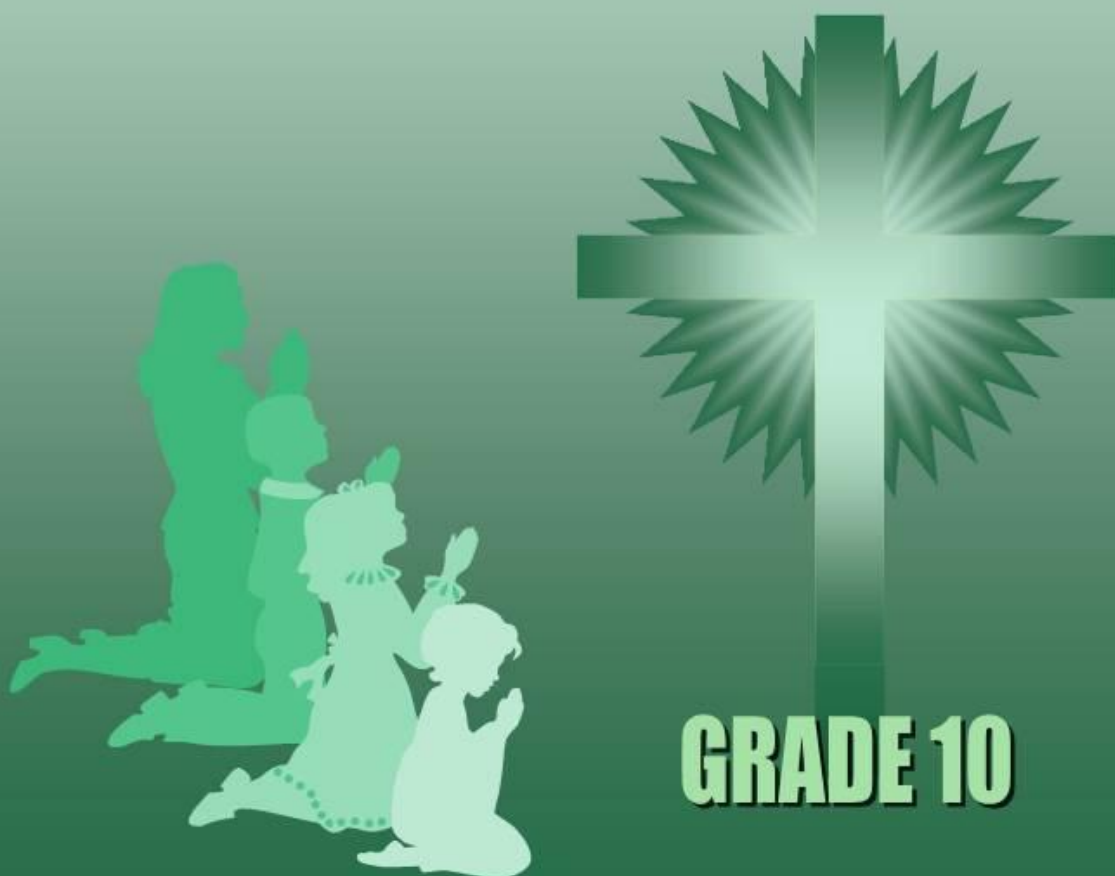




The Coptic Orthodox Diocese of
The Southern USA

SUNDAY SCHOOL CURRICULUM



GRADE 10

Πατριεπισκοπος ἡρεμῆχμῖ
ἡορθοδοξος
ἡτε ἡθωψ εἰζωτπ εἰσαρης



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

Sunday School Curriculum

Grade 10



ΜΑΡΙΑ
ΠΑΡΘΕΝΟΣ





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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 the children in 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 the lands of immigration. 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”

(I Samuel 7:12)



INTRODUCTION

This grade 10 Sunday school curriculum has been modified by substituting 18 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 land of immigration. 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 the months of October through January.
- Variable number of filler lessons for the period between the beginning of February and Jonah's fast.
- 2 lessons, one before and one after Jonah's fast.
- 7 lessons during the Great Fast.
- 7 lessons for the period between Easter and the Feast of the Pentecost.
- Variable number of filler lessons between the Feast of the Pentecost and the Apostles' Feast.
- 3 lessons for the remainder of July after the Apostles' Feast.
- 4 lessons for the month of August.
- 1 lesson for the first week of September.

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

The students of grade 10 enjoy being mentally challenged and appreciate a high level of knowledge and discussion. They also use logic to analyze any information they receive. The new lessons inserted in this curriculum stressed more Bible information, knowledge of other beliefs, church history and social topics relevant to this age. However, this can still be considered a preliminary modified curriculum for grade 10 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. Substance Abuse (Alcohol, Drugs, Smoking)
2. St. Cyril of Alexandria
3. How to Control My Emotions
4. Books Used in Church
5. The Acceptable Worship
6. St. Mina
7. The Strong Personality

1- Substance Abuse (Smoking, Alcohol, Drugs)

Objective:

- ❖ To understand the motives and conditions that lead to substance abuse.
- ❖ Learn to avoid the situations that may lead to substance abuse.
- ❖ Understand the spiritual and physical consequences of substance abuse.

Memory Verse:

“Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?”
(1Corinthians 3:16)

References:

Addiction- Spiritual perspective - Bishop Moussa
<http://pharos.bu.edu/cn/youth/addiction.htm>

Introduction:

Many of our youth think they are strong and will never make the mistake of falling into substance abuse. However, no one should think that he or she is immune from the temptation or pressures of the community that might lead even the pure into this sin of addiction.

Lesson Outline:

I. Causes of Drug Addiction

We are going to look at these causes, not merely to identify them, but rather to try to overcome them with the help of God. We will keep in mind that these causes can affect all of us. However, not all people fall into drug addiction because of these factors. Some people are psychologically and socially vulnerable to it.

1. The feeling of emptiness: There is no doubt that some young people suffer from all sorts of emptiness.

- ❖ **Intellectual emptiness:** Due to the instability of the spiritual and social concepts in the youth's heart and mind. Perhaps this underlines the role of the church in clarifying these concepts.
- ❖ **Emotional emptiness:** Due to lack of one's sense of belonging. As in, lack of loyalty to a country, and the spirit of sacrifice for it. Loyalty to the family may similarly be missing. Another symptom is disloyalty to the community, which represents a group of individuals among whom one lives and to whom one belongs.
- ❖ **Physical emptiness:** Due to a tendency to laziness, or isolation; not being involved in sports, social or recreational activities or any literary or artistic activities. These are the ways in which young people make use of their leisure time and during which they develop self-esteem. So they enjoy the outcome of their work and effort.

The role of the church is very clear and important in filling this emptiness, whether it is intellectual, emotional or physical. Undoubtedly, young people who are united in Christ and

the church have concepts, values and means of spending their leisure time in a fruitful way. This allows them to avoid problems that those who are far from the church and Christ may complain of.

2. Low Self-Esteem

This is one of the phenomena that have recently increased. The Devil tries to confront us with specific characters out of which he makes heroes and even gods that people are likely to admire. In the meantime, the Devil tries with all his strength and by all sorts of pressures to crush these idols so that they collapse, causing their worshippers to collapse too.

Accordingly, the youth reaches the conclusion that it is impossible to live in holiness, or behave honestly, virtuously and honorably. The result is a state of practical disorder that leads to loss of devotion to principles and virtues, falling thereafter into evil and sin.

Perhaps there are many factors that may drive the youth to feel that his or her values are shaken up, such as:

- ❖ The absence of a good example or an ideal model, especially if we follow the example of earthly heroes or some of the high-ranking people.
- ❖ The kind of injustice that might befall the youth in their studying or working career because of their dedication to their faith and their honesty.
- ❖ The sense of inability to enjoy free self-expression.
- ❖ Here the church has a leading role: the youth may see the sons of Christ, inside the church, as blessed examples, whether they be monks, clergy or marrying laity convincing him or her that it is quite possible to live with God and stick to values.

3. The Feeling of Anxiety Because of Anticipated Future Difficulties:

The great majority of young people nowadays may be faced with this feeling for a number of reasons, among them:

- ❖ Difficult economic conditions.
- ❖ Complicated social conditions.
- ❖ The desire to attain prompt solutions to problems.

Youth discover that these factors make their hopes and wide prospects difficult to attain. The result is that they are overcome by the feeling of despair and frustration.

In contrast, the children of God have strong confidence in His love and have moreover experienced it in their lives. Through their struggles and repentance, they have learned to trust that Christ will manage all their affairs and tackle all their problems. He will face all difficulties with them, accompanying them throughout their lives.

“He who did not spare His own son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall he not with Him also freely give us all things?” (Romans 8:32)

All these factors and more affect the psychologically and socially vulnerable youth. Those who are far from the church, those who desert life with Christ, with its repentance and struggle, are driven to a state of psychological disorder. This leads to deviation, which in turn, causes the following:

Criminal phenomena such as dissipation, crimes of violence, sex, money, and pleasure.

Drug addiction so as to escape problems or as an expression of dissatisfaction with life or the feeling of frustration and the impossibility of fulfilling the goals.

II. Spiritual Consequences of Drug Addiction

Some people may think that the effects of drug addiction are mostly physical, psychological and social ones. However, there are serious spiritual consequences of drug addiction. The following is a discussion of some of them.

❖ Drug addiction destroys God's holy temple

"Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Corinthians 3: 16)

Is it acceptable to take the members of Christ and submit them to corruption and addiction? Is it reasonable to take what Christ descended to redeem and be crucified for and turn it over to drug addiction? The Jewel was bought by Christ's blood so that it would not perish but rather be restored to its original brightness. Is it reasonable to sell it for dust and corrupt it with the wretched?

What will there be to gain thereafter? What good will it do to lose one's soul? What value will any treasures of this world have? None at all.

❖ Drug addiction is a merciless master

"No one can worship two masters". A person who is enslaved by this cruel master will automatically turn away from following the loving Master, the gracious Father and the Redeemer of humankind. St. Paul the Apostle talked about what is lawful for a child of God and what is not: "All things are lawful, but not all things are helpful... All things are lawful but not all things build up... All things are lawful for me but I will not be brought under the power of any" (1 Corinthians 10:32, 6:12).

How, then, can people give themselves over to this merciless master, and be able to follow Christ after that? They have lost the freedom of Christ after that? They have lost the freedom of will granted to them by Christ: "so if the Son makes you free you shall be free indeed" (John 8:36).

❖ Drug addiction drives young people to a series of sins

When a youth is drawn into sin, it brings many troubles in its wake. In most cases, the drug addict may not have enough money to buy the drug, so what can they do? These people will restrain themselves once or twice. However, they have put themselves under the influence of a merciless master who will impose pressures beyond any imagination on them. What can young people then do to face these pressures?

They will be driven to robbery so as to provide the money needed to buy the costly drug?

They will be driven to lying, deception and crookedness to attain their goals?

They will be driven to all sorts of crimes in order to rid their bodies of the withdrawal symptoms? In addition, their behavior will be characterized by fear of punishment, or from being caught in using or possessing drugs. They may also be haunted by the horrors of the gloomy future awaiting them.

❖ Drug addiction leads to the feeling of defeat and loss

How aggravating it is for a person to feel defeated. How difficult it is for a person to feel that he lost control of the senses, physical energy, or even the body itself.

Indeed, it is very hard for a person to be a prey to the feeling of failure.

We know that God has not given us a spirit of failure but one of power, love and self-control. For that very reason, an addict may feel that the hand of the Lord has forsaken him or her and that God has given him or her up to a base-mind, so, the feeling of loss arises. An addict especially has to face the feeling of complete inability to work, think, concentrate, or remember. There are also the physical disabilities of an enfeebled body and problems in sexual relations. We have to be confident that Christ is able to save us from such a hateful and fatal feeling and the loss of self-respect.

❖ **Drug addiction hinders a person's repentance**

What motivates a person to repent? Is it not the person's feeling of sin which has aroused the Lord's anger and his or her resolution to rise and return to God?

But what if the person's will has been weakened and a feeling of defeat and loss obsesses him or her? They would have no other choice but to evade the issue of repentance, and postpone it. So it is difficult for an addict to lead the life of repentance for several reasons, including:

- ❖ The inability to face up to oneself and one's sins.
- ❖ A multiplicity of sins, the one leading to the other until the person is swamped with problems.
- ❖ A sense of defeat, loss of will, power and indifference.
- ❖ Getting involved in bad company and caught up in their sins.

Conclusion:

Drug addiction deprives the person of both the kingdom of God and the eternal crown.

This is where it all leads. After the addicts have lost everything: energy, health, senses, family, relatives, community and happiness, they would have to face the greatest unparalleled loss, namely the loss of the Kingdom of God and eternal crown.

What can there possibly be to gain what has been given up to destruction and ruin?

Applications:

- ❖ Avoid the bad company that might lead you to substance abuse.
- ❖ Fill your free time with church and family activities.
- ❖ Don't be influenced by peer pressure.

2- St. Cyril of Alexandria

Objective:

- ❖ To learn about St. Cyril and his great role in our church history.

Memory Verse:

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (1 Timothy 4:7)

References:

“Life and Works of St. Cyril of Alexandria” - Dr. Rudolph Yanney

“The Story of the Copts” - Iris Habib el Masri

Introduction:

What is an ecumenical council? An ecumenical council is a gathering of the bishops of the universal Church. They discuss matters of doctrine, excommunicate those teaching heretical ideas, and determine canons (rules of behavior) for the entire Church. The Ecumenical Councils include Nicene in AD 325 (318 bishops), Constantinople in AD 381 (150 bishops), and Ephesus in AD 431 (200 bishops).

Lesson Outline:

I. Early Life

St. Cyril was born in AD 376. He was the nephew of Pope Theophilus, the 23rd Pope of Alexandria. He spent five years as a monk, learned the spiritual depth of the monastic fathers, in Nitria in the western desert of Egypt. He was summoned to Alexandria by his uncle who ordained him a priest. Later he became known as a great preacher. When Pope Theophilus died, Cyril was chosen to lead the Church, and became the 24th Pope of Alexandria in AD 412 at the age of 36.

II. His Fight Against Heresies

1. Novatians

He began by Novatian, who established a rival Church in Rome. He accused the Roman Church of being lenient in accepting apostates. St. Cyril came with the decision of shutting their churches.

2. Pagans

During St. Cyril's period, the pagans were competing with Christianity for converts. St. Cyril criticized this movement in his festal letter in AD 418. In the letter, he mentioned his concern that the pagan emperor's book was becoming popular in Alexandria, which was doing immeasurable harm to those who were weak in faith. St. Shenoute of Atripe also led a great campaign against paganism and destroyed the temples in Upper Egypt. Many miracles of healing took place during his time, causing many to renounce paganism.

3. Nestorianism

Nestor was the Bishop of Constantinople. He began teaching that it is wrong to call the Virgin Mary “the Theotokos” meaning the Mother of God. He claimed that St. Mary was only the mother of the man Jesus and he denied the divinity of Christ. The news of this heresy reached Alexandria by spring of AD 429. St. Cyril began to denounce this theology without mentioning names. Nestor rebuked St. Cyril for his criticism and outspokenness.

St. Cyril began exchanging letters with Nestor: first letter asked him to acknowledge the title of the Virgin Mary “Theotokos”. The second letter challenged the Christology of Nestor by using the words of the Nicene Creed: “God was incarnate and became man”. Third letter again used the words of the Nicene Creed to explain in detail what he meant by the belief in the one nature of the Incarnate Word and appended twelve anathemas. He asked Nestor to sign anathemas to prove his Orthodoxy, and Nestor refused to sign and responded with twelve anathemas of his own. These letters were circulated throughout the Christian world and St. Cyril explanations were widely accepted and praised. St. Cyril held a local council in Alexandria to discuss the issue, and decided to add the Introduction to the Creed: “We magnify you, the Mother of the True Light...”.

At Ephesus

Emperor Theodosius called for a general council to meet in Ephesus (modern day Turkey) in AD 431. The Pope arrived with 50 of his bishops and some monks. Delegates of Asia, Jerusalem and later Rome all supported St. Cyril’s definition. Nestor also arrived to the city but refused to attend the meetings. They decided to excommunicate Nestor. When the decision was announced to the people of Constantinople, they rejoiced.

III. Titles

Titles given to St. Cyril are: “The Second Athanasius”, “The Daring Lion”, “The Great”, “The Pillar of the Faith”, and “The Defender of Orthodoxy”.

IV. Legacy and Works

A. Scriptural commentaries

Pentateuch, Isaiah, the twelve minor prophets, fragments of Kings, Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Songs, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel, St. John, St. Luke, fragments of Matthew, Romans, Hebrews and First and second epistles to the Corinthians.

B. Festal letters

Twenty-nine letters were written between AD 414 - 442.

C. Sermons

Twenty-two sermons remain.

D. Books

Some of the books written by St. Cyril were about why we should be against pagans and the Arians. He also wrote doctrinal topics; such as, On the Holy and Con substantial Trinity and on the Unity of Person in Christ.

E. Liturgy

Originally written by St. Mark, but arranged by St. Cyril, oldest Liturgy in the Coptic Church.

Conclusion:

St. Cyril had a major role in the history of Christianity generally and particularly in the history of our church. His role and memory is revived every Sunday in the liturgy during the commemoration of the saints.

Applications:

- ❖ Search for the story of St. Cyril in the Synaxarium.
- ❖ What lessons do we learn from the life of St. Cyril?

3- How to Control My Emotions

Objective:

Self-control and the correct behavior.

Memory Verse:

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

References:

1 Corinthians 6:12, 9:24-27, 10:23.

Introduction:

- ❖ Ask the students if emotions should be controlled or fully expressed? What are the circumstances when they think they should be controlled and what are others when they should be expressed?

Lesson Outline:**The Powers of the Human Self**

There are three powers that conflict with each other within the human self. These are:

Desires

These include all instinctive inclinations and all the tendencies that arise in the heart of man, whether these tendencies are good or bad.

Will (ego)

This is the power that controls desires as it allows some desires to see light while it prevents others from being released according to the power of the stimulus.

Conscience (Superego)

This is the voice that God put in man. It grows through the work of the Holy Spirit although it is affected by many educational and social factors. It reproaches man when he sins.

These powers that conflict with each other within the human self have different results. For example, when the desire is strong and the will is weak, this desire sees light so conscience complains and rejects it. The opposite is true when the desires are good and the will let them appear. In this case conscience is satisfied.

There are three different types of outcomes. These are:

i) Immorality: It means the release of all desires. However, this is socially, medically and biologically impossible.

Socially: for example the society does not allow us to respond freely to our sexual desires. Alternatively, a soldier may escape from a battlefield responding to life (Eros) instinct and any man may kill anyone who may annoy him.

Medically: Immorality is dangerous to both mental and physical health. Since satisfying the instinct creates more desires and more hunger as instincts are never satisfied. This destroys the physical and mental health of man.

Biologically: Immorality contradicts the natural law for example immorality contradicts marital loyalty as one spouse may deviate and be unfaithful saying that it is necessary for the desires to be released.

ii) Repression: This is the outcome of so many desires being rejected by the will, therefore man lives as a prey to his suppressed desires and he tries to prevent them from seeing light so he becomes at a loss and suffers from tensions as there is a distance between what he wants to do and what he really does. If the case becomes more serious, the repressed vapor explodes and destroys the container of life and may lead to immorality with all its disadvantages or for psychiatric disorders.

iii) Control: Control, as a Christian concept is another thing, as grace causes radical changes in the power of the human self.

Desires: The Holy Spirit weakens physical desires and fills the heart with other holy desires such as prayer, service and love for others.

Will: The Holy Spirit supports the will “God is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13). The will does not feel the heaviness of the evil desires (because the Holy Spirit has weakened them) so there is no more repression, but there is easy control with the help of grace.

Conscience: The Holy Spirit increases its sensitivity, but conscience becomes perfectly clear as life goes on in the right way and the forgiveness of sins are fulfilled by the blood of Christ. Thus Christianity gives us the chance to build up the good and sound personality. This is not the case with immorality and repression, which are destructive factors.

Domains of Inner Control

The young man must control himself in many domains, such as:

- ❖ He must not look for his own interest, but for the interest of others. He must not be selfish. (In brotherly love, have tender affection for one another. Take the lead in showing honor to one another,).
- ❖ He sublimates his instincts with the help of grace so he directs the powers of his emotions into spiritual sacrificing love, and the combat instinct into struggle against sin and the energy of the life instinct to looking forward to eternity.
- ❖ He struggles against sin, in all its forms whether in his private life or in his relations with others. “In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.” (Hebrews 12:4)].
- ❖ He keeps the commandment.

- ✦ Pray constantly: Thessalonians 5:17
- ✦ Love one another: John 13:34
- ✦ Keep yourself pure: 1 Timothy 5:22
- ✦ Love your enemies: Matthew 5:44

- ❖ He labors in preaching and teaching service. To show the kingdom of God among men he should sacrifice his time, effort and money as much as he can.
- ❖ He practices the works of Christian asceticism, such as prayer, keeping awake, psalms and worship.

Means of Inner Control

Going into retreat and examining oneself

Let a man examine himself” 1 Corinthians 11:28

Take heed to yourself and to your teaching: 1 Timothy 4:16

Regular, continuous and accurate confession controls the way of man.

Reading the word of God and the Spiritual books enlightens the sides of inner life and the way of man.

Conclusion:

Self control and control of the desires is an important Christian concept that we should train ourselves to practice in our daily life. We should be great example and encourage others to practice self control.

Applications:

- ❖ Practice control of one of your bad instincts this week

Go to a retreat to examine yourself then go to confession and confess your sins in a vital and effective way to save yourself.

4 - Books Used in Church

Objective:

Introduce the books used in the church.

Memory Verse:

“You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me” (John 5:39).

References:

The Precious Scroll in the Explaining of Church Rituals (in Arabic “Al Kharida Al Nafeesa fe Sharh tokoos Al Kaneesah”) - Fr. Youhanna.

The Tower of the Holies (in Arabic “Manarah Al Akdas”) - Fr. Mankarious

Introduction:

The Coptic Orthodox Church is an old church with rich resources of books accumulated over the many generations and through the fathers of the church who maintained and contributed to this treasure of knowledge. The church is also rich in book of praises and doxologies, which are chanted all through the year. We will try to cover the main books used in the Coptic Orthodox Church in this lesson.

Lesson Outline:

I. Holy Bible

Old Testament: 39 Books plus 7 (canonical books removed by the Protestant Churches) .

New Testament: 27 Books.

II. Liturgy Book

Raising of Incense

3 Liturgies: St. Basil, St. Gregory, and St. Mark (St. Cyril).

Fraction Prayers.

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

III. Agpeya (Book of the Hours)

Seven hours of Prayer: “Seven times every day I praise You” (Psalm 119:164).

Prayer of the Veil (extra prayer for monks).

IV. Deacons’ Service Book

Contains all responses and the chants of the Church, including chants for special occasions.

V. Katameros (Book of Church Readings)

All the readings of the day have one single theme in common.

Five Different Katameros.

Annual for Sundays: Readings depend on the Sundays of the Coptic Months (e.g. first Sunday of Tute).

Annual for Weekdays: Readings depend on the Coptic date (e.g. the 1st day of the month of Tute). The theme for these readings depends on the Synaxarium of the day (e.g., if it is a feast of a Patriarch, the Gospel of the Good Shepherd is read).

Great Fast: Contains the readings of all the days of Great Fast and Jonah's Fast.

Holy Week: Contains all the readings of Holy Week.

Holy Fifty Days: Contains the readings of all the Holy Fifty Days from the Feast of the Resurrection to the Feast of the Pentecost.

VI. Synaxarium

The Chronology and History of the Church and its saints

VII. Book of Melodies

Contains the Melodies chanted during Communion

VIII. Psalmody (Book of Praises)

✠ Two Different Psalmodies

Annual Psalmody: Contains the praises for all the days of the week and all the occasions, except the month of Kiahk.

Kiahk Psalmody: Contains all the praises for the special month of Kiahk.

IX. Antiphonarium (called "Difnar" in Coptic)

Contains a glorification and a brief story of the saint of the day.

It is used in the Midnight Praises.

X. Book of Psalies

Contains special Psalies for special feasts and the feasts of the saints, not found in the annual Psalmody.

XI. Book of Processions

Book of Processions of the feasts of the Cross and Palm Sunday, and the expositions of the Great Fast and the Holy Fifty Days.

Contains all the expositions and Psalies for all these occasions.

XII. Holy Week Directory

Contains all the hymns rites, and readings for the Holy Week: starting from Palm Sunday until the Feast of the Resurrection.

XIII. Book of the Liturgy of the Waters and the Prostration Prayers

- ❖ Contains the prayers of the three Liturgies of Waters:
- ❖ Epiphany

- ❖ Holy Thursday
- ❖ Feast of the Apostles
- ❖ Also contains the Prostration Prayers of the Feast of Pentecost.

XIV. Book of Church Offices

Contains the prayers of the church offices, such as: Baptism, Confirmation, Engagements, Weddings, Unction of the Sick, Funerals, Baby's First Bathing, Prayer of "Abu Tarbu", etc.

XV. Book of Ordinations and Consecrations

Contains the prayers for ordaining deacons and priests, and the consecration of new churches, icons and vessels.

Conclusion:

Our Lord Jesus said: "You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf" (John 5:39). Thus, He clearly indicated that we would know about Him when we read more of the scripture and spiritual books.

Applications:

- ❖ The Servant should show the children all the books and let them look through them and identify them.
- ❖ Research about how the Synaxarium was accumulated and which saints get to be added to this book.

5 - The Acceptable Worship

Objective:

To train the students to practice the true worship with spirit and truth.

Memory Verse:

“God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:4)

References:

- ❖ The life of Orthodox prayer.
- ❖ The Paradise of the Spirit - Part One.
- ❖ The Paradise of the Monks.
- ❖ Examples of David’s Psalms and the prayers of the saints from the Holy Bible.

Introduction:

The acceptable worship is the worship of the person acceptable before the Lord. Before we offer our worship to the Lord we have to examine our actions and ourselves. The Holy Spirit helps us to know ourselves. The welcome worship is the work of the Holy Spirit in us. The Spirit Himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. We have to submit to the Spirit so that he may teach us how to pray. The Holy Spirit leads us to Christ, and Christ leads us to the Father and Christ puts our prayers and service in the sacrifice of Himself that has been welcomed by our heavenly Father.

For the prayer to be in the name of Christ it must be according to His will. Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well, i.e. the aim is the Glory of Christ, not self-interests.

Lesson Outline:

How Would Our Prayer in Jesus Christ Be Acceptable?

The Holy Bible teaches us that the prayer should be:

- ❖ With faith “Ask and you will receive, that your joy may be full”.
- ❖ With persistence and trust in the gifts of God (e.g. the widow and the unrighteous Judge).
- ❖ With thanks - each prayer in the church begins with: “We thank the beneficent...”
- ❖ With submission and humility: Submission to the will of God. Thy will be done O Father, not our will. In this way man comes out from his prayer room and he is sure that in everything God works for good with those who love Him.
- ❖ In secret without showing off (the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector).
- ❖ With a pure heart “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God”.

The acceptable worship applies to both our prayers at home and in the church during the liturgy. We should involve God in every thing that is happening in our life whether it is trivial or major matter. He is

our only helper and supporter in all times and in all situations. Prayer should be as simple and easy as a second nature to us.

Conclusion:

Let us worship the Lord with all our heart and he will welcome us in the prayers of our fathers the saints. Amen.

Applications:

- ❖ Hold a weekly prayer meeting to practice praying in Spirit.
- ❖ Read some texts from the church prayer books and make a wall magazine.
- ❖ Study parts of the psalms and hourly prayers (Agpia) so that you may repeat them in all the situations of life.

6 - St. Mina

Objective:

- ❖ To learn from the courage of St. Mina

Memory Verse:

“He who has the Son has life” (1John 5:12)

References:

- ❖ The Life of Mar Mina - Issued by Sunday School, Mar Mina church, Alexandria.
- ❖ The Biography of Mar Mina - Shubra.
- ❖ Synaxarium, 15 Hathour
- ❖ Martyrdom in Christianity - Anba Youannis.

Introduction:

- ❖ Review with the students the previous lesson
- ❖ When teaching this lesson the servant should emphasis the lessons that can be learned and applied in our life from the life of St. Mina, rather than just teaching the story of St. Mina

Lesson Outline:

I. His Biography

St. Mina was born of Christian parents- His father was Orcosius and his mother was Ophemiah.

He lived in the town of Nipneus-Minuf-in the Minufya Governorate.

Orcosius was a governor of one of the Roman states in one of the regions of Egypt.

Ophemiah was praying before the virgin's icon requesting the Lord to give her a son. She heard a voice coming from the icon saying; Amen. She gave birth to a baby boy in 283 and named him “MINA”.

II. A Blessed Atmosphere

Mina lived in a spiritual and pure atmosphere.

His father and mother departed to heaven (died) and his wealth, health and social status did not spoil him.

He joined the army and progressed quickly. He was promoted and became an officer loved by all.

III. In the Wilderness School

When the saint was 18 years old, he went to the wilderness.

He lived an angelic life and loved the gospel.

IV. Three Crowns

The saint was blessed by attaining three crowns: Virginity, Monasticism and Martyrdom and he deserved these crowns as he deserted the family life and the life of authority and luxury. They offered him temptations and he refused and they tortured him and he stood firm in faith. He was glad to offer his life willingly to Christ. They cut his head off in the name of the Lord Jesus and he deserved the crown of Martyrdom.

V. The Saint's Body

The soldiers made an attempt to burn the body and they failed to do so.

The Christian leader Athanasius kept the body and took it to Mariot as there was a battle.

Horrible animals came out of water and tried to devour the ship but fiery arrows came out of the body of the saint and dashed towards the animals and made them sink in the water.

After the military battle the camel that was carrying the body of the saint refused to move so they built him a tomb and made two pictures of the saint and two beasts under his feet.

VI. Building a Church Over His Body

A crippled man passed by the tomb and was healed. A scabby sheep rolled itself in the dust of the tomb and it was healed. So the believers built a church in that place in the time of St. Athanasius (328-373 A.D). Then Anba Theophilis built up a bigger church (385-412 A.D).

VII. Finding The Body

The saint appeared to the church priest on 7/9/1873 (St. Mina Church- Fom el Khalig- Old Cairo) and told him about the place of the hidden body. The priest found the body. A part of it was taken to his church in Old Cairo in 1959, and another part was taken to Mariot Monastery in 1962 after Pope Kyrillous VI reconstructed it.

VIII. The Saint's Miracles

The saint is called the "Al Agaybi" i.e. the wonders worker and his title demotes the style of performing his miracles.

He defended his servant

Who was accused of doing wrong but he was innocent. The servant of St. Mina church was wrongly accused of doing an evil deed. When he was tired a voice came out of the picture of Mar Mina saying: "My servant did not do that evil deed with the prince's daughter".

He sympathized with the needy

One of the workers who worked in building the church of St. Mina was a poor man. A horseman appeared to him and gave him a brick. He thought it was a brick of mud, but it was a brick of gold.

He saved our Patriarch from death

Some robbers beat Pope Kyrillous VI in his mill. St. Mina healed him and one of the robbers became mad, the second died and the third came to our father and repented.

The church celebrates the feast of the Saint twice a year:

- (1) On 15 Hathour (24th of November) the feast of his Martyrdom.
- (2) 15 Paone (21st of June) the memory the dedication of his church.

Conclusion:

St. Mina is great example of the Christian courage. He was strong in the faith even at a young age. His solitude started when he was a teenager. God has granted him three crown and even his body was a source of blessing and miracles after his departure.

Applications:

- ❖ Read a book about St. Mina during this week. The servant can hand the students a small book about St. Mina to read.
- ❖ Search the web for any information about St. Mina that you can find and bring it to class next week.

7 - The Strong Personality

Objective:

To build strong personality in the students.

Memory Verse:

“Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might” (Ephesians 6:10)

References:

“Youth and social issues” Anba Bemin.

Introduction:

The human personality is the result of many powers working together in the life of man. Some are inherited and he is born with them. These are what we call innate motives such as instincts and general motives. Others are acquired and are called emotions, habits, tendencies, values and concepts. This is the result of interaction between man and his environment, family, school, church and external society.

Lesson Outline:**I. Man is the Image of God**

The scripture teaches us that man was created in the image of God and after His likeness in freedom, will, speech, holiness, perfection and creativity to be a blessed model of the Divine work.

Man is distinguished by his mental power, will, confrontation, development and amelioration.

So the only civilization on earth is man's civilization and heritage, the fruit of his struggle and his various achievements.

If this is the natural life of man, which is characterized by the ability to control instincts and to build up good habits, emotions and tendencies under the effect of the environment and sound education, the imitation of high morale and practical examples, whether in the family or the external society, how much more do we find on the Christian level? We see the believer who is characterized by abilities above these ordinary natural abilities granted to every creature having flesh. This is called the new nature... Christianity believes that through baptism and receiving the Divine Communion man can obtain a new life according to the Scripture (2 Corinthians 5:17).

This new life does not end with the following nature or the ancient corrupt man in us but it cancels its effect so long as the will of man is united with and responding to the will of God (Galatians 2:20).

The new nature goes through the soul, the self, the thought and the body. It supplies the Christian youth with miraculous potentialities. It provides them:

- ❖ The ability to love - to overcome the self - to love even the enemies.
- ❖ The ability to overcome desires.
- ❖ The ability to be modest, lowly and to educe to the extent of being like Christ in this respect.
- ❖ The power to overcome time and its challenges.
- ❖ The ability to serve others and to surpass fanaticism and narrow mindedness.
- ❖ The ability to accept themselves as they are with all their weakness and talents.
- ❖ A personality with all these abilities is a strong personality from a Christian perspective. Let us discuss these abilities in brief.

The ability to sublime the motives and instincts

Grace gives the Christian youth the ability to surpass themselves, i.e. to crucify the desires of the flesh.

They deal with their bodies as a temple for the Holy Spirit and look at the bodily motives as if they were domains and means to carry out the will of God in their life (Romans 14: 6,8).

This process needs a continuous struggle and spiritual vigil... if they found that their will was weak towards the needs of the instinct, they would pray so that the Lord might grant them the ability to attain victory and triumph (2 Corinthians 12:9). The life of purity and chastity is a sign of the strong personality. Being enslaved to the desires of the flesh and the motives of the flesh is sure evidence of its collapse.

The ability to show modest thinking and to seek wisdom

The first sin in the life of man is the desire to be treated as a god and his wish to have knowledge independent of God. Those who built the tower of Babylon thought highly of themselves (Genesis 11:4). The stubborn man, who does not accept any discussion and wants to impose his opinion on others, is a man of weak personality, but the lowly modest man accepts to bend his head before truth and he enjoys having a strong personality. This is the case with our fathers the holy apostles (1 Corinthians 2:16; 3:18, 2 Corinthians 10:5) and as Solomon says in (Proverbs 24:5; Ecclesiastes 9:16,17).

Solomon praises wisdom as the greatest source of the strong personality but it is not the wisdom of the weak. It is the wisdom of those who stand firm in the truth who are confident of convincing proof of the power of God's Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:4).

Ability to persist and to show failure (2 Timothy 1:7)

The Christian young man who enjoys the power of the new life does not fall into despair (Philippians 4:13). He becomes strong with the grace of Jesus Christ and takes part in enduring troubles as a good soldier serving Jesus Christ.

He is not destroyed by his weaknesses but he prides himself in the grace of God, which reforms his defects and then the power of Christ will strengthen him (2 Corinthians 12:1).

The great men of the world overcame the challenges they faced, such as Beethoven the deaf who offered wonderful pieces of music and Helen Keller who lost all her senses but she overcame all this and became the miracle of the 20th century. The children of God persist in their spiritual, scientific and social struggle and even if they stumble on the road, they rise quickly.

Pastiness in the life of the children of God is a response to a Divine call (Ephesians 2:10).

Positiveness is the building up of humanity, a proof of practicing freedom and an indicator of a strong personality. He who loves Christ resists laziness, indifference, sympathizing with the self and fear of shouldering responsibility.

Ability to accept the self and enduring others

The strong personality accepts what is within her without murmuring. It is a very difficult process because the image we have of ourselves is different from what we really are so when we face the self as what it really is we become upset and anxious. Man cannot make a real progress except when he accepts himself as he really is. When we accept ourselves as what we really are with our weak and strong aspects, we feel comforted and we have a strong incentive to proceed. We begin from the real and make for a wider horizon. If man cannot accept himself, he cannot accept others (Romans 15:7).

Enduring others cannot be practiced by words but through life and suffering in the real situations of life. It is giving through love in its practical image - love's faith, hope and patience, love never fail (Corinthians 13:7; Songs 8:6,7). The powerful Christian personality

is the fruit of the work of grace and the believer's struggle. It is characterized by lowliness without weakness or cowardliness, chastity without doubt, simplicity without ignorance, and liveliness without anxiety.

It is a miracle and one of the Christian mysteries... The mystery of resurrection drives out fear... the mystery of hope removes anxiety... the mystery of love overcomes rejection... the mystery of faith gives.

Conclusion:

The Christian personality is a strong personality that sets example to others in their life. The strong personality in the Christian concept might be different than what the world expect but it is strong in itself and in the eyes of God.

Applications:

- ❖ The servant and the students hold a discussion about the effect of sin on man.
- ❖ A discussion about how sin - when man is enslaved to it - makes man live with a weak personality - and how the Lord Jesus restored man's first image to us and renewed our potentialities to live with a strong personality in family, the church and the society.

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

- Week 2-** The Victory of Martyrs
- Week 3-** Sin and its Consequences
- Week 4-** The Christian Man and Violence

Week 2- The Victory of Martyrs

Objective:

- ❖ Standing firm in faith, and gaining victory through the work of grace.

Memory Verse:

“And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death” (Revelation 12:11).

References:

- ❖ “Martyrdom in Christianity” - Anba Youannis.
- ❖ “They did not love their life” - Anba Bemin.
- ❖ “The Spiritual Values of the New Coptic Year’s Day (Al Nayrouz)” - Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty
- ❖ “The story of the Coptic church” - Iris Habib el Massry, Part 1.

Introduction:

Martyrdom is the ultimate expression of love, faith and desire to be with the Lord in His heavenly kingdom. Martyrs achieve the desires of their hearts of being with Jesus Christ. They consider death as a gain and a great reward.

Lesson Outline:

I. Who Is The Group Of Conquerors? (Revelation 12:11)

- ❖ They are the group of martyrs - who gave their life for faith.
- ❖ They are the group of confessors who, through standing firm in the apostolic faith, kept their faith.
- ❖ They are the group of monks, hermits and the carriers of the cross. These are the martyrs without shedding the blood.
- ❖ They are the group of believers who perform their work, but they suffer daily because they bear witness to truth and reject the spirit of the world.
- ❖ They are those who conquered the world and all its desires, the devil and all his temptations.
- ❖ They conquered it in their flesh (Chastity - fasting - struggle).
- ❖ They conquered it in its temptations and threats.
- ❖ They conquered it in its enmity.

II. With The Blood of the Lamb

The blood Jesus Christ shed on the cross gave the martyrs the power to shed their own blood. It also gave the power and wonderful boldness to their testimony.

III. By The Word of Their Testimony

The life of martyrs and their conduct was a life of truth, love and lowliness. Their life was the most powerful testimony to Christ. They proved that Christ's gospel is practical and is practiced in their life. It is not mere theories, principles and manners.

IV. They Did Not Love Life till Death

Our fathers the saints and martyrs were not happy with their life or hated it but in fact they were at the top of happiness, peace and joy. In their life they died to all the desires of the world - before they offered themselves willingly in the arena of martyrdom.

V. Examples of those who conquered:

- ❖ St. George
- ❖ Perpetora the Chaste
- ❖ St. Ignatius the Bishop of Antioch
- ❖ St. Barbara
- ❖ St. Doulagi

VI. Martyrdom Today

Someone may say that this is not the time of martyrdom, so what shall I do? Struggle against sin - honesty in keeping the commandment - crucifying the self, the flesh and the desires - bearing the sufferings with thanks. All these are domains for martyrdom.

Conclusion:

The crown of martyrdom is a great honor to whoever receives it. We should be ready to give a strong and a clear testimony to the Lord whenever it is required for us.

Applications:

- ❖ Train yourself to be like the martyrs in their inner life to be ready to give a live, true testimony.
- ❖ Students can perform a research about the state of the church in the age of martyrs. They can specialize in a limited period to be studied. They can study the life of a martyr such as St. George or St. Mina or St. Mercurius and offer a book or a wall magazine about the martyr.
- ❖ Students can perform glorification on the occasion of the feast of one of the martyrs.
- ❖ Students can read the Synaxarium and practice in the glorification of the day's saint.

Week 3 - Sin and Its Consequences

Objectives:

- ❖ What is the meaning of the commandment?
- ❖ Why was it broken (disobeyed)?
- ❖ What are the consequences?

Memory Verse:

“but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die’ (Genesis 3:3).

References:

- ❖ Genesis 3.
- ❖ “An introduction to the Christian Creed” - Costo Bindly.
- ❖ “The Divine purpose”.
- ❖ “The Divine love” - St. George Church, Sporting.

Introduction:

In this way the Lord showed man His love and waited for his answer and man had to answer willingly: Love for love or to refuse the Divine love.

Lesson Outline:

I. First: Man Was Created and Was Associated with The Lord

When man walked with the Lord he was associated with the life and enjoyed the joy of heaven. If he confined himself to his ego, he would separate it from the mystery of life and enclose himself in the prison of nothingness and death.

II. Second: The Meaning of Commandment

As the commandment was given to Adam, it was a covenant between God and man. If man walks with God, He will keep the source of his origin.

It is a domain of showing man's love for God.

It is a proof and evidence of the freedom of man and his freedom in choosing the attitude.

III. Third: How Did Man Sin?

Adam wanted to deify himself and to live with a power of his own independent of God and depending on the material world and that caused his fall.

The tree of knowledge of good and evil - knowledge here means testing and not the mental knowledge alone, as Adam was able by his mind to distinguish between evil and good.

The serpent, a creature, stands for evil. This means that evil is not everlasting as it has a beginning and it will have an end and the seed of the woman will bruise the head of the serpent.

The devil had a role in the temptation as he envied man after the devil separated from the life in heaven.

The sin entered by arousing suspicion in the heart of man towards God and His love for man.

IV. Fourth: The Consequences of Sin

Fear of God: as he separated himself from the Divine love.

He left the Lord and depended on other creatures - he hid himself among the trees.

V. The Destruction of Man

His unity with himself collapsed (His mind became dark - the instincts ruled over the will - the desire of the flesh).

His unity with others collapsed (selfishness - spite - envy - hatred).

His unity with the universe collapsed (earthquakes - disasters - wild animals - microbes).

Conclusion:

Every sin in its essence is disobedience to the will of God. It means that he refuses to be associated with Him as a son. The image of God has not been completely lost from man as he has kept in himself a mind and a will and tendency to do good - with the existence of contrast with evil things. The return of man to God is the realization of his loneliness and his reconciliation with himself, with people and with the universe.

Applications:

- ❖ The servant discusses with his students the importance of the work of grace and the spirit in bringing man back to his first image.
- ❖ Ask the students what are the reasons that make us fall into sin

Week 4 - The Christian Man and Violence

Objective:

- ❖ To train the students to lead the life of Christian lowliness which is devoid of cowardliness, weakness and humiliation

Memory verse:

“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).

References:

- ❖ The Life of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- ❖ The Life of St. Paul the apostle.
- ❖ The Life of Elijah and the Baptist.

Introduction:

Many young people like violence, but Christians have their opinion concerning violence. This opinion is derived from the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

The Lord Christ refused violence (Matthew 5:9, , Matthew 10:16).

John Chrysostom said: you can be a fierce wolf and you do not accept to be a lowly lamb, but you cannot be one of the subjects of Christ as He is the shepherd of lambs not a shepherd of wolves.

Paul the apostle wrote, “Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men” (Romans 12:17-18).

Lesson Outline:

I. Jesus Refused Violence in His Life

Jesus refused violence in His teachings and in His life (Matthew 12:18-20, Luke 9:54-56, Matthew 21:4, Matthew 26:51-53).

When questioned before the High Priest about His disciples and teachings, Jesus answered bravely that He was teaching in public “And when He had said these things, one of the officers who stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, “Do You answer the high priest like that?” Jesus answered him, “If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me” (John 18:22). Let us contemplate upon the Lord’s answer. Many people protest against the Lord’s teaching “If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also” and they see in this a call for cowardice and servility and they forget the great spiritual power of it, but Jesus’ conduct on that occasion sheds light on the commandment and explains how to carry it out. Jesus here did not turn the other cheek and there was no trace of humiliation or servility in His behavior but He caused the man to stand still in awe and fear. His manner was a mixture of lowliness and manliness, awe and greatness.

II. Jesus Who Was Slapped Protested Against This Soldier's Conduct

This emphasizes that the lowliness of Christian man does not mean cowardice but it means to forgive when you are able to punish. In so doing man surpasses his weakness and overcome the nature of the flesh and sublimates his innate instincts. They were filled with spitefulness against Jesus so they nailed Him to the cross and He faced their great spite with His great love and their violence with lowliness and when and when He was on the cross He prayed for His murderers (Luke 23:34).

III. The Church of the Apostles is a Model of Lowliness

The early Christians behaved in lowliness and in doing so they obeyed the commandment (Matthew 11:29).

They did not rebel against their persecutors but they achieved a spiritual revolution by offering the testimony of blood without any spite of envy. St. Stephen was stoned and as he was stoned the Bible said that "He knelt down and cried out with a loud voice: Lord, do not charge them with this sin. And when he had said this, he fell asleep" (Acts 7:60). The church raised earnest prayers for the rulers who persecuted her till Saul who threatened them was converted and became St. Paul the preacher and the chosen vessel.

St. Barbara prayed for the governor and her father who gave orders that she would be put to extreme torture and that her body should be stripped. Phileman and Apoldenus prayed for Arianus the governor of Insana and when they were martyred, he took some dust from their tomb and put the dust on his eyes, which were sick, and they were healed. He turned from a severe cruel persecutor into a great martyr "Because of the great amount of blood the wolves drank, they turned into lambs".

IV. Why Does Christianity Rejects Violence

Violence refuses love as it looks to the other person as something that should be destroyed, and not as a person who can serve. Violence indicates weakness as it fears others and this fear drives it to attack others to avoid being attacked.

Meekness is strength, love is strength and perfection- that is why Jesus is called the Commander of the law of perfection and it is He that planned the best law. Violence does not regard the humanity of man but Christianity confirms man and resists destroying others.

V. The Society Rejects Violence

Christianity rejects violence and urges people to be meek and to have a strong personality. Civilized Societies do not permit or allow violent actions as such actions are considered savage actions and the law was set to resist aggressions and to punish anyone who commits such irresponsible actions wherever he is.

VI. Christian Meekness Implies Real Strength

Christian meekness does not mean indifference- it is not against firmness, as firmness is needed in situations of defending truth and what is right. Firmness is necessary sometimes to waken the stony conscience. Jesus was firm and strict without showing any grudge or hatred, in many situations (Matthew 2:14; Matthew 17:7; Matthew 23:3; John 3:16). The true meekness does not mean servility, it implies insisting on bearing witness to truth whatever the difficulties may be. The meek would not destroy others but he offers himself as a sacrifice to save others if necessary.

Conclusion:

O young men and young women, if you have energy, enthusiasm, zeal and ambition let them all be ruled by the Holy Spirit. Let the violence you have be violence of love and bearing witness to truth.

Applications:

- ❖ Train the students to practice meekness in their life in the family and in the school.
- ❖ Train the students to favor meekness in our Lord's commandment: "Learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart".
- ❖ Encourage the students to hold brotherly relations and relations of love with Christian and non-Christian and to face any roughness in speech with gentleness and meekness not out of weakness but out of love.

LESSONS FOR THE MONTH OF OCTOBER

Week 1- The Holy Bible

Week 2- Job (I)

Week 3- Job (II)

Week 4- Obedience, St. John the Short

Week 1 - The Holy Bible

Objective:

- ❖ To give an overview of the Holy Bible
- ❖ To appreciate the importance of the Bible in our life

Memory Verse:

“If any one keeps my word he shall never see death” (John 8:51)

References:

- ❖ “An Introduction to the Gospel” by Anba Moussa
- ❖ The open study Bible-King James Version
- ❖ How to read the Bible-St. Macarious Monastery

Introduction:

- ❖ Review with the students last weeks lesson and memory verse
- ❖ There is a known wisdom saying “any day that passes without reading the Bible is not counted of our lives” Ask the students why is it important to read God’s word?

Lesson Outline:

I. Why Do We Study The Holy Bible?

It gives us redemption and salvation

Through the Bible we learn about the great story of God’s love and sacrifice for me. The Father loves us and gave His Son for our salvation. The Son incarnate and became man to redeem us. The Holy Bible reveals all these things to us “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). It is actually a personal story of my salvation from eternal death to eternal life.

We listen to the voice of God

It also contains the instruction of God. Through it we listen to the Voice of God “Speak Lord, for Thy servant hears”.

We learn His commandments

We study the Holy Bible so that we may know our duty towards God. If I love God, then I must obey His commandments which are announced in the Bible.

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37).

We get the Christian conduct

We study the Holy Bible so that we may know our duty towards the people and ourselves. In it we find the Ten Commandments, the sermon on the mountain and the parables that the Lord gave for Christian conduct. Through the Bible we know that all the people are brothers to us as we call the heavenly Father “Our Father”.

We learn how to love all the members of Christ’s body

It explains to us the Christian man’s obligations towards the family, fathers, sons, and sisters and towards one another. We find this in the words of the Lord and in the epistles of the holy apostles.

We learn how to live in holiness

It refines humanity, refines instincts and honors the dignity of man, wherever the Bible is, there exists the enlightened humanity that respects and considers the truth, freedom, constitution and virtue.

Our heavenly spiritual food

It is our spiritual food in our daily life (Psalm 119:105)

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path”.

“Your words were found and I ate them”.

The Commandment is a lamp, the law is a light and the water that the Lord Jesus gives us, i.e. His word is the source of our life “each one who drinks of it never thirsts”, as the Lord said to the Samaritan woman.

II. How to Read the Holy Bible?**With the spirit of need**

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied, but those who are proud are sent away without being given anything.

With the spirit of respect and awe

It is the voice of God and God speaks to us through it so we have to give it awe (Study how awe was expressed when the Lord spoke to Moses in the Old Testament).

With the spirit of prayer

It is a spiritual book and only spiritual people understand the demands of the Spirit of God but those concerned with the flesh do not understand.

With the spirit of persistence

It is not enough to read the text once then to neglect reading for some days. We have to be persistent in studying and contemplating.

With the spirit of being ready to carry out

As of what use is reading and the words turn to judge us. (An example of obedience and practical carrying out - The great saint Abba Anthony).

III. Evidence of the Unity of the Bible

Although it contains 73 books, 46 (39 main books plus 7 Second Canonical books removed by Protestants) in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament and more than forty writers from all parts of the world over nearly two thousand years, yet we feel that it is one book as God inspires it. It contains a variety of writings, stories, tales, biographies, poems and proverbs, but as a whole it concentrates on one message from the beginning till the end and it

is the message of salvation, carried out by our Lord Jesus Christ.

We find the crimson line clear in all its books and we notice clearly how the wonderful Divine plan in the Old Testament prepared humanity for salvation and how the events and topics were symbols of the Lord and His work of expiation.

IV. The Main Division of Books

The Books of Law

The first five books written by Moses called Torah.

Historical Books

12 Books including: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, First and Second Samuel, First and Second Kings, First and Second Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Tobias, Judith, and the Maccabees.

The Poetic Books

Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastics, Songs of Solomon, and Joshua, the Son of Serach.

The Major Prophets

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel.

The Minor Prophets

Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi and Baruch.

V. The New Testament Can Be Divided Into the Following Main Parts

The Four Gospels

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Acts of the Apostles

Paul's Epistles

Fourteen epistles: Romans, First and Second Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, First and Second Thessalonians, First and Second Timothy, Titus, Philemon and Hebrews.

Catholic Epistles

Seven epistles written by St. Peter, James, John and Judas to the whole church (not to certain churches or to individuals) including: James, First and Second Peter, First, Second and Third John, and Jude.

The Revelation

Written by St. John the apostle.

VI. Evidence of The Unity Of These Books

Review scientific books about the testimony of the Bible, history, archaeology and science. You will find proofs of the truth and correct information of the Holy Bible. There is no misconstruction and there is no contradiction.

VII. The Importance of The Holy Bible in Our Private Life

To understand the importance of the Holy Bible in our private life, we must read and study the Bible at home, at school, at work and in every occasion possible. The Lord says: "Apart from Me you can do nothing" (Ephesians 6:12). For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Also in his epistle to the Ephesians, St. Paul says: “Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness” (Ephesians 6:13-14).

Take the sword of the spirit, which means the word of God.

The Bible protects the youth from temptations, sanctifies his thoughts and tender feelings. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life. They are the lamps that light the road and a guide of life. Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, before the difficult days come, and the years draw near when you say, “I have no pleasure in them” (Ecclesiastes 12:1).

VIII. Examples of The Effectiveness Of The Holy Bible in The Life Of People Especially The Leaders

Prophet David

He meditated on the commandments day and night. He advised his son Solomon to keep the commandments of the Lord and walk in his way. When Solomon kept away from the commandments of God and married foreign women he deviated and lost his way.

Daniel and the three young men

They refused to betray the commandment so the Lord sent his angel to Daniel to shut the mouths of the lions. He also protected the three young men in the furnace of fire.

Joseph

Joseph is a good example of living in chastity, “How then could I do such an immoral thing and sin against God.”

Conclusion:

Religion does not mean lessons and exams but it is essentially life, spirit and practice.

Applications:

- ❖ There are useful references for the Servant and the students such as: “An Introduction to the Gospel” by Anba Moussa, “How to read the Bible” by Marcos Magazine, a book by Fr. Daoud for more spiritual benefit, etc.
- ❖ The Servant follows up the process of studying the Holy Bible and its effect on the daily life of the students. He should encourage them and find out the verses that give them comfort. He should then pray for applying them and using them as exercises for the day.
- ❖ One of the important matters is fixing a suitable period of time to be devoted for daily reading and prayer before and after reading the Bible. Emphasize the importance of regular study with open-mindedness and submission of the will and being prepared to obey the commandment. Let us encourage our children to study some verses to give them comfort during their study of the Word of God. This is a precious treasure that

will benefit them, all their long life. Let reading of the Bible be a criterion through which man examines himself and confesses his sins to his father of confession.

- ❖ Encourage the youth to participate in the Bible Study program posted on the internet: www.suscopts.org

Week 2 - The Book of Job (I)

Objectives:

- ❖ To study the book of Job.
- ❖ To take example of the life of Job the righteous and his experience with God.

Memory Verse:

“I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You” (Job 42:5).

References:

Job-The series of simplified knowledge

Introduction:

Job is considered one of the poetic books of the Old Testament. There are five Poetic Books: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs. There are other Old Testament books such as: Lamentations of Jeremiah, Wisdom of Solomon, Son of Sirach, and some of the Prophecies. Each of these books has a message for the believers. Here are some examples.

- ❖ Job: Wisdom and Plans of God.
- ❖ Psalms: Deep Prayers and Prophecies.
- ❖ Proverbs: Wisdom.
- ❖ Ecclesiastes: revealing the truth of the world “Vanity of vanity, all is vanity” (Proverbs 1:2).
- ❖ Song of Songs: Divine Love.

Lesson Outline:

Lived in Uz, thought to be a part of the land of Edom (Esau).

Some think he is Huz the firstborn of Abraham’s brother, Nahor “Now it came to pass after these things that it was told Abraham, saying, “Indeed Milcah also has borne children to your brother Nahor: Huz his firstborn, Buz his brother, Kemuel the father of Aram” (Genesis 22:20-21).

He lived after Abraham: one of his friends – Bildad the Shuhite (from sons of Shuah – son of Abraham from Keturah) (Genesis 25:1-2).

He lived before Moses:

No mention of the Aaronic priesthood, nor the Mosaic rites.

No mention of events during Moses’ time, but rather: Creation, fall of Adam, the Flood, and Sodom and Gomorrah.

He lived long (140 years); not typical of post-Moses time.

He is the writer of the Book.

I. Theme

God is Caring:

- ✚ The whole book talks about God's care of just one person
- ✚ Esther: God's care for His captured people
- ✚ It is not a "play"... It is "my" and "your" story
- ✚ God still cares for each one of us
- ✚ Satan still complains about me and you

God is beneficent

- ✚ He can do nothing but good, even if He "permits" evil to occur for a temporary time
- ✚ Question: Why do the righteous suffer?
- ✚ Does God's justice allow that the righteous should suffer more than others?
- ✚ Is it acceptable to judge someone as a sinner because he fell into a temptation?
- ✚ The difference between the weak comforting word of humans versus the true comforting words and works of God.
- ✚ Judge Not
- ✚ Even Christ did not judge Judas among his "brethren"
- ✚ Job's friends judged him falsely

II. Outline of the Book of Job

- ❖ Between Heaven and Earth (chapters 1,2)
- ❖ Human comfort (chapter 3)
- ❖ First debate (chapters 4-14)
- ❖ Second debate (chapters 15-21)
- ❖ Third debate (chapters 22-31)
- ❖ Elihu the wise (chapters 32-37)
- ❖ Heavenly comfort (chapters 38-42)

III. Between Heaven and Earth

Job and God

- ✚ "...Blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil" (Job 1:1).
- ✚ He was upright – relative to his peers: "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).
- ✚ His problem: he was blameless and he knew that!
- ✚ This led to his fall into self-righteousness and pride
- ✚ He offered sacrifices for all his children, but none for himself (Job 1:5)
- ✚ "I am blameless, yet I do not know myself; I despise my life" (Job 9:21).
- ✚ "My soul loathes my life; I will give free course to my complaint, I will speak in the bitterness of my soul. I will say to God: Do not condemn me. Show me why You contend with me" (Job 10:1-2).
- ❖ "I put on righteousness, and it clothed me. My justice was like a robe and a turban. I was eyes to the blind, and I was feet to the lame. I was a father to the poor, and I

searched out the case that I did not know. I broke the fangs of the wicked, and plucked the victim from his teeth” (Job 29:14-17).

- ❖ “But now they mock at me, men younger than I, whose fathers I disdained to put with the dogs of my flock” (Job 30:1).
- ❖ God asked the Devil about Job and witnessed for him, even before the Devil questioned about him
- ❖ God cares about everyone even before they are born, and He knows everything about them: “But the very hairs of your head are all numbered” (Matthew 10:30).
- ❖ He witnessed about him – God is proud of His children.
 - a) He “boasts” about them even in front of the devil.
 - b) He gets hurt when you do not care, and shame Him.
 - c) Do not shame God and allow the devil an opportunity to tell God that His Blood was not worth you.
- ❖ He allowed Job to be tempted to the fullest. He lost everything, even his health. But God always gives the medicine with the disease, and at the end – after Job waited for Him – He came through and restored him.

Job and the Devil

- ❖ Job was righteous as witness by God (Job 1:8), his wife (Job 2:9), and himself (Job 27:5), but the devil cannot witness that anyone is righteous.
- ❖ He sees nothing but evilness and excuses (Job 1:9-11).
- ❖ Satan judged that Job is unrighteous, though God witnessed otherwise.
- ❖ We sometimes do the same – Judge without knowing the whole story.
- ❖ Satan complained about Job because he was righteous – the more spiritual we get the more the devil attacks us.
- ❖ The devil did not leave Job alone, but tried to destroy him completely.
 - a) “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12).
 - b) “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8).
 - c) “Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat” (Luke 22:31).
- ❖ Job overcame Satan, not by studying the Law, but by his love:
 - a) He was righteous and loved God (Job 1:8).
 - b) He loved his family and taught them to love one another (Job 1:4).
 - c) He cared about their salvation and offered sacrifices for them (Job 1:5).
 - d) He loved and cared for the poor (Job 29:16).

- . His temptation was great because he lost everything

a) Possessions

- ❖ It would be easier to deal with the loss if we understand that we own nothing in this world, but we are just stewards for them, and that: “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there” (Job 1:21).
- ❖ “For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out” (1Timothy 6:7).

b) Children

- ❖ Our comfort is that they are not dead, but have departed.
- ❖ It is not proper for us to mourn like those with no hope: “But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope” (1Thessalonians 4:13).

1. That does not mean that we do not cry for Jesus himself wept over Lazarus (John 11:35).

2. We mourn their departure but are comforted in that we will meet them in the last day.

c) Bodily diseases

- ❖ We are comforted as Jesus is our true physician. The devil tried to make him doubt his faith in God “While he was still speaking, another also came and said: The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants, and consumed them; and I alone have escaped to tell you!” (Job 1:16).
- ❖ All the disasters seemed “natural” (Job 1:16-19).
- ❖ Has God forgotten Job and stopped watching over him?
- ❖ His wife was a “thorn”
- ❖ She was an “aid to evil” (St. Augustine).
- ❖ “Then his wife said to him: Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!” (Job 2:9).
- ❖ She considered death better than a life with temptation.
- ❖ Job rebuked her and corrected her (Job 2:10).

d) His friends, who came to comfort him:

“The devil used them to move him until he cursed the day of his birth” (Job 3:1).

IV. Human Comfort

His three friends heard of what happened and they came to comfort him.

Job used to bless God even in his temptation (Job 1:21), but they came and added to the temptation by their judgment and condemnation of Job.

Their words caused Job to:

- ❖ Talk about his righteousness.
- ❖ Blame God for the suffering of the righteous.
- ❖ Ask God to remove him from the earth.

Finally the conclusion: “Miserable comforters are you all” (Job 16:2).

- ❖ Their failure to comfort him: “And when they raised their eyes from afar, and did not recognize him, they lifted their voices and wept; and each one tore his robe and sprinkled dust on his head toward heaven” (Job 2:12).
- ❖ They had nothing to say, until Job cursed his day: “So they sat down with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his grief was very great” (Job 2:13).
- ❖ Their judgment to him: (1) They were righteous people, but they condemned Job of unrighteousness, and judged him falsely. (2) They came up with many correct conclusions about God’s judgment in general, but none of them were applicable to Job.

Conclusion:

God cares for our salvation. He may allow some tribulations to edify us and purify us but He never forsakes us.

Applications:

- ❖ Ask the students to read as much as they can from the book of Job during this week and prepare questions they have for next week.
- ❖ Ask one of the students to prepare to summarize today’s lesson for the rest of the class as a revision before next week’s continuation.

Week 3 - The Book of Job (II)

Objectives:

- ❖ To study the book of Job.
- ❖ To take example of the life of Job the righteous and his experience with God.

Memory Verse:

“Indeed, the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before” (Job 42:10).

References:

Job-The series of simplified knowledge

Introduction:

Review the previous lesson with the students. Check if any of the students read some of the book of Job during the week.

Lesson Outline:

I. The First Debate

Eliphaz the Temanite (Chapters 4 - 5)

- ❖ Was the eldest of the three friends.
- ❖ Was a good speaker, but his words offered no peace, but pain and sadness.
- ❖ The unrighteous suffer: “Remember now, who ever perished being innocent? Or where were the upright ever cut off?” (Job 4:7).
- ❖ Relied on his own personal experiences for this decision: “I have seen the foolish taking root, but suddenly I cursed his dwelling place” (Job 5:3).
- ❖ He did not pray for the foolish, but cursed him! Hence he failed to comfort others.
- ❖ Compare with Christ who did not show the faults of sinners, but rather had compassion upon them.
- ❖ He said harsh words concerning the sons of Job, forgetting how much Job cared about his children in prayers and sacrifices: His sons are far from safety. They are crushed in the gate, and there is no deliverer” (Job 5:4).
- ❖ At the end of his words he pronounced about the blessings of being chastened by the Lord (Job 5:17-26).

Job’s Response (Chapters 6 - 7)

- ❖ He felt the pain: “Oh, that my grief were fully weighed, and my calamity laid with it on the scales! For then it would be heavier than the sand of the sea; therefore my words have been rash” (Job 6:2-3).
- ❖ He asked for death, not because of its reward, but because it would be the end of his pains. Note: despite his pains and sufferings, and that he desired an end, he did not commit suicide, but still had hope.

- ❖ He rebuked his friends for not comforting him: “To him who is afflicted, kindness should be shown by his friend, even though he forsakes the fear of the Almighty. My brothers have dealt deceitfully like a brook, like the streams of the brooks that pass away” (Job 6:14-15).

Bildad the Shuhite (Chapter 8)

- ❖ His ideas were similar to those of Eliphaz, basing his decision on the experiences of the elders.
- ❖ His discussion, like Eliphaz, was correct, except that it did not apply to Job because he was righteous

Job’s Response (Chapters 9 - 10)

Job analyzes his state and realizes few things:

- ❖ God is all mighty (Job 9:4-14).
- ❖ He is amazed at the wisdom of God, who allows the righteous to suffer (Job 9: 22-23).
- ❖ He did not sin: “Though I were righteous, my own mouth would condemn me. Though I was blameless, it would prove me perverse. I am blameless, yet I do not know myself; I despise my life” (Job 9:20-21).
- ❖ He needs an intercessor (another verse about the intercession of the saints): “For He is not a man, as I am, that I may answer Him, and that we should go to court together. Nor is there any mediator between us, Who may lay His hand on us both” (Job 9:33).
- ❖ But He finds favor to stand before Him: “Your hands have made me and fashioned me, an intricate unity; yet You would destroy me” (Job 10:8-13).

Zophar the Naamathite (Chapter 11)

- ❖ He was the youngest and least ready to comfort anyone.
- ❖ He humiliated Job greatly and called him a liar and disrespectful person (Job 11:1-6).

Job’s Response (Chapters 12 – 24)

- ❖ Pointed their ignorance
- ❖ Did not go down to their level and tell them that he is wiser than they, but rather, that he is wise like them: “But I have understanding as well as you; I am not inferior to you. Indeed, who does not know such things as these?” (Job 12:3)
- ❖ Their silence is better: “But you forgers of lies, you are all worthless physicians. Oh, that you would be silent, and it would be your wisdom!” (Job 13:4-5)
- ❖ Blames himself (13:20-28).

II. The Second Debate

- ❖ Eliphaz: Showed his anger at Job.
- ❖ Bildad: Used every emotion of Job to make him bitter.
- ❖ Zophar: Attacked Job and concluded that he is an evil person.

III. The Third Debate

- ❖ Eliphaz: asks Job to return to God that he may receive goodness.
- ❖ Bildad: Man will not be justified before God.
- ❖ Job: Remembers his goodness prior to his temptation (Chapters 26-31)

- ❖ He helped the poor (Chapters 29:15-16, 31-32).
- ❖ Protected the innocent (Chapters 29:17).
- ❖ His purity (Chapters 31:1,9)
- ❖ His fairness to his servants (Chapters 31:13)
- ❖ Did not rely on his richness

Elihu, the wise youth

- ❖ This character appeared suddenly. We did not hear of/from him until all the elders have spoken but did not reach any solution.
- ❖ He was a patient person (Job 32:1-10).
- ❖ He rebuked Job for his self-righteousness (Job 32:2).
- ❖ He explained that salvation and righteousness are only acquired through One – Jesus (Job 33: 23-28).
- ❖ He spoke of the greatness of God, and that we can not understand Him (Job 37:5-17, 23-24).

Heavenly comfort

- ❖ God Speaks to Job
- ❖ After Job requested of God to explain to him his sins, God answered him
- ❖ God spoke in a strong tone: “Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said: “Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me” (Job 38:1-3).
- ❖ God revealed to Job that he is not “God” and pointed out his sin for him.
- ❖ He asked him if His judgment was right “Moreover the Lord answered Job, and said: Shall the one who contends with the Almighty correct Him? He who rebukes God, let him answer it” (Job 40:1-2).
- ❖ Lord “Would you indeed annul My judgment? Would you condemn Me that you may be justified?” (Job 40:8).
- ❖ Job could not answer: “Then Job answered the Lord and said: Behold, I am vile; What shall I answer You? I lay my hand over my mouth. Once I have spoken, but I will not answer; Yes, twice, but I will proceed no further” (Job 40:3-5).
- ❖ God showed and questioned him about the greatness of “His creation and asked him if he had anything to do with it” (Job 38-39).
- ❖ The Glory of the Creation (Job 38): Many concepts that scientists still do not understand until this day were mentioned by God to Job more than 4000 years ago.

Job’s Confession

After God questioned Job and showed him his weakness, Job confessed it. He confessed his foolishness (Job 42:3) and he repented (Job 42:6) “Then Job answered the Lord and said: “I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You. You asked, ‘Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge?’ Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. Listen, please, and let me speak: You said, ‘I will question you, and you shall answer Me.’ I have heard of

You by the hearing of the ear, But now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:1-6).

Conclusion:

Job’s Restoration.

- ❖ God restored Job’s dignity among his friends.
- ❖ He did not accept the prayers of his friends, except through the intercessions of job (Job 42:9).
- ❖ He restored his earthly possessions to him two-fold (Job 42:10).
- ❖ He restored his children (Job 42:13).
- ❖ He restored his health (Job 42:17).

Applications:

- ❖ Be thankful to God in all conditions, good and bad.
- ❖ Avoid judgmental words of others especially during their hardships.

Week 4 – Obedience, St. John the Short

Objectives:

- ❖ To learn the story of Abba John the Short.
- ❖ To analyze and assimilate his example of faith and obedience.
- ❖ To appreciate the blessings and fruits of obedience.

Memory Verse:

“And Samuel said: Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Surely, to obey is better than sacrifice” (1 Samuel 15:22).

References:

The Synaxarium

<http://www.lacopts.org/Synaxarium/Babah/JohnShort.htm>

Introduction:

Many teenagers resist obedience because they perceive this virtue as lack of freedom. They find it limiting restraining and conflicting with their own desires. Consequently, they resort to rebellious behavior, flaunting what they think is freedom by their disobedience of parents, elders, the Church, and sometimes God. The life of St. John the Short, who was only 18 when he started his monastic life, is an excellent example of the rich rewards of obedience in the life of youth.

Lesson Outline:

I. Entering the Monastic Life

Born in the Upper Egypt town of Tebsa, Abba John the Short and his brother were raised by God-fearing parents, financially poor but they accumulated spiritual wealth through faith and good works. At the age of 18, Abba John the Short was moved by the Holy Spirit to live in the wilderness of Shiheet. Here, Abba John yearned for the holy angelic garments of monasticism and thus sought out an experienced elder: Abba Ammoes of Sakha. Abba John offered Abba Ammoes a “metania”, asking Abba Ammoes to live with him in the wilderness. Abba Ammoes wished to test Abba John and so said to him, “O, my son, it is not right for you to dwell here, for this is a toilsome desert where the inhabitants work with their hands and sleep on the ground. They have many fasts and prayers and great tribulations. Why don’t you return to the world and live well?” To this Abba John replied, “If God wills, O, my father, do not turn me away, for I came to live in obedience to you and under the shadow of your prayers. If you don’t accept me now, I hope that the Lord will incline your heart towards me.”

Abba Ammoes, who never made a hasty decision, took time to ask the Lord Christ to clarify the matter of John to him. Thus an angel of the Lord appeared to him, saying, “The Lord says unto you, ‘Accept this brother for he will be chosen unto us.’” With this answer, Abba Ammoes went to John and shaved his head; he took the monastic garments and prayed over them for three days and three nights. After this, the angel of the Lord appeared again and

sealed the garments for Abba John's use. Thus Abba John began a life of great asceticism and holy works.

II. His Perseverance

One day, Abba Ammoes decided to give Abba John another test, so he kicked out Abba John, saying, "I cannot live with you." Abba John stayed seven days in front of the door, showing his loyalty without anger or violent reaction. Each day Abba Ammoes would go out and hit John with a reed and Abba John would offer Ammoes the metania. On the seventh day of this trial period, Abba Ammoes, while in church, saw a vision of seven angels holding seven crowns destined for the head of Abba John. With this sign, Abba Ammoes took Abba John back to live with him in mutual honor and reverence.

III. The Tree of Obedience

After some time, Abba Ammoes found a dry branch and gave it to Abba John, saying, "Take this and water it." Abba John, of course, obeyed by watering the branch every day, which entailed a 12-mile journey to the water and 12 miles again back home. After three years of persistent watering, the branch grew and became a fruiting tree. So Abba Ammoes picked some of the fruit and took it to other elders, saying, "Take, eat from the fruit of obedience."

Later, Abba Ammoes was sick for 12 years and Abba John served him in submission, never complaining. On his death bed, Abba Ammoes gathered the elders and took John's hand, and prayed and said: "take care of this one for he is an angel and not human." He commanded Abba John to live by the fruiting tree and then passed away.

After his years of obedience to Abba Ammoes, Abba John was blessed with the discipleship of his own elder brother, who had become a monk, and was appointed a hegumen over the church. During his ordination, while the patriarch was laying his hands upon John's head, a voice from heaven was heard by all, saying, "worthy, worthy, worthy;" and at every liturgy, Abba John was able to perceive who was worthy of receiving communion and who was not worthy.

Meanwhile, Abba Theophilus the Patriarch had built a church for three youth in Alexandria, and he requested Abba John to bring the bodies of the three youth from Babel of the Chaldeans. After many days, John went out as requested, but a cloud came and carried him away, showing him from its aerial view the city of Babel with its rivers, castles, and the bodies of the three saintly youth lying beside the body of King Nebuchadnezzar. A voice came from the bodies, informing Abba John that the three youth would not leave their graves until the Day of Judgment. However, he was to prepare the unlit torches of the church, leaving them without flame, in order that the youth could demonstrate God's power. Thus when Abba John returned to Abba Theophilus, the two filled the torches of the church without lighting them, and the torches were set ablaze by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Later in his life, Abba John was resting in his cell; a brother entered and saw angels hovering over him in his sleep, each saying, "let me place my wings over him."

After this, the Barbarians invaded to the wilderness of Shiheet so Abba John left for the mountain of St. Anthony at Klyasma -- not out of fear but, as he said, "lest a Barbarian comes to kill me [and go] to hell on my account, I do not want to be at peace and another in torture on my account. For if he is not like me at worship, he is my brother in the human image."

IV. His Departure

Thus Abba John lived on the suburbs of a town, alone except for a faithful, God-fearing servant. When the end of his life neared, according to God's will, God sent his pure saints Abba Macarius the Great and Abba Anthony to comfort John and inform him of his coming departure. Abba John fell ill and sent his servant for an errand in town; it was a Sunday night. Then angels and saints gathered to receive the soul of the blessed Abba John, ascending with him into the Heavens. And when the servant returned, he saw the soul of the saint surrounded by the congregation of saints and angels, singing, in front of Abba John; and before them all was one like the sun, praising God. The servant was, of course, astonished, so an angel came to him and told him the name of each saint, pointing at each with his finger. The servant said to the angel, "who is that one in front who shines like the sun?" So the angel replied, "That is St. Anthony, father of all monks." When the servant arrived at the cell, he found Abba John prostrate. The servant mourned greatly and hurried into the city to tell the townspeople who came and carried Abba John with great honor, witnessing many miracles by the power ' of his body. The monks buried Abba John the Short, leaving his soul free to receive all who seek his aid.

Conclusion:

Faith and obedience are inseparable. Each one leads to the other and neither can exist alone in a true Christian.

Applications:

- ❖ Search the Old Testament for other example of obedience.
- ❖ Practice complete obedience at home for the coming week.
- ❖ Record the results of that week of obedience in a spiritual diary.

LESSONS FOR THE MONTH OF NOVEMBER

- Week 1-** St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians
- Week 2-** Yourself: Know it - Accept It - Sacrifice It
- Week 3-** A Study of the Acts of the Apostles (I)
- Week 4-** A Study of the Acts of the Apostles (II)

Week 1 - St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians

Objective:

- ❖ To train the students to study the Holy Bible and to benefit from the word of God in their everyday life.

Memory Verse:

“Rejoice in the Lord Always. Again I will say rejoice” (Philippians 4:4)

References:

- ❖ The new open study Bible-King James version
- ❖ The Epistle to the Philippians by Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty

Introduction:

The servant gives the students a chance to discuss the unity, difficulties, and how to achieve unity of spirit in a falling world in which each individual seeks his/her own interest.

Discuss the difference between joy and amusement and jesting, which is a prevailing phenomenon in this age.

Lesson Outline:

The Location and Events of Philippi

- ❖ How did Christianity come to this city? St. Paul had a vision in which he saw a man of Macedonia standing and begging him. “Come over to Macedonia and help us” (Acts 16:9-12).
- ❖ The slave girl who had the evil spirit in her that made her guesses the future.
- ❖ Lydia who was a seller of purple goods was one of the first believers in Europe.
- ❖ Paul was sent to prison. The jailer was about to commit suicide but Paul prevented him from killing himself. What must I do to be saved? Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved - you and your family.
- ❖ The Philippians loved St. Paul. They sent him presents and gifts when he was in prison.
- ❖ The epistle was written in Rome when he was in prison in 64 A.D.

Why the Epistle Was Written?

- ❖ To tell them about his personal circumstances.
- ❖ To thank God for their love for him and to show his joy with them.
- ❖ To tell them that he would send them Epaphroditus who was very sick and who almost died. He wanted to send him to them so that they would be glad again when they saw him. He promised to send them his disciple Timothy.

I. The Attributes (Characteristics) of the Epistle

Love and great joy - although St. Paul was in prison, his love for Christ filled his heart and the joy of the spirit surpassed his pains.

II. The Main Items of the Epistle**Greeting and cordial longing to see them**

His imprisonment was for the benefit of preaching the word of God as the brothers doubled his efforts in preaching the Gospel. Others thought that their activity would annoy St. Paul when he was in prison but he declared that he is interested in the service not in himself.

The issue of life and death (Chapter 1)

“For to me to live in Christ, and to die is gain - My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better”. Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that you stand firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel and not frightened in anything by your opponents “For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in Him but also suffer for His sake”.

Unity of spirit and mind

This can be achieved as explained by the epistle:

- ❖ Christ should be the goal of each Christian.
- ❖ The members of the church should be Christians, not only in name but also in action.
- ❖ The Holy Spirit should work in them.
- ❖ They have to live in the spirit of fellowship and impartiality.
- ❖ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.
- ❖ The meekness of Christ should be a model to be followed and His obedience to His Father till he was hung on the cross should be a practical example for all believers.

III. The Most Important Challenges to the Unity of the Spirit

Pride - selfishness - love for praise - self-glorification and the love of appearance.

Desire for leadership.

Selfishness, self-centeredness and self-love.

Personal goals and personal interests other than the glory of Christ.

The apostle showed - in his epistle - that the most important ties of the life of the unity and fellowship are (Chapter 2):

- ❖ Preaching Christ and salvation.
- ❖ Giving comfort and sympathy through love, tenderness and gentleness.
- ❖ Fellowship of the Spirit.
- ❖ Showing mercy to the weak, those who failed, and those who keep away from the church, sinners and the needy.
- ❖ One mind and one goal (refer to what St. Paul said about the unity of the church and how this resembles the unity of the members of the body. Also refer to what the Lord said about the believers as branches in one vine).

IV. The Christian Joy

(Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice)

Christianity is the religion of spiritual joy- She knows - no anxiety- no fear- no pain.

Christianity is the religion of salvation and salvation is joy. She is the religion of heavenly beings. She soars with the soul to the Cherubim and Seraphim and shares the heavenly hosts their encouragement.

The church of the Apostles is a church of joy in spite of severe persecution. The Acts of the Apostles says: "And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit".

V. How to Develop the Spirit of Joy in Our Life?

Liberation from sin (The joy of Salvation).

Trust in the promises of God and faith with complete submission.

The unity of fellowship with the believers.

Singing hymns of praise: rejoice, be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, and live in peace and the God of love and peace shall be with you (2 Corinthians 13:11).

VI. What Weakens the Life of Joy?

Enslavement to sin (David wet his bed by his tears after his fall).

Being upset by life circumstances.

Selfishness and self-centeredness.

Testing and indifference that are the signs of separation and invert suffering and repentance.

VII. Characteristics of Christian Joy

Spiritual.

Innate- it fills the heart with peace.

Firm and fixed- well established (Your Joy no man can take it from you).

Calm-reverent- like St. Mary's joy with the good news.

It overcomes afflictions and cases "When the cases of my Heart are many, they consolations cheer my soul".

Conclusion:

As Christians we should always be joyful and fill others with the same joy inside us.

Applications:

- ❖ The servant gives the students a copy of the New Testament to study the epistle during the remainder of the week, chapter-by-chapter, concentrating on the spiritual contemplation and practical application.
- ❖ The servant gives some questions of the Epistle such as:
 1. What do you know about the city of Philippi, the church of Philippi and the coming of Christianity to that city?

2. Which Christian attitudes did Paul explain about the Problem of Life and Death and in this he was defying the opinions of materialists and non-believers?
3. Of what importance is the unity of mind in the church and how can it be achieved?
4. What is the meaning of the lived gospel and what differentiates it from Christianity by name?
5. What are the Characteristics of the Christian joy and what distinguishes it from the people's jesting?
6. How can we live in the perpetual spiritual test?
7. What was the Paul's attitude towards the following subjects: pain in the life of a believer- the model of obedience and meekness set before the believers- the ties of unity and fellowship among believers.
8. Choose the verses that have affected you the most and write spiritual contemplation about them.

Week 2 - Yourself: Know it - Accept it - Sacrifice it

Objective:

- ❖ To show the value of the self in the light of Christ.

Memory Verse:

“For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are God’s” (1Corinthians 6:20)

Introduction:

- ❖ Give some questions about how students define the self.
- ❖ The teenage period is a critical period when the youth become aware of the self especially the bodily looks. It is also a time where the dislikes about the self start to become their focus and they do enormous efforts to improve on their looks. Therefore it is important to refocus and appropriately exam ourselves.

Lesson Outline:

I. Know Yourself

Seeing ourselves as we are in reality and truth is a matter of great importance. This is difficult as the world falsifies the self in the eyes of man. The family, school, friends as well as social and mental powers make man in alienation from himself. Therefore, the Greek philosopher said “Know yourself”. However, it is impossible for a man to know himself by self-examination, self-knowledge, self-perception and self-awareness. It is impossible for a man to have true practical real honest perception without perceiving God, as the Lord who created the self (soul) in His image and after His likeness, calmness, solitude and eternity. Man may go deep into his innate life to find out the beauty of his soul and the beauty of his talents. He can also perceive the ugliness of sin and how it deforms the godliness and purity of the soul. When man has a true knowledge of himself, the virtue of true lowliness became easy to apply, as the natural man is liable to fall in the temptation of the right or the left- the temptation of pride and boasting- the temptation of inferiority and despising the self.

Man’s self-knowledge is not only a psychological demand; it is also a spiritual demand. It is not knowledge that comes through the mind and the mental model only but it is a test that is guided by the spirit, the mind and also inspiration.

II. Accept Yourself

The most difficult matter in the spiritual and psychological life is for man to accept himself after he knows it very well. As the image we have of ourselves gives us an unreal idea about ourselves so if we face ourselves with their reality we become upset and confused. That is why a man of the world keeps away from the prayer room and the confession seat. He also keeps away from the calm constructive criticism. He finds comfort in the friends who praise him and means of amusement and luxury that keep him away from his roots and depths. Some people may argue saying that if we accept ourselves as they are, all the struggles will collapse,

as when we accept ourselves we feel comfort. The answer to this argument is that we need a powerful incentive to make progress beginning from the real and progressing to the wider horizon. If man does not accept himself, he cannot accept others as they are. He lives in his self-enslavement. He is annoyed with those who oppose him and keep him away from those who do not agree with him. This is the reason behind the absence of unity among many people and this is the reason of failed marriage.

If the Lord accepts us as we are, why don't we accept people as they are? If the Lord alone is able to change others, why do we rebel against the people around us and demand that they should be like us? In this, St. Paul the Apostle says: "Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God" (Romans 15:7).

This acceptance does not mean refraining from guidance, education, advice and instruction. These spiritual and educational process cannot be achieved and their goal cannot be attained unless man welcomes those who direct and guide him. For Christ our Lord adopted our issue and bore our sin till death and grant us instruction and a way of life.

III. Sacrifice Yourself

Self-sacrifice means submitting your life to God and forgetting about our fears, our longings and the schemes for the future.

Self-sacrifice is perpetual submission to the will of God in the events that occur around Him and also yielding completely to the Divine Plan.

Self-sacrifice means offering the whole being to God, throwing oneself in the paternal bosom and forgetting about anxiety, fear or confusion.

Psychologist found that there is complete development, integration and achievement of the aims of life in self-sacrifice. The Lord called every soul that wants to offer earnest worship to desert everything to possess the real existence and the original being.

Self-sacrifice is not practiced by words but by living and suffering the real situations of life.

When we pray, we show contribution before the Lord and attain the power of sacrifice and the mystery of love.

When we work, we forgive others their weakness – we do not envy or grudge – we do not ask for what is theirs.

In times of afflictions and pain, we offer thanks and show forbearance as an evidence of absolute submission.

In this way the self melts in the Divine crucible to become as beautiful as the moon, as the sun, or terrible as an army with banners.

Conclusion:

The believer enters into his own depths to know himself and accepts it as it is with its powers and weaknesses, and then he offers himself to the Lord to purify him so that he may be able to sacrifice, love and give.

Thus the Divine words became true: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ Who lives in me."

Applications:

- ❖ Examine yourself to discover your weaknesses and talents.
- ❖ Offer true repentance before your confessor and be sure of forgiveness and Divine acceptance after confessing and receiving the Holy Communion.
- ❖ Practice the works of sacrifice, giving and service with the spirit of meekness and lowliness as an echo of God's love for us, so that God's purpose is achieved in our life.

Week 3 - A Study of the Acts of the Apostles (I)

Objective:

To learn from the strength of the early church.

Memory Verse:

“You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (Acts 1:8)

References:

- ❖ The Acts of the Apostles.
- ❖ “The Acts of the Apostles” - Fr. Anstassi Safeek.
- ❖ “The church in the age of the Apostles” - Anba Youannis.
- ❖ “Studies in the Acts of the Apostles” - Anba Athanasius.

Introduction:

The New Testament includes the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles and the epistles. The Gospels give the events of the Lord’s life in the flesh till He ascended to Heaven. The Acts of the Apostles give the events of the early church after the Lord’s ascension and the pouring of the Holy Spirit on the believers.

In the Gospels, the Lord is in the flesh and in the Book of Acts the Lord is in the people. In the Gospels, we see Christ and in the Book of Acts we see Christianity. That is why it is called the Acts of the Holy Spirit or the Gospel of the Holy Spirit.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Book and the Writer

This book gives us the image of the early church from all its different aspects. We see how Jerusalem was, the circumstances it faced and the spread of the church in different countries as well as the types of success and obstacles she faced. We also see the life of the fathers the Apostles and how they behaved, served and bore witness. It is the model and the history, the measure and the image of the life flowing from the spring of the Holy Spirit, who poured on the apostles on the day of Pentecost. By His power they traveled around the world preaching the Gospel, and although the world severely resisted them, they won victory over the world with the help of the Spirit that abode in them.

The writer of the book is St. Luke who wrote it after writing his Gospel. His purpose is to complete the story he started in his gospel as he said when he began his gospel: “In as much as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which are most surely believed among us” (Luke 1:1-4). Similarly, he began the Acts of the Apostles by saying, “The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen (Acts 1:1-2) by former he refers to his gospel.

One person then wrote the two books, St. Luke, to a man named Theophilus and the second book complete the story that began in the first book. The early church confirmed this.

The characteristics of the style of writing in the two books, the gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts, are identical as the two books address the Jews and the gentiles.

II. The Characteristics of the Book

Before the Lord's ascension, He said to His disciples "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

This book deals really with the story of the spread of Christianity by the apostles bearing witness starting from Jerusalem then spreading through Judea, Samaria, Syria, Asia Minor, Greece and at last Rome, which was the capital of the world at that time.

The Lord said to His disciples: "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father" (John 14:12). This book tells us how they spoke in tongues, cured the sick people, healed the paralyzed and raised the dead (Acts 8:7).

The Lord Christ warned His disciples about the price they will have to pay by saying: "But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues" (Matthew 10:17). Also "And you will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles" (Matthew 10:18).

II. Witness of St. John Chrysostom to the Book

This book shows the apostles' great wisdom and spiritual lowliness that made their service fruitful among those who heard them. The book also shows the high spiritual state of the apostles that was the result of the effectiveness of the Holy Spirit. They were filled with virtues. They did not show any envy or mean desire and they lived a lowly life full of love and tolerance.

III. It is the Only Book with no Ending in the Holy Bible

The story ends with the arrival of St. Paul to Rome and the Spirit does not end the story with the word "Amen" as usual, and we find ourselves before an incomplete book. The book began on Pentecost day and it is still open as the word and the church exists, so that all the people everywhere can bear witness to the Lord Christ.

IV. The Church Prior to the Coming of the Holy Spirit

The apostles struggled and were gathered to pray when the Holy Spirit came upon them. We also have to struggle to receive the talents through prayer, vigil and fasting.

During that time the apostles chose the twelfth disciple to replace Judas.

V. The Church in Jerusalem (The Life Of The Early Church Acts 2:2-47)

A. People were persistent in doing four things

- ❖ The teachings of the apostles: i.e. meetings were held so that the people might listen to the words of the apostles.
- ❖ Communion: The sacrament of the Holy Communion "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the Body of Christ?" (1 Corinthians 10:16)
- ❖ The breaking of bread: i.e. they eat food together and show a spirit of love.
- ❖ They were persistent in prayers.

B. Christianity spreads

Through preaching as the case was on the day of Pentecost and other occasions.

Through the good treatment and the good example; “Having favor with all the people”.

C. The life of voluntary poverty

Many believers fulfilled the law of perfection. They sold their property and possessions and gave the money to the apostles to spend it on the needy.

D. The Choice of the seven deacons

They were known to be full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom and they were put in charge of the various domains of social and spiritual service. One of them was Stephen the first deacon and martyr.

VI. The Church in Judea and Samaria**A. The persecution**

Persecution began by arresting the two apostles Peter and John, and then they were set free after receiving orders not to speak in the name of Christ. When the miracles increased in number and the power of the church spread, the pagan priests became annoyed and arrested some of them (Acts 5:17-18) but the Lord’s angel opened the prison gates and let them out and they stood in the temple and started teaching the pagan priests.

B. The stoning of Stephen

When the Christians increased in number, the leaders of the Jews bribed some men to say that they heard them speaking against Moses and against God (Acts 6:11). So Stephen was arrested and judged before the council and stoned (Acts 7:58).

C. Saul’s persecution

Saul was persecuting the church and houses, binding men and taking women to prison so all the believers scattered in Jerusalem. Saul carried letters to Damascus to bring all who went there, back to Jerusalem so that the Jews might judge them.

VII. The Gospel is Preached Outside Jerusalem (to the Samaritans)

The Samaritans were originally the Jews of the ten tribes that formed the kingdom of Israel, but in the 8th Century B.C. Sargon came from Assyria and captured many of them and settled other peoples in their place (2 Kings 17:24). In this way the Jews mingled with the Babylonians and the beliefs were mingled and confused, so the Jews despised the Samaritans and considered them strangers. They refused to let them take part in any activity such as the rebuilding of the temple. The Samaritans asked Ezra to allow them to take part in the work, but he refused (Ezra 4:1,2). They refused to speak with them and it was dangerous for the Jews to travel from Judea in the South to the Province of Galilee because they had to pass through Samaria but Christ visited their country and preached them (John 4) and healed their sick.

Preaching the Samaritans is considered a middle stage between the Preaching of the Jews and the Gentiles (the nations).

VIII. Saul’s faith

The Lord appeared to Saul, called him, and asked him why he persecuted Him.

Then the Lord told him to go to Ananias, and Saul went silently. He could not see and when Ananias placed his hands on him, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes and he was able to see again.

Then he preached in the Synagogues of Damascus preaching the Gentiles.

After the Samaritans received the faith, the apostles hesitated in preaching the Gentiles, but the Lord revealed His desire to accept the Gentiles through two unique events.

IX. The Vision of the Large Sheet

When Cornelius wanted to see the Lord, the Lord sent an angel to him and the angel said: "Now send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter" (Acts 10:5).

The large sheet was lowered by its four corners to the earth (Acts 10:5-7). In it were all kinds of animals, reptiles, and wild birds... "And a voice spoke to him again the second time: What God has cleansed you must not call common" (Acts 10:15).

When St. Peter met Cornelius and told him the story, the apostle taught them about the Lord of glory.

Then, the Lord gave him a very clear sign that was the Holy Spirit coming down on all those listening to Him without baptism or laying of hands. We have never heard, in the New Testament that the Holy Spirit has fallen down upon anyone except in this event alone. This was to drive St. Peter to baptize the Gentiles. The other apostles criticized St. Peter for what he did and said to him, "You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them" (Acts 11:2,3). However, ST. Peter convinced them that this was the will of God.

Conclusion:

God continued to work through the Holy Spirit in the church during the early church era as evident in all the events in the book of Acts.

Application:

The students should read the remaining chapters in the book of Acts to participate actively in this study next week.

Week 4 - A Study of the Acts of the Apostles (II)

Preaching the Gentiles

Objective:

- ❖ To know how Christianity spread
- ❖ To understand the remainder of the Book of Acts

Memory Verse:

“You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samiria and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8)

Lesson Outline:

I. Paul the Apostle sent to the Gentiles

St. Paul was wise in his service. In Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13:15-53) he began his words by reading the Old Testament and when the Jews refused to receive faith and they said evil things about him, he directed his words to the Gentiles and won them at once (Acts 13:46-49).

On his first missionary journey he tolerated the following:

- ❖ He ran away from Damascus by being lowered in a basket.
- ❖ The people of Jerusalem were stirred up against him and he ran away from them.
- ❖ He traveled everywhere and faced the troubles of the roads.
- ❖ He was driven out to Antioch in Pisidia.
- ❖ He ran away from Iconium.
- ❖ He was stoned at Lystra.
- ❖ He was sick during this period and said: “It was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first”.

II. The first missionary journey of St. Paul among the Gentiles

Acts 13 and 14 describe the first journey to Cyprus and Asia Minor.

In Cyprus

When they arrived at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the Synagogues.

They went to Paphos the capital and preached there. Bar-Jesus (Elymas the magician) resisted them and St. Paul made him blind.

In Asia Minor

In Perga: a city in Pamphylia, John and Mark left them when he wanted to go to Galatia.

In Antioch: in Syria, they preached in the Synagogue two Saturdays because the officials of the Synagogue sent them a message: “Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it”. When the Jews left the Synagogue, the Gentiles asked them to preach them the following Sabbath so the Jews were filled with jealousy and severely disputed what St. Paul said.

In Iconium: they preached in the Synagogue and the Jews and the fanatic Gentiles were stirred up against them and these people tried to stone them but they were able to escape.

In Lystra: they met Timothy who believed in Christ and received faith. They healed the man who had been lame from birth. The crowds thought they were gods and they gave Barnabas the name Zeus and Paul, the name Hermes. St. Paul taught the crowds about Christ so they stopped offering sacrifices to them.

In Derbe: many received the faith and the two apostles were not persecuted there.

III. The Trip to Antioch and Macedonia

They went back passing through all the countries where they had preached the word of God. They appointed priests in each city and they returned via Antioch in Pisidia then sailed to Antioch in Syria without going through Cyprus “And when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles” (Act 14:27).

Paul later visited four churches of Galatia; Derbe, Lystra, Iconium and Antioch. He took Timothy with him from Lystra, so the three apostles Paul, Silas and Timothy walked together. They tried to preach the word in Ephesus and the other cities of Asia, but the Spirit did not allow them. They wanted to go north to Bithynia but the Spirit did not allow them. At night, St. Paul had a vision in which he saw a Macedonian standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” So they got ready to leave for Europe and the first city they preached in, was:

Philippi in Macedonia

A great deed was fulfilled in Philippi the capital of Macedonia and the birthplace of St. Luke: The conversion of Lydia, the casting out of the evil spirit, they were thrown into jail, and the jailer was converted (Acts 16:12-40).

In Thessalonica

St. Paul held discussions with the people during their Sabbaths, and then the governor compelled them to leave the city. Although St. Paul stayed in the city about twenty days, yet the church grew quickly (Acts 17:1-8).

In Berea

The service was successful in Berea. Some Jews from Thessalonica came to stir people up. St. Paul fled to Athens and Timothy and Silas left him.

In Athens

St. Paul did not intend to preach in Athens but he was waiting for Timothy and Silas to tell him that the Jews of Thessalonica did not object to his going back to the city.

St. Paul was greatly upset when he noticed how the city was full of idols. So he held discussions in the Synagogues and the Public Squares. Later, the philosophers took St. Paul and brought him before the city council, Areopagus.

In Corinth

He had two principles in his service in Corinth.

a) After the failure, he met in Athens, where he preached the word starting by a philosophical point. He decided to preach the word of God and to forget everything except Jesus Christ and

especially his death on the cross. Although some people found it hard to believe, yet he insisted on following this method of preaching.

b) He decided to work to gain a living lest anyone should think that he had an aim of benefiting from preaching. He spent one and a half year in Corinth with Priscilla and Aquila who were makers of the tents like him.

In Cenchrea

He had his head shaved. In Ephesus: He preached to a few Jews and left Priscilla and Aquila. He sailed from Ephesus to Caesarea and left Priscilla and Aquila.

IV. The Third Missionary Journey

Paul left Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus where he preached very few people. On his way back he visited the churches of Galatia and Phrygia and strengthened the believers and the disciples.

In Ephesus

Apollos the Jew had been in Ephesus and Priscilla and Aquila preached him. Apollos went to Corinth but St. Paul served the Jewish believers who received the baptism of John, and then he served all the Jews in the Synagogue. The word of the Lord kept spreading and growing stronger. Faith drove the believers to burn their pagan books the price of which was 50,000 pieces of silver.

St. Paul the apostle spent three years there but Demetrius who made silver models of temples and idols stirred the people against him.

During his stay in Ephesus he faced many troubles. At that time he was gathering some money from the churches of the gentiles to send it to the poor people of Jerusalem. But sad news came to him; the churches of Galatia and Corinth deviated from the right way. He was greatly sad. It is possible that he had written his letters to the people of Galatia and Corinth at that time.

In Macedonia

He visited the church

In Achaia

He went to Achaia, South of Greece and he was compelled to go back to Macedonia because the Jews were plotting against him.

In Troas

He preached by night. The young man sitting by a window listening to St. Paul's preaching fell down from the third floor and St. Paul went down and threw himself on him held him and healed him.

The return to Jerusalem

The whole group sailed from Troas to Jerusalem. On their way to Jerusalem they visited many churches. He greeted them all and advised them to stick to the word of God. He knew that they would never see him again (Acts 20:25).

Note: The servant should read this farewell letter as it has a deep spiritual pastoral effect and convey it to your students.

In Jerusalem

The apostle gave the money he had to the church. The Jews arrested him and wanted to kill him but the Lord delivered him.

Note: Contemplate how the Lord made use of Lysias to save St. Paul.

St. Paul was judged by Felix the governor and king Agrippa.

V. The Journey to Rome

St. Paul was about to be declared innocent but he appealed to Caesar. St. Paul longed to visit Rome (Acts 19:21). The Lord had appeared to him and told him that he would visit Rome (Acts 23:11).

VI. The Last Journey

The Acts of the Apostles does not describe the life of St. Paul when he lived in prison or after the prison, but we know about his life from the epistles that he wrote in those days. We know that after he was set free from the prison of Rome, he went on preaching and he had two places to go to visit; Spain and the churches he had preached in Nicopolis. He was arrested and brought back to Rome where he received the crown of martyrdom by cutting his head off. The blessing of the prayers of our fathers the apostles be with us. Amen.

Conclusion:

St Paul submitted to the will of the Lord in everything. This attribute accompanied the apostle from the First moment the Lord revealed Himself to him. We have to bear in mind that Saul, even before he was converted to Christianity, he walked in the fear of God “I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers did, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day” (2 Timothy 1:3).

Applications:

- ❖ The servant can use the map of the Mediterranean Sea to study St. Paul’s journey and to concentrate on the spiritual aspects of his service.
- ❖ The students can make a model of the route of each journey to be displayed in the church museum and to be used in explaining lessons.
- ❖ The students should study the verses and the situations that prove that the church of the apostles was a church of Truth, Straightforward, Spiritual Joy, Persecution, Growth, Worship and Prayer. It was a church that is lit by the Holy Spirit, a church of fellowship and paternal love.
- ❖ The servant displays the film of the Acts of the Apostles from the Audio-visual Center and explains the struggle of our father the apostles for the service of the See.

This study should stimulate the spirit of the apostolic jealousy in the young people for serving the souls that need preaching and spiritual work.

LESSONS FOR THE MONTH OF DECEMBER

- Week 1-** The Hymn of Victory
- Week 2-** St. Macarius the Great
- Week 3-** The Nativity of Christ and My Birth
- Week 4-** Daniel

Week 1 - The Hymn of Victory The Song of Moses the Prophet

Objective:

- ❖ Songs of praise are deeply rooted in the structure of man and in the church.

Memory Verse:

“I will bless the Lord at all time; His praise shall continually be in my mouth” (Psalm 34:1)

References:

- ❖ Exodus 15, Revelation 15:3.
- ❖ The annual Psalmody - The book of daily Songs of praise and the Hourly psalms.
- ❖ The Book of “The Spirituality of the Song of Praise”.
- ❖ The rituals of the prayers of Apocalypse.

Introduction:

Praise and singing is an inherent nature of man. Man is the only creature that can talk and has the ability to sing. Man should use this unique gift that God has given him for the glorification and praise of God.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Song of Moses

When Pharaoh got his war chariots and his army ready, and set out to pursue the Israelites, the Egyptian army, with all the horses, chariots and drivers pursued them and caught up with them as they were camped by the Red Sea (Exodus Chapter 14).

The Lord of Glory made the Israelites cross the Red Sea before that powerful Divine work, the people of Israel expressed their feelings by this lovely song of praise. They praised the Lord by these wonderful inspired words.

They expressed their delight in the victory and happiness for salvation and the feeling of the work of God, His power and His victory. They thanked the Lord and glorified Him.

That is why the church ranks this song as the first song to be sung during the Eve of the Holy Saturday (The Apocalypse). In this she ensures and declares that the victory has been achieved and salvation has been completed and humanity has crossed from the life of slavery to the freedom of the children of God. It is not crossing the sea but crossing with Christ- Glory be to Him - with His death, His cross, resurrection and Ascension. So this song of victory is sung although Christ is still in the tomb and the church has not celebrated the resurrection yet.

To feel the work of God and His power and stage to praise them

Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord and said: “I will sing to the Lord, for He Has triumphed Gloriously...” This song is composed of stanzas and verses which all speak about the work of God. By this song they remember the power and salvation the Lord granted them and the defeat of Pharaoh and all his soldiers. The one who has sung this song feels the

delight of the people of Israel. Blessed is the soul that always feels the work of God and feels His great favor. This soul will sing to Him remembering His power, day and night in thanksgiving, in praise, in joy of the heart when we face the problems and troubles of life.

II. Singing Songs of Praise with The Spirit of The Congregation

Then Moses and the Israelites sang... the entire congregation sang... the work of God was not declared to one person but the whole congregation glorified the Lord. One cannot be aware of the work of God or perceive His power or attain His Salvation except through the whole congregation. So public songs of praise are clear response to the will of God and they indicate the achievement of His Holy will in humanity and the completion of God's purpose in man. In this spirit man enters into a state of pure worship of God. In the worship the Lord gives His glory, power and salvation and man receives the gift of the Lord with the spirit of thanksgiving, singing songs of praise, with great joy.

So the Lord begins the initiative of love and giving. This Divine love demands that we should enjoy it and enter into a fellowship of love and response with Him.

III. Between the Congregation of Israel and the Lord's congregation in the New Testament

All the events and rituals of the Old Testament were symbols of life so the holy congregation or the congregation of the New Testament (the church) assimilated these events and offered them as a life of Divine fellowship. They have been enlightened by the right of the Lord declared in the New Testament, and filled by the Holy Spirit so that it may affect the soul. The Israelite congregation offered this song to the Lord and at the head of that choir was Prophet Moses himself.

Hence we realize the mystery of the songs of praise sung in the church. These are not mere words or tunes offered to the Lord. They are a life of fellowship, where Christ is the head of the church and the Holy Spirit unites the hearts of individuals with the deep unity of love with the head. The tune comes out in harmony and expresses the mystical unity of work represented in this song of praise (the sacrifice of hymns).

IV. The Shout of Victory - the Song of Victory and Salvation

The people of Israel were able to increase the victory they won by this joyful song. It was like the shout of victory that shook all parts of the wilderness and it was a symbol of the salvation that the Lord made for His people. In the spiritual reality we find that the shout of victory leads the soul joyfully in the way of God as much contemplation in the weakness of man and his perpetual failure and the lack in his potentialities and his inability which hamper the spiritual way. But the sound spiritual position lies in perpetual contemplation in the power of the Lord and His victory and his salvation - and sticking to them as a Divine right granted to man by God.

"The Lord is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation. He is my God, and I will praise Him; my father's God, and I will exalt Him... Your right hand, O Lord, has become glorious in power; Your right hand, O Lord, has dashed the enemy in pieces and in the greatness of Your excellence You have overthrown those who rose against You. You sent forth Your wrath, which consumed them like stubble. How wonderful if we stick to the power of God - we move calmly and with simplicity from power to power - we change from glory to glory - from human inability to the great power of God" (Exodus 15:2-7).

V. Sing Joyfully to God Who Saves the Soul from Self-Righteousness

One of the most dangerous things that afflict man is self-righteousness or to feel that what you have got of victories or achieved of progress or virtues is the outcome of its innate powers. Here man steals the glory of God and falsifies facts. Read (Revelation 3:17). Here we see the necessity of singing songs of praise to the Lord as a Divine ritual that secures the soul against the most dangerous enemy that deprives her of all the blessings of salvation and the everlasting life.

The man who is used to singing songs of praise in the church with congregation of the Lord feels that his faith in the work of the Lord, his victory and salvation increases every day. The feeling of self-weakness and inability also increases. This is the continuity of spiritual development. Read Luke 9:23-24.

VI. Human Harmony to the Worship of God

Then Miriam, the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and dancing and Miriam sang to them, “Sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously.” This is the soul’s most beautiful expression when she goes out in harmony to sing to the Lord.

Conclusion:

Singing to the Lord expresses the extent of harmony, which was the outcome of the spirit of praising the Lord in both the congregation and the individual. This is God’s purpose for humanity to be harmonious and to unite in one body, i.e. the body of the Lord Himself then all the people goes out to sing to the Lord Perpetual joy. At that moment man perceives his real existence in the Lord and the dimensions of real life in Jesus Christ and the great work he is called for which is praising the Lord and he perceives also the beauty of the Lord (The fairest of the sons of men) and he enjoys his love, his power and perpetual peace. The most dangerous thing that afflicts the soul is her inner division in the worship of the Lord and the inner structure being torn hence the importance of praising the Lord with joy to unite man to glorify God “Unite my heart to fear Your Name”.

Applications:

- ❖ The students of the class should form a choir for praise and they should practice this worship with the spirit of joy, and harmony among the group.
- ❖ The students express all these experiences using all means of expression (prayer - drawing – magazines, etc.)
- ❖ The Servant and his students read part of the Book of “The Daily Songs of Praise” and the hourly prayers and to also contemplate together the spiritual subjects on singing to the Lord.

Week 2 - St. Macarius the Great

Objective:

- ❖ Do not judge others.
- ❖ Have the strength to withstand false accusations.

Memory verse:

“God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6)

References:

- ❖ Coptic Synaxarium
- ❖ The Book of Saints - St. George and St. Joseph Church, Montreal, Canada
- ❖ The Sayings of the Desert Fathers - Benedicta Ward

Introduction:

During the liturgy the priest mentions in the Commemoration of Saints “the three saints Abba Macarii” (plural for Macarius) these are St. Macarius the Great, St. Macarius of Alexandria and St. Macarius Bishop of Jerusalem.

St. Macarius the Great was called so because he was “the father of the monks” and to differentiate him from his contemporary St. Macarius of Alexandria. Just as St. Antony started monasticism in the Eastern desert (east of the Nile), St. Macarius started it in the Western Desert, which is called Scetis, in the Valley of Nitria.

Lesson Outline:

St. Macarius was born in the village of Shabsheer - Menuf around the year 300 AD. He worked in transporting goods using camels, between Alexandria and the Valley of Nitria. One night while the caravan was resting, a Cherub appeared to him as a ball of light and told him that God would give him and his children this desert to dwell in it and fill it with prayers. He added that out of the wilderness fathers and righteous people would come. This Cherub became the companion of Abba Macarius for the rest of his life.

Abba Macarius started a life of solitude in a cell near his village. He stayed there for ten years. The people of the village saw his chastity and purity; they took him to the Bishop of Ashmoun to ordain him a priest for them. They built a place for him to stay outside the village and they went to him for confession and to partake of the Holy Mysteries. They appointed a servant to take care of his needs and sell for him the work of his hands (he wove baskets and mats from palm leaves).

At that time a certain girl in the village became pregnant out of wedlock. She accused Abba Macarius of being the father of her child. When her family heard that, they went to him, insulted him, beat him severely, and inflicting much pain on him, which he endured silently. St. Macarius said to himself “Behold now you have a wife and a child, and it is necessary for you to work day and night for your own food and for that of your child and wife”. He worked continually at weaving mats and baskets, and he gave them to the man who ministered unto him; he sold them and gave the money to the woman. When the day of her delivery drew near,

her labor was exceedingly difficult. She continued to suffer for four days and did not deliver until she confessed her false accusation against the saint and named the true father of her child. The fury of the people turned into admiration for the saint's humility and patience. Now the whole village was coming to apologize to him. So, he escaped the esteem of men and fled to the place where he would live the rest of his life. That was the reason why he came to Scetis in the Valley of Nitria. He was then about thirty years old. Abba Macarius dwelt in the Inner Desert, in the place known now as the Monastery of El-Baramous.

Abba Macarius thought one day that the world had no more righteous people. God revealed to him that he had not attained the perfection of two women who were married to two brothers, who lived in Alexandria. Abba Macarius took his staff and provisions and went to visit them. When he entered, they welcomed him, and washed his feet. When he asked them about their life, they said: "There is no kinship between us and when we married these two brothers we asked them to leave us as nuns but they refused. So we committed ourselves to spend our life fasting till evening and we pray diligently. When each of us had a son, whenever one of them cries, any one of us would carry and nurse him even if he is not her own son. We are in one living arrangement, the unity in opinion is our model, and our husbands work as shepherds. We are poor and only have our daily bread and what is left over we give to the poor and needy". When the saint heard these words he cried saying: "Indeed God looks to the readiness of the heart and grant the grace of His Holy Spirit for all those who wish to worship him".

Abba Macarius was much influenced by St. Antony and visited him several times. He departed in peace in 390 AD. Our Coptic Church celebrates his departure on the 27th of Baramhat.

It was mentioned that Abba Babnuda, his disciple saw the soul of St. Macarius ascending to heaven, and he heard the devils crying out and calling after him: "You have conquered us O Macarius". The saint replied, "I have not conquered you yet". When they came to the gates of heaven, they cried again saying; "You have conquered us" and he replied as the first time. When he entered the gate of heaven they cried; "You have overcome us O Macarius" he replied: "Blessed be the Lord Jesus Christ who has delivered me from your hands."

I. From the Sayings of St. Macarius

❖ St Macarius delivered his instructions to his disciples in few words, and recommended silence, retirement and continual prayers, specially the last to all sort of people. He used to say "In prayer you need not use many or lofty words. You can often repeat with a sincere heart, Lord show me mercy as You know best". Or, "O God come to my assistance".

❖ A young man asked St. Macarius for spiritual advice, he directed him to go to a burying place and reproach the dead and after that to go and flatter them. When he returned the saint asked him what answer the dead had made. "None at all" said the other "Neither to reproaches or praises". Then replied St. Macarius, "Go and learn neither to be moved by abuse nor by flattery. If you die to the world and to yourself you will begin to live to Christ."

❖ Abba Paphnotius the disciple of Abba Macarius said, "I asked my father to say a word to me and he replied: Do no evil to anyone, and do not judge anyone. Observe this and you will be saved".

Conclusion:

Abba Macarius is a pillar in the history of monasticism in Egypt. He filled the desert with monks and prayers. The Monastery of Paramous still exists in Egypt until now with large number of monks

Applications:

- ❖ Find more of the sayings of Abba Macarius the great and share them with us next week.
- ❖ Memorize at least one of the sayings of Abba Macarius.

Week 3 - The Nativity of Christ and My Birth

Objectives:

The afflictions of Nativity in our life.

Memory Verse:

“To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, To guide our feet into the way of peace” (Luke 1:79)

References:

- ❖ Contemplation on Nativity - H.H. Pope Shenouda III
- ❖ Quotations from the Feasts - Anba Bemin
- ❖ The Blessings of the divine Incarnation - Anba Gregory
- ❖ With the babe of the Manger - Anba Moussa
- ❖ The Treasures of Grace - Arch Deacon Banoub Abdu
- ❖ Incarnated and became Man - Dr. Ragheb Abdel Nor

Introduction:

- ❖ Review the previous lesson with the students
- ❖ Ask them what does the Nativity of Christ mean to them? How does it affect their life?

Lesson Outline:

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth and all what we see in them and saw that all what He did was very good. Then He created Adam in His image and after His likeness. Adam lived in peace with God till he fell with the temptation of the Serpent and all human beings were sent to exile. Adam was driven out of Paradise.

I. I Am a Descendent of Adam

The wage of sin is death because we are all descendants of Adam, as sin came into the world through the man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned (Romans 5:12). The nature of man became wicked and signs of wickedness appeared.

Pride: Adam wanted to be equal to God in recognizing evil and good by himself and his descendants bore the same thoughts.

Disobedience: Adam disobeyed the commandment of God. He ate of the forbidden tree- All Adam's children did the same- the people of God disobeyed God- in times immemorial in the wilderness.

Weakness and Degradation: Adam began the fall from the time he accepted to negotiate with the devil- David is an example.

Hatred: It is natural that if my relation with God (The All Love) becomes corrupt and separates from Him, now can I love my brothers- Look and contemplate how Cain killed his brother.

The Bad Model: The fall of the first Adam was a bad example to all his children so the whole world corrupted. There was only one family that was the family of Noah the Righteous.

II. The Nativity of Christ and the New Nature

The Word took flesh and became Man to renew my birth and to reform what the devil corrupted to reconcile the heavenly with those on earth. He granted us all these blessings and grace.

Meekness

The Lord emptied Himself and took the form of a servant. He was born in a manger to give us back what we lost through the pride pushed into our hearts by the devil.

Obedience

The Lord said: "I delight to do thy will, O my God; the law is within my heart" (Psalm 40:8). In the Biography of St. John the short we hear of the tree of obedience.

Power

The Power of the Lord Christ in the days of His incarnation appeared when He faced the devil on the mount of Temptation.

Rising up

The Lord descended from heaven and took flesh so it was necessary that He would ascend to heaven again after His resurrection so that He might raise the hearts of His children to heaven where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God (Matthew 8:46).

Love

Greater love has no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends (John 15:13). With Love and through Love our fathers the martyrs offered their life to that who loved them.

The good model

With the Incarnation of the Word we have the example of the good model: "Learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart" (Matthew 11:29).

Conclusion:

Sayings of the Fathers:

- ❖ God is not information to be studied or history to be recorded but He is the One to meet and the life to be lived and a companion to live with (Yacoub Al Sinrougi).
- ❖ Today the seal of Godhead stamps the nature of humanity so that men may decorate themselves with the nature of Godhead (Mar Aphram the Syrian).

Applications:

To develop the talents of my new nature by singing to the Lord, music, drawing, struggle through meek behavior- obedience- love- good model.

Week 4 - Daniel

Objective:

- ❖ To learn about the personality of Daniel.
- ❖ To learn from the example of Daniel as a spiritual youth in a foreign land.

- ❖ To learn about the prophecies of Daniel.

Memory Verse:

“And among them all none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah” (Daniel 1:19).

References:

- ❖ The new open Bible: Daniel 1-12; Matthew 24:15; Mark 13:14; Hebrews 11:33-34.
- ❖ Daniel – Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty.

Introduction:

I. The Meaning of the Name: “God is my Judge”

Family Background: Daniel was of noble, if not royal, blood (Daniel 1:3). We know nothing of his parents, only that Daniel was of the tribe of Judah. (Daniel 1:6). At about age 20, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, took Daniel to Babylon. Daniel was young, but had wisdom beyond his years. His aptitude was high in all subjects, especially science. Daniel had a spotless character. He was referred to three times as, “the greatly beloved one”, in Daniel 9:23, 10:11 and 19.

Lesson Outline:

Daniel was indeed a prophetic statesman in his day. Jeremiah was a contemporary of Daniel in his later ministry. Daniel pondered the words of Jeremiah 25:8-13, concerning the 70 years of captivity (see Daniel 9:2). Daniel, then Ezekiel – both Jews and both prophets – were taken to captivity. They were the prophets of God during their captivity. Even though Daniel was in captivity, there was “a note of birth, and breeding, and aristocracy about his whole character.”

What did the Old Testament say about Daniel?

Prophecy fulfilled

The prophecy of the 70 years of captivity of Judah was foretold by Jeremiah 25:8-13 (notice verse 11) and compare to Daniel 9:2 and II Chronicles 36:21. Daniel was taken in the first deportation to Babylon in the third year of king Jehoiakim of Judah (Daniel 1:1). His deportation was completed in the fourth year (Jeremiah 25:1).

Descendants of Hezekiah

Isaiah prophesied that the sons that shall issue from you whom you will beget shall they take away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon (Isaiah 39:5-7).

Hebrews names changed

Four Hebrews including Daniel, who met the qualifications of Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 1:3) were placed under the master of eunuchs who changed their Hebrew names. The purpose in changing their names to Babylonian names was to wear them away from their land, their faith in the Lord God and get them to adopt the habits and religion of Babylon. Please notice the difference in their original names and their new names (Daniel 1:7).

1. Daniel: “God is my Judge” → Beltshazzer: “Whom Baal favors”
2. Hananiah: “Beloved of the Lord” → Shadrach: “Illuminated by the sun god”

3. Mishaël: “Who is as God” → Mesach: “Who is Ishtar”
4. Azariah: “The Lord is my help” → Abd-Nego: “Slave of god of wisdom”

God’s representative in Babylon

What Daniel said, by the inspiration of God, as prophecy, was different from all other prophets. Prophets, such as Isaiah & Jeremiah, were to go to the people and proclaim the word of the Lord. Daniel was to record what was revealed to him through visions (Daniel 12:4,9).

The miracles and prophecies of Daniel

We are not able to go into verse-by-verse study during this lesson but we will only point out some of the miraculous prophecies of Daniel.

Daniel and the three Hebrews refused to defile themselves by eating the king’s meat and wine. They ate only bread and water and appeared fairer and fatter than the others (Daniel 1:5-16). What was the outcome (Daniel 1:17-20)?

The meaning of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (Daniel 2): The king had a dream, which was the summation of the entire course of the “times of the gentiles”. None of the astrologers and magicians could interpret the dream. They sent for Daniel. Daniel and his three companions prayed (Daniel 2:17-18). God answered and revealed the meaning of the dream to Daniel in a night vision (Daniel 2:19-22). Daniel gave a testimony of the power of God to the king (Daniel 2:28). Notice, “what shall be in the latter days” (Daniel 2:29) and what shall come to pass hereafter. Said twice, then Daniel set forth the meaning of the dream. He names the world powers from Babylon on the kingdom of heaven pictured in the dream as the coming of the “stone cut out without hands, which is Jesus Christ coming in the days of the ten kings, (Daniel 2: 44-45), a miracle of God.

Daniel’s Vision (Daniel 7): We go to Daniel 7 where the Lord reveals to Daniel in a dream vision, a message concerning same world powers. This was God’s way of writing prophecy. All these world powers have come and have fallen. The prophecy of man of sin (Daniel 7:24) and the prophecy of the kingdom of God is again emphasized (Daniel 7:27).

Daniel interprets the tree vision of the king (Daniel 4): The dream of the king was one to be interpreted by Daniel. It could have spelled doom for Daniel, but he was faithful to the Lord. He had to tell Nebuchadnezzar that God still ruled over men and nations (Daniel 4:17). Underline the king’s description in Daniel 4:17 and Daniel’s interpretation of the same words at verse 25 and 32).

Belshazzar and the handwriting on the wall (Daniel 5): The grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, witnessed God’s handwriting on the wall. Daniel witnessed to the power of God and told the meaning of the writing (Daniel 5:25-28), that night Belshazzar was killed and Darius took the kingdom (Daniel 30-31).

Daniel in the Lion’s Den (Daniel 6): Here we notice how Darius acknowledged God (Daniel 6:7, 26).

The meaning of 70 weeks (Daniel 4): What was prophesied and what has come to pass is a miracle. The prophecies describe Israel in the latter days (Daniel 10-12). They speak of the glory of God and what God said to Daniel (Daniel 10:14). They were a vision and a prophecy. Daniel was able to declare the word of the Lord and interpret the future from Darius to the man of sin yet to come.

What the New Testament Says About Daniel:

The Lord Jesus spoke of Daniel in Matthew 24:15.

Jesus referred to Daniel 9:27 and 11:31 in that verse.

St. Paul describes the man of sin in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 and Hebrews 11:33- 34 (three Hebrews in fire).

Conclusion:

- ❖ Daniel was taken to Babylon at about 19 or 20 years of age. He lived there through the third year of Cyrus. He must have lived there no less than 72 years. It could have been longer. All of his life, he spoke of God in a land of captivity.
- ❖ The secret of Daniel's victorious life is prayer.
- ❖ All that God told Daniel to say came to pass except what is yet to come to pass.
- ❖ Daniel was a man whom God could use to outline the ages to come.
- ❖ If Jesus authenticated the words of Daniel, we should never doubt his prophecy.
- ❖ In Daniel 4:17, 25 and 32, we see the declaration of God to be true.

Applications:

- ❖ Practice prayer as a source of strength to every youth like Daniel.
- ❖ Practice fasting as Daniel and the three young men did and became better in appearance than all the other eunuchs.

LESSONS FOR THE MONTH OF JANUARY

- Week 1-** Patrology (Study of the Early Church Fathers)
- Week 2-** God Reveal Himself (Epiphany or Theophany)
- Week 3-** Joshua (I) - Life Of Practical Faith
- Week 4-** Joshua (II) - Crossing the Jordan

Week 1 – Patrology (Study of the Early Church Fathers)

Objective:

To understand the value of patrology in our church

To know the sources of patrology in the church

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:

- ❖ Studies in the fathers of the church by a monk from the wilderness of Anba Macarius the Great

Introduction

- ❖ The Orthodox faith consider only three sources for its teaching:
 - Bible
 - Fathers
 - Tradition
- ❖ The early church fathers helped keeping these teachings without any change or alterations.

Lesson Outline:

II. The Place of the Fathers

It has always been the custom, and still is, to prove the true faith in two ways; first by the authority of the Divine Canon, and second by the tradition of the Universal Church. The Canon alone does not of itself suffice for every question. Also, interpreting the divine words according to their own persuasion, take up various erroneous opinions. Therefore, it is necessary that the interpretation of divine Scripture should be ruled according to the one standard of the Church's belief, especially in those articles on which the foundations of all doctrine rest (St. Vincent of Lerins).

In contrast, Sola Scriptura is a protestant doctrine meaning that the Bible is sufficient in and of itself.

III. The Mind of the Orthodox Church

Universal opinion of the Church

Commonly accepted practice of the Church

IV. Enlightenment vs. Inspiration

- ❖ Scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit
- 1) Infallible

❖ Fathers were enlightened and passed on their enlightenment to us

- 1) Occasionally differing opinions
- 2) When all are agreed—dogma, tradition

V. Extent of Fathers' Writings

Ante-Nicene, Nicene, Post-Nicene Fathers

- 1) 38 volumes
- 2) Books
- 3) Internet
- 4) CD's

Additional Works

❖ Wisdom of the Desert Fathers

- 1) St. Anthony the Great
- 2) St. Isaac the Syrian
- 3) St. Isidore
- 4) St. Shenouda
- 5) Abba Poemen

VI. Ecumenical Councils

❖ Ecumenical vs. Local Council

- (1) First local council--Jerusalem

❖ Oriental Orthodox

- (1) Nicene (AD 325)
- (2) Constantinople (AD 381)
- (3) Ephesus (AD 431)

❖ Eastern/Byzantine Orthodox

- (1) Chalcedon (AD 451)
- (2) Constantinople II (AD 553)
- (3) Constantinople III (AD 680)
- (4) Nicene II (AD 787)

VII. St. Athanasius the Apostolic

Born in Alexandria around AD 300.

Attended the famous School of Alexandria.

Sought the wisdom and discipleship of St. Anthony at the age of twenty.

- 1) Stayed with him for three years
- 2) They prayed and worked diligently together
- 3) Wove baskets together
- 4) While St. Anthony would meditate St. Athanasius would write
- 5) Wrote two books, considered masterpieces:

- ❖ On the Vanity of Idols
- ❖ On the Existence of the One God

Athanasius would write the entire day and would read his writings at the feet of his teacher at the end of the day. St. Anthony would listen, enraptured by his writings. It was during this time that Athanasius gathered his first hand information for his famous book, *The Life of St. Anthony*, which touched the hearts of so many and transformed their lives, among them St. Augustine returned to Alexandria at the age of 23.

Key spokesperson in refuting Arius (theory known as Arianism)

- (1) Arius was a priest
- (2) He denied the Divinity of Christ

St. Athanasius attended the Ecumenical Council of Nicene in AD 325

- (1) Was a deacon
- (2) Was only 25 years old
- (3) Heroically defended the apostolic faith
- (4) Was hated by the Arians from that time forth

Upon departure of Pope Alexandros, who prophesied that his successor would be Athanasius, all the bishops and the congregation chose Athanasius as the 20th Pope of the See of St. Mark.

Arians pursued Athanasius incessantly, causing him all kinds of trouble and difficulty throughout his life.

He was exiled once and spent his entire papacy fleeing from the Arians and 4 emperors.

When told the whole world was against him, he responded “And I am against the world”.

After his departure, the Universal Church bestowed upon him the title of “Apostolic”.

It was said that the entire world would have fallen to Arianism, if it was not for Athanasius.

Famous works:

- (1) On the Incarnation of the Word
- (2) The Life of St. Anthony
- (3) Numerous Paschal Letters
- (4) Defense Against the Arians and History of Arianism

VIII. St. Augustine of Hippo

Born in Tagaste on November 13, 354 AD.

Father was pagan.

Mother was St. Monica, a pious Christian.

Lived a life of pleasure in the tempting city of Carthage.

Had a carnal (pre-martial) relationship, which led to the birth of a son at the age of 18.

Attached himself to the various heresies of the day.

St. Monica deplored his heresy and would not permit him in her home or at her table.

Continued in heresy for nine years.

Met St. Ambrose and began to accept the truth of Christianity.

Was baptized at the age of 33.

Sought Christian perfection

Sold his goods and gave the proceeds to the poor.

Withdrew from the city with some friends and lived a life of poverty, prayer, and the study of Scripture

Ordained a priest in AD 391 at the age of 37.

Eventually was ordained a bishop at the age of 42.

Considered as one of the most prolific writers of Christianity

1) Extensive interpretations of Scripture

2) Confessions

3) City of God

IX. St. John Chrysostom

Born in Antioch in AD 347.

Father died when John was very young; mother raised him and his sister.

Studied to be a lawyer.

Was influenced by Bishop Meletius.

Began to seek an ascetic Christian life; devoted himself to prayer, manual labor, and the study of Scripture.

Was ordained a reader.

Sought to live as a monk in the caves near Antioch for two years.

Returned to Antioch due to poor health from his intense vigils and fasting.

About AD 381 he was ordained a deacon and in AD 386 a priest.

Preached for the next 12 years consecutive explanations of Scripture.

Was ordained a Bishop and Patriarch of Constantinople.

Conclusion:

The life and writings of the fathers is a great source of spiritual inspiration for all of us. Their example is a light and a guide to many youth.

Applications:

- ❖ Search the internet for a story of the life of another father of the church to share with the class next week
- ❖ Search for a favorite saying from the fathers of the church to memorize.

Week 2 - God Reveals Himself (Epiphany or Theophany)

Objective:

The Spiritual illumination and to be acquainted with the new birth and spiritual illumination.

Memory Verse:

“You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased” (Luke 3:22)

References:

- ❖ The Spiritual values in the Mystery of Baptism - Anba Gregory
- ❖ The second birth of water and spirit: St. George Church, Sporting
- ❖ Quotations from the feasts: Kamal Habib
- ❖ The Feasts of Epiphany: Fr. Matta Al-Messkin
- ❖ The Treasures of Grace: Archdeacon Banoub Abdu

Introduction:

While preaching the word, the Lord Christ met a man who was blind since his birth. This man could not enjoy the grace of sight except after the Lord met him and rubbed his eyes with mud.

He ordered him to wash his face in the pool of Siloam as well as all the people who lost their spiritual sight and their heavenly illumination.

I. In Olden Times

“God did not leave Himself without a witness” Acts 14:17

Melchizedek (Genesis 14)

King of Salem ... who gave light in the middle of the Old Testament. He gave a glimpse of the light of Christ... The Levitical Priesthood appeared later then Christ came, a priest in the priestly order of Melchizedek (Psalms 11:4).

Jacob’s Stairway (Genesis 28)

Jacob saw a stairway when he ran away from the face of his brother and that was a symbol of Christ (John 1:51).

The Appearance of Light

This light appeared on the cover of the Ark of Covenant between the Cherubim to announce the presence of God

Finally, John the Baptist came

He came as an angel to get the Lord’s road ready for Him (Matthew 3:1). In the fullness of time, the Lord revealed Himself in a wonderful way. The heaven was opened and the Father revealed Himself and spoke to the Son and the Holy Spirit appeared like a dove.

II. The Complete Revelation

Finally, the Lord made His appearance known. The glimpses of the Old Testament paved the way for this divine appearance. The brightness of this appearance increased during the Lord's preaching (John 17:3) in the event of the Transfiguration on the mountain.

III. The Opened Heaven

✠ Heaven was opened on the day of the Theophany declaring the end of the age of shadows, symbols and darkness and the beginning of the new age of true light.

✠ Since heaven was opened, it has never been closed but it remained open for the believers (Acts 7:26, Acts 10:11, 2 Corinthians 12).

The two revelations of Peter and Paul

✠ When heaven was opened, the Holy Spirit came down from it to dwell among men and to be the source of life and a basis of comfort and to accompany the believer all the days of his expatriation.

The Heavenly Testimony

"This is my beloved Son" with this, the Father declared His fatherhood to His Son; the Son through whom we have obtained sonship and covenants.

"With whom I am well pleased," thus the Father declares that His perfect delight is in His Son; this means that the Lord finds His delight in the life of His children ... the believers. He says: "My delight is with the sons of men" (Proverbs 8:31). Here we ask: My brother, have you been enlightened in your life? Have the lamps of your own heart been lit with the oil of delight?

The Illumination of Baptism

Without baptism, the heart of a believer cannot see light. St. Paul the apostle says: For it is impossible to restore again to repentance?" (Hebrews 4:2). Every believer has the right to be enlightened.

The Extension of Enlightenment (Illumination)

As soon as the believer receives the power of baptism, he starts practicing the Holy Sacraments of the church such as Chrism, Confession and Communion. He keeps practicing means of grace regularly to increase the extension of enlightenment.

IV. Notes for the Servant

The Servant can discuss some other topics with his students, such as:

The work of the Holy Trinity in our salvation.

Christ humbled Himself and obeyed the law whether in circumcision or in baptism to fulfill all righteousness.

The importance of baptism and the spiritual values that we receive when we practice this sacrament. The servant can read some quotations from the book of "Church Service" about baptism.

Conclusion:

The second birth through baptism is not repentance and change of thoughts as some denominations claim; but repentance is the extension of the work of baptism in us; the second birth is by water and spirit.

The Sayings of the Holy Fathers:

St. Cyril the Great: “The Souls of the baptized are enlightened by receiving the knowledge of God”.

St. Justin the Martyr: “This washing is called enlightenment because those who learn these matters are enlightened in their minds”

Applications:

- ❖ The quiet spiritual contemplation on the blessings of baptism that each one of us has received. Collecting situations and verses from the holy Bible where the Lord revealed Himself, from both the Old and New Testaments.
- ❖ The students study some rituals of baptism and their relationship with light such as the white clothes, the lit candles surrounding the baptized in the procession that takes place after baptism.

Week 3 - The Life of Joshua (I)

A Life of Practical Faith

Objective:

A study of the life of practical faith and giving a model for the spiritual leadership that lives on faith.

Memory Verse:

“As I was with Moses, so I will be with you” (Joshua 3:7)

References:

- ❖ The life of Joshua in the book of Exodus 17, 24
- ❖ The book of Numbers 11-28
- ❖ The book of Deuteronomy 31, 34
- ❖ The life of Joshua in the book of Hebrews 4:8
- ❖ The life of Joshua, Translated - Fr. Marcos Daoud

Introduction:

- ❖ Review with the students the previous lesson and verse
- ❖ Ask them what they know about Joshua and what they think of him

Lesson Outline:

I. The Life of Discipleship and the Call

Joshua was Moses' disciple and he received the life of faith from him.

In Exodus 17:8-11, Joshua picked out some men to go and fight the Amalekites. Moses and Aaron held up their hands as a symbol of a prayer, work and struggle.

In Exodus 24:13-17, Joshua went up with Moses on the Holy Mountain. The elders waited in the camp at the bottom of Mount Sinai. Moses went up on the Mountain and the cloud covered the mountains. The glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai. Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel.

When Moses entered the tent of meeting, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the door of the tent. And when all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the door of the tent, all the people would rise up and worship, every man at his tent door.

Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses turned again into the camp. His servant Joshua, son of Nun, a young man did not depart from the tent. He observed Moses and lived through his experiences and gradually God prepared him to be a leader on the hands of Moses.

II. Joshua Spies Out the Land Of Canaan

Joshua is a model of the life of faith

Moses sent one man from each tribe to spy the land. Moses called Caleb the Son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun and sent them to spy out the land of Canaan. He said to them, "Go up into the Negeb yonder, and go up into the hill country, and see what the land is."

The men returned from spying out the land that flowed with milk and honey. They brought some of the fruit of the land. Caleb said, "Let us go up at once and occupy the land, for we are well able to overcome it. Then the men who had gone up with him said: We are not able to go up against the people for they are stronger than we are. So they brought to the people of Israel an evil report of the land which they had spied out" (Numbers 13).

Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb rent their clothes and said to the people: "Do not rebel against the Lord, and do not fear the people of the land. If the Lord delights in us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land which flows with milk and honey". Then the anger of the Lord was kindled against the people of Israel. The Lord said to Moses; "Your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness; and of all you number, numbered from twenty years old and upward, who have murmured against me, not one shall come into the land which I swore that I will make you dwell, except Caleb, the son of Jephunneti and Joshua the son Nun" (Numbers 14).

Zeal not based on true knowledge

Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp, and Joshua the son of Nun, the minister of Moses, asked Moses to forbid them. But Moses said to him; "Are you jealous for my sake?"

Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put His spirit upon them!" (Numbers 11:28).

The zeal that is not based on knowledge is found in the sons of Zebedee when they asked Jesus to allow them to call fire down from Heaven to destroy the people of a village that refused to receive the Lord. It is the same zeal that drove Saul of Tarsus to persecute the meek Christians in the age of the apostles. It is the same zeal that makes fanatic people blind so that they do not like truth in spite of the enlightenment of the spirit inside them.

Joshua is chosen as a successor to Moses

And the Lord said to Moses; "Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay your hand upon him; cause him to stand before Eleazar, the priest and all the congregation, and inaugurate him in their sight. And you shall give some of your authority to him that all the congregation of the children may be obedient. He shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire before the Lord for him by the judgment of the Urim, at his word they shall go out, and at his word they shall come in, both he and all the children of Israel with him, the whole congregation.". And Moses did as the Lord commanded him; He took Joshua and sit him before Eleazar the priest and the whole congregation, and he laid his hands upon him, and commissioned him as the Lord directed through Moses" (Numbers 27).

Then Moses summoned Joshua, and said to him; "Be strong and of good courage; for you must go with this people to the land which the Lord has sworn to their fathers to give them; and you shall cause them to inherit it. And the Lord, He is the one who goes before you; He will be with you; He will not leave you or forsake you; do not fear or be dismayed" (Deuteronomy 31).

(We notice the greatness of submission and discipleship. It is also the style of the monastic life.).

And Joshua the son of Nun was filled of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands upon him; so the people of Israel obeyed him, and did as the Lord has commanded Moses. And there has not risen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face.

(Notice the importance of laying the hand - that was the way of blessing and sanctification in the Old Testament, and it is now the way of ordination of priests in the church, since the days of the apostles and till now. (Deuteronomy 34).

III. Rahab the Harlot

The Lords promise to Joshua; “As I was with Moses, so I will be with you, I will not fail you or forsake you. Be strong and of good courage”. (How lovely this promise is!) The support comes from the Lord, not from the self or the people. The Scriptures says about the apostles, “and those Jesus called...” Make sure your call, as a believer, is a true call to bear witness.

The Lord commanded him; “This book of the Law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it, for then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall have good success. (If you are called then you shall obey the commandment).

Orders for departure - Preparations for departure - spying out Jericho - The two spies came into the house of Rehab the Harlot - the woman believed; “I know that the Lord has given you the land... The Lord your God is He who is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.” She asked them to promise her that they would deliver her and her family from death when they took the town. The two spies promised to do so on the condition that she would not betray them. She hid them on the roof. Then she let them down by a rope through the window. They asked her to bind the scarlet cord in the window. (This is a symbol of the Redeemers blood that delivers from death).

Conclusion:

Joshua was a great disciple of Moses. He was chosen by God to lead the children of Israel to the promise land. He was submissive to God and God was with him supporting him to a great success.

Applications:

- ❖ Nowadays, young people need to study the dimensions of spiritual discipleship - So this topic should be discussed in the light of the word of God and the words of the Holy Fathers. What is the concept? Of what importance is it and what are its benefits? What are the dangers that may arise in case it is not there? (Those are without a teacher fall like the leaves in autumn). The limits of the teaching process in the domain of discipleship - dangers of emotional sticking to the teacher and the spiritual father - the danger of the fathers’ effect on and influence over his spiritual children... Is there any contrast between discipleship and the enlightenment we gain through the Holy unction that teaches us everything as the apostle says.

- ❖ The topic “ritual of laying hands” in the Old and New Testaments and its importance in the church and pastoral life can be studied.
- ❖ The topic “zeal” that is not based on true knowledge, its dimensions, how the spirit sanctifies it and changes it into a holy zeal, can also be studied.
- ❖ In the audio visual aids centers, there are films about the life of Joshua. These could be shown and explained. We can contemplate the important aspects of this personality. We can show a map of the places mentioned in the Book of Joshua.

Week 4 - The Life of Joshua (II)

Crossing the Jordan and Circumcision

Objective:

To show the effectiveness of faith in the life of the children of God.

Memory Verse:

“The book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night” (Joshua 1:8)

References:

- ❖ The life of Joshua in the book of Exodus 17, 24
- ❖ The book of Numbers 11-28
- ❖ The book of Deuteronomy 31, 34
- ❖ The life of Joshua in the book of Hebrews 4:8
- ❖ The life of Joshua, Translated - Fr. Marcos Daoud

Introduction:

- ❖ Review with the students the previous lesson to be able to continue with this study of the life of Joshua.
- ❖ Discuss the issue of “faith” whether in the life Joshua, the minister of Moses, of Rehab the Harlot, as an introduction to the importance of faith in crossing the Jordan is clearly focused in today’s lesson.

Lesson Outline:**I. Crossing the Jordan****Joshua chapter 3 is to be studied**

Notice the importance of sanctification before performing a task (Verse 5). This can be extended to the importance of preparation before attending the liturgy and receiving communion.

Notice that the priests only took up the Ark of the Covenant and passed on before the people.

Notice the importance of priesthood since the Old Testament.

II. The Encouraging Words of the Lord to Joshua

And the Lord said to Joshua, “This day I will begin to magnify you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with you” (Verse 7).

Notice also how a man was chosen from every tribe to cross the Jordan with the priests. (This is a good contemplation that indicates *the unity of the community* - the people and the clergymen - as all are one family and the children of the house God).

Contemplate *the wonderful sight* - the water flowing in the Jordan to the Dead Sea - stopped flowing and piled up. The flow down stream to the Dead Sea was completely cut off. The water was like a fence and the people were able to cross over near Jericho.

While the people walked across on dry land, the priests carrying the Lord's Ark of Covenant stood on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan until all the people had crossed over.

Notice a very important thing here - *The place* where the people of Israel crossed the Jordan is called Bethany - it is the same place where John the Baptist baptized the Lord Jesus in the Jordan. The real crossing is crossing from darkness to light and from enslavement of the flesh to the freedom of the Glory of the children of God. This is achieved through baptism and the second birth and entering the Kingdom of God.

One man from each tribe carries a stone - they put twelve stones in the house where they spent the night - each man carried a stone on his shoulder. The Lord said; "This may be a sign among you, when your children ask in times to come, what do those stones mean to you? Then you shall tell them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord; when it passed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off." (Joshua 4:7).

Study the meaning of the memorial and its importance. Connect this with the Manna and with the Holy of Holies, then remember the everlasting living memorial who is the True Manna laid on the altar, i.e. the Holy Body and the Holy Blood of the Son of God "Do this in remembrance of Me".

The people crossed the Jordan and the Ark of the Covenant also crossed the Jordan - The Lord honored Joshua in the eyes of his people the Israelites, so they feared him, as they had feared Moses all the days of his life "I honor those who honor Me". How great the spiritual men of God are!

III. Circumcision in Gilgal (Chapter 5)

The Lord said to Joshua, "Make flint knives and circumcise the people of Israel".

All the men who came out of Egypt were circumcised. These men died in the wilderness. But those who were born in the wilderness were not circumcised.

When circumcising of all the nation was completed, the Lord said to Joshua, "This day I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you. And so the name of that place is called Gilgal to this day". Study the issue of the circumcision and the Covenant between the Lord and Abraham (Genesis 7:9-14). Study also this issue in the epistle to the Romans and the attitude of Christianity to circumcision (Romans 2,3,4 and Galatians 6:11-17).

They kept the Passover and the Manna Ceased.

They kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month in the evening, in the plains of Jericho.

On the morning after the Passover, they ate of the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain "And the manna ceased on the morning, when they ate of the produce of the land".

IV. The Three Important Issues Studied in This Lesson

- ❖ The issue of faith.
- ❖ The issue of circumcision.

- ❖ The issue of the wonderful Divine plan and how the symbol is achieved by the appearance of the symbolized.

The issue of faith

This issue deals with the following dimensions, whatever the circumstances are:

What is faith? (Refer to Hebrews II): Faith means to believe in the Lord God and to follow His commandments.

What are the obstacles of faith? Fear - Stress - Depending on humans, material, mental and temporal measures.

The relationship between faith and works: Integration between the epistle to the Romans and the epistle to James.

Practical exercise that a young man needs, in this age of ours, where worldly materialistic needs are the focus. Young people need to practice the life of faith, without it we cannot please God.

The Circumcision

It was the sign of a covenant between the Lord and His people.

It was a sign in the flesh, standing for faith in the heart.

As time went by, people left the essence and concentrated on appearance. They neglected the content and concentrated on what appears in the flesh.

Study what Paul the apostle said in his epistle to the Romans: Of what use is circumcision then?

Also study the movement of going back to the Jewish traditions - Judaism - i.e. going back to the Jewish practices of the law of Moses - circumcision, etc. (see Romans and Galatians).

Nowadays males only are circumcised. The law forbids the circumcision of females. The purpose is not religious. Circumcision is practiced for sanitary purposes. By cutting off the loose skin covering the end of the male sex organ, the organ is kept clean and it decreases the possibility of having cancer in this area.

Notice that there are Christians only by name. They pride themselves in being Copts - children of Martyrs - but they are not their children by spirit. This is exactly what happened among the Jews in the days of Christ... Abraham is our father...we are circumcised on the 8th day.

Haw was Joshua a symbol of the Lord Jesus Christ

Young people can easily make this comparison. The following points are to be considered.

Joshua

Everyone respected him.

The Lord was with him.

He led the people to the Promise land.

He gave the memorial of crossing the Jordan for generations to come.

He circumcised the people to the promise land.

He made the Passover.

The Lord performed miraculous deeds by his hands, such as the fall of Jericho.

He saved Rahab the Harlot.

Jesus

He is the Lord Himself who is in the bosom of the Father.

He led the church from the valley of the shadow of death to the everlasting life.

He gave the memorial of His Holy Body and Blood.

He fulfilled circumcision through baptism and for our sake he was baptized in the Jordan.

He was the true Passover through whom we find salvation from sin.

He is the Lord who performs the miracles such as raising the dead, healing the sick, casting demons out and destroying their hidden fences and dark powers.

He is Jesus who came to save sinners and would find in him the everlasting salvation. (Isaiah 61:1).

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: Joshua (III)-Between Triumph and Defeat, Battles and Farewell

Week after Fast: Priesthood

Week Before Jonah's Fast – The Life of Joshua Between Triumph and Defeat

Objective:

- ❖ Triumph through faith.
- ❖ Death is the wage of sin.
- ❖ Sin causes man's destruction.

Memory Verse:

“Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you” (Joshua 3:5)

References:

- ❖ The Book of Joshua by Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty

Introduction:

Ask the students what they know about Joshua and what are his major achievements.

Lesson Outline:

1. Joshua meets the commanders of the army of the Lord

Notice the ways of the Lord and how He prepares a man when He chooses him to do a great deed. Everything works in wisdom and insight as Paul says in his letter to the Ephesians, Chapter 1.

Marching around the city (Chapter 6). Notice the number seven, which refers to the seven Sacraments; the seven seals; and the seven Spirits of God that have been sent throughout the whole earth (Chapter 5).

On the seventh day they marched around the city seven times and the walls of the city collapsed. They blew the trumpets and the people shouted (a miraculous deed).

Rahab the harlot was saved. The whole city was destroyed and no one was saved except Rahab the harlot and her family.

The city was burnt with fire but gold, silver, bronze and iron were taken and put in the Lord's treasury.

Contemplate the faith that surpasses the mind, logic and all the material measures. How can all the walls of a stony city collapse by simply marching round it and by shouting? The mystery of the power lies in the word of God.

But as man must do his best, here lies the importance of works with faith. We lift up the stone and Jesus raises Lazarus. We obey the commandment and God manages everything well for the good of those who love Him. We study hard and God will help us because we believe that our whole life is in the hands of God Who lead us in His victory procession.

The fact that the harlot was saved is a fact that comforts young people who have sinned. Out of a whole city no one was saved except Rahab. Thus, our merciful God accepts us when we repent and have a lively faith like that of Rahab, who believed the spies and hid them, although all circumstances were not in her favor and were against her concept of faith.

2. The Sin of Achan the son of Carmi

Joshua sent some men from Jericho to Ai, which was a small and weak city. But the Israelites were defeated. Joshua tore his clothes in grief and threw himself to the ground.

There are devoted things in the midst of you, O Israel, you cannot stand before your enemies until you take away the devoted things from among you.

Achan the son of Carmi confessed his sin (Chapter 7). All Israel stoned him. They burned him and his family with fire. Then the Lord turned from his burning anger.

Achan the son of Carmi is an important subject suitable for young people as when we hide sin in our hearts, God's anger is kindled. God does not hate us, but He hates sin, because it is hateful. Every one of us must search his heart till triumph occurs. The reason of the repeated fall is hiding sin or sticking to it and love for it and not taking a decisive attitude against the desires of the flesh.

3. Victory over Ai

Joshua laid an ambush of five thousand men. He deceived the King of Ai by pretending to flee so king Ai went out after the Israelites. The Israelites rose up from the ambush and set the city on fire. There was not a man left in Ai on a tree. Then they raised over his body a great heap of stones.

The victory that took place after defeat in Ai gives us comfort and encouragement, so long as we offer true repentance and build up an altar for the Lord in our hearts.

4. Honoring The Lord

An altar was built: Joshua read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the Book of the Law. There was not a word of all that Moses commanded which Joshua did not read before the assembly of Israel.

His Battles and His Farewell Address

1. The Gibeonites Deceives Joshua (Chapter 9)

This is an example of the wisdom of the people of the world.

Joshua made a treaty of friendship with the people of Gibeon and the leaders gave their solemn promise to keep the treaty then they learned that those people lived nearby.

Notice that Joshua kept his promise but he condemned them and made them slaves, to cut wood and carry water for the people of Israel.

2. Joshua gains victory over the five kings (Chapter 10)

The five kings, joined forces, surrounded Gibeon and attacked it because the people of Gibeon made a treaty of friendship with Israel.

The Lord said to Joshua, “Do not fear them, for I have given them into your hands.” The Lord threw them into a panic. The Israelites slaughtered them at Gibeon. The Lord made large hailstones fall down on them. More were killed by the hailstones than by the Israelites.

Joshua said, “Sun stand still over Gibeon, and moon in the valley of Aijalon.” And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed until the nation took vengeance on their enemies. There has been no day like it before or since, for the Lord fought for Israel.

The five kings escaped and hid themselves in a cave. They rolled a great stone against the mouth of the cave.

Then the five kings were found and brought out from the cave and were hung on five trees. Large stones were laid against the mouth of the cave where they were thrown in (the rest of Joshua’s victories are mentioned in Chapters 11 and 12 of the Book of Joshua).

3. Joshua’s farewell address (Chapter 23 and 24)

The servant should read these two chapters, as they are full of instructions and wonderful spiritual pieces of advice.

Be very steadfast to keep and do all that is written in the book of the Law of Moses, turning aside from it neither to the right-hand nor to the left.

He warned them not to mix with the pagans and not to marry foreign women (Chapter 23:12,13 and Chapter 24).

And now I am about to go the way of all the earth, and you know in your hearts and souls, all of you, that not one thing has failed of all the good things which the Lord your God promised concerning you, not one of them has failed (Connect this with what Paul the apostle said to the elders of Ephesus, Acts 20:17-27, and what he said to his disciple Timothy in his second epistle when the time of his death came).

“But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord”. A wonderful decision to live for the Lord, he and his house, even if all the people left him and served other gods.

Then the people answered, “Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord, to serve other gods; for it is the Lord our God who brought us and our fathers up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, and who did those great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed; and the Lord drove out before us, all the peoples therefore we also will serve the Lord, for he is our God.

The people promised and made a covenant to serve the Lord after Joshua’s death. Joshua set up a big stone to be a witness against them.

Joshua died at the age of a hundred and ten. He was buried in the hill country of Ephraim. As long as Joshua lived, the people of Israel served the Lord. The body of Joseph was buried at Shechem, in the piece of land that Joshua had bought.

Conclusion:

He and his house insisted on serving the Lord, whether the others did so or not (the spiritual

man desires his power from grace and the firm principles, not from people).

The more the individual believes in his message the more he becomes jealous for it and the more powerful his personality becomes. He leads and is not led. In this way, Joshua's personality gives young people a good model for practical application in their daily life.

Applications:

In this study of Joshua's character, we can study all the aspects in which Joshua was a symbol of the Lord Jesus and how the Lord achieved all these symbols in his life.

Young people can study aspects of championship in the personality of a faithful leader and the work of grace in this personality with concentration on the effectiveness of faith and the possibility that each one of us can lead such a life. We have more opportunities because of the gifts of the Spirit and the grace of the Eucharist.

Joshua's farewell address needs contemplation and practical application in our daily life. The most important benefits young people get from this address are:

- ❖ The life of faithfulness.
- ❖ To obey the commandment and to consult the Lord in everything.
- ❖ Beware of idols and foreign women (What are the idols of modern times to which young people are exposed?)

Week after Jonah's Fast - Priesthood

Objective:

- ❖ To know how to honor the clergymen in general and the priests in particular.
- ❖ It is also a call to benefit from the experience of the spiritual fathers, their fatherhood and guidance and to vacate the means of Grace and the fellowship of the church.

Memory Verse:

“ But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come” (Hebrews 9:11)

References:

- ❖ Didascalia - Fr. Saleeb Suryal
- ❖ The Precious Gems (Laa'le Al Nafessa) in explaining the rites and the beliefs of the church – Parts 1 and 2, Fr. Youhanna Salama
- ❖ The Seven Sacraments in lines and verses - Anba Moussa
- ❖ The rites of ordination from the Aghnustus to Kommos - Youssif Habib
- ❖ Interpretation of the Exodus - St. George Church - Sporting.

Introduction:

God Created Man to Inherit The Glories of His Kingdom

God created man to inherit the glories of his kingdom and made him the center of His care. He chose some men to be in charge of him and to convey to him the commands of the Lord and the secrets of His love, kingdom and worship. Those are the priests. In Hebrew a priest is called “Kohein” which means “Adopt and Teach” the will of God, his commandments about worship, virtue and faith. “For every priest taken from among men are appointed for men in things pertaining to God” (Hebrews 5:1).

Lesson Outline:

In the Old Testament: God Appointed Man for This Service

Examples of those men are the great fathers Adam, Job, Noah and Abraham.... Then He confined Priesthood to the tribe of Levi. When Korah and a number of the people of Israel sinned and transgressed, they became a deterrent example for all ages. In the Book of Leviticus, the tasks of the priests are listed as follows: bearing the iniquities (sins) - offering the sacrifices and the offerings in fulfillment of a vow to God - guiding people as to how to worship - to judge the people...

In the New Testament: The Lord Chose His Apostles and Disciples

He gave them the gift of the Holy Spirit saying to them, “And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them: Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22). “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (John 20:23). The Lord also made judges over people (Mathew 18:15-18) and gave them the

authority to bind and to loose - to loose man from all the ties of injustice and darkness (as the priest says in the Absolution).

V. Orders of Priesthood

Deaconry

Deacon (Sham' mass) is a Coptic and old Egyptian word. It is also a Syrian word and it means "Servant".

Deaconry has seven orders: Sacristan, Psalmist, Reader, Subdeacon, Deaconess, Deacon, and Archdeacon.

All these orders aim at organizing the worship and the service of the believers. (Acts 6).

Priesthood

It includes three orders.

Priest (Prosveteros), i.e. Intercessor.

Archpriest (Kommos or Heghomenos), i.e. Spiritual guide.

Curate (Khuri Episcopos), i.e. Bishop of villages.

Episcopacy includes the following orders.

The Bishop: means he who looks from above (who manages the church's affairs). He has the right to ordain Deacons, Priests and Archpriests.

The Metropolitan (Mutraan), i.e. the Bishop of a big city (Governorate).

Patriarch (Patri = Fathers and Arch = Boss or Head).

So the Patriarch is the father of the fathers the bishops. He may be called the Pope as in Egypt and Rome. The Patriarch was first given the name of "Pope of Egypt" since Pope Yaroclass (13th Pope of Alexandria), because of his deep patriarchalistic feelings and the people's love for him, and then the Romans used the title.

VI. Priest Ordination

The ordination of deacon and priest takes place during the Liturgy, after the prayer of reconciliation between God and the people (2 Corinthians 5:18) but those who receive the orders of "Episcopacy" receive them after reading the Acts of the apostles because they always continue their works as their successors (Acts 20:28). St. Paul recommended the ordination of the clergymen (Acts 14:13; 1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 2:2; Titus 1:5-9).

VII. Priesthood Service

The clergymen are ordained to serve the believers and in doing so they are like our great high priest who offered Himself for us, a sacrifice of love for us. The clergymen then are servants and agents of the mysteries of the Lord (1 Corinthians 4:1). He offered us the grace and joys of redemption through the Holy Sacraments and they pray for us (1 Timothy 1:2; Ephesians 1:16) especially in the time of sickness (James 5:14) and they encourage us to repent with tears (Acts 20:31).

VIII. Priesthood Honor

The priests are dignified for their labor and service and giving their life for us, for our happiness, success and our delight with salvation. The Lord honors them as He honored all those whom He honored Him "If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor" (John 12:26). The Lord

honored Moses, and Elijah and showed them his glory on the mountain. He honored Abraham and Jacob and appeared to them and honored Stephen and showed him his heavenly glory. St. John saw the apostles and priest around the Throne (Revelation 4:14).

The priests are dignified for the holiness of their life as the bishop must be above reproach (1 Timothy 3:2).

Conclusion:

It is our duty; we the believers, to honor the priest for the sake of Christ. We must not despise them or defame them for their wrong deeds as they are humans who are exposed to weakness and sin, so we must cover these weakness as Shem and Japheth covered the nakedness of their father Noah, so he blessed them and cursed Ham who made fun of him. The believers should behave this way “Judge not, that you be not judged”.

Applications:

- ❖ Follow up on young people concerning confession. Tell them the difference between the confessor and the spiritual guide.
- ❖ Accompany young people to church and receive the Holy Communion together. This will deeply affect young people, as they will take their servants as a model.

LESSONS FOR THE GREAT FAST PERIOD

Week 0: (Preparation week)-The Holy Fasting

Week 1: (Surrender to the Heavenly Father)- Tithes and the First Fruit

Week 2: (Sunday of Temptation)- Confession

Week 3: (Sunday of the Prodigal Sun)- The Good Samaritan

Week 4: (Sunday of the Samaritan Woman)- Baptism and confirmation (why it is different from other churches)

Week 5: (Sunday of the Sick of Bethesda)- Unction of the Sick

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

Week 7: (Palm Sunday)- Palm Sunday

Week 8: (Resurrection Sunday)- Easter

Week 0 - The Holy Fasting

Objective:

Renewing the covenant with Christ through our fellowship with Him in His fasting

Memory Verse:

- ❖ “For thus says the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel: In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength” (Isaiah 30:15).
- ❖ “Blow the trumpet in Zion, consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly” (Joel 2:15).

References:

- ❖ Joel 2:15; 1 Corinthians 9:25; Psalm 109:24; Mathew 6:16-18; 9:14; Daniel 9:3-19.
- ❖ Psalm 9:9; Acts 13:3; Acts 27:9; 2 Corinthians 6:4, 11:27; Isaiah 28.
- ❖ The Paradise of the Soul - Anba Youannis
- ❖ Spiritual Fasting - Anba Bemin
- ❖ The Treasures of Grace - Part 2 - Archdeacon Banoub Abdu.

Introduction:

In the beginning, when God created the world, God’s commandment to man was to fast; not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Then the devil convinced man to eat of the tree because if he ate he would know...! When man fell in that temptation, till bread became the goal of man’s life... he works hard to get bread.

This deceit continued to work in the heart of man till Christ came, and when Christ came, he fasted forty days on the mountain and uncovered the lies of the devil. He summarized his experience in fasting in a short statement: “Man shall not live by bread alone”. Here the Devil’s lies were shown up and we knew that the Word of God is the source of life, but bread is not. Bread only helps flesh by giving it what it needs such as energy to work and to be active.

Lesson Outline:

Why Do We Fast?

When we fast we become like the first man before his fall. The first man used to take his food from God and to live in fellowship with Him. Through fasting we win victory with Christ over the Devil in his deceit concerning bread and through work we announce the truth of the Scriptures: “Man shall not live by bread alone”.

Christian fasting does not mean that passive side of refraining from having food but surpasses that point to the positive side of a greater release from this passive activity to spiritual activity.

This means that fasting is a holy domain for practicing and possessing Christian virtues. The Church, especially during the Lent gives this atmosphere through her rituals, hymns and readings.

So, fasting is a good opportunity for us to grow in love with Christ and to be established in Him.

How to Fast

With thanksgiving and Joy

Fasting is not a period of deprivation ... but it is an opportunity to live with Christ, free from the needs and desires of the flesh. It is the basis of Christ's call for us to come to Him, to sit with Him and to enjoy His fellowship and He will feed us as He fed the people before. He wants us not to worry about food, body and materialistic things. He wants us to live with Him as if we were in Heaven. It is the moments and days that we assign for living as if we were in the everlasting life where we can enjoy and taste the beauty of the angelic life without care. For the Kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. This is a generous call of Christ so we live it with thanksgiving because in fact we do not deserve that life. We live it with full joy because through fasting we surpass the limits of the flesh and the senses and we become like angels, so we rejoice.

Thanksgiving, joy and love, fill the heart with insight and enlightenment.... and give the word of God a chance to work in the deep depth of our life till commandment unites with the self and becomes confined to the fear of God.

With Reverence

This is the feeling of that who is not worthy... Lord, I do not deserve to fast with you or to receive the blessing of the life of the heavenly creatures because I am a sinner... I am weak... So when we fast, we do that out of mere obedience to the Commandments of God and the Church system not because we are holy people who practice the Christian virtues. We fast because we need the blessing of fasting not because we deserve these blessings, which God gives those who fast. Fasting with reverence trains us to be humble and modest, not to be haughty.

With Devoutness

Christian monasticism means to get rid of all things that are not useful. So we eat what the body needs and refrain from satisfying the body with unnecessary things. We avoid visits and meetings that are not fruitful or necessary. We devote our life to prayer, work and reading the Holy Bible.

When we fast we do not watch movies, we do not listen to worldly songs.

The aim of our life is concentrated on serious fruitful work... and we avoid what is not serious or fruitful. This simple devoutness or simple monastic life trains us to lead the life of chastity, to control the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eye and the love for possessing things.

With True Repentance

We repent the time we spent away from the fellowship of Christ - that beloved and satiating fellowship. Through repentance, we change our way of living. We direct our hearts to Christ, his love and our cordial connection with Him. Daily repentance based on examining the self and firm treatment of her wrong deeds, and taking clear decisive decisions against the deviation of the self. Repentance must be accompanied by confession before the priest and crucifying the desires in the light of Christ.

Through the Holy Mass we can receive the Holy Communion with awareness and understanding, as this is the Holy Body and Blood of the Lord. Fasting accompanied by selected readings of the Holy Bible and the spiritual books help us understand God's

commandments and reach our defiant spiritual goal. Fasting must also be accompanied with struggle against the temptation of the devil, lest the devil should tempt us to deviate from this goal.

These practices and the struggle, which need hard work, can release the soul and give depth to the inner spiritual life for deeper relationship with Christ.

Conclusion:

The Holy Fast in our church is a golden chance for seeking Christ and sticking to Him. The Church, with all her beautiful spiritual climate, wonderful rituals, wonderful monastic hymns, and her readings about repentance is ready to receive us. It is the time of repentance for everyone who loves Christ and wants to live with Him. Let us struggle so as this chance may not pass without meeting Christ.

Applications:

- ❖ Train yourself to fast and refer to your father of confession.
- ❖ Concentrate in the fast on the spiritual benefit not the change in food

Week 1 – Tithes and the First Fruit

Objective:

- ❖ To understand the importance of tithing as a commandment and as an expression of thanksgiving and honor to God.
- ❖ To help the students develop the habit of tithing and giving the first fruit.

Memory Verse:

“She put in all that she had to live on” (Luke 21:4).

References:

- ❖ St. John monthly magazine, Vol. 12, No. 123, April 2000 - California
- ❖ St. John monthly magazine, Vol. 11, No 119, December 2000 - California
- ❖ “Bring Me the tithes and try Me” - the first issue of the series the blessings of heaven and the gifts of men.
- ❖ The life of Anba Abram of Fayom: The lover of the poor - Gerges Rafla

Introduction:

Tithing means giving one tenth of everything we have to God. Tithing and offering are necessary and important commandments representing one of the three basic elements of Christian worship of which Christ talked about in His Sermon on the Mount saying, “when you give alms...” (Matthew 6:2), “when you pray...” (Matthew 6:5) and “when you fast...” (Matthew 6:16). Almsgiving is therefore one of the three basic elements of Christian worship and service.

Lesson Outline:

Tithing in the Bible

From the beginning of time man has instinctively felt the grace of God upon him and felt indebted to God for everything he has. He felt compelled to show his love and gratitude by offering back something of what God gave him. King David expressed this when he said, “What shall I render to the Lord for all His bounty to me” (Psalms 116: 12) and “...for all things come from You, and of Your own we have given You” (1 Chronicles 29:14).

Consider the first two sons of Adam; Cain made an offering of the fruit of the earth to the Lord and his brother, Abel, offered the firstling of his flock and of their fat portions (Genesis 4:4). Consider the sacrifice offering of Noah and Job (Genesis 8:20 and Job 1:5) or Abraham who offered tithes and almost offered his own son as a sacrifice (Genesis 22:10-12). Now tithing is only part and not all of almsgiving. The Jews were required to offer their tithes, firstlings and vows.

Originally tithing was the offering of one tenth of all the fruit of the land and offspring of the animals to the Lord. The first time we read about it was in the life of our father Abraham when he met with Melchizedek (the priest of God the Most High) and gave Him the tenth of everything (Genesis 14:20). The second time was in Jacob’s dream of the ladder when he

prayed saying “...and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You” (Genesis 28:22).

Later the Lord regulated tithing when He inspired Moses to decree it as a mandatory and not an optional commandment from God. Consequently, the Hebrews began to offer their tithes to the Levites who were denied an inheritance in the Promised Land on the promise that their lot is to be dedicated to the Lord and His service. The Levites in return offered one tenth of those tithes to the priests (Numbers 18:20, 24-31). The Jews also tithed from the remaining nine-tenths to the poor, the widows, the orphans and the strangers (Deuteronomy 14:28-29). And even though the Jews were not required to tithe their herbs, the Pharisees tithed their mint, dill and cumin (Matthew 23:23).

Facts Concerning Tithing and the First Fruit

God accepts our offerings regardless of their economic value. Rather, He accepts the spirit of thanksgiving, appreciation and honor that accompany the offering. Two brothers gave an offering. God’s rejection of one was not a preference between animals or plants. Rather, it was a rejection of careless, thoughtless gift of one brother and the acceptance of a generous choice offering of the other. Abel was favored because of his faith and righteousness. Cain was rejected because he gave to satisfy a sense of duty, envy and pride.

When you love someone, no expense is too great. Securing the right item for a special friend may consume time. Our offering to God deserves some thought and reflection. Giving to God out of duty brings little satisfaction. When the gift costs us time, money or careful planning, joy is more likely to follow.

When the Lord accused the Scribes and Pharisees of tithing their mint, dill, and cumin and neglecting the weightier matters of the law, justice, mercy and faith, He said, “These you ought to have done without neglecting the others” (Matthew 23:23). He also clarified that “For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:20). Another incidence the Lord said “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house...or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time...and in the age to come eternal life” (Mark 10:29-30). This time the Lord has expanded the range of giving and tithing not only for the poor but also for the service to the church, teaching, spreading the faith and the Gospel.

Conclusion:

There is double blessing from tithing:

God will open the windows of heaven and pour down on us an overflowing blessing.

The blessing will keep us protected from all evil, danger, loss, accident, problem, etc.

“From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from My statutes and have not kept them. Return to Me and I will return to you says the Lord of hosts. But you say, “how shall we return?” Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me. But you say, “How are we robbing You?” In your tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me; the whole nation of you. Bring the full tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house; and thereby put Me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing. I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil; and your vine in the field shall not fail to bear, says the Lord of hosts. Then all

nations will call you blessed, for you will be a land of delight, says the Lord of hosts” (Malachi 3:7-12).

Applications:

- ❖ If the devil tempts you saying that your income is low and you cannot tithe, rebuke him firmly saying: “Nine plus the blessing of the Lord is more than ten plus the curse of the Lord”.
- ❖ Read the story of Anba Abram of El Fayom - The lover of the poor.

Week 2 - Confession

Objective:

To elucidate the role of the mystery of Confession as a complete cure for the pains of man and its connection with repentance.

Memory Verse:

“For with the heart one believes to righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made to salvation” (Romans 10:10)

References:

- ❖ The Seven Sacraments of the Church - Habib Guirgis.
- ❖ The Paradise of the spirit, Part I - Anba Youannis.
- ❖ The Paradise of the Monks.
- ❖ How to practice the sacrament of Confession. - The Bishopric of Malloway.
- ❖ The Mystery of Confession - St. Mary Church – Rod el Farag.

Introduction:

Confessing the Sin is an Ancient Divine Plan

God asked Adam our father: “Where are you? Have you eaten of the tree?” That was the Divine Plan to bring man to confession and through confession he could have been forgiven.

The Law of Moses states that the unfaithful should confess his sin (Deuteronomy 5:1-6; Numbers 5:6).

Even David the Prophet and King when he sinned he had to confess his sin before Nathan the priest (2 Samuel 12:13).

In the days of John the Baptist many people came to him to be baptized in the Jordan and they confessed their sins (Matthew 3:5).

In the New Testament, the Lord Christ designed the mystery of confession and gave it to His disciples (Matthew 3:6, 18:17,18; John 20:22-24).

Lesson Outline:

To whom do you confess?

Is it enough for a sinner to confess his sins directly to the Lord? Why did the Lord command us to confess before the priests? Here we count the blessings of confession and its beneficial effects on the self, body and the soul:

Confession before the priest cures the problems of repression (Job 22:18-20).

The human nature drives man to complain to others.

The psychiatrists, the psychological clinic and modern psychiatry are a little point of a confession session. However, it doesn't give absolution of sin or listening to the word of God that proceeds from the mouth of the father of confession.

Self-peace resulting from confession is reflected upon the health of the body.

Forgiveness of sin by the priestly authority (Absolution) has many relieving effects on both the body and soul.

The person who confesses acquires the habit of accuracy and self-examination (1 Corinthians 11:31).

The person who confesses feels that his confessor is wise and kind father who shares with him, his feelings and pains (2 Corinthians 11:29).

In confession, we benefit from the blessed instructions given by the experienced father of confession. The elders' advice is good. Remember the advices given by the elder and young men to Rehoboam the king, son of Solomon. Not listening to the elders' advice destroyed the whole kingdom.

In confession, we share with the priest our thoughts that reveal the tricks and snares of the devil, and bring to light the weakness and defects of the self that may not be easily noticed by the person as he may be afflicted by the sin of pride, he may be in a state of despair or self-degradation.

How to Practice Confession Correctly?

Examine yourself before you go to confession. This should be according to the commandments, which call us to be holy, and without blemish before the Lord and the People.

Cast the self before the Lord with contrition and feeling of remissness, as Isaiah did when he saw the Glory of the Lord.

Confess to our father the priest with reverence and tears. Confess your sin in detail... the time taken in doing it, how often you did it, and your feelings while doing it.

The person who confesses must listen carefully to his father of confession and carry out his advice with great obedience and persistence.

Shyness

When we offer true confession with a spirit of shyness, we taste the bitterness of sin and we do not go back to it. If shyness turns to stubbornness and refraining from confession before the priest, then it is a hidden pride (Sirach 4:26).

Fear that the secret may become known

We all should have trust in the priest who has been accustomed to listening to hundreds of confessions and who cannot reveal any secret.

Some do not benefit from the father of confession's guidance

When people choose their father of confession, they must be sure that he is an experienced, wise, patient and spiritually advanced.

Note: The problem sometimes does not lie in the father of confession but it often lies in the person who confesses, as he does not obey the advice of the priest with earnestness and perseverance. You can change your father of confession when necessary but first take his permission to do so.

Conclusion:

There are multiple spiritual benefits to confession in the life of the youth. We must be aware of the blessing and grace of confession as through it man can wipe out all the dust of sin and remove its effects and then the Divine Icon appears. Confession is like a monitor of our spiritual growth and though it we can find the right path to salvation.

Applications:

- ❖ Read some of the booklets about how to practice the mystery of confession among the students before they go to confession.
- ❖ Prayer meetings should be held for those who have repented and those who have not repented yet.
- ❖ Encourage your students to practice confession regularly.

Week 3 – The Good Samaritan

Objective:

- ❖ To learn to love and serve others without discrimination

References:

- ❖ Luke 10:25-37
- ❖ Interpretation and meditation of the early Fathers - Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty

Memory Verse:

“By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).

Introduction:

The most difficult commandment in Christianity is to love those who hate us. It is a commandment that is above human nature, which can only understand the law of revenge, a quality that is also shared with other lower creatures like animals. It is very easy to hate and get angry. In essence, anger does not require self-control, whereas forgiveness and love are more difficult because they require self-control and an enormous spiritual strength. Hence, this commandment is really what distinguishes Christianity from any other religion or belief and cannot be accomplished without the Divine help. Therefore, it is very difficult for those who depend on themselves, and quite easy for those who depend and unite with the Lord Jesus and have communion with the Holy Spirit.

Lesson Outline:

The Jews did not like the Samaritans and considered them of lower class. The Pharisees in several occasions accused the Lord Jesus of being a Samaritan and that He was demon possessed. But the Lord denied that He had a demon without denying that He is a Samaritan.

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jerusalem represents the city of the Lord; Jericho represents the world with its evilness that is surrounded by high walls, which prevent any one from escaping and returning to the city of the Lord. The man who was traveling represents any person whose faith was weak and was starting to go astray from the path of the Lord. The thieves represent Satan and his powers. The clothes that the man had on represent the robe of grace and righteousness, which was granted to us by the Lord Jesus and with which nothing would harm us. The wounds represent the iniquities and sins inflicted by Satan, only after the man was stripped from the robe of righteousness. The priest and the Levite represent the law and the prophets, who felt sorry for mankind but could not save it. Finally, the Good Samaritan is the Lord Jesus, the awaited Savior who saved mankind. On one occasion the Jews told Him that He was a Samaritan and that He had a demon, but the Lord denied that he had a demon and refused to deny that He is the Good Samaritan “Then the Jews answered and said to Him, ‘Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?’ Jesus answered, ‘I do not have a demon; but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me’ ” (John 8:48-49).

Indeed the Good Samaritan who felt sorry for mankind and loved the sinners, bent on his knees and carried the wounded man, putting oil in his wounds to sooth his pains and suffering, adding wine to purify him from sins inflicted by Satan. He carried him to an inn which is His Church, spent the whole day and night caring for him until he restored to him the ring of sonship and righteousness. He later handed him to the owner of the hotel, the church servant, who continued to care for him, until He comes again in His second coming to take him to the place which He prepared for him and those who love His name.

It is a story of true love and giving. Many times we think that he who shares our nationality or religion is our neighbor, but the Lord has showed us that whoever shares human nature is our neighbor. Our love should be directed to everyone without prejudice, even to those who hate us “By this all will know that you are My disciples” (John 13:36).

✠ Love requires endurance for the weakness of others “Love bears all things”. The story of the departed Fr. Bishoy Kamel with the kids who called him bad names, and how he returned the evil with love is a living example of true love!

✠ The story of the Good Samaritan is also a story of courage. He rose beyond the limitations of the society and the boundaries of social hostility for the sake of saving a soul. The Samaritan sacrificed his comfort and his possessions to save a dying soul.

I wonder how many people we pass by in our life and we ignore their needs just like the Levite and the priest. How many are being tormented by the wounds of sin while we watch them from a distance and dare not help them?

The attitude of the priest and the Levite in this story is actually a very common attitude. It is the “WHO CARES” attitude. These words are very frequently used in our society. It is the attitude of carelessness and laziness. When we see wrong and crooked ways around us and we close our eyes as if we do not see them and close our ears as if we do not hear them. It is adopted by those who are not willing to sacrifice for the sake of others and the sake of righteousness. It is a selfish behavior and a self-centered attitude. It is simply choosing the wide path instead of the narrow difficult path. The Lord teaches us to go the second mile with those who force us to walk the first mile “If any one 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...for if you love those who love you what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same” (Matthew 5: 40-48).

Conclusion:

The story of the Good Samaritan is a story of love and sacrifice. We know that there is no greater love than the love of our Lord Jesus Christ who died for us. With the same love we should love others and sacrifice ourselves for them.

Applications:

- ❖ To try to remember those who upset or bother you in your prayers and ask God to fill your heart with love towards them.
- ❖ Look for someone who needs an act of mercy from others and offer your help.
- ❖ Remember what the Lord, the good Samaritan, has done to us the sinners, likewise as His chosen disciples and followers, we ought to seek those who are away from the

church, and preach those who do not know the Lord, bringing all through God's Grace to the church.

Week 4 - Baptism and Chrism

Objective:

- ❖ Understanding the work of baptism in us and its relationship with the mystery of repentance.
- ❖ To explain the work of Chrism in us. It is the sacrament by which we obtain the seal of the gift of the Spirit

References:

- ❖ Contemplation on: From Nativity to Baptism - H.H. Pope Shenouda III
- ❖ Nativity Impressions - Dr. Ragheb Abdel-Nour
- ❖ Baptism and Chrism - Youth Bookshop
- ❖ Luke 3:21-22; Matthew 3:13-17
- ❖ The church sacraments - Habib Guirguis
- ❖ Acts 8:14; 1 John 2:20; John 14:16-17

Introduction:

A word about sacraments

The church sacraments are holy works and divine gifts by which we can receive invisible grace.

The seven church sacraments are: Baptism - Chrism - Communion (Eucharist) - Repentance and Confession - Unction of the Sick - Marriage - Priesthood

The sacrament is fulfilled under three conditions:

1. A suitable substance for the sacrament such as water for baptism
2. A legal priest
3. Invocation of the Holy Spirit

Lesson Outline:

What Happens in the Sacrament of Baptism?

Through baptism we put off the old nature and put on the new nature (2 Corinthians 5:17; Colossians 3:9-10).

It is a sacrament of the first order as it is like entering the kingdom of grace (John 3:5).

It is a sacrament necessary for salvation (Matthew 3:11, Eph 5:25).

Baptism must be performed by immersion (1 Peter 3:21; Colossians 1:10).

What is the relationship between repentance and baptism? Repentance is a continuous trial to keep that image of Christ, which we have put on (Ephesians 3:9).

What Are the Blessings of Baptism for My Life?

Entering the kingdom of God and obtaining salvation (John 3:5).

By our baptism we are buried with Him and share His death (Romans 6:3-5).

Repentance and forgiveness (Romans 6:6-7).

Baptism is being born again (John 3:6).

The Sacrament of Confirmation (Chrism - Myron)

The Sacrament of Confirmation (Chrism) is performed immediately after baptism and by it we receive the seal of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 1:22).

The benefits of the sacrament of chrism

It gives us the enlightenment of mind and knowledge (1 John 2:20-27).

It gives us the strong will to worship God (2 Corinthians 1:21-22).

It puts the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit upon us (2 Corinthians 11:21).

What evidence is there to prove that it originated in the church?

The early church practiced it when all the apostles laid their hands on the baptized.

The Biblical evidence is the event of St. Peter (Acts 8:14-17).

Another evidence is Paul and his meeting with the believers in Ephesus (Acts 19:1-6)

Theophilus of Antioch says: That is why we are called Christians, because we are anointed with the oil of God.

History of making the Myron and its preparation

The apostles themselves made it of the spices, which were on the body of our Savior.

St. Mark brought it with him to Egypt and before it ran out, Pope Athanasius mixed it with new spices.

It is composed of 30 different kinds of spices.

The system of anointing

The priest makes the sign of the cross with the Chrism (Myron) on the body of the baptized 36 times to sanctify all parts of the body starting with the mouth, the ears, the eyes ... all the joints - with a certain prayer that suits each part of the body, for the confirmation of the baptism is the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion:

Baptism and Chrism are essential for the new birth in Christ. They are the first step on the road with Lord.

Applications:

- ❖ At 6 o'clock, pray to the Holy Spirit using the passages of the Third Hour Prayer: O Heavenly King.
- ❖ The teacher can recite, with the students, the prayer of rejecting the devil, to renew the covenant of baptism.
- ❖ The teacher can display a video of a child's baptism to review and demonstrate the lesson with the students.

Week 5 – Unction of the Sick

Objectives;

To be acquainted with the value and the spiritual benefits of the mystery of Unction of the Sick.

Memory Verse

“Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up” (James 14 &15).

References:

- ❖ James 5:14,15; Matthew 10:1,8; Mark 3:13-15, 6:7,13; Luke 9:21, 10:9.
- ❖ The Spiritual values in the mystery of the Unction of the Sick - Anba Gregory.
- ❖ Walk by the spirit - Fr. Abdel Messih el Nekheli.

Introduction:

How many church sacraments are there?

Why are they arranged according to our need for them: Holy orders - Baptism – Confirmation (Chrism “Mayroon”) - Penance (Repentance and Confession) - Holy Eucharist - Matrimony - Unction of the Sick.

The first five sacraments are necessary for salvation, i.e. we cannot be saved without them. The last two sacraments are not necessary for our salvation but are useful for the church and the believers. This means that man does not marry to be saved, but he who wants to marry is offered marriage in the form of the holy sacrament by the church. The same goes for he who is sick. It is not necessary for anyone to fall ill, so that we may pray over him to save him ... but those who fall ill the church will offer them the sacrament of the Unction of the Sick to cure their soul.

Lesson Outline:

1. All sacraments are means for the growth and the up building of the church. The church is composed of the group of believers who together form the mystical Body of Christ. The organs of the Body are connected and bound together by the holy fellowship with the One Head. Therefore the church is concerned with the spirituality of her members and she is also interested in the health of their bodies as they are also holy bodies because the Holy Spirit abides in them and because they all receive Holy Communion (The Holy Body and the Holy Blood of the Lord).
2. The church cares for us... What the Scriptures say about this one body: “And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it” (1 Corinthians 12:26).
3. Hence, the church cares about her sick children ... she comforts them and raises prayers for them, and asks them to repent and prays to the Lord to give them recovery. The Scripture says: “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church” (James 5:14).

4. Then the priest comes and persuades the patient to repent; he comforts him with words of grace, receives his confession, gives him absolution from his sins and raises the prayers of the Unction of the Sick (Andeel).
5. The ritual of this sacrament is composed of seven prayers. They are all similar in order. In each prayer, the priest lights a wick. By the seventh prayer we have seven lit wicks, giving light. This reminds us of a bright scene in heaven. St. John describes this scene: "I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet ... the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches" (Revelation 1:12).
6. By this church reminds us of Christ who walks along the seven golden lampstands (Revelation 2:1) so that we may be comforted in our affliction and pain and illness as Christ dwells among us.
7. When the priest lights a wick, we feel that the seven wicks are about to be lit and that the church whispers to us: "The Lord is coming". In fact, when all the seven wicks are lit, the prayers are complete. Through prayers and Hymns, the Lord dwells among the seven lampstands and gives us comfort.
8. The oil used in performing the sacrament refers to the work of grace in the self. The church reminds us of the parable of the wise virgins who filled up their lamps with oil so they were worthy of meeting the bridegroom.
9. The rituals begin with the prayer of thanksgiving because the thankful nature is that of the sons and the angels ... that slaves always grumble because they do not understand or know their masters will.
10. That is why; the church raises the prayer of thanksgiving at first in all her liturgies even in raising incense and the unction of the sick. Thus, the sick is lead to the life of thanksgiving and submission with satisfaction and trust in God's love.
11. Then we pray the psalm of repentance (Psalm 50) in which the church tells us that disease and death came into the world because of sin and Adam's disobedience ... and that man cannot be saved except through repentance. This is the same fact, which our teacher James the apostle declared, "And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven ... confess your trespasses to one another" (James 5:15,16).
12. The apostle establishes a relationship between the sacrament of the unction of the sick and that of repentance and confession and binds them together.
13. Then we read some passages from the Bible, Psalms and parts from the Gospel that speak about repentance, miracles of healing and granting the disciples the authority of healing.
14. When prayers are completed, the priest anoints the sick with oil and through the grace of the Holy Spirit the sick man is healed of his spiritual or physical diseases. This sacrament has a wonderful effectiveness of healing both the soul and the body according to the worthiness and faith of the sick man, as "The prayer of faith will save the sick man and the Lord will raise him up".
15. According to this sacrament, recovery from sins is the basis of the recovery of the body from diseases. This fact is confirmed by psychological researches, as both self and body are bound in man, and the sins committed by the self are reflected on the body so the body suffers from diseases.

16. In the same way, the diseases of the body irritate the self. This does not mean that all diseases result from sins or psychological problems as there are organic disease, disease that spread by (contagion) touch, or the spread of microbes etc. The sacrament is effective in curing all these diseases especially the disease of the body that are caused by psychological or spiritual illness.

17. This sacrament is not against medical science and resorting to medical treatment. The Savior, Glory be to Him, said: “Those who are well have no need for a physician, but those who are sick”. This means that those who are sick do need a physician.

Conclusion:

All diseases are the domains of the work of the unction of the sick. This sacrament is meant for spiritual and psychological healing and if God is willing for physical healing as well.

Applications:

- ❖ Tell your priest about a sick person you know so that he may practice and perform the Sacrament for him. Take part in the prayers of the sacrament so that the person may restore his health.
- ❖ Do an internet search about other churches that believe in this sacrament

Week 6 - The Holy Week

Objective:

How to live the church ritual with depth and simplicity to share Christ's pains?

References:

Isaiah 53; Exodus 12; Zechariah 11:12; 1 Peter 2:24,25; Mathew 27:39-42.

The Holy Week - Al Mahaba Bookshop.

Memory Verse:

"Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach" (Hebrew 13:13).

Introduction:

Distribute the book of "The Pascha Prayer", so that the students may follow up the subject in the pages of the book. This subject should be introduced before the Holy Week begins.

The importance of the Holy Week:

It is the most important week of the whole year. During this week we celebrate Christ's passion that led to our salvation. That is why the church has joined it to the Holy Lent since the time of Pope Demetrius XII (12).

The church concentrates its ritual effort and also its dogmatic and spiritual effort during this week to make of it a spiritual source of blessing for the whole year. So we have to share the church, earnestly and most of the time, her celebrations, so that we may taste the fellowship of the Savior's passions.

The word "Pascha" is a Coptic word, which means "The Passover". So it is the week of the Passover from the authority of the devil to the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

Lesson Outline:

Lazarus Saturday

On that day the church celebrates the miracle of raising Lazarus from death as an introduction to Christ's resurrection and our resurrection with Him. The church indicates that death has no authority over Christ whose death and Resurrection we shall celebrate. It is He that raised Lazarus after four days.

Palm Sunday

It is a great feast. The prayers of the church are performed in merry and bright tune. The procession of the cross is performed around the church on that day. During the procession, 12 passages of the Gospel are read before the different icons of the saints. It stands for the Jews receiving Christ as king when He entered Jerusalem. It is the day of enthroning the King and receiving Him with the hymn, "Evlogemenos".

The Public Requiem

During the Holy Week the church concentrates on the passions and death of our Savior, so if one of the believers dies during this week the church does not pray the regular departed funeral prayer over them, as the church has no time to raise the ordinary requiem prayer or to raise incense. Therefore, the body attends an hour of the Pascha so that the departed may not be deprived of the blessing of the church,. This is why the church raises the prayers of a public requiem after the Sunday Mass, where prayers are said over the water and it is then sprinkled on the believers.

The Pascha Prayers

Prayers are raised in the second choir of the church as Christ suffered outside Jerusalem... the church also teaches us, through her rituals, that before the crucifixion and death of Christ for us, we had no right to enter heaven (the church sanctuary). The Paradise was closed and the Cherubim were placed to guard the way and prevent anyone from entering the Paradise.

The church is dressed in black as a sign of protesting against the people's sin, which caused pains and shame to her kind and merciful Redeemer. We do not mourn for the passions and death of the Savior as they gave us salvation but we mourn for our sins that caused these passions.

Holy Liturgy is not performed on Monday, Tuesday or on Wednesday, and then it is performed on Thursday. In the Old Testament, people used to buy the Passover lamb on the 10th of Nissan, and it remained with them till the night of (the eve) the 14th day. On that day they slaughtered it. Christ entered Jerusalem on Sunday (10th of Nissan) and was kept there for three days, and then He offered Himself as a sacrifice on Thursday in the Mystical Supper (14th of Nissan) because Christ is our Passover.

This week is rich in Biblical readings, and the fathers' preaching and their interpretations. Each prayer contains prophecies, psalm, gospel and interpretation. Some books of the Bible are wholly read during this week. On Tuesday St. Mathew's Gospel is read. On Wednesday, St. Mark's Gospel is read. On Thursday St. Luke's Gospel is read and St. John's Gospel is read on the Holy Saturday. The Book of the Lamentations is read at 12 o'clock on Good Friday, and the whole Book of Psalms after the prayers of Good Friday and the whole Book of Revelations is read on the eve of Holy Saturday. Some Christians read the book of Job on Wednesday.

The day of the Pascha is divided into five-day prayers and five night prayers. These are the first hour, third hour, sixth hour, ninth hour, and the eleventh hour prayers. A new day begins at sunset. Each prayer is set in the following order:

Prophecies.

Passover Hymn (12 Times).

The Psalm in Coptic, with a sad tune.

The Gospel in Coptic then in Arabic or English, then the interpretation of the Gospel - a summary of it and contemplation.

The Intercession, the end and blessing.

These prayers start from the beginning of 9 O'clock on Palm Sunday till 11 O'clock on the eve of Maundy Thursday, (i.e. 9th hour prayer and 11th hour prayer).

Maundy Thursday

Maundy Thursday is the day Christ's mystical death. On that day He offered Himself as a sacrifice and established the sacrament of Eucharist, which is the foundation and pillar of the church, and it is a great feast.

The Sanctuary is opened because we, through receiving Communion from the Tree of Life, i.e. the Lord's Holy Body and Blood, obtain the everlasting life and the right to inherit the kingdom of heaven.

In the early morning, the procession of reproaching Judas is performed and in it the church declares that she deposes Judas and those who are like him because he spurned her bridegroom's love.

Prayers for sanctifying water (Lakan) are said and the priest washes the people's feet in memory of Jesus washing the disciples' feet.

Before offering the Lamb, the hourly prayers are not used as usual, but we pray the Pascha prayers instead, "The third, the sixth and the ninth".

Some hymns and passages are deleted from the mass. These are the ones that refer to salvation and reconciliation, as salvation is achieved through the Cross, and reconciliation is achieved through the Resurrection. That is why the Hymn "Soutis Amen" and the reconciliation prayers are not recited.

Both the commemoration and Requiem prayers are deleted, i.e. they are not recited because before the cross, the righteous were taken to Hades... and there is no fellowship between the church and those who dwell in Hades, so the church does not pray for them in this Liturgy.

The Rites of the Good Friday

Prayers are recited in the same order from Friday eve till the end of the third hour on Friday. Each prayer includes parts from the Gospels.

The Savior was crucified at the sixth hour... The church knows that the cross is the royal throne and that this hour is decisive moment for the church to overcome the devil. So the church receives the Holy Christ as a victorious King crowned on His throne so she lights the candles and censers, the priest put on their priestly garments and raise incense and the hymn "O Monogenis" is recited. The lights are put out while the Gospel is being read as a sign of the darkness that took place when the Savior was crucified. Then the passage about the faithfulness of the robber is recited and in it we take part in acknowledging the Godhead of the dead living.

At 12 O'clock, the crucifixion Icon is brought down in memory of bringing down the Savior's Body to wrap him in linen... Then the Sanctuary door is opened as a sign of opening the Paradise gate when Christ died for us "Today you will be with Me in Paradise". Genuflexions are performed in all directions as practical acknowledgement of the Godhead and the everlasting life of the dead and that He exists everywhere in the whole universe and He cannot be confined in a grave. A procession is done by the Crucifixion Icon in all parts of the church with a merry tune, saying Lord have Mercy (Kiryelayson) as if we were declaring the happy news of salvation to the whole world.

Then the Crucifixion Icon is buried in spices and aloes on the altar between two candle sticks, one at the east and the other at the west, as this was the way our Savior was buried in the tomb.

Holy Saturday

It is a night of Vigil and wakefulness in the church with our Savior in His tomb. The night is full of hymns, prayers, and readings and in it we read the Book of Revelation. The prayer rite is a mixture of the Pascha and annual prayers in a pleasant order as Christ's passions came to an end when He died for us.

The Holy Liturgy is performed and prayers that denote salvation are recited but the prayers of reconciliation are not said. The commemoration prayer and the Requiem prayers are recited as after His death, Christ went down to Hades, led the host of captives and He gave gifts to men, liberated the holy men and sent them to Paradise so there is a fellowship between us and them. We pray for them and they pray for us.

Holy Saturday is the only Saturday on which we fast all the day abstaining from any food.

Genuflexions are allowed on that day as a memory of the burial of Christ in the tomb.

Conclusion:

The greatest spiritual benefit from this Holy week is through regular attendance of the church prayers and living all the events with the church. May God give us the blessing to participate and appreciate the rituals of that week.

Applications:

- ❖ Attend the Pascha Prayers especially on Thursday and Friday and as much as you can of the prayers of the other days.
- ❖ Prepare a timeline project of the events of this week in a creative fashion and bring it to the class.

LESSONS FOR THE PENTECOST PERIOD
(Fifty days after Resurrection)

- Week 1-** Feast of the Resurrection
- Week 2-** The Effects of the Softly Spoken Words
- Week 3-** The Role of Women in Church (OT)
- Week 4-** The Role of Women in Church (NT)
- Week 5-** How Can I Benefit From the Summer Holiday
- Week 6-** Between Ascension and Pentecost
- Week 7-** St. Peter, the Seal of Martyrs

Week 1 - Feast of the Resurrection

Objective:

The Power of Resurrection as a revelation of the Divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Memory Verse:

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

References:

- ❖ “Glory be to You in Your resurrection” - Samir Kamil
- ❖ “Proofs of the Resurrection” - Anba Moussa

Introduction:

Christ’s resurrection differs from any other resurrection. He is called “The first fruit of them that slept”. So we notice that:

The Lord is only one who rose from the dead and his resurrection is followed by no death. He is living forever, and death did not and will not dominate Him.

Christ is the Lord who rose from the dead by His own power without any prayer from his disciples or the intercessions of anyone... such as the case with Lazarus or the widow’s son whom Elijah brought back to life.

The Lord said, “I am the Resurrection and life”. The power of resurrection was within Him and not outside Him... so the verse “God raised Him from the dead” does mean that He rose by Himself with His own power, as He and the Father are one. The Father raised Him because He is His only begotten beloved Son and He did not leave Him in the Hades. He rose with His power and by the will of the Father and the work of the Holy Spirit. The Three Hypostases are one essence as we said before “and designated. Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by His resurrection from the dead” (Romans 1:4). This means that the Holy Spirit performed the Resurrection, as He is the Spirit of Resurrection.

Lesson Outline:

His Divinity and His Humanity Never Parted

Godhead is the Divine Nature and manhood is our human nature that the Lord took from the Virgin Mary. The Lord died on the cross and the human soul parted the flesh. Yet His Divinity and His Humanity never parted and He Himself never parted His body or His soul.

The body that was in the tomb was the body of the Son of God. The body did not decompose or suffer corruption although it remained in the tomb for three days. He rose with great power and an active body and healed wounds after the body had attained a new bright nature.

When His soul went down into the Hades the devil did not arrest her. On the contrary, the Lord went down into the Hades, broke its iron gates and copper trenches... and raised Adam, his children and the prophets and brought them back to paradise.

The Lord was powerful even when He was in the grave. Death could not have power over Christ's human soul that united with the Logos (the Word). Death could not enslave His soul neither corruption could humiliate Him.

The Flesh of Resurrection

When the Lord rose, He was not weak. He did not need anyone to untie Him of His clothes as the case was with Lazarus, or eat to have power as the case was with Jairus' daughter.

But He rose and the stone put where it was the clothes were and the guards were standing. That who entered the room while the doors were closed, can go out while the stone blocked the grave.

The Lord rose with the same body he took from the Virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit but there was a difference...that body was glorified after passing through death. So the body became a spiritual body that had powers and transparency the same as that which the believers will put on after death. So it was not a dim material body but it was a spiritual body radiating with light. In spite of this it was a real true body and it was not an image or a spirit. "For a spirit have not flesh and bones as you see that I have... He took it and ate before them" (Luke 24:39-43).

Christ Abolished Death

The Lord Christ had to suffer all what the ordinary man suffers so He suffered death. Death was the natural destiny of man as Adam parted from the Lord. God was the source of Adam's life. So when sin separated Adam from God, Adam had to die.

What does the word "death" mean? It means anti-life; life means that man enjoys his unity with God (As the television set that functions well as it connects with an electric source). Death means that man keeps himself away from the light of God with all what that light radiates in him and from the warmth because of his existence in the presence of God who created him. Death is the state of affliction, worry, suffering and distress. This is what the sinner has chosen for himself when he wanted to part from God "I took to myself the issues of death" (The Gregory Mass).

What did the Lord do? The Logos united with manhood that is our human nature and He gave it what it had previously lost. He had to suffer death to redeem us from the consequence of sin "Through death He abolished death" and He granted those who were in the tombs the eternal life.

How to Prove Resurrection as a Historical Event

The gospel gives us the story of resurrection, the appearance of Christ. The gospel always tells the truth.

Resurrection was the core of St. Peter's sermon immediately after the coming of the Holy Spirit; his listeners witnessed that event. If the resurrection had not taken place many would have opposed the apostle but the opposite was what happened when they heard they asked Peter "what must we do?" (Acts 2:37).

He left the shroud that stuck to His body because of the blood that came out of the wounds. He left the shroud arranged as it was in the tomb.

This shroud is kept up till now in the Church of St. John the Baptist in Torrent in Italy. Scientists examined it and found the marks of the nails and wounds printed on the cloth (Refer to the Book “The Shroud” Al Minya Diocese).

It had been a legend or a superstition, the disciples and the apostles would not have believed it and lost their life to prove it.

Conclusion:

Resurrection is rising up against sin and overcoming it “Awake O Sleeper, and arise from the dead and Christ shall give you light” (Ephesians 5:14).

O Lord, allow me to live with You in the victory of resurrection and give me the power to submit my desire and sin under your feet.

Applications:

- ❖ Give proofs of the power of resurrection for unbelievers and quote some verses to support your proofs.
- ❖ Remember the power of resurrection in moments of weakness; despair, intellectual fights, fear, anxiety...
- ❖ Always pray the Morning Prayer in which you remember the power and effectiveness of resurrection.

Week 2 - The Effect of the Softly Spoken Word

Objective:

- ❖ To demonstrate the benefits of the softly spoken word.
- ❖ To learn from the example of our Lord and His wisdom of speech.

Memory Verse:

“The heart of the righteous studies how to answer” (Proverbs 15:28).

References:

- ❖ The applied explanation of the Bible - Bruce B. Barton, et al.
- ❖ “The Tongue” - A sermon by Pope Shenouda III.

Introduction:

The ultimate goal of any Christian is to resemble our Lord Jesus Christ in everything. We try to change ourselves gradually to reflect His image in our lives. When Jesus Christ was among people, He was obedient and helpful to His parents. He also fulfilled all the characters of Sonship to God “He will not quarrel nor cry out, nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets. A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoking flax He will not quench” (Isaiah 42:1-3; Matthew 12:18-21). Thus, He was gentle and kind to the weak and the sinner. He encouraged the broken hearted and strengthened the weary. Even in the critical discussions and testing by the pharisees and the priests, He was firm and strong, yet He never insulted or used unsuitable words. For example when He was slapped by one of the officers of the high priest, Jesus said: “If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me” (John 18:23).

Lesson Outline:

The virtue of the softly spoken word and controlling the tongue is an important virtue for every Christian. King David talked about it and said: “Lord who may abide in Your tabernacle? ... He who does not backbite with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbor, Nor does he take reproach against his friend” (Psalm 15:3). Also, St James said about the tongue “If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man able also to bridle the whole body” (James 3:2-12).

What is the value of controlling my words?

Words can lead us to evil and sin or it can lead us to blessings and spiritual growth. For example lying is a sin and praising God is a blessing and they are both expressed by words. Remember a word from Herod the king to Herodias’ daughter lead to the death of St. John the Baptist (Mark 6:22-23).

Through our words we can make friends or enemies, love or hate, peace or war.

We can bring the non-believers to the faith through our words. A message becomes stronger when it is delivered through gentle and kind words, as in the example of the Lord’s words to the Samaritan woman.

How can I acquire the virtue of the softly spoken words?

Pray that God may help you to be as gentle as He was. Ask the Holy Spirit to work and speak on your tongue.

Think Before You Speak

The wise and righteous thinks before he talks, because he would like to present his thoughts and ideas in the best manner. On the other hand, the foolish and impulsive person talks without thinking because he does not care about the consequences of what he says. In proverbs King Solomon said: “The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly, but the mouth of fools pours forth foolishness” (Proverbs15:2).

Choose the Words Carefully

You may have great ideas but if you use bad words to present them, they would seem to be bad ideas. Therefore, ask yourself: am I choosing the correct words or am I just talking. The words of a Christian are the guide to others to their Christianity. People would know that we are Christian by our words. St. John Chrysostom was described of having a mouth of gold because of the words of blessing he offered during his sermons. A true Christian is able to direct the conversation to be constructive and comforting (Proverb 9:11).

Put Yourself in Place of the Listener

You can build bridges or destroy them through your words with others. If you place yourself in the listener place you may be able to judge if your words bring comfort and knowledge to others or if they bring hurt and anger, “Soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (Proverb 15:1). Also, the Lord commanded us to do unto others what we would like done to us (Matthew 7:12).

Remember That Your Words Indicate What is in Your Heart

The words that come from your mouth indicate what is in your heart “For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12:33-37). So, let the Holy Spirit work in your heart to purify it and thus purify your words. By no means, can you speak good words if the heart is not clean (Luke 6:45).

Conclusion:

Experience the effects and the blessings of the softly spoken words in your life. Take the example of Job who blessed the Lord even in his hardship and Solomon the king whose words of wisdom brought the queen of Sheba from thousands miles afar to listen to him (1 Kings 10:1-7).

Applications:

- ❖ Avoid bad words, swearing, dirty jokes and lying.
- ❖ Avoid unproductive conversations and gossiping.

Week 3 – Role of Women in the Church (Old Testament)

Objective:

- ❖ To study the role of women in the Old Testament.
- ❖ To learn about some of the important female characters in the Old Testament.

Memory Verse:

“Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Corinthians 4:1).

References:

- ❖ Scripture: Exodus, Numbers, Micah, Judges, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 Samuel, Genesis, Leviticus, 1 Chronicles, Nehemiah, Esther, Judith.
- ❖ Article by Inas Michael, St. John Magazine, California.

Introduction:

It is the responsibility of the individuals to work together as equally redeemed Christians, putting the welfare of the Kingdom ahead of prejudices, customs, or mind-sets. Women and men must realize that each Christian has a calling and a ministry and that the service of each individual is important and valuable to the life of the church.

Lesson Outline:

The Old Testament gives a prominent place to the character, leadership, and service of many women (indeed three of its books – Ruth, Esther and Judith- are named after women).

This truth is especially evident in the giving of the titles “prophetess” and “judge” to women and on the participation of women in individual and family worship of God.

An Old Testament prophet possesses a number of unique characteristics, but technically a prophet is one through whom God speaks.

The Hebrew word for prophet is “Nabi” and its feminine form is “Nebiah”. This term is used in the Old Testament to refer to four specific women:

Miriam, the sister of Moses, was called a prophetess when she sang a victory praise of God at the time of the Israelite’s escape from Pharaoh’s army (Exodus 15:20-21). This is also clearly implied in Numbers 12:1-2. Although there is little indication of her work beyond these passages, she is referred to as a leader on a par with Moses and Aaron in Micah 6:3-4.

Deborah, in Judges 4:4, is called a prophetess and also a judge in Israel. In the latter role Deborah exercised decisive leadership. When Israel was severely oppressed, she called forth the will in the men of Israel to fight for freedom. The commander Barak said he would fight only if she comes with him to the war. Deborah gave the command to attack, and victory was secured (Judges 5). Thus, Deborah illustrated a woman who was raised up by God to judge and to deliver His people.

The third woman given the title of prophetess was Huldah (2 Kings 22:14). When the high priest told Josiah he had discovered the book of the law of the Lord, the king sent his

emissaries to find out what further message God had for him. They sought out Huldah who was well known for her commitment to God and message.

Judith is another widow in the Old Testament, who saved Israel from their enemy through her wisdom and courage. Her story is mentioned in one of the second canonical books, which is called after her name.

In private and public worship in the Old Testament participation of women went beyond the hearing and obeying of the law. They were free to approach God in praying just as the men. For example Hannah in 1 Samuel 1:10, Rebecca in Genesis 25:22, and Rachel in Genesis 30:6,22. God responded to their prayers (Genesis 25:23; 30:6,22) and appeared to them (Genesis 16:7-14; Judge 13:3).

They were also expected to take an independent part in bringing sacrifices and gifts before God (Leviticus 12:6, 15:29).

Women served at the door to the tent of meeting (Exodus 38:8), although it is not clear what form this service took.

Women also participated in the choirs and processions of the temple (1 Chronicles 25:5-7; Nehemiah 7:67).

Although they were not permitted to serve as priests, this was never interpreted to mean that they were less than full members of the worshiping community.

In sum, although the Old Testament reflects the patriarchal nature of the society in which it was written and with which it is concerned. The relationship of women to their fathers and husbands did not stand in the way of their joyful participation in the worship life of God's people. They had a significant role to play not only as mothers and in the home, but also as individuals, and leaders they were barred from leadership when the circumstances required it.

A good example is Esther, she teaches us about a woman's responsibility in God's plan. When she received news of the impending destruction of the Jews by Haman, she initially reacted, as any woman would have. First, she tried to make things right by sending garments to clothe Mordecai, her uncle, but it was not good enough (Esther 4:4). Then she researched the problem by sending an expert to find what was going on. Once again, Mordecai would not accept a "woman's solution." He went against the tradition of his people by saying, "Go to the King." He commanded Esther saying, "Implore his favor. Plead for your people" (Esther 4:8). It was a hard decision for her to make, yet Esther took the responsibility and enlisted others to pray although she realized her actions might cost her life... "If I perish, I perish." She risked being killed by the king, breaking the tradition of the court; however, her actions saved her people.

Look at Ruth and Naomi, during the time of the judges. Israel was full of sin (degraded, immoral, etc.). The Book of Judges states, "Every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judge 21:25). The characters in the book of Ruth are not like most of the people we find in the book of Judges. Ruth and Naomi displayed the characteristics of love such as generosity, chastity, and the desire to worship the God of Israel. Both women were blessed in God's eye.

Conclusion:

Today, the search for the status of women in Christianity is often made difficult, because of the concern for the equality of women in modern society as fueled by the feminist movement.

But we have to remember that when we discuss the role of women and how they can serve God in the Holy Church, we cannot view the Church as a power structure or a business enterprise. Being human is possible in only two forms: either male or female. One is not better than the other. Therefore men and women have to be viewed as essentially identical in their humanity, but endowed with different gifts, which allow for different roles and different spiritual vocations. Equality between the sexes and unity in the Church does not mean uniformity. Each member is granted different gifts to accomplish different roles. These roles are not based on privilege, power, or authority, and they do not denote superiority or inferiority, but rather they have to do with the manifestation of God's Kingdom on earth. In the end, God's judgment will look at our actions and their purpose. Whether males or females, we are to serve not for personal gain or vainglory, remembering, "from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance for you serve the Lord Christ" (Colossians 3:24).

Applications:

Women in today's society can do many things to serve the Lord; for example:

- ❖ They can serve as Sunday School servants.
- ❖ They can teach their kids about Jesus at home and help them to know our church.
- ❖ They can help organizing events for the church.
- ❖ They can help the poor, the sick, the strangers, the elders, the orphans... and many more.

Week 4 - The Role of Women in the Church (New Testament)

Objective:

- ❖ To study the role of women in the New Testament and how Jesus accepted them as treasured members of the human family.
- ❖ To demonstrate the role of women in the early church and the spread of Christianity.

Memory Verse:

“Then they said unto the woman, now we believe, not because of your saying: for we have heard Him ourselves” (John 4:42).

References:

- ❖ Scriptures: Luke, Matthew, Mark, Acts, and John
- ❖ Article by Inas Michael, St. John Magazine, California.

Introduction:

When all the disciples, except one (John), had abandoned Jesus, women accompanied Him to the place of His crucifixion. They were present at His burial. These same women found the empty tomb, met the resurrected Christ and angels, and reported the news of His resurrection to His disciples (Matthew 28:1-10). None of them, however, are included among the number of the apostles; they were parallel to the disciples as traveling companions.

Lesson Outline:

Women during the Lord’s Ministry

Jesus does not say anything about women having specific roles in life. He issues no new commands that apply to women only. He relates to them with love and respect. He speaks to them, teaches them, and heals them. He never speaks of them in a contemptuous way and never treats them as if they were unimportant. Jesus never gives the impression that only men were “full Israelites”.

Women stand alongside men as recipients of the universal invitation to the Kingdom through Christ (Matthew 12:50). The conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman shows this willingness to dismiss conventions of men, which stand in opposition to His purposes. Normally a Jew would not address a Samaritan. She emerges in this conversation as a perceptive and articulate individual, fully capable of engaging in theologically profound discourse. Certainly, if Jesus had considered this woman to be inferior and unable to speak of spiritual matters, He would not have spoken to her in concepts of “living water” (John 4:10). Nor would He have responded to her question about the place of worship (John 4:21). She was also the first messenger of that revelation outside the circle of disciples.

The conversation between Jesus and the Canaanite woman provides another example of the Lord’s respect for women (Matthew 15:21-28). Jesus praises women with virtues, as in the encounter with the repentant woman at Simon’s house; the woman who suffered with bleeding; the woman He healed on the Sabbath calling her “daughter of Abraham.”

A woman looking for a lost coin illustrates the concern of God for lost sinners (Luke 15:8-10). The wise and foolish bridesmaids are examples of the need for everyone to be prepared for the unexpected moment of Christ's return (Matthew 25:1-13). A woman appears in a parable to illustrate an aspect of the Kingdom of God such as perseverance in prayer (Luke 18:1-8). Jesus often refers to women in these parables and sayings always in a positive way.

Women were not only recipients of the Lord's ministry. St. Luke reveals that Jesus on numerous occasions gladly received the help and ministry of women (Luke 8:1-3). St. Mark attests that some women followed Jesus when He was preaching in Galilee (Mark 15:40-41). Women were a part of His close circle of friends and companions.

Women in the Early Church

In Romans chapter 16, St. Paul greets some of these women by name and acknowledge their important contributions to the life and growth of the church. Priscilla is a woman who receives particular mention. In Acts she is engaged with her husband, Aquila, in teaching the great orator Apollos. Paul's reference to the couple as "fellow workers" is to be noted. After, Priscilla and Aquila, Paul greets still other women: Mary, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, and Persis, all of the women "worked hard" in the Lord's word. Also he greets the mother of Rufus and sister Nereus (Romans. 16:13,15). In Philippians 4:2-3, he mentions two other women, Euodia and Synthe, who have labored beside him in the gospel. Although it is impossible to determine from St. Paul's words what specific missionary tasks these women assumed, there is no doubt that he often benefited from the cooperation of women in his apostolic labors and that women were no less active than men in spreading the gospel's message. The early Christian churches followed the pattern established by Jesus of including women as integral members. They attended worship, participated vocally, were instructed, learned of the faith and shared it with others (Acts 1:14).

They also played a significant role in the life of the community, teaching men and women and caring for those in need. Within the "official" ordering of the early church's life there were two primary orders of women: Widows and Deaconesses. Widows were recipients of the church's charity in return for which they were "appointed for prayer" (1Timothy 5:3). Widows were a part of clerical orders and had a broad range of responsibilities such as teaching women, visiting the sick, and helping in various ways at the church. A deaconess was a very significant feature of the church within Greek and Syrian Christianity. The West did not have this position until the fifth century when they reluctantly acquiesced. The outline of the activities of the deaconess can be discerned. They 1) assisted the bishop in the baptism of women, especially in the anointing of the body. 2) Assisted women who were in need or ill. 3) Guarded the door by which women entered and left the assembly and ensured that the younger women gave way to the older women in the place reserved for them. 4) Verified the corporal integrity of the virgins. 5) Bore messages and traveled about on congregational business.

Concerning the role of women, there is a general exclusion of them from priestly duties and from public teaching. Never from the beginning of the world has a woman served God as priest. Jesus chose to be baptized by John and He sent the twelve apostles for preaching. He has delivered to His church no indication of women priests because He "knows the order of creation" the man is the head of the woman and Christ is the head of the man. Jesus clearly shows His regard for women, created equally with men in the image and likeness of God. In order of creation, God has placed woman in a position subordinate to man. The Scriptural

concept of subordination is a matter of function between two persons of equal worth and not a matter of inferiority/superiority. God's people are called priests not to confer status but to commission all of them to declare His deeds of salvation. All Christians have been given the responsibility to live their Christian faith in their several callings, and share the faith and to judge all doctrine. Since a "headship" over congregation is exercised through the office of the public ministry, the functioning of women in this specific office is precluded. Just as the wife should not be the head of the house, so a woman should not be the head over the household of God (1Timothy 3:12). Holy Scripture clearly excludes women from the office of the public ministry of Word and Sacraments, review the verses of 1Corinthians 11, 14, and 1 Timothy 2 which deal with woman's subordination, woman's silence in the church, and woman's exercise of authority.

Can a woman become a priest or participate in public worship in the capacity of regarding the Scriptures?

Since women should be silent in the church, then reading the Scriptures is more properly the function of the priests and the clergy. According to St. John Chrysostom, women have a considerable teaching role in the life of the Church, and in instilling Christian virtues and understanding to the children, whether they are their own biological offspring or other children in the church. After all, some of these children will eventually become the hierarchy in the Church. This is clearly seen with St. Anthusa, St. John Chrysostom's mother, and St. Macrina, the oldest sister of St. Basil the Great and St. Gregory of Nyssa; she was instrumental in the instruction of her brothers. St. John Chrysostom interprets St. Paul's saying, "I do not permit a woman to teach" (1 Timothy 2:12) as prohibiting women from teaching in the Church during liturgical services in the place of the priest. But the influence of women in the instruction of children and even adults is important. Pricilla had a dominant role in the instruction of Apollos in the way of God (Acts 18: 24-28). A woman should be able to inspire, comfort and instruct those who experience her presence. This would affirm the description of a virtuous woman, whether she is single or married, a virgin or a mother. Besides being teachers of Christian Education and in the Sunday School, they can be members of parish councils, monasticism, counselors, administrators, and contribute to publications. They are encouraged to pursue theological studies both to deepen their own personal spiritual life and to serve the Church better.

Conclusion:

In Christianity, oneness with Christ is possible for those who live a life of purity and holiness, regardless of their gender. Each one has the potential, by God's grace, to be in communion with Christ, which is the highest goal for any human being to achieve. Every Christian individual possesses gifts, which contribute to the function of the body, and they ought to be joyfully and thankfully received. Thus, the Christian community will affirm the unique and differing gifts of women, seeking ways to enlist them more fully in the Church's life and work. But God did not call His Church into being and give gifts to His people so that they would be concerned about how they might become the greatest in the Kingdom. Since the life of every Christian is to be characterized by obedience and submission on some level. Any demand for "rights" and "power" is inappropriate.

Applications:

- ❖ Study the role of St. Monica in the repentance of St. Augustine.
- ❖ Study the role of St. Refka and St. Sophia in the martyrdom of their children.

Week 5 - How Can I Benefit From the Summer Holiday

Objective:

To clarify the importance of activities in solving the problem of leisure during summer.

Memory Verse:

“Remember how short my time is” (Psalm 89:47)

References:

- ❖ How to serve young people - Anba Moussa.

Introduction:

Summer and Leisure: Before the summer holiday begins, we need to think of how to fill our summer time with productive activities. Youth have many suggestions in mind on how to make use of leisure? The way of solving the problem differs according to the different circumstances and the environment surrounding each youth. In front there is no problem so long as the heart is in a state of satisfaction and contains no emptiness, indifference, laziness or deviation. Summer is a double-edged sword. It either drives youth forward in the way of spiritual growth and personality integration or drives them backwards and casts him in the dilemma of leisure or deviant business.

Lesson Outline:

Before the Beginning of the Summer Holiday

- ❖ The Servant should ask each youth about to what extent is he/she connected with Christ? To what extent are his/her prayers and worship regular? This should be one of the summer activities: Growth in the love of Christ.
- ❖ To what extent does a young man understand the Old Testament? To what extent does he/she study the Books of the New Testament and persist on reading the Holy Bible? This should be one of the summer activities: To read and study the books of the Holy Bible.
- ❖ To what extent is he regular in practicing the church sacraments? This should be his/her desire in summer to practice the church sacraments with Satiation and love.
- ❖ The level of his education and recognition of the modern currents of thinking and the different shapes and types of culture and the church concept in the light of Christ. This should be his task during summer.
- ❖ In this way and through being calmly convinced of the need enthusiasm is established in the heart, the mind becomes enlightened and time becomes fruitful.

Summer and Activities

Activity should aim at leading souls to Christ and concentrating the need for One. So activity removes and puts an end to boredom, sadness and the feeling of isolation from the hearts of

youth, and unites in a holy, spiritual pattern far away from evil friendships. Here is some glimpses about some activities and there importance.

- ❖ Prayer: Satiates and fills the soul with delight.
- ❖ Individual service: leads to prayer, service and visiting others.
- ❖ Committees for making research and reading in libraries: These give new horizons in knowledge.
- ❖ Spiritual Retreat: This is a chance for up building, spiritual clarity and fraternal love.
- ❖ The summer club: This is a chance for common comfort and Spiritual amusement.
- ❖ The Party: This is a chance for taking part in celebrating feasts and the church occasions.
- ❖ The journey: This is a chance for getting acquainted with each others and with their servant and a way of finding out their psychological state.

Liveliness of Summer Activities

- ❖ The liveliness of the summer activity helps it to continue and achieve its goals. So we have to study the spirit of the age and its needs and offer suitable activities for students according to their position, as a living satiating food.
- ❖ This does not mean that the church encourages the spirit of the age, but it means that the activity should be lively. One of the fathers said: “We have to satisfy the needs of the body according to the circumstances of the present world but by the spirit and struggle even to the shedding of blood, so that we may surpass its weaknesses and falls.
- ❖ Explore the role of the servant in being acquainted with the spirit of the age.

Conclusion:

Summer Holiday is a great chance to build our relationship with Christ and others fellows who love Christ. It is a time to increase in knowledge and understanding of the Bible and the church. It is a time for fun with Godly friends.

Applications:

- ❖ Understand the young man’s social status and the number of his family members.
- ❖ Examine the level of his bodily health and his need for games and the obstacles if any.
- ❖ Understand his emotional growth and its effect on his life.
- ❖ Understand his emotional growth and his ability to think and the obstacles if any.
- ❖ The Servant then makes the young man take part in one of the church activities according to his abilities and needs (Club - Spiritual meeting - etc.)
- ❖ The Servant must offer the activity without fear or anxiety aiming at achieving one goal, that is the Salvation of the soul from corruption of the world and the dominion of sin, and the devil’s temptation and the soul’s entering into the regions of happiness and eternity through Christ Jesus, Glory be to Him forever. Amen.

Week 6 - Ascension and Pentecost

Objective:

To celebrate these two great feasts with understanding and prayer that the Holy Spirit may fill our life and the life of those in the church.

Memory Verse:

“No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven” (John 3:13).

References:

- ❖ Acts Chapters 1, 2.
- ❖ The sermons of H. H. Pope Shenouda III on the Holy Spirit.
- ❖ The Holy Spirit between the new birth (Rebirth) and the continuous Renewal - Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty
- ❖ The Father’s covenant - Virgin Mary Church, Faggalla, Egypt.

Introduction:

- ❖ Review the previous lesson with the students
- ❖ Ask the students what is the value of Ascension to us as Christian?

Lesson Outline:

I. The Ascension Day

He was taken up into Heaven

- ❖ Our teacher St. Mark the evangelist says: “So then, after the Lord had spoken to them. He was received up into heaven” (Mark 16:19). We confess this fact in the Christian Creed and say: “He suffered and was buried, arose from the dead on the third day... He ascended into the Heavens and sat at the right hand of His Father...”
- ❖ In olden times Enoch was taken up to Heaven alive, and Elijah was taken up to Heaven by a whirlwind in a chariot of fire. Both were kept in upper places... but the Lord’s ascension was not in this way. The Lord ascended to Heaven by His own power and He rose from the dead by His power also.
- ❖ The ascension of the Lord Christ with His Glorified Body is the perfection of the Divine plan. After He redeemed Adam by the cross, He took the Body that bore the pains of the cross with the signs of wounds and nails, up to heaven to intercede with the Father for all human beings.
- ❖ Angels descended from heaven to announce the birth of the Son of God as a newborn babe in the manger at Bethlehem. Hosts of angels and archangels came also to worship the Lord who is enthroned upon the cherubim, the Lord who rode on a cherub, and flew; He came swiftly upon the wings of the wind. The Lord who is in heaven sitting at the right hand of God forever conquering and glorified forever.

He sat down at the right hand of God

- ❖ The right hand of God, means that after the Son carried out the Divine plan and completed the redemption, He took what He has of power, authority, glory and greatness, which are the attributes of His Holy Hypostasis that is equal to the Heavenly Father's Hypostasis. This is what St. Paul meant by saying: "who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Hebrews 1:3).
- ❖ With the ascension of the Lord and His sitting at the right hand of the Father, David's prophecy was achieved "The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at My right hand till I make Your enemies Your footstool" (Psalm 110:1).
- ❖ The teacher and the students study the relationship between Christ's sacrifice on the Cross and the Sacrifice of the Revelation and the Eucharist that is practiced on the altar of the One Apostolic Church and in this way the student will widen their Theological and Spiritual understanding.

II. The Pentecost**The meaning of the word "Pentecost"**

This is a Hebrew word that means a meeting. It means the Harvest feast or the "Khamaseen Feast" (Fifty-Days' Feast). The church used the word for the feast of the coming of the Holy Spirit because it comes after the Lord's Resurrection.

How was the Holy Spirit poured out?

- ❖ The Holy Spirit is poured out like a strong wind. Notice the likeness between the wind and the spirit. The wind fills all places and the work of the Spirit is a miraculous one. His results can be seen and felt by the mind (Acts 2:1-3; Psalm 50:3, Exodus 37,7).
- ❖ Our God is a consuming fire. The fire purifies and burns and the fiery spirit purified the disciples and burnt all the impurities and made the disciples inflamed with the love for the service, He also enlightened their insight and guided them to the truth (Hebrews 2:29; John 16:13).
- ❖ The Holy Spirit is poured out like tongues of fire spreading out. The tongues on Pentecost were gathered together, but in the Tower of Babylon, they were separated. The tongues on Pentecost are the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

The Work of the Spirit in the Church

- ❖ The church was born on the day of Pentecost as a united group, the family of people of the House of God, the members united in the Body of Christ, whose head is Christ.
- ❖ The day of Pentecost is the day when Christ united with the church, which is His Body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.
- ❖ The Spirit gave the church the spiritual talents and granted the disciples the ability to practice the sacraments because He abides with us forever and He bears witness for Christ.
- ❖ The Holy Spirit works in the worshipping church, so that it may bear witness for Christ through the behavior of her members and their pure life and their acceptable services in the church (Liturgy, etc.)

The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Believers

- ❖ It is He Who gives us the new birth and establishes us in the vine, renews our life and gives us acceptable repentance.
- ❖ It is He that inflames the new man with the Divine fire to make Him always worthy of deeper union with God the consuming fire.
- ❖ The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the spirit Himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words (Romans 8:26).
- ❖ The Spirit teaches the mind how to heal the wounds of the self and how to remove pains, which mingled with the flesh and also the other pains that mingled with the will. The Spirit sets a rule for the eyes to look forward in a pure and straightforward way and a rule for the ears to listen peacefully and He gives purity to the tongue and cleanses the hands when they are raised in prayer.

Conclusion:

The Holy Spirit has put His seal upon us and given us His Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee. Hence, the Holy Spirit abides in the believer and helps and supports him in his spiritual struggle and in his fight against sin and in his walk in the way of perfection.

Applications:

- ❖ The servant and his students study the work of the Holy Spirit in the Seven Sacraments of the Church and His effectiveness in each sacrament.
- ❖ Each one should examine himself in the light of what has been mentioned and ask himself whether the Spirit works in him with richness and ease or there are obstacles that hinder his work “Do not quench the Spirit. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God”.
- ❖ Everyone should repent to renew the mind.
- ❖ All students should take part in the worship prayer (Sagda) - practice prostration and intercede for the departed in faith because they are members with us in the same body.

Week 7 – St. Peter, Seal of the Martyrs

Objective:

- ❖ To know the great place of St. Peter “The seal of Martyrs” in the history of the church.
- ❖ To take example of his strong stand in the faith to the end.

Memory Verse:

“The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep” (John 10:11).

References:

- ❖ The Synaxarium
- ❖ The Story of the Copts - Iris el Masri, Vol. 6, Page 72-78

Introduction:

One of the remarkable things about the period of Diocletian’s fierce persecution of the Christians of Egypt is that the Fathers of Alexandria were able to carry on their work at the School of Alexandria. It continued to be a source of enlightenment, strength, spiritual and intellectual food for many. Hence it remained a bulwark of faith. In charge of it, as Dean at this critical time, was a sagacious person by the name of Peter. He became the 17th Pope of the Church, and later sealed with his blood that era of the martyrs by becoming the last to lose his life for the faith in this fiercest persecution.

Lesson Outline:

The Birth and Childhood of St. Peter

Peter was an only son, who was born in answer to his parents’ fervent prayers. His father, Theodosius, was assistant priest in Alexandria. His mother’s name was Sophia. Both were God-fearing people who, being childless, kept praying fervently that they be granted a son.

One day, when the Church was celebrating the martyrdom of the Apostles St. Peter and Paul, Sophia stood in the House of God and watched a company of Christians entering the Church with their sons dressed in goodly raiment, walking before them. With her heart deeply stirred, she kept weeping and praying, like the mother of the prophet Samuel of old, asking the Lord before His holy altar to bestow on her a son.

That night she saw in a vision two venerable old men dressed in white, comforting her and telling her that God had heard her prayers, and that she would be given a son whom she must call Peter who will be the father of the whole nation. They commanded her to go in the morning to Pope Theonas and ask him to pray for her. In the morning Sophia, with a glad heart, told her husband of her vision and he rejoiced with her. Then she went and related it to the Pope and he gave her his blessings.

In due time Peter was born. When he was seven years old, his parents offered him to the Pope, just as Samuel the prophet had been offered. He became as the Pope’s son, and was ordained by him, first reader then deacon, then priest. He grew up chaste and upright, and in time his knowledge, wisdom and understanding earned him the surname of “Excellent Doctor of the Christian religion”

When Abba Theonas was dying he counseled the church leaders to choose Peter as his successor. His counsel was attended to, and thus Peter, the child of promise, became the father of a nation and the 17th successor to St. Mark in the year 285 AD.

The Leadership of Pope Peter

The years in which St. Peter guided the church were years of excessive stress. Storms raged from without, in the form of the most terrible persecutions the Christians were subjected to; and storms from within such as the Arian heresy that was more than equally dangerous to the Christian faith. Like the able captain of a ship, St. Peter did his utmost to cope with both storms, and the fact that the church still stands today, as a living church is evidence of how he fared.

The persecutions that were unleashed against the Christians when St. Peter became pope were those ordered by Emperor Diocletian. They were the fiercest and longest of all persecutions, lasting for over ten years, and not ending until the Pope himself was martyred. Since he was the last to lose his life for the faith under Diocletian, he is called to this day in church history “Ieromartyros” or the Seal of the Martyrs.

It is impossible to determine the number of Egyptian Christians who lost their lives during Diocletian’s persecutions. The tortures and executions were carried day in, day out, and year in, year out, without respite. Tertullian, a priest from Carthage and a contemporary of the times says, “If the martyrs throughout the world were to be put in one side of the scale and the Coptic martyrs alone were to be put on the other, the latter would outweigh the former”. An article entitled “Martyrs” in “La dictionnaire des dictionnaires” states that the Copts who lost their lives in this seventh persecution suffered under Diocletian were eight hundred thousand.

The Coptic Calendar

To keep alive the memory of her valiant and heroic forefathers who laid down their lives for the faith, the Coptic Church decided to have a Coptic calendar with the year 284 AD. as its starting point. This is the year that Diocletian became emperor. They called it the Era of the Martyrs. . The Copts still follow the calendar system of the ancient Egyptians. It begins on the 11th of September of the Christian era, and has twelve thirty-day months and a short month of five days at the end of the year (and six on leap year).

During the fourth year of the persecutions, St. Peter felt it necessary to pass special regulations concerning accepting repentant apostates back into the Communion of the Church. So he drew up fourteen canons, which came to be considered as a veritable monument of the church. The Church body both in the East and the West respected them even after the schism, which alienated the Churches one from the other.

One of the principles set in the canons was that a Christian should be baptized only once, even if he renounced his faith, and then returned to it.

Baptism was a sacrament which is to be performed once only for each believer.

The truth of this principle was confirmed by an incident, which took place at the time. A Christian woman who lived in Antioch had two sons whom she had been unable to baptize because their father had obeyed the Emperor and given up his faith. Quietly and imperceptibly she boarded a ship to Alexandria and took them with her. While yet at sea the ship ran into a storm, and she was afraid lest her sons might die - if the ship sank - without having been baptized. So she wounded her breast and with her blood, she made the sign of the cross upon the foreheads of her two sons, and baptized them in the name of the Holy Trinity. However,

the ship arrived safely at Alexandria, and she took them to Church to have them baptized with other children. When their turn came and St. Peter attempted to immerse them in the holy water, the water froze. Thrice he tried, and thrice the same thing happened. In surprise he asked the mother about the matter and she told him what she had done on the way. He was astonished and glorified God, saying, "Thus says the Church, that there is only one baptism".

The Heresy of Arius

Among the persons St. Peter had to deal with was Arius, the man who began spreading the heresy denying the divinity of Christ, and who was stubborn and disobedient in his stand. St. Peter excommunicated him, and decreed that anyone following his teaching would be treated likewise. St. Peter had two close disciples called Achillas and Alexanderos, and he knew by the Holy Spirit that each of them, in turn, was going to succeed him, as head of the Church. So he took them aside one day and warned them against Arius and against ever re-accepting him into the Church. He told them that he had a dream the night before in which he had seen the Savior with His robe torn asunder; when he asked Him, "Lord, who is it that has thus torn Your garment?" the answer was "It is Arius who has done that to me". Therefore, continued St. Peter, "when I go my way, you two shall succeed me one after the other, on the Chair of St. Mark. Take heed, then. Be valiant and vigilant. Defend the Faith as did St. Dionysius, of blessed memory".

The Arrest of Pope Peter

When it became evident to Diocletian that after so many years of persecutions, the Christians of Egypt had not been exterminated, but rather that the converts to Christianity were increasing because of the example and the heroism of the martyrs, he became very angry. He ordered that their religious leaders be arrested and tortured, thinking that by so doing, he would break the spirit of the people. Six of the most active Bishops were arrested, but, as no amount of torture would induce them to relinquish their faith, they were martyred. When St. Peter heard of their martyrdom, he fell on his knees and offered thanks to God for having kept them steadfast unto the end.

Finally it was decided that the turn of St. Peter had come. In spite of the prestige of his office and his reputation for sanctity - or perhaps because of them, the Emperor's soldiers laid hands on him and led him to prison.

When news of his arrest went around, a large crowd of his devoted people gathered together and went to the prison in one big mass and there clamored for his freedom. Hearing their loud shouting and fearing that their behavior might bring calamity on them, St. Peter decided to do what Our Lord said about the good shepherd "to lay down his life for his sheep" (John 10:2). So he told the officers guarding him that if they granted him the opportunity to speak to them and pacify them, he would immediately give himself up to them so that there would be no more trouble on his account. The officers complied and led him to where he could address the crowd. In words of compassion and reassurance, he spoke to the multitudes and pleaded with them to depart in peace. They could not help but obey him. After they dispersed, St. Peter signaled to the officers that they could now take him, as he was ready. On the way to be executed, he was asked if he had any special request to make, he replied that he would like to be allowed to visit the Church of St. Mark. His request was granted, and he was permitted a few minutes there. He went in, knelt in prayer and fervently asked God to accept his life as a ransom for his people. Soon after he ended his petition, a voice was heard saying: Amen.

The soldiers then led him out to be executed. For a while no one dared raise a hand against him, for they beheld his face like unto the face of an angel. Then one of the officers took out twenty-five pieces of gold and said: “These will I give to him who dares behead this sage.” The sight of gold made one of the soldiers take courage and strike the saint’s head off. Having beheaded him, the soldiers went away, leaving him where he fell. Soon after, the faithful heard the news and came rushing, in tears. They carried away the remains of their blessed Patriarch back to St. Mark’s Church. There, they donned him in his complete ritual vestment and seated him on the Evangelist’s Chair, that Chair on which he had refused to sit all during his lifetime, because of his great humility and his admiration for that apostle, St Mark.

The Burial of St. Peter

They then celebrated the Rite for the burial and laid him to rest with his predecessors. The martyrdom of Abba Peter inaugurated a period of peace—hence he is called “Ieromartyros” or “the seal of the martyrs.” This appellation was given to him because he was the last person to be martyred by Diocletian. Other persecutions overtook the Copts in later years and times. But this seventh persecution, because of its fierceness, its length or duration, and the number of those martyred, is recognized as already explained as the starting point of the Coptic calendar—the Era of the Martyrs.

The End of Diocletian

As for Diocletian, all his efforts to stamp out Christianity were in vain. Unable to pulverize the Christians, he could not maintain his throne; he lost his power even while he was yet alive for he died in AD. 313, while he remained Emperor until the year 305. In ‘the wake of his atrocities, he became blind and mentally deranged; and when his own people deserted him, a saintly, old Christian woman nursed him and took care of him. By so doing she practiced our Lord’s injunction to do good to those who “spitefully use us and persecute us.

Conclusion:

The name of Era of Martyrs and the history of the Saints are read regularly in church as a reminder of all martyrs across the ages.

Applications:

- ❖ Look in the Synaxarium for the story of St. Peter, the Seal of Martyrs.
- ❖ Try to do good for someone you do not like.
- ❖ Take the example of St. Peter who learned everything about the church and God during the early years of his life

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: Spiritual Time Out

Week 3: The First and Second Epistles to Timothy

Week 4: St. Shenouda the Archimandrite

Week 2 - Spiritual Time Out

Objective:

- ❖ To understand the concept of “spiritual time out”
- ❖ To appreciate the importance of the spiritual time out for our spiritual growth and continuous relationship with God.

Memory Verse:

“And He went to the Mount of Olives, as He was accustomed and His disciples also followed Him” (Luke 22:39).

References:

- ❖ Sermon by Deacon Ayman Soliman
- ❖ Paradise of the Spirit - Anba Youanis

Introduction:

The meaning of spiritual time out is to take time away from everyday earthly activities and spend it with God. Usually our days are full, from the minute we wake up to the minute we go back to bed. We spend every minute of our days doing things useful or useless. The whole day may also be completely away from God and even when we intent to spend sometime with God, the devil intervenes and reminds us of something else to do or convinces us that we are too busy and there is no time for God at the moment. The devil is clever in giving us the feeling that there are hundreds of things to do and that we need more than 24 hours a day to finish everything that needs to be done. This can continue day after day until we are gradually but completely separated from God.

Lesson Outline:

Spiritual time out is very important in the life of every Christian to build a relationship with God. It is essential for our spiritual growth and to maintain our inner peace. It gives us an opportunity to detach completely from the world and connect with heaven and God.

Bible Examples of Spiritual Time Out

Many of the prophets in the Old Testament needed spiritual time out to give them spiritual strength and a new dimension to their relationship with God. For example:

- ❖ Elijah went into a cave, fleeing from the threats of Jezebel, he was afraid and weak spiritually but the Lord talked to Him and strengthened him. Away from everything and in the silence of the cave, Elijah was able to hear the voice of the Lord (1 King 19:11-16).
- ❖ Jonah was not able to understand the wisdom and mercy of God towards Nineveh, until he went out of the city, then he experienced the lesson of the worm that ate the plant that was giving shade to his head (Jon 4:4-11).
- ❖ Job also was able to hear the voice of the spirit during the silence of the night (Job 4:12-17).

- ❖ Moses was in the wilderness for forty year as a long spiritual time out for him after killing the Egyptian, to replace his physical strength with spiritual strength.
- ❖ Jesus Christ Himself was accustomed to take time out to pray (Luke 22:39).

Form of Spiritual Time Out

Spiritual time out necessitates complete isolation from the world and its worries. Thus, it is important to be disconnected from friends, media, noise and any source of distraction, e.g. telephone calls, pager, TV, radio, computer, mobile phone...etc. This is basically a time to communicate with God and this requires a calm environment, a clear mind and an open heart. A spiritual time out can be done as an individual alone or for the family together; which ever is more beneficial for our spiritual growth. The time can be spent in prayer, meditation, Bible reading, self-evaluation, reflecting on God's dealings with man, and/or even in complete silence ... "I was mute with silence, I held my peace [even] from good; and my sorrow was stirred up. My heart was hot within me; while I was musing, the fire burned. [Then] I spoke with my tongue: Lord, make me to know my end" (Psalm 39:2-7).

The Period of The Spiritual Time Out

This will definitely vary depending on the person and how much spiritual enjoyment we feel during this time with God. It is a time of rest and communication with the Creator, a time of relief from all the day's worries and burdens, a time of spiritual pleasure. Since it is a pleasurable time, every body would like it to last longer everyday. You might start with as little as 10 minutes everyday, then increase it gradually.

Spiritual time out is practiced heavily by monks to be in seclusion with God and God alone. St. Paula the first hermit is a great example of a person who did not see a face of a man for 80 years in the wilderness enjoying a continuous long spiritual time out with God. The whole idea of monasticism is build on the spiritual time out concept, except that it is for prolonged periods of time, much longer than what we can afford while living in the world and with a family.

Conclusion:

Listen to the Psalmist David during his spiritual time out: "For God alone my soul waits *in silence*, for my hope is from Him. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken. On God rests my deliverance and my honor; my mighty rock, my refuge is in God. Trust in Him at all times O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us" (Psalm 62:5-7).

Applications:

- ❖ Start practicing a daily spiritual time out with God and self.
- ❖ Tell others about the value and benefit of the spiritual time out.
- ❖ Read "The Paradise of Monks" to learn from the monks and their spiritual practices.

Week 3 - The Epistles to Timothy

Objective:

- ❖ To learn about St. Timothy and St. Paul's Epistles to him.

Memory Verse:

"Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith" (1 Timothy 1:5).

References:

- ❖ The New Open Bible
- ❖ The first Epistle to Timothy by Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty

Introduction:

Timothy

This name means: the one who worships God. He was the son of a Greek father and a Jewish mother. He was brought up in a religious atmosphere by his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois.

Lesson Outline:

Place and Time of the First Epistle

Paul the apostle wrote it after he was set free from his first imprisonment about 60 A.D. The letter was written in Macedonia and sent to Timothy in Ephesus to warn him against heresies and false teaching.

Topics Dealt with in the Epistle

Teachers and false teaching (1 Timothy 1:3-11)

The apostle distinguished between the correct teaching and the false one. **False teachings** spread divisions, weaken the structure and drive believers away from the spiritual love and drive them into false talk.

False teachers want to be teachers of law. They do not understand what they say and they do not carry out what they say - but the correct teachings agree with the Lord's Gospel.

The system of worship and Christian behavior (1 Timothy 2:1-11)

Prayer: It is a form of worship with which we begin and end anything we do. It should be raised for all people, it should be raised in all places, from pure hearts devoid of envy or hatred.

The Christian woman and worship: She has the right to take part in all public prayers. She must be modest, sensible in her clothes and dress properly not with fancy hair style, or with gold ornaments or pearls or expensive dresses, but with good deeds. Motherhood is her task bringing her children properly and in the fear of God.

Bishops and Deacons (1 Timothy 3:1-11)

The Bishop's Attributes: Episcopacy is a high office and important position in the church.

In teaching: He must be an apt teacher - mature in the faith, and self-controlled. He must not be a recent convert

As a model: He must be above reproach - the husband of one wife - not lover of money - not quarrelsome temperate and dignified.

His behavior: He must be well thought of by outsiders.

How he deals with others: He must be hospitable.

The Deacons Attributes:

They help the bishop and the priest in worship and managing the affairs of the church.

Collect alms and distribute them to the needy.

They should visit families as they are like alert serving eyes and hands.

Conditions of being a Deacon:

Serious - not double-tongued.

Not greedy for gain.

They must hold the mystery of the faith.

Their wives must be serious and faithful in all things.

Heresies and false teachings (1 Timothy 4:1-5)

The apostle speaks about the dangers of the difficult times when heresies and evil teachings appear and these are deviations that may appear at anytime and in later times a great number of these heresies will appear.

The attributes of false teachers: (Deceitful liars - they follow the teachings of demons).

The attributes of false teaching: They teach that it is wrong to marry and eat certain foods. But God created these foods to be eaten after a prayer of thanks.

The Christian as a model (1 Timothy 4:12-15)

The verses show instructions that can be explained as follows:

Principles of behavior:

Be an example for the believers in your speech, your conduct and your love.

Principles of Piety.

Be an example in your faith and purity.

Principles of preaching: Give your time and effort to public reading of the scriptures and to the preaching and teaching. Be ready at all times to answer anyone who asks you to explain the hope you have in you.

Love of money (1 Timothy 6:6-11)

There is great gain in godliness with contentment.

If we have food and clothing, with these we shall be content.

Consequences of the Love of Money:

Fall into temptation and hurtful desires.

The love of money is the root of all evils.

Wandering away from the faith.

The Second Epistle to Timothy

Place and Time of Writing the Second Epistle:

This was about 68 A.D. in the prison of Rome.

Items of the Epistle

- ❖ An introduction that includes greetings and thanks.
- ❖ Timothy and his spiritual needs as a Christian.
- ❖ Timothy and his spiritual needs as a servant of Christ.
- ❖ Warning about heresies.
- ❖ The effect of Paul and the Holy Books on Timothy's life.

Explaining the Important Text of the Epistle

The Christian and struggle in spiritual life (2 Timothy 1:7-18)

The Spirit given to the Christian: God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power, love and self-control. A Spirit of power that is the work of the Holy Spirit, the spirit of love which overcomes pains and the spirit of self-control for edification.

Testify to Christ: The sign that characterizes the children of God is bearing testimony which the world hates and severely resists, but the children of God stand firm by the power, love and lowliness.

Sticking to the correct teaching: He must keep what he received as a dear deposit. This deposit must be kept as it is without any change.

The Christian's attitude towards those who depart from the faith: A *sword pierced* through Paul's soul because of the believers who departed from the faith, but if this happens, Timothy should not be discouraged but he must endure to be crowned.

The Christian's attitude towards the faithful: Onesiphorus is a model of the man of principles and ideals, so Paul bore witness to him, prayed for him and prayed the Lord to grant him his mercy on that Day.

The nature of the Christian struggle and its characteristics (2 Timothy 2:2-12)

The teacher and the sound teaching: Faithfulness in sticking to sound teaching - competence in teaching - through being filled with the Holy Spirit, not through depending on the natural human abilities.

The good Soldier: This is characterized by the trials of the real military being attributed to him, the goal is clear; he is well prepared, well armed. He must not get mixed up in the affairs of civilian life to please his master who honored him by enlisting him in the army of salvation. His conduct should be according to the spirit of Christ's gospel.

Endurance of hardships: Hardships are numerous and come from within and from the outside. These may lead to prison or martyrdom, but the word of God is not chained as it remains free and will be effective to those who hear it.

Patience: He advised his disciples to endure all troubles patiently. If we continue to endure, we shall also rule with Him.

The traits of Christ's enemies (2 Timothy 3:1-8)

Selfishness: Holding the form of religion.

They give false teaching: They do not follow the ordinary system of addressing men in the Synagogue but they go into people's houses and gain control over weak women who are swayed by various impulses, who would listen to anybody and can never arrive to knowledgeable truth.

They imitate the form of teaching: As Jannes and Jambres were opposed to Moses, so also these people are opposed to the truth. They imitated all his works but they used evil ways to falsify the truth.

Final pieces of advice (2 Timothy 3:14, 4:5)

What are the conditions that Paul the apostle set for the legal struggle?

How can you be a good soldier in the army of Salvation? What are the weapons of struggle?

To manage the affairs of the church - to practice his work with all the people - each one according to his spiritual ability - he must not care for the attitudes of the people who stick to false teachers - He must endure troubles - do the work of the preacher – Complete your services.

Conclusion:

St. Timothy was a youth with great understanding and wisdom in Christ. His example would be a great example for the Christian youth

Applications:

- ❖ Write short notes on: Timothy - time and place of the first Epistle and Key to the Epistle - the topic of the epistle.
- ❖ Make an internet search about Timothy.
- ❖ Show what is mentioned in the first epistle of Paul to Timothy about money and how Christianity views it.
- ❖ Young females should follow the teaching in the Epistle about their dress and staying away from unsuitable fashion.
- ❖ “Holding the form of religion but denying the power of it”. What does this statement mean and what did the Lord Christ say in Mathew 23 about such people?

Week 4 - Anba Shenouda, the Archimandrite**Objective:**

- ❖ To learn the role of Anba Shenouda in the history of the church and monasticism

Memory Verse:

“Precious in the sight of the Lord Is the death of His saints” (Psalm 116:15)

References:

- ❖ The story of the Coptic Church - Iris el Massry.
- ❖ The holy man Anba Shenouda the Archimandrite - Late Anba Discurus, Bishop of Menoufya.
- ❖ The Archimandrite. Ameer Nassr.
- ❖ The holy man and prophet Anba Shenouda the Archimandrite - Ameer Nassr.
- ❖ Anba Shenouda the Archimandrite - Rushdy Azer Icladius.

Introduction:**His Holy Biography**

When Pope Athanasius the apostolic was near the city of Akmim running away from the Arians (followers of Arius), Archangel Michael appeared to him and took him to the wilderness and said to him; “Stretch your hands in the form of a cross”, and at that moment the Archangel stretched a sword of fire and burnt all the heretics, false teachers and those who departed from faith and the church. He told the pope that a child would be born after a short time and he would be called Shenouda (the son of God) and he would be a pillar in the church and he would overcome the heretics and conquer them.

Lesson Outline:

There was a hermit who lived a solitary life whose name was Hersasius. One day that hermit was walking with some monks. Suddenly he went to a woman that was getting some water.

He kissed her head and said: “The Lord will bless the fruit of your womb and He will give you a son who will be well known all over the world. One of those monks saw the Lord’s angel guard that woman, and the saint said to the monks: She will give birth to a son who will be a blessing to the church. That woman was the mother of St. Shenouda.

St. Mary the Virgin appeared to his mother in a dream and told her that she would give birth to a son and his name will be Shenouda. His father saw a dream, a star glittering in his house and he was very happy to see it.

His Birth and His Early Life

In the village of Shendaweel and on the 2nd of May 333 A.D. the babe Shenouda was born and all were happy and pleased. His parents taught him the Christian teachings, and the secrets of spiritual life so he grew in chastity and piety before the Lord and the people. He loved prayer and fasting and practiced the Christian virtues.

The shepherd who cared for his father’s sheep and whom the child Shenouda helped in his work tells this story: Shenouda used to fast all day. He used to give his food to others. After the hard work of the day he used to pray near a small pond and contemplate and cry to the

Lord, saying: “O Lord, shape my life as You like and according to Your will”. His fingers were like candles giving light and the smell of incense surrounded him. This story shows the deep spiritual life he led.

His Monastic Life

Shenouda’s father took him, to his maternal uncle St. Bigoul the Abbot of a monastery in Upper Egypt, to bless him, but Anba Bigoul took the hand of the small child and put it on his own head and said: “Bless me my son because you will be the father of many monks.” St. Shenouda stayed with his maternal uncle and began the life of monasticism and struggle as a monk. The Lord’s angel appeared to Anba Bigoul in a dream and told him to dress the child Shenouda in the monk’s vestment (Iskim) which the Lord Christ himself blessed, this happened among all the fathers of the monastery who expressed their joy.

The monk Shenouda lived the life of monasticism and struggled through fasting, prayers, asceticism and spiritual vigil. He also struggled against demons that fought him severely but he conquered them with the power of God and the Divine grace that was working in him. He also loved the solitary life and staying alone in caves far away from the monastery and one day he heard a voice from heaven saying: “Shenouda has become an Archimandrite”.

After the death of his uncle, the monks appointed him as abbot because of his godliness, holiness and spiritual life. He cared for monasticism and founded his strict system and the White monastery became famous in the world of monasticism.

His Virtues and Miracles

St. Shenouda enjoyed the spiritual transparency. He was taken up to heaven to see the church of the heavenly, first born. Angel Michael used to visit him. John the Baptist, Elijah and Elisha also visited him. The most important event in his life was when the Lord of Glory, Jesus Christ visited him and spoke to him about the Kingdom of God and about managing the monastery and monasticism.

The Lord also made nature serve him. The clouds carried him to Constantinople (in Turkey) as he longed to see Emperor Theodosius and also when the clouds carried him back to his monastery from Ephesus after he had attended the ecumenical Conference of Ephesus.

The saint was able to know the hidden secrets and the Lord performed many miraculous deeds through him:

- ❖ The story of the virgin priest who sinned.
- ❖ The story of the man who went to the saint asking for alms to test him.
- ❖ The story of the man, the tray, and his love for money.
- ❖ The story of the evil messenger who sinned.
- ❖ The story of the feeding the visitors of the monastery and the seed of wheat.
- ❖ The story of Eulogion given to him by Paul the apostle.

His Most Important Deed

He fought Paganism and the Pagans. He destroyed their temples and their idols and burnt their books.

He resisted heretics and accompanied Pope Cyril the Great (24th) to third Ecumenical Conference at Ephesus in AD 431 where Nestorius was tried for his heresy. It was decided to

excommunicate Nestorius and to send him into exile. Anba Shenouda played his role in teachings and heresies.

He was a Coptic man of letters as he wrote many sermons and articles in Akmimi Coptic, which is considered a great heritage.

He was a national leader that led his people in fighting the Byzantine imperialism. He did not allow foreigners to be ordained monks in his monasteries.

His Death

He visited one of the saints called Thomas who told him that he would himself depart to Heaven after a few days and St. Shenouda would depart after him, Thomas gave him a sign which was that the stone in front of his cavern would split in two.

Three months later Anba Shenouda was sick. He gathered all his sons and advised them to struggle to the last breath. His face lit like the sun and he prayed continuously then the Lord Jesus Himself came to strengthen and comfort him in his sickness. St. Anthony, St.

Pachomius and St. Bishoy also visited him. At last he knelt down to worship the Lord and crossed himself with the sign of the cross and he breathed his last on the 7th of Abib, AD 451 and he was about 120 years old. May the blessings of his prayers be with us, Amen.

Conclusion:

St. Shenouda contributed great contributions to the monastic life and the history of the church. His life was full of spiritually productive works. His example is a great example to all of us.

Applications:

- ❖ Search the internet for information about Anba Shenouda
- ❖ Let us take Anba Shenouda's example in prayer and fasting. Practice regular Wednesday and Friday fasting.

LESSONS FOR THE MONTH OF AUGUST

Week 1: Zeal and Enthusiasm

Week 2: The Eucharist

Week 3: The Life of the Virgin St. Mary

Week 4: St. Takla Hymanot

Week 1 - Zeal and Enthusiasm

Objective:

- ❖ Clarifying the meaning of some concepts concerning the subject.

Memory Verse:

“I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus”
(Philippians 3:14)

References:

- ❖ An article issued in Al Keraza Magazine on Friday. 12 March 1976 - Anba Bemin.
- ❖ The Holy Zeal - Kamal Habib.

Introduction:

Are Enthusiasm and Zeal Necessary Signs of the Stage of Youth?

Enthusiasm is a sign of psychological health in young people because of their abundant liveliness and energy. This enthusiasm is felt in their great concern and deep desire to achieve goals. They also show enthusiasm in defending ideals and principles. Of course the domain of this enthusiasm differ according to the different patterns, moods, aims and education of young people.

Lesson Outline:

The Difference Between Enthusiasm and Rushness

Each instinct has its own primary motives that stimulate the emotion. The emotion is the response to the stimulant. So rushness is moving according to emotions and in this it is a primitive feeling indicating the weak level and the uncivilized behavior. But enthusiasm is objective and results from deep thinking and self-control.

The Difference between Enthusiasm and Fanaticism

Fanaticism makes men unable to see the truth in others and the good side of other people. So fanaticism is Narcissism, self-love and self-worship. But Christianity means freedom in truth without fanaticism or narrow mindedness. It deeply respects the humanity of man “He who has ears to hear, let him hear”.

The Christian, who stick to his faith and to the Creed he believes in, does not oppose those who differ with him, but he calmly and modestly explains the truth by the Spirit of God dwelling in him “For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”

Signs of True Spiritual Zeal among Young Believers

Human enthusiasm, which is not spiritual, has several signs that characterize it and makes the young man anxious and drives him to seek praise from other people to achieve self-

aggrandizement. The life of the fathers and martyrs by the Holy Zeal and deep faith among difficult circumstances is an evidence of the power and type of the holy zeal (James 3:13-17).

The source of the holy zeal is the Divine love without partiality or fanaticism. It lies in the fire about which the Lord said: I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it was already kindled! So the chaste body, the sublime instincts, chastity and abstinence drive man to be jealous for the Glory of God and the Salvation of others.

The Holy Zeal accompanies aims:

- ❖ To obey the commandment and wait for the Lord.
- ❖ To be positive however difficult the circumstances are, as the Spirit of the Lord is loving and giving.
- ❖ To care with a holy flame of fire for those who falls or stumbles.

Models of the Holy Zeal

From the Old Testament: Nehemiah

Nehemiah did not enjoy the life of prosperity in the king's palace. Luxury destroys zeal, as the jealous person is ready to sacrifice his comfort for his zeal. When he stood before the king he was not a coward. He was not afraid but he declared why he was sad in a brave and powerful way before the king because the holy zeal does not know fear but it lives in the boldness of faith. According to the king's orders Nehemiah, was in charge of building the holy city. But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite heard this, it displeased them greatly that someone had come to seek the welfare of the children of Israel. They derided him and despised him and said: "What is this thing that you are doing? Are you building against the King?" Then the jealous Nehemiah replied with courage and power "The God of heaven Himself will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build, but you have no heritage or right or memorial in Jerusalem" (Nehemiah 2:20)

In this way the enemies united against Nehemiah but he did not fall into despair or become sad. The bad circumstance increased his courage and zeal and many men stood by him for the good of the city.

Nehemiah is a model of the holy zeal that does not favor faces or fear people (when he reproached the rich who seized the chance to exact interest each from his bother). He did not fall into despair. He did not feel tired of work or service but he depended on the Divine Arms in his plans to rebuild Jerusalem.

From the New Testament:

Paul the apostle: whose zeal is considered a wonderful model for young people to follow and a good example for anyone who lives the life of sacred zeal (2 Corinthians 6:4-8; Acts 20:17-34).

Conclusion:

There should be clear boundaries between the acceptable pure jealousy and the jealousy that is not based on knowledge (James 3:15-18). The life of the Lord Jesus was devoid of cruelty,

extremism of fanaticism so that this Divine life can be an example for young people to follow in their conduct and in orienting their motives.

Applications:

- ❖ The servant holds a discussion with the students about the fact that Christianity accepts zeal and rejects fanaticism.
- ❖ The servant holds a discussion with the students about practical models of bodily and spiritual jealousy so that the thoughts can be applied to practical models and examples.
- ❖ The servant holds a discussion with the students about the causes of extremism in the life of young people and the effect of grace on softening jealousy and directing it and assessing the factors and powers that affect the people's conduct and in this way our judgment will be just and fair.

Week 2 - The Eucharist

Objective:

- ❖ To go into the depths of the Eucharist Sacrament to meet the Lord Jesus and understand His work of Salvation through sacrifice of His love.

Memory verse:

“ Jesus took bread, blessed it and broke it, and gave it to them and said, Take eat, this is My body” (Mark 14:22)

References:

- ❖ Christ in the Sacrament of the Eucharist - St. George church Sporting.
- ❖ The Eucharist and the mass.

Introduction:

What is the Sacrament of the Eucharist!

It is the mystery of being united with God through the enlightenment of knowledge and reaching eternity.

It is the mystery of worship and consecration through which the soul knows the Holy Trinity and loves Him, accepts Him and responds to His work.

It is the mystery of thanksgiving through which we obtain the grace of Christ's life.

Lesson Outline:

Eucharist and Relationship with Passover, Salvation and Church

The Sacrament of the Eucharist is the continuation of Christ work of sacrifice as He is present in the Eucharist. The Eucharist is an extension to the Cross work of salvation.

The Eucharist Sacrament is the Sacrament of the New Testament and in it the covenant between God and man is achieved as the Sacrifice of Christ is the faithful witness (Revelation 1:5). Aso, He grants us heavenly relationship through it, a heavenly meal that grants us eternal life.

The Eucharist is a symbol of real Pascha as Christ was offered as the lamb of God (Corinthians 5:7). The mystery of the Pascha has been achieved in the Body of the Lord that He gave us in His body and His Blood so that we may enjoy eternity. So the sacrament of the Eucharist allows us to enter the kingdom of God to meet Him face to face forever.

The Eucharist is the church sacrifice, which Christ offers with all love and obedience to God. The church goes into the altar (the Golgotha) and soars up to the highest heaven and does not know what to offer except Christ.

Through the Eucharist we become members of Christ's Body, filled in Christ and known to the Father on the altar through His beloved Son.

The Eucharist and the Word of God

The Sacrament of the Eucharist is the flesh of the Word of God that fulfils the voice of God.

The sanctification of the sacrament of the Eucharist and receiving the Holy Communion bring us into the depths of the Holy Bible to realize that the Word of God is the presence of the living God with all His power as a Creator, Judge and Savior.

The Holy Bible is the main source of sanctioning the Sacrament of Eucharist as we read during Liturgy prayers the Pauline Epistle, the Catholic Epistle, a reading from the Acts of the Apostles, Psalms and the Holy Gospel.

The Liturgical Eucharistic text is taken from the Holy Bible (1 Corinthians 2:9).

The Eucharist Symbols in the Old Testament

The Passover (Pascha).

The heavenly Manna.

The offering of Melchizedek (Genesis 14:17-19).

The wisdom meal (Proverbs 9:1).

The Messiah's meal (Isaiah 55:1-3).

The wedding meal (Songs of Songs).

The prophecy of Malachi (Malachi 1:11).

The Division of the Eucharist Liturgy

The Eucharist Liturgy is a journey to heaven - during which we enjoy the company of our Lord Jesus through our unity with Him by:

The Hymn: This is a preparation for this journey and through it we enter the life of praising God the Creator.

The bread and wine Prayer (the Lamb): this is the beginning of the journey and in it we offer all our life to Christ.

Readings: These are the guides of the journey. Without them we cannot follow the road or achieve the goal. They give the believers a chance to listen to the voice of God through:

- (1) His apostles (the Pauline epistle and the Catholic epistle).
- (2) The works of His apostles (Acts of the apostles, Praxis).
- (3) The Acts of the church (Synaxarium).
- (4) The Acts of His Son (the Gospel).
- (5) Through the Ministers (the Sermon).

The Intercession: Throughout this journey the church prays for her safety and peace (the intercession for peace), the safety of her ministers (the intercession for the fathers), for the Lord to bless the Congregations (intercession for the congregations) so that she may complete, achieve and fulfill her message without fear.

Reconciliation Prayer: Before the Invocation of the Holy Spirit: The church announces reconciliation between God and the people in Christ (the apostolic embrace of Peace).

The coming of the Holy Spirit (Anaphora): It is the moment of going into heaven and being united with God through receiving His Holy Body and Blood.

Conclusion:

The Lord, with His great compassion toward man kind, has arranged for a continuation of His salvation to man kind through the sacrament of the Eucharist. This is the sacrament to continue the unity between man and the loving God. It would be very difficult for any wise person not to participate in it.

Applications:

- ❖ Clarify the concepts and meaning of the Sacrament of the Eucharist to the students so that the spiritual benefit of the sacrament may be achieved.
- ❖ A special Mass is to be said for the students and the teachers to explain the divisions of the Liturgy.
- ❖ All the students are to receive the Holy Communion in this Mass as one fellowship to renew the spirit of membership and understanding the basic relationship with the Lord.
- ❖ Encourage the students to receive communion regularly.

Week 3 - The Life of the Lady Virgin

Objectives:

- ❖ To learn from the multiple virtues of St. Mary

Memory Verse:

“My soul magnifies the Lord, And my spirit rejoice in God my Savior” (Luke 1:46,47)

References:

- ❖ With the Virgin - St. John Chrysostom, Translated by Fr. Mittyas Fareed.
- ❖ Virgin Mary - Fr. Zakarya Khalil.
- ❖ The Virgin looks like the church - Monk Max Thorian

Introduction:

When we speak about the Virgin Mary we have the feeling of fear that we feel when we are before the Lord's Sanctuary and His Holy of Holies. She, with her silence and calmness, her strong worship, her faith, her submission and modesty and the sword of pain that pierced her heart compels all people to honor her, respect her and love her.

Lesson Outline:

Mary, the Fruit of Prayer

Joachim was a rich Israelite and his wife Anna; Aaron's daughter from the tribe of (Aaron) was barren and had no children. Joachim and Anna always prayed and asked the Lord to grant them a child and the Lord answered their prayer.

A Babe in the Temple

When Mary was three years old, her parents took her to the temple, to live there as a virgin and to serve in the temple. She was loved by all. When she was twelve years old, the priests exchanged views as to what to do with her and who would be in charge of her and Joseph the old man was chosen to be in charge of her.

News for the Generations

Angel Gabriel appeared to the Virgin to bring her the happy news that she would be the Savior's mother. This happy news is a supreme sublime one for getting rid of the human shame.

The meeting between the two saints

Mary visited Elizabeth to congratulate her on her miraculous conception. We wish we had been there to witness the meeting of the saints and the visits between the righteous.

How lowly the visitor was! The Virgin sat on the throne of dignity where no girl had ever sat. How great Elizabeth was as a saint! She forgot her own happy news and remembered one thing only; that she was in the presence of the Savior that was in the Virgin's womb.

The Lady Virgin accompanies her Son and Lord in His service and in His walk to the cross.

During His Service

Jesus was well known in Galilee that is why they invited Him to the wedding in Cana and He accepted the invitation and shared them in their wedding (John 2:1,2). When they ran out of wine at the wedding, St. Mary knew that her Son can solve this problem. Here we ask, how did the Virgin realize the greatness of her Son and His ability and power although He had not performed miracles yet (John 2:11).

He and His Mother

Christ's respect for His mother is clearly shown in accepting to do the miracle and the Scripture says: "He was obedient to His parents" (Luke 2:51). He was thinking of His mother and where she would live, when He was on the cross (John 19:25-27).

On His way to the Cross

He cared for His mother because she followed Him to the cross, to the Golgotha and a sword pierced her heart... but with courage that fits the Lord's mother.

But on another occasion: Christ said, "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" Christ did not mean to degrade that who bore Him, but He said that for her benefit and to draw her attention to perceive His mission, because He cared for others and guided them to understand His mission and He had to do that too with His mother to raise her concept of Him in His present state of lowliness to the coming glory of His.

Another reason: So that His miracles might not be surrounded with doubt, the one who wanted anything had to ask for it first not His mother: "O Woman, what have you to do with Me" (Luke 9:11). These were the words of Divine wisdom and not words that denote roughness.

Before Her Departure

She used to spend most of the day worshipping in the temple... because it was a difficult period for her after she and her only Son were separated. If Mary did not love anyone but Jesus and this beloved Son ascended to heaven, all her emotions then were directed towards heaven... No wonder then if we know that she inhabited heaven while she was still on earth.

Her Death and the Ascension of Her Body to Heaven

After she breathed her last breath... the Lord sent His angels to carry her body to heaven and the apostles witnessed this miracle except Thomas who was not present at that time.

The Status of the Virgin and Her Intercession for Us

The coming of the Holy Spirit on the Virgin prepared her for bearing the Son of God but He did not grant her the privilege of sharing the nature of God. She attained the Holy Spirit with the apostles on Pentecost through baptism (The Holy Spirit and fire) (Acts 1:14).

Two Motherhoods: She became a mother through grace. She was chosen and sanctified. She also became a mother through struggle, faith and obeying the commandment "Whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother, and sister and mother".

To What Extent Does the Virgin Intercede for Us?

She asks her Son with great love and confidence. She adds her request to His mercy and raises her request with confidence till He answers her... because the prayers of humanity cannot reach the extent that makes Christ answer them except through faith.

Conclusion:

St. Mary is a mother for all human race. Through her the incarnation was fulfilled. She became the mother of the Lord. What spirit can tolerate this great honor? Thus, she is the pride of all humanity.

Applications:

- ❖ Study the situations mentioned in the Gospel where the virgin stood by her Son the Savior.
- ❖ Celebrate the day of her body's ascension and appearance.
- ❖ Ask for the intercession of the Virgin in your practical every day life.

Week 4 - St. Takla Hymanot

Objective:

- ❖ To familiarize ourselves with the lives of the saints and learn from them.

Memory verse:

“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up” (James 4:10).

References:

- ❖ Coptic Synaxarium
- ❖ The Book of Saints - St. George and St. Joseph Church, Montreal

Introduction:

The Coptic Church acknowledges St. Takla as a great saint and many churches in Egypt bear his name.

Lesson Outline:

St. Takla Hymanot was born of pious parents. His father Tsegab Ze-Ab (Which means the grace of the father) lived a godly life with his wife Sarah in Ethiopia. They were righteous, God fearing and very rich. On the twelfth of each Coptic month, they used to celebrate the commemoration of the Archangel Michael by offering alms to the poor.

But things did not remain peaceful for a long time. One day a pagan king attacked their city. He demolished the churches and built pagan temples. He was unjust and he plundered and captured women, among them Sarah the mother of St. Takla. Later she returned safely to her husband and both glorified God and praised His Holy name.

Sarah and her husband were sad because they did not have any children. Sarah went daily to the church asking God to give her a child that would delight her heart. One day, the angel of the Lord appeared to her and her husband in a vision at night and announced to them the birth of this saint. A year later, Sarah gave birth to the saint. They baptized him when he was forty days old and called him Takla meaning “Jerusalem Joy”. When the saint was one and a half years old, a famine befell Ethiopia. When the twelfth day of the blessed day of Baramhat, the commemoration of the honorable head of the Heavenly hosts Archangel Michael, drew near, Sarah was crying for she was not able to celebrate this occasion. The child wiped away her tears with his little hands and yet he was still too young unable to talk. He pointed to her to carry him where there was a plate with a little flour in it. She took him to the plate where he dipped his hand in the flour. The flour increased until it was pouring onto the floor. She brought containers to hold the flour and every time she emptied the plate, it became full again, until she had twelve containers. Sarah then knew that God was with the child. So she brought to him an empty container of oil he placed his hand over it and it was filled with the power of God. In the same fashion, other containers in the house were filled. When Tsega Ze-Ab, the father of the child returned from the church and knew what happened he glorified God. They celebrated the commemoration of the Archangel Michael, fed the poor and all the neighbors.

At fifteen, Takla was ordained a deacon. He taught the Holy Scriptures and the Psalms as the grace of God was upon him.

One day the boy went out hunting. Archangel Michael appeared to him and said, “From now on, you will be a hunter of men. You will preach to them, heal them for you will overcome the devil with the power of God who dwells in you”. Then the Archangel added, “And from now on your name will be Takla Hymanot which is translated “Pillar of the Faith”. Takla gave all his money and possessions to the poor, and set off to preach the word of God to the nearby villages. He met some people who worshipped a tree. The saint went to the tree and with the sign of the cross he ordered it to move. With great power, the tree uprooted itself, and fell to the ground. Everyone was scared but Takla comforted them, and told them about Jesus’ salvation and His authority. When the Ethiopian bishop Abba Cyril heard about him, he ordained him a priest.

Takla Hymanot led a life of chastity, full of prayers and fasting. His unequalled goal was the salvation of his people. One time, he went to a pagan temple and began to destroy its idols. He was arrested, and taken to the prince. The prince had a sick son, who at that time was suffering a great deal. The saint had compassion on the boy and healed him. The same night, the prince, his wife and his son were baptized.

When the king heard what happened, he was furious and ordered that Takla would be hanged. But when they tried to hang him from a tree, the tree bent down completely until its branches touched the ground and Takla was saved.

The prince tried to convince the king to let him go. From the conversation they had, Takla realized that this was the same king that kidnapped his mother years ago. However, the king, in his rage, picked up a spear and tried to kill Takla. But the spear bounced back and hurt the king. Immediately, the saint prayed for him and healed his wound. The king realized his mistake, apologized to Takla and was baptized along with his entire household. The saint stayed with the king and the prince for twelve years, during which new churches were built and Christianity spread throughout Ethiopia.

Later on, Takla Hymanot went to live in a monastery for six years. He used to do hard work and help the old and young. He was always humble and obedient to everybody. One day he was leaving the monastery, which was built on the tip of a steep mountain, as usual, they tied him with a rope and lowered him but all of a sudden the rope broke, and everyone screamed. But to their amazement, they saw six wings appear on the saint and he was able to fly down gently until he touched the ground.

On his way back to his country from visiting the Holy Land, he stopped by Egypt and visited several of its monasteries. After he went back to Ethiopia, he was appointed for an important position (Atceegi), he served as link between the Ethiopian monks and the Egyptian bishop.

We celebrate his departure on the twenty-fourth day of the blessed month of Misra.

Conclusion:

- ❖ Let us learn to trust in God and His angels.
- ❖ Let us learn how to forgive those who hurt us.
- ❖ Let us appreciate the importance of caring for the poor in the life of this family.

Applications:

- ❖ Find an icon of St. Takla Hymanot.
- ❖ Can you think of other characters that were gifted since birth?
- ❖ Do you believe this story? If not which part you do not believe? And why?
The servant should encourage a discussion.

LESSON OF THE FIRST WEEK OF SEPTEMBER
Before the Coptic New Year

Week 1: Effect of the Media

Week 1- Effect of the 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 - Father Tadros Y. Malaty
- ❖ The story of Father Youstos El Antony

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.
- ❖ Discuss also how much time everyday they spend interacting with one or more forms of media, e.g. TV, Radio, Internet, movies, or music.

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.

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.

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 you are spending with God and how much 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. Father Youstos El Antony 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 in front of the TV or on the Internet.
- ❖ 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:

- ❖ 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 (1Corinthians 6:12).

Application:

- ❖ 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.