

Sunday School Program

Grade 7

Class of St. Joseph



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The Main Objectives of Religion Education From an Orthodox Point of View

Christianity is not made up of philosophical theories or principles of behavior. It does not mean the rites and systems. Christianity is life, a new life, a pure life, a simple life, a life of love and modesty; its sole aim is unity with Christ and people. This unity, which joins us with Christ and people, is the “church”.

Christian Education, therefore, is uniting the individual with the living body of the church. It is a process of spiritual growth and a continuous living test that takes up the whole life. This is achieved through true and practical participation in the liturgical life of the church, the life of piety, submission, modesty and reverence. This results in the organic union of the individuals and the church into one organism. This will also make the individual aware of his message, duty and responsibility towards his society, the world and humanity.

The Schools of the Christian Education accommodate for the children in the different stages of their growth. They help children to practice the liturgical life inside the church and elucidate to them how to practice it. In the past, the liturgical services were the practical effective means of Christian education. They illuminated and fed the people spiritually in all stages of their intellectual and cultural development. They suited the illiterate farmer who lived along the banks of the Nile as he found solace and comfort in them. The refined dweller of the town also found in them his solace as they enlightened his mind and filled his life with piety.

The Effect Of Practicing The Liturgical Life

The Christian education -through practicing the liturgical life aims at:

First: Achieving living membership in the Church of God and the individuals recognition of his role in the kingly priesthood and his work, which is to be between the Hands of God, representing the whole world in practicing the sacrament of the Eucharist. Then comes his involvement and fellowship in the Eternal Sacrifice offered by Christ for the world and the Sacrifice is Christ Himself, and how he could become a part of this sacrifice by uniting himself to it, and become a priest for the sacrifice of his life which he offers to the Father through the Sacrifice of the cross.

Second: It aims at emphasizing the fact that God is present in the world. The world has been purified through the church and the Christian should recognize his commitment to humanity, which he belongs to and towards the service of the whole humanity. A Christian must be broad-minded. He must free himself from the narrow look of denominationalism and adopt the broad look that includes the whole human society bearing in mind that Christ died for all the people. As a son of God, redeemed by Jesus Christ and purified by the Holy Spirit, a Christian must glorify God and be faithful to Christ. As a Christian, he should do his duty towards his society and his country. He must also play his role in making the necessary changes and creating new tendencies in the world for a better life in a happy society.

This Christian education course presents our Orthodox heritage and avoids arousing the feeling of denominationalism and attempts to widen the individual's awareness to include all human beings of all levels; the regional, national, local and international levels.

Building up the course according to the Liturgical Year of the Church

We live with the church all the year round in a successive series of tests and occasions that are full of great values and deep meaning. So, the Church Education Course reflects all the levels of teaching that liturgical system. The School year begins with the Nyrouze Feast. The first feast we meet with is the Nyrouze, which is the Coptic New Year's Day of the Feast of Martyrs. We present this topic with all its different aspects in several stages. We explain, interpret and enrich the experience of both the child and the adult with this great rich heritage about martyrdom as it represents the church desire in the world since the early days of the apostles and the fathers and martyrs and the age of bearing witness to the Incarnate Logos through dogmatic campaigns inside and outside the Councils in the fourth and fifth centuries. All this forms a love story for Christ, which is stained with blood.

Then comes the month of Kiahk with its wakefulness and enjoyable hymns. In that month the church beautifies and glorifies St. Mary (the Theotokos) who bore the Incarnate Logos, the Son. Then comes the Christmas Day on which we receive our Savior and Redeemer with great joy and we speak about the Mystery of Incarnation and its relationship with the Mystery of the Eucharist. On the Feast of Epiphany, the church concentrates on the Mystery of the Holy Trinity, sanctification of material things and being and the Mystery of the Holy Baptism. When Lent begins, the whole church renews the first covenant of baptism through repentance and contrition while practicing the rites of the church and reading texts from the Bible. Christian Education advises Servants and children to repent and renew the covenant and receive the Holy Communion after showing true repentance and detailed confession to their confession Father.

Every feast in the church and each liturgical season have a place in the curriculum. We therefore have to encourage the children of Sunday School to attend the Church in its different seasons. They should also participate in the various liturgical services such as: carrying candles -bringing water bottles for blessing the people, carrying palm leaves and roses, carrying the icon of a martyr or a saint during the celebration procession and repeating the hymns that suits the occasion. In this way and through attending the church celebrations and participating in them the children taste the church life, which runs through the liturgical celebrations.

Christian Education and Orthodox Concepts

There is a valuable heritage, which we like to give to the present generation. This is the collection of the original orthodox concepts that the church adopted through all the ages. These concepts stemmed from her spiritual life and the teachings of her early fathers. The course, for example, emphasizes the child's concept of the church as the body, the sanctuary and the bride of Christ. The aim is that we should bear in mind that we are members of the body of Christ as one group consecrated to the Lord. The body should be sanctified, as it is the dwelling place of the Lord. We have to develop the sense of the Christian cell. We should know how to die with Christ and live the life of resurrection with the effectiveness of baptism, repentance and receiving the Holy Communion as sacraments that renew life and the concept of fellowship in the Eucharist, which helps us to avoid the tendency for individualism and gives us the group spirit and creates

the awareness of fellowship with the heavenly world and all the saints and angels who share us our worship and prayers. They also pray for us. We also study the symbolic meanings of the church with her buildings and contents. We also recognize the concept of the icon, Eucharist loaf, tapers, lamps, oil, incense, and the altar vessels. All these help the individual to participate effectively in the liturgical life of the church.

The Church Services Sanctify Everyday Life

“Christian Education” gives us a chance to recognize and understand the church services, which sanctify the important daily events such as blessing a new house, celebrating the birth of a baby, baptizing a child, Unction of the sick, engagement and marriage, ordaining deacons, prayers for the departed, etc. It also gives us an opportunity to learn about the different church books, their contents and the important and essential moments in each service so that we may practice the means of grace effectively. In this way we understand that the liturgical life of the church is not just attending church one day per week but what that matters is devoting the whole life to God and sanctifying all its dimensions: birth, growth, work, home, joy, engagement, repentance, marriage, sickness, suffering, death, etc. In this way, holiness does not mean mere pictures and images of history that we look forward to but becomes a life of pure practical living test that marks our daily life.

The Role Of The Holy Bible In The Christian Education

The Holy Bible is the Word of God, the Revelation of God. It is inspired. It has a prominent place in our curricula not because it is a collection of stories and historical events, but because it is the Divine Revelation of Truth in each story and it reveals God’s wisdom and work for the life of the world and the life of man. The Servant must know how the church interprets each chapter in the Holy Bible and how it is used in the liturgical services. The Servant must know why the church chooses some chapters for certain seasons and occasions, and how the church presents the eternal facts about God to the believers. The church presents the facts that one mentioned in the Bible within the frame of the liturgical worship. The creed, the liturgy and behavior should be taught through the Holy Bible and the Holy Bible should be taught through our explanation and interpretation of liturgical teachings.

From the practical point of view, when we teach the Bible we aim at helping the children understand the situations and issues of life in a better way. We also present virtues not as mere morals but we present them through the stories and characters of the Bible. We must assist the children to develop their habit of reading the Bible. Accordingly, in preparing and devising the Christian Education curriculum we took the following essential principals into consideration:

1. The church liturgical year.
2. The historical and eschatological attitude of the Orthodox Teaching.
3. Presenting the whole ecclesiastical life: rites, the Holy Bible, the ecclesiastical tradition, the sayings of the fathers, the Spiritual teachings. All this is presented in an integrated form including practicing the Christian virtues, on the personal and social levels in everyday life.
4. The child’s psychological, mental and education growth in each stage.
5. The occasions on which the church prepares her children to shoulder a certain responsibility or to play a new role in life (such as: going to confession, marriage,

being ordained, etc.)

6. The responsibility of the church towards society and the Christian's message and the child's commitment to the world and humanity.
7. All these things can be achieved with the frame of the religious, social and family environment in which the individual lives.

The Student Of The Middle School Stage

In order to offer the children of this stage a spiritual Ecclesiastical Service based on sound bases, we have to be well acquainted with the psychological, social and religious aspects of this stage. In dealing with the young people's attitude and defining the psychological aspects of this stage, the study emphasizes the social and religious aspects.

The Young People's Inclination And The Psychological Aspects Of The Stage

1. Wavering: This stage is characterized by its emotional stability and the boy or girl is inclined to be stable and loyal to authority. This is the case at the beginning of this stage as the children expect to be loved by the society in which they live. By the end of this stage they suffer biological and psychological changes accompanied by emotional disturbance and anxiety. This is the adolescence stage. Adolescence is the transition period between childhood and manhood. The adolescent wavers between many extremes:

- To be a grownup or to be a child.
- To be responsible or to be indifferent.
- To be merry, to grieve and fell distressed without reason.
- Sometimes they are optimistic and sometimes they are pessimistic without logic or reason.
- Sometimes they become so religious that they are considered a puritan and sometimes they become bohemian and reckless.
- Sometimes they are calm and obedient to other and at other times they are stubborn and do not respect authority.

The duty of teachers towards this wavering and hesitation is to resort to patience in dealing with adolescent boys and girls, and to encourage them to have emotional stability and psychological adjustment, and to assist them take decisions with objectivity and after a thorough study. A kind experienced teacher (or the priest) should help, guide and advise the boy and the girl in this period of adolescence so that they may keep away from deviation and passions.

Developing the scientific attitude in their studies, in practical life and in their ways of living protects them and guards them against fanaticism, narrow-mindedness or rashness in taking decisions.

2. Sexual Inclination: Sex plays a vital role in this period. It has a great psychological, physical, social and spiritual effect. Many adolescents suffer from lack of correct sex education as parents refrain from speaking about this subject. Moreover scientific and religious books that deal with this subject are very few. That is why adolescents resort to secular books, cheap magazine and pictures...

Sex motivation causes a feeling of psychological oppression, sensitivity and resistance to criticism and blame especially when directed to them before their friends and colleagues. Evil thoughts often occur to the adolescents and they think of forming erotic relations as love and sex in Christianity are characterized by sacrifice, commitment, maturity and inspiration and all these aspects cannot be achieved in this early stage. Such relations often cause absent-mindedness, backwardness and failure. In dealing with sex inclination, Christian education concentrates on the following:

1. To encourage the adolescents to go to confession regularly without fear or any feeling of shame.
2. To protect them from bad company, watch their relations with others and direct them soundly.
3. To protect them from temptations that result from lack of supervision, and to help them keep away from sources of agitation and desires.
4. Providing pure sources of sex education and examples of the life of purity and chastity in our everyday life and from church history to be set as models for adolescents to follow.
5. Taking their motivations and attitudes into consideration and making a friend of them, directing them with patience and treating them well, showing respect to them and being kind in treating them help the adolescents to overcome the crisis and the troubles of early adolescence.

3. Admiration of Heroism: In this period of early adolescence, the children admire heroic deeds. They admire great people, stars, wrestlers, boxers, football players, scientists, inventors, explorers and adventurers. They read a lot about those heroes and dreams of being a spaceman, for example, who escapes gravitation, or a strong boxer who defeats his component and wins the applause of the audience. If they meet with a successful priest or a minister that is scientifically, socially and spiritually successful, they greatly admire him and reveal their secrets to him, obey him and imitate him as a model and an instructor. They would also believe in his values and principles and follows his advice. In dealing with this inclination the Christian Education concentrates on the following:

- Providing the life of the Lord Jesus as a living model to be followed and lived.
- Providing the life history of heroes, martyrs and saints who lived as models of the life of struggle in all the spiritual, social and patriotic domains. We should provide different types of models. We should not restrict ourselves to one pattern or type such as monks, as this type may not conform to and agree with the attitudes of many boys and girls.
- Providing spiritual counselor who are good-hearted, modest, patient, highly educated and mature.
- The boys and girls should know that heroism is not an end in itself from the Christian point of view and believers should respect and follow the holy law, commandments and principles.

By the end of the stage, boys and girls like to make merry, make jests and to laugh at people of authority indicating rebellion against them, by giving them ridiculous titles.

4. Forming Social Relationships: There is a tendency among boys and girls to form social

relationships and many friendships. An adolescent likes to take part in journeys, camping, clubs, and parties. They greatly admire their friends and sometimes prefer them to their family. The secret behind this is that they feel at ease among their friends who are of their age. They tell them their anxieties and comfortably receive the secrets of their friends. In this way, friendships form a closed society full of words that are in many cases ambiguous to any ordinary person outside this society as they are full of puns and metaphors.

In dealing with this tendency, Christian Education concentrates on the following:

- There should be social activities such as parties, birthday parties, pleasant evening chat, outings, and camping under proper supervision.
- We should encourage boys and girls to practice the inner life successfully through forming a relation with God through private, family and public prayers and contemplating the Holy Bible. This inner life is a substitution for the confusion of everyday life.
- The Servant should be a person full of optimism and true rejoicing so that they can change jesting into true spiritual joy.

5. Review and evaluation of previous knowledge: At last... there is mental thought, which begin to appear and continues throughout the middle school stage. This tendency expresses the desire of the children to be acquainted with their religious, scientific and social environment in a way that differs from that followed in the previous stages. They want to reconsider all that they know. They want to ask, discuss, suggest, criticize and get through information. This necessitates that parents and educationists should give adolescents a chance for discussion, offer them lessons and printed material of mental and spiritual depth that satisfy their needs, and desires and give them a chance in domains other than the domain of the lesson so as to express themselves, investigate solutions for problems, and hold free meetings in all the different social, physical and religious activities. The stage is also a period of sowing, growth and maturity then reaping comes in other stages "Blessed is he that sows with tears and faithfulness as he reaps with joy and rejoicing".

The Religious Feeling In This Stage

The adolescent's religious feeling is different from that of the child. A child takes everything for granted and receives all facts about religion and faith without discussion but the case is different with adolescent.

1. The tendency of suspicion and criticism grows: An adolescent often hesitates in accepting what they had previously received concerning faith. They argue, ask, enquire and propose. They want to be acquainted with the opposing opinion. Concerning this tendency, Christian Education Concentrates on the following:

- The Servant or the priest who serves them should be broad-minded, highly educated, experienced and able to argue and reason.
- We should respect their opinion and ideas however simple they are. We should also encourage them to express his inner feelings so that any passive tendencies may not grow in their mind. We have to be ready to answer any question objectively and calmly.
- We have to deal with subjects that relates to religion and other domains such as:

Christianity and modern sciences, Christianity and modern philosophical attitudes, Christianity and Archaeology, Christianity and social trends, Christianity and modern psychology, etc.

- We have to give a chance for the integrated points of view. If, in one of the debates, we deal with chastity from a Christian point of view, a spiritual minister or a priest should discuss the question of chastity together with a doctor and a psychologist who is experienced in modern psychological sciences. Their agreement in opinion in spite of their different fields and domains give adolescents clear mental and spiritual stability.

2. The Second Characteristic of the adolescents' religious feeling in Nomism: What does Nomism mean in religiousness?

- It is the period of growth and standing firm at Sinai Mountain and not to go beyond this stage, the stage of grace, the time of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- In this period the relation between man and God is a relation of fear and horror not a relation of love, confidence, rejoicing and salvation.
- It is a period of dealing with God on an external level not on an inner level. God is an external level pole and man is opposite pole while Christianity in its origin is expressed in one statement that the Lord said in his final intercessory prayer: "I in them and You in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that You have sent me and has loved them even as You have loved me" (John 17:23).
- It is a period of demands, commandments and prohibition; it is not the period of love that goes beyond the letter even if it is characterized by awe, fear and careful behavior.
- It is a period of what is lawful and what is unlawful, a period of form not a period of originality, a period of appearance, a period of what is considered unlawful without looking for the reason that makes the deed unlawful, a period of resisting religion when one is asked to go beyond this period and go into a period of godliness of the heart, serenity of the soul, purity within and without. For this reason an adolescent needs someone to help him go beyond this stage, to into the depth and enjoy the inner life and the Divine holy fellowship with God.

In this domain Christian Education concentrates on the following:

- The Servant should have experience in the inner and spiritual life. Christianity to the Servant should not be just a matter of formalities, rites and exercises.
- The Servant and the father of confession should encourage adolescents to be trained in inner experiences and inner life but drills should not be formal, dry and devoid of depth and spirit. They should not enter the field of service and teaching before they are filled with the necessary spiritual tests.
- The Service topics should be concentrated on life in Christ towards the Father and the Holy Spirit, not on manners and social behavior that may be far away from Salvation, the Cross and Divine Sacraments.
- The criterion of the adolescents' spiritual progress in their growth in inner life (prayers, contemplating the Scripture, confession and true repentance, examining the Soul, crucifying desires, love and going beyond the ego), the criterion is not a matter of practicing some activities and services that are devoid of worship.
- The adolescents should be trained to concentrate their inner life and outer life on the work of grace, and bearing witness to truth not aiming at self-glorification (For the Law

was given through Moses; Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ).

- During the debates, all the questions should be answered not at the level of truth and what is appropriate and according to the guidance of the Holy Spirit in us and the instructions of the church through her Sacraments and Spiritual life.

3. Utilitarianism: One of the characteristics of religious feeling in this period is Utilitarianism - this means that the adolescents resorts to religion as they find comfort and solutions for their problems in religion as well as success in their studies and social benefits.

An evidence to move this attitude is in the parents' methods in bringing up their children. They always encourage them to go to church so that they may succeed and excel and when the adolescents go to church, the Servant welcome them and give them rewards and prizes.

This is all good but it is not right to confine ourselves in this stage, otherwise we shall not find a place for the Divine verse that says, "If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me". The Lord also says, "In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world". And where can we find a place for the gospel that is based on sacrifice, almsgiving, and endurance of suffering and receiving tribulation with patience and joy? What the people consider failure or death is regarded as crown, martyrdom and glory in Christianity.

The Task of Christian Education

- To raise the materialistic and social utilitarianism to the level of spiritual benefit. There is no Conflict between the two but we should be prepared to sacrifice everything for truth and to say with Paul the apostle: "Indeed I count everything as loss because of the suppressing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him..." (Philippians 3:8,9). The adolescent is advised to change his attitude and way of living. He should devote himself and his life to God who loved him and bought him by His blood. Young people should be given models of people who sacrificed and loved and did not live for themselves.
- The adolescent should be trained in the life of sacrifice gradually. The motto of St. Paul the apostle should be explained and taken into consideration. "It is more blessed to give than to receive".
- The problem that result from passivism, indifference and irresponsibility on the individual and group levels should be cured so that the life of adolescents can be positive full of love and giving without criticism, mockery and seeking utility.

4. Social Realism: Another attribute, which concerns the adolescent in this stage, is Social Realism. The adolescent is much pleased with social activities such as journeys, camping, and parties. He likes social atmosphere and public relations. In this social environment, the adolescent can achieve self-realization and satisfy his desires, needs, talents, gifts and himself. Christian education can make use of this attribute by performing the following activities:

- The church should perform many social activities under her supervision to prepare the Christian atmosphere in which he grows without hindrance or temptation and where he can apply the principles that he learned in a practical real style.

- The Servant of this stage should be sociable and able to collect all these characters through love and unity no matter how different the individuals are in patterns, temper and gifts.
- A wide scope of religious knowledge of the Holy Bible, the church and her sacraments and rites, modest of the life of history of the saints who lived in other different circumstances and made progress in the life of grace and overcome reality with the help of faith that was in them.
- Extend the vision from what is visible to the things that are invisible. A sight that extends to reach the heavenly creatures and those who won the victory and were perfect in faith. The adolescent, in this case, regards the Lord Christ is a champion of society and also a Savior and Redeemer who enters his heart to change it into a kingdom for Him as a guarantee for the coming kingdom during the Second Coming of Our faithful Lord.
- Religious guidance should encourage children to play a positive part in social activities but we must pay attention to their inner life with its supporting means such as prayers, contemplations, reading the Scriptures, Confessions, spiritual meetings, etc. In this way encourage them to grow in their inner life and outer life at the same time.

5. The Written Code: By this we mean the belief that religion is a collection of demands, prohibitions, the lawful and unlawful, practicing rites in a formal way without exerting a spiritual effort so that these exercises should have their effect in the mental and affective life. The adolescents do not object to reading psalms or bowing in worship, or singing songs of praise but they are shocked when asked to sacrifice, to give, to love their enemies, to control their mind and purify their soul. As sex motivation is the most powerful motivation in this period, their sexual state greatly affects their religiousness. When they fall, they resort to religious exercises to get rid of the feeling of remorse. This attitude should be adjusted. It is necessary, then, to draw the their attention to the following:

- They should have a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus and test the life of holy fellowship with God.
- They should choose the renewed life of repentance. He should not fall into despair because of their repeated fall, as God is able to raise us up if our will is one with His will.
- The curriculum should deal with the spiritual life through inner action and the work of the mysteries instead of emphasizing external matters.
- We should answer all the questions raised by the children, “Is this lawful or unlawful?” Christianity is at a higher level than the level of the lawful and unlawful. It is at the level of grace and truth. When the children live the life of grace, they can bear witness to truth through the Spirit that is dwelling in us, “For the Law was given through Moses; Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ”.

6. Superficiality: By “Superficiality”, we mean going around the Spiritual test without getting into the depth of the Spiritual life itself. This superficiality is clearly noticed in reading the Bible and in prayers. But that covers this superficiality is the zeal towards serving the church and religion. This effective zeal differs from spiritual warmth. That is why we should not charge adolescents with the duty of leadership in religious service before being sure that they have tested the true life of repentance and tasted the sweetness of the work of grace in their life and enjoyed the beauty of the Spirit in their hearts and stability, in their psychological life.

The Necessary Tendencies and Customs that the Curriculum is concerned with in this stage

Concerning God:

- The real pleasure that we enjoy when we worship God (Enjoying hymns and songs of praise, reading the Bible and attending the Holy Mass).
- To love God means to obey His commandments in our life.
- We should hate and despise sin as it causes misery and separates us from Christ.
- Take Christ as Savior and Guide. Resort to Him and trust in Him in hours of weakness and fall as well as hours of joy and triumph.

Concerning the church:

- We should understand her rites and beliefs and pride ourselves on believing in her apostolic faith.
- Gaining spiritual benefit from practicing means of grace in the church specially confession and receiving the Holy Communion.
- To have the feeling of membership through taking part in the Mass and attending Sunday School.
- Serving the church through all actions of almsgiving and sacrifice.

Concerning the family:

- Sharing the family is prayers and worship.
- Regarding home as the essential domain for applying the commandments of Christ especially the commandment of love.
- Escaping from offences and showing respect to our parents and not to imitate our brethren or our relatives when their behavior deviates.

Concerning the Society:

- Achieving spiritual heroism through service, sacrifice and self-control.
- Rejecting friendships that lead to indulgence in the world.
- We should love those who are not Christians “do good to them that hate you”.
- Keep away from fanaticism and respect others’ feelings.

The Traditions:

- Practicing individual prayers through using the Book of Canonical Hours.
- Practicing fasting as an ecclesiastical system for spiritual growth and self-denial.
- Praying before and after having meals and before studying. Pray for God’s help all the time.
- Regular study of the Holy Bible with persistence patience and contemplation.
- Dedicating the Lord’s days for worship (The Holy Mass, Sunday School, etc.).
- Almsgiving in the church for the needy.
- Showing respect for the family and cooperating with the members of the family and using polite words of respect.
- Sincerity, honesty, cooperation and shouldering responsibility.

Summary

We can summarize the previous tendencies as follows:

- The adolescent is a social being; therefore Christian education should facilitate the process of personal harmony with Christ and living membership of the church.
- Sound spiritual guidance is grace and truth not mere individual exercises.
- Sound ecclesiastical guidance is living membership through receiving sacraments and sanctified life in the triumphant struggling church.
- Sound social guidance is for everybody to be useful, and a shining light and to keep himself pure. Social guidance must protect the boy against and deviation.
- Sound education guidance is for the children to be positive in being acquainted with the truth. The process of education is not a process of addition or reshaping the individual but it is an inner growth in grace and perceiving the truth in us and approaching the true light that give light to all the people in the world.
- Successful leadership of adolescents needs grace, talent and experience... Blessed is who labor and toils for those adolescents. He builds a high tower for the church and God never forgets the labor of love.

General Tendencies for Review

The Servant should explain to his children that religion is not mere information, lessons, class time and examinations but religion is spirit and life and that true Christianity is composed of holy tests that the Holy Spirit performs through the work of the grace of the Lord Jesus in the heart through prayers studying the Holy Bible, practicing the church sacraments which are means of grace and salvation.

Review of lessons could be in the following way: Children should have their Holy Bible. The Servant reads parts of certain chapters or the children read them, discuss them, and contemplate the main items of each subject. Review could be done through questions previously printed and prepared by the Servant. These could be distributed among the children whether before or during the lesson. The Servant asks the children to prepare answers through studying the Holy Bible. The answers should take the form of definite clear points that could be easily understood and studied by the children.

Review could also be done in the following way: All children should be given a part of the unit to be reviewed. The Servant tells the children to prepare the unit. The Servant summarizes the items with the children. Through the positive participation of the children in preparation by answering questions, writing the main points etc., the children study all the needed points of the unit under review. The Servant can present the unit under review as a lesson to be given during the Service and deal with it as an ordinary lesson with all the steps followed such as preparation, hymns, text, references, questions and contemplations. In short, methods vary and differ according to the circumstances of each church, each class, and how the Servants care to teach Christian Education.

First Week of September

(1) Marvelous Stories of Martyrs

References

- + “Martyrdom in Christianity” Anba Youannis
- + “The Story of the Coptic Church” Iris Al Massry
- + “Christian Stories” St. George Church, Sporting

The Lesson

Aim

Standing firm in Christ till the end.

The Young Martyr

Timothy was a deacon in a village called Birab in Insanna Province. He got married a few days before. The decrees issued by Diocletian ruled that Christians would be persecuted and their books would be burnt. Timothy was driven to stand before Irianus the governor of Insanna who tried to force him to give him the church books but the governor failed in his attempt as Timothy refused to give him the Holy Books. Irianus threatened him verbally, then the tortured him physically. The sergeants cried out: “You fool. Your stubbornness and refusal to offer sacrifices to the gods caused the loss of your eyesight”. “I lost my eyes which were accustomed to seeing bad sights; but my master Jesus Christ gives light to the insight of my soul” Timothy replied. Then they tied him to a special whipping post and Irianus shouted, “Offer sacrifices to the gods and I shall stop tormenting you”. “There is no use urging me, for I do not feel the effect of torment. My Lord Jesus Christ protects me” Timothy answered.

Another idea occurred to Irianus... He brought his young wife, Mora, and began to express strong feeling towards her. He advised her to do her best to save her husband and her new house. The wife was deceived. She adorned herself and did her best to save her husband who was hung by his feet. But Timothy ordered her to cover her hair saying: “My sister and wife. My dear Mora. I saw you coming out of our house accompanied by a devil who was walking beside you tempting you to enjoy pleasures of the perishable world. I have rejected all these trifles which amuse the mind”. Mora answered him saying, “But my brother, you have not rejected the work of God. Otherwise who will read our holy books on Saturdays and Sundays”. “My sister, do not care for this transient world. Come, struggle with me in the nice campaign of martyrdom so that we may attain the everlasting crown... If we have courage, the Lord will forgive us all our sins” Timothy replied. Mora shouted, “How happy I am to accompany you, my dear husband... That has always been my dream but I always felt that I did not deserve that... Your Divine words have raised my soul of the power of God as if the Holy Spirit of God gave strength to my spirit and reproached me for my sins, so I now prefer the good things of heaven to the treasures of the world”.

At that time the martyr raised a warm prayer for Mora... Suddenly... she rose... entered the Court of Justice... stood before Irianus and said to him, “O Perfidious man... You should be ashamed of what you have done. You have tempted me and deceived me. You made offered me gold and silver as a price of atheism. You want to send our souls to eternal death. I shall not be deceived. I

am not afraid for Jesus Christ protects me and saves me". Irianus began to torture Mora, the young bride. He depilated her hair. Cut her fingers but she regarded that deformation as atonement for her sin when she tempted her husband by her beauty. Finally, Irianus made his last attempt. He promised to forgive her and to marry her to a great officer but she made up her mind to follow her husband to Christ. Irianus then gave orders that each of them should be crucified opposite to each other. On the cross, the couple agreed not to sleep till the bridegroom (Christ) came to find them ready to meet Him.

The Loving Martyr

Foka was an illiterate gardener. He used to pray and work at the same time. His small garden was an open book when he glorified God and praised Him. He always received sojourners and travelers in his house. When the governor heard of his faith, he passed the death sentence on him. Foka rose up early and dug his grave in his garden with great courage and wonderful tranquility. His simple heart was filled with peace. In the evening, the soldiers came and asked him, "Where is Foka the gardener?" He requested them to enter his house and get some rest first. He honored them and entertained them. In this way he obeyed the commandment of Christ who commanded him to love his enemies and honor those who offend him. Next morning, he happily told them that he was Foka whom they wanted. The soldiers were astonished and refrained from killing him for his generosity, courage and peace that filled his heart... but Foka urged and convinced them to perform their duty... May the blessings of their prayers be with us all.

Activities

- Visiting the churches of martyrs on their feast days and glorifying them.
- Reading the stories of martyrs and summarizing them and making wall magazines.
- Painting a picture of one of the martyrs and writing comments on it.
- Collecting data about the martyrs of that province in which your church stands. Make a register of those martyrs and keep it.
- Reading the life history of a martyr in the Synaxarium and making a glorification for that martyr especially if their icon is in the church.
- Reading the letters of St. Cyprian, which encourage believers to endure persecutions. These letters are found in the book "Martyrdom in Christianity" Page 216 (St. Cyprian of Corthage was born of pagan parents and of a rich family. He was instructed in secular sciences...he indulged in Vice...he believed in Christ and distributed his property among the poor. He was baptized in 245 AD. He was ordained bishop of Corthage during the time of martyrdom. He was martyred in AD 258).

Second Week of September

(2) Who Am I

Introduction

If you ask boys in your class "Who are you?" One may say, "I am so and so ... and a student in ...School", etc. Another one may say the same thing but adds that he is the son of Mr. ... who is a manager or a director of a certain firm and he may direct and draw your attention that his father often speaks on TV or that you always see him as he work in a firm near your house or your

school and that you must have noticed the great similarity between him and his father, etc. He will go on describing that attributes and characteristics of his father. He will say that his father is his role model and that he hopes one day to be like him.

The Lesson

Aim

God created man in His image and after His likeness

Verses

- + “Know that the Lord is God: It is he who made us and we are his, we are his people and the sheep of his pasture” (Psalm 100:2).
- + “All things were made through him, and without him nothing was made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1:3,4).

Notes

I like to draw your attention to the fact that you yourself are that young person who is proud of his father and who always counts his attributes and characteristics. If we do that for our earthly fathers, how the dearest Father who loves you and cares about you and He is pleased to meet you. His eyes are always on you. He is God Himself who out of His love did the following:

1. Created you in His image and after his likeness:

a) Mind: The Lord prefers you to other creatures. He grants you mind and knowledge. Haven't you gone once to the zoo and seen how the Lord granted you the grace of mind and thinking, knowledge and wisdom. Before He created man, the Lord was the only being and when He created man be granted him the gift of mind so that knowledge could distinguish him.

b) Eternity and Everlasting Life: God is everlasting and you are the only being who are eternal even when you depart this body of yours. You will live forever near God in His kingdom.

c) You are free: God created the universe out of nothing. He was able not to create it. In the same way you are free to do good or not to do good, to think soundly or not, to work hard or to laze.

d) You are called for love and fellowship: There is a fellowship of love between the Three Hypostasis in the One Unity of Essence and the One Nature. You are also called for a fellowship of love: To love your parents, to love your brothers and sisters and to love your friends. You are invited to do more than that: to enter into a fellowship of love with God Himself who created you in His image, to unite with Him and renew that covenant “The Covenant of Union with Him” each time you receive the Holy Communion from the altar so as to enter into a fellowship of oneness and complete unity with Him.

2) Our duty towards the image of God in which He created us:

a) We must unite with Him: The son is always bonded to his father and attracted to him. In the same way, we have the image of God so we must be always be attracted to Him, to renew the work of our baptism in which we were born as sons of God and the church our mother, to abide in Him through Chrism, and enjoy the blessing of the Sacrament of Eucharist given daily to us

without price so that we may enter into true fellowship and unity with God as through His unity with us He enters all our members and senses and all our life. In this way the Lord sanctifies our life and wipes away all the impurities that stuck to His image that is us.

b) To keep it: We have to work hard and to do our best so that this image may not be deformed. We have to put before our eyes the Holy image of God. The Bible says that God is gentle and lowly in heart. We also bear the image of God, which has the same attributes so do your best to be gentle, delicate in treating your classmates and friends. Keep your voice low within the limits of those who listen to you. Be careful in your style and in choosing your words. It is also said that the Lord was obedient to His parents during the time of His incarnation. May you have this wise obedience that was a characteristic of the Lord whom you bear His image. In this way, contemplate the attribution of God and do your best to have them in your life so that you may keep your image pure, that image in which you were created. You have been created in the image of God.

Psalm (100): “Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the Lands: Serve the Lord with gladness. Come into His presence with singing. Know that the Lord is God: It is He that made us, and we are His; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture. Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise: Give thanks to Him, bless His name: For the Lord is good; His steadfast love endures forever, and His faithfulness to all generations.

All the land sings to the Lord but we glorify Him for three things that are mentioned in verse 3:

a) He is God: The Holy, The Living and The Everlasting. I should be like Him. I look upwards and contemplate His attributes: “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into His likeness from one degree to glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

2) He made us: He created us so we must not corrupt His image in which He created us by sinning. We have to keep the bright image pure. It is said that the famous painter Leonardo DaVinci spent many years in painting the Last Supper when the Lord Jesus Christ sat with His disciples the night before the crucifixion. Then he went to one of the churches to search for a pure pious person that might resemble the image of the Redeemer. At last he met with a young man whose name was Petro. Twenty years passed and the painter wanted to paint a picture of Judas the treacherous so he searched in all the streets of Milano for a man that resembled Judas in his evil ways and he met with an evil criminal. After he had finished painting his picture he asked what his name was. He was astonished to know that he was the same Petro whom he had painted to represent Christ 20 years ago. Glory be to Him... The man told him that he had gone to Rome where he lived with evil friends so his image changed.

3) We are his people: He gave us all potentialities, and to guard us he gave us the Holy Spirit that dwells in us.

Man is the Priest of the whole creation

God made nature submit to man because he is the image of God. According to this, man has become the priest of the creation. Man is a meeting point between God and the universe. He is a

micro picture of this universe so man raises songs of praise and glorification to God on behalf of the whole creation as if nature had found a mind in man through which it could praise its creator. Man must control the world in the Name of God and we must raise the nature's songs of praise to God.

Activity

1. Before creating man the Lord was preparing all creatures to serve man and to please man. God saw that everything He created was good. He wanted His creatures to please the heart of man whom He would create in his image later on.
2. From the first chapter of Genesis quote the verses that show the good things God created for man and write them down in a notebook.
3. Pick up these verses from the Holy Bible and write them down in the activity notebook. These verses show God's care for man.
 - a. Genesis 1:27
 - b. Genesis 1:26,28
 - c. John 15:4
 - d. Mathew 15:4
 - e. I Corinthians 6:15
 - f. I Corinthians 3:16
 - g. Luke 17:21
4. "Man was created in God's image and after his likeness" Explain.
5. How can man achieve God's purpose in creating him?

Prayer: "O Lord You art great. We glorify You. What is man You are mindful of and the son of man that You do care for him. You created us O Lord and our heart will never rest till it abides in You" Amen.

Home Activity and Spiritual Exercises

- How can you use your members as righteous tools of God? Train them in doing good all the time.
- He created you to love so be careful to have a fellowship with God and to love others to achieve God's purpose in his image in you.
- He created you to be free so do not use your freedom in doing evil but remember that with freedom you have the commandment and responsibility.
- What did the first sin do concerning God's image in Adam? How did Christ bring back the first image of man?

What did the Original Sin do?

- It deformed the image but man still bears the traces of the beauty of this image in his human conscience, freedom of will, being inclined to truth, love, good and beauty.
- Christ incarnated, became man and took our nature to bring our first image back to us. We attain this image through baptism and sanctified behavior.

(3) For whom is this life?

References

- + “Christ in our life” Dr. Ralph A. Haring
- + “Life in Christ - The House of Dedication”

The Lesson

Aim

To live for Christ who died for me.

Verse

“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

Introduction

During the First World War, there were two soldiers in the Navy on a warship. They used to sleep in a bunk bed according to the bed system on the ship. One of them was a good hearted and pious young man. His name was Willy. The other one did not care for godliness. His name was Jimmy. One night Willy began to pray and Jimmy raised his voice and sang. He said to him, “Jimmy. We are on the sea and we do not know when death comes”. But Jimmy replied, “For this reason I want to enjoy myself with laughing, playing and singing before I die”. Willy said, “We should prepare ourselves for meeting the Lord”. Jimmy raised his voice more and more. When they were fast asleep, a great explosion shook the ship. Sirens were blown and soldiers immediately were on board the ship and the captain said to them, “A submarine struck the ship and the ship is sinking down” so the soldiers (250 soldiers) had to take to the boats. There were ten boats and each could hold 25 soldiers. A soldier came, stood to attention and saluted the captain and said, “The explosion destroyed two life boats” Soon, the captain chose 50 soldiers to remain in the ship by casting lots. Willy was very sad when he knew that Jimmy had to stay in the ship. While the soldiers were hurrying down to the lifeboats, Willy raised his voice and said, “O Jimmy. You can submit your life to the Lord and repent as the good thief did”. Jimmy said, “My heart is closed like the evil thief”. Willy said, “The Lord will receive you if you go to him as St. Peter who denied him then repented”. Jimmy wept bitterly and said, “Alas. I am like Judas”. Now seven boats were full of soldiers... the soldiers began to go down into the eighth boat... Willy drew back and pushed Jimmy forward... Jimmy was now in the lifeboat Willy threw the Bible to him and said, “Remember Galatians 2:20”.

The ship sank... Willy made an attempt to rescue himself by getting hold of a piece of wood but the waves overcome him and his soul departed to heaven. The boats reached the shore... the soldiers left the boats and had rest for one night. In the morning they asked Jimmy to accompany them to places of amusement to amuse themselves but Jimmy repeated the verse: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). The soldiers urged him to go with them but he said to them: “Christ died for us

all. Our life is not ours so we must live for the Lord not for the world. Jimmy's life ended yesterday with the ship from that moment this is Willy's life. I have to spend it exactly as Willy did".

Christ lives in me:

1. In the same way, your life is not yours. It is a gift from God:
 - a. It is He who created you. He breathed into a handful of dust so that you might be man and distinguished you from the rest of his creation. He preferred you to the other creatures.
 - b. When you fell through sin and your life became counted and ended with death. He died for you on the cross. He took what is yours and gave you what is His. This was done through baptism when you were buried with Christ to be raised with him... You now live his life.
 - c. In your daily life... how many times did you face death (illness, accident, etc.) but the Lord saved and rescued you?
 - d. Death is the price of your sins but during confession the Lord forgives them and gives you the power of the New Life.

Because of all these things I cannot withhold my life from the Lord, but:

2. Bow can I offer my life to him?
 - a. To devote a certain time every day for the Lord Jesus. During that time I sit with Him and enjoy the pleasure of being with him through prayers or reading the Holy Bible or the Spiritual books.
 - b. Through confession and receiving the Holy Communion so that my life may become pure as if I were cleaning the white robe of my baptism through taking care of my life, which God gave me... any sin will corrupt this life and stain it (When you put on your brother's shirt and a drop of ink stains it in the school, how will you give the shirt back to your brother... of course you will do your best to remove the stain of ink before you give it back to him). In the same way, we do our best to keep our life pure and to purify it continually so as to give it to the Lord when He demands it.
 - c. I serve God with my time, property and health.

The Signs of Christ's Life in me:

1. My hatred to sin and my repentance.
2. My deep love for the Lord Jesus.
3. My deep love for the Servant and brothers.

Activities

1. Read the first chapter of the Epistle to the Philippians and quote the verses that indicate the following meanings and write them in the notes devoted for the activities.
 - a. My life is for Christ.
 - b. Live according to the teachings of the Bible
 - c. I want to leave this world and go to Christ and give Him my life and enjoy the pleasure of living with Him.

2. Quote the following verses from the Holy Bible and write a short prayer about each one of them:
 - a. John 10:10
 - b. Galatians 2:20
 - c. II Corinthians 5:15
3. Complete the following text:
 - a. Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death that like... Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the ...even so we also should ... in newness of life (Romans 6:4).
 - b. Buried with Him in ...wherein also you are... with Him through the ...of the operation of God, who has ... him from the dead (Colossians 2:12).
 - c. For as many of you as have been ... into ... have ... on Christ. (Galatians 3:27).

Prayer: “O Lord let it be Your will not my will because You live in my heart now”.

Fourth Week of September

(4) What is my goal in Life?

References

- + “God and Money” Clement of Alexandria
- + “The Life of St. Anthony and others”
- + “The life history of the saints who lived to achieve the message of their life”

The Lesson

Aim

My Life is not for me but for others.

Verse

“But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you” (Luke 12:31)

Introduction

If I ask some of you about the thing that pleases each one of you -One of you will say -I feel very happy when my father buys me a new shirt -Another will say -I feel happy when I play with my friends -A third one will say -I feel happy when I watch television -A fourth one will say -I feel very happy when I have money with which I can do what I want -but someone will say -I feel happy with all these together but I also feel happy when I see my brother or my friend happy too. I feel happy when he puts on a new shirt or when he enjoys the pleasure of playing with his friends or others -all what pleases him pleases me.

- + Which type do you belong to?
- + Are you of that selfish type who cares only for himself and concentrates on what pleases him personally or are you of that type who is happy when others are happy?
- + But what binds me with the other so that I may be happy for his happiness and sad for his

sadness?

The fellowship of brotherhood

a) Members of one body: We have to know that we are all members of one body, if one member suffers all the other members of the body suffer (for example: If your leg is wounded, can the body do without this wounded leg and say to it, "you can suffer far away from me?" On the contrary, the whole body suffers when the leg suffers). Because we are members of one body and the head is the Lord Christ we share one another in joys and sorrows (An example: The Church of the apostles).

b) Cooperation and Integration: In football matches, the team cannot do without the goal keeper, nor can it do without the forward players or the defenders; all play and each one has his own important place and no one can do without the other. The same is with us; each one of us has a gift and a task to do. We need one another; the thread of love gathers our hearts and combines us together. Can a miller do without the farmer who plants wheat for him or can a baker do without the miller who grinds the wheat for him or can you do without all those people? We are all in need of one another. We integrate one another. No one is self-sufficient. So we must cooperate and integrate one another.

Phases of Practical Fellowship

a) Love and Service: Each time you can do a work of love, do it to please the heart of your brethren. When you make a summary of a certain lesson and your colleague is in need of it, give it to them with pleasure and love. If a blind man wants to cross the street help him cross the street with love. When you hear that a colleague is ill, visit him and so on.

b) Pray for one another: One of the best phases of fellowship is to raise our prayers for one other especially when one of us is in trouble or ill, sad, worried or is traveling. We have to pray for them and plead the Lord to support them (Example: The Church prayed for Peter when he was in prison).

c) The blessing of the Lord's brothers: To be an active member in the body of the Lord, you can do good work in secret to the poor and the needy that are the Lord's brothers. If your circumstances are better than those of any of them, it is your duty to help them, in the spirit of love and sacrifice. Give them as much as you can; money, visits, service but in secret (Example: Barnabas sold a field he owned, brought the money and handed it over to the apostles).

d) Endurance: The person in whom Christ dwells and who is considered a member in the body of Christ endures the weakness of others. He does not reproach them or blame them as he knows that his weaknesses and sins are more in number than those of others. Endure your brethren in their anger, endure your colleagues when they sin and pray for them, endure your friends and do not blame them when they do not share your joys or sorrows: you do not know their circumstances. Accept, with love, the instructions of the elders whether they are your parents, your brothers or your Servants (Teacher Guirgis El Gohary and the person who insulted him every day).

Activities

- Read the Epistle of Paul the apostle to the Corinthians (the first epistle) and quote the

verses, which contain these words: members -body -member.

- Try to achieve these trends in Sunday School classes and write about points of success and points of failure in achieving this exercise. Try to practice these exercises in your church and in your family to achieve your goal in life.
- Why can't money or food or all material matters be considered sufficient to be the goal of life?
- What is the true meaning of "riches" to God?
- What are the characteristics that enable you to be an heir to the Kingdom of heaven? And what are the obligations?
- Think out, you and your class, how you can give food to the hungry, find a shelter for the stranger, and visit the sick people.
- Contemplate the parable of the rich fool... and make a comparison between saints such as St. Paul and Anba Anthony who sold everything for their love of King Christ and the greedy people of this life. What is your situation? With whom are you?

Contemplation: Singing hymns of praise in our life: Hymns help us to be near God with our hearts and thoughts. We rise so that we may not indulge in this world, which is full of greediness and love of money. They establish true rejoicing in our hearts. Through humans and our love for one another, we shall make heaven of this earth and bring heaven and eternity here and the Kingdom of God will be inside us.

Prayer: "Deal with us in accordance with Your Goodness. You O Lord sustains everybody. Fill our hearts with rejoice and grace that we may develop every good deed and should be satisfied with the bare necessity".

Home Activity

Read the story of Lot and Abraham and follow Lot's idea about Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 13:19).

Fourth Week of September

(5) The Meaning of the Phrase: My Private Life is Mine

References

+ "The Life of Joshua" F.B. Mayer

The Lesson

Aim

The Lord gave us liberty and Liberty is to shoulder responsibility

Verses

+ "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient; all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not" (I Corinthians 10:23)

+ "Choose this day whom you will serve... but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord"

(Joshua 24:15)

Introduction

Once I met a person who was smoking heavily. When circumstances were favorable for us to speak together I began to talk to him about the harmful effects of smoking as it is harmful to health and has a bad affect on spiritual life. I was astonished at his reply. He said, “I am fully convinced that what you say is right but this is my life which I own and it is my right to do what I like with it. I never interfere in the life of others and this is enough”. Here I wanted to explain to him the meaning of the phrase “One’s life is one’s own possession and one is free to do what one likes with it” I gave him an example by saying, “Imagine that your father has bought you a new cassette recorder and gave it to you saying that it is for you and would be yours”. How would your feelings be like if he found that you broke and damaged the set? Would you say that the set was yours and nobody had any right to interfere in your affairs or freedom in doing what you like with the set? Suppose that your father accepted that way of thinking, could he trust you with any other thing or would he give you any other new present? Of course not... as he knows well that you are not responsible enough to keep his presents to you safely.

+ Are you like that person in that you feel that you own your life and no one has any right to interfere in it?

I shall clarify some points, and then I'll ask you to give your reply:

a) My life is not my own possession; it is a trust: In the lesson given two weeks before we said that you are the image of God and that you were created out of the breath of his mouth and He gave you the breath of life with which you live. Not only this, but when you deformed this holy image, He descended from heaven and died for you and bought your precious soul and redeemed you with His precious blood. So your life is not yours but it is your redeemer’s who redeemed you with His blood. You may say, “But my life is still mine and Christ has not taken it yet but He leaves it to me to do with it what I like”, but I tell you that he left it to you as a trust so He asks you to keep it in good condition. If a friend of yours gave you a sum of money and asked you to keep it with you till he came back from a trip, could you spend that money? Of course not as it is not yours even if it was in your possession. In the same way, your life is not yours even if you live it.

b) I do not live alone: In the lesson of the previous week I told you that you are not alone but you are a member of the body of the Lord Jesus and that there are other members in that body; you need them and they need you as each one integrates the other. In the same way, you cannot separate your life from the life of others. For example you cannot play football in the street at anytime without asking into consideration the cars which run in the street and the people passing the street and also the street dwellers as some of them may be sick, some are students who are studying their lessons and others are in need of rest. Another example is a person who smokes in a closed place. We say to him, “If you possess your health and your life and it is your right to do whatever you like with your life and health, this does not mean that you possess the health and life of others that are dangerously affected by the smoke of your cigarettes. Then how can I understand a man who says that he is free to do what he likes with his life? Truly you have that right, but you do what you like with your life for your happiness, joy and perpetual pleasure and this will not be achieved unless you have a goal, which in achieving it you will be happy. So you

are free to do what you like in your life but take the following points into consideration:

1) Know your own interest and define your goal: Do not be deceived by any bright goal that may destroy your happiness. For example, it is necessary for you to study hard and get high marks in your exams. Do not say to me, “But I am free and I do not want to study”. Such a person does not understand the true meaning of freedom. Also, your peace of mind, your happiness and joy in your fellowship with Jesus Christ. Do not say: “but I am free in my decision whether to connect my life with Christ or not; it is I who should decide”. This is not right. You have to know where your happiness and peace lie and search for them”.

2) Know the true means that you will use to achieve your goal: For example you know that your success in mathematics depends on solving as many problems as possible. You are mistaken if you think that you can succeed without solving many problems and say “I am free. It is true that I know my goal, which is success but the means by which I can achieve that goal should be of my own choice, I am free to choose the means”. So you have to know your goal well and the means by which you can achieve that goal thus you can guarantee that you will live your life that trust which the Lord trusted you with honesty and faithfulness. You should thank the Lord who redeemed your life with His precious blood. You must take into consideration the others who share this life with you.

Joshua the Son of Nun is one of the greatest heroes in history as a leader. His courage was notable when he was young, when Moses sent him to explore the land of Canaan. He was not afraid of the enemy but he said that the Israelites would conquer them as the Lord was with them. He led the people and crossed the Jordan and won victory over Jericho when the walls of the city fell. At last he entered the Land of Canaan and achieved victory. He distributed the land and gave each tribe the part appointed to them by the Lord.

At the end of his life, he stood before the people and said, “The Lord God, your God, fought for you. Whenever I remember the day when we crossed the Red Sea, the day we won victory over the Amalekites and our journey in the Mount of Sinai, when the Lord sent us food from heaven and water from the rock. With all faithfulness and zeal...tell me, do you intend to worship Him with faith or not? You have freedom of choice in that matter”. Here Joshua stood up and raised his eyes to heaven and said, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord”. And the people shouted, “How do you say that our teacher Joshua? We shall never leave the Lord. Is it possible for us to leave him after all those good deeds of His? No. He kept us safe in all roads where we walked. We also serve God because He is our God”. But Joshua again said, “Perhaps this will be difficult for you. You know that God is Holy and Jealous. He demands that your life be pure... and your behavior be straight before His eyes. You may not be able to do so”. The people said with a great shout, “No... No... We will serve the Lord”. Joshua said, “Beware, do not forget the Lord or what He did for you”. All the people said, “Amen”. Joshua said, “If you do that the blessing will rest upon you and your enemies will be unable to harm you”. The people said, “Amen”. Joshua said, “If you leave the Lord to serve idols, the Lord will severely punish you”. The People said, “Amen”. Joshua said: “Jehovah is great and there is no god like Him among the gods of the people of Canaan those gods demand nothing but offerings”. The people replied, “We worship God with faithfulness and truth with all our hearts”. Joshua said, “You are your own witnesses to the fact that you have chosen to serve the Lord. You have chosen Him with

your own free will so you have become responsible before God for that choice, is not that so?" They said, "We are witnesses, we shall worship God only and obey all His commands... Joshua made a covenant for the people that day and wrote this in the book of Law and set up a stone to be a witness against them. They were loyal to the covenant all the days of Joshua.

+ Who are the people of God?

They are those who believe in God and have great faith in Him. The Jews were the people of God in the past and all the other nations were pagans but now the people of God are those who believe in God the Redeemer. Whenever you meet with the words 'The Children of Israel' in the Bible, take it with the meaning of 'The Church' now where it is written "He came to his own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them, He gave the right to become children of God, even to those believe in his name" (John 1:11,12)

Questions for Discussion and Activities

1. Read Genesis Chapter 12 and answer the following questions in the Notes of Activities:
 - a. Did Abraham know his true interest when he obeyed the Lord's call for him to leave his land and I tribe?
 - b. What was the true goal for which Abraham went out of his land?
 - c. What was the promise that Abraham received from the Lord that made him leave his country?
 - d. Do you see, in Abraham's obedience to the Lord, the true means that would enable him to reach his goal and achieve it?
 - e. Do you see in the Lord's appearance to Abraham, a sign that the means he used to reach his goal was correct?
2. What did Joshua want the Israelites to do?
3. What was the model he set before the people?
4. What should your first choice be as a Christian?
 - a. In His teachings Jesus gave us freedom and did not force us to do anything. Example: Matthew 16:20.
 - b. He made a new covenant with us to stand firm in his love. Example: Luke 22:20.
 - c. In the story of Jonah the prophet we notice clearly the clarity of the will of God compared with man's thoughts and conscience. We also notice that God allows man to have freedom of choice so that he can disobey the will of God and this results in dangerous consequences but God, out of His love to us, sets hindrances in the way of our wrong will so that we may enjoy the blessings of obeying His will with our full freedom.
 - d. Each freedom has its own responsibility.

<i>Verse</i>	<i>Freedom</i>	<i>Responsibility</i>
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John 6:53

I Corinthians 10:23

Galatians 5:13

- e. Discussion: My life is my own possession... I am free... to do what I like (the useful aspects of this opinion... the harmful effects of this opinion).

Practical Exercises

Which of the following behaviors is expedient and which is not?

1. Going late to attend the weekly holy Mass.
2. Staying up late watching television, seeing films of violence and sex.
3. When someone insults me I do not answer him.
4. Giving excuses saying that there is no time for the Morning Prayer.
5. Obeying parents willingly, being stubborn or insisting on one's opinion.

Prayer: O Lord forgive us for the time when we chose to regard many things as most important in our life. Help us to fear and love You and be inclined to You above all things in the name of Christ. Amen.

Home Activity

Raise a hearty prayer to the Lord. Promise the Lord that you will do something in your life and remember your promise to God "Accept my offerings of praise, O Lord and teach me thy ordinances" (Psalm 119:108).

First Week of October

(6) God and Man

References

- + Genesis 1:11
- + "Adam and Eve" His Holiness Pope Shenoude III
- + "The Treasures of interpretation in the Holy Bible" Ilarion the Monk

The Lesson

Aim

God's position in the life of man. All the material creation is for the service of man. Man is the priest of the whole material creation.

Introduction

God creates the Universe: God is love and love gives what it has. Love is like light that shines over all without demand from anyone and without decrease. God is not in need of man, but man is in need of God; however, God prepares everything for man before He creates him.

On The First Day: God created a mass of light. It was burning and very hot. God separated the light from the darkness. God loves light and does not love darkness. He does not like light to mingle with darkness. The same is true in our spiritual life. It should be either light or darkness. The earth was all surrounded with seas.

On The Second Day: God created the sky, i.e. the space, which we call firmament. God separated the clouds, which were the waters above the firmament from the waters on the earth, which formed the seas.

On the Third Day: God created plants.

On the Fourth Day: God created the sun, the moon and the stars to adorn the sky and to rule over day and night.

On The Fifth Day: God created birds, fish and animals. Out of His love God had created the sky for birds to fly in and the sea for the fish to swim and plants for animals to eat... this wonderful arrangement that took place before God created man is: 1- Light; 2- The sky; 3 -Plants; 4- The Sun and the moon; 5 -Birds, fish and animals.

A unique masterpiece

- Man is the crown of the universe and the masterpiece that God the Creator made. God created man on the sixth day. Man is different from animal in that the soul, the mind, imagination, memory, his ability to talk and innovate, eternity and authority characterize him.
- Man is a double being. The Lord formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life (Genesis 2:7).
- God created Adam in His image after His likeness and made Him free so man became the Lord's representative on earth and gave him authority over the whole universe.
- God created for Adam a helper fit for him. Adam said, "She shall be called woman because she was taken out of man".
- That was the first family. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth and subdue it".
- God put Adam in the Garden of Eden to live in it and eat its fruits happily and thankfully. Adam began to call the other creatures and give each a name. God saw that man was very good.

Man

- The crown of the Universe and responsible for it.
- Soul, mind and body. He is able to talk and think but he is dust with a breath from God.
- Man and woman.
- He is in charge of tilling the Garden of Eden.
- Very good.

On the Seventh Day

Q1: Why did the Lord rest on the seventh day?

Answer 1:

- To teach us how to organize our life.
- To teach us how to sanctify the Lord's Day.
- Because he saw that what he did was very good.

Q2: What do you usually do on the Lord's Day?

Answer 2:

- Worship is the substantial work of man especially on the Lord's Day.
- To do good to others.

Q3: Do we sanctify Saturday or Sunday?

Answer 3:

- Sunday as true rest took place after Christ rose from the dead.

Q4: What is the commandment that the Lord gave to Adam in the Garden of Eden? How did he fall?

Answer 4:

- The commandment was that man should not eat of the knowledge of good and evil... as a test of man's obedience but man failed in that because of the Serpent's deceit.

Q5: What are the consequences of Adam's sin?

Answer 5:

- Concerning the relationship between man and God, man lost the fellowship, became afraid and hid himself.
- Concerning man's relationship with himself, he felt estrangement and he lost his purity and simplicity.
- Concerning his relationship with others, he blamed Eve regarding her responsible for his fall. Grudge and envy spread among men.
- Concerning his relationship with the Universe, the earth became corrupted and was cursed because of his sin.

Q6: How did sin spread among men after Adam's fall?

Answer 6:

- Cain sinned when he killed his brother out of envy. That was because Abel brought to the Lord an offering of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions but Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, which was not acceptable before the Lord.
- People sinned and sin spread among men. No one was without sin but Noah who found favor in the eyes of the Lord, as he was righteous. Then Noah's sons thought of building a tower that reached the sky. And the Lord mixed up their language so that they would not understand one another so the Lord scattered them allover the earth. The city was called Babylon.

Q7: What was God's reaction to the sin of Adam and his descendants?

Answer 7:

- *Adam*: He discovered that he was naked and he lost his purity. God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them. The Lord God sent them out of the Garden of Eden lest Adam put forth his hand and take also the Tree of life and eat.
- *Cain*: Love disappeared among brothers and treachery became the law among men. God gave him a sign so that no one would kill him. He blamed him for killing his brother and said to him, "Where is your brother?"
- *The Great Flood*: Evil spread and the Lord was angry with the people and was sorry for having created them. He drowned them in the great flood in the days of Noah; however God showed his mercy and rescued Noah and his children by

- putting them in the Ark.
- *Babylon*: Man was haughty. He thought that he could run away from the anger of God and make a miraculous deed that could protect him from the consequences of his sin, so the Lord mixed up the language of those haughty people because they wanted to build up a tower that could reach the sky.

Activities

“You made me man as you love man” (Genesis 1:11). Contemplate this statement and write a research on how the Lord dealt with men from the beginning of creation and after the fall.

Questions for Review

1. Why did God create man? Give evidence.
2. What did the Lord prepare for man before He created him? Follow up the steps of the formation of material creation.
3. “God created man in His image after his likeness”. Explain the meaning of this statement?
4. What is the commandment and what is the first sin? What did you learn from the sin of Adam our first father?
5. Why does the Lord ask us to keep the seventh day holy? Why does the church keep the Sabbath on Sunday?
6. What are the consequences of the First Man’s sin?
7. How did sin spread among men? Give examples.
8. God is Holy and He hates sin and destroys it. Explain this in the life of the first men.
9. God hates sin but He loves the sinner to repent and return to Him. Explain this in the life of Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel.
10. Why did God create Eve for Adam? What are man’s duties towards his family and of what importance is family life in the life of the church and society?

Second Week of October

(7) The Journey of the Divine Liturgy

References

- + “How to benefit from the Divine Mass” Anba Mettaus
- + “Interpretation of the Coptic Church Mass” Fr. Marcos Daoud
- + “The Spirituality of the rite of the Mass in the Coptic Church” Anba Mettaus

The Lesson

Aim

Sharing in the Mass with deeper awareness.

Introduction

The Divine Liturgy is the center of the church worship and the formal mode of all the celebrations and occasions in the church. Even if it is repeated in form, it is objectively renewed.

In it we see Christ present with us “God is with us”. We bear Him on our hands in the Mass of Nativity; we see His light on the Feast of transfiguration. We see His death and resurrection on the Easter Day, etc. It is useful in our private occasions and for our daily problems. In the Mass we pray to thank God or to ask the advice of God or we pray for some patient or for the departed. So we have to understand the Divine Mass fully so that it may not become a form of repetition or routine. If we understand it fully it will raise us to wide horizons and extend us to renewed depths that we can discover daily whenever we share in it. We do not intend here to explain the rites of the liturgy but we like to go into its depth quickly.

1. A Journey inside ourselves: When you go on the journey of the liturgy you have to prepare your thoughts and feelings, cast your worries outside yourself. You begin by repeating the psalm: “How lovely is Your dwelling place, O Lord of Hosts” or any other psalm as you are now entering a holy land so you have to cast out all worldly matters on your way and you do not have to take any provision for the journey with you as the church prepares everything for you. Only submit to the readings and hymns of the church and raise your heart with the incense that rises to the sky in the early morning while people are still asleep.

Preparedness for the Divine Mass begins on the previous day by the evening prayers and vigilance during the night (hymn of praise), then raising incense in the morning, then the mass for the catechumens... as a great event will take place that is the Coming of God the Logos and His being with us on the altar. We have then to go deep into our soul and wander in the wilderness of our life and examine our thoughts and what we did in the previous week and prepare ourselves to receive new life in a moment that carries us to eternity.

2. A Journey to Paradise: We are now in Paradise; the tree of life is before us and the guardian angel (the priest) is before us... receiving those who come and not turning them away. People come to him repenting and confessing. The tree of life from which Adam and Eve were deprived was the body and blood of the Lord. Jesus said: “I am the bread of Life; he that comes to me shall never hunger and he that believes in me shall never thirst”. But now, when we hear the voice of God in the church we do not hide. Listen to the voice of the deacon calling: “Approach, approach... Come near...”

3) A Journey to Golgotha: You are now, if we set time and place aside, at Golgotha. You see the body pricked and the bread broken and the blood poured out for you. The Sacrifice at Golgotha was propitiation for the sins of the whole world and it need not be repeated as the case was with the sacrifices of the Old Testament as the blood of His Son Jesus Christ purifies us of every sin and He is propitiation for our sins and propitiation for the sins of the whole world. You do not see no a stone altar but you see a mountain upon which the wounded body of Christ lies. We hold back our breath in those horrible moments and stand in awe and fear beside the beloved John and Virgin Mary to feel the last pulses of the Lord when He was delivering His spirit for us while drops fall in the chalice. We have to bear in mind that in the mass we take the Lord not the dead Lord but we take the Living Lord forever so we live with the Lord in His crucifixion and resurrection “For every time you eat this Bread and drink of this cup showing forth My Death, Confessing My resurrection and remembering Me till I come back”. A fact like this is enough to raise our feelings and hearts and gather our thoughts and pushes us into the seas of contemplation.

4. A Journey to Heaven: The holy liturgy has another dimension. We remember the Lord till He comes. We now take a guarantee only but we feel that we are in heaven on earth or that our earth has become heaven and that the church is taken above. No wonder then: the Lord is present with His angels, the Virgin and the apostles intercede for our weakness and share us our joys and happiness. They are present in the mystical body of Christ as they are members of that body. So you can see twelve crosses around the Lord's cross "Spadicon" on the Eucharistic bread. You also find the names of those saints and their icons always present. They are undoubtedly present in this new heaven, which has descended on earth. They are the soldiers of the Great King and His chosen people who follow him wherever he goes.

Activities

Select parts from the Divine Liturgy that support the above mentioned four points.

Exercise

1. Recite some psalms such as "How lovely is Your dwelling place" before you go to church and rise up early.
2. Make use of The Euchologium, control your thoughts and concentrate on the meanings of the Mass.
3. Recite special prayers, contemplations and some passages that express our present state and that may help us pour our feelings during the Holy Mass.
4. Study the deacons' hymns; recite them with the people in a loud voice and from your heart.

Third Week of October

(8) The Divine Liturgy

References

- + "How to benefit from the Divine Liturgy" Anba Mettaus
- + "Interpretation of the Coptic Church Liturgy" Fr. Marcos Daoud
- + "The Spirituality of the rite of the Coptic Church Liturgy" Anba Mettaus

The Lesson

Aim

Understanding the Divine Liturgy with more enlightenment.

Introduction

The Divine Mass begins earlier than we think, that is when the sun appears and the wheat seed is watered and the believers take it, grind it and turn it into a delicious Eucharistic bread to offer it to the Living God. We offer Him of what is His expressing thanks and love. Preparation for the Holy Mass begins the previous night by evening prayers when the believers meet to prepare themselves to receive that important event that is the coming of Christ with His body and blood to dwell among us. The rite of the raising of incense continues mingled with prayers and the humans of the middle of the night.

Then believers get up early in the morning to attend the prayers of raising incense (Those who seek Me diligently find Me). But we should be prepared for receiving the mass both within and without. Fasting, purity of the body, attending evening prayers and morning prayers and the use of the Canonical hours are all essentials. We have to examine ourselves, go to confession, forgive the others when they offend us and approach God with sincere intention and sound heart.

The Offertory

The priest chooses Eucharistic bread that must be spotless as it stands for the Lord Christ who was spotless. The Eucharistic bread is put in a simple dish of straw referring to the manger. After crossing it with the cross three times, the priest puts his hand on it (This is the lamb of God that bears the sin of the world). The priest prays inaudibly asking for mercy for himself and his people and for those who asked him to remember them during the Mass, whether living or dead, then comes the part of baptism, the priest wipes the upper part and the lower part of the Eucharistic bread with water, then he puts the Eucharistic bread on the altar which stands for the cross, and covers it with the “Prosphерine” which means “a cover” and it stands for the tomb, a corporal is put on it which refers to the Mark of the Seal, during this the prayer of thanksgiving is recited for what the Lord Christ did for us by His incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection. After a short time, the priest will raise the cover and the Seal. We notice that there are small anklets that make a sound to remind us of the earthquake of the resurrection as we, in each mass, remember the Lord’s death.

First: The Mass for the Catechumens

The Divine Mass is divided into the Mass for the Catechumens and this ends with the Orthodox Creed, and the Mass for the faithful (the believers). The rite in the Early Church demanded that all believers should receive the Holy Communion in a holy fellowship and the deacon ordered those who were not prepared or who were not baptized to go out. In this way those people would be trained step by step in the Spiritual way. The Mass of the Catechumens includes the Pauline, which are chosen chapters of the Epistles of St. Paul the apostle, the Catholicon Epistles, which are chosen chapters from the Epistles of James, Peter, John and Jude, and the Acts of the Apostles, then the Synaxarium, which includes the life history of the saints. All these precede the Gospel. The Church wants to give us examples of Saints in their life, and in their sayings, saints who lived the Gospel, carried it out, applied it and practiced it... We always notice that there is a link that ties all the chapters together either by the life history of the saint or the verses of the Gospel (specially on Sunday)... the church likes to offer Christ in two images:

1. Christ the Lamb of God who was crucified for the sins of the world, this is on the altar.
2. Christ the Word of God, the Good Teacher, this is done through the pulpit or the lectern. The priest, in his sermon, does his best to achieve the goal of the Gospel and the Ecclesiastical readings of that day.

Second: The Mass for the Faithful

What the Lord did for us can be summarized in three points:

1. He created us out of nothingness.
2. He redeemed us through His incarnation, death and resurrection.
3. He granted us that salvation in a mystical way through the church.

If it is the Father who wanted to create us, it is the Son who redeemed us by His blood and the Holy Spirit gave us this wonderful work in the sacraments. We now go back to the divisions of the holy Mass to find:

i) Reconciliation Prayer: To be read in both Liturgies of St. Basil and St. Gregory. We remember how the Lord created us and that He is not in need of our worship and how we disobeyed Him through the guile of the Serpent and He reconciled us through the prophets and by the death of His Son on the Cross. In these moments we kiss one another, the virgin and the whole heaven rejoice with us for the reconciliation, which prevailed between God and men and between man and his brother.

ii) Holy...Holy: In the Second passage we remember the work of Christ the Redeemer as He went down into the Hades from the cross and bore the injustice of the evil people... He exposed His back to the whips and His cheeks to slaps.

iii) The Great Mystery: "Great is the mystery of Godliness; God was manifest in the flesh" (1 Timothy 3:16). Christ gave us the mystery of redemption on Maundy Thursday when He took bread on His hands blessed, broke and thanked... the priest reads the Invocation of the Holy Spirit at this moment while the people are bowing in awe and fear... and in an invisible way Christ becomes present among us and the bread and wine become the body and blood of the Savior.

iv) Invocation and the Final Invocation: When we see Christ now with His flesh and blood "Emanuel -God with us" we are encouraged to invoke and ask for everything. *About what should we invoke? Discussion:* The final invocation is that God guides us to His Kingdom. We shall not wait for long because we have already entered that Kingdom the time we recite the prayer to the Congregation of Fathers and saints where we feel the fellowship of saints and their presence with us around the bridegroom.

v) Fraction: These are the trembling moments when the priest divides the body of Christ and His blood for us giving us His salvation. The cries of the deacons and the people become louder as everything now is sacred and honored. These are the moments of the Divine presence. Each soul should submit and each one should strike his breast to be prepared for receiving communion of that precious treasure.

Prayer: Amen...Amen...Amen. I believe, I believe, I believe, and profess to the last breath, that this is the life-giving body... Given for us and for salvation, remission of sins and an everlasting life to whomsoever partakes of Them".

Activities

1. Studying the Reconciliation prayer from the Liturgy of St. Basil.
2. Studying the Invocations.
3. Making a research about the Saints of the Congregation and being acquainted with their life history. Write this research in a wall magazine (Let your colleagues read it).
4. Being acquainted with the spiritual meanings of the following rites: the incense procession, using tapers and preparing the Eucharistic loaves.

5. Studying the fractions of: the only begotten Son and the Syrian Fraction.
6. Notice that the Liturgy of the Faithful is summarized in these points:
 - a. He took... prayers for choosing the lamb.
 - b. He thanked... prayers of Thanksgiving.
 - c. He blessed... prayers of blessing and sanctification.
 - d. He divided... prayers of the Fraction.
 - e. He gave... distribution with its famous hymns.
7. Try to find in the prayers of the Euchologium what belongs to each of these five essential parts. Study these parts in detail. Write your contemplations and pray.

THE SECOND UNIT

Fourth Week of October

(9) God's Covenants with Man

References

- + The Second Unit of the Christian Book
- + The previous references of the First Unit

The Lesson

Aim

To know the Covenants of God with us even after the fall of Adam.

Introduction

Q1: Explain the following statement: “God did not abandon man after his fall”

Answer 1:

Although the Lord punished Adam by sending him out of the Garden, yet he gave him a promise of salvation through a Savior who would be a descendant of Eve and who would crush the head of the Serpent (Genesis 3:15). The Lord gently blamed Adam and Eve and gave them garments made of skin and he was sorry for their fall.

Q2: Speak about God's covenant with Noah.

Answer 2:

People kept away from the Lord and lived in injustice and corruption but the Lord made a covenant with Noah saying: “I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation” (Genesis 7:1).

Noah believed in God's promise and made the ark. The people did not believe him so the great flood destroyed them. Once more, the Lord blessed Noah and his sons saying, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth” (Genesis 9:1).

God promised Noah that He would not destroy the whole earth again in spite of the man's wicked deeds.

Q 3: Why did God choose Abraham to make a covenant with him?

Answer 3:

Abraham was a man of faith and his faith was shown as follows:

1. He went out to an unknown land, leaving his relatives and tribe and in this he obeyed God.
2. He lived as a sojourner and he left the worldly heritage for Lot. So Lot chose the good land ...but Abraham chose the Lord.
3. Abraham believed in the promise of God that He would give him children in spite of his old age. The Lord appeared to him in the form of three men, "And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness" (Genesis 15:6).
4. Abraham could sacrifice his love for his only begotten son about whom God said that "Through Isaac, he would attain the promises and he offered him as a sacrifice on Mount Mariah" and here God interferes and gives a promise to Abraham promising him that: a) The Lord would give him as many descendants as there were stars in the sky or grains of sand along the sea shore. b) Abraham would be the Father of faith in all nations. c) From his seed Christ would come.

Q4: Explain how God prepared Moses to achieve promises with different means.

Answer 4:

1. Moses was born in difficult circumstances but the Lord guarded him and kept him safe. He gave him to Pharaoh's daughter so that he might be instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. He was also brought up between his parents on the life of faith.
2. He was educated in the wilderness and got rid of all his weaknesses so he became a man of prayer... he talked with God... and became a leader of his people.
3. God sent him with miraculous deeds to Pharaoh.
4. God's call to him to lead his people from the land of bondage to the wilderness.
5. God gave Moses the Ten Commandments and The Law.

Review Questions For Second Unit

1. God promised Adam after the fall that the woman's seed would crush the head of the Serpent. Why was this promise given? How was it achieved?
2. What was the original sin? To what extent was it dangerous?
3. Why did the world keep away from God and what was the attitude of Noah the righteous man and how did the Lord save him? What was the covenant that God gave to Noah? What were the blessings that Noah attained through the covenant?
4. Abraham is called the Father of fathers, i.e., the greatest man of faith. Explain and show what the Lord demanded Abraham to do and how did he achieve that?
5. The Scripture says, "Abraham went out not knowing where to go" What does this verse indicate and how can you benefit from the Spirit of faith in your daily life?

6. Although Abraham was the Man of Faith, yet he once became weak and told a lie. Explain this situation and show how the Lord saved him.
7. How did the Lord appear to Abraham? And how did the Lord fulfill his promise to him?
8. How did the Lord test Abraham's faith? To what extent did Abraham succeed?
9. Write what you know about: Lot, Melchizedek, Haran, and "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day..."
10. How did the Lord prepare Moses to be a distinguished leader? How did the Lord call Moses? What was the Covenant that the Lord made and how did the Lord fulfill His promise to Moses?
11. Write short notes on: The Ten plagues, the Ten Commandments, Manna and the quails, the murmurings of the Israelites in the wilderness, and the Symbols of Moses' life that stand for the Lord Christ.

First Week of November

(10) A Study of the Book of Exodus: Slavery

References

- + "An Introduction to the Holy Bible" St. George Church, Sporting, Alexandria
- + "The Divine Purpose" Suzan de Detrich
- + "Christ in all Books" A.M.B. Hodgkin
- + "Studies on Exodus" St. George Church, Sporting
- + "The Book of Exodus" Fr. Tadros Yacoub
- + "The Book of Exodus" Mr. Naguib Gergis
- + "The Life of Moses" F.B. Mayer

The Lesson

Aim

The stages of the sinner's repentance and God's salvation (as represented in this Book). The main objective of this section is to learn the consequences of the fall, how sin corrupted our life and to practice the freedom of the glory of the children of God

Introduction

1. God created man as a free creature: God created man, put him in the Garden of Eden and allowed him to live there and enjoy complete freedom, the freedom of the glory of the children of God. Adam enjoyed this freedom through his fellowship with God and dwelling in the bright presence of the Lord. He lived as a master over material, creatures and nature. When the devil tempted him to have complete freedom even from the authority of God, he suffered from severe enslavement to evil, lust, self and to the devil himself...The Book of Exodus gives us the type of this slavery through Pharaoh's enslavement to the people of God.

2. Submission to slavery: people of God yielded to slavery and were completely content with bondage. Moreover they enjoyed slavery and feared freedom and could not rebel against their bitter situation (Exodus 5:19-20). When the people wanted to liberate themselves, the devil

pursued them and increased their yoke so that they might lose any hope of rescue (Exodus 5:6-18). They did not listen to Moses because of humiliation and severe enslavement.

3) They were enslaved to the desires of the Flesh: Work became a sort of slavery. They were enslaved for their daily bread. When Moses led them to cross the Red Sea, they did not taste salvation but they went back with their hearts to paganism and longed for the Egyptian food looking at it as a tree good to look at... It is the crisis of Eden being repeated now but the Lord never stops work for the sake of salvation.

4) Moses was enslaved to himself: When Moses wanted to liberate his people of their bondage depending on himself and resorting to his human style, he killed the Egyptian man. The Lord sent him to the wilderness to mortify himself and his dependence on himself and give the leadership to the Lord to lead him and his people from the land of bondage to the land of the freedom of the children of God.

5) The Savior: Moses was a symbol of Christ (discussion). So the Liberator is Christ and no one else. The prophets of the Old Testament were no more than fading symbols of the eternal truth.

Discussion

- + What are the consequences of sin and its effect on the human race and on the system of the universe? If the Son therefore shall make you free ye shall be free indeed.
- + What will He free us from? How?

Exercise

Brethren, you have been invited to enjoy freedom, do not subdue freedom to the desires of the flesh. As free people and as slaves of God we should control ourselves by obeying the commandment.

Moses	Christ
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. He emptied himself of his sonship to the palace and preferred to lead the life of his people, i.e., in bondage.2. He was thrown into the sea and was saved by a miraculous deed to become a leader (the basket stands for the grave).3. He is a shepherd.4. He went out into the wilderness.5. Both were prophets.6. Both of them bore the guilt of the people and interceded for the guilty.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. He emptied himself and took the form of a slave.2. He died, was buried; and rose.3. He was the shepherd of the shepherds. He was the true savior of all who believe in him. He opened the Paradise and gave the eternal life to the believers.4.

Activities

1. Contemplate the following with reference to the Epistle to the Hebrews chapter 11.
"By faith Moses when he came of age refused to be the Son of Pharaoh's daughter. Choosing rather to affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy of sin. Esteeming

the reproach of Christ greater than the treasures in Egypt; for he to the By faith he forsook Egypt, not the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing him who is”

2. Read the Book of Exodus chapters 1 and 2 then join each half verse to its other half from groups A and B:

Group A

- The more they were oppressed
- They made their lives bitter with hard service
- And his sister stood at a distance
- An Egyptian delivered us out of the hands of the Shepherds
- And the people of Israel groaned under their bondage and cried out for help

Group B:

- and even draw water for us and watered the flock
- and their cry came up to God
- the more they multiplied and they spread abroad
- to see what would be done to him
- in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work field

Second Week of November

(11) A Study of the Book of Exodus: Crossing of the Red Sea

References

+ Previous references

The Lesson

Aim

Symbols of the cross and the Resurrection

Introduction

“Let My People go to worship me”, this was God’s call to Pharaoh on the mouth of Moses and Aaron. God does not need anything from man. He is not in need of anything but He likes His children to enjoy the fellowship with Him, and their sonship to Him “How can we sing the hymn of the Lord in the land of bondage”. That was the aim but what is the way? To answer this question we find that the way of crossing to God begins with the Bush, which stands for Incarnation, the Lamb of the Passover, which stands for the cross, and then the crossing of the Red Sea, which stands for death and resurrection. There is a deeper meaning behind the historical events of the Exodus as the Holy Bible draws a straight plan for salvation, which would be performed by Jesus Christ.

The Bush (Incarnation is the only way of Salvation)

When man failed to go up to God, God descended to him, but God’s presence on earth and his

taking the form of man needed a preparation for the minds of the people to accept this fact. The Book of Exodus is the Book of Redemption and this redemption begins with the Bush, which stands for Incarnation. God was among His people as a Father bearing them and bringing them up, encourages them and punishes them, carries them on the wings of virtues day and night... The second step was not only “God with us” but also “God in us”. God did not appear in a shining planet nor did He appear in a faraway bright glorious star, but He appeared in a wild rough small bush. This is a symbol of our human nature. Here we stand afar without having courage to go near before we put off our shoes from our feet. There the fire burns in the bush and fire stands for the limitless love. There is the fire of anger and the fire of judgment but this is not the fire of the bush, as fire does not affect the bush. It does not burn the bush itself but it burns the thorns of sin.

We are invited not only to go near this fire, but also to enter inside it. God whispers passionately in our ears and calls each one of us by his or her name once and twice “Moses... Moses... God does not appear in a way devoid of feelings but he shows his love in the bush. He expresses His endless love through eternal direct words that changed the course of history. I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the band of the Egyptians” (Exodus 3:7). When Jesus drew near the two disciples of Emmaus their hearts burnt within them. It was Jesus who said, “I come to send fire on the earth” (Luke 12:49) and fire was given to the disciples on the Day of Pentecost so that they might send out its light, movement and effectiveness to all the parts of the world. It is the same fire of the Bush... the fire of love as “Our Lord is a devouring fire”.

The Passover Lamb

The Cross is the Goal of Incarnation

In the Passover lamb we see the image of Redemption that is in Jesus Christ. The Lord emphasizes the Passover lamb, as a symbol of Christ, as it is written “For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us” (1 Corinthians 5:7-8).

The Passover Lamb	In the New Testament
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) It was a day of Judgment for the Egyptians and it was possible for the first born of Jews also to be smitten but for the sacrificed Iamb. 2) It was without blemish. 3) It was a year old. 4) Its blood was to be put on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses. 5) No bone of it was to be broken. 6) All the first born who were redeemed on the day the Passover Lamb was sacrificed were consecrated for the Lord (Exodus 13:2). 7) The lamb was to be wholly roasted, not cooked or boiled. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) “While we were yet sinners Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). 2) “You were redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:18-19). 3) Jesus was still young. 4) The blood of Jesus Christ His Son purifies us of every sin. 5) John 19:36 6) “You are not your own. For you are bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are God’s” (1 Corinthians 6:19,20).

8) It was roasted on bitter herbs. 9) All the redeemed congregation eat it. 10) None of it should remain in the evening.	7) A reference to the severe sufferings of Christ. 8) They gave him vinegar to drink. 9) He came for the salvation of gentiles and the Jews. 10) He was taken down from the cross before the Sabbath.
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The Passover (The Resurrection)

It is the door of salvation... Moses was taken out of water (Moses = the son of the water) and was saved from certain death when he was thrown into the sea. The same thing happened to Jonah and Noah. The people faced death when they saw the Red Sea in front of them and the enemy behind them and here the people stand to see the Lord's salvation.

Moses' rod was a symbol for the people to cross to the land of comfort. Behind this story of rescue lies the Passover sacrifice, which is still bleeding. Salvation is by the blood of Christ, his burial and his resurrection. Christ died and rose... he went down to Hades and conquered the power of the enemy (the devil) and destroyed all his soldiers and liberated all those in prison and declared victory... Thus the Book of Exodus teaches us to die with Christ and forget the past to live the new life and that this is the only way that leads to eternal life.

Activities

1. Paint a picture of the Bush or the Passover lamb or the people of Israel while crossing the Red Sea. On one side of the picture you can show what these events refer to in the New Testament.
2. Read the Book of Exodus chapters 1, 2, 12, 15.
3. Study some parts of the first division of the Hymn of praise.
4. Read The Revelation chapter 15 and compare it with Exodus chapter 15.

(12) A Study of the Book of Exodus: Murmurings Against the Lord

References

+ Previous references

The Lesson

Aim

Curing the problem of murmuring in the life of young people.

Introduction

The Lord did not lead them to the Land of Canaan although it was near them and could have been reached within a few days lest they should fight nations who were stronger than they. The Lord took them around the road of Sinai to teach them how to struggle in the wilderness. The scene of the green land of Egypt disappeared and the fearful wilderness appeared. Food and water ran out after a few days and there was no hope of their going back to Egypt so they had to

continue their journey but the people soon murmured against Moses and Aaron and tested the Lord. These murmurings indicate the following:

1) Forgetfulness

Man usually forgets the previous good deeds of the Lord and how the Lord saved him. Man always forgets the great miracles of God and His good deeds to him. We have to remember the good deeds of the Lord to us.

2) Narrow mindedness

The people of Israel did not know that their murmurings were not directed to Moses and Aaron but to God Himself, and that their troubles would soon come to an end if they took to patience but this is always the method of the people who want quick solutions for their problems. Adam stretched his hand to the tree that the Lord ordered him not to touch protesting against the commands of the Lord that forbid him from eating its fruit although the tree of life was at hand.

3) Lack of faith

Moses had the faith that enabled him to lead two and a half million people through the barren wilderness. He was sure of the help of God. He was like Jesus his teacher and God who remained fasting for forty days in the wilderness without food. The devil tried to tempt him and make him fall in doubt, complaint or murmuring but he could not. Moses could always look upwards where angels could send food to those people.

Marah and Elim

After three days of thirst, they found springs of water in Marah. Each one of them carried a small vessel to fill it with water to drink. God tested their faith, which they soon lost. The Lord commanded Moses to throw branches of a tree into the water and soon the water became fit to drink. The tree stood for the cross... After temptation the Lord usually gives comfort. Soon the people went to Elim, which was an oasis where they found twelve springs and seventy palm trees (The same number of disciples and the apostles). It was not possible for people to remain for a long time in Elim as they had to continue their struggle on their way to the Land of Canaan.

The gift of Manna

The people began to suffer from despair and boredom. The scene of the wilderness, the hot sands and scattered stones without any beauty and the still mountains and the hot sands blowing over them stirred despair in the souls that were thirsty for the beauties of life and the desires of the flesh. The desire to reach the land did not concern them and they were not interested in worship that might support them so their hearts longed for Egypt with its beauties, feasts, seasons, and armies. They remembered the watermelons, cucumbers, the leeks, the onions and the garlic. All the people of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness and the Israelites said to them, "Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the Land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger". Here the Lord rained manna from heaven for them ...Manna was a symbol of the Lord Christ.

The Manna	Jesus
1) Heavenly and miraculous.	1) He descended from Heaven.

2) Without price.	2) His gift is without price.
3) It saved them from death.	3) He gave himself to them as the bread of life.
4) The taste of it was like wafers, made with honey.	4) His speech is most sweet and he is altogether desirable. He is full of grace.
5) The amount was enough for the people and there was.	5) He satisfies the hunger of all the people.
6) It was given them every day.	6) He sends new gifts each morning.
7) The Jews hated it.	7) His people refused him

The people refused the manna saying that they were fed up with that sort of food so the Lord gave them the quails. While they were eating meat, the fire burnt in the camp. They complained once more when they did not find water in the desert and at Rephidim, the Lord commanded Moses to strike the rock and water came out of the rock. The rock was the symbol of:

1. The Jews whom the Lord did not abandon although they were exposed to enslavement.
2. The church, which stood firm facing temptations and affliction.
3. Christ who was stabbed by those whom he loved and from his side he gave them a living spring of water.

They also murmured against the leadership especially when Moses remained for a long time on the mountain and they decided to elect another leader and go back to Egypt. In this way they were not murmuring against Moses but on God Himself.

Topics For Discussion

Q1: What are the spiritual and social consequences of murmuring?

Answer 1:

Spiritually

It indicates lack of faith.

It makes us unable to give thanks to the Lord.

It hinders our prayers.

It stops the blessings from coming.

It provokes God to wrath.

Socially

It causes anxiety

It causes chaos and disorder among nations

It causes psychological diseases

It does not make us think soundly.

It leads to failure in our life.

Q2: How did the Lord cure the problem of murmuring?

Answer 2:

- By offering many gifts.
- By satisfying the hunger of the weak soul.
- By repeated tests.
- By punishment sometimes.
- He remained sincere till the end.

Q3: How can we live the life of thanksgiving?

Answer 3:

- We have to remember the mercies of God as he has protected, aided, kept and accepted us and has compassion upon us and has supported us.
- We have to remember our weaknesses and the mercies of God.

- We have to be patient in times of affliction such as disease, poverty and failure.

Fourth week of November

(13) A Study of the Book of Exodus: The Law

References

+ Previous references

The Lesson

Aim

Christianity is not mere lawful and unlawful deeds but it is grace and truth.

Introduction

Adam's sin separated man from God "Do not come near" (Exodus 3:5). Man could not have met God except through Moses and the prophets: "you speak to us, and we will hear; but let not God speak to us, lest we die. And Moses said to the people: Do not fear; for God has come to prove you, and that the fear of Him may be before your eyes that you may not sin. And the people stood afar off, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was" (Exodus 20:19-21). The Lord says to Moses, "Go down and come up bringing Aaron with you but do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the Lord lest He break out against them" (Exodus 19:23-24) There was a great gap between God and man before the coming of Christ who was called Emanuel "God with us". The people who reaches the university stage must go through the preparatory and the secondary stages. The same is true in spiritual life. God gave man Moses Law before He gave him the law of the New Covenant in the Sermon on the Mountain. God began to let man know Him in the first commandment of the Ten Commandments, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage". So He is the Lord whom they tested in rescue; He is the Lord who loves them. He does not want to enslave them but it was he who brought them out of the land of bondage.

The Covenant at Sinai

The old world knew political covenants and these covenants were made between two allies. This was exactly what happened between man and God when God gave the law and here are the items of the covenant.

In the Covenants	In the Ten Commandments
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Definition of that strong king. 2) To recount the steadfast love of that king. 3) Not to make any covenants with other gods. 4) This covenant should be kept and read to the people. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) I am the Lord your God (Exodus 20:1). 2) Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage (Exodus 20:1, Joshua 24:6). 3) You shall have no other gods before me. 4) Put his testimony in the Ark of the

5) Those who obey will be blessed. 6) The Covenant confirmed who disobey will be cursed.	Covenant. 5) Exodus 20:5,6 and Exodus 23:20-23. 6) And Moses took the blood and threw it upon the people and said, “Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you”
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The law was truly a step forward... but the law could not fill the gap between God and man. On the contrary, the law increased sin as people could not carry out the commandment so the commandment, instead of being a cause of blessing, became a cause of curse and judgment exactly as when a ray of light shines in a dark room and shows the dirty things in it.

Topics for discussion: The lawful and the unlawful

The Law of Moses and Religiousness in the Old Testament were characterized by the following:

1. Fear of God and practicing different types of worships were not out of love but out of fear and horror.
2. Superficiality and formality in practicing and keeping the Lord's charge, commandments, statutes, laws and rites.
3. Content and admiration for self-righteousness and despising others who do not keep the law (The Pharisee and the Tax Collector).

Many young people ask about what is lawful and what is unlawful and the following is the role that Paul the apostle set (1 Corinthians 6: 12, 9:23):

- All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient.
- All things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.
- All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.

You can always ask yourself, “Will Jesus be pleased with what I am doing or can He accompany me while doing it or not?” You can now have the trained senses to know what fits and what does not fit. There are examples for you to contemplate: eating swine meat, means of propaganda, adornment, and jokes and jesting, sitting at cafes, smoking, etc.

Discussion

- + Make a comparison between the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mountain?
- + What is the difference between carefulness and suspicion?
- + Judaism is based on what is lawful and what is unlawful... and Christianity is based on grace and truth... Give examples and situations for the Christian behavior in life in accordance with grace and truth.

First Week of December

(14) Canonical Hours Prayers: The Agpia Prayers I

References

- + “The Paradise of Spirit” Vol. II, The Late Bishop Anba Youannis of Gharbeya
- + “The daily hymn of praise and the hourly psalms” Fr. Matta Al Miskin
- + “Lectures of the Agpia Conference” His Holiness Pope Shenouda III

The Lesson

Aim

Prayer as a holy habit.

Introduction

St. John Chrysostom said a very important statement that strongly awakens our conscience. He said, “If you meet with a man that does not pray and does not like to pray, you know immediately that there is nothing good in him. The man who does not pray to God is a dead man”. What are the hindrances that encounter you in practicing this essential type of worship? You may not find words or thoughts in your mind to pray with or you may not have the incentive to stand and pray or you may not remember to pray because you do not devote a certain time for prayer... but the church, our mother, cures all these causes by offering us one of her beautiful gifts which is “the Agpia”.

The liturgy (public prayer) has one trend. It emphasizes the life of Christ on earth as the basis of the question of salvation and God’s plan towards us. If we live with Christ in His life, death and resurrection we can have the mind of Christ. In older times, the believers celebrated the Easter every thirty-three years then they celebrated it every year, this is called the annual course of the rite. We celebrate the Nativity, Baptism, the Crucifixion then the Resurrection. But this is not enough as there is the weekly course in which we remember the treachery of Judas on Wednesday and each Friday we remember the Crucifixion and on Sunday we celebrate the Resurrection.

The Daily Course

The Agpia prayers aim at confirming these facts so that we may live them all the time. In brief these Agpia prayers are the practical application of David’s verse: “But I give myself unto prayer” and the Lord says, “Pray without ceasing”. In the first hour (The Matins) we remember the resurrection of the Lord in the early morning. In the third hour prayer we remember the coming of the Holy Spirit. In the sixth hour prayer we remember the Crucifixion of Christ. In the ninth hour prayer, we remember His death. In the eleventh hour prayer (The Vespers) we remember the time when they brought Jesus down from the cross. In the twelfth hour prayer (sleep) we remember His burial. In the Middle of the Night, the midnight prayer, we remember His second coming.

A Power For My Prayers

The Agpia is a fitting material for expressing our feelings towards God. Those who wrote the psalms were the greatest poets of the Old Testament. They wrote them when they were in a spiritual state, which we cannot reach easily. We should not end the prayer after reciting the psalms but we must say private extempore prayers, and bow in worship. The Agpia aims at

raising our concentration and feelings to the level of pure prayer, which should not be done as a duty or routine.

Commitment To The Law

Prayer has a rule and the first who set the rules of prayers was the Lord Christ himself when He said, "When you pray say "Our Father who art in Heaven..." There are levels for the rule as each person can pray according to the spiritual level he has reached. The monk is not the same as the priest who is also different from the layman. We have to respect and stick to the roles of struggle, as it is they that brings us near to God and confirms our sonship to Him. Commitment in the spiritual life is not wrong or harmful as some extremists or those who refrain from prayers believe. The Lord advised us to pray without ceasing. He knows that sometimes we suffer from lukewarmness. Praying by the Agpia is of great benefit to us if we were given freedom, we would do nothing. Commitment is a covenant with God so at least if we were not in a state of Zeal and comfort, we would be still sticking to prayers waiting for the Lord till the spiritual tests come back to us. If the child studies only the time he wants to study, or if the traffic signals are cancelled from the streets and the whole matter is left to the manners of drivers, many troubles may take place.

The Sacrifice Of The Will

Prayer is the mother of virtues and their fuel. To pray regularly with patience and firmness whatever the sufferings may be at the beginning is regarded as a practical training so that you may have the will that should be firm, present and ready for every good deed. Do not neglect your prayers no matter how tired you are and when sleep overcomes the organs of your body be sure that this is the hour of martyrdom. Prayer is a practical sacrifice through which we declare to the world that we are dead to the world...and when the Lord sees our struggle, He will give us the pure prayer which is without blemish and which fills the soul with peace.

Unity of Spirit

Praying in the same way our fathers the saints used to pray gives us power and makes us feel the same feelings they felt in the words which they formed and smell their aroma in the psalms they used in their prayers. In this way, you feel that you are walking in the same road of your grandfathers and you also feel that all your brethren pray with you at this hour with the same meaning of the words used (As you unite with the spirit of a certain writer when you read this book with deep contemplation). In this way you feel that you do not pray without company but many others pray with you brothers in their rooms, fathers in their churches and monasteries. They are all praying with one spirit and one mind offering one sacrifice to God the Father.

How Can I Pray The Psalms?

Before Prayer

Think deeply of Christ so that He may come and help you. Begin with bowing and making the sign of the cross as you are standing to prepare what to say. Prayer is not reading. You can begin by singing "a spiritual short song or melody hymn to help you to start prayer. Stand when you pray and when you bow raise your hands and eyes to God. Be sure that the Lord will listen to all what you say. Let the words of prayers be your own words not the words of David.

During Prayer

Make use of all your senses. Use your eye to concentrate your thoughts and attention and pray in whisper so that your ears may share with you and use the melody to satisfy the emotions of your heart. Do not be in a hurry. When you find a word that affects you repeat it and contemplate it and bear in mind that our fathers, out of their love to the words of prayers did not easily utter a new word (The Story of St. John the Pwarf who was completely overwhelmed in prayer the moment he starts praying, and the camel man used to knock at his door and say, "Father, give me the baskets you have made, but whenever he entered his cell he became completely overwhelmed and this situation was repeated several times). St. Pachomius indulged himself completely in prayer and the devils became so jealous of him that they burnt the pillow he stood on when he prayed but he didn't care.

Be active in your prayer and complete your prayer till its end and say "God have mercy on us" quickly and actively contemplating the strikes that Christ received or contemplate your sins and you will feel happy by the end of your prayer. Do not end your prayer the moment you recite the psalms, as the aim of the Agpia prayers is to indulge completely in private prayers.

After Prayer

Bow to the Lord and thank Him for his grace. Sit to read your Holy Bible or do a useful work and do not let birds snatch the good seeds. St. John tells us how our fathers bowed between one psalm and the other and recited a short prayer ending it with the famous statement Doxapatri and these short prayers were extempore prayers and always were part of the prayer and they are now used as passages after the Gospels.

Why are Psalms Used in prayers?

1. Psalms were very important in the Old Testament as they were used in the worship of the Jews and this custom was still kept in the days of the apostles: "Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour" (Acts 3:1). And Paul the apostle advises us to recite the psalms: "When you come together, everyone of you has a psalm" (I Corinthians 14:26). The Law of our fathers since the days of the apostles have mentioned the psalms and advised us to recite them.
2. There are not other words better than the words of God to speak to God with. The same as the lawyer who uses the text of the Law when he speaks to the judge.
3. Many of our private prayers are private demands but the psalms open the domain of contemplation before us and teach us the prayers of praise and thanksgiving.
4. David the prophet, the writer of psalms and who was a man of prayers says, "Seven times a day praise You for Your righteous ordinances". "In the middle of the night I get up to thank your for the judgments of Your ordinance". "I will not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids". "But I give myself unto prayer". The Lord bore witness to David when he said; "I have found David the son of Jesse a man after mine own heart".
5. In the psalms we find all the tests. David was that young shepherd and the great king. He was the man who hovered in the sky of Spirit and tested the depth of repentance so we always find a psalm which suits our feelings: in times of affliction... in happiness... after the sin... that is why the fathers call the psalms the food of the spirit and the friends of the believers.

Activity

1. In order to live daily the feelings of the day of the cross, you can draw a watch and beside each digit indicate the event, which took place on Good Friday. Start from the sixth hour in the morning till the sixth hour in the evening with the help of the last chapters of the four Gospels. The following items of information will help you.
 - a. From 6 O'clock till 9 O'clock in the morning: the judgments.
 - b. 9 O'clock in the morning till 12 O'clock at noon: Carrying the cross.
 - c. At 12 O'clock at noon: Raising Christ on the Cross.
 - d. From 12 O'clock to 3 O'clock afternoon: The first five words.
 - e. 3 O'clock afternoon: The last two words and when Jesus breathed his last breathe.
 - f. From 3 O'clock to six O'clock in the evening: the spear, the earthquake, the time the tombs I opened and bringing down the body of Jesus from the cross.
 - g. 6 O'clock in the evening: the burial.
2. In order to know the prayers of the Agpia suit all types of feelings that man suffers you can draw a schedule to indicate that each of the seven prayers contain verses that suit the following feelings: asking for God's help in time of affliction, thanking God for His grace and good deeds, repentance, praising God.

Second Week of December

(15) Canonical Hours Prayers: The Agpia Prayers II

References

The previous references

The Lesson

Aim

To be acquainted with the spiritual meanings of some of the Agpia prayers.

Introduction

Merely making the sign of the cross means that we are ready to carry it with joy and give glorification to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Then we come to thanksgiving for all occasions. Thanks should precede demand. This we forget if we neglect Agpia prayers. Then we quote a psalm from the Agpia to recite it on every occasion and the Agpia draws our I attention to the following:

- a) What Christ did for us?
- b) We ask God's help during the day.
- c) Our daily duty.
- d) The end of the world.

Notes and Exercises

The third piece of each prayer is a glorification of the Virgin and a memorial for her motherhood. We can put a program for the Matins, the third hour prayer, the Sixth hour prayer, the Ninth hour, Vespers before going to bed prayer according to the circumstances of each one without

keeping the time literally. Make use of a picture that expresses the stages of the life of the Lord Christ as is divided by the Agpia prayers. This schedule could be written on a wall frame.

Young people must use the Agpia when they discuss this schedule.

What is said in each Prayer?

The Orthodox Creed and its introduction

Faith is the basis of our fellowship with God. God does not accept the prayers of the evil people or the hypocrites. We also say “Lord have mercy upon us 41 times (39 strikes and the crown of thorns and the stabbings with the spear). We put our sins on Christ’s back and ask for His mercy thus we come out as righteous.

Absolution

Forgive us our sins O Lord (What are the types of sins).

The Lord’s Prayer

This is the brief and deep meaning of prayer which the Lord uttered and that we must consciously recite and its meanings should not be lost through repetition. Prayer need not change but needs internal renewal.

Have Mercy on us O Lord and be kind to us

O Lord who all the time and at each hour... We remember the mercy of the Lord, as He is always patient with us. We pray that at this hour and at each hour He may accept our requests and answer us. We pray that He consecrates our souls and bodies, our thoughts and intention and heal our diseases and forgive us our sins.

Exercise

When we pray, “Lord have mercy” we remember Christ’s passions and we also remember all our sins that caused all these passions and we ask for the Lord’s mercy and forgiveness.

Homework

1. Fill in the spaces:

Be merciful to me, because of Your love. Because of Your great mercy my sins. Wash away all my evil, and make me from my sin I recognize my faults; I am always conscious of my sins. I have sinned only against you and done what You consider evil. So You are right in judging me: You are justified in condemning me. I have been from the time I was born: from the day of my birth I have been sinful. Sincerity ad truth are what You require; fill my mind with mind with Your wisdom. Remove and I will be; and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear the sounds of joy and gladness; and through You have crushed me and broken me, I will be happy once again. Close Your eyes to my sins, and wipe out all my evil. Create a in me, O God, and put a new and loyal spirit on me; do not banish me from Your presence; do not take Your away from me. Give me again the that comes from Your salvation, and make me willing to You.

2 In the pieces of the vespers there are three notations. Write them:

From Psalm 50 -from the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector -from the parable of the

prodigal son.

3. From Psalm 50 note the verses that indicate the following ideas or points:
Purification of sin is like the process of washing -the forgiveness of the Lord -I know my sins - God knows our sins.

4. From the pieces of the Vespers write down the following: Because of my weakness I could not endure the temptations of the enemy by day. Repentance means that I should hurry to the Fatherly bosom. My day passed and I was indulged in the desires of the flesh. My activity is in doing wrong.

Third Week of December

(16) The Canonical Hours Prayers: The Agpia Prayers (III) Matins and Vespers

References

- + “Contemplation on the psalms of the Vespers” Pope Shenouda III
- + “The daily hymn of praise and the psalms of the Canonical hours” Fr. Matta Al Miskin

The Lesson

Aim

Always pray the Matins and Vespers with understanding, interest and submission.

First: The Matins

It begins daily with offering bows and thanks to God (Mitanya and thanksgiving). Let us bow in worship... An invitation to carrying out the commandments of the Lord with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Renewing the covenant with God, living in faith and asking for His mercies as they are new each morning.

The Psalms

“Blessed is the man who walks not into the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners” (Psalms 1). This is an invitation for the practical Christian behavior amidst the evil doers whom we may meet in our daily living. “O God, You are my God, I seek You, my soul thirsts for You” as if the worshipper shortened the hours of sleep to get up early to keep the Lord’s name holy “I slept but my heart was awake”.

The Gospel

“In the beginning was the word”. By the beginning of the day we remember the eternity of Christ and His coming to us incarnated on earth.

The pieces

- + The true light... the light of the Sun is an artificial light as it is created but its shining reminds us of the Great Light.

+ The true light is God Himself (I am the light of the World). He cannot be seen by the eye but by the heart... We remember the beginning of creation once more so we glorify God, the Incarnate Son.

In the second piece we remember the senses that give light and the bright thoughts, which should shine in us each morning. In the third piece, we live some moments with the Mother of Light and we remember the Lord's good deed with her and the gift of the Holy Spirit and the grace of the Son.

The Father chose you... the son incarnated from you, and the Holy Spirit protected you.

With the angels

When the Sun of righteousness Jesus, shone, incarnated in Bethlehem, the angels glorified God in the Highest "Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased". Also contemplate the meaning of these words: "Since the night, I seek You O Lord for Your commandments are light on earth. I mediate on Your law O Lord for You have become my helper. In the early morning O Lord You hear my voice and at noon I stand before You and You see me".

Analysis of the Matins

We thank the Lord because the night passed in peace and He has brought us to the beginning of daylight... We pray that He helps us to begin our day in a good way and to be the children of Light and complete this day with righteousness and purity. A day starting with a prayer such as this must be full of grace and good work and our whole life may enjoy the Light of Christ.

Exercise

- + Study the pieces of the Matins and the absolution.
- + Be punctual in praying the Matins this week and concentrate on the psalms and increasing its number gradually and recording this in the spiritual notebook.

Second: The Vespers

The Vespers occupies a very important period of the day when man enjoys mental activity and bodily energy and is ready to do his evening tasks, which he should begin with prayer.

Being regular with a certain prayer gives us the chance to go deep into the meaning of this prayer and a new discovery every day of our life. Renewal here does not mean changing the form of words but saying the same words with a renewed mind.

Our fathers the saints and the monks used to meet in the church after a long day's work, and they used to pray these words in reverence and calmness and they felt that their spiritual youth were renewed continually after the hard work or keeping to their cells. At the end of this prayer they read the absolution and asked one another's forgiveness.

The Occasion Of The Prayer

The Vespers is a prayer of repentance and repentance is the basis of our spiritual life. By the end of the day, it is better for us to remember our sins in which we might have fallen on purpose or

accidentally and we promises the Lord that we shall try to make up for any mistake we have made during the day and that we will work actively in the remaining part of the day.

The Vespers is a rare chance for thanking God for His great Grace (Our Merciful King, we thank you).

After Jesus spent a whole day among the crowds performing His Service, He decided to rest for a short time but Peter requested Him to go to his house as his mother-in-law was sick in bed with a fever and Jesus went to Peter's house, touched her hand and the fever left her. Evening came but the people crowded around Peter's house. They brought to Jesus many who had demons in them. Jesus drove out the evil spirits with a word and healed all who were sick. God works all the time, in the morning and at sunset... Every moment in our life is a chance for us to do a good deed.

But the Vespers psalms are, for the man who tested them in prayer, very wonderful. The church set them to draw our attention to the fact that we must raise our hearts to God with caution and hope at the same time. Let us now contemplate Psalm 122: "To You I lift up my eyes O You who are enthroned to the heaven. When I do not find any help on earth because of the sins and the vexation of the people I lift up my eyes to God". This reminds us of the statement of the Divine Mass "Lift up your hearts..." They are with the Lord".

The Lord who is enthroned to heavens deserves every awe and reverence.

The Eyes Of Slaves:

These are contrite eyes sorry for their sins. Their tongues cannot speak. The Lord knows the feelings. It is better for us to remember our sins and lift up our eyes to the Lord as the slaves lift up their eyes to their masters or as a maid lifts up her eyes to the hand of her mistress so that the Lord may have mercy to us. The Lord says to such a contrite soul, "Turn away your eyes from me for they disturb me". Here the tongue prays for the mercies of God and longs for His love... Lord have mercy on us... Lord have mercy on us... Lord have mercy on us. For we have had more than enough of contempt" because of sin and the world's persecutions. We have to remember that Christ endured contempt for us. As for eunuchs and those who magnify themselves, they receive their good things in their lifetime so shame and contempt will be their destiny.

Exercise

Always pray the Vespers and study some parts of it... recite them on the occasions that may be appropriate.

Fourth Week of December

Third unit

Believers who believed in the Covenants or the Lord

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References

- + “The Treasures of interpretation in the Holy Bible” Ilarion the Monk

The Lesson

Aim

Review questions

Introduction

Q1: Isaac learnt a lot from his father in faith, obedience, and being on good terms with others. Explain with examples from the life of Isaac.

Answer 1:

- + In his obedience to the Lord he was a symbol of Christ who bore the cross and was raised on it then he conquered death.
- + He was also obedient to his father.
- + Abraham was on good terms with Lot and Isaac was also on good terms with his neighbors.

Q2: Joshua lived a life of faithfulness all his life till he carried out the task, which the Lord ordered him to carry out (Explain).

Answer 2:

- + He was a disciple of Moses... he learnt from him and received the Law from him. At the end of his life he charged him the responsibility of leading the people (Deuteronomy 31:7-8, Joshua 1:5-8).
- + Joshua had to do two tasks: Leading the people to the Land that the Lord promised to give them on the other side of the sea. The second task was the division of the land.
- + Joshua carried out the Lord's orders at the doors of Jericho and he punished the disobedient man.
- + He used to pray to the Lord and thank him after his victory.
- + He made a covenant that he and his family would live with the Lord.

Q3: Choose some situations in the life of David to show that his fellowship with God was the cause of his victory.

Answer 3:

- + David was a shepherd. He used to contemplate the creatures that the Lord created. He was famous for playing the musical instruments. He spent his time singing hymns and psalms to the Lord.
- + David was chosen because the Lord was pleased with him. David found favor in the eyes of the Lord.
- + David defeated Goliath, “You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin; but I come to you in the name of the Lord or hosts” (1 Samuel 17:45).
- + David treated Saul gently and patiently expecting the mercies of God although Saul was envious of him.
- + When David became king, he ruled wisely and with fear of God. He was a just king.

+ When he sinned, he repented when Nathan reproached him.

Exercise

+ Let those fathers be a living example for us to follow and let us have them as our ideals “Consider the outcome of their life and imitate their faith”.

Questions for Review on the Third Unit

1. Isaac was the child of the Promise: Explain and show that he was obedient to his father. How was Isaac a symbol of Christ?
2. How did Isaac marry? Of what benefit is this topic to us?
3. What are the attributes that aroused your admiration in the life of Isaac?
4. How did Joshua perform his duty as a leader after Moses? What was the Lord’s advice to Joshua when he began his task as a leader?
5. Joshua was a symbol of the Lord Christ. Explain this statement in detail and show the points of likeness and the points of difference between the two.
6. How did God choose David? Why did he choose him in particular from among his brothers? What are the virtues of that prophet? Explain how they could be of benefit in your life.
7. Write what you know about David’s attitude towards: Goliath the mighty, the enmity of King Saul, and Uriah the Hittite.
8. Why did the Lord refuse to allow David to build a house for Him?
9. How did David become King? How did David please the Lord when he was king?
10. You studied the life of Joseph the Innocent: Explain the stages of his life, his childhood, how his brothers envied him, how they sold him, his life in Egypt, Joseph and Potiphar.
11. Joseph is a model of the honest and chaste young man. Explain this statement and make a comparison between his circumstances and the circumstances that surrounded David’s fall in his famous sin.
12. Show how the Lord reward Joseph and what was his attitude towards his brothers and tribe?
13. Explain how Joseph was a symbol of Christ and show points of agreement and the points of difference between the two.
14. Write a note on: The Virtues of David, the Virtues of innocent Joseph, Joseph the interpreter of dreams, the colored shirt and its results and singing hymns in the life of David.

Fifth Week of December

(18) The Coming of the Savior

References

+ “Glory, peace and joy” Late Bishop Anba Bemin, Mallawe
+ “Levels of teaching feasts” Mahaba library

The Lesson

Aim

Joy and delight on the memorial of the Nativity of the King of Glory and the Prince of Peace.

The peoples expected the coming of Jesus and Jesus was the hope of the prophets:

Since Adam fell and was driven out of the Garden of Eden, the Lord promised Adam that the seed of the woman would smite the head of the serpent... and man waited for a long time and expected that the Lord would fulfill His promise through the Law and the prophets. In the Old Testament there are many clear references indicating the Coming of the Messiah and that the Promises of God must be fulfilled... as what happens before dawn appears... rays of light gather and light shines suddenly and darkness is no more...

Isaiah prophesied that Christ would come when he said, “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder and his name will be called ‘Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father Prince of Peace’” (Isaiah 9:6) The same prophet says, “Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel”.

Jeremiah emphasizes the promise in chapter 31 when he says, “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the Land of Egypt... I will put my law within them and I will write it upon their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people”.

The Old Testament paved the way for the New Testament, which is a spiritual testament. In it the Lord dwells in man, will be his God and we shall be his people.

The day, which the Lord has made:

Let us rejoice and be glad in it... In the first two chapters of his Gospel St. Luke explained how man was joyfully waiting for the day when Christ comes according to God’s promise.

When Virgin Mary visited Elizabeth, she sang hymns of praise and said, “My soul magnifies the Lord. And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He that is mighty has done to me great things and holy is His name... in remembrance of His mercy. As He spoke to our fathers to Abraham and to His seed forever” (Luke 1:46-55).

When Priest Zechariah opened his mouth, he said, “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel for He has visited and redeemed His people... As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, which have been since the world began. To perform the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant” (Luke 1:68-72).

When Simon the elder was in the temple, he took the child Jesus in his arms and gave thanks to God and said, “Lord, now let Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word: For my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared before the face of all people” (Luke 2:30). There was a very old prophetess, a widow named Anna. She never left the temple day and night she worshipped God. That very same hour she arrived and gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were waiting for God to set Jerusalem free (Luke 2:38}... Christ, through His Incarnation and His coming to us as man brought back our nature and our first order to us. The

greatness of what the Lord did by His coming to us, His Incarnation and His Nativity can be shown through the hymn, which the angels sang the moment the Lord Jesus was born “Glory be to God in the highest... and on earth peace... good will toward men” (Luke 2:14).

Glory to God in the highest:

Through Nativity man could share the angels in glorifying God. All heavenly and earthly creatures gathered to bow to Jesus and glorify Him... This is what the church says in her prayers: “We worship You, O Christ and with Your Good Father and the Holy Spirit for You have come and saved us”.

And on earth peace:

In the prophecy of Isaiah, the Lord Jesus was called “the prince of peace” and in the peace He sent on earth is the spiritual peace, which helps man to overcome sin as sin drives peace away. He gave us His peace by saying, “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world gives, I give unto you”. The Lord reconciled the heavenly creatures with the earthly ones and reconciled the soul with the flesh. In this way the church has become the kingdom of true peace on earth.

Good will toward men:

True happiness and good will result from the strong relationship between God and man and it gives man true joy, which is the work of the Holy Spirit in the believers. That is why the church in her prayers says, “Fill our hearts with joy and gladness. Fill our hearts with rejoice and grace that we may develop every good deed and should be satisfied with the bare necessity”.

Activities

- + Read the good news that the angel brought to the shepherds (Luke 2:8-14) and paint the scene.
- + Make a Nativity cavern showing the Nativity events. Invite your friends and explain these events to them and sing together the Nativity hymns.
- + Let your children see the Nativity film and make spiritual comments on it.

Recitation

Luke 1:46-55 or Luke 2:29-32

Exercise

The following prayer should be recited daily this week: “O Lord, who were born in poverty for me. Grant me that I will devote all my life for you. You who saved me through your Incarnation grant me that I give you myself and my whole life. You who gave me your peace let me be a messenger of peace among all the people”.

First Week of January

(19) Types of People Around the Manger

References

- + “Contemplations on Nativity” His Holiness Pope Shenouda III

- + “Studies in and contemplation on the great feasts” Anba Bemin
- + “The Feasts of the Divine Epiphany” Fr. Matta Al Miskin
- + “Levels of Teaching Feasts” Al Mahaba Bookshop
- + “Witnesses of the Glorious Nativity” Archpriest Beshoi Abdel Messeeh
- + “The Shepherds and the Lamb” Mar Mina Church, Shubra
- + “Behind the Star” Mar Mina Church, Shubra

The Lesson

Aim

Man’s attitude towards Christ, and Christ’s role in our life.

Introduction

Light must disperse darkness and darkness always resists light. The same is true with the Nativity of Christ, His life, His crucifixion and His resurrection. People are divided into different categories according to their readiness and how well prepared to receive truth in their life. All humanity is represented in the categories that surrounded the manger... There were:

First: Mary the Virgin

She was the first that recognized the wonderful mystery of Incarnation... Her heart recognized the purpose of God... The whole question was beyond human understanding but through faith she could accept the miraculous deed and in this way she bore witness that faith is always beyond human understanding. In this way she was the first believer not only in the child of the manger but also in the possibility of Incarnation when the angel brought her the good news.

She was a model of obedience “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord”. It is the endless and limitless obedience as a chosen vessel in the hand of the Lord and a good tool that He used well.

She was the ideal model of cleaving to Christ. She took Him in her arms. He was all in all to her. She forgot everything but Him. She bore Him, worshipped Him and raised her prayers to Him... She devoted her whole life to the child of the manger. She said him in her bosom and received eternal life from him.

The Virgin’s life was characterized by thanksgiving, singing hymns of praise and deep internal rejoicing, “My soul praises the Lord”. She invited all generations to glorify the Lord with her. “He has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of low degrees. He has filled the hungry with good things and the rich He has sent empty away”. Mary’s voice will continue singing praises in calmness as a modest pigeon that does not stop singing praises when all keep silent.

Second: John the Baptist

He is a model of early awareness. He recognized the voice of the Lord before His birth and hoped to hear the voice of God in his life. He was a model of the man who is filled with Spirit and who bore testimony to the baby of the manger even before His birth as “The Spirit Himself intercedes for us with signs too deep for words” so that people may know Jesus. He was the voice crying in wilderness. He began this mature work before he was born “Do not say that I am

young". He leaped happily in his mother's womb "You whose glory above the heavens is chanted by the mouth of babes and infants". He represents the conscious, which should awake us in our early life, to see Christ within us.

Third: The Shepherds

Those shepherds represent another type of people, their gifts may be limited or they may be simple. They are the owners of the two talents by they were out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. The wise watch and faithfulness in performing our ordinary duties undoubtedly please the heart of God. They were a model of faith, believing and simplicity. (Let us go over and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us). Because of their simple hearts the Lord gave them the mark and told them about the wonderful miracle. They were model of active preaching so they told many people of what they saw and heard.

Fourth: The Magi

They represent the wise men who look for God even in times of darkness. Each soul that thirsts for God must work hard and continuously in the fields of knowledge till she finds Him. They represent the good people who although they have no law are a law for themselves. They knew the truth through conscience given even to the pagans. God usually reveals His will to such people who thirst for righteousness and gives them a chance to see Him and the means here is the Holy Spirit himself who guides them, in the form of a star to Christ who is the source of wisdom and the spring of satisfaction. He is the Light of those who walk in His way. They were an example of almsgiving and their giving was deep representing all what humanity can offer (Their knowledge, their struggle, their journey and travels, their gold, frankincense and myrrh).

Fifth: Simon the Elder

He is a unique model, rarely found among men, for working hope and patient faith. He waited patiently for the Lord with complete awareness and firm faith. He sought no other but the Lord. He took Him between His arms... the child Jesus meekly goes to the hands of all those who seek Him and want Him. He loved the eternal dwelling Place. His desire was to depart and rest in the hands of the Lord. He is a model of true Christian life in which Christ represents the center of demand and the destiny of the people.

Six: Prophetess Anna

Her sadness because of her widowhood led her to complete involvement in worship and in this way the temptations guide believers to the right way. She devoted her life to the Lord worshipping with fasting and prayer day and night as a model that judges the lukewarm worship of ours drawing our attention to one of the reasons which deprive us from seeing Christ. She discovered the hour of salvation with a prophetic spirit and this condemns our neglect of the time or our salvation and our carelessness of our acceptable day. She recognized the question of redemption (which is the goal and aim of the manger) and that was a splendid discovery made by a righteous woman whose godliness was beyond description. She spoke about Him with all those who waited for Him to teach us to speak with our friends about Christ.

Seventh: Priests and Pharisees

They represented the passive leaders who did not care for the salvation of Israel... they entered the temple and went out of it just to arrange gold and count the things looted. Moreover, they

knew the time, the prophecies and the place that people of older times appointed for the coming of Christ but sorry to say they were indifferent. They were prepared to guide the earthly king (Herod) to the place of prophecies without being themselves guided by them or without guiding the people who were waiting for salvation. They conspired with the earthly king and rejected the kingdom of Christ in their hearts, and refused the commandment of the Lord in their life although they heard the good news for the Magi. They are bad models of divided hearts and blind leaders indifferent to their salvation.

Eight: Herod

He was an example of those who reject salvation for themselves and who also try to put off the light that gives light to the whole world. He was a mean man despised by all people as he followed the desires of the flesh ...and he was an enemy of the nation. His personal interests were all that he thought of and that was the main reason for his rejection to Christ. He was enslaved to his desires and he became a slave of the throne he sat on. He was trying to escape from the Light and keep away from the truth. Light was the coming truth and he tried to hinder the light's coming and progress and in this way he resisted God Himself. So he conspired against the life of the Son of God and killed the innocent people. Herod's attitude reminds us of those who destroy all signs of life within themselves. Herod met his spiritual death when he sentenced Jesus to death but Jesus remained alive, as "It is He who delivers and condemns". We urge those who refuse the way of the Lord to come back and not to put themselves on the line of Herod on whom the curse fell.

Exercise

You have to sit quietly now with yourself and define your attitude toward the Child of the manger and in this way you can determine of what human type you are.

Activities

- + Read the Nativity Gospels (Mathew 1,2 and Luke 1,2)
- + Study the Nativity hymns by heart, and Kiahk hymns of praise and repeat them joyfully
- + To show happiness for receiving the newborn of Bethlehem you can take part in an Opera or Choir (chorus) to sing these joyful songs
- + Take part in making the Nativity cavern

Second Week of January

(20) The Child of the Promise

References

- + "Contemplations on Nativity and Epiphany" His Holiness Pope Shenouda III
- + "Studies and contemplations on great feasts" Anba Bemin
- + "The Life of the Baptist" F.B. Mayer
- + "God appeared in the flesh" Issued by Sunday School, Guiza
- + "The Incarnation of the Word" St. Athanasius the Apostolic
- + "The Word became flesh" Dr. Ragheb Abdul Nur

The Lesson

Aim

The Baptist as a personality that should be followed as a model

Introduction

The Baptist is a distinguished character that is characterized by boldness, courage and strong faith in Truth. He was a disciple of his parents who were righteous before the Lord. He was filled with the Holy Spirit when he was still in his mother's womb. He was a Nazirite to God. He drank no wine or strong drink. He was a disciple in the School of Wilderness where he lived till he revealed himself when he began his service. He knew the prophecies that referred to preparing the way of God and that Elijah would come before Christ. All these factors were enough to make a jealous leader of him as well as a caller to Truth.

How and when did the Baptist come?

John the Baptist came at a time when prophets nearly disappeared in Israel "300 years B.C." as their disobedience stifled the voice of the prophets the last of whom was Malachi. He lived at a time of severe enslavement when the Jews suffered from Roman imperialism and they screamed to the Lord to rescue them. Corruption prevailed even among men of religion whom John gave the name of "brood of vipers." The call at that time was for people to go back to God so that He might put away His righteous anger towards them and Christ the Savior might come.

Elijah and the Baptist

John came with the spirit of Elijah and his power. Both lived as ascetics and both had long hair as they were Nazirites. Both lived in the desert "A voice crying in the wilderness". Elijah called fire down from heaven, and John said that the Lord would send that who is mightier than he and that would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Elijah stood against Ahab and the Baptist challenged Herod and both felt that they were standing before the Lord in the fire of the Divine presence. At certain moments each of them was weak but the Lord brought power back to his servants. Both were enthusiastic and have a fiery temper but they learnt that the Lord would come in the still small and gentle voice. Both could turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just to make ready for the Lord a people prepared at a time when no one could differentiate between what was good and what was evil and people went limping with two different opinions. The life history of such a prophet can bring enthusiasm back to our cool hearts and bring us back to truth from which we often keep away.

The Baptist and Christ (Discussion)

Among those born of women there has risen no one greater than John the Baptist. But it is difficult to compare the stars. The moon cannot be compared with the Sun of Righteousness Himself who is beyond comparison as John was not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He was the friend of the bridegroom but Christ was the Bridegroom. He was a voice preparing the way of Christ but Christ was the way, the truth and the life. John baptized with water for repentance but Jesus was the sacrifice of righteousness for the obedience of the Father and He came to baptize us with the Holy Spirit and fire. John represented the end of the Old Testament but Jesus was the beginning of the New Testament. Jesus said that John was a great and holy man, but John bore Witness to the Divinity of Christ and said that he bore the sin of the world

and when John's disciples heard these words they followed Jesus.

Conclusion: John's voice and life draw our attention to:

- The necessity of being filled with spirit at a time when most people's love grows cold.
- Resisting the evil currently prevailing in the world as evildoers grow and spread.
- Bearing witness to Christ at a time the voice of truth grows weak.
- Accepting repentance in our life as a guarantee for our salvation.

Remember the Baptist in the following situations

- Situations in which we should be truthful with ourselves and to others, e.g., examination where we should not cheat in exams.
- Truth in speaking and precision in telling news, e.g., fulfillment of promises and commitment to the appointed time.
- Keeping away from evildoers and not keeping in close touch with deviated company. We should be distinguished from all these and characterized by meekness and firmness at the same time.
- Bearing witness to Christ when we are asked to do so. Our witness should be clear and bold but in a wise manner without questioning.
- Accepting the message of repentance in our life as it is the second baptism and doing that through confession.

Activities

- Paint a picture of the Baptist or of Elijah standing before the king.
- Paint a picture of the Baptist carrying his head on a plate and a tree behind him with an axe laid to its root (a ritual picture you can find in old churches).
- Paint a picture of the Baptist and Christ in the Jordan.
- Write a dialogue of a play between Herod, Herodia and the Baptist.
- Make a wall magazine about the character of John the Baptist, his heroism and the virtues you admire in him.

Third Week of January

(21) Jesus begins His Preaching

References

- + "Studies in and Contemplations on the Great Feasts" Anba Bemin
- + "The Lent" Fr. Matta Al Miskin
- + "Struggle in the Wilderness" Habib Sad
- + "The Temptation of Jesus" translated by Iris El Massry

The Lesson

Aim

Concentrating on the Divine nature of Christ and Christ's work as a Savior.

The voice of one crying in the Wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord

The Heavenly Father's plan was to prepare the way for the coming of Christ by sending John the Baptist who prepared the way before the heavenly procession. It was said about that great prophet that he would be great before the Lord...he would drink no wine nor strong drink...he would be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb...he would turn many to the Lord...he would turn the hearts of the fathers to the children...he would go before Him in the spirit of Elijah and his power... and that he would make ready for the Lord a people prepared. His father Zechariah predicted and said, "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare His way, to give knowledge of salvation to His people in the forgiveness of their sins".

The Preaching of John the Baptist (Luke 3:1-20)

John preached in the Wilderness saying: "Repent for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand". Isaiah said about him, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness. Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight". John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather girdle around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. To the multitude who came to be baptized by him he said, "Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit that befits repentance. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees, every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Matthew 3:10). Many sinners came to him... he drew their attention to their sins and made them repent...he taught them how to confess and correct their life. Tax collectors came and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" and he said to them "Collect no more than is appointed you". Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what shall we do?" and he said to them, "Rob no one by force or by false accusation, and be content with your wages" (Luke 3:14). John reproached sinners and struggled against evil in every situation and on every occasion. He reproached Herod the tetrarch himself because of Herodia his brother's wife (when Herod wanted to marry her) and because of all the evil deeds that Herod used to do.

Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan (Luke 3:21-23)

When Jesus was thirty years old, He came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. When Jesus was baptized, He went up immediately from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form as a dove and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son, with Whom I am well pleased". He needed no baptism by John but He was baptized because He emptied Himself and became Son of man who planned the way of Salvation for all human beings.

Christ's fasting and His temptation (Luke 4:1-13)

The Spirit led Jesus for forty days in the wilderness, tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing in those days and when they were ended, He was hungry. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread" and Jesus answered him, "It is written: Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word of God". And the devil took him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to Him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. If you, then, will worship me, it shall all be yours". And Jesus answered him, "It is written: You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve". And he took him to Jerusalem and set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here; for it is written: He will give His angels charge of You, to guard You

and on their hands they will bear You up, lest You strike your foot against a stone". And Jesus answered him, "It is said: You shall not tempt the Lord your God". And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time.

The temptation is the model of struggle against evil (Discussion)

In the first temptation: The devil tempted Jesus by the desire for food when he became hungry. The devil may tempt us by the desires of the flesh (As greediness, pride, hatred and anger). The situation needs struggle for chastity, prayer commitment to the words of God with which man lives... Explain how this can be achieved. The second temptation was the temptation of richness, pride of life and corrupt luxury ...In it man is I enslaved to another god when he tries to attain the greatest benefit through the shortest way and by wrong means such as worshipping the devil. The third temptation was the temptation of the ego and it was an attempt to separate the will from obedience to the heavenly Father... The devil wanted to shake his belief in the truth of God's words and promises and in this way he wanted to lead him to rebellion and disobedience... The means of testing God's promises is through obeying His commandments and not through tempting Him. Discuss St. Paul's commandment to Timothy his disciple and apply it to your life, "But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts... For the love of money is the root of all evil. But you O man of God flee these things. Fight the good fight of faith, lay bold on eternal life..." (I Timothy 6:9-12)

How did the Lord begin His mission then?

He sent John to prepare people's minds for repentance... and to inform them of another baptism that is different from baptism with water. It is the baptism with water and spirit... a fiery baptism that purifies, washes and sanctifies. He made it the beginning of the spiritual way and the beginning of the Christian mission. Through fasting forty days and forty nights, through struggle and prayer, He resisted evil and won victory with spiritual armor (prayer, fasting and the word of God). With Him we begin our mission with baptism, true repentance and struggle against sin.

Activities and Questions

- Study aspects of greatness in the character of John the Baptist
- When is man's ambition dangerous for his spiritual life?
- How can you make both ends meet our need for the food of the flesh and our need for spiritual food?

Exercise

- Make use of prayers and the word of God all the week, add to them fasting on Wednesday and Friday. These are weapons to be used against the devil.
- Stick to them and pray God to strengthen you by them.

Recitation

+ Luke 3:16-23

Fourth Week of January

(22) Christ the Teacher

References

- + “Interpretation of the Sermon on the Mountain” St. Augustine
- + “Those are the happy people” Translated by Naguib Ghali

The Lesson

Aim

A brief summary of Christian dogmas and the way of applying them

The True Teacher

“The Teacher” was one of the titles of the Lord Jesus. When He was a child He used to go to the synagogue. When He was twelve years old He held arguments with the Scribes and Pharisees and they were all astonished at His teaching... When He began His service, He was given the (Holy Bible) Scriptures to read, explain and interpret and grace came out of His mouth and His teachings were not like those of the Scribes and the Pharisees who were teaching things they themselves did not carry out... but He spoke about things He knew. He is the truth and He is the way. He taught with Divine authority and the meek and simple souls were greatly affected by His words. One word out of His pure mouth turned many people... One word broke the stony hearts... One speech of His could turn a sinner into a preacher.

Examples of the sublime teachings of the Lord (Luke 6:20-49)

One day Lord Jesus went up the mountain and His disciples came to Him. The crowds hurried to hear His teachings. He gave His famous Sermon on the Mountain. The following are some of the sublime teachings from that sermon and they show the Christian style of life:

Love Enemies:

- + “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you” (Luke 6:27).
- + “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them” (Luke 6:32).
- + “Love your enemies” is a Christian commandment and your enemy is that who hate you... and Christ teaches you not only to love that who loves you but also to love that who hates you.
- + Repaying love with abuse is a savage action.
- + Repaying love with love is an ordinary human behavior.
- + But repaying abuse with love is Christian behavior resulting from the Spirit of Christ that united with our human nature and made us a new creation.

Tolerance:

- + “To him who strikes you on the cheek; offer the other also” (Luke 6:29).
- + When a man is struck on the face, he tends to take revenge and return the strike but Christ advised us not to return the blow but to receive it on the other cheek... In this way we receive the blow instead of the striker. Let us remember that Christ received the punishment which we deserved because of our sins instead of us.

Good Treatment:

“And as you wish that men do to you, do so to them” (Luke 6:31).

+ This is a golden rule... with it I can carry out the commandments of God in dealing with others... In every situation when I imagine myself in place of others and in their position, it becomes easy for me to find excuses for them when they do wrong and I do with them as I wish that they do with me.

Judge Not:

+ “Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned” (Luke 1 6:37).

+ Judgment is to think of other's sins and to condemn them, which is the most harmful sin... If I am busy thinking of other's sins, I shall not be able to discover my sins and see them and this will expose me to conceit and pride then fall in other sins. Judgment deprives man of the peace of heart.

Take the log out of your own eye:

+ “Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ...First take the log out of your own eye and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye” (Luke 6:41,42).

+ Why do I condemn the smallest mistake that is done by people and neglect my great sins? Correcting others needs correcting oneself first.

The House the foundation of which is laid on Rock

+ “Every one who comes to me and hears my words and does them... is like a man building a house, who dug deep, and laid the foundation upon rock” (Luke 6:48).

+ This teaching shows how the Christian man remains firm in truth and Christ is the rock of all ages and that whoever abides in Him will never be moved.

Law and Grace

+ The teachings of the Lord Jesus brought man above the level of the letter in the Old Testament (We do not serve under the old written code) and raised Him to the perfect level.

+ For example in the Old Testament sin lies in the action of murder but in the new Testament anger is sin... that who hates his brother kills a soul...this is a higher level than the first. The Law of the New Testament raised us from the level of the law to the level of grace and perfection.

Practical teachings, not imaginary teachings

Some people say that this law of perfection cannot be applied in our society in which evil, deceit and cheating prevail but this is not true... Lord Christ revealed the roots of sin to us so His words represent the deep truth... and that who follows Him becomes pure. The Lord Christ commanded us saying: “You shall be holy for I am holy. Be perfect for I am perfect”. He knows that His Commandments are practical and applicable at all times. The Lord did not give us a difficult law and left us alone to carry it out but He gave us Himself as the way and the eternal redemption. He gave us the fellowship of His Holy body and blood and said, “Abide in me, and I in you”. Christianity became practicable and possible through unity with Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit that abides in us. It is He who lives in us and works with His spirit in us... When I give Him my heart and will, He works in me in the Spirit of resurrection so that I may be a son of

light and a son of resurrection... Our teacher St. Paul emphasizes this by saying: "I can do all things through Christ which strengthen me".

Questions

1. What distinguishes the teachings of Christ from the teachings of Scribes and the Pharisees?
2. Which part of the Sermon on the Mountain affected you most? Show how you can apply it in your life.
3. What was the effect of the Lord Jesus Christ's words on the multitude? Write the text.
4. Mention five items in the Lord Jesus' program in your new Christian life.

Problem

1. Someone may ask you this question: Christianity is not practical, as it demands difficult and hard characteristics such as holiness, tolerance and love for the enemies. How will you answer such a question?
2. If you had not given your heart and your mind to Christ, do this now... Go to your Father of Confession and ask him to train you and give you exercises on how to obey the Spirit.

Recitation

+ Luke 6:27.28 or Luke 6:46

Suggested Activities

1. Get "the Sermon on the Mountain" printed and distribute it among the children or distribute some copies of the Gospel without price, between some Christians who have not read that Sermon.
2. Try to apply the teachings of the Sermon on the Mountain in your life for a week and write down the results.

Fifth Week of January

(23) Christ the Life Giver

References

+ "You are Christ the Son of the Living God" Anba Gregory
+ "Christ's titles and work" Anba Bemin

The Lesson

Aim

Christ is the source of life and he grants us I to abide in him.

In The Beginning

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters. And God said, 'Let there be light' and there was light... and on the sixth day God

created Adam the first man out of the dust of the ground... and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life... and man became a living being... In the beginning was the Word... and the Word was God... Jesus Christ... All things were through him... In him was life... (John 1:4)... and the Word took flesh and became man whose name was Jesus and He lived among us. We saw His glory and He proved that He is the life giver through His life history, His miraculous deeds and His great deeds on earth”.

He raises the dead (Luke 8:41-56)

One day a man whose name was Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue came to Christ and fell at his feet asking him to rescue his only daughter who was twelve years old and who was dying... After a short time a messenger came from the ruler’s house and said to Jairus “Your daughter has died, don’t bother the teacher any longer”. But Jesus heard it and said to Jairus “Do not be afraid”. When Jesus arrived at the house, He would not let anyone go in with Him except Peter, John and James and the child’s father and mother. Jesus took her by the hand and called out “Get up my child”. Her life returned and she got up at once and Jesus ordered them to give her something to eat. Her parents were astounded. This was not the only miraculous deed of raising a person from the dead. He raised the widow’s son of Nain when he was carried out. He raised Lazarus from the grave after they had buried him. This happened four days after his death. So what he said came true, “I am the resurrection and the life”.

These miracles and other deeds show that Christ is the life Giver. It is He who breathed the breath of life into Adam. It is He who gave life and resurrection to Jairus’ daughter, the widow’s son and Lazarus through His word. He is the same yesterday and today and forever. He gives eternal life to those who believe in him.

He is the giver of food, flesh and spiritual food

When Jesus was serving in Galilee, He spoke to the people about the Kingdom of God and He healed those who were sick. By the end of the day, He wanted to feed them all and the disciples said, “We have no more than five loaves and two fish”. He took them, blessed and gave them and the miracle took place. It is He who feeds and satisfies every living being... The five thousand ate the five loaves and the two fish and they were all satisfied (Luke 9:10-17).

I am the bread of Life

On the following day, after feeding the multitude, Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life, he who comes to Me shall not hunger and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. I am the bread which came down from heaven... I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live forever and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world, is My flesh... He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:35-54).

With you I live and for you I live

This shows clearly that we live, move and exist through Christ. He is the Life Giver and the food giver... So what is my duty towards Him?

1. I devote all my life to Him. My deeds should be according to His will and good commandments.

2. I must not defile or corrupt this life by sinning.
3. I should believe well so that I may find Christ in my soul and body, as they are His.
4. I gladly serve the Lord Jesus and worship Him in holiness and righteousness all the days of my life.

Discussion

If a non-orthodox Christian asks you and says that there is no need for receiving communion, what will you say in the light of what you know about Christ the Life Giver? How will you clarify to them the importance of receiving the flesh and blood of Christ?

Questions

1. Adam ate the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of good and evil so he died and Jesus came and gave life... How did this happen?
2. Give evidence to prove that the Lord Jesus is the Giver of the Living Flesh.
3. Give evidence to prove that the Lord Jesus brings the dead back to life.
4. "I am the resurrection and the life...he who believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live". Explain.
5. So long as Christ is the Giver of life and food what must I do to Him?

Recitation

+ Luke 8:50

Exercise

Going to confession and receiving the Holy Communion and thanking God for His precious gifts to us.

First Week of February

(24) The Prophet Isaiah

References

- + "The Tormented Servant" St. George Church, Sporting
- + "The Book of Isaiah" St. George Church, Sporting
- + "Christ in all the Books" A. Hodgkin
- + "Christ in Isaiah" F .B. Mayor

The Lesson

Aim

Finding Christ in the prophesies of Isaiah.

Isaiah the Evangelist and the Prophet

Isaiah is one of the great prophets of the Old Testament. He lived 800 years before the coming of Christ but he prophesied of the Messiah, His passions and His kingdom in a very clear way as if he were contemporary with him. Through the spirit of prophecy he revealed a clear picture and

wrote it to the coming generations. Some people, out of their great admiration, call his book “the Gospel of Isaiah”.

In the Palaces of the kings

Isaiah belonged to the family of the kings. He was contemporary with four kings: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. He lived in their palaces for about half a century. He shared in ruling the kingdom as those kings had confidence in him. He called for comprehensive reform when he recognized the afflictions that people suffered especially the poor classes who suffered from social injustice. In the days of Isaiah, the North Kingdom (Israel) fell into the hands of the king of Babylon and its people were captured and sent into exile...and there they spent a difficult time and they expressed their sufferings in this sad hymn: “By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion... On the willows there we hung up our lyres... for there our captors required of us songs, and our tormentors, mirth. How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?” (Psalm 137).

How did he see Christ?

He saw Him through the Spirit of prophecy: First: Incarnate God. Second: A Redeemer who suffered. Third: A king whose kingdom is lasting forever. The following are the images with which Prophet Isaiah expressed what he saw through prophecy:

First: The Messiah the Incarnate God

Isaiah prophesied of the conception of the Messiah and of the Virgin and the birth of Christ and considered this fact the top of all prophecies as we see in Isaiah (Isaiah 7:10-16). Ahaz requested the Lord to rescue him from the Syrians and the Lord told him to seek for a sign but he kept silent and the prophecy of the Messiah was uttered and it was the glory of all the signs and miracles and the prophecy was repeated once more in chapter nine and it emphasized that He is the true light that shines over the whole world (Read Isaiah 9:1-7).

Second: The Messiah, the Redeemer and Sufferer

The true Son of God is coming to redeem the world. Isaiah saw Him as a person sent by God taking the image of a servant and many sufferings and pains will gather upon His head and in His grave (Isaiah 53).

He saw Him bearing the men’s grieves “He has borne our grieves and carried our sorrows” (Isaiah 53:4).

Then he saw Him wounded on the cross, “He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that made us whole and with His stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5).

He saw him as a lamb that bears all our sins “Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth” (Isaiah 53:7).

Although He did not sin, yet He was numbered with transgressors: “He had done no violence and there was no deceit in his mouth” (Isaiah 53:9).

Finally he saw Him when He was sentenced to death in place of sinners: “He poured out His soul to death, and was numbered with transgressors; yet He bore the sins of many and made intercessions for the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:12).

The greatness of this personality is shown in the redemptive work, as through His passions He became a tool for saving men, He made this out of love and redemption. He turned sufferings into a fellowship of love and sacrifice for the others. His passions formed the way for achieving triumph and victory to achieve the blessed goals people hoped for... Our Orthodox church recites the prophecies of Isaiah about the passions of the Savior in her Pasch prayers of the Holy Week showing how these prophecies were fulfilled in Christ’s life and passions in the Holy Week.

Third: The Messiah the Spiritual King (Isaiah 11)

He saw Christ, the Son of David as a strong wise king ruling over the peoples of the world: “There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse... and the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him... the Spirit of Counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord” (Isaiah 11:1).

A kingdom where justice prevails: “With righteousness He shall judge the poor and decide with equity for the meek of the earth” (Isaiah 11:4).

A kingdom where peace prevails: “The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid and the calf and the lion and the fatling together and a little child shall lead them” (Isaiah 11:6).

He saw security and peace fill all the hearts: “The sucking child shall play over the hole of the serpent and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder’s den.” (Isaiah 11:8).

The knowledge of God fills the hearts with holiness so the bad and corrupt things of society will disappear “They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9). All these prophecies were achieved in the spiritual kingdom of Christ, which He established on earth and in the hearts of the believers:

- a) King: “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth” (John 18:37).
- b) A spiritual kingdom not worldly kingdom: “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36).
- c) A kingdom of peace, security and eternal joy “Righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17).
- d) A chosen and holy nation: “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” (I Peter 2:9).

Questions and Discussions

1. Compare the following verses to find out how the prophecies of Isaiah were fulfilled.

The Prophecy	Its fulfillment
Isaiah 7:14	Matthew 1:23

Isaiah 42:1-4	Matthew 12:18
Isaiah 53:4	Matthew 8:17
Isaiah 53:5	1 Peter 2:24
Isaiah 53:10 2	Corinthians 5:21
Isaiah 53:12	Hebrews 7:25
Isaiah 61:1	Luke 4:18-21

2. a) What is meant by the kingdom of Christ and who are the children of this kingdom?
b) Isaiah saw with his eyes all the kingdoms of the world, the luxury and joys of the kings. He also saw the sufferings of the meek and the poor people then he saw in the Spirit of prophecy the kingdom of Christ and the passions He suffered for the people and to grant men happiness. Explain this statement and clarify the comparison mentioned.
3. St. Paul the apostle, in his epistle to the Hebrews said the following about the passions of Christ: “For because He himself has suffered and been tempted, He is able to help those who are tempted” (Hebrews 2:18). Jesus endured the physical, psychological and spiritual passions and bore Himself all the sufferings which man should have endured to share man his sufferings. Show how you can benefit spiritually in your life from this divine fellowship to enjoy peace and happiness amid situations of severe afflictions.

Recitation

“We suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him” (Romans 8:17), or “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; He has sent Me to bind up the broken hearted” (Isaiah 61:1-3).

Prayer: Open the Holy Bible and read Isaiah chapter 53. You will find that it is full of prophecies of the passions of our Lord Christ. Thank God for these passions, which bring life to us. Pray with the church the prayer of the sixth hour and the ninth hour and say, “You who on the sixth day and at 6 hour were nailed to the cross because of the sin that Adam our father committed, cancel the bond of our sins O Christ our Lord... With the nails with which you were nailed, save our souls from the silly works of the flesh... to remember Your heavenly judgment according to your mercy”.

Review Questions for Unit 4

Q1: What is the work of a prophet? Why did God send the prophets? Give examples.

Answer 1:

1. To lead the people and organize their life (Moses and Joshua).
2. Calling for repentance (Nathan and David -Isaiah call the people).
3. To bring the good news of the coming of the Savior and to prepare the people to receive the Savior (John the Baptist).

Q2: How did the Lord call Isaiah to be a prophet?

Answer 2:

Isaiah saw a wonderful vision... He saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the angels shouting “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts... the whole earth is full of His glory”.

And Isaiah said, “Woe is to me for I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, for my eyes have seen the king the Lord of hosts” (Isaiah 6:5). Then one of the angels flew to him having in his hand a burning coal, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched his mouth and he sent him to call the people to go back to the Lord after his guilt was taken away and his sin forgiven.

Q3: Summarize Isaiah’s message to the people.

Answer 3:

Examples: The people’s repentance (Isaiah 1:16-20), the rulers’ justice, prayer in time of afflictions and wars (Isaiah 55:6).

Q4: How did Isaiah prophecy of Christ?

Answer 4:

His birth: Isaiah 7- His passions Isaiah 53 -His kingdom Isaiah 11.

Second Week of February

(25) Prophet Jonah and Salvation

References

- + “Contemplations on the Book of Jonah” Pope Shenouda III
- + “The Book of Jonah” Matthew Henry

The Lesson

Aim

God makes use of everything and all things for the salvation of man.

Introduction

A long time elapsed during which men kept away from God and people committed so many sins that they forgot themselves and forgot God their Lord but God did not forget them at all. He was always near them because He desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. It was not possible for God to come closer to men in a direct way as men invented gods for themselves and their idea about God was deformed so the Lord sent prophets to the children of Israel whom He had chosen to send to the other nations to let them know His holy name. He did not choose them out of prejudice, far be it from God, but He chose them because they were the seed of Abraham who believed in Him and blessed His name. God expected many good things of this people but sorry to say even those people who tasted many tidings worshipped the idols and the people and their prophets needed the Savior.

God never stops work

When man’s sufferings increased and people kept away from God, the Lord insisted on saving

them. His love for them remained strong and the Lord's hand was always ready to save them.

God saves Jonah

This prophet was characterized by fanaticism, stubbornness and faith heartedness. Like all other people he fled from the Lord when he heard His voice. This reminds us of the verse; "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself" (Genesis 3:10). As a prophet of the Jews, he was supposed to be better than others in obeying the commandments of God but if this is the case of the head what will be the case of the other members. Jonah thought that there would be peace for him in Tarshish or at the bottom of the ship although he knew that the Lord fills every place and although he read David's psalm: "Whither shall I go from Your Spirit?" (Psalm 139:7).

How the Lord Saved Jonah

The Lord made use of:

1. Discomfort: the rough sea, the destruction of the gourd (God insisted on fulfilling the message).
2. Tenderness: God was merciful to Jonah when He saved his life and taught him through practical educational examples (such as: the gourd -helping him to complete his mission and finally reproaching him gently).
3. The solid nature: The lesson was for Jonah in:
 - a. Obedience: The storm obeyed the Lord and carried out His purpose and the whale as a ship to carry Jonah to the appointed place and the worm is ordered to devour the tree.
 - b. Ability and Power of God: God is able to do everything and all things obey Him but man is free to obey or disobey.

God saves the sailors

The Gentile sailors were better than the prophet who escaped:

1. They prayed to their gods.
2. They prayed with the spirit of fellowship.
3. They believed that the calamity was because of the sin of one of them.
4. They asked Jonah to pray to his God so they were not fanatic.
5. They had a sensitive conscience. They only made sure that Jonah deserved death but they refused to carry out the sentence even after drawing lots.
6. They prayed for forgiveness before they threw him into the sea: "Lay not on us innocent blood".
7. In this way justice and mercy filled their hearts.
8. They believed in the miraculous power of God.

God saves Nineveh

At last the Lord found the man who would go to Nineveh. He was kind to them as a father who loves his children. The Lord could have punished and frightened them but He was also ready to turn from His anger. Jonah refused to go to those evil people but the Lord accepted their repentance. The Lord was patient with them. Although they were pagans and sinners, the Lord did not abandon them. The Lord does not abandon His children no matter how sinful they are. Theirs was true repentance. They were afraid and cried to the Lord and believed in what Jonah

said. The anointed king covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. All the people fasted and humiliated themselves, even animals. The Lord accepts true repentance and the contrite and submissive hearts.

Jonah is a symbol of Christ

God sent Jonah to the people of Nineveh so that they might repent and be saved. In the same way the Lord, out of love, chose to be incarnated and become man to die for the world then rise from the dead to grant salvation to those who believe in Him. Throwing Jonah into the sea saved all the sailors of the ship from certain death. In the same way the death of Christ on the cross caused the Salvation of those who believed in Him and saved them from eternal death. Jonah remained inside the belly of the whale three days and three nights then he went out and was alive. In the same way, Christ was buried three days and three nights in the tomb then He rose up from the dead. He was alive and granted us the eternal life. In Jonah's prayer we find a clear expression of his success in the test of death and rebirth: "Out of the belly of Sheol I cried... I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet You did bring up my life from the Pit... O Lord my God" (Jonah 2:2-6). Compare this to the death of the Lord Christ and His resurrection as He says to His disciples: "The Son of man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, and deliver Him to the Gentiles... and after three days He will rise" (Mark 10:33,34).

Questions and Discussions

1. How is Jonah's life a symbol of the death and the resurrection of the Lord?
2. After we had learned the life of the prophets of God, we saw Christ represented in the life and words of each one of them. Explain this referring to what you studied about: David, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Jonah.
3. What is your opinion of casting lots in our life? (The Spirit abides in us and we do not seek any sign from outside).
4. "The Lord has chastened me sorely, but He has not given me over to death" Apply this verse to the story of Jonah.
5. Mention some situations in the life of the holy men of God with whom God used severe punishments so that they might be saved.
6. Mention some situations in which the Lord was merciful to and patient with men.

Exercises

1. Resist despair so that you may proceed and correct your way of life.
2. Pray the Lord to receive our life and correct it as He likes.
3. Quick obedience that results from the heart to all that the Lord commands us to do having confidence that He is the Loving Father who desires the Salvation of the souls of men.

Third Week of February

(26) Ezekiel the Prophet of Renewal and Unity

References

- + “Ezekiel” Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty
- + “Ezekiel the Prophet” Fr. Bishoy Abdel Messeeh

The Lesson

Aim

The new life in the prophecy of Ezekiel

The defeat of Jerusalem before the Babylonians

In about 597 BC the Babylonians came under the leadership of Nebuchadnezzar and besieged Jerusalem. Jerusalem's king, Jehoiachin, surrendered and the Babylonians looted the city and took with them Jehoiachin and all the strong men as captives and sent them into exile in Babylon as the Scriptures say: “Nebuchadnezzar carried away all Jerusalem and all the princes, and all the mighty men of valor, ten thousand captives and all the craftsmen and the smiths; none remained, except the poorest people of the land”.

Ezekiel the Prophet

In those days there was a great prophet whose name was Ezekiel. He prophesied of the Exile before it took place but the people did not listen to him and were not wise in what they did. Ezekiel was taken captive to Babylon and there he prophesied about what would happen in the future. The people went to him and asked about the time of salvation and rescue from that affliction and Ezekiel prophesied saying: “The hand of the Lord was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley; it was full of bones. He said to me, “Can these bones live?” And I answered, “O Lord God, You know”. Again He said to me, “Prophecy to these bones. I will cause breath to enter you and you shall live”. So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied there was a noise... and behold a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to its bone. And as I looked there were sinews on them and flesh had come upon them and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them... Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath and breathe upon these slain that they may live and the breath came into them and they lived and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great host” (Ezekiel 37:1-10).

This prophecy had a direct meaning (which was near) and a spiritual meaning. The direct meaning indicates the historical events, which took place fifty years after this prophecy when Cyrus King of Persia gave an order that the Jews would return to Jerusalem from exile and rebuild the temple (Ezra 1:1-4). But the remote spiritual meaning is what Ezekiel prophesied about the work of the Holy Spirit and the New Life which is given to men: “When we were dead through out trespasses, made us alive together with Christ” (Ephesians 2:5).

The Work of the Holy Spirit

1. The Gift of the New Life: We can imagine human beings before Christ. They were sentenced to death because of sins. That was the wide valley which was full of the bones of the dead then Christ the Hope of Gentiles, came and His light shone on those sitting in the valley of darkness and shadows of death and the voice says, “O you who are still asleep, get up rise from the dead and Christ will send light for you. The soul that believes will pass from death to life and will rise

with Christ and take, with the help of the Holy Spirit, the gift of the new life... and on the day of Pentecost, there was a sound which came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind and the Holy Spirit rested on the early church and all the people were filled with Spiritual power... gifts and miracles according to what the Holy Spirit gave them and the new man who rose with Christ began to live his new life with the Holy Spirit: “We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4). In this way the rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit saved us (Titus 3:5).

2. *The Source of Unity*: Ezekiel prophesied of the Unity of the church in which the Spirit of the Lord works. “Come from the four winds O breath and breathe upon these slain that they may live”. The breathing of the Spirit from the four parts of the world indicates the one church in the whole world which is led and guided by the Spirit of the Lord in the holy unity of all believers as the Lord Jesus desires so that all believers as the Lord Jesus desires so that all may become one (John 17:21), a new heart and right spirit. St. Augustine said contemplate in this saying, “Come with all your sins and with all your faults, come with your heart, with your spiritual desires and in secret take off the works of darkness, take off the sins of humanity...the moment you do this the Spirit renews your senses which have been corrupted by iniquities and sins. In this way our souls will be holy temples for God and the Spirit of God abides in us... Ezekiel the Prophet wrote: Thus says the Lord... I will sprinkle clean water upon you and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my ordinances” (Ezekiel 36:25-27).

Prayer: O Holy Lord of Heaven. You spoke through the prophets of olden times about your work in the Salvation of our souls. We thank you as you made us your children. You offered us the Second birth in baptism and granted us the new life through your Holy Spirit. Do not allow us to sadden your heart. Keep us firm in You and keep Your church in the unity of spirit.

Review Question

How did the Lord call Ezekiel to serve Him and what message did He give him?

Answer

The Lord appeared to Ezekiel in a heavenly vision so he fell upon his face and the Lord said to him, “Son of man, stand upon your feet, and I will speak with you” (Ezekiel 2:1). This encouraged Ezekiel and the Lord gave him a message to call the captured to repent and ordered him to deliver that message.

Fourth Week of February

(27) The Prophets of the Messiah: Prophet Daniel

References

+ “Daniel the friend of angels” Fr. Bishoy Kamel

+ “The Life of Daniel and his prophecy” Fr. Abdel Messeeh

The Lesson

Aim

The Character of the Coming Christ in the Book of Daniel

Introduction

We see in King David a model indicating a greater king, i.e. the Messiah. He rules over all the world and his kingdom is endless according to the promises given from God and the prophecies uttered in the psalms. After him came prophet Isaiah and through the spirit of prophecy he revealed the personality of the coming Christ and His kingdom, which He would establish. But it was a spiritual kingdom not of this world. Here we meet with Daniel to whom Heaven revealed many secrets through visions and he saw the great events in the life of the Son of man and he prophesied of His coming and the kingdom of saints as he saw it in his vision.

The Son of Man in Daniel’s Vision

Daniel saw a dream (Daniel chapter 7). “I saw four great beasts come out of the sea... The first was like a lion and had eagles wings... a second one like a bear... it had three ribs in its mouth... the third was like a leopard with four wings of a bird... the fourth beast had ten horns”. It was strange that one of these horns spoke great things and fought the children of God and strongly smote the three other beasts. “As I looked thrones were placed and one that was ancient of days took his seat. His raiment was white as snow... his throne was fiery flames... a thousand thousands served him and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man... and to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him... his dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed”.

The Saints and the kingdom

Here Daniel began to understand the interpretation of this vision. One of those standing began to explain: “These four great beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth... The fourth beast will defeat them all. Then he shall fight the saints of God, despise them and boast... then his dominion shall be taken away and the kingdom shall be given to the people of the saints to the Most High... and the Son of man will rule over them... His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and all dominions shall serve and obey him”.

This explanation clarifies the vision to us and gives us its spiritual meaning as follows: The son of man who Daniel saw is Jesus Christ who took to Himself the title of the “Son of man”. This means that Daniel prophesied of His coming down from heaven, His incarnation and becoming man for us, the people and for our salvation. Daniel here reveals the symbols of the Holy Trinity the One God so we see: The Father (the ancient of days), the Son (the Son of man) and the Holy Spirit (a river of fire running and coming out from the Father). The saints whom Daniel saw in his vision are the Christians who believed in the Incarnate God and accepted Him and He gave them dominion to become children of God and made them children of the kingdom of God.

Those saints are from the kingdom of Christ, which begins and is established here on earth. This kingdom is the struggling church which includes a society whose life is characterized by holiness as they made Christ their king; the king of their life and their hearts. They obey the commandments of God and their holy hearts glorify Him. This kingdom extends to heaven which represents the triumphant church represented in the heavenly glories where the righteous inherit the kingdom prepared for them before the establishment of the world and they will attain the crowns of righteousness.

Daniel revealed the fight between the world and the children of God and how the world prevails and succeeds for a limited time (The fourth kingdom refers to the Roman Empire which was in existence when Christ came and how the Romans fought the believers and persecuted them severely). But the king of kings wins victory. He went out conquering and to conquer and to give His people triumph and victory. In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us (Romans 8:37).

Seventy Weeks!

Gabriel the angel appeared to Daniel and said to him “I have come to tell you because the Lord loves you... After seventy weeks (70 x 70 which means in the fullness of time... as 7 is a complete number) Christ the Holy of holies will appear and He shall make a strong covenant with many...and He shall cause sacrifice and offering to cease” (Daniel 9:20-27).

Activities

Choose from the Second group what responds to the first group and completes the meaning:

First Group

The Son of man whom Daniel saw is

The four beasts stand for

The beast which fights the children is

The horn which spoke great things against God stand for

The saints of the Most High to whom the kingdom is given are

Second Group

Four kings that will rule over the world

The rulers who falsely accused the innocent Christians

The Christians who believe in Christ the Son of God

The Lord Jesus in His incarnation and becoming man

The Roman Empire which persecuted Christianity

Questions

1. How did David, Isaiah and Daniel inform us of the Messiah?
2. Do all Christians have to be saints? How?
3. Why is Christ given the title of “Son of man”?

A verse to study: Daniel 7:13,14

Instructions

Let us be cautious of those who interpret the prophecies of Daniel in a way that may make people believe that Christ will come on a certain day or that Israel in her present political

circumstances is the outcome of ancient prophecies... as Christ will come on a day unknown to us and the present Israel has no connection with God.

Review Question

“Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the Lord delivers him out of them all” (Psalm 34:19). Explain this in the light of what you studied in the Book of Daniel.

Answer

1. Daniel’s interpretation of the king’s dream... caused him to find favor with the king and grace in his eyes.
2. The three young men and the blazing furnace.
3. Daniel in the den of the lions.

Review Questions for the Fourth Unit

God Sends His Prophets

1. St. Basil’s Liturgy says, “You did not leave us forever but You always sent Your holy prophets to us and in the last days You appeared to us, we who are sitting in darkness and the shadows of death”. What is this message of the prophets?
2. What were the circumstances in which God sent Prophet Isaiah? How did He call him? What was Isaiah’s attitude towards the rulers? What are the most important prophecies he said about the life of Lord Christ?
3. Write some of the verses you were affected by from the Book of Isaiah and show how you can benefit from them in your personal life.
4. How was Prophet Ezekiel called? What was his message? What did you learn from Prophet Ezekiel for your spiritual life? What are the most important prophecies uttered by Ezekiel about the Lord God?
5. Write notes on: The life of Prophet Daniel...Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and its interpretation.
6. Why were the three young men thrown into the blazing furnace? How did the Lord save Daniel from the lions’ den?
7. What are the prophecies uttered by each of the following prophets: Isaiah, David, Daniel, and Micah about the coming of the Lord Jesus and His life?
8. The Christian man bears witness to truth in his life and he is not afraid of any affliction. Apply this verse to the life of Daniel and the three young men.
9. Why is prophet Isaiah called the Evangelist Prophet? Give evidence.
10. What benefit did you derive for your spiritual life from the life of Prophet Daniel?

First Week of March

(28) I fast and Pray as Christ did

References

- + “The Paradise of the spirit” Part 2, Anba Youannis
- + “The Lent” Anba Bemin
- + “The life of prayer” Fr. Matta Al Misskin

The Lesson

Aim

Sound spiritual practice of the acceptable fasting

What does fasting mean?

Fasting is remaining without food for a period of time then the fasting eats meager food. It is not a commandment for weakening the body but it is an exercise for refreshing the soul and testing it to grow in grace and in the knowledge of God.

The position of fasting in the spiritual life

Fasting has an important position in the spiritual life: There are many examples, in the Old Testament, of the men of God who fasted and did great works. Moses fasted forty days before he spoke to God. Daniel was fasting when the Angel Gabriel appeared to him. Nehemiah fasted when he heard of the sad news about Jerusalem. David was a man of fasting. He said, “I afflicted myself with fasting”. Isaiah spoke about fasting (Isaiah 58:3-12) and king Jehoshaphat called all the people to fast (2 Chronicles 20:3).

In the New Testament, the Lord Jesus Himself fasted till He felt hungry. The Lord spoke about fasting in His Sermon on the Mountain (Mathew 6:16-18). He also spoke about the importance of fasting when He said about the Devil “This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer and fasting” (Mark 9:29). In “The Acts of the Apostles” we read about fasting in the church of the apostles (Acts 13:3,4) and (I Corinthians 7:5). The church fathers also wrote about fasting in their writings and rules, which reached us. The history of the Orthodox Church bears witness to the fact that the believers respected public fasting that have been established since the times of the early church such as Lent, fasting on Wednesday and Friday and many monks and ascetics practiced this Christian virtue.

How the Lord Christ fasted and prayed?

After Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan, He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And He fasted forty days and forty nights and afterwards He was hungry and the devil came and tempted Him three times but the Lord quoted verses from the Scriptures to answer him with. He gave us a practical example of how man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Mathew 4:2-11). The Lord’s fasting was accompanied by prayer and spiritual struggle. In the same way we fast and pray with Him and through Him. May our fasting and prayer be acceptable before the Lord.

Fasting is a wonderful rite in the church that goes side by side with receiving the Holy Communion. Fasting precedes every communion and receiving the Holy Communion follows every fasting. So the church connects our worship of fasting and prayers and unites them with the Divine Sacrifice of the Lord which is His Body and Blood so that it may be acceptable before Him and without blame.

How to fast correctly?

Fasting and Spiritual Growth: Fasting is an exercise to humiliate the desires of the flesh and not an exercise to weaken the body itself. In our physical nature there is a bad tendency which we inherited from Adam and Eve and St. Paul expressed it by saying; “For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other; so that you cannot do the things that you would” (Galatians 5; 17). In another place he says: “O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death” (Romans 7:24). St. Isaac the Syrian says: “Every struggle against sin and its lusts must begin with fasting especially when the struggle is because of an internal sin. Resisting the desires of the flesh does not mean that we should weaken the body and moderation in fasting is necessary so that physical and spiritual health may not be affected. Abstaining from food should go side by side with internal spiritual growth. This means that physical fasting is connected with the godliness of the heart, the soul’s fasting and the purity of the flesh. In this, one of the saints said, “If we are fasting only in the sense of abstaining from food while we are still bound to sin and iniquities, submission of the body will not benefit us so long as the most precious part of us is defiled. So as the outer man fasts, the inner man must also be controlled and be kept away from harmful food as acceptable fasting should be genuine, without evil, insincerity, grudge, hatred or defilement of body and soul”.

Inseparableness of fasting and prayer: The saints likened fasting to a stronghold and prayer to a weapon with which man fights inside the stronghold... St. Augustine said, “In the Temple built by Solomon, there were two altars, on the outer altar, burnt offerings are offered and on the inside altar the incense offerings were offered. The same is true with the temple of Spirit which is man where there must be two altars; the inside one which is the heart where he offers the incense of prayers and their aroma and an outer altar where the body is offered as an offering through fasting and types of abstemiousness and devoutness”.

Inseparableness of fasting and contemplation: It is necessary for spiritual life to feed on contemplations during fasting. The church sets fasting on important occasions so we must connect fasting with contemplation and remember the occasions of fasting. During the holy Lent we remember our Lord, the Holy righteous Lord when He fasted. On Wednesday we remember the plans of the chief priests to kill Him. Ask yourself then “Do I betray Him and how much shall I receive to betray Him?” Remember that you betray Him when you sin... So during each fasting raise your heart to God in the spirit of contemplation to attain spiritual power during fasting. You can get benefit also through reading the Holy Bible and the spiritual books with the spirit of discipleship, prayer and obedience of the commandments.

Inseparableness of fasting and almsgiving: Fasting is usually accompanied by works of love and mercy, so in his hunger, the fasting man shares the poor and the needy and spends what he has saved of the expenses of his food and other things on his needy brethren... Isaiah emphasizes this fact by saying: “Is not this the fast that I choose... Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house? When you see the naked, to cover him and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?” (Isaiah 58:6,7). Note the Lent hymn: Blessed are those who are kind to the poor....

Questions

1. If a young man who does not fast asks you “Why do you fast?” What will you say to him?
2. Of what benefit is fasting for your private inner and outer life?
3. What are the conditions of the acceptable fasting before God?
4. Why do the church and the Holy Bible emphasize the inseparableness of fasting and prayer?

Exercise

Practice fasting with reverence, prayer, contemplation and reading the Holy Bible.

Discussion

A young man may face a problem, i.e. the family sometimes does not allow him to fast as they believe this would keep him healthy and the suggested cure is the following:

1. He must test himself as his life may not be straight and his behavior may be a stumbling block in the eyes of the family.
2. He must discuss the matter with his father of confession and follow his advice concerning the period he appoints for fasting and if there are any health reasons a doctor should be consulted.
3. He should discuss the matter with his family and explain the importance of fasting and the importance of obeying the commandments of Christ and the church order.
4. He should seek the priest’s advice when necessary and the priest will help him to convince the family to allow him to fast. He could also pray so that the Lord may soften their hearts and allow him to fast.

Second Week of March

(29) Lent in the Church

References

- + “The Treasures of Grace” Part 4, Banoub Abdu
- + “Spiritual fasting” Anba Bemin
- + “Lent” Anba Bemin
- + “Lent” The Virgin Church, Fagala

The Lesson

Aim

A spiritual journey with the church rites that will carry us to the light of resurrection

Moses on the Mountain

When God desired to give the Law and the Commandments to the children of Israel He ordered Moses and the people to be prepared and asked Moses alone to go up the mountain and the Lord

descended in the cloud and the mountain was filled with smoke, fire, mist, tempest and the storm and the voice of a horn. The scene was so frightening that Moses said, “I am trembling and afraid” (Hebrews 12: 18-21). Moses fasted forty days and forty nights without food or water and after this preparedness the Lord gave him the two tablets of the Covenant which contained the ten commandments: “When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hand as he came down from the mountain. Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. And when Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him” (Exodus 34:29-30).

Jesus on the Mountain

When our Lord Jesus Christ came to give us the Law of perfection He fasted forty days and forty nights on the mountain. He struggled, prayed and triumphed on all the temptations of the devil. After completing his struggle He started His service and chose the twelve disciples and fulfilled His wonderful Divine plan.

We fast with Him to conquer with Him

1. The days of Lent are days of a blessed journey with the Lord in which we share with Him His struggle, His passions and His victory. The texts read in the church during lent start with the Temptation on the mountain showing how the Lord struggled with the devil and how He conquered him. We fast in the same way as Christ did and conquer the evil powers as our great victory is achieved through Christ who loved us.
2. During Lent many daily prayers are raised and daily masses are performed starting in the morning and ending in the afternoon accompanied by kneeling and bowing in worship. This indicates that the believer offers his senses and thoughts as an offering to the Lord God. We should fast without food for a long period according to our ability.
3. During fasting people are interested in the works of repentance. They repent, confess, and receive the Holy Communion with contrition and godliness. The texts read during the Lent about repentance and coming back to God cover the Lent weeks (the story of the Prodigal Son and the Samaritan woman).
4. Believers are used to baptizing those who have not been baptized and baptizing is performed on Sunday that precedes Palm Sunday which is known by Sunday of Baptism. On that day those baptized lead a new life with Christ (the Gospel of the healing of the blind man is read: I was blind and now I see).
5. In it the unction of the sick is performed in each house and for all people for attaining complete recovery of the physical and spiritual diseases by the end of the lent (The last week of fasting) and this sacrament (Al Kandeel) is performed in the church and all people are anointed with the holy oil.
6. Then comes Palm Sunday. On that day we celebrate the king’s triumphant entry into Jerusalem, which is a sign of entering the kingdom of God and the entry of the true believers with Him into the New Kingdom.
7. Then men’s feet are washed on Maundy Thursday as a sign of the necessity of helping people to repent and washing out their sins through confession, and all the people then share the Lord’s meal in memory of the Lord’s supper in which unity between the believer and Christ is performed through Christ’s body and blood given for us in the New Covenant as a sign of redemption and love.

8. In the holy week we fast with more asceticism and spend our time in the church in worship and prayer and we read whole books from the Holy Bible.
9. The people keep awake on the night of the Holy Saturday .They spend the whole night in the church reading the whole Book of Revelation as if they were enjoying the heavenly glories with the triumphant Christ.
10. By the end of that day we celebrate the appearance of resurrection light and the resurrection of Lord Jesus from the dead which dispersed the darkness of sin and gave light to life and eternity.

Questions

1. Why did Christ fast forty days? How did he conquer the devil?
2. Why do we fast the Lent?
3. What is the relation between fasting and keeping away from sin and between fasting and almsgiving?
4. What are the works that the church is interested in during the Lent?
5. Why does the church connect fasting specially the Lent with solemn assembly, seclusion, asceticism, kneeling in worship and calmness?
6. Why does the church consider Lent and fasting Wednesday and Friday as fasting of first degree?

Prayer: Fasting and prayer raised Elijah to heaven and saved Daniel from the lions' den. Moses performed Fasting and prayer so he was given the Law and the Commandments written by the Finger of God. The people of Nineveh kept Fasting and prayers and the Lord showed mercy to them and forgave them their sins and turned away His anger from them. Fasting and prayer helped the apostles to go and make disciples of all the nations and turn them into Christians and to baptize them in the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. The martyrs who sacrificed their blood for the Name of Christ who declared the good profession before Pontius Pilate kept Fasting and prayer. Fasting and prayer were kept by the righteous and the pious and the wearers of the cross who dwelt in mountains and wilderness and cracks in the earth for their great love for the King Christ. O Lord grant me to fast and pray as these saints so that the offering of my life may be acceptable to you.

Exercise

Practicing the Lent with worship and prayer, repentance and reading the Bible and going to confession to practice repentance.

Third Week of March

(30) O Lord: Forgive me

References

- + "The Garden of the Soul" Part I, Anba Youannis
- + "A Guide to Confession" Anba Bemin
- + "Turn me My God and I shall be Turned" Fr. Youssef Assaad
- + Many books about Saints who repented

The Lesson

Aim

Repentance as a practical technique and the problems of practice

Kind Bosom

When the Lord Jesus desired to show the love of God for the sinner, he gave the parable of the Prodigal Son who deserted his father's house and went to a far country and there he spent his money --- foolishly and led a life of corruption and extravagance. At last he became needy and he repented and decided to return to his father's house. He, at once rose and went to his father who was waiting for him stretching out his hands to receive him. He kissed him and gave him the best garment and slaughtered the fat calf for him. All these things show us how God's love is great enough to receive any sinner who repents and go back to God.

How to repent

1. ***The First step*** in the way of repentance is to test yourself. Sit with yourself and think of the things you did in the same way the Prodigal son did so that you may know your sins and points of weakness. In this regard, St. John Chrysostom says "Test yourself. If you remember your sin God will not remember it and if you forget it, God will not forget it".
2. ***The Second Step*** is to repent what you have done. The son repented leaving his father's house and his heart was broken. We cannot repent unless our hearts become sorry for what we did. We should be confident of God's love and be sure that He will accept us. We should never fall into despair.
3. ***The Third Step*** is to adopt an attitude against sin. Repentance does not mean that I should repent what I did only but it indicates a positive movement towards the Father. What would have been the benefit if the Prodigal son had sat in his place without doing anything? He rose, walked and went to his father's house. In the same way, we have to rise and pray and seek God's help to grant us the power so that we may not sin again. We should give signs of repentance to the Lord as when we say "sorry" to those whom we offend or as we get rid of a bad picture in our library... and so on.
4. ***The Fourth Step*** is going to confession. This is a necessary step as he who sins, sins against the Lord who is the Head of the church and against the church which is the Body of Christ. We should bear in mind that each believer is a member of that Body. That is why our Teacher James says to us, "Confess your sins to one another" (James 5:16). In the past, believers used to confess their sins in public in the church but the church saw that it was better for the believers to confess in secret to the priest.

Is it necessary to confess to the Priest?

Yes, we must confess our sins to our Priest. This Priest should be our spiritual guide and the most important reasons are:

1. The priest receives his authority from God who forgives our sins. He receives that authority through the Sacrament of the Holy Orders. The Lord said to His disciples, "Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Mathew 18:18). After His resurrection He confirmed that sacrament when He breathed in their

faces saying: “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (John 20:22,23). The priest makes me ashamed of myself when I repeat my confession of the same sin in my confession and it is of benefit for the soul to be ashamed and fear the guide, so that the soul in this case tends to fear God only. Pride may lead man to refuse to confess his sins to the Priest.

What are the sins that we should confess?

“Sin is lawlessness. Sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4) and it is written that the wages of sin is death. Sin may be in the form of action, saying or thinking. The more man proceeds spiritually, the more he discovers his wrong doings. At the beginning of the road he discovers the apparent sins such as insulting people, calling them names, swearing, theft and telling lies but when he makes progress, he discovers selfishness, stinginess, self-love, grudge, hatred etc. (John 3:14-20). We must examine ourselves well before confession to discover our sins as this is one of the signs of our spiritual progress. The real death is when we think that we are saints that are not in need of the Savior or when we are desperate of the mercies of God.

The Prayer of Repentance

O righteous Lord... I know my weakness and the silliness of my mind but I give myself to your grace I that is able to save me and with complete trust and confidence I leave myself between your hands and I am sure of your power and ability to keep me safe till that day. Bless me and grant me your grace till your Son comes. Glory and Honor be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit forever and ever, Amen.

A Test to examine yourself: Ask yourself the following questions and answer them honestly:

Pride: Are you proud of yourself or of your deeds? Do you despise others? Do you condemn others and judge them?

Selfishness: Do you harden your heart and show no mercy to your brothers? Do you prefer yourself to your brothers in choosing the best things? Do you refuse to help others and serve them with pleasure?

Grudge: Do you feel sorry when others succeed? Do you feel happy when evil befalls one of your relatives? Do you think of taking revenge when anyone offends you?

Hatred: Do you refuse to forgive others and reconcile with them? Do you say bad words about others? Do you put the seeds of hatred between friends?

Laziness: Do you do your homework and studies honestly? Do you neglect prayers or spiritual exercises? Do you eat much or sleep for a long time?

Disobedience: Do you refuse to respect or obey your parents? Do you lie to them or cause sadness to them? Do you refuse to eat with them?

Dishonesty: Do you cheat in exams? Do you evade paying the price to the shop assistant or to the conductor? Do you take other's belongings in secret?

Questions

1. What is sin? To what extent is it dangerous?
2. What are the steps of true repentance?
3. Why should we confess to our priest?

A Problem and a Solution

I am ashamed of confessing my sins to the priest? What shall I do? If you are not ashamed of yourself when you sinned before God you have to be ashamed before the priest during confession. It is of a great benefit to recognize the dirtiness of sin. This painful feeling should motivate you to go back to God. Remember that you do not confess your sins to man but to God.

Recitation

Psalm 51, Luke 15:18,19 or I John 1:28,2:3

Exercise

- + Examine yourself and be prepared for repentance then go to confession in the church.
- + Encourage your colleagues to go to confession and to repent. Then receive the Holy Communion.
- + Study the life history of the saints who repented to follow their example.

Fourth Week of March

Review Questions for the Fifth Unit

Some behavioral Values

References

- + “Christianity and the positive behavior” Dr. Seliman Nesseem

The Lesson

Aim

Man should be acquainted with the practical Christian behavior.

Questions

Q1: The Lord commanded that people should live in cooperative groups and keep away from selfishness and isolation. Give examples.

Answer 1:

- God created Eve to help Adam.
- Human societies were formed on the basis of cooperation among individuals.
- Christ chose His disciples and lived with them among the crowds healing patients, teaching people and comforting those in grief and He sent them to do the same thing with other societies.
- The church lived the life of fellowship. The believers sold their properties and gave the money to the poor and the needy.

Q2: Personal freedom does not contradict with commitment to laws and obedience. Explain this statement.

Answer 2:

God created man and gave him freedom yet we find that men of God obey the commandments of the Lord so that they may attain the blessings of heaven. Let us take Abraham as example -when he obeyed God, he went out of his country. Isaac also did the same when he accepted to be offered as a sacrifice. And Joseph when he obeyed his father and went out to serve his brothers.

Q3: Money is responsibility and trust. Show how a Christian man uses money soundly.

Answer 3:

God gave Adam all the good things of the earth and Abraham was very rich and that was a blessing from God. Christ advised us to serve God not money and that money should be a servant not a master (Nobody can serve two masters) -money is a talent and man is punished if he does not use it in doing good things and the Lord ordered us to bring the full tithes into the storehouse: “Bring the full tithes into the Storehouse, that there may be food in my house; and thereby put me to the test, said the Lord of hosts” (Malachi 3:10) and “God loves a cheerful giver”.

Q4: “Bad company ruins good morals” and vice versa: Give examples.

Answer 4:

The three young men cooperated to stand firm in grace and in the life of virtue and insisted on worshipping God. The prodigal son lived with bad company and lost everything. The psalm says, “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers”.

Q5: Show the responsibilities and the duties that man should shoulder towards himself, his family, his society and towards God.

Answer 5:

- His duty towards himself lies in the commitment to principles and morals and doing one's best to develop one's personality.
- His duty towards his family lies in sound relationships such as love, service, and obedience to the parents and the brothers.
- His duty towards his society: Obedience to his teachers, love for colleagues, and studying hard.
- His duty towards God and the church: Worship, thanksgiving, joy, serving the poor and love for all.

First Week of April

(32) Christ the Lord of Glory

References

+ Luke 9:28-36

+ “With the Lord on the Mountain of Transfiguration” Dr. Ragheb Abdul Nur

+ “Glory be to you in your resurrection” Samir Kamil

The Lesson

Aim

The glorified aspect in the character of Christ and our attitude towards him

The Son lives with the Father in Glory

God lives in light. The angels and archangels stand in awe of the Divine glory and when the Son was incarnated and became man, His glory remained in Him and He did not reveal it to the people as they would not endure or bear to see the light and the glory of him.

On the Mountain of Transfiguration (Luke 9:28-36)

The Lord desired to reveal His glory to three of His disciples so He took with Him Peter and John and James up on the mountain to pray. And as He was praying, the appearance of His countenance was altered, and His raiment became dazzling white. And behold two men talked with Him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of His departure, which He was to accomplish in Jerusalem (Crucifixion and Redemption). Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep and when they wakened, they saw His glory and the two men who stood with Him. And as the men were parting from Him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is well that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah”. As he said this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, My chosen, listen to Him”.

I was glorified and will also be glorified

By the end of the days of His incarnation, Jesus prayed to the Father saying, “And now, Father, glorify Me in Your own presence with the glory which I had with You before the world was made” (John 17:5).

A voice came from heaven saying, “I have glorified it and I will glorify it again” (John 12:28). The crowd standing by heard it and said that it had thundered. Others said, “An angel has spoken to Him”. Jesus answered: “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine” (John 12:29,30).

He told His disciples about the end of the world and said that He would come on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory and the angels around Him would gather His elect (Mathew 24:30,31).

We shall be glorified with Him

Lord Jesus rose from the dead with a glorified body. The glory which was hidden in Him and He revealed it on the Mountain of Transfiguration...this He appeared with after the resurrection... His illuminating body could enter the upper room while the doors were closed! St. Macari the great uttered a nice statement: “On the day of resurrection, the glory of the Holy Spirit comes out from inside us to the outside. The bodies of the saints shine with light and glory after the resurrection. In the end we shall be glorified with Christ”.

What is now and what is there?

When we pray we stand in silence and submission. We stand in the presence of the Lord. The angels are around us. Saints and the Lord of glory are before us. Prayer puts man amid the heavenly beings. We have to prepare ourselves here. The children of the kingdom and the children of heaven live here and grow in a heavenly atmosphere. “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into His likeness from one degree of glory to another for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Questions and Discussion

1. An orthodox artist painted the transfiguration icon and made light spread from Christ’s body covering the whole atmosphere... What was the purpose of this artist?
2. Make a comparison between the first coming of Christ and the second coming in the end of the world.
3. Show how and when the church will be glorified with Christ.
4. A young man may say to you, “The glory of the world which is based on treasures, money and dignity is man’s goal” What will you say to him?

Activities

- + Try to contemplate the Transfiguration Icon and write down your feelings.
- + Try to paint a picture either of the glorified body of Christ in the resurrection or the Mountain of Transfiguration.

Exercise

O Lord grant me to hide Your light, Your holiness and the glory of Your Spirit in my heart, so that when I meet You in glory on the day of resurrection I shall be without fear and I can dwell with You in the light of Your saints.

Recitation

“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Contemplations

Moses represents the law and Elijah represents the prophets and they bore witness to the coming of Christ and the Heavenly Father also bore witness to the Lord, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased”.

Moses stands for married men and Elijah stand for the Virgins and each of those has a place in the kingdom of God. In transfiguration the Lord remains alone in His glory.

Transfiguration was a Divine declaration so that Lord Jesus could prove His priesthood, as He later on would offer His body as a sacrifice on the cross.

Transfiguration is a declaration of the glory of resurrection and it draws our attention to eternity.

Second Week of April

(33) Christ the Servant and the King

References

- + “Christ the King” Anba Gregory
- + “Faith in Christ” The Monastery of Anba Macari
- + “Interpretation of the Gospel of Mathew” Guiza

The Lesson

Aim

Christ in His meekness and in His service was not weak but He was model for us to follow.

Introduction

St. John in his vision saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. He who sat upon it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems, and He has a name inscribed which no one knows but Himself. He is clad in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which He is called is the Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, follow Him on white horses. On His robe and on His thigh He has a name inscribed, “King of Kings and Lord of Lords” (Revelation 19:11-16). In this vision John saw the glory of Christ and His eternal authority which was from of old and that will be forever.

The King became a servant

This great king to whom all the kings of the world bow in worship and who is praised by all the heavenly hosts, leaves His glory and kingdom and descends to our earth to become man like us in everything except sin. The king became a servant and the Master became a slave and the Lord agreed to be poor, and to be born in a manger, and to flee from the face of Herod, and to work as a carpenter in Joseph’s house. He had nowhere to lay His head. He suffered from hunger and thirst. He was driven out of the cities that rejected him although He wandered everywhere to do good.

The Procession of the King and the Procession of great men

Five days before His crucifixion and on Palm Sunday, He went on ahead going to Jerusalem. He sent two of the disciples saying, “Go into the village opposite, where on entering you will find a colt tied... untie it, and bring it here. If anyone asks you ‘Why are you untying it?’ you shall say this, ‘The Lord has need of it’. They set Jesus upon the colt and as they rode along, they spread their garments on the road. The whole multitude began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice... saying, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest” And some of the Pharisees in the multitude said to him, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples”. He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out” (Luke 19:28-40).

It was a wonderful procession not like that of kings and great people who ride horses and use carriages and for whom roads are decorated with banners and before whom soldiers with swords run and guns are fired... The procession of the Servant the king was a modest procession... He rode a colt... people carried palm leaves and the branches of the Olive trees and children sang; “Hosanna - Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is coming -Hosanna in the highest - Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord”.

The Last Supper

A night before He was crucified, He washed the feet of His disciples saying: “If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet. For I have given you an example that you also should do as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him” (John 13:3-16). The Lord is wonderful in His Kingship and in His glory. Kingship of meekness and lowliness, of glorified service and sacrifice and of love and peace. A Heavenly king and his Kingdom is not of this world.

This King was not soundly understood

The mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to Jesus, with her two sons James and John, and said to Him, “Command that these two sons of mine may sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom”. But Jesus corrected her understanding about the kingdom of Christ saying that her sons would have to drink His cup and bear the sacrifice and sufferings like Him and then He said to His disciples, “Whoever would be great among you must be your servant... even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Mathew 20:20-28).

So, anyone who seeks to rule with Christ must lead a life of service and sacrifice. In this way he rules over the hearts through love and rules with Christ who is sitting at the right hand of the Father in glory. This type of kingship and glory did not please the Jews whose thoughts were worldly and who were looking for a powerful king who could save them and bring the glories of Solomon back to them. That is why Judas and others tried to enthrone Him as king but He left them and disappeared and the Pharisees were annoyed with Him but He declared that His kingdom was not of this world. Anyone who seeks for the glories of the world sees the cross as a stumbling block and feels ashamed before all the desires of the flesh, fading dignity and worldly glory.

We are invited to rule with Him

As the Lord Jesus ruled through the cross, the church will rule with Him in the same way and will also be glorified with Him when He sits with the chosen, the apostles and the saints in the heavenly wedding supper and the glory which each believer hides in his heart will be revealed by the Lord to the whole world and the Lord will give the victorious the crown of glory.

+ “He who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God”

+ “He who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I myself conquered and sat down with my father on His throne” (Revelation 3:12-21).

Questions

1. What does Prophet David mean by saying: “The Lord reigns” Why do Jews refuse Christ as their King up till now?
2. Whom do they expect? What is His kingship to us? What is our work as soldiers, as ambassadors, as kings, as priests, as heirs?
3. James and John desired to sit on the seat to judge the tribes of Israel. What did the Lord Jesus, glory be to him, say to them?

Activity

1. Make crosses of palm leaves and distribute them among your friends.
2. Study the hymns that are sung on Palm Sunday.
3. Make sacrifices and offer services. Remember that the Son of man came to serve not to be served.

Third Week of April

(34) The Lord of Glory gives His Life

References

- + “The suffering Christ” H.H. Pope Shenouda III
- + “Contemplations on the Passions of Christ and His resurrection” H.H. Pope Shenouda III
- + Luke 23:42-43

The Lesson

Aim

The Lord gives His life for us and we live our life for Him.

The Lord earnestly desire... (Luke 22)

On Maundy Thursday, after the disciples prepared the Passover, the Lord said to them, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer”. And after He ate the Passover, the Lord took bread and when He had given thanks He broke it and gave it to them saying, “This is My body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me”. And likewise the cup after supper saying, “This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood which will be given for you”. This was the Lord’s desire: to give His holy body and blood to the believers. He had referred to this great deed after performing the miracle of the five loaves and two fish saying: “That who eats My flesh abides in Me... Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died... I am the living bread, which came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh” (John 6:41-58).

The offering on the cross (Luke 23)

The Lord fulfilled His saying and offered His body on the cross as an offering of salvation and forgiveness of all the sins of the world. These eternal words that came out of the mouth of Jesus still echo in the storm and darkness that took place at noon and all generations still repeat the words “Father; forgive them...It is finished...Father, into thy hands I commit my Spirit”. This was the voice of Divine love, the voice of the slaughtered lamb, the voice of the Son who obeyed till death, death on the cross. Through the offering of the cross, the Divine Justice was satisfied, and Lord Jesus received the sin of Adam and his children and he put to death the sin through the flesh and it was buried in the tomb and the Lord rose after He had broken the sting of death. Prophet Isaiah prophesied of the wonderful work of salvation when he said, “He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that

made us whole and with His stripes we are healed. Yet it was the will of the Lord to bruise him; he has put him to grief when he makes himself an offering for sin... Yet he bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors" (Isaiah 53:4-12).

Offering of the Cross means complete submission to the will of God

The Lord Jesus showed obedience till death and the Father received this acceptable offering and was pleased. St. Paul expressed the importance of submission and obedience in the offering of the cross and compared it to the obedience of Christ and the disobedience of Adam. He said, "For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many...For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous" (Romans 5:15-19). A man should redeem Adam and this man should be without sin to satisfy the Divine Justice. This has not existed or been achieved except through the Incarnate Son Jesus Christ.

We are buried with him to rise with him

As Christ was buried three days and by His death He abolished death and broke its sting, we too in baptism are buried with Him in the likeness of His death and buried for three days through immersion for three times to attain, through the Holy Spirit, the fellowship of burial and death of the Lord so when we come out of the font we attain a new life. This is what Paul the apostle expressed in his epistle to the Romans when he said, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father we too might walk in newness of life. Let sin not therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. Do not yield your members to sin as instruments of wickedness but yield yourselves to God as men who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments of righteousness" (Romans 6:3-13).

Renewal of the Covenant of Baptism

As we have promised the Lord to reject the devil and all his powers and to live in the spirit of obedience in the kingdom of the Holy Trinity, our hearts should test this covenant, uttered by the godfather or the godmother on our behalf. This should be a personal covenant and individual commitment for each of us and we should, through it, oblige ourselves to obey the commandments of Christ and walk as he walked following his steps then we should renew this covenant day by day through the life of true repentance. In this way we feel the effect of Christ's death for us as it is written, "That those who live might live no longer for themselves but for Him who for their sake died and was raised" (2 Corinthians 5:15). In this, Paul the apostle also says, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2:20).

Questions

1. Why did Christ die on the cross?
2. Christ's death on the cross was an oblation and offering of obedience. Explain.
3. Make a comparison between Christ's obedience and Adam's disobedience.
4. Why are we immersed in baptism (the font) three times?
5. What is the covenant of baptism? Of what importance is it in our life? Give examples.
6. What are the signs that characterize the life of a Christian who died with Christ and was

raised with him?

Activities

- + Study some hymns of those sung on the Good Friday.
- + Put the picture of Crucifixion in front of you to remember Christ's passions for you.
- + Continue steadfastly in praying the sixth and ninth hours prayers in which we pray Christ to tear away the bond of our sins as He tore it through His cross. This can be achieved through renewal of repentance, going to confession and receiving the Holy Communion to attain the power of the Lord's death and resurrection.

Recitation

- + Luke 22:42 & Luke 23:42,43

Exercise

“It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me”. In the different situations of your life keep in mind what Christ would have done if he had been in your situation.

Fourth Week of April

(35) Christ Rose from the Dead

References

- + “Resurrection and our Spiritual Life” Anba Bemini
- + “The Resurrection of Christ in our Life” St. George Church, Sporting

The Lesson

Aim

The effect of resurrection on the life of the Lord, the life of the church and on our life

The Power of Resurrection

The devil won all the rounds before the Resurrection. He could make the authorities sentence Jesus to death as a sinner and evildoer. The Lord neither objected nor protested. The devil could direct all sorts of disgrace such as striking His body with whips and striking Him and spitting on His face, nailing His hands and stabbing Him with the spear...Christ received all these sorts of afflictions on the cross and the devil thought that the Lord was weak and that He could conquer Christ.

The disciples hid in the upper room. They were filled with horror and awe, as they were afraid of the Jews... while the sincere women and the Maries together with John and Peter went to the tomb all night long till dawn to offer the spices to the body of Christ in great sorrow.

Sorrow and despair filled the hearts of some disciples. The two disciples of Emmaus were speaking with the Lord while He was walking with them after His resurrection without knowing him. “... Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the

people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered Him up to be condemned to death, and crucified Him... It is now the third day since this happened" (Luke 24: 19-21).

But the truth of resurrection turned sorrow into joy and despair into boldness and courage and fear into courage and preaching... This is the power of resurrection, which filled the church with Joy, and comfort... The Lord Jesus rose with His own power... He rose and the stone was still at the door of the tomb... He rose and His wounds were as they were and His side was open... He rose declaring: "O death where is your sting? ...O Hades where is your victory?" He rose at the time He appointed and left the shroud and the napkin lying in their place.

The Joys of Resurrection

The church sings hymns that clearly express the joys of resurrection...she sings: "All the heavenly hosts. all heavenly and earthly ranks and orders... all angels and people sing happily as our Lord Jesus Christ, the True Lamb has risen from the dead". Your heart will be filled with joy when you see the deacons decorate the Resurrection Icon while singing: "O all heavenly ranks and orders sing to our Lord with hymns of praise and rejoice with us today as we celebrate the resurrection of Lord Christ... The Lord rose as if He had been asleep or affected by wine and granted us the eternal grace and freed us from severe bondage.

What is the secret of this great joy?

- He bruised the head of the Serpent.
- He broke the sting of death.
- He opened the door of Paradise.

Resurrection had a great effectiveness on the church of the apostles. The Writer of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles says: "And with great power the apostle gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and great grace was upon them all". St. Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, considers the resurrection as the basis of Preaching and without resurrection the preaching would be futile. He says: "If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that He raised Christ... If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:14-17).

Resurrection in our own life

When St. John saw the Lord in a vision on the island called Patmos, he fell at His feet as though dead. The Lord laid His right hand upon him saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the Living One; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore and I have the keys of Death and Hades... He who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne" (Revelation 1:17,18).

The Lord Jesus; then, is Living in heaven and is living in the hearts of the believers. Through the Holy Spirit, He fills their hearts with the power of his resurrection. In this, St. Paul the apostle says, "That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and may share His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead" (Philippians 3: 10). As the Resurrection was latent and present in the life of the Lord Jesus, it is also a test that takes place in the hearts of believers with which they attain the power, the glory

and the joys of resurrection.

Whenever our hearts are filled with the Divine love and strong will to carry out the commandment, the spirit of resurrection fills us and the ugly sin disappears. Whenever we overcome our grudge, lusts and bad tendencies, the Holy Spirit who raised Christ from the dead fills us and raises us with Him and delivers us from evil. Through the Holy Spirit, we attain the power that raised Christ from the dead, “If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through His Spirit which dwells in you” (Romans 8: 11).

If we have been raised with Christ, let us seek what is above where Christ is sitting on the right hand of the Majesty on high. If we have truly been raised with Christ let us search for the lost sheep to attract them as that who rose from the dead said to Peter, “Do you love me? ...feed my lambs” After His resurrection, the Lord used to say and still says to our hearts, “That who loves Me should feed My lambs”.

Questions

1. Why is the Resurrection of the Lord Christ considered one of the miracles?
2. What is the difference between the resurrection of Christ and that of Lazarus?
3. What was the effect of resurrection on the church of the apostles?
4. How has resurrection given the church joy and happiness?
5. How can we know that we have tested resurrection in our life?

Activities

1. Read what is written in the Gospels about Resurrection in the last chapter or two chapters of each Gospel.
2. Recite the cheering hymns of the Resurrection and take part with the deacons in the Resurrection Icon Procession.
3. Send presents to the orphans and those who mourn especially on Easter.
4. Pray and contemplate the prayer for the sharing of Holy Communion said by the priest while breaking the Holy Body. Study some parts of it and recite these parts.

Notes

The days of resurrection are days of happiness and joy so the church sings the resurrection hymns that are characterized by their pleasant and joyful tunes for fifty days during which she forbids any sad tunes even in her prayer for those who die. She also forbids fasting and kneeling in worship during these days. May the pleasures of resurrection be for the benefit of the soul not for the benefit of the body. May we be filled with joy so that we may test the power and brightness of resurrection.

Recitation

+ Luke 24:5,6, 7,23,31,39,46,48.

Exercise

Examine yourself to find out any sin and pray so that the Lord may help you to keep away from it and test the power of resurrection from the tomb of the sin.

Fifth Week of April

(43) The Lord is Risen Indeed

References

- + “Resurrection and our Spiritual Life” Anba Bemin
- + “The Resurrection of Christ in our Life” St. George Church, Sporting
- + “Glory be to You in Your Resurrection” Samir Kamil
- + “The Meeting at Tiberias” St. Mina Church, Shubra
- + “The Meeting in the Upper Room” St. Mina Church, Shubra

The Lesson

Aim

Logic and Biblical evidence that proves the Truth of Resurrection and those who bore witness to the truth of resurrection

The Resurrection is a Certain Truth

Christ’s enemies tried to conceal the fact that the Resurrection was a certain truth and they either denied resurrection or neglected it. Resurrection proves the priesthood of Christ and without it Christian faith and preaching become futile: “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins” (1 Corinthians 15: 17).

Biblical Proofs

- He died and was buried in the tomb for three days.
- The big stone that closed the tomb was so heavy that the Maries or the disciples could not have easily moved it.
- The tomb was new and nobody was buried in it but Christ... So no one else rose.
- Pilate the Governor sealed the tomb’s door for fear of any sedition that might take place if the rumor of resurrection spread.
- The guards who were guarding His tomb during the night were on the alert as they were afraid.
- Any attempt to steal the body was impossible during the Sabbath.

Rational Proofs

- The shrouds were left in the tomb although they were finally tuck to the body because of the coagulated blood, besides the stealing of the body was impossible because the disciples were afraid of the guards and of the Jews.
- Those shrouds are still kept in the Church of St. John the Baptist in Torrent in Italy. Scientists examined them and found the marks of the nails and wounds printed on them. (See that film which you can get from centers for means of illustration in many churches).
- If it had been a deception, there would have been a benefit behind it but in those days, preaching was a very difficult task and those who preached were sentenced to death.

- If it had been a superstition, the disciples would not have believed it and would not have given their blood as a price to prove it.
- Resurrection was God's purpose and prophets spoke about it.

Prophecies of the Resurrection

- For You do not give me up to Sheol or let Your godly one see the Pit (Psalm 16:10)
- O death where are your plagues? O Sheol where is your destruction? (Hosea 13:14)
- I lie down and sleep; I wake again (Psalm 3:5).
- The Lord Himself prophesied of His resurrection. "I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice" (John 16:22).
- He told the multitude about His resurrection: "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the Whale, so will the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:40).
- He said that in public and the Pharisees understood the meaning of His words when he said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" so they asked the authorities to guard the tomb.

The witnesses of the resurrection

The final evidence of the truth of the resurrection is the witness borne by many witnesses who saw and witnessed the resurrection in the life of the Lord and in their life. We now present the testimony of those witnesses who were eyewitnesses and we shall try to show the effect of resurrection on their life.

The Lord appeared to Mary Magdalene...then to the disciples without Thomas...then to the disciples and Thomas was with them, then to the disciples at the Lake of Tiberias...then to the two disciples of Emmaus. He also appeared to James and to five hundred brethren and at last He appeared to Saul of Tarsus.

He is the Lord

When Jesus came to His disciples in the upper room, He came in the evening but Mary who was active and energetic saw Him in the early morning among the trees of the garden. The loving active soul meet Jesus quickly but the weak wait as Jesus will come to them.

Discussion

The closed doors may be:

- + A sin you love may hinder your steps so you cannot go out to see the light of resurrection.
- + Materialism, self-love, selfishness and taking pride in one's dignity.
- + Fear of the past and anxiety about the future may prevent you from opening the doors of your upper room to God.
- + The Lord entered while the doors were close. He is always ready to forget your weakness and give you victory.

He showed them His hands and His side

"O Lord, what will you give those souls that are filled with fear, sadness, sin, fall, denial and doubt? I do not have many teachings or preaching nor even reproach or blame; all what I have are two hands with the mark of the nails on them and a wounded side and these I give you; they

are wounds of love; handle me and see.

Thomas needs a special meeting

The member Christ does, not neglect who is weak in faith, who does not attend the meeting on time or who comes late. Christ gently blames him. Christ is ready to appear to you again so that you may put your finger and feel His side and believe in His power to have a new life and say with him, "My Lord and my God".

Tiberius and Galilee

Christ desired that His disciples should go back to Galilee where He used to perform His service and where they used to have comfort. In this way He guides each soul that goes back to her first love when she falls. When the two disciples of Emmaus were walking in sadness on their way, He also appeared to them. Peter went back to his secular work and to the nets he left before and forgot that he had devoted his life to the Lord. He also forgot his first and early service. Peter needed a powerful event to remind him of his situation so the Lord performed the fish miracle again and blamed him gently.

It is a rare chance for any young person who falls into despair or is conquered by the devil to come with us to Tiberius and see how Christ deals with His disciple who sinned and once more is granted the power of resurrection.

Discussion

- + Who are the enemies of resurrection and how did the Lord dumbfound them?
- + Compare between the situation of the disciples before and after the Resurrection.
- + Write ten proofs to prove the resurrection of Christ with which you can convince others.

Activities

- + Read the stories of the meetings between Christ and His disciples after the Resurrection and also the booklets containing the essays on the resurrection and the Easter Day. Borrow them from the library.
- + In the wall magazine put pictures and drawings that show the meetings between Christ and His disciples.

First Week of May

(37) St. Mark the Patron Saint of our Country

References

- + "St. Mark" H.H. Shenouda III
- + "The Story of the Coptic Church" Part I, Iris Habib El Massry

The Lesson

Aim

The factors that affected the personality of St. Mark and the work of grace in him

Introduction

There is no doubt that St. Mark the apostle cares for our country and makes intercessions for his people and the church which he established, before the Throne of Grace so it is not right to neglect his memory or ignore celebrating his feasts and asking for his intercessions.

The Birth of St Mark

He comes from the city of Cyrene in Pentapolis in Libya. He is African in origin. He was a Jew and was called John which is his Jewish name, meaning “the kindness of God”. The name “Mark” is a Roman name which means “a hammer”. He was the cousin of Barnabas the apostle who accompanied Paul. He is a relative to Peter’s wife so Peter called him his son.

The Good Soil

St. Mark’s mother was a rare spiritual character. She taught him the Law and the Prophets. It happened that, in the reign of Caesar Augustus the family was obliged to leave Cyrene and migrate to Palestine after the repeated attacks of the Barbarians. The will of God put that seed in the soil of Palestine at the time when Christ began His service.

St. Mark also was among the first who saw the miracle at Cana in Galilee as the Tradition states and there he and his family enjoyed the fellowship of the Lord and seeing the beloved relatives such as Barnabas and Peter Simon who was from Cyrene. St. Mark’s father, Aristopolos, believed in Jesus Christ after he was rescued miraculously from the two lions.

After his father’s death, Mark dwelt with his mother... who became one of the Maries whom the Gospel remembers as those who followed Jesus in every city and village where He used to preach and evangelized. “They provided for Him out of their means” (Luke 8:1-3). Mark enjoyed all personal qualifications such as wealth, culture, knowledge of languages... and a perfect study of the Old Testament. He was deeply affected by the example of his mother who was loyal to the Savior in a spirit of love and devotion. He enjoyed the company of the Savior Himself with whom he lived.

The Open House

There was no safe place for the Savior in Jerusalem because the Jews wanted to kill Him and His hour was at hand and pains affected Him deeply. The only place of comfort for Him was the house of Mary, Mark’s mother “Where is the place of my comfort where I make the Passover with my disciples?” (Mathew 26: 17-19). There, Jesus made the Passover, a memorial of love. There, He showed modesty and washed His disciples’ feet and that was a symbol of purity and an example to be followed by them in their future service. There, Christ consecrated the bread and the wine and established the first church in the world in Mark’s house.

After crucifixion, the disciples went back with broken hearts to hide themselves in the upper room and there they remembered the face of the beloved. The doors were closed and the Lord appeared to them once more in the same place and the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. He comes to them once more after His resurrection to meet them, send them and blame Thomas and, accordingly that house became the place of the New Church. In that house the disciples devoted themselves in prayers with the women and St. Mary. It is the early church and the

congregation of saints. In that house Matthias was chosen to replace Judas and take his place with the twelve disciples. In that house, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the disciples took place “From that place, an earnest prayer was raised, and the prayer was so powerful that the prison gates were opened and an angel brought Peter back to the lane where the house stood. Aware of his situation, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John Mark. Many people had gathered there and were praying” (Acts 12:10). Later, the apostles changed the house into a church, which became the Seat of Jerusalem See and there the first Council was held about A.D. 50.

The Work of grace in the character of St. Mark

The fingers of God prepared that chosen vessel, and St. Mark responded without any obstacle. His heart and his house opened for the service of God. He rejoiced when the Lord came to them and when the Lord chose the seventy apostles, he was one of them. He was an eyewitness to the power of the Lord in casting out demons and to the power of the good name. He went back filled with faith, zeal and power. This does not mean that he had no personal weakness in his life but he himself mentions his weaknesses in his Gospel although the other three Evangelists did not refer to them.

When he was young he ran away from Gethsemane without clothes, as he could not endure the pains of the cross. He left Paul the apostle after and during his first journey and could not continue his service with that great man. A disease might have befallen him like Paul who also suffered a dangerous disease in his body but Mark could not endure the disease. But the grace of God made a great apostle of young Mark as he became a great preacher, Evangelist, a writer of a Gospel and an establisher of many churches... The power of resurrection worked in St. Mark and turned his weakness and fear into apostolic preaching and struggle.

St. Mark did not run away from death but he faced martyrdom and met his end by the hands of the agitated crowds. He did not refrain from the burden of preaching and service but he wandered on foot to preach, and he sometimes toured while he was bare-footed. Paul himself sent to call him back, as he was useful for preaching and service... There is no doubt that a Divine power supports those who open their hearts to discipleship and devotion to the Service of God... May the blessings of this saint be with us, with our country and with our church.

Exercise

Devote this week for prayers and practice of Christian virtues.

Activities

- + Put the Icon of St. Mark in your private room and ask him to intercede for you.
- + Write a list of the factors that affected the character of St. Mark and made him a saint in spite of his young age then compare his weaknesses to the domains of power in his life.

Second Week of May

(38) How to benefit From the Holy Bible

References

- + “The Holy Bible and our Holy Christ” Anba Youannis
- + “The Garden of the Soul” Part 2, Anba Youannia
- + “The Word of God” Fr. Matta Al Miskin
- + “How to read the Holy Bible” Fr. Matta Al Miskin
- + “The Holy Bible is a miracle” The Diocese of Al Minya

The Lesson

Aim

The effectiveness of the word of God and how to apply it in my life

Introduction

There is an essential difference between the word of man and the word of God. Man’s word echoes in the air and disappears. We may not believe it as it does not have the power to do things although the words of kings and judges have the power of action but the word of God is one of the attributes of God and a personal hypostasis coming out of the Lord whose word has the power of action and does not go back without benefit. The word itself is composed of saying and action without separation. The word of God is living and active.

How did the Word of God reach us?

God sent us His word through the prophets inspired by the Holy Spirit and when men did not listen to the voice of prophecy and kept away from the word of God, He sent his Incarnate Word (And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us). The Holy Bible is the Life of Christ on Earth and His sayings come from the Mind of God Himself. The Bible is a precious message sent to us; as for the Old Testament, it composes the whole and all messages of the prophets whom the Lord spoke to through the Holy Spirit.

The Word of God is Light

- + God said, “Let there be light”. The word of God lightens darkness, gives light to the thoughts of the heart and the spiritual insight.
- + Christ granted the Samaritan woman enlightenment and she recognized her darkness and sinful past. The Word of God is powerful enough to lighten the hearts (Thy word is a lamp to my feet).

The Word of God is Life

The word of God has its power in the material creation “My word is Spirit and Life”. God has created living beings from dust and nonexistence. Ezekiel the prophet saw a place full of bones and when he prophesied through the Word of God they became a great army. When Jesus called Lazarus the soul went back to the body, which gave out a vicious smell. The Word has a great authority “He who hears My word and believes Him who sent me has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life” (John 5:24).

The Word of God is Power

“Praise the Lord O angels who carry out the commands of God when you hear the voice of His Word”. Contemplate what happened on the Mount of Sinai when the Law was received. It was the powerful voice of the Lord...the voice of God with great glory shakes the wilderness and fills

the heavens. “So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:11).

The Word of God is Food

“Your words were found and I ate them and Your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart” (Jeremiah 15:16). “How sweet are Your words to my taste; sweeter than honey to my mouth” (Psalm 119:103). The body lives on food and the soul lives by every word that comes forth from the Mouth of God.

The Word of God is a Weapon

The Word of God is powerful and effective, it is sharper than any sword that is double-edged. It comforts and reproaches. It is for rectifying and instruction. It drives away our enemies and with it we judge ourselves. It keeps us safe in time of trouble and saves us from stumbling blocks, which we bring to ourselves.

How do I read the Holy bible?

(1) With the Spirit of Prayer: Contemplate how people stand when they read the Holy bible in the church and when the priest starts to raise incense while praying so that we may hear, understand and work according to the Holy Gospel and the deacon asks us to pray from the Holy Gospel. Prayer should accompany reading the Bible so we pray before, during and after reading the Gospel. We thank God for His promises and pray him to give them to us with understanding, not repeating the same words in our private prayers. We pray that He might lighten our insights and touch our hearts and clarify what we do not understand.

(ii) With the Spirit of discipleship: Whatever the degree, of your knowledge or culture may be, read the Bible as a young child who wants to know something about the Absolute Truth. Read it regularly. Use a regular educational method. Start with the simple explanatory series (The key to the Book) and then study the characters and heroes of the Book. Then read it a third time slowly verse by verse. Resort to the method of studying by heart. Stay for a long time to enjoy it. We usually spend a long time to achieve the sciences of the world. Begin now and concentrate on the study of the Book of Heaven “Heaven and earth will pass away but my words will not pass away”.

(iii) With the Spirit of Obedience: You also see the priest put the Gospel over his head bowing his head to the voice of God as if he were ready to slaughter every dear and precious thing “And take every thought captive to obey Christ”. “That who hears the word and does not keep it deceives himself and these words will condemn him”

Activity

With the help of your Servant or your father of confession, set a program for studying the Holy Bible this month. Pray so that God will help you to commit to it and write down your notes. Take one verse every day and write it down in your notebook. Repeat it during the day, recite it and apply it to your life.

Third Week of May

(14) Who is the Poor Man?

References

- + “The Garden of the Soul” Part 2, Anba Youannis
- + “Our love for our poor brethren” Fr. Tadros Yacoub
- + “The Garden of the Monks”
- + “The Life of Anba Abraam the Bishop of Fayoum” Al Mahaba Bookstore

The Lesson

Aim

Developing the tendency of almsgiving without limit or fanaticism.

Who is my relative? (Who is my neighbor?)

A Jewish teacher stood up to put Christ to the test. During conversation, Jesus spoke about love for the neighbor (You shall love your neighbor as yourself). The Teacher asked him, “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. Likewise, a Levite when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion, and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying: Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back. Which of these three, do you think proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers? He said. ‘The one who showed mercy to him’. And Jesus said to him: Go and do likewise” (Luke 10:29-37).

Christianity knows no fanaticism

Christianity knows no fanaticism as she follows the example of the Good Samaritan in her attitude towards humanity. Anyone who needs my love, mercy and kindness is my brother regardless of race, language, religion or social class. The Lord Jesus considers the poor his brothers and he did not distinguish between a poor man and another and he did not limit his mercy to any race, religion or language. There are many examples, which prove this stated fact in the life of the Lord Jesus. It is He who met the Samaritan woman and talked to her about His wonderful salvation. It is He who praised the faith of the woman of Canaan and healed her son and St. Paul the apostle says, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

How do I give the poor?

I give him as a brother as almsgiving is not showing sympathy to people but it is the Christian love that motivates man to give alms and compels the brother to open his heart to his brother. “But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?” (1 John 3:17). As a true Christian he has to share him

his feelings, his sorrows and his joys and suffers with him as members of one body; i.e. Christ's body. Our teacher St. Paul says: "Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you also are in the body" (Hebrews 13:3).

Give him with love and generosity as almsgiving devoid of inner love is rejected. The Pharisees offering was not acceptable before the Lord. When Ananias and Sapphira gave a part of the price of the field to the apostles and kept a part for themselves, St. Peter the apostle refused to accept their offering. But that who first offers his heart pleases God as the woman who offered two lepta (small coins). She offered her whole heart to God. And also the woman who offered the Lord an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment as a sign of love. St. Paul the apostle says; "If I give away all I have... but have not love, I gain nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:3), and the Lord Himself says: "I want mercy, and not sacrifice" (Mathew 9:13).

Give him in secret

The Lord in His sermon on the mountain says: "Thus, when you give alms, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be in secret; and Your Father who sees in secret will reward you" (Mathew 6:2-4). John Chrysostom says; "If you reveal your alms, the devil steals them from you as the Pharisee did".

The blessings of almsgiving

(1) Almsgiving makes us like God in his mercy: St. John Chrysostom says: "Alms are valuable and have power as they can loose the bonds, lighten the darkness, quenches the raging fire of Hell and its effectiveness qualifies almsgivers to be like God in His mercy and the Lord says; "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful".

(2) Alms deliver us from judgment: "By loyalty and faithfulness iniquity is atoned for" (Proverbs 16:6). This does not mean that almsgiving in itself is able to atone for sin; otherwise there will be no need for redemption. Alms reveal a heart filled with love for Christ, a heart that loves the needy and those who suffer. How beautiful the prophet Isaiah's saying is: "Correct oppression; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, let us reason together" says the Lord, though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool" (Isaiah 1:17,18). That who does not show mercy does not deserve mercy... and the church says in the Agpia prayers that there is no mercy on the Day of Judgment for those who were merciless on earth (Vigils/Midnight prayer).

(3) We attain the heavenly treasure: The lord of glory says: "Give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven" {Mathew 19:21}. The believer who gives to the poor will have great glory in heaven and the immortal things not mortal things. Pope John II Patriarch of Alexandria, known as "the Merciful Pope" told us about the Story of Peter the Miser. A poor man begged him to give him something and Peter threw a loaf at his face. Two days later Peter fell ill and he saw in a dream, that he was dead and that he was brought before the Lord to be judged. The demons argued that Peter was theirs but the angel found that Peter did one good thing in his life and that was the loaf he had thrown to the beggar so he said to Peter, "Because of this loaf the Lord gives you a chance to repent and He postponed your day of death so repent and give alms". Peter's life changed completely and he began to give some of his clothes to the church to give them to the needy. In a vision he saw the Lord putting on the clothes Peter gave the poor so he

rejoiced, as he knew that Christ received his alms and kept them for him as heavenly treasure.

Questions

1. Give evidence to show that Christianity knows no fanaticism in almsgiving.
2. Who is the poor indeed? What are the types of poverty in the life of man? What is the Christian man's duty towards these types?
3. What is the Christian style in almsgiving? What characterized the true Christian in giving alms?
4. What aspects corrupt the Christian's almsgiving to the poor? How can he avoid them?
5. Study the life of Anba Abraam, the late Bishop of Fayoum, as a model of Christian almsgiving.

Exercise

Distribute the alms gathered during the previous week by visiting the poor families and charity institutions that are concerned especially with the disabled regardless of any religion or belief.

Recitation

+ Luke 10:37

Fourth Week of May

(40) What can I do now?

References

- + “The Garden of the Soul” Anba Youannis
- + “The Garden of the Monks”

The Lesson

Aim

How to practice almsgiving practically at the individual and group levels

Christianity is a Practical Christian

James the apostle says: “Of what benefit is it, my brothers, if a certain one says he has faith, but he does not have works? That faith cannot save him, can it? If a brother or a sister is in a naked state and lacking the food sufficient for the day, yet a certain one of you says to them ‘Go in peace, keep warm and well fed’ but you do not give them the necessities for their body, of what benefit is it?” (James 2:14-16)

In his first Epistle St. John says, “But whoever has this world’s means for supporting life and beholds his brother having need and yet shuts the door of his tender compassions upon him, in what way does the love of God remain in him. Little children, let us love, neither in word nor with the tongue, but in deed and truth” (I John 3:17,18).

Jesus is our Model

Lord Jesus Himself not only gave us commandments about mercy, love and kindness but He also gave us His Body. He gave “Himself” to us as a model to follow His steps. He came down from heaven to become man like us in everything except sin only. He lived as a poor man and worked as a carpenter in Joseph’s house. He visited the poor in their homes. He also entered the houses of sinners and tax collectors. He shared the household of Lazarus with His heart and tears and He shared in the wedding at Cana of Galilee with His love and rejoicing. In this way He gave us a model for practical participation.

Examples of life

The following are examples of the people’s problems. We should do something to help those people:

The orphan: A little boy who lost one of his parents or both of them and he had nobody to support him. He lost the kindness of the mother and the parents’ care so he became needy, vagrant and deviant.

The Widow: A woman whose husband died so she and her children are without means of support and her responsibility towards her children and her duty to bring them up make her unable to work to support her children.

Unemployment: A young man who is able to work but he does not find a job to help him support himself and his family. He may have a profession or experience but he does not have the money needed for a simple project.

Poverty: A worker whose resources are very few and whose wage is very low and limited and the demands of life are pressing, had to borrow money and the creditors ask for their money back. He dwells in an unsuitable house and his children suffer from malnutrition because of lack of food. He was forced to find work for his children at an early age, so he deprived them of being sent to school.

Addiction: A family supporter who spends a large portion of his limited income on drinking wine, smoking or tea or any other things and what remains does not suffice the necessities of life. His health is dangerously affected and the family atmosphere and home happiness are corrupted.

Some domains in which we can serve Lord Christ

1. Visiting orphanages and charity institutions to study their spiritual needs and material needs and showing them spiritual and cultural films, making Agapi (love) parties there, and giving children some religious and scientific books.
2. Visiting the widows and the disabled and giving them help and care, caring for old people and the aged ones who have nobody to support them and sending them to institutions.
3. Visiting a family that suffers a severe shock or that is in grief and sorrow, and sitting with those in grief to soften their suffering by reading them texts from the Holy bible.
4. Visiting those in prison after getting permission and offering the prisoners some pamphlets and spiritual guidance and encouraging them to repent and endure affliction if they are not guilty.
5. Giving help to the poor and the unemployed by giving them money loans so that they

may set up simple small projects to support themselves. To find a dwelling place for sojourners and to make agreements with social and national institutions to make an integrated plan for offering services.

6. Visiting patients in hospitals and comforting them by showing the feelings of love and raising prayers for them.

Examples of things offered in the previous domains

Materials: money -food -sweets -presents -clothes -covering.

Cultural: Holy books -religious and cultural books -magazines -pictures.

Abstracts: Visits -reconciliation -sharing occasions.

Spiritual: prayers -gospel -religious pictures -public masses -visits and individual work.

Instructions in Social service

1. Respect the poor man's feelings and dignity. Do not hurt him by any word lest the Lord Jesus should be angry with you. But at the same time be on your guard so that you may not be a prey for swindlers. So a social worker should study each case.
2. Concentrate on prayers and reading the Bible during your visits.
3. Draw the poor people's attention to the Lord Jesus, as He is the source of every good gift and do not tie them to yourself.
4. Try to find a suitable job for each unemployed man for alms may drive people to laziness.

A problem and its solution

We do not have enough money to meet the needs of the poor and our pocket money is limited. This problem faced the disciples when Lord Jesus asked them to give food to the multitude and they said to him. "We do not have enough food". We have to believe that He who blessed the little and filled five thousand people, with five loaves can bless our little money and our gifts and the more we pray and show zeal the more the Lord gives us. Then comes the story of the poor widow who dropped two coins in the treasury chest out of her want and the Lord praised her saying: "This widow, although poor, dropped in more than them all... this woman out of her want dropped in all the means of living she had" (Luke 21:1-4). This emphasizes that the limited potentialities did not hinder the woman to excel over the rich when she gave out of her want. The spirit and the way of almsgiving are more important than its amount. So we have to offer the little that we have and we have to ask loving people to participate in the projects we make for the poor.

Recitation

+ I John 3:17

Exercise

Practical practice of some of the above mentioned domains of service.

First Week June

(41) The Glories of the Feast of the Holy Ascension

References

- + “The Divine Ascension” Anba Bemin
- + “The Divine Ascension” Fr. Ibrahim
- + “Glory be to you in your ascension” Samir Kamil

The Lesson

Aim

The priesthood of the Lord in His ascension

Introduction

This feast refers to the last glories of the Lord in His life on earth and the beginning of the glories of the church.

The Glories of the Incarnate and Meek Redeemer

The meekness of the Lord in His incarnation and concealing His glory, then His crucifixion and burial causes astonishment to the minds of angels and men, but on the other hand we have to think of His glorious resurrection, His ascension to heaven, and His sitting at the right Hand of God in the Highest.

“No man has ascended into heaven but He that descended from heaven” (John 3:13). “The very one that descended is also the one that ascended far above all the heavens that He might give fullness to all things” (Ephesians 4:10). The ascension of the Lord indicates that He is the Heavenly Being who came from above and that He is above all, and at the same time He fills all beings and no place limits Him. That who descended is he who ascended and that who humbled himself is he who was exalted and that who accepted passions and insults is he who sits on the wings of the cherubim in the clouds of glory. The angels sang; “Lift up your heads, O gates and be lifted up, O ancient doors that the king of glory may come in” (Psalm 24:9).

On the cloud

“He rode on a cherub and flew; He came swiftly upon the wings of the wind” (Psalm 18:10).

“Who makes the clouds His chariot, who rides on the wings of the wind” (Psalm 104:3).

“A cloud took Him out of their sight” (Acts 1:9).

Since ancient times cloud has been connected with the eternal glory and the Divine Presence. The glory of the Lord appeared on Mount Sinai amid the clouds and the only begotten Son ascends to heaven amid the cloud of glory. The righteous will be taken to Him on the cloud. So “The cloud” is a Biblical symbolic expression that stands for the Brighter and greater Glory.

At the Father’s Right Hand

“Sitting” here does not mean that the Son was separated from the Father’s Bosom at any moment or that He was separated from heaven at any time. It does not mean the bodily sitting as the Father has neither left nor right and heaven is limitless and endless so it does not have any angles boundaries or dimensions. What is meant by the Right Hand of the Father is His greatness, ability and Power. The Lord Christ ascended in flesh, the glorified risen body so that He may glorify us with Him in heaven as after completing His ministry and His redemption, He took

what is His of ability, power, glory, greatness that fits His holy Hypostasis that is One with the Hypostasis of the Heavenly Father, as Paul the apostle says; “He is the reflection of His glory and the exact representation of His very being and He sustains all things by the word of His power, and after He had made a purification for our sins, He sat down on the right hand of the majesty in lofty places” (Hebrews 1:3).

One of the saints explains the meaning of sitting on the right hand by saying “It is the right hand of the fellowship with the Father in luxury, blessings and power”. These He took to give the church. This sitting was emphasized through a vision seen by St. Stephen when he was filled with the Holy Spirit and was ready to give his life as a price for proving this vision: “Look I behold the heavens opened up and the Son of man standing at God’s right hand” (Acts 7:56). Christ was in a state of glory that was reflected on the holy face of Stephen so they saw his face like the face of an angel.

He made His enemies His footstool

“The Lord says to my Lord: Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool” (Psalm 110:1). This prophecy has come true. Those who rejected Him and stabbed Him now look at Christ in His glory. They look at Him in sorrow and grief. The devil also and all his powers were conquered and they fell down as lightning.

All this glory is for us

He raised our nature with him and took us to His glory. Let us then live as children of Light. Let us not defile ourselves with the lusts of the mortal world “If, however, you were raised up with Christ, go on seeking the things above where the Christ is seated at the right hand of God” (Colossians 3:1).

Activities

1. Write an essay on the heaven where the Lord dwells with the saints.
2. Read the story of St. Stephen (Acts 7) and write an essay on the secret of power in his life.

Discussion

- + What are the interests of the young people of today?
- + What are your interests in the light of the above mentioned verse from the Colossians? (Colossians 3:1)
- + What is the relationship between ascension and the second coming of Christ?

Second Week of June

(42) Thus the Holy Spirit was outpoured

References

- + Books on the Holy Spirit
- + “The Pigeon and the Lamb” Fr. Lefe Gilet

The Lesson

Aim

The spiritual meaning of the appearance of the Holy Spirit

Introduction

The Book of the Acts of the Apostles explains to us the circumstances of the Day of the Pentecost and its events. The Lord had advised His disciples not to leave Jerusalem (when He ascended) but to wait for the Promise of the Father and He told them that they would have power when the Holy Spirit came on them and at that time they would be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Samaria, Judea and in all parts of the world. And the apostles obeyed the commandments of the Lord and went up to the upper room and together with the women and the Maries, they continued praying and on the day of Pentecost all were together. Suddenly there was a noise from the sky that sounded like a strong wind blowing and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then they saw what looked like tongues of fire which spread out and touched each person there. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to talk in other languages, as the Spirit enabled them to speak.

You can contemplate these forms through which the Holy Spirit was outpoured: The strong wind and tongues of fire and clear language.

First: The Strong Wind

The first characteristic of the Spirit is that He fills the life of the believer everywhere and at all ages: When referred to the outpouring of the Spirit in the form of a strong wind, He said that the Spirit filled the whole house. It is the Spirit that embraced the earth when it was without form and void. The Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters declaring that He is the Spirit of life from whom every life springs up. It is the Spirit that shook the earth when the Lord was nailed to the cross at Golgotha and it was He that raised many dead people from the tombs. It was the Spirit that filled the upper room declaring the beginning of a new life and establishing the Church of the Lord, His bride and body and His kingdom on earth.

It is the Spirit that still fills all the humble saints who persist in praying and repentance through feeding on His living word and the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist that gives life. The Spirit fills their minds so they have nothing but the mind of Christ. He fills their hearts and feelings so no strange love knows the way to their hearts. He fills their whole bodies so they know nothing in the world except Jesus and His crucifixion.

The second characteristic lies in the wind is that it is a stormy and strong wind: Thousands of people heard Him and they gathered and were amazed and confused. In this David the prophet prophesied saying, “The voice of the Lord makes the oaks to whirl and strips the forest bare; and in His temple all cry: Glory!”

It is the Spirit of power that creates from nothingness. He is the living initiative. He is the true source of all the universe, life and power of all beings. It is the Spirit of Power that smites the evil and the proud. He drowned the earth with the flood... dispersing all the people who made the Tower of Babylon. He burnt and destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. He drowned Pharaoh and his

chariots in the sea. He closed the lions' mouths in the pit of Daniel. He quenched the flames of fire in the burning furnace where the three young men were. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living Lord.

It is the Spirit of power that supported the weak. It was His power that supported our fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He fought with Gideon, Jephehah, and Samson and gave victory to young David before Goliath the mighty man. He gave power and courage to the weak apostles and disciples so they became strong through the support of the Lord and the power of His Spirit to the extent that they aroused the whole world's admiration and they evangelized all the parts of the world.

The Spirit still gives power to anyone who desires to bear witness to the Lord Jesus by giving his life as a living offering acceptable to the Lord.

How do you say then that we are weak... and the Spirit of God in us is the spirit of power and domination? Why do you lose power and retreat while the Spirit is ready to support anyone who desires to do the work of God with sincere heart and humble mind? Why do you say that you cannot... and what is impossible to us is possible to the Spirit of God?

The third characteristic of the wind is that it is miraculous in movement and effectiveness: The Lord Himself said to Nicodemus: The wind blows wherever it wishes "We cannot physically watch it but we feel its presence and effectiveness.

The Spirit is miraculous in the making and in the work of the universe. Contemplate the stars and planets. Study the anatomy of the human body. Read about the world of plants and animals. When you do this you will say: "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth". The Spirit is miraculous in the second birth... the Lord explained to the teacher of the Law that that who is born anew is that who is born of water and the spirit... how do we become a new creation through baptism? This is a far-fetched mystery. The Spirit is also miraculous in preserving the church of the Lord... It is enough to reach the church history through all ages and generations to say that the true miracle of the Spirit is the Continuation of the Church as the gates of Hades could not conquer her... and every tool that was aimed at her did not succeed.

Second: Tongues of Fire

Fire, in the past, was used for lighting and for burning. Thus we read about Sodom and Gomorrah but there was another holy fire in the Tent of Meetings and in Solomon's Temple... It is a holy fire that never ends. The burning flame of the Spirit had its effectiveness in the life of the believers, as they are members of one body and branches of the vine. It is for purification: It burns all lusts and destroys all what is ancient and corrupt so the believer can say: "Through His grace everything has become new". It is for enlightenment: Our fathers the saints said that the mystery of baptism is the mystery of enlightenment. They emphasize the fact that the Chrism is given to the baptized in a spiritual form that makes him aware of Truth through a wonderful inner test.

It is for the Holy Zeal (Jealousy): This is the burning flame that inflamed all humanity with the love for God, as all those in whom the Spirit works do not stay still. Some of them lead a life of

continual fasting and prayers; the others serve the world sincerely with a heart full of zeal, sincerity and self-denial. Some feel great love for society without any obstacle or hindrance... This is the fire of which the Lord Jesus says: "I came to start a fire on the earth, and what more is there for Me to wish if it has already been lighted?" (Luke 12:49).

Third: The Clear Language

Man's sin and true crisis lie in leading a life of self-enslavement. He does not want to see any other but himself and does not desire to hear any other voice other than his and this is death and nothingness... In Babylon the languages became confused and no one could understand his brother. So they separated and went asunder... but on the day of Pentecost we find that each one heard his own native language (Acts 2:8). In this way, the tongues united them through one mind... this is the miraculous deed of the Spirit when He makes the different divided people one unit living in one mind, one opinion and one heart as the case was with the church of the apostles.

Exercise

1. When the stormy wind blows we pray saying: "O God fill us with the Spirit and smite anything that may hinder Your work in us, perform the miraculous deed in us so that we may live according to the spirit not according to the flesh. Do not allow us to close the door before your powerful work in us."
2. When the Divine flame appears we sincerely pray: "Burn all the thorns in the soil of our hearts. Purify us of all the blemishes of the flesh and the soul. Fill us with enlightenment and holy zeal for the glory of the Father and for the bearing of witness to His only begotten Son Jesus Christ. Our Lord who is the spring of life for everyone".
3. When the gathered tongues appear we struggle and pray for the unity of the heart, the soul, and the mind so that we may all become one body, and one soul to attain our share and heritage with all the saints.

Activities

- + Study passages from the Third our prayer "Your Holy Spirit, O Lord, that You sent to Your holy disciples at the third hour; keep Him with us O Lord and do not take Him away from us".
- + Draw a picture of the Day of Pentecost showing the tongues of fire over the disciples' heads.
- + Study this prayer: "Purify us of the blemish of body and soul and bring us to the spiritual life so that we may walk in the Spirit and not accomplish the desire of the flesh".

Third Week of June

(43) God Calls Paul

References

- + "Paul the apostle" translated by Fr. Marcos Daoud
- + "The apostle of Struggle" Habib Saeed
- + "St. Paul the Mighty Preacher" Fr. Youssef Assaad
- + "St. Paul the apostle" Fr. Hareth Kreissa

The Lesson

Aim

The pleasant meeting with the Lord in our life and the possibility of change

Saul the Persecutor of the Church (Acts 9:1-31)

A Pharisee young man appeared in Jerusalem. His name was Saul and he was a disciple of Gamaliel the teacher of the Law. He was a great fanatic to Judaism. He heard the Story of Jesus of Nazareth and the appearance of Christianity from the Jews. He was greatly annoyed and began to persecute the believers severely as he believed that in doing so he served God and his religion. He used to destroy and loot the Christian churches. When the Jews planned to stone St. Stephen the pious deacon Saul attended the process of stoning and heard him when he said: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit". He also saw his angelic face when he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice "Lord, do not remember this sin against them" and Saul approved of his murder (Acts 7:4-60). The Book of the Acts of the Apostles says that this fierce lion used to break into the churches and houses and draw men and women and take them to prison. The church endured Saul's persecutions patiently and the Book of Acts says that those who were scattered because of persecution went about preaching the Word of God and in every house where a murder took place because of this fanatic man's persecutions, many prayers were raised for him. Nobody thought of hurting him because the Lord says to the believers; "Look, I am sending you forth as lambs among wolves". The lamb is devoured by the wolf but a lamb cannot devour otherwise it will turn into a wolf.

God never fails the prayers of His children. This moaning and those cries, which rose continually from the catacombs "O Lord, remember Saul" found in the heart of the Lord of the church a wonderful response.

A meeting and a change

Saul caused Jerusalem's flock to scatter. His fanaticism led him to take letters from the chief priest to Damascus and to the synagogue of Damascus so that if he should find any of these followers of Jesus, he would be able to arrest them, both men and women and bring them back to Jerusalem. He was armed with all the weapons of power, he had the power of the High Priest and strong men and soldiers, he had his zeal and fanaticism which were beyond description, all this was against a humble meek flock that cannot resist because their Lord prevented them from carrying a sword and demanded that they should learn lowliness from Him and leave vengeance to the Lord "Vengeance is Mine". On his way to Damascus, jealousy and fanaticism filled his heart. As Saul was coming near the city of Damascus, suddenly a light from the sky flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "Who are you Lord," he asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads" (The goads is a piece of iron used for pricking a beast to urge it to run). Saul was frightened and confused. He said, "What shall I do, Lord?" The Lord said to him: "Rise, go your way into Damascus, and there you will be told about everything it is appointed for you to do". The men who were traveling with Saul had stopped, not saying a word; they heard the voice but could not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground and opened his eyes, but could not see a thing. So they took him by the hand and led him into Damascus. For three days he was not able to see and during that time he did not eat or drink anything.

My Lord and My God

- My Lord and my God, your power is filled with love... the wolf which devours your flock you call it by its name and show him your love.
- My Lord and my God, Your power is filled with might... the lion before whom no one could stand collapsed before your glory and fell to the ground humiliated and asking You humbly "O Lord, What do you want me to do?"
- My Lord and my God... Your power is filled with glory the fiery sharp eyes that devoured the meek lambs, when they met you, they could see nothing... their fanaticism was no more... You brought them back through meekness to enlightenment to see the Divine light.
- My Lord and my God... How great you are and how majestic. Saul the fierce man, becomes Paul, the apostle of struggle and the chosen vessel and the great pillar of the church.
- My Lord and my God... turn me as you turned him, meet me and call me as you called him, O Lord.

In the House of Ananias

There was in Damascus a certain disciple named Ananias, and the Lord said to him in a vision; "Ananias". He said, "Here I am, Lord". The Lord said to him; "Rise, go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look up a man called Saul, from Tarsus. For, look, he is praying, and in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands upon him that he might recover sight". But Ananias answered; "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how many injurious things he did to your holy ones in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to put in bonds all those caning upon your name". The Lord said to him: "Be on your way, because this man is a chosen vessel to me to bear my name in the nations as well as to kings and the sons of Israel. For I shall show him plainly how many things he must suffer for my name". So, Ananias went off and entered into the house, and he laid his hands upon him and said, "Saul, brother, the Lord Jesus that appeared to you on the road over which you were coming, has sent me forth in order that you may recover sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit".

The Persecutor becomes a Preacher

And immediately there fell from his eyes what looked like scales, and he recovered sight and he rose and was baptized and he took nourishment and gained strength. He got to be for some days with the disciples in Damascus, and immediately in the synagogues he began to preach Jesus, that this One is the Son of God. But all those hearing him gave way to astonishment and would say: "Is this not the man that ravaged those in Jerusalem who call upon this name, and that had come here for that very purpose, that he might lead them bound to the chief priests?" But Saul became Paul and he kept on acquiring strength all the more and was confounding the Jews that dwelt in Damascus as he proved logically that this is the Christ.

A Test that I must attain

How can I be one of the Lord Jesus' disciples? Christ who directed His call to Saul is still directing it to each one of us. And the Lord who met him is on the way ready to meet with us on the way of our life and call us all to be His disciples... He expects us to respond to Him and

answer his call.

Contemplation and discussion

“Whom shall we go away to? You have sayings of everlasting life” (John 6:68).

“This man is a chosen vessel to me to bear my name to the nations as well as to kings and the sons of Israel. For I shall show him plainly how many things he must suffer for my name” (Acts 9:15,16).

“Lord, what will You have me to do?” (Acts 9:6)

Questions

- + Why did Saul persecute the church?
- + Why is religious fanaticism considered dangerous?
- + What is the difference between fanaticism and keeping firm in faith?
- + How did Saul meet the Lord? And how did he answer his call?
- + Give evidence to show that Saul was a chosen vessel.

Recitation

- + John 15:16

Suggested Activities

- + Draw a picture to show the beauty of the meeting between the Lord and Saul.
- + Write an essay or make a wall magazine on the Call of Saul.

Fourth Week of June

(44) Paul is a chosen Vessel

References

- + “Paul the apostle” translated by Fr. Marcos Daoud
- + “The apostle of Struggle” Habib Saeed
- + “St. Paul the Mighty Preacher” Fr. Youssef Assaad
- + “St. Paul the apostle” Fr. Hareth Kreissa

The Lesson

Aim

The fruit of that meeting and the necessity of bearing the cross in our life

The Faithful Witness

Saul turned into Paul the faithful preacher. He was filled with the Spirit and could bring many souls to Christ and serve His Gospel with zeal and enthusiasm. St. Luke tells us, in the Book of Acts of the apostles: “But while we were remaining quite a number of days, a certain prophet

named Agabus came down from Judea and he came to us and took up the girdle of Paul, bound his own feet and hands and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit: The man to whom this girdle belongs the Jews will bind in this manner in Jerusalem and deliver into the hands of the people of the nations". Now when we heard this, both we and those of that place began entreating him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered: What are you doing by weeping and making me weak at heart? Rest assured, I am ready not only to bound but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 21:10-13). Paul, the faithful witness who loved his master and endured many afflictions and troubles from him remained faithful to him in spite of all persecutions then he declared that he was ready to give his life and die as a martyr for the name of the Lord Jesus.

The Persecutions that the apostle of the nations suffered

As the Lord Christ suffered in bearing witness to the Heavenly Father, each member bearing witness to the Lord Jesus has to suffer also. Every witness should be persecuted... persecuted by the world, the devil, and men and by the corrupt ancient man that lies in his nature. Thus the life of every faithful witness is composed of persecution forming a sad symphony outside him but inside him it is pleasant and enjoyable as St. Paul said: "For though tribulation is momentary and light, it works out for us a glory which is of more and more surpassing weight and is everlasting" (2 Corinthians 4:17).

Sources of Paul's troubles

The Jews: They were shocked when they saw Saul change into Paul the preaching apostle so they resisted him severely in every synagogue and in every city. They flogged him five times, struck him many times and they stoned him once and at this time he was about to die.

The false brothers: Those are the Jews who became Christians but kept the Spirit of Judaism in their heart and tried to introduce Jewish beliefs in the Christian faith to dye it with the Jewish life. Those, Paul called "the false brothers". They used to go to every church he established and arouse tribulations and spread rumors so Paul suffered a lot because of their behavior.

The Pagan Priests: Those caused the people to rebel against Paul because they felt that Paul's preaching caused the loss of their resources and income. This happened in the city of Ephesus as an example. Besides, he faced many other troubles in his travels especially the thorn in the flesh and in this he entreated the Lord that it might depart from him but the Lord said to him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:7-9).

Paul the apostle explained some of the troubles he faced

He mentioned them in (2 Corinthians 11:23-33).

- He was obliged to refer to them to confirm his evangelism before the stubborn who resisted him and who wanted to corrupt the service in the church of the Ephesians.
- With far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings.
- I have received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one.
- Three times I have been shipwrecked, a night and a day I have been adrift at sea.
- On frequent journeys.
- In labor and toil, in sleepless nights often.
- In dangers from highwaymen, in dangers from my own race, in dangers from the nations.

- In hunger and thirst... in abstinence from food many times... in cold and nakedness.
- The anxiety for all the congregations.

In spite of all this Paul was always faithful to his Lord

- Concerning the message appointed to him and for the souls he loved, listen to him when he says:
- “Who is stumbled and I am not incensed?” (2 Corinthians 11:29).
- “When being reviled we bless, when being persecuted we bear up, when being defamed, we entreat” (I Corinthians 4:12,13).
- “Nevertheless, I do not make my soul of any account as dear to me, if only I may finish my course and the ministry which I received of the Lord Jesus, to bear thorough witness to the good news of the undeserved kindness of God” (Acts 20:24).
- “Who will separate us from the Love of the Christ. Will tribulation or distress or persecution or hunger or nakedness or danger or sword?” (Romans 8:35).

Why does God permit such persecutions to afflict his servants?

In answer to this question St. Theodorus says:

- To protect us from falling in negligence and laziness and to make us always on our alert, on our guard and with open eyes.
- To look all the time to God pleading His mercy and help.
- So that we may not be proud but think humbly of ourselves.
- So that we may show that we are sticking to the glory of God, His love and faith till the end.
- So that continuous distress may give us the power to attain greater crowns.
- So that God may be glorified and the devil may be ashamed through our endless patience.
- So that we may show our faithfulness to God in spite of all tribulations.

Discussion

How can each one of us become a faithful witness to all? What are the expected difficulties that may face us nowadays?

Examples

- + “Who is weak and I am not weak? Who stumbles and I am not incensed?”
- + Who said this statement and what does it mean?
- + What are the sources of troubles in Paul’s life?
- + What were the types of tribulations he met?
- + Why did the Lord permit his servant to suffer such tribulations?

Activities

- From the Epistles of Paul the apostle quote some verses that refer to his service. From the Book of Acts try to quote passages that refer to the life history of St. Paul and his labor. Summarize them and put them in the wall magazine.
- In your prayers ask St. Paul to intercede for you. Give the name of St. Paul to some of the classes of Sunday School.

Recitation

“Why, for that matter, I do indeed also consider all things to be loss on account of the excelling value of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord. On account of Him I have taken the loss of all things and I consider them as a lot of refuse, that I may gain Christ” (Philippians 3:8).

First Week of July

(45) Life for Christ

References

- + “Paul the apostle” translated by Fr. Marcos Daoud
- + “The apostle of Struggle” Habib Saeed
- + “St. Paul the Mighty Preacher” Fr. Youssef Assaad
- + “St. Paul the apostle” Fr. Hareth Kreissa
- + “Christ in our life” Dr. Rolf A. Raring

The Lesson

Aim

Bearing witness to Christ in our life till the end

To live is Christ

The life of Paul the apostle is a wonderful story of a hero of faith. It is characterized by endurance of risks and dangers as he sacrificed his life for his love for Christ that filled his heart so he lived in Christ and expressed this fact by saying: “For in my case to live is Christ; and to die, gain” (Philippians 1:21).

The apostle considered all things as a lot of refuse that he might gain his life in Christ so he followed the example of his master and Savior in his life and he advises us saying: “Become imitators of me, even as I am of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1).

Many people whom he served turned against him and the Jews aroused many riots against him. He used to be judged and stoned to death for the name of Christ. He was imprisoned many times because he preached the word of God and the name of Jesus Christ whom he loved. He belittled the dangers of death so that he might bear witness to Christ to those living in far away places. He bore up all this in great love. He said: “Love is long suffering and obliging... It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things” (1 Corinthians 13:4-8).

The healing of the cripple

In his first journey, Paul the apostle went to the city of Lystra in Asia Minor. There was a man who had been lame from birth and had never been able to walk. Paul healed him and the man jumped up and started walking around. The crowds were amazed and started shouting: “The gods have become like men and have come down to us”. They gave Barnabas the name Zeus and Paul the name Hermes. The priest of the god Zeus came to offer sacrifice to the apostles. Paul shouted, “Why are you doing this? We ourselves are only human beings like you. We are here to

announce the Good news, to turn you away from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven, earth, sea and all that is in them". But the Jews won the crowd over to their side and stoned Paul and dragged him out of the town, thinking that he was dead. Paul strengthened the believers and encouraged them to remain true to the faith showing them that they must pass through many troubles to enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:8-22).

The Jailer of Prison believes in Jesus

On another missionary journey, Paul was preaching in Asia. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night, a man of Macedonia was standing beseeching him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us". Paul concluded that God had called him to preach the gospel in Europe. Paul and Silas set sail to Philippi and stayed with Lydia, a seller of purple goods, whom the Lord opened her heart to give heed to what was said by Paul. As they were going to the place of prayer, a slave girl who had a spirit of divination met them. Paul said to the spirit, "I charge you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her", and it came out that very hour. But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the rulers who gave orders to beat them with rods. Then they threw them into prison. The jailer put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and suddenly there was a great earthquake and immediately all the doors were opened and every one's fetters were unfastened. The jailer drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, we are all here". Trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas and said, "Men, what must I do to be saved?" And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household". And they spoke the word of the Lord to him, and he took them... and washed their wounds and he was baptized with all his family (Acts 16).

A journey full of risks and dangers for bearing witness to Christ

Before his final journey the Lord appeared to him and said, "Be of good courage. For as you have been giving a thorough witness on the things about me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness in Rome". When he was brought in before Festus the governor to be judged being accused with false accusations he said, "I appeal to Caesar". Then Festus said, "To Caesar you have appealed; to Caesar you shall go". And the governor sent him to Rome guarded by soldiers. Paul traveled by sea to Italy. Suddenly the sea became rough and the waves became high and a strong violent wind hit the ship and the ship was carried along by the wind. The sun and the stars did not appear for many days so they lost hope of being saved. After the men had gone a long time without food, Paul stood before them and said, "An angel of God came to me last night and said: Do not be afraid, Paul God in his goodness to you has spared the lives of all those who are sailing with you, as you are going to bear witness to God in Rome before Caesar". The ship was driven by the waves toward the coast but its back part was broken to pieces by the violence of the waves. The passengers threw themselves into the sea. Some swam ashore, the rest followed holding on to planks or to some broken pieces of the ship. And thus they all got safely ashore (Acts 37).

Grace and Truth

Two things characterize a Christian man and distinguish him from others. These two things are grace and truth. Grace and Truth came through Christ. Grace is God's gift in the triumphant

internal life. This is one of the gifts that Christ gives us without price. Bearing witness to truth is the life of everyone who attains the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul the apostle was filled with grace. He spent his life in prayers, fasting and reading the Holy Books. He kept bearing sincere witness till it bore fruit in his life in the form of Christian virtues. In this domain he says: “I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified” (1 Corinthians 9:27). He also says, “We put no obstacle in anyone’s way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we command ourselves in every way; through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings...by purity, knowledge, forbearance, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love...” (2 Corinthians 6:3-7).

H e lived to bear witness to Truth

Paul was granted great grace so he lived faithfully giving his life for bearing witness to truth in genuine Christian service devoid of any selfishness or self-love. His heart was inflamed with sincerity, and zeal for the salvation of the soul. Listen to him when he says: “If I were still pleasing men, I should not be a servant of Christ” (Galatians 1:10) and he also says: “But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may accomplish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24).

Questions

1. Show the things you admire in the character of Paul the apostle.
2. Explain one of his virtues that you admire and mention a practical situation and a verse written by Paul in his epistles.
3. Give examples of the sacrifices endured by Paul the apostle for the Service of Christ.
4. The Life of Paul the apostle is a model of the victorious life. Explain.

Activities

- + Make a wall magazine and write about the virtues of the life of Paul the apostle. Make summaries of parts of his life history and his journeys in the Book of Acts.
- + Draw a map to show the journeys of Paul the apostle and put it in the wall magazine.

Exercise

Pray for the young men who keep away from the church and attract them to the church.

Hymns (about the apostles)

- + O Lord, if you desire, send me...
- + To strengthen the hearts of the sinful all the time...

Recitation

“For in my case to live is Christ, and to die, gain” (Philippians 1:21).

Second Week of July

(46) The Church after the Departure of the Apostles

References

- + “Ignatius and Polycarbus” St. George Church, Sporting
- + “The Army of God” Marcos Magazine
- + “St. Clement of Rome” Fr. Tadrus Yacoub

The Lesson

Aim

Heroism in the life of the fathers who carried faith down to us

The pleasant rise

The day of Pentecost was a shining day in the history of humanity. A stormy wind shook Jerusalem and tongues came down on the disciples and the Holy Spirit outpoured over them and filled them with all knowledge and kept fear away from them and they went out of their upper room to the world carrying the message of Christ... a message of love and redemption. Years go by and the disciples work hard and the Christians grow in numbers and the churches increase in number and the first century came to its end and all the apostles departed from this world after they had changed the whole world. Before them the world was completely filled with paganism. There were group of Jews, some were in Palestine and the others were scattered here and there. But now, delightful lights began to shine the lights of the church of Christ, which began to lighten darkness.

The Happy Church

The Christians were pleased with the new religion. They shared everything among them. Nobody was poor or needy. They sold their property and divided the price among all according to each one's need. Every day they gather for prayer, singing hymns and listening to the preaching and to one chapter of the Gospel that the apostle had left them. They used to eat together. On Sunday, they gather to attend prayers of the Holy Mass and receive the Holy Communion. People around them desired to imitate them so the Christians allowed them to attend their meetings and taught them to rules of religion and the Lord brought those who were saved to the church each day.

Persecutions

The spread of Christianity was not easy. Many enemies tried to hinder its progress and growth. They fought it by all means but it won victory over them. In spite of persecutions, the Christians were an example of loyalty and sincerity even to their persecutors and their life was a good model for all people to follow. Many non-Christians believed in Christ when they saw their deeds and they glorified their Father who is in heaven. Through love, sacrifice and martyrdom, Christianity became victorious and the more persecution and torment increased, the more they kept close to Christ. They did not fear death but they sought it and desired it everywhere. They were martyred in Egypt, in Syria, in Rome and their martyrdom astonished the people around them and made them ask themselves “Why do they thus hold fast to their God?” Many believed because the Christians held fast to their Christ is spite of cruelty and tormenting them to death.

Ignatius

Ignatius, Peter's disciple, was the Bishop of Antioch. He cared for his people with power and courage so the people gave him the name of “Theoforus” i.e. “that who carries the Lord”. The king urged him to worship the idols. He tempted him with money and glory and threatened that

he would torment him and put him to death but all his attempts were in vain and at last he sent him to Rome to be thrown to the fierce animals to devour him. Ignatius was not frightened. All his people wept for him but he encouraged them all and in his epistle to the Romans he says: "At last my brothers I attained what I desired... to die for Christ to declare myself a Christian and deserve the glorious name given to me but my fear is that you, through your love for me might try to save me from death and deprive me of the martyrdom for Christ".

Clement

Clement knew Christ in Rome through St. Paul. He was ordained Bishop of the city and because of his activity to spread Christianity, the Emperor sent him into exile in a far away country. There he met two thousand Christians in exile like him because of their Christian faith and they were tormented with hard work. He encouraged them and helped them in their work and reminded them of the heavenly joy that awaits them. Those banished people endured hardships joyfully and their life changed. Many non-Christian people believed in Christ because of Bishop Clement's works.

Polycarp (69-156 A.D.)

In Izmir in Asia Minor, the governor arrested Polycarp, John's disciple. When he saw his white beard and bent back, he showed sympathy for him and advised him to deny Christ but he said to the governor, "Since my childhood, I have been serving Christ for 86 years and during that long time He gave me every love and kindness so how can I reject him?" The governor threatened that he would send him to wild beasts but the saint said, "Let these beasts come to me. I am not afraid of them". The governor said, "If you despise the beasts I will throw you into a burning fire" and the saint said, "Your majesty, you threaten me to send me to a fire that burns a little then dies away but you do not know the fire of the eternal judgment that the Lord has prepared for non-believers". Then the saint said, "Why are you slow, your Majesty? Do what you want quickly". The governor ordered that Polycarp would be burnt alive and when the soldiers wanted to tie him up, he said to them, "there is no need for that. God who gave me power to endure the insult, gives me power to stand amid fire". He lifted up his eyes to heaven and prayed: "O Lord, I bless you because you have chosen me to be one of your martyrs who die for bearing witness to your name. I have glorified You in my life and I am now glorifying You in my death". The saint attained the crown of martyrdom and the Christians gathered his bones and kept them in their church in Izmir.

Ignatius, Clement and Polycarp were martyred and gave us the best example of holding fast to Christ. Their life and death were the seeds of faith in the church.

Discussion

1. As you are one of the children of those martyrs, what are the troubles and sacrifices, which you are ready to endure for the growth and spread of the church?
2. What types of service can you perform to achieve this purpose?

Home Activities

1. On a map, write the names of Ignatius, Clement and Polycarp beside the cities to which they were Bishops.
2. Write the verse. (Hebrews 10:36-38).

3. Write the name of the children in your house and in the school who must attend Sunday School and pray for them.

Recitation

- + “I desire martyrdom to declare myself Christian not only in words but also in action” (St. Ignatius).
- + “Since my childhood I have been serving Christ and He never harmed me but He showed me every mercy and kindness, how can I leave him?”

Third Week of July

(47) The Church before the Council of Nicene

References

- + The Synaxarium
- + “The Story of the Coptic Church” Iris Habib El Massry
- + “The History of the Coptic Church” Fr. Menassa Yohanna

The Lesson

Aim

How did the church grow and kept faith through the ages.

The way to the cross

On the land of Palestine, Jesus went about teaching the people and doing good to them and although He made no sin, He was raised on a cross and endured disgrace, torment and death. Christians imitated their master and endured tortures and the way to the cross was the same way to their happiness. They were faithful to their motherland, they served all and lived in piety and endured persecution and grew in numbers.

First: Faithfulness

In spite of all these persecutions, Christians preached through enduring tortures in silence and receiving martyrdom happily and also through their calm call for the knowledge of Christ. Wherever they went, they preached.

There is a wonderful story the heroes of which are simple farmers. The Roman imperialists took them from Thebes, their city and enlisted them in the Roman army. They took them from Thebes in Upper Egypt and sent them to Switzerland to fight and there the Romans discovered that the Soldiers of Thebes were all Christians. When they all refused to worship the idols, the Romans killed Muarice their leader and killed also many soldiers and those who remained were scattered but after a little time they found three of them preaching Christ so they killed them and there is a church standing up till now in Zurich in Switzerland for those three Coptic martyrs Felixer, Rigbiola and Alexrantus.

Second: A great love

Did all these persecutions succeed in stopping the growth of the church? Of course not! The church remained and the Christians proved through all ages that they are loyal and faithful to their motherland. They love all people even their enemies. During the reign of Emperor Galus, a dangerous plague spread (251-252) and in spite of the violence of persecution, the Christians looked after patients and buried the dead whether Christians or non-Christians exposing themselves to the dangers of catching disease while the pagans kept away from the patients even their neighbors and relatives.

Third: Enduring severe persecutions

In Rome, the Mistress of the world at that time, the kings of Rome tortured the Christians and tried to abolish Christianity from this world. Emperor Desius issued a decree (249-251) and gave orders that all Christians of the Roman Empire should be persecuted. They had either to raise incense to the idols or to be tormented to death. After him came Galus (251-253) who killed the chief priests and bishops. The Emperors, who came after them, tortured the Christians but the great persecution was in the reign of Diocletian (284-305) who gave orders to dismiss all the Christian officers of the army and to dismiss all the Christians from their positions. He destroyed the churches, imprisoned, tortured and killed Christians everywhere and the names of many martyrs are recorded in history. They are models for us to follow.

Cyprian: Cyprian was a bishop of (Cortag) in the north of Africa. The governor asked him:

- Do you insist on not following the Roman religion?
- + I am a Christian and a bishop. I know no one but God whom I and all the Christians worship.
- Reject this belief of yours, Cyprian.
- + He who knows God does not go backwards.

When the governor saw that he insisted on his belief he sent him into exile and when the Emperor gave an order that the bishops of the church would be killed, he was summoned to the church to be judged again. They proposed to send him to a safe place to hide him but he refused and attended judgment with great courage and confessed Christ. So the governor killed him with the sword. When Cyprian heard the sentence, he rejoiced and said, "Thanks be to God".

Tawadros El Mirhriky: He was a brave soldier. He was persecuted before the governor and the leader. He confessed Christ and reproached them for their worship to the idols. They were amazed because of his words and wanted to give him a chance to think but in vain so they were obliged to torture him and through that time of torment he sang the psalm: "I will praise the Lord as long as I live. I will sing praises to my God while I have being".

Fourth: Growth and Success

1. The School of Alexandria: In the city of Alexandria, the capital of Egypt at that time, the pagans fought the church by using a different method. Besides torturing and killing they wrote books to attack Christianity. When a book appeared, Christians used to read it well then some of them wrote arguments to answer it. There were also discussions between the Christians and the pagans. Christians always won victory, why? They learned rules of religion in the schools established by St. Mark in the great university of Alexandria to which the church directed her attention so it became a source of enlightenment for those who came to it from all parts of the world. Many of them became professors in their countries later on.

The following are some of the great teachers of the School of Alexandria:

- (i) Clement of Alexandria: He specialized in dogmatic polemical writings against paganism and he wrote many books in that field.
- (ii) Pantaenus: translated the Holy Bible into the Coptic language, which is the Ancient Egyptian language that was written in symbols and pictures but he chose alphabetical letters for it.
- (iii) Didymius the blind: invented a method of reading through touching or feeling the letters for the blind before Brail invented his method, fifteen centuries later.

2) The Hold Bible: The apostles began their preaching by the word of mouth then they started writing books by the middle of the first century. At that time each church copied the books and in this way the gospels and the epistles were kept safe. As the last apostle to die was St. John the apostle who died by the end of the first century, the Books of the New Testament were gathered at the beginning of the second century and the gospel as a whole began to spread at that time.

Questions

1. What are the factors that helped the church to grow?
2. Christians used to do good to those that hated them. Give an example to prove this.
3. How was the Coptic language written in the past? How did Pantaenus write it?
4. The School of Alexandria supported faith. Give examples...How can you yourself support faith?

Activity

1. Write a list of the books of the New Testament and study it.
2. Together with your colleagues in the class make a journey to the churches that are named after the saints and martyrs whose life history you have studied.

Notes

The Servant can draw a picture to represent a trunk of a tree with inscription on it and a blind man feels the inscription and reads it. The picture should show the joy that the blind man feels and should be a symbol of the book and its cover. Write any symbol that may refer to Didymius and to the lesson.

Fourth Week of July

(48) The Church after the Council of Nicene

References

- + “The Age of Councils” Fr. Cyril al Antony
- + “The life history of St. Anthony” Athanasius the Apostolic
- + “St. Basil” the Franciscan Institution at Al Maadi.

The Lesson

Aim

To have an idea about the heroes of the church in the fourth and fifth centuries

Introduction

Three centuries passed and the church endured persecutions with great courage while the kings invented new horrible methods for torturing the Christians thinking that they could get rid of Christianity and put an end to that religion. Christianity spread and gained power and the greatest persecution took place by the end of the third century during the reign of Diocletian.

Constantine the Pious King

Once King Constantine came to the Roman throne, He fought his enemies whose number was much greater than his soldiers and he lost hope of victory but he saw a cross of light on the horizon and a writing on it saying: "With this you will conquer". In a dream he saw the Lord Christ who said to him, "Make a cross and keep it as a sign for you". When Constantine got up he ordered that a cross would be drawn on a big banner (flag) and together with his armies he marched behind the flag. Constantine won victory and recognized the great mistake made by the previous kings when they persecuted the church. He insisted on correcting that mistake so he was converted to Christianity and stopped the persecutions of Christians. His mother Helen went to the Holy Land and searched for the tomb of Christ and the holy cross. When she found them she built the Resurrection church and the Nativity Church at Bethlehem in the place of the manger. The Christians stopped raising their prayers in caves and catacombs. They built their churches everywhere and fear disappeared. There were joy, prayers, and thanksgiving.

Arius

In Egypt Pope Alexander, the Patriarch of Alexandria and Athanasius his disciple were very happy. But there was a priest in the city named Arius whom the people heard preaching strange teachings, which was different from the sound Christian faith of the church. He said that Jesus was not God. The people were annoyed to hear this and they discussed these things everywhere. When the Pope knew this he summoned Arius and tried to convince him that his beliefs were wrong. He summoned a council of the Egyptian Bishops to convince him but he insisted on holding fast to his belief so the fathers saw that the presence of Arius in the church will help him to spread his heresy so they decided to excommunicate him, that is keeping him away from the church.

Arius went to Palestine and was able to convince a bishop that he was correct in his belief. King Constantine was on a visit to Palestine and the Bishop requested him to give his order that Arius would go back to Alexandria.

The king thought that it was a question of personal dispute between Pope Alexander and Arius so he sent one of the pious bishops to Alexandria where the bishop knew the core of the problem so he returned to the king and suggested that the king should hold a council of all the bishops of all the churches of the world to consult the matter with one another with the spirit of love and to emphasize the true faith.

The Council of Nicene

The King gave his argument in 325... The bishops came from all parts of the world and made for the City of Nicene in Asia Minor. Their look filled people with awe. The marks of torture appeared on their bodies. Some lost their eyes others were without hands because of persecutions

but these deformities were like models crowning their bodies.

The council listened to Arius then Athanasius stood up and discussions ran for days and the Christians were praying everywhere and longing to know the results. At last the Fathers agreed to write the Orthodox Creed. "Truly we believe in One God... whose kingdom shall have no end". People in all parts of the world studied it and recited it in their prayers.

St. Anthony

At this time of the church history Egypt, Syria and Asia Minor were full of Monks and saints who deserted the world and devoted themselves to prayers and worship. The first to establish the Monastic System was St. Anthony who was born in the city of Kimn El Arous in Governorate of Beni Sweif in Upper Egypt. Anthony was a young man when he heard the priest reading in the church, one of the sayings of the Lord Christ: "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven, and come, follow me". He considered these words directed to him so he sold all his possessions and distributed the price among the poor and headed for the desert and there the devil tempted him by different ways but he conquered the devil by prayers and fasting. When he heard of the persecutions of Maximianus to the Christians he went to Alexandria (313) to encourage the martyrs and comfort the persecuted. He once more left the wilderness in the year 351 to help Pope Athanasius in resisting the Arian heresy.

St. Basil the great

St. Basil studied all the sciences of his time. When he visited the monasteries of Egypt, Syria and Iraq he desired the life of the monks so he stayed alone in one of the mountains to pray, contemplate and read the Bible. One day he descended to his native town and its Bishop ordained him a priest to help him resist Arianism. When the Bishop departed to heaven, the people chose him to be their Bishop. Basil cared faithfully for his people and resisted Arianism and wrote books. The greatest of what he wrote is the Liturgy of St. Basil, which is used in our church up till now.

Saverus Patriarch of Antioch

He was born in Persia. He was a pagan and made studies in Beirut. He was baptized in Trabulus. He desired the life of worship and became a monk and traveled to Alexandria. He was elected Patriarch of Antioch in 512. He spent seven years supporting the sound Orthodox faith. When one of the Emperors who supported the heresies became king, St. Saverus was excommunicated and they cut off his tongue. St. Saverus came to Egypt and stayed in the town of Sakha in the Governorate of Kafr El Sheikh. He was a great supporter to Pope Theodosius I, Pope of Alexandria. He departed to heaven in Egypt in about 542. This Saint is one of the heroes of the Orthodox faith. The Coptic Church remembers him in the prayer to the Congregation of the Fathers and saints, before Athanasius and Dioscorus.

Discussion

1. Why did Pope Alexander refuse to reconcile with Arius and to return him to the church in spite of the request of the Emperor?
2. How do you explain the Pope's behavior, which contradicts the words of Christ "Love your enemies?"

3. The marks of deformity were clear on many of the fathers who were present in the Council of Nicene. What beauty can you see in the attendance of those deformed people to such a great council?

Homework

Enlist the churches named after martyrs and saints and mention their places.

First Week of August

(49) Ecumenical Council

References

- + “The Age of the Councils” Fr. Kyrillos el Antony
- + “St. Athanasius the Apostolic” Fr. Matta Al Miskin

The Lesson

Aim

An idea about the three great councils and the work of the church...

Administration System in the Church

The church in any village is in charge of her priest and some deacons. If there is a simple dogmatic question, people ask the priest of the church. The deacons are in charge of financial and administration matters. This is like the system followed in organizing any group. A principal runs the school assisted by a vice-principal and a board that is held from time to time. A society also has a board and a boss. In the church we have deacons, priests headed by bishops and his holiness the Patriarch. The Holy Congregation is the highest authority in the church and it is its members who decide and it is they who have the final word in the domains of the church creed and faith, in ordaining bishops and their assistants and in setting the general policy of the church.

The Holy Congregation

1. It is the highest authority that looks into the affairs of the church, managers its activities and solves its problems.
2. If there is a problem in more than one country and is too difficult to be solved as the case was in the early Christian period, there is a need to hold a council in which the different churches of these countries are to be represented. As the early church had one dogma and one faith, Ecumenical councils were held. The main direct reason for holding these councils was the appearance of strange religious views or what we call heresies.

The First Council and the Choice of Matthias

“The Council” is a living expression... on the part of the church to keep the spirit of understanding and love. The Lord Christ left the apostles as a group of believers who love one another, are tied to one mind and one heart. They expressed their opinions and took their decisions with unity in mind, heart and spirit so they gave a model to the church, a model of unity and love. In the apostolic age, the eleven apostles held a meeting under the leadership of

the Holy Spirit and they all prayed so that God might choose Judas' successor as Judas betrayed the Lord. They drew lots and the one chosen was Matthias who was added to the group of eleven apostles (Acts 1:15-26).

The Conference in Jerusalem

We also read about the first council in Jerusalem in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 15:1-20). Here we find the great apostles holding a meeting to discuss the problem that aroused a lot of discussion those days: The problem was: It is necessary for a believer to go through the Jewish stage first then to Christianity or can his faith in Christ take him from paganism to Christianity? They discussed this problem, then one of them proposed a suggestion and a certain decision and they all agreed then they wrote it and sent it to all the churches.

- + Mention some names of the apostles who attended that meeting.
- + Who was the head of the council?
- + What were the decisions?
- + Was this the apostles' own point of view, or was it God's desire? Prove this.

The faithful Christian must do the same if he misunderstands a religious topic and the church clarifies it for him. In this case he must obey and be happy to learn, not to be stubborn and resist. There appeared in the church people who understood dogmatic matters wrongly. Those persons appeared at different times in the fourth and fifth centuries when Christianity was declared a formal religion of the State, i.e. the Roman Empire. Let us have some examples:

The Council of Nicene (A.D. 325)

Arius was a priest in Alexandria. He came from Libya. He could not understand the Holy Trinity and how God is One in Three Hypostases. He thought that God the Redeemer was not God. He said that the Son was of a less degree than the Father. The Egyptian church tried to convince him but he did not obey the church so the church excommunicated him. He complained to Emperor Constantine who summoned a conference in Nicene in Asia Minor. 318 Bishops from different parts of the world came to attend the conference. It was a blessed model of the unity of the church. Theological discussions ran between Arius and the church. The great defender of faith was Deacon Athanasius who accompanied Pope Alexander who was the Pope of that time. Arius enjoyed a strong character. In Alexandria and other places he wrote hymns that contained his corrupt belief and tried to inculcate his belief into the minds of many people. In the conference, he played with words but the council reached decisions and opinions were listened to and votes were taken for each decision. "Truly we believe in one God...Creator of heaven and earth, and all things, seen and the unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Only begotten Son of the Father...true God out of true God; Begotten not created..."

- + What was the conviction of the council?

The council excommunicated Arius and the bishops signed approving the decision. They glorified God who gathered them as brothers and the Holy Spirit who guided them to take this decision.

The Council of Constantinople (A.D. 381)

The church settled the question of the Son but Macedonia's Patriarch of Constantinople said that the Holy Spirit was created or made, so the Second Ecumenical Council met in Constantinople and was attended by 15 bishops. The principles were discussed and decisions were taken and thus the last part of the Orthodox creed was written: "Truly we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord the life giver...we look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the age to come. Amen".

The Council of Ephesus (A.D. 431)

The questions raised never end. Before the fourth century people used to ask and they still ask questions. Blessed are those who obey and never cause troubles to the church but the devil never keeps still. Nestorius the Patriarch of Constantinople said that God was not born of Mary the Virgin but she gave birth to a man then God abode in him. These words are against the Holy Bible. We shall give three verses to prove this fact. For example:

1. "And the word was made flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14).
2. "Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh" (1 Timothy 3:16).
3. "For you have found favor with God...therefore also the holy one which shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:30-35).

So the council of Ephesus was held and 200 bishops attended it and the leader was St. Cyril the Pope of Alexandria. After the discussion they came to the following definite decisions: "We exalt you O Mother of the True Light..." They ended with this text: "We preach and evangelize the Holy Trinity. One Godhead... we worship Him and glorify Him". So the decisions of the Council of Nicene summarized the most important topics studied by the Ecumenical Councils.

Questions

1. Why are the great Ecumenical Councils never heard of before the fourth century?
2. What are the three Ecumenical Councils?
3. Why was each of them held? What were the decisions of each council?
4. Write what you know about Athanasius the Apostolic, Arius, and Cyril the great.

Activities

Write a list of the heretic instructions showing the statements from the Orthodox Creed that refute these fallacies: Write the items opposite each other.

The Second Week of August

(50) The Council of Chalcedon

References

- + "Nestorianism" Anba Gregory
- + "Eutychianism" Anba Gregory
- + "Pope Dioscorus the defender of faith" Anba Gregory
- + "Pope Dioscorus" St. George Church, Sporting

The Lesson

Aim

To be acquainted with the reasons behind the Schism of the church.

The Heresy of Eutyches

Eutyches was an archimandrite of a monastery at Constantinople. He defended the Orthodox faith against the heresy of Nestorius but his great zeal for the sound faith led him to a new heresy. He believed that Christ's body was not like ours but it was an ethereal body. Many people followed him in his belief, so a small council was held in the city of Constantinople under the leadership of its Bishop, Flavianus and the council decided to excommunicate Eutyches because he said that the Manhood of Christ was totally lost in his Divine Nature as a drop of vinegar is lost in the waters of an ocean. The heresy of Eutyches caused a great split in the church so King Theodosius decided to hold a new council in the city of Ephesus. He invited all the churches to attend that council and he also invited Pope Diocletian to exercise supreme authority over it as president. Twenty Egyptian bishops came with Pope Diocletian.

The Second Council of Ephesus (A.D. 449)

The Bishops of Alexandria, Jerusalem and Antioch and all the churches came to Ephesus but the Pope of Rome sent two delegates with a message "Leon's Tome". Pope Diocletian presided the council according to the king's desire. The Pope began the meeting by reading the king's decree of holding the council then he asked someone to read the message sent by the Pope of Rome but one of the bishops suggested that Eutyches should stand before the council so that his beliefs might be examined and all agreed. So Pope Diocletian summoned Eutyches to appear before the council.

Eutyches declares Orthodox Statement

Eutyches appeared before the council and said that he repented his wrong belief and that he confessed the belief of the church so the council declared him innocent and rehabilitated him.

The Roman Pope Protests

There was no chance for them to read the message sent by the Roman Pope to the council and that was a new heresy about the Lord Christ, so the Pope's delegates went back to Rome and told the Pope that his message was not read and the Pope was annoyed. The Roman Pope asked the king to hold another council in Rome to re-examine Eutyches' beliefs but King Theodosius did not agree to hold that council saying that the Second Council of Ephesus declared the true faith and there was no need for holding another council.

The goal is achieved

King Theodosius died and his sister Pulcheria and her husband Marcian reigned Rome. Pulcheria hated Diocletian because he used to reproach her because of her sins as she was a nun but she married. Pope Leo seized the chance and asked the queen to hold another council. At last there was an agreement to hold a council in Chalcedon.

The Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451)

It is clear that the council of Chalcedon was not held to discuss a dogmatic creed but it was held

for personal reasons. The queen desired to take revenge of Pope Dioscorus because he used to reproach her for her sins and Pope Leon wanted to declare himself as the head of all the churches of the world including the church of Alexandria as he saw that the Popes of Alexandria preside the Ecumenical Councils and some of the excommunicated bishops wanted to be rehabilitated. In this way all the parties were against Pope Dioscorus and they tried to prove that he did not follow the orthodox faith and that he followed the heresy of Eutyches. Because that was out of their power, they asked for the meeting to be postponed for five days. Then they held a meeting and ordered the soldiers to keep him within the confines of his house and prevent him from going out so that he might not attend the council. Then they excommunicated Pope Dioscorus and deposed him.

Schism inside the church

The council of Chalcedon had a very bad effect on the church in the whole world. The church split into two: The Eastern churches included the church of Alexandria and the church of Antioch and the western churches included the church of Rome and the church of Constantinople. It was love that gathered and united the hearts of the fathers in the first three councils of Nicene, Constantinople and Ephesus so those councils succeeded and the church became more powerful through them but when the spirit of jealousy and dispute appeared in the council of Chalcedon, the church divided into groups.

Discussion

“For where envy and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work” (James 3:16).

1. Show how this verse came true in the Council of Chalcedon.
2. Why St. Dioscorus was condemned in the Council of Chalcedon?
3. Write a list (a diagram) showing: The councils you know and their dates, the names of the famous fathers of each council, and the heresies they discussed.
4. Raise many prayers so that the church may be reunited and all become one according to the desire of Lord Jesus and the heavenly Fathers that we may be one in Him as He and the Father are one.

Third Week of August

(51) Some Virtues in the life of the Virgin

References

- + “The Second heaven” Anba Bemin
- + “Studies and contemplations on the great feasts” Part 2, Anba Bemin
- + “The Virgin” Fr. Youssef Assaad
- + “The Virgin” Fr. Tadrus Yacoub
- + “The Theotokos” Anba Macari Monastery

The Lesson

Aim

The Virgin as a model of perfect humanity

Introduction

The Father looked down from heaven and he did not find any one like you. He sent His only begotten Son who came and incorporated from you. There is no doubt that the grace of God kept the Virgin as an example of perfect human being and a unique model of humanity. She found favor with the Lord, the Father chose her and the Holy Spirit came upon her and the Son descended became man and took flesh through her. With her humbleness, the Virgin responded without hindering the delivering grace of God.

The Virgin and the Life of grace

The continuous sincere prayers of the Virgin to God in the temple and her contemplations on the kingly law made of her a chosen vessel for the Holy Spirit the source of perfection and all gifts. Being without any blemish and her complete response to the gift of grace made her bear the fruits of the Spirit in perfect love and deep rejoice and perpetual peace in lowliness, meekness and chastity. Her fullness made her a second heaven and a dwelling place of the Living God and a Paradise for the word. The Virgin's life as a model reproaches us because we do not have the Spirit in us and because we neglect having Christ within our hearts although he have his body and his blood so that He may abide in us and we in Him. Each soul then must possess Christ inside her heart, mind and whole being and be occupied with that fullness all her life and in this way the soul will become a chaste virgin to Christ like Mary the mother of Christ.

The Virgin and the life of Obedience

She was indeed the servant of the Lord. She obeyed the good news of the angel and subdued herself to the wonderful will of God who will be born in a manger. She escaped to Egypt in very severe circumstances and endured the life of poverty in Nazareth without murmur or complaint and in complete submission to the Lord she agreed that her only begotten son would leave her to devote himself to the message He brought from the Father. Her obedience was with understanding. She understood the purpose of God even if that Divine purpose was beyond human understanding and the Holy Spirit taught her everything.

It was obedience out of love as it was the obedience of the children not that of slaves. It is the obedience that obtains her power from the burning obedience of love that lives in the heart as the Son obeyed the Father and gave Himself for the Salvation of the world.

Obedience within the frame of truth: As the Christian's obedience is not for a certain man. It is obedience of the truth only. For this reason the Virgin obeyed her son not because He was her Son but because He Himself was the Truth and the Lord Jesus honored His mother not because she was His mother but because she knew His will and obeyed the Truth in Him.

The fathers used to refer to the obedience of the virgin as a model contrasting that of Eve. The first woman was tempted by disobedience in the Garden of Eden but the Second Eve (Mary) opened the way for us to go to the Tree of life.

The Virgin and the Life of Devotion

The word "devoted" means "separated from a certain task" and the virgin was devoted to the Lord God from birth and she was a Nazarite to God. The Divine words were directed to her: "A

garden locked is my sister, my bride, a garden locked, a fountain sealed". As the Tent of meeting was devoted to the Lord, with all what was inside it and nobody could enter it but the Levites, the case also was true to the Virgin who was devoted to God and no one entered her or went out of her except the Son of God, the Word, the Second Hypostasis. Mary lived her childhood with God in the Temple and she lived a life of virginity and that is why she asked the angel Gabriel when he told her the good news of the birth of Christ, "How shall this be, since I have no husband?" Thus she lived a virgin after giving birth to Christ; for this reason we call her the virgin of perpetual virginity. The church rejects the ideas of those who say that Mary married after giving birth to Jesus. Jesus' brothers mentioned in the Gospel are the sons of Claupa, Joseph's brother whose wife Mary is the Virgin's sister. He who contemplates Ezekiel knows how the virgin lived as a virgin all her life (Ezekiel 44:1,2). She is a model of true devotion. She was devoted in her body, in her virginity, in her mind, in her feelings and in her soul... She was an acceptable offering of life before the Lord.

The Virgin and the Life of Contemplation

Contemplation is devoting man's mind and heart for the Love of God, keeping away from the worldly concerns, to unite with God so that the mind does not find pleasure in anything except in prayer and seeing God. The life of contemplation is a glorious connection with God through internal prayers and understanding the scriptures. The Virgin was a blessed model so she "kept all these things, pondering them in her heart" (Luke 2:19). She was conscious of the Gospel's prophecies with the Spirit of inspiration... In her hymn, she held fast to the Lord's promises to Abraham. She remembered His mercy to His faithful ones through all generations, and His support to Israel. She quoted Hannah's hymn (the mother of Samuel). So the Virgin kept the spirit of the scriptures and the text too. The tradition tells us how she remembered all the events of the New Testament in silence and pondering as a holy vessel of the events of the church history of which she was eyewitness. The history and life of the virgin will remain a wonderful, splendid, calm model for contemplation and deep understanding that will call us always to understand the word of God.

The Virgin and the Life of suffering

The Virgin was adorned with pain and virtue... She was exposed to psychological pains when Joseph suspected her... She found no place where she could give birth to her son. She spent two years or more in Egypt without shelter exposing herself to the dangers of robbers. She suffered from (bodily) physical pains and her heart suffered a lot under the cross when she knew that the disciples escaped and suspected Him and that one of them betrayed him. The Jews at that time were able to crucify her only son. She suffered a lot at the time of burial and at the garden when the stone was put to block the tomb. This is what Simon the elder prophesied: "A sword will pierce through your own soul also". The physical pains were unbearable. The state of poverty when she was in Nazareth made her work to help her old husband...the pains of the journey to Upper Egypt, giving birth to her Son in an unsuitable place, etc.

What is the Virgin's attitude towards all this?

She called all generations to magnify her. These pains were an offering of love and thanksgiving and an exercise of wonderful patience.

The Virgin and the life of purity

Her purity and virginity were not only in the flesh but that was also true in her soul and spiritual

life. It was the purity of thought, life, heart and conscience. The Virgin is a model for anyone who wants to live the life of perfection in everything. She helps every young man and woman who suffers from the wars of the devil. She is their intercessor in their struggle. She is a model of holiness on the earth. To honor and magnify the Virgin in our life, we must imitate her in her life and be inspired by her virtues. We must obey her Son so that we may be shining tapers before her icon.

Exercise

1. Follow the example of the life of the Virgin in the following situations:
 - a. Serve others in obedience, joy and love.
 - b. Subdue yourself to the will of God in your life in time of disease and temptation and endure that thankfully.
2. Put the picture of St. Mary the Virgin in your room and keep the picture as a model of purity. Remember her when you admire the physical beauty and ask her to intercede for you in times of troubles.
3. Draw a picture of the Virgin carrying her Son the Lord Jesus. Make a wall magazine and write about the virtues of the Virgin. Through grace try to follow her example.

Recitation

- + The Virgin's hymn: My soul magnifies the Lord (Luke 1:46-55).
- + One of the Virgin's hymns in the Mass such as: "The Censer of pure gold..."

Fourth Week of August

(52) The Christian Refuses Fanaticism

References

- + "Problems of Youth" Anba Bemin
- + "Denominationalism" Costi Bendlaj

The Lesson

Aim

Facing fanaticism with love in a positive way not a passive one.

Do not feel distressed as a wrongdoer

A child may make a mistake or cheat in the exam and the teacher (Servant) punishes him, and to justify his mistake or failure, the child accuses that teacher (Servant) of religious fanaticism. A man may feel oppressed in his profession or in his studies for a different reason such as partiality or favoritism and he attributes this to fanaticism. There may be a dispute between two children for one reason or another this dispute may turn into a conflict between two parties that may take the form of denominationalism. When the Lord said to His disciples, "Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you" ... He added "falsely on my account". So fanaticism is of a religious shape if what you receive of injustice and persecution is because of your religion, belief or holding fast to your faith.

Denominationalism and its dangers

Some people resort to a passive solution when they gather around those who belong to the same religion, belief or attitude... those people may be more enthusiastic, religious and zealous but this jealousy is not spiritual in nature so it does not please the heart of God. Besides, those religious people may feel happy when the other party faces troubles or failure. They are mainly concerned with their number not with their spiritual life. They consider the church and the bishops as an institution responsible for protecting and defending their secular interests regardless of the Salvation of their soul... These are the characteristics and dangers of denominationalism as it is against the Spirit of Christianity. It also deprives the citizen of being loyal to his country and keeps him away from love and positive situations.

The Christian cure

There are four solutions for this problem:

1. Standing firm in faith: Faith is a gift that God puts in your heart. You have to keep it lit, as it is a flame that came to you through the ages. It came to you lit with a bright light so you have to keep it lit with a brighter light. Be always ready to answer anyone who asks you, read books, study your religion before you study the beliefs of others, and search for the light that exists in the Gospel. It is better for you if you study and ask than being asked when you cannot answer. In this case your faith will grow weak. Paul the apostle says: "Test everything; hold fast what is good".

2. True love: Remember that those who do not have your religious belief are your brothers in humanity. If your heart can receive all those fanatic people or narrow-minded people, they will also show love and feel that God is with you. Be always prepared to treat all people with a smiling face. Let your love be out of your heart and do not pretend it but if the other party hurts your feelings or caused you pains or does not treat you in the same way, in this case you are blessed as the Lord does not forget the labor of love.

3. Demanding one's rights: Christian love does not mean that you do not seek your rights, as meekness is not cowardice. This does not mean that you should get your rights through violence, power and destruction. Ask for your rights calmly and with courage and be sure that "Right" can defend itself. Finally be ready and be prepared to leave all your rights joyfully if you have to choose between your rights and your faith.

4. The Common ground: Fanaticism always results in separation of people and hatred among men. It causes people to keep away from one another so they do not deal with one another in the daily common domains. The library, the playground, the laboratory, the music team, the School broadcasting, Society and all the social and practical activities form a common ground for practicing true love so that love may prevail among people and if anyone of the extremists tries to arouse hatred, he will be unable to do that and the two parties will resist him.

Discussion

Discuss the problems of your life and your studies and propose solutions in the light of the principles you studied.

Debate

How to Study My Lessons Well

Discussion and dialogue should include the following points:

1. It is important that the goal should be clear. The man who seeks to increase his knowledge loves reading, and that who like to get the best and highest science certificates only through any means, usually does not pay much attention to hard work and achievement.
2. It is necessary to clarify the relationship between knowledge and the humanity of man as that who knows well and his knowledge increases and deepens, practices the life of man in the best way. Ignorance is the most dangerous enemy of man. Examples include health of the body, human relationships practices, knowledge of languages and their benefit in the future.
3. It is necessary to clarify the importance of studies in forming sound mental attitudes of the boy so that he may form his career in a good way. Examples include how he thinks, how he faces problems, how he studies a certain subject without superficiality, how he applies his studies in the domains of his daily life, how to keep away from partiality in his thoughts and attitudes, how he expresses his thoughts logically and with concentration and clarity, etc.
4. It is necessary to show the importance of the gifts given by God and that God will ask for account and that who is honest with his few talents will be honest with more talents.
5. It is necessary to show the importance of investigation and study and increasing one's knowledge and to train oneself to create and invent and to know living languages. All these are very important in social life, as the motherland is greatly in need of good citizens who are efficient and whose talents are fruitful.
6. Do not be pessimistic in your look to the future especially when you think of the career of the university graduates. It is possible for a person to study literature, art or languages and work as a clever carpenter or a clever painter. The aim of the first type of study is to form and build up the personality and the craft is for earning one's own living. There is no conflict between the two aims as the case was in the past but there is integration and harmony in them.
7. The Servant explains the essential rules of psychology that help children to study:
 - a. The subject should be clear.
 - b. The subject should be well categorized.
 - c. It should be read once as a whole then some parts should be read with concentration.
 - d. Underline the most important points.
 - e. Doing some exercises to inculcate what has been studied.
 - f. Reciting the part studied to make sure that that part has been inculcated in mind and memory.
 - g. Go back to the same subject after a short time for more revision, more exercises, doing model answers for some questions so that information will be deeply inculcated.

- h. Keep away from anything that may cause distraction of thoughts such as evil thoughts, television, and people talking loudly in the room or a radio set that causes noise in the room.
- i. Begin with the difficult part then go through the easier parts. Complete the easy task during the day or write the easier parts that do not need effort in studying.
- j. Do not leave your study for rest except after spending two hours. Take rest for half an hour then go back to complete your study.
- k. Do not study your lessons in bed or on a comfortable chair. Do not eat filling meals lest they should result in relaxation and desire for sleep.
- l. Resort to prayers, reading the Holy Bible, contemplating the life history of saints before starting your study. But be on your guard, do not let other activities or readings take up the time devoted for studying. Work should be well organized and discipline should be the rule of life.
- m. Devote half a day each week for rest, sports, social activities, service or family visits.

Debate

How to Choose My Friends?

The Lesson

Aim

Bad company corrupts good manners. Showing the necessity of bearing witness to Christ in social life.

Who is a friend and what are the characteristics of a good friend?

- A friend differs from a colleague.
- A colleague is merely a companion in work or in the scientific domain.
- A true friend is that whom you trust and love in purity, sincerity and internal relief.

Of what importance is friendship to man?

- Man was created as a social being in need of another person whom he trusts.
- Friendship is a domain for achieving true Christian love that is devoid of Unitarianism, personal interests, selfishness and misunderstanding.
- It is a domain for cooperation in school life, social life and overcoming the problems of everyday life (e.g. David and Jonathan in 1 Samuel 18-20).

The Christian behavior of friends

- What you want him to do to you, do it to him.
- Do not concentrate on your personal benefits and interests as this attitude is against Christian love.
- Show respect to him and do not speak about weaknesses but endure them as God endures our weaknesses.
- Share with him his happy occasions and his sufferings and sorrows (Rejoice with those

who rejoice and weep with those who weep).

- Do not say your confessions to him as confessions should be said to the father of confession only. But general topics are liable to discussions, dialogues and frankness.

Whom should I choose as a friend?

- Those with whom you feel spiritual, psychological, social and mental comfort or relief.
- Those who are not indifferent or whose character is bad whose mouths are full of repulsive words, sexual jokes and impure words.
- The family must give agreement to that friendship so that your friendship with them should be within the frame of the family friendship so that all your movements would be in light not in darkness.

Debate

My Attitude Towards the Sexual Instinct

References

- + Genesis 2
- + 1 Corinthians 6 ,7
- + “Life of Chastity, The mystery of love, Sex and flesh, Christianity and Flesh” Anba Bemin
- + “Questions about Chastity” Archdeacon Ramsees Naguib
- + “Sex and its human meaning” Kosta Hendly
- + “Youth and Pure Living” by H.G. Bishop Moussa
- + “Body From A Christian View” Dr. Adel Halim

The Lesson

Aim

Control the flesh and sublimation of the instinct into blessed activities and developing the Christian look towards flesh and sex.

Verse

“But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ and make not provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof” (Romans 13:14)

First: Why did the Lord create sex in man?

1. Refer to the Book of Genesis chapter 2: The first aim is fellowship and unity “The Two shall become one flesh”. Discuss the fellowship of marital love.
2. Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth: keeping kind (What is the difference between man and animal in sex, the first is characterized by noble feelings and higher emotions while animal is characterized by its sexual instinct and biological instincts).
3. A suitable companion to help man: The aim is cooperation and support in life so that man may not suffer loneliness and monotony, and the one fills the psychological gap of the other.

Second: What characterizes sexuality in man?

1. Man is blessed by God.
2. He is filled with noble emotions and sublime love.
3. He makes for unity and fellowship so the unity of marriage is only broken by marital treachery.

Third: Our attitude towards sex

1. We must not be ashamed of what the Lord was not ashamed to create.
2. One gender should not boast over the other as God made males and females equal, and in Jesus there is neither man nor woman as Christ is all in all.
3. Do not pay much attention to the sexual members. Only keep them clean and let them go naturally so that they may perform their message in marriage.
4. Do not stir them as they are sensitive and this may lead the energy into patterns other than the essential aim they were created for.
5. We have to estimate the sufferings faced in controlling this instinct if we expect a successful pure family life later on. For the sake of this life we have to endure and control ourselves in everything.
6. There are three fundamentals that may protect young people:
 - a. Control of thoughts: keeping the senses pure especially the eye and the ear, "Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord, keep watch over the door of my lips". "I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I look upon a virgin?"
 - b. Sports and hobbies: filling the spare time with spiritual, social and artistic activities and not to go to bed until you feel sleepy.
 - c. Spiritual life: (i) seeking grace and the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome the desires of the flesh and the sexual instinct. (ii) Prayers, the Holy bible, confession and receiving communion are the best means to protect young people from sexual deviation and falling into the bondage of sexual desires. (iii) Read examples of people who followed the desires of the flesh then they repented and became saints such as St. Augustine, St. Moses the Black, St. Bylagya. (iv) By the Spiritual fasting is considered a very important factor of the means of grace to overcome the desires of the flesh.
7. Sex in man is characterized by reverence. The Lord covered the naked flesh of Adam and Eve. The Christian man does not utter words of sex and does not speak of this topic without care. When he speaks about sex, he speaks with reverence and respect, as these are holy members that God uses as tools for putting the breath of life and creating man.