

Sunday School Program

Grade 9

Class of St. Abanoub



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PREFACE.

These are notes for the three periods from (September) to (August) of the 9th grade Program.

The beloved Servant will find the lessons well prepared. He is not advised to copy them to the young people as they are but only to make use of the ideas and the useful notes presented. There is no doubt that he will pray before and during the preparation of the lesson and even while dealing with the lesson and during his discussion with his children.

The power of the Holy Spirit of God makes the lesson effective and fruitful. Without the Spirit of the Lord, the topics would be mere intellectual thoughts and discussions devoid of life and without spiritual benefit for the life of the youth. Therefore, we insist that our beloved servants should pour themselves before the Throne of Grace and seek the guidance of the Spirit. The presence of the Lord while dealing with the topics, in prayers and singing praises to the Lord, in visiting the children or in activities is highly effective because any action that is void of the work of the Spirit and the presence of the Lord is of no value.

No doubt, the beloved servant has read (and we hope that he will read again and again) the introduction to this course and grasps the idea behind it, its goals and the nature of the Secondary Stage and its characteristics, its problems and the ways of cure as well as the religious feeling of the stage. All these items are stated in detail in the notes for the first period of the first year.

May the Lord bless this combined effort between the Diocese of Mallawy (His Grace Anba Bemin) and the Youth Service Committee at the Patriarchate through the prayers of His Holiness Pope Shenouda III. May he live long for the good of the church.

Bishop Moussa
Bishop at Youth

INTRODUCTION

Servants of the Secondary Stage need a curriculum to help them serve young men and women. Here we offer them this curriculum, which is characterized by the following characteristics:

1. The curriculum concentrates on the ecclesiastical side: it devotes several weeks for the young people to participate in the church liturgies and feasts and also when the church celebrates her saints, young people should take part in such celebrations and feasts; as the Coptic New year's day (El-Nyrouze), St. Mina's Day (Mar Mina's feast), Kiahk's Hymns of praise, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, the Holy Week and the Easter, Ascension Day, Whitsunday and the Feast of the Apostles.
2. The curriculum also concentrates on the Biblical side: as young people in this stage have the mental and spiritual ability to make a regular speculative study of some of the books of the Bible as a practical training to study the other Biblical books during their own life. Of these studies, we have: Joshua, a study of the Gospel of our servant St. John, the Acts of the Apostles and the two Epistles of Paul to his disciple Timothy.
3. The curriculum also concentrates on the social and social sides: debates are to be held where social and psychological issues are discussed and investigated and young people should hold clear Christian concepts about these issues so that they may apply and practice them and in this case they will be living Gospel in their daily life. Some of these debates are; "The Christian and Freedom, Violence and Meekness, Christianity rejects fanaticism, The Repeated Fall, Love and the life of Purity, The Christian Family and its attributes, The Sound Jealousy is devoid of rashness and extremes, How to practice the Sacrament of Penance (Confession) and the attributes of true repentance, and The difference between the strong personality and pride and haughtiness. We do believe that these are the issues that adolescents are interested in and that the religion education should face using a spiritual objective style.
4. The curriculum also concentrates on the lessons of Christian Religion: according to the curriculum set by the ministry to fill the gap. In this way we teach different topics each month. A lesson to revise the religion lessons, another lesson to hold a debate, a third to celebrate a feast, a fourth lesson for academic study. We offer this course as a joined effect between youth service in the Patriarchate and the Bishopric of Mallawy, under the supervision of His grace Anba Bemin and His grace Anba Moussa. May the Lord make it a basis for the growth of the service in the important stage? May the grace of the Lord be with us all through the prayers of His Holiness Pope Shenouda III.

Essential Books That Serve The Curriculum

1. Issues that concerns young people (His grace Anba Bemin).
2. Christian Education (His grace Anba Bemin and Dr. Siliman Nesseem).
3. The Religious Feeling in Childhood and Adolescence (His grace Anba Bemin).
4. How to serve young people (Anba Moussa).

Essential Elements In Serving The Secondary Stage

In the secondary stage, young men and women reach a turning point that may lead them either to sanctified life in Christ or to a life devoid of grace and this may expose them to danger. This is the stage of adolescence, the beginning of self-structure and the formation of aspects of personality and personality components. Young men and women in this stage are in dire need of:

1. ***The Work Of The Holy Spirit:*** The Holy Spirit sanctifies the whole structure of the human being's mind, feeling and behavior.
2. ***The Work Of The Father of Confession:*** The father of confession relieves young people and helps them to have a clear conscience. He guides them to correct way of true repentance that is based on true understanding of the real facts of life not on romanticism. It is a life renewed by the grace of Christ and growing in true struggle.
3. ***The Work Of The Young People's Servant:*** The servant gives young people spiritual and effective love. He leads them in living conversational and holy friendships, spiritual and social benefits and growth in grace, knowledge and service.
4. ***The Appropriate Books:*** These books give them sound knowledge and answers all their questions about their mood in this stage, the signs of the spiritual road, how they belong to the church, and love for all with open heart and clear conscience.
5. ***Effective Meetings:*** These meetings offer them the personality of Christ the Redeemer, the Christian fellowship of love, the fellowship of the saints as a holy domain where they smell the pure breeze of the Spirit.
6. ***The Constructive Activities:*** Such as parties, journeys, work camp, the church choir, remedial work classes for children, service in villages and others. These make young people devote their energy to constructive activities such as building up their character, their brethren, their society and their motherland.
7. ***Service:*** There is no doubt that when young people join classes of servant's preparation and then go out for service whether by visiting their brothers or serving children in cities and villages, their personality traits become fixed and they become finally connected with Christ and church.

Hence an integrated curriculum is needed. The curriculum should include all the above-mentioned topics. This book is an attempt to cover all these topics by offering young people some suitable lessons that are useful to this stage.

The Curriculum Axes

We shall see that the curriculum goes around certain axes, which we have given special attention:

1. ***Christ:*** Christ is the young people's beloved friend and Savior. Young people submit themselves daily to Him in renewed repentance to rest from their labors and sins, to receive the power necessary for victory and spiritual freedom, and to have a firm belief that Christ is the friend who is able to accompany them all the way to the kingdom of Heaven.
2. ***The Gospel:*** The Gospel should be the essential food of their spiritual life and a behaviorism style of their daily life, and the light that guides them to heaven and to teach

them how to behave correctly in all the domains of life.

3. ***The Church:*** This is the medium of the holy environment where young people should live, be brought up, feed on spiritual matters, be cured and enjoy spiritual rest. In this way they face the battles of life protected by grace, the sacraments and the prayers of the saints. The church is the domain where we unite with the others in Christian love whether those others are the children of Baptism or our brethren in humanity, as Christianity does not confine her children within the church frame, but she prepares them for social life as good citizens.
4. ***The Society:*** This is the domain where we bear witness to Christ who dwells in us and who gives us the power of unity and love for all people without exception. In this way, grace makes young people able to deal with older people in constructive way, to be generous and to behave in the right way. By so doing, love and fraternity will prevail, and hatred and sin will be avoided.
5. ***The Family:*** In it young people feel the gap among generations and by grace they can cross the gap as they know their weakness and needs, the experience of their parents and the elders and it is a domain for the sacrificing brotherly love as they are brought up in the spirit of giving, obedience, love and serving the society.
6. ***The Stage:*** The curriculum takes into consideration the nature of this stage and explains it to young people so that they may know themselves, their general and spiritual circumstances, their need for a guide and a light, their need for grace that saves them from their sins and deviations and their psychological troubles from which they suffer sometimes.
7. ***The Service:*** The curriculum aims at turning every young man and young woman into servants in the Vine Of Christ. Their service should reach the brothers everywhere whether Christians or non-Christians in sincere love that knows no selfishness or fanaticism. In this case they will enjoy the spirit of service, which is expressed in giving their motherland and citizens. This service will grow over days and will make of them a good citizen and faithful servants that can serve their church and their motherland with sincerity and faithfulness.

Dear Sister, I wish that this short introduction gives you the fullness of grace and the gift of the Spirit and I hope that each one of us will concentrate on the following:

1. Continuous Prayer: with and for the young people whom we serve. The main way of living the service is unity between the Servants and Christ.
2. Deep study of the Word of God: and daily satiating with it and its promise so that we may have a message for young people.
3. Daily involvement in the church life: in the hourly prayers, in reading the Synaxarium, to attend prayer regularly, to go to confession to receive the Holy Communion, to go to church on the religious occasions, to fasting, etc. so that we can become church servants who can convey the church spirit to young people in words and actions.
4. Regular reading and general culture: to help the coming generation have a deeper understanding, contemplation and study. We should acquire deeper knowledge, as this will enable us to direct the young people towards the good.
5. Careful study of the attitudes of this curriculum and preparing its lessons will with the spirit of prayer.

6. The lively individual visits: young people learn through love more than through lessons and sermons and they benefit from discussion more than from lectures.
7. The meeting: This must be delightful, lively and juvenile in its spirit, in its hymns and melodies, its prayers and words, and in its instructions and dates of meetings. The lively meetings turn the audience into servants and disciples.
8. Renewed Activities: These gather young people in a sacred holy atmosphere and they have an effective delightful spiritual goal in attracting those who stand afar and confirming those who are near.

We pray that the Lord will bring many workers to his harvest. We ask you to send us your suggestions and comments on this curriculum. May the Lord's grace be with us all.

(1) Young People and the Life of Martyrdom

References

- + “Martyrdom in Christianity” Anba Youannis
- + “Martyrdom and Testimony” Anba Bemin
- + “Extracts in the Feasts” Anba Bemin
- + “The Feast of Martyrs” Fr. Matta Al Miskin
- + “The Spiritual Values of Nyrouze” (The Coptic New Year: St. George Church. Sporting)

The Lesson

Aim

Martyrdom in our life

Verse

“You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve” (Matthew 4:10)

Introduction

We often ask ourselves, why do the persecutions that befall us surpass in number the persecutions that befall the people of the world, although we are the faithful children of God? Moreover, the righteous martyrs face death with joy and yearning and we ask ourselves, what is the secret behind this wonderful joy? Which seems extraordinary in position and timing?

Motives for Martyrdom and how the church brings up and educates her children

- The concept of suffering as a fellowship with Christ.
- Expatriation and vanity of the world as an established fact in the sight of the children of God (Psalm 119:19): Thus we see that persons nominated for kings, leave all that glory for martyrdom such as St. George and St. Mina.
- If the fear of God is established in the hearts of the faithful, fear of the people vanishes (1 John 4:18).
- The Love of Christ kindled the hearts of His children so they offered their bodies as love sacrifice. Let us contemplate the epistle of Ignatius the martyr who yearned to offer his body to the beasts as a love sacrifice for Christ.
- Perpetual contemplation on the heavenly glories results in the heart clinging to them and the mind's preoccupation of their beauty and wonder, thus every worldly thing becomes valueless.
- Martyrs were victorious in their spiritual struggle (Exodus 14:13) but was martyrdom confined to a certain period in history?
- Has the church given up raising martyrs and offering them to God?
- We are given the name of “Children of Martyrs”, would this be a historical name only or would it mean that we have our share in our fathers’ martyrdom although the age of persecution and killing elapsed?

Martyrdom in our daily life

- Martyrdom is a daily test that faithful lives in a vivid way since he daily dies to his desires, and is daily crucified for Christ (Romans 8:36).

- The troubles we endure for service are a daily domain of suffering for martyrdom (2 Timothy 4:8).
- The good model and clinging to the truth have considered practical daily martyrdom amid a crooked generation. The church history is full of examples such as that pure young man whom the governor decided to leave with a harlot to tempt him. They only way for him to keep her away and to keep himself pure was cutting off his tongue with his teeth and he spat it to her face.
- Here we say, “What are our gains as Martyrs’ children? What is that thing that distinguishes and characterizes our church to which we give the name of “The Church of Martyrs”?

What are the blessings of martyrdom?

- The Spiritual blazing flames of love that is not quenched in our hearts.
- Testing the endurance of the faithful and declaring and testing their glory as the gold is tested by fire (I Peter 1:7).
- Martyrdom was a living preaching that brought many sons to the church (I Corinthians 15:29).
- The martyrs were given the crown of life (Revelation 2:10).
- That is why the church honors the martyrs and sets them at the top of the list of saints and arranged occasions and rites to honor them.

Honoring martyrs

- The faithful keep feasts of martyrs and celebrate them to renew the memorial.
- The churches are full of their icons before which tapers are lit representing their shining life.
- The relics that the churches endear and honor build altars on it.
- Sanctifying the places where they dwelt and which witnessed their testimony. St. Macarius the great used to visit the two martyrs Maximus and Domidius together with other visitors with whom he used to talk saying, “Let us have a look at the place where the young strangers martyred”.

(2) Characteristics of the Adolescence Age

I. Problems and methods of cure

This stage is considered a transition period between childhood and manhood. The first stage is related to its innocence and simplicity while the second stage is related to its responsibilities and difficulties. This stage witness radical changes in the life of youth in bodily and psychological domains. These changes drive others to make fun of young men sometimes and when this happens the young man/woman behaves in an unbalanced unreasonable way because these changes and their effects are very clear.

The adolescent likes to be treated as a man, and at the same time he likes the characteristics and sweetness of childhood to continue with him. This desire makes him in perpetual need of an elder friend and a guide with experience and this is a role of the servant who serves the youth. Here appears the importance of these stages, it shows the youth, his way into the future and

defines the traits and limits of his personality in the future.

The Changes that come upon the Adolescent

1. Bodily Changes

+ These include: body, voice, organs, hair, secretion, ductless gland, etc.

2. Mental Changes

+ Growth in mental powers such as deduction, criticism, understanding, memory, and attention
+ Growth in the accuracy of senses such as touch, taste, and listening
+ Mental powers, motor power, and artistic ability
+ The Servant should develop and guide these powers towards self-criticism devoid of despair and conceit and in this way the adolescents thinking becomes balanced and mature.

3. Emotional Changes

+ The growth of self-consciousness as a member of the group
+ Inclination towards the other sex
+ Inclination towards forming groups of friends
+ Inclination towards glorifying heroism and heroes

A) Sexual Inclination

- The adolescent is confused because the society avoids him. This is a natural useful inclination for the survival of humanity, but using it wrongly as in homosexuality, masturbation, or adultery impedes the sound growth of the body.
- The servant should give true and correct information, sincere advice, sympathy and love, and form a sense of disgust at defiled matters from physical, social, inventive artistic attitudes.

B) Social Inclination

- To make friends he needs good guidance in a way that does not weaken his personality. He needs help in choosing his friends.

C) The qualities of a good friend

- Of a family that appreciates the spiritual values practically.
- Of nearly the same age.
- He studies hard and he is successful in society and in his studies.
- Not aggressive not introvert but psychologically balanced.
- His language is refined and he has no inclination to violence or pride.

D) His desire to be treated as a grown up adult

- He likes to bear responsibility and to have his mark in groups and organizations.
- He likes to be treated as a master not as a slave.
- He accepts to receive orders from his colleagues not from his boss and this is an important point.
- He is deeply affected if he is well treated by his Servant or his father (The Servant and his responsibility).

E) Curiosity and inclination to exploration

- He likes to discover everything by himself and to make practical experiments and likes to listen to stories of explorers, discoverers, scientist and adventurers and also news about politics and sports.
- So we should encourage him to be scientific researcher and practice reading different and various references.

F) Self-centeredness

- The adolescent is sensitive for criticism and he criticizes himself severely and cruelly. If he is entirely absorbed in himself, he may become weak and fail. He may despair over the sins and mistakes he practiced. So he needs the encouragement from his guide, who leads him to positiveness and takes him gently away from the passive matters.
- We should not blame or reproach him before guests or the elders. We have to bear in mind that gentle friendly reproach is effective with him.

G) Inclination to be merry

- In spite of anxiety he likes fun and social participation. So evening parties that are soundly directed are useful for young people but young people should commit themselves to moral code and avoid inappropriate jesting.

H) Inclination to be rebellious and the desire to reform

- Self-assurance leads him to rebel against religion, society, the school and family, and drives him to criticize the mistakes of others.
- We can direct this inclination towards serving others with love.

I) Showing admiration for a hero and considering him ideal

- His love for society, comforts him. Giving him examples of holy men and their spiritual heroism.
- Our duty is to make him forget about physical championship and think spiritual heroism and to concentrate on the spiritual values.

(3) Troubles of the Adolescent Age

1. Inclination to rebel: Refusing the authority of parents, his elder brother or sister and alike. There is conflict between his inclination for self-esteem and submission to society.

Signs:

- Refusal of domination.
- Imposing his opinions on the family atmosphere in problems, clothing, etc.
- Refusing parental advice concerning choosing friends and studies.
- Refusing to accept any type of kindness from the family.
- Withdrawal from practicing activities and introversion of his family does not allow him to practice his freedom and assert his personality.

Causes:

- He feels that he has become a man and his desire to be treated as a man.
- Bad treatment at home -between pampering and cruelty.

Cure:

- Good treatment (Firm and balanced).
- The independent personality of the son. The son has the freedom to choose what appeals to him.
- Do not punish him if he is psychologically annoyed.
- Approach him gently and kindly.
- Parents should be good examples to be followed.
- A child should honor his parents out of love, not out of fear.

Rebellion against the school: To follow the bases of sound education.

Rebellion against Society: The adolescent's anger with society for personal or social reasons or because of various events. Watch the adolescent's conduct and set before him positive social sound ideals and make him feel that he is also responsible for this society. The real cure for this problem is the change from concentrating on the self to Christ through repentance and fellowship.

2. Inner Anxiety: This is the result of the conflict between his inclination to childhood and his inclination to manhood, between his inclination to sex and the restrictions of the society, between his self-love and inability to achieve his desire and this makes him upset and perplexed, between rebellion and calmness between optimism and pessimism.

Cure:

- There is no peace," says the Lord, "for the wicked". There is no doubt that the only way to inner peace is the Lord Jesus Christ who is our peace and the Prince of Peace and who through His birth, peace came to the earth.
- So when a young man makes a covenant of repentance with Christ, and a fellowship of life with the Redeemer, in this case they can obtain the true peace which surpasses the mind Christ is then the only solution for the dangerous problems of the youth, because it is He that forgives us our sins and this is what we really need.
- It also purifies our hearts and this calms down our Inner rebellion. Christ also liberates us from the slavery and darkness. He takes us to His glorious kingdom where we find comfort, freedom and peace.
- There is no doubt that sin is the main reason for anxiety. This is the nature of things. No man can cure this matter. Only the Lord Jesus Christ can crucify with him our old selfish nature with its sin and he then gives us the new creation that is the new man created in the image of God in righteousness and the Holiness of truth.

3. Sex Troubles

Causes:

1. The individual's growth in the first stage abundance of cuddling or deprivation of love, can affect the growth of the young man later on.
2. The long time between adulthood and marriage because of civilization.

3. Wrong sex education at home and at school.
4. The exciting effect of the society on the adolescent: Cinema, press, broadcasting, books, loose scenes in the streets and wicked friends.

But the real prominent reason is the nature of sin in man, which made the man lose the balance and calmness of his instincts. Because this nature is inclined to sin, it responds to any external incentive. The problem then lies in the depths of man not outside him “Everything is pure for the pure, but to the defiled nothing is pure, as their minds have also been defiled together with their conscience”. The problem lies in the heart, which can be a treasure of evil deeds “For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks”.

The inner spring is the problem and needs to be purified. No one can purify it except Christ with His grace and Holy Spirit...and the role of man is only to show his sincere intention to accept salvation and to express his deep trust in the Lord. If the man asks for the gift and takes it and feels the work of grace in his life this work is kindled by young men's struggle in prayer, Biblical lessons and spiritual readings and by regular confession and receiving the Holy Communion. We say that if the young man gets the Divine work and feels the grace that changes his life, he has to guard himself and not to expose himself to the evil currents or to hand himself over to the devil. He has to persist on prayer and worship. We say these words before we deal with the sex problem because we know for sure that there are various aspects of one thing that is enslavement to sin from which the Son will liberate us.

Examples of Sexual Deviations

1. Masturbation: The adolescent suffers from psychological tension and overcomes it in this way, which is very harmful and kindled by exciting outside incentives or family problems or deviant friends. The uncircumcised person finds that his organs are dirty and this may drive them to practice this habit. Also tight clothes or eating rich foods, if one lies on one's back or belly, all these lead to forming this bad habit.

Dangers:

- It activates the secretions of the glands and this helps confirming the habit.
- It arouses psychological conflict between delight and the sense of guilt.
- It forms a type of delight that differs from the sound type of delight, which may lead to failure in married life.
- It often brings the adolescent outside society and drives him to become an introvert.
- It has a bad effect on both body and health as through it the adolescent loses the energy he is badly in need of in the stage of growth and development.
- It is a sin as it is lust. It is an evidence of self-centeredness. It causes spiritual frigidity in overcoming.

Cure:

- We must study the case of the adolescent at home and his psychological, sex, health, social and mental states. There may be a source of excitement and the cure will never work unless we cure the causes at first.
- Sound sex education.
- Entering into the fellowship with God through a spiritual guide and a father of confession

and practicing the spiritual life and in this way the young man shifts his concentration from negative sides to positive sides.

- The adolescent must accept his social responsibility as a husband later on.
- The adolescent must spend his time doing useful activities: The club, hobbies, the library, debates, lectures and trips.
- We must keep away from evil friends and deviant sources of sex education.
- Developing the sound physical, psychological and mental attitudes that drive him to settle the conflict and to make use of his energy in noble matters.

Many young men who are enslaved to this habit suffer from feelings that are in conflict:

A) Some demand health only: Such people must feel that the habit is a sin that needs repentance and that it is against God and that without the grace of God he cannot get rid of it.

B) Some indulge themselves in it in humiliation and humility: Such people should raise their eyes to heaven and in this case their concern will be turned from this bad habit to the blessed fellowship. Our criterion should not be always the habit and how to overcome it but the criterion should be the fellowship with God and its liveliness and effectiveness. The horizons of godliness and continuous fellowship fills a heavenly delightful way of light for man and the adolescent breaks the ties of sin and the authority of the devil. Let us be positive and concentrate our talk on the fellowship with God not on the sin the more the adolescent directs his mind towards heaven, the more he keeps away from this bad habit. It is not fit to speak about such topics in detail in a public meeting. The individual work in this domain is much better and if we feel that it is important to discuss this matter in a public educational meeting, let it be done in a spiritual atmosphere. The talk should also be positive and constructive not negative. We must widen the concept of purity among young people. The wide concept of holiness should include all the dimensions of his life and the troubles of life. Concentrating on material things only is not good as the personality is one integrated wholly.

II. Homosexuality

Cause:

- Development may stop at the stage of adolescence when a young man is on friendly relations with the same sex and these friendly relations may deviate and become a means of forming a type of delight.
- Bad sexual education. Feeling that such relations are dirty may lead to feeling that the relationship between married people is also dirty.
- Separating the two sexes leads each sex to introvert (armies, schools).
- Strong relations between and among young people may lead to exciting sensations as they touch one another.
- Biological factors as the increase in the glands excretions.
- Finally, disputes drive a young man to refrain from showing any interest in the other sex in the domain.

Cure:

- We study the causes of the problem: psychological, physical or social.
- Sound sex education at home, in the school and in the club.

- Spiritual friendship between young people and the spiritual guide.
- Watching the gatherings of young men and discussing the matter with them frankly and calmly.
- Cruelty and indifference when we know that this habit is practiced, i.e. established the habit.
- The spiritual approach; Prayer, the Holy Bible and the social activities.

III. Religiousness among adolescents

- Religiousness among adolescents may be of three types:
- Doubt: This needs a man in whom a young man have trust to discuss everything with him in a friendly way.
- Sticking literally to the Law: i.e., carrying out the commandments literally without concern to the inner godliness and the inner work of grace just to comfort the conscience. The will establish a state of self-righteousness in the adolescent.
- Superficiality: The unsettled visionary emotion for monasticism and others. This needs spiritual guidance and sound planning.
- To be bound to the Lord Christ, the Gospel and the church, to go regularly to confession and to perform the service are greatly important in acquiring the sound religiousness.
- The friendly relations among young people in the holy places and in the club give them a chance to assimilate and absorb useful important spiritual experience.

IV. Sexual dream (It has three types)

- Natural: So long as the mind is pure all the day.
- Sinful: It is a reflection of defiled thought.
- Psychological: It is a reflection of fear. So long as the mind is pure and man is in fellowship with God, he must not worry about such things as if one concentrates on this topic or thinks a lot of it, the dream will be repeated many times.

(4) The Adolescents Religious Feelings

The Responsibility Of Religion Education In This Stage

The Secondary Stage is the period of late adolescence and the beginning of physical maturity. By the end of this stage, physical growth becomes complete. The child of secondary stage has his own attitudes and problems and limited needs.

1. The Stage attitude and problems:

- Seeking self-discovery: Sensitivity towards the self increases, and the young man seeks to discover himself. He thinks: Who am I? What am I thinking? etc. He wants to know himself, but he does not like to be criticized especially before his friends or before the other sex. He likes encouragement and likes those who are aware of his talents and seeks their development.
- Inclination towards idealism and the absolute and dissatisfaction with the real world: The young man at this stage is idealistic in his thoughts. He criticizes everything on the criterion of perfection without taking into account the challenges of time, place and structure. He criticizes himself and his family and he sometimes rebels against authority.

Because the environment and the psychological state differ from one young man to another, patience in treating young men and holding discussion with them are needed. This stage is the stage of discovery of values. It is the period of high free jumps towards the ideals. The responsibility of religion education towards this inclination should be introducing programs that satiate his inclination towards ideals and spiritual heroism and studying the issues of the agreement between religion and science from effective specialized books.

- Seeking the discovery of new patterns of life: The inclination towards the ideal and dissatisfaction with the real life are connected with the discovery of the new ways and patterns of life. The young man wants what is new and this is useful...as Christianity believes in perpetual renewal but she sees that the real renewal is the inner one "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind". He that renews his inner self seeks to develop his society but he does not neglect the heritage but benefits from the experience of the past so that the new is integrated.
- What he thinks about love and the other sex: The child of the secondary stage is occupied in the contemplation of topics on sex. This instinct of sex occupies his mind and represents a lively concern in his life. One may differ from another in objectives yet all young men are deeply indulged in this thought. We would fight evil thoughts in this stage. The young men of this stage seek love because they feel the need to go out of the ego. In the body there are currents of the instinct and love for other sex. The self needs other's love. Romanticism is the attribute of friendly relationships. The young man imagines that these friendships will last forever. Sometimes the platonic ideals are confused in his mind. He dreams of relationship with the other sex but his relationships are not physical. All these relations indicate self-centeredness and emotionally void. In this way the responsibility of religious education is determined to face that inclination as follows:
 - Offering the curriculum of sound sex education through Christianity and the Gospel.
 - Introducing examples to be followed of those who lived the life of chastity and real love.
 - Deepening the concept of love and establishing in them the correct attitude towards love.
 - Chastity in the real preparation for love.
 - Showing the difference between real and false chastity results from suppression and self-depreciation.
 - Establishing chastity among young people is achieved through granting and giving him spiritual energy that supports the will and increases the effect of the Holy Spirit.
- Anxiety about the future: Many questions occur to the mind of every young man and woman in this stage. When anyone of them reads about the hardships of life, their anxiety increases and they become psychologically tired. The responsibility of Religion education towards this attribute is as follows:
 - A young man must be acquainted with a spiritually mature guide who can absorb the waves of anxiety and confirms and establishes hope.
 - The program of this stage should find a cure for these problems within the lessons themselves so that a young man may know himself, which is very important in

this stage.

- The features of education in this stage are positive and optimistic attitude with concentration on the fact that enslavement to sin deprives the believer from redemption.
- Social spiritual activities play an important role so camping establishes the attitudes of love and sacrifice and encourages young men to go into retreat and pray.
- Violence, Roughness and Rebellion in various ways: A young man of this stage is usually violent and rough as a result of the strong sex motivation and the instinctive energy associated with it. Another psychological reason is fear of others so he attacks others because they attack him and the young man is affected by Christ's instructions about lowliness. So religion education in this stage should concentrate on the following:
 - Lowliness is a Christian trait, which is the outcome of the work of the Holy Spirit.
 - Violence leads to violence and leads man to perpetual tension and anxiety.
 - Lowliness does not mean slackness but it means wisdom and firmness.
 - Grace delivers man from the sources of violence, which are weakness, fear and anxiety.
 - The energy of violence is consecrated by the Holy Spirit and is used in the works of following love and the violent Moses the Black, becomes known for his great love and service for others.
- Violence sometimes takes the form of rebellion so the duty of religion education and dealing with this attribute is as follows:
 - To encourage the young man to discover his talents and his abilities.
 - Liberating him from every hatred to himself. If the Lord has accepted us, how don't we accept the people and ourselves.
 - Directing the energies of young men towards constructive works and fruitful services.
 - Getting rid of destructive books and encouraging him to read constructive books such as books about the heroes of faith, science, and creative thinking.
- Love for service: Young people of this stage like to sacrifice and serve. They offer their service to those whom they trust and love. The duty of religion education is as follows:
 - To be sure that the young man has submitted his life completely to the Lord.
 - To entrust the service to him after he begins to struggle against his desires.
 - The domains of service entrusted to him should aim at glorifying God no at achieving personal interests. Hence the importance of preparing and serving on sound bases to develop the energy of young men and direct it to constructive spiritual work, not more activity practiced to occupy the leisure time.
- The most important attitudes that should be developed at this stage:
 - Spiritual inner peace and balance and to enjoy peace.
 - Lowliness and to win victory over the desires of the flesh.
 - Firmness and bearing responsibility, resisting indifference and laziness in work.
 - Violence and godliness of the heart through the Gospel and the Lord Jesus.
 - Sticking to and standing firm in faith based on inner motives not on external effects.
 - Hatred for sin and for evil works and love of sacrificing.
- Types of activities needed:

- Dealing with non-believers with toleration and without fanaticism.
- Practicing Exercises of repentance.
- Borrowing books from the library.
- Studying the Bible and practicing works of mercy and service.

(5) Friendship

References

- + “The Proper Behavior in a mingled Society” Anba Athanasius
- + “The Social Life from an Orthodox Perspective” Anba Bemin
- + “Questions about mingling between the two sexes” Mr. Ramsees Naguib

The Lesson

Aim

Proper behavior in society: Distinguish between your friends and how to choose the good ones. Don't involve yourself in relationships that may lead to destruction.

Verses

- “But it was you, a man my equal, My companion and my acquaintance” (Psalm 55:13)
- “He who loves purity of heart And has grace on his lips, The king will be his friend” (Proverbs 22:11)
- “And He said to them: Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves’” (Luke 11:5)
- “He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled” (John 3:29).

Introduction

- + Ceceron said, “Tell me about your friends, I tell you about personality. Man is unconsciously affected by his friends”.

Who is my friend?

The concept of “friendship” varies according to the type of people and their aims. To the people of the world, “Friendship” means that I choose a friend that has approximately the same attitudes which I do have, or of nearly the same age or social rank or certain aspects of behavior.

But to the Spiritual man, “My friend” is the person whose aim is salvation and for this end the two friends encourage and support each other. Although David and Jonathan were different in origin, education and social rank, they accompanied each other on the way of salvation.

Necessary Elements of Friendship

Two types of friendship:

- A. The good friend:** Joshua Son of Sirach says, “The good friend is more precious than any other living thing in the world and his goodness is matchless”. He is a treasure and a supporter in times

of psychological, social and financial crises. He is a model and a mirror for his friend. A friend usually encourages his friend to develop spiritually and academically.

B. The bad friend: Paul the apostle says, “Bad Company ruins good morals”. The bad friend may cause his friend to indulge in bad habits such as smoking, drinking, going to places of entertainment, gambling and sometimes committing crimes as St. Augustine’s friends once did.

How to choose your friends:

1. You have to like him and be on good terms with him taking David and Jonathan as example “The soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul”.
2. His behavior should be characterized by the spirit of holiness in talk, meetings, and short excursions and in play.
3. He should be characterized by Christian attributes such as honest and telling the truth, “The mouth of the righteous utters wisdom, and his tongue speaks justice”, “For my mouth will utter truth; wickedness is an abomination to my lips”.
4. He should be characterized by self-control (eye -tongue -thought).
5. He should be a man of sound judgment and good reputation. He should not be a gesturing fellow or a reckless one.
6. He should love God and people.
7. He should be assiduous in his work and studies.
8. He should have the same attributes.
9. There should be conformity between you in age, and the academic, social and spiritual level.

The Ideal Friend:

Lord Jesus is the best friend “The Lord is at hand”, “The Lord is near”, “We love Him because He first loved us”, “Let’s follow His example”.

How to Preserve Friendship:

1. Friendship should be free from opportunism and selfishness so that it may last for a long time. It should be based on sacrifice and self-sacrifice.
2. There should be mutual appreciation and respect, serious and frank talk without reproach or violence, gentle treatment and the aim is spiritual benefit.
3. Friendship should be centered upon Christ and it should aim at salvation and Spiritual growth.
4. Forgive your friend when he sins against you, “How often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?”
5. Defend your friend in his absence and reveal his virtues. Don’t give ear to slander. Contemplate how St. Peter spoke about St. Paul (2 Peter 3:5).
6. Give earnest advice to your friend and guide him to what is right. Contemplate the talk between Christ and the workers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20).
7. Do not impose your ideas on him and do not criticize him severely.
8. Refrain from harmful jesting.
9. Sympathize with him in all circumstances “Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep”.

Exercise

Take part in the spiritual fellowship through prayers, receiving Holy Communion, continuing spiritual reading and attending meetings.

6) A Study in the Epistle of St. James: The Christian and Suffering

References

- + “Our sufferings and Glories” by one of the monks of the Syrian Monastery
- + “Who can harm you?” St. John Chrysostom
- + “The Epistle of St. James” Fr. Tadros Yacoub
- + “An Introduction to the Gospels and the Epistles” Anba Moussa

The Lesson

Aim

How pains and sufferings lead us to God.

Instructions to Teachers

Concentrate on the blessings of pain and its positive aspect. Do not give the painful details that may be troublesome to young people.

Introduction

1. In the Apostolic age, the early church suffered from many troubles whether in Judea during the Roman Reign or in the places where the Jews were sojourners. The Christians received the worst treatment from their brothers the Jews who did not support them because of their faith in Christ.
2. Troubles surrounded the church in all ages in the form of heresies which caused a dangerous - schism in the church and that increased her troubles.
3. The church in our present age face different types of troubles and sufferings whether are caused by nature such as earthquakes, volcanoes, heat, etc. or illness and various types of diseases (Tobias 2:10-12). There are also troubles of spiritual struggle and service as well as troubles of perpetual practice of means of grace such as prayer and fasting. The devil directs a special war against the faithful; a war in the form of various persecutions because of their faith. God permits the occurrence of other sorts of temptation to test the saints (Abraham’s offering of his son). The church glorifies Abraham’s faith and the trial of his faith.
4. The other types of suffering is not according to the will of God but it is the outcome of our sins which St. Peter the apostle asks us to refrain from (1 Peter 4:15, Genesis 3:8-14, Genesis 4:11.14).
5. This we find that suffering is connected with the church life history in all ages starting with Adam who was driven out of Eden as a result of his fall up to the present day. How did the Fathers then face this suffering? What was their good plan for overcoming this suffering? St. James the apostle spoke about the problem of suffering that faced the sojourning Jews and wrote his epistle to explain the best way of facing suffering and turning it to our benefit and making use of it in building up our spiritual life. The

following are examples of this:

- a. A. The apostle sets before us the example of a great hero of suffering and patience, i.e. Job whose steadfastness enabled him to bear suffering (James 5:10, 11).
- b. In the age of the great Patriarch we refer to our father Jacob, who fell in the sin of deceiving his father Isaac. He lied to his father in order to obtain the birthright and blessing so the Lord God permitted that he should go through a long way of temptations and suffering. He fled his brothers; Laban deceived him and exploited him when he married him his two daughters; he felt humiliated before his brother when he met him; and he lost his son Joseph. All this was necessary for his spiritual growth and purification (Genesis 25:26).
- c. Moses, the man of God, who went out with all his tools, potentialities and hopes to rescue his people, no sooner did he kill the Egyptian man that he received a violent shock when the secret was known and he heard two brother Jews speaking about the murder. Moses fled to the wilderness and there he lived as a shepherd for forty years, thus loosing all his previous glories. But, for him the wilderness was an opportunity to find out himself and to show modesty before the Lord (Exodus 2:3). The church emphasizes this blessing that results from trial (Psalm 37:20-22).
- d. Then we came to Christ, who is the head of the church, when I meet with a trial, I face it by following steps similar to those followed by Christ in his suffering, so I feel that he is tempted for me. Christ helps me and shows me how to behave in time of suffering. I feel the fellowship of his suffering so my heart is filled with joy. St. James speaks about a very important point in facing temptation. The type of temptation and its cause should be easily cured (James 1:14). If I know the reason why I have been tempted; is it because of a certain sin or negligence in struggle or a natural catastrophe...etc. it will then be easy for me to overcome it by following the steps recorded by early fathers.
- e. In the New Testament, the fathers complete their technique in overcoming sufferings. We take St. Stephen the first Christian martyr as an example. In the depth of his pains he deserved to see the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. He received the crown of martyrdom and thus opened the way of crowns and glories for everyone who suffers pains in Christ (Acts 7:54-60).
- f. The saints of the New Testament experienced lots of pains. An example of those is Paul the Simple who was shocked when he discovered that his wife was an adulteress. But this temptation did not destroy him; on the contrary, it made him stronger and he kept away from the evil of the world, led an ascetic life and followed the Lord. Our churches are built in the form of an ark or a tent so that when we are inside it, we may feel that we are sojourners in this world so we do not expect to receive glories from the world but we receive pains and sufferings. Our real joy is in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Exercise

Contemplate the sufferings of Christ for us specially when we meet with temptation.

Activity

Pain leads to blessings: Give examples from: the Old Testament, the New Testament, Church History, and Your personal experience.

(7) A Study in the Epistle of St. James: Faith and Deeds

References

- + James 2:14-26
- + “Salvation in the Orthodox Understanding” Pope Shenouda III

The Lesson

Aim

Salvation by faith working through love

Introduction

1. Since the fall of man, man has been trying to please God through different types of worship and religion. When the Lord chose himself a people to worship Him with spirit and have Him the commandments connected with spiritual concepts and faith, that people turned the commandments into a form of practice and rites devoid of the spirit of faith (such as the works of the unfaithful) or though self-dependence (King Saul offered the sacrifice by himself instead of Prophet Samuel when Samuel was late).
2. When man could not please God through his works, God descended to him (in Christianity, Matthew 23:5), through the mystery of Incarnation and revealed Himself to the faithful and raised them through His grace to the life of faith as a way to the kingdom of Heaven.
3. Paul the apostle wrote his epistles explaining what the Christian faith is and showed that faith is trust in the existence of God and the belief that God is with us. Elijah and his well-known saying; “As the Lord the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand” (1 Kings 17:1). In his prayer during the mass, the priest says, “The Lord be with you all” to make us feel that the Lord is with us.
4. Faith also means being fully convinced that the promises of God and His commandments are true (Abraham was fully convinced that he would return with Isaac, and that God would fulfill His promise although Abraham was going to slaughter Isaac).
5. It is faith in my place that is prepared for me in the Kingdom of God (Genesis 22:10-14, Stephen saw the Heaven opened). The domes of the church are like the sky and the pictures of angels and the saints who are in heaven are drawn on these domes (Acts 7:55-56).
6. It is faith in membership of the church, the mystical body of Christ (Paul was concerned with collecting money from the churches of the nations for the poor people of Jerusalem, 1 Corinthians 16:1-3). The church keeps hold of this faith and prevents the unbelievers from entering the church building. A deacon is responsible for preventing those who are not church members from entering the church during the Holy Mass.
7. It is faith in all the church creeds, sacraments, and rites. That is why the church keeps asking her children to reveal their faith through repeating the creed of faith in all public

and private prayers but unfortunately, some people appeared in the church and misinterpreted Paul's words. They called for neglecting works and depending completely on faith. James the apostle directed his epistle to them and explained that faith is the basic condition for salvation but it is not the only condition (James 2:14-16). He showed the importance of works as they indicate the inner life (Matthew 12:34-35):

- a. Works, then, are the fruit of faith (the tree ref. Matthew 12:23). Monks, for example, revealed their faith by living as sojourners in the world. They sold all their possessions and left the world and deserted it. Anba Aghathon emphasizes the importance of works by saying; "Good behavior without talk is useful but talk without work is useless". Works also will be brought to judgment. I'll be judged according to my works (The rich man and Lazarus).
- b. The priest declares this important principle in the Mass saying, "and appointed a day for retribution whence He shall appear to judge the world in equity and give each according to his deeds".
- c. The church established this practical spiritual concept in the sayings of the Fathers and in the basis of her structure, and in her seven sacraments as they are the mystical work of the Holy Spirit given to the struggling believers inside the church offering bread and wine accompanied by prayers and fasting and the Lord substantiates them and gives us his Holy Body and Holy Blood (Refer to 1 Samuel 17:40-54, Exodus 17:8-15, Judges 7:19-22, and Luke 15: 11-33).
- d. This concept is the basis of the spiritual life in the spiritual struggle necessary for salvation (means of grace where we offer our struggle in prayers and fasting, believing in the work of the Holy Spirit that comes to us through them, etc.).
- e. Also several services, "The labors of Paul" (2 Corinthians 11:23-28). The church demands that her children should do charity works so she sets apart the southern door for charity works and calls it the door of oblation or the Door of Alms. Through that door people give their alms in secret.
- f. The priest's clothes are loose and his sleeve is large in size and this enables him to hide the alms, which he receives and gives to the needy of the church children when he visits them.

Exercise

The Spiritual struggle is through keeping hold of the means of grace and the holy Sacraments and being punctual in receiving them.

Activity

1. Collect the principles of faith from the Creed of faith and quote a text from the Holy Bible about each principle.
2. Specify a day for young people to pay a visit to a needy family, share with them their way of life and help them.

(8) A Study in the Epistle of St. James: The Tongue

References

+ James 1:19-27,3:1-12, 4:11, 5:12

The Lesson

Aim

Control your tongue.

Instructions for Teachers

Do not enter into drills and the fathers' sayings about Silence as this surpasses the ability of the ordinary young man and may misunderstand it.

Introduction

1. Since the dawn of man's existence, he has been searching for a way to express himself; the caveman drew pictures, the ancient Egyptians left civilizations that denote their way of living, and the Greeks were concerned with the sciences of philosophy. Thus, we see from the history of humanity how important the tongue is as a principal means of man's expression of himself.
2. When God chose his people, and brought them to the wilderness, He ordered Moses to prepare the people to meet Him. He appeared to them on the mountain and spoke to them and they knew the Lord through his words, which were written later on to become the Written Law.
3. In the fullness of time, Christ, the Word appeared and He had His distinguished way in His talk. His disciples imitated Him and followed His example. They were known for and characterized by this way of talking (Matthew 26:73).
4. Jesus' tongue was a spring of sermons and living instructions in His preaching service but He added a new dimension to the concept of the tongue as He showed people the great power that lies in the heart, that is, far beyond the tongue (Matthew 12:34,35).
5. The ugliness of one of the sins of the tongue, which Christ endured appeared during his judgment (Mark 14:55-59) and that was bearing false witness:
 - a. Thus we find that all the sins of the tongue are deeply rooted in the heart. The flow of rushing talk is based on and stems from a void heart, cold spirit and absence of sound judgment and patience (Peter and his need for Christ, Matthew 16:21).
 - b. *Telling lies* is a sin denoting the absence of inner frankness in the heart or shyness or fear. Such was the case of Annias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11).
 - c. *Swearing* or taking an oath denotes using the Name of God slightly (Matthew 5:33-37, James 5:12).
 - d. *Speaking evil against others* and judging others stem from a heart devoid of love; haughty and boasting heart that aims at replacing the Lord in judging others (James 4: 11-12).
 - e. *Cursing or reviling* denotes inner grudge and anger (Shimei, the son of Gera and David).
 - f. *Words of jesting and scoffing* stem from lack of wisdom and inner voidness and indifference to the feelings of others. That's why David the Prophet praises the man who does not sit in the seat of scoffers (Psalm 1:1).
 - g. *Words of flattery and hypocrisy* stem from perverse minds and frightened hearts, which seek, benefit only. An example of this is the kiss of Judas Iscariot (Luke

22:47-48). The church demands that deacons should not be double-tongued (1 Timothy 3:8).

- h. *The words of murmuring* stems from dissatisfaction and not giving thanks to God as well as inner bitterness (Numbers 11).

The Church had an integrated approach for controlling the tongue and making use of it and this approach includes:

(a) A passive aspect:

That is searching for the reason that lies in the mind and caused the tongue to sin. That is why we find that the principle of Solitude is clear in the spiritual life and the rites of the church such as the period of solitude that a priest spends after his ordainment. Solitude is an opportunity for careful examination of one's actions and for self-evaluation. This will result in strictness in the whole life and tongue control. As a result the tongue will not fall into sin. Moreover, man must be aware of the danger of the sins of the tongue and the consequences so that he can resist them (The story of the three men who wanted to deceive Anba Abram to take money from him. Two of them met him and said that the third died and that they wanted to bury him. Of course they lied to him, so when they took the money and went out they found that their friend was already dead).

(b) A positive aspect:

An example of this approach is St. John Chrysostom who delivered many useful preaching for the benefit of his generation and the church in the ages that followed his God is pleased with such words and the angels surround such preachers whose teachings are useful but when such preachers give bad talk, angels leave them and demons accompany them. Useful talk stems from a heart filled with love for God and for others (St. Macari who hid the harlot in a big jar made of clay). St. Abraham says, "He who guards his mouth, loves all people".

Exercise

Find out the most prominent tongue sin that troubles young people and ask your priest to give you a spiritual training to cure it.

Activity

Spend a period of solitude in a monastery or any church or at any solitary spot.

(9) The Christian Mammon (Money)

Reference

+ James 1:9-11, 2:1-7,5:1-6

The Lesson

Aim

+ Using money wisely.

Introduction

Many people concerned themselves with mammon with all its forms, money, buildings, clothes, precious articles, means of living or any possessions of any type and saw that money was their means to enjoy themselves and a source of rejoicing in the world.

Love of money appeared as a sin that results in other sins as St. Paul the apostle said (Timothy 6:10). Love of money leads to: exploitation, injustice, stealing, covetousness, lies, murder and hypocrisy (Ahab, Jezebel and Napoth of Jezreel, 1 kings 21:1-16; the words said by James the apostle in James 2:1- 7).

Money has become the main target of life so it kept people away from the kingdom of God, and made them resist God; in this way the words uttered by our Lord Jesus Christ about money has come true (Refer to Matthew 6:24, John 12:6, John 22:3-6, Acts 8: 18-23). So the church, in her service, sets money apart and concentrates her aim on serving God alone, following the principle set by our Savior for service. So the church offers her services without money (Refer to Matthew 10:8). When money becomes the sole object of man, man becomes anxious about worldly affairs (The rich fool). That is why some people of the church did not concern themselves at all with money and led a monastic life (The story of St. Arsanus who, after being ordained a monk, refused to inherit a rich property as the dead do not inherit the property of the dead).

Money causes involvement, worries, cares and troubles that are likened to the thorns in the parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:22). That is why the church does not care for money, does not save it or collect it, and does not accept offerings from the unfaithful except for buying coal. Christ drew out the truth from the clashing principles and gave a new approach for using money. Christ explained this approach in His speech to His disciples when He saw their great surprise on hearing what He said to the rich young man and Christ uttered His famous saying which is the key to the Christian approach to money (Mark 10:24).

Christ declared that money in itself is not dangerous but danger lies in trusting in one's riches. A poor man may perish because he loves money; at the same time many rich people may be saved if they do not trust in their riches. For this reason, the Christian's attitude towards money should include the following: Wise use of money and How to gain money. We shall explain each point in detail:

First, the Lord Christ throughout the period of His ministry emphasized the necessity of making use of money in a wise way aiming at guiding people to the kingdom of God: So true richness lies in virtue not in possessions. Clement of Alexandria, in his book about "money" says that money must be a useful means for the benefit of others (like the dishonest steward) (Luke 16: 1-12) That is why Social Service and helping the needy are examples of the chief work of the church. Using money for doing good connects our hearts with the kingdom of God; "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:21). Anba Aghathon says, "If you are longing for the king of heaven keep away from the richness of the world".

Moreover, Christ our Lord states that spending money in doing good is the main condition made for man to enter the eternal kingdom of God; as the Lord of glory will allow the righteous people on His right to enter His Kingdom, because they spend their money in doing good. He will not

allow people on His left to enter the kingdom as they did not spend their money in doing good (Matthew 25:31-46).

The church advises her children to give alms, as almsgiving is an essential part in true worship (offertory book). Saints said that money is the worst master and the best servant. Here we refer to the attitude of the church towards saving money. The church doesn't forbid saving money but forbids storing it, as storing money leads people to trusting in uncertain riches which is a sin (1 Timothy 6:17-19) but is wise to save money to satisfy certain needs. Joseph was wise enough to store wheat in Egypt (Genesis 41- 49).

Second, let us examine how to deal with the way of gaining money. It is good for a Christian to spend his money in a good and wise way. It is also good if he has gained it in an acceptable way. Hence, the church commands her children to work to earn their own living (2 Thessalonians 3:6-15). We refer here to the principle of the church; "Whoever refuse to work is not allowed to eat". Work or means of gaining money, from a Christian point of view, must be through an active, hard and honest work (as we read in Matthew 25:14-30).

Exercise

Follow the Lord's commandments and instructions concerning means of gaining money and using it.

Activity

Making full use of this topic for one's benefit and refraining from love of money. Let's use money in doing good.

(10) The Orthodox Creed

References

- + "Theology" Fr. Michael Mina
- + "The Book of Deacons about The Orthodox Law" Grgis Samuel Azir

The Lesson

Aim

Developing the feeling of Pride in our Orthodox Creed and the spirit of enlightenment in understanding its depths.

The Creed and the Spiritual Life

There is no separation between Theology and testing, experimenting and investigation as knowing God cannot be fulfilled through reason only. It cannot also be fulfilled through concepts, images and academic definitions of the Creed. Conceptions often lead to pagan ideas about God, these ideas are nearer to paganism than to the true belief.

St. Gregory the Nazianzus, in his comment on the "Beatitudes" said, "The blessing does not lie in knowing God, but the true blessing means that God is inside the soul. There is then, a close

relationship between what we believe in and the way we live. The person who feels the holiness of the Virgin or the intercession of the saints or the effect of Baptism has a different taste for the spiritual life, which is far better than the taste of others. Same for the person who believes in the Oneness of Christ, i.e. Christ is the One of Two: Divinity and Humanity. His Divinity never departed from His Humanity. They are one without mingling, nor confusion or alteration. That person is deeply affected by this doctrine in his Spiritual Life, his approach and his instructions.

Life Inside the Church

“Spiritual Life” can be defined as life directed to the Father through the Son and the Holy Spirit. In other words, it means that we should follow His example and live His life on earth. Christ is present in the Gospel and in history through Incarnation. He is also present now in the church in His glory and the glory of His good Father and the Holy Spirit.

Why do we meet on Sundays? For two reasons:

1. Sunday is the day on which the World was created. Hence it stands for our new creation in Christ.
2. It is the eighth day that escaped from the borders of Time and reached the borders of the everlasting life. In the Mass, we live as a new creation in a new heaven and a new earth. This explains why we use white clothes, chant the hymn of the Trisagion and practice the other delightful rites which take the believers to the kingdom of God, then they go back to the world where they have a living message to deliver but they are careful not to be like the people of the world in their way of living.

Features of the Orthodox Spiritual Life (Emphasizing the Work of the Holy Trinity)

The Orthodox Church emphasizes the work of the Three Hypostases in every prayer or service. This is not the case in the Western thought which concentrates on the work of Christ. For example, when the Orthodox priest grants the Apostolic Benediction, he says, “The love of God the Father, and the grace of the only begotten Son, and the Communion and the gift of the Holy Spirit be with you”. In the prayers of the Canonical Hours we raise prayers to the Heavenly Father, “We thank You O Father, the Father of Our Lord and Redeemer Jesus Christ”. Another prayer is raised to the Son. There is a mass that is addressed to the Father and another mass that is addressed to the Son, as the Orthodox Church believes that the Three Hypostases work in unity. Concerning the work of the Hypostases for Virgin Mary, the church says, “The Father chose you, the Son was incarnate of you and the Holy Spirit overshadowed you”. While Protestantism concentrates on Christ only, especially on the human aspect of Christ and the aspect of salvation, Orthodox teaching always addresses the Three Hypostases and concentrates on their work in the heart.

Consecrating Materials

The Lord incarnated and became Man. Material, in itself, is not evil or wicked. Christianity does not mean the salvation of the soul without the body (flesh). In the resurrection, bodies will rise again and all things will become new with man. That is why the church believes that consecration is fulfilled through the work of the Holy Spirit in the material things (water, oil, wine). The church uses icons, candles, incense...as well as bodily activities such as seeing, touching, action, movements. In this way both the soul and the body receive the blessings. They do not restrict themselves to mental contemplation and despise the other components of the

human personality.

Grace and will never contradict

Spiritual life in the Orthodox Creed is the work of grace but this necessitates the presence of the Will to receive this grace, and without grace our struggle will be in vain, and without struggle, grace will never last and grow in this life of the believers. If our way is to be blameless, we must struggle. Spiritual practice does not mean that I can please God through my effort but it means that I should prepare my life for the Lord to dwell in, and I should accept from the church all means of grace, which fill my life with joy.

The Life of Fellowship

Orthodox Spiritualism does not recognize individual spiritualism. The moment a believer is born anew through baptism, he is planted in the church, and all the church sacraments and services aim at this holy unity that unite the believer's soul and body with the members of Christ (the church). If we contemplate the prayers of the Holy Mass, this unity becomes obvious. The bishop cannot perform the mass by himself neither can the deacon. The people cannot perform the mass if the bishop and the deacon are absent. All the members must take part together in harmonious unity.

Orthodox Spiritualism also emphasizes the unity between heaven and earth, those in heaven and those on earth, the unity of the believers with God and the believer in the church. In both her private prayers and public prayers the church recites the names of saints and remembers angels and archangels and all the saints. In the Commemoration of the Saints, the struggling church raises a prayer for the triumphant church "Graciously, O Lord, be mindful of all the Saints who have pleased You since the beginning". So the partnership extends between the members of the body of Christ whether these members are still living or have departed, saints or struggling.

(11) St. Athanasius the Apostolic

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The Lesson

Aim

Developing the attitude of bearing witness to truth and being faithful and honest in defending the sound and true faith. .

St. Athanasius Childhood

He was born in Alexandria about AD 297. His parents were pagans. His father died when he was a child. When his mother wished to send him to the best schools, she did not find any good school at that time so she sent him to a Christian school, which was the best one.

History tells us that one-day he was playing with his Christian friends. They acted the rite of baptism and Athanasius played the part of a bishop. At that time, Anba Alexander the Patriarch (the 19th Pope) was watching them. The Patriarch said to the boys, "Believe me, my children, each one of you will receive the same priestly order that he played in that play. Young Athanasius (12 years) as it seems, was expressing a great feeling of love and an ability of pastoral leadership.

His Early Maturity and Ordination

He was serious in his behavior and in his studies refraining from the delights of life and looking forward to the everlasting life. As a result of his spiritual growth, he loved virginity and chose Christ to be his good share. His mother was not of his opinion and she opposed him but she gave up in the end and obeyed the Divine will. She took him to the Patriarchate and there he became a student in its Christian School of Theology. He longed to live in the wilderness, so he went there and became a disciple to St. Anthony for about three years.

He wrote his first book about AD 318. He was faithful to the Patriarch and helped him. He was ordained Archdeacon. He was the strongest personality in the Council of Nicene (AD 325). He dumbfounded Arius. He became the Pope of Alexandria when he was about thirty years old.

His Struggle and Defense of the Christian Faith

The Council of Nicene is considered the first ecumenical Council (AD 325). All the bishops of the world attended the Council in answer to Emperor Constantine's call to settle several disputes the most important of which was the Arian heresy. Pope Alexander and his deacon Athanasius represented the See of Alexandria.

Arius denied the Divinity of Lord Christ the Son. He claimed that the Son was made and He was not Consubstantial with the Father. He also claimed that the Father, before all ages, existed alone and He created the Son. Athanasius challenged him and opposed him and dumbfounded him by his knowledge and eloquence. Emperor Constantine admired his knowledge and eloquence. The Emperor said to him, "You are the hero of the Church of God".

The Council of Tyre

His enemies plotted against him and assembled a council at Tyre in AD 335 where they directed many false serious accusations at Athanasius. They accused him of having broken a chalice of a priest who was a heretic but the priest declared that the accusation was false. They also accused him of murdering Bishop Arsarius but the bishop appeared before the council. They finally brought an evil woman who accused Anba Athanasius of committing adultery with her, but the woman pointed to another man, thinking that he was Athanasius, and accused him of having ravished her. His innocence was thus declared.

His First Exile

Athanasius decided to appeal to the Emperor but his enemies slandered him to the Emperor and the Emperor banished him to Treve, a city in the south of France. The people of Treve welcomed him and he was a blessing to the City. After three years of exile and after the death of Constantine the Great, Athanasius returned to his See. He received a warm welcome. St. Gregory of Nyssa said that the welcome St. Athanasius received was like the welcome the Lord received

when He entered Jerusalem.

His Second Exile

The Arian Bishop assembled a Council at Antioch and decided to ordain the Cappadocian Gregory as Patriarch of Alexandria. The day, that Patriarch arrived at the church and the soldiers were guarding him, was a day of massacre. That happened in the Holy Week and the persecuted Pope (Athanasius) decided and insisted on celebrating the Easter Day. The Pope was sent to Rome where he spent a long time in exile. Nine years after he was able to obtain a decree of his innocence. He returned to his See in about AD 349.

His Third Exile

The Arians, once more, slandered him to Emperor Constantine who was so deeply affected that he gave an order to his soldiers to send Pope Athanasius into exile. So he disappeared and hid in the desert for six years. He secretly took care of his people. He went back to his See after the death of Emperor Constantine. Julian, who became Emperor, began his reign brought all the bishops who were in exile back to their Sees. (AD 361).

His Fourth Exile

Emperor Julian soon departed from the faith and demanded that Athanasius should leave Alexandria. So St. Athanasius the Apostolic left his throne to Thebes and stayed there till the death of the Emperor. When Jovian became Emperor, St. Athanasius returned to his See in AD 363. Jovian reigned seven months only.

His Fifth and Last Exile

Anba Athanasius made a pastoral visit to his people in Upper Egypt. When he returned to Alexandria, he was informed of Emperor Valens' decree of sending him into exile. So he left his see and stayed for some time in the grace of his father. His disappearance caused a great revolution among the people who demanded that he should return to his see. So Valens sent him back to his see after four months.

The Time of His Death

He departed in the Lord on the Seventh day of Bashans AD 373 after 45 years as a patriarch. The bishops of the See of St. Mark in that time were 100 bishops.

His Writings

1. Discourses against the Arians
2. The Life of Anba Anthony
3. Incarnation
4. The Cross
5. The Godhead of the Holy Spirit
6. A Research on the Councils
7. His letters on the occasion of the Easter every year

His Titles

1. Patriarch No. 20
2. The Judge of the World

3. The Apostolic
4. Against the World
5. The Protector of True Faith

History bears witness

- The person, who praises Athanasius, praises the virtue itself (St. Gregory of Nyssa).
- In the church, he was the rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (St. Gregory the Theologian).
- All the world respects his holiness and the purity of his teaching. He filled the world with the aroma of his writings (St. Cyril the Great).

Exercises

- We hope the young people today will commit to spiritual manhood and early maturity, hard study and achievement in all the spiritual, intellectual and scientific domains.
- The beauty of deaconate (1 Timothy 3:13): The deaconate should be characterized by complete awareness, hard study and contemplation, not mere repetition of hymns and practicing rites.
- Bearing witness to truth in the school specially when we speak about the Godhead of the Lord Christ. To keep the tradition handed to us by our fathers with blood needs struggle.
- Be patient and bear sufferings till the end.

Activities

- Draw a picture of St. Athanasius the Apostolic who was against the world.
- Imagine a conversation between Athanasius and Arius and write some of the sayings of St. Athanasius in your notebook.

(12) Bible Study: The Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Ephesians

References

- + “Interpretation of the Epistle to the Ephesians” St. Mary Church Sporting
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The Lesson

Aim

Emphasizing the work of the Holy Trinity in the Church and the work of grace in the gentiles, Jews, the life of fellowship, and how to use the spiritual weapons and the family and social relationships from a Christian point of view.

Items of the Lesson

Question 1:

What do you know about the city of Ephesus and its church?

Answer 1:

Ephesus is the capital of Asia Minor. It was famous for its great knowledge, wealth and

commerce and the Temple of Artemis, which was one of the Seven Wonders of the World. St. Paul the Apostle preached the Ephesians and stayed in their city for two years and three months but the Ephesians resisted him. The Apostle was able to establish a church in Ephesus and the Ephesians burnt the magicians' books.

Question 2:

What are the general characteristics of St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians?

Answer 2:

It is a common Epistle for all the saints of Ephesus and all believers in Christ. It was used as a circular to be read in several churches. It is free from personal greetings, names of people and condemnation of heresies. St. Paul the Apostle wrote this Epistle in the Prison of Rome in AD 62. It was the best Epistle written about heavenly life. It is positive and didactic.

Question 3:

What is the topic of the Epistle to the Ephesians and what are its divisions?

Answer 3:

The topic of the Epistle is: The Work of the Holy Trinity in the church. It is divided into:

First: The Didactic section, which includes the first three chapters and ends with giving thanks to God.

Chapter 1: God chooses the church and redeems her with the blood of His Son.

Chapter 2: Paul's call for people to receive redemption.

Chapter 3: Unity of all in Christ.

Second: The Applicative section, which includes chapters 4 to 6.

Chapter 4: Urging the believers to behave as it is fit.

Chapter 5: The believers' duties lie in refraining from sins and sticking to holiness in their life.

Chapter 6: The necessity of being armed with faith and good works.

Question 4:

What are the bases of the Christian Unity as they are presented in the Epistle to the Ephesians?

Does this unity contradict the diversity of gifts?

Answer 4:

There are seven bases of unity between Christians:

1. One body: All are members of the body of Christ.
2. One Spirit: This is the Spirit of God who guides us in our life.
3. The Hope of one Calling: Salvation.
4. One God: God is one.
5. One Faith: Children of God through faith in Christ.
6. One Baptism: It is a covenant.
7. One God and Father to all God is the source of true fatherhood. He is the father of all mankind and the Lord of all.

The parts of the body differ in the work they do but the body is one. The same is true with the unity of soul and heart although there are various gifts.

Question 5:

The Epistles makes a comparison between the attributes of the ancient man and those of the new man. Explain.

Answer 5:

The Ancient Man

1. Refers to the behavior of gentiles before the faith in Christ.
2. He behaves according to his worthless thoughts.
3. He is completely ignorant and stubborn. He has lost all feeling of shame.
4. He has no part in the life that God gives.
5. He is completely ignorant.
6. He gives himself over to vice.

The New Man

1. Like God in righteousness, holiness and truth.
2. His mind is made completely new.
3. He refrains from lying, anger and theft...etc.
4. He does not use harmful words.
5. He does not give the devil a chance.
6. He does not make God's Holy Spirit sad for the Spirit is God's mark on him.

Question 6:

Mention the Spiritual Armor and show how the enemies are wicked and how wakefulness is necessary.

Answer 6:

Read the Epistle to the Ephesians 6:10-18.

(13) Bible Study: The life St. Paul

Question 1:

Speak about Paul's youth and renewal.

Answer 1:

1. His name was Saul. He was born in Tarsus. His father was a Pharisee.
2. He studied logic, law, languages, and the Old Testament.
3. He learned how to make texts.
4. Gamaliel instructed him in Moses' law in Jerusalem.
5. He persecuted the Christians and approved of stoning Stephen.
6. The Lord appeared to him when he was on his way to Damascus (Acts 9:1-22).

Question 2:

How did the Lord call Paul for his Service?

Answer 2:

1. He called him when he was on his way to Damascus (Acts 9:15).
2. He called him to preach the gentiles when he was performing his successful service in Antioch.
3. When he was in Troas, he called him to go to Macedonia to preach the Greeks.

Question 3:

How did the Lord prepare Paul the Apostle for the Service?

Answer 3:

Religious preparation: He was brought upon a Pharisee. Gamaliel instructed him in the law.

Scientific preparation: He was instructed in philosophy, logic and mathematics.

Spiritual preparation: He raised a prayer, which made him strong and he fasted three days so that he might be sure of the call. He went into the wilderness of Arabia where he stayed three years.

Political preparation: Paul was characterized by spiritual punctuality and this helped him face troubles at Philippe and gave him the right to appear to Caesar.

Question 4:

Speak about Paul's attributes after his renewal.

Answer 4:

First: He defended the truth.

1. He declared that he decided to know nothing...except Jesus Christ and him crucified.
2. He said the truth before King Agrippa and Governor Bernice and at last he lost his life for defending the truth.

Second: He offered Himself.

What he said about himself, "In labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one" (2 Corinthians 11:23,24).

Third: He faced troubles.

- a) He did not care for his past: That past which attracted him to Judaism and made him a fanatic. He persecuted the gentiles and even Jesus. He did not rely on his righteousness of law or on the honorable rank of his family or his spiritualism but he said, "But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ" (Philippians 3:7).
- b) He did not seek comfort in his life: His contemporaries resisted him. The Jews plotted to kill him. The heathen resisted him. The idol makers resisted him.
- c) He exposed his life to risks: He knew that he would face and suffer from many troubles and hardships and that those who want to live in piety are persecuted (Acts 20:24).

(14) Christianity and the up building of Personality

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Aim

The integrated growth of personality within the frame of the love of God

Introduction

The Value of personality to God:

God created man in His image after His likeness in freedom, will, and holiness. The mystery of the greatness of man lies in the dimensions that belong to him and to any other creature. He has an inner dimension and an external dimension, inner life and social life. Man is crowned with glory and honor (Hebrews 2:7,8). God’s love to man increased through the incarnation of Christ. Man has become marked with the Holy Spirit. The relationship between God and His children is a personal relationship. He knows each one of us privately (John 10:8,14). In this way the value of man becomes clear. He was created in God’s image and after His likeness and the Lord shared his nature.

The Integrated outlook to Personality

“And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man”. From this verse we know how the Lord looked upon man:

- Growth in wisdom (mental growth)
- Growth in stature (bodily growth)
- Growth in grace (psychological growth)
- Growth with God (spiritual growth)
- Growth with People (social growth)

- Christianity, then, is interested in the development of mental abilities to be used in their domains so that man may control nature and may perform his message in life.
- Christianity also demands that a Christian should lead a normal and positive life devoid of repression.
- Christianity cares for bodily growth, as the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and the tool or means used to perform God’s desires.
- Christianity cares for social growth and the important role the believer plays in the life of people.
- Christianity is also concerned with the spiritual growth, as it is the top of the integrated growth. Man sees God through his simple eye and listens to the voice of eternity by his marked ear .How is this integrated growth achieved?

Man’s opinion of himself must not be more or less than he deserves. Man is the priest and the crown of the whole creation. He is in charge of performing the Divine desires. At the same time man knows that he is weak and poor outside the confines of grace and fellowship of the spirit. When the Christian follows, obeys and submits himself to the truth which is in the Holy Bible and in his spiritual guide, he becomes mature, honest and faithful in keeping the will and the commandment of God.

Berdyayen, the philosopher, states that the true relationship of personality growth lies in purifying it from individualism and selfishness, and in its ability to give and Co-operate with others.

What does Christianity give for building up Personality?

A new nature

The seed of life begins with baptism and renews itself and grows by practicing means of grace such as receiving the Holy Communion and prayer. For the Christian to reach the state of the complete disappearance of the self and the complete presence of Christ he must start the journey of his life with Christ and prefer Christ's will to his own will and then say with Paul, "I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me". This new nature provides the Christian with certain potentialities and abilities. It gives him the ability to:

- Love all the people even his enemies.
- Be a saint and to overcome the desires of the flesh.
- Be modest and meek to the extent that he may be like Christ in meekness.
- Overcome time to extent that the invisible things look as if they were visible.
- Accept himself with all his weakness and to receive others patiently (Romans 15: 7)

The Sublimate of Motivations

The inner spiritual life affects the person's motivations, attitudes and instincts. The true Christian who lives the life of fellowship with God and felt his mercy and kindness is filled with positive spirit and optimism so he sings, "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (2 Timothy 1:7). This psychology is the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22).

Peace of mind and comfort without being unconscious

True peace lies in living with God. We take Paul as an example. Paul enjoyed peace of mind when he was inside the prison. Although he was tied with bonds he was singing hymns. It is the life of submission to God that gives comfort. The true Christian is assiduous and positive but his ambition does not turn into an idol to be worshipped.

The Service of Reconciliation

God has given us the service of reconciliation. He reconciled us to himself and demands that we should be ambassadors:

- Reconciliation between man and heaven.
- Reconciliation between man and himself through the forgiveness of sins.
- Reconciliation between man and others (Colossians 1:20). In this way, his relationships with others become pure and filled with sacrifice.

Christianity heals the psychological problems

1. Inferiority feeling

This is a common feeling as the individual feels that he is inferior to others because of his weak health, poverty or infirmity he tends to be self-absorbed, stubborn or malevolent:

- Introversion: tendency to be alone and avoiding society and hesitance to bear any responsibility for fear of failure.

- Malevolence: the person's main concern is to criticize society.
- Stubbornness: the person is opinionated and stubborn. He always glorifies himself. This is not the case with normal man who is ready to give up his opinion if he is convinced that the other's opinion is right.
- Puritanism and extravagance: Some people exaggerate in showing religious feelings to make up for their feeling of inferiority (Ecclesiastes 7:16).

Christianity heals the inferiority feeling

- Christ did not encourage the tendency of introversion, "You are the salt of the earth", and salt does not function unless it reaches all parts of the body.
- The Holy Bible increased man's status and brought self-confidence back to him. Let's take Moses whom God encouraged as an example (Exodus 3:11, Exodus 4:10-16).
- St. John says, "But to all who received him, who believed in His name, He gave power to become children of God" (John 1:12). This means that Christianity made man the child of God.
- Service in the church is the means of being free from inferiority as the individual leads the life of fellowship and sacrifice.
- Christian life teaches us the correct style of compensation, which is in trusting in the Lord's grace, so a person can excel in one of the aspects of life (2 Corinthians 12:9).
- To know God and to believe in Him rekindle the spirit of struggle within man (2 Timothy 1:7).

2. Self-aggrandizement

The feeling of aggrandizement makes a person imagine that all admire him and that he is the Center of their thoughts. Being completely indulged in this feeling, a person may not respect the feelings of others, as he believes that they are inferior to him in their abilities. Those who attain more knowledge, education or culture are liable to aggrandize themselves. The normal personality does not deny her gifts and abilities; at the same time, she does not aggrandize them.

How to cure the feeling of self-aggrandizement

- Man must recognize that his gifts and abilities are free gifts from God and man has no merit to make him deserve these gifts.
- Christian life teaches us modesty so man must not be proud of his gifts because he knows that they are not his. Modesty does not mean that man should deny his gifts but it means that he should use them for glorifying God.
- The Lord Christ defined "greatness" as being a servant to all people.
- In the Christian life of fellowship with others, the feeling of greatness disappears, as all the people are brothers born of one father.

(15) Trinitarianism and Monotheism

References

+ "Trinitarianism and Monotheism" Yassa Mansour

The Lesson

Introduction

Our Great God is One Nature (called “Ousia”) and Three Hypostases: The Divine Soul, The Divine Wisdom, and The Divine Life.

These three Hypostases are not separated. They are Consubstantial One God. It is very easy to say: The Divine Soul + The Wisdom + The Divine Life = One God. Is there any difficulty in this simple formula? Let's study the matter in detail:

The meaning of the word “Ousia”

The word “Ousia” means the nature that characterizes this being. For example we have the Divine Ousia; i.e. the Nature Godhead: the simple soul that is able to do anything. The Almighty God that fills all places. He created all things. There is the human substance or the human nature, which was created in God's image, after His likeness in beauty, knowledge, freedom and eternity. This human nature is limited. It derives its existence from God. It has a human soul and a human body and a human spirit and a human mind, etc.

Our God is one in Essence; i.e. He is unique in kind. There's no one like Him. He is supreme and higher than all creatures because it is He that created them. He gives them life and keeps them safe. This Divine uniqueness and unbounded superiority makes our knowledge of God limited and imperfect and impossible.

How can the bounded contain the unbounded? So long as we are in this flesh and in the bounded human mind, it is impossible for us to recognize God with all the depth of His nature, boundless existence and superiority. That is why theologians call the Divine Nature “The Holy Mist”. When we stare at the sun, which is one of the creatures of God, we quickly retreat in a state of semi-blindness -how the state would be if we looked at our great God.

So we have no way to perceive the depth of the Nature of God while we are still in flesh. We have to wait till eternity comes and then we shall see the Lord face to face but now we see Him in a mirror daily (1 Corinthians 12:13). This is what Job said, “And after my skin has been thus destroyed, then from my flesh I shall see God” (Job 19:26).

Let's then approach our Lord with reverence, awe and holiness so that He may reveal to us little information about Him through His Spirit that is dwelling in us.

The meaning of the word “Hypostasis”

The term ‘hypostasis’ is derived from two words, “hypo” means “under”, and “stasis” means “a standing”. Hence the hypostasis is the original characteristic without which the Divine Essence cannot stand. For example:

1. There is the characteristic of existence or the Being. Is it reasonable that God exist without this characteristic? For be it on the contrary, He exists. He is the source of existence. He gives all beings the power to be and the ability to exist. It is impossible to imagine God without existence or without a soul.
2. The same is with wisdom or mind. Is it possible that God exists without this

characteristic? How does He give us the power to think then? How does He control the universe? It is taken for granted that God is Wise.

3. The characteristic of life is essential to God. He lives forever. He gives life. It is impossible to imagine that He can exist without life.

Our great God then is a Wise Living Spirit or a Wise Living Being. Is there any problem understanding this? If man is the same shouldn't his Creator be the same as he is and He created us after His image?

Denominating the Hypostasis

- The problem, then, does not lie in the belief that God is One. All religions adopt this belief. In our Orthodox Creed we say, "We believe in One God" and we say, "In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, One God, Amen". We do not say, "In the names". The Bible is full of verses that emphasize our faith in the Oneness of God, such as: "The Lord our God is one Lord" (Deuteronomy 6:4, Mark 12:29), "You believe that God is one, you do well" (James 2:19).
- The problem does not also lie in poly-hypostasis as we have already known those hypostases are mere characteristics within the One Divine Essence.
- The problem then lies in giving a name to each hypostasis.
- We call the Divine Being = Father and the term "Father" here means "the Origin". It is not the kind of human fatherhood resulting in and from reproduction but it is equal spiritual fatherhood. We say that the Nile is our father and that Egypt is our mother.
- We call the Divine Wisdom = the Son. As wisdom and mind express the inner self. When we say: The mind of so and so solved the problem = So and so solved the problem. Then the mind of so and so = So and so himself and the Mind of God = God himself. It is a spiritual sonship not a reproductive sonship, the same as our sonship to the Nile and to Egypt.
- We call the Divine life = the Spirit, as the Spirit is the breath of life. When the Spirit departs man, man is no more. So the Spirit of man = man himself.

There are then mere terms or names that interpret the essential meaning that God exists by Himself, speaks by His Word, living by His Spirit -One God -three hypostasis.

The Hypostasis distinct and not separated

It is clear that the Divine Soul is not the wisdom and not the life, but could they be separated. If that happened, everything will come to an end of course. They are distinctive in function. The Soul creates, wisdom incarnates and redeems and the Spirit sanctifies man. But the three are one Essence.

Similarities

1. The Human Life

- Man solves the mathematical problem with his mind but his intuition or subconscious works with him and also his incarnation and movement have their role as he writes and counts with the help of a ruler.
- When man paints a picture, the whole burden falls on affection, which feels and tastes the artistic work but does that mean that perception and conation have been cancelled? Impossible! Mind and affection work together to form the picture. His hands also move

and paint.

- When man participates in a running race, the burden is focused on conation, but at the same time the affection is working with enthusiasm to get the prize, and perception is after the best way to win.

2. The Sun

Here is an old beautiful Simile: Sun's disc + light + heat = One Sun

- The disc is different from light and from heat but the three are inseparable.
- Light is generated from the disc and heat is issued forth from the disc.
- Heat is issued forth from the disc and the rays of light carry it to us.

The same thing is said when we say that the Holy Spirit is issued forth from the Father and the Son sends the Holy Spirit to us.

3. The Mathematical Example

We do not say, " $1 + 1 + 1 = 3$ " but we say, " $1 \times 1 \times 1 = 1$ " I am in the Father and the Father in me" (John 14: 10) "I and my Father are One" (John 10:30).

Exercise

Let us worship the Holy Trinity, our Great Almighty One God and offer Him earnest worship asking for His effective action in our hearts. Let us make the sign of the cross many times as a brief mark of our Creed of Faith and as a power that supports our struggle.

(16) Incarnation and The Holy Trinity

Aim

To develop a high regard for the presence of God in history emphasizing the fact of the Godhead of the Incarnated Son

How do the laws of nature Drove the existence of God

It is true that we cannot see God now in our present state because of our flesh but we instinctively know that God exists. We can not see God but we believe in His existence, and when we desire to see God we can see Him through His actions, perfection's and creatures, the order of this wonderful universe and in the laws of nature which indicate the presence of God who has a supreme Intelligence and Supreme Wisdom. For Example: The Innumerable heavenly bodies vary in size; some of them are much bigger than the earth, nevertheless they move in space with almost lightning speed without falling down though they are floating (suspended) in space. This is because they have definite orbits that govern their movement. The Sun also shines over the whole universe and sends heat and energy to man, animals and plants although the distance between the Sun and the earth is 93 million miles. If this distance were less than that, the earth and everything on it would burn owing to the great heat and if it were a bit more the earth would be frozen and everything on it would die. This means that this distance between the sun and the earth is appropriate distance necessary for keeping life in existence on earth. So the rotation of the earth around the sun results in the succession of the four seasons. This admirable order does not change or alter. It is a well-known fact that the laws of nature govern the life of the living creatures whether man, animals or plants. Every creature has its own inner system and

accurate natural laws, which keep its life going. If we take man as an example we find that all the organs of the body work in harmony under the control of the mind, which controls and directs them (Job 1:7-9).

How Christianity believes in One God who has no partner?

The Church has a firm belief in the One and Only God, i.e. God is one and there is no other God but the One God. Polytheism on the other hand is a pagan belief. The texts of the Scripture in this respect are clear in stating the principle of the One and Only God. Check out the following examples:

First: Refer to the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 32:39, Isaiah 44:6, Isaiah 45:5) and the many other text that confirms this belief.

Second: Refer to the New Testament (Matthew 19:17, Romans 3:30, Ephesians 4:6) and the many other text that confirms this belief.

The church, in her worship, confirms the belief in the One and Only God when she says in the Orthodox Creed, “Truly we believe in the One God”. At the beginning of her prayers she says: In the Name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit, One God. Amen. Thus the closing phrase is One God to confirm the unity within Trinity.

The concept of Monotheism is not contradictory to the concept Trinitarianism

God is One in Essence, Word and Spirit:

1. The One God in whom we believe has revealed His Divine nature to us. The Lord has brought us to Him and revealed His Divine nature to us step by step and He revealed the Holy Trinity to us.
2. Trinity is a heavenly instruction revealed by God Himself in the Scripture (Matthew 28:19, 1 John 5:7). In fact there is no contradiction between the concept of the One God and the concept of Trinitarianism. Trinity does not mean that God is divided into three persons since the Spirit is indivisible as it is not flesh or material and because each Hypostasis is God Himself characterized by a certain attribute. The Father is God in that He is the origin of existence. The Son is God in that He is the Wisdom of God and His Word. The Holy Spirit is God in that He is the origin of Life.

The Work of the Holy Trinity

- (a) God the Father and the Omnipotent does not owe His existence to another. God is the Omnipotent who governs the Universe in a way that nothing happens without His knowledge. He is the creator of heaven and earth and all that exists within them, whether creatures or beings, whether visible or invisible.
- (b) God the Son is the second Hypostasis in the Holy Triad. He is the Lord Jesus Christ the Word of God who appeared in flesh and He is the only begotten Son. He is the same Divine nature and essence of God in God (Refer to John 14:9,11 and John 10:30). He is present with God from everlasting and before all ages; Consubstantial with the Father and in the Divine Nature (Refer to John 14:9,11).
- (c) The Holy Spirit is the third Hypostasis. He is God and source of life and existence. In Him we live, move and exist.

Why Was The Son Incarnated And Became Man?

Because the incarnation of the Son is a revelation of the Lord's love and justice:

1. God's Justice: When Adam sinned; the Lord gave sentence that Adam should die.
2. God's love: God's love desired that man would not die (Refer to John 3: 16).

The Blessing granted to man through the Incarnation of Christ

1. Renewing the nature of man and bringing him back to his first order and giving him the new life.
2. Revealing the love of the Heavenly Father to man.
3. Destroying the body of sin "But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter" (Romans 6:6).
4. He took what is ours and gave us what is His (St. Athanasius)..

Why was Redemption delayed?

For the Lord to show the people that no one can deliver himself of anyone else. Saints and Prophets sin, so how can the one who cannot deliver himself deliver others? Could Adam's repentance be a substitute for the Incarnation of Christ and His Redemption? That could not be because the corruption that occurred wasn't outside flesh but connected with it and because death reached the depth of humanity. That is why the Lord put on our flesh to unify with us and to give us, through our fellowship with him, the power of His life to destroy the corruption of death, which was inside us.

(17) The Divinity of Jesus Christ

References

+ "Christ the Son of God" Anba Gregory

The Lesson

Introduction

Since the Lord honored our world and took our human nature to Himself, the devil has been trying hard to attack the great mystery of Incarnation. Although thousands of heresies attempted to underestimate the Godhead of the Lord, their attempts ended with complete failure as Jesus Christ, Glory be to Him "declared to be the Son of God, with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (Romans 1:4). A short article as this one does not suit that serious and great topic, but it is a mere simple key that we offer to our blessed youth, then we ask them to read the writings of the church and the writings of the fathers which explained this important mystery in detail.

Notes

- We do not raise a man called Jesus to the rank of Godhead, on the contrary we believe that the Hypostasis of the Word came down to us, incarnated, became man and appeared to us as the Person Jesus Christ. So, the Lord is not a man we try to make a God of, but

He is God who came down and appeared in our flesh.

- For this reason we emphasize that we believe that our Christ is the Logos Incarnate, perfect God and perfect Man united in One Nature and that the Lord's human nature was without sin.
- True manhood that becomes tired, hungry and fall asleep, is an essential purpose of Incarnation. For how can Christ represent humanity without taking the human nature, and how can Redemption be fulfilled unless the Lord conceals the glory of Godhead in the modesty of manhood. Otherwise people would not have crucified him and we would have lost redemption.
- The problem, then, does not lie in Christ being perfect man, but lies in the question: Is that Perfect Man the True God at the same time? The answer is: Of course. He is the Incarnate God, and the following are some evidences to prove this.

First Evidence: “His Perfect Holiness”

1. The Lord lived among us without sin, holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens (Hebrews 7:26). “Who knew no sin” (2 Corinthians 5:21) and who one day defied the Jews: “Which of you convicts me of sin” (John 8:46) and mouths were kept shut and tongues could not give an answer.
2. All prophets and apostles “have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23) “There is none righteous, no, not one” (Romans 3:10).
3. Even David to whom the Lord gave testimony and said, “I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart” says, “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psalm 51:5).
4. The Lord Christ took Himself a real and perfect manhood. He is without sin as the Holy Spirit had purified the womb, which the Logos Hypostasis took from the pure flesh of St. Mary to be His flesh. A long time ago Pascal said, “If we met with a perfect man the man must be God”.

Second Evidence: “Complete Authority”

The man who has this complete authority and power is not just a man.

1. Authority over inanimate things, “This is clear from the” miracle performed by Jesus when he fed five thousand men” (Mark 6:35-44).
2. Authority over water: Jesus walked on the water and made Peter walk on the water (Mark 6:48-51).
3. Authority over plants: Jesus cursed the fig tree, which did not bear fruit (Matthew 21:18-22).
4. Authority over the animals: Jesus allowed the demons to go into the herd of pigs (Matthew 8:28-34).
5. Authority over man:
 - a) In sickness: Those who touched his cloak were healed (Matthew 9:20-22), He healed people by the word of mouth (John 5:1-9). He healed people who lived far away (John 4:13-54).
 - b) In death: He brought Jairus' daughter back to life (Luke 8:49-56). He raised the widow's son of Nain and the child was carried to the grave (Luke 7:11-15). He brought Lazarus to life after he had been dead for four days the body smelt bad (John 11:38-44)

6. Authority over nature: Jesus calms the sea and the storm (Mark 4:37-39).
7. Authority over thoughts: He revealed the thoughts of Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7:39-40). He perceived what the people were thinking when he forgave the sins of the paralyzed man (Matthew 9:4).
8. Authority over the future: He prophesied that Jerusalem would be destroyed (Mark 13:14-23) and that Peter would deny him (Luke 22:34) and that he would be martyred on the cross (John 21:18,19).
9. Authority over demons: Demons were horrified when they saw him (Mark 1:23) and went out on his word (Mark 1:34).
10. Authority over sin: He forgave sins and this is only of God's authority (Mark 2:7-10).

The Third Evidence: His Testimony for Himself

1. Son long as the Lord is Holy without sin; His testimony for himself is true and acceptable “Ever I bear witness to myself, my testimony is true” (John 8:14).
2. After healing the man who was born blind, he said to him, “Do you believe in the Son of God?” He answered, “and who is He, sir, that I may believe in Him?” Jesus said to him, “You have seen Him, and it is He who speaks to you”. He said, “Lord, I believe” and he worshipped Him (John 9:35,36).
3. Lord Jesus Christ said that He was the Son of God and the Jews understood that He was equal with God “He said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God” (John 5:18).
4. They entered into a great conflict with Him when He said, “Before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58). They raised stones to stone him saying, “For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God” (John 10:33).

The essential problem lies in the way we understand Jesus Christ. He unites the two natures in one nature of the Incarnate Logos of God. Lord Jesus used the term, “I am He” “Ero Emi” several times. It is the same term that God used when He spoke to Moses about Himself in the Old Testament (John 6:20, 35, 41, 51, 8: 12, 18, 11:25, 14:6, 18:5). The Sonship of the Son to the Father does not give the meaning of reproduction as some may believe neither is there any separation of time or polytheism. On the contrary it gives the meaning of the unity of nature and essence: “I am in the Father and the Father in me” (John 14: 10), “He that has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9) “I and the Father are One” (John 10:30).

Our great God is self-existing, speaking by His Logos, Living by His Spirit. The Father is the inner love, the Son is the declared love and the Spirit is the effective love working in the hearts. As light is generated from fire without any difference in time and without separation, the same thing is with the Son who is light out of light and true God out of true God.

The Fourth Evidence: The Testimony of others about Him

When the Lord was living with us on earth He heard many testimonies for himself from many people. These testimonies emphasized His Godhead and He accepted them all.

1. St. John the Baptist said, “And I saw and bare record that this is the Son of God” (John 1:34).
2. Nathaniel said, “Rabbi, You are the Son of God” (John 1:49).

3. Peter said, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God” (Matthew 16: 16).
4. Martha said, “I believe that Thou art the Christ the Son of God which should come into the world” (John 11:27).

The Fifth Evidence: Effectiveness in the hearts

In fact this is the most powerful evidence we offer to others. The Lord could change adulterers into virgins and the weak women and children into lions that could face the hungry lions with splendid bravery. A few moments with the Samaritan woman made of her a preaching saint. A simple visit to the house of Zacchaeus the lover of money made of him a man that sacrifices and loves the poor. How many millions of people followed you O Lord! How many hearts loved you because of Your sweet love to them! How many souls refused to dwell among people to satisfy themselves of Your love in the deserts and the wilderness!

Exercise

Always repeat the words of Jesus' prayer; “O my Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me. I have sinned”.

(18) How the Lord Prepared the World For His Incarnation

References

- + “An introduction to the Gospels and Acts” Anba Moussa
- + “The Lord had promised Adam, after his fall, that the Lord Jesus Christ would come from the seed of the Woman to bruise the head of the serpent” (Genesis 3: 15).
- + “In the fullness of time God sent his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the Law” (Galatians 4:4).

The Lesson

What does the term “fullness of time” mean?

It means the time in which the Lord prepared the world to receive the Savior. This preparation included many domains:

1. The Religious Domain

The Jews returned from their exile in Babylonia in the 5th Century BC. The feeling of repentance filled them because of their sins and their worship of idols. They showed true repentance before Ezra and Nehemiah. Days went by and the Greeks occupied Jerusalem by the hands of Antiochus Epiphanies who hated the Jews and wanted to destroy them. But a priest called Matthias opposed him and led a famous revolution called the Revolution of the Maccabees. The Revolution could win victory over the Greek occupation, recovered the city and the temple. They cleaned the temple, the Institution of the Feast of Dedication, which Christ attended later on (John 10:22).

The difficult conditions of the Jews at that time made them gather in groups in different parts of the world. And their synagogues spread allover the world that James the apostle said, “Moses has had in every city those who preach him” (Acts 15:21). This spreading was a good basis for the spread of Christianity later on.

Ptolemy Philadelphius, a wise king, requested the elders of the Jews to translate the Old Testament into Greek. That happened in the third century BC (285-247 BC). Seventy-two elders performed that glorious work and the Septuagint came into existence and spread in all parts of the world. This is the translation on which the Lord Christ and the Fathers the Apostles relied and from which they quoted many verses. It was a suitable preparation for the coming of Christ. We should not forget the clear moaning in the stories and history of the different nations before the coming of Christ expressing hearty longing for the coming of a savior that will save humanity from destruction.

2. The Political Domain

The Roman Empire controlled all the world and that led to a sort of political settlement and social settlement that paved the way for the spread of Christianity. The Roman Empire issued the law; paved roads and that helped the preaching journeys to go everywhere to the east or to the west. There were no bands of robbers, and small local wars stopped for a long time. This helped the spread of Christianity. It is a fact that the Emperors of Rome persecuted Christianity, but this persecution was a blessed stimulus for more work and preaching.

3. The Linguistic Domain

The Greek language spread in all parts of the world starting from the days of Alexander the Great. The Greek occupation succeeded in spreading this language. The Holy Bible was translated into Greek and this made it easy for the apostles to preach all the parts of the world that nearly spoke one language. The Greek philosophy and the Greek culture paved the way for Christianity when Christianity began to search for the greatest facts and investigate them: God - man -universe -existing things -manners...etc. Thus each played their role:

- The Jews played the religious role.
- The Greek played the cultural role.
- The Romans played the political and practical role.

Christianity started with a group of simple fisherman without any weapon or money. But they started with strong faith that could overcome mountains. During a period of few years Christianity could attract the whole world and direct it to Christ who gave Himself for us. This is what our fathers the apostles did. What is your role now my dear brother? Let us all go together and serve our brothers who need the word of life. Let us prepare for the Lord a special zealous people that perform every good work. Let us prepare the hearts for the coming of Christ to dwell in them.

Exercise

The Lord prepared the world for receiving His glorious Nativity. Mustn't we prepare our hearts for receiving Christmas? How? This is a question for your people to discuss.

(19) Why Christ Incarnated

References

+ “Questions about Incarnation” Anba Moussa

The Lesson

Introduction

Many times we ask ourselves:

Why Incarnation?

How can the Lord take the image of man and dwell with us in this world? Why?

What is the wisdom behind this?

Let us begin the story for the very beginning.

The First Bases

In the beginning God created the angels. He created them wise spirits. But a group of them were filled with pride. They imagined that they could do without God the Creator. They separated from the Lord and fell down into darkness. Then God created man. He created man in His image and after His likeness: In holiness, in beauty, in eternity and in knowledge. But man did not stay long in that situation as the devil envied him. The devil wanted to deform what God performed. But the Lord was not absent from the scene. He sees everything. Nothing runs out of its circuit unless God allows it to do so. God allowed the devil to tempt man. Man fell down and his image was deformed. But the Lord willed to make Adam a free man. He wanted Adam to choose to submit himself to Him with his free will. In this way Adam tests the fellowship of God and the fellowship of the devil. Adam chose God and rejected the devil.

How to solve this problem?

How can we solve this problem? Man has become corrupted and the ground produces thorns and thistles for him to eat. Giving birth to children will be in pain. Man dwelt outside in Paradise. Will God’s work end with failure? Impossible! This contradicts His power and authority. Will the Lord simply forgive man? This is also impossible for two reasons:

- If mercy takes its right, where is the right of justice?
- If the Lord forgives Adam in his corrupted state he will sin later on and continue making sins. The important thing is not to forgive Adam but to renew his fallen nature.

Characteristics of the Redeemer

Man needed a Redeemer to redeem him. This redeemer must have specific characteristics.

1. The Redeemer must die because the sentence was death.
2. The Redeemer must be a man, because it is man who sinned.
3. The Redeemer must be without sin, because who has nothing can give nothing.
4. The Redeemer must be unbounded because the sin of man was directed to God who is unbounded. It also included all the human race in all ages and generations.

The Only Solution

The only solution for these contradicting specifications “man -dies -unbounded -without sin” was for the loving God to Incarnate and become God and man at the same time. Thus by His manhood He becomes a man that dies and by His Godhead, He becomes unbounded and without

sin. The problem, then, was solved when the Lord incarnated from St. Mary the Virgin. The Holy Spirit filled her and sanctified her womb and marked the Divine Logos in her taking His flesh from her “For that reason also what is born will be called Holy, God’s Son” (Luke 1:35). That is why Elizabeth called out loudly, “So how is it that this privilege is mine, to have the mother of my Lord come to me?” (Luke 1:43).

In this way the Lord came and redeemed man and man received salvation but were these all the blessings of Incarnation? No, there are other blessings.

No man has seen God at any time

This is an established fact. God the Creator dwells in the light, which cannot be approached (I Timothy 6:16). He is higher than the human beings the same as the human beings being higher than the tools they invent. He is unbounded and man is limited. He is a simple Spirit and man is spirit and material. He lives in the highest place of heaven and man lives on earth. Then how can the meeting be? Will the Lord keep Himself in the highest place of heaven and man stay all the time in the mud of the earth? Where is love then? Where is fellowship? Didn’t He create us to live with Him? How can this fellowship be achieved?

Can man ascend to heaven to find God there and meet Him? This is impossible because of the weak nature of man and because of his fall in sin. What is the alternative then? Which is easier? For the Loving Powerful and Almighty God to meet with man where he is. There is no doubt that the Older can descend to the level of the younger and not vice versa. For this reason, Incarnation was fulfilled.

St. Athanasius the apostolic likened the idea of Incarnation to the good teacher who descends to the level of his young children without expecting that the young would ascend to him “No man has seen God at any time, the Only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared him” (John 1:18). “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds” (Hebrews 1:1,2).

Great is the Mystery of Godliness

St. Paul the Apostle says, “Great is the Mystery of Godliness. God was manifest in the flesh” (1 Timothy 3:16). What is the relationship between Incarnation and human Godliness? There is no doubt that it is an essential relationship represented in two factors:

1. Without Incarnation redemption would be impossible, with redemption our original and daily sins are forgiven and forgiveness is essential in the life of Godliness.
2. Incarnation has also given us a chance to live in “the fellowship of the Divine Nature” (2 Peter 1:4), i.e. The Lord in Incarnation took what is ours “the human nature” and gave us what is His (Partakers of the Divine Nature). This was the term used by St. Athanasius the Apostolic. We use it every day in our hymns, to express the kindness of the Wonderful God, who is ready, through Incarnation, to dwell in us.

Look and Contemplate

- “That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” (Ephesians 3:17)
- “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Galatians 2:20)

- “Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you? Unless indeed you fail to meet the test” (2 Corinthians 13:5)
- “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him” (John 6:56)

Exercise

Incarnation was an inevitable necessity for: The Redemption of man, Seeing God and Godliness of man. Let us fill our hearts and thoughts with this essential creed without which salvation would be impossible and Godliness would be impossible. We can achieve the first aim through repentance and receiving the Holy Communion. We can achieve the second aim by studying the word of God and the Spiritual books. We can achieve the third aim through confession.

(20) Nativity

References

- + “Marcos Magazine” January 1978, January 1984
- + “With the baby born in the manger” Bishop Moussa
- + “Contemplation on Nativity” H. H. Pope Shenouda III

The Lesson

Aim

Emphasizing the meaning of Nativity as a guarantee of Salvation as well as the fruits of Nativity in our life.

Introduction

The Birth of our Lord Jesus Christ is:

- An expression of how the everlasting has revealed within time.
- The openness of eternity to time “This is the day which the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it”.
- Through Nativity our dead body has been prepared to receive the Holy Spirit and has become a temple of God ready to be renewed. Therefore all the hereditary attributes from Adam will be no more because he is born again of God and so he becomes a son of God.

Why Incarnation

- The descendants of Adam inherited his fallen state and his original sin. “By one man sin entered the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon men” (Romans 5:12).
- Human beings inherited that death because they are Adam’s descendants and they lost the Kingdom of God and His image in their life (the innocence of the heart) and became servants (Galatians 4:1-8).
- The Son of God took unto Himself human nature to bear our sins in His body and to die instead of us and for us. He also sanctified us and brought back the peace of God to our hearts, which then will be pleasing and comforting, and those who accept the Savior will participate in His glory and Kingdom (I Peter 3:5).

The Blessing of Nativity

1. Nativity fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament and endowed humanity with a new shining life (Refer to Jeremiah 31:31-34).
2. It has revealed the mysteries of God to man after it had been concealed since the beginning of the world (Ephesians 3:3-6).
3. It has proclaimed the dispersion of darkness and the dawning of the light of the eternal life in the world (Isaiah 9:2, Luke 1:78-79, John 1:4,5,9, 1 John 1: 1-3).
4. It has proclaimed the Joy of Salvation to humanity (Luke 2: 10-11, Ephesians 2: 1-5).
5. It has proclaimed the Divine mercy of the Lord to all people after the life of disobedience and breaking the law (Galatians 3:10, Romans 3:12, Luke 1:46-50).
6. It has proclaimed the full reconciliation with God after the life of enmity, which separated us from our king and our Lord (Corinthians 1:21-22).

How Our Life Is Blessed with Nativity

The presence of the Lord in our life depends on the inner willingness of man to obey the Lord. The Nativity of Christ is a call for gaining new dimensions and new awareness of our life. He is the open door for eternal life, which is revealed in the Son of God. Thus we have to give up all the principles of logic so that we may enjoy the eternal life through our Savior. We have to renew ourselves and forget all about the natural talents of man so that we may feel the greatness and modesty of the new born.

Exercises and Activities

1. Explain the different spiritual meanings of Nativity and the mystery of salvation performed by Christ in the flesh through incarnation, while telling the story of Nativity.
2. Those who are served should participate in the activities and live with Nativity by receiving the communion in the Divine Mass.
3. The teacher asks the students to record their feelings and the effects and blessings of Nativity in their private diaries.

(21) The Power of Baptism

References

- + “Re-Birth (Second birth)” Bishop Bemin
- + “The Spiritual Values in the Sacrament of Baptism” Bishop Gregory
- + “Baptism in the One Church” Habib Girgis
- + “The Seven Sacraments of the Church” George Habib

The Lesson

Aim

The effectiveness of Baptism

The Importance of Rituals

Rituals in the Old Testament were a means by which man drew near to God, but in the New Testament, they emphasize the mysterious presence of God. The Cross in the past is borne in

Baptism, i.e. Baptism is associated with Christ and His resurrection, but the Holy Spirit upon the disciples, and priesthood is associated with the intercession of Christ.

The Symbols of Baptism in The Old Testament

1. The material world was created with the Word of God, the water and the Spirit appear in the story of Creation. The same thing is in the new creation; the water purifies the vessel and the Spirit reshapes it.
2. The ark was made of wood and the rescue was with the help of wood and water which are symbols of the cross and baptism. The dove is a symbol of the action of the Holy Spirit and the branch of the olive tree is a symbol of Chrism.
3. Moses' rod divided the Red Sea into two. In the same way, the cross sanctifies the water so faith and belief are basis of baptism. In the past, the baptized was asked about his faith and was asked to prove his belief before baptism.
4. The picture is clearer under the leadership of Joshua (which also means Savior) who tramped Leviathan (the devil) in the river.
5. Elisha cured Na'aman the Syrian of his leprosy when he told him to wash in the Jordan seven times. Elijah poured water on the sacrifice three times and fire came down and devoured it. So pouring water is a symbol of baptism and the fire is a symbol of the Holy Spirit.
6. Elisha threw a piece of wood in the water and it miraculously attracted the piece of iron that sank in the water. When we are crucified in the baptism, our old nature vanishes and we take the new nature with which we can walk on water.
7. There are several references to baptism (Jeremiah 2:13, Psalm 1:3, Ezekiel 11:19, 36:25-27).

Names and titles of Baptism

1. It is called the second birth: Early Christians considered the fish as a symbol of believers, because the Greek letters of the word FISH contains initial letters of the words; "Jesus Christ, God's Son, the Savior". This is a confession of faith, and as fish live in water and in no other place so the Christian is born of water and the Spirit (James 1:17,15). There is a spiritual embryo inside you: if you care for it, it will grow.
2. It is called the anointment of children (Mark 1:11): What happened when the Lord was baptized happens to each one of us. We have become children of God through the resurrection after we had been children of death.
3. It is called the door of Salvation: Repentance in itself was not enough for the salvation of Adam. The Lord gave him the Law but the Lord condemns sin. The tragedy is clear in the story of the sick man of Bethzatha (John 5:1-9), which is a symbol of baptism. The man was weak and could do nothing and the ritual washing (the pool) was of no effect and then Jesus Christ comes to heal.
4. It is called the mystery of enlightenment (John 9:1-7): The story of the man who was blind from birth indicates the action of the enlightenment performed by baptism. The catechumen were not allowed to attend the Mass even as listeners because when weak eyes see a strong light they become dazzled.

5. It is called the Signet (or the mark): Fire leaves a mark on the flesh. The same thing is done by baptism, which prints the image of God in us. This print does not vanish. The Book of Revelation tells us that this print distinguishes the Christian and characterizes them forever.

6. It is called the Baptism (Luke 12:50): Fulfillment of all righteousness has only one meaning.

(22) Anxiety: A Debate

References

- + “Away with anxiety. Begin Life” Del Karingy
- + “Youth and Anxiety” youth Book shop, Iris Nesseem

Causes of Anxiety

Human existence from the point of view of the people of the world is a combination of tension and anxiety as it embraces contradictions, eternal and temporal, life and death, contact and conflict...everlasting tension between the definite and indefinite. According to Kercgourd, the existentialist philosopher, no human life can escape anxiety since every body has a motive power, called demands or needs and if these needs are not satisfied, they cause tension.

These needs are:

1. Bodily needs, such as the need for water, food and oxygen.
2. Psychological needs such as the need for friendship, security and love.
3. The need for self-esteem and self-regard.
4. The need for achievement.
5. The Spiritual need for peace and security.

These needs may contradict one another so person may sacrifice one of them for the sake of attaining another one. For example:

- Students may do without sound sleep (bodily need) so that they may succeed in their exams.
- The hungry person may search for food first then seeks friendship, i.e. he satisfies the bodily need before seeking the satisfaction of supreme needs.
- The effect of anxiety is clear in adolescence. The adolescent asks everybody to show respect for him and to treat him as an adult. The people with whom he lives consider him as a student and think that he must submit himself to them.

Spiritual causes of anxiety

Young people are enslaved to sin and they do not want to confess their sins. The sinner is dead and without the cross he cannot attain the eternal life “Therefore since we are justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God” (Romans 5:1-2). So Justification by faith gives peace to the child and excludes all sadness and anxiety. The disappearance of the good news results in self-approbation and not following the way of the Lord.

Kinds of Anxiety

Passive and Active Anxiety: The active anxiety has the same meaning as ambition and zeal for action and the salvation of the soul. This gives happiness to the reaper who looks at the fields and sees that the harvest is plentiful. The Passive anxiety results from the conflict and contradictions of the inner motives or from the fact that one's ambitions are far greater than one's potentialities, or one's association with sin and self-dissatisfaction, or defeat and frustration.

Anxiety and time: Weariness, boredom, despair and restlessness are associated with man's surrender to time and his worry for the past, present and the future without bearing in mind the eternal dimension which could have brought him out of the circle of time.

The Theological cure of anxiety is as follows:

1. The Incarnation of Christ presented man's problems before the Lord to solve them and so the cure does not come from outside.
2. The redemption of Christ solved the problems of sin and conscience remorse.
3. The gift of Christ satisfied the psychological and bodily needs of man and all that man can do is to receive these gifts with happiness and enjoy them.
4. Means of grace given by Christ satisfies man's spiritual needs by heavenly pleasant food.
5. Hope in Christ brought man into the scope of eternity and immortality and freed him from the fear of death.
6. The service of Christ gave a meaning to life (John 14:27, John 14:26, Isaiah 41:10, Isaiah 43:2-3).

Some practical ways to overcome anxiety:

1. Talk with the Lord: If your talk with friends makes you feel happy, how much will your feeling be when talk to your Heavenly Father.
2. Face your fears and analyze your problems by yourself. Once you resort to a practical decision or attitude anxiety will disappear.
3. Don't feel sorry for past events and do not look back. When Lot's wife looked back, she was turned into a pillar of salt. She wanted to have a last look at the past.
4. Forgive yourself because the Lord forgives you and do not let anxiety dominate you as the reformation of the past can be fulfilled the instant you look to the future.
5. Let your motto be "Make others happy". This has no other meaning than "Christ -the kingdom of God- the others".

(23) The Book Of Jonah: Between Science And Religion

References

- + "The Holy Bible is a miracle" The Diocese of Al Minya
- + "Our Holy Bible and Our Holy Christ" Bishop Youannis
- + "Conformity between Modern Science and the Holy Bible" St. George Church, Sporting

The Lesson

Aim

Refuting the scientific oppositions and arguments on the corrections and genuineness of the Bible.

Introduction

Much opposition have been raised against the Book of Jonah considering the story as a superstition and the Holy Bible is accused of containing scientific mistakes and fables. But we now use the same story to prove that the Bible is true and right and that the prophecies it mentioned are accurate. Then we will take from them the symbols and miracles for our own personal benefit.

The Internal Evidence

1. The recording of this story and Jonah's frankness in confessing his iniquities is the evidence that proves the truth of this book. The Jews accepted it on the list of their holy books although it disagrees with their ethnic fanaticism.
2. The Book of Kings recorded the story of Jonah in detail (2 Kings 14:25).
3. There is evidence of the truth of the story in Matthew 16:4 and in Luke 11:29-30.

External Evidence

4. Archeologists excavated Nineveh and they found evidence indicating that the city was a great city and its monuments were great and wonderful thus proving the truth of the Bible. The City was an exceedingly great city three days journey in breadth.
5. **Modern Discoveries:** Here is a true story to prove the whale (a great fish) swallowed Jonah and that Jonah stayed alive inside the belly of the whale. In 1758 a man fell out of a ship into the Mediterranean Sea. A whale swallowed the man and the mariner of the ship saw the sight. He shot the whale and the whale vomited out the man, who was still alive. They caught the whale and took it with them and made a show of it all around Europe.
6. **Physical Sciences:** Whales are of two kinds. One of them has sharp teeth with which it tears up its prey. The other kind has no teeth but it has thin foils in the back part of its teeth that form a net when the whale closes its mouth. It feeds itself in this way: It rushes in the water at a great speed with its mouth open, then it closes its mouth compressing the water with its tongue through the net of foils. The water rushes out leaving food behind. The stomach of the whale is a complicated organ containing five to six caves in which a man can live.
7. **To those who mock the Book we say:** The Lord Jesus referred to this Book and considered it an evidence to prove His Resurrection (Matthew 12:39-40). He also mentioned the repentance of Nineveh (Matthew 12:41). As believers, we believe that the Lord incarnated, became Man and rose from the dead, so it is easy for us to believe that the Lord made ready a whale to swallow Jonah.

Science and the Holy Bible

First: There are no scientific mistakes in the Holy Bible. If you read a book that was issued one

hundred and fifty years ago you will see that many data and suppositions mentioned in that book have been changed and altered. We give an example to prove this. The Ancient Egyptians believed that the earth came out of a winged egg in the same way a chicken comes out of an egg. But Isaiah said, “It is He who sits above the circle of the earth (Isaiah 40:22) although he was a contemporary of the Egyptian and Babylonian Civilizations. Isaiah, Moses and Daniel were never affected by the views of such civilizations because the Spirit of the Lord directed and guided them.

Secondary Examples of scientific facts included in the Bible

1. In the Book of Ecclesiastics we read “All streams flow to the sea, but the sea is not full; to the place where the streams flow, there they flow again” (Ecclesiastics 1:7). This refers to the theory of vapor, where clouds gather and cause floods in the rivers.
2. What Moses recorded concerning the order of creation agrees with modern science in the appearance of simple plants first, then plants yielding seeds then sea animals and birds, then animals and finally man.
3. Moses wrote that the Lord gathered the waters under the heavens together into one place. This is true because the seven oceans have one ocean bed (bottom).

Thirdly: The following are some of the scientific discoveries that drove the truth of the Bible

1. In Geology: There is a soft layer of clean silt or alluvial deposit resulting from water that once covered that land. This confirms the story of the great Deluge.
2. In Chemistry: The soil of the region of Sodom and Gomorrah is saturated with sulfur and volcanic lava. This is the result of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah with fire and burning sulfur.
3. In Archeology: The wide chariot cities (1400 Chariots) in the days of King Solomon. The Holy Bible states this fact in the days of Solomon (1 Kings 10:26-29 and 2 Chronicles 1:14-17).
4. In Medicine, anatomy and space research: The shrouds of the Lord Jesus Christ and the picture printed on them; this indicates crucifixion and resurrection.

(24) The Spiritual Fight

References

- + “The Spiritual Fights” Theophan the ascetic
- + “Silwanis the Monk and the Invisible Fight”
- + “Paradise of the Spirits” Anba Youannis
- + “The Spiritual Disposal” Fr. Matta Al Miskin

The Lesson

Aim

Encourage young people to contend and strive and emphasize the attributes of canonical fight.

Introduction

The meaning of “Fight”: The spiritual life is a continuous fight against the devil and against the

old, corrupt man which we inherited through being born of flesh (the self), and because we dwell among people who live according to the flesh (the evil world).

The Importance Of Fighting In The Spiritual Life

- Without fighting the flesh with its lust would govern our spiritual life.
- Without fighting we could not overcome the hosts of wickedness.
- Without striving we would not be crowned because the Scriptures command that we should strive to death.
- If the Lord Himself strove fervently although He was not in need of striving, then we must share the fight of the Lord, share in love and happiness and share in suffering and tribulation. These are the attributes of fighters (2 Timothy 2:3-6).

Consider the following similes:

First: The Soldier

1. A soldier is in active service, and does not get mixed up in the affairs of civilian life.
2. He is to commit himself to prompt obedience and zeal.
3. He is ready to sacrifice himself for Him who said, "This is my body which is given for you".

Secondly: The Athlete

1. An Athlete is crowned if he competes according to the rules of the game.
2. Although many athletes take part in the competition, yet only one wins the race.
3. An athlete commits himself to severe exercises, denies himself and sacrifices the pleasures of life. It is a daily sacrifice.

Thirdly: The hard-working farmer

1. He is simple, strong, patient, satisfied with his work and expecting the results of his hard work.
2. He works all the time. We see him all the time either sowing or reaping.

The common element in these three images is (Victory, Prize, Reaping)

1. How much more will be the Christian's toil to attain an immortal crown and an everlasting happy life?
2. Distinguish between what is unclean and what is clean. Don't accept anything unclean through the eye, the ear, the mouth, the thought and conscience, whether in secret or in public.
3. Do not look at a woman lustfully but circumcise your eye because the eye is the lamp of the body (Matthew 5:28). Watching the eye and circumcising it starts in one's own room when one offers oneself to the Lord through prayer. Thus man is purified when the Holy Spirit, who is present during the prayers, anoints him.
4. Overcome the feeling of sexual deprivation:
 - a. Empty your mind of the evil images.
 - b. Command your mind to the Holy Spirit.
 - c. Confess the Holy Spirit and receive Him in secret and in public.
 - d. Being contented with life of deprivation abolishes the meaning and effect of deprivation. Receiving the Holy Spirit with Joy abolishes the feeling of

repression.

5. Circumcise your heart with an everlasting covenant. The circumcision of the eye should precede the circumcision of the heart since the eye is the door of the heart. The everlasting covenant that sanctifies the mind and conscience should be:
 - a. The outcome of spiritual convincement and not as an obligation of the flesh.
 - b. Shown with the confidence and trust of that who will win.
 - c. With inner satisfaction and joy and not out of affliction and anguish.
 - d. Should be continued until death.
6. How to resist anger:
 - a. Turn away from any situation that may cause anger.
 - b. The soft answer and the calm talk turn away wrath.
 - c. Blame yourself before you blame others.
 - d. Do not let the sun go down on your anger.
7. How to resist the desire of judging others?
 - a. Do not contemplate the people's manner of life.
 - b. Think of your own sins when you judge others as you do the same things, which you judge others for.
 - c. Give excuses to others and say that they have sinned but they may repent; and I may sin and may not be given repentance.
 - d. Show the motive for judgment; is it because of jealousy or a desire for revenge?

The weapons a Christian uses in his fight

St. Paul was bound with a chain with a Roman soldier. St. Paul contemplated how the soldier was dressed and how he was ready all the time. He said, "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we are not contending against flesh and blood" (Ephesians 6:11-18).

1. Wrestling: The two opponents are equal in strength. They fight by holding and throwing the body. They defeat one another and the fight is violent and continuous.
2. The Girdle: It is the belt. The Christian who lives in Truth can move freely and quickly in all situations. The girdle is the symbol of readiness and vigilance.
3. The Breastplate: The breastplate is the symbol of righteousness. The girdle stands for truth in sayings and the breastplate stands for truth in actions.
4. The Shoe: The shoe stands for the readiness to announce the Good News of peace.
5. The Shield (The Shield of faith): The shield was made up of two pieces of wood stuck together. It was large in size and rectangular in shape. It protected the whole body of the soldier. When burning arrows were shot, the insulating spot between the two pieces of wood put them out. This is the work of faith.
6. The Helmet of Salvation: The helmet guards and protects the thoughts of the faithful. So spiritual fight is a duty but Salvation is grace.
7. Prayer: Prayer is the most powerful and effective weapon of the Christian in the way of Salvation and it should be according to the following terms:
 - a. Pray Constantly: Continue steadfastly in prayer.
 - b. Pray with fervent love and eager desire.
 - c. In Spirit: Avoid formalities and routine.
 - d. Be Awake: Strive in your prayers.

e. Devotion to Prayer: Pray constantly for all people.

The Importance of self-crucifying

Do not rely entirely on yourself. It is necessary that we should not rely on ourselves in our strife since we always think highly of ourselves. To overcome this spiritual disease:

- You have to know that you are nothing and you can do no good to deserve the kingdom of heaven.
- Seek the help of the Lord through fervent prayer; since you are aware of your weakness, you will be given grace from God.
- Be watchful and careful and fear your enemies whom you cannot resist.
- If you transgress the commandment of the Lord, go back quickly and remember your weakness since the Lord permits your fall so that you may be more watchful and aware of your weakness.

Firstly: Why does the Lord Permit Temptation and Perpetual Spiritual Fights?

1. To instruct his people in the art of fighting (Judges 2:21-23).
2. To protect us from falling in the sin of carelessness.
3. So that we may not be haughty but modest and not to think highly of ourselves.
4. To prove that we stick to the glory of God and obey the commandments of God accurately.
5. So that the constant war may give us greater crowns.

Secondly: The terms of Canonical fight

1. It should be with living faith and great confidence so that we may be worthy of the Lord's call "Without faith we cannot please the Lord".
2. With perseverance, "But he who endures to the end will be saved" (Matthew 24:13).
3. With a humble heart (Remember the story of the fathers who saw many people falling into the snare of the devil and he cried, "O Lord, who will be delivered?" And he heard a voice saying, "The Humble").
4. With joy and without grumbling because it is against faith and keeps the blessings of fight from us (I Corinthians 10).
5. With patience and without longing to achieve certain results on the way to please the body.
6. With the spirit of fellowship and participation with others in the church of God (Philippians 1:27).

Thirdly: How to avoid carelessness and slackness?

1. Avoid curiosity and not to be prying (talking -interested) and keep away from earthly matters.
2. Avoid things that appeal to you and submit yourself to the Lord.
3. Follow the advice and instructions of your Spiritual teacher (Jeremiah 48:10).
4. Slackness may affect everything in your life so the mind will be oppressive, the conscience will be weak. Remember what the Lord said in (Jeremiah 48:10).

Fourthly: How to resist pride and arrogance of heart?

1. Pray with a contrite heart "God be merciful to me a sinner".

2. Do not take pride in your knowledge or intelligence or social status.
3. Don't be fussy about your clothes and outward appearance.
4. The humble endure criticism and guidance from others without showing any sign of anger.
5. Remember that the Lord washed the feet of His Disciples and said: "I do not receive glory from men", "Woe to you when all men speak of you".

Fifthly: Avoid youthful passions

Keep away from doing evil deeds, as these deeds will pursue you. To sanctify your thoughts, you have to refrain from evil, evil sights and evil words.

(25) Hindrance To Prayer

References

- + "The Life of Prayer" Fr. Matta Al Miskin
- + "Paradise of the Spirit" Anba Youannis

The Lesson

Aim

To know the obstacles of prayer

Introduction

Certain obstacles stand in the way of the beginners and hinder their prayer. Other obstacles stand in the way of the advanced and hinder their prayer. For beginners these obstacles stem from the fact that they have not been accustomed to praying, so their mind is worried and troubled about matters that concern man. They always complain that they do not understand the words they use in their prayers. They do not understand the Psalms or the Holy Bible.

The basic factors that concern the advanced are:

The Spiritual Dryness (Psalm 22:2,5)

- ❑ It is not a sign for the loss of anything in our good relationship with God, but it is a necessary phase for instructing the self and preparing it for a more advanced spiritual life that does not rely on self-support or self-approval.
- ❑ Dryness governs the soul's calmness and peace.
- ❑ The serious result of this stage is that man may doubt his way and believe that his relationship with God is lost so he stops praying and withdraws spiritually and enters unnecessarily into a serious passive temptation, i.e. Murmuring against God.
- ❑ Even if man felt that grace has apparently left him, he should be content with its mystical action and rely on the previous motive power kept in him to get through the test; thus his soul will settle with the Lord without resorting to any means of encouragement.
- ❑ In this test, man depends on the advice of his spiritual guide whose instructions should be followed strictly.
- ❑ The commandment that benefits man in this spiritual dryness is that he should humbly receive the test and feel that he is not worthy of receiving comfort.

- Man will profit nothing if he seeks causes or even he doubles vigilance and fasting.
- Dryness gives ways to evil recklessness. One of the serious effects of dryness is the release of the senses and thoughts to act out of the control of the spirit. That is because the suspension of spiritual comfort with which the grace feeds the soul's attributes. This gives evil deeds chance to have a bad effect on the soul's attributes.
- The strong wish of man to reject thoughts when he enters into temptation puts an end to it. We trust that the Lord will not count our evil thoughts against us, so long as we are not pleased with these thoughts and offer proof through continual prayer without growing weary.
- Another source of danger stems from recklessness, which is the natural outcome of a long period of temptation.
- After our emotions, thoughts and concepts are fused in the spiritual dryness of tribulation, we finally become worthy of the innocence and purity with which we can live with God.

Spiritual Coldness (Psalm 142:3)

- The difference between dryness and coldness: Dryness is a feeling that man endures during prayer but it does not hinder man from continual prayer and reading but coldness stops and suspends prayer and deprives man of his ability to practice spiritual deeds.
- Desire for prayer exists but the volition is weak and the desire for prayer may be affected.
- The enemy seizes the chance and directs violent blows in an attempt to convince man of failure and the loss of his effort. The result is that man is convinced that his spiritual approach is not correct. The aim of the enemy is clear that man should reject the whole spiritual life once and for all.
- But the self is still associated with God and worships the Lord unconsciously or unwillingly.
- The self indulges in thoughts, responding to the enemy and doing wrong to the utmost of its desires. For the self to work is impossible as faith which was born in the heart one day cannot be easily withdrawn and leave the man empty.
- The Lord does not put the soul to the test without purpose; these are reasons that necessitate putting the soul to the test.

The refinement of the ambitious self

- When the self is deeply indulged in the act of its progress. It earnestly tries to double the speed of its procession in a way that exceeds its ability.
- In this case, coldness secures from pride and arrogance, and suspends the exaggerated self-indulgence in the wrong procession that stems from volition, delusion and self-exaltation.

Adjusting the concept of our relationship with God

- When the self is occupied in a spiritual fight, it thinks that its persistence and faithfulness in prayer make it worthy of the love of God and His sonship.
- As soon as the Lord draws the activity and ability of man to do the spiritual work, the self is shocked by the fact that she has rejected for a long time; i.e. God, despite His fatherly love to us, is not in need of our prayers or deeds.
- Thus spiritual coldness returns to governs those people and causes an essential adjustment to the concept of understanding God and the assessment of the spiritual

relationship, which bind the human self to God.

Strengthening faith in God

- Sometimes man feels that he enjoys happiness and peace owing to the Lord's great care for him. The Lord supports him, helps him and gives him material blessings. Thus man feels secure believing that he is kept safe in the powerful hands of God. In this case his faith in God becomes deep and strong owing to the material blessings.
- The result is that the Lord withdraws his visible help and care from man, and anguish seizes man who becomes an easy prey for his enemies.
- What shocks the self is not the losses but because of a belief that the Lord has shown hostility "Let me blow why do you contend against me? Why do you hide your face and count me as your enemy You have turned cruel towards me".
- The Lord revealed, through Job's test, the fact that faith in Him confirms that man must raise himself above all these charges and trust in the existence of God and in His mercy despite all troubles.
- This type of spiritual dryness is the cruelest and severest type of trials. It is the same as death, like what Job said: "O that I might have my request, and that God would grant my desire: that it would please God to crush me, that He would let loose His hand and cut me off".
- The more severe the trial is, the more purified the self becomes and the clearer the vision becomes revealing the greatness of God Almighty and the Lord's great love for man and the previous pains- seem as if they were of no effect.

When the aim is lost (Psalm 50:16-17)

- Prayer is a spiritual action and every spiritual action has its motives and aims so we must always examine the causes of prayer, which must be in conformity with the will of God and defined in the Gospel.
- Prayer is a commandment and a Divine instruction that must be obeyed.
- Through prayer man lives in the presence of God and without it the self dies.
- Prayer protects us from falling into evil temptation (Pray that you do not enter into temptation).
- Through prayer our requests are made known to God (Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be known to God).
- Prayer is the mystical means by which we offer help to a man in trouble, in danger or living in error (Pray for one another that you may be healed).
- Prayer is the son's service of thanksgiving (If I am a father where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear?).
- Prayer is an action imposed on us towards our enemies who show hostility to us and who persecute us.

We notice that prayer for requests is not the aim of prayer but is its motive. I do not pray because I want the Lord to answer my requests, but I pray to make my requests known to God and He answers what He likes to answer.

The correct aim

For the way to be clear before man we shall try to clarify the real aim in prayer, which is according to the will of God. The Lord has set a final aim for the spiritual life of man in which and to which all the Divine commandments gather and end. This aim is the everlasting fellowship with God. This fellowship grows and strengthens till it becomes complete. In the beginning it is difficult to distinguish between a man who prays for a real aim according to the pleasure of the self and of the change of the self. In the end you search for the fighter who has been praying and striving for private aims but you do not find him.

The target aims are:

1. Man prays to be praised by people.
2. Man prays to please the Lord.
3. Man prays to be acquitted in his own eyes.

It is easy for man to discover the degree of his deviation if he examines the aim that attracted his heart.

(26) Lent: Spiritual and Dogmatic Aspects

References

- + “The Spirituality of fasting” H. H. Pope Shenouda
- + “Lent” Bishop Bemin
- + “Spiritual Fasting” Bishop Bemin
- + “Lent” Alexander Shmiman

The Lesson

Aim

Practical conviction of the benefits of fasting and exercising it

Introduction

Lent is considered the spring of the spiritual life in the church, as the church is full of an ascetic wave. Lent is a firm creed going back in history to the age of the Apostles and the Lord Jesus Christ established it (Mark 9:36).

Objections and Refutations

1. Some say that fasting is not compulsory quoting the Lord’s words; “When you fast”, but He also said, “When you pray”, “When you give alms” and this does not mean that the Lord abolished public prayers or public fasting.
2. Some objected by saying that the Scripture does not assign a certain time for fasting, but Christ Himself commanded that his Apostles should fast when the Lord was raised and fasting was assigned in the Old Testament (Zechariah 8:19). The Lord allowed the Apostles to arrange church affairs when He said by the tongue of Paul (Titus 1:5).
3. Others show objection by quoting Paul’s words, “Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink...” but these words meant the heresy of living like

Jews. It does not mean that we leave the church in chaos.

4. Some may object to the Apostles fasting and the Virgin's fasting. In fact we fast such fasts because the Apostles fasted them because we fast to the Lord.

Fasting and correcting the wrong concepts

1. "Man shall not live by bread alone" The devil tried to convince man that material things are the basis of life but the Christian resorted to fasting to live with the Spirit.
2. Fasting is not humiliation but Christian asceticism abolishes fleshly desire.
3. Fasting is associated with happiness (Psalm 35:3). Christ commands the one who fasts to anoint his head, and in the Gospels of the third week of the great Lent refer to the return of the Lost Son "We had to enjoy ourselves and rejoice".
4. Fasting is not a punishment for sins. In Christianity there is no means to blot out the sin except by the blood of Christ. We receive His blood from the altar after we repent and confess our sins. But fasting is one of the means of grace.

Fasting is useful health wise

Vegetables are very useful. Regardless of the health factor, we feel that fasting has its spiritual beauty. It is the enjoyment of going back to life of Paradise. Adam did not eat meat. The Lord created plants, vegetation and then plants yielding seeds. He also created fish, then birds and then animals.

Degrees of fasting

During the days of Lent, one must abstain from food. The same must be done on Jonah's fast and vigils. On Wednesdays and Fridays, fast of Advent and the Apostles' fast, one should also abstain from food.

There are other special fasts such as:

- The Bishop's fasting after his ordination.
- The Monks fasts.
- Fasts in time of trouble and for knowing the will of God.

Fasting is associated with prayer and reading. If we liken fasting to embers, prayer is likened to incense and not one of them is useful without the other. Assign a time for reading and contemplation during fasting. When you read, your aim should be to understand the Gospel listening to the voice of the Lord when He talks to you. Your life should be according to the words of the Psalm, "On his law he meditates day and night".

Gradual abstaining from food during fasting: Abstaining in fasting causes some symptoms at the beginning such as headaches and sluggishness but the body adjusts itself gradually to the new position and its activity increases and becomes aglow with the spirit.

Fasting and Moderation

(27) Salvation in the Orthodox Understanding **(Salvation is only obtained by the blood of Christ)**

References

+ “Salvation in the Orthodox Understanding” H. H. Pope Shenouda III

The Lesson

General Aim

Salvation in the Orthodox understanding

Specific Aim

Conditions for deserving the Blood of Christ

Verse

“Unless the blood is poured out no forgiveness takes place” (Hebrews 9:22)

Introduction

1. Without the blood of Christ, works are useless: The righteous who pleased the Lord with their good works in the Old Testament were waiting in Hades till the Lord brought them out after His crucifixion. All the verses of the scriptures condemn the works, which are performed without the blood of Christ or by works of the law.
2. Why is salvation obtained only by the blood of Christ? Adam’s sin was infinite because it was against God who is infinite and whatever man does his works are finite. So only an infinite atonement can forgive sins and the Lord God is the only infinite Being. For this, our teacher Paul the Apostle said: “Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Whom God has set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past. (Romans 3: 24- 25).
3. Conditions that should be fulfilled to obtain salvation by the blood of Christ. The blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin and gives salvation on certain conditions that should be fulfilled so that the sinner may deserve this blood by which Salvation is obtained.

Faith

“For if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins” (John 8:24). “For God loved the world so much that He gave His only begotten Son, in order that everyone exercising faith in him might not be destroyed but have everlasting life” (John 3: 16). The blood of Christ can deliver you and save you but it cannot save you if you do not have faith. The faith, which we mean, is not abstract faith but it is the vivid faith operating through love (James 2:26, Galatians 5:6, 1 Corinthians 13:2).

Baptism

“He that believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mark 16:16). “Unless one is born from water and spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). Without baptism man cannot see the kingdom of God. Thus Salvation is obtained through baptism and faith leads man to baptism. Examples to show the importance of baptism for Salvation:

1. Peter on the day of Pentecost “Repent, and let each one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the free gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:37,38).

2. The prison keeper of Philippi who received faith at the hands of Paul and Silas, “he and his household were baptized without delay” (Acts 16:33).
3. Lydia, a seller of purple received faith at the hands of Paul, “She and her household got baptized” (Acts 16: 15).
4. Through baptism we are united with Christ in the likeness of His death and in the likeness of His resurrection (Romans 6:2-8).

Sacraments Necessary for Salvation

1. The sacrament of the Holy Chrism (Myron). By it we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit without which we cannot walk in the way of Salvation (Acts 2:38, Acts 8:14-17, 1 John 2:20,27).
2. The Sacrament of the Eucharist (Communion). “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you” (John 6:53-58). Salvation cannot be obtained without receiving communion; the flesh and the blood of the Lord because the Eucharist Sacrifice is an extension of Christ’s sacrifice so we cannot be forgiven without the holy Eucharist, which gives us Salvation and forgiveness of sins.
3. The Sacrament of Repentance. “Unless you repent you will all likewise be destroyed” (Luke 13:3). Repentance makes man worthy of washing himself with the blood of Christ that purifies him and thus he is saved.
4. The Good Deeds. The good deeds are necessary for Salvation but without faith, baptism and sacraments, these deeds in themselves are not enough.

Exercises

Receiving communion of the flesh and blood of the Lord Christ to obtain salvation and forgiveness of sins.

(28) Salvation in the Orthodox Understanding **(The importance of the work of Salvation)**

References

+ “Salvation in the Orthodox Understanding” H. H. Pope Shenouda III

The Lesson

General Aim

Salvation in the Orthodox Understanding

Specific Aim

Deeds are the natural fruits of faith

Verse

“As the body without breath is dead, so also faith without works is dead” (James 2:26).

Introduction

1. Evil deeds lead to destruction: God is perfect in His mercy and He is also perfect in His

Justice. So long as “the wages of sin is death”, the sinner must be punished for his sin. It is true that Christ died for us but only the repentance enjoy the merit of the death of Christ, otherwise this free salvation would be subject to recklessness and corruption (Galatians 5:19-21, Ephesians 5:5-6, 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9, 2 Peter 2:4- 22, Revelations 21:8, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, Hebrews 13:14).

2. Judgment according to the deeds (in the Old Testament): David in his Psalms says, “To You, O Lord, belongs steadfast love. For You don’t require a man according to his works” (Psalm 62:12). In the book of Ecclesiastics we read, “For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil” (Ecclesiast 12:14).
3. Judgment according to the deeds (In the New Testament): The Lord Says, “For the Son of man is to come with his angels in the Glory of His Father, and then he will repay every man for what he has done” (Matthew 16:27).
 - a. On the Day of Judgment men will render account not only for their deeds but also for every careless word they utter (Matthew 12:36).
 - b. One of the most beautiful images of Judgment according to deeds is that which the Lord Jesus describes in (Matthew 25:31-46).
 - c. St. Paul the Apostle made a summary of Judgment according to deeds by saying, “Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption; but he who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life” (Galatians 6:7-8).
 - d. Deeds are the natural fruits of faith. If your faith does not give fruit then it is dead because if your faith were a living faith it would have given fruit (Luke 3:8-9, Titus 3:8,14, James 2:14, Galatians 5:22). You believe in Christ and say that the blood of Christ purified and blessed me. This is good but if you are without deeds, can this faith save you? No since faith must be a living faith operating through love.
4. Deeds indicate the presence of faith. Our teacher St. James says, “Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith” (James 2:18). This means that deeds indicate the presence of faith.
5. Deeds indicate being born of God. “No one born from God commits sin” (1 John 3:9). “By this it may be seen who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil” (1 John 3:9-10). Deeds then are a proof that we are the children of God and indicate our sonship to the Lord. If anyone comes to you and says, “I am a child of the Lord because I have been renewed, declared righteous and sanctified”, say to him, “You will know them by their fruits”.
6. The importance of conduct and good deeds. Some say, “What is the relationship between Salvation and man’s conduct?” It is a matter of faith and not a matter of conduct or good deeds. But conduct and good deeds play a vital part in Salvation as we shall see.

Our teacher John the Apostle says; “If we say we have fellowship with Him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth; but if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus His son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:6-7).

So living in the light has two outcomes, fellowship and cleansing, our fellowship with God and the merit to be cleansed with the blood of Christ. The commandments of our fathers the Apostle

concerning the importance of good conduct are numerous (Galatians 5:25, Ephesians 5:15, 1 Corinthians 1:15, Romans 13:12).

Exercise

Our true witness to Christ should be through our deeds and conduct and our love for others so that we may become the light of Christ and His aroma everywhere.

(29) Salvation in the Orthodox Understanding (Struggle and Grace)

References

+ “Salvation in the Orthodox Understanding” H. H. Pope Shenouda III

The Lesson

General Aim

Salvation in the Orthodox Understanding

Specific Aim

Salvation of man through struggle and grace together

Verse

“Apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5)

Introduction

1. Man cannot be saved by his own struggle: “For all things I have the strength and virtue of Him who imparts power to me” (Philippians 4:13). Your own human strength without the help of God cannot save you despite your great struggle and toil.
2. Grace does not save you if you do not have the will: St. John Chrysostom said, “God does not want us to lie on our backs so as to give us His kingdom; grace does not do everything by itself. Grace does not permit laziness, indifference and slackness”. Grace offers you help and you are free to accept or refuse, to work or not to work (Revelation 3:20). The work of grace then does not mean abolishing personal freedom. Striving is a very important factor and it does not stand by itself as a private strife apart from the work of God through it “In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood” (Hebrews 12:4).
3. Struggle and Grace together:
 - a. Struggle and grace are inseparable in the spiritual life.
 - b. The apostolic blessing says, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Corinthians 13:14). What does the phrase, “the fellowship of the Holy Spirit” mean? It means that it is a fellowship between two persons working together, the Holy Spirit and man. The Holy Spirit can save you but He wants you to share with him in arranging your life.
 - c. Paul the Apostle says to his disciple Timothy, “Fight the good fight of faith” so

fight and faith go together, they are inseparable.

- d. In the spiritual life, there is fight against the devil. There is no doubt that you fight with all your power and the power you have is from God. Don't say "I'll sleep and in my dreams I shall see the Lord coming to save me by His grace. God does not save the lazy and grace does not encourage slackness and indifference.
- e. Joshua and Moses as an example, Exodus 17:11: The people won victory thanks to Moses, prayers and the fight of Joshua the warrior. This means that victory was the outcome of fight and grace together. The two are inseparable and they go side by side.

4. Has the believer got the right to consider himself worthy of entering the kingdom of God? If someone asks you, "Are you sure you will enter the kingdom of God?" What will your answer be? Yes I am sure one thing; my trust in God is limitless. I have trust in the blood of Christ, but I am not sure of myself as I am inclined to do evil deeds. Having begun with the Spirit, I may end with the flesh (Galatians 3:3). We do not stand as the righteous who have renewed, sanctified and become sure of entering the kingdom of God but in every prayer we confess that we deserve judgment and ask for Salvation. I'll be standing before the Just Judge, shaking in horror owing to my sins, which are numerous (Vespers). How beautiful are the words of Solomon in this respect: "A wise man is cautious and turns away from evil, but a fool throws off restraint and is careless" (Proverbs 14:16).
5. Is it possible for a believer to be destroyed? A believer may be destroyed if he does not stand firm in the Lord and if he separates himself from the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

Examples

Romans 11, John 5, Hebrews 3, Hebrews 4, Hebrews 6:4-8, 2 Timothy 4:10

Exercise

We have to fight while holding the weapons of war, relying, at the same time, on the grace operating in us.

(30) Receiving Christ As King

References

- + "Christ the King" Bishop Gregory
- + "The Titles of Christ and His Works" Bishop Bemin
- + "Extracts from the Feasts" Bishop Bemin
- + "The Treasures of Grace" Archdeacon Banoub Abdu

The Lesson

Aim

Christ reigns over our life.

Introduction

The reception of kings is one of the wonderful scenes in the life of the people. Such scenes gained their admiration so they recorded them in their writings and books. But how did the people receive the King of kings when He entered the capital of His kingdom?

- The prophet Micah prophesied the reception of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 21:5). When Christ entered the city.
- The whole city was thrown in an uproar (Matthew 21:10) as the city was crowded with people celebrating the feast of the Passover.
- Before the entry of the king, He had sent His ambassadors to arrange everything so the disciples went to Bethphage to get everything ready.
- When the king entered the city, His subjects expressed their love for Him by spreading their cloaks on the ground and the procession made its way among the people whose hearts were filled with joy. The cheering crowd was shouting, waving with their hands holding branches of trees thus they proclaimed the personality of that Great king who was coming to them.
- The king proceeded with power and authority facing the Pharisees, hypocrites and blessing the cheering children and when his procession arrived to his Royal Palace (the temple), he drove out those who polluted the temple (Matthew 21:12).

Here we may ask ourselves: “Is Christ an ordinary king as all other kings? Does His Kingdom have specific attributes other than the common attributes of earthly kingdoms that made people realize that the kingdom was unique and that made their show of honor distinguished? “Hosanna in the highest - Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is coming from Heaven”.

Now let us contemplate the attributes of the kingdom of Christ:

1. The Savior established it. The people longed to that Savior after their life had been filled with submission and humiliation to the authority of the devil and his tyranny. So when the people realized that they were before the Savior they shouted “Hosanna” i.e. “Save Us”.
2. Praising is the language of the kingdom so all those who prophesied of the appearance of the kingdom, the holy prophets and the honored Apostles, partook in raising praises to the king.
3. Christ himself went to His subjects who were driven out of the kingdom and showed His love for them unlike many kings who are haughty and look down upon their subjects knowing nothing about their circumstances. Christ’s love for His people was revealed when He sent two of His disciples to the village of Bethphage near Jerusalem to announce the joy of His Salvation to all those who were deprived of entering the Holy Kingdom.
4. Christ the King announced His lowliness and meekness when He rode on a donkey and colt thus showing that the glories of heaven have come down to the land of toil and troubles.
5. The King Christ was all mercy. He was kind hearted and His authority was great. He was kind to the sick, the handicapped, the deformed and the toiling and loaded down. He healed them and comforted them (Matthew 21:14).

6. Christ is the King of peace. He did not enter Jerusalem with His sword drawn out, but entered the city surrounded by the branches of the olive tree seeking reconciliation and peace because peace is His message. He wanted to establish peace between God and man, between man and himself and between man and his brothers.
7. Christ as king was firm and straight forward. Christ received the branches and olive tree and He was received by the branches of palm trees, which were symbols of the life history of Christ and His followers on the way to heaven. Palm fronds are taken from the heart of the palm tree. It is white in color and white is a symbol of the purity of Christ who “committed no sin; no deceit was found on His lips” (1 Peter 2:22). Palm trees also stand for firmness and straight forwardness.
8. Christ is King and the Cross is His Throne (Psalm 95:10) When Christ was on the Cross He stretched out His hands spreading His mercy and kindness to His creatures allover the world from east to west. When He was on the cross all the people reconciled in Him and plundered His weapons (Matthew 12:39). Thus the cross was His throne and He climbed it to reign over all the people.

After we have been acquainted with our heavenly king and the attributes of His kingdom, we have to ask ourselves how to achieve the right to be subjects of the kingdom and how will the king treat us and how will we treat Him and show obedience to Him and what to offer so that we may become good sons worthy of the kingdom.

He is ready to:

- a. Free us from the ties and bondage of sin as we listen to the priest in his prayer of absolution.
- b. Purify us of our impurity, sanctifying our hearts, thoughts, understanding and intentions as He cleansed the Temple on that happy day.

How about if we respond to Him?

- We receive Him with open hearts leaving aside every worldly dignity, and vain pride that may hinder His reception in our life.
- We go to Him willingly motivated by our hearty love for Him not aiming at worldly gain or false profit.
- We have to be aware of the depth of His grace operating in us as it renews our will, sanctifies our hearts and purifies our life. We raise to Him proof of our new life, which the branches of olive trees stood for. The branches of the olive tree are the first fruit of the new plants on the surface of the earth after the Deluge (flood). Let us take off our old man as they took off their clothes.
- Our hearts should be ready and renewed and our mind must be prepared to be worthy of the happiness brought by Christ when he enters the heart.

From the sayings of the Fathers

St. Ephanius said: “Rejoice O most favored. Rejoice and be happy O church of the Lord because your king is coming to you, your bridegroom is coming to you”.

Exercises and Activities

1. Attending the vigil and the mass of Palm Sunday to share with the church in the reception of her king Christ.
2. Offering something of a great value to Christ in His feast; money, service for your household, or service for the poor.
3. When you treat those who are inferior to you in Status, treat them with meekness and love following the example of Christ (at home, in school and in the street).

(31) How Can I Benefit From The Pascha (The Holy Week)

Aim

The one who does not benefit spiritually in the Holy week finds it difficult to benefit on the other days as Passion Week has a deep effect on the self.

Introduction

What kind of advice can we offer so that we may benefit during the Holy Week?

1. ***Follow the same conduct both outside and inside the church:*** We notice that many people stay outside the church building during the Holy week and they behave in a completely different way than when they are inside. Inside the church building we see black curtains outside the camp, we listen to sad hymns and we concentrate on the passions of Christ. There may be laughter, playing amusement and jokes outside. So what we had built inside the church is destroyed outside it and all our gains are lost. Let us live this week alone outside the camp, apart from the secular atmosphere that surrounds us.
2. ***Living: Seclusion:*** We have to live in seclusion by keeping away from unnecessary meetings and talk because the days of Pascha are characterized by seclusion and living with God. We also have to keep away from all means of amusement. Try to live in seclusion and go deep into your inner self and be alone with God and confine your meetings and talk to the necessary matters only and spare your time for spiritual work, which fits this Holy Week.
3. ***Follow the steps of Christ:*** Let us follow the life history of Christ this week step-by-step starting with refusal of the earthly kingdom on Palm Sunday when the Jews lost their hope in Him till they crucified Him and put Him into the tomb. You must have your own appropriate contemplation's all the days of the Pascha seeking to please God in His spiritual kingdom and try to benefit from the general Requiem (funeral) to be ready for the everlasting life bearing in mind the kiss of Judas. While following up the events of the Holy Week take the extracts read in the church this week as a subject for your contemplation.
4. ***Observe the holiness of this week:*** This week is the holiest of the days of the whole year. In this week the Lord Jesus Christ gave Himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age and He fulfilled what we need for our salvation. Let the days of this week be spiritual days in which we look carefully how we walk with deep interest in spiritual and devotion to worship.
5. ***Share His Sufferings:*** Remember what St. Paul said in (Philippians 3:10), can you share the sufferings of the Lord becoming like Him in His death as Paul the Apostle did? (2

Corinthians 4:10-12 and Romans 8:26). Have we shared His sufferings? Have we endured reproach for Him? Or do we complain and murmur whenever we suffer for Him? And we say that the cross is too heavy for us. If you remember your cross in the Holy Week bear it calmly to the place of Golgotha where the Lord endured His sufferings till He said; “It is finished”.

6. ***Take delight in suffering:*** Take delight in every suffering you endure for the Lord and enjoy its blessing and crown. The saint Anba Pham put on the most magnificent clothes when he was on his way to be martyred and he said, “This is a wedding day, so if you are sensitive about your dignity and rights, try to get rid of this sensitivity bearing in mind what was said about Christ” (Isaiah 53:7). Take delight in suffering as the Lord grants it as a blessing (Acts 9:16) and we shall receive our wages in heaven according to our labor (1 Corinthians 3:8). Each person is assigned a certain type of suffering to be endured for the Lord (Hebrews 6:10, Acts 10:38).
7. ***Asceticism:*** The person who puts the suffering of Christ before him fasts willingly without compelling himself to fast but abstains from food and becomes indifferent to it. So in the Holy Week the people fast and practice fasting ascetically without feeling tired because they are absorbed wholly in the sufferings of Christ, which cause them to forget food. So you have to stick to a certain system in fasting. Discipline yourself this week and keep away from anything desirable. You have to overcome the temptation of food firmly so that you may manage asceticism.
8. ***Suitable Reading:*** Reading is the food of the soul and the Holy Week has its own readings about the Passions of Christ and the events of this holy week. Read any book that may inflame the soul with the love of God. It is very important for the reading to be with understanding, with depth and with spiritual benefits.
9. ***Hymns:*** The Holy Week has its own hymns, which are deep and effective. Hymns protect the mind from being distracted and lead it to the spiritual atmosphere. Even those who are not endowed with the talent of singing hymns are deeply affected when they listen to hymns.
10. ***Prayer:*** Using special deep prayers connect us with God and also the Pascha hymns and the repeated short prayers of request, thanksgiving or glorifying God. Following the public ritual prayers of the church with concentration brings us nearer to God who will forgive our sins and have mercy on us.
11. ***Confession and receiving Communion:*** In the Holy Week sit with yourself and carefully count your sins and repent remembering that they are the cause of Christ’s crucifixion. In the Holy Week we convict ourselves of sins, as we are the cause of His sufferings. That is why the heart looks at the crucified Lord and says; “Lord, I am sorry for I am the cause of your suffering. I rejoice in your salvation, which you offered me and to the world by your blood” (1 Corinthians 5:7). We have to remember our sins and judge ourselves and not to judge others and confess our sins and be ready to receive communion.

Instructions and Activities

1. The servant must follow his children up and see to what extent they have benefited from the previous lessons and points each according to his potential.
2. The servant has to attend the prayers of the Pascha and the Holy Hours during the Holy Week with his pupils.

3. The servant should give his children spiritual books during the period of the Pascha to help them understand the Pascha rituals and to read some of the spiritual contemplations during this Holy Week.

(32) The Life of Fellowship

Aim

Developing the spirit of fellowship in the life of young people through their fellowship with God, the saints, the members of the church and the Christian family.

What do we mean by the life of fellowship with God?

- God lived in unity (in Trinity) and when He created man He made man share His righteousness and holiness, because He is everlasting, we shared the everlasting life He also created us in his image and after His likeness in freedom, talk and holiness. God is with man all the time and everywhere (Matthew 18:20, John 17:24).
- The fellowship with God not only means that God is with us but it also means that He is in us (John 14:23).
- Our fellowship with God does not mean that we share Him in His Divine Essence and Nature but it is a fellowship in work, love and companionship (Ephesians 13:7).

What are the foundations of the life of fellowship with God?

- God is Holy and our fellowship with Him is in holiness so if the believer keeps away from the life of holiness, he cannot have fellowship with God (Colossians 6:14-18).
- God is Light and our fellowship with Him is in truth and light. So he who wants to live in fellowship with God must live in light and not live in darkness (Ephesians 5:11-13).
- God is love and our fellowship with Him is in love (1 John 2:9-11).

How can we live in fellowship with others and what are the foundations of this fellowship (Ephesians 4:1-6)?

- We must live in the life of the holy fellowship as we have One Father, One faith and one baptism.
- Our concern is one and holy as we are one family and together with the saints we are members of the household of God.

Some of the foundations of the life of fellowship among believers are:

1. The members of the church should be true believers in name only.
2. Love binds all things together in perfect harmony and it binds all members together.
3. To welcome one another as Christ welcomed us, for the glory of God.
4. Hindrance to the life of fellowship among the believers.

1. Individualism and selfishness: This means that the individual is not on good terms with others in work and he seeks glorification and likes to be the leader of the group and this is against love.

2. Subjection and Prejudice: This leads to a sort of division and disunion. Christianity must not admit subjection or prejudice as the Teacher is One and the Lord is one and all the believers are His disciples.

3. Impatience, speedy judgment and quick condemnation of others: Teamwork requires patience so the group may be strong living in harmony and sacrifice.

How to practice the life of fellowship (in the family, the church, and the world)?

In the family

The family is the foundation and the structure of the church. The husband and wife live with one mind and one heart, so that their children may grow up in the holy unity. Christianity believes that the children are the natural fruit of the fellowship of love between man and woman. Christianity cares for children whom Christ blessed and called to Him. Children should show respect and obedience to their parents within the confines of the commandments of God, His love and the glory of His holy Name (Exodus 20:12).

In the church

The Church of the Apostles led the life of fellowship (Acts 2:42-47). Paul the Apostle praised the church of the Philippians who received and accepted the Gospel and gave a lot (Philippians 1:3-5, 4:16-18). Christians should also live as one family caring for the needs of each member. Each one should contribute to satisfy the needs of the others without showing pride or haughtiness.

What is the Christian's attitude towards the world?

Christianity believes in the close relationship between man and the universe in which man lives. This is clearly shown in the story of creation and its authority over everything, and then its fall and God's bringing the life back to man. For this reason Christ gave the responsibility towards the universe back to man but the love of the world is against the love of God (1 John 2:15-17). From this concept we realize that the world in itself was not wicked but the corruption that came to the world through the envy of the devil led to the existence of a will that is against the will of God the Father. Thus the faithful Christian loves the world, i.e. the people and the material creatures but he hates the evil current and corruption, i.e. sin.

(33) Resurrection

References

- + “How to live the Resurrection” Fr. Bishoy Kamel
- + “The Fruits of Resurrection” Bishop Moussa
- + “O Death where is Thy Sting” Fr. Matta Al Miskin
- + “Resurrection and Ascent” Fr. Matta Al Miskin

The Lesson

Aim

To deepen the young people's understanding of the relationship between resurrection and triumph over sin and the revival of rejoicing in the hearts of the believers.

Resurrection and the life of triumph

The life of triumph and victory has three dimensions. The life of man and the whole world as resurrection is considered the beginning of a new life and it is the Divine triumph given to man from Golgotha and the empty tomb. The Lord, the conqueror, bruised the head of the serpent and abolished death. In the present church the victorious Leader leads his followers in the procession of his victory granting them the power of his resurrection. In the life to come, which the saints expect hope and long for, we recognize the eschatological dimension which integrates what was performed for us.

Jesus bruised the head of the serpent and abolished the power of death

After the disobedience of Adam the devil became the ruler of this world and he used to throw the soul, which parted its body into Hades. But when the time came for the Lord Jesus Christ to give up His Spirit, the devil came near him trying to get hold of his spirit, but Jesus tied him and brought him down to Hades. Then He brought up the souls of those who died in faith (I Corinthians 2:15, Philippians 3:7, Psalm 47:11, Psalm 68:1- 3, Revelation 5:12). By His resurrection, the Lord Jesus abolished the sting of death, which is sin. Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, death spread through to all men because all men sinned. If because of one man's trespass death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of the righteousness reign in the life through the one man Jesus Christ.

Jesus grants us the power of His Resurrection

The Father gave us the mystery of triumph and the power of victory through our Lord Jesus so the death of sin has no power over us neither does it have any power over all the people of God. Resurrection is an action operating continuously in the church of God. The Church vows that the armors of hell were destroyed. The church exercises the power of the Lord's resurrection in her sacraments. The devil has been renounced through baptism. The secret is revealed in the form of death since the new life came out of the empty tomb. We were buried with him by baptism into death (Romans 6:4). The sacrament of repentance is an extension to baptism. In it we can conquer our envies and desires thus emphasizing the truth of resurrection as Paul the Apostle says in Romans 6:13.

This is the first resurrection

In the Liturgy of the Eucharist we practice the operation of real seclusion from the world and we are considered as those rising in heaven because we receive the flesh of the Lord, risen from the dead and drink the innocent blood which enables us to sacrifice, to be ready for martyrdom and to show piety waiting for the trembling second Advent which is full of glory. So the Christian is expected to put the mysteries he obtains into practice in everyday life and in his relationship with people so that the aroma of Christ may spread. In this way he emphasizes the fact of the effective resurrection in the world.

The eschatological dimension of triumph

Although Christ reigns over the church as a sign of triumph and resurrection, yet there are many people in the world who do not put themselves in subjection to the kingdom of God (Isaiah 2:7). But we believe that Jesus died and rose from the dead. Through Jesus, God will bring with Him

those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first then we who are alive, who are left shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and so we shall always be with the Lord (Isaiah 4:16, Revelation 21:2-4, 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18).

Resurrection and the life of joy: Resurrection and Man

The resurrection of the Lord from the dead brought joy and happiness back to the believers after the Lord abolished the sting of death, bruised the devil and granted the church the grace of Salvation but the natural man when facing the bitter life in the cursed land either laughs and mocks or be merry and amuse himself. Humor and slackness, the attributes of the natural man are associated with the tribulations of life. It is a human attempt to get rid of worries and concern but Christ has given us the mystery of true joy (John 16:23).

The mystery of the Paschal Joy

Joy is connected with the cross, discernment, discharge of the will and obedience of truth. Sadness is connected with sin, the phase of acquiring possessions and behaving according to the flesh. All the saints who walked in the way of the Lord gave up themselves and lived in Joy.

The power of the Paschal Joy

The natural (normal) man leads a superficial life that has no depth but resurrection gives the believer depth and an inner dimension, it gives a meaning to life and a new insight of it and it draws our attention to matters which are invisible as they are eternal and everlasting. The modern world considers joy a sort of humor, slackness and indifference. In this Peter comforts us (1 Peter 1:130). The one who has buried himself in the tomb of sin and died or the man who has buried himself in bitter sadness cannot rejoice with Christ. But the one who lives in the way of the Lord, shares the church in her joy, walking in the procession of the Resurrection Icon in the holy days of Pentecost, this man rejoices with Christ. The resurrection fills us with joy and love and that who loves forgives, condescends, forgets, takes his time and shows kindness and patience. The joy of resurrection washes away all enmity and the powerful flame of resurrection disperses darkness and connects us together. Why don't we rejoice? Why don't we love? How? Jesus rose from the dead. Hallelujah. He rose from the dead Praise the Lord.

Do you have these references in your library?

- + The church youth message (Series)
- + The names of the Manger New Born (Bishop Moussa)
- + Inevitability of the Divine Incarnation (Bishop Mattaus)
- + St. Augustus: his life history and sayings
- + The Secondary Stage Program (Notes - 3 Years)

(34) The Attributes Of The Church of the Apostolic

References

- + "The church in the Apostles Age" Bishop Youannis
- + "Features of the Church" Bishop Bemin

+ "My church" Dr. Ragheb Abdul Nur

The Lesson

Aim

The attributes of the church of the Apostolic

Introduction

First: A church of worship, fellowship and seal happiness

1. One of the most important factors that characterized the apostolic church was that they worshipped God with faith with one accord. Here are some examples to show the power of their worship.
 - a. Prayers for Peter the Apostle.
 - b. Stephen the martyr (Acts 6:15)
 - c. The prayers of the Apostles added to the church those who were saved (Acts 2:47).
 - d. Witness concerning the resurrection of the Lord Jesus (Acts 4:33).

The most important features of worship in the church of the Apostles are:

1. With one accord, The Eucharistic Sacrament. Perseverance in breaking bread (Agape).
2. Being filled with true happiness and joy. The cause of joy is grace, salvation and everlasting life and voluntary poverty.
3. Our responsibility towards this type of apostolic life:
 - a. We should be filled with the spirit of the church especially through the holy mass and hymns so that this spirit may go deep into our heart.
 - b. Earnest obedience to the Gospel and living according to the gospel.
 - c. Sharing in public prayers with the spirit of Love and paternity.

Second: A Church Of Love

God is love. So it was natural for Christ to choose people filled with love to be in charge of preaching after his ascent to heaven. Jesus began His work with them by disciplining testing preparing them to carry His message to the parts to the world. The most important features of love in the church of the Apostles are:

1. Love of sacrifice: It is not void or only in words since they left everything and followed him.
2. Love of struggle against the Wolf! We see St. Peter ask the Lord Christ, "How often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him?" and the Lord guides him to truth and teaches him the philosophy of sacrifice.
3. Open love towards all people (Act 10:25).
4. Private love directed to everyone (Acts 20:31), our responsibility toward the full love is to live the dimensions of this practical love.

(35) A Contemplate Study Of The Life Of Elijah The Prophet: **The Meeting Between Elijah And Ahab**

References

- + The first book of Kings chapter 17
- + The second book of Kings chapters 1,2
- + “The life of Elijah” Translated by Fr. David

The Lesson

Aim

This character represents an excellent model to young people who seek the high ideals and admires the practical model that stood firmly defending what was right overcoming all the obstacles in their way and were able to achieve their principles.

Elijah Meets Ahab

1. King Ahab did evil in the sight of the Lord: He married Jezebel the pagan princess, worshipped the Baal and built a temple for Baal in Samaria. The evil he did to displease the Lord God of Israel was far more than the evil done by all the Kings of Israel that came before him. The Scriptures state that marrying an evil woman is very bad and dangerous (e.g. Samson).
2. Elijah defines evil: As the Lord the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years except by my word. Consider the greatness of the personality of Elijah and do not forget that Kings in the past were tyrants. Heaven answered Elijah’s request plus the Lord appeared to Elijah.
3. The Lord God fed Elijah: Ravens brought bread and meat in the brook of Cheiuth east of the Jordan each evening. The brook supplied Elijah with water to drink (refer to God feeding St. Anthony and St. Paul in the eastern desert of Egypt). Make a comparison between the wicked person and the saint in the sight of heaven and in the opinion of the people.
4. Elijah and the widow in Zarephath near Sidon The blessing of the Lord filled the house. The Lord God says, “The bowl will not run out of flows or the jar run out of oil”. It is a great thing to welcome men of God in our houses. They are a blessing in the house. They bless the places and the people around. This is also what the Lord God said to Abraham. “I will bless you and through you I will bless all the nations”. This was a symbol of the real blessing of our Lord Jesus Christ that fills our spiritual and material life.
5. Elijah raises the widow’s son “O Lord my God, let this child’s soul come into him again”. The Lord answered Elijah’s prayers. Elijah delivered the child to his mother. Compare this to what the Lord Christ did when he raised the son of a widow from Nain.

Instructions, Exercises And Activities

1. Make a thorough study of the life of Elijah and show the heroic situations that filled you with admiration and give the reason that make you admire him.
2. Elijah was a symbol of the Lord Jesus Christ in bearing witness to the truth but the Lord Jesus Christ was himself the truth. He said, “I have come into the world to bear witness to the Truth”.
3. But there are differences between Elijah style and Christ when heaven answered the prophet’s prayers. What are the similarities and what are the differences?

4. Elijah was a symbol of Christ in the blessing, which filled the house of the widow in Zarephath near Sidon. What are the similarities here? Christ referred to this widow in his talks (Refer to Luke 4:25).
5. Why does the Bible say that the Baptist comes in the spirit of Elijah? What are the similarities between the two characters and what are the similar situations for each. Refer to the prophecy of Malachi 4:5 and show how our teacher St. Luke quoted it in chapter 1:17. Show that this prophecy was fulfilled in the character of the Baptist.
6. The tendency now adopted allover the world is a tendency of flexibility, conformity and diplomacy .The tendency is not to displease anyone and to avoid bearing witness to the truth so as to respect the feelings of others; what do you think?
7. How could bearing witness to the truth be powerful effective and acceptable in the sight of God? What is the meaning of: O Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ?
8. Elijah was a symbol of Christ when he raised the son of the widow in Zarephath near Sidon what are the similarities and differences between the two? What does our teacher St. James say about Elijah's prayer and its power (James 5:17)?

(36) Contemplating study of the life of prophet Elijah:
The second meeting between Elijah and Ahab

References

- + The first book of Kings chapter 18,19
- + The second book of Kings chapters 1,2
- + "The life of Elijah" Translated by Fr. David

The Lesson

Ahab and Obadiah

Ahab called in Obadiah who was in charge of the palace. Obadiah revered the Lord greatly. While Jezebel was killing the Lord's prophets, Obadiah took a hundred of them, hid them and provided them with food and water without any feeling of fear, cowardice or humiliation (Note how a man of a high rank can make use of his position for the glory of God. Refer to the character of Nehemiah and the character of Ester and all those who bear witness to the Lord in their positions).

- + Why didn't Obadiah want to deliver Elijah's messenger to Ahab?
- + What had Elijah done before meeting Ahab?

Is it you, you troubler of Israel (1 Kings 18:17)

Notice how powerful Elijah was when he answered king Ahab. Refer to the words of the Baptist "You brood of vipers..." But we should not speak of others in this way as we have no authority and our life is not like theirs. We do not have a message to deliver as the case is with them but we should bear witness modestly and firmly.

Elijah meets the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel (chapter 18)

How long will you go limping with two different opinions?

- “If the Lord is God, follow Him, but if Baal is God, then follow him. And the people did not answer him a word”.
- Elijah was alone facing four hundred and fifty men (Refer to Athanasius the apostolic when he was told that the whole world was against him and he said “And I am against the world”).
- Elijah mocked the prophets of Baal saying, “Cry aloud, either he is musing, or he has gone aside, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep, and must be awakened”.

Notice the idols of the modern world, which people worship. They are not Baal but they are like it. Examples: money, material, lust, social status, reputation, certificates and the vain atheistic philosophy etc. But the man of God has only one God who loved him and died in body for his salvation.

Elijah's attitude

Why did he repair the altar of the Lord that had been torn down, digging a trench around the altar, filling four jars with water and pouring water on the offering and the wood? He did not find his soul but the whole situation was prayer and glorification to the Lord God of Israel “Let it be known this day that You are God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word. Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that, You, O Lord, are God, and that You have turned their hearts back”. Heaven answered Elijah's prayer. Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. To understand the greatness of the event refer to Moses when he crossed the Red Sea and to Joshua when he crossed Jordan and to Daniel in the pit of lions and the three young men in the blazing furnace.

- How great is the young person who adheres to his principles even if the whole world worshipped Baal.
- How great is the young person who does not respond to people's talk and is not affected by the social, economic and psychological stress.

Elijah's situation at Mount Carmel after heaven had answered his prayers

- He killed the prophets of Baal.
- He climbed to the top of Mount Carmel where he bowed down to the ground with his head between his knees.
- A little cloud appeared and heavy rain began to fall.

Elijah was afraid because of Jezebel's threats (Chapter 19)

This great man wished for death because of the threats of an evil woman (a model for the weakness of human nature). Compare this with the situation in which Christ said “Which of you convicts me of sin? The ruler of this world is coming he has no power over me”.

The Lord does not leave His children alone

The Lord sent an angel to Elijah The angel gave him food to eat and water to drink. The food gave him enough strength to walk forty days. Contemplate Christ when He was at the mountain. He was not in need of food as He fed on the love of His Heavenly Father.

Elijah stands before the Lord

- The Lord was not in the wind. He was not in the earthquake. The Lord was not in the fire. The Lord was in the soft whisper of a voice. Contemplate this.
- What Elijah said was: I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts, for the people of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, thrown down Your altars, and slaying Your prophets with the sword, and I am left alone as sultan (ruler) of the place and time. How weak he is when he thinks of himself. How weak he is when he is afraid of the authority of man (Refer to Moses and how the Lord commanded him to take some of the spirit and give it to forty people).
- But the Lord did not leave Himself without a witness. He kept for Himself seven thousand knees that have not bowed to Baal. Our faithlessness did not nullify the faithlessness of God. God is able to raise up children to Abraham from stones.
- Jehu was anointed to be king over Israel and Hazael was anointed to be king over Syria, and Elisha was anointed to be prophet in place of Elijah. We need to look forward to Him alone so that we can get power from above “I lift up my eyes to the hills. From whence does my help come? My help comes from the Lord behold, He who keeps Israel, will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is your keeper”.

Instructions, Exercises And Activities

- In his Epistle to the Romans, St. Paul quoted Elijah’s words (Romans 11:2). Why did he choose this quotation and what are his comments on the prophet’s words?
- What are the acceptable and true attributes of the Christian witness? What are the false ones?
- What is the difference between holy zeal for God, fanaticism, anger and rage?
- How can the believer resist the evil attitudes of the world whether in the domain of lust or conformity to evil?

Benefit from the life of Christ and the life of Elijah

1. What are the similarities and differences in character between the Lord Christ and Elijah?
2. Elijah was a symbol of Christ in the following situations:
 - a. Giving witness to the truth.
 - b. Attacking false religiousness.
 - c. Heaven’s answer to all his prayers.
3. Standing alone in the most difficult situations But Elijah was different from the Lord in the following:
 - b. Violence.
 - c. Weakness and fleeing from Jezebel.
 - d. Considering the self and fear of loneliness.
 - e. His need for external support.

Let your saying be:

- How long will you go limping with two different opinions? If the Lord is God follow him, but if Baal is God then follow him.
- I am the Lord thy God; you shall not have strange Gods before Me.

(37) Contemplating study of the life of prophet Elijah: The third meeting between Elijah and Ahab

References

- + The first book of Kings chapter 20-22
- + The second book of Kings chapters 1,2
- + “The life of Elijah” Translated by Fr. David

The Lesson

The greediness of Ahab and his desire to possess Noboth’s vineyard in Jezreel

(Study the case of greediness in Man’s life and how the eye is not satisfied). What is the solution Christianity offers to solve his problem? How did the evil woman succeed in getting rid of Noboth? Lies and slander, injustice and murder through fraudulent and false zeal for religion.

We are not surprised to find that the world is full of Jezebel’s examples but those who lift up their eyes to heaven know that the examples of Jezebel has been lost and they are no more. The crowns and everlasting life are kept for the children of God in spite of the apparent failure in the present life but heaven will not keep silent. Heaven will take revenge and punish them. Heaven keeps in memory all insults and the complaints of the appraised and the debased God hears and answers (Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, who is in Samaria! Behold he is in the vineyard of Noboth where he has gone to take possession. And you shall say to him, ‘Thus says the Lord Have you killed and also taken possession? In the place where dogs licked up the blood of Noboth shall dogs lick your own blood’.

Because you have sold yourself to do what is evil upon you I will utterly sweep you away, and will cut off from Ahab every male, bond or free, in Israel. The dogs shall eat Jezebel within the bounds of Jezreel. Anyone belonging to Ahab who dies in the city of dogs shall eat, and anyone of his who dies in the open country the birds of the air shall eat. There was none who sold himself to do what was evil in the sight of the Lord like Ahab, whom Jezebel his wife incited.

Ahab’s Repentance

When Ahab heard those words he rent his clothes and put sackcloth upon his flesh and fasted and lay in sackcloth and went about dejectedly “Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the evil in his days but in his son’s days I will bring the evil upon his house”.

Instructions, Exercises And Activities

- Collect stories of saints who were evil and then repented and contemplate the life of repentance and why fathers call repentance the second baptism and how the Lord was merciful to them.
- Make a study of greediness in the life of man. Show its psychological and spiritual reasons and how Christianity cures it.

- Make a study of social injustice and how the powerful dominate the week and how the powerful forget that God exists. Collect situations from the church history and the secular history and show how tyrants meet their end.
- Show that a true Christian rejects injustice and that the message of the prophets and the message of our Lord Jesus Christ was a call for emancipation from injustice and a call for human fraternity and rejecting fanaticism and disposition. Quote texts from the sayings of the prophets of the Old Testament and state what the Baptist said and what James the Apostle said in his epistle. Make a study of the life of John Chrysostom as a model of calling for social justice.
- Notice how Ahab died in Samaria and bow the dogs licked up his blood (1 Kings 22:37).
- The word of the Lord never falls down and the punishment of God is everlasting and fearful. It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the Living God.
- A true Christian should defend the rights of man and social justice but the church should not plunge herself into the political currents (Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's).
- Show the difference between patriotism and plunging into politics, and the difference between defending principles and having a bias towards parties and political and economical bodies.

(38) A Meeting With The Messengers Of Ahaziah (2 Kings 1)

References

- + The second book of Kings chapters 1
- + “The life of Elijah” Translated by Fr. David

The Lesson

Introduction

- Ahaziah felt through the lattice in his upper chamber in Samaria and lay sick so he sent messengers with these words “Go, inquire of Beelzebub, the God of Akron I whether I shall recover from this sickness”.
- An angel of the Lord commanded Elijah to meet the King’s messengers and tell them that the King sinned when he inquired of the idols and did not inquire of God’s word.
- The punishment was “You shall not come down from the bed to which you have gone, but you shall surely die”.
- The king sent military regiments and fire came down from heaven and killed them once, twice and thrice. Then the king died.

Elijah is taken up to heaven in chariot of fire (Ch: 2)

- Elisha’s attitude towards Elijah.
- Elisha’s request to inherit a double share of Elijah’s spirit.
- A chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.
- Elijah’s spirit settled on Elisha.

- The prophets searched for Elijah in the desert for three days then they became sure of the truth of Elisha's words when he said that Elijah was taken up to heaven in a chariot of fire.
- Elisha was Elijah's disciple. He followed the same footsteps of Elijah his master.

Instructions, Exercises And Activities

- Why is consulting wizards, mediums and evil spirits dangerous?
- What is your attitude if you meet one of those who consult these evil spirits?
- How can we recognize the will of God in our life?
- Give examples of saints who recognized the will of God and submitted to the will of the Lord in their life and did not disobey the Divine will (Paul the Apostle St. Anthony etc).
- Why do you admire Elisha's request of Elijah at the end of his life on earth?
- Of what importance is spiritual discipleship?
- Give examples from the life of saints especially from the monastic schools to show, what the difference is between spiritual discipleship and favoring a spiritual leader?
- Make a thorough study of this case and show the danger of conflicting trends in the church if there is any.

Sources of power in the life of Elijah

- He was a man of truth. He bore witness to the truth and he did not fear rulers.
- O Lord you are righteous and your judgments are right. You command justice and faithfulness, which are your testimony.
- I will speak of your testimony before Kings and shall not be put to shame. The rulers plotted together against me. But your servant walks in faithfulness to you.
- He was firm in faith, was not lenient and was a brave man. He did not fear any body. He was a man of great power who never surrendered when facing threats.
- He was a man of holiness, asceticism and virginity. He lived in the wilderness, his clothes were made of camel's hair and he rejected the live of luxury. That is why he challenged Jezebel and Ahab and refused to accept anything from them. Because of his holiness he was taken up to heaven in a chariot of fire.
- He was a man whose prayers had a powerful effect. St. James the Apostle bore witness to him saying that his prayer had a great power in its effect. His prayer was so powerful that the Lord heard him and answered his prayer; prayer is the key to heaven, the door of the kingdom and the guarantee of the everlasting life.
- He a man of social justice. He opposed injustice, slander and greediness. He neither feared the powerful nor did he back them up at the cost of the weak. Because of his virginity, prayer and fiery witness he was worthy to appear to the disciples at the Transfiguration and to speak to the Lord, in His Glory, with Moses. When the Lord talked with them about the redemption that He was to offer for the Salvation of humanity, their faces were shining and the garment of the Lord were glistening as snow (Refer to Matthew 17:3 and Mark 9:5).

(39) You Have Brought Up My First Fruits Of The Heaven

References

- + “The Divine Ascension will” Bishop Bemin
- + “The feasts enlighten” Bishop Bemin
- + “The Ascension day and Pentecost” Fr. Matta Al Miskin

The Lesson

Aim

Showing that the Son who came down from heaven must, go up to heaven and we look for His second coming (Parousia) from heaven.

Introduction

- When God created Adam, He saw that what He made was very good. The only guarantee for human nature to remain in that great glory was that it should submit to the commandment of the Lord.
- When Adam was in Eden He was in the presence of God. He spoke to the Lord face to face.
- The human nature in Adam and Eve could live, through the Divine grace, a life of purity and simplicity.

Nature no longer suitable for glory

But sin came to the world through the envy of the devil. Man said no to the divine love as an expression of his free will that was wrongly made use of through the devil’s deceit. At that time nature was corrupted. This state of corruption was well expressed by St. Athansius the Apostolic when he said, “Man is no more outside sin but is within it” and in the middle of it. God, who is all love, willed to restore Adam to his first order to bring him back to Paradise. So the Lord took the nature of man, which He unified in His Divine nature, so that through His incarnation, His crucifixion, death and resurrection, He could create a new human nature that is able to live in Paradise in the presence of the Lord, the Heavenly father. Through Jesus Christ the Father sees the perfect man and through Jesus Christ man sees the Holy Glorified Father.

The first Adam and the second Adam

- If the first Adam fell in disobedience, the second Adam succeeded in fulfilling complete obedience till death on the cross.
- As one man’s trespass led to condemnation and death reigned all man, life of righteousness reigns for all man through the salvation offers by the only begotten son our Lord Jesus Christ.
- If, because of sin there was fear and hiding in the garden of Eden then it was because of resurrection that there was rejoicing and human appearance in the presence of the sanctuary of the Father so that the sacrifice of the High Priest may meet acceptance and everlasting redemption.
- If, because of Adam’s trespass, man became naked and tried to cover his naked body with fig leaves, Christ’s hands fill man with grace. Thus man is able to take up the weapon of the Lord, the most Holy put on the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Christ’s ascent of the Mount of Olives is an action apposite to Adam’s descent from the Garden of Eden.

- Christ's victory and triumphal rise in glory is an action opposite to the dangerous fall of man into the depth of hell.

On the Mount of Olives

The Lord took the physical nature of man after redeeming it and glorifying it by the power of His cross and resurrection. Then He raised it with Him and in Him to the Heavenly Father so that man can be present before the Holiest of all after the long absence of Adam in the wilderness and the loss of his share because of his disobedience and revolt. This is what Zechariah the prophet prophesied in olden times, "And his feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives which is before Jerusalem on the east" (Zechariah 14:4).

Lord: You raised my nature to the sky

O Lord direct my eyes to these Heavenly values all the time. Make me seek the things above because it is written in the Scriptures, "If however, you were raised up with Christ, go on seeking the things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God" (Colossians 3:1). Then through the Lord's ascent to heaven and sitting on His throne at the right side of His father the prophecy came true; "The Lord said unto my Lord, sit at My right hand, until I make your enemies Your footstool" (Psalms 110:1). "That who has been made a little lower than angels, through incarnation and through emptying himself, is seen crowned with glory and honor after his death and resurrection" (Hebrews 2:9).

He will come back in great glory in the same manner

"The two angels said to the disciples "Men of Galilee why are you standing gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as you have seen Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). This is what the Lord Himself said "And they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matthew 24:30). All the members of the church held firmly to the good hope that was placed before them all over the ages and through generations. Rejoicing in hope and patient in tribulation, they lift up their eyes with hope to heaven saying, "The Lord is coming soon. The Lord is coming and He will wipe away every tear from the eyes and death will be no more, neither will mourning nor outcry nor pain any more. The former things have passed away".

Activities

Contemplate the following verses:

- "For if the first fruit be holy, the whole is also holy". Showing how we have become accepted through Him.
- "But I would have you know that the head of every man is Christ". Showing how we must remain in union with Him so as to receive the blessing of being seated at the right hand of God.
- "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".
- "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive, but every man in his own order".

References

- + “Studies and contemplations of Major Feasts” Vol. 2, Bishop Bemin
- + “What the Father has promised” St. Mary Church, Fagala
- + Many books in the library about the Holy Spirit

The Lesson

Aim

Developing the attitude of self- observation and acceptance of the Holy Spirit’s reproof for spiritual development.

Verse

“And when He comes, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness and of judgment” (St. John 16:8-11).

Introduction

The divine convict is one of the works of the Holy Spirit; it is not like the convict of the world or the convict of the people. One convicts one’s brother because of business, interest or personal motive, but the Spirit convicts for salvation only and for bearing witness to Jesus Christ who was sent by the Father to accomplish the divine intentions? People are merciless when they convict but we find deep spiritual rebuke in the Spirit’s reproof. However, the Spirit’s convict provides help, consolation and hope for those who accept and respond.

The wicked world does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God for they are fall to it. Secular people do not understand spiritual matters because they are carnally sold under sin. But the spiritual person who is led by the spirit of God, whose inner feelings have been trained to discern between good and evil, has a spiritual ear, which can discern between the voice of the shepherd and that of the wolf. This spiritual person gains and insight into spiritual matters, thus seeing these invisible things as if they were visible through faith without resorting to any mental measures or physical evidence.

He Will Convict The World Of Sin

“Concerning sin because they do not believe”. The Lord Jesus considers Sin and Unbelief as synonymous. In fact each wicked thought and each evil action results from disbelief, i.e. a distrust of the presence of God everywhere and at all times. If we believe that God exists and that He is in us now and in all times, we will not sin and search for excuses and live in darkness, refusing the true light that enlightens every man coming into the world.

- Faith saved Joseph the righteous man, when sin in its worst form and severe challenge attacked him he said, “How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?”
- And Elijah, the great prophet, through faith bore witness to truth when he faced evil and injustice and when he met the prophets of Baal, he said, “As the Lord, The God of Israel lives, before whom I Stand”.

- When our teacher Peter the Apostle was asked not to proclaim the name of Jesus, His strong belief that the Lord was with him made him prefer death to leading a life of surrender and he said, “We must obey God rather than man”.
- When Polycarp, the Bishop and martyr, was submitted for martyrdom and in spite of the threat and temptation, he said, “I spent eighty six years with the Lord and He has been kind to me, merciful and beneficent, so how can I arouse His wrath by denying Him and worshipping the idols?”

The ideology of modern atheism not only proclaims that there is no God, but it also proclaims that we are not in need of God in our daily life and that we do not see God in our civilized societies. So anyone who does not believe in the Lord Jesus and have true faith in Him, and bear fruit of good deeds, love, meekness, chastity, piety, patience and long suffering is liable to be convicted by the spirit because he sins the sin of unbelief.

St. Paul the Apostle says “Nobody can say: Jesus Is Lord except by holy spirit” (1 Corinthians 13:3) and anyone to whom the holy spirit reveals Christ as Savior and blessed God and refuses to accept Him, such a person does not deserve salvation but he arouses the father’s wrath. Anyone who accepts the reproof of the spirit and corrects his conduct and adjusts his route gains the everlasting life. This happened on the day of Pentecost when Peter gave a speech when he was filled with the Holy Spirit and reproached the people who were listening to him. The Spirit stabbed them to the heart and they received Peter’s words gladly. They were baptized and on the day about three thousand souls were added (Acts 2:41).

He Will Convict The World Of Righteousness

“Of righteousness, because I go to my father and you see me no more”. Since the work of the Holy Spirit is to bear witness to the Son, He shows the world the righteousness and Holiness of Christ. He supports His witness with the miracles that the Apostles performed and that the pure Disciples showed, and by the miraculous talents He granted the church on the day of Pentecost. Thus preaching becomes concentrated, centered and confirmed to the righteousness of Christ, who grants righteousness to the lawbreaker and delivers all from judgment (Revelation 3:25,26 and 5:18). If the righteousness of Christ grants righteousness, the false righteousness of the world does not save people from destruction.

Since the apostolic age, the church has resisted the movement of imitating the Jews, which aimed to concentrate on the law, circumcision, the Sabbath Mosaic ordinances and flesh washing which are all the good things to come. St. Paul supported by the Holy Spirit preached the whole world saying, “And there is Salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by whom we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Many superficial Christians ate still content with social manners considering them a substitute for the Gospel of satisfaction. Although those manners are human in their truth and depth, they are more than a will of man which was excluded by John the Apostle from those born of God (John 1:13).

The false self-justification relies on education and social bringing up of children. In this case the individual refuses repentance and prayer does not obey the commandment, does not enquire the Cross and is satisfied with deceptive formalities. He does not practice the church sacraments and means of grace through which the Holy Spirit works. The spirit convicts this false righteousness

and it reveals its incapacity and failure. The foolish maidens were not accepted and those who did not put on the wedding robe were thrown in the burning pool.

He Convicts Of Judgment

“Of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged” This judgment is for those who crucified Christ and thought that they succeeded in destroying the truth. But the Lord through His resurrection destroyed the dominion of death, the devil (Hebrews 12:14). He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him (Colossians 2:15). “And He declared: I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (Luke 10:18). The honored holy disciples in their preaching revealed the devil’s fraud and lies when they were driving him out and making fun of him with the sign of the Cross. Anyone who pretends that the devil is still powerful and unconquered, will be convicted by the spirit “because the ruler of this world has been judged and he has no more authority or power over the redeemed”. “Your holy spirit O Lord that you sent on your holy saints and honorable Apostles at the third hour of the day, do not take Him away from us O Good Lord but renew Him in our hearts”.

Allow Him to convict those who reject the narrow road and let them know that this is the sin which makes the Lord angry with man and brings the judgment of the Father to man forever. “O Paraclete the spirit of the truth, Comforter convict those who lead a false religious life so that they may reject self-justification and stick to obedience of the soul operations in you church, the One Holy Universal and Apostolic Church”. The Paraclete also convicts all those who lead a false religious life so that they man earnestly and truly rejects the deceiver and the deceived.

(41) Conditions of the Fellowship of Christ

Aim

Developing the attitude of carrying the cross and following the Lord as a basis of the canonical struggle.

The Nazirite’s attributes

When we contemplate the Book of Numbers chapter 6, we find a wonderful reference to the spiritual man’s attributes. The spiritual man devotes his heart and his life to God. He lives for the Lord. The vow is the free man’s response to the call of the Lord and His Salvation. The following are some attributes and characteristics of the Nazarite:

1. He keeps away from the joys of the world: It is not enough for him to refrain from wine and strong drinks “He shall separate himself from wine and strong drink; he shall drink no vinegar made from wine or strong drink and shall not drink any juice of grapes or eat grapes, fresh or dried all the days of his separation, he shall eat nothing that is produced by the grapevine, not even the seeds or the skins”. Eating such things is not forbidden, but if a devoted man eats or drinks them, he may long for the joys of the world. So for all those who are separate for the service of God and those who chose monasticism as the way of life those people know that their food is living according to the will of their Heavenly Father, and that they are separated from any earthly joy even if it is allowed for others. The Lord says, “My food is for me to do the will of him that sent me to finish his

work" (John 4:34).

2. He abandons the honors of this world: St. Paul the apostle says, "Doesn't nature itself teach you that for a man to wear long hair is degrading to him" (1 Corinthians 11:14). Yet God commands "All the day of the Nazirites vow of separation no razor shall come upon his head". So when the Nazirite lets the locks of hair of his head grow long, he abandons the honor and glory of this world. The devoted man who is separate from the service of God must follow Jesus' steps. When the people wanted to honor the Lord and make Him king, He disappeared from among them.
3. He is not preoccupied by family relationships: The Nazarite is dead to the world. He should not be sad if his father, mother or brother dies "All the days that he separates himself to the Lord, he shall not go near a dead body. Neither for his father nor for his mother, nor for brother or sister, if they die shall he make himself unclean because his separation to God is upon his head". His long hair reminds him that he had died to nature which demands honor, since all the people have become his father mother, brothers and sisters "For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Matthew 12:48).

The Chastity Cross

- There is a difference between chastity (passive refraining from desire) and Purity (positive love which one is devoted to).
- The pure man is that man who substituted love for love. So he loved the Lord more than any other love (but chastity means swimming by one hand, John the Daragi).

Without holiness we cannot please God. Chastity has two routes each implies carrying the cross:

Marriage

- Marriage is the mystery of purity. Before the coming of Christ, it aimed at the life of fellowship and to give posterity from whom the Savior of the world would come.
- But after the coming of Christ, its aim has become to unify people in Christ if this expression is right.
- So marriage is the mystery of unity. Eve was a rib in the body of Adam and that rib was separated; now she is going back to him. The Christian youth keeps themselves pure for marriage.

Virginity

- The monk achieves the unity of his nature in virginity not through marriage but through unity with Christ. The Virgin is called the bride without marriage as Christ is in her.
- Thus virginity is considered more fertile than marriage as it gives spiritual children to the church.
- Sarah was barren and so was Abraham but he became the father of believers. Hannah was barren but she gave birth to Samuel who anointed David Christ's grandfather. Elizabeth the barren gave birth to John the Baptist, but the Virgin solved the problem. The absolute barrenness produces absolute fertility and Christ is the offering of virginity.
- Thus sexual abstinence, except within the limits of purity which is blessed by marriage, is the first step in carrying the cross and it is not repression or deprivation or barrenness but it is sublimation and fertility.

The Cross of Obedience

This may take the form of obedience to the priest who receives confessions, or to the Commandments of the Scriptures and basically obedience to God. This means that our life is hid with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3). It means that we free ourselves from our own will. Virtue may soften the self but obedience consumes the self completely. No wonder then that the fathers consider obedience, as a sign for the monk's progress and his spiritual readiness but obedience must be based on the following terms:

1. It must not be performed out of partiality, enticement and bias for persons.
2. It must not be a sort of sycophancy and an attempt to gain the confidence of the poss.
3. It must be attentive obedience not blind obedience.
4. It must be internal obedience not formal external obedience.
5. It should be positive and active, willing to help without sycophancy.
6. It must take the form of suffering as it is a cross directed towards the self "If you love me you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15), "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29), "Purify your souls by your obedience to the truth" (1 Peter 1:22), "As obedience children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct" (1 Peter 1:14).

The Cross of Abstinence

It is secluding oneself from the world. It is not despising but it means preferring the best of the whole universe, i.e. the Creator of the Universe. God is the only being who is not in need of any possessions because He is self-sufficient. Abstinence means that we should be in the image of God. The meaning is that we seek to "be" not to "have". Sometimes we call it voluntary poverty because we abstain from possessing anything to stick to the knowledge of God and this is important for our inner freedom "Give us this day our daily bread". Abstinence here makes us stand in the presence of God and request him to give us our spiritual and material needs. Lord Christ achieved acute poverty when He emptied Himself and took the form of a servant. This virtue is not practiced now. Monasteries must not be rich institutions but they should be a copy of abstinence and refraining from material things. The early Christians abstained themselves from possessions and they led a life of fellowship sharing everything together. No one of them owned anything but they as a group owned everything.

The inner and outer cross of asceticism

The way of the cross is of three stages parallel to the stages the Israelites followed when they left the land of bondage for the wilderness of struggle and to Canaan.

1. The stages of keeping away from whims: The motto is fear of God, thinking of death, repentance, keeping away from bad company, the desire of greed, anger and carelessness.
2. The stages of the outer asceticism: These are characterized by fasting, prayer, keeping the tongue, almsgiving which must be practiced by man who must be sure of having skills useful for the following stage.
3. The stage of spiritual virtues and inner asceticism, the innocence or heart, love, meekness and contemplation. This is a sign indicating the success of the spiritual stewardship and the liberation of man from his own self forever. Then a final piece of advice is to be directed to anyone who walks in the way of salvation, that is to sit daily in awe and read or listen to the word of God, seeking the help of the spiritual guide so that the grace may

work and operate in his life. Thus he can offer a holy acceptable sacrifice of his will to the Lord.

(42) A Holy Summer

Introduction

The summer vacation is near and we as young people need to make a thorough study of the problem of leisure. When we were busy studying during the school year, we did not have any spare time but we needed more time. The reason is simple, the heart was busy aiming at success and prominence, and the mind was busy with the responsibility of studying thus there was no spare time for both the heart and the mind.

If we, as young people, adopt this simple idea, we will feel it necessary, during this summer, to make a revision and to think seriously...how shall we spend this summer? We can spend the summer indulging ourselves in amusement and laziness; we can spend it in retrogression, in sin and in deviation but it would be better if we could convince ourselves that we are in need of change, benefit and up building. I hope that you will go deep into your inner self and ask yourself these questions:

- How far is the work of salvation effective in my life and to what extent am I satisfied with Christ?
- Are my prayers regular, aglow and true? Is my worship vivid and filling?
- To what extent do I understand the Old Testament and how far have I studied the New Testament in detail?
- Is it suitable for the children of God to neglect the words of God in this way?

Let this be a second project for this summer...i.e., to read all the Books of the Old Testament or to study the New Testament in detail.

There was a lot of confusion during the school year. My confessions and receiving the Communion were not regular neither were they satisfying. Can't I make use of leisure this summer and receive the blessing of these two sacraments and learn how to practice them in a second way? Read very few books all over the school year. I lack a lot of information about the spiritual way, about my beloved Church, about the other orthodox churches, about the relationship between Religion and science, about Christ's opinion of the current modern thought and about different types of culture. Doesn't this open a new domain of constructive reading?

I used to find excuses during the school year saying that the time was limited so I could not offer the service, which was appropriate to God. Can't I now serve a village, a class, and a club or visit young people and boys?

Thus quiet convincement of needfulness fills the heart with concern and enthusiasm for some useful attitudes that may fill the heart with what is useful to it, and the mind with what is pure and the time with what builds up.

A double-edged sword

The summer vacation, my dear friend, is a double-edged sword as it may push you forward in the way of spiritual growth and the integration in the way of spiritual growth and the integration of the Christian personality or it may push you backwards and through you into the labyrinth of defiled leisure or deviated work. The summer vacation is not a static matter as some people may imagine but it necessarily a motive power either forward or backward so watch your way.

The Spiritual Domain

We must not forget, even for one moment, that the sole aim of our service is the earnest call for a change of life, so the teachers in charge of summer activities must be watchful so that the days of summer may not elapse in many embarrassing situations. Thus the service becomes void of meaning. In fact all types of activities should be directed to one domain; i.e. the Spiritual domain and to rise high to one aim, i.e. the Salvation of the soul from the corruption of the world and the influence of sin and the temptation of the world and the devil, to the areas of light, and joy of everlasting life through Jesus Christ.

Features of Some Activities

1. To be numerous: simple and satisfying, pleasing to the soul, including a prayer from Canonical Hours performed in a ritual way with hymns. Students and teachers can read the first lines of the chapters of the Book, "The Life of the Orthodox Prayer". Teachers and young people can read them again together with the sayings of the Fathers during the week.
2. Service: Summer is a good blessed chance to prepare some teachers spiritually and practically in different domains such as:
 - a. Teaching in the deprived villages.
 - b. It would be better to spend the night there.
 - c. Praying during different meetings.
 - d. Visiting and seeking those who do not go to church.
 - e. The Service of love such as caring for widows, orphans and the needy.
 - f. Supervision of the summer club.
 - g. Serving in the library: borrowing -keeping books in good condition -arranging them - searching for them and bringing them back. Giving an idea about some of them to encourage reading activity -making a wall magazine inside the library.
 - h. Writing activity: Writing summaries for topics and debates and keeping them in the library or getting them printed and distributed or issuing magazines.

The Studies

Young people must build themselves up through continuous study especially at home in the morning. Some readings encourage them to do so: Examples are:

- ❑ Reading the Old Testament, ten chapters everyday so it could be completed in summer. Preparing some studies about some Scriptures or topics or Biblical characters in detail.
- ❑ Connecting one's life with the life of the Lord of glory from certain domains (each one in the group chooses one domain).
- ❑ Making summaries of church books: Creed (dogma) rituals, history and life stories.
- ❑ Reading with understanding a limited group of spiritual books, presenting them and simplifying them.

- To learn the Coptic language and Ecclesiastical hymns.

Recess (Retreat)

Opportunities for young people to retire in a quiet secluded place should be arranged. They should go to that place twice a year, for example, during the vacation. On these occasions, which should be filled with joy and peace and firmness, the young man has a chance for building up his spiritual eternity of the soul, fraternal love. On some occasion let us study the obstacles that stand in the way of our spiritual growth (Is purity a problem?) How can I overcome the problems of using the Canonical Hours in my prayers: Problems on my way to receive Common, problem during practicing confession, how to avoid the dangers of the media surrounding us, how to behave in a sound way, how to read the Orchard of the Monks and how to follow its Fathers' example and how to offer Christ as a living service. A daily program should be set and carried out precisely. It should include all the prayers of the Canonical hours. Other opportunities should be devoted to public prayers, private prayers, readings, and debates and open opportunities.

(43) The Life of St. Peter the Apostle

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The Lesson

Aim

As you contemplate how their conduct turns out imitate their faith.

The word “Apostle”

This title was given to the twelve disciples and those who were sent to the Jews in the dispersion after the destruction of Jerusalem to talk to them about Christianity. Their task necessitated movement from place to place to preach. They established churches and ordained ministers to them then they left for other places.

Who is Peter?

He was one of the two disciples who went to prepare the last Passover and was one of the three who witnessed raising Jairus' daughter after her death. He was with Christ when Transfiguration took place on the Mountain of Tabor. He was with Christ in Gethsemane. He was one of the four disciples who heard Christ's prophecy about the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.

Peter's Characteristics

His love for his master Lord Jesus was deep and great. He was characterized by his inflamed zeal but he was rash. He was the first to confess the theology of Christ, and the first to preach about Christ on the day of the Pentecost but his rashness caused him to prevent Christ from death so when Jesus was arrested he took out his sword to defend Christ whose kingdom is not of this world. Peter then was in need of a bitter temptation to shake him and to make him know his weakness, so after the resurrection, he met Lord Jesus at Lake Tiberias. Lord Jesus asked him

three times, “Do you love me?” as Peter denied him three times. Thus Jesus brought him back to his apostolic order when he said to him, “Take care of my lambs”.

St. Peter was an ordinary man. He had his virtues as well as his mistakes and weakness. When this simple personality met Jesus Christ, it changed into a great and glorious character whose effect extended to all the subsequent generations. The call of the New Master reached him, that master who went through the cities and villages of Palestine teaching, preaching and healing. Peter left everything and followed him. He lived with Jesus in a life of discipleship. He ate and drank with him. He accompanied him in the wilderness and on the mountain, on land and on water. He saw his miracles and his glorious deeds. He listened to the words of the everlasting life that came out of his mouth. He listened to his prayers and felt the life of holiness, righteousness and the Divine perfection in him, love and kindness, mercy and long suffering, endurance and patience, frankness and courage till he accompanied his Master to Gethsemane then to Golgotha and the cross and finally saw him when he rose in triumph over death and sin (the wage of which was death).

The Bible related Peter’s life history, in its early rage with its great power after the ascent and the pouring of the Holy Spirit. Peter changed from a fisherman to a fisher of the people. His life flourished with the light of knowledge and the love of God. He devoted all his life to service and performing the message he received from the Lord Jesus, the Lord granted him miraculous deeds to be performed by his hands.

So the study of the life of this apostle is a guide to every man who sees clearly his weakness and believes that, in his case, he cannot bear witness to the Lord in a powerful way and brings many fruits to the Kingdom of God. The study of this personality also elucidates how grace works in the souls of people and the work of the grace of the Holy Spirit poured in our hearts is not hindered by the weakness of our human nature but through the work of God Almighty in us. This view makes us always look forward to the power of Christ and the power of His blood that is able to turn the wicked people to the life of piety and to destroy all the bonds that hinder the soul to enjoy the holy life through the Lord.

This new sight which we live through our study of the life of Peter the apostle and the work of the Spirit in him prevents us from despising anyone, or look down upon anyone whatever his human weakness may be so long as this man seeks earnestly and consciously to glorifying the name of God and to spread His Kingdom, and does not seek glory for himself. We trust that the Lord will work in us, operating wonderful deeds, revealing to the world, through us, the power of his Holy Spirit and saving us at the same time.

These are some situations in the life of Peter the apostle:

1. Peter’s attitude towards the Lord when he was in his ship and the Lord sent them to the depth after they had suffered all night resorting to their human efforts. The Lord was glorified and performed the miracle and they caught a great amount of fish. Peter said to him, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man”. He confessed his weakness when he realized that the Lord was the cause of satisfaction. Peter also expressed his unworthiness with love.
2. Peter’s attitude when he was in danger of drowning. He looked at the dangerous water

but did not look at the Lord. This is our problem. We think of the problem in the deep well without realizing that the Lord is the water spring of everlasting life.

3. Peter, unaware of the fact of crucifixion wanted to hamper the cross of Christ “Be kind to yourself, Lord You will note have the destiny at all”. He forgot that we need to enter the everlasting life through the cross “If anyone wants to come after me, let him disown himself and pick up his torture stake and follow me continually”. He said that not only to his disciples but all of us.
4. Peter also wanted to disable the cross where he struck at the High Priest’s slave with the sword.
5. “Even if I should have to die with you”. Peter was hasty and rash but the Lord turns our hastiness and rashness into a powerful return to a powerful repentance, and the fruit of salvation to humanity (He did not realize his human potentialities).
6. How soon did he deny Christ and how soon did he return but this necessitated that he should go outside and weep bitterly. Peter returned with power greater than weakness and this is what we need (Repentance).
7. Christ’s attitude towards Peter. To God, bargains are of no value but the heart is invaluable. When Christ first met Peter, he did not punish him for his thoughts or reproach and reprove him but he said to him three times, “Do you love me?” What the Lord wants of us is only love whatever our mistakes may be. He said it to him three times, as Peter denied him also three times (The Lord does not look at weaknesses and their consequences but he looked at the earnest love in the heart).
8. He endured responsibility and cared for the sheep. He fed Christ’s lambs through preaching and teaching for salvation that was ready to be declared and revealed in the last period of time.
9. Peter preached and bore good witness to the Lord even in his death and when he refused to be crucified, the Lord appeared to him and said, “I will be crucified for you”. This was to strengthen his faith. Peter decided to die for Christ, crucified with his body turned upside down (Refusing the cross was a return to fighting the old man, and his triumph was by the power of the Holy Spirit operating in him).

His Service

He began his service among Jews of his race in Judea and Galilee and Samaria. The Lord was glorified through some miracles performed by Peter such as healing the lame man at the Beautiful Gate. He healed Aeneas in the City of God. He brought Tabitha back to life after her death in Joppa. The Lord opened the door of faith for the Gentiles at Peter’s hands through Cornelius, the Centurion. Yet, the main field of work for that apostle was to preach the Jews (Galatians 2:7-9).

He preached in Antioch and toured the countries of Pontus, Galatia, Bithynia and some countries in Asia Minor to whom he directed his first epistle His Martyrdom. It is well known that Peter ended his life in Rome when he was condemned to death. He was crucified in the age of Neron the tyrant after July 64. His wrote two epistles that were sent to the Christians of Asia Minor at the end of his life.

- ❑ He is one of the most useful characters for young people owing to his firm hope in Christ and because he did not feel desperate because of his weakness.

- He reveals to us that the Lord does not treat us according to our weaknesses so long as we confess them, but he treats us according to our attitude and sticking to him.
- In John 13 the Lord revealed to us the mystery of true purity which means trusting Him and hope without despair when Peter was considered pure and Judas was not pure (All of you are clean, all except one, John 13:10. Because he knew who was to betray him).
- Peter the apostle was really the apostle of hope. He was filled with despair after the crucifixion and resurrection and accompanied the disciples to the lake to catch fish but the Lord looked at his longing and loving heart and his earnest desire and went to him at Lake Tiberias (John 21) and gave him abundance of fish after he had spent all the night without catching any fish.
- He is the apostle of hope because while being hasty and weak, he represents our case but after having the grace of the Holy Spirit and the power of Christ, he bore witness before the Society, the Congregation and the Jews (Some young people refrain from the service because of their weakness but we hope that they will concentrate on this point to give hope to the audience).
- Peter the apostle represents every one of us. Christ works and is ready to work with us all the time as he worked with him.
- Peter the apostle, after gaining experience, writes in his epistle, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for according to his great mercy he gave us a new birth to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”
- “How beautiful is this living hope when we stick to it”.

(44) The First Epistle of St. Peter (I)

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The Lesson

Aim

- Clarifying the true Christian dimensions offered to us in the New Testament through the Blood of Christ.
- Showing the value of salvation introduced in the New Testament through the blood of Christ and how to obtain salvation and keep it.

Introduction

The writer of this epistle is our Teacher St. Peter whose name was Simon Son of Jonah. He was also called Cephas (I Corinthians 1:12). He is Andrew’s brother and he is one of twelve apostles. He was a fisherman and Christ called him at Lake Galilee (Matthew 4:18). He was known for his rash and zeal. His strong and weak characteristics are known to all. Peter was a married man. He preached among the Jews and Paul preached among the Gentiles (nations). Both were martyred

in Rome during the reign of Neron.

The Epistle was written in Babylon. The common belief is that it was written in Old Babylon (Old Cairo in Egypt), so Babylon is Egypt. Peter visited Egypt where he met St. Mark.

The time when the epistle was written

It was written a short time after St. Paul had written his epistle to the Romans. This means that it was written between 63-67 AD as Peter the apostle was martyred at the hands of Neron in AD 68.

To whom was it written?

It was written to all the chosen people of the Jews who live as refugees scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, and Asia Minor.

It is one of the Catholic epistles which our Teacher Peter wrote to encourage the believers to stand firm in faith as they suffered afflictions and persecutions which befell them and to explain to the believers the value of salvation which they gained through Jesus Christ and to give them instructions about the life that they should lead in conformity with the holiness of their call. He concentrated on the commitments of the Christians among the people of the world and their conduct among nations. The epistle is full of valuable pieces of advice directed to “the inner life”. Some of them concern priests and the subjects (the congregation).

Chapter 1

The blessing: It is clearly worded in verses 1-12.

Verse 1: We notice the apostle's love for the name given to him by Christ. He forgot his old name as everything has become new.

Verse 2: We notice that the Heavenly Father chooses the believers. The one who wants to know that he has been chosen should obey the Spirit and should be sanctified by the blood of Christ. In this case he is surely chosen. The work of the Holy Trinity in believers is clear in this verse. The Father has chosen as according to his foreknowledge. The Holy Spirit has sanctified us for the purpose of our being obedient. The Son the Logos (the Word) sprinkled us with his blood.

Verse 3: The apostle gives the blessing, thanks, and glorification to the Hypostasis of the Heavenly Father who is the Father of our Lord Jesus through whose love and great mercy gave us a new birth through water and spirit to live not for earthly hope but for the living hope. The basis and source of the living hope is the earnest promises of the Lord and the power of the Lord's resurrection from the dead.

Verse 4: The Christian's hope aims at the kingdom of heaven, our Lord Jesus, and living with the Lord in His glory. This is an inheritance which we inherit as we inherit with Him. This inheritance is an incorruptible, and undefiled and unfading inheritance. Wars and accidents cannot affect it. Neither time nor place can influence it.

Verse 5: One of the basic creeds in Christianity is that the faithful are safeguarded because we

are His sheep and He is our Shepherd, our honest Shepherd. He is our great High Priest. We are His sons and He is our beloved dear Father.

Verse 6-7: There is no doubt that salvation obtained by the faithful from Christ makes him rejoice all the days of his life in spite of afflictions and trials everywhere and all the time. These trials have a function that is to show and reveal faith when the Lord Jesus appears in His glory and the glory of his Father.

Verse 8: Although we haven't seen the Lord Jesus when He was in flesh as Peter saw Him, yet through faith we believe that He exists and we believe in His incarnation, resurrection and Second Advent so we love Him from all the heart because He first loved us. This faith in the Savior makes us rejoice greatly with unspeakable and glorified joy (Ch. 1:9-10). Salvation of our souls, which the prophets inquired and searched for, should be the ultimate goal of our faith. In fact there is no other goal for us than being saved and to save many other souls with us. Any work in the church of God that does not aim at salvation or bear fruit of salvation for souls is not spiritual and Christ has no share in it. This salvation of ours in Christ was searched for by the prophets of the Old Testament who longed to see what we see but they did not see, and to hear what we hear but they did not hear. As for us: May our eyes be blessed because they see and may our ears be blessed because they hear (Hebrews 11: 13).

Verse 11: The apostles emphasizes that the process of waiting and searching that the prophets exercised was under the guidance of the Holy Spirit operating in them. They were waiting for the time and hour when the Son of Man comes.

Verse 12: The apostle declares that the prophecies of the Old Testament were preliminaries to and declarations of the salvation given to us by the Holy Spirit operating in our Fathers the apostles. The angels desire to enjoy this salvation and be worthy of it.

Verse 13: clarifies our responsibility. It sets our hope fully upon the grace of God, which is given to us in this world through the church sacraments and is fulfilled at the revelation of Jesus Christ to the church in His glory on the day of His second coming. Thus the way of the spiritual life is a matter of deep trust in grace with spiritual vigilance and struggle.

Verse 14-16: Do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance. Obeying the Commandment is a characteristic of the children of God. Their obedience to the Commandments of God makes them refuse to share the joys of this world. They practiced these joys in the days of ignorance before renewing themselves and being acquainted with the Savior. But the children of grace are commanded not to be content with the passive approach but they have to practice the active approach, i.e. the practice of the Holy life.

Verse 17-21: Conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile. Our Father judges each one impartially. He knows the heart of man and does not judge by appearance and he will judge each one according to his deeds, hence, it is necessary to conduct ourselves with fear and reverence throughout the time of our exile, because we know that Our Lord Christ ransomed us not with perishable things such as silver or gold but with the precious blood of the Savior, the Lamb of God who ransomed us from the futile ways inherited from our fathers and from our

earthly nature of the flesh. This redemption was destined by the Heavenly Father before the foundation of the world, but was made manifest at the end of the times when the Lord incorporated, became man, died and rose from the dead for us.

Verse 22: Purify our souls by your obedience to the truth. Christ is Truth and whoever obeys Him and submits his life to Him, his soul will be purified and his life will be sanctified by the Work of the Holy Spirit. Love, which is the nature of God, will abide in him. It is not like the love of the people of the world, which is characterized by utility, interests, hypocrisy and fraudulence. If we really are the children of God, the spirit of love must fill our hearts and we must love one another earnestly.

Verses 23-24: The New birth (The Second Birth). We have been born anew not of perishable seed but of imperishable seed through the living and abiding word of God. This second birth is baptism. The source of this birth is the work of God, the Second Hypostasis, and the Lord Jesus. The first birth of the flesh is perishable like the grass of the field, and all the glory of the flesh is like the flower of grass. The grass withers and the flower falls but those who are born of God abide forever.

This is the main topic of preaching. Whoever believes in the Son enjoys the everlasting life.

Hymn Verse 25: The apostle presents the opposite image of the flesh the glory of which falls. That glory is the word of God, which abides forever. Heaven and earth will pass away but the Word of God is everlasting because the source of the word is everlasting.

Chapter Two: A Chosen Race

The Blessing

God has chosen us to be members of His Holy Body. This means that we who believe have been chosen by grace to enjoy the everlasting life:

- “A holy Royal priesthood” means that we are devoted to the Great King. We offer our life as an acceptable and pleasing sacrifice offered through the grace of Christ to be acceptable to God.
- “A holy nation” does not have the political meaning but it means that the Holy Spirit sanctifies all the Christians.
- “God’s own people”. This means that we are God’s people. He made us and we are His people we have been ransomed with His blood so that we may not live for ourselves but for that who died for us and rose from the dead.
- We have to declare the wonderful deeds of His grace, and how He raised us from the dust and ash heap and how he called us out of darkness in the kingdom of the Son of his love. The believer must preach the chosen grace in his life.
- Choosing is not a process against the will of man but man has freedom to accept or refuse the choice of the Lord.

Verses 6-8: He who believes in the Lord Jesus as a pure holy sacrifice for the life of the world does not fail. Faith in the Lord as Savior gives man everlasting life. Trust in the Lord as the head Stone of the Corner in the life of man gives him salvation from every sin. Simon the elder

prophesied that the Lord will be the cause of the rising of many people and the stumble and fall of many people. Anyone who believes in Him will be honored and anyone who does not accept the word will be judged by the Truth and he will stumble and fall before the truth and will be rejected.

All these advantages, although they make us alien and exiles in this world, yet they are originally set for the benefit of this world.

Responsibility

Verse 1: Put away all sins. The apostle asks the believers to put away all malice and all guile and insincerity and envy and all slander, reproaching and despising others because such things are not in conformity with their sonship to God or go along with the call of the Lord Christ for their conduct to be right and good.

Verse 2: Grow up by the Word of God. He speaks to them as if they were new in faith. So he likens them to babes but when the faithful grows up in his fellowship with God becomes an adult and seeks no milk but seeks fatty food that suits the life of fellowship with God.

Verse 11: Bearing witness through the holy conduct. Then the apostle speaks about what Christians have to do towards holiness in life and refraining from the desire of the flesh in life and refraining from the desires of the flesh and how their conduct should be clean and right so that nobody may blaspheme the good name but God is glorified through the deeds of his children.

Verses 13-16: Submission to the civil authorities. The apostle draws their attentions to submit themselves to the civil authorities whether to the supreme ruler or to the governors of the provinces for it is God's will that by doing right you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish men. He explains the meaning of freedom, as Christians should understand it. It is a spiritual gift. The freedom of man from himself and from sin so we should not use freedom as a pretext for evil. The apostle advised the Christians to honor all men, to love the brotherhood and to fear God.

Endure pain for the sake of Christ

Be watchful so that your conduct may not cause such pains and thus become hindrance to the name given to us. The faithful have been chosen to endure pain so the name of God is glorified in them. They imitate the Lord who was "as a sheep led to the slaughter and He opens not His mouth". He explained through blessed verses that work of Christ's redemption and how he was a guilt offering for our life since through it we were brought back to the Shepherd and bishop of our souls.

Aids

First (Chapter One): Some prophecies and symbols of salvation are in the Old Testament. So we have to know the similarities between the paschal lamb and Christ's offering.

Second (Chapter Two): Refer to examples of some of the chosen people in the Old and New

Testaments and explain the commitments of this choice (Abraham, Jeremiah, John the Baptist, Anba Bishoy, etc.).

Exercises

Chapter One:

1. Pick up the words that indicate the virtues of faith, hope and love from chapter one and apply them.
2. There is an association between grace and deeds in this chapter. Explain

Chapter Two:

1. Are my pains due to personal attributes such as bad temper, pride or disobedience?
2. Do my life and my conduct seem strange to the spirit of this world or am I looking forward to go along with world current?
3. What is the concept of real freedom to me (Verse 16)?
4. What is Christ's position, glory be to Him, in the up building of the church as the congregation of the faithful? Contemplate this point guided by the words of Peter the apostle.
5. What are the positions of the faithful, what is their message, what are their values according to the work of the cross as explained by our Teacher Peter?
6. Explain the concepts of obedience and freedom from the Christian point of view.

(45) The First Epistle of St. Peter (II)

References

- + “The Christian Family” Anba Bemin
- + “The Christian and the Society” Fr. Matta Al Miskin
- + “Love as preparation for Pain” Mother Bacilla
- + “Pastorate” John Chrysostom

The Lesson

Aim

- Elucidating the case of an ideal Christian family (Chapter 3)
- Explaining the Christian attitude towards pain (Chapter 4)
- Explaining the responsibility of the priest towards the flock of God.

Chapter Three: The Christian Family

The Blessing:

1. In the family atmosphere man may be saved without preaching: 1, 2.
2. We are the children of the saints.
3. The Christian family is the place of a weak man (They do not fear anything at all. The Christian who is brought up in a pious family grows up without any complications).

Responsibility

1. The duties of a wife: Wives should submit themselves to their husbands. They should take Sarah Abraham's wife as example. Let not yours be the outward adorning with braiding of hair, decoration of gold and wearing of fine clothing because this outward adorning means that the inside is not adorned with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. When the woman is in touch with grace and finds out salvation, as a treasure in her heart cannot accept the outward adorning. The true adorning for the woman is the adorning of the meek quiet spirit that is precious in God's sight.
2. The duties of the husband (Verse 7): Men are advised to live with their wives bestowing honor on the woman as both men and women together are heirs to the grace of the everlasting life. Our Teacher Peter sees that if the relation between husbands and wives is bad, their prayers will be hindered and will not be accepted. For if we fail to form a unit of love here, how can we form a unity in heaven?
3. The duties of individuals (Verses 8-18): Peter the apostle advises the believers:
 - a. To have unity of spirit, love of the brethren, a tender heart and a humble mind.
 - b. Not to return evil for evil, to do good and to seek peace.
 - c. Even if you do suffer for righteousness sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them nor be troubled but in your hearts reverence Christ as Lord.
 - d. Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence.
 - e. Christ is an example for us in enduring sufferings. So keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are abused, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. Christ died for sins once for all that he might bring us to God through his death and resurrection.

Hymn Verse 22.

Chapter Four: The Christian and Suffering

The Blessing

Verses 12 –19: Endurance of Sufferings. The apostle advises the believers to endure afflictions and explains that the fiery bitter ordeal is not strange to them.

He draws their attention to the glory and joy that the faithful obtains, that faithful who shares the sufferings of Christ at the blessed advent of the Lord. If the believer is reproached for the name of Christ, the spirit of glory will rest upon him. While the wicked blaspheme the Lord, the Christian refrains from murder, theft and doing evil so that he may not be ashamed and not to be judged by anyone. As for those who do not obey the Gospel of God, they will face a terrible end but those who suffer according to the Will of God will be well rewarded on the day of resurrection -the day of judgment by the Creator who is honest in doing good.

Responsibility

Verses 7-11: Advice about the believers' conduct and behavior to refrain from the desires of the flesh. He sees that faith in Christ who suffered when he was in flesh is a weapon that makes us keeps away from the sin. The apostle gives the faithful these spiritual pieces of advice:

1. Keep sane and sober for your prayers for the end of all things is at hand.

2. Hold unfailing your love for one another since love overcomes a multitude of sins.
3. Practice hospitality ungrudgingly to one another.
4. As each has received a gift, employ it for one another as good stewards of God's varies grace whether in uttering oracles or in rendering service in order that in everything God may be glorified.

Hymn verses 11, 19.

Chapter Five: Pastorate

The Blessings

Pastorate is to share the chief shepherd the High Pastor. When pastorate is based on love, it will be performed with activity and meekness asking nothing for oneself because the flock is the flock of God.

Responsibility

The duties of shepherds:

1. Rejoice in your work as a shepherd.
2. Refrain from the love of domineering and pride.
3. Work with spiritual eagerness and zeal, energy and enthusiasm.

Exhortations to the congregation: (a) Submission in meekness. (b) Obedience in love.

Hymn Verse 10.

Questions:

1. Chapter 3: Examples of successful faithful families in the two Testaments (Abraham and Sarah, Noah and his family, Zechariah and Elizabeth, Ibrahim Al Gohary).
2. Chapter 4: examples of the life of martyrs and their piety (St. George, St. Dimyana, the life of Job).
3. Chapter 5: examples of vigilant Shepherds (Pope Kyrillos, Fr. Bishoy Kamil).

Exercises

1. Our Teacher Peter established the foundation of the sound family relationships. Explain showing how these instructions solve the problems of the Christian family.
2. Study the topic of bashfulness from a Christian prospective.
3. Show what the apostle said about: (a) endurance of sufferings. (b) Baptism. (c) Christ descended into Hade.
4. The first epistle of Peter was written so that he believers may stand firm before suffering. Collect the verses that are about this subject and contemplate them for your private benefit.
5. The epistle is characterized by a great zeal for holiness. Show the instructions and exhortations concerning holiness and contemplate them for your own life.
6. "Be subject to every human institution for the Lord's sake". What did the apostle say about slaves, women and young people?
7. What are the instructions given by Peter the apostle about enduring sufferings?

8. Why does a believer refrain from the desire of the flesh?
9. What are the exhortations, which the apostle directed to the believers concerning their relationship with one another?
10. Choose some verses and write your contemplations on them.

(46) Hope in the Life of Young People: A Debate

References

- + “Life and Hope” Late Bishop Samuel, Bishop of Public, Ecumenical and Social Service
- + “Young people and Anxiety” Iris Nesseem Shenouda

The Lesson

Aim

Understanding the hope of life: many questions of Youth and how hope is associated with the Lord of life.

Why did God create me?

Many young people ask this question. The answer is sometimes incorrect and the result is that we keep away from the Perfect God but the correct answer is that God created us so that we might enjoy His love and His blessing. He gives us from his abundance. He made his creatures and formed them (Psalm 19:1). When He created us, He gave us the gift of free will so that we may think, decide, and distinguish between matters. He can make His own choice, to refuse or to accept. He supplied us with a map of the road as well as the rules and man began the journey of life, met the sin and accepted it and walked with it, then he discovered that he lost his ability to enjoy happiness because he lost the source of life. Thus man destroyed himself by himself. In the fullness of time, God sent His Son who took our physical nature and came to live in us and help us in our weakness. Thus the man who accepts Christ to be the redeemer of his life, and declares his repentance, God lives in him and gives him the living hope, which the Lord set in us for a better life (1 Peter 1:3). While we are aware of our weakness, we know for certain that we possess power much greater than our own (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Thus hope is a power that grants trust and faith in the existence of God and guarantees and continuity of my life in him (Psalms 23:4, Hebrews 13:8).

The effectiveness of Love

1. Hope is a creative power: Hope sets a clear goal for man’s life so he steadily marches towards it. Hope creates a positive attitude towards life and work, and enables man to be patient and persistent (Romans 5:1-5).
2. Hope leads to psychological maturity: If the goal is supreme and distant, it will generate patience and endurance, and these in their turn will help man to achieve maturity in thinking and feeling. “Seeking first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well” (Matthew 6:33).
3. Hope gives man full perspective and wide horizon: When man enjoys perfect hope, hope will give them full perspective and wide horizon. Hope enables man to get out of the

shell of self and egocentricity and selfishness into the domain of caring for and thinking of others (his family, society and the whole world).

4. Hope is the source of victory: The redemptive work of Christ on the cross opened the doors of hope to the sinful and the weak (Proverbs 24: 16, Matthew 21:18). Thus man may say to himself, “So long as I desire and long for a better life, why should I suffer discomfiture”, thus hope is generated to strengthen the weak knees and to lift the drooping hands (Hebrews 12:12). So hope gives victory over despair and failure.

How to develop faith

1. Deepening of faith in God (Hebrews 11:1, Ephesians 2:12).
2. Meditation in God’s blessing: Meditation in God’s blessing and mercies leads our hearts and tongues to a feeling of constant gratitude for them. Our hearts and tongues will ceaselessly thank the Lord. This gratitude will refresh our hope in the future and this will lead to constant victory.
3. Membership in the church: The lonely isolated man will be overwhelmed by cries of despair, but if he belongs to a group, the spirit of fellowship in the church will give him hope, he will meet those who will encourage and support him and his hope will serve. In the church, the body of Christ, there is this fellowship at the highest level (1 Corinthians 12:26, 27).
4. Expectation of eternal life (I Corinthians 15:19): When man’s hope and ambition seek the achievement of deeper and supreme goals, other than the earthly goals, then he expects the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 2:9). Our hearts then will be full of the mystery of the Divine joy as a proof of our eternal life.

Exercises and Activities

1. The teacher should explain that man is not mere flesh but he is soul and mind that need hope to motivate him and strengthen him. Hope encourages man to continue his struggle and fight in this world.
2. The living hope is to be associated with the young people’s needs these days in which their hope is subject to despair and failure as a result of the speedy changes that overwhelm the world nowadays as a result of the destructive powers which threaten the world today.
3. Emphasize the concept that the power of youth lies in the possession of the power of hope, which makes of them an energy that carries the light of faith and construction as well.

(47) Interpretation of the Divine Liturgy

Introduction

The glory and splendor of our Creator Orthodox Church is greater than what a simple faithful can realize. Our church is still nowadays, like the tabernacle in the Old Testament covered with tanned rams’ skins and goatskins ... but her real glory lies inside the church (Psalm 44:4). Everything inside is pure gold. No one can see them from outside. Only that person who enters can see. The beauty of our church lies in its heritage. The heritage of the church is kept in the church rituals and traditions. The church is the House of God and the door to heaven. During the

time of prayer the archangels and cherubim come and stand in rows round the altar in great glory. The liturgy of the Mass relates the story of the Life of Lord Jesus Christ and his incarnation from the beginning to the end.

Raising the incense

- Using incense in the church is not a pagan work. It is a heavenly angelic hymn done all the time in heaven “And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer; and he was given much incense to mingle with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar before the throne” (Revelation 8:3).
- Raising incense is considered an introduction or a prelude to the mass because it is composed of a group of prayers and supplications and thanksgiving to ask for blessings for this sacred Service.
- Raising incense could be done without the mass for raising prayers and praises to the Lord but it is not right to perform a mass without incense, at least the morning raising of incense preceded by midnight hymns.
- Uncovering his head, the priest stands at the entrance of the sanctuary and says; “Have mercy upon us”. Then he cites the Lord’s Prayer, “Our Father Who are in Heaven”. After this the priest kneels in front of the sanctuary door, then he bows towards the other priests and the deacons as he says, “Bless me. Here I bow. Forgive me”. He holds the hands of the other priests as a sign of greeting and love. Then he takes permission of the people by saying, “I have sinned forgive me”. Having absolution of the priests and the congregation is very important before starting prayers as our Savior says, “And when you stand praying, forgive...” (Mark 11:25). The priest comes back humbly to his place in front of the sanctuary door. He lifts up his hands while the deacon stands behind him to the right, holding the Cross then the priest begins the prayer of Thanksgiving.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

- The Prayer of Thanksgiving is very important in the church. With it we start all our prayers in the Mass, wedding prayers, funerals, prayers for the baptized and the sick, prayers of canonical hours and others. We thank the Lord, the Almighty God on every occasion, in every condition, and for all things.
- After the Prayer of Thanksgiving, the priest bows and kisses the sanctuary threshold, then enters the sanctuary with his right foot first because the place is the Holy of Holies, the symbol of heaven, then bows before the altar threshold and kisses the altar.
- These several bows are supplications to the Lord to please Him so that he may send His mercies and accept his prayers, sacrifice and oblation.

The Intercession for the Deceased

This is an established firm creed in Coptic Orthodox Church for the following reasons:

1. To show that the souls of the deceased are alive and not as the souls of animals which perish when they die and their bodies decompose. When we raise prayers for the deceased, we remember that their souls as well as ours are eternal.
2. To believe in resurrection: We pray the Lord to raise their bodies as well as ours in the Last Day and forgive us and forgive them.
3. For the fulfillment of the Common Judgment: In our prayers for the deceased we confess the day of judgment; those who know it, remember it, those who don’t learn.

4. To emphasize that nobody has been rewarded yet, they have not received any reward yet, as apart from us the deceased should not be made perfect (Hebrews 11:40).
5. To remember all the time that the deceased are our brothers and it is our duty to commemorate them acting on the verse, “For the righteous will never be moved; he will be remembered for ever” (Psalms 112:6).
6. To comfort the living and grant them the grace of patience.
7. To pay our debt towards the deceased for thus the Lord commands us to pray for one another (James 5:16).

Lord Have Mercy

- After saying the Doxologies and the Orthodox Creed the priest holds the cross with three lit tapers on it indicating that that who was crucified is the light of the world. The priest stands before the sanctuary, raises both hands, the right hand holding the cross with the three lit tapers on it and the left hand stretched in supplication as he prays, “O Lord Have Mercy upon us. O Lord have mercy”.

The Gospel

- The people sing the verses selected from the Psalms of David. The priest holds the cross and crosses the incense box and puts some incense in the censer then cites the Gospel Intercession, censes the Gospel while standing before the sanctuary saying: “Bow before the Gospel of Jesus Christ through the prayers of the Psalmer David, O Lord forgive us our sins”.
- The priest enters the sanctuary. The deacon comes out holding the Scripture, the priest censes him as he goes once around the altar saying, “Lord, now let Your Servant depart in peace, according to Your word”. Then the Gospel is read in Coptic, Arabic, or English.
- The Priest then prays the five short intercessions, which are the Intercession for peace; Intercession for the Fathers, Intercession for the Place, Intercession for the winds, and Intercession for Congregations.

The Priest's Absolution

The priest holds the cross and prays the three absolutions; two of them while facing the east and the third with his face to the west facing the people who are bowing for absolution and forgiveness.

The blessing

The priest gives the blessing with his face to the west, “May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us. Their holy blessing, grace, power, love and help be with us all forever. Amen”. Then he gives permission with peace.

(48) The Virgin In the Coptic Liturgy

Verse

“For behold, henceforth All generations shall call me blessed”

Introduction

- “You are greater than the heavenly hosts and higher in rank than the Cherubim, better

than the Seraphim and more honorable than the Spiritual angels”.

- You are the pride of our race. Virginity is proud through you. Through you true purity and chastity are honored...you deserved the greatness, blessing and honor bestowed upon you by the Lord before whom all the people bow and who chose you and was born of you.
- For this we deeply honor you, as your intercession is so powerful that it has immediate answer.
- From the memoir written by Anba Paul Al Bushy our Coptic Church blesses and glorifies Virgin Mary.
- Such blessings and glorification are offered because of her supreme rank. When contemplate the prayers of the daily hymns, the Psalms cited in the canonical hours and the Divine Mass, we find a wonderful rich heritage of expressions and phrases that glorify her purity and all the lovely attributes which the church endows on her are mentioned in these prayers. Such expressions emerge from theological originality and the fathers, the saints and the theologists who were inspired by the Lord set them all. They extracted these attributes from the symbols and prophecies of the Old Testament, which were fulfilled in the character of the Virgin.

In the annual holy Psalmody

- This includes the daily hymns of the ordinary days. We find that the name of the Virgin is glorified at the beginning of the midnight prayers in the paragraph about resurrection. We address her saying, “All joys are appropriate to you O Theotokos, Mother of our Lord since through you Adam was brought back to Paradise and Eve became adorned and her sadness disappeared”. We request her intercession at the end of the last two “lobshes”, i.e. interpretations of the first and second hymn of praise and also at the beginning of the Intercession for Congregations.
- There are three Doxologies, i.e. glorification for the Virgin, which are sung in the evening prayer, midnight prayer and the morning prayer, these include glorification of her beatitude. Examples are: “Mary in the upper heaven sitting to the right of the Lord is praying for us”.
- At the end of each Doxology we complete, “Peace be to you O Virgin the real true queen. Peace be to you, the pride of our race because you gave birth to Emmanuel, we ask you to pray for us and remember us O honest and pure Virgin, and ask our Lord Jesus Christ to forgive us our sins”.
- According to the basic structure of the daily hymn: First we pray the introductory opening of the hymn then the first three hymns, the hymn of the three young men, commemoration, Doxologies, then the fourth hymn, then the day’s Psalmody and the memoirs of the day (The memoirs are glorification for the Virgin the Mother of the Lord).

Evening and Morning Raising of Incense

- Bell Quadripartite hymns are sung after the Prayer of Thanksgiving. In these hymns we see that the sentences which address the Virgin and through which we send peace to her differ. The phrases of Watts days are different from those sung on the days of Adam. Then we complete, “Peace be to you O Mary. Holy peace. Peace be to you O Mary the Mother of the Holy”.

- Then we pray the extracts preceding the Orthodox Creed. The first is, “Peace be to you, we ask you O Holy Virgin...” and some Doxologies then the Orthodox Creed.

In Psalms of Canonical Hours

The church set the prayers of Canonical hours. They are selected pieces after each hour’s Gospel. They are set in a precise way and in a perfect manner. The third peace is always about seeking the Virgin’s intercessions. In some of these pieces, the Virgin is given the titles of, “The true Vine bearing the cluster of life, full of grace, the fence of our salvation, the conquered well fortified stronghold, the mental door of life”.

In the Coptic Liturgy

- The Virgin is beautified and blessed. Beatitude of the Virgin occurs in about ten parts of the Holy Mass.
- The blessing hymn: The church Virgin Anthem is sung before raising the Lamb.
- After the Prayer of Thanksgiving: In Lent some verses of Psalm 87 are sung. This Psalm refers to the Virgin as the Holy City of God, “On the holy most stands the city he founded”.
- When raising The Pauline Incense: This is sung on feast days and the non-fasting days “This is the censer of pure gold...” In the days of fast: “You are the gold censer bearing the blessed stone of fife”.
- Before and after reading a lesson from the Acts of the Apostles: Here the hymn of Mary is sung in five different ways on five different occasions over the Coptic Year.

Hymns of the Gospel

These also are sung in different ways. On the first two Sundays of the month of Kiahk the hymn is sung in a certain way and on the last two Sundays of the same month the hymn has another tone. We also beg her intercession on the other days of the year after beautifying the Saint of the day.

In the Orthodox Creed

The church emphasized the concept of the Virgin’s character as Theotokos, the Mother of God in her church convention and tradition immediately after the Ephesus Council in AD 431. That was to correct the concept of the Divine Incarnation and to resist the heresy of Nestorius. Thus the church added the essence of the true Creed stated by that council to the preface of the Orthodox Creed, “We glorify you O Mother of the True Light...” Adam and Watts are sung after the prayer of Reconciliation and before the liturgy of the faithful. The most famous of them is, “Rejoice O Mary the servant and the Mother...”

During and after the commemoration of Saints

According to the supreme rank of the Virgin in the church rites, the priest requests her intercession at the top of the list that include the members of the victorious church in the commemoration intercession and also in the blessing prayer and the final supplication. Then this piece is repeated, “Through the prayers and intercession of the Virgin, the holy, glorified pure and blessed Virgin”.

What is said during the distribution?

- This hymn is sung, “The bread of life that came to us from heaven and gave life to the

world, You too O Mary bore in your womb the mental manna that came from the Father”.

- After this short presentation of the church organization of the order concerning the Lady Virgin, we observe and notice the abundance of prayers and hymns devoted for the beatitude and glorification of Virgin Mary. The church also spends several hours each day honoring the Virgin through singing wonderful hymns and delicate praises seeking her intercessions.
- May we compare this to our personal relationship with Virgin Mary in our everyday life so that our hearts and tongues may glorify the Virgin who said, “For behold, henceforth, all generations will call me blessed”.

(49) The Liturgy of the Catechumens

Aim

Preparations for sanctifying the Mystery, The Mystery of Oblation, The Eucharist Sacrament

Introduction

In her early years, the church allowed the catechumens who were prepared to receive faith to remain inside the church till the beginning of the Mass. After they listen to the holy Divine Scriptures, the church prays for them so that the Lord may confirm them in faith and give them understanding to what they heard and remove from their hearts the worship of idols and make them worthy of receiving forgiveness of their sins. They were not allowed to remain inside the church during the mass prayers. They were commanded to leave the church since they could not understand the Divine mysteries neither could they recognize their meaning as “the natural man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, And he is not Able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned” (I Corinthians 2:14). St. Gregory says, “It is not appropriate neither is it good for the weak eye to look at the sun. The babes who suck milk cannot eat complete food but they should proceed gradually to what is supreme and raise themselves step by step to supreme matters. By doing this we show such people the light of Truth gradually”.

Although there are no catechumen these days in the church, the name remained and prayers are still raised for the people so that the Lord may take away from their hearts all worldly concerns, love of money and greediness which means being idol later (Ephesians 5:5) and to enlighten their hearts and confirm them in faith so that they may grow in grace and the fear of God. The signs and symbols used in this section relate to us all the events that occurred to the Lord Jesus from the day of His birth to the passions He endured. This section is given this name because many extracts from the Bible are read and interpreted and ends with a sermon.

- The Lambs: The priest goes around the altar saying: Glory and Honor...Honor and Glory.
- When the priest carries the lamb with his hands and raises the Lamb over his head, this refers to what Simon the elder did when he received the young child Jesus into his arms when the parents brought the young child to the temple to do for it according to the customary practice of the Law (Luke 2:28).
- When Simon received the child he blessed God who revealed His Light to the Nations. The same thing is done by the priest who goes around the altar blessing and glorifying

indicating the end of the Old Testament and the Coming of the New Testament with the coming of the Savior.

- The Mass circuit denotes the presence of the Lord Savior. That is why people bow in worship while singing the hymn, “This is the day that the Lord has made”. This refers to our joy for receiving the faith of the Savior. The apostle says, “But when he again brings his first born into the inhabited earth, he says: And let all God’s angels worship him” (Hebrews 1:6).
- The people glorify the Lord because His mercy has been established. We should begin our work by saying: In the Name of the Trinity ...The priest places the bread on a paten covered with silk corporal. He pours the wine into the chalice, mingles it with little water perfectly one third. Then he cites the prayer of Thanksgiving.

The Bread and Wine Prayer

- This prayer is said in a low voice. The priest says, “We beseech and implore Your Goodness, O lover of mankind, to reveal Your Divine Visage unto this Bread and this Chalice. Bless them and sanctify them...so that This Bread will be Your Holy Body and the mixture in this Chalice will be Your Honorable Blood. May they be for us all a source of exaltation, a balsam, and redemption for our souls, our bodies and our spirits too”.
- Then the priest covers the Bread in the Paten with a clean corporal. He also covers the Chalice with a clean corporal. That explains why this prayer is given the name of the Covering Prayer.
- The reason in covering the Bread with a corporal is, “The Prospherie, after the prayer of Thanksgiving refers to the absence of Jesus in flesh when he was hiding his glory in Egypt and in Nazareth after the people witnessed their miraculous birth”.
- This refers to shrouding the Lord and His burial in the tomb. The prospherie refers to the big rock, and the corporal that the priest places on the prospherie refers to the stamping of the tomb. The priest then cites the ministers’ absolution.

The Pauline Intercession

The priest and the deacons go up to the sanctuary .The priest cites the Pauline incense prayer as a preface to reading any chapter from the epistles of St. Paul the apostle. While this is read and interpreted, the priest cites this prayer in a low voice. So when people are listening to the word of God, the priest is busy inside the sanctuary praying and struggling imploring the Lord to grant him the blessing of the Word for the people who here the word. Some of his prayers are for:

1. Those who hear to be granted knowledge and wisdom and the meaning of what they hear to be revealed.
2. Granting them a mind that is not preoccupied with anything save the word of God, which they hear so that they may understand how useful the holy instructions read to them are.
3. Making them deserve to be like Paul the apostle who after he had severely persecuted Christianity for a long time, the Lord summoned him to be a chosen vessel and a preaching apostle.

The Catholic Epistle Mystery

A chapter of the Catholic Epistles is to be read (James -Peter -Jude). The priest, in both prayers of Catholic epistle and Pauline intercession implores the Lord to grant us the grace of deserving the fellowship of the writers of these epistles and that we may follow their footsteps, to be like

them in struggle. He also implores the Lord to safeguard His church, which He Himself founded through their hands.

Acts of the Apostles: Synaxarium

“Ipraxis” is a Greek word meaning “acts”. It is applied to the Acts of the Apostles. While reading the Acts of Apostles, the priest prays in a low voice, and implores the Lord to help us to decide to listen to the word of God attentively and with a submissive heart and with the Spirit of prayer sharing the priest who prays for us. Then the priest reads the Synaxarium, which is the history of our holy fathers and martyrs. The aim is to be the image of the church fathers as example to be imitated by the Christians. The life stories of our holy fathers encourage us to continue their struggle.

The Most Important Hymns

When raising the Pauline incense, this gold censer, we notice the precise conformity between the meaning of the hymn and the occasion of placing the incense in the censer. Before reading the Acts of the Apostles (Sheri ni Marya) and after the Prayer of Reconciliation (Rejoice Mary).

The Trisagion.

This hymn is very old. It dates back to the early age of Christianity. Many writers emphasize that Joseph and Nicodemus were the first to use it when they took the body of Christ. Through this hymn we recognize Christ, His birth, crucifixion and resurrection from the dead. Let us, when singing it, implore the holy God to sanctify our souls and our bodies so that we may share His resurrection. We may crucify the world in us so that we may rise in a new life.

The Gospel Intercession

In this prayer, the priest thanks the Lord who qualified us to hear and see what the prophets and the righteous and even angels themselves earnestly desire to bear these things and enjoy them. The priest implores the Lord to help all the listeners to hear the word and apply it so that it may help them in their growth of their spiritual life. What we must note here is that prayer for the Gospel and those who hear the word is not confined to the priest alone, but it is the duty of the people also “Pray for the Holy Gospels”. After the priest completes the prayer, he enters the sanctuary and goes around the altar once with the incense and the deacon before him holding the cross and the Gospel. This refers to the apostles’ preaching the Gospel all over the whole world carrying Christ’s cross and it also declares that Salvation was through the cross. While the priest goes around the altar, the congregation sings the psalms as the Psalms include more references and prophecies of Christ than any other Book. The priest then comes out of the sanctuary with the Gospel in his hand. This is an indication of Christ coming out preaching the Good News of the kingdom of God in all Judea, Galilee. The moment the priest goes out of the Sanctuary, the Deacon commands the people to stand up and listen to the Holy Gospel. Just as John the Baptist previously did for Christ preparing the way for Him and informing the people that the kingdom of God was near. The deacon also tells the people that the Gospel is about to be read so that they may stand in the fear of God to listen to the Gospel. And as John referred to the Savior by saying, “This is the Lamb of God” (John 1:29), the deacon refers to the Gospel and summons people, “In the fear of the Almighty stand up and listen to the Holy Gospel”.

Moses, in the past, warned his people not to come near the mountain, when the Lord gave him the Law so that they might not die, but in the age of grace, the deacon commands the people to

stand to listen to his voice addressing them through the Gospel so that they may have everlasting life (John 5:39). When the deacon commands the congregation to stand and listen to the Gospel, he reminds them of the voice of God calling from heaven saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I well pleased. Hear Him” (Matthew 17:5).

If the deacon commands the people saying, “Stand up in the fear of God” they all stand indicating their submission to the Gospel, and to that who speaks to them through the Gospel. While citing the Gospel, the priest prays in a low voice for the sick to be healed, the travelers to come back home, the blessings of the winds of heaven, the fruits of the earth and the lifting of the river water, the blessing of the cross, plants of the field, the salvation of people, the animals, the safeguard of the House of God everywhere. He prays for the President, the Christians, the departed, those who offer oblations, and those who are in trouble. Then he prays for the catechumens. Then he prays for the chancel.

Intercession for the peace of the church

This includes the peace of the church and the peace of the members of the church.

Intercession for the Fathers of the church

St. Paul asked the faithful many times to pray for him and for all the saints so that he might be able to perform his service and be given utterance in opening his mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the Gospel (Ephesians 6:18-19).

Intercession for Congregation

+ In this prayer, the priest asks for God’s blessing to this congregation and every congregation that raise prayers to the Lord. He also implores the Lord to make of these places of congregation houses of prayers, houses of purity and houses of blessing where the faithful pray in spirit and truth, and purify and cleanse themselves of their sins and come nearer to God. He also implores God to eradicate pagan worship altogether from the world. He also says, “May all dissensions of corrupt heresy cease. Those who are hostile to Your Holy Church O Lord; as the case is not and at all times, dost Thou humiliate them”. Then the Orthodox Creed is cited. Meanwhile the priest washes his hand thrice saying the first three words from Psalm 51:7 “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean”. This is because he will hold the Lord’s body in his hand and also the Lord’s honorable blood. The priest faces the west and wipes his hands in front of the people thus warning them and drawing their attention to the fact that those who will receive the holy communion should be pure and sanctified and that he is innocent of their guilt if they dare receive the Holy Communion without being worthy of the mystery.

The Reconciliation Prayer

This prayer has been called the Reconciliation Prayer because the priest refers to the wonderful miraculous deed of Christ to reconcile man with God “For He is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in His flesh the Law of Commandments and ordinance that He might create in Himself one new man in place of the two so making peace and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, hereby bringing the hostility to an end” (Ephesians 2:14-16). Then the priest completes the prayer saying “Vouchsafe, O Lord to fill our hearts with Your peace”. In the first supplication we implore God to grant us peace and in this supplication we implore Him to fill our hearts with that

peace which will keep our hearts and minds with Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7) and to purify us and cleanse us of evil and semi-evil and even the memorial of evil (thinking evil) so that we may enjoy peace with God and with our brethren and kiss one another with a pure holy kiss because He wants to offer our sacrifice while we are on good terms with our brothers “So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remembers that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go first be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift” (Matthew 5:23- 24), “if I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened” (Psalms 66:18) and because, “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive your men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:14). Both priest and deacon remove the prosphore from the altar and make it flutter over the oblation. Removing the prosphore stands for removing the stone from the tomb door when Christ rose from the dead and the flutter of the prosphore stands for the earthquake, which occurred when the stone was removed. The congregation sings the hymn, “Through the intercession of the Mother of God”. When the prosphore is removed, the second part of the Mass ends. This is the Mass of the Catechumens. At this time the catechumens leave the church because the Spiritual sacrifice is uncovered and the catechumens who are still learning cannot understand the mystery.

(50) The Liturgy of the Faithful

References

+ I Corinthians 11, Matthew 26:26-29, and Mark 14:22-26.

Introduction

The liturgy of the faithful begins with the people’s praise, “The Mercy of Peace is the Sacrifice of praise” as we received our peace with God through the cross. The church doors are shut and only the only the faithful are inside so that all are lifted up to heaven. Both the priest and the deacon remove the prosphore as if the heavenly liturgy begins with the resurrection of our Lord.

The priest holds the corporal, which covers the Lamb and crosses the people, the deacons and himself declaring that the church receives the blessing from the Lamb of God. The priest blesses the people, “The Love of the Lord Father...” and the priest cries “Lift up your hearts...” So we follow the Lord Christ in His ascent and we passed and overcame the well of time and place, then “We thank God” because without His grace and redemption, our hearts would remain sticking to earth. The Eucharist Prayers go on and the faithful raise their praises and hymns “The cherubim Worship You”. This hymn is a token of our fellowship with the angels and the heavenly hosts.

Meanwhile the Angel of the offertory guards it and prays with us. The priest crosses himself and the deacons and the people three times with the corporal, which was on the Lamb and says, “Holy” because Christ is Holy and is able to sanctify us. He declares our Salvation. He speaks about incarnation of the Son of God, His crucifixion, His resurrection, His ascent and His Second Advent to reward each one according to his deeds.

The priest begins prayers of sanctification that is prayers for the Lord to transubstantiate the Bread into the Body of Christ and the wine into His blood. The priest relates to us the story of sanctification, which the Lord practiced when He established this mystery. The church cites the same words of Christ proclaiming His perpetual presence for the salvation of the church.

The deacon cries out, “Kneel to God in fear and trembling”. At this moment the oblation are transubstantiated into the Lord’s body and blood. That is why the church prays for all people and in the Commemoration she asks for the intercession of the departed saints and also prays for the departed Diptych.

The Fraction prayer is the last part of the Mass. It includes the fraction prayer and it differs according to occasions (Give examples to young people). Meanwhile the priest breaks the Holy Body in a certain way more than once in the form of the cross (This could be explained on an oblation under the guidance of the priest). When the Fraction prayer is completed the Lord’s Prayer is cited. Then the priest cites some prayers in a low voice asking for forgiveness for himself and for all the people. He says, “The Holy unto the holy” then he dips the Fermentum in the Chalice and crosses the body with it three times. “Holy and honored are the true Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, the begotten Son of Our God. Amen”. Then he puts the Fermentum (Spadikon) back into the chalice. The priest’s face should be towards the blood, towards the chalice after crossing the Body with the Blood as a token of their unity. Then he lifts up the paten and says the confession, and then he kneels and asks for forgiveness then ministers the communion.

Notes

1. “The Holy unto the holy” means that (the holy matters concerning the Holy God are for all the people who are sanctified in Him). No body must think that holy means without sin, it only means sanctified in the Blood of Christ, and through the holy sacraments. St. Cyril of Jerusalem says, “Receive the communion and believe that you will receive a power that can destroy false desires, cure any disease or weakness operating in us”.
2. Being worthy of receiving communion means trust in the Love of Christ and the feeling that we need this mystery that gives life and also being prepared to receive the Holy Communion.

Exercise

You must receive communion many times since through it you stand firm in Christ and your eternal life.