



**The Coptic Orthodox Diocese of
The Southern USA**

SUNDAY SCHOOL CURRICULUM



GRADE 7

Πατριεπισκοπος ἡρεμῆχμῖ
ἡορθοδοξοσ
ἡτε νῖθωψ ετρωτπ ετσαρησ

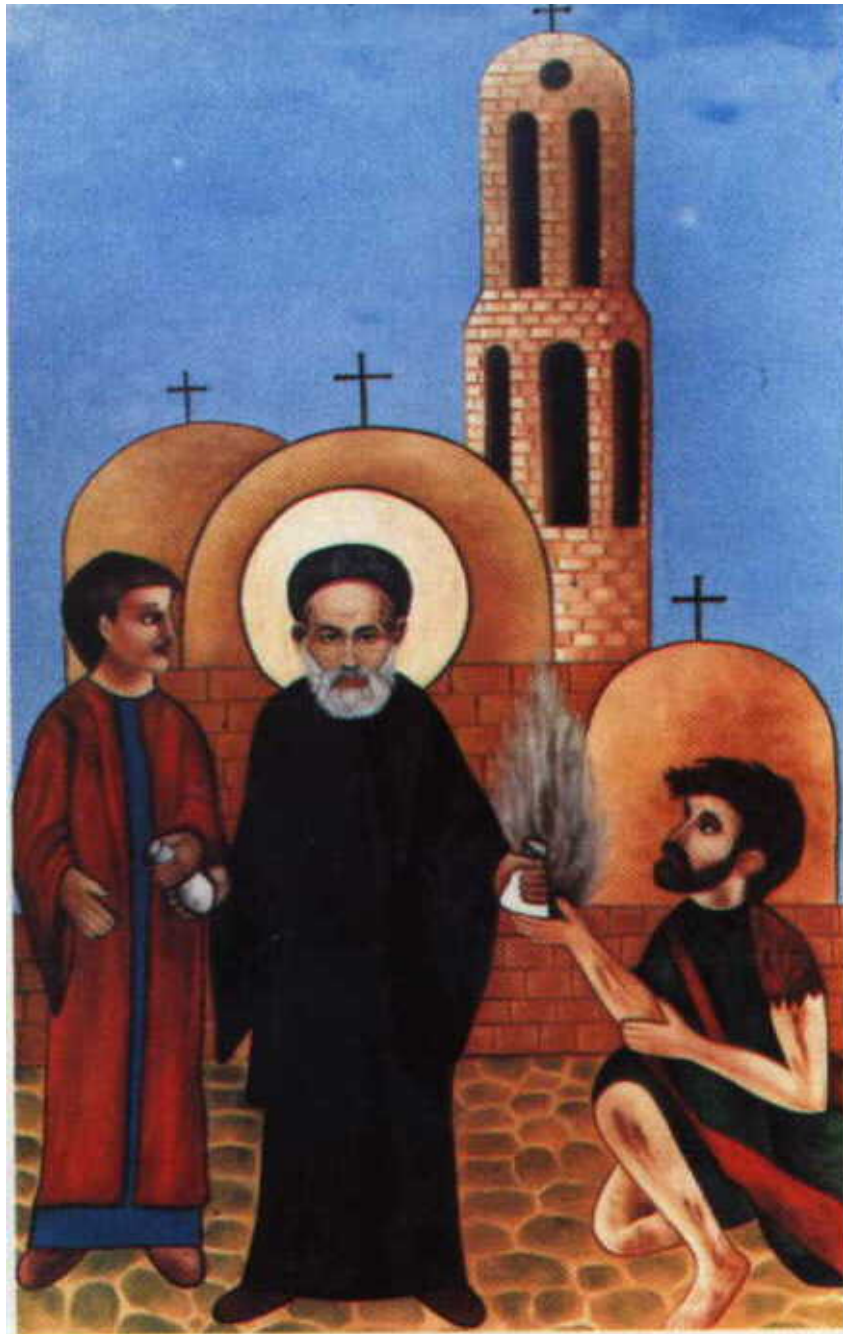


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Sunday School Curriculum

Grade 7





القديس العظيم الأنبا أبرام



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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 7 of Sunday School curriculum has been modified by substituting 22 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 changed to follow the major events in the church. This resulted in the following order assuming the starting date is the first week after the Coptic New Year celebration (El Nayrouz) on September 11:

- 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 Resurrection 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.

I. The Student of The Middle School Stage

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

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

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

stage. Adolescence is the transition period between childhood and manhood. The adolescent wavers between many extremes:

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

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

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

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

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

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

directing them with patience and treating them well, showing respect to them and being kind in treating them help the adolescents to overcome the crisis and the troubles of early adolescence.

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

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

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

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

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

- ❖ There should be social activities such as parties, birthday parties, pleasant evening chat, outings, and camping under proper supervision.
- ❖ We should encourage boys and girls to practice the inner life successfully through forming a relation with God through private, family and public prayers and contemplating the Holy Bible. This inner life is a substitution for the confusion of everyday life.

- ❖ The Servant should be a person full of optimism and true rejoicing so that they can change jesting into true spiritual joy.

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

The Religious Feeling in This Stage

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

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

- The Servant or the priest who serves them should be broad-minded, highly educated, experienced and able to argue and reason.
- We should respect their opinion and ideas however simple they are. We should also encourage them to express their inner feelings so that any passive tendencies may not grow in their mind. We have to be ready to answer any question objectively and calmly.
- We have to deal with subjects that relates to religion and other domains such as: Christianity and modern sciences, Christianity and modern philosophical attitudes, Christianity and Archaeology, Christianity and social trends, Christianity and modern psychology, etc.
- We have to give a chance for the integrated points of view. If, in one of the debates, we deal with chastity from a Christian point of view, a spiritual minister or a priest should discuss the question of chastity together with a doctor and a psychologist who is experienced in modern psychological sciences. Their agreement in opinion in spite of their different fields and domains give adolescents clear mental and spiritual stability.

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

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

In this domain Christian Education concentrates on the following:

- The Servant should have experience in the inner and spiritual life. Christianity to the Servant should not be just a matter of formalities, rites and exercises.
- The Servant and the father of confession should encourage adolescents to be trained in inner experiences and inner life but drills should not be formal, dry and devoid of depth and spirit. They should not enter the field of service and teaching before they are filled with the necessary spiritual tests.
- The Service topics should be concentrated on life in Christ towards the Father and the Holy Spirit, not on manners and social behavior that may be far away from Salvation, the Cross and the Divine Sacraments.
- The criterion of the adolescents’ spiritual progress in their growth in inner life (prayers, contemplating the Scripture, confession and true repentance, examining the Soul, crucifying desires, love and going beyond the ego), the criterion is not a matter of practicing some activities and services that are devoid of worship.
- The adolescents should be trained to concentrate their inner life and outer life on the work of grace, and bearing witness to truth not aiming at self-glorification “For the Law was given through Moses; but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17).
- During debates, all questions should be answered not only at the level of truth and what is appropriate but also according to the guidance of the Holy Spirit in us and the instructions of the church through her Sacraments and Spiritual life.

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

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

This is all good but we should help them understand the Divine verse that says, "If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me". The Lord also says, "In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world". This will then enable them to envision what the gospel says about sacrifice, almsgiving, and endurance of suffering and receiving tribulation with patience and joy. They will understand that what people consider as failure or death is regarded as crown, martyrdom and glory in Christianity.

The Task of Christian Education

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

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

- The church should perform many supervised social activities to prepare the Christian atmosphere in which they grow without hindrance or temptation and where they can apply the principles that they learned in a practical real style.
- The Servant of this stage should be sociable and able to collect all these characters through love and unity no matter how different the individuals are in patterns, temper and gifts.

- A wide scope of religious knowledge of the Holy Bible, the church and her sacraments and rites, modest of the life of history of the saints who lived in other different circumstances and made progress in the life of grace and overcome reality with the help of faith that was in them.
- Extend the vision from what is visible to the things that are invisible. A sight that extends to reach the heavenly creatures and those who won the victory and were perfect in faith. The adolescents, in this case, regards the Lord Christ as a champion of society and also a Savior and Redeemer who enters their heart to change it into a kingdom for Him as a guarantee for the coming kingdom during the Second Coming of Our faithful Lord.
- Religious guidance should encourage children to play a positive part in social activities but we must pay attention to their inner life with its supporting means such as prayers, contemplations, reading the Scriptures, Confessions, spiritual meetings, etc. In this way encourage them to grow in their inner life and outer life at the same time.

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

- They should have a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus and test the life of holy fellowship with God.
- They should choose the renewed life of repentance. They should not fall into despair because of their repeated fall, as God is able to raise us up if our will is one with His will.
- The curriculum should deal with the spiritual life through inner action and the work of the mysteries instead of emphasizing external matters.
- We should answer all the questions raised by the children, “Is this lawful or unlawful?” Christianity is at a higher level than the level of the lawful and unlawful. It is at the level of grace and truth. When the children live the life of grace, they can bear witness to truth through the Spirit that is dwelling in us, “For the Law was given through Moses; but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17).

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

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

Concerning God:

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

Concerning the Church:

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

Concerning the Family:

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

Concerning the Society:

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

The Traditions:

- Practicing individual prayers through using the Book of Canonical Hours.
- Practicing fasting as an ecclesiastical system for spiritual growth and self-denial.
- Praying before and after having meals and before studying. Pray for God’s help all the time.
- Regular study of the Holy Bible with persistence patience and contemplation.

- Dedicating the Lord's days for worship (the Holy Mass, Sunday School, etc.).
- Almsgiving in the church for the needy.
- Showing respect for the family and cooperating with the members of the family and using polite words of respect.
- Sincerity, honesty, cooperation and shouldering responsibility.

Summary

We can summarize the previous tendencies as follows:

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

General Tendencies for Review

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

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

After all, this can still be considered as a preliminary modified curriculum for grade 7 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 to fill the empty weeks due to the changing date of the Resurrection Feast.

1. What Can I Do Now?
2. Introduction to the Old Testament
3. Introduction to the New Testament
4. The Epistle of St. James
5. How to Choose My Friends?
6. Success in the Christian Concept
7. My Attitude Toward the Sexual Instinct

1 - What Can I Do Now?

Objective:

- ❖ How to practice almsgiving practically at the individual and group levels

Memory Verse:

“Little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18)

References:

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

Introduction:

I. Christianity is a Practical Life

James the apostle says: “What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’ but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit” (James 2:14-16).

In his first Epistle St. John says, “But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:17,18).

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

Lesson Outline:

I. Typical Life Examples

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

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

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

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

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

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

II. Some Domains in which we can Serve Lord Christ

1. Visiting orphanages and charity institutions to study their spiritual needs and material needs and showing them spiritual and cultural films, making Agapi (love) parties there, and giving children some religious and scientific books.
2. Visiting the widows and the disabled and giving them help and care, caring for old people and the aged ones who have nobody to support them and sending them to institutions.
3. Visiting a family that suffers a severe shock or that is in grief and sorrow, and sitting with those in grief to soften their suffering by reading them texts from the Holy bible.
4. Visiting those in prison after getting permission and offering the prisoners some pamphlets and spiritual guidance and encouraging them to repent and endure affliction if they are not guilty.
5. Giving help to the poor and the unemployed by possibly setting up small projects to support themselves.
6. Finding a dwelling place for sojourners and looking for some sort of make agreements with social and national institutions to make an integrated plan for offering services.
7. Visiting patients in hospitals and comforting them by showing the feelings of love and raising prayers for them.

III. Examples of Things Offered in the Previous Domains

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

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

Abstracts: Visits -reconciliation -sharing occasions.

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

IV. Instructions in Social Service

1. Respect the poor man's feelings and dignity. Do not hurt him by any word but at the same time be on your guard so that you may not be a prey for swindlers. Therefore, a social worker should study each case.
2. Concentrate on prayers and reading the Bible during your visits.

3. Draw the poor people's attention to the Lord Jesus, as He is the source of every good gift and do not tie them to yourself.
4. Try to find a suitable job for each unemployed man for alms may drive people to laziness.

V. A Problem and its Solution

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

Conclusion:

As Christians we show our faith through our acts. We are sensitive to the needs and pains of others. We show them love and mercy as the Lord loves us and is always merciful to us.

Applications:

- ❖ Practical practice of some of the above mentioned domains of service.
- ❖ Memorize verse: 1 John 3:17

2 - Introduction to the Old Testament

Objective:

- ❖ To have a clear overview of the Old Testament
- ❖ To know the theme and the importance of the Old Testament.

Memory Verse:

“And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God” (John 17:3)

References:

- ❖ <http://www.mesk.com/SMOF/>
- ❖ “Introductions to the Old Testament” Vol. I, Dr. Wahby Georgy Kamel.
- ❖ The New Open Bible or a Study Bible- New King James Version

Introduction:

Eternal life is the gift of Jesus Christ to those who believe in Him “He [the Son] should give eternal life to as many as You [the Father] have given Him” (John 17:2). Also, it is the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven, which comes upon us when we apprehend the mission of our Lord Jesus Christ “But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Luke 11:20). This life starts here on earth and continues forever in the life to come.

In John 17:3, Jesus Christ confirms that eternal life is **the knowledge** of God through Him. “Knowledge” here does not mean the theoretical intellectual knowledge, but the spiritual knowledge based on experience, communion, living and tasting. Briefly, the means for this experience and communion are:

1. In the **sacrament of communion**, in which we experience eternal life by receiving the body of Christ that was broken (Acts 2:24), and His blood that was shed: “if any man eats of this bread, he shall live for ever” (John 6:51).
2. In the **mystery of the word** - the word of God - the voice of God in the Holy Bible, which gives eternal life when it is heard “the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.” (John 6:63), “He that hears My word, and believes in Him who sent Me, has everlasting life” (John 5:24). This second means is the subject of the present “Short Notes”.

So, **the Holy Bible is the word of God to mankind...**and when we read it we know God’s purpose in our life. It is important to understand that there is **a personal message** from God to every one of us in every passage we read in the Holy Bible, despite the widely different topics of these passages. And the messages change to suit the particular circumstances that the person is facing. These messages include knowledge, prophecy, comfort and guidance. They expose the desires and pleasures of the inner person. They motivate the will in the direction of goodness, sanctification and repentance. And, in brief, **they give life**, strength, hope and faith.

If you approach the word of God in this spirit ... and in readiness to receive the word of God ... and obedience to God's commandments ... surrendering your heart to the work of the word ... the Holy Bible will become the partner of your life and its light until the last hour.

We will try in this message and in forthcoming ones to introduce a simple syllabus to help you to read the word of God, understanding it and become enlightened by its light. To follow an organized program in our studies, we shall start by a brief outline of the books of the Holy Bible, followed by general comments on the Old Testament.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Holy Bible

It contains 73 books written through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit over a period of more than 15 centuries. These books are divided into two testaments:

- 1) **The Old Testament**: Includes the history of creation, the fall and corruption of mankind, and the establishment of a covenant between God and man in preparation to save mankind from their corrupt state. The Old Testament covers the period from the creation till the coming of Jesus Christ, the Savior and the King. The Old Testament consists of 46 books. These books are again divided into:
 - a- The first canonical books, which are 39 books collected by Ezra the priest in one volume
 - b- The second canonical books (Deuterocanonical or Apocryphal), which are seven in addition to the completion of the books of Daniel and Esther.

2) **The New Testament**: The New Testament consists of 27 books.

II. The Main Sections Of The Old Testament

- 1) **The Five Books of Moses** (from Genesis to Deuteronomy): Also called the Pentateuch, Torah or the covenant. They correspond to the four gospels in the New Testament. These books describe the beginning of human history dealing with God...the failure of the human race...until his arrival to the gates of the Promised Land. Whereas these books declare the need for a savior to free the human race from bondage, the gospels in the New Testament reveal this savior, who is the desire of all nations, and take us into the true Promised Land.
- 2) **The Historic Books (from Joshua to Esther)**: These books present the chronicles of the work of God with His people from before the period of the kings (period of Joshua and the Judges) until the captivity in Babylon. The corresponding book in the New Testament (The book of the Acts of the Apostles, "Praxis") presents Jesus Christ as the judge and king who does not request an earthly kingdom. It also presents His disciples declaring the only savior (Joshua vs. Jesus), and warning against sin that leads to devil's captivity.
- 3) **Poetic, Edification or Wisdom Books** (from Job to the Song of Solomon): They present practical teachings for living with God, teachings which help us throughout the present life. The corresponding books of the New Testament (the Epistles: the Pauline and Catholicon) present the Christian life with the Father in His Son through the Holy Spirit as a true foretaste of eternal life in heaven.

- 4) **Prophetic Books** (From Isaiah to Malachi): These books came in a spiritually dark period, calling people to repentance and preaching a glorious vision of the Messiah, Christ the Savior. The corresponding book in the New Testament, Revelation, encourages us to keep up our struggle expecting the glorious second coming of Jesus Christ, the King of all kings and Lord of all lords.

III. General Comments On The Old Testament

- 1) **Jesus is the center** of the two Testaments. He appears in the Old Testament behind the scenes and the events and in symbols and through holy men. For example:
 - At the creation of man, God said, “Let us make man in our image” (Genesis 1:26).
 - Isaac carries the wood (the cross) on his way to death as a burnt offering (redemption) but he returns alive (resurrection).
 - Joseph saves the world from starvation and death (salvation) in the Old Testament.
 - Moses and Joshua lead the Israelites from slavery to freedom.
 - The Passover and sacrifices as a method to escape death and receive forgiveness.
- 2) **The Holy Bible is one book**, and the Holy Spirit has inspired the writing of the two Testaments. The New Testament complements the Old Testament and sees the men of the Old Testament as heroes of faith (Hebrews 11). They are the people that hoped for salvation and resurrection of the dead. In the transfiguration, Moses and Elijah appear beside Jesus (Matthew 17:1-8).
- 3) **The Law** was the means to discover man’s sin, and a helper for him to look ahead to the savior (Galatians 3:24). It successfully accomplished these purposes during the period of spiritual childhood of mankind until the coming of the “fullness of time” (Galatians 4:4) declaring Jesus Christ the Savior who gives new life and grants liberty, and proclaiming the age of the generous grace for every one who accepts.
- 4) **The sons of Israel** are the people whom God has entrusted with the seed of faith in order to prepare a field for the continuation of the work of God, i.e. the salvation of all people and the spread of the kingdom of heaven when His Son arrives in the “fullness of time”.

Conclusion:

We leave you in the hands of the Holy Spirit that He might guide you to God’s purpose in what you read, and guide your steps to its depth to gain the spiritual experience. The interaction with the word is a continuously renewed field, in which the heroes of faith become alive among us, and the past in flesh becomes the present in the Spirit, through Him.

Applications:

- ❖ Start reading the Old Testament from the beginning and make note of things you do not understand to ask about their meaning the next Sunday School class.
- ❖ We hope that the book of Genesis will become the subject of the daily Bible study for all of us in the coming days until we meet again in the next “Short Notes”.

3 - Introduction to the New Testament

Objective:

- ❖ To have an overview of the content of the new Testament
- ❖ To learn the theme of the new Testament

References:

- ❖ The New Open Bible-NKJ version
- ❖ “Introduction to the New Testament” Bishop Moussa, Bishop of Youth

Memory Verse:

“The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63)

Introduction:

This is the era of grace that embraced mankind by the glorious advent of the Messiah and the salvation from corruption by redemption which gave us the privilege to become the children of God who have the blessed hope of eternal life at the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ at the end of time. The Bible has 1,189 chapters, thus it can be completed in less than three years if we read one chapter a day.

Lesson Outline:

The New Testament consists of 27 books:

- ❖ 4 Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John)
- ❖ The Book of Acts (written by St. Luke)
- ❖ 14 Epistles written by St. Paul
- ❖ 7 Epistles written by St. James (1), St. Peter (2), St. John (3) and St. Jude (1)
- ❖ Revelation written by St. John

I. The Gospel of St. Matthew

St. Matthew wrote this Gospel for the Jews in order to explain to them that the Lord Jesus is the expected Messiah, the son of David of whom numerous prophecies of the Old Testament were written. Therefore, this gospel has about 65 prophecies and focuses on the Lord as the king, the son of David.

II. The Gospel of St. Mark

St. Mark wrote this gospel for the Romans. He emphasized that our Lord Jesus is a powerful minister. This would satisfy the powerful Romans. It has a simple and lively style and explains some of the Jews traditions.

III. The Gospel of St. Luke

St. Luke wrote this gospel for the Greeks, the men of wisdom and philosophy, to show them that Jesus Christ is the Son of Man who will deliver man from all his problems and will open for him the gates to eternity.

IV. The Gospel of St. John

St. John wrote this gospel in order to reply to the heresies that tried to refute the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. He addressed the world as a whole.

V. The Acts of the Apostles

St. Luke wrote this book to his friend, Theophilus, so as to continue his conversation with him. He told him about the life of the Lord in his gospel and then started to explain to him how the apostles preached the message to the world, exactly as Jesus Christ asked them to do and through the power of the Holy Spirit.

VI. The Epistles

While the apostles were preaching, they faced a lot of questions, various problems and heresies that threatened the soundness of faith. Thus, they started to reply to these matters in the epistles directed to churches, people, or priests in order to explain to them the basics of Christian faith and to warn them of the hated heresies.

St. Paul wrote to the Galatians in 49 A.D. in order to deal with their reversion to the Jewish law.

In 53 A.D. he wrote to the Thessalonians in order to explain to the believers the meaning of expecting the Lord's Second Coming, as some had left their jobs, waiting for this event.

In 58 A.D. he wrote to the Romans and Corinthians to explain to the believers the meaning of justification through active faith and to correct the numerous faults found in the Corinthians such as division and the abuse of spiritual gifts. He also wrote to the Hebrews to demonstrate to them the superiority of Christ than all the prophets, priests and angels.

Subsequently, St. Paul wrote four epistles when he was prisoner in Rome in the years 62-64 A.D. known as "Captivity Epistles". These are the epistles to the Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians and to Philemon. Each of these epistles had a wonderful pastoral message. For example:

- ❖ The theme of the epistle to the Ephesians was "Building the body of Christ".
- ❖ The theme of the epistle to the Philippians was "To live in Christ".
- ❖ The theme of the epistle to the Colossians was "the preeminence of Christ".
- ❖ The theme of the epistle to Philemon was "Forgiveness from Slavery".

He went on writing according to the condition of the churches or the priests. He wrote, for example the first epistle to Timothy, which was a leadership manual for churches. Then he wrote the epistle to Titus, which was a conduct manual for the churches. Finally, he wrote the second epistle to Timothy, which was a farewell counsel as he felt that his martyrdom was near (67 A.D).

James, Peter, John and Jude wrote the catholic or universal epistles to all the churches. They are 7 epistles, one was written by St. James, two by St. Peter, three by St. John and one by St. Jude.

VII. Revelation

This book was written by St. John the beloved while he was exiled on the island of Patmos by the Emperor Dumetian who, at seeing that throwing the saint in boiling oil had no effect on him, thought that by exiling him to Patmos he could stop his influence on his children in Asia Minor. The Lord, however, revealed Himself to St. John in order to encourage him and his children in their tribulation assuring them that victory was at hand and that He is coming undoubtedly. St. John wrote this book in a symbolic style.

Thus the 27 books of the New Testament were completed by the end of the first century. However, they were scattered in different places and their collection into one book was done during the second century.

Conclusion:

Christians should deeply know the Bible because God is its primary author and hence it gets them closer to Him by hearing His commandments. The Bible's practical benefits for us may well be summarized under two headings: knowing and growing. The Bible proclaims the good news of the gospel that we might know God; it explains the will of God that all of us may grow spiritually before Him.

Applications:

- ❖ Read one chapter of the New Testament every day.
- ❖ Read every paragraph carefully and if you do not understand anything bring it to the Sunday School teacher or the priest to explain it to you.
- ❖ Also try to look for books that explain the Bible

4 - The Epistle of St. James

Objective:

- ❖ The objective of this lesson is to introduce the epistle of St. James to the students.
- ❖ To learn the characteristics of true faith.

Memory Verse:

“Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath, for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God” (James 1:19-20)

References:

- ❖ The Orthodox Study Bible
- ❖ “St. James” Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty

Introduction:

First review the order in which the New Testament is written. For example, first are the four gospels, then the book of the Acts of the Apostles, then the 14 Pauline epistles, then the 7 Catholic (Universal) epistles, and finally the book of Revelation. It would also be beneficial to mention that during the Coptic Orthodox liturgy we read a piece of each one of these sections except from the book of Revelation. However, the whole book of Revelation is read in the night of Apocalypse.

This epistle is the first Catholic epistle in the bible. It addresses issues that we frequently face and temptations that we usually place ourselves in. It is almost like St. James is talking to everyone of us personally and helping withstand the trials that we sometimes go through.

Lesson Outline:

I. Who is St. James?

It is believed to be James the Just or Christ’s brother/cousin as mentioned in Galatians 1:19. In the Jewish tradition, cousins were called brothers and sisters and so when the Bible refers to Christ’s brothers, it doesn’t mean St. Mary’s children, but rather her nephews and nieces. St. James was one of the apostles, and he was the first bishop of Jerusalem. He was originally a very devout Jew that is why he was called the “Just”.

II. What is the Major Theme of this Epistle?

The theme of this epistle is the harmony of faith and works, in other words how faith relates to works. St. James does not teach that works saves us, but he does teach that dead faith, one without works, does not save. There is a distinction between faith and works but never separation. St. James explains that grace does not nullify personal responsibility. Basically St. James wants to instruct us on how to be true Christians. It is very important for the Servant to simplify this concept for the students. Giving examples would be very helpful to distinguish between faith and works. But what

does grace mean? Explain what grace is...i.e. Christ's death that resulted in our salvation and washing of sins.

Do you really want to be a true Christian or do you want to be a hypocrite just like the Pharisees were? A true Christian believes in Christ and has a close relationship with Christ. As a result of this relationship, he/she would act like a Christian. St. James points out that we see the poor and tell them God would provide for them, but yet we do not physically do something to help them (James 2:14-20). The other biggest example of dead faith is when we read the Bible, but we do not do what it teaches us to do. Let's ask ourselves a question, are we doers as much as we are hearers or are we hearers only? If we were hearers only, it would be a shame because we would be missing the true meaning of being Christians. Let us pray to the Lord that He may help us do His will that is in His Holy Bible.

A. Overview of the Epistle

- ❖ Test of Faith (1:1 to 1:18)
- ❖ Characteristics of Faith (1:19 to 5:7)
- ❖ Triumph of Faith (5:8 to 5:20)

B. Recipients of the Epistle

This epistle was written in elegant Greek; therefore it is believed that it was written to Jew and gentiles. Unlike typical epistles, the style of this epistle is more like a sermon instead of a letter. It is very similar to Christ's sermon on the mountain. Also, one of the main advantages of this epistle is that it addresses everyday life issues, i.e. using profanity, the love of money, covetousness...etc. It would be beneficial to point out verses from the Bible, which states these issues.

C. Historical Setting

St. James was addressing people that were experiencing several trials: persecution from Jews, deception, economic injustice and poverty, and divisions in the church. As a result of these trials, they were tempted by:

- a. Depression from the persecutions.
- b. Anger because their good will is being taken advantage of.
- c. Bitterness because they were poor while the unrighteous were rich.
- d. Impatient, waiting for the Second Coming of Christ.
- e. Hypocrisy because they were having quarrels amongst them in church.

St. James encourages his readers to patiently endure the sufferings of the present life in view of the future prospect of the coming of the Lord (5:7-12).

Conclusion:

St. James' epistle is a very practical epistle that has very beneficial guidelines for the life of faith.

Applications:

- ❖ Read the epistle of St. James and identify two of his teachings. start applying them in your life and monitor your progress about every two weeks. With the help of your father of

confession, continue to evaluate your performance and modify your efforts by which you are changing until you achieve your success in mastering that good behavior.

5 - How to Choose My Friends?

Objective:

- ❖ Bad company corrupts good manners. Showing the necessity of bearing witness to Christ in social life.

Memory Verse:

“A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity” (Proverbs 17:17)

References:

- ❖ “How to Win Friends and Influence People” by Dell Carnegie
- ❖ “The Story of David and Jonathan” 1 Samuel 18:1-4 and 23:15-18

Introduction:

Who is a friend and what are the characteristics of a good friend?

- ❖ A friend differs from a colleague.
- ❖ A colleague is merely a companion at work or in the scientific domain.
- ❖ A true friend is that whom you trust and love in purity, sincerity and internal relief.

Lesson Outline:

I. How Important is Friendship to Man?

- ❖ Man was created as a social being in need of another person whom he trusts.
- ❖ Friendship is a domain for achieving true Christian love that is devoid of Unitarianism, personal interests, selfishness and misunderstanding.
- ❖ It is a domain for cooperation in school life, social life and overcoming the problems of everyday life (e.g. David and Jonathan in 1 Samuel 18-23).

II. The Christian Behavior of Friends

- ❖ What you want him to do to you, do it to him.
- ❖ Do not concentrate on your personal benefits and interests as this attitude is against Christian love.
- ❖ Show respect to him and do not speak about weaknesses but endure them as God endures our weaknesses.
- ❖ Share with him his happy occasions and his sufferings and sorrows (Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep).
- ❖ Do not say your confessions to him as confessions should be said to the father of confession only. But general topics are liable to discussions, dialogues and frankness.

III. Whom Should I Choose as a Friend?

- ❖ Those with whom you feel spiritual, psychological, social and mental comfort or relief.
- ❖ Those who are NOT indifferent or whose character is bad whose mouths are full of repulsive words, sexual jokes and impure words.
- ❖ The family must give agreement to that friendship so that your friendship with them should be within the frame of the family friendship so that all your movements would be in light not in darkness.

IV. How to Win Others?

- ❖ Show care to them.
- ❖ Smile when you see them.
- ❖ Be a good listener and give people a chance to talk about themselves.
- ❖ Show respect and appreciation to others.
- ❖ Talk in things that interest others.

Conclusion:

You can win others to Christ by showing them the same love and care as Jesus Christ our Lord showed to you.

Applications:

- ❖ Examine if your friends are good friends and will strengthen your spiritual growth or not.
- ❖ Show love and care to your friends.

6 - Success in the Christian Concept

Objective:

- ❖ To learn that spiritual success should be our main goal in life.
- ❖ To understand that any worldly success is granted from God.

Memory Verse:

“The Lord was with Joseph and he was a successful man” (Genesis 39:2)

References:

- ❖ The story of Joseph in Genesis 39: 1-6, 19-23, 41:37-43

Introduction:

The youth period is the peak of human ambition and dreams of a prosperous future. The youth would usually have dreams of being very successful in different forms and aspects of life. Some of them may desire to be very rich, others may want to be very famous or they may have very high academic ambitions of being always the top of the class and having a PhD in the shortest time possible ...etc.

The servant may start the lesson by giving every student a chance to express what would he/she like to do for his/her career.

Lesson Outline:

I. Spiritual Versus Earthly Success

The story of Joseph is a great example in the Bible that demonstrates the spiritually successful man whom whatever he did, the Lord made it prosper. Joseph was at the top of his spiritual success when he resisted the temptation of his master's wife. However, his reward at that time was to be put in prison. If you think about it, a prisoner would probably not fit the earthly understanding of success. However, that was a great success for Joseph in the eyes of the Lord. Joseph was actually being tested in different hardships and tribulations:

- ❖ His brothers were envious of him so they threw him in a well.
- ❖ He was taken to a foreign land where he was sold as a slave.
- ❖ He was tempted by his master's wife
- ❖ He was thrown into prison
- ❖ The chief butler forgot him after interpreting his dream of restoring his position again in pharaoh's palace (Genesis 40:21-22).

In all these hardships, Joseph held strong to his faith and his purity although he was young and alone in a foreign land.

II. The Reward Of Spiritual Success

Joseph did not ask the Lord for earthly success or seek any high ranks or position in Pharaoh's palace. All what he probably looked for is to be safe in Egypt until he can return back to his father's house. Yet, because he clinked to the Lord during the harsh testing of his spiritual strength, God blessed him with many blessing that he became the second man in Egypt after Pharaoh (Genesis 41:39-43) and he ruled over all the Egyptians. This support what our Lord Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33). Job is another good example of a spiritually successful man through the severe testing by Satan and he was finally rewarded a multiple times on earth.

Does this mean that every earthly success is the reward of spiritual success and every spiritual success results in earthly success? The answer is NO.

There are many successful men whom do not even know God or believe in Him. Their success is pure earthly success, which may or may not lead them to eternal life. On the other hand, there are many spiritually successful characters who lead a miserable life e.g. the parable of the rich and Lazarus; Lazarus suffered on earth yet he was in the Bosom of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in heaven while the rich man was tortured in hell. Other examples are Anba Rewiss and Anba Paul...etc.

III. The Secret Of Joseph's Success

Since Joseph was such a successful man and probably all of us would like to be like him, then we must ask **what was the secret of Joseph's success?**

The secret is that God was with him. This is actually repeated multiple times in the story of Joseph (Genesis 39:2,3,21,23 and 41:16,38) to emphasize and confirm the fact that the sole reason for Joseph's success was the presence of God with Joseph and the spirit of God in Joseph. Joseph also in return always felt the presence of God with him; therefore he refused to sin with his master's wife.

Conclusion:

The Christian youth should seek first spiritual success with no compromise for the sake of earthly success or worldly achievement. They should place their career and life in the hand of the Lord who will grant them success according to His will.

Applications:

- ❖ Start with a prayer or Bible reading before studying everyday.
- ❖ Develop the habit of giving the tithes at an early age even from part-time.

7 - My Attitude toward the Sexual Instinct

Objective:

- ❖ Control the flesh and sublimation of the instinct into blessed activities.
- ❖ To develop the Christian attitude towards flesh and sex.

Memory Verse:

“But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts” (Romans 13:14)

References:

- ❖ Genesis 2, 1 Corinthians 6, 7
- ❖ “Life of Chastity, the mystery of love, Sex and flesh, Christianity and Flesh” Anba Bemin
- ❖ “Questions about Chastity” Archdeacon Ramsis Naguib
- ❖ “Sex and its human meaning” Kosta Bendly
- ❖ “Youth and Pure Living” by H.G. Bishop Moussa
- ❖ “Body from a Christian View” Dr. Adel Halim

Introduction:

The period of adolescence is charged with many feelings and emotions towards the opposite sex. It is very important that these feelings and emotions are directed and guided by the Holy Spirit within us and the love of Christ towards us. Clarification and understanding of the correct and Christian attitude towards sex is very important at this stage in life. It also requires a loving and non-judgmental guidance from a spiritual person.

Lesson Outline:

I. First: Why Did The Lord Create Sex In Man?

1. Refer to the Book of Genesis chapter 2: The first aim is fellowship and unity “The Two shall become one flesh”. Discuss the fellowship of marital love.
2. Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth: keeping kind (What is the difference between man and animal in sex, the first is characterized by noble feelings and higher emotions while animal is characterized by its sexual instinct and biological instincts).
3. A suitable companion to help man: The aim is cooperation and support in life so that man may not suffer loneliness and monotony, and the one fills the psychological gap of the other.

II. Second: What Characterizes Sexuality In Man?

1. God blessed man.
2. Man is filled with noble emotions and sublime love.

3. Man makes for unity and fellowship so the unity of marriage is only broken by marital treachery.

III. Third: Our Attitude Towards Sex

1. We must not be ashamed of what the Lord was not ashamed to create.
2. One gender should not boast over the other as God made males and females equal, and in Jesus there is neither man nor woman as Christ is all in all.
3. Do not pay much attention to the sexual members. Only keep them clean and let them go naturally so that they may perform their message in marriage.
4. Do not stir them as they are sensitive and this may lead the energy into patterns other than the essential aim they were created for.
5. We have to estimate the sufferings faced in controlling this instinct if we expect a successful pure family life later on. For the sake of this life we have to endure and control ourselves in everything.
6. There are three fundamentals that may protect young people:
 - a. Control of thoughts: keeping the senses pure especially the eye and the ear, “Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord, keep watch over the door of my lips”. “I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I look upon a virgin?”
 - b. Sports and hobbies: filling the spare time with spiritual, social and artistic activities and not to go to bed until you feel sleepy.
 - c. Spiritual life: (i) Seeking grace and the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome the desires of the flesh and the sexual instinct. (ii) Prayers, the Holy bible, confession and receiving communion are the best means to protect young people from sexual deviation and falling into the bondage of sexual desires. (iii) Read examples of people who followed the desires of the flesh then they repented and became saints such as St. Augustine, St. Moses the Black, St. Bylagya. (iv) Spiritual fasting is considered a very important factor of the means of grace to overcome the desires of the flesh.
7. Sex in man is characterized by reverence. The Lord covered the naked flesh of Adam and Eve. The Christian man does not utter words of sex and does not speak of this topic without care. When he speaks about sex, he speaks with reverence and respect, as these are holy members that God uses as tools for putting the breath of life and creating man.

Conclusion:

The sexual instinct is a blessing to man if it is used correctly for the right purpose, in the right time and with the spouse. The sexual instinct is a means of expressing love between the married couples who were united into Christ through the marriage bond.

Applications:

- ❖ Examine your thoughts and actions towards the opposite sex.
- ❖ Seek guidance from your father of confession.
- ❖ Educate others about the Christian understanding of sex.
- ❖ Run an Internet search about the Christian attitude toward sex.

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

Week 2- Marvelous Stories of Martyrs

Week 3- Holy Liturgy (I)

Week 4- Holy Liturgy (II)

Week 2 - Marvelous Stories of Martyrs

Objective:

- ❖ To learn how to stand firm in Christ till the end.

Memory Verse:

“I will declare your name to my brethren” (Hebrews 2:12)

References:

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

Introduction:

We are indebted to the martyrs, who keep the faith strong and unchanged to pass to us in coming generations. They sacrificed everything even their life for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. They proclaimed the faith boldly and courageously in front of authorities without fear or hesitation. We as descendants of the martyrs should have all their characteristics. We are the inheritants of the fruits of martyrdom.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Young Martyr

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

Another idea occurred to Irianus... He brought his young wife, Mora, and began to express strong feeling towards her. He advised her to do her best to save her husband and her new house. The wife was deceived. She adorned herself and did her best to save her husband who was hung by his feet. But Timothy ordered her to cover her hair saying: “My sister and wife. My dear Mora. I saw you coming out of our house accompanied by a devil who was walking beside you tempting you to enjoy pleasures of the perishable world. I have rejected all these trifles which amuse the mind”. Mora answered him saying, “But my brother, you have not rejected the work of God. Otherwise who will

read our holy books on Saturdays and Sundays”. “My sister, do not care for this transient world. Come, struggle with me in the nice campaign of martyrdom so that we may attain the everlasting crown... If we have courage, the Lord will forgive us all our sins” Timothy replied. Mora shouted, “How happy I am to accompany you, my dear husband... that has always been my dream but I always felt that I did not deserve that... Your Divine words have raised my soul by the power of God as if the Holy Spirit gave strength to my spirit and reproached me for my sins, so I now prefer the good things of heaven to the treasures of the world”.

At that time Timothy raised a warm prayer for Mora... Suddenly... she rose up... entered the Court of Justice... stood before Irianus and said to him, “O Perfidious man... You should be ashamed of what you have done. You have tempted me and deceived me. You offered me gold and silver as a price of atheism. You want to send our souls to eternal death. I shall not be deceived. I am not afraid for Jesus Christ protects me and saves me”. Irianus began to torture Mora, the young bride. He depilated her hair. Cut her fingers but she regarded that deformation as atonement for her sin when she tempted her husband by her beauty. Finally, Irianus made his last attempt. He promised to forgive her and to marry her to a great officer but she made up her mind to follow her husband to Christ. Irianus then gave orders that each of them should be crucified opposite to each other. On the cross, the couple agreed not to sleep till the bridegroom (Christ) came to find them ready to meet Him.

II. The Loving Martyr

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

Conclusion:

Let us pray that the Lord grant us the strength and courage to proclaim our faith in every place and to everyone. May the blood of those martyrs enrich our faith and love to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Applications:

- ❖ Visit the churches of martyrs on their feast days and glorifying them.
- ❖ Read the stories of martyrs and summarizing them and making wall magazines.
- ❖ Read the life history of a martyr in the Synaxarium and make a glorification for that martyr especially if their icon is in the church or at home.
- ❖ Read the letters of St. Cyprian, which encourage believers to endure persecutions. These letters are found in the book “Martyrdom in Christianity”. St. Cyprian of Corthage was born of pagan parents and of a rich family. He was instructed in secular sciences...he indulged in Vice...he believed in Christ and distributed his property among the poor. He was baptized in

245 AD. He was ordained bishop of Corthage during the time of martyrdom and was martyred in 258 AD.

Week 3 - Holy Liturgy (I)

Objective:

- ❖ Explain the steps of the Holy Liturgy and how to benefit from attending it.

Memory Verse:

“He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me and I in him” (John 6:56)

References:

- ❖ “Spirituality of the rites of the Holy Liturgy” Anba Metaos, Bishop of Al Saurian Monastery.
- ❖ “How to benefit from the Holy Liturgy” Anba Metaos, Bishop of Al Saurian Monastery.

Introduction:

The Holy Liturgy is the most sacred part of our worship to God since our Lord Jesus Christ is present physically on the altar by his body and blood. Every move in the Holy Liturgy has a deep spiritual meaning as explained below.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Church Rites

- ❖ The word (Ἱερατεία = Taksis) is a Greek word meaning order or arrangement. It means the order of service in church and the different prayers that are chanted in her.

II. God Takes Care Of Rites

- ❖ God accepted Abel sacrifice and not Cain because He had already taught them that it should be an animal sacrifice and because of His knowledge of the purity of their hearts.
- ❖ In the tent of meeting, God has shown Moses how the tent should look like and how different parts of service is carried out with great detail. Anybody changing this order would be severely punished. For example, Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron offered profane fire before the Lord, fire went out from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord (Leviticus 10).

III. How The Church Rites Started And How It Reached Us

- ❖ Jesus Christ Himself laid the foundation for the church rites when He instituted the sacrament of the Eucharist in the upper room.
- ❖ The apostles delivered to the churches what they learnt from our Lord. This in turn was given to the next generations.
- ❖ All parts of the Holy Liturgy are from the Bible, e.g., the Great, the Mighty God, whose name is the Lord of hosts (Jeremiah 32:18).
- ❖ Finally having a defined way of praying the Liturgy is an element of stability and order in church.

IV. Parts of the Liturgy

A. Prayers for Saturday evening

1. The Agpia prayer (11 & 12) or (9, 11 & 12) hours.
2. Vespers praises.
3. Vespers raising of incense.
4. Agpia (mid night prayers).
5. Mid night praises

B. Prayers for Sunday morning

- 1- Agpia (Prime payer)
- 2- Morning praises.
- 3- Morning raising of incense
- 4- Agpia (3 & 6) or (3, 6 and 9) hours.
- 5- The Holy liturgy (Catechumen and Believers).

V. Components of the Divine Liturgy

(Steps Jesus performed in the Last Supper (Matthew 26:26-30))	Steps of the Divine Liturgy
The disciples prepared the upper room	The raising of incense
Jesus washed the disciples feet	Repentance, confession and absolution
Took Bread	Choose Lamb
Gave thanks	Thanksgiving Prayer
Blessed it	The blessing
Broke it	Fraction
Gave it to His Disciples	Communion
Sang hymns (Matthew 26:30)	Hymns for communion

VI. The Raising Of Incense

- ❖ Using the incense in praying is a heavenly angelic act. (Rev 8:3) “Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.”
- ❖ The priest enters the sanctuary and put five hands on incense. This is a symbol of the offerings of Abel, Noah, Melchizedek, Aaron and Zechariah.

VII. The Qorban and Wine

A. The Qorban

- ❖ It is Circular in shape (A circle does not have a beginning or an end same like God).
- ❖ A big cross in the middle and twelve smaller crosses around it (Jesus Christ and the apostles).
- ❖ Around this it is written (Ἁγίος ὁ θεός ... – agios = holy) in a circle.

- ❖ It is made of flour (purity) and water.
- ❖ Leaven (yeast) is added. It is a symbol of sin, which make something look different than its normal size. This is a symbol of Jesus Christ carrying our sins on the cross.
- ❖ No sugar is added. Sugar is a symbol of the pleasure of the world.
- ❖ No salt is added since it is a symbol of preserving from corruption. Jesus is incorruptible and therefore salt is not added. Also, the cross was a stumbling block for the Jew and ignorance for the Greek (no salt).

B. Choosing the Lamb

- ❖ A deacon carries a basket of the Qorban. It contains an odd number of Qorban (3, 5, 7...). Every Qorban has a similar one except one left that is unique (Christ).
- ❖ Another deacon carries a bottle (cruet) of wine at the priest's right hand.
- ❖ A third deacon carries a cruet of water at the priest's left hand.
- ❖ All four (the priest and the three deacons) form the symbol of the cross.
- ❖ The priest picks the best Qorban that does not have any blemish and all the crosses and writings are clear. He also checks the wine by smelling it to see if it is ok.
- ❖ He then takes some water and washes the chosen Qorban (now called the lamb) as a symbol of baptism. He then says "Honor and glory, glory and honor ..."

C. The prayer of thanksgiving

- ❖ We start all our prayers with the prayer of Thanksgiving (e.g., Baptism, wedding, funeral...)

Conclusion:

Everything in the liturgy has a meaning and it becomes more enjoyable when we understand those meanings. We feel as if we are living many of the events of the life of Jesus Christ on earth. The liturgy finally left us from earth to heaven.

Applications:

- ❖ Pay attention in church to the prayers and moves of the priest. You may use a liturgy book to help you out.
- ❖ If there is anything that you do not understand during the liturgy, ask the priest or your Sunday school teacher for an explanation.

Week 4 - Holy Liturgy (II)

Objective:

- ❖ To learn the sequence and the meaning of the liturgy.
- ❖ To appreciate the beauty of the Holy liturgy.

Memory Verse:

“I am the bread of life” (John 6:35)

References:

- ❖ “Spirituality of the rites of the Holy Liturgy” Anba Metaos, Bishop of Al Syrian Monastery.
- ❖ “How to benefit from the Holy Liturgy” Anba Metaos, Bishop of Al Syrian Monastery.

Introduction:

Examine parts of the Liturgy and analogy with the Last Supper. Refer to the previous lesson.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Burial

- ❖ The priest places the bread on the paten.
- ❖ He pours wine into the chalice, emptying out completely the cruet.
- ❖ He pours water into the empty wine cruet and from it he adds to the wine in the chalice a little water (around a third). This is a symbol that blood and water came from Jesus’ side when he was on the cross
- ❖ The prayer of thanksgiving.
- ❖ The priest covers the oblation with a handkerchief and he covers likewise the chalice with another handkerchief. This is a symbol of the clean linen cloth that our Lord Jesus was wrapped in the tomb.
- ❖ He covers both with the Prospherine together with the deacon facing him. This is a symbol of the big rock that was roiled over Jesus Christ’s tomb. Also the priest and deacon on either side of the altar are a symbol of the two angels seen by Mary Magdalene in the tomb, one on the head’s side and the other on the legs’ side (John 20:12).
- ❖ Then, the priest places a handkerchief above the Prospherine. This is a symbol of the seal on the rock.

II. The Absolution of the Servants

- ❖ This is the absolution given to everyone in church to be able to complete this service and partake from the Holy Communion.

- ❖ If two priests are attending the liturgy, one is called the serving priest (choosing the lamb, saying the fraction and administering the body of Christ), and the other is a participating priest.
- ❖ The participating priest always says the absolution even if he is younger or newer than the other one is.
- ❖ The bishop always says the absolution himself.

III. The Readings

- ❖ The Pauline: From the 14 epistles written by St Paul.
- ❖ The catholic: From the epistle of the other disciples: St. James (1), St. Peter (2), St. John (3), St. Jude (1).
- ❖ The Acts: from the Book of Acts (Praxis).
- ❖ During the reading of the Pauline, the priest goes around the altar and the whole church representing the preaching of St. Paul to the whole world. During the reading of acts, the priest turns around the altar and the deacons' chorus only remembering that the Lord asked His disciples not to leave Jerusalem until they receive power from above.
- ❖ The Synaxarium: Every day in the Coptic calendar has an occasion, either a feast of our Lord or a martyr or a saint. This is considered to be an extension to the Book of Acts.
- ❖ The Psalm: Some verses from the Book of Psalms.
- ❖ The Gospel: This is the center of all readings. It speaks about the occasion of the day according to the Synaxarium. Sundays, Lent, and Pentecost days have separate readings.
- ❖ The sermon: This explains what is read in the Gospel.

IV. The Creed

- ❖ Two main things we need to do before approaching the sacrifice, faith and love. Faith we prove by saying the creed and love by the holy kiss.

V. The Prayer of Reconciliation

- ❖ This narrates the story of salvation.
- ❖ The deacon stands on the other side of the altar and the priest takes the handkerchief on the Prospherine and holds it up. This is a symbol of the separation between God and man before our Lord Jesus was incarnated.
- ❖ At the end, the Prospherine is removed (symbol of resurrection).

VI. The Blessings

- ❖ The priest asks the Holy Spirit to come and bless the bread and wine to change them to the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

VII. The Seven Prayers

- ❖ After the bread and wine change to the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, we start asking Him for all our requests. We pray for the safety of the church, the Pope and bishops, the priests, God's mercy, our place (water of the rivers, the plants or the air of heaven) and the oblations.

VIII. The Congregation of the Saints

- ❖ We remember all the saints asking for their prayers on our behalf and take them as an example.

IX. The Fraction

- ❖ The priest divides the body of Christ. The middle part “Ispadikon” (the small cross in middle of Qorban) is kept as one piece.
- ❖ The “Ispadikon” is placed in the chalice and eaten by the priest later. This is a symbol that “this body is for this blood and this blood is for this body”.

X. The Absolution

- ❖ Another absolution here before approaching the sacrifice.

XI. The Confession

- ❖ The priest and the deacon confess their faith.

XII. Taking Communion

- ❖ During communion the deacons and the congregation chants psalm 150 and appropriate hymns praising God and thanking Him for His gifts.

XIII. Washing the Altar Utensils

- ❖ After the congregation has taken communion, the priest will finish all the body and blood. He then washes the utensils and drinks the water himself and the deacons. This is a symbol of the Passover where nothing was left to the morning (Exodus 12:10).

XIV. After the Liturgy

- ❖ Each one should take care not to take anything out of his mouth or get injured.
- ❖ Meditate on the gift and blessing received for the rest of the day.

XV. How to Benefit from the Holy Liturgy**A. Prepare for the liturgy**

- ❖ Attend vespers the previous night.
- ❖ Come clean to church, outside and inside. Outside, by washing and wearing tidy clothes. From inside by having a pure heart through peace with everyone together with repentance and confession.

B. Come early to church

- ❖ Coming to church too late may prevent you from taking communion.
- ❖ Coming early allows the enjoying of the readings, hymns and deep prayers in the liturgy.
- ❖ The longer time spent in church will calm down the soul and ease the concentration in the liturgy.

C. Participating in the Liturgy responses

- ❖ The congregation is one of main three persons needed for a liturgy: a priest, deacons and the congregation.
- ❖ The responses are meant for the congregation not only the deacons.

D. Concentrate in the prayers and responses

- ❖ We should pray with the mind not the lips only.
- ❖ Using a Liturgy book may help in this situation.

E. Take communion

- ❖ Every one should be prepared by repentance and confession and participate in the communion.

Conclusion:

“The time that we spend in church during the Holy Liturgy is a moment of heaven on earth. This glory surrounding us may be hidden from our eyes at that time. This is only because we are human but many are deserved to see this glory. They witnessed and it is true” (The life of orthodox prayer).

Applications:

- ❖ Try to apply all the methods mentioned above to benefit from the Liturgy.
- ❖ Pay attention in church and use a liturgy book to follow up.

LESSONS FOR THE MONTH OF OCTOBER

Week 1- The Meaning of the Phrase: My Private Life is Mine

Week 2- The Tabernacle of Meeting

Week 3- The Ark of Covenant

Week 4- Intercession

Week 1 - The Meaning of the Phrase: My Private Life is Mine

Objective:

- ❖ The Lord gave us liberty and Liberty is to shoulder responsibility.

Memory Verse:

“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)

References:

- ❖ “The Life of Joshua” F.B. Mayer

Introduction:

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

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

Lesson Outline:

I. Questions – Answers Scenarios

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

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

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

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

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

At the end of his life, he stood before the people and said, “The Lord God, your God, fought for you. Whenever I remember the day when we crossed the Red Sea, the day we won victory over the Amalekites and our journey in the Mount of Sinai, when the Lord sent us food from heaven and water from the rock. With all faithfulness and zeal...tell me, do you intend to worship Him with faith or not? You have freedom of choice in that matter”. Here Joshua stood up and raised his eyes to heaven and said, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord”. And the people shouted, “How do you say that our leader Joshua? We shall never leave the Lord. Is it possible for us to leave Him after all those good deeds of His? No. He kept us safe in all roads where we walked. We also serve God because He is our God”. But Joshua again said, “Perhaps this will be difficult for you. You know that God is Holy and Jealous. He demands that your life be pure... and your behavior be straight before

His eyes. You may not be able to do so". The people said with a great shout, "No... No... We will serve the Lord". Joshua said, "Beware, do not forget the Lord or what He did for you". All the people said, "Amen". Joshua said, "If you do that the blessing will rest upon you and your enemies will be unable to harm you". The people said, "Amen". Joshua said, "If you leave the Lord to serve idols, the Lord will severely punish you". The People said, "Amen". Joshua said: "Jehovah is great and there is no god like Him among the gods of the people of Canaan; those gods demand nothing but offerings". The people replied, "We worship God with faithfulness and truth with all our hearts". Joshua said, "You are your own witnesses to the fact that you have chosen to serve the Lord. You have chosen Him with your own free will so you have become responsible before God for that choice, is not that so?" They said, "We are witnesses, we shall worship God only and obey all His commands... Joshua made a covenant for the people that day and wrote this in the book of Law and set up a stone to be a witness against them. They were loyal to the covenant all the days of Joshua.

+ Who are the people of God?

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

Conclusion:

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

Applications:

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

God, out of His love to us, sets hindrances in the way of our wrong will so that we may enjoy the blessings of obeying His will with our full freedom.

d. Each freedom has its own responsibility. Fill in the spaces:

Verse Freedom	Responsibility
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John 6:53	-----
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1 Corinthians 10:23	-----
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Galatians 5:13	-----
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e. Discussion the useful and the harmful effects of this opinion: My life is my own possession... I am free... to do what I like...

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

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

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

Week 2 - The Tabernacle of Meeting

Objectives:

- ❖ To learn the structure and contents of the tabernacle.
- ❖ To know its symbols.

Memory Verse:

“Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them” (Exodus 25:8)

References:

- ❖ Exodus 25-27; 35-40
- ❖ “The tabernacle of meeting-The house of God among his people” Fr. Mercurius Anba Bishoy.
- ❖ “The Icon of Heaven” Anba Arsanios, Bishop of Minia and Abokorkas.

Introduction:

God commanded Moses and gave him all the details to build a tabernacle of meeting for Him to live amongst His people. He also guided them in the wilderness in the cloud to reach the Promised Land. How great is God’s love for His people that He longs to live with them and walk with them their way.

Lesson Outline:

The tabernacle of meeting was made up of the following:

1. The Holy - only priests were allowed to enter. The dimensions of the holy were 10x20x10 cubits
2. The Holy of Holies – only the high priest was allowed to enter once a year. The dimensions of the Holy of Holies were 10x10x10 cubits.

I. Outside the Holy

A. The altar of burnt offering

Made of bronze and acacia wood – 5x5x3 cubits. The bronze is a sign of the strength of those who repent and the wood is a sign of the salvation through the cross. There was a continuous burning fire on the altar that was started by God Himself (Deuteronomy 6:13; 9:24). This fire never stopped to symbolize the continuous love of God that He sacrificed His only begotten Son as a burnt offering for the sin of the whole world. There were 4 horns on the corners of the altar to indicate those four directions of the world and that salvation was for the whole world.

This was the only altar where people were able to meet with God through their sacrifices. This is how we are able to meet with God through Jesus Christ our sacrifice. This altar was outside the Holy similar to our Lord Jesus Christ who was crucified outside the city. This altar was also outside to demonstrate that animal sacrifices were unable to reconcile us with God until the true sacrifice Jesus Christ was able to bring this altar to the middle of the Holy of Holies as we see now in the church.

B. The Laver

Was made of bronze and filled with water. It was used for the priests to clean their bodies before ordaining them and to clean their hands and feet before entering the Holy. Washing with water is a symbol of baptism and confession before entering to the Holy, which is equivalent to communion.

II. Contents of the Holy**A. The Golden Lampstand**

It was made of one piece of gold that was hammered to be shaped. This is similar to our Lord who was beaten and tortured for us. It also resembles St. Mary who carried the light of the world in her womb. The lampstand had seven cups for oil as a number of completeness. It was the only source of light in the tabernacle as Christ is our only source of light and the only light in the heavenly Jerusalem, which needs no sun or moon to lighten it (Revelation 21:23).

B. Table of Showbread

It was made of acacia wood and gold. The wood resembles the humanity and the gold resembles the divinity of the incarnated Christ. Laid on it were 12 unleavened breads representing the 12 tribes of Israel. There were also wine and incense placed on this table. The priests ate the bread on the Sabbath after replacing it with 12 new breads. This is a sign of the fullness from the bread of life that never ends or empties. This is similar to our Lord the bread of life and whoever eats from Him will never hunger again (Psalm 16:11, John 6:35). Only priests ate of this bread to indicate that only those who dedicate their lives to Him will not hunger.

C. The Altar of Incense

It is made of acacia wood and gold similar to the table of showbread. It also has a crown of gold and 4 horns at its corners. Its dimensions are 1x1x2 cubits (1 cubit = 45 cm).

Aaron raised incense in the morning and the evening of every day. The altar of incense was placed in front of the entrance to the Holy of Holies, which contained the ark. Thus, the incense would enter into the Holy of Holies and reach the ark where the Lord used to dwell. The incense is a symbol of the pleasant aroma of the accepted sacrifice of our Lord on the cross that was smelled by the Father.

The horns were covered with blood once a year as a symbol of the blood of Jesus Christ that was shed once for all of us.

It was forbidden that any strange incense be used on this altar. Only the incense prepared and mixed by the high priest as God told him. When the 2 sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, raised profane fire in their censer, which the Lord had not commanded, fire went out and devoured them and they died (Leviticus 10:1-3).

Everything inside the Holy and the Holy of Holies was made of gold and things outside were made of bronze. This demonstrates that the real beauty is from inside.

All the material for the tabernacle was offered by the Israelites in abundance (Exodus 36:5-7). This teaches us to give in abundance to the house of the Lord to cover all its needs. It is our responsibility to take care of the house of the Lord, the church.

Conclusion:

- ❖ It is awesome to compare the resemblance in the structure of the tabernacle that was dictated by God and the structure of the church now.
- ❖ The Lord longs to live with you and guide you as he lived and guided His people in the wilderness. So, give him your heart as a sanctuary that He may come and dwell in it.

Applications:

- ❖ Study the similarities and differences between the tabernacle of meeting and the structure of the church.
- ❖ Study the Holies and its content for the next Sunday lesson.
- ❖ We need to practice giving to the Lord in abundance, whether it is time or material things.

Week 3 - The Ark of Covenant

Objective:

- ❖ To know the contents of the Holy of Holies
- ❖ To understand the meaning and the function of the ark of covenant
- ❖ To know some of the history and movements of the ark.

Memory Verse:

“And there, I will meet with you and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat” (Exodus 25:22)

Introduction:

The Holy of Holies was the most sacred part of the tent of meeting. It was separated from the Holy with a curtain. It contained the Ark of Covenant only. The high priest was the only person allowed to enter the Holy of Holies once a year to spray blood of sacrifice on the ark for the forgiveness of the sins of the people. This was a symbol of our Lord’s only sacrifice for us.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Ark of Covenant

The Ark of Covenant was the most sacred object in the tabernacle. It symbolized God’s presence and His covenant with Israel. It was made of acacia wood that was covered with gold from within and without. It contained:

1. The two tablets of stone with the Ten Commandments written on them with the finger of God. These were a symbol of the word of God.
2. The manna as a symbol of the bread of life.
3. The rod of Aaron as a symbol of St. Mary’s perpetual virginity.

The ark was covered with the mercy seat, which was made of pure gold and on top of it the two cherubim with extended wings. The wings of each cherub touched the wings of the other one and they covered the mercy seat. This is where the voice of God was heard speaking to Moses. It was the throne of God in the tabernacle of meeting.

The Ark of Covenant guided the Israelites in the wilderness to the Promised Land. It was usually carried by the Levites on two wooden sticks covered with gold. No human being was allowed to touch the ark or he would die.

II. The History of the Ark of Covenant and its Trips

Moses put the two tablets of stone in the ark and placed it in the middle of the Holy of Holies. Then, the cloud of the Lord filled the place. After 7 weeks the cloud lifted and the Israelites started

moving again. Whenever, the cloud appeared in the morning and the column of fire at night they settled down and whenever it lifted they started moving. The ark was the leader when they left mount Sinai, crossed the Jordan River and when they turned around Jericho (Joshua 6:1-20).

Israel wanted to use the ark to defeat the Palestinians without instructions from God (1 Samuel 4:4). So, they were defeated and the ark was taken from them (1 Samuel 4:3). When the ark was placed in the temple of Dagon, the idol collapsed (1 Samuel 5:2-7). It was then moved to Gath, where the men of Gath struck by strange disease (1 Samuel 5:8,9). Then the ark was moved briefly to Ekron and finally returned to the Hebrews in Beth Shemesh led by two milk cows (1 Samuel 6:13-16). The ark then was taken to Kirjath Jearim at the house of Abinadab where it stayed for many years (1 Samuel 7:1,2). Finally it was taken to Jerusalem in David's time (2 Samuel 6). Subsequently Solomon built the permanent temple of God in Jerusalem and placed the Ark of Covenant in it. It disappeared after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians.

- ❖ Where was the ark of covenant placed in the tent of meeting?
- ❖ What was placed inside the ark of covenant?
- ❖ Describe the mercy seat? Why is it important?
- ❖ Who brought the ark of covenant to Jerusalem?

III. The Importance of Studying the Tabernacle of Meeting

- ❖ It is an example of heavenly Jerusalem (Revelation 5:15)
- ❖ It is an example of the incarnation of Christ (John 1:14)
- ❖ The tent was mobile to lead the people in the wilderness as Jesus Christ traveled from one place to another performing miracles and leading people to salvation.
- ❖ The outer appearance of the tent of meeting was humble as it was covered with the skin of goats but the inside was full of gold. This is similar to our Lord Jesus Christ who was humble in appearance but he was the holy divine God (Isaiah 53:2-3).
- ❖ The tent of meeting was the place where God met with His people.

Conclusion:

If God requested to have a meeting place with us on earth, wouldn't we seek to meet with Him too in prayers and meditations? May our hearts be an ark of covenant to the Lord that He may dwell in them.

Applications:

- ❖ Ask the students to do an Internet search about the Ark of covenant and where could it be now?
- ❖ Compare the building of the church to the structure of the tabernacle of meeting and identify the differences.

Week 4 - Intercessions

Objective:

- ❖ Show the Importance of Intercession in our life

Memory Verse:

“Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct” (Hebrews 13:7)

References:

- ❖ “Follow Their Example, Ask And You Shall Receive Their Intercession”
- ❖ “The Redemptive Intercession” Shafaa Kafareiah
- ❖ <http://www.geocities.com/samirbillatos/Intercession.html>

Introduction:

To intercede means to act between parties with a view to reconcile differences (Webster Dictionary). Intercession is actions by those who are more able than we are in our behalf. Some times the Church refers to those saints who intercede on our behalf as the “Cloud of Witnesses” (Hebrews 12:1-2): “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, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God”.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Redemptive Intercession

The Redemptive Intercession was the act of Jesus Christ on the cross. Christ is the only reconciliator between God the Father and man in salvation. There is no other savior or redeemer as it is clearly stated by St. Paul “Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption” (Hebrews 9:12). However, there are other intercessors in our church including:

- ❖ St. Mary, the Archangels, the Angels, and St. John the Baptist.
- ❖ Disciples, Apostles, Prophets, Martyrs, Saints, and all those who please God (past, present, and future) in their deeds.

These intercessors pleased God in their deeds, are acceptable to Him, present in His kingdom, and hence their voices are heard.

II. How do we Know there is Intercessions?

First, we notice in the following verses how the Israelites asked Moses to pray on their behalf “Therefore the people came to Moses, and said: We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord that He take away the serpents from us. So Moses prayed for the people. Then the Lord said to Moses: Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live. So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived” (Numbers 21:7-9:). We also read in Daniel “Suddenly, a hand touched me, which made me tremble on my knees and on the palms of my hands. And he said to me: O Daniel, man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak to you, and stand upright, for I have now been sent to you. While he was speaking this word to me, I stood trembling. Then he said to me: Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard; and I have come because of your words” (Daniel 10:10-12).

In the New Testament we read: “Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains, that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak” (Colossians 4:2-5). Thus, we have to pray for the success of the service of the Church as Paul asked the believers in Colossi to do. Here, we become intercessors.

In Revelation, we read of the rewards awaiting those who please God with their good deeds: “And He said to me: It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts” (Revelation 21:6). If this is what awaits those who please God, it is hard to believe that God would refuse their requests. And praying on our behalf---they do, as evident in the following verses from Revelation: “Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne” (Revelation 8:3).

Also, from the Old Testament we know of the story in which Saul tried to consult the Prophet Samuel, using an evil spirit, a woman with “familiar” spirit (1 Samuel 28:7-17). Moreover, we listen to the words of Jesus, describing God, the Father: “I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living” (Matthew 22:32).

Also, from the story of Lazarus and the rich man, we learn that Saints are alive and do petition God on behalf of those they care about, for the foolish rich man asks the Lord to send Abraham to comfort him: “But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. Then he cried and said: Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said: Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us. Then he said, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment. Abraham said to him: They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said: No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will

repent. But he said to him: If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead” (Luke 16:20-31).

If we believe in the value of praying for one another, then we should believe in the value of intercessions. Not to believe in the intercessions of the saints is either to deny that these saints are alive or to deny that they are capable of praying. Both of these are obviously wrong assumptions as clear from the scriptures above. Therefore, denying the value of intercessions is to reject the scriptures.

III. What Can Intercessors Do?

1. Intercede: St. Mary, Angels, Archangels, John the Baptist Intercede in our behalf to the Lord.
2. Pray: All the others pray on our behalf before the Lord.

We, also, can and should pray for each other to the Lord. We are intercessors for those whom God entrusted us with. Pope and Bishops pray for all the believers, priest for his congregation, Sunday School Servant for his students, parents for children... etc. We need to practice this in our daily life.

IV. Intercessors are Special Friends

We should develop a friendship with our intercessors. Like friends, we rejoice in learning of their lives and celebrating special occasions (e.g. their birth, their martyrdom, etc.)

V. Intercession In the Church

The Church asks for the intercessions of all the saints all the time. It takes faith for these intercessions to bring fruits. In the Raising of Incense: we start with praises: Psali (Psalms unto the Lord), Theotekia (Magnifying the Theotokos), and Doxologia (Glorifications for the saints). We then conclude with the Congregation of the Saints, which is a long list of names from all categories.

In the Liturgy: We sing Zoxapatri (Glory to the Holy Trinity), Tai-shori (to the Virgin Mary), Heeteniat (Intercessions). In the order given, Agios (Praising and giving Glory to Jesus Our Lord), 7 Prayers (Intercessions), Khenevran (Glory to the Holy Trinity, followed with Axios, worthy to St. Mary, Saint of the Church, and the Saint(s) of the day and/or Occasion). The Cherubim Glory to God through His angels, and the Congregation of Saints towards the end of the Liturgy.

VI. Value of Intercessions

Through Intercession and Prayers, we are assured of our Salvation. In a sense we see the saints as mentors-as examples of people “who did it”. Through intercessions, we receive help with problems: Spiritual and Physical-a clear assurance that God is working in our life. In Romans 8:27-29, we read: “Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren”.

VII. Examples from the Old Testament

- ❖ Abraham: Abraham interceded for his cousin Lot and for Sodom and Gomorrah. Also, Abraham interceded for Isaac his son to find a wife suitable for him.

- ❖ Jacob for Rachel: Rachel was barren, and through the intercession of her husband she bore Joseph and Benjamin. She cried to her husband and in turn he cried to God.
- ❖ Joseph for Egypt and His Brothers: Joseph certainly interceded for Egypt by his wisdom and prayers, they were saved from famine. He also saved his eleven brothers from famine.
- ❖ Eli the Priest for Hannah: Eli the Priest interceded for Hannah when he heard her hurtful cries. She was given Samuel who followed Eli as Priest and highly regarded prophet of Israel (1 Samuel 1:17).
- ❖ Nathan and David (2 Samuel 12).
- ❖ Solomon when God spared him from losing the kingdom (2 Kings 18).
- ❖ King Hezekiah and Isaiah the Prophet.
- ❖ Elijah when he prayed and the rain stopped for 3 years and 6 months.
- ❖ Elisha: His prayers healed Naman the leader of the army of the king of Syria.
- ❖ Daniel: Through prayers and intercession he saved the king of Persia from destruction.

VIII. Examples from the New Testament

Jesus heard the intercessions of the people. For example the Centurion asked for the healing of his servant, the whole flock testified to him about how good this gentile (non-believer) was to them. Then the man showed Jesus even a greater thing by asking Jesus not to enter under his roof because he was a sinner, but say one word and my servant will be healed.

St. Mary (Theotokos) asked her Son, and He provided heavenly wine at the wedding in Cana of Galilee, it is the first miracle recorded in the gospel. She always intercedes for our race. The stories in Church history are very many: The dissolving of Iron bars of the jail in Asia Minor (Hallat Al-Hadeed), the saving of the Church in Atreeb (during Abassid Rule), the Moving of Mukataam Mountain East of Cairo (during Fatimide Rule). These are but a few stories of intercession. The Apparition in Zeitoun (1968) and Shoubra (1986) are intercessions. We call her full of grace, turtle dove, censor of Aaron, Dome of Moses, the intercessor of our race. Through her intercessions and prayers we can triumph on many of our adversaries. We celebrate for her the 21st of every month of the Coptic Calendar.

Archangel Michael is the first in the Archangels as we sing in the praises. His Intercessions are very powerful. We celebrate for him the 12th of every month in the Coptic Calendar. The stories of his intercession in the Bible, and in the history are many. He fought for Daniel, he fought the devil not to reveal the location of the body of Moses... etc. Archangels Gabriel, Rafaiel, Soriel, Sadakiel, Sarasiel and Ananieniel are all powerful as well.

The prayers of the disciples and their intercessions are most helpful. Think of St. John, James, Andrew and Peter for example. They are Christ's first disciples. He called them and they followed Him. They became fisher of men. Can we be like them? First we need to ask for their intercession and prayer. Peter heard the intercession for Tabetha, and he raised her from the death, in the Name of Jesus.

St. Mark the Apostle came to our land Egypt, and taught us the Father and the Son and The Holy Spirit. Can he be our Intercessor? There are 70 Apostles. They all can intercede and pray for us.

The Martyrs are very special in the eyes of God. They followed the example of Jesus by giving their own life for the name, which is above all names. In our church we always remember St. George, St. Mena, St. Demiana, St. Philopateer, and St. Abanoub (Just a 12 years old, who endured

suffering and finally was executed for professing the name of God). How about saints Kouzman and Demian from the Arabian Desert, St. Gregory the Armenian, St. Maximus and Domadius, St. Athanasius the Apostolic, St. Cyril the Great, St. Anthony, St. Paula (Paul) the Anchorite.

In our days also, we have intercessors whom some of us knew. They are great intercessors like St. Abraam, Pope Cyril VI, Fr. Michael Ibrahim, Fr. Bishoy Kamel, etc. If you experienced the effects of their prayers and intercessions, you can tell others, if you did not. There are many books, which tell the wonders, miracles, help these saints can provide. God is glorified through these miracles. It is all the works of God through the Saints.

The Book Of Synaxarium is a book of history and stories of the martyrs and saints. We read it every day of the week. It reminds us of their good deeds, and makes us want to follow their example and do like them. It also gives us a chance to know more and want to benefit from prayers and intercessions.

Conclusion:

Intercession is a powerful tool available to all believers. By asking the intercession and prayers of the saints, we receive help from the heavenly host. We should use it always. May their Holy Blessing be with us all. Intercessions are means of unifying the earthly with the heavenly church.

Applications:

- ❖ A good practice is to choose a patron saint for your life and give him a special honor on his feast by attending the celebration and bringing a special offering (gift) to the Church in the name of your patron saint.
- ❖ Also practice reading and learning new virtues from the stories of the saints.

LESSONS FOR THE MONTH OF NOVEMBER

Week 1- The Sermon on the Mount (I)

Week 2- The Sermon on the Mount (II)

Week 3- Christian Self Esteem

Week 4- Dating

Week 1 - The Sermon on the Mount (I)

Objective:

- ❖ To learn the virtues desired for Christians as outlined in the Sermon on the Mount
- ❖ To know what are the contents of the Sermon on the Mount.

Memory Verse:

*“Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which lead to life, and there are few who find it”
(Matthew 7:14)*

References:

- ❖ Matthew 5:1-16
- ❖ “The Bible according to St. Matthew.” Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty.
- ❖ “The spirituality of the prayer with the Agpia” Anba Metaos, Bishop of Al Saurian Monastery.

Introduction:

Jesus Christ our king met His people on the mountain to give them His new law. In the Old Testament, Moses went up the mountain to get the law after fasting 40 days. Nobody approached the mountain but Moses. The mountain was smoking and the thick clouds and thunder surrounded it. Now, the Word of God Himself came to us and talked directly to us with simplicity.

Lesson Outline:

I. Blessed are the poor in the spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven

- ❖ This is the humbleness that teaches us that without God we are nothing.
- ❖ If pride is the basis of every fall then humbleness is the way to the kingdom of Heaven.
- ❖ This is the best start to the blessings since “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Psalm 111:10) and “Pride is the first Sin” (Wisdom of Joshua 10:15).
- ❖ The poor in spirit is the person who fears God and confess his sins. He is never proud of his righteousness.

II. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted

- ❖ The humble person feels his sins and its weight, so the Holy Spirit leads him to the “Spiritual Mourn”. He also mourns for every sinful person.
- ❖ The normal mourning is for losing something or someone precious. A spiritual person does not consider any of these things as precious to him.
- ❖ “For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death” (2 Corinthians 7:10).

III. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth

- ❖ The mourn on our sins leads us to meekness.
- ❖ Meekness does not mean weakness but means the power of the inner spirit that does not get disturbed by the timely things.
- ❖ Our Lord said: “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matthew 11:29).
- ❖ The reward is inheriting the earth, which can be interpreted literally. A meek person does not get only spiritual reward but also an earthly reward.
- ❖ It can be interpreted as the land of life “I cried out to You, O Lord: I said: You [are] my refuge, My portion in the land of the living” (Psalm 142:5).

IV. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled

- ❖ A meek person will always wish to quench his spiritual thirst by Christ Himself, proclaiming “As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God” (Psalm 42:1).
- ❖ The Holy Spirit takes us through this hunger and thirst to unite with Christ so we are a filled only by Him “As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness.”
- ❖ The Jewish people were not only hungry or thirsty in the desert waiting for the manna but it was a matter of life and death to them. Also our hunger to our Lord Jesus Christ should be on the same level, “I am the bread which came down from heaven” (John 6:41), “For with You is the fountain of life” (Psalm 36:9).

V. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy

- ❖ When we are filled with Jesus Christ, we start to become like Him, “Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful” (Luke 9:36).
- ❖ Mercy is not only by giving to the poor but in every aspect of our life. We should feel others’ pain and share it with them.
- ❖ Who does not have mercy does not deserve the mercy of God (St. Keprianos).
- ❖ If you saw a poor man then, even if he does not look like Jesus Christ, He is the one accepting your act of mercy, “Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me” (Matthew 25:36).

VI. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God

- ❖ God works in the merciful person’s heart so that he can see God. His inner eye sees what cannot be seen.
- ❖ The pure in heart are those who gained every virtue and do not carry any evil inside them, “Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord” (Heb 12:14).
- ❖ We can only see the divinity with our hearts, “My heart said to You: Your face, Lord, I will seek” (Psalm 27:8).

VII. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God

- ❖ Making peace is not an outside act but it is the nature of the sons of Gods. Through the inner peace, they shine on everyone.
- ❖ Peacemakers control their lusts inside them.

VIII. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven

- ❖ When we become the sons of God through uniting with Him in baptism, we do God's work, which is peace. The Devil starts prosecution against us.
- ❖ We have to accept prosecution for righteousness' sake as the apostles accepted prosecution with happiness, "So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name" (Acts 5:41).

IX. You are the salt of the earth

- ❖ Salt is a cheap element but is indispensable. Same with the Christian person, he is humble giving his life for everyone.
- ❖ Food is not good without salt, like the world with a good Christian person.
- ❖ The salt is dissolved in the food, like the Christian giving all his life for others.
- ❖ Salt alone has no effect, only when it is mixed with food it gives the taste. The Christian also gives taste to the world when he is in the world.

X. You are the light of the world

- ❖ When we offer our life, God makes us shine as light to the world, "that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world" (Philippians 2:15).
- ❖ The basket that hides the lamp is our sin and the lust of the flesh.

XI. That they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven

- ❖ We do not do well for others but to please God and glorify His name.

XII. Why we pray this part of the Gospel in the sixth hour

In the sixth hour, our Lord was on the cross, so these are the blessing for everyone sharing the cross.

On the Cross	The Gospel
"My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death" (Matthew 26:38)-Thursday of covenant	Blessed are those who mourn
He was meek, "He was oppressed and He was afflicted" (Isaiah 53:7)	Blessed are the meek
"I thirst" (John 19:28)	Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness

The cross is the peak of the Divine mercy	Blessed are the merciful
“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Luke 23:34)	Blessed are the pure in heart
On the cross He made peace between heaven and earth	Blessed are the peacemakers
Jesus was prosecuted in all His life	Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake

Conclusion:

The Sermon on the Mount requires fifteen minutes to read but its brevity has not diminished its profound influence on the world. The Sermon on the Mount presents new standards and laws for God’s people.

Applications:

- ❖ Try to adopt one of the virtues blessed by the Lord to practice for your life, e.g. you can try to be a peacemaker and not get involved in fights or arguments.
- ❖ Read this Sermon on the Mount many times this week and memorize some parts of it as much as you can.

Week 2 - Sermon on the Mount (II)

Objective:

- ❖ To learn the new laws of the New Testament era, the grace era.

Memory Verse:

“But I say to you, do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is His footstool” (Matthew 5: 34,25)

References:

- ❖ Matthew 5:17,6,7
- ❖ “The Bible according to St. Mathew.” Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty.

Introduction:

Here, we continue the contemplation of our Lord Jesus’ meeting with His people on the mountain to give them His new law. We will understand some of the strong commandments like, “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill” (Matthew 5:17) where our Lord showed them a new dimension of the law. He also introduced a new spiritual law for the sons of God, “For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds [the] [righteousness] of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:20).

Lesson Outline:

I. Killing

The Old Testament commandments tell us not to kill, but the New Testament asks for even higher spiritual level with higher new standards “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’ But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember 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. Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny” (Matthew 5: 21-26). These verses teaches us that anger with our brother has different levels:

1. Raca is a Hebrew word which means disrespect. This is a worse level of showing anger of one person to his brother. This angry person deserves the council, which is a higher court.
2. A higher level of expressing anger is saying a fool. We should control our anger in the first step, if we cannot totally prevent it.

3. “But no man can tame the tongue” (James 3:8). Man can tame beasts, but it is difficult to tame his tongue. God can only do this for us. This verse demonstrates how hard it is to control the tongue. It may be easier to control our temper earlier in the ladder of anger.
4. When anger is expressed in words, it is a sin that deserves the judgment on judgment day and it can cause us to lose our brothers on earth because of materialistic things, even if they seem important.

II. Adultery

Sin is a three-step process: desire, enjoying and fulfilling. The Law had forbidden the fulfilling of the sin and our Lord Jesus Christ wanted to uproot this sin by preventing the first step, “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell” (Matthew 5: 27-30). In these verses, plucking the eye means not seeing the beloved person or the desirable object.

III. Swearing

The world will recognize us by our language. Swearing is a sin that many of us slip into to it and some people do it many time a day. Again it takes prayer and lots of self-control to prevent the tongue from slipping into the sin of swearing “Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.’ But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God’s throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one” (Matthew 5:33-37).

IV. Returning Evil with Good

This is the highest level, to return evil with good. This is the level of Christian perfection “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away” (Matthew 5:38-42). What does the right cheek mean? Usually a strike is on the left cheek unless the person is left-handed. So, you are the one who would humbly turn your cheek in an effort to stop the angry striking person. That is why Christianity is called the second mile religion. The believer would give more than required to win others to Christ.

V. The Narrow Gate

God commanded us to “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matthew 7:13,14). The wide gate is the lust of the world and the narrow gate is opened by spiritual fighting like fasting, praying...we do not have to search for the wide gate; it is available for everyone. However, few can find the narrow gate. Even when they find it, they may not enter. The end is different in both cases.

VI. Building on the Rock

Our Lord Jesus Christ told us, “Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall” (Matthew 7: 24-27). Who is the rock except our Lord? If we build our souls on Jesus Christ, then we are not afraid from any rain, which is the devil that tries to demolish the house. We need to hide in Jesus.

VII. Summary: The Ten Major Sections of the Sermon on the Mount

1. The beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12)
2. The lessons of salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16)
3. True righteousness (Matthew 5:17-48)
4. Practice without hypocrisy (Matthew 6:19-34)
5. The Christian’s concern (Matthew 6:19-34)
6. Warning against Judgment (Matthew 7:7-12)
7. Invitation to prayer (Matthew 7:7-12)
8. The two ways (Matthew 7:13, 14)
9. A tree and its fruit (Matthew 7:15-20)
10. The importance of deeds (Matthew 7:21-29)

Conclusion:

The central theme of the sermon is summarized in Matthew 5:48 “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect”. The word “perfect” does not refer to sinless or moral perfection. It indicates completeness, wholeness, maturity...being all that God wants a person to be.

Applications:

- ❖ Apply this sermon
- ❖ Control your anger
- ❖ Do not swear
- ❖ Make a comparison between the Ten Commandments in the old Testament (Exodus 20) and the sermon on the Mount.

Week 3 - Christian Self Esteem

Objective:

- ❖ To have a Christian self-esteem and use it in our society.

Memory Verse:

*“Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”
(Romans 5:1)*

Reference:

- ❖ The Holy Bible
- ❖ “Sanctify the Present” a monk from the Saurian Monastery.
- ❖ “How to remain ever happy” Fr. M. K. Gupta

Introduction:

What is self-esteem? How to acquire it? We have a built-in worth as humans, and that self-esteem is how we feel about our self-concept. Self-esteem means that we are to have respect and regard for ourselves, and to recognize our potential. But, what are some factors that will help us attain a good self-image?

Lesson Outline:

1) We must have a sense of Aim. This aim comes from a proper understanding of God and His Word. Our understanding of God enables us to understand who we are and why we are here on this earth. St. Paul, the apostle wrote of his aim: “Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him” (Philippians 3:8).

2) We must have a sense of Belonging. The sense of belonging is essential to our well being as people. Our belonging to a family, friends or school club gives us the self-confidence that we belong and are accepted in our environment. St. Paul the apostle had a sense of belonging to God through Jesus Christ, “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ 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” (Galatians 2:20).

3) We must have a sense of Competence. By that, we all must feel significant! Our competence grows as we think better of ourselves, which in turn changes our outlook on life. Solomon wrote: “For as he thinks in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7). Therefore, have full confidence that you can do a lot if you awaken your dormant mental faculties and put your mind attuned to God. Always remember the verse “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13).

4) We must have a sense of Worth. By this we mean a good self-worth. Christ has given us the greatest feeling of self-worth when He gave Himself up for me and you to give us our sense of worth. If He did not feel that you and I are worth this great sacrifice and this honored blood, He would not

have done it “you were bought at a price, do not become slaves of men” (1 Corinthians 7:23). However, a person with low self-esteem and inferiority complex is bound and has imprisoned himself in a steel cage with the idea that he/she cannot escape.

5) ***We must have sense of Security.*** Lack of security creates fear and worries. Both insecurity and fear can destroy self-esteem. King David says, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me” (Psalm 23:4).

6) ***We must have a sense of Freedom.*** Freedom from sin is a source for high self-esteem. In contrast, sin lowers the self-esteem and may be followed by guilt feelings and hopelessness. This was clear in the case of Judas who betrayed Christ and then surrendered to hopelessness and suicide. Adam and Eve also felt ashamed when they sinned that they hid themselves from God. Also, freedom from worshipping men is important. Fear of others’ opinion is the greatest threat that man has created for his self-esteem. By trying to impress others you are gradually giving the key to your self-esteem to others. St. Paul clearly says: “Do not become slaves of men” (1 Corinthians 7:23).

7) ***Sanctify the present for a Better Future.*** Accepting self-responsibility for your life and realizing that your thoughts, words and actions are the mould for your future can bring about a major change in your attitude towards yourself and life. You need not be slave in the hands of destiny. By exercising high self-esteem, positive thinking and making actual physical efforts with firm determination and will power against various obstacles; you can defeat the idea of destiny. Further, if you surrender yourself to God you will have divine help that is available to you at every step “I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

In other words, learn from the past; not live in it! Again, listen to the Bible: “Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13,14).

Remember: How we think and feel about ourselves will determine how we get along with others and ourselves in this world.

Conclusion:

God has created us and supported us with all the sources of a high self-esteem. A low self-esteem would be due to the works of devil who always tries to put us down and separate us from the power, the glory and the might of the Lord.

Applications:

- ❖ Always remember that you are the son and daughter of the King. You are created in the image of God. And even when we sinned, we were bought with a price. These facts should elevate our self-esteem.
- ❖ If you feel down or your self-esteem is low, remember you have a friend in Jesus, “Talk to Him” and he will take your burden away.
- ❖ You can also confess to your priest, talk to your parents, and Sunday School teachers.

Week 4 - Dating

Objective:

- ❖ To clarify the meaning of dating.
- ❖ To know how to mix with the opposite sex in a Christian manner suitable for the sons and daughters of God.
- ❖ To demonstrate the correct timing and form of dating.

Memory Verse:

“Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart” (2 Timothy 2:22)

References:

- ❖ Genesis 39:1-12 and Genesis 29:9:30
- ❖ “Let Me Grow “ Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty (English and Arabic)
- ❖ “The Christian Chastity” Bishop Bemini of Malawi (Arabic)

Introduction:

The period of adolescence and teenage is a critical period in the lives of young youth. There are many physical and hormonal changes taking place during this period. One of the important characteristics of this period is seeking attention and attraction from the opposite sex. This becomes the center and the focus of the young youth self-esteem. This may push some of the youth beyond the acceptable limits to get this acceptance and attraction from the opposite sex. Dating can be used in the wrong time and beyond the acceptable Christian limits to attain attraction and relationships with the opposite sex. Some teenagers use dating just to be part of the crowd and to follow the stream of the surrounding society. It is usually easier to follow the stream than to stand against it, especially at a young age. Dating can also be practiced mentally only, when the young adult spends hours a day dreaming with all kinds of sexual thoughts even when he is physically alone.

Lesson Outline:

I. Dating in the Non-Christian Concept

It is an outing or a meeting between two persons from the opposite sex and frequently leads to physical intimacy or even pre-marital sex. Dating is usually for the sake of having fun in a very temporary relationship driven by peer pressure. Teenagers think that this is the way to prove their maturity especially when they are in a transition from childhood to adulthood. There is no projected goal or sense of responsibility toward the opposite sex in such a relationship. It also indicates the egocentricity of these relationships since the person cares only for his physical, social and ego satisfaction without caring for the consequences of such relationship on the opposite sex. An example of such relationship was the behavior of Potiphar’s wife toward Joseph, which ended by placing him in prison (Genesis 39:7-20). Definitely, this kind of relationship is devoid of the true Christian love,

which resembles the love of our Lord Jesus Christ to us. The love that gives and sacrifices without asking for what is for itself (John 15:13).

II. Consequences of these Relationships

- ❖ Pre-occupation with the physical aspect of the opposite sex.
- ❖ Degrading the image of the opposite sex when he/she becomes an object rather than a person created in God's image (Genesis 1:26).
- ❖ Daydreaming and decreased concentration during studying and school leading to poor performance and results.
- ❖ Pre-occupation with own physical appearance and dress in unsuitable clothing to emphasize the body features.
- ❖ Inappropriate behavior in the presence of the opposite sex to attract attention and to gain acceptance from peers.
- ❖ The most important and the most serious consequence is neglecting and ignoring the adolescent spiritual and inner growth.

III. Daydreaming, Sexual Thoughts and Mental Dating

Many of our youth may restrain themselves or are restrained by their families from actual physical dating but allow their thoughts to wonder freely in all kinds of sexual thoughts and dreams (Proverbs 6:25). Our Lord has placed the sexual immorality in the same level of physical adultery when he said "Whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:28). In contrast the devil will always try to convince us that it is not bad to have sexual desires and thoughts as long as we are not practicing them.

IV. Means of Spiritual Fights Against Non-Christian Dating and Sexual Thoughts

- ❖ Fill your soul with the love of God and make Him your best friend.
- ❖ Choose your friends carefully and surround your self with believers (Proverbs 13:20).
- ❖ Give equal care to your spiritual growth as you give to your body. Spiritual growth is achieved through prayers, church meetings and Bible reading.
- ❖ Discover the energies in your adolescence that can be directed towards the service in the church and others.
- ❖ Guard your senses including your eyes, ears, smell and touch against temptation (Proverbs 4:23-27).
- ❖ Flee from unspiritual environment and surroundings (Proverbs 7: 24-25).
- ❖ Never think that you are strong and will not be affected by bad company or bad surroundings.
- ❖ Always stay in the group and avoid one to one interactions at an early stage.
- ❖ Resist and expose sexual thoughts in confession so the devil would know that your mind is not his hiding place.
- ❖ Never give-up or lose hope in purity if you sin by thought or deed.

V. Dating in the Christian Concept

Dating in the Christian concept is demonstrated in some pre-marital love stories that were mentioned in the Bible. The story of Jacob who was directed by his father Isaac to go and choose a wife from the House of his uncle Laban (Genesis 28:1-2). Jacob obeyed his father and mother and went to his Uncle's land to find a wife. There, Jacob met Rachel his cousin and he loved her and worked 7 years to marry her (Genesis 29:18-20). During the 7 years Jacob has never been intimate with Rachel, since Jacob said to Laban "give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled, that I may go in to her" (Genesis 29:21).

VI. The Characteristics and Consequences of the Christian Dating

- ❖ Its goal is a serious relationship towards Christian love and marriage (Ephesians 5:30-33)
- ❖ Brings two souls, minds, and feelings closer to each other and to God.
- ❖ Physical intimacy is completely prevented in the pre-marital dating period.
- ❖ Usually blessed by the family and under the guidance of the father of confession.

Conclusion:

Discover the real maturity and growth when you say NO to non-Christian dating, "My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent" (Proverbs 1:10).

Applications:

- ❖ Reach out to your Bible and read a chapter or few psalms whenever you are tempted with a sexual thought.
- ❖ Have company with pure Christians.

LESSONS FOR THE MONTH OF DECEMBER

Week 1- Ezekiel the Prophet of Renewal and Unity

Week 2- Daniel, the Prophet of the Messiah

Week 3- Canonical Hours Prayers: The Agpia Prayers (I)

Week 4- Canonical Hours Prayers: The Agpia Prayers (II)

Week 1 - Ezekiel the Prophet of Renewal and Unity

Objective:

- ❖ To learn about the new life in the prophecy of Ezekiel

Memory Verse:

“The name of the city from that day shall be: THE LORD IS THERE” (Ezekiel 48:35)

References:

- ❖ “Ezekiel” Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty
- ❖ “Ezekiel the Prophet” Fr. Bishoy Abdel Messih

Introduction:

Ezekiel is a priest and a prophet, ministered during the darkest days of Judah’s history: The seventy years period of Babylonian captivity. He was carried to Babylon before the final assault on Jerusalem and used prophecies, parables, signs and symbols to dramatize God’s message to His exiled people.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Defeat of Jerusalem Before the Babylonians

In about 597 BC the Babylonians came under the leadership of Nebuchadnezzar and besieged Jerusalem. Jerusalem’s king, Jehoiakim, surrendered and the Babylonians looted the city and took with them Jehoiakim and all the strong men as captives and sent them into exile in Babylon as the Scriptures say: “Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had carried away captive Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, and the princes of Judah with the craftsmen and smiths, from Jerusalem, and had brought them to Babylon” (Jeremiah 24:1).

II. Ezekiel the Prophet

In those days there was a great prophet whose name was Ezekiel. He prophesied of the Exile before it took place but the people did not listen to him and were not wise in what they did. Ezekiel was taken captive to Babylon and there he prophesied about what would happen in the future. The people went to him and asked about the time of salvation and rescue from that affliction and Ezekiel prophesied saying: “The hand of the Lord was upon me, and he brought me out in the Spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley; it was full of bones. Then He caused me to pass by them all around, and behold, there were very many in the open valley; and indeed they were very dry. And He said to me: Son of man, can these bones live? So I answered: O Lord God, You know. Again He said to me: Prophecy to these bones, and say to them, ‘O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! Thus says the Lord God to these bones: Surely I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live. I will put sinews on you and bring flesh upon you, cover you with skin and put breath in you; and you shall live. Then you shall know that I am the Lord.’ So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and suddenly a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to

bone. Indeed, as I looked, the sinews and the flesh came upon them, and the skin covered them over; but there was no breath in them. Also He said to me: Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, 'Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.' So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army" (Ezekiel 37:1-10).

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

III. The Work of the Holy Spirit

1. *The Gift of the New Life:* We can imagine human beings before Christ. They were sentenced to death because of sins. That was the wide valley which was full of the bones of the dead then Christ the Hope of Gentiles, came and His light shone on those sitting in the valley of darkness and shadows of death and the voice says, "O you who are still asleep, get up rise from the dead and Christ will send light for you. The soul that believes will pass from death to life and will rise with Christ and take, with the help of the Holy Spirit, the gift of the new life... and on the day of Pentecost, there was a sound which came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind and the Holy Spirit rested on the early church and all the people were filled with Spiritual power... gifts and miracles according to what the Holy Spirit gave them and the new man who rose with Christ began to live his new life with the Holy Spirit: "We were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4). In this way the rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit saved us (Titus 3:5).

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

Conclusion:

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

Applications:

- ❖ Do a Bible search for the characters that saw a vision.
- ❖ Try to find verses from the New Testament that was actually prophesied in the book of Ezekiel.

Week 2 - Daniel, the Prophet of the Messiah

Objective:

- ❖ To Know the Character of the Coming Christ in the Book of Daniel

Memory Verse:

“Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Daniel 12:2)

References:

- ❖ “Daniel the friend of angels” Fr. Bishoy Kamel
- ❖ “The Life of Daniel and his prophecy” Fr. Abdel Messih

Introduction:

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

Lesson Outline:

I. The Son of Man in Daniel’s Vision

Daniel saw a dream: “I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the Great Sea. And four great beasts came up from the sea, each different from the other. The first was like a lion, and had eagle’s wings. I watched till its wings were plucked off; and it was lifted up from the earth and made to stand on two feet like a man, and a man’s heart was given to it. And suddenly another beast, a second, like a bear. It was raised up on one side, and had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. And they said thus to it: ‘Arise, devour much flesh!’ After this I looked, and there was another, like a leopard, which had on its back four wings of a bird. The beast also had four heads, and dominion was given to it. After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth; it was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. I was considering the horns, and there was another horn, a little one, coming up among them, before whom three of the first horns were plucked out by the roots. And there, in this horn, were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking pompous words. I watched till thrones were put in place, and the Ancient of Days was seated; His garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head was like pure wool. His throne was a fiery flame, its wheels a burning fire; a fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him. A thousand thousands ministered to Him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him. The court was seated, and the books were opened. I watched then

because of the sound of the pompous words which the horn was speaking; I watched till the beast was slain, and its body destroyed and given to the burning flame. As for the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away, yet their lives were prolonged for a season and a time. I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed” (Daniel 7:4-14).

II. The Saints and the Kingdom

Here Daniel began to understand the interpretation of this vision. One of those standing began to explain: “Those great beasts, which are four, are four kings which arise out of the earth...The fourth beast shall be A fourth kingdom on earth, which shall be different from all other kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, trample it and break it in pieces. The ten horns are ten kings who shall arise from this kingdom. And another shall rise after them; He shall be different from the first ones, and shall subdue three kings. He shall speak pompous words against the Most High, shall persecute the saints of the Most High, and shall intend to change times and law. Then the saints shall be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time. But the court shall be seated, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and destroy it forever. Then the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him” (Daniel 7:17-27).

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

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

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

III. Seventy Weeks!

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

Conclusion:

Let us be cautious of those who interpret the prophecies of Daniel in a way that may make people believe that Christ will come on a certain day or that Israel in her present political circumstances is the outcome of ancient prophecies... as Christ will come on a day unknown to.

Applications:

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

First Group

- ❖ The Son of man whom Daniel saw is...
- ❖ The four beasts stand for...
- ❖ The beast, which fights the children, is...
- ❖ The horn, which spoke great things against God stand for...
- ❖ The saints of the Most High to whom the kingdom is given are...

Second Group

- ❖ Four kings that will rule over the world.
- ❖ The rulers who falsely accused the innocent Christians.
- ❖ The Christians who believe in Christ the Son of God.
- ❖ The Lord Jesus in his incarnation and becoming man.
- ❖ The Roman Empire, which persecuted Christianity.

Questions:

- ❖ How did Daniel inform us of the Messiah?
- ❖ Do all Christians have to be saints? How?
- ❖ Why is Christ given the title of “Son of man”?
- ❖ Study the following verse: Daniel 7:13,14
- ❖ Review Question: “Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the Lord delivers him out of them all” (Psalm 34:19). Explain this in the light of what you studied in the Book of Daniel.
- ❖ Answer: Daniel’s interpretation of the king’s dream... caused him to find favor with the king and grace in his eyes...The three young men and the blazing furnace...Daniel in the den of the lions.

Week 3 - Canonical Hours Prayers: The Agpia Prayers (I)

Objective:

- ❖ To make prayer as a holy habit.

Memory Verse:

“Men always ought to pray and not lose heart” (*Luke 18:1*)

References:

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

Introduction:

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

Lesson Outline:

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

I. The Daily Course

The Agpia prayers aim at confirming these facts so that we may live them all the time. In brief these Agpia prayers are the practical application of David’s verse: “But I give myself unto prayer” and the Lord says, “Pray without ceasing”.

- ❖ In the first hour (the Matins) we remember the resurrection of the Lord in the early morning.
- ❖ In the third hour prayer we remember the coming of the Holy Spirit.
- ❖ In the sixth hour prayer we remember the Crucifixion of Christ.
- ❖ In the ninth hour prayer, we remember his death.

- ❖ In the eleventh hour prayer (the Vespers) we remember the time when they brought Jesus down from the cross.
- ❖ In the twelfth hour prayer (sleep) we remember his burial.
- ❖ In the Middle of the Night, the midnight prayer, we remember his second coming.

II. A Power for my Prayers

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

III. Commitment to the Law

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

IV. The Sacrifice of the Will

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

V. Unity of Spirit

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

VI. How Can I Pray the Psalms?

A. Before Prayer

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

B. During Prayer

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

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

C. After Prayer

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

D. Why Psalms are used in prayers?

1. Psalms were very important in the Old Testament as they were used in the worship of the Jews and this custom was still kept in the days of the apostles: “Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour” (Acts 3:1). And Paul the apostle advises us to recite the psalms: “When you come together, everyone of you has a psalm” (1 Corinthians 14:26). The Law of our fathers since the days of the apostles have mentioned the psalms and advised us to recite them.
2. There are not other words better than the words of God to speak to God with. The same as the lawyer who uses the text of the Law when he speaks to the judge.
3. Many of our private prayers are private demands but the psalms open the domain of contemplation before us and teach us the prayers of praise and thanksgiving.
4. David the prophet, the writer of psalms and who was a man of prayers says, “Seven times a day I praise You for Your righteous ordinances”. “In the middle of the night I get up to thank you for the judgments of Your ordinance”. “I will not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my

eyelids”. “But I give myself unto prayer”. The Lord bore witness to David when he said; “I have found David the son of Jesse a man after mine own heart”.

5. In the psalms we find all the tests. David was that young shepherd and the great king. He was the man who hovered in the sky of Spirit and tested the depth of repentance so we always find a psalm which suits our feelings: in times of affliction... in happiness... after the sin... that is why the fathers call the psalms the food of the spirit and the friends of the believers.

Conclusion:

Prayer is considered our spiritual food that we need to grow spiritually. Every day we eat multiple times and drink multiple times. Similarly we need to pray multiple times every day to equivalently grow in the spirit as we do for the body.

Applications:

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

Week 4 - Canonical Hours Prayers: The Agpia Prayers (II)

Objective:

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

Memory Verse:

“But I give myself to prayer” (Psalm 109:4)

References:

- ❖ “The Paradise of Spirit” Vol. II, the Late Bishop Anba Youannis of Gharbeya
- ❖ “Lectures of the Agpia Conference” H. H. Pope Shenouda III
- ❖ “Contemplation on the Psalms of the Vespers” H. H. Pope Shenouda III
- ❖ “The daily hymn of praise and the psalms of the Canonical hours” Fr. Matta Al Miskin
- ❖ “The daily hymn of praise and the hourly psalms” Fr. Matta Al Miskin

Introduction:

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

- What Christ did for us?
- Asking for God’s help during the day.
- Our daily duties.
- The end of the world.

Make use of a picture that expresses the stages of the life of the Lord Jesus Christ as it is divided in the Agpia prayers. The life stages and corresponding prayer schedule could be written on a wall frame. In this lesson, we will concentrate on the Matins and Vesper prayers.

Lesson Outline:

I. First: The Matins

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

A. The Psalms

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

B. The Gospel

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

C. The Litany

- ❖ The true light... the light of the Sun is an artificial light as it is created but its shining reminds us of the Great Light.
- ❖ The true light is God Himself (I am the light of the World). He cannot be seen by the eye but by the heart... We remember the beginning of creation once more so we glorify God, the Incarnate Son.
- ❖ In the second piece we remember the senses that give light and the bright thoughts, which should shine in us each morning. In the third piece, we live some moments with the Mother of Light and we remember the Lord’s good deed with her and the gift of the Holy Spirit and the grace of the Son “The Father chose you... the son incarnated from you, and the Holy Spirit protected you”.

D. With the angels

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

E. Analysis of the Matins

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

I. Second: The Vespers

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

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

Our fathers the saints and the monks used to meet in the church after a long day’s work, and they used to pray these words in reverence and calmness and they felt that their spiritual youth were

renewed continually after the hard work or keeping to their cells. At the end of this prayer they read the absolution and asked one another's forgiveness.

A. The Occasion Of The Prayer

The Vespers is a prayer of repentance and repentance is the basis of our spiritual life. By the end of the day, it is better for us to remember our sins in which we might have fallen on purpose or accidentally and we promise the Lord that we shall try to make up for any mistake we have made during the day and that we will work actively in the remaining part of the day.

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

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

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

B. The Eyes Of Slaves

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

I. What is said in each Prayer?

A. The Orthodox Creed and its introduction

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

B. Absolution

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

C. The Lord's Prayer

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

D. Have Mercy on us O Lord and be kind to us

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

Conclusion:

Matins and Vespers prayers are important to start and end the day. They are full of high spiritual meanings. We should pray them as regularly as possible.

Applications:

- ❖ Be punctual in praying the Matins this week and concentrate on the psalms and increasing its number gradually and recording this in the spiritual notebook.
- ❖ Always pray the Vespers and study some parts of it... recite them on the occasions that may be appropriate.
- ❖ Fill in the spaces: Have mercy upon me, O God, according to; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me for I my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against You, You only,, and done this evil in Your sight; that You may be found just when You speak, when You judge. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me. Behold, in the inward parts, and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom. Purge me, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones Hide Your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You. Deliver me from, O God, the God of my salvation, and my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, shall show forth Your praise. For You do not desire sacrifice You do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are, a broken and a contrite heart; these, O God, You will not despise. Do good in to Zion; build the walls of Jerusalem. Then You shall be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering; then
- ❖ From Psalm 50 note the verses that indicate the following ideas or points: Purification of sin is like the process of washing -the forgiveness of the Lord -I know my sins -God knows our sins.
- ❖ From the litany of the Vespers write down the following: Hasten to me, O my Savior, by laying open your paternal bosom, because I have consumed my life in pleasures and lusts, and daytime has gone forth and passed away from me. Therefore, I now rely on the abundance of

your infinite mercy. So disregard not a submissive heart who needs your mercy crying and yielding; “Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before you, and I am not worthy to be called your son; so let me be one of your hired servants”.

LESSONS FOR THE MONTH OF JANUARY

Week 1- The Coming of the Savior Jesus Christ

Week 2- St. John the Baptist

Week 3- Jeremiah the Prophet

Week 4- St. Monica

Week 1 - The Coming of the Savior Jesus Christ

Objective:

- ❖ To contemplate the Nativity of the King of Glory and the Prince of Peace.

Memory Verse:

“Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people” (Luke 2:10)

References:

- ❖ “Glory, peace and joy” the Late Bishop Anba Bemin, Mallawi
- ❖ “Levels of teaching feasts” Mahaba Library

Introduction:

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

Lesson Outline:

I. The Prophecy

Isaiah prophesied that Christ would come when he said, “For to 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, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6) The same prophet says, “Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14).

Jeremiah emphasizes the promise when he says, “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah-- not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people” (Jeremiah 31:31-33).

The Old Testament paved the way for the New Testament, which is a spiritual testament. In it the Lord dwells in man and we become God’s people.

II. The Day, which the Lord has made

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

When Virgin Mary visited Elizabeth, she sang hymns of praise and said, “My soul magnifies the Lord. And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; for behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name. And His mercy is on those who fear Him From generation to generation. He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty. He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever” (Luke 1:46-55).

When Zechariah the Priest opened his mouth, he said, “Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited and redeemed His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David, as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, who have been since the world began, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us, to perform the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant” (Luke 1:68-72).

When Simon the elder was in the temple, he took the child Jesus in his arms and gave thanks to God and said, “Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word: For my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared before the face of all people” (Luke 2:29-31). There was also a very old prophetess, a widow named Anna. She never left the temple day and night she worshipped God. That very same hour she arrived and gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were waiting for God to set Jerusalem free (Luke 2:38)... Christ, through His Incarnation and His coming to us as man brought back our nature and our first order to us. The greatness of what the Lord did by His coming to us, His Incarnation and His Nativity can be shown through the hymn, which the angels sang the moment the Lord Jesus was born “Glory be to God in the highest... and on earth peace... good will toward men” (Luke 2:14).

III. Glory be to God in the Highest

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

A. And on earth peace

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

B. Good will toward men

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

Conclusion:

Let us sing praise with St. Mary when she said: “For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name. And His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation” (Luke 1:49-50)

Applications:

- ❖ Read the good news that the angel brought to the shepherds (Luke 2:8-14) and paint the scene.
- ❖ Make a Nativity cavern showing the Nativity events. Invite your friends and explain these events to them and sing together the Nativity hymns.
- ❖ Let your children see the Nativity film and make spiritual comments on it.
- ❖ The following prayer should be recited daily this week: “O Lord, who were born in poverty for me. Grant me that I will devote all my life for you. You who saved me through your Incarnation grant me that I give you myself and my whole life. You who gave me your peace let me be a messenger of peace among all the people”.

Week 2 - St. John the Baptist

Objective:

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

Memory Verse:

"Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight" (Luke 3:4)

References:

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

Introduction:

St. John was only 6 months older than the Lord Jesus Christ. St Elizabeth was very old when she became pregnant with St. John but it was a miraculous conception. The angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariahs the priest and told him about the conception of Elizabeth his wife. When Zechariahs questioned the angel, he was silent until Elizabeth gave birth for their son. When Zechariahs was asked what would he call the child, he wrote "John". Then, he was able to speak again (Luke 1 and 2)

Lesson Outline:

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

The Heavenly Father's plan was to prepare the way for the coming of Christ by sending John the Baptist who prepared the way before the heavenly procession. It was said about that great prophet that he would be great before the Lord...he would drink no wine nor strong drink...he would be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb...he would turn many to the Lord...he would turn the hearts of the children to the Father ...he would go before Him in the spirit of Elijah and his power... and that he would make ready for the Lord a people prepared. His father Zechariah predicted and said, "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare His way, to give knowledge of salvation to His people in the forgiveness of their sins" (Luke 1:76-77).

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

John preached in the Wilderness saying: "Repent for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand". Isaiah said about him, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness. Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight". John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather girdle around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. To the multitude who came to be baptized by him he said, "Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not think 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. And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (Matthew 3:7-10). Many sinners came to him... he drew their attention to their sins and made them repent...he taught them how to confess and correct their life. Tax collectors came and said to him, “Teacher, what shall we do?” and he said to them “Collect no more than is appointed you”. Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what shall we do?” and he said to them, “Rob no one by force or by false accusation, and be content with your wages” (Luke 3:14). John reproached sinners and struggled against evil in every situation and on every occasion. He reproached Herod the tetrarch because of Herodia his brother’s wife (when Herod wanted to marry her) and because of all the evil deeds that Herod used to do.

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

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

IV. Christ’s fasting and His temptation (Luke 4:1-13)

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

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

In the first temptation: The devil tempted Jesus by the desire for food when He became hungry. The devil may tempt us by the desires of the flesh (As greediness, pride, hatred and anger). The situation needs struggle for chastity, prayer commitment to the words of God with which man lives... Explain how this can be achieved. The second temptation was the temptation of richness, pride of life and corrupt luxury ...In it man is enslaved to another god when he tries to attain the greatest benefit through the shortest way and by wrong means such as worshipping the devil.

The third temptation was the temptation of the ego and it was an attempt to separate the will from obedience to the heavenly Father... The devil wanted to shake the belief in the truth of God’s words and promises and in this way lead to rebellion and disobedience... The means of testing God’s promises is through obeying His commandments and not through tempting Him. Discuss St. Paul’s commandment to Timothy his disciple and apply it to your life, “But those who desire to be rich fall

into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses” (1 Timothy 6:9-12).

VI. How did the Lord begin His mission then?

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

Conclusion:

St. John the Baptist was the last of the prophets who prepared the way for the Lord’s coming. He was great in the sight of the Lord and was led by the Holy Spirit. He helped many people to repent and he baptized many with water in preparation for the real baptism by water and spirit after the Lord’s coming.

Applications:

- ❖ Make use of prayers and the word of God all the time, add to them fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays. These are weapons to be used against the devil.
- ❖ Stick to them and pray to God to strengthen you through them.
- ❖ Study aspects of greatness in the character of John the Baptist.
- ❖ How can you make both ends meet: our need for food of the flesh and our need for spiritual food?

Week 3 - Jeremiah the Prophet

Objective:

- ❖ To learn about the personality of Jeremiah the prophet.

Memory Verse:

“For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more” (Jeremiah 31:34)

References:

- ❖ “The Book of Jeremiah” Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty
- ❖ The new open Bible-New King James

Introduction:

Let us imagine something. Let’s say when you are praying, God would speak to you and asks you to go to specific people in school who drink, party, commit adultery, or take drugs. God wants you to preach to them and tell them that if they do not repent, then they would be destroyed. What would you say? How would you feel and what are some of the issues that would be going through your mind about this request? Well, this exact thing happened before with Jeremiah the prophet. Let’s read Jeremiah 1:4-10, 19 and see how Jeremiah the prophet responded.

Lesson Outline:

When God called Jeremiah the prophet for service, Jeremiah was initially scared because the people he had to face were very wicked, and they were a lot higher in status than he was. However, God comforted Jeremiah by telling him not to worry, and that God will help him speak. From the first scene between God and Jeremiah we can summarize some basic characteristics of Jeremiah the prophet:

1. Humility – when he told the Lord that he “can not speak, for [he] is a youth” (Jeremiah 1:6).
2. Full of spirituality – God has chosen Jeremiah the prophet when he was about 13 years old! That by itself says a lot about how much God valued Jeremiah the prophet.
3. Obedient – When Jeremiah expressed his concerns to the Lord, and the Lord comforted him, he trusted and obeyed the Lord. Thus, witnessing to the evil and wicked people of Israel at the time.

Some interesting facts about Jeremiah the prophet and his relationship with God include:

1. God chose Jeremiah the prophet before he was born. This is shown in the fifth verse of the first chapter when God said, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you.”
2. In order for him to serve and set a good example before the wicked, he had to be sanctified and blessed by the Lord as mentioned in Jeremiah 1:5, “Before you were born I sanctified you.”
3. Finally God has ordained him or appointed him to the service when He said, “And I ordained you a prophet to the nations.”

What an honor to be so special to the Lord. We all have the same status in front of God, it's just a matter of our willingness to serve Him and be good witness before the others, showing them the true meaning of Christianity.

Even though Jeremiah the prophet was very strong when he went to preach about God and tell people to return from their evil ways, at times of persecutions and hardships, he would always plead with God for help and encouragement. The other amazing feature in his service is that although the people he was preaching were evil, he still cared for them and prayed for them. We see that in Chapter 9, verse 1 when Jeremiah says, "Oh, that my head were waters and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!" Here Jeremiah the prophet expresses his sorrow for his people.

Jeremiah was never able to make the wicked people return. He worked very hard telling them to repent, but unfortunately these wicked people started plotting to kill him. He was able to escape the death several times, but he was finally killed by and for his people. He was killed by his people, and he was killed for them because he continued to care for them by carrying God's message to them but they did not care. Similarly the Jews, who claimed to know the God of Israel all their lives, killed Christ, and Christ was killed for them because He wanted to save them and grant them eternal life.

Here is a question for further reflection: What other characteristics of Jeremiah the prophet could we compare to Christ's characteristics and life?

We learn many virtues from Jeremiah the prophet, one of which is the relationship with God. Jeremiah always had intimate conversations with the Lord, and we pray that we would improve the quality of our talks with God. Also, Jeremiah the prophet trusted in the Lord in the hardest times when people were seeking to kill him. We wonder, if we were in his situation, if we would've done the same thing?

Conclusions:

We see that Jeremiah the prophet was a courageous yet a humble man. He started his service when he was a very young man, i.e. 13 years old. This tells us that it's never too early to start serving the Lord. We should always have the sense of responsibility toward serving the Lord and others. Also we should learn from Jeremiah that even though we might find road blocks, we need to keep on going and asking God for His support.

Applications:

- ❖ Never be afraid or ashamed from what God likes you to say or do, we should always know that God would be on our side to support us.
- ❖ Get more familiar with the Bible so we would be more qualified to carry the divine message to others.

Week 4 - St. Monica

Objective:

- ❖ Understand the importance of persistence in prayer
- ❖ The love of a mother

Memory verse:

“Pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks” (1 Thessalonians 5:7-8)

References:

- ❖ “The Book of Saints” St. George & St Joseph Church Montreal
- ❖ Butler’s Lives of the Saints

Introduction:

No one talks about the life of St. Augustine, the bishop of Hippo without mentioning the great role of his mother St. Monica in converting him to Christianity. St Monica gave the church a double gift. She not only gave birth to St. Augustine the great teacher but she was also God’s principal instrument in bringing about his spiritual birth.

Lesson Outline:

In the year 332 AD St. Monica was born in North Africa at Tagaste near Carthage. She was born of Christian parents. From the day of her baptism she lived a life of principle and quality.

As soon as she reached the age of marriage, her parents gave her as a wife to a citizen of Tagaste called Patricius. Patricius was a pagan with generous qualities. On the long run, Monica’s prayers resulted in winning over to Christianity not only her husband but also her mother-in-law who lived with them. Patricius died a holy death in 371, a year after his baptism.

Monica and Patricius had three children two sons and a daughter. It was in the elder son, Augustine, that the parents’ ambitions centered, for he was brilliantly clever and they were resolved to give him the best possible education. However, Augustine’s love for pleasure and his fits of idleness caused his mother great anxiety.

At the date of his father death St. Augustine was seventeen and a student at Carthage, devoting himself especially to rhetoric. Two years later Monica was cut to the heart by the news that Augustine was leading a wicked life, and has as well embraced the Manichean heresy. For a time after his return to Tagaste she went so far as to refuse to let him live in her house or eat at her table that she might not have to listen to his blasphemies.

Monica never ceased her efforts and prayers on his behalf. She stormed heaven by her prayers and tears, she fasted, she watched, she importuned the clergy to argue with him. “The heart of the young man is at present too stubborn, but God’s time will come” was the reply of one of the bishops. As she persisted he said in words which have become famous: “Go now, I beg of you: it is not possible that the son of so many tears should perish”.

Augustine was twenty-nine years old when he decided to go to Rome to teach rhetoric. Monica, though opposed to the plan because she feared it would delay his conversion, was determined to accompany him if he persisted on going. Augustine on the other hand, had made up his mind to go without her. He pretended he was going to say farewell to a friend and while Monica was spending the night in prayer in the church, he sailed alone. "I deceived her with a lie while she was weeping and praying for me" he wrote afterwards in his book "Confessions". Deeply grieved as Monica was when she discovered how she had been tricked, she was still resolved to follow him, but she reached Rome only to find that Augustine had left Rome to go to Milan. There he came under the influence of the great bishop St. Ambrose. When Monica at last tracked her son down, it was to learn from his own lips, that he was no longer a Manichean. At last in August 386, there came the long-desired moment when Augustine announced his complete acceptance of the Christian faith. He declared that he would live a celibate life. At Easter 387, St. Ambrose baptized Augustine who soon after returned to Africa.

As Monica's life was drawing to an end she had a conversation with Augustine shortly before her last illness, she said, "Son nothing in this world now affords me delight. I do not know what there is now left for me to do or why I am still here, all my hopes in this world being fulfilled. All I wished to live for was that I might see you a Christian and a child of heaven. God has granted me more than this in making you despise earthly felicity and consecrate yourself to His service."

Shortly after Monica passed away to her eternal reward. She was fifty-five years of age. Augustine was with her at the time of her death, he restrained his own tears at the funeral but afterwards, when he was alone and began to think of all her love and care for her children, he broke down for a short time. He writes:" if any one thinks its wrong that I wept for my mother some small part of an hour -a mother who for many years had wept for me that I might live to You, O Lord-let him not ridicule me. But if his love is great, let him weep also for my sins before You". In his book "Confessions", Augustine asks the prayers of his readers for Monica and Patricius, but it is her prayers, which have been invoked by successive generations of the faithful who venerate her as a special patroness of married women and as a pattern for all Christian mothers.

Conclusion:

Let us raise our prayers to the Lord in faith that no matter how long it takes for Him to respond it is always at the right time. Let us have trust in Christ.

Applications:

- ❖ Can you name mothers in the Bible who dedicated their sons to God?
- ❖ Can you name mothers who were martyred with their children for the love of Christ?

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 Fast on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. These lessons are for the Sunday before and the Sunday after Jonah's fast.

Week Before Fast: Prophet Jonah and Salvation

Week After Fast: Susanna and The Second Canonical Books

Week before Fast - Prophet Jonah and Salvation

Objective:

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

Memory Verse:

“I long for Your salvation, O Lord and Your law is my delight” (Psalm 119:174)

References:

- ❖ “Contemplations on the Book of Jonah” H. H. Pope Shenouda III
- ❖ “The Book of Jonah” Matthew Henry

Introduction:

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

Lesson Outline:

I. God saves Jonah

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

II. How the Lord Saved Jonah

The Lord made use of:

1. Discomfort: the rough sea, the destruction of the gourd (God insisted on fulfilling the message).

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

III. God saves the sailors

The Gentile sailors were better than the prophet who escaped:

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

IV. God saves Nineveh

At last the Lord found the man who would go to Nineveh. He was kind to them as a father who loves His children. The Lord could have punished and frightened them but He was also ready to turn from His anger. Jonah refused to go to those evil people but the Lord accepted their repentance. The Lord was patient with them. Although they were pagans and sinners, the Lord did not abandon them. The Lord does not abandon His children no matter how sinful they are. Theirs was true repentance. They were afraid and cried to the Lord and believed in what Jonah said. The anointed king covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. All the people fasted and humiliated themselves, even animals. The Lord accepts true repentance and the contrite and submissive hearts.

V. Jonah is a symbol of Christ

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

Conclusion:

God has prepared the humanity with many prophets before Him. He also gave different signs and prophecies for the awaited salvation of the world. Those who were attentive and responsive to the fulfillment of the prophecies (Jesus Christ) were saved.

Applications:

- ❖ What is your opinion of casting lots in our life? (The Spirit abides in us and we do not seek any sign from outside).
- ❖ “The Lord has chastened me severely, But He has not given me over to death” (Psalm 118:18). Apply this verse to the story of Jonah.
- ❖ Resist despair so that you may proceed and correct your way of life.
- ❖ Pray the Lord to receive our life and correct it as he likes.
- ❖ Quick obedience that results from the heart to all that the Lord commands us to do having confidence that he is the Loving Father who desires the Salvation of the souls of men.
- ❖ Mention some situations in the life of the holy men of God with whom God used severe punishments so that they might be saved.
- ❖ Mention some situations in which the Lord was merciful to and patient with men.

Week after Jonah's Fast - Susanna and The Second Canonical Books

Objectives:

- ❖ To learn about the Second Canonical books.
- ❖ To learn the story of Susanna and the spiritual meanings behind it.

Memory Verse:

"I will fall into your hands, rather than sin in the sight of the Lord" (Daniel 13: 23)

References:

- ❖ Daniel chapter 13 – The Second Canonical Books (Arabic and English)
- ❖ Bible Companion (CD) - The New Revised Standard Version, H. H. Pope Shenouda
- ❖ The Holy Pascha Book (Arabic and English)
- ❖ Internet site: <http://wesley.nnc.edu/noncanon/apocrypha.htm>

Introduction:

The commonly used Bibles (Protestant versions) do not include some of the Old Testament books, which the Orthodox, the Roman Catholic, the Greek Orthodox, the church of Antioch and the Byzantine churches consider as part of the Old Testament. These books are usually called "Apocrypha" which means hidden. The Protestant believe that they do not have the same spiritual level as the rest of the Old Testament and since they were not included in the Old Testament version collected in the time of Ezra the priest in 534 B.C, they should not be part of the Bible. However, these books were written by the Jews in the exile after the time of Ezra and were included in the Septuagint translation of the Bible and many other early translations of the Bible, including the first Coptic translation. These books are:

1. Tobit - 14 chapters and should come after the book of Nehemiah.
2. Judith - 16 Chapters and should come after Tobit.
3. The remainder of the book of Esther - Chapters 10 to 16.
4. The Wisdom of Solomon - 19 chapter and should come after the Song of Songs.
5. Joshua the son of Sirach - 51 chapters and should come after the Wisdom of Solomon.
6. The Prophecy of Baruch - 6 chapters and should come after Lamentations.
7. The remainder of Daniel, which include the rest of chapter 3 and chapters 13 and 14.
8. The first Maccabees - 16 chapters and should come after Malachi.
9. The second Maccabees - 15 chapters and should come after the first Maccabees.

The Orthodox Church believes that these books are part of the Old Testament because many of their verses were repeated in the New Testament and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself cited verses from some of them. Many of the early church fathers also used verses from these books in their writings, including St. Clement the Roman, St. Polycarp, St. Clement of Alexandria, St. Origen, St. John Chrysostom, St. Augustine, St. Gregory and many others. There are other Apocrypha books, which all the churches agreed on the fact that the Holy Spirit did not dictate them, e.g. the book of Bernaba.

Lesson Outline:

The story of Susanna is mentioned in Daniel chapter 13 and is read during the Apocalypse night. It is one of many stories read on this night to demonstrate deliverance from death to life by the power of God. These are considered prophecies of the salvation given to the humanity through Jesus Christ who changed our death into life and our punishment into salvation. The story of Susanna is as follows (Daniel 13):

“There was a man living in Babylon whose name was Joachim. 2 He married the daughter of Hilkiyah, named Susanna, a very beautiful woman and one who feared the Lord. 3 Her parents were righteous, and had trained their daughter according to the Law of Moses. 4 Joakim was very rich, and had a fine garden adjoining his house; the Jews used to come to him because he was the most honored of them all. 5 That year two elders from the people were appointed as judges. Concerning them the Lord had said: “Wickedness came forth from Babylon, from elders who were judges, who were supposed to govern the people.” 6 These men were frequently at Joachim’s house, and all who had a case to be tried came to them there. 7 When the people left at noon, Susanna would go into her husband’s garden to walk. 8 Every day the two elders used to see her, going in and walking about, and they began to lust for her. 9 They suppressed their consciences and turned away their eyes from looking to Heaven or remembering their duty to administer justice. 10 Both were overwhelmed with passion for her, but they did not tell each other of their distress, 11 for they were ashamed to disclose their lustful desire to seduce her. 12 Day after day they watched eagerly to see her. 13 One day they said to each other, “Let us go home, for it is time for lunch.” So they both left and parted from each other. 14 But turning back, they met again; and when each pressed the other for the reason, they confessed their lust. Then together they arranged for a time when they could find her alone. 15 Once, while they were watching for an opportune day, she went in as before with only two maids, and wished to bathe in the garden, for it was a hot day. 16 No one was there except the two elders, who had hidden themselves and were watching her. 17 She said to her maids, “Bring me olive oil and ointments, and shut the garden doors so that I can bathe.” 18 They did as she told them: they shut the doors of the garden and went out by the side doors to bring what they had been commanded; they did not see the elders, because they were hiding. 19 When the maids had gone out, the two elders got up and ran to her. 20 They said, “Look, the garden doors are shut, and no one can see us. We are burning with desire for you; so give your consent, and lie with us. 21 If you refuse, we will testify against you that a young man was with you, and this was why you sent your maids away.” 22 Susanna groaned and said, “I am completely trapped. For if I do this, it will mean death for me; if I do not, I cannot escape your hands. 23 I choose not to do it; I will fall into your hands, rather than sin in the sight of the Lord.” 24 Then Susanna cried out with a loud voice, and the two elders shouted against her. 25 And one of them ran and opened the garden doors. 26 When the people in the house heard the shouting in the garden, they rushed in at the side door to see what had happened to her. 27 And when the elders told their story, the servants felt very much ashamed, for nothing like this had ever been said about Susanna. 28 The next day, when the people gathered at the house of her husband Joachim, the two elders came, full of their wicked plot to have Susanna put to death. In the presence of the people they said, 29 “Send for Susanna daughter of Hilkiyah, the wife of Joachim.” 30 So they sent for her. And she came with her parents, her children, and all her relatives. 31 Now Susanna was a woman of great refinement and beautiful in appearance. 32 As she was veiled, the

scoundrels ordered her to be unveiled, so that they might feast their eyes on her beauty. 33 Those who were with her and all who saw her were weeping. 34 Then the two elders stood up before the people and laid their hands on her head. 35 Through her tears she looked up toward Heaven, for her heart trusted in the Lord. 36 The elders said, "While we were walking in the garden alone, this woman came in with two maids, shut the garden doors, and dismissed the maids. 37 Then a young man, who was hiding there, came to her and lay with her. 38 We were in a corner of the garden, and when we saw this wickedness we ran to them. 39 Although we saw them embracing, we could not hold the man, because he was stronger than we, and he opened the doors and got away. 40 We did, however, seize this woman and asked who the young man was, 41 but she would not tell us. These things we testify." Because they were elders of the people and judges, the assembly believed them and condemned her to death. 42 Then Susanna cried out with a loud voice, and said, "O eternal God, you know what is secret and are aware of all things before they come to be; 43 you know that these men have given false evidence against me. And now I am to die, though I have done none of the wicked things that they have charged against me!" 44 The Lord heard her cry. 45 Just as she was being led off to execution, God stirred up the Holy Spirit of a young lad named Daniel, 46 and he shouted with a loud voice, "I want no part in shedding this woman's blood!" 47 All the people turned to him and asked, "What is this you are saying?" 48 Taking his stand among them he said, "Are you such fools, O Israelites, as to condemn a daughter of Israel without examination and without learning the facts? 49 Return to court, for these men have given false evidence against her. 50 So all the people hurried back. And the rest of the elders said to him, "Come, sit among us and inform us, for God has given you the standing of an elder." 51 Daniel said to them, "Separate them far from each other, and I will examine them." 52 When they were separated from each other, he summoned one of them and said to him, "You old relic of wicked days, your sins have now come home, which you have committed in the past, 53 pronouncing unjust judgments, condemning the innocent and acquitting the guilty, though the Lord said, "You shall not put an innocent and righteous person to death." 54 Now then, if you really saw this woman, tell me this: Under what tree did you see them being intimate with each other?" He answered, "Under a mastic tree." 55 And Daniel said, "Very well! This lie has cost you your head, for the angel of God has received the sentence from God and will immediately cut {The Greek words for [mastic tree] and [cut] are similar, thus forming an ironic wordplay} you in two." 56 Then, putting him to one side, he ordered them to bring the other. And he said to him, "You offspring of Canaan and not of Judah, beauty has beguiled you and lust has perverted your heart. 57 This is how you have been treating the daughters of Israel, and they were intimate with you through fear; but a daughter of Judah would not tolerate your wickedness. 58 Now then, tell me: Under what tree did you catch them being intimate with each other?" He answered, "Under an evergreen oak." 59 Daniel said to him, "Very well! This lie has cost you also your head, for the angel of God is waiting with his sword to split {The Greek words for [evergreen oak] and [split] are similar, thus forming an ironic wordplay} you in two, so as to destroy you both." 60 Then the whole assembly raised a great shout and blessed God, who saves those who hope in Him. 61 And they took action against the two elders, because out of their own mouths Daniel had convicted them of bearing false witness; they did to them as they had wickedly planned to do to their neighbor. 62 Acting in accordance with the Law of Moses, they put them to death. Thus innocent blood was spared that day. 63 Hilkiah and his wife praised God for their daughter Susanna, and so did her husband Joachim and all her relatives, because she was found innocent of a shameful deed. 64 And from that day onward Daniel had a great reputation among the people".

The story of Susanna demonstrates the strength in her stand against sin regardless of the price, even if it was humiliation to herself, her husband and her family. She was about to lose her life but she felt safe in the hands of the Lord regardless of what man can do to her. She probably was singing with David the Psalmist when he said, “let Your hand become my help for I have chosen your precepts. I long for Your salvation, O Lord and Your law is my delight. Let my soul live, and I shall praise you; and Your judgments help me” (Psalm 119:173-175).

There is a great resemblance between the story of Susanna and Joseph against Potiphar’s wife temptations to sin with her (Genesis 39:7-23). They both refused to sin against God and initially had a hard punishment from humans but God delivered them and restored them to a higher rank or reputation.

It is also interesting how God used Daniel and guided him to save Susanna. In contrast, He used the dream of Pharaoh to save Joseph. It has never occurred to Joseph or Susanna that they will be saved is such Godly plans and arrangement for them. This shows how His thoughts can be above our understanding and expectations. As He said in Isaiah “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways; says the Lord: For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts (Isaiah 55:8-9). Therefore, we might as well surrender completely to His good will for those who keep His commandments.

Conclusion:

Standing against sin has a certain triumphant reward from God. We pray that God may give us the same strength and faith that He gave to Susanna to face all evil wars against her.

Applications:

- ❖ Study other stories read in the Apocalypse night that demonstrate deliverance from death to life.
- ❖ Read stories of saints that demonstrate chastity in their lives.

LESSONS FOR THE GREAT FAST PERIOD

Week 0: (Preparation week) - I Fast and Pray as Christ Did

Week 1: (Surrender to the Heavenly Father) - Witnessing to the Lord in Today's World

Week 2: (Sunday of Temptation) - O Lord: Forgive Me

Week 3: (Sunday of the Prodigal Sun) - What is My Goal in Life?

Week 4: (Sunday of the Samaritan Woman) - The Prophet Isaiah

Week 5: (Sunday of The Sick of Bethesda) - Night of the Apocalypse (Apo-Ghalmesis)

Week 6: (Sunday of The born blind) – Resurrection

Week 7: (Palm Sunday) - No lesson

Week 8: (Resurrection Sunday) – No Lesson

Week 0 - I Fast and Pray as Christ Did

Objective:

- ❖ Sound spiritual practice of the acceptable fasting

Memory Verse:

“Give yourselves to fasting and prayer” (1 Corinthians 7:5)

References:

- ❖ “The Paradise of the spirit” Part 2, Anba Youannis
- ❖ “The Lent” Anba Bemim
- ❖ “The life of prayer” Fr. Matta Al Miskin

Introduction:

What does fasting mean? Fasting is abstaining from food for a period of time followed by eating vegetarian food. It is not a commandment for weakening the body but exercising and controlling the body to refresh the soul and test it to grow in grace and in the knowledge of God.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Position of Fasting in the Spiritual Life

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

In the New Testament, the Lord Jesus Himself fasted till He felt hungry. The Lord spoke about fasting in His Sermon on the Mountain (Mathew 6:16-18). He also spoke about the importance of fasting when He said about the Devil “This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer and fasting” (Mark 9:29). In Book of Acts we read about fasting in the church of the apostles (Acts 13:3,4) and (1 Corinthians 7:5). The church fathers also wrote about fasting in their writings and rules, which reached us. The history of the Orthodox Church bears witness to the fact that the believers respected public fasting that have been established since the times of the early church such as Lent, and fasting on Wednesday and Friday.

II. How the Lord Christ Fasted and Prayed?

After Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan, He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights and afterwards He was hungry and the devil came and tempted Him three times but the Lord quoted verses from the Scriptures to answer him with. He gave us a practical example of how man shall not live by bread alone but by every word

that proceeds from the mouth of God (Mathew 4:2-11). The Lord's fasting was accompanied by prayer and spiritual struggle. In the same way we fast and pray with Him and through Him. May our fasting and prayer be acceptable before the Lord.

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

III. How to Fast Correctly?

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

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

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

Inseparableness of fasting and almsgiving: Fasting is usually accompanied by works of love and mercy, so in his hunger, the fasting man shares the poor and the needy and spends what he has saved of the expenses of his food and other things on his needy brethren... Isaiah emphasizes this fact by saying: "Is not this the fast that I choose... Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the

homeless poor into your house? When you see the naked, to cover him and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?" (Isaiah 58:6,7). Note the Lent hymn: Blessed are those who are kind to the poor....

IV. Discussion

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

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

Conclusion:

Fasting is essential for us to develop self-control and to grow spiritually. Jesus Christ Himself fasted and we should follow his example.

Applications:

- ❖ If a young man who does not fast asks you "Why do you fast?" What will you say to him?
- ❖ Of what benefit is fasting for your private inner and outer life?
- ❖ What are the conditions of the acceptable fasting before God?
- ❖ Why do the church and the Holy Bible emphasize the inseparableness of fasting and prayer?
- ❖ Practice fasting with reverence, prayer, contemplation and reading the Holy Bible.

Week 1 - Witnessing to the Lord in Today's World

Objective:

- ❖ To help our youth become more proud of following Jesus Christ
- ❖ To identify some ways by which they can witness to Jesus Christ in today's world.

Memory Verse:

"Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves" (Luke 10:3)

References:

- ❖ Luke 10:1-20
- ❖ "The Book of Jeremiah the prophet" Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty

Introduction:

Can you imagine if one day while you're praying to God, He sends an angel and asks you to go to school the next day and tell everyone at school that they are on the wrong track, that God is warning them to repent, and that if they do not return to God, He will destroy them? Really, how would you respond? Would you feel worthy of this task? Would you feel capable of this task? Well, I know that this might be difficult to believe considering your age, but you know it has actually happened. God asked Jeremiah the prophet as a teenager to witness to the Israelites when they were sinful and went after other gods (Jeremiah Chapter 1). Jeremiah the prophet felt incapable, but God told him that He will put the words in his mouth as he serves. So could the same thing happen to us? Are we expected to witness in the world? These questions will hopefully be answered through this lesson.

Lesson Outline:

First it is important for us to establish the normal conditions under which service is expected to occur. Christ Himself said to the seventy apostles that He appointed, "Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves" (Luke 10:3). It is apparent through this verse that God is aware of the world's corruption and that His servants will face lots of problems. Now why do we use the word servants here even though we are talking to teenagers who are being served? Because God said that we are the light of the world. He did not differentiate the levels. We as true Christians are by default the light of the world. We actually carry the light of Jesus Christ to the world. It is the duty of every Christian to confess the name of Jesus Christ to everyone. We even repeat at least every Sunday, "Amen, Amen, Amen, Your death, O Lord we proclaim." Have we ever stopped and thought about what that really means? Do we really proclaim and confess Christ's death and resurrection?

Now that we know that tribulation and hardship come from service and witnessing, it is important for us to know the tools by which we can witness.

1. In Luke 10:2, Christ asks the seventy to pray to the Lord for the sake of service; therefore, prayers are essential for the success of witnessing or carrying the good news to others. Have you ever

known a good non-Christian friend, and you were too disappointed that they are not Christians? Well, pray to God and ask Him to lead you in your witnessing. Ask God to help you find the way by which you can introduce your friend to Jesus Christ.

2. The second essential tool for witnessing is humbleness. It is important for us to introduce Christ to others with meekness. We need to start out teaching others about Christ's love rather than condemning them. It is a shame that some of the people whom we meet at the malls and roads claim to be witnesses by stopping people while shouting and telling them that if they do not believe in Christ they would go to hell. St. Paul said, "Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one" (Colossians 4:6).
3. The third important tool in service is the Gospel. St. Paul said, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another..." (Colossians 3:16). Also St. Peter said, "always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear" (1 Peter 3:13). This is an excellent verse because it explains the importance of knowledge and meekness.

There are few true believers in Jesus Christ in this world and this fact naturally makes us feel odd enough. However, We always have to remember that we are not just governed by natural instincts but by the blood of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion:

We need to understand that the least we could do as an appreciation to God's blessings in our lives is to introduce others to Him. We as Christians are expected to attract others to Christ. Even if we do not have the personality to talk about it, our actions and behaviors should attract others. Do we display the true Christian behavior? When people see our actions, do they form a good or a bad impression about Christianity? Being a true Christian is a serious responsibility; we have to watch our actions and make serving God our focus in life.

Applications:

- ❖ Some of the ways we can build our knowledge include attending as many Sunday School classes, youth meetings and bible studies as we can.
- ❖ Also a close relationship with your father of confession can help guide you into becoming a more active servant to God.
- ❖ If you have extra few months and resources, you might consider serving with the missionary group in Africa. That would build self-confidence in terms of witnessing to others about Christ.

Week 2 - O Lord: Forgive Me

Objective:

- ❖ Repentance as a practical technique and the problems of practice.

Memory Verse:

“Against You, You only have I sinned and done this evil in Your sight” (Psalm 51:4)

References:

- ❖ “The Garden of the Soul” Part I, Anba Youannis
- ❖ “A Guide to Confession” Anba Bemin
- ❖ “Turn me My God and I shall be Turned” Fr. Youssef Asaad
- ❖ Many books about Saints who repented (e.g., Anba Moussa the black)

Introduction:

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

Lesson Outline:

I. How to repent

1. **The First step** in the way of repentance is to test yourself. Sit with yourself and think of the things you did in the same way the Prodigal son did so that you may know your sins and the points of weakness. In this regard, St. John Chrysostom says, “Test yourself. If you remember your sin God will not remember it and if you forget it, God will not forget it”.
2. **The Second Step** is to repent what you have done. The prodigal son repented leaving his father’s house and his heart was broken. We cannot repent unless our hearts become sorry for what we did. We should be confident of God’s love and be sure that He will accept us. We should never fall into despair.
3. **The Third Step** is to adopt an attitude against sin. Repentance does not mean that I should repent what I did only but it indicates a positive movement towards the Father. What would have been the benefit if the Prodigal son had sat in his place without doing anything? He rose, walked and went to his father’s house. In the same way, we have to rise and pray and seek God’s help to grant us the power so that we may not sin again. We should give signs of repentance to the Lord as when we say “sorry” to those whom we offend or as we get rid of a bad picture in our library... and so on.

4. *The Fourth Step* is going to confession. This is a necessary step as he who sins, sins against the Lord and against the church, which is His Body. We should bear in mind that each believer is a member of that Body. That is why our teacher St. James tells us to “Confess your sins to one another” (James 5:16). In the past, believers used to confess their sins in public in the church but the church saw that it was better for the believers to confess in secret to the priest.

II. Is it Necessary to Confess to the Priest?

Yes, we must confess our sins to our Priest. This Priest should be our spiritual because he receives his authority from God who forgives our sins. He receives this authority through the Sacrament of the Holy Orders. The Lord said to His disciples, “Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Mathew 18:18). After His resurrection He confirmed that sacrament when He breathed in their faces saying: “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (John 20:22,23). The priest makes me ashamed of myself when I repeat my confession of the same sin in my confession and it is of benefit for the soul to be ashamed and fear the guide, so that the soul in this case tends to fear God only. Pride may lead man to refuse to confess his sins to the Priest.

III. What are the sins that we should confess?

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

IV. The Prayer of Repentance

O righteous Lord... I know my weakness and the silliness of my mind but I give myself to your grace to save me. With complete trust and confidence I leave myself between your hands to keep me safe till the Day of Judgment. Bless me and grant me Your grace till Your Son comes. Glory and Honor be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit forever and ever, Amen.

V. A Test to Examine Yourself

Ask yourself the following questions and answer them honestly:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

VI. A Problem and a Solution

I am ashamed of confessing my sins to the priest? What shall I do? If you are not ashamed of yourself when you sinned before God you have to be ashamed before the priest during confession. It is of a great benefit to recognize the lowliness of sin. This painful feeling should motivate you to go back to God. Remember that you do not confess your sins to man but to God (read Psalm 51, Luke 15:18,19 or 1 John 1:28,2:3).

Conclusion:

There is no joy in heaven and on earth greater than the joy of the Father with the true repentance of His children. On the other hand, there is no comfort greater than the comfort of the sinners when they rid themselves from the burdens of sin. Do not deprive yourself from that comfort and do not deprive your Father from this joy.

Applications:

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

Week 3 - What is My Goal in Life?

Objective:

- ❖ My Life is not for me but for others.

Memory Verse:

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

References:

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

Introduction:

If I ask some of you about the thing that pleases each one of you –One of you will say: I feel very happy when my father buys me a new shirt. Another will say: I feel happy when I play with my friends. A third one will say: I feel happy when I watch television. A fourth one will say: I feel very happy when I have money with which I can do what I want. Another one may say: I feel happy with all these together but I also feel happy when I see my brother or my friend happy too. I feel happy when they put on a new shirt or when they enjoy the pleasure of playing with their friends or others, in general all what pleases them pleases me.

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

Lesson Outline:

I. The Fellowship of Brotherhood

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

Cooperation and Integration: In football matches, the team cannot do without the goal keeper, nor can it do without the forward players or the defenders; all play and each one has his own important place and no one can do without the other. The same is with us; each one of us has a gift and a task to do. We need one another; the thread of love gathers our hearts and combines us together. Can a miller

do without the farmer who plants wheat for him or can a baker do without the miller who grinds the wheat for him or can you do without all those people? We are all in need of one another. We integrate one another. No one is self-sufficient. So we must cooperate and integrate.

II. Phases of Practical Fellowship

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

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

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

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

- ❖ Why can't money or food or all material matters be considered sufficient to be the goal of life?
- ❖ What is the true meaning of "riches" to God?
- ❖ What are the characteristics that enable you to be an heir to the Kingdom of heaven? And what are the obligations?

Conclusion:

Christianity is the religion of the second mile, which reaches out to others. It is the religion of the living sacrifices, where we sacrifice our comfort, material and time for the sake of others. It takes the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, who sacrificed Himself for our sake.

Applications:

- ❖ Read the First Epistle of St. Paul the apostle to the Corinthians and quote the verses, which contain these words: members –body –member.
- ❖ Try to achieve these trends in Sunday School classes and write about points of success and points of failure in achieving this exercise. Try to practice these exercises in your church and in your family to achieve your goal in life.
- ❖ Think out, you and your class, how you can give food to the hungry, find a shelter for the stranger, and visit the sick people.

- ❖ Contemplate the parable of the rich fool... and make a comparison between saints such as St. Paul and Anba Anthony who sold everything for their love of King Christ and the greedy people of this life. What is your situation? Who would like to be your role model?
- ❖ Singing hymns of praise in our life: Hymns help us to be near God with our hearts and thoughts. We rise so that we may not indulge in this world, which is full of greediness and love of money. They establish true rejoicing in our hearts. Through hymns and our love for one another, we shall make heaven of this earth and bring heaven and eternity here and the Kingdom of God will be inside us.

Week 4 - The Prophet Isaiah

Objectives:

- ❖ To have an overview about the book of Isaiah
- ❖ To learn lessons from the book of Isaiah

Memory Verse:

“All flesh shall know, that I, the Lord, am your Savior, and your Redeemer” (Isaiah 49:26)

Reference:

- ❖ The Book of Isaiah, Holy Bible
- ❖ “The Book of Isaiah” Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty
- ❖ Complete guide to the Bible. Readers Digest, 1998, Pleasantville – New York, pp.199-209.

Introduction:

Isaiah is the first of the 4 great prophets “Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel”. He belonged to the family of the kings. He was contemporary with four kings: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. He lived in their palaces for about half a century. He shared in ruling the kingdom as those kings had confidence in him. He called for comprehensive reform when he recognized the afflictions that people suffered especially the poor classes who suffered from social injustice. In the days of Isaiah, the North Kingdom (Israel) fell into the hands of the king of Babylon and its people were captured and sent into exile...and there they spent a difficult time and they expressed their sufferings in this sad hymn: “By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion... On the willows there we hung up our lyres... for there our captors required of us songs, and our tormentors, mirth. How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?” (Psalm 137)

The book of Isaiah contains 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 40:3 “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.”

Jesus, Himself, read part of Isaiah 61:1-2 that said, “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. The evil king Manasseh, who followed Hezekiah, had him sawed into two. His 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:

1. Isaiah’s dramatic call to be a prophet occurs in a vision where he saw God sitting 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).

2. A large section of Isaiah’s book 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 in Isaiah 15:1.
 - The oracle against Egypt in chapter 19 depicts the Lord in majestic term. The seafaring nation Phoenicia, with its capital Tyre, was told of its dread fate in chapter 23.
3. 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”.
 - Chapters 34 and 35 describe God as the divine judge and is calling all people to listen to God “For the indignation of the Lord is against all nations, and His fury against all their armies; He has utterly destroyed them, He has given them over to the slaughter” Isaiah 34:2.
4. The coming of the Savior:
 - The birth of Jesus is prophesied in Isaiah 7:14 “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the 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, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace”.
 - Jesus is a descendent of King David “There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, And a Branch shall grow out of his roots” (Isaiah 11:1).
 - Jesus’ character “Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles” (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 extolled and be very high” but only after surviving affliction and oppression “He was wounded for our transgression, He was bruised 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 Have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined” (Isaiah 9:2). Compare with Matthew 4:16 “The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death Light has dawned”.
5. Return to God:
- God expects us to be righteous, repent our sins and worship Him “Thus says the Lord: Keep justice, and do righteousness, for My salvation is about to come, and My righteousness to be revealed” Isaiah 56:1.
 - God promises that those who are faithful “Shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint” (Isaiah 40:31) and “Fear not 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 another, and from Sabbath to another, all flesh shall come to worship before God” (Isaiah 66:23).

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

I. First: The Messiah the Incarnate God

Isaiah prophesied the conception of the Messiah of a Virgin and the birth of Christ and considered this fact the top of all prophecies as we see in Isaiah (Isaiah 7:10-16). Ahaz requested the Lord to rescue him from the Syrians and the Lord told him to seek a sign of being rescued. However, Ahaz did not ask for a sign and kept silent. Here the prophecy of the Messiah was uttered and it was the glory of all the signs and miracles. This sign and prophecy was repeated once more in chapter nine and it emphasized that He is the true light that shines over the whole world (Read Isaiah 9:1-7).

II. Second: The Messiah, the Redeemer and Sufferer

The true Son of God is coming to redeem the world. Isaiah saw Him as a person sent by God taking the image of a servant enduring many sufferings, pains and grave (Isaiah 53). Isaiah saw Him bearing the men’s grieves “He has borne our grieves and carried our sorrows” (Isaiah 53:4).

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

He saw Him as a lamb that bears all our sins “He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth” (Isaiah 53:7).

Although He did not sin, yet He was numbered with transgressors and was sentenced to death in place of sinners: “And they made His grave with the wicked-- but with the rich at His death, because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth... Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul unto

death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:9-12).

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

III. Third: The Messiah the Spiritual King (Isaiah 11)

He saw Christ, the Son of David as a strong wise king ruling over the peoples of the world: “There shall come forth a rod from the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord” (Isaiah 11:1).

A kingdom where justice prevails: “But with righteousness He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked” (Isaiah 11:4).

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

He saw security and peace fill all the hearts: “The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole, And the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper’s den” (Isaiah 11:8).

The knowledge of God fills the hearts with holiness so the bad and corrupt things of society will disappear “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9). All these prophecies were fulfilled in the spiritual kingdom of Christ, which He established on earth and in the hearts of the believers:

- a) King: “You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth” (John 18:37).
- b) A spiritual kingdom not worldly kingdom: “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36).
- c) A kingdom of peace, security and eternal joy “for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17).
- d) A chosen and holy nation: “you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people” (1 Peter 2:9).

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.

Applications:

- ❖ Open the Holy Bible and read Isaiah chapter 53. You will find that it is full of prophecies of the passions of our Lord Christ. Thank God for these passions, which bring life to us. Pray with the church the prayer of the sixth hour and the ninth hour and say, “You who on the sixth day and at 6 hour were nailed to the cross because of the sin that Adam our father committed, cancel the bond of our sins O Christ our Lord... With the nails with which you were nailed, save our souls from the silly works of the flesh... to remember your heavenly judgment according to your mercy”.
- ❖ Choose few verses from the book of Isaiah and meditate on them and show your meditation to the teacher next Sunday.
- ❖ Try to search for some of God’s characters from the book of Isaiah and support them with verses from the book.

Week 5 - Night of the Apocalypse (Apo-Ghalamesis)

Objective:

- ❖ Learn what happens in church in Apocalypse night.
- ❖ Learn the spiritual meaning of everything that takes place.

Memory Verse:

“God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (Revelations 21:4)

References:

- ❖ The Book of Revelation
- ❖ “The spirituality of the rite of Joyous Saturday” Anba Metaos, Bishop of Al Saurian Monastery.

Introduction:

The joyous Saturday night (apocalypse) is a night of transformation from death to life, from sadness to happiness. All prayers that we pray and all readings that we read express this feeling (Jonah in the belly of the whale, King Hezekiah whom God added 15 years to his life, the three youth in the furnace, etc.). The readings also address many important subjects such as:

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

Lesson Outline:

I. Apocalypse's Main Events

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

II. Praises and Prayers of the Prophets

A. Psalm 151

- Tells the story of David and 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).

- Tells us How the Lord saved us from the spiritual Goliath, which is Satan, whom he slew by the Cross.

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 lighted candles and 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 the prophet Moses

- Tells the story of the Lord’s deliverance of His people by Moses, through the Red Sea.
- It is a symbol of the Lord’s deliverance from Satan (the mental Pharaoh), who enslaved us by sin.
- This praise is called the Praise of the Lamb (Revelation 15:1-3)

D. The Second Praise of the Prophet Moses (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)

- This is the 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 Levi and was one of the singers in the Temple.
- His Prayer is a prophecy about the crucified Christ. He even prophesied about some of 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 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.
- The seamen did not see any hope for saving his life.
- He entered into the belly of the whale, 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, 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, but they came out alive, likewise 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 Deutrocanonical 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****BB. The Story of Susannah, the virtuous****CC. 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 will follow the Lord under any condition (even in the furnace).
- After the church heard all the prayer and praises of the salvation of the Lord, it goes around the church assuring the Lord that it will follow Him all the time: “We follow you with all our hearts...”

DD. 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 glories 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).
- It is the night that our Lord opened the gates of paradise and we see the description of the Heavenly Jerusalem (Revelation 21).
- We see many promises to those who overcome.

Conclusion:

The Apocalypse is a very special night with a transition from sorrow to joy and from death to life.

Applications:

- ❖ Plan to attend this night in church and enjoy what happens in it.

Week 6 - Resurrection

Objective:

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

Memory Verse:

“I am the life and the resurrection, he who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live” (John 11:25)

References:

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

Introduction:

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

Lesson Outline:

I. The Power of Resurrection

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

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

Sorrow and despair filled the hearts of some disciples. The two disciples of Emmaus were speaking with the Lord while He was walking with them after His resurrection without knowing Him. “... Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered Him up to be condemned to death, and crucified Him... It is now the third day since this happened” (Luke 24: 19-21).

But the truth of resurrection turned sorrow into joy and despair into boldness and courage and fear into courage and preaching... This is the power of resurrection, which filled the church with Joy, and comfort... The Lord Jesus rose with His own power... He rose and the stone was still at the door of the tomb... He rose and His wounds were as they were and His side was open... He rose declaring: “O

death where is your sting? ...O Hades where is your victory?" He rose at the time He appointed and left the shroud and the napkin lying in their place.

II. The Joys of Resurrection

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

III. What is the secret of this great joy?

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

Resurrection had a great effect on the church of the apostles. The Writer of the Book of the Acts (St. Luke) says: "And with great power the apostle gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and great grace was upon them all". St. Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, considers the resurrection as the basis of Preaching and without resurrection the preaching would be futile. He says: "And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up--if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:14-17).

IV. Resurrection in our own life

When St. John saw the Lord in a vision on the island called Patmos, he fell at His feet as dead. The Lord laid his right hand upon him saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death" (Revelation 1:17,18).

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

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

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

Conclusion:

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

Applications:

- ❖ Read what is written in the Gospels about Resurrection in the last one or two chapters of each Gospel.
- ❖ Recite the cheering hymns of the Resurrection and take part with the deacons in the Resurrection Icon Procession.
- ❖ Send presents to the orphans and those who mourn especially on Easter.
- ❖ Pray and contemplate the prayer for the sharing of Holy Communion prayed by the priest while breaking the Holy Body. Study some parts of it and recite these parts.
- ❖ Examine yourself to find out any sin and pray so that the Lord may help you to keep away from it and test the power of resurrection from the tomb of the sin.

LESSONS FOR THE PENTECOST PERIOD
(Fifty Days After Resurrection)

Week 1: How to Study?

Week 2: The Effect of Media

Week 3: Who is the Poor Man?

Week 4: How to Benefit from the Holy Bible?

Week 5: The Glories of the Feast of the Holy Ascension

Week 6: The Church after the Apostolic Era

Week 7: God Calls St. Paul

Week 1 - How to Study?

Objective:

- ❖ To guide the students to the sound academic habits
- ❖ To help them achieve success in their schools.

Memory Verse:

“But wisdom brings success” (Ecclesiastes 10:10)

References:

- ❖ “Let me grow” Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty (English and Arabic)
- ❖ The story of Joseph as an example of a successful man- Genesis chapters 39-41

Introduction:

We as children of the king should glorify God in our success in school. A Christian person is hard working, responsible and successful with the help and blessings of the Lord.

Lesson Outline:

There are basic important factors that should be understood and followed closely to achieve success. These factors are:

1. It is necessary to clarify the relationship between knowledge and the humanity of man as that who knows well and his knowledge increases and deepens, practices the life of man in the best way. Ignorance is the most dangerous enemy of man. Examples include health of the body, human relationships, practices, knowledge of languages and their benefit in the future.
2. It is necessary to clarify the importance of studies in forming sound mental attitudes of the children so that they may form their career in a good way. Examples include how they think, how they face problems, how they study a certain subject without superficiality, how they apply their studies in the domains of their daily life, how to keep away from partiality in their thoughts and attitudes, how they expresses their thoughts logically and with concentration and clarity, etc.
3. It is necessary to show the importance of the gifts given by God and that God will ask for account and that those who are honest with few talents will be honest with more talents.
4. It is necessary to show the importance of investigation and study and increasing one’s knowledge and to train oneself to create and invent and to know living languages. All these are very important in social life, as the motherland is greatly in need of good citizens who are efficient and whose talents are fruitful.
5. The Servant explains the essential rules of psychology that help children to study:
 - a. The subject should be clear.
 - b. The subject should be well categorized.
 - c. It should be read once as a whole then some parts should be read with concentration.

- d. Underline the most important points.
- e. Doing some exercises to inculcate what has been studied.
- f. Reciting the part studied to make sure that it has been inculcated in mind and memory.
- g. Go back to the same subject after a short time for more revision, more exercises, doing model answers for some questions so that information will be deeply inculcated.
- h. Keep away from anything that may cause distraction of thoughts such as evil thoughts, television, and people talking loudly in the room or a radio set that causes noise in the room.
- i. If you wish, begin with the difficult part then go through the easier parts. Complete the easy task during the day or write the easier parts that do not need effort in studying.
- j. Do not leave your study for rest except after spending at least a couple of hours. Take rest for half an hour then go back to complete your study.
- k. Do not study your lessons in bed or on a comfortable chair. Do not eat filling meals lest they should result in relaxation and desire for sleep.
- l. Resort to prayers, reading the Holy Bible, contemplating the life history of saints before starting your study. But be on your guard, do not let other activities or readings take up the time devoted for studying. Work should be well organized and discipline should be the rule of life.
- m. Devote some time each week for rest, sports, social activities, service or family visits.

Conclusion:

God will help you and give you support and understanding if you ask for His blessings before you start your studies.

Applications:

- ❖ Start with reading the Bible and/or a prayer every time before starting your studies.
- ❖ Memorize some Psalms to pray them on your way to or from school every day.

Week 2 - The Effect of Media

Objective:

- ❖ To understand the effect of media on our life as Christian youth.
- ❖ To learn to be selective in what we expose our senses to.

Memory Verse:

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

References:

- ❖ “Let me grow” Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty (English and Arabic)
- ❖ “Worshiping the Devil in the present age” Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty
- ❖ The story of Father Youstos El Antoni

Introduction:

The media has a great impact on our mind and behavior. It also influences our morals and personality. Unfortunately, the very basics of Christianity are sometimes completely ignored by the media. The freedom of media and speech in the west is a double-edged sword. Media can be a powerful tool for the devil to manipulate people. On the other hand, it can be efficiently used to glorify the name of the Lord and spread the word.

Lesson Outline:

Discuss with the students the forms of media that affects them most and how much time everyday they spend interacting with one or more forms of media, e.g. TV, Radio, Internet, movies, or music.

I. Media as a Constructive Tool in our Lives

- Educational, e.g. History channel and discovery channel.
- Awareness to events around the world e.g. News.
- Some Christian movies and religious messages are very helpful spiritually.
- We can take the example of some good characters, e.g. mother Teresa.
- The Internet can be a source of very good Christian and educational information.

II. Media as a Destructive Tool

- Exposure to sex and violence which destroys the purity of the mind and heart.
- Bombarding the hearing with dirty language.
- Justification of sins as the norms of the society e.g. acceptance of homosexuality, adultery and abortion.
- Waste of valuable time of our life in non-constructive activity, e.g. talk shows, browsing the Internet without an aim or for immoral web sites.

- Pre-occupation with celebrities, e.g. actors and singers.
- Many songs may encourage the youth to stay away from religion and God or actually may push others to commit suicide, e.g. rock and rap music.

III. How do we avoid the destructive impact of the media and the Internet?

- Fill your free time with God and His word.
- Watch how much time are you spending with God and how much time are you spending in front of the TV or the Internet. David the king admits clearly that our lives are short so do not delay your meetings with the Lord (Psalm 89:47).
- We have to realize that every minute of our lives count towards our eternal life. Fr. Youstos El Anthony was famous for frequently asking the question “What is the time?” to remind himself that he is continually getting closer to the last minute in his life and reminding others around him. This will make us appreciate the value of time and help us minimize the time wasted watching TV or the Internet. So we have to manage our time wisely “*redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is*” (Ephesians 5:16-17).
- We must be selective for what is beneficial to our spiritual and mental growth and what is wasteful and unfruitful (1 Corinthians 6:12).
- Guard your senses of what they receive and protect your heart, soul and mind of the small offences that gradually build up to ruin our purity.

Conclusion:

May God give us the discerning spirit that we may be able to discriminate between what is constructive and what is destructive to our minds, souls and spirits. Help us Lord to guard our senses from the hidden evils.

Applications:

- ❖ Limit the time you spend in front of the TV as a practice for this week and try to make this a habit.
- ❖ Investigate the effect of violence and media on the rate of crime in the western world.

Week 3 - Who is the Poor Man?

Objective:

- ❖ Developing the tendency of almsgiving without limit or fanaticism.

Memory Verse:

“Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me” (Matthew 25:40)

References:

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

Introduction:

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

Lesson Outline:

I. Christianity Knows No Fanaticism

Christianity knows no fanaticism as she follows the example of the Good Samaritan in her attitude towards humanity. Anyone who needs my love, mercy and kindness is my brother regardless of race, language, religion or social class. The Lord Jesus considers the poor His brothers and He did not distinguish between a poor man and another and He did not limit His mercy to any race, religion or language. There are many examples, which prove this stated fact in the life of the Lord Jesus. It is He who met the Samaritan woman and talked to her about His wonderful salvation. It is He who praised the faith of the woman of Canaan and healed her son. St. Paul the apostle says, “There is neither Jew

nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

II. How do I Give the Poor?

I give him as a brother as almsgiving is not showing sympathy to people but it is the Christian love that motivates man to give alms and compels the brother to open his heart to his brother: “But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?” (1 John 3:17) As a true Christian he has to share him his feelings, his sorrows and his joys and suffers with him as members of one body; i.e. Christ’s body. Our teacher St. Paul says: “Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you also are in the body” (Hebrews 13:3).

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

A. Give the poor in secret

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

B. The blessings of almsgiving

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

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

(3) We attain the heavenly treasure: The Lord of glory says: “If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me” (Matthew 19:21). The believer who gives to the poor will have great glory in heaven and the

immortal things not mortal things. Pope John II, Patriarch of Alexandria and known as “the Merciful Pope”, told about the story of Peter the Miser. A poor man begged him to give him something and Peter threw a loaf at his face. Two days later Peter fell ill and he saw in a dream that he was dead and that he was brought before the Lord to be judged. The demons argued that Peter was theirs but the angel found that Peter did one good thing in his life and that was the loaf he had thrown to the beggar so he said to Peter, “Because of this loaf the Lord gives you a chance to repent and He postponed your day of death so repent and give alms”. Peter’s life changed completely and he began to give some of his clothes to the church to give them to the needy. In a vision he saw the Lord putting on the clothes Peter gave the poor so he rejoiced, as he knew that Christ received his alms and kept them for him as heavenly treasure.

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

Conclusion:

Almsgiving is a great virtue for those who acquire it. It is also a great blessing and God considers it as caring for His brothers and sisters, since He considers the poor and his family.

Applications:

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

Week 4 - How to Benefit from the Holy Bible?

Objective:

- ❖ To know the effectiveness of the word of God and how to apply it in my life.

Memory Verse:

“How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth” (Psalm 119: 103)

References:

- ❖ “The Holy Bible and our Holy Christ” Anba Youannis
- ❖ “The Garden of the Soul” Part 2, Anba Youannis
- ❖ “The Word of God” Fr. Matta Al Miskin
- ❖ “How to Read the Holy Bible” Fr. Matta Al Miskin
- ❖ “The Holy Bible is a Miracle” The Diocese of Al Minya
- ❖ “The Tormented Servant” St. George Church, Sporting
- ❖ “The Book of Isaiah” St. George Church, Sporting
- ❖ “Christ in all the Books” A. Hodgkin
- ❖ “Christ in Isaiah” F .B. Mayor

Introduction:

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

Lesson Outline:

I. How Did The Word of God Reach Us?

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

II. The Word of God is Light

- ❖ God said, “Let there be light”. The word of God lightens darkness, gives light to the thoughts of the heart and the spiritual insight.

- ❖ Christ granted the Samaritan woman enlightenment and she recognized her darkness and sinful past. The Word of God is powerful enough to lighten the hearts “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet”.

III. The Word of God is Life

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

IV. The Word of God is Power

“Praise the Lord O angels who carry out the commands of God when you hear the voice of His Word”. Contemplate what happened on the Mount of Sinai when the Law was received. It was the powerful voice of the Lord...the voice of God with great glory shakes the wilderness and fills the heavens. “So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:11).

V. The Word of God is Food

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

VI. The Word of God is a Weapon

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

VII. How do I Read the Holy Bible?

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

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

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

Conclusion:

The word of God is the most important guide to our life to reach the unity with God on earth and eventually in heaven.

Applications:

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

Week 5 - The Glories of the Feast of the Holy Ascension

Objective:

- ❖ To understand the priesthood of the Lord in His ascension.

Memory Verse:

“He was taken up and a cloud received Him out of their sight” (Acts 1:9)

References:

- ❖ “The Divine Ascension” Anba Bemin
- ❖ “The Divine Ascension” Fr. Ibrahim
- ❖ “Glory be to You in Your ascension” Samir Kamil

Introduction:

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

Lesson Outline:

I. The Glories of the Incarnate and Meek Redeemer

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

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

II. On the Cloud

- ❖ “He rode on a cherub and flew; He came swiftly upon the wings of the wind” (Psalm 18:10).
- ❖ “Who makes the clouds His chariot, who rides on the wings of the wind” (Psalm 104:3).
- ❖ “A cloud took Him out of their sight” (Acts 1:9).

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

III. At the Father's Right Hand

“Sitting” here does not mean that the Son was separated from the Father's Bosom at any moment or that He was separated from heaven at any time. It does not mean the bodily sitting as the Father has neither left nor right and heaven is limitless and endless so it does not have any angles, boundaries or dimensions. What is meant by the Right Hand of the Father is His greatness, ability and Power. The Lord Christ ascended in flesh, the glorified risen body so that He may glorify us with Him in heaven as after completing His ministry and His redemption, He took what is His of ability, power, glory, greatness that fits His Holy Hypostasis that is One with the Hypostasis of the Heavenly Father, as Paul the apostle says; “He is the reflection of His glory and the exact representation of His very being and He sustains all things by the word of His power, and after He had made a purification for our sins, He sat down on the right hand of the majesty in lofty places” (Hebrews 1:3).

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

IV. He Made His Enemies His Footstool

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

Conclusion:

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

Applications:

- ❖ Write an essay on the heaven where the Lord dwells with the saints.
- ❖ Read the story of St. Stephen (Acts 7) and write an essay on the secret of power in his life.
- ❖ What is the relationship between ascension and the second coming of Christ?

Week 6 - The Church After the Apostolic Era

Objective:

- ❖ Learning heroism in the life of the fathers who carried faith down to us.

Memory Verse:

“So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily” (Acts 16:5)

References:

- ❖ “Ignatius and Polycarp” St. George Church, Sporting
- ❖ “The Army of God” Marcos Magazine
- ❖ “St. Clement of Rome” Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty

Introduction:

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

Lesson Outline:

I. The Happy Church

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

II. Persecutions

The spread of Christianity was not easy. Many enemies tried to hinder its progress and growth. They fought it by all means but it won victory over them. In spite of persecutions, the Christians were an example of loyalty and sincerity even to their persecutors and their life was a good model for all people to follow. Many non-Christians believed in Christ when they saw their deeds and they glorified their Father who is in heaven. Through love, sacrifice and martyrdom, Christianity became victorious and the more persecution and torment increased, the more they kept close to Christ. They

did not fear death but they sought it and desired it everywhere. They were martyred in Egypt, in Syria, in Rome and their martyrdom astonished the people around them and made them ask themselves “Why do they hold fast to their God?” Many believed because the Christians held fast to their Christ in spite of the cruelty and tormenting they suffered.

A. Ignatius

Ignatius, Peter’s disciple, was the Bishop of Antioch. He cared for his people with power and courage so the people gave him the name of “Theo-Forus” i.e. “that who carries the Lord”. The king urged him to worship the idols. He tempted him with money and glory and threatened that he would torment him and put him to death but all his attempts were in vain and at last he sent him to Rome to be thrown to the fierce animals to devour him. Ignatius was not frightened. All his people wept for him but he encouraged them all and in his epistle to the Romans he says: “At last my brothers I attained what I desired... to die for Christ to declare myself a Christian and deserve the glorious name given to me but my fear is that you, through your love for me might try to save me from death and deprive me of the martyrdom for Christ”.

B. Clement

Clement knew Christ in Rome through St. Paul. He was ordained Bishop of the city and because of his activity to spread Christianity, the Emperor sent him into exile in a far away country. There he met two thousand Christians in exile like him because of their Christian faith and they were tormented with hard work. He encouraged them and helped them in their work and reminded them of the heavenly joy that awaits them. Those banished people endured hardships joyfully and their life changed. Many non-Christian people believed in Christ because of Bishop Clement’s works.

C. Polycarp (69-156 AD)

In Izmir in Asia Minor, the governor arrested Polycarp, John’s disciple. When he saw his white beard and bent back, he showed sympathy for him and advised him to deny Christ but he said to the governor, “Since my childhood, I have been serving Christ for 86 years and during that long time he gave me every love and kindness so how can I reject him?” The governor threatened that he would send him to wild beasts but the saint said, “Let these beasts come to me. I am not afraid of them”. The governor said, “If you despise the beasts I will throw you into a burning fire” and the saint said, “Your majesty, you threaten me to send me to a fire that burns a little then dies away but you do not know the fire of the eternal judgment that the Lord has prepared for non-believers”. Then the saint said, “Why are you slow, your Majesty? Do what you want quickly”. The governor ordered that Polycarp would be burnt alive and when the soldiers wanted to tie him up, he said to them, “there is no need for that. God who gave me power to endure the insult, gives me power to stand amid fire”. He lifted up his eyes to heaven and prayed: “O Lord, I bless you because you have chosen me to be one of your martyrs who die for bearing witness to your name. I have glorified You in my life and I am now glorifying You in my death”. The saint attained the crown of martyrdom and the Christians gathered his bones and kept them in their church in Izmir.

Ignatius, Clement and Polycarp were martyred and gave us the best example of holding fast to Christ. Their life and death were the seeds of faith in the church.

Discussion

- ❖ As you are one of the children of those martyrs, what are the troubles and sacrifices, which you are ready to endure for the growth and spread of the church?
- ❖ What types of service can you perform to achieve this purpose?

Conclusion:

Those are the word of these saints who loved the Lord from all their heart and were ready to endure all kinds of suffering for His sake: “I desire martyrdom to declare myself Christian not only in words but also in action” (St. Ignatius). “Since my childhood I have been serving Christ and He never harmed me but He showed me every mercy and kindness, how can I leave Him?” (Polycarp)

Applications:

- ❖ On a map, write the names of Ignatius, Clement and Polycarp beside the cities to which they were Bishops.

Week 7 - God Calls St. Paul

Objective:

- ❖ Learning the pleasant meeting with the Lord in our life and the possibility of change.

Memory Verse:

*“You did not choose Me but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit”
(John 15:16)*

References:

- ❖ “Paul the Apostle” translated by Fr. Marcos Daoud
- ❖ “The Apostle of Struggle” Habib Saeed
- ❖ “St. Paul the Mighty Preacher” Fr. Youssef Asaad
- ❖ “St. Paul the Apostle” Fr. Hareth Kreissa

Introduction:

St Paul was converted from a persecutor of the church to a preacher and a great teacher in Christian. All of this through a meeting with the Lord who was able to change him completely.

Lesson Outline:

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

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

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

II. A Meeting and a Change

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

III. My Lord and My God

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

IV. In the House of Ananias

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

appeared to you on the road over which you were coming, has sent me forth in order that you may recover sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit”.

V. The Persecutor becomes a Preacher

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

VI. The Persecutions that the Apostle of the Nations Suffered

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

VII. Sources of Paul’s Troubles

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

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

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

VIII. Paul the Apostle Explained Some of the Troubles He Faced

A. Lots of Tribulations (2 Corinthians 11:23-33)

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

- ❖ In dangers from highwaymen, in dangers from my own race, in dangers from the nations.
- ❖ In hunger and thirst... in abstinence from food many times... in cold and nakedness.
- ❖ The anxiety for all the congregations.

B. Always faithful to the Lord

- ❖ Concerning the message appointed to him and for the souls he loved, listen to him when he says: “Who is stumbled and I am not incensed?” (2 Corinthians 11:29).
- ❖ “When being reviled we bless, when being persecuted we bear up, when being defamed, we entreat” (1 Corinthians 4:12,13).
- ❖ “Nevertheless, I do not make my soul of any account as dear to me, if only I may finish my course and the ministry which I received of the Lord Jesus, to bear thorough witness to the good news of the undeserved kindness of God” (Acts 20:24).
- ❖ “Who will separate us from the Love of the Christ. Will tribulation or distress or persecution or hunger or nakedness or danger or sword?” (Romans 8:35).

C. Why does God permit such persecutions to afflict his servants?

In answer to this question St. Theodorus says:

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

Conclusion:

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

Applications:

- ❖ Meditate on the following two verses:
 - “This man is a chosen vessel to me to bear My name to the nations as well as to kings and the sons of Israel. For I shall show him plainly how many things he must suffer for My name” (Acts 9:15,16).
 - “Lord, what will You have me to do?” (Acts 9:6)
- ❖ Spend time in prayer and reading the Bible to be able to meet with the Lord and talk to Him.
- ❖ Write an essay or make a wall magazine on the Call of Saul.

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: Trips of St. Paul

Week 3: The Church after the Council of Nicene

Week 4: The Ecumenical Councils

Week 2 - Trips of St. Paul

Objective:

- ❖ To learn about the trips that St. Paul made and the story of each.
- ❖ To learn from the persistence of St. Paul and how he preached the word of God even though he went through persecutions and tough times.

Memory Verse:

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

References:

- ❖ The Book of Acts
- ❖ The Pauline Epistles
- ❖ The Bible Atlas

Introduction:

Where is the farthest that any of you have been for a vacation? Have you ever been on a ship or boat? Well, today our lesson is about a man who practically lived on a boat because he was traveling to preach the word of God. He wasn't on vacation, but he was doing his job of serving God.

Lesson Outline:

As you know Saul was converted to St. Paul after the Lord had appeared to him in Damascus. He went through a lot of persecutions for the sake of spreading the word of the Lord and converting people to Christianity. This week we will talk about the trips of St. Paul.

I. St Paul: Childhood, Conversion, and Preaching

St. Paul was born in Tarsus, and he was a Hebrew from Diaspora. He also had two names. He was named Saul, but his name was changed to Paul when he was converted (Acts 9) and he was a Roman citizen. When he was 13, he was sent to Jerusalem to learn the law from Gamalael and he learned tent making and was a Pharisee. After he became a follower of Christ, he began to preach His word and endured many persecutions, as we know. He also traveled a lot through a place called Asia Minor near the Mediterranean Sea. We will talk about 4 stories from the trips that St. Paul made.

St. Paul did three circular trips where he would return to the same city or close to where he started. These trips were to preach and spread Christianity to as many cities as he could reach. The fourth trip is a one-way trip to Rome where he was persecuted and Martyred.

A. 1st Trip: Aleem the Sorcerer

First, read the story from Acts 13:6-12. This is a story that happened during St. Paul's first trip (see map). By doing miracles like this with the sorcerer, many people were converted to Christians.



1st Trip



2nd Trip



3rd Trip



4th Trip

B. 2nd Trip: The Jailer of Philippi

Another story is in Acts 16:25-34. In this trip (the second trip) he was in Philippi near Macedonia (see map). Let us read what happened there. (Our memory verse is included in this reading)

C. 3rd Trip: His Final Speech

St. Paul then took a third trip in which he passed by Miletus (see map). Read Acts 20:18-38. This was Paul’s final speech to the people there and they were sad to see him leave.

D. 4th Trip: In Malta on the way to Rome

The last story that we will talk about is when St. Paul was going to Rome; he passed by an island called Malta (see map). Our last reference is Acts 28:1-10. Here we see how St. Paul traveled a lot just to preach the word of God. After these trips, he went to Rome and lived there continuing to preach about God.

II. The Political and social state of the world

The state of the world during the time of St. Paul trips facilitated the spread of Christianity. The Roman Empire was occupying many countries and they were connected together, which facilitated the spread of Christianity. The factors that helped the spread of Christianity at that time, were:

- ❖ The Roman Empire
- ❖ The Roads
- ❖ The Language
- ❖ The nationality
- ❖ The justice

Conclusion/ Questions:

Now that we have learned about the trips of St. Paul, there is a question we should be able to answer. What does the priest do during the readings of the Pauline, Catholic Epistle, and Acts? He walks around the church with the censor during the first two readings and only walks to the sides of the church during the final reading. What does this represent? The first two times is the trips that St. Paul made preaching the word of God throughout the world. The final time when Abouna does not go entirely around the church represents the commandment of the Lord to the disciples not to leave Jerusalem.

Applications:

- ❖ How can we also preach the word of God in our lives?
- ❖ What can we do other than preaching the word of God to serve Him?

Week 3 - The Church After the Council of Nicene

Objective:

- ❖ To learn and take example from the heroes of the church in the fourth and fifth centuries

Memory Verse:

*“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of God”
(Matthew 5:10)*

References:

- ❖ “The Age of Councils” Fr. Cyril al Antony
- ❖ “The life history of St. Anthony” Athanasius the Apostolic
- ❖ “St. Basil” the Franciscan Institution at Al Maadi

Introduction:

Three centuries passed and the church endured persecutions with great courage while the kings and emperors invented new horrible methods for torturing the Christians thinking that they could get rid of Christianity and put an end to that religion. Christianity spread and gained power and the greatest persecution took place by the end of the third century during the reign of Diocletian.

Lesson Outline:

I. Constantine the Pious King

Once King Constantine came to the Roman throne, He fought his enemies whose number was much greater than his soldiers and he lost hope of victory but he saw a cross of light on the horizon and a writing on it saying: “With this you will conquer”. In a dream he saw the Lord Christ who said to him, “Make a cross and keep it as a sign for you”. When Constantine got up he ordered that a cross would be drawn on a big banner (flag) and together with his armies he marched behind the flag. Constantine won victory and recognized the great mistake made by the previous kings when they persecuted the church. He insisted on correcting that mistake so he was converted to Christianity and stopped the persecutions of Christians. His mother Helen went to the Holy Land and searched for the tomb of Christ and the holy cross. When she found them she built the Resurrection church and the Nativity Church at Bethlehem in the place of the manger. The Christians stopped raising their prayers in caves and catacombs. They built their churches everywhere and fear disappeared. There were joy, prayers, and thanksgiving.

II. The Arian Heresy

In Egypt Pope Alexander, the Patriarch of Alexandria and Athanasius his disciple were very happy. But there was a priest in the city named Arius whom the people heard preaching strange teachings, which was different from the sound Christian doctrine of the church. He said that Jesus was not God. The people were annoyed to hear this and they discussed these things everywhere.

When the Pope knew this he summoned Arius and tried to convince him that his beliefs were wrong. He summoned a council of the Egyptian Bishops to convince him but he insisted on holding fast to his belief so the fathers saw that the presence of Arius in the church will help him to spread his heresy so they decided to excommunicate him, that is keeping him away from the church.

Arius went to Palestine and was able to convince a bishop that he was correct in his belief. King Constantine was on a visit to Palestine and the Bishop requested him to give his order that Arius would go back to Alexandria.

The king thought that it was a question of personal dispute between Pope Alexander and Arius so he sent one of the pious bishops to Alexandria where the bishop knew the core of the problem so he returned to the king and suggested that the king should hold a council of all the bishops of all the churches of the world to consult the matter with one another with the spirit of love and to emphasize the true faith.

III. The Council of Nicene

The King gave his argument in 325... The bishops came from all parts of the world and made for the City of Nicene in Asia Minor. Their look filled people with awe. The marks of torture appeared on their bodies. Some lost their eyes others were without hands because of persecutions but these deformities were like models crowning their bodies.

The council listened to Arius then Athanasius stood up and discussions ran for days and the Christians were praying everywhere and longing to know the results. At last the Fathers agreed to write the Orthodox Creed. "Truly we believe in One God... whose kingdom shall have no end". People in all parts of the world studied it and recited it in their prayers.

IV. St. Anthony

At this time of the church history Egypt, Syria and Asia Minor were full of Monks and saints who deserted the world and devoted their lives to prayers and worship. The first to establish the Monastic System was St. Anthony who was born in the city of Kimn el Arous in the Governorate of Beni Sweif in Upper Egypt. Anthony was a young man when he heard the priest reading in the church, one of the sayings of the Lord Christ: "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven, and come, follow me". He considered these words directed to him so he sold all his possessions and distributed the price among the poor and headed for the desert and there the devil tempted him by different ways but he conquered the devil by prayers and fasting. When he heard of the persecutions of Maximianus to the Christians he went to Alexandria (313 AD) to encourage the martyrs and comfort the persecuted. He once more left the wilderness in the year 351 AD to help Pope Athanasius in resisting the Arian heresy.

V. St. Basil the Great

St. Basil studied all the sciences of his time. When he visited the monasteries of Egypt, Syria and Iraq he desired the life of the monks so he stayed alone in one of the mountains to pray, contemplate and read the Bible. One day he descended to his native town and its Bishop ordained him a priest to help him resist Aryanism. When the Bishop departed to heaven, the people chose him to be their Bishop. St. Basil cared faithfully for his people and resisted Aryanism and wrote books. The greatest of which is the Liturgy of St. Basil that is used in our church up till now.

VI. Saverus Patriarch of Antioch

He was born in Persia. He was a pagan and made studies in Beirut. He was baptized in Trablus. He desired the life of worship and became a monk and traveled to Alexandria. He was elected Patriarch of Antioch in 512 AD. He spent seven years supporting the sound Orthodox faith. When one of the Emperors who supported the heresies became king, St. Saverus was excommunicated and they cut off his tongue. St. Saverus came to Egypt and stayed in the town of Sakha in the Governorate of Kafr el Sheikh. He was a great supporter to Pope Theodocius I, Pope of Alexandria. He departed to heaven in Egypt in about 542. This Saint is one of the heroes of the Orthodox faith. The Coptic Church remembers him in the prayer of “the Congregation of the Fathers and Saints”, before Athanasius and Dioscorus.

Conclusion:

The great fathers of the church have defended the faith with all their strength and power. Therefore, we should keep this orthodox faith from generation to generation with full understanding and knowledge of the church history.

Applications:

Answer the following questions:

- ❖ Why did Pope Alexander refuse to reconcile with Arius and to return him to the church in spite of the request of the Emperor?
- ❖ How do you explain the Pope’s behavior, which contradicts the words of Christ “Love your enemies?”
- ❖ The marks of deformity were clear on many of the fathers who were present in the Council of Nicene. What beauty can you see in the attendance of those deformed people to such a great council?

Week 4 - The Ecumenical Councils

Objective:

- ❖ To learn about the three great councils and the work of the church.

Memory Verse:

*“Always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you”
(1 Peter 3:15)*

References:

- ❖ “The Age of the Councils” Fr. Kyrillos El Antony
- ❖ “St. Athanasius the Apostolic” Fr. Matta Al Miskin

Introduction:

I. Administration System in the Church

The church anywhere is always in charge of her priests and deacons. If there is a simple dogmatic question, people usually ask the priest of the church. The deacons could help in financial and administration matters. This is like the system followed in organizing any group. For example, a principal runs the school assisted by a vice-principal and a board that meets regularly to discuss the school's needs. A society also has a board and a chief. In the church we have deacons and priests headed by bishops and his holiness the Patriarch. The Holy Council is the highest authority in the church and it is its members who decide and it is they who have the final word in the domains of the church creed and faith, in ordaining bishops and their assistants and in setting the general policy of the church.

II. The Holy Council

- ❖ It is the highest authority that looks into the affairs of the church, manages its activities and solves its problems.
- ❖ If there is a problem in more than one country and is too difficult to be solved as the case was in the early Christian period, there is a need to hold a council in which the different churches of these countries are to be represented. As the early church had one dogma and one faith, Ecumenical councils were held. The main direct reason for holding these councils was the appearance of strange religious views or what we call heresies.

Lesson Outline:

I. The First Council and the Choice of Matthias

“The Council” is a living expression... on the part of the church to keep the spirit of understanding and love. The Lord Christ left the apostles as a group of believers who love one another, are tied to one mind and one heart. They expressed their opinions and took their decisions with unity in mind, heart and spirit so they gave a model to the church, a model of unity and love. In the apostolic age,

the eleven apostles held a meeting under the leadership of the Holy Spirit and they all prayed so that God might choose Judas' successor as Judas betrayed the Lord. They drew lots and the one chosen was Matthias who was added to the group of eleven apostles (Acts 1:15-26).

II. The Conference in Jerusalem

We also read about the first council in Jerusalem in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 15:1-20). Here we find the great apostles holding a meeting to discuss the problem that aroused a lot of discussion those days. The problem was: It is necessary for a believer to go through the Jewish stage first then to Christianity or can his faith in Christ take him from paganism to Christianity? They discussed this problem, then one of them proposed a suggestion and a certain decision and they all agreed then they wrote it and sent it to all the churches.

- ❖ Mention some names of the apostles who attended that meeting.
- ❖ Who was the head of the council?
- ❖ What were the decisions?
- ❖ Was this the apostles' own point of view, or was it God's desire? Prove this.

The faithful Christians must do the same if they misunderstand a religious topic and the church clarifies it for them. In this case they must obey and be happy to learn, not to be stubborn and resist. There appeared in the church people who understood dogmatic matters wrongly. Those persons appeared at different times in the fourth and fifth centuries when Christianity was declared a formal religion of the State, i.e. the Roman Empire. Let us discuss some examples in the following sections.

III. The Council of Nicene (325 AD)

Arius was a priest in Alexandria. He came from Libya. He could not understand the Holy Trinity and how God is One in Three Hypostases. He thought that God the Redeemer was not God. He said that the Son was of a less degree than the Father. The Egyptian church tried to convince him but he did not obey the church so the church excommunicated him. He complained to Emperor Constantine who summoned a conference in Nicene in Asia Minor. 318 Bishops from different parts of the world came to attend the conference. It was a blessed model of the unity of the church. Theological discussions ran between Arius and the church. The great defender of faith was Deacon Athanasius who accompanied Pope Alexander who was the Pope of that time. Arius enjoyed a strong character. In Alexandria and other places he wrote hymns that contained his corrupt belief and tried to indoctrinate his belief into the minds of many people. In the conference, he played with words but the council reached decisions and opinions were listened to and votes were taken for each decision. "Truly we believe in one God...Creator of heaven and earth, and all things, seen and the unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Only begotten Son of the Father...true God out of true God; Begotten not created..."

- ❖ What was the conviction of the council?

The council excommunicated Arius and the bishops signed approving the decision. They glorified God who gathered them as brothers and the Holy Spirit who guided them to take this decision.

IV. The Council of Constantinople (381 AD)

The church settled the question of the Son but Macedonia's Patriarch of Constantinople said that the Holy Spirit was created or made, so the Second Ecumenical Council met in Constantinople and was attended by 15 bishops. The principles were discussed and decisions were taken and thus the last

part of the Orthodox creed was written: “Truly we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord the life giver...we look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the age to come. Amen”.

V. The Council of Ephesus (431 AD)

The questions raised never ended. Before the fourth century people used to ask and they still ask questions. Blessed are those who obey and never cause troubles to the church but the devil never keeps still. Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople, said that God was not born of Mary the Virgin but she gave birth to a man then God abode in him. These words are against the Holy Bible. We shall give three verses to prove this fact. For example:

- ❖ “And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14).
- ❖ “Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh” (1 Timothy 3:16).
- ❖ “For you have found favor with God...therefore also the Holy One which shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:30-35).

So the council of Ephesus was held and 200 bishops attended it and the leader was St. Cyril the Pope of Alexandria. After the discussion they came to the following definite decisions: “We exalt you O Mother of the True Light...” They ended with this text: “We preach and evangelize the Holy Trinity. One Godhead... we worship Him and glorify Him”. So the decisions of the Council of Nicene summarized the most important topics studied by the Ecumenical Councils.

- ❖ What are the three Ecumenical Councils?
- ❖ Why was each of them held?
- ❖ What were the decisions of each council?

Conclusion:

The Orthodox Church was strong and defended the faith actively in all the councils. The heroes of the church St. Athanasius, St. Cyril and Pope Alexander were the defenders of the faith. We should be proud of the role that our church lead in these councils.

Applications:

- ❖ Write what you know about Athanasius the Apostolic, Arius the heretic, and Cyril the great.
- ❖ Write a list of the heretic instructions showing the statements from the Orthodox Creed that refute these fallacies: Write the items opposite each other.

LESSONS FOR THE MONTH OF AUGUST

Week 1: The Council of Chalcedon

Week 2: The Transfiguration

Week 3: Some Virtues in the life of the Virgin

Week 4: The Christian Refuses Fanaticism

Week 1 - The Council of Chalcedon

Objective:

- ❖ To be acquainted with the reasons behind the Schism of the church.

Memory Verse:

“You may charge some that they teach no other doctrine” (1Tim 1:3)

References:

- ❖ “Nestorianism” Anba Gregory
- ❖ “Eutychianism” Anba Gregory
- ❖ “Pope Dioscorus the Defender of Faith” Anba Gregory
- ❖ “Pope Dioscorus” St. George Church, Sporting

Introduction:

I. The Heresy of Eutyches

Eutyches was an archimandrite of a monastery at Constantinople. He defended the Orthodox faith against the heresy of Nestorus but his great zeal for the sound faith led him to a new heresy. He believed that Christ’s body was not like ours but it was an ethereal body. Many people followed him in his belief, so a small council was held in the city of Constantinople under the leadership of its Bishop, Flabianus and the council decided to excommunicate Eutyches because he said that the Manhood of Christ was totally lost in his Divine Nature as a drop of vinegar is lost in the waters of an ocean. The heresy of Eutyches caused a great split in the church so King Theodosius decided to hold a new council in the city of Ephesus. He invited all the churches to attend that council and he also invited Pope Dioscorus to exercise supreme authority over it as president. Twenty Egyptian bishops attended with Pope Dioscorus.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Second Council of Ephesus (449 AD)

The Bishops of Alexandria, Jerusalem and Antioch and all the churches came to Ephesus but the Pope of Rome sent two delegates with a message “Leon’s Tome”. Pope Dioscorus presided the council according to the king’s desire. The Pope began the meeting by reading the king’s decree of holding the council then he asked someone to read the message sent by the Pope of Rome but one of the bishops suggested that Eutyches should stand before the council so that his beliefs might be examined and all agreed. So Pope Dioscorus summoned Eutyches to appear before the council.

II. Eutyches Declares Orthodox Statement

Eutyches appeared before the council and said that he repented his wrong belief and that he confessed the belief of the church so the council declared him innocent and rehabilitated him.

III. The Roman Pope Protests

There was no chance for them to read the message sent by the Roman Pope to the council and that was a new heresy about the Lord Christ, so the Pope's delegates went back to Rome and told the Pope that his message was not read and the Pope was annoyed. The Roman Pope asked the king to hold another council in Rome to re-examine Eutyches' beliefs but King Theodosius did not agree to hold that council saying that the Second Council of Ephesus declared the true faith and there was no need for holding another council.

IV. The goal is achieved

King Theodosius died and his sister Pulcheria and her husband Marcian reigned Rome. Pulcheria hated Dioscorus because he used to reproach her because of her sins as she was a nun but she married. Pope Leo seized the chance and asked the queen to hold another council. At last there was an agreement to hold a council in Chalcedon.

V. The Council of Chalcedon (451 AD)

It is clear that the council of Chalcedon was not held to discuss a dogmatic creed but it was held for personal reasons. The queen desired to take revenge of Pope Dioscorus because he used to reproach her for her sins and Pope Leon wanted to declare himself as the head of all the churches of the world including the church of Alexandria as he saw that the Popes of Alexandria preside the Ecumenical Councils and some of the excommunicated bishops wanted to be rehabilitated. In this way all the parties were against Pope Dioscorus and they tried to prove that he did not follow the Orthodox faith and that he followed the heresy of Eutyches. Because that was out of their power, they asked for the meeting to be postponed for five days. Then they held a meeting and ordered the soldiers to keep him within the confines of his house and prevent him from going out so that he might not attend the council. Then they excommunicated Pope Dioscorus and deposed him.

VI. Schism Inside the Church

The council of Chalcedon had a very bad effect on the church in the whole world. The church split into two: The Eastern churches included the church of Alexandria and the church of Antioch and the western churches included the church of Rome and the church of Constantinople. It was love that gathered and united the hearts of the fathers in the first three councils of Nicene, Constantinople and Ephesus so those councils succeeded and the church became more powerful through them but when the spirit of jealousy and dispute appeared in the council of Chalcedon, the church divided into groups.

Conclusion:

Our church, which is one of the non-Chalcedonian churches, believes in "Miaphysis" which means the unity of the two natures of Christ (the Divine and the Human Natures) into one nature of the incarnate God. The two natures never separated and never changed each other.

Applications:

- ❖ "For where envy and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work" (James 3:16). Show how this verse came true in the Council of Chalcedon.
- ❖ Why St. Dioscorus was condemned in the Council of Chalcedon?

- ❖ Write a list (a diagram) showing: The councils you know and their dates, the names of the famous fathers of each council, and the heresies they discussed.
- ❖ Raise many prayers so that the church may be reunited and all become one according to the desire of the Lord Jesus and the heavenly Fathers that we may be one in Him as He and the Father are one.

Week 2 - The Transfiguration

Objectives:

- ❖ To learn about the events and the nature of the transfiguration of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- ❖ To know what kinds of bodies we will have when we depart from this world.

Memory Verse:

“Then human beings will be like angels of God in heaven” (Matthew 22:30)

References:

- ❖ “The Transfiguration of our Lord Jesus Christ and its Theological Significance” Pope Shenouda III
- ❖ www.livres-reliedieux.com/EngT/Tranfiguration
- ❖ Mark 9: 2-8, Luke 9: 30-32

Introduction:

The Transfiguration, which is one of the Lord’s feasts, and the Church celebrates it on the 13th of the Coptic month Misra, which is the 19th of August. The story of the Transfiguration is mentioned in the Holy Gospels of Mark and Luke (Mark 9: 2-8, Luke 9: 30-32).

As for His divinity, it is evident that in a moment He was transfigured to this illuminating bright-full aspect, whose brightness was magnificent... and about which it was said: “His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them” (Mark 6:2). The Lord willed to show to His disciples that He had put on this human body, simply out of His humility, and His self-abnegation.

Lesson Outline:

I. Graduation in the Transfiguration

The Lord Christ took steps in the revelation of His nature, even toward His saintly apostles. This Transfiguration on the mount of Tabor was the simplest image of His Transfiguration, in spite of its magnificence and its glory, in its light and in the testimony of the Father from the cloud.

Another kind of the Lord’s transfiguration was in His resurrection and His ascension. That glorious Resurrection in which He rose with a glorious body and was able to come out of the tomb while it was closed, and was able to enter to the apostles while the doors were closed (John 20:19), in a calm way that would not terrify them.

His ascension to heaven with a body that is over the level of the earth’s gravitation is like His transfiguration, “He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight ... while they looked steadfastly toward heaven” (Acts 1: 9-10). Our teacher the apostle saint Mark says about that: “So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God” (Mark 16:19).

This transfiguration in the resurrection and the ascension, happened in a manner, which amazed them and made them feel His divinity, but it did not terrify them.

The last transfiguration will be in His second coming when “the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints” (Jude 14), “when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father’s and of the holy angels” (Luke 9:26), He “will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works” (Matthew 16:27), “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats” (Matthew 25: 31-32).

II. With Moses And Elijah

Moses and Elijah in their transfiguration symbolized the whole human nature. In the same way the Lord gave us His Transfiguration with Moses and Elijah, as a symbol of the transfiguration which the Lord will grant to all human beings in eternity.

1. Elijah represents the virgins (of either sex), and Moses represents the married. Rather Moses married more than once. He married Zipporah the daughter of the priest of Midian (Exodus 2: 19-22). He also married an Ethiopian woman (Numbers 12:1), who was a symbol of the acceptance of the Gentiles. All this is a symbol, because the transfiguration will equally be the destiny of the virgins and the married.
2. Moses represented those who were dead. And Elijah represented the living who have not yet died. That would symbolize, in the second coming of Christ, the dead who will rise, and the living who will be lifted up to the clouds, as saint Paul said in (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17).
3. Elijah represents those who have lived a life of ascetism in the mountains, as he was himself on the mountain of Carmel; and Moses represents those who have lived in the world with their families in a social life.
4. One of them represents the life of monks, and the other represents the ministry and the guidance of crowds. One of them is in the style of Miriam, and the other is in the style of Martha, with the difference in measuring ... all of these two kinds will be transfigured with the Lord.
5. Moses represents meekness and Elijah represents the fiery jealousy. The one represents forgiveness, and the other represents punishment ... (Numbers 12:3, 2 Kings 1:10,12).

As if Christ our Lord says: “I shall assemble all of them to Me in the transfiguration”. Him who was married, and him who was a virgin; him who lived the life of meditation, and him who lived the life of service; him who was meek and calm, and him who was firm and strong; him who lived on the mountain, and him who lived in the city. The important thing is that they live a life of righteousness “who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body” (Philippians 3:21).

What is it then that will happen to that human body in the resurrection? The apostle says:

- ❖ “So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power ... It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body” (1 Corinthians 15: 42-44).

- ❖ “And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man” (1 Corinthians 15:49).
- ❖ “For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality”. Death will then be transformed into victory, and we shall say: “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?” (1 Corinthians 15: 52-55).

Then human beings will be “like angels of God in heaven” (Matthew 22:30), as the Lord has said. Our glorified body in the resurrection, will be a body that does not hunger nor thirst, nor get tired nor become ill, nor will die nor will be corrupted; but rather will be elevated upward in the transfiguration of the human nature.

How will be the new nature of our bodies that will become spiritual heavenly bodies? Will they move as the angels who pass on from heaven to earth in the twinkle of an eye? Will they possess the spiritual perception instead of the ordinary vision?

III. Other Kinds Of Transfiguration

We mentioned before that the human nature obtains a kind of transfiguration in the general resurrection, when it will be clothed with spiritual heavenly incorruptible bodies, and human beings will become like the angels of God in heaven. But there are some kinds of transfiguration which happen here in life on earth such as:

A. The transfiguration of thinking

Sometimes thinking is lucid and bright, bringing out extremely ravishing thoughts. That happens to a poet whose imagination and thinking becomes radiant in writing a poem of verse; or to a writer who composes a story or a novel while he is at the top of his creative capacity, in a state of transfiguration, in the depth of intelligence, and the depth of imagination.

B. Transfiguration in the fields of many arts and gifts

It happens to an artist, or a designer, or a sculptor, or a musician, or a poet, or a novelist. Any one of these gifted people presents a marvelous masterpiece whose author is then described as being in a state of transfiguration in his feelings and senses and thinking, during the production of his artistic work. All these cases may be for a moment, during the production and the fabrication, and may be representing a case of perpetual transfiguration of gifts, and may appear even in infancy.

Yes, undoubtedly, gifts are transfigurations that God grants to man. Because gifts are extraordinary capabilities that God gives, they are of many kinds, which the apostle St. Paul mentioned, in his first epistle to the Corinthians saying: “But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills” (1 Corinthians 12: 7-11).

C. Transfiguration with regards to certain definite spiritual qualities

In humans, senses have singular characteristics with regards to their realization: in mercy for instance or tenderness or commiseration, or the forgiveness of offenders as we read about these

things in some stories about Anba Abram, the bishop of Fayoum, or Anba Sarabamoun, the bishop of Menoufiah, or Anba Rewiss.

This transfiguration may appear in the thoughts or the responses of some saints, as it was mentioned in the words of Anba Antonious or the sayings of many fathers, which were recorded in “the Paradise of the Monks” ... words at which, man stands amazed, and meditates upon their depth, and says: “Undoubtedly, this was a case of transfiguration in which the fathers pronounced what they said, so that the generations have preserved their words”.

D. Transfiguration as of the great works of grace in man

As the apostle St. Paul said: “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Corinthians 15:10). Extraordinary capabilities and gifts are transfigured in man as a result of the work of grace. His image is granted a form that amazes those who see him as a result of transfiguration. It was said about St. Stephan in the story of his martyrdom, that during his trial before the congregation of the Jews: “All who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel” (Acts 6:15).

Sometimes it happens during certain dreams that we see a person whom we know, in a wonderful image or in a shining form, although we did not see him like that in his earthly life. But he appears to us during the dream in a state of transfiguration.

Conclusion:

Jesus’ transfiguration was the first fruits of the transfiguration of our human nature. “Who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body” (Philippians 3:21).

Applications:

- ❖ Compare between re-incarnation and the appearance of Moses and Elijah with the Lord during the Transfiguration.
- ❖ Write about what our glorious bodies will be able to do that we cannot do with our present earthly bodies.

Week 3 - Some Virtues in the Life of the Virgin

Objective:

- ❖ The Virgin as a model for the humanity.

Memory Verse:

“ Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be according to your word” (Luke 1:38)

References:

- ❖ Luke 1, Mathew 2:13-23
- ❖ “The Second Heaven” Anba Bemin
- ❖ “Studies and Contemplations on the Great Feasts” Part 2, Anba Bemin
- ❖ “The Virgin” Fr. Youssef Asaad
- ❖ “The Virgin” Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty
- ❖ “The Theotokos” Anba Macari Monastery

Introduction:

The Father looked down from heaven and he did not find any one like St. Mary. He sent His only begotten Son who came and incorporated from her. There is no doubt that the grace of God kept the Virgin as an example of perfect human being and a unique model of humanity. She found favor with the Lord, the Father chose her and the Holy Spirit came upon her and the Son became man and took flesh through her. With her humbleness, the Virgin responded without hindering the delivering grace of God.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Virgin and the Life of Grace

The continuous sincere prayers of the Virgin to God in the temple and her contemplations on the kingly law made of her a chosen vessel for the Holy Spirit the source of perfection and all gifts. Being without any blemish and her complete response to the gift of grace made her bear the fruits of the Spirit in perfect love and deep rejoice and perpetual peace in lowliness, meekness and chastity. Her fullness made her a second heaven and a dwelling place of the Living God and a Paradise for the word. The Virgin’s life as a model reproaches us because we do not have the Spirit in us and because we neglect having Christ within our hearts although He gave us His body and His blood so that He may abide in us and we in Him. Each soul then must possess Christ inside her heart, mind and whole being and be occupied with that fullness all her life and in this way the soul will become a chaste virgin to Christ like St. Mary the mother of God.

II. The Virgin and the life of Obedience

She was indeed the servant of the Lord. She obeyed the good news of the angel and subdued herself to the wonderful will of God who will be born in a manger. She escaped to Egypt in very severe circumstances and endured the life of poverty in Nazareth without murmur or complaint and in complete submission to the Lord she agreed that her only begotten Son would leave her to devote

Himself to the message He brought from the Father to us. Her obedience was with understanding. She understood the purpose of God even if that Divine purpose was beyond human understanding.

It was obedience out of love as it was the obedience of the children not that of slaves. It was the obedience that gains her power from the burning obedience of love that lives in the heart as the Son obeyed the Father and gave Himself for the Salvation of the world.

It was the obedience within the frame of truth, as the Christian's obedience is not for a certain man. It is obedience of the truth only. For this reason the Virgin obeyed her Son not because He was Her Son but because He Himself was the Truth and the Life. The Lord Jesus honored His mother not because she was His mother but because she knew His will and obeyed the Truth in Him.

The fathers used to refer to the obedience of the virgin as a model contrasting that of Eve. The first woman was tempted by disobedience in the Garden of Eden but the Second Eve (Mary) opened the way for us to go to the Tree of life.

III. The Virgin and the Life of Devotion

The word "devoted" means "separated for a certain task" and the virgin was devoted to the Lord God from birth and she was a Nazarite to God. The Divine words were directed to her: "A garden locked is my sister, my bride, a garden locked, a fountain sealed". As the Tent of Meeting was devoted to the Lord, with all what was inside it and nobody could enter it but the Levites, the case also was true with the Virgin who was devoted to God and no one entered her or went out of her except the Son of God, the Word, the Second Hypostasis. Mary lived her childhood with God in the Temple and she lived a life of virginity and that is why she asked the angel Gabriel when he told her the good news of the birth of Christ, "How shall this be, since I have no husband?" Thus she lived a virgin after giving birth to Christ; for this reason we call her the virgin of perpetual virginity. The church rejects the ideas of those who say that Mary married to Joseph after Jesus' birth. Jesus' brothers who were mentioned in the Gospel are the sons of Claupea and Mary (St. Mary's sister. She was given the same name "Mary" after St. Mary left to the temple). He who contemplates Ezekiel's prophecies knows how the virgin lived as a virgin all her life (Ezekiel 44:1,2). She is a model of true devotion. She was devoted in her body, in her virginity, in her mind, in her feelings and in her soul. She was an acceptable offering of life before the Lord.

IV. The Virgin and the Life of Contemplation

Contemplation is devoting man's mind and heart for the Love of God, keeping away from the worldly concerns, to unite with God so that the mind does not find pleasure in anything except in prayer and seeing God. The life of contemplation is a glorious connection with God through internal prayers and understanding of the scriptures. The Virgin was a blessed model so she "kept all these things, pondering them in her heart" (Luke 2:19). She was conscious of the Gospel's prophecies with the Spirit of inspiration. In her hymn, she held fast to the Lord's promises to Abraham. She remembered His mercy to His faithful ones through all generations, and His support to Israel. She quoted Hannah's hymn (the mother of Samuel). So the Virgin kept the spirit of the scriptures and the text too. The tradition tells us how she remembered all the events of the New Testament in silence and pondering as a holy vessel of the events of the church history of which she was eyewitness. The history and life of the virgin will remain a wonderful, splendid, calm model for contemplation and deep understanding that will call us always to understand the word of God.

V. The Virgin and the Life of Suffering

The Virgin was adorned with pain and virtue. She was exposed to psychological pains when Joseph suspected her... she found no place where she could give birth to her Son. She spent two years or more in Egypt without shelter exposing herself to the dangers of robbers. She suffered from (bodily) physical pains and her heart suffered a lot under the cross when she knew that the disciples escaped and suspected Him and that one of them betrayed Him. The Jews at that time were able to crucify her only Son. She suffered a lot at the time of burial and at the garden when the stone was put to block the tomb. This is what Simon the elder prophesied: "A sword will pierce through your own soul also". The physical pains were unbearable. The state of poverty when she was in Nazareth made her work to help the aged Joseph...the pains of the journey to Upper Egypt, giving birth to her son in an unsuitable place, etc. What is the Virgin's attitude towards all this? She called all generations to magnify her. These pains were an offering of love and thanksgiving and an exercise of wonderful patience.

VI. The Virgin and the Life of Purity

Her purity and virginity were not only in the flesh but that was also true in her soul and spiritual life. It was the purity of thought, life, heart and conscience. The Virgin is a model for anyone who wants to live the life of perfection in everything. She helps every young man and woman who suffers from the wars of the devil. She is their intercessor in their struggle. She is a model of holiness on earth. To honor and magnify the Virgin in our life, we must imitate her in her life and be inspired by her virtues. We must obey her Son so that we may be shining tapers before her icon.

Conclusion:

St. Mary is the example and the pride of all human races. Through her the incarnation was completed and manifested. We magnify her for her special place at the right hand of the Father and for her place in our hearts. She also feels for us and intercedes for our sake in front of her Son day and night.

Applications:

- ❖ Follow the example of the life of the Virgin in the following situations:
 - Serve others in obedience, joy and love.
 - Subdue yourself to the will of God in your life in time of disease and temptation and endure that thankfully.
- ❖ Put the picture of St. Mary the Virgin in your room and keep the picture as a model of purity. Remember her when you admire the physical beauty and ask her to intercede for you in times of troubles.
- ❖ Draw a picture of the Virgin carrying her Son the Lord Jesus. Make a wall magazine and write about the virtues of the Virgin. Through grace try to follow her example.
- ❖ Memorize one of the Virgin's hymns in the Mass such as: "The Censer of pure gold..."

Week 4 - The Christian Refuses Fanaticism

Objective:

- ❖ Facing fanaticism with love in a positive way not a passive one.

Memory Verse:

“For God not given us the a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7)

References:

- ❖ “Problems of Youth” Anba Bemin
- ❖ “Denominationalism” Costa Bendley

Introduction:

A child may make a mistake or cheat in the exam and the teacher (Servant) punishes him, and to justify his mistake or failure, the child accuses that teacher (Servant) of religious fanaticism. A man may feel oppressed in his profession or in his studies for a different reason such as partiality or favoritism and he attributes this to fanaticism. There may be a dispute between two children for one reason or another this dispute may turn into a conflict between two parties that may take the form of denominationalism. When the Lord said to His disciples, “Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you” He added “falsely on my account”. So fanaticism is of a religious shape if what you receive of injustice and persecution is because of your religion, belief or holding fast to your faith.

Lesson Outline:

I. Denominationalism and its Dangers

Some people resort to a passive solution when they gather around those who belong to the same religion, belief or attitude... those people may be more enthusiastic, religious and zealous but this jealousy is not spiritual in nature so it does not please the heart of God. Besides, those religious people may feel happy when the other party faces troubles or failure. They are mainly concerned with their number not with their spiritual life. They consider the church and the bishops as an institution responsible for protecting and defending their secular interests regardless of the Salvation of their soul... These are the characteristics and dangers of denominationalism as it is against the Spirit of Christianity. It also deprives the citizens of being loyal to their country and keeps them away from love and positive situations.

II. The Christian Cure

There are four solutions for this problem:

1. **Standing firm in faith:** Faith is a gift that God puts in your heart. You have to keep it lit, as it is a flame that came to you through the ages. It came to you lit with a bright light so you have to keep it lit with a brighter light. Be always ready to answer anyone who asks you,

read books, study your religion before you study the beliefs of others, and search for the light that exists in the Gospel. It is better for you if you study and ask than being asked when you cannot answer. In this case your faith will grow weak. Paul the apostle says: “Test everything; hold fast what is good”.

2. **True love:** Remember that those who do not have your religious belief are your brothers in humanity. If your heart can receive all those fanatic people or narrow-minded people, they will also show love and feel that God is with you. Be always prepared to treat all people with a smiling face. Let your love be out of your heart and do not pretend it but if the other party hurts your feelings or caused you pains or does not treat you in the same way, in this case you are blessed as the Lord does not forget the labor of love.
3. **Demanding one’s rights:** Christian love does not mean that you do not seek your rights, as meekness is not cowardice. This does not mean that you should get your rights through violence, power and destruction. Ask for your rights calmly and with courage and rest assured that “Right” can defend itself. Finally be ready and be prepared to leave all your rights joyfully if you have to choose between your rights and your faith.
4. **The Common ground:** Fanaticism always results in separation of people and hatred among men. It causes people to keep away from one another so they do not deal with one another in the daily common domains. The library, the playground, the laboratory, the music team, the School broadcasting, Society and all the social and practical activities form a common ground for practicing true love so that love may prevail among people. If any of the extremists tries to arouse hatred, the other parties will resist him.

Conclusion:

Christianity is the religious of peace and love; therefore fanaticism is never a feature of Christianity. Fanatics are not considered true Christians. Also Christians receive fanaticism from other religions calmly and with a peaceful attitude.

Applications:

- ❖ Discuss the general problems of your life and your studies and propose solutions in light of the principles you studied.

LESSON OF THE FIRST WEEK OF SEPTEMBER
Before the Coptic New Year

Week 1: The Book of Esther

Week 1- The Book of Esther

Objectives:

- ❖ To study the book of Esther and know its theme and content
- ❖ Learn from the courage of Esther.
- ❖ Learn that God always protects His people

Memory Verse:

“Fast for me; neither eat or drink for three days, night and day” (Esther 4:16)

References:

- ❖ “The book of Esther” Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty
- ❖ The new open Bible – NKJ version
- ❖ The applied explanation of the Holy Bible

Introduction:

God’s hand and deliverance to His people is evident throughout the book of Esther, though His name is not mentioned once. This is actually the theme of the book of Esther. The author of this book is not known. The book consists of 10 chapters describing a conspiracy plotted against the Jews in Persia during the reign of king Ahasuerus and how God saved them from it through the courage of the beautiful Esther and the wisdom of her cousin Mordecai.

Lesson Outline:

The name Esther is taken from the Persian name meaning a “star”. Her story fits between chapters 6 and 7 of Ezra, between the first return by Zerubbabel and the second return led by Ezra to Palestine. It provides the only biblical portrait of the vast majority of Jews who refused to return and chose to remain in Persia. God’s protective hand on behalf of His people is evident throughout the book of Esther. The clearly emerging message is that God uses ordinary men and women to accomplish His gracious purposes. Although God disciplines His people, He never abandons them.

I. The Threat to the Jews (Chapters 1-4)

The story begins in Ahasuerus’s winter palace at Susa. The king provides a lavish banquet and display of royal glory for the people of Susa, and proudly seeks to make Queen Vashti’s beauty a part of the program. When she refused to appear, the king was counseled to depose her and seek another queen, because it is feared that other women will become insolent if Vashti goes unpunished. Esther later finds favor in the eyes of Ahasuerus and wins the royal “Beauty Pageant”. At her cousin’s Mordecai’s instructions, she does not reveal that she is Jewish. With her help, Mordecai was able to warn the king of an assassination plot, and his deed was recorded in the palace record.

Meanwhile, Haman became captain of the princes, but Mordecai refused to bow for him. When he learned that Mordecai was a Jew he plotted to eliminate all the Jews as his hatred grew. Through

bribery and lies he convinced Ahasuerus to issue an edict to slain all the Jews in the Empire. The decree created a state of confusion, and Mordecai asked Esther to appeal to the king to spare the Jews. At the peril of her life, Esther decided to see the king and reveal her nationality to him in desperate attempt to dissuade him. Mordecai convinced her that she has been called to her high position for this purpose. Esther asked all the Jews to fast for three days.

II. The Triumph of the Jews (Chapters 5-10)

After fasting, Esther appeared before the king and wisely invited him to a banquet along with Haman. At the banquet she requested that they attend a second banquet, as she seek the right moment to deliver her request. Haman was flattered but later enraged when he saw Mordecai. He took his wife's suggestion to build a large gallows for Mordecai. That night Ahasuerus decided to treat his insomnia by reading the palace records. Reading about Mordecai's deed, he wanted him to be honored. Haman, mistakenly thinking the king wanted to honor him, told the king how the honor should be bestowed, only to find that the reward was for Mordecai.

At Esther's second banquet, Ahasuerus offered her as much as half of his kingdom for the third time. She then made her plea for her people and accused Haman of his treachery. The infuriated king had Haman hanged on the gallows he built for Mordecai.

Persian law sealed with the King's ring cannot be revoked, but at Esther's request the king issued a new decree to all the provinces that the Jews may assemble and defend themselves on the day when their enemies attack them. This decree changed the outcome intended by the first order and produced great joy. Mordecai was also elevated and put over the house of Haman. When the fateful day of the two decrees arrived, the Jews defeated their enemies in their cities throughout the Persian provinces, but did not take the plunder. The next day became a day of celebration and an annual Jewish feast called "the feast of the Purim". The word is driven from the Assyrian word Puru, meaning lot referring to the lots that were cast by Haman to determine the day for the annihilation of the Jews. The narrative closed with the advancement of Mordecai to a position second only to the king.

III. Emphasizing the Role of God in the Book of Esther

The God of Israel is the sovereign controller of history, and His providential care can be seen throughout this book. He raised a Jewish girl out of the obscurity to become the queen of the most powerful empire in the world. He ensured that Mordecai's loyal deed is recorded in the palace records. He guided Esther's admission to the king's court. He superintended the timing of Esther's two feasts. He was involved in Ahasuerus's insomnia and the cure he used for it. He saw that Haman's gallows will be utilized in an unexpected way. He gave Esther great favor in the sight of the king and He brought about the new decree and the eventual victory of the Jews.

Conclusion:

God can use any of us to help other through salvation; we only have to be ready for it and courageous to do it. As he used Esther and Mordecai for the salvation of His people, He can use any of us for the service and help of others. God is the Pantocrator who arranges every event in our lives for the final salvation of the human race; we just have to surrender to His perfect plan.

Applications:

- ❖ Find other occasions when people fasted three days.

- ❖ Learn to fast for your own problem.
- ❖ Look for the similarities between the book of Esther and the book of Yahodet “Second Canonical Books”