinai on the first day of the second year after the people of Israel left Egypt (Exodus 40:17). It stood in the middle of the twelve tribes of Israel, whether they were traveling or resting. And the glory of God rested and filled the tabernacle of meeting (after its anointment and sanctification) in the form of a cloud that provided shade during the day and light during the night. When the cloud descended, the people rested; and when it ascended, they traveled (Exodus 40:34). When the journey across the wilderness was over, the people of Israel crossed the river Jordan. The priests who carried the Ark of the Covenant led them and as their feet touched the water, the water parted (Joshua 3:15) so that the people could cross and enter the land of Canaan. There, the Tabernacle of Meeting was set up, first in Gilgal, then in Shiloh.

During the events that followed, the Tabernacle of Meeting was transported to other places a number of times. Once it was taken by the Philistines who kept it for seven months after which they returned it. It then remained in the house of Abinadab (a son of Aaron the high priest) for twenty years. Later, David the king and prophet transported it to the house of Obed (David's grandfather). It was then taken to the hometown of David (Bethlehem).

During the reign of king Solomon, the Ark and the contents of the Tabernacle of Meeting were carried to the Altar, which he had built (2 Chronicle 11:5). During the reign of one of the evil kings of Judah, the ark was removed from the Altar, and the Holy Bible does not say anything about it after that. This could be due to its transportation to Babylon during the captivity and it was not returned.

3. The purpose of constructing the tent

- i. During the days of Moses the prophet, the tabernacle of meeting was a sign of God's presence in the middle of His people: "that I may dwell among them" (Exodus 25:8). In this way, God could grant His people security and confidence.
- ii. The tent was intended as a testimony of God's glory and place to which people could come to worship and feel close to Him.
- iii. The Lord God Himself dictated the rites of worship and offerings. By following these, man could experience confidence and peace of mind.
- iv. The rites observed were symbolic and prophetic signs indicating the incarnation of the Son of God, His appearance among people and the value and importance of the

redemption He would offer, as well as the atonement of sin through His holy and precious Blood.

Exercises

1. Contemplate the love of God to man ever since his creation. God wishes us to be in His blessed presence at all time, and offer Him continuous thanks as we experience His companionship throughout our lives.
2. Display the colored film (or slides) showing the tabernacle of meeting to arouse interest to know the details concerning the contents and their symbolic significance. In this way, students will be ready for the next lesson.

(6) The Tabernacle of Meeting and Its Spiritual Symbols (Part II)

The Parts of the Tabernacle of Meeting:

11. The Outer Court of the Tabernacle of Meeting: Its contents: The Gate, the Altar of Burned Offerings (the Bronze Altar), and the Bronze Laver.
12. The Tabernacle of Meeting: The contents of the Sanctuary or Holy Place: The Altar for Burning Sweet Incense, the Golden lamp stand (Candlestick), the Table of the Showbread, the Veil, the Most Holy (the Ark of the Covenant).

First: The Outer Court

1. The Gate of the Tabernacle of Meeting (Exodus 38:18-20): “I am the door. If anyone enters by Me he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture” (John 10:9). We have indicated that the tabernacle of meeting was intended to signal God’s presence in the middle of His people. Moreover, it offered the opportunity for the soul to enter into the presence of his creator. The person entering, however, needs to pass through a door or gate, and Jesus Christ has become that opening through which we can enter. He is the way that leads us into God’s presence and into His heavenly kingdom. Thus the door of the Tabernacle of Meeting is a symbol of Christ in various ways: The door measured twenty cubits long, and five cubits high. It consisted of curtains hung up on four pillars. The curtains were made of four kinds of material:
 - a. Blue yarn cloth (light blue), as a symbol of Christ’s heavenly person since He is the Son of God.
 - b. Purple yarn cloth (vivid red) to denote the King of Glory -purple is a royal color.
 - c. Scarlet cloth (dark red) to denote Jesus who was wounded for us.
 - d. White fine linen (twined) as a symbol of our Lord’s nature -spotless and without sin -thus denoting our Redeemer. The curtains were hung up on four pillars made of acacia wood overlaid with gold. These stand for the love of Christ (God’s Son Incarnated) and His redeeming offering that encompasses and embraces the whole earth (the four corners): “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Begotten Son” (John 3:16).
2. The Bronze Altar (for Burned Offering): This is what first meets a person entering the court and it lies on one line leading from the door of the court into the tabernacle of meeting, then into the holy place or sanctuary and into the most holy. The bronze altar is considered the biggest piece in the tabernacle of meeting. It was in the form of a case that

was five cubits long, five cubits wide, and three cubits high. It was made of acacia wood (resistant to wood worms) overlaid with bronze. It had four protruding horns on the four corners (refer to the illustration). The altar was hollow and this became filled with fuel and ashes of the offerings presented on it. The altar had two poles made of acacia wood and overlaid with bronze, which were passed through rings found in the grate network (a frame in the form of a net all around the altar). These poles were used to carry the altar. All the utensils used on this altar were made of bronze. The offerings presented on it were of various kinds. The fire was never put out so that it continually burned (Leviticus 6:9). The Lord started this fire on the day of its sanctification and it was the ministers' job to add dry fuel only.

Meditation

The bronze altar and all the offerings presented on it indicate Christ who suffered indictment on our behalf: "He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities...and by His stripes we were healed" (Isaiah 53:5).

The offering presented had to be spotless, without blemish. The sinner had to place his hands on its head and confess his sins. Then the priest would bum it all on the altar. It was the promise God had made to forgive the sins of those who presented an offering, "sins are not forgiven without blood" (Hebrews 9:22). This promise of atonement and salvation are indicated by the horns of the altar, which stand for the power and efficacy of Christ's offering. The horns also served as a means of salvation to all those who sought refuge in them. There, they could be safe until their innocence was confirmed.

The offering was tied to the horns of the altar before it was presented and burned. This symbolizes the tie of love, which made the Lord look towards Jerusalem and Golgotha. Although the offering was considered a bearer of sin upon presenting it yet God ordered that its ashes be gathered in a pure pot. These were sprayed over sinners as a means of purification (Numbers 19:9). St. Paul comments on this issue and says, "Consider the efficacy of Our Lords offering on the Cross to purify and sanctify us. What a contrast this makes with the offerings made in the Old Testament? If the blood of rams and bulls and their ashes could sanctify and purify; how much more can this offering do -the pure Blood of Jesus, the Eternal Spirit, who offered Himself without blemish". Surely, It can purify our conscience from all dead acts and prepare us to serve the living God.

3 The Bronze Laver (Exodus 30:17-21)

The bronze laver had a base of bronze too. However, the Holy Bible does not describe its appearance or size. It was put in the outer court, between the bronze altar and the entrance to the sanctuary (the Holy and the Most Holy). It was filled with water and the priests had to wash in its water when they had to present offerings on the altar. Similarly, they had to wash before entering the sanctuary, "so that they will not die" (Exodus 30:20). The bronze laver symbolizes our second birth (Timothy 3:4,5), our renewal and purification through the mystery of baptism "As Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word" (Ephesians 5:25). It is through baptism that we become qualified to be members in the Body of Christ and to serve His Holy Name, "by offering spiritual sacrifice to the living God".

The laver was used on the first day, then on the day of sanctification, and to appoint priests consecrating them and the utensils to be used. Therefore, all was well cleaned and washed as a symbol of our washing in baptism. Moreover, the priests had to wash their legs and feet with its water daily before drawing near the altar of burning incense or the holy place. This indicates our daily struggle to adhere willingly to God in order to preserve the purity and holiness of our being. We refer to such a stage as the life of scrutiny and repentance.

When Christ washed the feet of His disciples before offering Himself, Peter objected and Christ told him “unless I wash you, you will not be a part of Me”. And when Simon went on to ask the Lord to wash his hands and head too, the Lord said, “Anyone who has washed his body needs only to wash his feet. Then he is clean all over” (John 13:10). Here, our Lord teaches us that repentance (the washing of feet) is a continual task, which reenacts the work of baptism (which we observe only once).

In the Cross, we see the combination of both the altar and the laver “This is He who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not only by water, but by water and blood” (1 John 5:6). Thus, the Lord has granted us redemption and atonement by His offering. His holy Blood is a means of purification and inspires repentance.

Second: The Tabernacle (of Meeting)

God ordered Moses to build the tabernacle of vertical boards (ten cubits long and one and a half cubits wide). These were joined together by horizontal bars. The final dimensions were: thirty-three cubits long, twelve cubits wide, and ten cubits high. Each board was made of acacia wood (resistant to wood worm) and overlaid with gold. These would each stand in two silver sockets and would have three gold rings through which the horizontal bars were passed to hold the boards together. The whole construction symbolizes the coming together of believers, as one building, into the living altar of God; as the apostle explains, “in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:21,22). The whole construction was covered with four layers:

The first layer consisted of fine linen and blue, purple, and scarlet silk. We have already noted the symbolic significance of this in our study of the curtains of the door in the outer court. A cherub was embroidered and added here in the holy place. This layer symbolizes spiritual virtues, which the Lord grants to the inner soul.

The second layer consisted of coverings made of coarse goats' skins. Their dark color denoted the hardships believers and the Church tolerate due to external persecution. Inwardly, however, they are filled with the grace and consolation granted by God, “I am dark but beautiful...like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon” (Song of Sol 1:5).

The third layer was made of rams' skins dyed red which remind us of the leather clothes that God made for Adam and Eve to cover them up. It also points to the One who will come at the end of the days, “a Lamb with no spot” to be slain for us to cover (atone) our sins and clothe us with His righteousness.

The last layer was a covering made of badger a skin, (a sea animal) which is dark and strongly resistant to weather conditions. It indicates the Lord's protection and surveillance over His children, guarding them in their wanderings and estrangement and as the Holy Word says, "I dressed you with beautiful cloth and put leather shoes on your feet" (Ezekiel 16:10).

From the above, it is clear that the construction of the tabernacle and its coverings denote the Lord Incarnate, pure, holy, and appearing as the Son of Man. Some have said of Him. "Is not that the Son of Joseph?" and Peter said to Him: "You are Jesus, the Son of God". The tabernacle of meeting indicates the Church as she travels in the wilderness of this world and is sunburned. Consequently, it is black (Song of Songs 1:5). However, it is lovely internally as it is "variously ornamented". This refers to the soul of each one of us. God has ornamented our souls with saintly virtues, and He has become our shield repelling the fiery arrows of the wicked enemy.

(7) The Tabernacle of Meeting and Its Spiritual Symbols (Part III)

The Contents of the Sanctuary or Holy Place

1. The Table of the Showbread (of the Presence of God, Exodus 37:10-16)

God ordered that the table be made of acacia wood, overlaid with gold. Its dimensions were two cubits long, one cubit wide, and one and half cubit high. It had a molding of gold all around it. There were four gold rings at the four corners, and through these poles were passed when the table was carried. On the table, twelve loaves (showbread) were put and left for the whole week. They would then be removed and replaced by twelve others. Only the priests ate of it in the holy place.

This is the first time in the Bible where the table for serving the Lord is mentioned. It is a symbol of our Lord and Redeemer who offered Himself as the "Bread of Life". It is also a reference to the Communion to which the Lord invites us so that we could eat and be satisfied by His blessed Person. The Lord offered Himself by giving His holy Body and Blood as food and a means of growth for us. This is possible through our communion with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit "Our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ" (I John 1:3).

2. The Golden Lamp stand (Candlestick) (Exodus: 37:17-24)

There were no windows in the tent to give light. Therefore, God commanded that a golden lamp stand be used in the Sanctuary to give light. The Holy Word does not specify its dimensions, but says that it was made of pure gold, which is a symbol of our Lord and Redeemer who is Light proceeding out of Light, and Truth from the God of Truth. Light is always a symbol of God's glory and divinity.

The shape of the lamp stand was as follows:

It had a central shaft and three branches came out of each side. Each branch ended with a bowl used as a lamp so that there were seven lamps in all. In these bowls pure olive oil was poured and the candles were lit continually. Aaron used to add oil daily, day and night, and cleaned the bowls of the ashes with golden tongs and plates. Just as the lamp stand symbolizes God who is the light of the world; so does it refer to the light and grace of the Holy Spirit that fills the Church; pouring blessings upon the members through the participation in the seven mysteries.

The ultimate result is that members, in turn, give out light in their generation for, “you are the light of the world”. The Church too, blesses the Virgin and mother of God by calling her “the mother of Light”, and says, “You are the lamp that carried the true Light that shines for every person”.

Let us contemplate Aaron as he cleans the bowls from the ashes, and adds oil to increase the heat of the flame. He represents the grace of God working in us to bring about repentance. This is brought about as Christ extended His wounded right hand to support us. Thus we are filled by the power of the Holy Spirit within us, “Do not sadden the Spirit of God by which you have been marked with till the end”.

3. The Altar for Burning Sweet Incense (Exodus 37:25; 30:1-10)

This was also made of acacia wood overlaid with gold. Its dimensions were one cubit long, one cubit wide, and two cubits high. It had horns and a molding of gold all around it. It was put in front of the veil and Aaron burned sweet incense on it every morning and evening when he refueled the lamp stand.

The altar for burning incense is a symbol of Our Lord who “offered Himself as a sweet offering for our sakes, and the smell went up to His Father from Golgotha in the evening”. A sweet smell that earned pardon and joy for us! The horns of the altar rubbed by the blood of the offering (for atonement) denotes the extent to which the offering of Christ made to redeem and save man, is efficient and powerful. The presence of the altar for burning incense in the holy place and Aaron’s ministry on it denotes the task of the redeemed who offer spiritual sacrifices to God. These take the form of prayers and songs of praise as well as a life of holiness and purity; “you are the sweet smell of Christ”. All those who have experienced the salvation of the Lord throughout the ages pronounce the songs of praise. It is important to note that the fire burning on the altar of incense was taken from the altar of burned offering for God had warned against using a foreign fire. Similarly, insincere prayers are rejected since they do not come from a heart purged by the grace of God.

4. The Veil (Exodus 26:31-33)

The veil divided the tabernacle into two: the Holy Place (or Sanctuary) and the Most Holy. Accordingly, there were things inside the veil, like the Ark of the Covenant (or testimony); and things outside the veil the contents of the sanctuary, the table (on the northern side of the observer looking at the veil), and the lamp stand (on the southern side), as well as the altar of incense which stood in the center, opposite the veil. The veil was made of woven blue, scarlet and purple yarn, and fine white linen thread, with cherubim designs. Components (as we have noted before) point to the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ as a heavenly person, His eternal reign, His purity and His holiness. The Holy Inspiration has interpreted the significance of the veil and its components through the words of St. Paul who says, “having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh” (Hebrews 10:20).

The design of the cherubim on the veil reminds us of the cherubim that guarded the entrance to the tree of life when God drove man out of His presence (Genesis 3:4). Consequently, it became impossible to enter the Holiest due to the obstacle of our indictment. However, Jesus Christ bore

this indictment by His death and the tearing of the veil (He gave Himself on the Cross) and consecrated by His blood the way to the Holiest for us. Thus He reconciled us with the Father and renewed our nature to qualify us for the Kingdom of Righteousness. This happened at the moment of crucifixion during the earthquake when, “the veil was torn from top to bottom” (Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:35). The Holy Inspiration tells us that the priesthood of Christ “remains forever” and has cancelled the “priesthood of the Levites and animal offerings, which were temporary and lasted only in the Old Testament. Now, we have entered the New Testament where man appears before God, since Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He is the intermediary between man and His heavenly Father, “who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (I Corinthians 1:30). We wish to indicate that there is now nothing in the Church called the veil of the altar to divide believers from the altar or the table of the Lord. What we see standing now between the inside and the outside of the altar is called “the icon of the deacon”, or “the bearer of the icons”.

5. The Holiest (or Most Holy or the Art of the Testimony; Exodus 25:10-22; 37:1-9; Deuteronomy 10:33; Hebrews 9:4)

God told Moses to build the ark from acacia wood two and a half cubits long, one and a half cubit wide, and one and half cubit high. It was to be overlaid with pure gold on the inside and outside, with a molding of gold all around it. Four rings, cast of gold, were put in the four corners, and two poles of acacia wood overlaid with gold were passed through the rings, on the sides by which the altar could be carried. The ark represented the presence of God in the middle of His people. In fact, He was their Shepherd and leader in their march toward the land of Canaan. In the same way, the priests carried the ark and led the people in their journey. It was called the Ark of the Covenant (Deuteronomy 31:26) in reference to the blood of the covenant, which allowed the priests, once a year to approach the ark to obtain God’s blessing and confirm the promise of mercy and forgiveness. God also called it the Ark of the Testimony, as He commanded Moses to put in it the Tablets of the Covenant, on which the Ten Commandments were written. Later God commanded the priests to put the golden pot that contained manna there also as a testimony, before the people of Israel, a sign of His mercy to them in the wilderness. The budding rod of Aaron was put into the ark as a sign of the consecration of priesthood to Aaron and his sons by God’s command.

6. The Mercy Seat (Exodus 17- 22)

The ark had another part of special importance and that was the mercy seat. God commanded that it be made of pure gold with two cherubim of gold at its ends. The cherubim stretched their wings above, covering the mercy seat and facing each other. God had told Moses, “there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, between the two cherubim which are on the Ark of the Testimony, of all the things which I will give you in commandment to the children of Israel”. The relationship between the ark and its cover is interpreted in the prayer of praise recited on Sunday at midnight in the Church, “you, Mary, are the ark. You were taken from among mankind pure (wood resistant to wood worm), protected by grace (overlaid with gold on the outside and inside), and carried the Son of God (the pure gold cover), who is praised and bowed to by the heavenly ranks (the cherubim). These surround and cover you as you have become the seat of God and the second heaven”. The cover was called the place of atonement or the mercy seat because it concealed the commandments. These were a testimony against man who had walked away from God’s law and forsaken the way of Jesus Christ and all

that it offers: atonement, redemption, forgiveness of sins and trespasses, “I do not remember your sins any more, as they have been thrown in the river of forgetfulness”. It is also called the mercy seat in reference to the blood of the offering, which the priest put on the cover on the day of the great atonement (Leviticus 16). We notice that the blood was sprinkled only once. This was enough since Christ offered Himself once only and “provided eternal redemption”. However, the blood was sprinkled seven times before the mercy seat, facing eastwards towards the priest and the people. This would underline their confidence in the perfect value and power of the blood of the offering in gaining the favor of God.

The people of Israel knew that there was the pot of manna inside the ark. However, it was hidden from them for they had humiliated God when they protested against the great gift of the manna and said, “We are fed up with this unreasonable bread”. Now, it was as though the divine inspiration was announcing to them that they were not worthy of eating of the Tree of Life, Jesus Christ, the “True Manna” and the Bread descending from heaven. It is He who offers Himself as our food in the wilderness of this life. He is the promised life to anyone who is convinced, by Grace that he will receive the true and satiating food, “to him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden flashing sword to guard the way to the tree of life”. No human being dared approach, as he was unworthy. Here, we see the cherubim bending their faces towards the mercy seat in appreciation of the blood offered for atonement.

Based on it, a believer approaches confidently the throne of grace. Praise be to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ through whom we have been reconciled with God. Through Christ we have become courageous and bold and can enter the holy place and the most holy.

Exercises

Contemplate the feeling of the people in the Old Testament as they approached, in awe, the tabernacle of meeting, yet unable to enjoy ministry inside it. On the other hand, contemplate the joy we experience as we enter the Holiest of all since we have been invited to the wedding ceremony of the Son. We have been invited to His holy table, to partake of His holy Blood and Flesh so that we may live in Him forever, and that is according to His good will.

Instructions

1. There are slides, films, and cassettes available that could be useful in providing explanation and clarification.
2. Youth could join in making models of the different parts of the tabernacle then contemplate the various aspects of it.
3. Talented youth could be asked to draw the parts of the tabernacle on boards of wood, or they could produce a wall magazine. In this way, art is associated to Bible lessons as well as ecclesiastical and spiritual matters.

(8) Discussion: Christianity and Violence

Aim

Training students in living a Christian life marked by meekness and devoid of cowardice, subjugation or humiliation.

References

The life of Jesus Christ
The life of St. Paul
The life of John the Baptist

Also consider the use of verses from the Bible which clarify the absence of contradiction between meekness and strictness or firmness. We need to train our children to abstain from practicing violence in their lives and to face its different forms with meekness, which befits the children of saints. The following are only some of the problems that might be raised during discussions (Matthew 12:18-20; Luke 9:54-56; Matthew 21:4; Matthew 26:51-53).

Christian Youth and Violence

Psychological studies underline the tendency of violence in most youth, especially in males. This is compatible with the surging instincts in their bodies, and the ambitions filling their beings, as well as their ultimate requirements and the tendency to seek to fulfill them at whatever cost. However, Christian youth should base their opinion about violence on the attitude of Jesus Christ Himself, and from His life where He rejects violence in all its aspects.

The Teachings of Jesus Concerning Violence

- Our Lord rejected violence for He said, “blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 4:5).
- He also preached and said: “Blessed are the peace makers for they are called the children of God” (Matthew 5:9).
- Again, He said, “He who slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also” (Matthew 5:39).
- To His apostles, He said, “I send you as sheep among wolves, so be wise as serpents and harmless as doves” (Matthew 10:16).
- St. John Chrysostom comments upon that when he says, “you can be a savage wolf and unwilling to be meek as sheep, but you cannot be of Christ’s fold because He is the shepherd of sheep and not of wolves”.

Jesus rejects violence in His life: When He was interrogated by the religious leader of the Jews, the latter asked Him about His disciples and His teachings. Jesus courageously answered that He taught in public. At that point, one of the soldiers hit Jesus, according to the gospel St. John, and he said to Him, “Is that how You talk to the head of the religious leaders?” Jesus said, “if I said anything wrong, tell Me what was wrong. If I said what was right, why did you hit Me?” (John 18:22). It is important to stop for awhile and think” about the words of Jesus. Jesus did not turn the other cheek to the soldier who hit Him; neither did He reveal any sign of humiliation, subjugation, or depression in his reaction. However, He did put an end to the man’s aggression by using a tone characterized by meekness and manliness, as well as being awesome and sublime. This underlines that the meekness of a Christian is not due to cowardice but rather to forgiveness arising from spiritual ability and power. These characteristics enable a Christian to overcome his own weakness and physical nature. When the Lord was crucified, He faced the worst form of hatred with the peak of love as He called aloud on the Cross and prayed on behalf of His murderers.

The Church at the Time of the Apostles is a Practical Model of Meekness

The first Christians followed the model set by their Teacher (Matthew 11:29). Consequently, they did not revolt against their persecutors. In fact, they achieved the biggest spiritual revolution by offering a testimony of blood without any hatred. For example, Saint Barbara prayed for the governor and her father who commanded that she be made to suffer. Philemon and Appolonious also prayed for the governor Arianos of Ansana. Upon their martyrdom, the latter took dust from their graves and rubbed his ailing eyes, which were instantly healed. Thus he was transformed from a cruel persecutor to a great martyr.

Why Does Christianity Reject Violence?

- Violence rejects love since it considers a person like an object, which should be destroyed rather than someone to be respected.
- Violence is weakness because it fears others, while meekness is strength and love is power and perfection.
- Violence disregards man's humanity, while Christianity strengthens it and opposes contempt for others.
- Violence involves pride since it involves exaggerated self-confidence while the meek tolerates discussion and listens to others.

Does Society Reject Violence?

Yes, civilized societies reject violent actions and consider those who react with hostile attacks as savage. Consequently, society judges and condemns both the aggressor and the violent defender.

Why Meekness?

Because by facing violence with meekness, we allow love to enter the heart of the violent through our own living testimony of true love.

Christian Meekness Implies True Power

- Christian meekness is not due to wavering, for it does not oppose security, firmness or steadfastness.
- In standing for the truth. Severity is required to shake our hardened consciences.
- Jesus was severe without bearing any hatred in the following instances: Matthew 12:14; Matthew 17:17; John 3:13-16.
- Meekness does not mean making compromises or bargaining with evil or making peace with the wicked because it arises from love and truth.

Dear youth, let all your energy, keenness, jealousy and ambition be blessed and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. May the only violence you experience be the violence of love and testimony to the truth.

Exercises

- Train students to practice meekness in their family life as well as at school and in national service.
- Train students to praise meekness and to prefer it over cruelty and violence.
- The fathers receiving confession need to encourage students in developing loving and

brotherly ties with Christians as well as with those holding other beliefs. Besides, they need to practice facing rigidity in speech with gentleness and sweetness arising out of love and not a consequence of weakness.

- Record this conference in the magazine of the parish as a useful, practical reference to all youth.

(9) How to Start a Spiritual Life with God?

Aim

To give signs marking a correct start or false starts in the way of spirituality.

Main Points

1. God is the One who always takes the initiative with man

Jesus Christ came to us, incarnated and brought atonement by accepting to die for us and consequently lifting the load of indictment on our behalf. He granted us a life of victory forever and the hope for an eternal, glorious, and heavenly heritage by His sacrifice. He said about Himself, “I stand at the door and knock”, for He invites us to live with Him forever as He says, “In My Father’s house there are many mansions”. By all these means, He seeks to make us members of His flock, with His saints, and the family of God’s house.

2. Why do we not live with God right now?

Our response to God’s invitation means that we dismiss and despise Satan and the will of the self. At the same time, we choose the narrow road, which is the way enlightened by God’s commandments and the voice of the Holy Spirit. If we do not adhere to it, that is if we neglect the commandments of our Heavenly Father and turn to a distant world where we are lost as we follow our own lustful instincts, then we discover our intense hunger and thirst. Our life is devoid of God’s consolation. At this point, we need to arise and return into the arms of our Father. We can do so by kneeling down and praying fervently, filled with the hope and the faith that He will receive us joyfully and open His house to us. He will do so because His son was dead but is now alive, he was lost but now is found. Consequently, we should deliver our lives into His hands, leaving behind our carnal desires and worldly inclinations. Surely God will perceive our repentance and sincerity and will accept our return to Him. Someone may say that he was determined to repent but did not act upon that, or that he wished to live with Christ but did not know how to go through this experience. Another may say that he started but failed and sinned quickly. In such conditions it is necessary to realize that the start was wrong for many reasons as discussed below.

3. Obstacles standing in the way of making a correct start

a. Sins that are dear to us

In other words, I have not given up any personal or physical pleasures in spite of my desire to live with God. Whatever the form of sin, sin is darkness and death as well as destruction to the soul. Consequently, not giving it up indicates that I do not fully trust God’s power to liberate me and fill me up. If we trust our Lord, He will give us victory, safety, and recovery from the bites of the serpent (Satan) more than those who were healed by looking with faith at the serpent made of brass.

b. Fear of people

The fear of people's words about me, especially those coming from wrong friends and the fear of losing them if I walk in the spiritual path. Now I ask you, "Who is the one who is more permanent, eternal and beneficial to you? Is it the evil friend, or God who is the best supporter, helper, and consoler and who can compensate by giving you saintly friends in this life ... Friends who will love you in the deep sense of the word and will treat you with due appreciation and respect". Noah disregarded the sneers of sinners for many years during which he was building the ark. Lot obeyed the call of the Lord and quickly walked away from the uncleanness of Sodom and Gomorrah. Daniel disregarded people's words and refused to bow to the idols of the king. Similarly, the three youths who were consequently protected by God from the lions and the fiery pit. We should learn that the important issue is the testimony of God in our inner conscience, rather than man's judgment -whoever he may be. For it is God who indicts, saves, and punishes, while man has no power whatsoever. The testimony of God in the conscience of Athanasius was more powerful than any worldly hallucinations. Consequently, when he was told that the whole world is against him, he inverted it and said, "and I am against the world".

c. Pride and self-esteem

I could be self-confident and believe in my personality, opinions, and views of life. I could consider the Cross as a mark of ignorance, weakness, and a stumbling block since it is actually weak for the sake of achieving love. Furthermore, the Cross is a stumbling block because it does not share in the selfish wisdom of this world. Rather, the Cross signifies sacrifice and endless giving. Under the Cross, you learn true love and lay aside your selfishness and your pride and personal self-glorification. You learn gentleness and humility and find peace for your soul that has been fatigued by jealousy, hatred and envy towards others.

d. The Labyrinth and the failure to specify goals

The true Christian has a specific and fixed goal or destination that is founded on the Rock and not on sand. John the Baptist illustrates this by not giving in to any threats or swearing, and Jesus spoke about him saying, "he is not like straw carried by the winds". A person may feel distracted and lost due to his listening of all contradictory views and because heminges with the wicked while anxiously desiring to preserve his spirituality. The Bible warns us against that through the words of St. Paul, who says, "Do not resemble the people of this world, but rather, change your appearance by renewing your mind, (through repentance)". We should be devoted in our love to our God and beware of negotiating the devil. Let us try to get away from his subjugation as a final issue and that can be done by God's grace. Then we can say as Moses and the people of Israel said to Pharaoh, "there is no cloven hoof," when he negotiated that they leave and then return. Through prayer and the obedience of spiritual leaders we are able to distinguish between the voice of our Shepherd and that of Satan.

e. Laziness

Although this seems to be an unreasonable cause, laziness could be a detrimental factor to spiritual perseverance. Therefore our Lord blessed the honest servant who is on vigil so that when his master comes he is still up and active. On the other hand, laziness leads to a diminishing state of the soul that has not exploited its talents or potentials, even though it has been made in the likeness of God. A lazy person is like a still pool whose water has become stagnant and like a forsaken place where wolves can be heard. To oppose laziness we need to

practice positive faith, and lovingly seek to study the history of saints and martyrs and the crown prepared for all those who conquer.

4. *False Starts*

We should be on our guard against Satan. When he sees our enthusiasm to make a spiritual start, he deceives us and makes us rush into adopting a certain attitude that is not spiritually correct. Some clarification of such behavior follows:

a. Ethical Teachings

These constitute one of the most popular false starts, since it adopts ethical behavior as a substitute for spirituality and faith necessary to lead a life with God. People championing ethical behavior describe spiritual life as rash and compulsive. They substitute worship of God with sweetness towards others. In its essence, Christianity is communion and acquaintance with our Lord and Savior. Within such a relationship, He blesses us with His righteousness, purity, holiness, and immortality. As for self-righteousness, resulting from ethical teachings, it is a dead issue as it proceeds from the self that is enslaved by sin and Satan for “he who is born of the flesh is flesh”. Consequently, those who declare, “God is our righteousness” are the ones who have been born “not of the blood (pride in descent or family lines), or of the will of the flesh (self righteousness), or of the will of man (ethical teachings), but are born of God (their nature has been renewed by union with Christ)” (John 1:13). The Christian lives by grace and testifies to the truth, “Because grace and truth proceed from the Lord Jesus Christ”. Consequently, Christianity calls all who wish to be adorned the good manners and truly good acts to come and be filled with the Holy Spirit of God. It is He who fills man’s life with every virtue, righteousness and good deeds.

b. Sectarian Jealousy and Social Activities

These also constitute false starts. A person may imagine that a correct start would be to practice some kind of religious activity that serves the community. He does so through jealousy and not real love, whereas a good start require repentance and self-denial. In fact, a true Christian realizes that Jesus Christ did not come to insure the interests of His believers or those of social parties for He said, “My kingdom is not of this world”. Sectarian conglomeration is, actually, a satanic substitute for true spiritual activity, as well as a fake form of religion adopted by a deceived person. It becomes clear that a correct start involves repentance and returning to God. In this way, a person becomes a member in the mysterious body of God who fills heaven and earth. This membership instigates man to seek to serve everyone and to deny all personal interests with respect to other people’s interests. For a Christian is the salt of the world, he dissolves to become adequate light to the world, burning to brighten the world without fanaticism or discrimination.

5. *The correct start bears the following marks*

- To love the Lord God with all my heart: This love enables me to put my trust in His blessed Person as the King, Shepherd, and Bridegroom of my soul, and my eternal Friend. I enthrone Him in my heart and entrust His right Arm to purify it of all darkness and corruption.
- To hate sin: and reject the advice of the wicked while persevering in repentance and constantly praying for the eternal and purifying grace of God.

- To love others and be concerned about them and all that is theirs rather than myself for he who loves his brother has moved from darkness to light. It is the experience of receiving communion with our fellow saints and the partaking of the body and blood of Jesus Christ that can truly develop a brotherly spirit among us.

Let us, therefore, hurry to our Lord who is our Savior, our Redeemer, and our Righteousness so as to make a correct start with Him and to continue with Him. This is His promise, “he who comes to me, I will never turn away” (John 6:37).

Examples of Penitents

- In the book “The Paradise of the Spirit”, volume I, the first chapter is about repentance: David the prophet and king (Psalms 11,12), Bishop Moses the black, St. Augustine, St. Mary the Egyptian are some examples of penitents.
- In the book “The Paradise of the Monks” published by the parish of Beni Sweif, on pages 39,89,96,289, and 484 there are more examples.

Instructions, Activities and Exercises

- Conduct a discussion on the signs of correct and incorrect aspects of religion.
- Discuss the value of manners from the human aspect as opposed to the fruit of the work of God’s Spirit in man.
- Discuss the impediments to repentance and its challenge in the life of youth.
- Assign to some students the task of preparing material on the lives of some figures who have repented.
- Assign to some students the task of collecting verses depicting God’s acceptance of penitents and the examples He has given to portray them.

(10) The Spiritual Value of Using the Agpia for Praying

Aim

Training on practicing prayers while using the Agpia (the book of hours) and becoming enriched through them.

Introduction

The book of the Agpia contains the seven prayers of the hours recited during the day and night. The word Agpia is derived from the Coptic word “agp” meaning “hour”. These hours are seven according to David the prophet who says: “Seven times a day I praise You, because of Your righteous judgments” (Psalms 119:164). The hours are prime, terce (third), Sext (6th hour), none (9th hour), vespers (11th hour), Compline (12th hour), and midnight. Each of these prayers has twelve psalms. The fathers who were guided by an angel when they gathered to lay down the canons of daily worship have set the psalms. During their meeting, it is said that the angel of the Lord appeared in their midst and began to chant the psalms. As they listened carefully, he ended chanting after the twelfth psalm and suddenly disappeared.

Main Points

1. The Wisdom of the Church in arranging the Agpia prayers of the hours

There is no doubt that in setting down for us, by the guidance of the Holy Spirit the prayers of the seven hours, the Church intended that we benefit spiritually and increase in faith and stature until we reach the height and completeness of Christ Himself (Ephesians 4: 13).

The Church has drawn from three sources for the prayers in the Agpia: the Psalms, the Gospels, and the prayers of the saintly and holy people. The psalms come first in order and consist of twelve psalms, then one chapter from one of the Gospels, followed by three to six prayers taken from the fathers. A benediction prayed by one of the holy fathers is recited at the end, and is appropriate to the hour of the prayer. The Church has also arranged the hours of prayer to enable her children to lead a life of prayer and adhere to God by being in constant communion with Him. Furthermore the prayers include useful spiritual teachings. The hours have been arranged according to the most important events related to our Savior Jesus Christ so that we are constantly reminded of God's plans to redeem and save us. We will present a brief summary of each hour of the Agpia below:

- Prime, the Prayers of the First Hour: They are arranged in memory of the Lord's resurrection from the dead. We therefore pray to thank God for having allowed us to pass the night safely and beg Him to protect us during the day. We pray that He will protect us from sin and give us peace.
- Terce, the Prayers of the Third Hour: They are arranged in memory of three occasions; the trial of Jesus Christ before Pontius Pilate and the decree to crucify Him (Psalms 15:25; Isaiah 53:7), the Lord's ascension (Psalms 23), and the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples (Acts 2:15).
- Sext, the Prayers of the Sixth Hour: They are arranged in memory of the crucifixion of Christ on the Cross after bearing many sufferings, beatings and floggings. The Lord prayed on the Cross (Luke 23:34) at that hour and also led the Samaritan woman to repent (John 4).
- None, the Prayer of the Ninth Hour. They are in memory of Christ's redeeming death, which was necessary to achieve our salvation. The Church chose a special chapter of the gospel to be read at this hour as most fasts end at the ninth hour (three o'clock in the afternoon).
- Vespers, the Prayers of the Eleventh Hour (Prayer at Sunset): They are arranged in memory of the hour when the Holy Body of Christ was brought down from the Cross to be embalmed and buried.
- Compline, the Prayer of the Twelfth Hour (Bedtime Prayers): They are arranged in memory of the burial of Christ's body after preparing it and according to the words of the psalmist "on my bed I remember You" (Psalm 63:6). This is also an hour of repentance before God at bedtime.
- Midnight Prayers: They are arranged in accordance with the words of the psalmist, "I will rise late in the night to give thanks to You" (Psalm 119:62). The object of staying up late is meditation upon the divine Word which helps man to lead a life of repentance and get ready for the second coming of Our Lord.

2. Some of the benefits and blessings of praying using the Agpia

It is possible to discover the benefits and blessings obtained by following the Agpia if we try the beauty and depth of prayer achieved in the process. Among these, the following will be noted:

1. The prolonged presence before the Lord: In our personal haphazard prayers, we stand before the Lord for a few minutes only. On the other hand, following the Agpia gives us the opportunity to stay longer before God and enjoy a close relationship with Him (Psalms 37:4).
2. The inclusion of all forms of prayer:
 - a. Thanksgiving: This is a special prayer at the beginning of all the prayers in the Agpia, along with numerous verses giving thanks found in other psalms.
 - b. Repentance and Humility: This is in Psalm 50, which is recited in the introduction of every hour just like the prayer of Thanksgiving. There are other numerous psalms dealing with this aspect throughout the Agpia.
 - c. Glorification and Praise: There are many prayers said in this context such as the Three Holies, the Song of the Angels, and other psalms spread out in the various hours of prayer.
 - d. Supplication: This includes all the requests a person prays for as well as his needs in different situations, especially the need for forgiveness of sins both hidden and apparent; as well as seeking God's help to save us from envy and temptation.
3. Praying fervently for mercy: At the end of every hour, the person repeats forty one times the words "Lord have mercy on us". By praying fervently, we know that the Lord will not return our prayers unanswered. Jesus underlined that in the parable of the unjust judge (Luke 18:1-7).
4. Praying in accordance with God's Will: If your prayers are in accordance with God's will, then "the Lord will hear your prayer in the day of trouble and the name of the God of Jacob will keep you safe" (Psalm 20:1-5).
5. Lessons on how to pray: The Psalm says, "Worship God with fear and praise Him as you tremble. Be afraid that He may be angry and destroy you in the way" (Psalm 2:11-12).
6. There is an element of preaching in the prayers of the Agpia: This refers to didactic and preaching trend besides that of worship and contemplation. This complies with the advice of the apostle, "speak day after day to each other while it is still time so your heart not become, hard by being fooled by sin" (Hebrews 3:13).
7. Being spiritually preoccupied all day long: Most people remember the Lord at the start and at the end of the day. As for the rest of the day, it is consecrated to conflicts and worries so that there is no time for prayer. Therefore, our mother, the Church, who is concerned about our joy and salvation, invites us to pray all day long by providing the Agpia, the Book of the seven canonical prayers.
8. A healthy and spiritual meal: One of the Church fathers likens the seven canonical prayers of the hours, Agpia, to a nourishing meal and goes on to say that it is the attire of a wedding that qualifies us and directs our thoughts and feelings so that we can enjoy the blessings of this invitation. This attire consists of a dress, a belt, and shoes: the dress stands for the Lord's prayer, the belt stands for the prayer of thanksgiving, and the shoes stand for the prayer of repentance.
9. A dialogue with God: "Hear me when I call O God of my righteousness, You have made a way for me when I needed help" (Psalm 4).
10. Countless spiritual benefits: Through prayers based on the Agpia, we learn to live a life of faith. Our hearts are filled with peace and security and we draw various spiritual lessons.

3. The reasons that led the Church to use the Psalms in Prayer

The Church has chosen to use the book of Psalms in all prayers for many reasons, some of which are:

- In the character of David there is a combination of astonishing experiences, he was a shepherd, a great king, an inspired prophet, a saint, and a human being tried by temptations. These experiences find an echo in our psychological make up and needs.
- The psalms are the Words of God conveyed to David by the Holy Spirit and this is what Jesus clarified by His own words, “David being led by the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 22:43).
- The Psalms contain the element of thanksgiving, the language of angels and spiritual beings.
- The Psalms provide a wonderful opportunity for contemplation to those who say them sincerely, for the Spirit of God is their source.

4. Our Lord Jesus Christ is our Ideal when we say our prayers and organize them

- Our Lord Jesus Christ is our Great Teacher of prayer who spent all night long in prayer (Luke 6:12). He used to pray in the early morning as it is written, “in the morning, the sun was up, Jesus went to a place where He could be on His own... He prayed there” (Luke 2:35).
- Jesus prayed at the sixth hour (Luke 23:34) and He also prayed at the ninth hour (Luke 23:46).
- He used to pray at night (Matthew 14:23). In the midnight prayer He observed in the Garden of Gethsemane, He offered three consecutive vigils (Matthew 26:36-45).
- To emphasize the midnight prayers, He gave the parable of the wise virgins (Matthew 25: 13). Thus Jesus set firm foundations for prayer and worship (1 Corinthians 14:4), and organized it for us. For He is a God of peace and order and He is not a God of confusion (I Corinthians 14:3).
- That explains why He has left us a model to follow (1 Peter 2:21) in order to enable us to walk in His steps.

5. The ideal way of praying with the help of the Agpia

To pray in an ideally correct way using the Agpia without being burdened or bored by routine, you may follow few rules or conditions:

1. Have your own Agpia prayer book next to your bed and note down on the margin your own contemplations or interpretations that help you understand and meditate.
2. Even if you have studied the prayers by heart, look at the pages and use all your senses while saying them so that you are not distracted.
3. Say your prayers aloud to prevent your mind from wandering. Do not say them quickly, otherwise you could miss the pleasure and spirituality of prayer, and do not mumble the words.
4. Reciting the psalms to music or chanting them is important as this provides comfort and consolation.
5. Read some interpretations and studies related to the psalms and gospels to help clarify ambiguous verses.
6. Raise your hands as high as you can during prayers. Do the same with your eyes, heart, and thoughts, as well as your whole being. This will allow you to live some moments in

heaven while you are still on earth, and conquer through perseverance all the army of the evil one as well as their wicked head. Note the attitude of Moses in this context (Exodus 17:11).

7. Repeat the sweet name of Our Lord Jesus Christ during prayer; every time you say “God” follow up by “Jesus Christ”.
8. It would be convenient to make the sign of the Cross and kneel down to the floor every time you give glory to God.
9. Beat on your chest in humility every time you mention sin and offer repentance. Ask for mercy by saying, for example, “have mercy upon me, according to Your great mercy, O God”.
10. It is preferable to say all the prayers included in each hour, though you could consult your father of confession. Do not neglect to say a spontaneous prayer at the end of your prayers in which you have recited the psalms.
11. If you are behind, you could compensate the hours you have missed by saying them at any other time. This is useful and good and you may want to sit quietly after that to get some spiritual and physical rest.

(11) Man from a Christian Perspective

Aim

Learning about the ultimate goal of the creation of man. God has a certain message for man.

Verses

Genesis 1:31; Genesis 2:7-25; Psalms 8:4-8; Ephesians 2:10; 1 Corinthians 16

Introduction

Stimulate interest in the topic by posing a question, “Is man a divine being or an earthly one?” We would answer this question if we could define the reason for the creation of man. God is Love and consequently He wishes to create beings with whom to set up a tie of love and to introduce them into His life and joy. This is what is meant by the glory of God: that man should live and be happy. St. Ambrose accordingly says, “the glory of God is the life of man”. It is also useful to discuss the above verses and draw the main points as follows:

Main Points

1. We notice the difference between what God said upon creating man and what He said when He created all other creatures.
2. It seems that “in our image” denotes free will and reasoning (understanding himself and what surrounds him). Freedom fills a person with a sense of responsibility and underlines that we are God’s children. Therefore, we are able to know Him and be united with Him.
3. The word “in His Likeness” implies the goal man should aim at within the scope of virtue and holiness, and which he could attain in varying degrees.
4. Sin does not strip man of God’s image (features that characterize human nature). However, it strips him of the “likeness” (since virtue and holiness are related to man’s free choice).

5. The words “let us create man” do not refer to the spirit alone or to the body alone. They refer to both since man is one entity. Moreover, the fact that man has a body does not make him less than angels. For man has a more perfect nature and he has been granted greater potentials (since he is a small world). Actually, he is the meeting point of all spiritual and physical (material) creation. As such, man is a priest to creation in its totality.
6. “In the image of God man, has been created” so that he is enabled to see God Who lives within his heart.
 - a. Through faith and referring to his own soul for “the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21). St. Anthony said, “he who knows himself, knows God”. St. Isaac, the Syrian said, “if you have a pure heart then heaven is within you”. It has been said of St. Pakhomius that, “due to the purity of his heart he saw God, Who is invisible, as though through a looking glass”.
 - b. Since man is made in the image of God, then every member of the human race, however sinful or poorly talented, is very precious and dear in God’s sight. St. Clement of Alexandria says, “when you see your brother, you see the picture of God”. Such an honor is underlined in Orthodox worship, honor to all mankind.
 - c. Moreover, since man is made in the image of God, then his soul is immortal for God “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life”. This breath is the mystery behind man’s power. We notice that when Jesus rose from the dead, “He breathed on them” and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22). Immortality applies to the soul and excludes the body, “the dust shall return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return to God who gave it”. (Ecclesiastic 12:7). However, the nature of the body made of dust is not evil, for Adam was good while he was made of that body, and before his fall. For God does not create evil and there is a difference between natural instincts that are pure and holy and the deviations that have occurred to these after the onset of sin.
7. “He made them male and female” (refer to the following texts: Genesis 2:21-25; Matthew 19:4 -6; Ephesians 5:28-32):
 - a. We note how St. Paul uses the same expressions for Adam and Eve who is a bone taken out of his bones and flesh taken out of his flesh. St Paul uses this to underline the relationship between Jesus Christ and us by saying, “For we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones” (Ephesians 5:30).
 - b. The natural relationship that tied Adam and Eve (being of one body became ours once more through Jesus and the mystery of the Holy Spirit which made the two become one “man and wife”). This new unified body has become the seed of the Church, which consists of members joined together, and which is the mystery of Christ’s body.
 - c. “I will make him a helper comparable to him” (Genesis 2:18; Genesis 1:27-29). This indicates that there is no distinction whatsoever between the genders from the point of view of their rights and duties, whether these be spiritual or social. St. Paul underlines this point as he says, “there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).
8. Why did God give Adam the commandment? The human soul arises out of God Himself. Consequently, it possesses wisdom, freedom, and will even though these are limited because the physical body binds them. That is why the human soul is aware of its self.

Moreover, this is evident in the use of its talents granted to it by God. On this account, it was necessary that God give Adam a commandment that would offer the opportunity for him to use his freedom, his will, and his wisdom besides self-realization. Thus, the commandment was given to Adam to underline his freedom rather than to bind it, to achieve self-realization rather than to cancel or thwart it. Moreover, the commandment is a tie of love between God and Adam. Adam obeys His words as a sign of sincere love and trust in God and therefore deserves a good reward.

9. How did man fall? Adam's nature was not inclined to evil. His fall proceeded from his own free will, which he projected into a prohibited larger scope. By obeying the evil one, Adam fell and committed evil, which he did not know. What he did know, however, was that the result of evil is death.

- a. The state of the soul after its fall: He started to fear God, who loved him, and the voice of indictment and punishment filled his being, "You shall surely die".
- b. His will to do good weakened as the Spirit of God left man while the knowledge of good and evil introduced in him an enormous duality and inner conflict. It became impossible for man however hard he resisted, to progress alone, even one step, towards eternity. This is due to the soul that is impotent in the face of directing its conscience towards matters above its potentials, all on its own.
- c. The crack in man's being: (i) Within himself [a conflict between the spirit and the body, between the conscience and the self], (ii) Between himself and others [egoism (of Adam), hatred and envy (of Cain)], and (iii) Between him and the creation [upon losing God's image within him, he lost his power over the earth and nature which began to revolt against him].

10. Man's Salvation:

- a. Man's salvation takes place by the Incarnation. In this act, God united Himself with man so that His life might flow into man and consequently be granted to him. In other words, man becomes an image of God and shares His love, glory, holiness, and immortality. This does not mean that man achieves the essence of God, but it makes him, as St. Peter says, "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4).
- b. Having experienced the features of God's love to us, we understand the quality of love we should show our neighbors on the level of the family, the Church, the country, and the whole world. This is what Jesus requested, "that you love one another, as I have loved you" (John 15:12).

Based on the above, Christian love embodies the following characteristics:

- i. It is founded upon self-sacrifice, "hereby we perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 John 3:16).
- ii. It is embellished by sharing, "who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?" (2 Corinthians 11:29).
- iii. On the plane of the will and of work, "my little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18).

- iv. Gratuitous unconditional love, “for when we were yet without strength in due time Christ died for the ungodly” (Romans 5:6-8).
- v. Love that is specifically directed to those in suffering, deep need, and the oppressed.

11. Man has a divine task. Through that he achieves the full stature of his humanity.

- a. “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).
- b. For the Christian after having received the gift of faith in Christ is invited to use all his potentials in love, in doing good works as he follows Christ’s leadership in all things:
 - i. In thought, (we have been granted His thoughts).
 - ii. In words, (From the good treasure of his heart his mouth speaks).
 - iii. At work, (where a new divine concept operates after the renewal of our nature, so that work is not merely a social obligation).
 - iv. In worship, on the internal level where our humanity rises to an angelic degree. On the external level: catering for the needs and visiting the widows, the orphans, the sick, the sad, and the imprisoned.

Activities

- Study the songs of praise and practice them.
- Summarize the following books: The Means to Reach God, and The Introduction to the Doctrines
- Undertake a research about “Knowledge and Faith”.
- Practice works of sacrificial love (that is self giving, e.g. catering to the needs of and visiting orphanages, sick brothers and sisters, prisoners, and those who suffer).

(12) The Christian and the Life of Chastity

Aim

Clarification of the Christian understanding of a life of chastity, Chastity is the fruit of inward control and interaction of God with man.

Verses

2 Thessalonians 2:22; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20; 1 Corinthians 7:1-9; Galatians 5:16-26

Introduction

Sex in man is related to instincts; yet it transcends them.

- Ordinary instincts pose for a thing or object, which upon its consumption is relieved of its tension. It is like hunger, which disappears by consuming food, similarly thirst. As for sex in man, it is essentially a drive to unity, and unity cannot be achieved between a person and a thing or object. However, it could be between one person and another. This unity between two patrons has the ultimate goal of perfecting each other. It is a meeting of greater depth and goals than merely a passing pleasure.

- If the object of sex were pleasure, then the other person would be of no importance other than a tool or means of achieving pleasure. He/she is no longer a person to unite with, but a thing or object to consume.
- If we isolate sex from its human implication to overcome the problem of loneliness in man, and be satisfied with trivial pleasure as a goal, then the result will be a greater feeling of loneliness and inward emptiness. These lead to frustration disappointment and boredom.
- The western world has solved the problem of sex in a negative way, through immorality. The result was greater experience of boredom and frustration. This is due to the fact that man is a divine creature that is unsatisfied by trivial pleasure. Moreover, such triviality opposes man's nature and draws man from one form of slavery into a stronger one. This explains why the majority of western youth use drugs to overcome the problem of their overwhelming sense of loss.
- On the other hand, Christianity does not call for harmful repression; rather it calls for inner control that can be achieved by the support of grace that strengthens man's will. The soul, then, truly overcomes its egoism and isolation and hence is enabled to participate in the communion with God and fellowmen.
- It is essential that sex prevail in achieving its unifying and human objective. In doing so it out steps narcissism, which could make it a prey to suppression, suffocation, or loss in lustful pleasures. For an effective realization of its objectives, one of two alternatives may be practiced:
 - Determining to control your instincts and direct its energies towards seeking a counterpart and having marital perspectives.
 - Greater transcendence of sex and converting the wealth of emotions to God, to His service and the service of others. Although these alternatives are different, yet their ultimate goal is the same since in both cases there is the search to meet another one (a counterpart). Such a meeting cannot be wholly satisfactory without God who is the core of unity among people and the pole to mankind's longing.

What is the meaning of Christian chastity?

1. Chastity does not simply mean refraining from practicing delinquent lusts while the mind and heart remain impure. Rather, it involves the work of grace, for chastity is a positive virtue and not a negative one.
2. Repression portrays wrongly the blessed sexual instincts as an enemy... so that we turn all our energies to fight them. In doing that, we lose the blessed function of our sexual potential, which is a source of generosity, love and sacrifice. We also waste our original energies and efforts. This leads to tension, psychological disturbances, immorality, evil egocentricity, and the inclination to dominate.
3. On the other hand, Christian chastity is the positive channeling of sexual energy, thus drawing from its wealth to strengthen the personality and enliven the different human activities. Moreover, ultimate chastity crosses the boundaries of eternal conduct and is achieved through the purity of the whole being and holiness of thought.
4. True chastity is not easy to achieve, yet a good Christian carries his Cross daily feeling happy and free. His heart, which is inclined towards eternity, urges him to do without physical pleasure willingly and joyfully. In that sense, chastity is a form of martyrdom

and according to St. Athanasius, “deaden your members on earth and become a martyr by your own will”.

5. Christian chastity associates sex in marriage with love, self-giving, and sacrifice. Consequently, it is desirable before and after marriage. For a chaste person constantly struggles to tear himself away from the call of selfish, trivial pleasure. He does so because he has chosen to be wholly dedicated psychologically and physically, either to the mystery of holy wedlock or to press forward and persevere for the sake of a better love and complete consecration to God.
6. Christian chastity is all-inclusive for it includes instincts, inclinations, potentials, senses, clothing and food. It is also a maturing process, which deepens according to one's sincerity to God and the obedience of His commandments.

Chastity and Physical Health

- The center of instincts in the brain is greatly independent in animals. In man, however, it is subject to a higher center and that is a layer, which is subject to the frontal lobe of the brain behind the forehead. This area is the center dominating the self and reactionary balance. It also governs man's ability to control himself and channel his instincts without surrendering to their power. This is where the restraint of the senses is essential, especially that of sight as Our Lord pointed out.
- The nervous system is greatly affected by habit. On that account desire spontaneously instigates lust even though external provocation is absent. Perseverance, patience and conscious restraint (without suppression) is important here in order to form correct habits protecting the youth from constant provocation.
- It is also necessary to avoid wrong trends in religious education, which teach that the body is the source of sin, therefore hateful. Here the difference between the body and lust of the body needs to be clarified.

Chastity and Psychological Health

- The satisfaction of a child's needs (security, love, freedom, control) fill him with confidence in life and people. Therefore, he/she is enabled to step out of his/her own entity in order to communicate with others. Upon growing up into a young youth, a child is urged, through love for others as well as a deep sense of conviction and obligation, to reach out to them.
- Moreover, children should not be made to fear sexual matters. On the contrary, his/her questions should be answered intelligently and broad mindedly. In this way, they will grow up learning to accept themselves and feel confident that God has not created anything harmful within them, which could cause tension, conflict, or sadness.
- The importance of a spiritual life founded upon correct faith and filled with the spirit of thanksgiving and joy is most essential. A happy family life is also essential along with the satisfaction arising from leading an ecclesiastical life (Church life).

Chastity and the Spiritual Life

- Spiritual life consists of positive persevering work, in which a person, out steps his own self and rises above it in a state of sublimation. He will receive blessings only after perseverance and struggling.

- A true Christian crucifies the body with the various whims and lusts (Galatians 5:24), and this by the action of the Holy Spirit within him. For a spiritual life is deeply associated with Christ (I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me). It also involves the actual practice of prayer, confession, communion, and constantly reading the Word of God to appease our hunger. Such practices are the means of obtaining grace.
- Such grace, which we obtain through our positive struggle, blesses our spiritual life, which flows purely and sincerely out of the heart. It also ensures steadfastness and growth in our love, generosity and chastity.

Exercises

1. Develop the spirit of deep reciprocal love and concern among youth.
2. Develop the spirit of cooperation by carrying out tasks together.
3. Develop the spirit of repentance daily and conscientiously, careful scrutiny during confession and constantly practicing the mystery of the Holy Communion.

Questions

1. Christian chastity is a virtue, which has further implications than the world's view of it. Elaborate and clarify the importance of this virtue.
2. Discuss the following expressions:
 - a. Christian virtue is comprehensive and progressive.
 - b. Christian virtue does not produce or cause suppression or subjugation of the instincts.
 - c. Chastity is an important issue for youth.
3. Mention the relationship between Christian chastity and each of the following:
 - a. Psychological health
 - b. Physical health
4. Chastity is closely related to man's spiritual life. Explain.
5. What are the internal and external factors that oppose chastity? How can these be overcome?

(13) David and the Life of Praise

Aim

To reveal the value of giving praise, as an opportunity to worship God and to underline its strong association with the personality of David, the psalmist shepherd.

Main. Points

- David is a Hebrew name meaning “loved”. He is the son of Jesse of Bethlehem and the second king to rule Israel. He was born in the village of Bethlehem of an Ephrathite out of the tribe of Judah. He was beautiful as he was fair and had pretty eyes. He was also strong and courageous. In his youth, he killed a lion and a bear that attacked the flock he was guarding and saved the lamb from their cruelty.
- Furthermore, he killed the giant Goliath, while he was still young. This saved his people from shame before their enemies. Samuel the prophet anointed him on God's orders as Israel's king when God rejected Saul. Saul meanwhile followed David in an attempt to

kill him, but God saved David from his hands. Then Saul was killed and David became king of Israel. God praised David and said; "I have found David the son of Jesse a man after My own heart" (Acts 13:22).

- ❑ A chain of kings followed from the house of David, from whom Jesus Christ the Son of God came to save mankind. David was considered “the sweet psalmist of Israel” (2 Samuel 23:1). He was named the writer of the Psalms as he said most of them while filled with the spirit of prophesy. They are full of prophesies concerning the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ incarnate and His redeeming death, as well as His ascension into Heaven and presence on the right of the Father. David was a clear symbol of Christ at birth, for Christ was born in David’s small city of Bethlehem. David was born in a humble house just like the Lord who left His throne to become a slave.
- ❑ He was honest in his work as a shepherd symbolizing the good Shepherd. The envy of Saul towards David represents the envy of the Pharisees towards Jesus. David loved music and he played the harp with great skill (1 Samuel 16:18-23). It was David who set the order of service in the holy places of God (2 Chronicle 6,31). He lived for seventy years, thirty before kingship and forty after being king. He then died in peace and his son Solomon reigned after him. The Church remembers David on the twenty second day of Kiahk may his prayers be with us, Amen.

David and Praise

David was constantly preoccupied with God. In his worship, therefore, he constantly praised and sang as that is the best way of expressing a combination of feelings and meaningful words. The Holy Spirit inspired most of the songs of praise in the Holy Book spoken by holy saints. This is because prayer and praise proceeding from the soul is a sign and proclamation of the reciprocity of the will and the grace of God that is poured on it.

Praise in the life of David is a characteristic that distinguishes the life of a Christian

David presents a living example of that, “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down” (Psalm 136)...etc. He and his comrades could not offer praise as they were estranged from the city of the Lord, Jerusalem. This refers to the lack or regression of love in the heart of a Christian due to his estrangement from God and absence of a relationship with Him. Consequently, love gradually cools down, and the heart stops giving praise or thanks to God.

Christ and Praise in the Psalms of David

The Psalms of David are a treasure that contains all modes of prayer.

Thanksgiving: The Lord is my light (Psalms 27)
The Lord is my Shepherd (Psalms 23)
Lord, You have been favorable (Psalms 85)

Humility: Psalms 150

Glorification: O Lord, how excellent is Your name (Psalms 8)
Praise the Lord...

The book of Psalms is one of the most beautiful and deepest books, which speaks of the Lord. It is often referred to as the book of Jesus Christ, as He lives in the Psalms through symbols and signs as well as His suffering and characteristics.

The Lord and Shepherd (Psalm 22, 23)
Christ the Rock of the Ages (Psalm 17:5; Psalm 31:2-3; Psalm 40:2)
The Light of the world (Psalm 27:1; Psalm 18:27)
The Redeemer (Psalm 19:12-14; Psalm 69:18)
The King (Psalm 2:6-8; Psalm 20)
The Son of God (Psalm 2:110)
The Priest (Psalm 110; Psalm 40)
His suffering (Psalm 22; Psalm 35:11)
His resurrection (Psalm 16:5-10; Psalm 110)

Instructions and Activities

- It is preferable to have the Book of the Psalmody at hand, to quote some of the expressions used for praise.
- Encourage the youth to join the service of praise with the chorus and their leader, and to begin by devoting a short time, then gradually increasing the time to avoid boredom.
- Arouse their enthusiasm to learn a few short songs of praise.

(14) Jesus Christ Isaiah the Fulfillment of the Prophecies

Aim

Clarification of prophecies about Jesus Christ as the central issue of the Holy Bible, and the way these have been fulfilled by the coming of Christ.

Main Points

1. Definition of A Prophecy: It is the announcement of matters before their occurrence and it is inspired by God “And Aaron your brother shall be your prophet” (Exodus 7:1), “Now you shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth” (Exodus 4:15).
2. Were there prophecies about Christ in the Old Testament (El Torah)? Yes, Christ is in all its books and in every verse. All the lines and words are nothing but glorious reflections of Jesus Christ.
3. The prophecies concerning Jesus Christ are so numerous and include details concerning His life and His Divine Person that you can get to know all the specifics from the Old Testament.

The following are some of the most important prophecies that have been fulfilled by the coming of Christ:

Prophecy	Old Testament	New Testament
Place of birth	Micah 5:2	Matthew 2:1-6
God Incarnate	Isaiah 9:6	John 1:14
Born of a virgin	Isaiah 7:14	Matthew 1:8-23

Sold for silver	Zechariah 11:12	Matthew 26:14-15
False testimonies against Him	Psalms 35:11	Matthew 26:59-60
His fall under the Cross	Psalms 109:24	John 19:17
His prayer for His accusers	Isaiah	Luke
Giving Him vinegar and gall	Psalms 61:21	Matthew 27:34
Giving up the Spirit	Psalms 31:5	Luke 23:46
Darkness on His crucifixion	Amos 8:9	Matthew 27:45
His resurrection	Psalms 16:10; Psalms 22:22	Matthew 28; 1 Corinthians 15
His ascension	Psalms 4:7; Psalms 68:18	Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9-12

Christ and the phases of prophecy are explained below:

- From Adam to Moses: reference to the Redeemer was made besides specification of the person and tribe out of which Christ will come.
- From Moses to Christ: in this phase the rituals and rites were set down then the Psalms and the redemption. The time and conditions in which Christ would come are defined accompanied by accurate calculations and specific testimonials.
- Christ and the Church: in this phase the prophecies indicate the growth of faith and of the Church, the destruction of the temple, and finally the new earth and heaven.

The testimony of the Holy Books for Christ:

- His redeeming work: “Shall bruise the head of the serpent” (Genesis 3:15).
- Christ’s origin: from the line of Abraham (Genesis 23:18), and from the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10), and from the stem of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1).
- A man of sufferings: acquainted with grief (Isaiah 53:3). He was beaten; lashed and spit upon (Isaiah 50:6). His cry on the Cross: “My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Psalms 22:1).
- He will also arise: He rose victorious over death (Psalms 16:10).
- Just as the prophecies concerning the past have been fulfilled, so will those concerning the future. “Yes. I come quickly...Come O Lord Jesus Christ”.

Instructions and Activities

- Arouse in youth the desire to complete the search for the other prophecies and verses that have been fulfilled in the New Testament.
- Undertake a study or research about Christ in anyone book in the Holy Bible (Old or New Testament).
- Deepen the foundation of faith in the minds of youth, as they need to believe in the prophecies. This is an area that helps to prepare them in receiving Jesus as the Redeemer, Savior, and constant friend living within them by the grace of the Holy Spirit.
- Deepen the meaning of prophecies concerning the future and organize conferences that focus upon the new resurrection and the confirmed victory of God’s children. They will be victorious because, while still living in this world they are sure of their eternal inheritance which according to the prophecies will be fulfilled by His second coming.

(15) Christianity and the Problems of our Age

Aim

Recognizing the characteristics of this age. How can Christian youth face the most important problems of his/her age with the spirit of faith?

Verses

“I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (John 10:9,10).

Introduction

- This is an age of science, knowledge, and specialization, which makes it necessary for us to have a specific education that would enable us to make decisions and to solve our own problems. It is, consequently, vital to be concerned with our religious education as well, which would serve as a foundation for our eternal life.
- This is an age of rebellion and revolt against all forms of authority whether that of parents or others which appear to restrict our freedom.
- It is the age of speed and impulsiveness, which lead to anxiety and self dissatisfaction.
- It is also a materialistic age where earthly matters prevail. Consequently, certain distinct problems are widespread, such as: atheism, doubt, and social evils, legitimate versus forbidden matters. The most outstanding social evils are: cheating, bribery, usury and dishonesty.

Atheism

- In the old times atheism sprang from the basic idea of the presence of God. The motive was to revolt against His authority. Science and philosophy were simultaneously used for this purpose but each seemed to prove the opposite.
- In modern times, existentialism the modern form of atheism, sought to prove that man is everything that exists and that there is no other being to bind his authority or potentials.

What are the direct causes of atheism?

- Inadequate spiritual and mental understanding, as well as the ignorance of God's love to man who created him is His image and likeness.
- Scientific deliberations and analysis: every day science testifies to God. It also proves, each day, with proven facts, the truth of the Holy Bible. For the Holy Bible has been given to us that we should know God and obtain eternal life “And this is eternal life that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3)
- The wrong idea about the Day of Judgment, as people imagine the overpowering dread and the fear of that Day, although the Bible clearly mentions that “there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” (Romans 8:1).

What are the motives leading to atheism?

- The wish to criticize.
- Incorrect religiousness based on formalities and appearances.
- Misunderstanding the basis of inspiration.

- The presence of beloved sins and the rejection of a repentant life.

What are the consequences of atheism?

- The loss of a true understanding of humanity; for man occupies his place in the creation through the honor that God has granted to him. It is through man's rejection of God that man lowers himself to the status of animals and is deprived of his ideal and his hope in eternal life.
- The loss of humane brotherly feelings.
- Deprivation from earthly and eternal happiness. This arises from the loss of the spirit of faith, leading to anxiety and insecurity. That is how Adam felt after his fall. Being unrepentant is in itself sufficient to deprive man of eternal happiness.

What is the attitude of Christianity to atheism?

- Facing contrivers.
- Giving directions and guidance that enable youth to mature spiritually.
- Treating atheists with demonstrated love and avoiding rough arguments or discussions.
- Praying fervently to God with deep faith for them, that they may be led to repentance and receive forgiveness.

Doubt

Doubt is a word that denotes wavering between faith and thoughts but more inclined to thoughts. An example of such a state is Thomas to whom Jesus said, "Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed". Another example is St. Peter to whom the Lord said, "Why did you doubt...you have little faith".

What are the factors of doubt that impede faith?

- Sin and its aftermath: feelings of guilt.
- Failure and its aftermath: feeling that God has withdrawn from His children. As for the believer, he says, "all things work together for good to those who love God" (Romans 8:28).
- The sin of pride, which leads to disbelief of the Holy Bible instead of praying and asking God for understanding.

What means does Christianity use to treat doubt?

- Jesus Christ did not condemn waverers. Conversely, He treated them gently and guided them to faith through a show of divine conviction and deep love.
- Setting good model or example and demonstrating the love of Christ and its results, which are apparent in believers (Psalms 23:4).

What is the outcome of faith in mans behavior?

Belief in the doctrines is closely related to life, since a person who has faith is not shaken or moved by events or tragedies.

Social Evils

Social evils cannot be treated by harsh punishment; nevertheless they attempt to be inhibitory. They are not associated with social standards. Conversely, many wealthy people practice them.

a. Cheating

- This is a combination of several evils (lying, being sly, hypocrisy, injustice, bearing hate, pride).
- It has many forms, e.g. speech, in dealings, in examinations, laudatory and hypocritical.
- Cheating causes the spirit of God to grief. Besides, it deprives man of his self respect and becomes an eternal source of shame.

b. Bribery

This could be a financial aspect indicating the acquisition of what is not rightly one's own but that of others. Christianity rejects bribery completely and considers it a sign of lack of faith (Judges 16:5; Proverb 29:4; Isaiah 5:22; Psalms 146:3-5).

c. Usury

- The Holy Bible condemns usury and there are many instances of that (Exodus 22:25; - Ezra 18:5; 1 Thessalonians 6:10).
- Christianity teaches that the love of money is the root of all evil and a usurer loves money.

d. Dishonesty

Honesty is a requirement and it flows from the love of the Lord. Its rewarding wreath is eternal life. The Bible is full of models of honesty: Moses (Numbers 12:7), Abraham (Numbers 9:7,8), Joseph (Genesis 39:9), and the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30).

The importance of the virtue of honesty:

- It is vital for the success of any work (read 2 Kings 12:15).
- It empowers the person to undergo great effort.
- It teaches the person to the possessions of others.

Treatment to Social Evils

- Strengthening the relationship between God and man as a basis for the relationships among people.
- It is not right for a Christian to adopt any means that oppose the ultimate goal (of heavenly life).
- Clarify the dividing line between Christian virtues and matters that cause grief to God.

The Christian Attitude towards Absolved and Forbidden Matters

Christian life consists of a general inclination that prevails in life and controls the spirit, the soul, and the body (Galatians 2:20). Thus, Christian life does not consist merely of a number of commandments we have to observe, or a number of errors we have to avoid. The children of God are led by the Holy Spirit and can therefore distinguish between virtues and vice.

It is impossible to set a rule about absolved and forbidden matters:

- The judgment of acts does not rest upon appearances but on the sincere intentions revealed by God.
- Setting rules concerning absolved and forbidden matters alienate us from the spirit of the Bible.

- Principles can be fixed but life is mutable.
- The Holy Bible does not contain texts on absolved and forbidden matters. Rather, it presents general principles.
- The work of the Spirit in the New Testament lifts up our hearts and assists us to be perfect.

How do we behave in the different situations we face?

We can know how to behave by knowing the Will of God and that is to love the good of others. Consequently, our conscience must be enlightened by the Holy Spirit Who can make distinctions (Romans 14:23; 1 Corinthians 6:12).

How can we define our attitude towards what is absolved or forbidden?

- Do not judge others, but judge yourself only.
- Before undertaking any course of action ask yourself: Is this in accordance with my life with Christ? Does this task obsess me? Does it strengthen and develop my spiritual life?
- As long as what you are doing is good and pleasing to God, do not be concerned about people (Romans 14). If you are doubtful, do not act.
- You might feel that something it is good and you do not feel guilty in doing it, yet you sacrifice and drop it for the well being of others (1 Corinthians 10:33).

(16) Youth and the Case of Love

Aim

To underline the true meaning of holy marital love

Introduction

One of the words that have been greatly corrupted by the world is that of “love”. This is so true that it is very hard to dismantle all the false meanings and delinquent trends associated with it in the writings and words of many.

Main Points

What is the difference between true love and evil lust?

1. True love: True love is to want another person not as an object to be possessed. It is a life of sharing whose basis is devotion and freedom. It is more like “light”. Lust, on the other hand, is contact with someone else on the level of the body. This is often done in the absence of spiritual unity or true love so that it results in greater isolation, hatred and awful enmity, in spite of actual physical union between two people.
2. Love is not physical lust: Physical contact is not a means to unity, for both bodies remain separate even after contact. Consequently, lovers face each other without containing or possessing one another. As a result, they realize that physical love has not succeeded in unifying them together, especially and as long as each finds himself/herself reverting to his/her original isolation after physical contact is over.
3. In the Holy Bible, we have an example of such an instance. We see how Amnon lusted for Tamar, Absalom's sister, being driven by strong physical desire. After taking her, the Bible tells us that: “Then Amnon hated her exceedingly; so that the hatred with which he

hated her was greater than the love with which he loved her" (2 Sam 13: 15). It is clear that lust arises from impulsiveness, rashness, and violent reactions. Love, on the other hand, is self-giving, respectful, controlled, and rational.

What, then, are the constituents of true sexual love?

1. Physical maturity: Since the body plays a role in marital life.
2. Psychological maturity: Indicated by the liberation from all psychological bonds that impede the projection of the personality. By maturity we mean spiritual progress and appreciation of the communal life and acquaintance with God. It also implies the stand that youth take in opposition of his whims and bad inclinations.
3. Fullness: A personality that experiences inner fullness is rich optimistic and positive. Moreover, it is free from all psychological complexes or hallucinations. Consequently, it is capable of loving.
4. Divine love: Real love that arises from divine love and pours into a youth's heart by the Holy Spirit is capable of sanctifying his feelings, thoughts and senses. Thus he is qualified for holy matrimony and its pure bed.
5. Freedom: Denotes, here, internal and external freedom.
 - a. Internal freedom: This is liberation from the slavery of the self, lust, bad habits, past imprints and outcome of early education. If each lover feels that he/she is offering himself/herself to the other freely and with appreciation, then this ascertains a happy marital life. Besides, it strengthens the ties of love and unity.
 - b. External freedom: There should not be any kind of external factors causing pressure upon the choice made by a partner. This arises from an insistence to choose from a certain family, or of certain financial standard, or from within the family circle of either the father or the mother.
6. Attraction and inspiration: When a person is physically minded, then they will be attracted by physical considerations. When a person is temperamental, then psychological matters attract them. When they are spiritual, then the attraction is due to spiritual aspects in the other person. Furthermore, it must be clear that the physical and psychological factors are subject to the spiritual outlook to the divine inspiration and the true Christian spiritual inclinations.
7. Marital commitment: There is no love without marriage, and no marriage without love. This is true because love outside marriage carries the germ of self-destruction. The human soul cannot cancel sexual love from its natural physical expression since a real sexual love is meaningless without a child and a family.

Is it essential to have love before marriage?

1. Love develops and is perfected in marriage, even though it begins before that. It is therefore important for a person, choosing a wife, to feel psychologically and spiritually inclined towards that partner besides being emotionally attracted to her. It is necessary for each of them to feel that there is mutual harmony in their likes and in their inclinations. Furthermore, each one of them should be fully prepared to be self-giving, devoted and self-sacrificing.
2. The Church has set accordingly, a period of engagement during which a couple gets to know one another within a framework of respect; holiness, decency and devoid of any

artificiality. They get to know the goals, principles, trends and challenges. Besides, they learn how to face difficulties and walk in the light leading to marriage.

The characteristics of Christian marital love

1. A Christian love is not self centered but rather self-sacrificing and focused on devotion (self-giving). Laying down oneself for the others without any expectation of reward or benefit.
2. A Christian love is unaccountable love is not defined by certain motives. Rather, it exists and its core arises from the mystery of the inner love, which is creative and accepts the loved one as they are.
3. A Christian love sanctifies physical instincts and redeems them since it considers that the sexual relationship between couples is not hateful in the eyes of God. In fact He is the reason for the spiritual love that fills couples hearts, unifying them in a wonderful spiritual relationship.
4. A Christian love is a demure uncompulsive love. It is love that is not rash or delinquent, realizes the commitment of marital love and is aware of all its difficulties. It is love that is capable of passing through hardship, however great.
5. A Christian love is a realistic love that is devoid of imagination and of delinquent dreams. It is cautious and kind and at the same time unselfish, envious or boastful (1 John 4:18).
6. A Christian love is a strong love. It is as strong as death (Song of Sol 8:6). It is love that draws upon the divine love for its existence (John 17:16).
7. A Christian love is a comprehensive love that has a transparency, which perceives the soul of the loved one as light. This love brings a couple so close that they learn to know each other to a degree that cannot be attained except by lovers. The beauty of such love is that it eliminates distance between the couple.
8. A Christian love is a fruitful overflowing love. It is a creative powerful function, which produces more love. In the process, it overflows to bear a blessed fruit in the form of a child and the marital love will expand and become motherly and fatherly love.
9. A Christian love overpowers and conquers death. The joy the Holy Spirit pours into the hearts of a married couple renews the body and ascertains perpetual union. If we say that marital love lasts forever, then what did the Lord mean when He told the Sadducees, “For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage”. Does this mean that marriage, in all its aspects, will disappear? Actually, all that is related to the physical, material world will disappear. Yet the essence of marriage remains, for example, harmony and understanding.

Christian marital love follows the pattern of the Lord's love to the Church

It is a gift of divine inspiration and a mystery that unites a man and a woman together. They undertake to live inseparably even through death. We see, therefore, that the words of the apostle are not a coincidence when he speaks about marital love within the context of Christ's love to the Church, “husbands, love your wives” (Ephesians 5:23 -25).

Activities and Instructions

- The servant should discuss the difference between true Christian love and lust and physical infatuation.

- A comparison would be useful in clarifying our marital and sexual values in contrast to western values, which differ totally. In the latter, sexual immorality and extramarital relationships are allowed with no pure ecclesiastical obligations.
- The students could conduct research work about the mystery of love, the life of chastity, Christianity and the body, young people inquiries, etc.
- Students could read through the prayers of holy matrimony and draw out all the petitions for sanctifying the love and union of the married couple.

(17) New Year Resolutions

Aim

Preparing for the New Year by making new promises to God.

Introduction

At the start of the New Year an individual hopes to use every minute and does not want to allow his life to be wasted. Rather, he hopes the year will be a fruitful one. This is what you should do.

First: Be Accountable To Yourself

- Each one of us needs to sit down, inspect and examine his soul and come out with a new plan (Revelation 2:3).
- Examine sins that recur and have a strong hold upon you and you can get rid of them (Revelation 2:5).
- Examine your outstanding personal characteristics and decide which to discard and which to replace.
- With a fair conscience, sit down as though with a fair judge who rules truthfully.
- This is a moment for directing all the potentials owned by a person into spiritual channels for the glory of God.
- In this meeting with yourself, decide to keep away from stumbling blocks (Matthew 5:29,30). Become saintly (1 Peter 1:15,16), active (Matthew 5:48), but beware of despair (Revelation 12: 12).
- Actually, you should work quickly to attain God and enjoy communion with the saints while you progress on the road to spiritual maturity.

Second: Blame Yourself

He who does not possess the virtue of self-reproach does not know how to sit and meditate alone and if he does, he cannot benefit. Bides, he who does not blame himself does not recognize his sins nor does he repent. On the other hand, he who can blame himself enjoys the following virtues:

1. Discovers the truth about himself

- By blaming himself he gets to know the truth in spite of all his deficiencies.
- In not blaming himself, he will need to be reproached by outsiders (I Samuel 25:23; 12:13).

2. Does not judge others

- Being occupied by his own sins a person has no time to condemn the sins of his brother: for he sees the mote in his own eye and is ashamed.
- His deficiencies and defects could drive him to blame others in the manner it has affected Elijah (1 Kings 19:14; Genesis 20:11).
- By blaming himself he finds out his weakness and consequently does not condemn others but rather finds excuse for them (John 9:25; John 8:7).

3. Reforms himself and purifies his soul (Psalms 50)

By blaming himself, he is prepared to mend his ways and clean his soul from sins. On the other hand, self-justification is a devil that devours repentance. In every moment of trial or difficulty say: “This is due to my sins”. Such a procedure will lead you to repentance if you have done wrong, and if you are innocent then it will help you to grow spiritually.

4. He is enabled to confess his sins

Confession means self reproach before God within hearing of the priest in order to receive remission of sins. Thus, if there is no self-reproach how can there be confession?

5. He is led to forgiveness (Matthew 9:12)

- God forgives what you have confessed is sinful. The tax collector who blamed himself was granted forgiveness.
- What is there for God to forgive the (righteous) Pharisee or to any other person who says: “I have never disregarded your commandments!” In so doing, you move outside the scope of Christ (Luke 19:10; Matthew 9:13). The blood of Jesus cleanses sins; therefore, you have to confess first.

6. Humility

- By blaming yourself you become humble.
- A humble person, who blames himself, undoubtedly has compassion for others “Remembering them that are in bonds, as though bound with them” (Hebrews 13:3).

7. A peacemaker among people

When there are differences among brothers, reconciliation can be effected through self-condemnation or reproach (Proverbs 15:1). On the other hand, self-justification leads to obstinacy (Matthew 5:25), as it is the devil who stands for anger, division, obstinacy, pride, and opposes self-reproach.

8. The way to perfection and growth are open wide

One of the virtues of self-reproach is that it allows a comparison with what is of a higher and better nature (Philippians 3:12,13).

9. Wisdom and discernment

Self-reproach should not lead us to despair, since it is combined with hope (Philippians 4:13). Hence, it is associated with wisdom, which is a virtue of the heart.

Third: A New Heart And A New Spirit (Exodus 36:26)

We want this year to be new in everything in our style, in our behavior, and in our nature.

1. It is the work of God (Exodus 36:25-29)

It is God Himself who will bring about a change within us, since repentance cannot be affected by the power of our own human arm. The Lord delivers us from our impurity and tears away our stony hearts (Matthew 11:28). The road to repentance is prayer: in which we hold on to God and beg Him to keep His promises (Psalms 85:7; Romans 12:2).

2. A new life

As a sign of a new life, God named “Abram” a new name “Abraham”. Saul became Paul, just as a newly appointed priest is given a new name to indicate his entry into a life devoted to God. You should feel the renewal taking place in your heart (Matthew 9:16,17). It is a continuous process of renewal that we pray for every day (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3,4; Psalms 103:5). There is a likeness here to a piece of black coal...once it enters the incense pot it becomes a live coal characterized by a burning glow. Is your life a piece of black coal or has it been converted into a live coal? This is the work of God for whatever you do with your own arm is done in vain.

3. How change can occur (Pa 62; Pa 119)

You can change only when God’s love fills your heart and the love of the world is excluded. The conflict between love of God and love of the world, between good and evil, appears because the love of God was not stable within the heart.

4. Struggle with God (Proverbs 3:4; Genesis 32:26)

- “Do not abandon me,” be patient in prayer so that you may be empowered to destroy a devil made of spirit and fire.
- If you do not wrestle with God, He will feel you are not serious in your prayer. On the other hand, if you persevere with Him you will be relieved of the conflict with yourself, since God will tear away your stony heart.
- In the New Year we need assistance to make up for our deficiencies and work positively.
- Do not begin the New Year with your eyes fixed upon the old, just as Lot’s wife did. Rather, escape (Genesis 19:17); and bury the old year with all that it entails at the feet of God’s endless mercy (Philippians 3:13).
- Begin with hope and pray for the assistance of the Spirit of God while holding on to His promises. (Draw your sword upon your thigh) for this is not your job but God’s as He works inside you.

Fourth: Good News

Jesus brought good news, which bears the message of salvation to all men (Luke 2:10,11; Matthew 3:2).

The reason for joy (Philippians 4:4)

- Be glad as the Lord has forgiven your sins (Jeremiah 31:34; Jeremiah 24:7). It pleases us to remember the work of the Lord (Isaiah 61:1-3). What a wonderful message to the disheartened.
- We look into the New Year with optimism (Isaiah 52:7; Revelation 7:17). The mission of Jesus was to do good to all (Acts 10:38; Isaiah 5:16; John 16:52).

Bring joy to people

- Bring a smile to all lips and plant hope. Every problem has a solution, and every closed door has a key (Romans 12:12). Be a song of joy to all hearts.
- Preach to every weak person about the Divine Power, which supports him (2 Thessalonians 2:4; Hebrews 12:12; Isaiah 35:3).
- Relieve people of their burdens just as Christ does (Matthew 11:28; Isaiah 53:4; Matthew 12:20).
- Do not give in to depression or repeat the words of the wise man “by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better” (Ecclesiastes 7:3); and the words in the Gospel (Luke 6:26), since tears and sadness are blended with joy (John 16:2,21; 2 Corinthians 6:10; 1 Peter 1:8).

Joy in toil (Hebrews 12:2)

- The children of God find toil or labor to be a crown, and to every man he finds a reward (1 Corinthians 3:8; James 1:2).
- Martyrs were glad as they went to their martyrdom (Luke 12:7; Acts 5:41).

God win conquer through you (John 16:33; Psalms 84:50)

- In one year, God can do powerful and joyful work that may endure forever (Isaiah 40:29; 2 Corinthians 3:14). Open your eyes and see (2 Kings 6:17; Psalms 123).
- God’s children are glad they have found God and are acquainted with Him. Therefore, all worry, which stems from Satan, is dispelled (2 Corinthians 2:11).
- The grace of God can work miracles if we give in to its power and let it work in us without any resistance. A strong spirit and heart predict a pure, powerful future.

Fifth: Time

- Life is time and a person who wastes his time also wastes his life. Consequently, we need to study carefully every minute we spend and consider ourselves supervisors over this life: every moment spent filled with goodness will be reckoned as our life.
- Saints have lived for short periods on earth, yet these short periods were considered full. Although Metoshaleh lived 969 years, he never did any great deed, like some of the deeds of St. John the Baptist, which took place in a few short months.
- Is time an enemy or a friend to you? Do you develop spiritually or do you say that you wish that this day had never been in your life?
- Some people have lived as though they had never been born, for the world has not benefited by their presence in any way.
- Exploit time for your own development and that of others.

(18) Gold, Incense, and Myrrh

Aim

The presents offered by the wise men are a testimony of the glory of the baby born in Bethlehem and expression of faith in Christ (Matthew 2:1-12).

Main Points

Who were the Wise Men?

- They were wise men from the East, who looked forward to the time depicted by Zeradetch concerning the appearance of the star of the king of the Jews. We realize that underlying their wisdom there was a divine plan for God used them to announce to the nations the coming of Christ.
- They were sure of what they were seeking when they started out on their journey.
- These wise men are a symbol of every soul waiting for God's coming and who seeks Him with perseverance. As each wise man meets Him, he opens his heart and bows to Him in acknowledgement of faith.
- Let us contemplate their offerings and what they signify.

Gold

- Gold is a sign that indicates that the baby born of Mary is a great King despite the humble place of the manger. However, His glory is seen in His reign of love within the hearts and His greatness is in His humbleness and protection of the miserable (Ezekiel 37) and not in material surroundings.
- He came into our world to announce His kingdom, and His throne was the Cross that was raised, with His body, nailed to it and which He accepted by His own will (Psalm 95).
- The Lord came to redeem us and make us the King's children. Consequently, we attain glory and honor in the heavens. The scope in which to practice our rights as the King's children becomes evident in our power to reject lust, and to marshal all our motives and will so that they are controlled by His grace.

Incense

- An indication of His priesthood (Psalm 11:4).
- In old times, priesthood was temporary and for a limited time, therefore it was inherited from father to son to ensure continuity. However, the priesthood of our Lord and Savior is eternal (Hebrews 7:30).
- The role of the priest, according to God's plan, consisted of intercession and assistance. Now, however, we have a great Intercessor who is "the Son of God," and He has made of us kings and priests (Revelation 1:6). The laying of hands on specific people has not done this, but rather by considering us all as priests (spiritually speaking). Through general consecration, we all have been designated as God's priests in the same way as the Levites (Revelation 5:10).
- Origen the scholar says: "I love my brothers to the extent of sacrificing myself for them, and if I struggle until I die for righteousness' sake, if I crucify myself to the world and it is crucified for me, then I would present an offering upon God's altar, and I would be the priest offering my own soul".

Myrrh

The wise men offered this gift as a symbol of suffering. For suffering has been a trait of the life of all the prophets sent by God. Our Lord, the true Lamb, presented His offering as the Lamb of the Passover, which was killed and grilled and then offered on "bitter herbs". On the way to Golgotha and on the Cross, our Lord tasted all forms of suffering that man should have tasted on account of his sins, but our Lord bore them all on our behalf.

Nevertheless, these sufferings and wounds were the means to the resurrection, to glory, and to the realization of divine plans. When St. Paul suffered, he realized, through the spirit that these sufferings are in themselves the glory granted to believers. For Christ is our Head, and we are members of His body, so that as the Head has suffered, so must all believers realize that in suffering lies the secret of glory.

Consequently, we shall suffer when we reject and despise the self and ignore it. We shall offer ourselves as an offering of obedience. At first, this offering or sacrifice may be bitter. However, it may be transformed into sweetness and tenderness due to the comfort granted by the Holy Spirit.

Christ our Redeemer is the King of Glory. He is the High Priest who saved us through suffering. We are, therefore, invited to become kings having dominion over our passions; to become priests offering ourselves as a spiritual sacrifice; and to become prophets bearing the bitterness of suffering which we undergo to become martyrs for Christ our Savior.

Instructions and Discussion

- Did previous generations have prophets that testified to the true God?
- Explain the concept of the verse that says Christ: “made us kings and priests to our God”. What is the general meaning of the king and the priesthood of believers, and what is the specific meaning indicated in the order of the priesthood and the consecration to it?

(19) The Christian and the New Life

Aim

The Incarnation and Man’s Renewal.

Verses

Romans 8:18-23; 2 Corinthians 5

Main Points

First: A description of man’s condition before the advent of Our Lord Jesus Christ

Man suffered spiritual fatigue, physical fatigue, anxiety, confusion, fear, slavery, spiritual death, separation from God, and was crying for the Savior. God prepares the way and promises the Savior through the prophets.

Second: Man’s dilemma seemed insoluble

There were attempts to remove the trace of sin from man’s nature. However, these led to physical purification only, such as the attempt of presenting offerings. It was also necessary that these be repeated daily since sin was an internal issue that needed the renewal of the whole being. When God dictated the Law, man was further overwhelmed as he got to know the commandments but could not obey them. He needed power to assist him in carrying them out. Consequently, the Law, which is good, became a cause of destruction since it condemned man as deserving to die; “For the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23).

Third: The Incarnation of Our Lord and Ensuing Blessings

- Reconciliation with God: a fulfillment of divine justice (God's work and mercy was completed in the incarnation of Christ).
- Renewal or recreation of man's nature in the image of God Himself: This is similar to the artist who needs to recall the person portrayed if the original portrait is completely destroyed. God has granted us His living body that we might live in Him, and be steadfast in Christ who can raise us up to God, "He took what is ours, and gave us that which belongs to him" (the daily prayer of praise).
- Claiming God: "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him" (John 1:18).
- Communion and Fellowship with us: (Emmanuel = God with us). This gives us the power to live a victorious life. It grants us peace in times of trouble, and closeness with God in prayer. Thus we experience Christ's love fully: "I have come that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).
- Everlasting life: since our nature has become the same as that of Christ, we have become heirs with Him and brothers to our fellowmen.

(20) Discussion: The Christian Rejects Fanaticism

Aim

The definition of religious fanaticism and suggestions to solve the problem

Main Points

When is fanaticism a religious issue?

Being biased is part of man's physical nature. He is biased towards himself, (selfishness); biased toward his parents and family (kinship or tribal). Man also shows color (race) and colleague (career or profession) prejudices. As for religious fanaticism, it is a violent bias which is governed by several matters. Some of the most important are:

1. Man's ignorance and abhorrence of the humanity of others.
2. Man's ignorance of religious and social circumstances of his fellow men, which have contributed to the development of a different way of life, thought, belief, or religion.
3. Man's ignorance of the doctrines of others' religions and his continuous pressure on them.
4. A cover up on an internally corrupt life, so that people notice the externally visible and deceitful fervor only.

How to face religious fanaticism?

We should define religious fanaticism so that it is possible to exclude it out of any of our motives. For example, if a Christian has problems in his career, he could wrongly attribute it to religious fanaticism. Or there could be some kind of injustice caused by favoritism or bribery, which would be mistakenly considered religious fanaticism. On the other hand, a Christian could be oppressed or persecuted by a fellow brother on account of abhorrence to his religion; then this is truly an indication of religious fanaticism. There are several principal solutions by which this religious fanaticism can be faced:

1. True love

It is impossible for a normal person to love his enemy. However, God alone can love even those who reject Him (John 15:18; 1 Peter 4:12,14). A really good Christian knows that he may suffer on account of his faith. Moreover, he considers suffering a blessing that he should accept thankfully and joyfully. The apostles of the early Church accepted the persecution of the rulers by surrendering while praying for them.

2. Claiming your rights

Christian love does not imply forfeiting your rights or those of the Church.... in the early Church there was a group of persecutors, like Tertullian and Kyrian who brought their oppressors to court, while Jesus turned his back to His floggers. Christian meekness does not imply surrender neither does encourage mean violence or destruction. Demand your rights through lawful channels, but be prepared to face injustice on account of your religion.

3. Common grounds

Religious fanaticism often arises due to repulsion and distance, as well as man's dislike of the unknown. Therefore, Christian youth should seek a common ground with those who differ in faith or religion. For example, school playgrounds, picnics and such occasions could bring students together in an educational atmosphere devoid of any prejudice. In such a setting, a religious youth can reveal a picture of a pure and blessed life. Examples of common grounds are: Different fields of sports, games and activities, scientific research and experimental studies, and projects that serve the national economy and construction.

4. Constructive discussion

Every positive form of discussion necessarily results in closer relationships. The world today is keen on drawing people closer and on increasing the understanding among men of all levels and in all sectors. Religious discussion among the public also demands mutual rest and religious awareness. In this way, it is possible to ensure that such discussions do not result in further repulsion or estrangement.

5. A positive attitude in life

Love can melt away the snows of hatred. Similarly, a positive attitude in life can remove the painful fingerprints of fanaticism. Every true believer must be armed with hope so that whenever someone in a certain sphere of life opposes him, he is confident of God's providence to open up another sphere.

The persecutions that believers suffered in Jerusalem caused Christianity to spread all over the world. St. Macarius likened these to the sparks that get spattered and so set flames of love for Christ all over the world.

Our Christian religion teaches us to be loyal to our country and countrymen. These should have priority. Simultaneously, we should be willing to die and be martyrs for our faith in the name of Christ. He has called us to testify to Him in Israel, in Samaria, and to the ends of the world.

Topics for the Month of February

(21) The Epistle to Philemon

Aim

To train students on studying the Holy Bible

Introduction

This is a personal letter from St. Paul, which he addressed to his friend Philemon. It concerns his slave, Onesimus, who escaped, and who met St. Paul in Rome. There, he was converted by St. Paul, repented, and was baptized. After some time, St. Paul sent him back and gave him this letter (or epistle).

Although this is a short epistle it is very sweet. It bears the sweetness of the apostolic spirit that is full of love. Between the lines there is the practical application of Christian principles. The following may be noted:

1. The Divine fatherly love is apparent as it binds the shepherd with his sheep in Jesus Christ. The highest degree of love is embodied in the concern for every single member as an important individual.
2. The spirit of love embracing his friend is clear. Although he commands him, yet he does so with a humble and broken spirit. Before requesting him to love Onesimus, St. Paul overflows with love towards Philemon. Moreover, he gives Philemon the opportunity to forgive voluntarily, and therefore sends the slave to him, voluntarily bearing this letter.
3. By reading the letter, the apostolic spirit prevailing in the Church becomes apparent. It mirrors the full and positive employment of all potentials in and through Jesus Christ.

Who is Philemon?

1. He was either born in Colossus or was raised there.
2. He probably met St. Paul in Ephesus, or when the apostle went to Colossus, and was converted by him.
3. He was anointed bishop over Colossus.

Place and time of writing the epistle to Philemon

It was written at the time of St. Paul's first imprisonment. It was sent from Rome, together with the epistle to the Colossians approximately in the year 62 or 63 AD. This is based on the following:

1. The apostle mentions that he is a prisoner (Philemon 1:1,10,21).
2. St. Paul speaks about his hope to be released, and asks him to prepare to accommodate him (Philemon 1:22).
3. Onesimus himself was the one who carried the letter to Colossus.
4. The persons mentioned in this letter are the same ones mentioned in the epistle, to the Colossians and who sent their love.

Main sections of the letter

Apostolic salutations

Verses 1-3

The apostle's love to his friend

Verses 4-7

The apostle's supplications on behalf of Onesimus	Verses 8-21
Closing greetings	Verses 22-25

1. Apostolic Salutations

A. In the introduction of the letter St. Paul calls himself a “slave” rather than an “apostle”:

- In order to arouse Philemon’s tender affections towards himself (St. Paul).
- In order to announce the common features shared between himself and Onesimus and therefore the treatment they both deserve.
- In order to allow Philemon the opportunity to accept Onesimus not on account of an obliging apostolic command but on account of love that is voluntary.

a. B. In sending greetings of peace, the apostle gives special attention to every individual, as far as he possibly can. Thus he pays attention to the following:

- b. To Philemon, by calling him “our beloved friend and fellow laborer”, since Philemon is a partner in apostolic work. As such, he is bound to adopt the spirit of a mature minister.
- c. To Philemon’s wife, as a chaste and virgin person, the apostle is unashamed to call all men and women his beloved since his heart is devoted to all mankind. Moreover, he loves them specifically in Jesus Christ, and as an elderly man.
- d. To Philemon’s son, “Archippus, our fellow soldier” and is thus described as a fellow worker participating in the same work. Even though he is a young man and a deacon, St. Paul pays great attention to him.
- e. Having mentioned all Philemon’s parents and relatives by name, St. Paul finally says: “to the Church in your house”. By this, he is referring to all the believers who gathered in Philemon’s home.

2. The Apostle’s Love of his Friend

The apostle is used to behaving according to the spirit of Christ. We find him, accordingly, pouring his love to his friend before issuing orders. He reveals the inner depth of his love to Philemon, which is embodied in the following:

1. Although he is fettered in chains, he does not forget to mention Philemon in his prayers.
2. In spite of his troubles he follows his friend’s news. Thus, he hears about his faith in Jesus Christ and his love of all the saints.
3. His admiration for Philemon motivates him to thank God every moment on his account.
4. St. Paul was not alone in his joy over Philemon as he says: “For we have great joy and consolation in your love”.

How sweet is the love and unity of the Church! It rejoices greatly, and is consoled by the love of its shepherds and its flock, and by their spiritual growth.

3. The Apostle’s Request on Behalf of Onesimus

After this introduction kindled with love, the apostle starts pleading on behalf of Onesimus. He uses wisdom and accordingly supports and strengthens his words as he depends on Jesus Christ. Through Him he is made bold, not to ask, but to command “what is fitting” in Christ. The reason and mystery underlying why the request, or rather, the command is fitting is as follows:

1. Love obliges Philemon to accept Onesimus. Thus St. Paul says: "for love's sake I appeal to you being such a one as Paul, the aged". The word "aged" here conveys the authority of fatherly priesthood.
2. The new position of Onesimus. The request is fitting in the light of Onesimus' new status, becoming a believer and being baptized, he has become St. Paul's son, the son of the aged; the son of chains.
3. Onesimus' new characteristics. The change did not stop at his becoming St. Paul's son, but his very characteristics changed. According to the apostle's words, "who once was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable to you and to me".
4. To enable Philemon to do good voluntarily and not by compulsion. St. Paul, as a good shepherd, does not allow Philemon to miss the opportunity of forgiving Onesimus willingly and voluntarily.
5. The revelation of God's will in the incident. God's children are aware that their lives consist of a series of opportunities, which the Lord provides and from which they could benefit. It is therefore appropriate that Philemon asks himself: Why has God allowed Onesimus to rob him and run away? The escape of Onesimus was turned into an opportunity for him to progress from a state of temporal slavery to an eternal relationship with his master Philemon. Indeed, it was an association with St. Paul and the whole Church as well.
6. St. Paul speaks and makes up for him. I consider Onesimus as though he were myself. Therefore, I ask you to receive him without asking him to return what he has stolen "if he has wronged you or owes you anything, put that on my account". This is a promise that St. Paul puts down in his own handwriting and therefore, is trustworthy.
7. St. Paul wishes to rejoice at heart on account of Philemon himself. The apostle sets this motive in view and consequently makes a reasonable request; he wishes to rejoice that he is in the Lord. As proof, Philemon is enabled to obey His Commandments.

4. Closing Greetings

The apostle concludes this epistle, which is filled with love, as follows:

1. He asks for the preparation of a guest room for him.
2. He conveys the salutations of those ministering with him, and these are: "Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke".
3. He ends his letter in prayer. That is the most beneficial issue, as he says: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, Amen".

(22) Jonah the Prophet

Aim

To encourage youth to live a life of repentance

Main Points

1. Jonah's Problem

- Prophets do not have a nature different from ours. They have their weaknesses. Their strength, however, that is of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 4:7).
- Jonah's failings: First; disobedience and opposition. Second; pride, evident in esteeming

his own words (Jonah 4:2).

- His sin was similar to that of the first Adam. However, God used his sin for a good purpose. For Jonah was used as a tool, profitable in its obedience as well as in its opposition.
- Let us try to profit from moments of distress and sickness, as well as from those of joy and well being.

2. God makes use of dumb nature

- Nature fulfills its role for God. It was a missionary from God that led the people to pray. This is clear when God used the sun, the fig tree, and the worm (Jonah 4:8).

3. God demands our obedience

- Man often trusts his own wisdom and this could clash with God's will (Proverbs 14:12; Proverbs 16:25; Proverbs 21:2).
- The most important kind of obedience required by God is that which involves wearisome missions.
- Although God has created the mind as a blessing to man, it often stands in the way between him and a life of surrender. This occurs if the mind isolates itself, thus drawing away from the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. When emotions are in harmony with the mind, they are in accordance with God's Will.

4. Heathen seamen were better than Jonah

- They turned to God.
- They prayed, and then threw their belongings into the sea to lighten the load.
- "Arise, call on your God", it is astonishing that a heathen person is called by God to rebuke one of His prophets.
- The seamen were simple men who showed faith, mercy, and pity. They did their best to save Jonah, while they surrendered to God's will to achieve what pleased Him. Consequently, when the sea calmed down, they became convinced that God's hand had affected it. As a result they believed in God and offered sacrifices.

5. Jonah in the whale's belly

- The whale was sent by God to execute the Divine Will. On that account, dear brother remember Jonah and draw consolation for times of trouble are the best schools for teaching prayer.

6. Nineveh, the great city

- God issued the same old command "Arise, go to Nineveh". God did not reproach Jonah, neither did Jonah object, for Jonah had learned a lesson and he obeyed.
- God called it a great city, not due to its great population, or its being the capital of the country, but because its people were ready to repent. The Book of Jonah gives us a profound idea of how much God hates sin. At the same time, however, he has compassion towards sinners and seeks to save them.
- Nineveh was great in its response to God's word for repentance (Jonah 3:10). What adds to this repentance, making it more beautiful and stronger, is its general aspect for all the one hundred and twenty thousands repented.

7. Jonah is rescued from his pride and cruelty

- God and His angels rejoiced, but Jonah was sad (Jonah 4:1). Then what is the task of a prophet other than to save people? Jonah reminds us of the elder son who was sad when his younger brother repented and returned. Jonah was thinking of no one else but himself and his honor. He proved that his will was not in accordance with God's Will (1 Thessalonians 2:4).
- The astonishing thing is that Jonah prayed because he was furious and not that he had repented "Now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live!" (Jonah 4:3).
- The Lord sought to save Jonah after he had saved the people of Nineveh. He healed the cruelty of his heart through His merciful acts, so that he could see and learn.
- The Lord prepared a plant Jonah was grateful for it, then a worm that damaged it, so Jonah was sad however through these, he received a useful spiritual lesson.

8. God in the Book of Jonah

- It is God who seeks man searches for him and strives to make him repent by using all means to help him.
- The Lord insisted on the repentance of Nineveh, and went about it seriously (compare that with the crucifixion of Christ).
- God may use punishment, however, it could be blended with gentleness. He is willing to withdraw His threatening, if man leaves his ways.

(23) Ecumenical Councils: Religion Lessons

What do ecumenical councils mean?

They are meetings held for the Bishops of all the Christian Sees in the whole world. They are held when urgent matters arise, such as strange teachings that could cause disruption or division within the Church.

Several conditions should be observed in ecumenical councils. These are:

1. They are to be held whenever there is heresy or division.
2. They are called by a Christian leader.
3. They are attended by the majority of the Bishops in the east and west to ensure global representation.
4. They are to be held whenever a new issue is to be determined which had not been discussed before.

These conditions apply to three councils only. These are:

1. The Council of Nicene.
2. The Council of Constantinople.
3. The First Council of Ephesus.

The importance of such councils arises from the fact that the Church wishes to insure that it draws its doctrines from the following principal sources:

1. The Holy Bible.
2. Apostolic doctrines.
3. Ecumenical councils.

Consequently, the Church respects these councils, and is blessed by them, as well as by their decisions and saintly members. This is due to the belief that these councils ensure that the Church is built on very strong foundations.

What are the specific domains of these Councils?

1. The investigation of issues related to the faith (To ensure the correct delivery of its teachings and doctrines).
2. Setting down the regulations and laws necessary for the policies of the Church.
3. Solving the problems that face the Church, and ending disputes among the clergy or the congregation or between both of them.
4. Bringing to trial the clergymen who deviate or contradict the faith.

Which was the first council in Christianity?

This was mentioned in the Holy Bible in Acts 15:6-29, in the year 50-51 AD. It was the first council held in Jerusalem and was presided over by the apostle James, Bishop of Jerusalem. The purpose of the council was to study the conditions imposed upon the Gentiles as a prerequisite to their conversion into Christianity. Some apostles agreed that a Gentile should fulfill the doctrines of Moses concerning circumcision first, and then become a Christian by accepting baptism. Saint Paul, however, felt that faith in Jesus Christ transcends the Jewish ordinance and all the apostles accepted his opinion.

What do we know about the second council of Ephesus?

It was held in 449 AD to issue a judgment on the heresy of Eutyches who was the head of the monastery near Constantinople. At first, he was a fervent defender of the faith, opposing the doctrines of Nestor. However, he suddenly swerved to the opposite camp and claimed that Christ's humanity (manhood) vanished into His divinity (Godhood) so that He had one integrated nature. When the council was held, presided by Pope Discorus, Eutyches attended it to clarify his doctrine. It proved to be consistent with the true faith...which is the Nicene faith. His innocence was, therefore, announced and he returned to his monastery. The council then produced the following decree: "for the second time, we reinforce our statement and belief in the one nature of the Incarnate Word... without mingling or confusion or alteration".

What is the belief of the Church concerning the nature of Jesus Christ?

The Coptic Orthodox Church believes that the Lord Jesus Christ is God Himself; the Incarnate Logos Who took to Himself a perfect manhood. His Divine nature is one with his human nature yet without mingling, confusion or alteration, a complete Hypostatic Union. As this union is permanent, never divided nor separated, we pray in the Coptic Liturgy that His Divinity parted not from His Humanity for a single moment nor even for a twinkle of an eye. The Divine nature (God the Word) was united with the human nature, which He took of the Virgin Mary, by the action of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit purified and sanctified the Virgin's womb so that the Child to whom she gave birth would inherit nothing of the original sin; the flesh formed of her blood was united with the Only-Begotten Son. This Unity took place from the first moment of

the Holy Pregnancy in the Virgin's womb. As a result of the unity of both natures-the Divine and the human-inside the Virgin's womb, one nature was formed out of both: "The One Nature of God the Incarnate Logos" as St. Cyril called it. After the schism, which took place in the year 451 A.D., when the Coptic Orthodox Church rejected the motions of the Council of Calcedon and its theological struggles, we were wrongly called Monophysites. However, the union in which the non-Calcedonian Orthodox Churches believe differs essentially from the union, which the Eutyches believe. Eutyches said that our Lord is one nature, but His union is based on a notion that the humanity of Christ is totally absorbed in His Divinity and vanishes completely like a drop of vinegar in the ocean. In this way, the Eutyches in fact, deny the real existence of the human nature of Christ. The Coptic Church condemns the absolute monophysitism of Eutyches as heresy.

What do we know about the council of Calcedon?

It was held in 451 AD in the city of Calcedon in Asia Minor and was attended by emperor Markian and his wife. It was concerned with the discussion of the laws laid by the second council of Ephesus, and particularly two problems:

- The pardon of Eutyches and the confirmation concerning the one nature of Jesus Christ.
- The neglect of reading the letter of Lakan, the Nestorian Bishop of Rome.

During the first session, they could not resist the argument brought forward by Pope Discorus. They then held a second session without him, and issued incriminating verdicts, after they had confessed in the first session and ad said: "We have sinned and ask for forgiveness". The Pope had also told them: "As for me, I do not hesitate or falter one moment in the belief of the universal apostolic Church and I am interested in nothing else but the salvation of my soul and the protection of the true doctrines and upright faith". This attitude led to the beginning of the divisions in the Church. Two big parties were formed: the Orthodox Churches which included the followers of Pope Discorus and which continued to adhere to their doctrines as opposed to the Calcedonian Churches.

The hope for the unification of the Churches and their restoration to the order preceding the division

There is hope that the Church becomes universal and apostolic so that all Christians become one flock of one shepherd.

Exercises

1. What do ecumenical councils mean? In general, what are the causes leading to holding them?
2. Compare the three ecumenical councils of Nicene, Constantinople, and Ephesus in the light of the heresy they fought against. What were their most important decrees?
3. Clarify briefly the heroic roles of St. Athanasius, St. Cyril, and Discorus in strengthening the Orthodox faith. What title did each deserve?
4. Clarify the role of ecumenical councils in the history of the Church.

A comparison among the three Ecumenical Councils

	The council of Nicene	The council of Constantinople	The council of Ephesus
Year/Attendants	325 AD / 318	381 AD / 150	431 AD / 200
Presiding Emperor	Constantine the Great	Theodosius the Great	Theodosius the Young
Name of heretic	Arius, an Alexandrian priest	Macdonius, anointed priest Bishop of Constantinople	Nestor, Patriarch Constantinople
The heresy or false teaching	The denial of Christ's divinity as he claimed that the Son (Word) is not One with the Father in essence.	The denial of the essence of the Holy Spirit as he stated that the Holy Spirit is not a person of the Holy Trinity, distinct from the Father or the Son but a creature similar to angels.	He claimed that in Jesus Christ there are two persons or entities and two natures. He also refuted the designation of the Holy Virgin Mary as the mother of God. In other words he denied the union of humanity and divinity.
Important persons in council	St. Athanasius the Apostle, a deacon at the time	Patriarch Thimothaous, Pope of Alexandria, Abba Malathius of Antioch, St. Gregory " Speaker of Divine things, and St. Gregory of Nysos.	St. Cyril the great, (Pillar of faith) Pope of Alexandria
Most important laws issued by the council	The issuance of the Creed: "Truly we believe... of whose kingdom shall have no end".	The completion of the Creed of faith, by adding: "Yes, we believe in the Holy Spirit".	The introduction to the Creed of faith was written: "We magnify you, O mother of True Light..."

(24) Discussion: The Christian and Psychological Health

Aim

Christianity fulfills deeply the various psychological needs.

Verses

1 John 4:7-21; 1 John 5:1-3; 1 Corinthians 13:1-8

Introduction

Psychological health implies the complete harmony and integration among psychological functions leading to a positive feeling of happiness. The meaning of harmony is the absence of inner conflict within a person and the presence of principles governing his life (religious, social, moral). These principles provide a way out of the conflicts. Being unable to resolve these

conflicts properly leads to tension, anxiety, and loss of self-confidence.

Christianity, moreover, gives sufficient and fulfilling remuneration to the personality (2 Corinthians 12:9). This is true as the grace of Christ compensates for all deficiencies in man (Luke 3:5). Man possesses extraordinary power through Christ and through the salvation and redemption that has been granted to him in the New Testament.

It is possible to enumerate psychological needs as being:

1. The need for security

Christianity fills the souls with security and safety to an extent that is beyond the mind's conception. This is due to the peace God grants to the soul thus shielding it from the penetration of anxieties or pain. Such peace filled the heart of St. Peter when he was in prison.

2. The Deed for love and tenderness

- A child can never have enough of his parents' love for him...he loves himself and grows selfish and unable to love others.
- Spiritual life fulfills the need for love, for God is love. And when God dwells in the heart, He fills it with love for others who would spontaneously love him in return.
- Love is the mother of all virtues.

3. The need for appreciation

- A person grows with the need for others to appreciate him. A child deprived of being appreciated grows with weak self-confidence. He dreads new situations, and expects failure in any task he sets out to do.
- For the children of God the need for appreciation is fulfilled on the divine level. It does not matter if that need has, or has not, been satisfied socially.
- The reason is that the Christian finds it the most honorable thing to be considered the child of God and the heir of His kingdom.
- The Christian, consequently, disregards external appearance, be it of position, status or authority. Although these are useful and could be exploited by God's help, yet they do not fulfill the need of the soul for appreciation, since the Holy Spirit already inhabits it.

4. The need for freedom

Freedom is an important psychological need that plays an essential role in the edification of a wholesome personality. There is the condition however that such freedom should be within a correct framework. Youth who call for freedom express an internal yearning implanted by God within the depths of every person; for God created man as a free being in His image. Christ also clarified that there is an inner freedom that he spoke about in John 8:32,36. The Lord explained that when man fell, he enslaved himself to many inward and outward matters such as:

- Sin: By committing sin, one is enslaved to it (Luke 8:34). The apostle explains how God liberated us from sin (Romans 5; Romans 6:1-13).
- Fear: (Hebrews 2:14,15; Romans 8:15-17; 1 John 4:18). In these passages the apostle explains how the Lord liberated us from fear.
- Law: We were bound by it (Romans 7:6) and we have been set free from it (Romans 7).

External matters that bind us are:

- Our surrender to Satan, the world, people, and different thoughts. A spiritually oriented person experiences in his life, in sublime ways, how the Lord has liberated us from such influences. We also observe this in the lives of the saints. St. Augustine explains this mystery in his words: “I have come to live above the world when I no longer fear things, or lust for anything”. Thus freedom is not an opportunity for the flesh (Galatians 5:3), but man is the one who controls himself (He 12:4).
- Moreover, the obedience of the law in one’s spiritual life does not bind a person’s freedom. So that praying by the help of the Agpia or by being generally religious does not confine one’s liberty. On the contrary, such matters assist the enjoyment of a liberty that is mature and free of weaknesses.

Application

- Study the Holy Word and experience its power: “for the word I speak are spirit and life”.
- Experience the power of prayer by the help of the Agpia and persevere in observing that, even though it seems hard at the start.
- Persevere in confession, as it is a positive power in regulating the direction of our life, and also observe communion regularly.
- Be willing to take on some kind of responsibility and be involved in the weekly meetings of youth. This provides a friendly atmosphere. Also aim on channeling your individual effort with young people in order to help them and deliver to them the message of the Lord’s love.

(25) Christian Youth and Family Life

Aim

The clarification of the meaning of a Christian family, its importance and depth as well as the role of Christian youth in it

Introduction

The Christian family is the basis upon which the holy Church of God grows, extends, and is edified. Since the beginning of creation, the family has been the model and ideal of God’s purpose. The purpose of creating a family is to form a spiritual unity and a partnership of love, friendship, and self-giving displayed by all its members. This family would thus be a simple reflection of the unity among the Trinity.

However, when sin entered the world it destroyed this unity. Nevertheless, God reinstated by the death of Christ and His resurrection, a new Christian meaning of family life. This is different to the concept that an ordinary social man holds:

1. Members of a human family are bound together by cooperation and loyal ties.
2. Members of a church family are members in the one body united to the Head, to Christ. Thus Christ in the family is the origin, the basis, the goal, and its glory.

Functions of the Family

First: The function of love

The love expressed by all for Jesus Christ, and through such love, reciprocal love springs out among all members. The love that reigns within the hearts of the members clarifies the purpose of God in designating marriage. For truly, all that is subject to the laws of time will disappear in the divine kingdom; whereas love among the members will last eternally. When a child grows up in a truly Christian family, he absorbs religion through his experience of love. Therefore, he becomes saturated by the spirit of respect and holiness and aspires with his whole being to God and eternity.

Second: Tie function of finding living member of the Church of God

God has decreed: “Be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 49:25; Jeremiah 29:6; Psalm 127; Psalm 128). When a godmother/godfather announces the Christian creed and denounces Satan at the ceremony of baptism of a child, they become responsible for delivering the faith to the child. This is their duty until the age of maturity when the child is able to denounce the devil by his own free will and determination. From the above the importance of family worship, of a spiritual domestic atmosphere and ethical leadership becomes obvious. This is because the object of forming a family is to enlarge the kingdom of God. Bringing in new members to share life with God can do that. Moreover, it is the duty of a spiritual family to present the best it has (of children) as an offering consecrated for the service of the Word.

Third: The function of providing good testimony before others standing outside the Church

The task of the family is to prepare saints who testify for Jesus Christ. They should bear the following features:

1. Chastity, decency, and sanctity. With these, a lowered voice is associated.
2. Generosity and hospitality to guests and strangers. That is a divine command (1 Thessalonians 3:2). Whatever the actual housing conditions may be, the reception of the needy and the clergy in Christian homes achieve a deeply needed Christian interaction.
3. Nationalism and absence of fanaticism.
4. Internal coalition. And the solution of problems, due to different reactions by prayer.

The Dimensions of Family Relationships

First: Sonship (Exodus 20:12, Proverbs 13:1, Proverbs 10:1, Proverbs 17:6, Proverbs 23:24, Proverbs 17:25, Proverbs 19:13, Proverbs 30:17; Proverbs 6:20-23).

However, sonship in the Christian sense goes beyond ethics to something more sublime (Romans 8:29). For the heavenly Father introduced fatherhood and sonship to mankind in its highest and holiest sense through the obedience of Jesus to His Father and by His coming to our world. Thus, through baptism and Jesus Christ, His Son, we are accepted as sons of God (1 Corinthians 1:9). Our sonship, consequently, does not end at honoring our parents. Indeed, we are liberated from physical ties so that our scope for obedience widens into the ultimate obedience of Truth. This means that a son in Christianity should learn to abhor his old self that self which is emotionally bound to physical fatherhood (Luke 14:16).

- Thus, the son honors his parents out of spiritual and not ethical motives.

- He loves his parents based on truth and not through family allegiance.
- Motherhood, fatherhood and brotherhood are all expanded to include all of humanity (Mark 3:34).
- When family interests conflict with truth, we should obey God above men (Matthew 19).
- Punishment and edification are accepted as issuing from the Cross and not from men (Hebrews 7:28; Hebrews 2:10).

Second: Brotherhood (Proverbs 17:17, Proverbs 18:19; Psalm 119)

Human brotherhood is wonderful and God's purpose is that man lives with his brother in spiritual coexistence. Man, however, has been unable to establish union with his brother. Nevertheless, Christianity has granted man the grace of love. This is in accordance with the divine commandment to "love your God with all your heart, might, and will, and to love your neighbor as yourself".

The mystery behind our own self-rejection is the imaginary life we lead. Once we come into contact with fellow brothers, dreams quickly dissolve. Instead of repairing our ways, we reverse our anger onto them and hate them. Actually, if I am disturbed by the vanity of a fellow brother, then I am the one who is actually vain.

Undoubtedly there is pain in brotherhood and if I love my brother who hurts me, then it means that I have crucified myself, with its passions and whims. It also means that my heart has opened up to receive love poured into it by the Holy Spirit (John 13:34,35; John 15:12,13). St. John the apostle teaches us the importance of this commandment of brotherly love, which Jesus Christ Himself has delivered to us (1 John 3: 16). It reflects Christ's love for us and it is the best testimony of discipleship "by this all will know that you are My disciples".

That is why brotherly love is the peak of spiritual influence in the life of a person (2 John 1:7; James 1: 9; James 4: 11; Romans 12: 10; Matthew 18: 15 -17; Galatians 6:1,2; 1 Corinthians 8:12; 2 Thessalonians 3:14).

From the above verses, we realize that the most important brotherly interactions are embodied in the following virtues.

1. Absence of vanity and absence of self-humiliation.
2. Refraining from criticizing and condemnation.
3. Reproving mildly, correcting in a spirit of meekness, and warning with brotherly love.
4. Care for weak souls to avoid overburdening them or becoming stumbling blocks for them.
5. Sharing the burdens of others and their frailties while offering friendship as a testimony of love.

The isolation of the sly from among Christians by name is a sin, as well as all forms of isolation from fellow patriots as an excuse for protecting the inner spiritual life is a kind of Pharisee or concentric attitude. Being broad-minded, however, does not imply that our children should imitate the unseemly behavior of others.

If a believer suffers on account of his friendliness with his fellow brothers, then he should persevere in prayer, patience and loving acts so that the Holy Spirit may work and reconcile opposites (Ezekiel 37). It is a unique example of the power of the spirit to reconcile diversity (different members) to complement the work of the ministry and the consequent edification of the body of Christ.

Our Lord Jesus Christ taught us, in the parable of the good Samaritan, that it is my brother who needs my love, mercy, and friendliness; whatever his religion, sect, or belief.

Third: Marital Companionship

Marital love is associated with existence and not with possession. This is true, as one partner loves the other regardless of any consideration than that of being his/her partner. Through reciprocal love the fallen conjugal nature is transformed into a place established in the new heaven.

Fourth: Parenthood

Human parenthood has been greatly honored ever since the very beginning of creation. This is important in that God clarifies to us the depth of His love for us by asking us to call Him our Father. Actually, parenthood in the person of the Father was a divine commandment in the Old Testament. It was concerned with the great task of education (Proverbs 22:6; Deuteronomy 21:8,12; Proverbs 13:24; Proverbs 19: 18; Proverbs 20:7).

- Scientific education underlines the most important aspects of education and. the responsibilities of parents as follows:
- Parents are responsible for their children's physical health.
- Their responsibility for psychological health entails satisfying the child's need for love, tenderness, and undiscriminating treatment.
- Their responsibility for mental health by focusing on the development of imaginative and memory powers, as well as enlarging the culture and general knowledge of the child.
- Their responsibility for social education and training the child to help others.
- Moral education, like telling the truth and being honest, sincere and cooperative, is another responsibility.
- Their responsibility for aesthetic development that implies revulsion from anything ugly.
- Their responsibility for the development of an all-rounded personality of the child.

Spiritual Fatherhood.

St. John Chrysostom sets a precondition that those who practice parenthood do so not on account of their physical birth, but on account of their spiritual birth; for while the former is doomed to destruction, the latter leads to eternity. St. Paul the apostle says: "Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?" (1 Thessalonians 5:8). This is an example of spiritual parenthood. Moreover, it clarifies the importance of caring for members of our household.

Spiritual Leadership.

This needs to be an unbiased guidance, cautious but encouraging, as well as enlightened (1 Corinthians 3:21; Ephesians 6:4). It should not be tyrannical but motivated by love and Christian

inclinations. It involves no discrimination. A Christian family, moreover, should not prevent its youth from pursuing a life of consecration to God, thereby offering their lives as a burnt sacrifice to Him.

(26) Fasting and the Consumptive Drive

Aim

Fasting is an opportunity for correcting a person's belief that his value are measured by the material things he consumes.

Main Points

1. Food from God's hands

- In the first and ideal creation of man, God set food as an essential basis for life. In fact, He invited man, and said: "Of every tree in the garden you may freely eat" and God created food that was "good to eat". Through the taste of food God wanted man to know the extent of His love. It was up to man to realize fully that the breath of God in him, is the source of his being and existence.
- Satan (the serpent) deceived our parents by projecting that their being and value proceeded from food, even forbidden food. They both believed his words and ate while they were away and at a distance from God. Since then man believes that his life flourishes by food only and that his happiness is regulated by the amounts consumed. We may consider food as a mere example for what man consumes. Clothes and luxurious possessions are other things he consumes.

2. Why did our Lord Jesus Christ fast?

- We are not surprised that Christ's first temptation on the mountain was that of food. Satan expected submission to his words since no human being had rejected the idea that his life proceeded from food and that, by not eating, he would die. Our Lord revealed this deception and reminded us all that: "Man shall not live by bread alone" but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:3).
- Satan's lie is still believed in the world. The whole nature of man's activity is oriented towards the goal that is defined by contemporaries as the "consumptive drive". In other words, the value of man lies in what he consumes of food, clothing, and luxuries.
- Fasting is sharing with Christ the choice to live according to God's will. It is a choice arising from satisfaction, joy, peace, and happiness due to the feeling of God's presence even in the face of a monastic and frugal life, devoid of any luxury.

It is fasting that will convince us once again, that food and different materials are just a means and a chance through which we experience the blessing of God's grace towards us. Thus, if a believer fasts for a period of time, and abstains from food, speech, sex and entertainment, he will discover that, in spite of all such deprivation, he feels satisfied and stable. Moreover, he will experience spiritual power and a sense of victory over whims and passions. Under no condition will he be any longer deceived by Satan's lie, which claims that his life depends on food. Let us try some practical applications to experience the blessedness of fasting in governing the consumptive drive

a. The consumption of food

A normal person is by nature greedy as he devours food, while taking delight in its quantity and quality. Every person wishes to see tables piled up with luxurious food laid out before him. When this proves impossible, man feels sad and depressed. He curses his bad luck, and is jealous and envious of others whom he hates because they possess plenty. Moreover, he may break all spiritual and moral rules to achieve his consumptive goals while claiming that he has to eat lest he die as an excuse.

A spiritual person however, realizes perfectly, as St. Paul does, that “him who eats let him not despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats, for God has accepted him He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who does not eat, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:3,6,17). A spiritual person does not live his life worrying about the future or constantly thinking about his food and thereby becoming a victim of anxiety. On the contrary, he strives hard and eats his bread with a heart full of peace, thankfulness and self-surrendering to God. He lives confident in God’s promise to him “And do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink nor have an anxious mind. For all these things the nations of the world seek after and your Father knows you need them. But seek the kingdom of heaven, and all these things shall be added to you” (Luke 12:29-31).

b. The consumption of speech

Fasting provides the opportunity for the external being to be quiet and tranquil in order to hear the internal self: “In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength” (Isaiah 30:15). Thus fasting offers a scope for contemplation and self-examination. Moreover, it is a chance to examine carefully the meaning of the words we utter and the extent to which our conversation is serious insofar as it is constructive or destructive. Have we adopted worldly clichés that are meaningless or that are in step with the language of our contemporaries’ -mere slogans opposing relationships, uprightness, honesty, and the fear of God? During fasting we come to realize man’s grave role in external edification and wonder whether that will lead to superficiality or to spiritual death to love gossip or reconciliatory conversation? During fasting it is possible to experience the words of the elderly father: “Your tongue is silent, therefore your heart speaks; your heart is silent, therefore. God speaks”.

c. Other areas of consumption

The consumption of time for the sole service of sensual gratification are places of entertainment. Moreover, God does not bless the consumption of the potential of love and emotions in irresponsible and temporary relationships.

Training and Instructions

1. Let us practice abstaining from food for a fixed period of time, which could be gradually extended.
2. Let us dispense with the great variety of foods and appetizers.
3. Let us practice opening new spiritual opportunities, such as prayer and contemplation in Gods Word.

4. Let us practice the observation of our speech, what it serves and the extent of depth it embodies.
5. Let us look over our friendships of both genders and the extent to which God blesses them.

(27) The Redeeming Suffering of Our Lord Jesus Christ

Aim

Understanding the suffering of our Lord so that we may know Him and the power of His resurrection and share His suffering.

Introduction

Our Lord raised the value of suffering through His Holy suffering. Through Him suffering has come to convey the most sublime feelings that mankind expresses towards God and people.

Main Points

Many godly and saintly people in the Old Testament have spoken symbolically about the suffering of the Lord Jesus Christ. These have referred to all that happened to Jesus Christ during His incarnate existence on earth. They spoke about His suffering with strong yearning, for they would cure all humanity of its sins, pains, and its iniquities.

- Isaiah prophesied concerning Him and said, “But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon Him and by His stripes we were healed” (Isaiah 53:5).
- St. Peter confirms this fact by saying, “Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we having died to sins, might live for righteousness by whose stripes you were healed” (1 Peter 2:24) where “Stripes” refer to Christ’s sufferings.
- In the fraction prayer recited on Holy Saturday, we address Our Lord and say: “You have been wounded for our sins and suffered for our iniquities. The edification of our peace is upon You, and by Your wounds we have been healed. We were all like lost sheep and You have come and saved us through the knowledge of Your Cross”.
- Our Lord Jesus Christ bore many wounds and sufferings in order to save us and rescue us out of slavery to Satan. He has killed our sins on the Cross, by nailing them, and making us worthy of eternal life. That is why we call the wounds and sufferings of Christ “the healing and life-giving sufferings”.
- Our Lord’s pains are indications of His love for mankind. It is on account of His love that He was crucified. Without that love, neither Pilate nor the Jews could have crucified Him. He bore suffering joyously as He found happiness in the great redeeming task He performed.
- Christ’s sufferings were not merely physical ones; whether they were thorns, floggings, slaps, carrying the Cross, or the crucifixion. He endured all other forms of physical pain arising from poverty, asceticism, hunger, traveling, slaps, floggings and then crucifixion.
- Christ suffered psychologically too: He passed through rejection and abandonment, treachery, humiliation, and conspiracy. While He is the Holy One in whose mouth there was no deception. The psalmist prophesies concerning Him saying “my sorrow is

continually before me" (Psalm 38:17). Also, "The pain of death encompasses me, and the pangs of Sheol laid hold of me. I found trouble and sorrow" (Psalm 116:3).

- His words were internal as well as external. He has spoken about the internal psychological pain when He was in the garden of Gethsemane: "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death" (Matthew 26:38). By understanding the psychological pain, our Lord wished to console grieving hearts and give them peace for He is the source of all peace.
- Christ also underwent spiritual suffering; His spirit suffered while He is the Holy One without blemish who became a sinner for our sake, "We like sheep, have gone astray; we have turned, everyone, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 56:6).
- "Your Spirit, a Lord, has borne the iniquities of endless generations in the past and in the future, and the sins of all mankind".
- Christ was overwhelmed, moreover, with pain at the deception and erring of mankind and wept over Jerusalem that was taken up by merry-making and revelry.
- Meditation on suffering raises the soul to sublime levels; that is where Christ was crucified and where He lifts up the soul above the level of matter or knowledge. Thus, in times of suffering, man is in a deeper and stronger spiritual condition. Because pain is beneficial for the spirit, God allows it that is if man endures it wisely.
- Since the road of pain is the only scope where man is schooled to learn obedience, St. Paul accordingly, writes about the Savior: "though He was Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered" (Hebrews 5:8).

Conclusion

What was shameful became honorable; what was humiliation became glorious; what was weakness became strength and salvation. That is what Christ's Cross has achieved.

Sayings of the Fathers

"O, how past understanding is God's wisdom...the wicked sins, yet the honorable is punished: the compulsive is wounded, yet the good is judged: and whatever the hypocritical commits, the righteous has to bear!" (St. Augustine).

Exercises

1. Can we bear the sins of others just as Christ has done? Or do we stop and fuss over every mistake committed by others?
2. Have you experienced sharing the sufferings of Christ?

(28) Discussion: The Christian and the Meaning of Life

Aim

Discussing how every Christian may find meaning for his life and existence.

Main Points

It is true that some people commit suicide. However these people do not know the value of life. They give up life only because they loved it more than anything else. It seems that they preferred

to die rather than to live an unrewarding, unfulfilled existence, not worth living. This reflects the thought of Malraux; a French writer.

True life is found in God (John 1:4)

True life is reflected in the Holy Trinity, which is granted to the Word (John 6:33). For the earth was desolate and empty and darkness was on the face of the deep, but the spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters, from there life appeared, for God alone is our life “In Him we live and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28). Such a phenomenon indicates God’s existence that is Light proceeds from Light. It is a life beyond one’s farthest imagination and man is invited to share it with God. It is a glorious life which man shares since he has been created in God’s image and likeness. When man fell, the all-loving God came down to restore life to him. He announced that He is “the resurrection, and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live” (John 10:10; John 11:25). From this basis, a Christian’s life is considered a mission, an inspiration, a blessing and a truth.

Life is a mission

Christ’s life on earth was a mission of love and obedience to the heavenly Father. He has given us His precious flesh and blood so that we may be united with Him. Through this union it is possible for us to go through life following His footsteps. Indeed, we should strive to fulfill His heavenly goals and divine mission (2 Corinthians 5:15). A Christian’s life is therefore a mission which is achieved through his activities involving his thoughts, words, deeds, and worship.

Thoughts

Our humanity is fulfilled only through our thoughts and intellect. It is realized through the use of this potential granted to us by God. A Christian devotes all thought to the obedience of Christ. He thinks of making himself happy as well as promoting the whole of mankind. All his words proceed from an enlightened intellect; and an active mind that works as a harp moved by the Blessed Divine Fingers. Thus, a holy tune proceeds of a holy life sublime in its goals and noble in its aims.

Work

There is a theory in the field of labor that states neither man nor the world form a perfectly wholesome predetermined established fact. It is a flexible actuality that needs to be realized or an incomplete matter that needs to be completed by labor (or work). Thus work is an obligation of the Christian towards nature and society. Ever since God created man, He commanded him to toil the earth, cultivate it and dominate it. Consequently, work is a divine commandment more than a social obligation. Purgeon observes that what we do is what we are, i.e. our acts reflect what we are. The Holy Bible speaks about that and explains that out of the treasure of a good heart proceed treasures and out of the treasure of a wicked heart proceeds evil. The Church teaches us that God judges each one according to his works. Therefore, a true Christian, who knows his mission, does not stop from doing everything, which would spread love, goodness and righteousness throughout creation for the Lord walked through this earth, doing good work.

Worship

The best activity in life is worship and glorification to the sacred name of God. Worship raises our humanity to the level of Seraphim. Everyone who has tried the experience of living with God

and knowing Him has realized the value and pleasure of life. Worship gives life a deep inner dimension. It grants peace to hard laborers, alleviates suffering, pacifies the soul, strengthens hope and maintains patience and consolation.

Life dispels fears

Life carries within its folds varied fears. A normal person fears failure, the unknown, disability, old age, danger, and death. These fears deprive him of life's pleasures. A believer however, bears within himself the dynamics of his life, the ability to overcome fear through faith; he stands on the peak of the world, unmoved by any fear. It is Jesus Christ, living within him, who has conquered sin and death.

This is our Christianity, a life lived, there is no ambiguity or heaviness, there is no idleness or waste; but there is a mission, struggle, and determination. There is, moreover, happiness, joy and praise while Jesus Christ supports us.

(29) My Need for Jesus Christ

Aim

There is no life without Jesus Christ.

Verses

“Mary has chosen that good part” (Luke 10:4)

“For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21)

Introduction

Limited yet insatiable

Within man is a need that is endless and insatiable. All philosophical and psychological studies have identified that need. Moreover, the daily observation of man's life has proved its existence. For example, man may seek knowledge and he may attain various scientific degrees, however, he is still unsatisfied and demands more.

Another may seek the truth and the truth is God, so that he will struggle in his search. However, he will not reach the other bank for the simple reason that he is limited. At the same time, there is within him an infinite hunger, which can be satisfied by God only. This need will not be satisfied except in the world to come when man shakes off the finiteness of his flesh and short sightedness and puts on another nature granted by God. Then the words of the apostle will be fulfilled: “For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face” (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Similarly, man may struggle in his search for money. He may obtain a lot of it. However, he continues his relentless search. This is because money is limited and no matter how plentiful it is, the finite cannot ever satisfy that infinite hunger within man. The same theory applies to earthly pleasures. Man may strive and seek for them; he may greedily indulge in them every day, yet he is never satisfied. Actually, these pleasures are like salty water, which does not quench thirst, but rather inflames it. This reveals the truth of the saying, “man's heart is a triangle and even if we put inside it the whole globe, the angles will still be empty. For there is nothing that can satisfy

the triangle of man's heart other than the Trinity in One God. A philosopher known as Bagy said, "Man is a deep well of desires, and a well can never be filled. However much water is poured inside it, yet it will never be filled. Now, let us ask ourselves: what are my real needs? How can I satisfy them?

Man's deepest needs

These can be grouped into two categories:

1. Psychological needs: For example the need for love, success, security, etc.
2. Spiritual needs: For example forgiveness, immortality, etc.

Jesus Christ can only fulfill all these needs. For example:

a. The need for love

This is a real need present in man's inner depths. Without love, man lives within his shell isolated from the flow of human life. He is wrapped within himself and deprived of communal life. However, human love is limited, and is often diverted. In fact, it is a love that likes to take before it gives. Consequently, it is not satisfying and soon becomes transformed into hatred. On the other hand, if we obtain infinite spiritual love that proceeds from the heart of God, we will be satisfied. Moreover, we will offer it to others without any hindrance, reservation, or diversion. It will take the form of a holy, generous and communal quality that is self-sacrificial.

b. The need for success

The definition of success varies from one person to another. However, real success is to "prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers" (3 John 2). This important form of success is a gift of God only. It protects the soul from harm and grants it true peace. This is what truly makes man successful in all the walks of life, and not only in one limited sphere as that of money or knowledge.

c. The need for security

Man may live in a fortified fortress but still experience fear from people or the unknown future. Our children, however, experience real security for they are supported by God's promise "Fear not, for I am with you" (Isaiah 41:10). Thus they are saved from the torment of fear (1 John 4:18) and they speak out of perfect love that casts out fear (1 John 4:18).

d. The need for forgiveness

"For there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). For Jesus Christ alone is the redeemer and; "through His blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Ephesians 1:7). He is the only offering that can adequately cover our sins (cover = coper = redeem). This gift cannot be granted by anyone else other than Jesus Christ. Man obtains it through repentance, baptism, and Holy Communion.

e. The need for immortality

It is impossible for man to be satisfied by the world or by time for he will always transcend these and aspire to an encompassing immortality and happy eternity with God. Such eternal life is confined in the person of Jesus Christ for "this is eternal life that they may know You the only

true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have Sent" (John 17:3).

Exercises

- Train yourself to love, start with your fellow brothers and extend that to include the love of enemies.
- Train yourself to go into retreat so that your soul is at peace and can meet Jesus Christ even for one hour on a weekly basis.
- Go regularly to confession to obtain absolution and forgiveness and to solve your problems.
- Read fathers' saying; e.g. "Turn your soul to God and you will find peace" by Abba Moussa.

(30) Monasticism

Aim

To get acquainted with the sublimity of monastic life and to learn the indebtedness of the church and the world to monasticism

Introduction

There are some objections held against Christian Monasticism:

1. There is no reference to it in the Holy Bible and that it is derived from paganism and Jewish traditions.
2. Monasticism is an escape from the world and its evil.
3. It has no value to the Church or society.
4. It is the refuge of the poor and ignorant who have not been able to get oriented to society.

Monasticism is a Biblical Call. (Matthew 19:10- 12; 1 Corinthians 7:6,7; Mark 10: 29)

Since early Christianity, a strong wave of enthusiasm for virginity and deprivation invaded believers. This led many husbands and wives to sublimate their bodies and live as brothers and sisters. Their ideal was the Lord who lived as a virgin, was born and baptized as one, and delivered his mother to the safe keeping of a virgin. If we study the biography of any giant saint in monasticism, we find that his life was in accordance with Christ's command: "If anyone thirst let him come and drink". For these travelers who have settled in the desert have found what they were looking for: so they drank and were watered by the riches of divine love. Consequently, out of their bodies flowed living waters.

What does the word monk denote?

In the Coptic language "monakhos" denotes "a hermit" who has isolated himself from people. He does so as he wishes to live in solitude without wife or children and keep away from society. Thus he would have enough time to grow spiritually and to consecrate all his time to the worship of God. In Arabic "Raheb Allah" means "one who fears God".

The principles of Christian Monasticism

First: Virginity

This does not mean celibacy (unmarried state) because it is not merely the escape from marital obligations and children or a form of sexism. This is a positive virginity for it is the complete dedication to the service and worship of God in step with that of angels (1 Corinthians 7:32.34). The virgin is someone whose concept of the family has become so comprehensive that he is no longer concerned with a wife and few children. Rather, he has consecrated himself to God to be in the service of the family in the full sense of the word, and to serve the whole human society. The verses of the apostle (Revelation 14:1-5) focus on virginity.

Second: Asceticism and Solitude (Luke 9:28; Hebrews 11:32-39)

The inclination to asceticism, which appeared in the Church, was inspired by the Lord's way of life. He used to spend His day teaching in the temple, and at night He went into the mountains (Luke 21:37). He spent forty days there before starting His ministry. Ascetic fathers and saints have elaborated on the blessings of the life of a recluse. For as much as the deserts are wide and expansive, so are the dimensions of the soul, heart, and thought enabled to expand accordingly.

Third: Voluntary Poverty and Deprivation (Luke 18:18-25)

This is illustrated by the story of the rich man. The apostle warns us against money (1 Thessalonians 6:6-11). St. John the Tiberius says: "We should attain a state in which we do not desire anything for ourselves other than the sole love of God". It is not true that monasticism is the way adopted by the poor who wish to evade the world and the burden of life. Indeed, many monks were known for their wealth, such as Arsenius, Maximus, Anthony and others.

Fourth: Obedience (Hebrews 5:8; Philippians 2:8)

Obedience to the will of God and as embodied in the spiritual law constitutes the safety valve ensuring protection from sinning due to the leftist attacks (to disobey God's commands) or the rightwing attacks (through self justifications).

Monasticism in Egypt

Monasticism in Egypt appeared and flourished before any other country due to the following:

1. Egypt's Geographical Nature: Egypt is formed of a narrow valley surrounded by deserts and dry plains and these inspire the rejection of the world.
2. The Nature of Egyptians: The Egyptian is religiously inclined by nature. He loves to meditate. This is true of the Pharaonic era, for though they were heathens, their culture was founded on the belief in immortality and the life to come.
3. The Factor of Religion: In the fourth century, and with the end of the age of martyrdom people found in monasticism the opportunity for asceticism and the tolerance of difficulties in the depths of the wilderness. It was a chance for offering themselves a living sacrifice to God. This is a way of martyrdom without the shedding of blood.
4. The Political and Economical Factor: Some Christians escaped and led a monastic life in the desert as a result of persecutions as well as the monstrous taxes imposed on those who were small farmers (mostly Christians).

The Most Important Orders of Monasticism

First: The order of hermits

Each lives in a cave alone, and follows a special personal system of prayer and fasting. Abba Paul the wanderer and Abba Anthony are among these.

Second: The order of monastic groups

St. Anthony founded this order. Groups of the dispersed caves formed a monastery without walls. The monks gather around one of the great fathers known for his spiritual nature.

Third: The order of fellowship

Here groups of monks live together and observe a strict and severe order concerning the regulation of hours of wakefulness, sleep, prayers, food, and work. Each has duties and rights.

Applications

1. Study and contemplate the biographies of famous monks.
2. Watch a film on the history of monasticism and a film on historical and present day monasteries.
3. Go on excursions to visit monasteries and encourage spending days in retreat and solitude.
4. Display the virtues of monasticism and asceticism in a positive way that would reveal their beauty.
5. Conduct research to clarify the indebtedness of the Church and the world to monasticism.

(31) The Resurrection and the Divinity of Christ

Aim

The resurrection of Christ is proof of His divinity, and His power to save those who believe in Him.

Main Points

God's plan for salvation was put into effect from the moment His only Son became incarnate. He became flesh in order to bless our nature and renew our being by His life and holiness. He intended to suffer death on our behalf and ascended, for He is the Lord of life. Through His resurrection, we have been granted resurrection. Now, God invites believers to open their hearts so that He may renew His divine power of His resurrection. We will study how God introduces all the effects of His resurrection into our life.

1. A great earthquake occurred (Matthew 28:2) at dawn on the day of His resurrection. This announces the wonderful power contained in the resurrection of our Lord. This earthquake shook the gates and stronghold of the Pit. It also shakes the heart in order to roll away the evil hurdles and tribulations that suffocate it. Every repentant feels the power of the resurrected Christ shake his being and uproot evil as he offers repentance. This power produces a new living person who shakes off the pangs of death (death due to sin). Throughout his life, the repentant will experience the uplifting impact of this Power that will constantly raise him from every failing and protect him at every turning point.
2. Christ, our Lord, arose and the sealing stone remains on the tomb. He entered into the disciples meeting place though the doors were locked. He is the God of Glory who challenges all earthly powers, obstacles, and chains. This is a confirmation of the Lord's divinity. Every Christian feels that by the power of the risen Lord, which has been

granted to him, he is enabled to overcome all obstacles and hurdles. Indeed, whatever is mentally or logically impossible can be overcome since the Lord has granted us faith. Through which we are raised to the level of heavenly life. In spite of the plots of the Jews and the seals of the Romans, Christ rose. In the same way He resurrects His children from death due to their sins and their apathy. He strengthens them to oppose the strong evil currents and deceptive temptations. Through such power, St. Athanasius challenged the heretics of the world around: him vis-à-vis his steadfastness concerning true evangelical faith which teaches the glory and deity of Christ, the Son of God. Moreover, such power inspired a crow to serve Abba Paul in the wilderness, thus transforming its nature from being a burglar of food to a carrier of it.

3. It is important to note that the miracles wrought to resurrect the dead have recurred by the power of the Lord and through some prophets and apostles throughout the different ages. However, our Lord rose alone without anyone else helping Him to do so. This is because He arose by the power of His divinity that has vanquished death thus underlining His deity, inborn power and self-sufficiency. All these overflow and satiate His people.
4. When the Jews heard the words of Christ concerning divine matters and everlasting life, some of them suspected that these were pure imaginations, “For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty” (2 Peter 1:16). Also: “To give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death” (Luke 1:79). Thus the Lord arose and conquered the pains of death. He released the saints who had died and rested in the hope that He will come and rise and take them to His heavenly kingdom and eternal paradise (Ephesians 4:8).
5. We say that Christ became the herald of those fallen asleep denoting that His is an eternal resurrection. All those who have gone through the miracle of resurrection by human hands have died again. Jesus Christ, however died only once, “the all righteous on behalf of sinners”, and thereby opened the door of life and brought in the souls of believers: “today, you will be with me in Paradise”. He also called saying...He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die” (John 11:25). In the book of Revelation the apostle speaks about those who have been granted the first resurrection through Jesus Christ “Over such the second death has no power”. This explains why an those who have surrendered themselves into God’s hands should be confident that no one, whoever he may be, can snatch them (John 10:28) or deprive them of this protection as long as they are steadfast in faith and believe in the Savior, and in their spiritual struggle.
6. The Lord arose in His glorified body. This is not fictitious. He said: “Feel Me”, yet it was an extraordinary glorious resurrection for He entered while the doors were closed. None of those resurrected by the apostles or prophets awoke with similar glory. This is not only a clear indication of Christ’s divinity but it is a definite guarantee of the glory of His kingdom and a true proof of the reality of eternal life which the Lord promised to His children: “Where I am, there will you be also”. A person who has tasted the effects of the resurrection in his life, is reassured of the hope in the resurrection of the dead and the eternal life to come and prays to God to preserve this hope in him. In fact, God has given evidence of the life to come which involves no decay, to his saints, for the bodies of some of them gave out light while they were still alive, (for example: Pope Shenouda, the head of hermits; Maximus and Domadius). God has also preserved the bodies of some others

that remain without decay (like Anba Pishoy). On account of all that, believers remain steadfast against the torrent of evil and tribulation in the world, the lusts and egoism of the self, while holding on to hope and being joyful in spite of the stress of this life. Their strong faith is the best testimony to the truth of the Lord's resurrection before any opponents.

Exercises

1. Experience repentance and the power of the Lord's resurrection as you reject sin or an evil habit dominating you. By God's power and perseverance in prayer and surrendering your will, all is possible.
2. Experience the joy of the resurrection in the middle of difficulties and dilemmas of life.

Activities

1. Produce a wall magazine on the resurrection and its positive influence in the life of believers and in the Church and its ministry.
2. Organize and conduct a conference on the resurrection and problems of youth.
3. For those whose hobby is drawing, draw an icon for the resurrection and indicate the *error* in the icon portraying the angel rolling the stone to allow the Lord to leave the grave. This stone was rolled quite a while after the resurrection so that the women and the disciples could check this truth by seeing the empty grave.

(32) Discussion: Youth and the Life of Victory

Aim

Simplifying the meaning of victory in our lives as youth, as well as the indication of the victorious manner of proceeding through this world laden with evil and lust.

Main Points

What is a life of victory?

- It is the fruit of our knowledge of Jesus Christ apparent in our lives.
- It is the course followed by believers in their everyday dealings and throughout their lives.
- It is the acceptance and proclamation of the kingdom of Christ within the heart.
- For it is through the reign of God's kingdom within him that a youth lives in a state of constant renewal and victory over all Satan's temptations and sin. As a result, he experiences the effect of God's kingdom in his whole being.
- It is a state of sublimation raising man above all earthly passions or delinquent whims.

How do I lead a life of victory?

The Holy Bible tells us a lot about the life of victory led by the prophets and apostles. We shall choose one of the leaders of the Holy Bible who has presented a practical and wonderful model of the life of victory. Through him we will get acquainted with the principles of such a life. We have chosen Joshua:

1. Love

Young people can live a life of victory and renewal when they practice love towards everyone: “He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now” (1 John 2:9). “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death” (1 John 3:14). That is why Joshua lived a life of victory; he loved his fellowmen and experienced a spiritual jealousy in all that concerned them. On that account, victory became the course of his life and of that of everyone who has experienced true love.

2. Awareness of the Call of God

“Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9): This divine invitation from the Lord our God, to live a life of victory over sin and darkness, is just like the Lord’s call to Joshua to lead the doubtful nation and cross into the fortified cities. Victory was always prominent in his life, for God had promised him, saying, “Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go” (Joshua 19).

3. Being armed with God’s Word

When God’s Word becomes the source of satiation in our lives, it satisfies our person and grants it a constantly renewed and victorious existence. It becomes the ultimate secret of a successful life. That is why the Book of the Law never departed from Joshua’s mouth (Joshua 1:8. Also see John 14:23; Ephesians 2: 13; 1 Peter 1:23; John 6:63; John 5:24).

4. Perseverance

A youth needs to persevere in his struggle against Satan’s plots. He needs to obey God’s commandments and live a life of victory; he can do so only if he is armed with His power and victory over sin and death. He also needs to be armed with the Word of the Bible and in constant communion with God through prayer (See Ephesians 6:10-18).

5. Awareness of God’s companionship

“I am a companion of all those who fear You. And of those who keep Your precepts” (Psalm 119:63). “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” (2 Corinthians 6:16). Jesus prayed to His heavenly Father on our behalf and said: “I pray for them. I do not pray for the world, but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours” (John 17:9). “I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one” (John 17:15). “And for their sakes I sanctify Myself that they also may be sanctified by the truth” (John 17:19). “I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). These verses reveal Jesus as our companion in life. He has granted us the Holy Spirit to live within us and sanctify our being, thus enabling us to lead a life of victory; conquering the world and the evil one. Consequently, our acceptance of God’s companionship is a condition for victory to operate in our lives. It is His companionship to Joshua that brought him constant victory throughout his days, “as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you” (Joshua 1:5).

6. Avoid rashness

Joshua did not carry out orders hastily. On the contrary, he was prudent and wise. That is why victory was always realized in his life. Before going into war, he asked God’s permission to wait

three days before crossing the Jordan. He wanted to be prepared and fortified for the task as well as reassured that the people would fight with him. Consequently, he was victorious at war. We could achieve similar results if we do not act recklessly or rashly. We only have to live closer to God, asking Him for advice and learning to pray to Him. We will find answers to our prayers as long as we ask in His name. Thus we will constantly be victorious our lives.

Exercises

- Servants should encourage those who serve to apply the above principles consecutively. They could share together their experience of the life of victory as they recount their dealings and relationships.
- The importance of practicing the mystery of repentance and confession should be underlined as the starting point to a life of victory, so that all may be encouraged to take part.
- Partaking of Holy Communion and attending mass together would help all those served to receive God's light in their hearts showing them the way and giving them a strong motive to carry on along the victorious way.

(33) The First Epistle of John (Part I)

Aim

Getting acquainted with the epistle and its writer.

The Writer of the Epistle

1. He is John, the son of Zebedee, from Bethesda in Galilee. Although his name is not mentioned in this epistle, it has been attributed to him due to the similarity between its contents and those of the Gospel in his name, because he speaks in both about:
 - a. The eternal Word (John 1:1,2; 1 John 1:1,2).
 - b. The Incarnate Word that grants life to believers (John 1:14; John 10:10; 1 John 4:2,9).
 - c. Faith that transfers the Christian from death into life (John 5:45; 1 John 3: 14).
 - d. Love being the most important feature of a believer (John 3:34,35; 1 John 2:11).
2. He is the brother of James, and his mother is Salome (the cousin of the Virgin Mary). His father was a fisherman.
3. He is the writer of the Gospel according to John, the three Epistles and the Book of Revelation.
4. He is the only one who did not die as a martyr, yet he underwent a lot of torture. He passed away at the beginning of the second century at the age of ninety-eight.
5. He preached the Word in Asia Minor and was banished to the Isle of Patmos.

To whom did he write this epistle?

He wrote it to believers, originally Gentiles, who had come into the faith. He aimed at preserving and warning them against idols (John 5:21).

Why was it written?

Heretical teachings appeared and were spread by such false teachers as:

Raspopism: They believed that the body of Christ is an imaginary concept, and that flesh is evil.
Gnosticism: They imagined that they could attain salvation through knowledge only.

What is the goal of writing this epistle?

1. So that our joy may be complete (1 John 1:4).
2. That we may keep away from sin (1 John 2:1).
3. To avoid deceivers (1 John 2:26).
4. To know that life is eternal (1 John 5:13,14).

Subjects dealt with in the epistle and corresponding references

Chapter One: The effect of the belief in the incarnation in our lives.

Chapter Two: Fellowship with God and with our fellow brothers.

Chapter Three: The blessing of adoption we have been granted and the obligations associated with it.

Chapter Four: Love within a framework of truth and wisdom.

Chapter Five: Baptism: its effect upon us and our capacity to believe in Christ our Lord.

Chapter One

Purpose: The clarification of the vital value of the belief in the incarnation.

Major Points

First: The reality of the Incarnation of the Word, the Giver of Life (Chapter One and Two).

1. The body that Christ took on was a real body, (1 John 1:1).
2. The body He took from the holy Virgin is itself God, the Word, “the life was manifested”.
3. The incarnation provided the opportunity for man to get intimately close to God and to know Him fully.

Second: What we first get to know about our fellowship with Christ. He is light and the characteristics of light are.

1. Clarity: So that all those who share fellowship with Him are lucid and clear in their faith.
2. Uprightness: For in God there is no change or circumvention.
3. Darkness cannot be overpowering: It cannot overcome the light, for light shines in the darkness and is unaffected.

Third: Signs of fellowship with Christ.

1. Walking in the light (Romans 13:12).
2. Humility: If we say we do not sin, we deceive ourselves.
3. Continuous repentance: If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just.

Instructions and Activities

1. Quote the verses that underline the following meanings; basing your answers upon your study of chapter one:
 - a. The goal of the incarnation is to grant us fellowship and enjoyment of the true life.

- b. The goal of the incarnation is to allow us to follow the Light and walk in it.
- c. The confession of sin is a Christian obligation.
- 2. Based on the Gospel and the Epistles of John, explain what is meant by the following:
 - a. The Word; The Life; The Love; The Joy; The Light.
 - b. Can you quote verses that relate several of these together?
- 3. Practice the mystery of confession fearlessly and shamelessly, so that you may live in the light.
- 4. Practice walking in the light and do not act in the darkness.

(34) The First Epistle of John (Part II)

Aim

Studying chapters two and three and clarifying our fellowship with God

Main Points

What are the features revealing our fellowship with God?

- 1. Not committing sin (John 2:1,2). This is the aim of everyone...and if we sin, we have an "Advocate" with the Father.
- 2. Keeping the commandments (John 2:3-11). This is the proof of our love to Him because they speak of Him (John 14:15). Finding the commandments difficult arises from lack of inner love (John 2:9-11).
- 3. Rejecting the love of the world (John 2:12-17). For he has granted us the power to do so (John 2:12-14). Furthermore, it is impossible to love the world and God at the same time (Matthew 6:24).
- 4. The rejection of apostasy and those separated from the Church (John 2:18-23). There will surely be confusion and Christ has warned us about that (Matthew 24:5, 24-28). Moreover, we will not be shaken since we will remain steadfast in the Lord. Nevertheless we should avoid deceivers, such as Antichrists (2 Corinthians 6:14-18).
- 5. Steadfastness in God (John 2:24-27).
 - a. Steadfastness in Love (John 8:31).
 - b. Steadfastness in faith: that is a recommendation delivered by all the apostles to us (1 Corinthians 16:13; 2 Thessalonians 3:14; 2 Peter 3:17). The Lord has promised to bless our efforts (John 15:17; 2 Corinthians 1:21-23; Revelation 2:8- 25).
 - c. The Reward: All who follow in the Lord's footsteps walk in righteousness.

Chapter Three

- 1. The gift of adoption: There are two spiritual families in the world, one belongs to Satan and one belongs to the Lord. We belong to the Lord's spiritual family (Galatians 3:26). We are heirs regardless of our condition.
- 2. Our responsibility as children of God (John 3:3-18):
 - a. Purity, having become the children of God, it is our task to purify ourselves.
 - b. Holiness, whoever is born of God, does not sin, (1 John 1:8 -10; 1 John 2:1,2).
 - c. Love (John 3:10-18). This is a positive value, not that we should not sin but that we show love to our fellow brothers (John 3:10,13,14).
- 3. How to preserve the status of the children of God adoption (John 3:19): We have to

reckon with ourselves. If our heart condemns us, this means our inner life and motives in doing charity are incorrect. God is greater than our heart. Therefore, we admit our sins and weaknesses. If our heart does not condemn us and we find that we bear true love, then we have confidence in God (John 3:1).

4. Steadfastness in faith (John 3:23): This takes place by keeping the commandments (John 3:22).

Instructions and Activities

First: Chapter Two

1. Indicate the practical ways of demonstrating our love to God who loved us and laid down his life for us.
2. Love within the framework of truth. Explain how our love for God makes us reject heresy.
3. What is the relationship between our love for God and our love for men? Support your view by verses from this chapter.
4. What is meant by righteousness? How can we practice righteousness?
5. What is meant by “Do not love the world?” How is it related to the verse: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son so that none who believe in Him is condemned?”

Second: Chapter Three

1. The apostle distinguishes between two spiritual families in the world, what are they? What are their characteristic features?
2. What is the greatest honor bestowed upon you by God? How can you preserve it? What is your attitude towards the world that does not appreciate that honor?
3. How can you answer those sects that claim that a true believer never sins? To assist you, refer to the following verses: 1 Corinthians 10:2; 2 Corinthians 12:17; 2 Corinthians 11:2; 1 Corinthians 9:27.

(35) The First Epistle of John (Part III)

Chapter Four

2. Love and Wisdom (John 4:1-6): Love means that we should follow the spirit and its teachings. But what is the true spirit? It is every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. On the other hand, an evil spirit manifests itself in rejecting faith in Christ’s incarnation, defying the rites and teachings of the church.
3. The spirit of truth and the spirit of evil:
 - a. The spirit of truth: (i) Proceeds from God, therefore it confesses and recognizes the incarnate Lord. (ii) Its characteristic feature is love, for it proceeds from God. (iii) He is the greatest, “because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world”.
 - b. The spirit of evil: (i) is antichrist and does not love the truth. (ii) It is of the world; hence the world listens to it. (iii) It is non-loving, because it does not know God.
4. God’s love for us (John 4:7-10): (i) the only religion that speaks about God’s love for mankind is Christianity (John 4:8). (ii) God’s love for us is eternal for He has sent His

Son, “that we might live through Him”. That is true, for even when we sin, we remain His children, and can ask Him for all our needs (Romans 8:32).

5. How can we enjoy the taste of His love (John 4:11):
 - a. Through brotherly love (John 4:11-20): (i) If any spirit of hatred towards anyone is stirred within us, or any spirit of revenge, or enmity, or jealousy is awakened, then He is able to burn all the thorns that suffocate the soul by His fiery power; but only if we pray to Him to do so. (ii) The sign of steadfastness in the Lord is love towards our fellow brothers (John 4:16,20,21).
 - b. Through watching for the coming of the Lord with joy (John 4:17,18): For perfect love is found in heaven (John 4:17). As we taste God’s love while we are here on earth, and as we interact with Him we wait anxiously and confidently for the day of the Lord (1 Corinthians 13:8 -13).
6. There is no fear in love (John 4:18): (i) As much as love increases, fear decreases. Yet there is fear of another kind that accompanies love, the fear inspired by awe and respect, the fear experienced by a person who does not wish to hurt a loved one, the fear to be separated from God. (ii) St. Felix says, there is one who fears to be flogged and that is the fear experienced by a slave; there is one who fears to lose, a fear experienced by an employee, while there is one who fears to provoke his loved one and such fear is experienced by the righteous.

Chapter Five

1. Adoption by God is the fruit of believing in Him: In the early Church, candidates for baptism were gradually promoted into the lines of the catechumen. In the present baptism rituals it is necessary to recite the Creed of the Faith before the dipping into the water.
2. The fruit of baptism (John 5:2-514,15,18): (i) Love towards our fellow brothers whom we see, and love for the saints (John 5:2). (ii) Keeping the commandments (John 5:2,3). (iii) Confidence in our prayers being answered and as long as we pray for things that are according to His Will (John 5:14,15).
3. Baptism by the Blood (John 5:6-12): (i) Baptism is founded on the Cross and accepting it means accepting to be buried and resurrecting with the Lord. (ii) The components constituting baptism are water, blood and the spirit. These are the elements that gushed from the Lord’s side when He was on the Cross. (iii) The heavens testify to the power of baptism as the Holy Trinity appeared at the time of Christ’s baptism.
4. A final recommendation (John 5:21): (i) the apostle reiterates that we are God’s children therefore, we surrender to Him. (ii) We should surrender our hearts to God, for there are so many idols: money, greed, lust, honor, egoism, etc.

Instructions and Activities

Which verses in chapter four reinforces the following Christian principles:

1. Love implies our rejection of all that opposes the spirit of God, love expressed, through the truth.
2. The source of true love is the Cross. We get a taste of love through our experience of it towards our fellow brothers and through our vigil for the coming of the day of the Lord.
3. What is meant by: “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear?”
4. What is the difference between fear and being awe stricken within the framework of our love for God?

5. Attempt to learn by heart the verses concerned with brotherly love and to apply them in your practical life. This would involve daily and continual practice.

(36) Youth and Specifying a Goal

Introduction

Many people live to achieve temporary earthly goals that perish. They devote all their time and thoughts in achieving such goals even though they get coveted by rust or worms such as money, commerce, knowledge, lust or other lowly desires as passionate indulgence. However, such people are rarely satisfied or gratified. After a while, they realize they have wasted their lives to achieve these goals. They wish that life would go back in time to give them another chance to choose a different goal. Unfortunately, time would be up, the door closed and the bridegroom already inside. They will find themselves thrown outside the door and deprived of the heavenly bridegroom.

The danger such people take by living without having goals is that they are swept by the different trends surrounding them. They go because they see others doing so, and they stop as they see others stop. They do not wish to see for themselves and often wonder why they are living, or why God has created them. Because they live without a purpose, they are like a ship that sails without having any destination.

Main Points

1. The importance of setting a goal

There should be a goal and it should be specified. It should also have a defined strategy. Jesus Christ came to define your goal for you. He then holds your hand and leads you towards it. He scolds every wind, and calms every wave, so that your boat proceeds peacefully to the port, blessed by His presence inside it.

2. Clarity of the goal

By this, we mean that a person should know exactly what he is going to do, where he is going, and how much time he will spend on his journey. Our Lord Jesus Christ, Himself, in planning for the salvation of mankind, had a goal Set before Him. St. Paul the apostle expresses this when he speaks about Christ saying, “who for the joy that was set before Him endured the Cross, despising shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2). Thus the Lord came to achieve the goal He had set. He struggled to achieve it and it was motivated by His love, an inexplicable love, to save the world.

3. Specifying the goal

When Jesus handed down His mission to His disciples, He made them responsible for the whole world; they had to teach all His ways. He therefore offered Himself totally to them, thereby ensuring the realization of His goal:

- “Go and make disciples of all the nations and be my witnesses in Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the world”.
- “Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you”.

- “And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of ages”.

From the above three specifications, the overall goal, its depth, and its sublimity that transcends power and time become clear. These last three commandments that the Lord delivered to His disciples reveal that the mission is very lengthy. In fact, it would entail all ages for its fulfillment. As for our responsibility towards this lengthy divine mission, we should observe its comprehensiveness, which seems impossible unless it is put within the framework of the divine Will and the assistance of Jesus Christ.

However, comprehensiveness in its full sense is hard to achieve. Nevertheless, we could serve and mark our mission by this feature when we do not discriminate among people or areas, flesh or blood, friendship or profit, moods, comfort, beliefs, or nationality. Such a multiple population, served so completely, elevates the value of the goal: It makes it a task greater than could be confined to one man, one group, or one people. Therefore, we are required to present the Lord Jesus Christ to the entire world exactly as He has presented Himself to it.

The task of the Christian could be clarified in the following three goals. He hopes to achieve them through his contacts with the world, supported by Christ Himself as well as the Holy Bible:

First Goal: Promoting the relationship between people and God to achieve its true spiritual level.

Second Goal: Promoting man's relationship with himself so that he becomes concerned with the salvation of his soul above all other considerations whatever those may be.

Third Goal: Promoting the relationship between man and his fellowmen in order to raise it to its original divine status, and give it priority over all other considerations.

4. Consolidating the goal

When a Christian succeeds in achieving his goal in society, on the basis of the above three specifications, he will find that this does not guarantee steadfastness. To ensure the strength and development of a human soul or any group within the limits of the defined goal, a transformation must take place whereby the affected become effective. In other words, there is the need to become continually and actively alive. For every person living with Jesus Christ is required to be actively alive within the body of God. This necessitates unity with the Church and close adherence to it.

Consequently, any work undertaken by a Christian and which does not end with leading people to join the Church or end in their perseverance in prayer so that they, too, would carry the mission one of these days, would come short of achieving the goal. This is so because life with Jesus Christ is inconceivable if a person is isolated from the rest of those who live with Him. All this is preparation work for the greater task undertaken by a person to get spiritually unified with all people in the whole world; to love them on the basis of, and through, Christ's love for everyone. That is how the responsibility of a Christian transcends the circle of Church service and moves into the circle that comprises work for the benefit of all mankind. It involves responsibility for providing the needs of all nations and peoples who are suffering or are deprived. That is the goal of Christ's mission as well as that of the Bible. It is the way that Christ has designated as the perfect picture of the Christian person. This is how man was at the beginning in the image of God and, likewise upon the Cross, the picture of Christ, Himself,

crucified for the salvation of the whole world.

We are all invited to attain this picture. We can achieve it whether through our small services or larger ones within the Church. It is a possible task when the heart is prepared to receive and love every person it meets; becoming like Christ's heart and actually taking on His power to change and convert the hearts of men. In other words, as much as the task is comprehensive, it becomes a prerogative to open up one's heart. Moreover, to consolidate the goal as well as ensure its promotion, we need to exert a great effort.

(37) The Pentecost in Our Lives as Young Adults

Aim

To be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Introduction

- The experience of the earlier apostles when the Holy Spirit descended upon them on the Pentecost fifty days after the resurrection.
- Why it descended as a violent storm, as tongues of fire settling upon each one, so that each spoke according to what the Spirit inspired.

Main Points

First: Do not be sad (Do not oppose the Spirit)

- What saddens the Spirit is our being unfriendly and constantly occupied and distracted by material matters and affairs.
- What also sadden the Spirit are the hidden sin, irresponsible behavior and indulgence in lust so that there is no self-examination or accountability.
- Another source of sadness is our laziness in worship, slackness in prayer, fasting, repentance and our lack in partaking of the Holy Body and Blood in the Communion.

Second: Be filled with the Spirit

Sources of the Spirit

1. Personal Prayer: Study the canonical prayers of the third hour, in which we make supplications that the Spirit of God fills us. The Spirit arouses the soul through prayer. The Apostolic Church is an example of knees bowing in prayer.
2. The Bible: The Word, which I speak to you, is Spirit and Life. You are holy on account of the Word I speak to you. The Holy Bible reveals God's plans, the obedience of the Spirit, and the love of Jesus Christ.
3. The Liturgy: The holy mysteries enflame the soul, if practiced through the Spirit, filling it with satisfaction and appeasement. Study the history of the Apostolic Church to see how it carefully practiced the reading of the Word, prayer, fellowship, and partaking of the Holy Eucharist.

The conditions for getting filled with the Spirit:

1. Obeying the Spirit
 - a. This involves obeying the commandments of the Holy Bible.

- b. Obeying the spiritual instructions of the Church.
- c. Obeying your father or confession as a spiritually experienced man.
- 2. Loving the Lord fervently.
 - a. This is evident in the form of a warm prayer and dialogue.
 - b. Testify to His Name through words and deeds.
 - c. Love His children and His brothers who are poor.
- 3. Being Ascetic and crucifying the self and its egocentricity.
 - a. Asceticism provides the opportunity for the spirit to soar. That is why the Church focuses on constant prayer and long periods of fasting, kneeling in worship, reclusion, and rejection of physical pleasures. In this way, it is possible to enjoy a fervent spiritual life; I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me.
 - b. Crucifying the self is surrendering the reins to the Spirit so that He is in charge.
 - c. A life of sacrifice also allows the Spirit to be in control.
 - d. A life of sacrifice and the resistance of selfishness provide an opportunity for the spirit to be filled and to grow in grace, in supplication, and in humility.

The Fruits of the Spirit

Love

Love does not demand proofs and is not conditioned by a response; it is pure and does not wish or seek anything for itself (1 Corinthians 13). It is a practical love within the framework of truth. For example, in the Apostolic Church they sold their possessions and brought them before the feet of the apostles. This framework makes Christian love distinct from worldly love. Examples are found in the chronicles of the saints.

Joy

- Christian joy is distinctly in contrast with the lavishness of earthly sparkle.
- The apostles were full of joy and the Holy Spirit.
- Joy is a sign of cheer arising from salvation and efficacy of the Holy Spirit.
- Joy is the Christian's testimony before the world that he fears nothing and lusts for nothing.
- Joy is related to abstention, and associated with the renewal of life and with singing and giving praise.

Peace

- Christian peace is different from worldly peace.
- It is a peace that surpasses all understanding preserving our thoughts in Jesus Christ.
- The confines of inner peace cannot be trespassed by the world. Neither can its purity be confused. Examples of peace are found in the peace of the apostles as they were taken to the arenas of martyrdom and thrown in.

Long Suffering

- This is the fruit of the Spirit.
- It involves tolerance of others especially in times of weakness.
- It involves the appreciation of love and its victory over any other factor.
- It is trust and faith in the Word of God.

Kindness.

- This involves the sweetness inspired by the Spirit's effect in our lives.
- Kindness in words and deeds. Sweetness does not imply weakness or hypocrisy rather it is associated with discipline and cheerfulness.

Goodness

Out of the goodness of a heart comes goodness. This involves the sanctification of the heart intentions, senses, and thoughts.

Faithfulness

Faithfulness is faith in unseen things. It is faith in God's promises however long it takes.

Gentleness

It is opposed to cruelty and violence. It is gentleness that tolerates injustice with sweetness and cheer. However, it does not imply subjection or weakness; In fact, it holds its ground while behaving sweetly and tactfully.

Chastity (self control)

It is opposed to immorality, curiosity, and gossip. It is sexual chastity and physical chastity because the eye does not covet what others have and the ear does not intrude into other people's news. Thus it is concentration as opposed to distraction and loss.

Walking in the Spirit

- We do not follow our own will since we practice obeying the Spirit and trust its guidance. In fact, the Spirit leads us in every action where upon we give the Spirit the leading role to control our behavior.
- We should not be admirers, vexatious, or envious towards one another: these are the fruits of pride, selfishness and a sign that the Spirit has departed from us.
- The fervor of preaching and zeal to save souls: We study the lives of the apostles and disciples to become aware of the great influence of the Pentecost on their ministry. It was a fervent spiritual ministry, e.g. St. Paul's sermon, St. Stephen's speech, and St. Paul's attitude on different occasions.

(38) The Apostolic Church

Aim

Learning about Christianity in Egypt and its relationship with the Apostolic Church. Understanding the spirit of apostleship.

Introduction

The world was in a state of darkness and confusion from the moment Adam was expelled from the Garden of Eden. God, nevertheless, observed those struggling to know Him. Moreover, He was planning and preparing mankind to retrieve the original state and image. God found that He Himself should come (Hebrews 1:1) to establish the Church, the pillar of Truth (1 Timothy 3:15) and lay its foundation.

Today, in the twenty first century, as we enjoy the motherhood of the Church and her protection, we realize that we are gathering the harvest of ages and ages of toil. In spite of that, a believer wonders today, why do I find in the world so many Christian Churches that are so varied and apart? Has not the Lord said, “He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad” (Matthew 12:30). We will now make a survey of the condition of the Church in the apostolic era with respect to: Her birth, Her expansion, and Her principles.

Main Points

A. The birth of the Church in the apostolic era

The Church was born into a confused world: the heathen world was overflowing with different philosophies and different idols taking forms that were known or unknown to men (Acts 17:23). This led to the corruption of men's values as they worshipped “the creature rather than the creator” (Romans 1:25). Into this corrupt and tense environment the Church was born on the day of the Pentecost. It was a miraculous birth and since then the congregation started growing.

B. Factors contributing to the growth of the apostolic Church

1. The guidance of the Holy Spirit in the ministry

- The success the apostles achieved was not due to human effort, for the Spirit was completely in control of the ministry and it was He who nominated the ministers (Acts 13).
- He spoke through the mouths of the ministers (Mark 13:11).
- The Spirit defined the places where they had to go to preach (Acts 8:26,39; Acts 10:19; Acts 16:6).
- He also inspired the Church and was her Guide (Acts 6:3; Acts 15:28).

2. Preaching the good news of salvation

- The apostolic Church announced the news of redemption and forgiveness through Jesus Christ, the Savior of mankind (Luke 2:11; John 4:42). Thus salvation from every sickness was found in Him (Matthew 9:35 -37; Acts 4:12).
- On account of all that the whole creation that was groaning and sighing, under its burdens, rushed to that sweet Lord to obtain the joy of salvation.
- By realizing all that, we get to understand the mystery underlying the spread of the religion of salvation, the Church of the Savior, and her popularity among all social levels, especially among the despised and the weak. The expansion of the Word to Africa is the most explicit proof that the oppressed and the poor welcome Christ the Savior as King and Redeemer.
- Therefore, it appears seemly and adequate that we enjoy the blessings and influence of the Lord in our lives, having inherited it all at the end of time. Similarly, we should present to Him what our active Savior had. Thereupon spreading the gospel of faith to others.
- At this point, we would like to learn about the new values the newly born Church laid down, as well as the principles upon which her system is constructed.

C. The principles of the apostolic Church

1. Love

The apostolic Church announced that the first commandment is that of love (Matthew 22:38). It

is the greatest commandment and the purpose of the law (1 Timothy 1:5). For no one can claim that he is a Christian and the Lord's disciple except according to the measure of love in his heart (John 13:35). The Apostolic Church expanded the circle of love to include even the enemies (Romans 12:20,21). Indeed it asserted that God is Love (1 John 4:8).

2. The spirit of brotherhood

The Apostolic Church raised the value of humanity and brotherhood of mankind. Thus it placed these above the values of nationality or patriotism. It glorified the act of the Samaritan who transcended the boundaries of country and nation to help his brother in humanity. That is how the congregation of believers lived (Ephesians 4:1-6), with one heart and one soul. Consequently, they all greeted one another with a loving kiss in holy brotherhood (Romans 16:16).

3. The spirit of abstention and work

The Apostolic Church combined these two aspects, which seem to be contradictory. Yet it is divine greatness alone that could combine opposites. Thus the Church taught her children caution against dependence on the rich (Matthew 6:33), indulging in worldly love (James 4:4), or in clinging to the present life, which will vanish or dwindle (James 1:14). The Church has established in the minds of her children the spirit of alienation; as well as the expectancy of the heavenly city (Philippians 3:20), which has strong foundations. The teachings of the apostles and the book by father Hermes, are packed with heavenly thoughts concerning alienation and abstention. The Apostolic Church constantly waited for and expected the coming of the Lord (Revelation 3:11; Revelation 22). She waits for the coming of Christ who will lift up His bride and take her to Him. This is how the children of the Church are relieved of every earthly burden, which could impede the flight of their souls towards the Lord.

At the same time, the Church does not neglect work. Rather, it underlines the obligation of her children to be faithful in performing their tasks. This is because work is a divine principle set out by God to Adam (Genesis 3:19) in Paradise. Accordingly, the Church observes that principle and has forbidden persons to eat if they do not wish to work (2 Timothy 3:10-12). This applies even to spiritual fathers and those who make a living by offering spiritual assistance. Sometimes we find religious fathers and ministers giving up their spiritual tasks (1 Corinthians 9:15) and taking up manual work in order to serve as models of perseverance for their children in the field of labor. In this way the divine wisdom is illustrated in the balanced attitude of the Church towards living in this world actively and yet ascetically.

Moreover, through her example, the Church has elevated the attitude towards manual work and put an end to laziness and negligence. In the chronicles of the fathers of monasticism we also have clear proof of their interest in work and their perseverance in performing different jobs, as well as their reaction against laziness and apathy.

Questions

- Is our study of the apostolic period a historical or spiritual study? Why?
- However hard conditions and situations get to be, God is able to bring "out of the beast something to eat, and out of the strong something sweet". Discuss this statement.
- How does the Spirit call us to be ministers?
- Is there only one way to this call?

- Does my faith in the work of the Holy Spirit in my life conflict with my ideas when planning for my future and my career?
- The weapon of love is stronger than all human weapons in spite of its apparent weakness. Discuss this statement.

(39) The Church of Egypt

Aim

Understanding Christianity in Egypt and its relationship with the apostolic Church. An overview of the Church of Alexandria and its school

Introduction

During the Apostolic age, Alexandria was considered the most important city in the world after Rome. It was also considered the scientific and cultural capital of the world. Moreover, due to the natural inclination of the Egyptian people to be religious in general, there was a powerful heathen school in Alexandria at that time. This hosted a number of the greatest heathen scholars and philosophers who were strongly supported by a very grand library.

The Christian faith seems to have made its way to Egypt at a very early stage; for some of the Egyptian Jews attended the birth of the Church in Jerusalem on Pentecost Day (Acts 2:1). These probably carried the good news back with them to Egypt. The Holy Bible, too, mentions some of the Christian leaders in Egypt, such as Apollo the Alexandrian (Luke 1:3-4) who had been converted, and traveled widely and preached with fervor and strength. We also recognize the person of Theophilus (Acts 18:24-25) to whom Luke wrote in his gospel. Some believe that the apostle Simon, the lawmaker, preached in the areas of Aswan and Nuba in south Egypt.

The Church in Egypt was thus founded on the hands of the apostle St. Mark and upon the strong basis previously laid down by the Lord. By His encompassing wisdom and plan, the basis had been laid and strengthened for He loved and blessed His people in Egypt (Isaiah 19:25).

When St. Mark began preaching in Egypt, the Lord blessed his work and many heard him. Consequently, he felt that these people were unusual; possessing a great civilization, deeply touched by religion, and favored by the Lord's blessing in Jesus' earlier trip to Egypt. Guided by the Holy Spirit, he found it necessary to establish a school for Christian theology. Its task was to strengthen the faith and reveal the truth, as it would confront the activity of the heathen school of Alexandria.

1. The Foundation of the Alexandrian School or neology and its Concerns

At first, the school had to oppose the dominant heathen wave. Gradually, it became a powerful threat to it. In fact, it was able to divert its progress so that it became weak and deteriorated. Thus Alexandria became a center for the Christian faith and its school occupied a pioneering role in theological studies throughout the world. The task it undertook was great and extensive; it contributed to the edification of new believers by implanting the facts of the faith within their souls. In this way, the seed would be deeply and genuinely received, while carrying the promise of bringing fruit. For this reason Christianity in Egypt was marked by fervent worship, sublimity,

and deep contemplation. The Jewish philosopher, Philo, testified to all this (The Book of the Life of contemplation by Philo).

Besides the task of consolidating believer's faith, the school supported a group of active and faithful members who wished to preach the Word to the heathens. Consequently, it provided them with appropriate material to assist them in their missionary work. In so doing, the school had a dual task: serving within the church and outside it. This is similar to a fruitful tree which spreads its branches high in the sky and in the same time stretches its foot in the ground.

Philosophers have classified the students of the school of Alexandria into two groups: a group of believers representing the majority who accepted the faith simply and without arguing, and a minority who reasoned their faith. They believed and yet sought for evidence and knowledge, which would bring logical explanation and clarification to their faith. Such a minority would then participating in spreading the Word.

The school did not own a specific building, and its students, who were men and women, youth and elders, gathered in the home of a professor or any open place where research and studies could be conducted. The life of these students and their teachers portray the wonderful fervent Christianity that spread throughout Egypt. It was a life marked by fellowship and love, which serves as an excellent model of Christianity. The studies included a variety of social sciences such as astronomy and music. This provided stimulation and interest rather than a harsh remote curriculum. It was then possible for students to undertake research in different theological branches. The whole approach depended on debate, questions and answers. Whereby the senses were sharpened focused, and activated.

At this point, we may ask what kind of faith did this school seek to teach, establish and propagate? What are the most important facts of the faith that it believed in and sought to strengthen?

2. The Faith and Doctrines of the School of Alexandria:

The school did not operate in a vacuum. Indeed, it had a clear theological basis with distinct features. Moreover, the Church in Egypt had its defined laws and theological creeds so that, in spite of simplicity, there would be no diversion or laxity in applying its doctrines. Thus the school and Church of Egypt safeguarded the faith as the saints had once handed it down to it. Both sought to hand it down in its basic spirit to the modern world. The most important features in the faith are:

a. Belief in the divinity of Christ

The Church clearly indicated her strong adherence to this Christian truth, which constitutes the basis for its existence. It is on the basis of this strong confession of the divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:16). On the basis of this Christian rock, the Church is established. Therefore, she cannot be careless in confirming the divinity of the Savior. She kept before her the words of St. Peter on the day of the Pentecost concerning prayer in the name of Christ (Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21). He is God to whom we offer prayer, and He is the One to whom Stephen prayed (Acts 7:59) at his martyrdom. He is, also, the One that St. Mark, the founder of the Egyptian Church, declares in the Mass, known as the Cyrillean Mass, by saying,

“You are He who has created man in Your image and likeness, and who has created everything by Your wisdom. Your true Light, Your only Begotten Son, our Lord God Savior and King Jesus Christ through Him we thank and offer to You with Him and the Holy Spirit who are consubstantial in the Holy Trinity, without separation, this living offering and unsullied ministry”. Origen, who was one of the deans of the school of Alexandria, declared that praise is addressed to God alone, and His only Son who is the Word and God.

The opening used by St. Mark in his gospel could serve as a good example of the extent to which the truth of Christ’s divinity is clear in the Church of Alexandria. At the beginning of chapter one, he says: “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God”. He closes the gospel by speaking about Christ’s ascension and His seating at the right hand of God (Mark 16:19). That is how the Church of Egypt believed in Christ who is God (Romans 9:25), the Lord (Acts 2:36), the only Son of God (Acts 9:20) the Creator (John 1:3), the eternally Immortal (1 Timothy 6: 16), the Holy (Acts 3:14), the Judge (Acts 10:22), the Forgiver (Acts 5:31), the Savior (Acts 4:13), the Hope of believers (Romans 5:2), and the Living God.

b. The belief in salvation through faith and acts

As an extension of the Apostolic Church, the Church of Alexandria possessed the Divine Right and preached it thoroughly. She, therefore, did not hesitate to underline that good acts were a necessary prerequisite to man’s eternal salvation. Consequently it is unworthy of any Christian person to deny the obligation of Christianity to do good acts as a condition for the salvation of the soul. Indeed, the Protestant Church’s proclamation that good works are unnecessary could be the basic reason for the deterioration of society, its immorality and indecency. In spite of their insistence on being called Christians and on preserving appearances, the essence is lacking.

It is only natural that St. Mark reports what he has previously heard and experienced with the Lord Jesus Christ. Has not the Lord told him that there will be a reckoning associated with the good and bad works enacted during a person’s life? (John 5:28-29); and that the reward will be according to his works (Matthew 16:27), and that the yardstick by which each tree will be measured is its fruit? (Matthew 7:19-20). Moreover, every good deed, even if it is the offering of a cold glass of water, does not go unrewarded (Mark 9:41), and every evil deed, even an unfair word (Matthew 12:36-37) will be judged.

Probably St. Peter the apostle was the nearest to St. Mark’s heart due to blood ties and long acquaintance. So that, like him, St. Mark preached in Alexandria that God will judge according to each one’s work without partiality (1 Peter 1:17). Therefore, good works (2 Peter 1:10; 1 Peter 4:18) and a righteous life are essential.

c. Belief in the doctrines and sacraments

“The Church recognized the doctrines and claimed their legality. In fact, the doctrines are the method of religious teachings adopted by Christ. He taught a group, lived with them, and ordained them to receive the truth as they had taken it from Him and to deliver it to the whole world (Matthew 28:19-20). When St. Mark the preacher came to Egypt, he came to preach what he had heard (1 John 3:5) and experienced with Jesus Christ. That is how the Church believed in the doctrines and that is what St. Mark started to hand down to his heir, Pope Anianus and each following pope handing it down to his heir until this day.

In this way, our Church has become an Orthodox Church in which our ecclesiastical fathers respect the holy doctrines. The extent of this respect is apparent as they always refer to the holy source upon which they base their writings and teaching, and from which they have drawn enlightenment. Moreover, they give proof of their identity through mentioning the names of their teachers and professors.

The Church of Alexandria also believed in the seven holy sacraments. She considered these to be the basis upon which the Holy Spirit worked in the circle of believers. Even though there have been differences concerning the application of the sacraments, yet this has no bearing whatsoever on the essence itself. It seems natural that a new and persecuted church cuts down the words it recites during spiritual practice. That is due to scarcity in time and status. In spite of that, the essence of the doctrines remains wholesome, enduring, and faultless.

- Baptism transfers man from retribution to salvation (Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 1:3) where he attains the new birth.
- Through confirmation, the Holy Spirit descends upon the baptized (2 Corinthians 1:21-22) thus filling him up.
- Through communion the believer is fixed in Christ so he can produce much fruit (Acts 2:42; Acts 26:28).
- In confession (Acts 19:18) his sins are absolved.
- Those spiritually or physically sick receive the sacrament of anointing of the sick (James 5:14-15).
- Marriage becomes an order of holy unity between a man and a woman (Ephesians 5:22-32).
- Priesthood implies the ministry of all the holy sacraments (Hebrews 5:4).

That is how St. Mark anointed the pope, priests, and deacons; just as Jesus had instructed him. We should correct our attitude towards our early mother Church in Egypt. She was not in a state of naivety or apathy. In fact, her deep faith was mature and erudite and was supported by the struggle of the Theological school of Alexandria as well as by the strength of her children.

Questions

- Do you have any idea about the religions of old Egyptians?
- How have these affected the expansion of Christianity in Egypt?
- Christianity is a positive religion that finds neutrality repulsive. Show how this motivated the foundation of the divine Theological school of Alexandria.
- Does faith conflict with the mind? Discuss the issue.
- Mention some instances in the gospel of St. Mark that clarify the divinity of Jesus Christ.
- “He who believes and is baptized is saved”. “Faith without works is dead”. Discuss these two statements and clarify the view of your Church.
- The Lord Jesus Christ attacked the Scribes and the Pharisees who annulled the law of God by their traditions (Matthew 15:6), while the Church calls for the application of the doctrines; explain this.
- Reconcile between St. Paul’s attack on works in (Galatians 2:21; Titus 3:5) and the belief of the Church in the necessity of works to attain salvation.

Exercises And Activities

- Conduct a debate after class according to the spirit of the school of Alexandria.
- Collect the verses proving the divinity of Christ.
- Investigate some doctrines of the Church and trace them to their source.
- Undertake research on any of the seven sacraments.

(40) The Christian and the Media

Aim

“Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? For you are the temple of the living God” (2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

Main Points

There is no doubt that the world today is undergoing a tremendous revolution in the domain of mass media, which is evolving with astonishing speed. For example, in the span of a few years, we have seen the development in television into colored pictures: then we have seen the video through which recordings we wish to preserve are possible, and to which we have access whenever we want. The progress in transmitting pictures has become so great that there has been uproar in France due to the overpowering attraction of American television. This reaches the French very clearly, and relays the thoughts, culture and negative aspects of the American society with such great impact that the French are beginning to dread the loss of their identity in spite of their outstanding history and culture. Consequently, the study of the influence of mass media upon our youth becomes a necessity. It is, moreover, important to know how to develop an open-minded attitude and heart in facing its impact.

There is no error in having different forms of mass media in the Christian home, from television to newspapers to magazines. But the error lies in the neglect of educating the conscience of youth. In fact, we need to educate the conscience of the parents themselves as to how to make the right selection. Everyone must learn how to choose the proper cultural media, programs, books, etc. Leaving our children exposed to trivial and negative media that are destructive and hardly edifying is a matter that deserves consideration and self-accountability. We are looking forward to the day when the media will present what is constructive for our children, for life is not a series of immoral theatrical situations nor is it a show of violence. Indeed, mass media should promote man and his instincts rather than demean them. There are multiple scientific, literary, artistic and sportive spheres; and even more appropriate, there are religious domains that oppose atheism and spread love...this is what we should look out for in media.

The Influence of The Media

1. The Spiritual Perspective

Mass media affects youth in two ways:

- It occupies their time, distracting them from important, edifying, and basic matters related to the salvation of the soul. For example, we are often obliged to modify the hours of Sunday classes and youth meeting so that they do not conflict with the times when television films or football matches are presented. Moreover, television often occupies

our time and attracts our attention for such long periods that definitely affects our spiritual education, whether this involves our individual worship, or our participation in family and general worship.

- Some television programs are stumbling blocks for Christian youth. They often deal with issues that are inappropriate and with morals that are in conflict with Christian dignity as well as with our principles since these are different from those of our faith. All of which could arouse responses that conflict with the Christian sense of respect and chastity.

2. The Social Perspective

Mass media present social programs that host writers who discuss family and social problems. These reveal the immorality that is prevalent in society but of which we were unaware. Thus we are presented with those who deceive, steal or act violently and gradually we learn to live with and in time, to accept this behavior as part of our life at home even though they are completely foreign and far removed from Christian purity.

3. The Cultural Perspective

There is bitter complaint concerning the shallowness of materials created by Meters and thinkers. There are hardly any writers of humane fiction or of social edification. Due to such a state, there is a threat to the Christian personality since it is exposed to the triviality of television programs as well as to the immorality prevalent in western life and which are shown in different forms of media.

4. The Behavioral Perspective

There can be no doubt that the wave of violence pervading movies and television screens finds a response particularly in youth and their behavior. The Los Angeles police in the United States noted that a particular sort of crime took place predominantly the next hour following a certain television show. This indicated that viewers watched, and then went out to put into practice what they had seen. It even seems that movies these days depend on two types of films: those portraying violence and those exposing physical lust. These reduce man to the vilest form of existence for they address the two instincts of killing and sex.

How can we face these influences?

1. Spiritual Satisfaction

“A satisfied soul loathes the honeycomb, but to a hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet” (Proverbs 27:7). Thus, if we fill our youth with Christ, the Bible, stories of saintly fathers and ecclesiastical life, with hymns, songs, spiritual readings and ministry in the city and surrounding precincts; we will satisfy them, thereby enabling them to overcome the tyrannical flow of the media. It will become easy for them to resist its strong influence. Those who are really and fully satisfied will decide to watch the little that is beneficial and reject all else, as they are empowered by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

2. Cultural Satisfaction

There was a time when our homes were filled with all up to date literature in the spiritual, philosophical and scientific spheres. The father used to read a book, allow his son to read it then they would join, in a marvelous spirit, in discussion. Today, sadly enough, we depend on the superficial culture offered by the papers, magazines, or television screens.

We need to develop a new urge to read, an urge to charge the brain and life with a holy keenness and wholesome inclinations. Youth should not find time to waste in depravity and immorality. A cultured person gains inner strength that protects him in the face of trivialities and attracts him to constructive programs and books.

3. Positive Selections

When the heart is filled with Christ, positive thought, and culture; it becomes easy for man to distinguish between the trivial and the valuable and to select programs, friends, books and magazines that edify him while rejecting destructive ones. A Christian person, moreover, possesses the guidance and inspiring inner light granted by God. This allows him to “examine everything and hold on to that which is good”. He weighs matters according to three criteria stated in the three verses:

“All things are lawful for me but all things are not helpful” (1 Corinthians 6:12).

“ All things are lawful for me, but all things do not edify” (1 Corinthians 10:23).

“All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of anything” (1 Corinthians 6:12).

Thus a Christian person enjoys inner freedom. He reads, studies, discusses, reviews, travels abroad and returns home and “yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us” (Romans 8:37).

So let us live a fulfilling life with our youth: spiritually and culturally satisfying. Let us carry on with them constant dialogue that is edifying to their conscience and character in Jesus Christ. Thus they will not be as a feather exposed to the winds; but, rather, they will be completely filled by God. Consequently, they will walk in faith and holiness to testify for Christ who has redeemed them.

(41) The Epistle to the Colossians (Part I)

Aim

Underlining the preeminent glory and honor of Christ, the Lord, and His transcendence.

The Church of Colossi

Paul had a fellow prisoner by the name of Epaphras in his prison in Rome, (Phil 23). When this person was renewed (converted), this could be sometime during the three years that St. Paul spent in Ephesus, he founded a church in Colossi as the verses indicate in Colossi 1:7 and 4:12.

The heretics in Colossi

- St. Paul learned from Epaphras that they were numerous in Colossi.
- It seems that the heresies arose from the Jews, Gnostics, the worshippers of angels, and those claiming that the flesh is inherently evil.
- Based on their teachings, it was claimed that God had invented a being, which could move between His infinite character and that of evil. This third being was considered less holy than the Highest One, it was Christ, who came devoid of divinity and closer to

man's nature in order to elevate it to higher levels.

Undoubtedly, such heresy sought to destroy Christ's divinity and His glorious intercession and consequently to reduce Him into one of the numerous other intercessors.

Synopsis of the Epistle

- Introduction: Thankfulness to the Colossians and intercession on their behalf (Colossians 1:1-14).
- Doctrinal Section: The glory of Jesus Christ, His honor and preeminence (Colossians 1:15, 2:3).
- Practical Section:
 - Warnings against false heresies (Colossians 2:4-23).
 - Union with Christ and its results (Colossians 3:4-6).
 - Spiritual exhortations to the fathers, women, children and slaves (Colossians 3:18-4:5).
- Closing: Closing salutations and commendations (Colossians 4:3-18).

First: The Introduction

Contemplate the meaning of, "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ". He is not an apostle sent by a man

- The members of the Church are saints for they are sanctified in Christ and they are brothers for they are members in one body.
- In the verses 3- 5, the apostle draws together the themes of faith, hope, and love. Do we have a living faith in Christ and do we show love towards all saints arising from the hope laid for us in heaven?
- Contemplate verses 6-8 where one of the slaves establishes a church, and how the truth about the Word was delivered through him. St. Paul praises the efforts arising from the faith of the Colossians.
- In verses 9-14, study the prayer St. Paul offers on their behalf and which he constantly recites:
 - a. That they may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all wisdom, and divine understanding.
 - b. That they may be fruitful in every good work.
 - c. That they be chaste according to God's glorious power and might.
 - d. That they may be patient and joyfully long suffering in the face of any hardship.
 - e. That they may thank the heavenly Father who made them worthy to share the inheritance of the saints.

May our holy fathers' prayers be confined to these aims when they intercede on behalf of their children and their congregation.

Second: The Doctrinal Section

- Christ's glory, honor, and preeminence (Colossians 1:15-2:3). Note that the talk about the Son necessarily leads into talking about the Father, His work towards redemption through which we have been reconciled, loved, and made worthy to share the inheritance of the saints, and to live in the Light. For without His love we could not have been saved from

the power of darkness or accepted and transported into the kingdom of His beloved Son, the kingdom of Christ. It is through Christ that we have been redeemed, and through His Blood we attained forgiveness of our sins. Notice how the Cross covered the debt we owed, and how the Blood effectively brought about righteousness, reconciliation, redemption and adoption.

- “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation” in other words, the Son is exactly the same as the Father in nature and essence. This is what is meant by “the image of the invisible God,” because the image corresponds exactly to the original. Thus the image of the invisible God is also invisible, which means that Christ originally, and before the incarnation, was invisible due to His divinity. However, by becoming incarnate we saw Him and through Him we got to know the Father present within and united with Him “he who has seen Me, has seen the Father”. That is seen spiritually and by faith and not by earthly knowledge.
- “The firstborn of all creation,” indicates that He is the source and origin of all life and creation. He is the spiritual source out of which all creatures have sprung, “For by him all things were created,” so that the starting point of all creatures was in Him.

Let us contemplate the greatness and glory of God for “all things were created through Him and for Him”. In other words, there would have been no existence or stability for creation without Him. Moreover, there would be no real presence for creation unless it is associated to and dependent on Him. Notice that He is the head of the body of the Church, the One preeminently honorable. The Church consists of branches and He *is* the beginning and the end, the firstborn from the dead. For He is the first who arose, ascended, and sat on the right hand of the Father so that He may have preeminence in all things. Surely He deserves all glory, honor, dominion, and power since He was slain for our sake and God, His Father, bought us from every nation tongue, and tribe. Glory be to Him forever, Amen.

Remainder Of Chapter One

- “And by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the Blood of the Cross, whether things on earth or things in heaven (Colossians 1:20). This, too, is the Will of the Father, that He sacrifices His Son, Jesus Christ, so that by offering Himself, He becomes a burned offering and atonement for sin and transgression. In this way He enacted reconciliation and peace between heaven and earth. He has made them both to become one, the heavenly and the earthly. This reconciliation does not indicate that God harbored enmity toward us. Nevertheless, it means that He cancelled enmity, that is sin, and trampled its power by His death on the Cross. Through the Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ we have become new creatures since we have become part of the covenant of adoption and love. We have become His bride.
- “And you who were once alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh, through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and irreproachable in His sight” (Colossians 1:21). The Colossians were considered as Gentiles, unassociated with the flock of the Jews so that they had no promise, no legacy, no inheritance. We, too, are like them. We are all strangers and enemies. We had no knowledge of God, we had no Bible, our works were wicked, and our nature selfish and unclean. Praise be to God who ha granted us holiness through His Spirit. The task of reconciliation was achieved” by the death of His incarnate Body, since

at His death on the Cross, and in the terms of divine justice, His offering was accepted before the Father for it gave Him pleasure, joy and peace. The aim of His death and resurrection was to sanctify us and be united with us. In this way, we obtained purity through His holiness. Holiness is the name by which the Holy Trinity was declared, and through Him and Jesus Christ we have become saints. For saintliness is partaking in God's life, it is the perfection of baptism and the entry into the mystery of redemption. The holiness granted to us urges us to walk towards eternity and the coming kingdom. It increases as we cling closer to the Holy One who is distinctly detached from the wicked.

- “If indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the Gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven” (Colossians 1:23). This is the basic condition that would make us holy and without blame at His second coming; that we remain grounded and steadfast in the faith and confident in the message and the choice announced to us in the Holy Bible. Moreover, we should not be shaken by temptation or suffering if we want to retain the sacred hope we have received from the Bible.
- “I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body which is the Church” (Colossians 1:24:). The apostle here announces an important Biblical message: that the suffering he experiences and undergoes in his flesh for the sake of Christ's Church and for spreading of the Word is only a supplement to the sufferings on Golgotha. This is sharing, even though in a minimal way. But it is essential to participate in such suffering. For just as the Head underwent suffering on the Cross so must the members suffer. Thus unifying the Church in its moments of pain and bringing the Head and body together at such times. When Jesus Christ finds that the lost member has undergone the last pain to be tasted, He will appear in His Church and enter in to His rest and glory, joyful before the Father on account of the sufferings that He and His Church have shared through the ages and past generations. Read the Chapter on “The Church undaunted by Suffering” in the book entitled “The Eternal Church” produced by the Consecrated Home.
- “Of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His Saints” (Colossians 1:25,26). St. Paul always spoke with pride about God's call to him to preach the Word and he became a servant of the Church according to the plan of the heavenly Father who chose him to achieve God's work among the Gentiles. That is the great task that God draws people from all nations to form His Church that will be the object of His love and that will share His glory. This mystery was hidden all through the ages but is now declared to the saints through the Bible.
- Verses (Colossians 1:27 -29): It is God's pleasure to reveal to believers the richness of the glory prepared for the nations, so that we might share with Him, and become His people, and that He may become our Lord. This is the hope that comes in the person of Jesus Christ, the Savior of us all. Preachers speak in the name of Christ and the goal of preaching and teaching is to bring every one into contact with Jesus Christ in order to get filled with all wisdom, to become perfect in divine knowledge (and such perfection is only relative, yet it comes from the effect of grace). St. Paul worked day and night to achieve this goal, and he struggled in prayer, fasting, and vigils to that end. Due to his faithfulness in delivering the Word and preaching the Bible among the Gentiles, God

filled him with the Holy Spirit who worked powerfully within him.

(42) The Epistle to the Colossians (Part II)

Verses (Colossians 2:1-3): The apostle announces to the Church of Colossi his great struggle on her behalf and on behalf of the Church of Laodicea, as well as for all believers he has known, loved, and became close to even though he has not seen them in the flesh. He proclaims that the goals of his endeavors are:

1. Their hearts maybe consoled by His grace.
2. They may be filled with love.
3. They may understand the mystery of Jesus Christ and the Church. The mystery of the love of God, the Father and of His Son for the Church.
4. The fullness with such knowledge would be in the person of the Lord Himself since He alone is full of wisdom and knowledge...

The Practical Section (Third section from previous lesson)

(a) Warning against false heresies (Colossians 2:4-23)

- Verses (Colossians 2:45): “Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words. For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ”. The apostle warns against sweet words that deceive and lure people towards opinions and principles that are in opposition to the Bible. When he insists on the heresy prevalent in their midst, he also insists on the power of their faith, thus encouraging them lest they feel the gospel to be burdensome.
- Verses (Colossians 2:6,7): “As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him rooted and built and established in the faith as you have been taught, a bounding in it with thanksgiving”. Here the apostle underlines that faith is not merely an articulated creed, but rather it is an attitude and a way of life. Thus a person who believes in Christ will ultimately have Christ to reign in his heart and mind so that the Lord inspires his whole manner. The apostle also wishes to draw their at tension to the necessity of genuine and steadfast faith as well as the need to be filled with thanks however much the demands of faith may be.
- Verse (Colossians 2:8): “Because lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world and not according to Christ”. The apostle once more warns them against those who wish to deceive them through a philosophy that conflicts with Christian faith. Such erroneous philosophy fills men with pride and vanity. Apparently many vain philosophers have tried to lead the Colossians away from the correct faith.
- Verses (Colossians 2:9,10): “For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power”. Here the apostle speaks about the unification of the divinity with the flesh in the person of Jesus Christ; and explains how in the Savior dwells all the fullness of the divinity. This verse pulls down every heresy that diminishes the honor of Jesus Christ or denies that He is consubstantial with the Father. Moreover he has granted us, the believers, and union with

the Son that we may be filled with His grace. Thus He is our head and we are His body. He reigns over us, and over all principalities and power since He alone is worthy of glory, honor and dominion.

- Verse (Colossians 2:11): “In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ”. The apostle speaks here about the work of redemption and the efficacy of grace in believers, and how these separate them from the world while their hearts have been circumcised thereby excluding all physical or material love. This circumcision is different from that of the Old Testament where it involved beings and their circumcision. Here, it is the work of the spirit that casts off the old man.
- Verse (Colossians 2:12): “buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the workings of God, who raised Him from the dead”. The apostle speaks here about the mystery of baptism. He explains how we are buried in the baptism receptacle three times in order to die with Christ who remained three days in the grave. We then arise to a new life, just as Christ arose, vanquisher and victorious. For God, who raised His Son from the dead has also raised us from sin and has granted that we sit with Him in the heaven. These are the two aspects of His divine sacrifice: He was delivered on account of our sins and He was raised to grant us righteousness. We partake of the first aspect of the sacrifice in baptism, so that baptism is the practical demonstration of faith in the death of Jesus Christ. Thus we die with Him and are buried with Him when we are baptized. We also partake of the second aspect of the sacrifice, which is the resurrection, by taking communion “he who eats. My Body and Blood, shall live in Me”.
- Verses (Colossians 2:13,14): The apostle reveals here how we were enslaved, by sin and lust. “Uncircumcision” used in this verse refers to uncleanness. But Christ raised us to live with Him, forgiving us all our sins. He has redeemed the debt we owed, tearing it down by the Cross. Moreover He has lifted up the law, which condemns us defeating and nailing it to the Cross. Thus He has granted us the glorious freedom belonging to God’s children.
- Verse (Colossians 2:15): speaks of the action of the Cross, how our Lord conquered Satan and his army, disarming them of their power and proclaiming His victory over them.
- Verses (Colossians 2:617): indicate the prevalent heresies at the time, which aimed at drawing the Church into Jewish life. The apostle shows that the old laws do not rule God’s children.
- Verses (Colossians 2:18,19): The apostle reiterates his warnings to believers against the prevailing heresies. These claimed the difficulty to communicate and the sufficiency to worship angels as a sign of humility and acknowledgement of their inability to reach God. The apostle describes these heretics as people who do not hold steadfastly to the “Head (Jesus Christ), from whom all the body, joints and ligaments, grows with the increase which is from God”.

(b) Partaking in death and resurrection with Him

Verses (Colossians 2:20-23): “Therefore. if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations”. The apostle speaks here about dying with Christ, as well as crucifying the old self. He reveals how the

spiritual person is not governed by commands such as “do not touch, do not taste, do not handle”, since these are the spirit of the Old Testaments of which the grace of Christ has liberated us. As for the heresies, which became widespread in Colossi. The apostle condemns them, as they are an invitation to return to the old order of life governed by heretic human thoughts and not by the Will of God. Examples of such heresies mentioned by the apostle; are the worship of angels as a sign of humility and the humiliation of the body as an aim in itself.

Chapter Three

- Verses (Colossians 3:1-4): “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not things on the earth. For you died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life, appears then you also appear with Him in glory”. Those who have risen with Christ, have all their interest linked with Christ who sits at the right hand of God. Thus most important sign of a believer is that his yearnings are sublimated, his feelings sanctified, his inclinations heavenly oriented and his thoughts elevated. Concerning God’s children, the apostle says that their existence is hidden and it is Christ who appears and works in them, “it is no longer I who lives, but Christ lives in me”. If the glory, which is Christ’s, does not appear in us now, it is because we are still in the flesh. However, we receive this glory secretly and it will be announced when the Lord comes in the clouds and His glory appears. At that time we “will appear with Him in glory”, which is ours through Him. What a great hope, we will be glorified with Him! This is our only consolation whenever we suffer with Him. Whenever we are persecuted, crucified or put to death with Him for the purpose of achieving His mission, which He has entrusted within our souls.
- Verses (Colossians 3:5-7): The apostle speaks about the need to kill the old self, to struggle against the lusts of the body, such as adultery, uncleanness, delinquent passion and greed which involves idolatry, love of money and selfishness. All these things invoke God’s anger upon the wicked. We were enslaved to all these before we knew the Lord; but thanks be to God who has granted us victory in Jesus Christ.
- Verses (Colossians 3:8 -11): Having exhorted believers to abstain from apparent ugly sins such as adultery and the worship of money, the apostle speaks about uglier and more abject matters which are far more dangerous. He speaks about “anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, and filthy language”. These sins are inappropriate and do not fit the children of God who are calm, loving, gentle, and chaste in all their members. The apostle then forbids lying in the same manner he used in the epistle to the Ephesians; all such behavior is incongruous on the level of the one family whose members are brothers. For can a brother lie to his brother? If we have put off the old self, and put on the new, how is it that we continue to follow the latter after having crucified him? We grow and get renewed continually so that we might become in the picture of the great Lord Himself. In Jesus Christ we have become one family “there is neither Greek nor Jew, no circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all”.
- Verses (Colossians 3:12-17): Having spoken about negative matters concerning the departure from many sins of varying evilness, the apostle speaks of positive conduct:
 - That “we put on tender mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long suffering, bearing with one another, and forgiving one another”. That is a batch of virtues, which are necessary for God’s children who testify for Jesus Christ. They

- are also necessary for brotherly relationships and for unity among believers.
- That we “put on love, which is the bond of perfection” and love as a virtue is the peak of all virtues since they all arise out of it. Because God is love, therefore he who loves is born of God and is able to live in the light.
- That “the peace of God rule” in the hearts. He gives peace, which is unlike that of the world; rather, it is a peace that passes all understanding. It protects our thoughts and hearts and keeps them in Jesus Christ.
- That we be “thankful” in order to progress in virtue and obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ. A life of thankfulness is necessary.
- That the Word of God live richly in our hearts, “singing with grace” to the Lord. This is the sign of a fulfilled life where the Word is active and thereby achieving inner renewal (the words I speak to you are spirit and life).
- That we surrender our lives totally and completely to the Lord, “whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus”. Let God be all in all.

This constitutes the life pattern of true children of God. They do not claim anything as their own yet the precious Blood has bought them in order to glorify God in their lives. He has died so that the living do not live for themselves in the future, but rather live for Him who died and rose for them.

Exercises

Examine yourself carefully. Then undertake one of the following exercises:

1. Do I always aspire to heavenly matters?
2. Do I crucify the passions of the flesh through grace?
3. Am I filled with love, which is the way to perfection?
4. Am I constantly and sincerely thankful and singing praise to the Lord?

(43) The Lord Jesus Christ: The Shepherd and Savior

Aim

There is no rest or peace, or salvation except through Jesus Christ.

Main Points

Jesus the Savior

“And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21).

- No other name has been as frequently mentioned as that of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. It has occurred six hundred times. After His birth Christians refused to call anyone else by that name. Consequently, Paul calls his friend, named Jesus, as Justus (Colossians 4:11). In this way the name of Jesus is consecrated to the person of our blessed Lord.
- The name of Jesus corresponds to the Hebrew name of Joshua and it is the same name as Hosea: they all mean “the Lord saves”.
- The Greeks associated the name of Jesus with the verb “Fashai” meaning “to heal”. Thus

the Lord is the physician of our soul, spirit and body.

- Jesus saves us not only from sin but also from all its off springs. Thus, if sin separates us from God, then Jesus Christ has come “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). Isaiah the prophet says in the Old Testament, “But your iniquities have separated you from your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear” (Isaiah 59:2).
- If sin has caused enslavement and humiliation, then Jesus Christ has liberated us from the slavery of sin in order to glorify the liberty of God’s children. Through salvation, He has adopted us so that we have become His sons, His flock, and members of God’s house, partaking with the saints in all blessings.

The Clouds of Salvation

1. The Lord’s salvation of mankind is granted to all, “who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4).
2. It is salvation granted freely and with grace, and it has been secured by the incarnation the cross, and the mystery of baptism. Without these, there cannot be a second birth, and without confession and repentance there cannot be a renewal of man’s mind.
3. It is a salvation that cannot be obtained without submission to the mysteries of the Church; for without baptism and anointing there cannot be a second birth; and without the mystery of matrimony there can be no holy unity and sharing between a man and a woman.
4. It is a salvation that encompasses the life of the believer in the past, present, and future.
 - a. In the past, we have attained it in baptism.
 - b. In the present, it is attained through repentance.
 - c. In the future, we expect Him to redeem our bodies when we all change and put on the new glorified bodies and get ready to enter the wedding and eat with the Lamb.

Jesus the Shepherd

The title of “the Shepherd” was one of the most cherished by the Lord while He was on earth. Thus, the title is frequently used in the gospels, “Do not fear little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32). The tenth chapter of the gospel of St. John is considered the greatest and most wonderful passage that speaks of the Lord as the good Shepherd who watches His flock feeds and protects them, and lays down His life for their sakes.

The dynamics in the relationship between the Shepherd and the flock

1. The Shepherd knows his flocks and they know His voice: The Shepherd gives a name to each one of His sheep. This means a personal relationship. It is a strong and deep acquaintance. The Lord draws a similarity between the depths of His acquaintance and that between Him and His holy Father as He says, “I know my sheep and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me even so I know My Father”.
2. He protects them from dangers and they follow Him: The shepherd walks in front of His sheep carrying His rod and staff. The rod is used as a weapon to defend the flock. On the other hand, to be protected the sheep must not walk away from their Leader and to be safe they have to experience peace and trust.
3. He watches and looks after His flock, and they surrender to Him: The Shepherd leads His

flock to green pastures and still waters. Under His shadow they eat, drink, and enjoy all the richness and fullness He provides. Yet the sheep must watch out for the poisonous thorns and rotten water. Moreover, they should distinguish between His voice and that of enemies, thus differentiating between what He offers and the other dangers and poisons.

4. He lays down Himself for them, even unto death. When there is danger, the Shepherd stands before the wolves and thieves. He stands on vigil at the door and He who keeps Israel “shall neither slumber nor sleep”. He said about Himself, “I lay down My life for my sheep”. Blessed be the Good Shepherd for His sacrifice, His love, and His guidance to us. Let us be one flock under one Good Shepherd. To Him be the glory for ever. Amen.

(44) The Lord Jesus Christ: My Lord

Main Points

The Son's Eternal Reign

David, the prophet sang: “Lift up your heads, O you gates! And the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty. The Lord of hosts, He is the King of glory” (Psalm 24). David was speaking about the eternal reign of Christ. He was prophesying about His incarnation, priesthood, and dominion over the hearts of the people. Thus Dad is considered the first prophet who perceived the royal relationship between the Father and the Son.

“The Lord said to my Lord, sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool” (Psalm 110). In another context, he says. “Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession” (Psalm 2:8). Throughout the Old Testament Israel awaited the coming of the Messiah as a great king, hence the psalms of David, which the children chanted, and which were sung by the Levites were engraved in the hearts of the people expecting the coming of a great king. He would come from the house of David, out of the tribe of Judah. He would reign over the house of Jacob forever.

Daniel the prophet confirms the praises sung by David as he says, “And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms and it shall stand forever” (Daniel 2:44). The prophet Zechariah says, “And the Lord shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be The Lord is one and His name one” (Zech 14:9).

Christ, the King of Glory

Our Lord Jesus Christ came into our world and was born in Bethlehem thereby confirming all the prophecies. Bethlehem was no longer that unknown place among the towns of Judah for the wise men came to it from the East as they sought the king of the Jews. Herod inquired of the chief priests who told him that He would be born in Bethlehem. The wise men went there and worshipped the baby. They offered Him gold signifying that He is a king. But Herod was terrified for due to his earthliness, he suspected Jesus Christ to be an earthly king.

My Kingdom is not of this World

The prophecy of Zechariah was fulfilled: “Tell the daughter of Zion. Behold, your king is

coming to you, lowly, and sitting on a donkey...a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Zechariah 9:9; Matthew 21:4). For Jesus Christ entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday victorious and glorified to the extent that Jerusalem was shaken as it received her King (Matthew 21:8-10). The Lord constantly condemned and warned the Pharisees for their earthly thoughts and hypocritical, sly spirits. He condemned Jerusalem, "the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her". The one who did not recognize her King and Savior when He came to her! Indeed, she even gave Him up to be crucified on account of an unjust accusation that He claimed to be king. He had refused to be an earthly king!

The Bible says, "therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to a mountain by Himself alone" (John 6:15). When the governor asked Him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "It is as you say" (Matthew 27:11; Mark 15:2; Luke 23:3; John 18:37). We notice in these verses that all the apostles have recorded this event due to its importance. Since the Lord was accused of claiming that He was the king of the Jews, the sign put over His Cross said, Jesus the King of the Jews. The Lord of glory was consequently greatly mocked, they dressed Him with a scarlet robe (denoting His royalty) and twisted a crown of thorns, which they put on His head and gave Him a rod in His hand (the king's scepter) and they mocked Him saying: "Hail. King of the Jews!"

Although this picture could be painful to the proud yet the children of God proclaim that Jesus reigns, even from His wooden Cross. Moreover, His obedience won Him glory that exceeds all other glory. In this context, St. Paul says: "Therefore God also has exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:9-11).

(45) The Fullness of the Soul

He created man in a state of hunger

When God created man in Paradise, He created him as a hungry being; he hungers to eat and gets filled upon eating. The mystery of fullness, however, did not lie in eating nor in the food but in the blessed Hand that granted him food in Paradise. Material or physical fullness was associated with spiritual fullness, which Adam experienced as long as he carried on a dialogue with God. He faced the heavenly Light and Divine Truth while he ate the makings of His blessed hands. He ate of all the fruit in Paradise, except of the Tree of Good and Evil. However when man differentiated between food and the divine mystery, food became a cause of his suffering. The earth was condemned due to him, it began to produce thorns and thistles; with the sweat of his face, and with toil and struggle, man obtained his daily food. A similar split occurred between the soul and the creation between beings and things, between that which is subjective and that which is objective. Since man is subjective his surroundings could not fulfill or satiate him, consequently, he lived in pain.

Vanity of vanities; all is vanity

King Solomon symbolizes the story of mankind in its possessiveness of other forms of creation when he said, "I made my work great, I built myself houses and planted myself vineyards"

(Ecclesiastes 2:4 -11). The interpretation of such sufferings indicate how man is a soul that cannot be fulfilled except by being united with the One who can raise him from his isolation and grant him victory over inner anxiety and emptiness.

Divine action alone is capable of helping man and granting him a sense of harmony continuity, and purposeful existence. God can never be objective. In fact, if the relationship between Him and man becomes objective, then He becomes a mere external authority. God is a presence and not a mere authority, demanding deprivations or issuing commandments. When God perceived man's misery, He found him devoid of faith after his fall and overwhelmed by fatigue. Materialism could not satisfy him and the more he drank, the more he was thirsty. Consequently, He wished to reinstitute in man a real fulfillment and fullness.

The Son became incarnate and as a person He became like us in all ways except in sinfulness alone. In Him is the mystery of blessings and true satisfaction which man realizes when he approaches the world and matter through God's hands. In the mystery of the Eucharist matter is blessed, sanctified, and transferred into the holy Body and Blood. In this way God clarifies that the world as food to man is not matter that is limited by material functions that oppose spiritual ones. Rather, the world is the gift of God to man and it provides scope to live and practice communion and fellowship with Him. It is divine Love, which has become man's food and life. God blesses everything He offers to man. Hence blessing God is not a mere spiritual act or a form of worship but it is the road to a life of real satiation.

Materials which man has chosen for himself, such as money, job, sex, food, knowledge, do not represent real life; they are merely an appearance of life. Man lost fellowship with God at his fall and became a slave to the earth, and his priesthood was annulled. However, Jesus Christ has come and has given us, through His person, the ability to be kings and priests to God, His Father. He has granted us the Holy Mystery that brings life to His creation. By so doing man's estrangement is cancelled, the void disappears, and the soul is fully satisfied.

Exercises and Instruction

1. This topic answers the many questions that youth bring forward such as: Why have You created me, God? What do I do to achieve His plans? Due to such important matters, it is necessary to go in depth into the topic, elaborate and conduct edifying discussions.
2. Students may attempt to put these concepts into practice: words, thoughts, actions, worship. Thus they may undertake national or ecclesiastical tasks, writing, drawing, and many other various activities that correspond with their talents. This would enable them to discover themselves, feel self-fulfilled and psychologically happy.

(46) Virgin Mary in the Coptic Church

Aim

Giving honor and praise to the holy Virgin according to the commandments of divine inspiration.

Introduction

The fathers consider that Virgin Mary was as mother earth: she gave birth to the Church. We also

like to think of the aspects of resemblance between the Virgin Mary and the Church. This enables us to examine our relationship with our mother, the Virgin; as well as estimate our membership in the holy, universal and Apostolic Church of the One God.

The Virgin Receives The Good News

The holy Virgin was a representative of mankind when she received the good news, all mankind responded through her holy mouth as she received and expressed her acceptance of the Holy Incarnation. On that day, she said: "Behold, the hand maiden of the Lord!" This was to be fulfilled in the fullness of time. It was an announcement of mankind's spiritual preparedness to receive God among them. The Church too resembles the Virgin in that both are the holy receptacles that carry the Word announcing salvation and God's message to mankind. Insofar as the Church obeys the commandments accepts them, as testified in the lives of her children and as she reveals her features and characteristics that indicate that she is the consecrated bride. Just as the mouth of the holy Virgin was filled with praise, so do the children of the Church sing songs of praise and prayer.

Meditation Upon Virginity

St. Augustine says about the Mother of God: "She is a virgin while she is pregnant, a virgin though a mother, a virgin at her death". In the Saturday Theotokos, he says, "She was called the mother of God, the real King; and having given birth to Him, she remained a virgin by an astonishing decree". The Church is also like a virgin honored by God and His commandments. She is as a spotless bride. The Church is also like a virgin for she turns all the feelings of Her children towards Her Redeemer.

Upon Motherhood

The Virgin is the mother of all mankind for she removed the curse pronounced on all the children of Eve. Similarly, the Church is a mother that gives birth to Her children when she baptizes them giving them a spiritual delivery. Moreover, she plants them as members in the holy vine and demands them to give blessed fruit.

Upon Complete Obedience

The Virgin obeyed the Will of the Father when He chose her. Her obedience has become a blessed model that counteracts Eve's opposition and unruliness in the Garden of Eden.

Upon Long Suffering Unto Death

The holy Virgin suffered pain and drank fully of its cup (Luke 2:35). She tolerated the confines of the manger, the flight, and the pains of the Cross, which her Son experienced. She went through Golgotha, the mystery of internal pain, in her life and that of the Church. She has offered her Bridegroom suffering martyrs and ascetic monks.

Finally, Upon Intercession

The holy Virgin is the intercessor of the whole human race. She alone knows her Son well and He does not refuse her petitions on our behalf. In this the Church is similar to the Virgin for the Church intercedes on behalf of the whole world before God. She prays for the dead, the sick, and the sad. She is aware of her responsibility to offer a liturgy of prayer and praise on behalf of the whole world.

Instructions and Activities

1. Students could study parts of the Theotokos recited in thanksgiving.
2. Students could study the hymn. "Be joyful, Mary, the handmaid".
3. The students undertake an act of glorification before the icon of the holy Virgin.
4. The students practice asking the Virgin to intercede for them in every petition they offer.
5. Artistic students could draw an icon of the Virgin carrying Jesus Christ, which they could use to ornament their class or magazine cover.
6. The students could collect information from the Church's literature that underlines the status of the Virgin in the Church. Then they could write a research upon that great status and explain why the Church raises Her above archangels in the different liturgies and prayers.

(47) The Correct Attitude Towards Sex

Introduction

The issue of sex, love, and the body is one of the most difficult issues, which our youth suffer from. Some deal with it as follows:

- In a totally unspiritual manner, as they claim that the Church ought to evolve and bend with the prevailing trends of the times. By so doing they swerve into immorality and move away from Christian esteem.
- Others deal with it in a stiff, narrow-minded way, as they claim that the best policy for facing this issue is to despise and/or ignore it.

In this article, we wish to define some features of the orthodox trends related to the sexual impulse in man:

Sex from the Human Perspective

Some consider sex despiteful due to the following:

1. The presence of the same biological impulse in animals.
2. Erroneous teachings indicating that sex is actually a sin as it is charged with emotions.

However, we can answer these statements as follows:

1. Man can sublimate his instincts and elevate them, for example, a celibate devotes himself to the world, or a virgin or a monk devotes all his energies and presents them as an offering to God.
2. The object of sex in animals is to preserve the species. In man, however, correct sexuality is associated with the reciprocal involvement of two people in a healthy relationship.
3. Sexuality in man has given him a prominent place in the creation (Genesis 2:24).
4. In Christianity, sexuality is colored with fine emotions and sublime feelings. It is not a mere biological impulse. In the Orthodox Church, sex is sanctified by the divine mystery and the Church is aware that all human activity needs to be redeemed by Christ.

We may ask: Then why does sex get to be immoral?

1. Egoism: Man's problems arise when he revolves around his own self and rejects to share anything with others or even with God. A youth starts by obtaining pleasure from himself

through immoral inactions. He ends up loving himself and seeking nothing else but to please himself on other people's account. Drawing close to Jesus Christ corrects this trend in life (Song of Songs 5:2).

2. Materialism: In practicing sex man may be thrilled. However, this is quickly dissipated and boredom and discomfort set in. The problem is that youth do not want to live life with its fullness and purity of purpose, falling down to the level of materials and senses entails enslavement to materialism generally.
3. Emptiness or Vacuity: When life has no mission it becomes empty; but here the Lord opens wonderful prospects for us. "Love each other as I have loved you". Man on earth has been created to serve and be united in love with all mankind. He has to feel that he is the apostle of love, forgetting himself and remembering others.
4. Tension: This occurs when youth are psychologically disturbed and worried about the future. They turn to sin in order to experience a pleasure that might reconcile them with their bitter existence or compensate for it.

That is why it is so important for a youth to surrender his life quietly into God's hands. Moments spent in prayer offer a solution to all your problems.

Question: What does "consecrated chastity outstrips the constrictions of love" imply?

Answer: Consecrated chastity is the search to liberate love of all constrictions. In matrimony, love is largely constricted by possession and accountability. Consecrated chastity out passes restrictions and works to achieve angelic standards, it does not flee from love, for true consecration is the liberation of love from all confines and attaining it while free from all its boundaries.

Question: How does love lead to eternity?

Answer: We know that God is love and that anyone who is steadfast in love is steadfast in God and God dwells in him. Since God is love, then every genuine human love arises from God who is the source, and eventually love returns to Him in the end. Sexual love in particular is the most powerful form of love in man. This is true as it involves all man's being: his mind, body, spirit, feelings, thoughts, and will. All these are marshaled into the mainstream of love and are an integral part of it.

Question: "He who loves father or mother...or wife or children more than I does not deserve Me". How do we reconcile between what you say and our love to God?

Answer: When we love a father or mother more than our Lord it does not mean that we do not love Him for there is no love except in God. God alone knows how we love and we cannot know love unless we love God. Christ intended by His words those who love themselves through a parent. Christ teaches us that our love for Him and our love for people form an integral whole.

Exercises

- The church servant conducts a discussion about the warrants of a life of chastity.
- The servant addresses the problems facing the specific age group of his class, and tries to

deal with them through the lesson.

(48) Discussion: Youth and Mixing with the Opposite Sex

Introduction

- In our society, the two sexes intermix in most sectors: in Church, at work, in transportation and in institutes.
- In some sectors such interaction is limited; such as in Churches and at home. In others, interaction is wide open in institutes, transportation and jobs.
- The problems of mixing with the opposite sex arise from over interaction; for even though the heart is loyal to God and filled with grace, yet being unreserved, staying out late and mixing freely, results in a gradual deviation of emotions. This leads to involvement and problems.

Main Points

How to mix with the opposite sex without creating problems?

We interact in Church and sing with one voice, pray together and get involved as we stand before God. We become integrated with Him and not with people. This is the tip of the thread to successful behavior in mixed society, which involves:

1. Being filled by God.
2. Objective preoccupation (interest in work).
3. Limited interaction.

1. Being filled by God

There is a great difference between being basically occupied by this world and God is part of it, and God being our life and the earth is part of His world. There is a great difference between living with God while the world, with all there is in it; college, work, neighbors and television, is only a part of our life in Christ. Or living and enjoying all the latter while Christ is part of the chain of our interests on earth. Christ cleanses us of many things and allows us to enjoy many good and pure things. If we live in the world and consider Christ as part of it, we do not find rest. However, if we live for the Lord and the world is just a part of Him then we find rest. In that case, we get to select what we read, see, and hear; and to make friends on Christian basis and fulfillment, for we belong to Christ and not to the world. Christianity represents holiness: it is not forced, or superficial, neither is it the ethics followed by man to govern his manners. Rather! Christian manners are an expression of the new life, implying that all is changed, since it is a life throbbing, with grace, expressing it and invigorated by it.

2. Objective preoccupation - interest in work

An objective attitude is one that is related to work and is not concerned with people. For instance, if we go in to Church and look left or right or are interested in the people, then we are in Church but prayer does not take us up. On the other hand, if we are wholly caught up by the words "Lord have mercy" and if our hearts and thoughts focus on all the prayers then this is a correct social attitude as it is an objective one. However, in our society, we suffer from egotistical individual thinking. Objective thinking demands immersion (absorption) in work. It is

necessary to focus on the subject rather than on our colleagues around us. It is also necessary to focus on correct attitudes rather than on attractive ones.

It is necessary to master objective thinking in all matters rather than subjective personal thinking. Moreover, there is social thinking too. Correct objective thinking and social thinking are two basic methods in learning. Consequently, we find that one of the principles of universal study focuses on small groups known as workshops. With the above in mind, our Church needs this kind of collective practical thinking as its guiding principle. It is also relevant to our goals as it ensures a correct social attitude that transcends individual or personal preoccupation. This insures the absence of relationships or errors that could be destructive.

3. Limited interaction

Duplicating ourselves with our society does not constitute social success. On the contrary, it is the interaction based on the principles of our God and Lord Jesus Christ while keeping our inward peace and fullness through God that constitutes success. In fact, orienting ourselves to whatever society so that we become its duplicate causes disruption in our character. Speaking with colleagues politely and briefly, and dealing with society while our spirits are filled with the Lord allows us to accept what is appropriate and reject what is not. That is the correct way to social orientation. It is worthy to note that by accepting everything in a society develops in us feelings that correspond with those of society for feelings are formed by repetition of an event accompanied by acceptance or rejection. Thus, words constantly repeated by a specific youth and repeatedly feeling comfortable with him creates emotional involvement. Youthful rashness or recklessness subsequently heightens these feelings. Youth imagine that such feelings are correct and sincere; while in most cases they constitute a deviation from the right path.

We should adopt an attitude based on brevity and fellowship. There is no need to draw attention or to lose character. Joseph and David were two prophets who were concerned with pleasing God. However, David, in a moment of weakness, sinned as he was married; and was overwhelmed by the feeling of having fallen. On the other hand, Joseph was always on the lookout and was, consequently, victorious. It is necessary to guard our feelings so that they belong to Jesus Christ and within His holy embrace and dominion. Let us be aware that any feeling can change, for many have loved one another, got married, and then experienced different and changed feelings. That is because Christ was not the basis upon which they had formed their feelings.

That is why we ask the Church to organize social activities in the form of lively and creative meetings. These should be supervised by a responsible management aware of its leadership role. Basically, youth here would gain spiritually, as well as learn how to participate and behave correctly. Correct social behavior requires us to preserve our feelings with the Lord continuously. As for society, we need to be cautious and satisfied with good neighborly relationships devoid of any personal commitments (bondage).

Finally, we should be filled with Christ just as the early followers were. Their lives were steadfast in grace, and they worked in society vigorously. Their personality was satisfied and brimming with Christ so that they rescued society from the evils of idol worship while they grew in grace.

We should be immune and reserved. We should be interested in reaching the Christian message in society even though we may not speak. In this way, we shall have become oriented in the right way and would have learned to deal with people while preserving our entities. We should not give weight to what society or young colleagues say. Neither give attention to the glamour of cheap books and their appeal, for all these are disputes and arguments over words" (1 Timothy 6:4).