



The Coptic Orthodox Diocese of
The Southern USA

SUNDAY SCHOOL CURRICULUM



GRADE 11

Πατριεπισκοπος ἡρεμῆχμῖ
ἡορθοδοξοσ
ἡτε νῖθωψ ετρωτπ ετσαρησ



**The Coptic Orthodox
Diocese
Of the Southern USA**

Sunday School Curriculum

Grade 11







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PREFACE

The Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States, under the auspices of His Grace Bishop Youssef, felt the pressing need for a modified Sunday School Curriculum which would be better suited to address the problems and issues facing children both in America and the lands of immigration. Therefore, the efforts and time of many faithful servants have been dedicated to modify and improve the presently used English translation of the syllabus published by the Youth Services Committee of the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate. This has resulted in the elimination of many existing lessons from this syllabus and the substitution with new lessons that are more appropriate for our youth in American society. These additional lessons give greater consideration to the differences in quality of life, education, media influence, cultural differences and the surrounding diversity of beliefs between Egyptian society and that of the west

We pray that God may bless this work for the spiritual growth of our children in the immigration countries. We also thank His Grace Bishop Youssef for his continued support, prayers and motivating guidance in this service.

May God reward every servant who offered time and effort toward the completion of this Sunday School Curriculum.

“Thus Far The Lord Has Helped Us”

(1 Samuel 7:12)



INTRODUCTION

This grade 11 Sunday school curriculum has been modified by substituting 26 lessons from the previous curriculum published by the Youth Service Committee of the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate with new lessons that are suitable for the youth in America. The order of the lessons has also been arranged to follow the major events in the church. Hence, assuming that the starting date is the first week after the Coptic New Year celebration (El Nayrouz) on September 11, the lessons have been arranged in the following order:

- 3 lessons for the month of September
- 4 lessons for each of the months of October through January
- Variable number of filler lessons for the period between the beginning of February and Jonah's fast
- 2 lessons, one before and one after Jonah's fast
- 7 lessons during the Great Fast
- 7 lessons for the period between Easter and the Feast of the Pentecost
- Variable number of filler lessons between the Feast of the Pentecost and the Apostles' Feast
- 3 lessons for the remainder of July after the Apostles' Feast
- 4 lessons for August
- 1 lesson for the first week of September

Please note that filler lessons can also be used for the occasional fifth Sunday in any month. These filler lessons are in the beginning of the book and it is preferable that they be used in sequence for the sake of unity in all the churches.

The students of grade 11 enjoy being mentally challenged and appreciate a high level of knowledge and discussion. They also use logic to analyze any information they receive. The new lessons inserted in this curriculum stressed more Bible information, knowledge of other beliefs, church history and social topics relevant to this age. However, this can still be considered as a preliminary modified curriculum for grade 11 that will require your feedback as a servant in order to continue the improvement process. Any inquiries or comments can be forwarded to ssc@suscopts.org

May the Holy Spirit guide every servant using this curriculum.

FILLER LESSONS

These lessons are to be used for the fifth Sunday in a month and for any week lacking a lesson due to the changing date of the Resurrection Feast.

1. Be Merciful
2. One Ousia and Three Hypostases
3. Coptic Saints Witnessed in Foreign Lands - St. Verena and St. Maurice
4. Death and Euthanasia (Merciful Death)
5. The Beauty of the Orthodox Creed
6. Discipleship
7. Contentment

1- Be Merciful

Objective:

- To learn about an important virtue that every Christian needs to acquire.
- To learn from the merciful examples of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Memory Verse:

“Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy” (Matthew 5:7).

References:

1. The Lord Christ went about doing Mercy- By H. H. Pope Shenouda III
2. http://www.copticpopo.org/articles/english_articles/

Introduction:

The perception of God as the merciful and kind Lord is very prominent in the New Testament. Our Lord Jesus Christ went about showing mercy and love to all people. He shared the pains and suffering of every soul in pain. We as Christians should take the example of our Lord Jesus Christ to heart and be merciful to others for, He also promised in the Sermon on the Mount that the merciful would obtain mercy.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Loving Lord

- ✠ The Lord Christ was a fountain of love to all people. It is written, “Jesus went about all Galilee teaching... preaching... and healing all kinds of sickness.... and they brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments....and healed them” (Matthew 4:23,24).

II. The Comforting Lord

- ✠ He carried the pains of all the people, and said, “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). He came to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound.... to comfort all who mourn (Isaiah 16:1,2).

III. The hope providing Lord

A. Hope to the Jews

- ✠ He was the hope of those who are hopeless and the help of those who have no helper. He embraced the forsaken among the Jewish people, like the tax collectors and sinners, and opened a gate of hope before them. He accepted Zacchaeus the chief tax collector and entered into his house and led him to repentance. When the Jews complained because He had gone to be a guest with a man who was a sinner, He said to them, “Today salvation has come to this house, for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was

lost” (Luke 19:7-10). When they grumbled because He accepted Matthew the tax-collector and sat in his house where other tax collectors gathered, He told them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick...For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repent” (Matthew 9:9-13).

B. Hope to the Gentiles

- † As He encouraged women, children and sinners, He likewise opened the gate of hope before the Gentiles. The Jews hated the other nations and had no dealings with them, but the Lord Christ accepted the wise men from the East as the first fruit of the Gentiles. He praised the faith of the Gentile Centurion who asked for his sick servant to be healed, and said about him to the Jews, “I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel! Many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness” (Matthew 8:11,12). And to the Canaanite woman He said, “O woman, great is your faith” (Matthew 15:28). He entered the city of Samaria and they accepted Him and believed in Him though the Jews had no dealings with Samaritans (John 4:39-41).
- † He was a source of hope to the weak and pitied them. As said of Him, “A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench” (Matthew 12:20). He gave hope even to the hands, which hang down and the feeble knees (Heb. 12:12). Therefore St. Paul said, “Comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all” (1 Thessalonians 5:14).

IV. The Compassionate Lord

- † He had compassion on the sinful women and saved them from the leaders of the Jews. When they wanted to stone a sinful woman caught in adultery, in the very act, He said to them, “He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first” (John 8:7). And to the woman He said, “Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more”.
- † He had compassion on Mary Magdalene and cast seven demons out of her (Luke 8:2), and she followed Him with others and became a disciple.
- † When some grumbled because of the woman who anointed His feet with very costly fragrant oil saying that the fragrant oil would have been sold and its price given to the poor, He said to them, “Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial” (John 12:7).
- † He had compassion also of the Canaanite woman and praised her faith.
- † He pitied the children; for when His disciples rebuked them for crowding around Him, He said to His disciples, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them, for of such is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 19:14). He put His hands on them and blessed them. And when His disciples fought with pride who of them would be the greatest, He sat a child in the midst and said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:1-3).

V. The Forgiving Lord

- † The Lord Christ sought the salvation of those who cared not for their own salvation. He never looked at the sins of the people but at His own love for them.

- ✠ He gave salvation to the thief on His right at the last moment of His life. He pitied the sinful and the weak, and was firm with the cruel. He taught the people to be simple and “harmless as doves” (Matthew 10:16). What beautiful and wonderful works indeed are those expressing His kind-heartedness, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Luke 23:34).

Application:

- ✠ What a lesson for us to go about, like Him, doing good to all people. Let our exercise be to go about doing well.

Conclusion:

- ✠ Dear brethren, any day that passes without doing good, do not count it of your life; it is a lost day. Know that sin is not just doing evil, for this is the passive side of sin. Refraining from doing good is also a sin, as the apostle says, “Who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is a sin” (James 4:17). It is also written, “Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in the power of your hand to do so. Do not say to your neighbor: “Go, and come back, and tomorrow I will give it, when you have it with you” (Proverbs 3:27-28).
- ✠ In conclusion, we pray that God may also be merciful to us as He was with them and that He guide and teach us to do good to others as we strive to follow His example.

2- One Ousia and Three Hypostases

Objective:

- To understand the meaning of Hypostasis
- To understand the concept of the Trinity

Memory Verse:

“For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one” (1 John 5:7).

References:

- Trinitarianism and monotheism (Yassa Mansour)

Introduction:

Our Great God is One Ousia and Three Hypostases.

- The Divine Soul
- The Divine Wisdom
- 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.

Lesson Outline:

I. The meaning of the word “Ousia”

The word “Ousia” means the nature that characterizes this being. We have the Divine Ousia; i.e. the Nature Godhead: the simple soul that is able to do anything. The Almighty God who fills all places and 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? As 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 creations 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 hope 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 Himself through His Spirit that dwells in us.

II. The meaning of the word “Hypostasis”

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

- ✠ 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.
- ✠ 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.
- ✠ 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 has the same three characteristics, shouldn’t his Creator be the same as he is Who created us after His image?

III. Denominating the Hypostasis

The problem, then, does not lie in the belief that God is one. Most religions adopt this belief. In our Orthodox Creed we say, “We believe in One God” and we say, “In the name of the Father, 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 call the Divine Wisdom = the Son as wisdom and mind express the inner self.

When we say: The mind of Mr. X solved the problem = Mr. X solved the problem. Then the mind of Mr. X = Mr. X himself and the Mind of God = God Himself

It is a spiritual adoption not a reproductive adoption. 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.

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

IV. The Hypostases are 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.

V. Similarities

A. The Human Life

Man solves the mathematical problem with his mind but his intuition or subconscious works with him and also his inclination and movement have their role as he writes and counts with the help of a ruler. When he 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 coronation, but at the same time the affection is working with enthusiasm to get the prize, and perception is after the best way to win.

B. The Sun

Here is an old beautiful analogy

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 proceeds from the Father and the Son sends the Holy Spirit to us.

C. The Mathematical Example

We do not say, "1 + 1 + 1 = 1" which is mathematically inaccurate but we say, "1 x 1 x 1 = 1"

"I am in the Father and the Father is 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 His effective action in our hearts. Let us remember to 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.

3- St. Maurice and St. Verena

Objective:

- To know the story of The Theban Legion and to learn from their strong faith.
- To know the role of our saints in spreading Christianity and witnessing to the Lord in foreign lands.

Memory Verse:

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

References:

- 1) Samir F. Girgis, PhD, “The Theban Legion in Switzerland”.
- 2) Samir F. Girgis, PhD, “The significant contribution of the Copts to the early evangelization of Switzerland “.
- 3) Samir F. Girgis, PhD, “A short introduction to the Coptic orthodox Church of Alexandria.
- 4) J.R. Fox: “The treasure at Saint Maurice of Aganum”.
- 5) L’Abbaye Saint Maurice en Valais: A place called Saint Maurice.
- 6) Thurston and Attwater: Butler’s lives of the Saints.

Introduction:

A traveler on the highway that leads from Geneva to Rome will notice a small and a very old Swiss town called “Saint Maurice”. This town was known in the Roman times as “Aganum”; an important communication center. It was there that a Coptic officer named Maurice and 6600 of his fellow soldiers died for the sake of Christ at the hands of the impious Emperor Maximian (285-305 AD).

Lesson Outline:

I. The Theban Legion

The story of these martyrs, commonly known as the Theban Legion (Alkateebe al Teebia or Alkateebe al-sa’eedia) has been preserved for us by Saint Eucher, the bishop of Lyons, who died in 494 AD. Bishop Eucher started the account of the martyrdom of these valiant soldiers by the following introduction: “Here is the story of the passion of the holy Martyrs who have made Aganum illustrious with their blood. It is in honor of this heroic martyrdom that we narrate with our pen the order of events as it came to our ears. We often hear, do we not, a particular locality or city is held in high honor because of one single martyr who died there, and quite rightly, because in each case the saint gave his precious soul to the most high God. How much more should this sacred place, Aganum, be revered, where so many thousands of martyrs have been slain, with the sword, for the sake of Christ.”?

Under “Maximian”, who was an Emperor of the Roman Commonwealth (Empire) with Diocletian as his colleague, an uprising of the Gauls known as “Bagaude” forced Maximian to march against them with an army of which one unit was the Theban Legion composed of 6600 men. This unit had been recruited from Upper Egypt and consisted entirely of Christians. They were good men and soldiers who, even under arms, did not forget to render to God the things of God, and to Caesar the things of Caesar.

After the revolt was quelled, the Emperor Maximian issued the surprising order; that the whole army must join offering sacrifices for the Roman gods for the success of their mission. The order included killing Christians (probably as a sacrifice to the Roman gods). Only the Theban Legion dared to refuse to comply with the orders. The legion withdrew itself, encamped near Aguanum and refused to take part in these rites.

Maximian was then resting in a near-by place called Octudurum. When these news came to him, he repeatedly commanded them to obey his rules and orders, and upon their constant and unanimous refusal, he ordered that the legion should be “decimated”.

Accordingly, every tenth man was put to death. A second “decimation” was ordered unless the men obeyed the order given but there was a great shout through the legion camp: they all declared that they would never allow themselves to carry out such a sacrilegious order. They always had the horror of idolatry; they had been brought up as Christians and were instructed in the One Eternal God and were ready to suffer extreme penalties rather than do any thing contrary to their religion.

When Maximian heard this news, he got more angry than ever. Like a savage beast, he ordered the second decimation to be carried out, intending that the remainder should be compelled to do what they hitherto refused. Yet they still maintained their resolve. After the second decimation, Maximian warned the remainder of the Theban legion that it was of no use for them to trust in their number, for if they persisted in their disobedience, not a man among them would be able to escape death.

The greatest mainstay of their faith in this crisis was undoubtedly their captain Maurice, with his lieutenants Candid, the first commanding officer, and “Exuperius” the “Compidactor” fired the hearts of the soldiers with the fervor by his encouragement.

Maurice, calling attention to the example of their faithful fellow soldiers, already martyrs, persuaded them all to be ready to die in their turn for the sake of their baptismal vow (The promise one makes at his baptismal to renounce Satan and his abominable service and to worship only God). He reminded them of their comrades who had gone to heaven before them. At his words, a glorious eagerness for martyrdom burned in the hearts of those most blessed men.

Fired thus by the lead of their officers, the Theban legion sent a loyal and brave reply to Maximian (who was still enraged).

“Emperor, we are your soldiers but also the soldiers of the true God. We owe you military service and obedience, but we cannot renounce Him who is our Creator and Master, and also yours even though you reject Him. In all things that are not against His law, we most willingly obey you, as we have done hitherto. We readily oppose your enemies whoever they are, but we cannot stain our hands with the blood of innocent people (Christians). We have taken an oath to God before we took one to you. You cannot place any confidence in our second oath if we violate the first. You commanded us to execute Christians, behold we are such. We confess God the Father the creator of all things and His Son Jesus Christ, God. We have seen our comrades being slain with the sword, we do not weep for them but rather rejoice at their honor. Neither this, nor any other provocation will tempt us to

revolt. Behold, we have arms in our hands, but we do not resist, because we would rather die innocent than live by any sin.”

When Maximian heard this, he realized that these men were obstinately determined to remain in their Christian faith, and he despaired of being able to turn them from their constancy. He therefore decreed, in a final sentence, that they should be rounded up, and the slaughter completed. The troops sent to execute this order came to the blessed legion and drew their swords upon those holy men who, for love of life, did not refuse to die. They were all slain with the sword. They never resisted in any way. Putting aside their weapons, they offered their necks to the executioners. Neither their numbers nor the strength of arms tempted them to uphold the justice of their cause by force.

They kept just one thing in their minds, that they were bearing witness to Him who was led to death without protest, and who, like a lamb, opened not his mouth; but that now, they themselves, sheep in the Lord’s flock, were to be massacred as it by ravaging wolves. Thus, by the savage cruelty of this tyrant, that fellowship of the saints was perfected, for they despised things present in hope of things to come. So the truly angelic legion of men was slain. Those who, we trust, now praise the Lord God of Hosts, together with the legions of Angels, in heaven forever.

During their martyrdom, numerous miracles happened, which undoubtedly largely contributed to the massive conversion of the inhabitants of these regions to Christianity. In Zurich for instance, the three beheaded saints Felix, Regula and Exuperantius miraculously rose, carried their heads on their own hands, walked to the top of a hill, where they knelt, prayed and at last lay down. On the same spot, a large cathedral was later erected. The three saints carrying their heads on their hands appear on the coat of arms and seal of Zurich until today.

Other saints like Victor, Orsus, and their comrades were barbarously tortured by Hirtacus, the Roman governor of Solothurn. During this torture, several miracles occurred, e.g. the shackles suddenly broke open, the fire was instantaneously extinguished, etc. The lookers-on were thus filled with wonder and began to admire the Theban legionnaires, upon which the furious Hirtacus ordered their immediate beheading. Without the slightest resistance they offered the executors their necks. The bodies of the beheaded Saints shone in glaring brightness. The bodies of the Saints which were thrown in the river Aar, advanced the bank, stepped out, walked heads on hands, then knelt and prayed at the spot where the Basilica of St. Peter later arose.

The bodies of the martyrs of Aguanum were discovered and identified by Saint Theodore the Bishop of Octudurm, who was in office at 350 AD. He built a Basilica in their honor at Aguanum, the remains of which are visible until now. This later became the center of a monastery built about the year 515 AD on the land donated by King Sigismund of Burgundy.

Saint Eucher mentions that in his time (he died 494 AD), many came diverse provinces of the empire devoutly to honor these Saints, and to offer presents of gold, silver and other things. He mentions that many miracles were performed at their shrine such as casting out of devils and other kinds of healing “which the might of the Lord works there everyday through the intercession of His saints.”

In the middle ages Saint Maurice was the patron saint of several of the Roman dynasties of Europe, and later on of the Holy Roman emperors. In 926, Henry I (919-936 AD) even ceded the present Swiss Canton (province) of Aargau in return of the lance of the saints. Some emperors were also anointed before the Altar of Saint Maurice in saint Peter’s Cathedral in Rome. The sword of Saint Maurice was last used in the coronation of the Austrian Emperor Charles as King of Hungary in 1916. Kings, noblemen, and church leaders vied to obtain small portions of the relics of the saints in

order to build churches in their honor. The famous King Charlemagne offered the monastery one of the treasured thorns that came from the crown of thorns of our Savior in return for a small portion of the sacred relics. He later built a church in honor of the martyrs inside the court of his palace.

Saint Maurice has always been one of the most popular saints in Western Europe, with over 650 foundations in his name in France alone. Five cathedrals, innumerable churches, chapels and altars are consecrated in his name all over Europe. Agunum (Saint Maurice en Valais) has always remained the main focus of veneration of the Thebans and a significant pilgrimage resort. In the monastery that bears his name there, the monks perform a special devotion to the saints every day, and celebrate their feast on September 22 of each year. Nearly 1000 people attend an all night vigil, on the night before the feast. On the feast day, they carry in procession the relics of the martyrs in the ancient silver caskets. Over seventy towns bear the name of Saint Maurice.

In the Monastery carrying his name in Switzerland, the vigil “Tasbeha” has been chanted continuously (24 hours a day) without stopping for more than 500 years now.

II. Saint Maurice and the Theban Legion in the Coptic Tradition

There is no mentioning in the Coptic Synaxarium of these saints, however, there is a number of new churches and altars that are erected in the 20th century and beyond. For example, there is a church of St. Maurice and St. Verena in the Diocese of Public Services in Egypt. There is also an altar consecrated in the name of saint Maurice in the Church of the Virgin Mary and Saint Athanasius in Mississauga, Canada. There is an icon depicting the martyrdom of Saint Maurice in Saint Mary’s Coptic Orthodox church in Cambridge, Canada. And in California there is a church consecrated to St. Verena.

In 1991, The Christian world celebrated the seventeenth centennial of the martyrdom of these saints. H.H. Pope Shenouda delegated His Grace Bishop Serapion to represent the Coptic Church in these celebrations. On that occasion parts of the relics of Saint Maurice, St. Cassius, and St. Florentius were returned to the Coptic Church.

III. St. Verena

Saint Verena was brought up in the Theban region (Luxor) in a noble Christian family, who handed her over to Bishop Sherimon, Bishop of Beni Sweif, who in turn taught her and baptized her. Saint Verena joined the Theban legion in its mission to Switzerland. The Soldiers were allowed to accompany their relatives in order to look after them and take care of their wounds. When Saint Maurice and members of the legion were martyred, Saint Verena led a lonely and hermit’s life. She used to fast and pray continuously. Moreover, God performed several miracles through her . This Saint was particularly concerned over young girls and used to look after them spiritually and physically, because of her expertise as a nurse. As a result of her fame, the ruler arrested her and sent her to jail, where Saint Maurice appeared to her to console and strengthen her. After her release from jail, she moved into several regions, and God made several miracles through her prayers. Because of her, many converted to Christianity, and many others became witnesses to the Lord Jesus Christ. Saint Verena was interested in serving the poor and used to offer them food. Moreover, she enjoyed serving the sick, especially those suffering from leprosy. She used to wash their wounds and put ointments on them, not fearing contagion.

At the time of passing away, Virgin Mary appeared to her to console and strengthen her. On the 4th of the Coptic month Tute, Saint Verena departed in peace. In 1986, a delegation from Saint Verena’s Church in Switzerland, brought to Egypt a part of Saint Verena’s relics. In 1989, Saint Verena’s

Group of the Bishopric of Public Services started its ministry to provide integral, spiritual, social and health services in the popular poor areas. On the 22nd of February 1994, His Holiness Pope Shenouda III consecrated Saint Maurice and Saint Verena's Church in the Building of the Bishopric of Public Services, at Anba Rewiss Basilica, Cairo. May the intercession of Saint Verena and the Theban Legion be with all of us, Amen.

Applications:

Read more about the lives of St. Maurice and St. Verena

Learn from them the courage and self denial

Imitate St. Verena in her life of service and love

4- Euthanasia

Objective:

1. To understand what euthanasia is?
2. To know the position of our church regarding this issue.
3. To be able to respond to different opinions in the society.

Memory Verse:

“Would you indeed annul my Judgment” (Job 40:8).

References:

1. The Church and Contemporary Social Issues by Bishop Serapion
<http://www.lacopts.org/Perspectives/index.htm>
2. Euthanasia-Moral and pastoral perspectives by Richard M. Gula
3. The book of Job as an example of accepting suffering in our lives with patience as Job did. Emphasis chapters 39-42.

Introduction:

‘*Euthanasia*’ is a Greek word that means ‘*happy death*.’ It is used to signify the medical intervention in discontinuing the life of patients with complicated diseases, or those who suffer severe pain from incurable diseases. This intervention is seen as stemming from the doctor’s mercy and pity on his patients. The concept also calls for discontinuing the lives of children or infants who suffer from mental retardation or complicated diseases, thus having mercy upon them and saving them from a callous life.

Lesson Outline:

I. Supporters of Euthanasia are divided into two groups

- ✠ One group demands the clear and frank approval of the patient before medical intervention to discontinue his life. This is called *Voluntary Euthanasia*.
- ✠ The second group regards the medical opinion in the intervention of discontinuing the life of the patient as sufficient, since it is in the interest of the patient, rescuing him from pain and suffering. In this case the approval of the patient is not necessary. This is called *Involuntary Euthanasia*.
- ✠ This second group takes into consideration the cases in which the patient is incapable of giving his approval and supposes that if his condition permitted, he would agree.

II. The base for Euthanasia is built upon three conditions

A. The Patient’s Desire:

- ✠ Some consider that the patient’s desire to discontinue his life justifies medical intervention to carry out this wish, on the basis that only the patient has the right in choosing death.

These people limit their acceptance of medical intervention only when patient approval exists. Hence, they only support *Voluntary Euthanasia*.

B. The Honor of Human life

- ✠ Some support Euthanasia on the basis of preserving the honor of human life and hence, accept intervention in discontinuing life when that individual has reached a stage that does not agree with such honor.
- ✠ These people take into account some complicated diseases and the symptoms that accompany them, such as: pain, loss of concentration, delirium and lack of control over bodily functions. These are among the cases that they consider as not agreeing with the honor of human life. They consider intervention to discontinue the life of the patient in such cases as not only an act of mercy, but also an act, which reserves the honor of the patient.
- ✠ It is obvious that these people do not mean that just any case having these characteristics qualifies for intervention, but they mean that complicated diseases such as AIDS, in which the patient has an incurable disease and wishes to discontinue his life.

C. The Patient's Interest

- ✠ Some believe that as long as the intervention to discontinue the life of the patient realizes the interest and good of the patient, it is an acceptable act. Even if the state of the patient makes it difficult for him to give his approval.
- ✠ *Euthanasia* is a practice that has the appearance of mercy and pity, but from within, there is a denial of basic truths of faith that rely upon matters of life and death. Hence from a religious point of view, it is rejected. Every Christian who has a live conscience must resist the attempts to pass laws that allow it.

III. Euthanasia is rejected for the following reasons

A. Human Life is a Gift from God

- ✠ “And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being” (Genesis 2:7). Man does not have authority to discontinue his life based upon his desire to do so. Likewise, a person's expression of his desire to discontinue his life, no matter what the reasons are, does not justify others, especially those who work in the medical field to carry out this desire.
- ✠ The acceptance of the principle of a patient's right to discontinue his life based upon his desire leads to the acceptance of suicide, which, without a doubt, is carried thorough the desire of the person who is committing suicide. Therefore, shall we accept suicide with the excuse that it is the desire of the person committing it?

B. The Honor of Human Life is in Life Itself

- ✠ No matter what the appearance of this life is, no sickness, pain or physical weakness can destroy the honor of a person. Sin alone destroys human nature and devalues its honor.
- ✠ Sickness is indeed not a part of human nature that God created in complete health. Therefore, man struggles to avoid and treat disease. The presence of disease, no matter how severe it is or what its appearance is, does not justify the medical intervention to discontinue the life of the patient. The aim of medicine is to preserve life, and not to discontinue it for the reason of the inability to present a cure.

C. God Wishes Good for Man, and Allows Sickness for the Good of Man

- † Sickness has led many people to repentance, and purified their souls and spirits through the crucible of the pain of sickness. The sick person, during the severity of his sickness, is also an educational message for the healthy who do not realize the grace of good health, or for those who indulge in worldly matters and over-value them.
- † It is difficult for us to define, with our human view of matters, what is beneficial for the sick. Hence, with every effort that is made to ease the pains of the sick and every prayer that is raised for the sake of his healing, we leave the matter of the life and death of the sick, in faith and total submission to our Good Lord, Who alone knows what is of benefit to the sick.
- † Finally, we would like to differentiate between Euthanasia and the intervention to remove the medical life-support equipment from a patient who suffers ‘Brain Death.’
 1. In the case of *Euthanasia*, the patient is still alive, meaning that his brain is functioning, and so are many of his organs, but there is no hope of a cure. Intervention here discontinues life. Therefore, it is considered to be a crime of murder that is not justified by the approval of the patient, the despair of not finding a cure, or supposedly having pity on that patient.
 2. As for the second case of *Brain Death*, the patient has been separated from life as indicated by the lack of brain function. What appears to be breathing or pulse is actually artificial and relies upon the life-support systems attached to the patient. Intervention to remove these instruments is an act befitting the honor of the deceased, and merciful toward the feelings of relatives and loved ones.

Conclusion:

A Christian should accept the suffering in his life if God’s will permits it. A human that takes another persons life is taking the role of God the creator rather than the creature.

5- The Beauty of the Orthodox Creed

Objective:

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

Memory Verse:

"If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes" (Mark 9:23).

References:

- Theology – Fr. Michael Mina
- The Book of Deacon Girgis Samuel Azir about The Orthodox Law

I. 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 closer to paganism than to the true belief.

St. Gregory Nazianus, 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. And the person who believes in the Oneness of Christ, the Monothelite doctrine, i.e. Christ is the One of Two Godhead and Manhead. His Divinity never departed from His Humanity - One with His Divinity without mingling, nor confusion - that person is deeply affected by this doctrine in his Spiritual Life, his approach and his instructions.

II. 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.

We meet on Sundays for two reasons:

- ✠ Sunday is the day on which the World was created. Hence it stands for our new creation in Christ.
- ✠ It is the eighth day that escaped from the borders of Time and reached the borders of the everlasting life. In the Liturgy, 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.

III. Features of the Orthodox Spiritual Life

A. 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 find prayers raised 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 liturgy, which is addressed to the Father and another liturgy, which 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.

B. 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, and wine). The church uses icons, candles, and incense as well as bodily activities such as seeing, touching, action, and movements. 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.

C. 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.

D. 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, which unite the believer’s soul and body with the members of Christ (the church).

If we contemplate the prayers of the Holy Liturgy, this unity becomes obvious. The bishop or the priest cannot perform the liturgy by himself, neither can the deacon. The people cannot perform the liturgy 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.

6 - Discipleship

Objective:

- To learn about discipleship and its importance
- To learn the different forms of discipleship

Memory Verse:

“Whoever does not bear his cross and follow me cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:27).

References:

1. Discipleship by H. H. Pope Shenouda III
2. The spiritual servant- a sermon by H. H. Pope Shenouda III
3. The Bible

Introduction:

The life of ministry, of serving God, begins with discipleship. The deeper the individual goes in his discipleship, the more successful and effective is his ministry. Blessed is he, who lives as a disciple throughout his life, learning every day, though he might have already become a teacher to others.

Lesson Outline:

Discipleship is not just a matter of learning particular facts, but is rather, a way of life. Discipleship has certain conditions and a disciple has certain characteristics that need to be fulfilled in practical aspect of life.

I. Characteristics of a Disciple

- ❖ Follow the Lord’s teaching: “if you hold to My teaching you are really My disciples” (John 8:31).
- ❖ Love others: “As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34-50).
- ❖ Leave everything for His sake: “In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:26,33).
- ❖ Endurance: “anyone who does not carry his cross and follow Me cannot be My disciple” (Luke 4:27).
- ❖ Humility: “at the feet of Gamaliel I was thoroughly trained in the law” (Acts 22:3). It begins with a person feeling that he needs to learn, to ask and to seek guidance.

Anyone who wants to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus must take on what he has been taught as his duty, and carry it out. Thereby transforming what he has learnt in theory into his practical life. What use are words if we just listen to them and then forget them, or memorize them just for the sake of information? The fathers used to say “tell me a word that I might live by”.

II. Life of Discipleship

The ear is not the only mean of learning the eye is too. Discipleship is not only to learn from the word of your teachers but from their behavior and way of life. Even when they say nothing, you still absorb their way of living. So, in fact, one should be a disciple of silence as much as for beneficial words. This is what St. Anthony did at the beginning of his monastic life. He used to learn from the life of the hermits by observing them.

Just as you learn from people's virtues, you can also learn from their faults. If you see something that is not right, and notice its repercussions on others, you can learn from it by making sure that you avoid it in your own life.

III. Discipleship From Books

The basis of discipleship is learning from the fathers and teachers. But what if you don't find a teacher, father or guide? Then, books can provide good guidance. Everything can be found in books. However, the person must choose carefully the books which he reads and from which he learns, and must read them selectively and not embrace unquestionably all what he reads. Books can also be a link between a teacher and his disciple by discussing books that they both read and learning from them.

Conclusion:

Discipleship is a continued process of learning from everything surrounding the disciple. A disciple can even learn from nature, animals, death, and events and from everything that leads him to become a disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

Application:

1. Search for the early fathers definition of discipleship.
2. Search for examples of discipleship in the Bible.

7 - Contentment

Objective:

- To understand the Christian concept of contentment
- To enjoy the inner peace through contentment.

Memory Verse:

“O satisfy us in the morning with Your loving kindness that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days” (Psalm 90:14).

References:

1. **1 Timothy 6:6** “Godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment.”
2. **Psalm 90:14** “O satisfy us in the morning with Your loving kindness, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.”
3. **Philippians 4:11-12** “Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.”
4. **1 Timothy 6:8** “If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content.”
5. **Hebrews 13:5** “Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, ‘I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you’.”
6. **2 Corinthians 2:12** “Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.”
7. Stanley, Charles (1998) “Contentment in All Circumstances”.

Introduction:

If you have ever heard of the saying “content as a couple of cows,” you might picture a peaceful pasture scene with cows lazily munching their cud, without a care in the world. What do you think would happen, however, if those cows stopped grazing on their plot of grass and stared longingly over the fence to that proverbially greener grass?

Lesson Outline:

A. What does contentment mean to you?

Without trying to think of the Webster’s definition, attempt to envision a practical, living example. You might think of a friend or neighbor who does not possess much and is still happy with what he has, or maybe the older person in an assisted-living center who always has a smile for visitors.

Discontentment is the unsatisfied outlook that cries: “What I have is not enough. I need something more or different to make me feel happy and secure.” Have you ever had the grumbles? Be honest now. On a day when nothing goes well, when you achieve nothing that you plan to, and all your dreams seem a million miles away - how do you feel on a day like this? If you give in to natural, human emotions, you drag home with a chip on your shoulder and complain about all the things you do not like. An almost visible brown cloud seems to hang over your surroundings.

In your heart, you know this is not the way God intends for you to live, but how do you overcome the daily rush of negative events and circumstances? Better yet, how do you see past them as though they were not there? Or is that even what God asks us to do?

B. Learn to be content

In the book of Philippians, the Apostle Paul writes to encourage this group of believers to know experientially the peace of God in spite of their surroundings. He says: “But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity. “Not that I speak from want; for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need (Philippians 4:10-12).

These words came from a man who was imprisoned in Rome under the unrelenting watchful care of the elite praetorian guard (Philippians 1:13). St. Paul had no idea how long he would be living without privacy and freedom.

It is easier to understand how such statements could be uttered by someone in comfort in his own home, with the hope of good days ahead. How then could St. Paul be so calm and collected and assured of his well being? The “secret” comes in Philippians 4:13, a verse you have probably heard quoted many times in various contexts: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

St. Paul was no pie-in-the-sky visionary who habitually denied reality. He had endured shipwrecks, beatings, rejection, ridicule, and public outrage (2 Corinthians 11:24-33), yet he could look at his bleak prospects, humanly speaking, and say he was truly content in any circumstance.

He knew that not every believer endured the things that God had called him to go through. St. Paul could have complained and spent his days weeping and yearning for better times, confused and angry at God’s seeming lack of concern and response for his condition.

C. Does God not care for our comfort?

Why couldn’t he enjoy the benefits of a quiet life, and not be harassed by Rome and difficulties? When St. Paul said that Christ was his strength for everything, he meant everything - with the understanding that “everything” sometimes meant negative experiences. St. Paul did not worry about counting his “have’s” and “have not’s” in a spirit of grasping fear. He knew that God’s best for him was found daily abiding in Christ, trusting Him to provide exactly what he needed. Looking with envious eyes at what God blessed other believers was not only sinful, but also self-defeating and discouraging.

When the Lord works in your life with unpleasant circumstances and things you wish you could change, He does so with the purpose of refining your spirit and drawing you nearer to Him and into His purposes.

D. Overcoming discontentment

What things are you unhappy about in your own life? Do you find yourself always wishing you could trade places with someone else? That is the path to certain dissatisfaction and heartache.

An often-recommended remedy for a discontented spirit is “counting your blessings,” and that activity is good in one respect; it encourages you to number the things you consider positive. But thanksgiving does not go hand-in-hand with contentment. You can be grateful for all you have and still look wistfully over the fence.

Contentment is an attitude cultivated by consistent consideration of Christ’s certain provision. To conquer a spirit of discontentment, you must hand over your desires to God, acknowledging His power and His wisdom to satisfy what is best. No matter what your current condition is, you have this assurance from Psalm 16:5-6:

“Lord you have assigned me my portion and my cup; you have made my lot secure. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance.”

Applications (Philippians 4:6-7):

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

How to gain contentment:

- ✠ Pray: Prayer as an expression of personal worship. Talk to God and worship Him. Pray saying, “Lord, I am coming to You because You are omnipotent, and You know every thing. Lord I thank You that my life and my circumstances are in your hand.” We need to believe that God will live out His will in our circumstances.
- ✠ Tell Him how inadequate you are. Express your feeling by praying “I am coming to You Lord in a sense of helplessness.” When we are weak we can get the power of God.
- ✠ Thanksgiving as expression of faith. Pray saying “God in resting this in Your hand, I know that You are going to recognize the circumstances.”

The Contentment of God will build a wall or a fortress around your mind and it will keep you in perfect peace.

LESSONS FOR THE MONTH OF SEPTEMBER
(Starting with the Coptic New Year)

Week 2- Young People and The Life of Martyrdom

Week 3- The Troubles of The Adolescence Stage

Week 4- The First Epistle of Peter (I)

Week 2- Young People and Life of Martyrdom

Objective:

- Martyrdom in our life.

Memory verse:

“He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it” (Matthew 10:39).

References:

1. Martyrdom in Christianity- Anba Youanis.
2. Martyrdom and Testimony- Anba Bemin.
3. Extracts in the Feasts: Anba Bemin
4. The Spiritual Values of Nayrouz (The Coptic New Year, St. George Church, Sporting).

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 we ask ourselves, what is the secret behind this wonderful joy which seems extraordinary in position and timing?

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

A. The concept of suffering as a fellowship with Christ

- ✠ Expatriation and vanity of the world is 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. Ina.

B. 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?

II. Has the church given up bringing up 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?

III. 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. The only way for him to keep her away and to keep himself pure was cutting off his tongue with his teeth and spitting it to her face.
- † Here we say: What are our gains as Martyrs’ children? What distinguishes and characterizes our church to which we give the name of “The Church of Martyrs”?

IV. What are the blessings of martyrdom?

- † The Spiritual blazing flames of love that are not quenched in our hearts.
- † Testing the endurance of the faithful and declaring and testing their glory as the gold is tested by fire (1 Peter 1:7).
- † Martyrdom was a living preaching that brought many sons to the church (1 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 arranges occasions and rites to honor them.

V. 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 and over which altars are built.
- † Sanctifying the places where they dwelt and which witnessed their testimony. St. Macarius the great used to visit the two martyrs Maximus and Domadius together with other visitors with whom he used to talk saying, “Let us have a look at the place where the young strangers martyred”.

Week 3 - The Features of the Adolescence Stage

Objective:

Get the youth to be aware of the physical, emotional and psychological changes they go through during that period of their life

Get them to know the problems that might face and how to deal with them

Memory verse:

“Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth” (Ecclesiastics 12:1).

References:

1. Christian Education.
2. Service and the Teacher (Ministry and Minister) Mr. Fawzy Nimr.
3. Problems of Maturity. Mr. Abdel Monem el Zyadi.
4. Education Psychology. Dr. Ahmed Zaid Salih.
5. Christ and Young People Parts 1&2, Dr. Nosehy Abdel Shihied.

Introduction:

This period is a transition stage from childhood with its innocence and simplicity to adulthood with its responsibilities and difficulties. This stage is characterized by radical changes in the life of young people. Such changes, which are physical and psychological, are an object of the mockery of others, which may cause the adolescent to show inappropriate conduct and unusual behavior owing to the clarity and clear obvious effect of such changes. The adolescent likes to be treated as adult and earnestly wishes to enjoy the characteristics of childhood. Thus they are in dire need of a spiritual guide, who has walked on the same route, has been acquainted with it and has gained experience and has digested it. This important stage in the young people life cycle draws the character and sets the way.

Lesson Outline:

I. Physical Changes

- ✠ The body grows up.
- ✠ The voice changes.
- ✠ The organs of the body change and the secretions of the ductless glands change.

II. Mental changes

- ✠ Growth of mental powers such as inference, understanding, memory, attention and criticism
- ✠ Growth in the preciseness of the senses such as feeling (touch), hearing and taste.

† The emergence of mental, motor and artistic abilities.

III. Emotional changes

A. Inclination to the other sex

B. The Spiritual guide should provide the adolescent with sound information and the adolescent should be disgusted at uncleanness. Being occupied in social services, or hobbies will help keep the teen distracted from wrong thoughts and ideas about sex. **Inclination to form groups of friends**

The adolescent needs the advice of his spiritual guide, his sound instructions to choose his friends from among those who enjoy certain characteristics such as spiritual values, suitable age, having approximately the same educational and social level, emotional balance, and self-consciousness.

B. Growth of self-consciousness and the need to be treated as a grown up

Adolescents may accept orders from their friends but may reject orders from elders. They may also be too sensitive for criticism and hence may criticize themselves severely. Continuation of these actions may degrade their self-esteem and cause them to fall into despair because of their morale and help them overcome their sins

C. Inclination to curiosity and discovery and practical experiments

Naturally teens have high interest in the world around them, however, it is the priest's or youth leader's duty to help them explore meaningful activities

D. Inner Anxiety

This inner conflict between their inclination to childhood and manhood , and between their inclination to the other sex and the restraints of society, result in their swinging between rebelliousness and calmness, optimism and pessimism, etc. The only way to secure their inner peace is to direct them to Christ the Prince of peace and to bring them to a life of repentance and fellowship with Christ. The Spiritual guide must open the door of hope for them and encourage them to repent and to lead a life of purity. Teens should be willing to accept the advice of those who are older than they are and more experienced than them. Here the importance of the role of the priest who receives their confessions emerges and his relationship with them is of utmost importance.

E. Inclination to humor and gaiety

The need to attend parties must be orientated to the right direction so that neither they nor the group of teens resort to inappropriate behavior.

F. Inclination to rebellion and desire for mending and improvement

To emphasize their self-assertion, they may rebel against their family if they disagree in their choice of clothes, friends, their pocket money or the way they study their lessons, etc. They may become self-absorbed if they cannot convince their family that their point of view is correct. They may rebel against the school regulations and may rebel against society and its traditions so they search for the mistakes of others. So we must set before them sound social ideals and make them feel that they have an effective role to play in the society they live in, a role in serving others and showing love to them. They must be warned to keep away from the currents of atheism, nihilism, misunderstanding freedom and love of appearance.

G. Inclination to show admiration for a hero and taking them as their idol

The ministry to young people should offer them good role models and examples of saints and their spiritual heroic deeds.

IV. The troubles of Adolescence

A. Introduction

Here we are going to investigate the troubles and problems of this stage *of* life. The factors we are going to speak about are: inclination to rebellion - inner anxiety - sexual abnormality - incorrect religiousness - sexual dream - love of appearance

B. Inclination to rebellion

- ✠ Rejecting the domination of parents, elder brothers, etc.
- ✠ Conflict between self-assertion and submission to society, family and school.
- ✠ Rejecting the domination of the family (in choosing their friends - clothes - appearance -the way of studying), they may become introvert if they cannot convince their family that their own point of view is right.

C. Cure

- ✠ Good, well-balanced treatment.
- ✠ Do not be strict in your treatment to them.
- ✠ Do not reproach but encourage.
- ✠ The practice of honoring their parents from childhood.

Setting sound positive social ideals and encouraging the adolescent to shoulder responsibility and play a part in their community and bringing them to Christ.

D. Sex troubles

- ✠ Wrong sex education at home and in school.
- ✠ The influence of the outer society upon the adolescent; the cinema - the press (newspapers) - the radio - books - dissolute sights - bad company.
- ✠ Physical differences and speedy growth. The adolescent should be soundly directed to the right way since the problem lies within "For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34, Luke 6:5).

Examples of sexual aberrations:

Masturbation: This causes psychological conflict between enjoyment and sense of guilt. It is a type of pleasure that is different from the sound natural one which may cause failure in married life and result in the adolescent introversion besides the hygienic and psychological injuries.

Cure:

The adolescent case should be thoroughly studied. The study should include family conditions and the psychological, sexual, hygienic, social and mental state of the adolescent.

Sound Sex Education:

- ✠ The life of fellowship with God at the hands of the spiritual guide and the priest who receives confession and through practicing spiritual life.

- ✠ Let the adolescents shoulder their social responsibility. Spend your spare time doing useful things, the club - hobbies - debates - journeys.
- ✠ Keep away from bad company and deviated sources of sex education.
- ✠ The door of repentance and hope should be opened before them and they should be encouraged to go on.

V. Religiousness: It is of three types

A. Doubt

They need a trustworthy person with whom they may discuss all matters in a friendly way.

B. Keeping to the letter of the law

Putting commandments into practice to the letter without regard to inner purity, which may result in a state of self-righteousness

C. Superficiality

Unstable imaginary emotions; monasticism and others. This needs the minister's submission to the will of God.

VI. Sexual dreams: These are of three types

A. Normal

Because of increase in secretion.

B. Lusty

As a result of the effect of the defiled thoughts. In this case the priest who receives confessions has a role to play in directing young people to the way of purity and following them up.

C. Psychic

This is because of fear of its occurrence but so long as the mind is pure and young people live in fellowship with God, they should not bother about that.

D. Love of appearance

Adolescents like to assert their personality so they must be soundly directed to society and different activities.

VII. Christ is the Center of True Dignity

One of the deep feelings of the adolescent is their sense of dignity and self-assertion. This sense may take the form of divergent behavior. Their desire is to get others to admire them, praise them and honor them but their faith in Christ as Father and their strong sense of this adoption grant them the true dignity (No longer do I call you servants... but I have called you friends), (you are God's temple and God's Spirit dwells in you). Their trust in Christ's love and care makes them renounce people's praise and respect "Let him who boasts, boasts of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:31).

VIII. Christ is the Center of True Freedom

Freedom is not, as some adolescents think, a release of the desires of the flesh, but freedom is a release of the spirit. Freedom does not mean loose clothes and long hair or indifference to the feelings of others and the social traditions. True freedom means being free from bad habits and mean desires "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful...all things are lawful unto me, but all

things are not expedient” (1 Corinthians 6:12). Christ did not give us the spirit of slavery; Christ gave us the spirit of freedom “Henceforth I call you not servants, but I have called you friends”, “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed” (John 8:36), “Stand fast therefore in the liberty where with Christ has made us free... Only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another” (Galatians 5:1,13). Christ makes us free from self-centered, inner desires and bad habits, which humiliate man and deform human nature, which God made. The adolescents may feel that confession and regular prayer limit their freedom and release but we assure them that this is the right way for the soul to be free and to be released from being enslaved to sin which is only erased through repentance and confession and here the adolescent discovers their real soul in the light of Christ and without deception. The person who does not follow Christ walks in darkness and does not know where to go as darkness makes their eyes blind. Christ alone with His care, concern and love for the human soul, which repents, can cure every weakness and heal every illness and purify the soul and free it from fear and anxiety and all the troubles from which the adolescent suffers.

IX. Christ is the Center of Power which the Adolescent Seeks

Christ in His death, resurrection and triumph over death raised us with Him. The young man should say, “I can do all things through Christ which strengthen me”. Christ is our helper and supporter in times of weakness and in temptation and the psychological troubles that afflict the adolescent. (Neither is there salvation in any other), (Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.)

X. Christ is the Center of Love, Kindness, Compassion and Security

He supports those who are tempted because He himself suffered pains. He walked for long hours to rescue the Samaritan Woman and the sick man of Bethesda.

Jesus says, “And him that comes to me I will not cast out.” “For he who touches you touches the apple of His eye” “It is I; be not afraid.” If the adolescents feel that Christ is with them, their anxieties and fears will be no more, thus they will say, “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me”, “The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous man runs into it and is safe”, “Perfect love casts out fear”.

XI. Christ directs and guides our sentiments and satisfies them

The adolescent’s sentiments may be contaminated by the desires of the flesh and be enslaved to emotions. The adolescent may yield to false misleading sentiments such as untrue love and pity. Christ alone can guide these sentiments to what is right, to good and the service of others so that man may know the value of his life (For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life?) (Shall I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute?) They are temples of the Holy Spirit. Christ sublimates our sentiments and instincts and directs them to righteousness by His wonderful light.

Week 4 - The First Epistle of St. Peter (I)

Objective:

Clarifying the true Christian dimensions offered to us in the New Testament through the Blood of Christ.

Memory Verse:

“But rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy” (1 Peter 4:13).

References:

1. The First Epistle of Peter, St. George Church. Sporting
2. The Studies of Dr. Maurice Tawadrous, The Coptic Orthodox Seminary
3. The Testing Fire. Fr. Marcos Daoud
4. Interpretation of William Parkley
5. Interpretation of the Catholic Epistle, Bishop Moussa.

Introduction:

The writer of this epistle is our teacher St. Peter whose name was Simon Son of Jonah or Cephas (1 Corinthians 1:12). His brother’s name was Andrew and was one of twelve apostles. He was a fisherman and Christ called him at Sea Galilee (Matthew 4:18)

He was known for his rash and zeal and his strong and weak characteristics are known to all. St. Peter was a married man. He preached among the Jews while Paul preached among the Gentiles (nations). Both were martyred in Rome during the reign of Nero.

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

Lesson Outline:

I. 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 Nero in 68 AD.

II. 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 advices directed to priests and the congregation.

Aim:

Showing the value of salvation introduced in the New Testament through the blood of Christ and how to obtain salvation and keep it

III. Contents

Chapter I

A. 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 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 us according to His foreknowledge

✠ The Holy Spirit has sanctified us for the purpose of our being obedient.

✠ The Son the Logos (the Word) redeemed 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 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 - He is also our great High Priest and our beloved dear Father. -and we are His sons and daughters

Verses 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 the flesh as Peter saw Him, yet through faith we believe in His existence, incarnation, resurrection and His Second Coming. Therefore we

love Him from all our heart because He first loved us. This faith in the Savior makes us rejoice greatly with unspeakable and glorified joy (1Peter 1: 9-10).

There is no other aim for us than to be 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 did not see, and to hear what we hear but 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 apostle 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 would come.

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.

IV. Responsibility: This is clear in Verses 13-24

We must set out 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 clay of His second Coming. Thus the way of the spiritual life is a matter of deep trust in grace with spiritual vigilance and struggle.

Do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance (verses 14-16). Obeying the commandments 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 becoming acquainted with the Savior. But the children of grace are commanded not to be content with the passive approach but they must practice the active approach, the practice of the Holy life.

A. Conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile (Verses 7-21)

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 redeemed us not with perishable things such as silver or gold but with the precious blood of the Savior, the Lamb of God who redeemed 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 incarnated, became man, died and rose from the dead for us.

B. Purify your souls by your obedience to the truth (Verse 22)

Christ is the Truth and whoever obeys Him and submits his life to Him, his soul will be purified and the Work of the Holy Spirit will sanctify his life. 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 are really the children of God, the spirit of love must fill our hearts and we must love one another earnestly.

C. The New birth (The Second Birth) (Verses 23-24)

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; 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.

D. 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.

V. 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 all the Christians are sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

“God’s own people.” This means that we are God’s people. He made us and we are His people we have been redeemed 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.

Man has freedom to accept or refuse the choice of the Lord.

Verses 6-8

He who believes in Jesus as a pure holy sacrifice for the life of the word does not fail. Faith in the Lord as Savior gives man everlasting life. Trust in the Lord as the chief cornerstone 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. Any one 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 advantage - although they make us alien and exiles in this world - yet they are originally set for the benefit of this world.

VI. Responsibility**A. Put away all sins****Verse 1:**

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.

B. Grow up by the Word of God

Verse 2:

He speaks to them as if they were new in faith. So he likens them to babes but when the faithful grow in their fellowship with God, they become adult and seek no milk but fatty food that suit the life of fellowship with God.

C. Bearing witness through the holy conduct.

Verse 11.

Then the apostle speaks about what Christians have to do towards holiness in life in refraining from the desire of the flesh and how their conduct should be appropriate so that God may be glorified through the deeds of His children.

VII. Submission to the civil authorities (verses 13-16)

The apostle draws their attentions to submit themselves to the civil authorities. Whether to the supreme ruler or to the governors of the provinces, 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 apostle advised the Christians to honor all men, to love the brotherhood, and to fear God.

VIII. 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 showing 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).

Application

First: Chapter One

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

Second: Chapter Two

- Are my pains due to personal attributes such as bad temper, pride or disobedience?
- 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?
- What is the concept of real freedom to me? (Verse 16)
- What is Christ's position in the up building of the church as the congregation of the faithful? Contemplate this point guided by the words of St. Peter the apostle.
- 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 St. Peter.
- Explain the concepts of obedience and freedom from the Christian point of view.

LESSONS FOR THE MONTH OF OCTOBER

Week 1- The First Epistle of St. Peter (II)

Week 2- Hope in The Life of Young People

Week 3- Submission-Depend Not on Your Own Understanding

Week 4- Discovering God's Will

Week 1 - The First Epistle of St. Peter (II)

Objective:

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

Memory Verse:

“For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the LORD is against those who do evil” (1 Peter 3:12).

References:

1. The Christian Family: Bishop Bemin.
2. Love as preparation for Pain: Mother Bacilla.
3. Pastorate by St. John Chrysostom.

Lesson Outline:

IX. I. Chapter Three: The Christian Family

A. The blessing

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

II. Responsibility

A. The duties of a wife

- ✚ Wives should submit themselves to their husbands. They should take Sarah, Abraham’s wife, as an 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.

B. 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 St. Peter says 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 unity of love here on earth, how can we form a unity in heaven?

C. The duties of individuals (Verses 8-18)

St. Peter the apostle advises the believers:

- † To have unity of spirit, love of the brethren, a tender heart and a humble mind.
- † Not to return evil for evil, but rather to do good and to seek peace.
- † Even if you do suffer for righteousness sake, you will be blessed in your hearts by Christ our Lord.
- † Have no fear.
- † Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, and do it with gentleness and reverence.
- † 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 our sins once for all that He might bring us to God through His death and resurrection.

III. Chapter Four: The Christian and Suffering**D. Endurance of Sufferings (Verses 12-19)**

- † 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 who shares the sufferings of Christ will obtain 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 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.

IV. Responsibility (Verses 7-11)

St. Peter advises the believers to watch for their conduct and behavior and to refrain from the desires of the flesh. He sees that faith in Christ who suffered when He was in the flesh is a weapon that makes us keep away from the sin.

The apostle gives the faithful these spiritual advices:

- † Keep sane and sober for your prayers for the end of all things is at hand.
- † Hold unfailing your love for one another since love overcomes a multitude of sins.
- † Practice hospitality ungrudgingly to one another.
- † As each have received a gift, employ it for one another as good stewards of God's various grace whether in uttering oracles or in rendering service in order that in everything God may be glorified.
- † Hymn (Verses 11, 19).

V. Chapter Five: Pastorate

A. The Blessing

- ✠ 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.

VI. The Responsibility

A. The duties of shepherds

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

VII. Exhortations to the congregation

- ✠ Submission in meekness.
- ✠ Obedience in love.
- ✠ Hymn (Verse 10)

Questions:

I. Chapter 3

- ✠ Examples of successful faithful families in the two Testaments (Abraham and Sarah - Noah and his family - Zechariah and Elizabeth - Ibrahim Al Gohary).

II. Chapter 4

- ✠ Examples of the life of martyrs and their piety (St. George - St. Demiana - the life of Job).

III. Chapter 5

- ✠ Examples of vigilant Shepherds (Pope Kyrellos - Fr. Bishoy Kamel).

Exercises:

- ✠ Our Teacher St. Peter established the foundation of the sound family relationships. Explain how these instructions solve the problems of the Christian family.
- ✠ Study the topic of bashfulness from a Christian prospective.
- ✠ Show what the apostle said about:
 - (a) Endurance of sufferings.
 - (b) Baptism.
 - (c) Christ descended into Hades.
- ✠ The First epistle of St. Peter was written so that the believers may stand firm before suffering Collect the verses that are about this subject and contemplate them for your private benefit.

- † The epistle is characterized by a great zeal for holiness. Show the instructions and exhortations concerning holiness and contemplate them for your own life.
- † “Be subject to every human institution for the Lord’s sake”. What did the apostle say about slaves, women and young people?
- † What are the instructions given by St. Peter the apostle about enduring sufferings?
- † Why does a believer refrain from the desire of the flesh?
- † What are the exhortations, which the apostle directed to the believers concerning their relationship with one another?

Choose some verses and write your contemplations on them.

Week 2 - Hope in The Life of Young People

Objective:

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

Memory Verse:

“Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Romans 5:5).

References:

1. Life and Hope-By Late Bishop Samuel, Bishop of Public, Ecumenical and Social Service.
2. Young people and Anxiety - Iris Nessesem Shenouda.

Lesson Outline:

I. 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. The correct answer is that God created us so that we might enjoy His love and the 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. We can make our own choice, to refuse or to accept. He supplied us with a map of the road as well as the rules. 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 weaknesses. 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 the continuity of my life in him (Psalm 23:4, Hebrews 13:8).

II. The effectiveness of Hope

A. 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 yet persistent (Romans 5:1-5).

B. Hope leads to psychological maturity

If the goal is supreme and distant, it will generate patience and endurance, and these in turn will help man to achieve maturity in thinking and feeling “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33).

C. Hope gives full perceptive and wide horizon

When we enjoy perfect hope, hope will give us full perspective amid wide horizon. Hope enables us to get out of the shell of self and egocentricity and selfishness into the domain of caring for and thinking of others –(our family - society and the whole world).

D. 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.

III. How to develop faith**A. Deepening of faith in God**

Hebrews 11.1, Ephesians 2:12

B. Meditation in God’s blessing

Meditation in God’s blessings 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.

IV. Membership in the church

The lonely isolated person will be overwhelmed by cries of despair, but if they belong to a group, the spirit of fellowship in the church will give them hope, they will meet those who will encourage and support them and their hope will service. In the church, the body of Christ, there is this fellowship at the highest level (1 Corinthians 12:26,27).

V. Expectation of eternal life (1 Corinthians 15:19)

When our hope and ambition seek the achievement of deeper and supreme goals, other than the earthly goals, then we expect 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:

- The Servant should explain that we are not mere flesh but also soul and mind that need hope to motivate us and strengthen us. Hope encourages us to continue our struggle and fight in this world.
- 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 due to the destructive powers which threaten the world.
- Emphasize the concept that the power of youth lies in the possession of the power of hope, which makes of them a force that carries the light of faith and construction as well.

Week 3- Submission – Depend not on Your Understanding

Objective:

The youth should train themselves how to seek, know, and submit to God's guidance and His will in their lives. They should learn when to stop and ask guidance rather than rush into the situation and depend on their own point of view. They should pray and consult their parents, father of confession, and spiritual guides.

Memory verse:

“There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Proverbs 16:25).

References:

1. Scriptures: Proverbs 16
2. “How can I make decisions” By Bishop Moussa (Bishop of Youth).
3. “Spiritual War fares” and “The Holy Spirit and His work in us” By Pope Shenouda III.
4. Songs and Praises: “O take my hand Dear Savior.”

Introduction:

Ask the class what their response or action would be if they were confronted with a situation, and they needed to take a decision affecting their future or others. Ask them what their reaction would be if they discovered, later on, that this decision was the wrong one, even though it appeared at the time to be the correct one.

Lesson Outline:

VI. A Story

Proverbs 28:26 “He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, but whoever walks wisely will be delivered.”

Let us read and examine the following story of **two young men** who wanted to become army officers:

Both believed that this was the only promising future for them. Both of them passed all the exams except one physical endurance test. They tried to get a waiver but failed. Both of them consulted their fathers of confession who advised them that it may be God's will not to have this job and to try another avenue.

One of them accepted this advice, as from God, and began to study medicine. The road for him was long (8 years), tough (many exams), and the pay at the end was not that good until he became board certified in which he was allowed to practice medicine.

The other youth refused the advice of his father of confession and went and pulled some strings, offered illegal gifts to top corrupted officers who then waived the physical endurance test and allowed this dismissive young man in. Within four years only, this man was commissioned as an

officer with good pay and a lot of prestige. This made his friend question himself if he had made the right decision.

During the following four years, the officer was surrounded by corrupted officers who dragged him gradually to their sinful ways. Knowing that he had joined the army this way, he justified what he was doing as being the norm. Nothing now could stop him. His father of confession's warnings fell on deaf ears. He was trapped and finally he ended up in prison (lost his liberty, pride and pay). He was stricken with a venereal disease as a result of his four-year relationship with sick women.

In the meantime, the officer's old friend (the young doctor) came to visit him in the prison. This doctor had just been accepted by the board and had also started to save some money to marry. Over the years, the girl, he was hoping to marry, married another person while he was building his future as a doctor. During that time he had asked his parents to help him marry her or at least be engaged to her, but they told him "this girl is not suitable for you" without giving him details. They knew about the girl (but preferred to keep it to themselves in order not to ruin her future). He reluctantly and sadly accepted his parents' objection. Sure enough the girl's marriage did not last long due to her bad temper, which she had hidden under a pretended smile and sweet talk.

- † Now who do you think is the winner, the officer or the doctor? The **officer depended on his own understanding and experience**, which for a long period, appeared to **satisfy all his dreams** and earthly desires. The doctor took the **rocky road**. He **lost** his bid for an officer's job, prestige and money, **spent most of his life studying** and **lost** his dream girl. One thing he didn't lose was **his dependence on God's guidance** that was perceived through his father of confession and family.
- † God created man as a free human being and gave him the opportunity to make his own decisions. Out of contentment, conviction, and love, man can unite his will with God's, or he can follow his own heart although "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?"(Jeremiah. 17:9).
- † Because **you are limited** in your mental abilities, executive ability, knowledge of your own good and limited in knowing the future, you have to take your daily life's decisions according to God's will through certain channels. Acquiring The Divine wisdom has characteristics listed by St. James as "pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy" (James 3:17). On the other hand, stubbornness can be portrayed as worshipping your own ego. It is "idolatry" (1 Samuel 15:23).
- † We are limited by human factors in decision making. These factors include:
The divine aspect of **Spirit** seeking to connect to God; the **Conscience** voice that comes from heaven; The gift of thinking (**Mind**); the **Soul** with its Instincts, Habits, Tendencies and Emotions; the **Body** with its weakness, strength, beauty ugliness, ...etc.; and **Society** (man is a social being by nature). They all can be in harmony if they come under the shadow of prayers.
- † Human nature needs a constructive mixture of both freedom and control, and thus we don't become careless by unlimited freedom or intensely frustrated by full control.

The controls that help us see if our choices and decisions are sound or not are:

- **The Holy Spirit** that pours light into our hearts so that we can differentiate between what is good for us and what is against us. When purified by the Holy Spirit, through prayers, the heart is freed from the corruption of sin, twisted motives, and self-centered will.
- **The spiritual father**, who should be a compassionate father and God's representative in the sacrament of penance, should be experienced, mature, and have the spiritual and wise voice.
- **Dialogue** with other loving family members, friends with constructive ideas, and church servants. Let's free ourselves from the prison of ego, discuss things calmly, be willing to be criticized and learn from others, and admit that it's possibly wrong. This does not mean that we have to discuss our affairs with everybody. The early fathers taught us: "do not unfold yourself except before someone **who can help you in your salvation**".

Application:

Do not restrict your vision by following your own heart and desires. When you pray and fast, recruit your father of confession, family, and spiritual guides to work for you. By doing this you are actually increasing your resources and not demeaning yourself. Sometimes you will receive undesired and unexplained answers from them. This may not make sense at the time, but will make a lot of sense later on. Remember, the time will come when we thank God for unanswered prayers more than the answered prayers.

Conclusion/Questions:

How can we know what God's will is? The Lord doesn't have to give us a miraculous or specific sign to reveal His will because He gave us His Holy Spirit to guide us. We should not rely on paranormal because this would make it easy for Satan to interfere and possibly tempting us with psychological self-deceit.

Does the Altar Lot work? The Apostles resorted to it before being filled with the Holy Spirit when there were: 1) Equal viable alternatives, 2) Complete sincerity and 3) No wavering after knowing the results (3 conditions).

Then how can I know? The decision should not contradict the commandments of the Bible. The course of circumstances will show God's intervention. Then God's guidance will be clear to you allowing the Holy Spirit to give you an inner peace.

Week 4 – Discovering God’s Will

Objective:

1. To appreciate the importance of seeking God’s will before every decision that we make.
2. To know how to make decisions according to God’s will.

Memory Verse:

“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)

References:

1. How to make decisions by H.G. Anba Moussa, the Bishop of Youth
2. Discovering God’s will By Ed Young-Winning Walk Ministries.

Introduction:

Everyday we face multiple decisions that challenge us in various aspects of our lives. Some decisions are big and some are small, but we always have to live with the consequences.

Many Christians make their plans and decisions like atheists, without reference to the Lord. They verbally profess to be Christians, but their lives are no different from those who deny God’s existence. But the Lord calls us to forsake practical atheism and puts feet to our verbal profession of faith.

So how do you know what to do? Our contemporary world provides us a dizzying abundance of choices and opportunities in our personal, family and public lives. Which option should we choose? Sometimes the choices for the Lord stand out starkly and we at least are aware of what we are supposed to do. But even when we know what we are supposed to do, our will to honor God often seems disabled. How do we follow through in obedience with the right choices? In our contemporary world, the choices for the Lord are not always clear. In our family, in our vocation, and in our community several tough options often confront us, and maybe none of them seem terribly clear. How does the Christian sift through shades of gray?

Lesson Outline:

I. God’s will has two aspects

One aspect is the revealed will of God and the other is the hidden will of God. What is the difference?

The revealed will of God is the Word of God, the Holy Bible.

The hidden will of God is His plan for each one of us that is not immediately evident on the pages of the scripture.

Many Christians agonize as they try to ascertain the hidden will of God for their lives, but the key is first obeying the revealed will. It is truly amazing how much God’s hidden will becomes apparent to us when we are faithful to follow Him in the things He has already revealed. Our Lord Jesus said:

“you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things” (Matthew 25:20). So, what is God’s revealed will for your life and my life?

First, God’s will is that you and I be saved. The only way to be in the middle of the Lord’s will for our lives is to be saved and be reconciled to God through Christ. His highest hope for you and I is to be in a loving relationship with Him every moment of every day.

Second, God’s will for us is to obey His commandments and love Him with all of our heart, mind and strength. The Holy Bible tells us that it is God’s will that we should avoid sexual immorality, and that we pray continually and give thanks in all circumstances (1 Thessalonians 4:3-5, 5:17-18). Also God’s will for all of us is to be spirit-filled (Ephesians 5:18). This means that we are to surrender our will to the Lord and let the Holy Spirit direct and empower us. God’s will for us is to obey scriptural commands.

But what about the situations where God does not specifically give a command? If you are unsure ask yourself these questions:

1. Will God be glorified if I choose this option?
2. Will people connected to this decision be strengthened in their faith or at least see a clear example of Godliness?
3. Would Our Lord Jesus do that?
4. Does this help me grow closer to the Lord?
5. Would I like this done to me or said about me?

II. Two important activities that help in making God’s desires your desires

- Prayer.
- Godly advice.

A. Prayer is one way the Holy Spirit works (John 16:13)

Godly counsel is important in seeking to discover God’s hidden will. Ask your father of confession a Sunday School Servant, or a trusted friend in church. The Holy Bible tells us that the church (all believers) is the body of Christ, and the Lord often works His blessings in our lives through other parts of the body. However, be careful whom you ask. Make sure you know that the individuals that you solicit advice from are trustworthy, mature, loving and true Christians. Seeking Godly counsel does not mean that you do exactly what they tell you but it does mean that you give serious consideration and weight to their advice.

III. Waiting and Fearing God’s Will

Waiting is a difficult but important part of seeking God’s will. Many of us have been conditioned by society to expect results right away. We are impatient in waiting for the Lord’s direction on important decisions in our lives. However, God tells us to wait upon Him: “Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the Lord! ” (Psalm 27:14). He is very concerned about our character, not just our clarity in decision-making. Often we find that the very process of waiting illuminates selfish, demanding areas of our hearts, which God can purify and cure.

Also some people express anxiety about God’s will that it may not be according to their will and that will make them miserable. Fearing to submit to God’s will shows that we don’t know the

goodness of God and His love for us. The Lord knows us perfectly. He knows our physical, mental and emotional make-up and needs. He knows our hopes, dreams, and fears. He knows all the good and bad in us and He loves us utterly the whole time. God's desire is for our best. In fact, **He wants what is best for us more than we do!** *“If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!”* (Matthew 7:11).

Conclusion:

When you pray, “Lord, I am yielding my will to yours. I relinquish my own selfish plans and accept whatever you have for me,” the Lord becomes exalted because He can bring more blessing and joy in your life more now than ever before. The one place in the universe where your fears must flee forever is in the center of our loving God's will. It doesn't get any better than this.

Application:

- Search the Bible for the acceptable prayers in the Old and New Testament and look for the way they were worded.
- Identify Bible personalities that submitted completely to God's will and contemplate on the outcomes in their lives.

LESSONS FOR THE MONTH OF NOVEMBER

Week 1- The Christian and Mammon

Week 2- Abortion

Week 3- The Epistle of St. Paul to the Ephesians

Week 4- Forgiveness

Week 1 - The Christian and Mammon (Money)

Objective:

Using money wisely.

Memory Verse:

“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24).

References:

- James 1:9-11, 2:1-7, 5:1-6
- The Book: God and Money

Introduction:

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

Love of money is a sin that leads to other sins as St. Paul the apostle said, “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil” (1 Timothy 6:10).

Love of money leads to exploitation - injustice - stealing - covetousness - telling lies - murder and hypocrisy (Ahab and Jezebel and Naboth of Jezreel, 1 Kings 21:1-16, 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).

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 free of charge (Refer to Matthew 10:8).

When money becomes the sole object of man, man becomes anxious about worldly affairs (The rich fool). Some people of the church did not concern themselves at all with money and led a monastic life (The story of St. Arsenius 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. This approach was explained by Christ 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.

I. Christian's attitude towards money

1. Wise use of money.
2. How to gain money.

We shall explain each point in detail:

- ✠ The Lord Christ throughout 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 unjust steward) (Luke 16:1-12). 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 kingdom 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 if he is to be given the full right to enter the eternal kingdom of God; as the Lord, in His 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.
- ✠ The church fathers 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 she forbids storing it, as storing money leads people to trust 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).
- ✠ The Second part of our research deals 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 refused 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.

Week 2 - Abortion

Objective:

1. To understand the position of the Orthodox Church regarding abortion.
2. To know how to react towards the different opinions in the society regarding abortion.

Memory Verse:

“Can a mortal be more righteous than God” (Job 4:17).

References:

1. Article by Anba Sarapion in St. John Magazine
2. <http://www.lacopts.org/Perspectives/index.htm>
3. Questions and answers by H. H. Pope Shenouda

Introduction:

Termination of pregnancy occurs for various reasons. When there are either maternal or fetal factors, which cause termination of pregnancy without human intervention, then it is referred to as “spontaneous abortion”. It can also result from trauma to the mother as a result of an accident, or due to other reasons. However, sometimes termination of pregnancy is due to human intervention because of the woman’s choice to abort by request or consent.

Lesson Outline:

We now pose this question: **Is it a woman’s right to have an abortion?**

Under normal circumstances, pregnancy, despite its pains, brings to the expecting mother joy, which is complete with the birth of her baby. Although a woman experiences labor pain, yet all is forgotten once she gives birth to a new human being.

The question then is: Why would a mother refuse to carry full term and give birth? There must be reasons for this refusal.

In our discussion about the reasons, let us bear in mind that the decision to have an abortion is very serious and has religious implications. This decision affects the life of a new human, the fetus, regardless whether he is a few days (an embryo) or a few weeks. The Church believes that life begins at the moment of conception and the fetus is regarded as a living being who has the right to both life and dignity.

How can a mother, a physician, or anyone agree to participate in ending the life of a living being by having an abortion? From the religious perspective, this cannot be accepted unless the continuation of pregnancy threatens the life of the mother, and the only solution is “therapeutic abortion”. But we thank God, that as a result of medical advances; these cases are very rare now.

Let us discuss the reasons that may force a woman or a family to consider abortion:

I. As a means of family planning

Granted that family planning has become essential due to the economic and social hardships, yet abortion as a means of birth control is rejected religiously. Some Eastern European countries such as Russia and Romania have witnessed an increase in the number of abortions due to the economic hardships these countries face. As a result of repressive and atheist regimes for many years, the citizens of these countries have minimal or no religious background. Nowadays, the Church in these countries is actively trying to alert the people's conscience and instill awareness in them to avert from abortion as means of solving some of their economic problems.

Couples may choose to use natural or artificial means of birth control. But despite the various contraceptive methods, none has been proven to be absolutely 100% effective; each has a failure rate. Therefore, a couple may find themselves facing a situation, which they are unprepared for economically. Also, their economic or social situation may not allow them to have a new child. What should they do? Unfortunately, some resort to abortion as a means of ending an undesirable pregnancy.

We must point to the seriousness of this gravely erroneous solution. From a Biblical and Christian perspective, abortion is an interruption of human life and therefore is considered murder. All the arguments made in our permissive and secularized society cannot justify it. So, regardless of the circumstances of the mother, in particular, or the family, in general, resorting to abortion in order to solve a problem is wrong, even if it is in the initial stages of pregnancy. It also indicates that this family lacks faith and confidence in God. Many families have faced similar situations, but accepted it with faith and trusted God; they regarded the new child as a gift from God and submitted to His will. Eventually, their circumstances got better and the new child, who was originally unwanted, became a source of joy and blessing to the entire family.

II. As a means of concealing sin

Throughout history, women have used abortion to terminate unwanted pregnancies, especially when it is a young, unmarried woman, who may have sinned with a man and became pregnant. Out of fear that her act may be discovered, she might think of having an abortion. Her family members and even her church friends and servants may approve of her decision and even encourage it.

We must understand that one of the basic rules in trying to live a spiritual life is not hiding one sin by committing another one, even if the intentions are good and needs are compelling. Knowing the harsh circumstances the young woman will face and the ordeal she will go through makes her relatives and the church eager to help her. Yet, this does not justify resorting to abortion as a solution. There are other means of helping and caring for the unwed, pregnant women; we will not discuss them now since circumstances vary with each case. The one thing that is absolutely certain is: abortion is not a solution and should not be an option.

III. As a means of showing mercy towards an abnormal fetus

Every family hopes for a child that will be fully healthy both physically and mentally. The birth of a child, which has a congenital disease or a physical or mental defect, is an ordeal that the family will have to cope with. To endure the situation, they need very strong and deep faith, as well as encouragement and support from others.

Nowadays, with all the medical advances, physicians can inform the mother if the fetus has congenital disease, a physical anomaly, or a mental defect. Still, medicine cannot discover all cases of birth defects, and the certainty of what is revealed varies from one case to another. Obviously, these

medical advances create a dilemma for some families. The foreknowledge that the expected child will certainly be born with a physical or mental defect accompanied by the fact that there is no cure, created a very difficult situation for the family. Should the family resort to abortion as an act of mercy towards the fetus, which will suffer, through no fault of his own, after his birth? How about mercy for the family members?! Indeed, it is an extremely difficult position.

To help such a family make a religiously sound and correct decision, let us imagine that they did not know the baby's birth defect before hand. Suddenly, they find themselves facing an innocent newborn with a physical anomaly or a mental defect. What then? Naturally, they will suffer with the baby, but they will do everything possible to care for their newborn infant. They might seek help from specialty treatment centers in an attempt to find a cure for the baby's condition and to make his life comfortable. But will they resort to killing the newborn to relieve him and themselves of misery? We cannot believe that anyone with an alert conscience and a spiritual background would agree to the idea of murder.

No one is justified in killing an innocent newborn because of a birth defect, even if mercy and compassion are the reasons behind it. If we agree on this principle, then we can move on to the next question, which is: Do we believe that a fetus is a human life? Also, do we believe that our foreknowledge of a physical or mental genetic malformation does not change the fact that the fetus is a living being? The Voice of God within us says, "If we agree on abortion we are not absolved."

IV. As a woman's right to choose

In our society, the "Pro-Choice" groups, which are mainly part of the feminist movement, call for a woman's right to have an abortion based on their belief that it is woman's right to continue with pregnancy or terminate it. On the other hand, the "Pro-Life" groups refuse abortion based on the right of life of the unborn.

From a religious standpoint, we cannot agree that one human being's freedom can be based on denying another human beings his rights. We cannot agree on a woman's right to choose at the expense of denying life to another human being, i.e. the fetus in her womb. There are limits to our actions towards our body and our organs. These limits are even more when another living being is involved!

Therefore, in this case, a woman's freedom of choice should be prior to conception and not after. A woman has the right to marry or not marry. Even after marriage, she has a certain degree of freedom to choose to become pregnant or not. Freedom of choice is prior to conception and not after.

Conclusion:

Abortion is termination of a human soul and should not be considered except if the life of the mother is in danger or will terminate if the fetus is not aborted. The life of the mother is selectively preserved instead of the fetus because she is important for the integrity of the family and can have other babies in the future, while the preservation of the fetus will start a life without a mother.

Application:

Search for verses in the Bible to indicate the presence of life as a baby is conceived.

Week 3 - The Epistle of St. Paul to the Ephesians

Objective:

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

Memory Verse:

“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Ephesians 4:4-6).

References:

- Interpretation of the Epistle to the Ephesians. St. Mary Church, Sporting
- Interpretation of the Epistle to the Ephesians. Fr. Ibrahim Saeed

Lesson Outline:

I. The city of Ephesus and its church

- ✠ 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 the 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 magician's books.

II. General characteristics of St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians

- ✠ 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 is positive and didactic.

III. Topics and Sections of the Epistle to the Ephesians

This epistle is about the work of the Holy Trinity in the church. It is divided into:

A. First: The Didactic Section:

- Chapter 1. God loves 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.

B. Second: The Application Section:

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

Chapter 5. The believers’ duties lie in refraining from sins and abiding by holiness in their life.

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

IV. Basis of the Christian Unity as presented in the Epistle to the Ephesians

A. Does this unity contradict the diversity of gifts?

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.

V. A comparison between the attributes of the ancient man and those of the new man

The Ancient Man	The New Man
Refers to the behavior of gentiles before the faith in Christ.	Like God in righteousness, holiness and truth.
He behaves according to his worthless.	His mind is made completely new thoughts.
He is completely ignorant and stubborn.	He refrains from lying, anger and has lost all feeling of shame.
He has no part in the life that God gives.	He does not use harmful words.
He is completely ignorant.	He does not give the devil a chance.
He gives himself over to vice.	He does not make God’s Holy Spirit sad for the Spirit is God’s mark on him.

VI. The Spiritual Armor

The Epistle to the Ephesians 6:10-18.

Week 4 – Forgiveness

Objective:

The objective of this lesson is to understand our responsibility as Christians to forgive others and also the personal benefits in forgiving others when they trespass against us.

Memory Verse:

- *“For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you”*
(Matthew 6:14).

References:

- Matthew 18:21-35.
- The Orthodox Bible interpretations of the parable.
- Healing for Damaged Emotions by David Seamands.
- Illustrations Stories and Quotes to Hang Your Message on by Jim Burns and Greg McKinnon.

Introduction:

The year was 1947. It was almost two full years after the liberation of Auschwitz (a Nazi concentration camp), as Corrie Ten Boom stepped forward to share the message of forgiveness and healing at a German church. As she stepped forward she prayed that God would use her words to bring about healing, forgiveness and restoration. What she was about to experience changed her life forever.

As she finished her message, a man stepped forward, moving his way through the crowd of people there to talk to Corrie. He looked familiar, like she'd seen him somewhere before. As she looked into his eyes, it all became crystal clear. She recognized him...the uniform...the whips...walking past him naked at the selection. She remembered her sister dying a slow and painful death at his hands. The memories came flooding back to her... memories from Auschwitz and this man who had been a guard at the camp.

“I’m a Christian now.” He spoke with his eyes sadly looking into hers. “I know that God has forgiven me, but will you forgive me?” He stretched out his hand to receive hers.

She stood there for what must have seemed an eternity, although it was probably only a moment or two. She knew that she needed to make a choice. Would she forgive the man at whose hand she experienced so much hurt, pain and humiliation? Would she? Could she?

“Jesus, I need your help. I can lift my hand, but you need to supply the feeling.” She slowly raised her hand, reached out to the man and took his hand in hers. As she reached out, a warm sensation filled her heart. God was indeed faithful. “I forgive you, brother-with my whole heart!” she responded (Burns and McKinnon 179-180).

What would you have done if you were in the place of this woman, would you have done the same thing she did? As human beings we would even understand if she would not forgive him, we would say it is hard to do and we would feel sorry for her. However, as Christians, Jesus Christ asks us to

forgive others. But why does Christ demands that we forgive others and what is the importance of forgiveness? Also, what does it imply to refuse forgiving others when they have trespassed against us? These are the questions that we will answer through this lesson.

Lesson Outline:

Jesus Christ answered these questions through the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18:21-35)

“Then Peter came to Him and said: Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times? Jesus said to him: I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. The servant therefore fell down before him, saying: Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all. Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt. But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii’s; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying: Pay me what you owe! So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying: have patience with me, and I will pay you all. And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. Then his master, after he had called him, said to him: You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you? And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.”

What’s the importance of forgiving others? It is plain and simple if we do not forgive others, God will not forgive us.

I. Understanding the Parable

It is quite interesting to understand the meaning of this parable; it will explain many aspects of forgiveness from Christ’s perspective:

- ✠ It turns out that what the unforgiving servant owes the king is equivalent to \$10 million!! At that time, a servant’s wage would be a denarius a day, so even if a servant works all his life, he would not be able to pay off his debt. Thus the lord commanded him to be sold and his family. But still that would probably not pay off the debt.
- ✠ The break that the unforgiving servant asked for was a lot less in value than what the master granted him. For example, the servant offered to be sold along with everything he had and his family, and he asked for more time to pay the king back, but the master offered him freedom that the servant would have never dreamed of.
- ✠ When the forgiven servant did not forgive the other servant, the forgiving and compassionate king transformed into a rough and strict king for the sake of disciplining the unforgiving servant.

- ✝ Also, what the unforgiving servant owed, \$10 million denarii, if compared to what his fellow servant owed him, \$100 denarii, shows that no matter how much we have to forgive others, it is nothing compared to how much God has forgiven us.
- ✝ In addition to eternal death, the punishment for being unforgiving to others could be experienced during our lives on earth. For example, usually an unforgiving soul is one that is quick to anger, feel guilty, and conflict with its own self.
- ✝ God intended for mankind to be loving and full of grace, therefore, that is the healthiest state and the most comfortable for human nature. In the story of the German prisoner and guard, when the two shook hands and made up, it was mentioned that “[they] both healed and set free from the bondage of bitterness and anger” (Burns and McKinnon 180). That means that we will experience a special feeling of self-gratification when we pardon others.
- ✝ The importance of forgiveness is also reinforced in the Lord’s prayer, “and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” Anba Abraam of Fayoum was approached one day by some people, who were in disagreement, and when they refused to forgive each other and forget the past, Anba Abraam asked them to pray and each one goes his way. During the prayer, Anba Abraam said, “and forgive us not our trespasses for we are not forgiving the trespasses of others.” At that point these people were touched and they grieved for being so stubborn and unloving.

II. What does it imply when we cannot forgive others?

It could actually mean that we are not accepting God’s forgiveness. This could be explained further through the parable. As mentioned above, what the unforgiving servant asked for was totally different from what the master was willing to give him. The master offered a far better deal than the servant had ever hoped for. Even when the servant was pardoned, he still did not comprehend the extent of the master’s mercy. This is shown in the way that the unforgiving servant treated his fellow servant, who owed him 100 denarii. Let’s ask ourselves a challenging question. How could we repay God for forgiving us? Can we? Well, the answer is easy to say but hard to comprehend and apply to our lives: God’s forgiveness is free, and no matter what we do, we will never be able to repay the value of this forgiveness!! The only thing that the master asks us to do in return is to forgive others the same way He forgave us.

Application:

- Make sure before taking communion that you are in good standing with all your brothers and sisters in Christ at least in your heart.
- Make a list of people that you are awaiting to forgive and pray that God would help you in forgiving them. Notice the peace and freedom that you experience as a result of reconciling with these people.

Conclusions/Questions:

Now that we know the importance of forgiving others and its positive effects in our lives, it is important for us to note that the only way we can forgive is through God’s grace. It is very hard for mankind to set pride aside and forgive others when they are mistreated. Therefore, just like the German former prisoner did and asked God to help her, we need to ask God. God is faithful, and He

will help us because He wants us to be in peace with others. I pray that the Lord help us stay in harmony and fellowship with everyone and help us forgive others just as He forgave us.

LESSONS FOR THE MONTH OF DECEMBER

Week 1- Kiahk Praises

Week 2- Friendship

Week 3- The Parable of The Ten Virgins

Week 4- Fun and Joy

Week 1- Kiahk Praises

Objective:

- Introduce the concept of praise.
- Give a quick idea about the parts of the midnight praises.
- Explain what happens in the praises of the month of Kiahk.

Memory Verse:

“Praise God in all His saints” (Psalm 150:1).

References:

1. The Kiahk Psalmody
2. <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/9011/kiahk10.html>

Introduction:

I. Kiahk Praises

During the month of Kiahk, we celebrate the Nativity fast with special praises called the Kiahk Praises. The Kiahk Praises have a special Psalmody book called the “Kiahk Psalmody”. These praises consist of 4 Hoases and 7 Theotekias (Praising the Virgin Mary), so we call it “Seven and Four”.

II. Praising

- Saint Basil the Great said that praising attracts the service of the angels because this is part of their job and they come closer to those who do the same.
- Hymns are a delightful, enjoyable means of worship and spiritual exaltation similar to that of the angels.
- Coptic singing is not ordinary; it is analogous to conversing with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Lesson Outline:

I. Praising St. Mary

The Virgin Mary, the Mother of Light, is celebrated all through the month of Kiahk. Kiahk starts on December 11 and ends with the celebration of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ on the 28th of Kiahk the 7th of January.

During this Month, which is part of the 43 days of Nativity Fast, the Church changes the tune of singing into the Kiahk tune, a joyful tune that underlines the Church’s feelings about the importance of Christ’s incarnation, as the first step in the journey of salvation. God chose St. Mary to bear His Incarnate Word. Thus she is rightly, as the Church Fathers called her from the early centuries of Christianity, the Mother of God (Theotokos).

II. Why do we praise St. Mary?

St. Mary is the first among all on earth and in heaven to become worthy of praise. She was born like us, a human condemned to eternal death because of sin, but the Holy Spirit descended on her and the power of The Most High overshadowed her and made her worthy to carry the Incarnate Word in her womb.

That is also why the introduction to the Creed of faith was added in the Council of Ephesus: “We magnify you O Mother of the True Light, and **glorify** you O Virgin Saint Mother of God because you bore for us the Savior of the world. He came and saved our souls...”

III. The Midnight Praises

It consists of the following:

A. The First Hoas

It is the praise of Moses the Prophet after crossing the Red Sea (Exodus 15). “Let us praise the Lord for with glory He is glorified...”

B. The Second Hoas (Psalm 135)

“Give thanks to the Lord for He is good, for His mercy endures forever”. It is the praise of thanksgiving, which the Church offers to God for the sake of His love for us.

C. The Third Hoas

It is the praise of the three saintly youths in the fiery furnace. This is sung by the church with the tune of joy in order to reveal to us that the fire of the world is necessary for the trials of the church, but God is in the midst of the furnace changing the fire into cool dew.

D. Congregation of the saints

We ask the saints to pray for us so that God may forgive us our sins.

E. The Fourth Hoas (Psalms 148, 149, 150)

It is all about praise. Praise is the work of the angels, and the continuous act of the church in heaven, and the act of His saints and the succession of animals, plants, and material things.

F. Psali

Connected with the four Hoases and the seven Theotokias are seven Psalis. The word “Psali” means a hymn. This is a prayer to our Lord Jesus Christ. For example, in the Psali for Sunday, every verse ends saying, “My Lord Jesus Christ, help me”.

G. Theotokia

This glorifies St. Mary the mother of God (the Theotokos). Again we have a different one for every day of the week.

IV. In the Month of Kiahk

Extra parts are added to the midnight praises in the month of Kiahk mainly Coptic Psalis and Arabic hymns.

These are not very old. Their composers usually signed their names in Psalis titles, in the last verse or the first character in each verse consequently to form their names. We can find names like H. H. Pope Marcos VIII who was Pope until the beginning of the 19th century.

V. How should we praise in the church?

- Hymns are a delightful means for worship.
- Worship should not be changed to just a ritual.
- A loud voice in praises is not the way of the angels. But it is a means by which the enemy misleads us so that by doing so, we lose the tranquility of the hymn and its magnificence.
- Use all the senses like raising of hands, heart and thoughts. Tunes should express the depth of the soul more than expressing words.

Application:

Come and attend midnight praises in the church especially during the month of Kiahk.

Conclusion/ Questions:

Truly, the successful Kiahk evening gathering transforms the church to be part of heaven.

Week 2 - Friendship

Objective:

Proper behavior in society: Distinguishes between your friends and when you choose the good one. Don't involve yourself in relationships that may lead to destruction.

Memory Verse:

"He who loves purity of heart and has grace on his lips, the king will be his friend" (Proverbs 22:11).

References:

- The Proper Behavior in a mingled Society: (Bishop Athanasius)
- The Social Life from an Orthodox Perspective: (Bishop Bemini)
- Questions about mingling between the two sexes: (Mr. Ramsis Naguib)

Introduction:

Cicero said, "Tell me about your friends, I tell you about personality." Man is unconsciously affected by his friends.

Lesson Outline

I. 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 who has approximately the same attitudes I have, is of nearly the same age, social rank, and behaves similarly.

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 education and social rank, they accompanied each other on the way of salvation.

II. 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, "*Do not be deceived: Evil company corrupts good habits" (1 Corinthians 15:33).* The bad friend may cause his friend to indulge in bad habits such as smoking, drinking, going to places of immoral entertainment, gambling and sometime committing crimes as St. Augustine's friends once did.

III. How to choose your friends

- ✠ You have to like them and be on good terms with them 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”.
- ✠ Their behavior should be characterized by the spirit of holiness in talks, meetings, and short excursions and in play.
- ✠ They should be characterized by Christian attributes such as honesty “*The mouth of the righteous utters wisdom, and his tongue speaks justice*” (Psalm 37:30) “*For my mouth will utter truth; wickedness is an abomination to my lips*” (Proverbs 8:7).
- ✠ They should be characterized by self-control (eye - tongue - thought).
- ✠ They should be of sound judgment and good reputation. They should not be gesturing or reckless.
- ✠ They should sincerely love God and people. David lamented for Jonathan saying, “*Your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women*” (2 Samuel 1:26).
- ✠ They should be assiduous in their work and studies.
- ✠ They should have the same attributes.
- ✠ There should be conformity between you in age, in academics, and in social and spiritual level.

IV. 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”.

V. How to Preserve Friendship

- ✠ Friendship should be free from opportunism and selfishness so that it may be long lasting. It should be based on sacrifice and self-sacrifice.
- ✠ There should be mutual respect, serious and frank talk without reproach or violence with gentle treatment aiming at all spiritual benefits.
- ✠ Friendship should be created upon Christ and it should aim at salvation and spiritual growth.
- ✠ Forgive your friends when they sin against you, “How often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?”
- ✠ Defend your friends in their absence and reveal them. Don’t give ear to slander. Contemplate how St. Peter spoke about St. Paul (2 Peter 3:5).
- ✠ Give earnest advice to your friends and guide them to what is right. Contemplate the talk between Christ and the workers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20).
- ✠ Do not impose your ideas on them and criticize them, only constructively.
- ✠ Refrain from harmful jesting.
- ✠ Sympathize with them in all circumstances “*Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep*” (Romans 12:15).

Application:

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

Week 3 - The Parable of The Wise and Foolish Virgins

Objectives:

1. To understand the symbols behind this parable.
2. To learn how to relate it to our own lives.

Memory Verse:

“Love never fails” (1 Corinthians 13:8).

References:

- The Gospel of St. Mathew- Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty
- The Ten Virgins- H.H. Pope Shenouda III

Introduction:

- ✠ Read Matthew 25:1-13
- ✠ The church arranged for this chapter to be read everyday during the first watch of the midnight Agpeya prayer to teach us that we need to be prepared for the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Lesson Outline:

- This parable illustrates lack of preparation for the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- The prophets of the Old Testament portray the covenant between God and Israel as a marriage covenant. This parable shows that the marriage will finally be consummated when the Bridegroom returns at the end of times and the righteous form a wedding party to go forth and meet Him. The Bridegroom represents Our Lord Jesus Christ in His Passion, who dies out of love for His church (Orthodox Study Bible).
 - ✠ **Oil:** Symbolizes the good works of the Holy Spirit. A believer through the Holy Spirit gives his senses to the groom (Christ) by faith that works through **love**.
 - ✠ **They all slumbered and slept:** Both the wise and the foolish virgins slumbered and slept. The wise virgins were prepared to receive the Bridegroom and were able to rest. Their refusal to give the foolish virgins oil does not show a lack of love. Spiritual preparedness cannot be given or borrowed. If we do not prepare ourselves spiritually for the Second Coming of Our Lord Jesus Christ, we will be just like the five foolish virgins who were not ready for the Bridegroom’s coming and were not allowed into the wedding party.
 - ✠ **Give us some of the oil:** an indication that good works can save the person who does them. They cannot be lent to others and after death the time for good works has ended. *Therefore repent oh my soul as you dwell on earth for dust does not give praise and among the dead no one remembers and in Hades no one give thanks (Compline agpeya prayer)*

- † **I do not know you:** For those who lived with God on earth and had a fellowship with Him, eternity is just a continuation of their life on earth. Whereas for those who did not have fellowship with God, it is not surprising that God tells them He does not know them.
- † St. Augustine teaches us that this parable does not apply to those who committed themselves to a life of celibacy only but for every one in the church.
- † **Number 5=** five senses. Therefore any one who is able to control his senses (sight, hearing, tasting, touching and smelling) carries the title “virgin”.
- † **Virgins:** Virginitiy has also been considered a special “lamp”.
- † If good works were worthy of praise, why would five of them be accepted and the other five rejected? The oil distinguishes between them. The oil is a great thing; it is the “love—the grace of the Holy Spirit. *And yet I show you a more excellent way. Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels but have no love, I have become ...* (1 Corinthians 12:31-13:1).
- † St. Augustine explains that the foolish therefore resemble those who committed themselves to the life of celibacy but did so in order to please men rather than to please God. They carry their lamps so that men would praise them but inside, they lack the oil that God sees in the heart.
- † St. Jerome cautions us that one may loose his virginitiy just by a thought. Therefore the evil virgins are those who are physically virgins but lack the spiritual virginitiy of the soul, those are the foolish who lack oil, and therefore are cast out by the groom.

Week 4 - Fun And Joy

Objective:

1. To be able to differentiate between the acceptable forms of godly fun or joy.
2. To learn that Christianity is the greatest source of joy in our lives.

Memory Verse:

“ Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say rejoice” (Philippians 4:4).

References:

- An article by Fr. Antonios Hanna, St. Mary and Archangel Michael Church, Orlando, Florida in St. Mary monthly review- The Coptic Diocese of the Southern U.S. magazine Vol. 12, December 1995, Page 11.
- Worshiping the Devil by Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty.

Introduction:

“Wow!” “It is fun”. “It is cool.” We hear these expressions among youth frequently. They’ve become one of the most widely used expressions among the youth in their daily life. Most youth believe that the religious people are boring and weird people. Some times when we ask young people to do something in the church, they always say “No! It’s boring; it’s not fun.” I keep asking myself, “What is the relationship between boredom and religion, and between fun and evil? Is there any correlation between the two?”

Lesson Outline:

Before we answer this question we need to define exactly what we mean by “fun” and “cool”. Webster’s Dictionary defines the word “fun” as “the act that brings enjoyment and joy”. According to this definition, every act that brings joy or happiness to the person is considered fun. Now the most important question we need to ask ourselves is this: “Is Christianity against fun? Are fun people less spiritual than boring people?! Can any person be very religious and be a fun person, too?”

To answer the first question we need to know what is the opinion of the Bible regarding this issue. For example, in the book of Deuteronomy, God ordered His people to rejoice and to celebrate when they reached the Promised Land: *“And you shall rejoice before the Lord your God in all to which you put your hands” (Deuteronomy 12:18).* If we read the story of Nehemiah, after he built the wall of Jerusalem, he said to his people *“Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength. So the Levites quieted all the people, saying: Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved” (Nehemiah 8:10-11).* Jesus Himself, rejoiced and was filled with joy when the disciples came back from their first mission and they found that they overcame devil: *“In that hour Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit and said: I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight” (Luke 10:21).* Jesus promised us that upon His second coming we will be rejoicing: *“Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and*

your joy no one will take from you” (John 16:22). And it will be eternal joy and happiness. This sounds like fun to me. Therefore:

I. The Bible is not against joy or having fun

What attracts me the most is the verse from Nehemiah, when he said to his people “This day is holy to our Lord. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength. The Levites calmed all the people.” If we accurately now define fun, it would say, “Any act that brings joy is considered fun”; and Nehemiah here relates joy with holiness. Yes, holiness brings joy as he told them not to grieve because it is a sacred day.

The key is this: most people confuse fun with sin. People think sin is always fun or the only way to have fun is to sin. What can sin do to a person? Mainly cause guilt and fear. Sin never brings joy to any person. We agreed that any act that does not bring joy to the person is not fun, then:

II. Sin is not fun at all

What about drinking or smoking drugs? According to the users of these things, they bring enjoyment to them. But are they fun? Or are they a sin? The Bible said it clearly in Isaiah 22:13: “But instead, joy and gladness, slaying oxen and killing sheep, eating meat and drinking wine: Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!” Sounds fun to me! But let us see what the Lord God said about that in Isaiah 22:14: “Then it was revealed in my hearing by the Lord of hosts, ‘Surely for this iniquity there will be no atonement for you, even to your death’, says the Lord God of hosts.” Sounds like no fun at all! What I am trying to explain here is this: sin could be hidden under the word “fun”. People could commit many sins and they are deceived by fun. If we do not have the spirit of discernment we can easily become confused between sin and fun. For example, let’s consider music. It is fun according to the definition. It brings enjoyment to the person. Could it be a sin? Yes, if the music brings bad feelings and bad emotions to the person, it is sin. If I feel angry, depressed, or lustful after I hear a piece of music or a song then definitely there is something wrong. Fellowship or friendship is fun. It brings joy and happiness to the person. It is good to love and to be loved. If love becomes sharing sins and bad behavior together, then it is not fun anymore. It is a sinful relationship, whatever it is. The conclusion is this:

III. Fun is innocent but sin will never be fun

Nevertheless, the ability to do well and to be a righteous person is fun, too. How good do you feel when you give a poor person a donation? Don’t you feel happy and joyful? Certainly you do. It is joy; it is fun. You can call it spiritual fun, it brings joy to your spirit. Repentance is joy. Listen to king David in Psalm 51:12: “*Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit.*” Prayer is fun; it is a joy when you talk to someone you love. It brings the feelings of security and peace. I feel, through my prayer, that God is my best friend. It is joy and happiness that God himself can listen to me. That is cool! Listen to St. Augustine when he is talking to God saying “Let me not tire of thanking You for Your mercy in rescuing me from all my wicked ways, so that You may be sweeter to me than all the joys which used to tempt me; so that I may love You most intensely and clasp Your hand with all the power of my devotion; so that You will save me from all the temptation until the end of my days.” I think when you hear him talking to God with this kind of emotion you can say that this man is having fun! He is enjoying himself when he is talking to God. Listen to him when he says, “Leave all your desires. He who made heaven and earth is more beautiful than all; He who made all things is better than all; He will be to you everything you love. Learn to love the creator in the creature, in the work whom He made. Don’t let what was made take

such a hold of you that you lose Him by whom you yourself were made.” He does not sound like a bored person because of God. He is definitely enjoying himself.

IV. The fun person does not have less spirituality

Finally, sports, music, movies, parties, friends, reading, trips, or any fun thing you can imagine could be fun and not a sin if it is innocent and it will bring clean joy and happiness to your spirit. There is no relationship between depressed or bored people and religion. It is a must that we introduce religion to people in a fun way. Our Lord Jesus used to do that all the time. He was trying to tell them the parables with media effects to make them enjoyable. Look at the parable, which Jesus used to describe the Kingdom of God and see how interesting and fun it is. Look at Him when He was preaching to the people from the ship and let the nature assist Him to get the message through. The problem sometimes is not in the Church activities but in those who prepared these activities. If we prepared all the church service and activities in a right way, they will be fun. If we know how to sing right and on one key, it will sound right and fun. And that also applies to all the activities we do. We could be very creative to introduce God to people if we do it right.

Application:

- List 10 ways of joyful pure activities for the youth in your age.
- List 10 ways of wrongful fun activities for the youth in your age.

Conclusion:

Fun and joy have to be away from sin to bring real happiness to the soul.

LESSONS FOR THE MONTH OF JANUARY

Week 1- How the Lord Prepared the World for Incarnation

Week 2- Marriage

Week 3- Baptism Prophecies

Week 4- Anxiety

Week 1 –How the Lord Prepared the World for Incarnation

Objective:

To understand the fullness of time and how it was the perfect time for the Incarnation

Memory Verse:

“But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law” (Galatians 4:4).

References:

An introduction to the Gospels and Acts (Anba Moussa)

Introduction:

The Lord had promised Adam, after his fall, that He would send the Messiah from the seed of the Woman to bruise the head of the serpent (Genesis 3:15).

Generations followed one another waiting for that promised Savior and at the fullness of time God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the Law (Galatians 4). What does the term “the fullness of time” mean? It means the time in which the Lord prepared the world to receive the Savior. This preparation included many domains discussed in this lesson.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Religious Domain

The Jews returned from exile in Babylon 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 Epiphanes 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 gained victory over the Greek occupation, recovered the city and the temple. They cleaned the temple, and instituted 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. Their synagogues spread all over 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 Philadelphus, 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 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 meaning 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.

II. The Political Domain

The Roman Empire controlled the entire 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 civil 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.

III. 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 in all the parts of the world. The Greek philosophy and the Greek culture paved the way for Christianity when Christianity began to search for the greatest facts and investigate them.

IV. 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.

Exercise:

The Lord prepared the world for receiving His glorious Nativity. Mustn't we prepare our hearts for receiving Christ? How?

This is a question for your class to discuss.

Week 2 - Marriage

Objective:

1. To understand the rite and Sacrament of Marriage in our Orthodox Church.
2. To understand the symbolism to Biblical teaching and events.
3. To appreciate the uniting action of the sacrament of marriage.

Memory Verse:

“A man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh”
(Genesis 2:24).

References:

1. “The Precious Pearls in Explaining the Rite of the Church” by Hanna Salama
2. “The Sacrament of Love” by Paul Evdokimov
3. “The Marital Love” St. George Church, Sporting, Alexandria

Introduction:

Marriage is one of the church’s seven sacraments. The meaning of a sacrament is an unseen change through the work of the Holy Spirit. In the Sacrament of marriage, the change is the unity between the couple into one. The change is not physical it is spiritual.

Lesson Outline:

The aim of marriage is a subjective aim that unites one man with one woman in a holy matrimony forming a Christian family. St. John Chrysostom said: “There are two reasons for which marriage was instituted; to bring man to be content with one woman and to have children, but it is the first reason that is the most important”.

The sacrament of marriage in the Orthodox Church is inspired completely by Biblical teaching and commandments. It flows in gradual steps towards the unity of the two persons into one. The unity of the couple is similar to the unity of the church with our Lord Jesus Christ. The steps of the Holy matrimony in our church are as follows:

- ✠ The bride is first brought to the groom as God created Eve and brought her to Adam “Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman and He brought her to the man” (Genesis 2:22).
- ✠ The bride and groom are brought into the church with the deacons singing (EPOURO... O King of Peace) which is a joyous song. The groom is a symbol of our Lord, that is why they chant the hymn starting with “O King of peace”)
- ✠ The bride sits on the right hand of the groom in resemblance of St. Mary the queen sitting on the right hand of the throne of the king.
- ✠ The ceremony starts with the proclamation of the marriage bond to the guests, who are considered witnesses to the marriage of the couple.

- ✠ Then the priest prays the thanksgiving prayer.
- ✠ The Pauline epistle is read, Ephesians 5:22-29 “Wives submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as also Christ is the head of the church; and He is the savior of the body.” This reading clarifies the strength of bond and love between them as the strength of the love of our Lord to the church. It also explains to the husband that he ought to love his wife as his own body.
- ✠ Then, the litany of the Bible is prayed followed by Psalm 128:3-6 to indicate that the glory of the marriage is in keeping the word of God who said “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and they shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24).
- ✠ This is followed by reading the gospel from Matthew 19:4-9 “Whoever divorces his wife except for sexual immorality and marries another commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery”. This reading indicates the importance of only one wife keeping a holy unity.
- ✠ Then the deacons sing a wonderful song saying: those that have been united together in harmony by the Holy Spirit, like a harp praising God continuously, with Psalms and Praises and spiritual songs day and night from the heart without interruption. It is ironic that immediately after the wedding we start with an earthly celebration including loud music and degrading types of dancing during the wedding receptions.
- ✠ Then the priest prays the supplications...during which he asks the Lord to bless this wedding as He blessed the wedding of Cana in Galilee.
- ✠ Then everybody prays the creed.
- ✠ Subsequently, a special **matrimonial prayer** is prayed on the heads of the bride and the groom to bring them in unity and love so they may multiply and be fruitful as He blessed Abraham with Sarah, Isaac with Rebecca and Jacob with Leah and Rachel (Genesis 1:28).
- ✠ The groom is dressed in a special cloak as the head and the priest of the new family.
- ✠ Then, the bride and the groom are anointed with oil (Psalm 23:5).
- ✠ Then the altar curtain is opened and the priest holds the crowns and prays over them to be crowns of honor and glory...
- ✠ The priest continues to pray while placing the crowns on their heads and asking God to bless them and that now the woman is under the man’s control and vice versa (1 Corinthians 7:1-5). The crowns indicate that both man and woman are glory for each other (1 Corinthians 11:3).

At this point the unity is holy by the action of the Holy Spirit as a sacrament:

- ✠ The groom is given the commandments (Ephesians 5:28-29).
- ✠ The bride is then given the commandments (Ephesians 5:23-29, Peter 3:1-8, Psalm 45:9).
- ✠ In front of the altar, the bride and the bridegroom kneel and a final blessing prayer of their marriage is prayed.
- ✠ Then the deacons escort the bride and the groom out of the church while singing a special hymn “Hail to Mary ...” indicating the bride on the right hand of the groom as St. Mary is seated on the right hand of the throne.

Conclusion:

The Orthodox Church marriage ceremony is one of the most enjoyable heavenly experiences. The non-orthodox usually are amazed at the beauty of this celebration in our church. It is all Biblical in content.

Application:

Let the students search for t other churches that have the same believe regarding the marriage sacrament.

Week 3 - Baptism Prophecies

Objective:

- To appreciate the effect of this sacrament in our spiritual life.
- To know the scripture regarding baptism in the Bible.
- To understand the rationale behind baptism of children in our church.

Memory Verse:

“The one who believed and is baptized will be saved” (Mark 16:16).

References:

1. Baptism in The Orthodox Concept by Fr. Mikael Abdel Malek (English)
2. The Precious Pearls in Explanation of the Church Rites by Fr. John Salama (Arabic)
3. Sermons of H.G. Bishop Youssef about Baptism.

Introduction:

I. What is baptism?

Baptism is the first of the sacraments alluded to in John 3:5, acquired through water and Spirit. It is an action of deliverance from sins and is the fundamental work of God in the very spirit of man. It is a new birth.

We are baptized as John the Baptist baptized Jesus in the River of Jordan.

Lesson Outline:

I. How is baptism done?

Baptism is a Greek word that means to immerse, therefore it is done by immersing completely in water. It is one of the seven holy sacraments by which we are reborn through water and the Holy Spirit. It is administered by immersion in water three times in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and is stipulated to be performed by an ordained priest we obtain salvation, purification, justification, regeneration, rebirth, and membership in the body of Christ.

The Holy Spirit, which we receive after baptism, comes from the sacrament of Confirmation, by which the baptized is anointed by the Myrron oil.

Through baptism, we acquire the image and likeness of the Lord Christ, as St. Paul said in Romans 8:29, *“Those whom God has already chosen He also set apart to become like His Son”* and *“God’s Spirit joins Himself to our spirit to declare that we are God’s children. Since we are His children, we will share His treasures” (Romans 8:17).*

II. Symbols of Baptism in the Old Testament

In the **Old Testament**, there are many symbols that refer to baptism, such as:

- ✠ The Spirit of God hovering on the face of the water. The new creation was from water and Spirit.
- ✠ The Flood: according to St. Peter, “Those who disobeyed God long ago when God waited patiently while Noah was building his boat. In which a few, that is eight souls were saved through water” (1 Peter 3:19-20). The ark was surrounded by water all around, a symbol of baptism, whereas the dove, which came back with the olive branch, is a symbol of the Holy Spirit and the olive branch is a symbol of peace, which we attained by reconciliation with God. This is the picture of baptism in which we are saved from death and corruption, through the power of Jesus Christ’s resurrection.
- ✠ Circumcision is a symbol of baptism. *“In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands by putting off the body of sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism in which you also were raised with Him through faith”* (Colossians 2:11-12). Circumcision symbolizes the removal of the old and corrupt cover, so that the good and uncorrupt nature that God created in us would reappear. In addition, circumcision is a symbol of getting into a covenant with God, likewise in baptism we become members united in Jesus Christ.
- ✠ The Red Sea crossing: as described in Exodus 14:19-29. *“I do not want you to forget what happened to our ancestors in the wilderness long ago. God guided all of them by sending a cloud that moved along ahead of them and He brought them all safely through the water of the sea on the dry ground. They were all baptized in the cloud and the sea”* (1 Corinthians 10:12). Pharaoh was a symbol of devil, which enslaved the people of God in sin in the land of Egypt. Their crossing of the Red Sea was a form of baptism, a new beginning away from sin. The clouds that led them is a symbol of the Holy Spirit.
- ✠ The Bronze Laver: The Lord instructed Moses saying, “you shall also make a bronze laver, and its base also of bronze for washing, and you shall put water in it”. The priests used to wash their hands in the bronze laver before offering a sacrifice as a sign of cleansing from sin in baptism before accepting Jesus Christ in communion as our everlasting sacrifice.

Importance of baptism in the New Testament

A. The Lord’s command

The Lord commanded His apostles saying, *“Go then to all people everywhere, and make them disciples and baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”* (Matthew 28:19).

“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5).

B. In the day of Pentecost

When the Jews accepted faith on the day of Pentecost, St. Peter called upon them to be immediately baptized saying, *“Repent and let everyone of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins”* (Acts 2:38).

C. The Ethiopian Eunuch

He asked to be baptized immediately after accepting the faith saying, *“Here is some water, what is to keep me from being baptized”* (Acts 8:30).

D. Saul of Tarsus

He was instructed by Jesus to go to Damascus to meet Ananias who ordered him saying, *“And now, why delay, get up and be baptized, and have your sins washed away” (Acts 22:16).*

E. Lydia the Purple Dealer

The Lord opened her heart and she accepted the faith, then she was baptized along with other members of her household (Acts 16:14).

F. The Philippian Jailer

As soon as he believed, he asked the disciples, *“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” they answered, “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved you and your family.” At that very hour of night the jailer and all his family were baptized at once” (Acts 16:31-33).*

G. Cornelius the Captain of the Roman Regiment

He had been baptized having accepted faith and the powering of the Holy Spirit.

III. The Effectiveness of Baptism**A. The Rebirth of Water and the Spirit**

The Lord once said to Nicodemus, *“I assure you unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (John 3:3)*

B. Salvation Attained through Baptism

The Lord says, *“The one who believed and is baptized will be saved” (Mark 16:16).*

C. Baptism is Death with Christ and Rising with Him

St. Paul says, *“That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death” Philippians 3:10).* St. Paul also says, *“Therefore, we were buried with Him through baptism into death... united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection. Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin” (Romans 6:4-6) “Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him” (Romans 6:8).*

D. We obtain remission of sins

On the day of Pentecost, when the Jews accepted faith and were deeply shaken, they asked, *“Men and brethren, what shall we do?”* St. Peter replied, *“Repent and let everyone of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:37-38).* In the Orthodox Creed, we clearly say, *“we believe in one baptism for the remission of sins”.*

E. In Baptism, We Put On Christ

St. Peter the Apostle says, *“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal 3:27)*

F. Through Baptism, We Became Members of the Church

As the circumcised was considered a member of God’s people (Genesis 17:7), likewise the baptized becomes a member of the church and a member of the Body of Christ.

G. Baptism Gives New Life

St. Paul says, *“therefore, we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also should walk in newness of life”.* So,

it is a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17), a resurrection from death to a new life (Ephesians 2:5-6), and a new life in the kingdom of God's beloved Son (Colossians 1:13).

IV. Why Should Baptism be by Immersion?

- ✠ Baptism is dying with Christ and being buried with Him as St. Paul the Apostle says, *"Therefore, we were buried with Him through baptism into death"* (Romans 6:4). Burial can only be done by immersion in the water.
- ✠ Baptism is washing away of sins *"Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins"* (Acts 22:16)
- ✠ Baptism was by immersion even in the days of John the Baptist, for the Lord Christ Himself was baptized by immersion, *"Then Jesus when He had been baptized came up immediately from the water"* (Matthew 3:16, Mark 1:10).

V. Baptism of Children

We are keen about children's eternal life, because the Lord says, *"Let the children come to Me and do not forbid them. The kingdom of God belongs to such as these"* (Matthew 19:14). So if we prevent children from being baptized, we expose them to God's judgment, since the Lord says, *"Unless one is born of water and Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God"* (John 3:5).

Baptism grants children the opportunity to practice an ecclesiastical (spiritual) life as well as enjoy the grace activities effectiveness, and practicality of the church's sacrament. Otherwise, they will be excluded from eternal life (John 3:5).

Then Peter said to them *"Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all"* (Acts 2:38-39).

Also in circumcision, which is a symbol of baptism, the new born males were circumcised on the eighth day. This is an indication that children should be baptized shortly after birth.

It is important to be baptized when we are children to get eternal life.

Conclusion:

Baptism is the beginning of a life with Christ that will last eternally.

Week 4 - Anxiety

Objective:

- Get the youth to recognize anxiety and its causes.
- Discuss how to overcome anxiety in a spiritual and practical way.

Memory Verse:

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God” (Philippians 4:6).

References:

- Away with Anxiety. Begin Life -Del Karingy.
- Youth and Anxiety. - Iris Nesseem

Lesson Outline:

I. 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.

II. Types of needs

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. Personal needs such as 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 a person may sacrifice one of them for the sake of attaining another. 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 seek 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 him respect 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 mind and excludes all sadness and anxiety. The disappearance of the good news results *in* self-approbation and not following the way of the Lord.

III. Kinds of Anxiety

A. Passive and Active Anxiety

- 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 potential, or one’s association with sin and self-dissatisfaction, or defeat and frustration.

B. 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.

IV. The Theological cure of anxiety is as follows

- ✠ The Incarnation of Christ presented man’s problems before the Lord to solve them and so the cure does not come from outside.
- ✠ The redemption of Christ solved the problems of sin and conscience remorse.
- ✠ 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.
- ✠ Means of grace given by Christ satisfy man’s spiritual needs by heavenly pleasant food.
- ✠ Hope in Christ brought man into the scope of eternity and immortality and freed him from the fear of death.
- ✠ The service of Christ gave a meaning to life (John 14:27, John 14:26, Isaiah 41:10, Isaiah 43:2-3).

V. Some practical ways to overcome anxiety

- ✠ Talk with the Lord. If your talk with friends makes you feel happy, how much greater will your feeling be when you talk to your Heavenly Father.
- ✠ Face your fears and analyze your problems by yourself. Once you resort to a practical decision or attitude anxiety will disappear.
- ✠ 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.
- ✠ 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.

Let your motto be “Make Christ happy”.

BEGINNING OF FEBRUARY TILL JONAH'S FAST

Use Filler Lessons (placed at the beginning of the book) until the Sunday before Jonah's fast.

LESSONS FOR JONAH'S FAST

Jonah's fast comes two weeks before the Great Lent on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. These lessons are for the Sunday before and the Sunday after Jonah's fast.

Week before Fast: The Book of Jonah, Between Science and Religion

Week after Fast: Heaven

Week before Fast – The Book of Jonah between Science and Religion

Objective:

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

Memory Verse:

"For as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so also the Son of Man will be to this generation"
(Luke 11:30).

References:

1. The Holy Bible is a Miracle. - The Diocese of Al Minya.
2. Our Holy Bible and Our Holy Christ. - Bishop Youanis.
3. Conformity Between Modern Science and the Holy Bible. St. George Church, Sporting, Alexandria

Lesson Outline:

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.

I. The Internal Evidence

- ✠ 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.
- ✠ The Book of Kings recorded the story of Jonah in detail (2 Kings 14:25).
- ✠ There is evidence of the truth of the story in Matthew 16:4 and in Luke 11:29-30.

II. External Evidence

- ✠ Archeologists excavated the site where Nineveh was and they found evidence indicating that the City was an exceedingly great city. The excavated pottery indicates Sumerian origin which supports the biblical facts..

III. 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 fish. 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 exhibited it all around Europe.

IV. 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.

V. What to say to those who mock the Book?

- † 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.

VI. Science and the Holy Bible

A. 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. For example: 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 40:32) 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.

B. Examples of scientific facts included in the Bible

- † In the Book of Ecclesiastics we read “All streams run 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.
- † 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.
- † 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.

C. Some of the scientific discoveries that prove the truth of the Bible

- † 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 Flood.
- † 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.
- † 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, 2 Chronicles 1:1-17).

✠ In Medicine and Anatomy:

The shrouds of the Lord Jesus Christ and the picture printed on them; this indicates crucifixion and resurrection.

Week after Jonah's Fast - Heaven

Objective:

- To learn about heaven and the heavenly creatures.
- To learn about our second life (after death).

Memory Verse:

“But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain” (1 Corinthians 15:13,14).

References:

- “Heaven” Late Bishop Youannis of El-Gharbeya.
- Revelation 21 and 22

Introduction:

Our life on earth is a short and temporary one, and its main objective is to prepare us for our eternal life in heaven. If someone is to move to a new country, he tries to learn as much as he can about it. The longer he plans to live there, the more interested he would be to learn about its people, history, culture, ...etc. How about that place where we will be moving to live for a life time that doesn't end? How about Heaven?

Lesson Outline:

I. The Heavenly Creatures – The Angels

The word Angel literally means ‘Messenger’. Angels are spiritual heavenly creatures *“Sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation” (Hebrews 1:14).*

Although Angels were mentioned in numerous occasions in the Old and New Testaments, many people do not believe in them such as the Sadducees (Acts 23:8). The angel that appeared to Hagar (Genesis 16:7), and the two angels who came to meet Lot in Sodom (Genesis 19:1-22), Angel Gabriel announcing the birth of Christ to Mary in (Luke 1:26) are a few examples that prove the existence of Angels.

The bible teaches us that the Angels constitute a very organized population. They are divided into ranks, each having a specific role. Some of the ranks of the Angles are, the Seraphim, the Cherubim, the Thrones, and the Powers. Based on their ranks, Angels are assigned certain duties. Some of these duties include praising the Lord, helping humans, executing God's orders, and carrying God's messages to humans.

The bible tells us the story of Lucifer, the fallen Angel in (Isaiah 14:12-15), and (Ezekiel 28:14-16). We find from the story that Satan was originally an archangel from the rank of the Cherubim. He wanted to become higher than God, so he fell in the sin and became Satan. Satan is always wandering around trying to capture as many people as he can. He is very powerful and knowledgeable. It is impossible for us to overcome him without the help of the Lord through fasting and prayer.

II. Death and the second life

For us the believers, death is not the end, but rather the beginning. It is the start of a better life, the eternal life in the presence of the Lord. Throughout the ages, people existed who didn't believe in resurrection or life after death. But here is St. Paul assuring us that, without resurrection, our faith is in vain (1 Corinthians 15:13, 14).

There have been different opinions about what happens after death. Some people believe that one goes to a long sleep after death to wake up in the last day for the general judgment. Another opinion is that there is a private judgment for the person after his death. A third group believes in the existence of a temporary place where one goes after his death to suffer for a while for his sins. That latter belief is the Catholic Church's heresy of the Purgatory. The Orthodox belief on the other hand is that, the departed person goes to one of two temporary waiting places; either Paradise or Hades, based on their deeds. Then, at the Day of Judgment those who were in Paradise will go to their final rest place in Heaven, and the sinners, who are in Hades, will move to their final place of suffering in Hell.

Heavens is that place which St. Paul described as *"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man. The things, which God has prepared for those who love Him"* (1 Corinthians 2:9). So despite of how our imagination contemplates heaven's beauty, it is not even close to what heaven's beauty really is. Heaven's beauty cannot be described, simply because in heavens we dwell with God, the source of every true joy and gladness.

Application:

Remember always that this life is very short compared to the eternal life. Try to keep your heart and your thoughts in heaven. Build a personal relationship with the departed saints and the heavenly creatures, by always asking their intercession.

Conclusion:

Our heavenly Father has such a wonderful place prepared and waiting for us, Heaven.

LESSONS FOR THE GREAT FAST PERIOD

Week 0: (Preparation week) - Fasting: Spiritual and Dogmatic Aspects

Week 1: (Surrender to the Heavenly Father) - Hindrance to Prayer

Week 2: (Sunday of Temptation) - Isaiah

Week 3: (Sunday of the Prodigal Sun) - Spiritual Fight

Week 4: (Sunday of the Samaritan Woman) - Salvation in the Orthodox Understanding

Week 5: (Sunday of The Sick of Bethesda) - The Great Friday

Week 6: (Sunday of The born blind) - Night of the Apocalypse

Week 7: (Palm Sunday) - No Lesson

Week 8: (Resurrection Sunday) – No Lesson

Week 0 - Fasting: Spiritual and Dogmatic Aspects

Objective:

Practical conviction of the benefits of fasting and exercising it.

Memory Verse:

"But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly" (Matthew 6:17).

References:

- The Spirituality of Fasting - H. H. Pope Shenouda.
- Lent - Bishop Bemin.
- Spiritual Fasting - Bishop Bemin.
- Lent - Alexander Shmiman.

Lesson Outline:

Fasting is considered the spring of the spiritual life in the church, as the church is full of an ascetic wave.

Fasting is a firm creed going back in history to the age of the Apostles and the Lord established it Jesus Christ (Mark 9:36).

I. Objections and Refutations

- ✠ 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.
- ✠ Some objected 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 as St. Paul mentions in his letter to Titus *"For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you" (Titus 1:5).*
- ✠ Others show objection by quoting St. Paul's words: "Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink..." but these words meant living like Jews. It does not mean that we leave the church in chaos.
- ✠ Some may object to the Apostles' fasting and the Virgin's fasting. In fact we fast those fasts not because the Apostles fasted them, but because we fast to the Lord.

II. Fasting and correcting the wrong concepts

- ✠ "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

- † Fasting is not humiliation but Christian asceticism abolishes fleshly desires.
- † Fasting is associated with happiness (Psalm 35:3). Christ commands the one who fasts to anoint his head, and the Gospel of the third week of the Great Lent refers to the return of the lost son “We had to enjoy ourselves and rejoice”.
- † 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 at the altar after we repent and confess our sins. But fasting is one of the means of grace.

III. Fasting is useful, health wise

Fasting has its spiritual beauty. It is the enjoyment of going back to life of Paradise.

- † During the days of the Great Lent, one must abstain from food for a certain period of time daily. The same must be done on Jonah’s fast.
- † Similarly, on Wednesdays and Fridays, fast of Advent and the Apostles’ fast, one should abstain from food for a period of time to be determined between you and your father of confession.

IV. There are other special fasts

- † The Bishop’s fasting after his ordination for a year and the priest’s fast for forty days.
- † The Monks fasts.
- † Fasts in time of trouble and for knowing the will of God.

V. Fasting is associated with prayer and reading

If we liken fasting to embers, prayer is likened to incense. During fasting, you should assign a time for reading and contemplation. When you read, your aim should be to understand the Gospel, listening to the voice of the Lord as He talks to you through the scripture. Your life should be according to the words of the Psalmist, “on Your law I mediate day and night”.

VI. 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.

VII. Fasting and Moderation

Man must not exceed the period of abstention assigned to him by his father of confession. The priest takes all matters into consideration; the body, state of health and circumstances of work without exceeding the proper limits that may make the body weak and compel it to withdraw.

VIII. Excuses for not fasting

- † The body becomes weak.

Scientifically this is absolutely wrong since we know for fact that vegetarians tend to live longer than non-vegetarians. Biblically God created Adam a vegetarian and it is not till the time of Noah that God allowed man to eat meat.

- † The family is not fasting.

God tells us *“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven”* (Matthew 5:16). If we make a point to start fasting we will be a good influence upon our family. Instead of saying my family is not fasting and I will do like them, say I am fasting and I pray they do like me.

✠ Why those who are fasting do not feel the benefits of fasting.

If fasting is just a change of diet there is definitely no benefit in it. But fasting is not only diet it is having our whole body, senses and soul fasting. Let your tongue stop saying bad things. Let your eyes fast from seeing inappropriate movies or read tasteless magazines. Fast from going to wrong places, etc. When you stop doing the bad things and start reading the Bible and praying more only then will you feel the benefits of fasting.

IX. Sayings of Saints about Fasting

- ✠ Fasting means controlling the power of fire and closing the mouths of lions (St. Basil the Great).
- ✠ When the body becomes weak through fasting, the soul becomes strong through prayer (Mar Isaac).
- ✠ Make your hand, your eye and your ear fast and abstain from any wrong action then your fast will be clean (Anba Youssab).

Applications:

- ✠ Make a commitment to start fasting as soon as fasting starts.
- ✠ Talk with your father of confession about any obstacles you think will prevent you from fasting.
- ✠ Pray that God help you benefit from the fast.
- ✠ Specify more time daily to read the Bible.

Week 1 – Hindrance to Prayer

Objective:

To learn the obstacles of prayer.

Memory Verse:

*“Evening and morning and at noon I will pray, and cry aloud, And He shall hear my voice”
(Psalm 55:17).*

References:

- Paradise of the Spirit.- Bishop Youannis.

Lesson Outline:

Certain obstacles hinder both those just beginning in prayer and those who are experienced in prayer. For beginners these obstacles stem from the fact that they have not been accustomed to praying, so their mind is worried and troubled by matters that concern their earthly life. 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:

I. 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 if he doubles vigilance and fasting.

II. Dryness gives way 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.

III. Spiritual Coldness (Psalm 142:3)

A. 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.

IV. Reasons that necessitate putting the soul to the test

A. 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.

B. Adjusting the concept of our relationship with God

- ✠ When the self is occupied in a spiritual fight, it proves 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 God for a long time, despite His fatherly love to us, is not in need of our prayers or deeds.
- ✠ Thus spiritual coldness returns to govern those people and cause an essential adjustment to the concept of understanding God and the assessment of the spiritual relationship, which bind the human self to God.

C. 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 shock the self are not the losses but a belief that the Lord has showed hostility "*Let me know why do you contend against me? Why do you hide your face and count me as your enemy. You have turned cruel toward 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.

D. 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 be 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.

V. The right goal

For the way to be clear before man we shall try to clarify the right goal in prayer which is according to the will of God. The Lord has set an ultimate 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, which grows and strengthens till it becomes complete.

✠ In the beginning it is difficult to distinguish between a man who prays for the right aim that guides him in God's way or the false aim that pleases him with earthly lusts.

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

Week 2 - Isaiah

Objective:

- An overview of the book of Isaiah, its theme and content.
- Learn about the prophecies in Isaiah regarding the coming of the savior.

Memory Verse:

“If you are willing and obedient you shall eat the good of the land” (Isaiah 1:19).

Reference:

- The Holy Bible.
- Complete guide to the Bible. Readers Digest 1998, Pleasantville – New York, pp.199-209.
- Isaiah: Father Tadros Y. Malaty,

Introduction:

- † Isaiah is the first of the 4 great prophets “Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel”.
- † The book of Isaiah consists of 66 chapters and is the second most quoted book after psalms, in the New Testament, about 50 quotations. The four evangelists quoted Isaiah in referring to John the Baptist “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God” (Isaiah 40:3). Jesus, Himself, quoted Isaiah 61:1-2 saying “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed” (Luke 4:18).
- † Isaiah began his prophecy in 733 BC and continued for 50-60 years, during the rule of king Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. The evil king Manasseh, who followed Hezekiah, had him sawed into two.
- † The book has several themes. The most prominent is the portrayal of God as king over all creation and His eternal commitment to the descendents of King David.

Lesson Outline:

- † Isaiah’s dramatic call to be a prophet occurs in a vision where he saw God sit grandly on a throne, and the angels called “Seraphs” serve Him and proclaim the essence of God’s character *“Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory” (Isaiah 6:3).*
- † A large section of Isaiah contains cracks against foreign nations. The first of the nations marked for condemnations is Babylon and Isaiah foresaw its fall to the Persians in the 6th century.
- † The Assyrians were singled out for a condemnation in Isaiah 14:25. Moab, Israel’s neighbor to the east of the Dead Sea, was next on the list of wicked nations, Isaiah 15:1.

- ✠ The oracle against Egypt in chapter 19 depicts the Lord in majestic term. The Sea faring nation Phoenicia, with its capital Tyre, was told of its dread fate in chapter 23.

I. Condemnation of sin

- ✠ The first chapter condemned the sins of Israel *“Israel’s hands are full of blood” (Isaiah 1:2,15)*. God commends Israel *“Cease to do evil, learn to do good, seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow” (Isaiah 1:16-17)*.
- ✠ Satan’s sin and fall was described in Isaiah 14:12-15 *“How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High. Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit”*. Chapter 34 and 35 describe God as the divine judge and is calling all people to listen to God *“ For the Lord is enraged against all the nations” (Isaiah 34:2)*.

II. The coming of the Savior

- ✠ The birth of Jesus is prophesied in Isaiah 7:14 *“Therefore, the Lord himself shall give you a sign, behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son and shall call His name Immanuel.”* Also, Isaiah 9:6 *“For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government will be upon His shoulder, and His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting father.”*
- ✠ Jesus is a descendent of King David *“He is coming from the stem of Jesse” (Isaiah 11:1)*. His character *“The spirit of God shall rest upon Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of council and right...and righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins” (Isaiah 42:1)*.
- ✠ Isaiah 52:13 and 53:12 provides a sobering sense of the price that must be paid for redemption. The divine servant *“Shall be exalted and lifted up” (Isaiah 52:13)*, but only after surviving affliction and oppression *“He was wounded for our transgression, and crushed for our iniquities” (Isaiah 53:5)*. Acts 8:32 echoed the language of Isaiah 53:7 to describe Jesus suffering and death.
- ✠ Jesus as Savior *“The people who walked in darkness... upon them a light has shined” (Isaiah 9:2)*. Compare with Matthew 4:16 *“The people which sat in darkness saw a great light, and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up.”*

III. Return to God

- ✠ God expects us to be righteous, repent our sins and worship him *“Thus says the Lord, maintain justice, and do what is right, for soon My salvation will come, and My deliverance be revealed” (Isaiah 56:1)*. God promises that those who are faithful *“shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint” (Isaiah 40:31)* and *“ do not fear for I am with you” (Isaiah 41:10)*.
- ✠ God offers the promise of a joyous future for the righteous. For them, God will create a *“new heaven and a new earth” (Isaiah 65:17)* in which all human infirmities will disappear and there will be continual rejoicing. The divine plan will achieve full realization when

“From new moon to new moon, from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before God” (Isaiah 66:27).

Conclusion

The first 39 chapters of Isaiah reflect concrete historical events from the eighth century BC. The last chapters depict a future in which God will fashion an entirely new heaven and earth.

Thus, a spanning time period from the eighth century BC to the unrealized future, Isaiah’s vision addresses the morbid fears of judgment and fervent hopes for consolation of countless generations past, present and yet to come.

Application:

- Study all the prophecies in Isaiah that appeared in the New Testament.
- Look for information about the character of Isaiah.

Week 3 – The Spiritual Fights

Objective:

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

Memory Verse:

“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God” (2 Corinthians 10:4).

References:

- The spiritual Fights. - Theophan the ascetic.
- Silwanis the Monk and the Invisible Fight.
- Paradise of the Spirits.

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).

Lesson Outline:

I. 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. The following will describe the attributes of fighters (2 Timothy 2:3-6).

II. Similes of Spiritual Fight

A. The Soldier

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

B. The Athlete

- ✚ An Athlete is crowned if he competes according to the rules of the game.
- ✚ Although many athletes take part in the competition, yet only one wins the race.

- † An athlete commits himself to severe exercises, denies himself and sacrifices the pleasures of life. It is a daily sacrifice.

C. The hard-working farmer

- † He is simple, strong, patient, satisfied with his work and expecting the results of his hard work.
- † 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). How much more will be the Christian's toil to attain an immortal crown and an everlasting happy life?

a. 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 openly.

b. 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.

Overcome the feeling of sexual deprivation

- † Empty your mind of the evil images.
- † Commend your mind to the Holy Spirit.
- † Confess the Holy Spirit and receive Him in secret and in public.
- † Abolish the meaning and effect of deprivation by being content with the life of purity.
- † Abolish the feeling of repression with the joy of receiving the Holy Spirit.

d. Crown 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 the outcome of:

- † The spiritual convincement and not as an obligation of the flesh.
- † The confidence and trust of that who will win.
- † The satisfaction and joy and not out of affliction and anguish.
- † The continuation and persistence till death.

e. Resist anger

- † Turn away from any situation that may cause anger.
- † The soft answer and the calm talk turn away wrath.
- † Blame yourself before you blame others.
- † Do not let the sun go down on your anger.

Resist the desire of judging others

- † Do not contemplate the people's manner of life.
- † Think of your own sins when you judge others.

- ✠ Give concessions to others and say that they have sinned but they may repent, and I may sin and may not repent.
- ✠ Show the motive for judgment; is it because of jealousy or a desire for revenge?

III. 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 wrestle against flesh and blood...stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness...above all, taking the shield of faith...and take the helmet of salvation...praying always” (Ephesians 6:11-18). Let us analyze this to explore the weapons that the Christian should use in his spiritual fight.

A. 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.

B. The Breastplate

- ✠ The breastplate is the symbol of righteousness. The girdle stands for truth in sayings and the breastplate stands for truth in actions.

C. The Sandals

- ✠ The sandals stands for the readiness to announce the Good News of peace

D. 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, they were put out by the insulation between the two pieces of wood. This is the work of faith.

E. The Helmet of Salvation

- ✠ The helmet guards and protects the thoughts of the faithful. So spiritual fight is a duty but Salvation is grace.

F. 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:

- ✠ Pray Constantly: Continue steadfastly in prayer “Pray with fervent love and eager desire”.
- ✠ In Spirit: Avoid formalities and routine.
- ✠ Be Awake: Strive in your prayers.
- ✠ Devotion to Prayer: Pray constantly for all people.

G. The Importance of self-crucifying: Do not rely entirely on yourself

It is necessary that we do 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.

IV. Why does the Lord Permit Temptation and Perpetual Spiritual fight?

- † To instruct His people in the art of fighting (Judges 2:21-23).
- † To protect us from falling in the sin of carelessness.
- † To teach us not be haughty but modest and not to think highly of ourselves.
- † To teach us to stick to the glory of God and obey the commandments of God accurately.
- † To teach us that constant war may give us greater crown.

V. The terms of canonical fight

- † 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".
- † With perseverance, "But he who endures to the end will be saved " (Matthew 24:13).
- † 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".
- † With joy and without grumbling because it is against faith and keeps the blessings of fight from us (1 Corinthians 10)
- † With patience and without longing to achieve certain results on the way to please the body.
- † With the spirit of fellowship and participation with others in the church of God (Philippians 1 27).

VI. How to avoid carelessness and slackness?

- † Avoid curiosity and not to be prying (talking - interested) and keep away from earthly matters.
- † Avoid things that appeal to you and submit yourself to the Lord.
- † Follow the advice and instructions of your Spiritual teacher.
- † 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).

VII. How to resist pride and arrogance of heart?

- † Pray with a contrite heart "God be merciful to me a sinner".
- † Do not take pride in your knowledge or intelligence or social status.
- † Don't be fussy about your clothes and outward appearance.
- † The humble endures criticism and guidance from others without showing any sign of anger.

- ✠ 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.”

VIII. Shun 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.

Week 4 - Salvation in the Orthodox Understanding

Objective:

1. To understand the concept and meaning of salvation in the Orthodox Church.
2. To understand the importance of working towards salvation.

Memory Verse:

“By works, faith is made perfect” (James 2:22).

References:

“Salvation in the Orthodox Understanding” By His Holiness Pope Shenouda

Introduction:

Many Christians believe that salvation can happen in an instant and last a lifetime. Yet, in the Orthodox Church, salvation is a long continuous process.

Lesson Outline:

I. The danger of using a single verse

A. Wrong practice can lead to incorrect understanding of Biblical truths

B. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, you and your household” (Acts 16:31)

- ✠ Some take this verse to mean that salvation comes through faith alone.
- ✠ This verse was said to an unbeliever, so he needs to believe in Christ first as a beginning of a life of salvation.
- ✠ Sometimes the Bible mentions a first step:
 - a) Simeon the Elder said: “my eyes have seen Your salvation” (Luke 2:31).
 - b) Christ said, “Today salvation has come to this house” (Luke 19:9).
- ✠ How could salvation come to the entire household through the faith of the jailer?
- ✠ If we continue the passage, we see that he and his family were baptized.
- ✠ So we learn that we have to put together a number of verses in order to understand ‘salvation’ correctly

C. Once a young man came to Christ and asked Him what he should do to have Eternal life (Matt 19:17)

- ✠ Christ did not mention faith or grace in his response.
- ✠ Christ said he needed to keep the commandments.

Should we then say that keeping the commandments is sufficient without faith, baptism, and the sacraments?
- ✠ Christ here made His comments in order to reach this person’s weakness.

D. “Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God” (Romans 5:1)

- ✠ Again this verse alone indicates that justification is through faith alone.
- ✠ We should include other verses, such as, “For not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified” (Rom 2:13).
- ✠ Also, “You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only” (James 2:24).

II. There is no salvation except through the blood of Christ alone**A. Faith in the redeeming work of Christ is essential for salvation**

- ✠ Those who do good works apart from faith in Christ will not be saved.

B. Why can there be no salvation but only through the blood of Christ?

- ✠ Since God is unlimited, any sin committed against Him is also unlimited.
- ✠ So sin cannot be forgiven except by an unlimited propitiation.
- ✠ Therefore the only solution for man is for God to take flesh and die on man’s behalf.

C. Conditions of salvation through the blood of Christ

- ✠ Faith
- ✠ Baptism
- ✠ Church sacraments
- ✠ Good works

III. The importance of working for salvation**A. Evil works lead to perdition**

- ✠ Galatians 5:19-21
- ✠ Ephesians 5:5,6
- ✠ 1 Corinthians 6:9,10

B. Judgment will be according to works

- ✠ Old Testament:

- a) Psalm 62:12 *“also to You, O Lord, belongs mercy; for You render to each one according to his work”.*
- b) Ecclesiastics 12:14 *“For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether it is good or whether it is evil”.*

- ✠ New Testament

- a) Matthew 16:27 *“For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.”*
- b) John 5:28-29 *“Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth--those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.”*
- c) Matthew 12:37 *“For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”*

✠ Works are required of faith

- a) Luke 3:8 *“Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.”*
- b) James 2:14 *“what does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?”*
- c) Matthew 21:43 *“Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.”*

✠ Works are evidence of the existence of faith

- a) James 2:18 *“but someone will say” You have faith, and I have works. Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works”.*

✠ Works are evidence of being born of God

- a) 1 John 2:29 *“If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.”*

✠ Works make faith perfect

- a) James 2:22 *“Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?”*

IV. Striving**A. A person cannot be saved through his own efforts**

- ✠ *“Without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5)*
- ✠ Grace is necessary for salvation, but it cannot solely save us unless we respond to it

B. The communion of the Holy Spirit

- ✠ It is a fellowship where both we and the Holy Spirit work together
- ✠ The Holy Spirit alone could save us, but He does not work against our will

C. The necessity of striving

- ✠ Hebrews 12:1 *“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us”.*
- ✠ Hebrews 12:4 *“You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.”*
- ✠ 2 Timothy 4:7-8 *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all”.*

D. The spiritual war

- ✠ 1 Peter 5:8-9 *“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world who have loved His appearing.”*

V. Confidence and trust concerning the Kingdom of God**A. Two questions: To what extent may one have hope in God’s mercy? Can a believer trust**

that he will attain the Kingdom?

B. Unlimited trust in God

- ✠ We have hope in God's mercy.
- ✠ Hope is one of the three great virtues mentioned in I Corinthians 13:13.

C. We should not trust our own will

- ✠ A person may err easily.
- ✠ A person is mistaken to think that he has done away with sin and is now renewed and sanctified.
- ✠ We trust in Christ's blood, but admit our tendency to sin
- ✠ Luke 13:3 *"I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish."*
- ✠ 1 Corinthians 10:12 *"Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall"*.

D. Are you saved or not?

- ✠ We answer saying, "We were saved from the original sin in baptism, but final salvation shall be attained when we put off the flesh".
- ✠ The Church does not celebrate the birthdays of the saints or the day that they were accepted in the Church. It celebrates the godly completion of the journey of their lives on earth.

E. Let your answers be from the faith of the Church

- ✠ *"Lean not on your own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5).*
- ✠ Church teaches us in our prayers: "If the righteous is hardly saved, where shall I a sinner appears?"
- ✠ "Behold I am about to stand before the Just Judge, terrified and trembling because of my many sins. For a life spent in pleasures deserves condemnation. So repent, O my soul, so long as you dwell on this earth..."
- ✠ These prayers teach us not to rely on any guarantee, but to struggle with humility for salvation.

VI. Is it possible that a believer should perish?

A. First example

- ✠ Romans 11:20-22 *"Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, and if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off."*
- ✠ John 15:2 *"Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit"*. John 15:6 *"if anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned."*

B. Second example

- ✠ Hebrews 10:26-31

C. Those who deny the faith

✠ 2 Peter 2:20,21

D. The saints can be overcome

✠ Revelations 13:7 “And it was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation”.

E. The perdition of Demas

✠ Colossians 4:14 “Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you”.

✠ Philemon 1:24 “as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow laborers”.

✠ 2 Timothy 4:10 “for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica--Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia”.

Conclusion:

Both faith and works are essential for a continuing process of salvation.

Application:

Do a search regarding the understanding of salvation in the Protestant and Catholic faith

Week 5 – The Great Friday

Objective:

1. To feel and share the Lord's path of suffering and pains He endured on the day of His crucifixion.
2. The youth should feel the richness of their mother church through traditions and; the love of the early fathers who prepared the schedule of the Holy Week including the Great Friday.
3. They should learn to follow the readings, participate in the prayer, sing the hymns and benefit from this highly spiritual day.

Memory verse:

“And He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again” (2 Corinthians 5:15).

References:

1. “The Holy Pascha” English (The Arabic copy printed by Sporting, Alexandria offers a lot of explanations.
2. “Jesus The Crucified” By Fr. Manasseh Youhanna (Arabic) summarized in the Coptic Church Review in English.

Introduction:

During Great Friday we see the greatness of the Lord's sacrificial love to man. This is the day when the love reaches its height and depth. This is the day when the fullness of love is manifested on the cross for those He loved (John 3:16). Therefore, the picture of crucifixion is considered the most beautiful picture humanity has ever seen.

Lesson Outline:

Ask the class about the importance of the Holy Week and particularly the Great Friday for them.

- ✠ The Church has set for us the Holy Week in general and Good Friday in particular to remind us all, what Christ overcame for our sakes. During this time, the church is arrayed in black, the tunes heard are uniquely sad but with a triumph note embedded in them, to portray our deep sense of pain for what Christ was going through and His final victory. We pray outside the Altar as Jesus was crucified outside Jerusalem.
- ✠ Starting from the night before Friday, we add a new sentence to the beginning of the prayer “Thine is The Lord is my strength and my praise, and has become my salvation.” The Bible readings increase to be from the four Gospels.
- ✠ During the night of the trial (before the cock crew) the Jewish priests condemned Jesus to death.

Let's follow the steps of Good Friday hour by hour

I. The Prime (first) hour

- ✠ When Judas saw that Jesus was condemned he regretted betraying Him, returned the thirty pieces of silver to the high priests saying: “I have betrayed the innocent blood.” When they were not moved, Judas, instead of repenting like Peter, he became desperate and hung himself. The high priests, the elders and the scribes took counsel against Jesus and instead of stoning Him, they delivered Him to Pilate with false accusations that He was a trouble maker who is against Caesar, claimed to be a (Christ) king and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar.
- ✠ Pilate examined and found no guilt on Him and when he knew that Jesus is from Galilee, he sent him to be tried by Herod. Herod asked to see a miracle but Jesus did not dignify him with an answer (not a word). Herod mocked Him putting a fine robe on Him and returned Him back to Pilate. *The hour is concluded with the day’s litanies with kneeling.*

II. The Terce (third) hour

- ✠ Pilate scourged Jesus; his soldiers put a crown of thorns on His head and clothed Him with a purple robe. Pilate brought Him out in this shape and told the high priests and the crowd that he could not find Him guilty and; he is releasing Him as it is customary to release a prisoner for the feast. The high priests threatened him if he release Jesus it will be a sign of disloyalty to Caesar. They even requested the release of a known killer “Barabbas” instead.
- ✠ Pilate washed his hands before the multitude, saying, “I am innocent of the blood of this just person. The crowd answered, “His blood be on us, and on our children.” Pilate finally submitted to their will and permitted the crucifixion.
- ✠ The Roman soldiers mocked Jesus, clothed Him with purple, put a reed in His hand, and bowed their knees saluting Him saying “Hail, King of the Jews!” They smote Him on the head with the reed, spat on Him, put back His clothes on Him and the wood of the Cross on His shoulders and; led Him to be crucified. In their way out of the city they forced a man (Simon the Cyrenian), returning from work in the field, to carry Jesus’ Cross. *The hour is concluded with the day’s litanies with kneeling.*

III. The Sixth (six) hour

- ✠ In our Coptic churches, at the beginning of this hour, Candles are lit before the icon of the Crucifixion, the priests in their service tonics offer incense and prayers, the congregation sings “Tai-Shori” (The pure golden censor - the long tone) followed by “Phai et af” (He offered Himself on the Cross, an acceptable sacrifice for the salvation of our race and His sweet aroma was inhaled by His good Father in the evening on Golgotha). This is followed by a reading from the Pauline Epistle and the parts of the sixth hour from the Agpeya; followed by “O mono Genes” (O the Only begotten), which ends with the three Holy (all crucified). Then the regular Pascha Psalm and readings from the four Gospels.
- ✠ At Golgotha, the soldiers gave Jesus vinegar with gall and when He had tasted it, he wouldn’t drink. They stripped Him of His clothes, divided them among them and cast lot on His robe. They nailed Him to the Cross and wrote a sign on top saying “The king of the Jews.” They also crucified with Him two thieves one on each side. There was darkness all over the world for three hours. *When the Bible containing this sentence is read we put off the lights and candles.*

- ✠ The right thief believed, confessed his sins and requested the Lord to remember him. Jesus spoke seven sentences only. The first three forgiving those who crucified Him, accepting the thief, giving His mother a son (the disciple who followed Him to the Cross, John the beloved) and giving John the best gift; His mother. The last four related to the completion of the salvation of mankind as pre-stated in the Psalms and the Old Testament. *The hour is concluded with the day's litanies with kneeling. Then the right thief plea and the Savior's answer to him are sung.*

IV. The None (Ninth) hour

- ✠ The lights are switched on again in the church as a sign of ending the three hours of darkness. Candles are lit before the icon of the Crucifixion. After the reading of the prophecies, the priests offer incense and prayers while the congregation sings "Ti-Shori" (The golden censor is the Virgin - the long tone) followed by "Phai et af" (as in the Sixth hour). The Pauline Epistle and the parts of the ninth hour from the Agpeya follow this. Then, the regular Pascha Psalm and the readings from the four Gospels.
- ✠ Jesus said I thirst. They filled a sponge with vinegar and put it on hyssop to His mouth to drink. When He tasted it, He said, it is finished and He cried with a loud voice and gave up the spirit.
- ✠ The veil of the temple was torn. *The hour is concluded with the day's litanies with kneeling.*

V. The Eleventh hour

- ✠ An earthquake occurred and graves were opened and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many. The centurion and his guards were afraid and said; "Truly this was the Son of God". Near the Cross, there were women relatives and followers looking from afar off.
- ✠ The custom of the Jews was to break the legs of the crucified to speed their death. The soldiers broke the two thieves' legs but didn't break the Lord's legs because He was already dead. Nevertheless, one of them pierced His side with a spear and blood and water gashed out. *The hour is concluded with the day's litanies with kneeling.*

VI. The Twelfth hour

- ✠ The Altar's curtain is opened to reveal the altar that is clothed in white. The priests and deacons enter into the Altar. The crucifixion stand is removed aside and the icon of the Crucifixion is taken up to the deacon's quarter. After the reading of the prophecies, the Pascha song is alternated one is sung from inside the altar and one from the congregation. The psalm "Peke-thronos" (Your throne O God) is sung in its known long tune. It is the answer of the church to the people who crucified the Lord that He is not dead but He is on His throne judging forever and ever.
- ✠ Joseph of Arimathaea, rich man not consented to their evil counsel, requested the Body of Christ from Pilate, who was surprised that He died that fast. When he had confirmed it from the centurion, he granted the Body to Joseph. Joseph and Nicodemus took the body, covered it with myrrh and aloes and wrapped it in linen. They put Him in Joseph's new

tomb, hewn in stone where no other was buried before. They rolled a stone on the entrance.

- ✠ The women who used to follow Jesus went with them to know the location in order to return back after the Sabbath to complete the anointing.
- ✠ The hour is concluded by the once a year 400 worshipping (Metanya). 100 in each direction East, West, North and South declaring that every knee and head will bow down to Him in the four directions of the earth. We also pray for the spread of the Gospel to the four directions. This is followed by 12 more worshipping to the east ending the hour, then a procession (3 times) around the altar with the icons of the Crucifixion and the burial, then out to the church ending at the altar again. The icon of the burial is then covered with red roses, spices and perfumes, wrapped in white linen, placed between two candles on the south side of the altar. The entire 150 Psalms are read before the priest closes the Altar's curtain.
- ✠ Shortly before midnight the church starts the prayer of Joyous Saturday which is the crossing over from death to life with its magnificent hymns and the reading of the Book of Revelation followed by the Divine Liturgy.

Conclusion/Questions:

Contemplate on the following points:

1. The Cross is the cornerstone of our faith.
2. Both Peter and Judas had regrets. But one washed his sins with tears and gained his salvation and the other, in despair, committed suicide and lost his salvation.
3. Pilate ruled that Jesus is innocent but submitted to the pressure and crucified Him the very next moment.
4. Simon the Cyrenian representing the tired human who is forced to carry the Cross. He received the blessing of reducing the pain of the Lord.
5. Beware that the high priests and scribes who knew better twisted the judgment, didn't fear nature's wrath and lost their salvation. On the other hand, a thief, a centurion and a spear-carrier saw the nature's reaction and the signs and believed.
6. All the Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled as if the prophets were standing during the trials, next to the cross and at the tomb.
7. The disciple who followed all the way to the Cross got the prize (Virgin Mary).
8. Note where did we get our prayers passages in the Agpeya.
9. What is the meaning of the temple's veil being torn?
10. What is the meaning of having both blood and water gushing out from the Savior's side?
11. Note that the people who care for the respectable burial of the saints and the poor are receiving unexpected reward.
12. Why do we recite all the 150 psalms at the burial?
13. What is the importance of the Joyous Saturday night prayer?

Application:

1. Prepare yourself to share in this great day that your church is offering to you once a year. This is a treasure you will not find anywhere. It is a concentrated dose of spiritual life, which will keep you near the Cross where you will find a fountain flowing from the Savior's side.
2. Talk to your friends about the love of Jesus Christ manifested on the cross and the salvation that we received through the cross.

Week 6 - Night of the Apocalypse

Objective:

- 1- Know what happens in church during Apocalypse night.
- 2- Learn the spiritual meaning of everything that takes place.

Memory Verse:

“My heart trusted in Him, and I am helped” (Psalm 28:7).

References:

- The Book of the Holy Week.
- “The Spirituality of the Rite of Joyous Saturday” Anba Metaous, Bishop of Al Saurian Monastery.

Introduction:

I. The readings in this night speak about

- ✠ Salvation.
- ✠ The Living God who does not die.
- ✠ The joy of the righteous waiting for our Lord to save them from Hades.

The joyous Saturday night (Apocalypse) is a night of transformation from death to life, from sadness to happiness. All the prayers that we read express this feeling (Jonah in the belly of the fish, King Hezekiah to whom God added 15 years to his life, the three youth in the fiery furnace).

Lesson Outline:

I. Layout

- ✠ Praises and Prayers of the Prophets.
- ✠ Matins' Raising of Incense.
- ✠ Prayers of the Third and Sixth hours.
- ✠ Reading of the Book of Revelation (Apocalypse).
- ✠ Prayer of the Ninth hour.
- ✠ The Liturgy.

II. The Praises and Prayers of the Prophets

A. Psalm 151

- ✠ Tells the story of David: How God transferred him from poverty to glory.
- ✠ Tells how David transferred the Children of Israel from shame and disgrace to victory and salvation (by the slaying of Goliath).

✠ The church reminds us of how the Lord saved us from the spiritual Goliath, which is Satan, whom he slew by the Cross.

✠ As David was the youngest in his brothers and served them, Jesus came to serve.

B. The First procession: Explanation of the Second Hoas

✠ Starts with “Let us thank Christ Our Lord, with David the Psalmist...”

✠ The entire congregation (priests, deacons, and laymen) partakes of this (and all other processions) during this night with lit candles and with crosses. This is to proclaim their joy in the Lord’s salvation, which He fulfilled on the Cross.

✠ This first procession follows Psalm 151 to portray our joy in the Lord’s Salvation over Satan (the spiritual Goliath).

C. The First Hoas: The first praise of Moses the prophet

✠ This tells the story of the Lord’s deliverance of His people by Moses, across the Red Sea.

✠ It is a symbol of the Lord’s deliverance from Satan (Pharaoh), who enslaved us by sin.

✠ This praise is called the praise of the Lamb (Revelation 15:1-3)

D. The Second Praise of Moses the prophet (Deuteronomy 32:1-43)

✠ These are Moses’ last words to the children of Israel.

✠ In it he reminds them of God’s aid to them and calls them to repent and seek the Lord.

✠ It ends with Joy in the Lord’s salvation.

✠ The church is calling us to repentance so that we may partake of the Joy of the Lord’s salvation and enter the Heavenly Jerusalem.

E. The Prayer of Hannah, Mother of Samuel (1 Samuel 2:1-11)

✠ A prayer of thanksgiving of Hannah when she brought her son Samuel into the temple, fulfilling her promise to God.

✠ The church likewise thanks God for granting her a Son (Christ) to redeem her from death.

F. Prayer of the prophet Habakkuk (Habakkuk 3:2-19)

✠ Habakkuk was a Levite and was one of the singers in the Temple.

✠ His Prayer is a prophecy about the crucified Christ. He even prophesied the changes in nature that occurred during the crucifixion (darkness, earthquake, etc.)

✠ The church reads this praise as a reminder of the Salvation of the Lord.

G. Prayer of the prophet Jonah (Jonah 2:2-10)

✠ This is the prayer of Jonah while in the belly of the fish.

✠ The church reminds us of the story of Jonah because of the many symbols of similarities between Jonah and Christ.

✠ Three days in the belly of the fish.

✠ Was condemned to death but remained alive.

✠ By his death, the ship was saved.

✠ It was necessary for the seamen to throw him in order that they would be saved.

✠ He entered into the belly, which no one entered before.

H. Prayer of Hezekiah, the King of Judah (Isaiah 38:10-20)

✠ God added 15 years to his life.

✠ This prayer is a symbol of God's taking his people from death to life and from sadness to Joy.

I. Prayer of King Manasseh

✠ He was the son of Hezekiah. He was evil and for this reason he was defeated by his enemies and taken as a captive.

✠ He repented and regretted all his sins and God accepted his repentance.

J. First Prayer of the prophet Isaiah

K. Second Prayer of the prophet Isaiah

L. Third Prayer of the prophet Isaiah

M. Song of the prophet Jeremiah

N. Song of the prophet Baruch

O. Song of the prophet Elijah

P. Prayer of the prophet David

Q. Prayer of King Solomon

R. Prayer of the prophet Daniel

S. The vision of Daniel regarding the three young men in the fiery furnace (Daniel 3:1-100)

✠ As the three young men were condemned to death in a fiery furnace but came out alive, humanity was condemned to death but the Lord granted it life, through His death.

✠ Whoever wishes to see the Lord, must pass through the fire of temptations and overcome it with the power of God.

✠ The salvation of the three young men from the fiery furnace is a symbol of salvation from the eternal fire.

T. Praise of Azarius (from Deuterocanonical books)

U. Psalm (Praise) of the three young men: the Third Hoas (Daniel 3:2-10)

V. Arep-salin

W. Greek Hymn for the three young men

X. The rest of the story of the three young men

Y. Song of St. Mary

Z. Prayer of Zechariah the priest

AA. The prayer of Simon the Elder

AB. The Story of Susannah, the virtuous (from Deuterocanonical books)

III. The Second Procession: The Praise of the three young men

✠ This is a portion of the Praise of Azarius while in the furnace, as he proclaims that he'll follow the Lord under any condition (even in the furnace).

✠ After the congregation hear all the prayers and praises of the salvation of the Lord, they go around the church assuring the Lord that they will follow Him all the time: "We follow you with all our hearts..."

IV. Reading the book of revelation:

✠ We see our Lord Jesus Christ in His glory; divinity and eternity after the people saw Him on the cross (Revelation 15:2-4).

- † We see the glory prepared for the cross bearers (Revelation 14:13, 7:14-17).
- † We see the punishment of the people who crucified Him (Revelation 6:16).
- † We see His Second Coming, fearful and full of glory to give each one according to his deeds (Revelation 14:6-8, 20:12).
- † We see the redeeming work of our Lord (Revelation 1:5, 5:9, 12:10-11, 19:13).
- † We see the gates of heaven open for the sons of man (Revelation 4:1, 11:19).
- † We see the great description of the Heavenly Jerusalem since this is the night that our Lord opened the gates of paradise (Revelation 21).
- † We see all the promises given to those who overcome.

Application:

Plan to attend this night in church, share and enjoy its blessings with a joyful heart.

LESSONS FOR THE PENTECOST PERIOD
(Fifty days following Resurrection)

Week 1: The Resurrection

Week 2: The Life of Fellowship

Week 3: History of the Liturgy

Week 4: The Meeting Between Elijah and Ahab

Week 5: The Second Meeting Between Elijah and Ahab

Week 6: The Third Meeting Between Elijah and Ahab

Week 7: A Meeting with The Messengers of Ahaziah

Week 1 - Resurrection

Objective:

To deepen the understanding of the relationship between resurrection and triumph over sin and the renewed rejoicing in the hearts of the believers.

Memory Verse:

“For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection” (Romans 6:5).

References:

1. How to live the Resurrection. Fr. Bishoy Kamel.
2. The Fruits of Resurrection. Bishop Moussa
3. Feast of the Holy Resurrection: Easter Message by H.G. Bishop Youssef

Lesson Outline:

To Christians the resurrection is a reason for rejoicing. The resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ gives us hope for eternal life. It is our gate to eternity and has three powerful effects in our life:

I. A New Life

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. His crucifixion and resurrection has given us faith and hope in the Son of God as stated in Galatians 2: 20: *“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me”*.

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 knows 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). Just as baptism is a new life for us, so is resurrection.

II. Eternal Glory

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, 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).

When Christ appears in glory, we will appear with Him in glory too. What a wonderful thing to look for “But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light. And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. Its gates shall bring the glory and the honor of nations into it. But there shall by no means enter it, anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life” (Revelation 21:22-27).

III. Restoration to the Image of God

After the disobedience of Adam the devil became the ruler of this world. He used to throw the soul, which parted its body into Hades.

But when the time came for the Lord Jesus Christ to give 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 Jesus brought the souls of those who died in faith (1 Corinthians 2:15, Philippians 3:7, Psalm 47:11, Psalm 68:1-3, Revelation 5:12). By this 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, and because of this sin, death spread to all men. Because of one man’s trespass death reigned over man, but with the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ and His resurrection death was abolished and the Image of God was restored. Setting our minds on things above, not on things of the earth means seeking the ultimate spiritual glories of the age to come. The Resurrection of Our Lord has enabled us to “Put on a new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him (Colossians 3:10). Thus, the Resurrection restores to us the Image of God that we lost due to sin.

V. 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 Body of the Lord, risen from the dead and drink the honored Blood, which enables us to sacrifice, to be ready for martyrdom and to show piety waiting for the awesome Second Coming which is full of glory.

So the Christians are expected to put the mysteries they obtain into practice in everyday life and in their relationship with people so that the aroma of Christ may spread. In this way, they emphasize the fact of the effective resurrection of the world.

VI. Resurrection, man and the life of joy

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. 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).

VII. The power of the Paschal Joy

The natural 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 as a sort of humor, slackness and indifference. In this Peter comforts us (1 Peter 1:13). 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 in the holy days of Pentecost, this man rejoices with Christ.

Conclusion:

The resurrection fills us with joy and love and he who loves forgives, forgets, and takes his time to show 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?

In the creed we recite, "we look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the age to come. Amen."

Week 2 - The Life of Fellowship

Objective:

To develop the spirit of fellowship in the life of our youth through fellowship with God, the saints, the members of the church and the Christian family.

Memory Verse

*“God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord”
(1 Corinthians 1:9).*

Lesson Outline:

I. 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 13:17).

II. What is the foundation 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 6:1-18).
- † 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).

III. 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.

IV. Some foundations of the life of fellowship among believers

- † The members of the church are united through Christ. Christians are united into a special fellowship through their love for one another and their common union with Christ.
- † Love binds all things together in perfect harmony and binds all members together.
- † To welcome one another as Christ welcomed us for the glory of God.

V. 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.

VI. 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 his wife live with one mind and one heart so their children may grow up in holy unity.
- ✚ Christianity believes that the children are the natural fruit of the fellowship of love between husband and wife. 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 Apostles' Church led the life of fellowship (Acts 2:42-47). St. 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 others without showing pride or haughtiness.

VII. 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, which came to the world through the envy of the devil led to the existence of a will, which is against the will of God the Father. Thus the faithful Christian loves the world, the people and the material creatures but he hates the evil current and corruption, i.e. sin.

Week 3 - History of The Liturgy

Objective:

- To know the history behind the Divine Liturgy
- To understand what the Liturgy is all about
- To know the importance of the Eucharist in our lives

Memory Verse:

“So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart” (Acts 2:46).

References:

1. A History of Eastern Christianity, Aziz S. Atiya 1980; Rites and Ceremonials pages 126-130.
2. The Divine Liturgy a Company With Heaven, Fr. Bishoy Kamel; Coptic Church Review Vol. 5, # 2.
3. The Coptic Orthodox Divine Liturgy, Fr. Gabriel Abdel-Sayed; Coptic Church Review Vol. 1, #3.
4. Liturgical Worship in the Coptic Church, Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty; Coptic Church Review Vol. 8, # 4.
5. The Coptic Liturgy, Special Issue of Coptic Church Review Vol. 8, # 1.

Introduction:

Man has been given the longing to acquire the virtues: *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness”* (Matthew 5:6). He becomes as one who hungers and thirsts for all righteousness, that is, both for bodily virtue and for the moral virtue of the soul. He who has not tasted something, says Basil the Great, does not know what he is missing; but once he has tasted it, he is filled with sweet longing. Thus he who has tasted the sweetness of the commandments, and realized that they lead him gradually towards the imitation of Christ, longs to acquire them all, with the result that he often disdains even death for their sake. Glimpsing the mysteries of God hidden in the Holy Scriptures, he thirsts to grasp them fully; and the more knowledge he gains, the more he thirsts, burning as though drinking flames. And because the Divine cannot be grasped fully by anyone, he continues to thirst for ever.” **St. Peter of Damascus**

“The Holy Liturgy is a prayer itself, the highest prayer that exists. It is the Sacrifice, dedicated by our Redeemer at the Cross, and repeated every day on the altar. If you wish to hear Liturgy as it should be heard, you must follow with eye, heart, and mouth all that happen at the Altar. Further, you must pray with the priest the holy words said by him, in the name of Christ and which Christ says through him. You have to associate your heart and feelings with the holy words spoken. This way facilitates your comprehension of all that happens on the Altar. When acting in this way you have prayed Holy Liturgy.” **His Holiness, Pope Saint Pius X**

In the current era of Liturgical reform and “modernization”, the use of the historic Liturgy of the Christian Church has become synonymous with conservatism. This is due, in large measure, to the

fact that the current form of the Liturgy, with a few minor changes, has been in use since the sixth century. Therefore, advocates of radical reform often make appeals to worship in a “new” and “fresh” manner. However, Liturgy and worship are not interchangeable ideas. Corporate worship is the activity that includes repentance to God, His forgiveness of our sins through confession and absolution, the Gospel, baptism, and the Lord’s Supper and our response of prayer, praise, and thanksgiving. Liturgy is the rite that congregations follow when they are worshipping. Not everyone who participates in the Liturgy is worshipping, as worship also incorporates a faith response on the part of the worshiper. One can almost be certain that Cain and Abel used the same form, or liturgy, when offering up their sacrifices in Genesis 4. However, God accepted Abel’s sacrifice while Cain’s was refused because of the difference in their motivations and attitudes. The historic Liturgy, which has been used by the Church for almost 1400 years, is the form for worship that is most appropriate for engendering the correct attitude in the worshiper.

I. Origin

The Eucharist is the central rite of the Christian religion, in which bread and wine are consecrated by an ordained priest and with the attendance of the members of the congregation in obedience to Jesus’ command at the Last Supper, “Do this in remembrance of Me” (Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24). In the Orthodox Church this act is regarded as a sacrament, which symbolizes and affects the union of Christ with the faithful.

The word “Liturgy” itself is taken from the Greek word leitourgia, which can best be translated as “public service undertaken on behalf of the people”. It comes from: “laos,” meaning, “people” and “Ourgia,” meaning “work”.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, this word is translated “ministry” or “worship” (Hebrews 8:6; 9:21).

The church has used this term since the apostolic age, to cover all worship which is officially organized by her, and which is offered by all her members, or on their behalf. In the course of time, this term has become to be particularly applied to the performance of the service of Eucharist, although there are other liturgies as the Liturgy of Baptism, and the Liturgy of marriage.

The liturgy is a life that the church practices, through which she acknowledges her nature and realizes her message and attains her own existence, life and growth in Jesus Christ.

II. Roots

The central act of liturgy from earliest times was the Eucharistic assembly, the commemorative celebration of the Last Supper of Jesus. This was set in a structure of liturgical prayer. The first six centuries of the Christian Church saw the development of a rich variety of liturgical systems, many of which have survived in the Oriental churches.

The most widely used liturgy in Orthodox worship is the Liturgy of St. Basil the Great. It is generally recognized that the wording of the Liturgy of St. Basil goes back to the 4th century to St. Basil himself.

The Divine Liturgy is the central function in all Coptic sacraments. It is like standing before the Lord. Indeed, all the numerous sacraments connected with baptism, matrimony, unction of the sick and the rest converge upon the Liturgy and should end with Holy Communion.

III. Details

The Liturgy cannot be prayed without an ordained priest, deacons and people. The altar, the vessels and instruments of Holy Communion may not be used a second time on the same day for the

Eucharistic Liturgy. The liturgy may, however, be repeated on another altar in the church. The priest or an authorized man bakes the Holy Bread; leavened but not salted, in the morning of the day it is to be used. The Holy Bread is stamped with a cross surrounded by twelve smaller crosses and an inscription from the Coptic Trisagion: “Agios O Theos, Agios Ischyros, Agios Athanatos,” from a hymn sung by Nicodemus and Joseph at the Lord’s entombment, “Holy God! Holy Mighty! Holy Immortal!” The Holy Bread is then pierced five times around the central cross, symbolizing the four nails, and the spear used in the Passion (three on the right side (two nails and one spear) and two on the left. Note here that there are two nails for the two arms and two nails for the two legs. They used to nail one leg first and then nail the second leg on the top of the first). The chosen Holy Bread is called Hamal, meaning the ‘Lamb.’

St. Theodore says, “The two deacons on either side of the altar are symbolic of the two angels standing by the tomb at the time of resurrection because the altar stands for the tomb where the Sacrifice was laid.” Also the presence of a deacon by the Sacrifice symbolizes the presence of the angel who tended to the Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane during His suffering as a sacrifice since the Sacrifice of the Liturgy is itself the Sacrifice of the suffering of the Lord.

At present, the Copts use only three liturgies: St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory the Nazianzen, and St. Mark. The last was initiated by St. Mark and perfected by St. Cyril the Great, whose name is usually associated with it. The Basilian Liturgy is habitually used throughout the year, while the Gregorian is often reserved for the festive occasions of Christmas, Epiphany and Easter. The Cyrillian Liturgy of St. Mark is rather long and little known and is partially used during Lent Sundays.

Most of the Coptic Divine Liturgy is chanted. All hymns, prayers and litanies officiated are full of images, symbols, and expressions taken from the Bible, requiring the knowledge of the Scriptures for their understanding.

The Divine Liturgy requires a sequence of movements or rites including readings, kneeling, raising of hands, bowing of head, the kiss of peace and standing. The liturgy is actually officiated in three main stages. The first is the Matins Services. The second is the liturgy of the word (Catechumen). The third is the liturgy of the faithful, where it is inaugurated with the Nicene Creed, followed by a long service of prayers, litanies and intercessions that encompass almost everything and everybody. During the liturgy the celebrant bishop, or priest, the deacons and the congregation become engaged in various responses humbly interceding for the sanctification of the occasion.

The Coptic liturgy reveals the deep and intense piety of the Coptic Church, its meditation on Scripture and delight in the saints.

IV. The Characteristics of the Coptic Liturgies

- ✠ The Coptic liturgies are not monopolized by the clergymen, they are the liturgies of all the church, laymen and clergymen.
- ✠ The Coptic liturgies not only characterize the church unity, clergy and laity, young and old, men and women, but also aim at revealing the heavenly life as near and recognizable to us.
- ✠ The Coptic liturgies are correlated to the church dogmas and doctrines. The liturgy is the school of the people, which opens its doors to the children through its simplicity and to the theologians through its depth.
- ✠ The Coptic liturgies are correlated to the ascetic church life.

- ✠ The Coptic liturgies are biblical. Every liturgy declares the word of God and the experience of the evangelic life.
- ✠ The Coptic liturgy touches the believers' daily life, where the believers practice the common worship as a part of their lives as a whole.

We find our comfort in the liturgy of the Eucharist, as we find the precious Blood of Jesus Christ as the expiation of our sins (1 John 4:10), and a source of our inner peace.

It is noteworthy that the Orthodox faith has its most adequate expression in the Divine Liturgy, which through worship contributes to the building up of the members in the One Body of Christ.

V. The Six Meanings of The Eucharist

The Eucharist has six meanings that no other sacrament has, nor any other Church service can achieve. In trying to understand the Eucharist, as far as it is humanly possible, the Church Fathers and theologians throughout the ages have looked at it from numerous aspects that are reflected in its numerous names. These are:

1. THANKSGIVING (Eucharist): This is the first part of any prayer where man thanks, blesses and glorifies God for His divinity and His work in creation and in salvation.

2. REMEMBRANCE (Anamnesis): Following the words of Christ at the Last Supper we (remember) Him in His work of salvation *“For every time you eat this Bread, and drink of this cup, you preach My death, confess My resurrection and remember Me til I come.”*

3. OBLATION (Sacrifice): which is an anamnesis of Christ's sacrifice on the Cross, the Church, as His body, offers herself and all her members within this one eternal Sacrifice.

4. PRESENCE OF GOD: The Eucharist is a Trinitarian action in which is manifested the work of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

5. INTERCESSION: In the Eucharist, the Church intercedes for the living and the dead through Christ.

6. COMMUNION: With each member participating in the one Body and Blood of Christ, they are no longer separate individuals but One Church, the Bride of the Lamb.

“At the Last Supper, on the night He was betrayed, our Savior instituted the Eucharistic Sacrifice of His body and blood. He did this in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the Cross throughout the centuries until He should come again, and so to entrust to His beloved spouse, the Church, a memorial of His death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a paschal banquet in which Christ is consumed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us” (Sacrosanctum Concilium 47).

Conclusion:

There is nothing on earth holier, higher, and more solemn and life giving than the Liturgy. The Liturgy is the constant reiteration of God's love for mankind and an all-powerful petition for the salvation of the whole world and every individual person.

The Eucharistic Sacrifice, or Christ's most Pure Body and Blood, is the inexhaustible source of reconciliation with God, the mercy of purification, sanctification, and renewal for all believers, an active prayer for the bringing to Christ of all peoples of the world.

In the liturgy the Church is presented to the Golgotha, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to enjoy the sacrificial Blood of her Savior, practicing the saving deeds of her heavenly Father. In other words the Eucharist is an anamnesis of the redeeming action of Christ in the mysterious sense that it is still active and continuous.

Week 4 - The Meeting Between Elijah and Ahab

Objective:

Elijah represents an excellent model to a youth in this stage in which he seeks the high ideals and admires the practical model that stood firmly defending what was right overcoming all the obstacles in his way and was able abide by his principles.

Reference:

- The first book of Kings, Chapter 17
- The life of Elijah by F. B. Meyer

Lesson Outline:

I. Elijah Meets Ahab

A. King Ahab did evil in the sight of the Lord

He married Jezebel the pagan princess, worshipped Baal and built a temple for Baal in Samaria. The evil he did displeased the Lord God of Israel more than the evil done by all the Kings of Israel that came before him (1 Kings 16:29-30).

The Scriptures state that marrying an evil woman is very bad and dangerous (e.g. Samson).

B. Elijah defines evil

“As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years except by my word.” (1 Kings 17:1)

Consider the greatness of the personality of Elijah and do not forget that Kings in the past were tyrants. God answered Elijah’s request and appeared to him.

C. The Lord God fed Elijah

God commanded ravens to bring bread and meat to Elijah by the brook of Cherith, east of the Jordan, each morning and evening. The brook supplied Elijah with water to drink (refer to God’s feeding of 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.

D. Elijah and the widow in Zarephath near Sidon

The blessing of the Lord filled the house- The Lord God says, *“The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until the day the Lord sends rain on the earth.” (1 Kings 17:14)*. 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, which fills our spiritual and material life.

E. Elijah raises the widow's son

“O Lord my God, I pray let this child's soul come into him” (1 Kings 17:21). The Lord answered Elijah's prayers and Elijah delivered the child to his mother. Compare this miracle with what the Lord Christ did when He raised the son of a widow from Nain.

Exercises and Activities:

- † Make a thorough study of the life of Elijah and show the heroic situations that filled you with admiration and give the reason that makes you admire him.
- † 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”. 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?
- † Elijah was a symbol of Christ in the blessing, which filled the house of the widow of Zarephath. What are the similarities here? Christ referred to this widow in His talks (Luke 4:25).
- † Why does the Bible say that John 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 1:17. Show that this prophecy was fulfilled in the character of the Baptist.
- † A tendency now adopted all over 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?
- † 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?
- † 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).

Week 5 - The Second Meeting Between Elijah and Ahab

References:

1 Kings 18 and 19

Lesson Outline:

I. Ahab and Obadiah

- ✠ Ahab called on Obadiah who was in charge of the palace. Obadiah revered the Lord greatly. When 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 now 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 Esther and all those who bear witness to the Lord in their positions)

II. Is that you, O troubler of Israel?

- ✠ 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.

III. Elijah meets the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel

- ✠ 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.*" (1 Kings 18:21)
- ✠ 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.*" (1 Kings 18:27)
- ✠ Notice the idols of the modern world, which people worship. They are not Baal but they are like it. Examples: money, material, lust, fame, degrees 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.

IV. Elijah's attitude

- ✠ We see Elijah repairing the altar of the Lord, which had been torn down, digging a trench around the altar, filling four jars with water and pouring water on the offering and the wood. Why did he do this? 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, Hear me, O Lord, Hear me, that this people may know that You, O Lord, are God, and that You have turned their hearts back to You again*" (1 Kings 18:36,37). God answered Elijah's

prayer “*Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench*” (1 Kings 18:38). 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.

V. Elijah’s situation at Mount Carmel after God 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.

VI. Elijah feared Jezebel’s threats

- † Elijah wished for death because of the threats of the evil woman Jezebel (a model for the weakness of human nature). 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.
- † Elijah stood before the Lord.
- † The Lord was not in the wind and He was not in the earthquake. The Lord was not in the fire. The Lord was in the soft whisper of a voice Meditate.
- † What Elijah said was “*I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life*” (1 Kings 19:10). " How weak he was when he thought of himself.
- † How weak he was also when he was 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 who is able to raise up children to Abraham from stones.
- † We need to look forward to God 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”.

Activities:

- Why didn’t Obadiah want to deliver Elijah’s message to Ahab?
- What had Elijah done before meeting Ahab?
- In his Epistle to the Romans, St. Paul quoted Elijah’s words (Romans 11:2). Why did he choose this quotation and what were his comment on the prophet’s words?
- What are the acceptable and true attributes of the Christian witness and what is the false one?
- What is the difference between holy zeal for God, fanaticism, anger and rage in the situations

- 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?
- What is the similarities and differences in character between the Lord Christ and Elijah
- Elijah was a symbol of Christ in the following situations:
 - a) Giving witness to the truth.
 - b) Attacking false religiousness.
 - c) Standing alone in the most difficult situations
- But Elijah was different from the Lord In the following:
 - 1) Violence.
 - 2) Weakness and fleeing from Jezebel.
 - 3) Considering the self and fear of loneliness.
 - 4) His need for external support.

Let your saying be: “How long will you go limping with two different options? If the Lord Is God, follow Him, but If Baal, Is God then follow him”.

Remember: “I am the Lord thy God; you shall not have strange Gods before Me”.

Week 6 - The Third Meeting Between Elijah and Ahab

Reference:

1 Kings 21

Lesson Outline:

I. Another exciting meeting between Elijah and Ahab

- † The greediness of Ahab and his desire to possess Naboth'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 Jezebel, the evil woman, succeed in getting rid of Naboth?
- † What do you think of 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 have 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 lives in Samaria. There he is, in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has gone down to take possession of it. You shall speak to him, saying, 'Thus says the Lord: Have you murdered and also taken possession?' And you shall speak to him, saying, 'Thus says the Lord: In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, dogs shall lick your blood, even yours'" (1 Kings 21:18,19).
- † "Because you have sold yourself to do evil in the sight of the Lord: Behold, I will bring calamity on you. I will take away your posterity, and will cut off from Ahab every male in Israel, both bond and free" (1 Kings 21:20,21).
- † "The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the walls of Jezreel" (1 Kings 21:23).
- † "The dogs shall eat whoever belongs to Ahab and dies in the city, and the birds of the air shall eat whoever dies in the field" (1 Kings 21:24).
- † "But there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do wickedness in the sight of the Lord, because Jezebel his wife stirred him up" (1 Kings 21:25).

II. Ahab's Repentance

- † "When Ahab heard those words, that he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his body, and fasted and lay in sackcloth, and went about mourning" (1 Kings 21:27).
- † "And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying: See how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the calamity in his days. In the days of his son I will bring the calamity on his house" (1 Kings 21:28,29).

Application:

- ✠ 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 weak 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 were a call for emancipation from injustice and a call for human fraternity and rejecting fanaticism and disposition. Quote related texts from the sayings of the prophets of the Old Testament, from John the Baptist, and from James the Apostle. Make a study of the life of John Chrysostom as a model of calling for social justice.
- ✠ Notice how Ahab died in Samaria and how the dogs licked his blood (1 Kings 22:37). The word of the Lord never falls down and the punishment of God is everlasting and fearful. 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.

Week 7 – A Meeting with the messengers of Ahaziah

Reference:

2 Kings 2

Introduction:

Ahaziah felt through the lattice in his upper chamber in Samaria and laid sick so he sent messengers with these words, inquire of Beelzebub, the god of Ekron, 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 three consecutive military regiments and fire came down from heaven and killed each group. Later the king died.

Lesson Outline:

I. Elijah is taken up to heaven in chariot of fire

- † 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.

II. Sources of power in the life of Elijah

A. He was a man of truth. He bore witness to the truth and he did not fear rulers

- † 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.

B. He was a man of holiness, skepticism and virginity

He lived in the wilderness, his clothes were made of camel's hair and he rejected the life 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.

C. 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.

D. 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 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).

Application:

- ✠ 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 the difference 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.

THE APOSTLES' FAST PERIOD

Use Filler lessons (at the beginning of the book) between the feast of Pentecost and the second week of July.

LESSONS FOR THE MONTH OF JULY

Week 2: The Life of St. Peter the Apostle

Week 3: Midnight Praises

Week 4: New Forms of Addiction-Internet, e-mail and Computer Chats

Week 2 - The Life of St. Peter the Apostle

Objective:

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

Memory Verse:

“And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18).

References:

- The life of Peter the apostle -By F. B. Meyer translated by Fr. Marcos Daoud.
- John 13 - 21

Lesson Outline:

I. 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, ordained ministers to them, and then moved on to other places.

II. 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.

III. Peter’s Characteristics

St. Peter’s 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 divinity of Christ, and the first to preach about Christ on the day of the Pentecost but his impulsiveness caused him to try to prevent Christ’s death on the cross. So when Jesus was arrested Peter took out his sword to defend Christ and prevent the soldiers from taking Him. Peter then was in need of a bitter temptation to shake him and to make him know his weakness. As Jesus predicted *“Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times” (Matthew 26:34)*. St. Peter denied His master but as soon as he heard the rooster crows he realized his mistake and cried bitterly in repentance. 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, *“Feed My lambs...tend My sheep...feed My sheep” (John 21:15-17)*.

St. Peter was an ordinary man who had his virtues as well as his mistakes and weakness. When this simple personality met by Jesus Christ, it was 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. He has also seen Jesus' love and kindness, mercy and long suffering, endurance and patience, frankness and courage. Then, he accompanied Jesus to Gethsemane, saw him after He rose in triumph over death and sin and finally watched Him as He ascended into heaven.

The Bible relates St. Peter's life in its early rags with its great power after the Ascension of Christ and the pouring of the Holy Spirit. St. Peter changed from a fisherman to a fisher of men. His life flourished with the light of knowledge and the love of God. He devoted all his life to service and spreading the message he received from the Lord Jesus, the Lord granted him the gift of performing miracles.

The study of St. Peter's personality elucidates how grace operates 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 makes us always look forward to the power of Christ and the power of His blood that is able to turn the wicked to the life of piety and to destroy all the bonds that hinder the soul to enjoy the holy life through the Lord.

Studying the life of St. Peter the apostle and understanding the work of the Holy Spirit in him teaches us not to despise 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.

IV. Situations in the life of Peter the apostle

A. Lord Jesus helps St. Peter catching a great number of fish (Luke 5:1-8)

Let us examine St. Peter's attitude towards the Lord when he was in his ship. The Lord sent them to the depth and asked them to let down their nets after they had toiled all night (resorting to their human efforts). The Lord was glorified and performed the miracle and they caught a great amount of fish. St. 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. St. Peter also expressed his unworthiness with love.

B. St. Peter walking on the Sea (Matthew 22-33)

St. Peter asked to go to the Lord on the water. Jesus granted him his wish. However, instead of keeping his eyes on the Lord he started looking around him and noticed the fierce wind, lost faith and started to sink. 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.

C. Lord Jesus tells His death and resurrection (Matthew 16:21-27)

When St. Peter, full of zeal, heard Lord Jesus talking about His death and resurrection, not realizing the importance of His crucifixion, he tried to hamper God's plan saying "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!"

D. At the time of the arrest and crucifixion

St. Peter also wanted to prevent the cross when he struck the High Priest's slave with his sword.

"Even if I should have to die with you." St. 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).

How soon did he deny Christ and how soon did he return but this necessitated that he should go outside and weeps bitterly. St. Peter returned with power greater than weakness and this is what we need "Repentance".

E. Lord Jesus' attitude towards Peter

To God, bargains are of no value but the heart is invaluable. When Lord Jesus met St. 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 St. Peter denied him three times "The Lord does not look at weaknesses and their consequences but He looks at the earnest love in the heart".

St. Peter endured his responsibility and cared for the sheep. He fed Lord Jesus' lambs through preaching and teaching for salvation that was ready to be declared and revealed in the last period of time.

St. Peter preached and bore good witness to the Lord even to 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. St. Peter decided to die for Lord Jesus, crucified 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).

V. His Service

St. Peter began his service among Jews of his race in Judea, Galilee and Samaria. The Lord was glorified through some miracles performed by St. Peter such as healing the lame man at the Beautiful Gate. He healed Aeneas in Lydda. He brought Tabitha back to life after her death in Joppa. The Lord opened the door of faith for the Gentiles at St. Peter's hands through Cornelius, the Centurion. Yet, his main field of work 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.

VI. His Martyrdom

It is well known that St. Peter's life ended in Rome where he was condemned to death. He was crucified at the time of Nero the tyrant after July 64.

V. His writings

His first epistle and the second epistle were sent to the Christians of Asia Minor towards the end of his life.

He is one of the most useful role models for young people for his firm hope in Lord Jesus and because he did not feel desperate.

He revealed 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 our sticking unto Him.

In John 13 the Lord revealed to us the mystery of true purity, which means trusting Him and hope without despair when St. Peter was considered pure and Judas was not pure "*you are clean, but not all of you*". For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, "*You are not all clean.*" (John 13:10) Peter 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 he 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, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*" (1 Pet 1:3) 'How beautiful is this living hope when we stick to it.

Week 3 - Midnight Praises

Objective:

1. Show the great joy associated with the life of praise that our youth need to enjoy.
2. Praises is a powerful mean of worship with the heavenly hosts.

Memory Verse:

“Oh sing to the Lord a new song” (Psalm 96:1).

References:

- The Holy Psalmody
- The Spirituality of the Praises. Anba Metaous, Bishop of Al Saurian Monastery.

Introduction:

I. Praises are one of the functions of the church

- 1) It practices praises as a manifestation of the Resurrection of Christ.
- 2) Praising is a cooperative function between the Struggling Church and the Victorious Church.
- 3) Praising is the work of the Angels.
- 4) “Praise Him, all His angels; Praise Him, all His hosts!” (Psalm 148:2).
- 5) We share the Angels in praising God.
- 6) We are training ourselves for our life in Heaven – Praising God.
- 7) The praises are the preparation for the banquet of the King, who is to come in the Liturgy.

II. Praising was practiced in the early Church

- 1) “So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, **praising God...**” (Acts 2:46-47).
- 2) Praising is a living Sacrifice.
- 3) “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a **living sacrifice**, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service” (Romans 12:1).
- 4) Through praising, we present ourselves a living sacrifice to Christ, Who presented Himself a Sacrifice for our sins.
- 5) We say in the Liturgy, “A mercy of peace, A **Sacrifice of Praise**”

III. What is this “Sacrifice of Praise”

- 1) “Let my prayer be set before you as incense, **the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice**” (Psalms 141:2).
- 2) “... Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you have prepared for me” (Hebrews 10:5).

- 3) We offer our sacrifice in our bodies “Therefore by Him let us continually offer the **sacrifice of praise** to God, that is, **the fruit of our lips**, giving thanks to His name” (Hebrews 13:15).

IV. We do not praise God alone, but rather together with the heavenly

- 1) “I will praise You with my whole heart; before the angels I will sing praises to You” (Psalm 138:1).
- 2) “Praise God in all saints” (Psalm 150:1).
- 3) “I will declare Your name to My brethren; In the midst of the assembly I will praise You” (Psalm 22:22).

Lesson Outline:

I. Terminology of the Praises

A. Psalmody: The Book of Praises

There are two types of Psalmodies:

- 1) Annual Psalmody that contains all the praises prayed during the year.
- 2) Kiahk Psalmody that contains all the praises and expositions prayed during the month of Kiahk.

B. “Hoas”: A Coptic word meaning “Praise”

1. There are 4 Hoases are prayed in the Midnight Praises.
2. Lobsh: A Coptic word meaning “Explanation”. There are two lobshes in the Midnight Praises; after the first and second Hoases.
3. Psali: A Greek word meaning “Song”. There are different kinds of Psalies:
 - a) For Our Lord Jesus Christ.
 - b) For Virgin Mary.
 - c) For the three young men in the fiery furnace, chanted after the third Hoas.
 - d) For the Saints.
 - e) Other Psalies for the feasts and fasts.
4. Theotokia: A Greek word meaning a “Glorification for the Theotokos (Mother of God)”
5. There is always one Theotokia for every day of the week.
6. Doxology: A Greek word meaning “Glorification”.
7. It can be for any saint or angel, or even feast.
8. Antiphonarium (Deph-nar): A Greek word meaning “A brief history”.
9. Contains a brief history and glorification of the saint of the day.
10. Adam: Coptic Word meaning “Adam”.
11. It is used to distinguish the first three days of the week – Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday – along with their hymns, and tunes.
12. It is taken from the first word of the Monday Theotokia: “Adam E-ti efoi...” (While Adam was sad...).

13. Vatos (Watos): A Coptic word meaning “Bush”.
14. It is used to distinguish the last four days of the week – Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday – along with their hymns, and tunes.
15. It is taken from the first word of the Thursday Theotokia: “Pi-Vatos e-ta Moi-sees...” (The bush, which Moses has seen...).

The Structure of the Midnight Praises

1. The Hymn of Ten theno (Arise O Children of the Light).
2. The Hymn of Ten Nav (We look at the Resurrection of Christ).
3. The First Hoas.
4. Lobsh of the First Hoas.
5. The Second Hoas.
6. Lobsh of the Second Hoas.
7. The Third Hoas.
8. The Psali of the Three Young Men in the fiery furnace: “Arib-salin” (O sing unto Him who was crucified...)”
9. A Greek Psali also for the Three Young Men in the fiery furnace: “Ten-oweh enthok” (We follow you...)
10. The commemoration of the Saints.
11. The Doxologies.
12. The Forth Hoas.
13. Psali for the Virgin Mary (on Sundays).
14. Psali of the day for the Lord Jesus.
15. The Theotokia of the day.
16. The Antiphonarium is read.
17. The Conclusion of the Theotokias.
18. Kerie-Layson is chanted, and the praises are concluded.

Application:

Attend the Saturday midnight praises on a regular basis.

Week4 - New Forms of Addiction: Internet, E-mail, Chat Rooms

Objective:

1. Recognize the hidden dangers of computer technology.
2. Identify the signs of addiction to this new technology.
3. Find solutions to break this kind of addiction.

Memory Verse:

“Avoiding the profane and vain babbling and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge” (I Timothy 6:20).

References:

The Church and its Challenges From the Present Age (Bishop Moussa)

Introduction:

Computers are presently becoming a necessity in every home. The time and number of people interacting with computers is growing significantly each day. Computers are also increasingly available in schools and universities as an important educational tool. Thus, society is becoming more and more dependent on computers in daily life. However, as computers become more commonplace, so do their adverse effects. The most important of these adverse effects, which accompanies prolonged use of a computer, is computer addiction.

Lesson Outline:

- ✠ It is important to define what addiction is in order to understand the new syndrome of Computer Addiction. The Webster’s Dictionary defines an addict as one who gives up to something, which is usually considered evil (for example, smoking). In other words, with addiction, the need for the item controls the human, desire becomes the master and the actual person, the slave. Addiction of any sort is against the spirit of freedom which God has granted us and has shed His blood for, freeing us from slavery to the Devil: *“So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36).*

I. Internet

Internet, like any other worldly item, has its advantages and disadvantages. It is either extremely beneficial or extremely harmful depending on the manner and the duration of its use.

A. Advantages of the Internet

- ✠ An efficient and useful tool to quickly access scientific, spiritual, and social information.
- ✠ A tool that links the whole world together with vast and diverse search engines.

B. Disadvantages of the Internet

- ✠ Easy exposure to dispersed ungodly images or information detrimental to mental, spiritual, and social growth.

- ✚ Often used excessively, taking time away from God, friends, and family which, when prolonged, may lead to isolation and loss of normal human interaction.
- ✚ May affect physical health if sleep is denied for Internet time or if Internet is used to pass through periods of Insomnia.

II. E-mail and Chat Rooms

A. Advantages of e-mail and chat rooms

- ✚ Instant communication at little cost with others who are far away - An easily accessible and large audience (example: for business purposes).
- ✚ Time- efficient means of communication as opposed to regular mail or phone.
- ✚ Flexibility in time of use.

B. Disadvantages of e-mail and chat rooms

- ✚ Decreases the need for verbal and physical communication, which is necessary for a healthy human life; for example, the user cannot hear laughter or crying and thus is unable to share or see common emotions.
- ✚ Makes communication with ungodly people much easier, even if unintentional, which may lead to sin: *“You shall not follow a crowd to do evil” (Exodus 23:2).*
- ✚ Like the Internet, takes away time from God, friends, and family.

III. Signs of Computer Addiction

1. Computer is used for an extended period of time each day.
2. An inability to pass through one day without using the computer.
3. A change of regular social or work-oriented habits to accommodate computer time.
4. A feeling of isolation and a disinterest in verbal communication.
5. An inability to easily stop use of the computer.
6. A deterioration in spiritual, social, and/or physical health.
7. A decrease in time spent with God for time with the computer, the most harmful sign of Computer Addiction.

IV. Solutions to computer addiction

1. Spending time with God in order to allow Him to guide your actions throughout the day.
2. Limiting the number of hours spent with a computer.
3. Differentiating between instructive and destructive computer information, a conscience decision made stronger by increasing the time spent with God.
4. Verbal and not electronic contact with others each day; in other words, increased verbal contact with family and friends.

Application:

Modern technology should be utilized for its benefits, but use must be limited in time and in purpose; one must watch the number of hours spent in front of a computer and check how much of this time is used productively, and how much is only used idly.

Conclusion:

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

LESSONS FOR THE MONTH OF AUGUST

Week 1: The Book of Hosea

Week 2: The Second Coming

Week 3: The Virgin in the Holy Liturgy

Week 4: The Liturgy of the Catechumens

Week 1 - The Book of Hosea

Objective:

- To reveal the great love of our Lord behind the salvation story.
- Compare between Hosea's love to his unfaithful wife and Jesus Christ's love to us.

Memory Verse:

"I will love them freely and my anger has turned away from him" (Hosea 14:4).

References:

1. Hosea – By Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty
2. The New Open Bible- Introduction to the Book of Hosea

Introduction:

The book of Hosea is one of the small books of the Bible and Hosea is considered one of the Minor Prophets in the Old Testament. The book consists of 14 chapters and contains living prophecy experienced by Hosea through his marriage to a harlot called Gomer. The name Hosea means salvation, which is similar to Joshua and Jesus in Hebrew. Hosea prophesied for 40 years during the reign of six different kings in the northern territories of Israel. When Hosea began his ministry, Israel was enjoying a temporary period of political and economic prosperity under Jeroboam II. However, the nation crumbled when the Assyrians strengthened. The reign of Israel's last six kings were relatively brief since five were murdered and a sixth was carried captive to Assyria. During this prophetic ministry, Hosea repeatedly echoes his threefold message:

1. God abhors the sins of His people.
2. Judgment is certain.
3. But God's loyal love stands firm.

However, the people of Israel refused to heed Hosea's warning of imminent judgment. The people were in spiritual stupor, riddled with sin and idolatry.

Lesson Outline:

The book of Hosea is divided into two main themes:

1. Adulterous wife and faithful husband- chapters 1:1 to 3:5
2. Adulterous Israel and faithful Lord - chapters 4:1 to 14:9

I. The adulterous wife and the faithful husband

God instructed Hosea to marry a harlot called Gomer and he loved her. She gave him two sons and a daughter. The meanings of their names were indications and warnings of what is going to happen in Israel. The first child was named Jezreel, which means God scatters. The second was named Lo-Ruhamah, which meant not pitied, and the third was called Lo-Ammi meaning not my people.

Subsequently, Gomer went and committed adultery with other lovers and left Hosea who loved her faithfully. Yet, Hosea went after her and brought her back and kept her with him. Hosea had compassion for his people, and his personal suffering because of Gomer, gave him some understanding of God's grief over their sins. In Hosea's relationship to Gomer, he portrays God's faithfulness, justice, love and forgiveness toward His people. Thus, his words of coming judgment is passionately delivered and tempered with a heart of tenderness.

II. The adulterous Israel and the faithful God

Israel refused the knowledge of God and ran after idols and committed many sins. Israel also refused to repent which angered God. Hosea upbraids his people for their lying, murder, insincerity, and idolatry. The people have violated all of God's commandments. Even now God want to heal and redeem them, but in their arrogance and idolatry they rebel. Israel's disobedience will lead to her dispersion (Hosea 8-10). Israel spurns repentance, and the judgment of God can no longer be delayed.

God is holy and just, but He is also loving and gracious. God must discipline, but because of His endless love He will ultimately save and restore His people. "How can I give you up Ephraim? I will heel their backsliding. I will love them freely for my anger has turned away from him" (Hosea 11:8, 14:4).

III. God's love to us was revealed on the cross

Hosea's experience was an attempt from God to show us with our limited feelings and emotions the unlimited love He has for us. A greater love is shown on the cross. God Himself coming down to earth and carrying our sins in His body to bring us back home with Him. There is no greater love than this, that He puts himself for His beloved.

Applications:

Let us show our love to God through a truthful repentance and confession.

Questions:

- What is the meaning of the name Hosea?
- Who is the wife of Hosea?
- How many chapters is the book of Hosea?
- What is the main theme of the book of Hosea?
- What is the resemblance between Hosea's wife and Israel?

Week 2 - The Second Coming

Objective:

1. To know some of the prophecies about the second coming.
2. To compare between the first and the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.
3. To be prepared for the Second Coming any time.

Memory Verse:

“You also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect Him” (Matthew 24:44).

References:

1. “Signs of the Times” by Fr. Augustinos Hanna, St. John Magazine 11:119, December 1999, P 8.
2. “The First and Second Coming of Christ” by Fr. Augustinos Hanna, St. John Magazine 12:120, January 2000, P 6.

Introduction:

Many scientists and religious leaders have spent exhaustive efforts trying to predict and calculate a date for the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. They used the prophecies and mathematical calculations to be able to resolve the great mysteries around the Second Coming. Many of us also wonder and try to imagine what would the Second Coming be like and what are the signs of the times?

Lesson Outline:

It might seem contradictory that the Lord rebuked the Pharisees who could not discern the signs of the times (Matthew 16:2-3) while mentioning on the other hand that “It is not for you to know the times or seasons which the Father has put in his own authority” (Act 1:7, Matthew 24:36). It is not for anyone to know the exact time when the second coming will take place, but the Lord gave us some signs to indicate His coming and to be prepared at all times (Matthew 24:4-31). We also have to keep in our minds “that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Peter 3:8).

I. Signs of the Second Coming

A. Great Earthquakes

One of the signs of Christ’s Second Coming is great earthquakes (Luke 21:11). What is happening around the world at the present time confirms this sign? There are many major earthquakes that have killed thousands of people such as those in Turkey, Iran, Mexico, Korea, Taiwan and California.

B. Apostasy

Jesus said, “When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8). And St. Paul mentioned that apostasy will occur before the second coming: “Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first” (2 Thessalonians 2:3).

The seeds of this apostasy are being sown everywhere. All kinds of weeds and thorns are choking faith in the living God, in Christ and in the Bible. This abomination of desolation is sitting in the temple of God. Many now teach that:

1. Belief in God is fiction, a myth!
2. As modern people we have to abandon theological realism.
3. The idea that God actually exists as the Creator of the Universe, and that Christ was actually raised from the dead could not be true.
4. We must now learn to view Christianity, like Buddhism or any other religion, as a historical human construction.
5. All of our beliefs originate in the human imagination.

The worldwide spread of crimes, sexual addiction, drug addiction, alcoholism, same-sex marriage, gay rights, devil-worship, human sacrifice, abortion, pornography, atheism, rape and murder, are the common characteristics of the generation of the flood. The time of Noah has returned on earth!

C. Modern Heresies

There are many new beliefs and modern heresies that are engulfing millions of people at the present time. Examples of those who spread strange beliefs are Jehovah's Witness and Mormons. They all deny the divinity of Christ and are modern versions of Aryanism and the Gnostic heresies.

D. Persecution

There are still violent waves and vicious attacks from Muslims, Buddhists and atheists against Christians in India, Pakistan, Sudan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, China and Indonesia. This is also one of the signs of the times.

II. Comparison between the First and the Second Coming of our Lord

- ✠ The first coming of our Lord was quiet and calm and only a few people knew about it. The Second Coming is going to be awesome and full of glory. He will be coming on the clouds with the shouts of the angels and the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky (Matthew 29:24).
- ✠ Both the first and second coming fulfill the prophecies.
- ✠ In the first coming the kings plotted the death of the Lord on the cross but in the second coming all the kings and the rich will hide in the mountains and in the caves (Revelation 6:12-17).
- ✠ In the first coming He came as a poor man, but in the second coming He will come as a Glorious King and every knee shall bow to Him (Philippians 2:5-11).
- ✠ In the first coming He came to save us and in the second coming He will come to judge everyone (Matthew 25:22).
- ✠ In the first coming He came first to the Jews and they rejected Him but in the second coming He will come for everyone and all nations will come to Him.
- ✠ In the first coming He took the righteous to paradise and in the second coming He will take them to the heavenly kingdom.

Conclusion:

The second coming can happen at any day and at any time. Actually the moment of death is the end of life and resembles the second coming for every human. At that moment the chance to inherit the kingdom is gone. Therefore, we should be prepared at anytime for the second coming of the Lord or the end of our life.

Application:

- Where are the 24 priests mentioned in the Bible?
- Make a list of the seven seals mentioned in Revelation Chapters 6-8.

Week 3 - The Virgin in the Coptic Liturgy

Objective:

- To show the importance of St. Mary and her position in our Coptic Church.
- To understand how to praise St. Mary.

Memory Verse:

“For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed” (Luke 1:48).

Introduction:

From the memoir written by Anba Paul Al Bushy our Coptic Church blesses and glorifies Virgin Mary:

- ✠ “For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed”.
- ✠ “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 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.

Such blessings and glorification are offered to St. Mary because of her supreme rank. When we contemplate the prayers of the daily hymns, the Psalms cited in the canonical hours and the Divine Liturgy, 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 theologians 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.

Lesson Outline:

I. 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. For example “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 studied earlier we first pray the introductory opening of the praises followed by the first three hoases, the hymn of the three young men, commemoration of saints, Doxologies, the fourth hoas, then the day’s Psalmody and the memoirs of the day (The memoirs are glorification for the Virgin the Mother of the Lord).

II. Evening and Morning Raising of Incense

Bell Quadripartite (Arbaa Al Naqous) 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 (Note that the tunes of Watos days are different from those of Adam days). 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.

III. In Psalms of Canonical Hours

The church set the prayers of Canonical hours. They are selected parts after each hour’s Gospel. They are set in a precise way and in a perfect manner. The third part is always about seeking the Virgin’s intercessions. In some of these parts, the Virgin is given the titles of, “The true Vine bearing the cluster of life, full of grace, the rampart of our salvation the gate of heaven, the Mother of God, the mighty and impregnable fortress, the mental door of life”.

IV. In the Coptic Liturgy

The Virgin is beautified and blessed. Beatitude of the Virgin occur in about ten parts of the Holy Liturgy:

- ✠ The blessing hymn “Sheri Maria ti Ouro” is sung before procession of 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 mount stands the city He founded.”
- ✠ When raising the Pauline incense, on feast days and non-fasting days, we sing “This is the censer of pure gold”. On the days of fast, we sing “You are the gold censer bearing the blessed stone of fire.”
- ✠ Before and after reading the Acts of the Apostles, we sing the hymn of St. Mary in five different ways on five different occasions over the Coptic Year.
- ✠ Hymns of the Gospel during the month of Kiahk are all sung for St. Mary. We also ask her intercession on the other days of the year after beautifying the Saint of the day.
- ✠ In the Orthodox Creed the church emphasizes her virginity and her motherhood of God calling her the Theotokos. The church also added the Introduction to the Creed “We magnify you O Mother of the True Light.” To ascertain her position the Orthodox faith.

- † “Aspasmos Adam and Watos”. These 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”.
- † In the commemoration of Saints and after. According to the supreme rank of the Virgin in the church rites, the priest requests her intercession at the top of the list of the victorious church members in the commemoration intercession in the blessing prayer and the final supplication. Then this part is repeated, “Through the prayers and intercession of the Virgin, the holy, glorified pure and blessed Virgin...”
- † What is said during the communion: 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...”

Conclusion:

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 daily life so that our hearts and tongues may glorify the Virgin who said, “For behold, henceforth, all generations will call me blessed.”

Week 4 - The Liturgy of the Catechumens

Objective:

- Preparations for Sanctifying the Mystery.
- The Mystery of Oblation.

Memory Verse:

“Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water” (Revelation 14:7).

Introduction:

The catechumens are those receiving instruction in the basic doctrine of Christianity before baptism and admission to communicant membership in the Church.

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 Liturgy. 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 liturgy prayers. They were commanded to leave the church since they could not understand the Divine mysteries neither could they recognize their meaning as *“But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 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.

Lesson Outline:

I. The offering of the Lamb

- ✠ The priest goes around the altar,
- ✠ The priest chooses the Lamb, carries it in his hands and raises it over his head, saying, “Glory and Honor, Honor and Glory...” This refers to Simon the elder who received the young child Jesus into his arms when His parents brought Him to the temple to present offering on His behalf according to Moses’ 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 Liturgy procession denotes the presence of the Lord Savior. That is why people bow in worship while singing “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 the firstborn into the world, He says: Let all the angels of God worship Him*” (Hebrews 1:6).
- † The people glorify the Lord for 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.

II. The Bread and Wine Prayer

- † This prayer is said in a low voice. The priest says, “We beseech and implore Thy Goodness, You 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, a 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. This is why this prayer is called the Covering Prayer. The covering of the Bread with a corporal, 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 His miraculous birth.
- † The Prospherine refers to shrouding the Lord and His burial in the tomb. The Prospherine refers to the stone, and the corporal, which the priest places on the Prospherine refers to the sealing of the tomb. The priest then prays the people and servants absolution.

III. The Pauline Prayer

- † The priest and the deacons go up to the sanctuary. The priest prays the Pauline incense prayer as a preface to reading a chapter from the epistles of St. Paul the apostle. While this is read, 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 imploring the Lord to grant him the blessing of the Word for the people who hear the word. Some of his prayers are for:
 6. Those who hear to be granted knowledge and wisdom and the meaning of what they hear to be revealed.
 7. Granting them a mind that is not preoccupied with anything so that they may understand how useful the holy instructions read to them are.
 8. Making them deserve to be like Paul the apostle who after severely persecuting Christianity for a long time, the Lord summoned him to be a chosen vessel and a preaching apostle.

IV. The Catholic Epistle

- ✠ A chapter of the Catholic epistle is to be read (James, Peter, Jude, or John). 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.

V. Acts of the Apostles

- ✠ “Praxis” is a Greek word meaning “acts”. It is applied to the Acts of the Apostles. While reading the Acts of the Apostles, the priest prays in a low voice, and implores the Lord to help us 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.

VI. Synaxarium

Then the priest reads the Synaxarium, which is the commemoration of our holy fathers and martyrs. The aim is to show the image of the church fathers as example to be followed by the Christians. The life story of our holy fathers encourages us to continue their struggle.

VII. Important Hymns

- ✠ When raising the Pauline incense, we sing the hymn –“this gold censer...” Here 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, we sing “Sheri mi Maria” giving peace to St. Mary.
- ✠ After the Prayer of Reconciliation, we sing “Rejoice Mary...” where we contemplate the joy of St. Mary for being the Mother and Servant of the Lord Jesus Christ.

VIII. 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, His crucifixion and His 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.

IX. The Gospel prayer

In this prayer, the priest asks the Lord to make us worthy to hear and act according to His Holy Gospel. He also reminds us that there were many prophets and righteous people who desired to hear and see the things that we see and hear and have not seen or heard them. 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 to “Pray for the Holy Gospel”. 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 world carrying Christ’s cross. 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 many references and prophecies of Christ. 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 and

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, “Stand with the fear of God. Let us hear 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 am well pleased. Hear Him” (Matthew 17:5).

When the deacon commands the people saying, “Stand with the fear of God” they all stand indicating their submission to the Gospel, and to that who speaks to them through the Gospel.

After reading the Gospel, the priest prays for the healing of the sick, the safety of the travelers, the blessings of the winds of heaven, the fruits of the earth and the rising of the river water, the blessing of the crop, plants of the field, the salvation of people, and 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 and the church.

X. The three long prayers

A. Prayer for the peace of the church

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

B. Prayer 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).

C. Prayer for our assemblies

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 closer to God. He also implores God to eradicate pagan worship altogether from the world. He says, “The enemies of Your holy church, O Lord, as at all times, now also humiliate. Strip their vanity; show them their weakness speedily. Bring to naught their envy, their intrigues, their madness, their wickedness and their slander, which they commit against us. O Lord, bring them all to no avail; disperse their counsel, O God, Who dispersed the council of Ahithophel.” Then the Orthodox Creed is cited. Meanwhile the priest washes his hand thrice saying the 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 dries 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 completion of the three long prayers ends the Liturgy of the catechumens.

LESSON OF THE FIRST WEEK OF SEPTEMBER
Before the Coptic New Year

Week 1: The Liturgy of the Believers

Week 1- The Liturgy of the Believers

Objective:

- Understanding the symbolism in the Liturgy
- Understand the rituals of Eucharist

Memory Verse:

“For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26).

Reference:

1 Corinthians 11 - Matthew 26:26-29 - Mark 14:22-26

Introduction:

The liturgy of the believers begins with the deacon crying out saying “In the wisdom of God, let us attend. Lord have mercy. Lord have mercy. In truth”. The reason is that there used to be some noise of people leaving the church after the Liturgy of the Catechumens. Hence the deacon calls everybody’s attention to the start of the holy liturgy of the believers. The church doors are shut and only the faithful are inside so that all are lifted to heaven.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Reconciliation Prayer

This prayer is called the Reconciliation Prayer because the priest refers to the wonderful miraculous deed of Christ to reconcile man with God. “For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the Law of Commandments contained in ordinance, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity” (Ephesians 2:14-16). Then he completes the prayer saying “According to Your good will, O God 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 from evil and the remembrance 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 us to offer our sacrifice while we are on good terms with our brothers *“Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remembers that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift” (Matthew 5:23-24).* *“If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear” (Psalms 66:18)* and because, *“For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:14).*

- ✠ Both priest and deacon remove the Prospherine from the altar and make it flutter over the oblation. Removing the Prospherine stands for removing the stone from the tomb door when Christ rose from the dead and the flutter of the Prospherine stands for the earthquake, which occurred when the stone was removed. The congregation sings the hymn, “Through the intercession of the Theotokos (Mother of God)...”
- ✠ The priest holds the corporal, which covers the Lamb and crosses the people, the ministers 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 ascension and we pass and overcome the well of time and place Then “We thank God” because without His grace and redemption, our hearts would remain clinging to the 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, the ministers 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 ascension and His Second Coming to judge each one according to his deeds.

II. The Sanctification Prayer

- ✠ The priest begins prayers of sanctification, which are 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 performed when He established this mystery. The church repeats the same words of Christ proclaiming His perpetual presence for the salvation of the church.
- ✠ The deacon cries out, “Worship God in fear and trembling.” At this moment the oblation are transubstantiated into the Lord’s Body and blood. The church then prays for all people and in the Commemoration she asks for the intercession of the departed saints and also prays for the departed Diptych.

III. The Fraction Prayer

- ✠ The Fraction prayer is the last part of the Liturgy. The fraction prayer differs according to occasions. (Give examples to young people) Meanwhile the priest breaks the Holy Body in a certain way 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 Spadikon 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 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. He then lifts up the paten and says the confession, and then kneels and asks for forgiveness then administers the communion.

- ✝ “The Holy unto the holies” 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.”
- ✝ 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.