

Dare to be Different

1- Objectives

- To understand what it means to be a Christian in today's world
- And where our sphere of influence lies

2- References

- Holy Scripture
- Interpretation of Romans 12: 1-2 by Father Tadros Malaty
[http://st-takla.org/pub Bible-Interpretations/Holy-Bible-Tafsir-02-New-Testament/Father-Tadros-Yacoub-Malaty/06-Resalet-Romya/Tafseer-Resalat-Romia_01-Chapter-12.html](http://st-takla.org/pub_Bible-Interpretations/Holy-Bible-Tafsir-02-New-Testament/Father-Tadros-Yacoub-Malaty/06-Resalet-Romya/Tafseer-Resalat-Romia_01-Chapter-12.html)

3- Scriptural Verse

- "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." (Romans 12: 1-2)

4- Lesson Outline

- We must realize that one characteristic all Christians Must have is the courage and boldness to be different.
- Our Lord has asked us to be light unto the world and a city set on a hill (Matthew 5:14-19). These two objects are very obvious, they cannot be missed. A city set on a hill can be seen miles away. Light pierces the darkness and does not intermingle with it. The two cannot coexist.

Reasons we can be with people and never stand out as Christians?

- We are too embarrassed to admit we are Christian, that we follow a certain doctrine and live a certain way of life for fear of rejection, or ridicule.
- We are too shy to reveal our beliefs feeling that it makes us reveal too much about ourselves and who we are and may be make us vulnerable in front of others.
- We believe that in order to be humble, we must not show our righteousness.
- We don't want others to feel uncomfortable around us; if they know we are Christians they may behave differently.
- We don't know enough about our beliefs so we don't answer when we are questioned.
- We feel awkward sharing our Orthodoxy because it is less known or common.
- Living double lives with double standards without really ever knowing it.

Why do we have to be different? Why can't our relationship with God be a personal experience?

Our relationship with God can be personal but our convictions and beliefs must not. Why?

- We must spread the knowledge of God to both believers and unbelievers, even if it is uncomfortable for us and for those who are listening (2 Corinthians 2:14-16).
- We have a mission in life and that is to bring others to the knowledge of God. We are called to be different not just for the sake of being different but so that our difference will lead others to the Lord Jesus Christ when they see that we have the courage to disassociate ourselves from a sinful world. Many of us don't think of our lives as missionaries but we really are.
- Being different is not easy and it goes against what the majority of people would do or what would come naturally to them. There is a risk involved.
- **Nice story:** There was a German soldier who was injured during the Second World War on the Russian front. The other soldiers left the place without realizing that he was injured. He crawled until he arrived to a small house. He knocked. An Old Russian lady opened up for him. She cleaned his injury, offered him food and bed to sleep. Four days passed by, and the soldier was unable to understand why this enemy is taking good care of him whilst endangering her own life for him. Finally he saw an icon of St. Mary in her bedroom. He realized that she was an Orthodox faithful. He left the house for the German frontier. Unfortunately for him, he had lost his way and returned to the same place. He found the house in ruin, the old lady had gone. He inquired about her. He was told that the soldiers found out about her helping an enemy, they destroyed her house and sent her to prison. He managed to go and see her. She was happy and cheerful because God had used her as an instrument of his love to change the life of another person. The soldier became a priest in his country and he is still alive today.

People always tend to follow

- A few years ago, psychologist Ruth W. Berenda and her associates carried out an interesting experiment with teenagers designed to show how a person handled group pressure. The plan was simple. They brought groups of ten adolescents into a room for a test. Subsequently, each group of ten was instructed to raise their hands when the teacher pointed to the longest line on three separate charts. What one person in the group did not know was that nine of the others in the room had been instructed ahead of time to vote for the second-longest line. Regardless of the instructions they heard, once they were all together in the group, the nine were not to vote for the longest line, but rather vote for the next to the longest line. The experiment began with nine teen-agers voting for the wrong line. The stooge would typically glance around, frown in confusion, and slip his hand up with the group. The instructions were repeated and the next card was raised. Time after

time, the self-conscious stooge would sit there saying a short line is longer than a long line, simply because he lacked the courage to challenge the group. This remarkable conformity occurred in about 75% of the cases, and was true of small children and high-school students as well.

- Each and every Christian is called to be different and to be a leader regardless of what your personality is like: St. Athanasius, Pope of Alexandria, stoutly opposed the teachings of Arius, who declared that Christ was not the eternal Son of God, but a subordinate being. Hounded through five exiles, he was finally summoned before emperor Theodosius, who demanded he cease his opposition to Arius. The emperor reproved him and asked, "Do you not realize that the entire world is against you?" St. Athanasius quickly answered, "Then I am against the world."

How do we remain different?

- Watching the Company that we keep (1 Corinthians 15:33, Proverbs 2:20, Proverbs 22:24). Regarding intimate relationship, we should be very picky as to whom we associate with so as not to be brought down by others. For example, it is not correct to marry a nonbeliever or someone with a drinking problem for the sake of bringing them to the faith because more than likely that's not going to happen. But we are not called to avoid the world around us in our every day dealings, at work, school, our acquaintances, at church even. This is where we need to stand out.
- Daily, remember your mission which is to spread the knowledge of God. If we live our lives with that mindset then our words and behavior will be different.
- Do not be afraid of rejection and ridicule by others but rather expect it (Luke 21:17-18) this verse is repeated three other times in the Gospels; it's a very true statement. However, God comforts us through the promise that He is our defender. Expect rejection from people but trust in God's ultimate acceptance of you. Noah for example was the only righteous man in his generation, though the whole world was destroyed; he and his family were saved.
- Our Lord tells us how we are supposed to accomplish being different in Matthew 10:16. He says "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves." It means to reject everything around us that does not conform to His will but still being loving, meek and merciful to all people.

5- Conclusion

- We are called to be leaders in this world and not followers when it comes to our beliefs and convictions. It takes a lot of courage to be different but with perseverance the results will be spreading the word of God and pleasing our Lord (Matthew 25:21).

6- Activities / Discussion Points

- Start the lesson by a discussion about the experiment of Berenda and how people always tend to follow even if they know that they are going wrong. Give examples of strong people who dared to say no and did the right thing (Joseph, Elijah, Daniel and the 3 young men....)