



The Coptic Orthodox Diocese of
The Southern USA

SUNDAY SCHOOL CURRICULUM



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

Sunday School Curriculum

Grade 8



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PREFACE

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

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

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

“Thus Far The Lord Has Helped Us”
(I Samuel 7:12)



INTRODUCTION

This grade 8 Sunday School curriculum has been modified by substituting 17 lessons from the previous curriculum published by the Youth Service Committee of the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate with new lessons that are suitable for the youth in America. The order of the lessons has also been changed to follow the major events in the church. This resulted in the following order assuming the starting date is the first week after the Coptic New Year celebration (El Nayrouz) on September 11:

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

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

The students of grade 8 are in a transition period between childhood and adulthood. They still like stories but they also like to discuss and understand information. They need good effort from the teacher to keep them interested and focused on the lesson. The use of audiovisual aids is still very important at this age. They also start to question many of the previous learned facts of faith seeking understanding. 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 is a preliminary modified curriculum for grade 8 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. Social Injustice**
- 2. Bribe and Corruption**
- 3. Love is the Greatest Gift**
- 4. History of the Exile and the Book of Ezra**
- 5. The Laws of Kingdom of the World: Division in the Church of Corinth**
- 6. The Book of Joshua**
- 7. Peace in Christianity**

1- Social Injustice

Objective:

- ❖ The role of the Christian in Society.

References:

- ❖ A Sermon by H. H. Pope Shenouda III about Social Justice.

Memory Verse:

“But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everlasting stream” (Amos 5:24).

Introduction:

When you look around you, you will find many people treat one another with injustice. Some try to control others and misuse the authority given to them by the Society and they make use of this authority for their personal benefit at the cost of others and at the cost of the other groups and classes of their society. The rich become richer and the poor become poorer. In some societies, individuals are not considered equal because of differences of race, religion or the social class they belong to. There is no doubt that distinction between individuals for any of these reasons is wrong and not just.

Lesson Outline:

I. Religion Calls For Equality And Justice

Religion calls all persons to achieve equity and justice in their society. Religion makes a pious person free from fear and helps him to recognize the aspects of social injustice and resist them. The Old Testament gives us examples of prophets who stood against kings when those kings exploited their authority and took for themselves what the other poor people had. King Ahab and his wife Jezebel took possession of a field that belonged to a poor farmer named Naboth of Jezreel. Prophet Elijah met the king and severely reproached him saying, “*Have you killed, and also take possession?*” (Read the story in the Holy Bible 1 Kings 21)

Prophet Amos called people to treat one another with justice and warned them that the Lord will punish those who take possession of others’ possessions and do not care for the poor. Amos said to them “Thus says the Lord: For three transgressions of Israel and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes. That they trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth and turn aside the way of the afflicted” (Amos 2:6,7).

John the Baptist was a voice crying in the wilderness; he reminded people of their sins; he called people to treat one another with justice. He said to them, “Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” Some tax collectors asked him about what they should do and he answered them “Collect no more than what is appointed for you!” Soldiers also asked him... and he said to them, “Rob no one by violence or by false accusation, and be content with your wages” (Luke 3:9-14).

II. The Lord Teaches About Justice And Equality

The Lord Jesus cared for the poor and the needy. He spent most of His time with them. His family was a poor family and He learned to work as a carpenter. His disciples were of the poorest classes of society. The Lord Jesus reproached the scribes and the Pharisees because they neglected the orphans and widows and scolded them for their tyranny and oppression.

He said to them: “Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows’ houses, and for pretence make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation” (Matthew 23:14).

The disciples and the apostles obeyed the commandments of the Lord of glory and were against injustice among men.

James the apostle wrote sharp words in his epistle attacking the rich people who treat the poor workers with injustice: “Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days. Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth” (James 5:1-4).

III. The Church Is Concerned With Establishing Social Justice

In the history of the church, there are many examples that show that the church is concerned with social justice. St. John Chrysostom, the Patriarch of Constantinople stood by the poor and the needy. He supported them and defended them. In his sermons, he used to reproach the rich who neglected the poor. He used to remind them of the fact that when they neglected the poor, their brethren, they destroyed the Body of Christ. He asked them to feed the hungry first then to decorate the altar of Christ with embroidered cloth and gold vessels.

St. Basil the great called the rich to care for the poor. He used to say to them, “The food that you hide is not yours, but it is the food that should be given to the hungry men. That cloak which is inside your stores is the naked’s dress and the money you keep at home is for the needy.

IV. The Duty Of The Christian Towards Social Justice

A true Christian rejects any unjust treatment that causes others’ suffering. He himself may endure oppression that may afflict him as he follows Christ’s example, but he always defends the oppressed and scolds the oppressors.

When a Christian knows that some of the poor, the needy and weak people are oppressed, he stands in the name of Christ and resists the unjust authority and declares what is right. He stands against the oppressors and calls them to do justice. He is aware of the different social situations and attitudes and the injustice that may prevail in society. He himself explores and finds out the unjust treatment in everyday life.

V. What A Christian Should Do To Fight Injustice?

- ❖ He can help the oppressed in their fight against tyrants.
- ❖ He can request the unjust authority to establish the rules of justice and equity in society.
- ❖ He can play a part and share in the activities performed by the movements and the advanced institutions that stand against injustice and he can also help those institutions.

- ❖ He can help others to see aspects of injustice in their life and in the life of society.

Applications:

- ❖ Study the situations in which social injustice appears in the environment where you live and try to stand against injustice. Make use of the means suggested above.
- ❖ Discuss the problem of cheating in the examinations and show how cheating leads to corruption and injustice.
- ❖ Mention other examples of social injustice from the Holy Bible and write down what was said about them.

Conclusion/Questions

- ❖ What does “Social Injustice” mean? Give examples from everyday life.
- ❖ Why does the Lord hate social Justice?
- ❖ How does the church resist social injustice in the world today?
- ❖ What is your role in resisting social injustice?

2- Bribery and Corruption

Objective:

- ❖ Resisting social diseases.

Memory Verse:

- ❖ “He who hates unjust gain will prolong his days” (Proverbs 28:16).
- ❖ “Do not gather my soul together with sinners, nor my life with bloodthirsty men. In whose hands is a sinister scheme and whose right hand is full of bribes. But as for me, I will walk in my integrity. Redeem me and be merciful to me” (Psalm 26:9-11).

Introduction:

I. The Failing Nature Of Man

God created man in His image. The Lord said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.”

When God created man, God saw that it was good. When Adam was in the garden, he enjoyed happiness, love and freedom. Although man was created of dust, yet God gave him a great authority as he had the breath of life as God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. God’s purpose was that man would enjoy His good things as a lover rejoices when he sees his beloved happy in his life. Adam enjoyed the good things of God but when he failed through the envy of the devil; he was separated from God and God’s image in him was destroyed and the unity within man and the unity between man and others disappeared and through sin, corruption, division and selfishness changed the nature of man.

In his epistle to the Romans Saint Paul says, “*They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one*” (Romans 3:12).

In the same epistle, the apostle throws light upon the corruption which changed the nature of man saying: “*being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents*” (Romans 1:29,30).

Despite of this corruption, man still keeps within him that Divine image which was deformed by sin. He also kept within himself conscience, Spirit and inner longing for sublime and spiritual life. Thus conflict between good and evil within man arose conflict between the bright image of God in him and the law of sin that is not of his nature. In this St. Paul the apostle says: “*But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*” (Romans 7:23-24).

Lesson Outline:

I. Bribe Is One Of The Images Of Corruption

Bribe is considered one of the images of corruption that changed the nature of man. For this reason, the Lord gives us a very important commandment in the Law of Moses in the Old Testament. The Lord said, *“And you shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the discerning and perverts the words of the righteous” (Exodus 23:8).*

In the Book of Deuteronomy, the Lord says: *“Cursed is the one who takes a bribe” (Deuteronomy 27:25).*

The Old Testament gives us examples of corrupted persons who took bribe. One example is Eli’s sons whom the Lord refused. The Lord cursed the whole household of Eli because the man neglected the instruction of his sons and because of the bad conduct of his sons. The Scripture says about them: *“But his sons did not walk in his ways, they turned aside after dishonest gain, took bribe and perverted justice.” (1 Samuel 8:3).*

Prophet David describe the wicked men as those, *“In whose hands is a sinister scheme, and whose right hand is full of bribes” (Psalm 26:10).*

David praises the righteous by saying, *“Who does not put out his money at usury, nor does take a bribe against the innocent” (Psalm 15:5).*

Solomon praises and beautifies those who refuse bribe by saying: *“he who hates covetousness will prolong his days” (Proverbs 28:16),* and describes him by saying that he is honest and pure: *“He will accept no recompense, nor will he be appeased though you give many gifts” (Proverbs 6:35).*

II. Simonism Is A Dangerous Disease

Simon the magician wanted to give Peter money (a bribe) for the gifts of the Holy Spirit, but Peter said to him, *“Your silver perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money. You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God” (Acts 8:20,21).* Thus Simonism became a dangerous sin. The teachings of the apostles warn every bishop against taking bribe or any money for giving what is taken without money, i.e. the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

III. What Are The Shapes Of Bribery In Our Present Society

- ❖ The person who gives some money to officials or people of authority to get or obtain things that are not his right, or to get any privilege or special favor through unjust ways in different domains.
- ❖ The person who gives money or presents to receive unjust decisions or civil or church judgment.
- ❖ The student who pays his teacher a big sum of money for private lessons expecting him to give him high marks in the exam.
- ❖ The official who pays the doctor’s fee in the doctor’s private clinic to facilitate giving him sick leave.

IV. The Dangers Of Bribery From The Christian And Social Points Of View

- ❖ It is an aspect of social injustice.

- ❖ It is the source of the corruption of society and perverting justice. It causes the spirit of murmur, anxiety and doubt to spread.
- ❖ It is against the Christian principles. It corrupts the spiritual being of both those who take and those who give the bribe.

V. How To Resist Bribery?

- ❖ Do not encourage those who ask for a bribe whatever the circumstances may be.
- ❖ Take a decisive decision against those who take bribe especially if we have authority to do so.
- ❖ People should be aware of the dangers of bribery and should refuse it.
- ❖ Develop the good conscience in individuals to be able to refuse it.
- ❖ The government should punish severely those who take bribes.

Questions:

- ❖ Bribery is considered a spiritual and social disease. Explain.
- ❖ What are the causes of bribery and corruption in the world?
- ❖ What are the shapes of this dangerous disease within the scope of your private experience?
- ❖ How can you resist bribery?

Applications

- ❖ Write a circular to be distributed among people calling them to resist bribes.
- ❖ Holding a public debate about this phenomenon and its dangers.

3- Love is the Greatest Gift

Objective:

- ❖ Love is the greatest gift of practicing true love.

References:

- ❖ The fruit of the Spirit is love / Fr. Bishoy Kamel.
- ❖ The Divine Love and the Commandment / St. George Church, Sporting.
- ❖ Love for the Neighbor / St. George Church, Sporting.

Memory Verse:

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

Introduction:

When St. John the Beloved became very old, the believers used to carry him to the pulpit of the church to preach but he only repeated these words each time: “Love one another, My sons, love one another.” When he was asked why is he repeating these words only, he said: “Love is the fulfilling of the commandments and the law, and he who loves is born of God for God is love.”

Lesson Outline:**I. A Nice Story**

Marcos sat in his room, opened his Bible and read St. Paul’s Epistle to the Corinthians. The first Epistle, chapter 13 about love but he could not understand the practical meaning of love. While he was thinking he fell asleep and saw a nice vision in a dream. When he awoke from his sleep, he wrote down what he saw in his dream.

“I was at a railway station. I saw a man standing beside me. The man said to me, ‘Come with me’. I walked with him and we took the train. We sat at two opposite seats. The train moved. The first station we stopped at was ‘The New Corinth’. We got out of the train. While we were walking together, I looked at the man. The man smiled to me. His face was all kindness and peace. Comfort filled my heart and I was happy. The people who were walking in the street were also calm and had bright faces. We reach the Love Square. In the middle of that square, there was water flowing from a nice fountain. The Square was full of statues. The man said to me, ‘Look at this big cross on which the crucified Christ is hung.’ I looked and saw Jesus hung on the cross and there was a statement written under him: “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (John 15:13). There was also a statue of St. Stephen the first martyr bowing on his knees. The words he had said were written under him: “Lord do not charge them with this sin” (Acts 7:60). In a corner, I saw a big painting of Virgin Mary holding the child Jesus in her arms and the hymn that Mary sang was written thus: “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior, for He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant... For He who is mighty has done great things for me and holy is His name” (Luke 1:46-49). There was a statue of the Father receiving the Lost Son and

these words were written: “Let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found” (Luke 15:23, 24).

We found a seat at a corner and we sat there, the one beside the other. I said to the man: “I like this beautiful square.” and the man said, “In this place, no one knows animosity or hatred; no one feels jealous of anyone else; each one serves the others with the gifts he has modestly and thankfully. Nobody boasts about what he has before others as the Lord has given each one of them the blessing to serve others with their gifts. Nobody raises his voice foolishly or impolitely but each one listens to the others with patience and lowliness. When a person like you sits with his friends or in his class, he listens attentively to what the others say. He never despises anyone; he never tries to impose himself on others, but tire to convince them of his opinion and points of view with patience. Even if someone says something incorrect, he does not despise him or answers him dryly, but he says a nice word instead. In this way the situation changes to the better, discussion becomes fruitful and they all talk in a friendly atmosphere. Each one of them opens his heart to the other, speaks frankly, and believes what the other says and endures everything with perfect love. Each one of them expresses his good wishes to the other”.

I said to the man, “I like to stay in this place and enjoy this friendly atmosphere which is full of love”, and the man said, ‘But you can enjoy this atmosphere in your life. Everything depends on you. When your heart is filled with love for all people, you will see everything in a different way and you will find that the small problems can be easily solved and you will.’ I interrupted him saying, “But how can I listen to a person who insults me without answering him back? How can I love such a person? And the man said, ‘this is why love is the greatest virtue. You need to train yourself and practice love in your life, if you truly desire to live in New Corinth. You can live there with your mind and heart. Did you know that love is the crown of all gifts and the mother of all virtues?’ When I heard these words I came to myself and looked around me and discovered that all I saw was a nice dream and the Holy Bible was still open at the same chapter. At once I took a piece of paper and a pen and began to write and record this beautiful dream.

II. Let Us Go To The New Corinth

Marcos read his dream to his colleagues in the class the following Sunday and when he finished reading it, there was a lot of discussion on the part of his colleagues who made many comments. One of them said, “I envy the boy who sits beside me in the class as he gets higher marks in the examinations.”

The teacher said, “You must not be jealous of him as this may lead to hatred, but you have to rejoice. At the same time, you have to exert a greater effort and study hard and in this way you will get higher marks next exam”

Marcos said, “I love my younger brother, but he annoys me when he takes my things and use them I know I must show kindness to him and share with him the things that belong to me. But I will try to tell him that when he needs anything, he must tell me before he takes it so that I may not search for it.”

Then all the class read together chapter 13 of Paul’s first epistle to the Corinthians. One of the boys asked, “I cannot understand how love is considered greater than faith or hope.”

The teacher said, “Our faith in God is based on God’s love for us and our love for God as without love there is no faith nor is there hope. St. John the apostle explained this meaning clearly: *“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God, and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested*

toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him” (1 John 4: 7-9).

Without love, the soul cannot draw near to God, as God is Love. That is what John the Beloved preached all the days of his life even when he became an old man.

III. St. Paul The Apostle Says “Aim At Love”

In this epistle to the Corinthians, St. Paul promised the importance of gifts in the church and he said to the believers: “Earnestly desire the best gifts” and then he said, “And yet I show you a more excellent way.” (1 Corinthians 12:31).

He asked the believers to aim at the life of love. He wonderfully emphasized the importance of love by saying: *“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing”* (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

This shows us that love is the greatest of all gifts whether these gifts are speaking in the tongues of men, prophetic powers, knowledge, faith or works of mercy, as unless these gifts are mixed with love, they become void of the good essence that makes them acceptable before the Lord and the Lord does not accept works in number or quantity but in quality.

In this the apostle says: *“And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love”* (1 Corinthians 13:13).

IV. The Importance Of Love In The Christian Life

There are three kinds of love in our life:

1. The first kind is the passion of the flesh. This is called lust as it results from selfishness.

2. The second kind is mutual love, which is superior to the first kind but it is not deep and it cannot form unity between lovers.

3. The third kind is the spiritual love (Agape), which is the true Christian love of which the Lord Jesus gave us a model when He loved us and gave Himself for our sins to deliver us and redeem us. True Christian love means the presence of the Lord Jesus in the believer’s heart as Jesus alone is love and without love, the soul cannot draw near God, as God is love. Without love the church cannot be a church, as how can the body become the body of the Lord while it is devoid of love? We can realize the depth of love and its importance in the life of our Lord Jesus especially when He gave us His holy Body and Blood as power, sacrifice, gift and love for all who receive them. St. John the apostle shows us the importance of this love when he says:

“He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes” (1 John 2:10, 11).

V. The Fruits Of Christian Love

St. Paul the apostle spoke about the fruits of love and its qualities in the chapter we are contemplating when he said:

❖ Love is patient and kind so we have to be kind to the weak.

- ❖ Love does not envy so we have to bless the gifts of others so that envy may not fill the heart of a believer.
- ❖ Love wants not itself and is not puffed up. This is because love is meek and modest so the devil's finger cannot corrupt it. Love does not separate itself from others, as it is not boastful.
- ❖ Love does not believe itself unseemly and it does not seek her own. This is because love is pure because of the work of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of love and holiness.
- ❖ Love is not easily provoked and thinks no evil. It is meek, modest and patient. It endures all and is open to all.
- ❖ Love does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. This is because it aims at truth and abides in the light. It does not aim at the darkness of sin and fanaticism "But he who does the truth comes to the light" (John 3:21). "*He who loves his brother abides in the light*" (1 John 2:10).
- ❖ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. Love never ends (1 Corinthians 13:4-8).

VI. Practical Love

- ❖ The story of the two brothers and wheat, in the church history.
- ❖ The Story of Ibrahim El Gohary and his brother who was despised and insulted by one of his neighbors.
- ❖ The story of the bunch of grapes which was sent before its season and each monk gave it to his brother without tasting it, out of love and preference till it went back to the Abbot of the monastery.
- ❖ Stories of Anba Bishoy, Anba Sarabamon and Anba Abraam (Read the Books of The Garden of the Monks, the History of the Church and the Synaxarium).

Questions

- ❖ What does it mean to say that love is the greatest of all gifts?
- ❖ What are the kinds of love and what is the true Christian love?
- ❖ What are the qualities of Christian love?
- ❖ What are the fruits of Christian love?

Applications:

- ❖ Do acts of love to your brethren especially those who are sick, poor, and those who are in grief. Send gifts to hospitals and orphanages.
- ❖ We have studied some topics mentioned in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, but the servant, together with his children can study the whole epistle and prepare questions for discussion and practice the spiritual exercises in their behavior and conduct.
- ❖ The following are the topics to be studied in the first epistle to the Corinthians:
 - o Divisions in the church (chapters 1, 2, 3, 4).
 - o Do not mix with adulterers, as this sin of adultery is dangerous and fatal. Your body is holy as it is the temple of the Holy Spirit (Chapters 5, 6).

- ❖ Virginitv is better than marriage. To remain single is better than to marry (must present characteristics of both situations) (Chapter 7).
- ❖ Do not cause others to fall (Chapter 8)
- ❖ Bring your body under complete control (Chapter 9).
- ❖ The Lawful and the unlawful. What is expedient and what is inexpedient? (Chapter 11).
- ❖ He who eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord (Chapter 11).
- ❖ Spiritual gifts, living membership, the unity of spirit (Chapter 12).
- ❖ Love is the greatest gift. Study by heart the verses about love (Chapter 13:4-8).
- ❖ The gift of speaking in tongues, the gift of prophecy and the gift of interpretation (Chapter 14).
- ❖ The Resurrection of the Lord from among the dead and its effectiveness and the Second coming of the Lord in the clouds (Chapter 15).
- ❖ Instructions and wonderful spiritual pieces of advice (Chapter 16).

4- The Exile and the Book of Ezra

Objective:

- ❖ God continues to fulfill His promise to His people. If we obey Him, He will let us inherit the Promised Land and further fulfillment of His promise of salvation.

References

- ❖ Book of Ezra

Memory Verse:

“O Lord God of Israel, You are righteous, for we are left as a remnant, as it is this day. Here we are before You, in our guilt, though no one can stand before You because of this” (Ezra 9:15).

Introduction:

I. Quick Timeline

- ❖ The exodus from Egypt around 1440 B.C.
- ❖ Conquest of Canaan around 1400 B.C.
- ❖ Saul anointed first king in 1043 B.C.
- ❖ David became king in 1025 B.C.
- ❖ Kingdom divides in 931 B.C. (northern Israel and southern Judah)
- ❖ Fall of Northern kingdom in 722 B.C.
- ❖ Fall of Jerusalem to Babylon in 586 B.C.
- ❖ Exile: 586-538 B.C.
- ❖ Temple rebuilt in 516 B.C.
- ❖ Walls of Jerusalem rebuilt in 444 B.C.

Assyria had expanded as an empire from the east (Iraq currently) and was seeking to gain more power in the west. In its expansion, it conquered a number of nations including the Northern Kingdom of Israel, which was destroyed in 722 B.C. According to the policy of the Assyrian kingdom at that time, when their capital city, Samaria, was destroyed, the Jewish people were deported to other locations in the empire. That was the end of the northern kingdom. The Temple of the Lord was in the southern kingdom of Judah, which was spared from a similar fate because its king, Hezekiah, had remained friendly to the Assyrian Empire with gifts and taxes.

The Babylonian empire eventually overran the Assyrian empire in 612 B.C., and Babylon became a large empire. The people of Israel were not very loyal to the Lord God. During the reign of king David, they introduced other gods in their worship and even built altars for them inside the Temple of the Lord. Thus, the Lord decided to punish the people. Consequently, Babylon, under Nebuchadnezzar, defeated Israel in 597 B.C. and king Jehoiachin was imprisoned and sent to exile with thousands of people. The Babylonians installed another king, Zedekiah who eventually tried to rebel against Babylon in 586 B.C. But without God's support, Nebuchadnezzar defeated the Jews,

and the people of God were punished by complete destruction of Jerusalem, as well as the Temple of the Lord. This was the first time the Temple was destroyed, and most of the Jewish people were carried back as exiles to Babylon.

Lesson Outline:

This new relocation was an unexpected turn of events for the Jews. They had never left the Promised Land since God gave it to them, and they had assumed that they would always have it. However, they forgot that without their obedience to the Lord, they could easily be defeated by the world. Thus, the exile was a time for the Jews to start thinking about their actions, repent over their sins and return back to the Lord. Nevertheless, their attempt to maintain their identity during exile was tempered by their contact with the Babylonian empire. They forgot their Hebrew language, and started using Aramaic. They started dressing like the Babylonians and speaking like them. Perhaps the greatest issue they faced was the absence of the Temple, because the Jewish ritual prohibited sacrifice outside the border of the Promised Land, since all other lands were considered unclean.

Their reaction can be found in Psalm 137: “By the rivers of Babylon there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion. On the willows there we hung up our harps. For there our captors asked us for songs, and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying, sing us one of the songs of Zion! How could we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land? If I forget you O Jerusalem, Let my right hand forget its skill if I do not remember you, let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not exalt Jerusalem above my chief joy.” Alleluia

Under these circumstances certain rituals not restricted to the Promised Land acquired new significance. The weekly Sabbath rest and the covenant of circumcision developed into clear ethnic markers for the exiles. In public gatherings and feasts they would meet and lament the loss of their homeland, and pray for their speedy return. They were in exile for over 50 years.

The Lord listened to their prayers, saw their repentance and decided to restore them back. A new empire had grown in strength during this time period. This was the Persian Empire, led by king Cyrus, who in 539 B.C. overthrew Babylon. He issued a decree allowing Jews to return to Jerusalem in 538 B.C. This fulfilled the prophecy written by Isaiah two centuries before (Isaiah 44:28-45:4). Zerubbabel, a descendent of David led some of the exiles back. Apparently only a few of the people who lived in Babylon returned back to Jerusalem. These were the most committed among them who were willing to leave the life of comfort in Babylon and endure a long trek to a destroyed city. Zerubbabel’s priorities were in the right place, and he restored the altar of the Lord and celebrated religious feasts before beginning the work on the Temple. They began building but stopped after two years because of opposition from non-Jews living in those regions. These people tried tricking the Jews into joining them, however, when they refused, problems arose. But under the guidance of the Lord, and encouragement by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, the people started building the Temple again and they finished it in 515 B.C. Thus, the temple was rebuilt after 70 years from its destruction.

Eight years later, in 457 B.C. there was a priest in Babylon named Ezra. Ezra was a direct descendent of Aaron. He had studied and learned the laws of God during captivity. He was a godly man marked by his trust in the Lord, moral integrity and grief over sin. He led another group of exiles back to Jerusalem under the orders of the Persian king; who had given them gifts and money to rebuild the house of the Lord. They traveled the long trip without guard, but God protected them and their valuable gifts until they reached Jerusalem. When Ezra arrived at Jerusalem, he discovered that the people had returned to sin again by intermarrying with foreign women. After a period of just fifty

years, the people of God had fallen into sin again. Ezra became disappointed, wept and prayed for them to return from their evil. Through the work of God, the people realized their fault and responded to the word of God.

Conclusion:

- ❖ Because the Jewish people stayed away from God, they suffered in the world and were exposed to a long period of captivity during which they lost their city and their link to God and the temple.
- ❖ Nevertheless, they returned from their sins and obeyed the Lord. God forgave them and kept His promise, and returned them back to the promise land.
- ❖ When the Jewish people returned, the first thing they did was to build the Temple, even before building walls to protect their city. Thus they believed that the greatest protection was of the Lord and not of earthly foundation.
- ❖ When the surrounding countries saw the people of God's dedication to building the temple, they tried to stop them. However, the Lord kept watch over His people and they succeeded in finishing the Temple.
- ❖ Even though the Jewish people saw the miracles of the Lord in bringing them back from captivity and letting them build the Temple, they still fell into sin. But when Ezra showed them their downfall, they repented.

Applications:

When we stay close to God, we will always be under His protection, but once we start losing sight of His way, we get overwhelmed by the world and its temptation. Thus we should always keep strong faith in God and attempt to always be close to Him. This requires that we be steadfast in the church, and just as the Jewish people knew that the Temple of the Lord was their protection, so is the Church. In it, we are close to God and He communicates to us whether through the Bible, liturgies, prayers, services, or Sunday School. We should take every opportunity to listen to and follow Him, for He has sacrificed His only Son to save us.

5- Division in the Church of Corinth

Objective:

- ❖ I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me.

References:

- ❖ The Divine Love / Fr. Tadros Yacoub.
- ❖ Love for the Neighbor / St. George Church, Sporting.

Memory Verse:

“So neither he who plants, nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth” (1 Corinthians 3:7).

Lesson Outline:

I. The Church Established by Jesus

When the Lord Jesus came to our world, He desired to mend the effect of sin on man that led to individuality, division and perplexity. The image of humanity at the Tower of Babylon was a clear model of the effect of sin on the relation between man and his body. Man, in his haughtiness wanted to be a god and build a tower whose top would reach heaven. God came down and mixed up their tongues, so they could not understand one another.

The Lord chose apostles and disciples and He tried to remove the inner obstacles among them, and He stood against selfishness, pride and love for having authority. He gave Himself as a model of modesty, love and sacrifice and He showed them a little child as a model of modesty, endurance, and meekness, a model to be followed. Then He celebrated the Passover with them and gave them His Holy Body and Blood and established the Sacrament of Eucharist, the mystery of fellowship and unity. He ordered them to keep that Divine Sacrament in memory of Him, and to keep that covenant, the covenant of unity, love and strong internal relationship. On the day of Pentecost, the apostles, the disciples and women were gathered praying in one spirit and the Holy Spirit came down on them. They spoke different languages but these languages were not like those spoken by the Tower of Babylon; on the contrary, they were gathered, unified tongues so that each one who joined the church and was baptized became an integral living part of that mysterious wonderful body.

The Book of Acts tells us about the unity of the church saying, “And all who believed were together and had all things in common, and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes” (Acts 2:44-46).

II. Divisions

But the enemy (the devil) is never calm and never feels comfort when he sees a muted group living in one spirit, one mind and one heart. He always causes troubles, divisions, partialities and fanaticism. Let us have an example: The Church of Corinth which Paul, the apostle, visited on his second journey after his visit to Athens. He stayed in Corinth one year and six months according to a vision, “And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision: Do not be afraid, but speak and do not be

silent; for I am with you, and no man shall attack you to harm you, for I have many people in this city” (Acts 18:10).

Silas and Timothy joined him and Luke had been with him since the beginning of his visit but after Paul had preached and departed, a man named Apollos, a Jew from Alexandria, who had deep knowledge of Scriptures went to Corinth and taught there a matter which caused division in the church, some said, “I belong to Paul” and others said, “I belong to Apollos.”

While Paul was in Ephesus, reports of dissensions in Corinth came to him. He was deeply sad because of this news which he heard and he wrote to them saying in his first chapter, “I appeal to you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no dissension among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. For it has been reported to me by Chloe’s people that there is quarrelling among you, my brethren What I mean is that each one of you says, “I belong to Paul” or “I belong to Apollos,” or “I belong to Cephas” or “I belong to Christ.” Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul?” (1 Corinthians 1:10- 13).

In the third chapter he says, “For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving like ordinary men? For when one says, ‘I belong to Paul’ and another, ‘I belong to Apollos,’ are you not merely men? What then is Apollos? What is Paul? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are equal, and each shall receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building” (1 Corinthians 3:3-9).

III. Cause

From the text of this epistle we can deduce the factors that corrupt the unity of church and lead to divisions and dissension.

A. Haughtiness

This disease separated and split the unity that was between Adam and God in the Garden of Eden, it is this disease that caused dissension and division of the church in the Council of Chalcedon.

B. There is no love

Love is the remedy that strengthens the ties that make unity strong. Love is the juice that forces each organ to be fixed and to flower and give fruit for the vine. Love that never thinks badly of others and is not selfish never fails.

C. Envy and dispute

This is the fruit of being lukewarm in worship, and separation from the Holy Spirit’s domain, which is, expressed by Paul the apostle by saying. “You are merely men”.

Applications:

- ❖ Discuss the effectiveness of love in the life of the believers and show how can we put an end to the disputes that may happen between:
 - A believer and his wife at home.
 - The people and the priest.

Questions:

- ❖ Of what importance is unity in the life of the church?
- ❖ How did the Lord unify the many into one?
- ❖ The church of the apostles is considered a blessed model of unity. Give evidence and show how unity overcame dissension.
- ❖ What are the factors of dissension in the church?
- ❖ What causes the present dissension inside the churches and the religion institutions? How can they be cured?
- ❖ What is your role as Christ towards this dissension?

Exercises:

- ❖ Reconcile between those who are in dispute.
- ❖ Pray for the unity of the members of the church in the local area.
- ❖ Pray for the unity of the believers in the church of the whole country.
- ❖ Pray for the unity of all Christians all over the world within the firm of the sound Orthodox faith.

6 - The Book of Joshua

Objective:

- ❖ To know the content of the book of Joshua
- ❖ To learn about Joshua as an example of Jesus

References:

- ❖ The New Open Bible- study edition, The New King James Version. Thomas Nelson Publishers
- ❖ “Joshua” - Bible studies by Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty

Memory Verse:

“The Lord our God we will serve, and His voice we will obey” (Joshua 24:24).

Introduction:

The book of Joshua is the first of the 12 historic books from Joshua to Esther. It forges a link between the five books of Moses (the Pentateuch) and the remainder of Israel’s history. The Book contains 24 chapters written mostly by Joshua himself except for the last few verses in the last chapter after Joshua’s death, which are most likely written by Eleazar the son of Aaron.

Lesson Outline:

Joshua is the focus of this book and the people of Israel learn a crucial lesson that victory comes through faith in God and obedience to His word.

Joshua’s original name was Hosea which, means salvation (Numbers 13:8) but Moses changed it to Joshua (Numbers 13:16) which means “Yahweh is salvation” and it is the Hebrew equivalent of the name Jesus. The secret of Joshua’s strength during his leadership is God’s promise that He will be with him (1:5). Thus Joshua trusted in God and adhered to the commandments.

Joshua is similar to Christ in bringing the sons of Israel triumphantly to their possession as Christ will bring many sons to glory (Hebrews 2:10). Joshua succeeds Moses and wins the victory unreached by Moses. Christ will succeed the Mosaic Law and win the victory unreached by the law (Romans 8:2-4, Galatians 3:23-25, Hebrews 7:18-19). Rahab’s scarlet cord portrays safety through the blood (Hebrews 9:19-22) and amazingly, this gentile woman is found in Christ’s genealogy (Matthew 1:5). This represents the inclusion of the gentiles in the faith.

The book of Joshua covers 31 years from the death of Moses to the death of Eleazar the son of Aaron 6 years after the death of Joshua.

The book is divided into three geographical settings:

- (1) The Jordan River (Chapters 1-5)
- (2) Canaan (Chapters 6-13:7)
- (3) The twelve tribes situated in both sides of the Jordan (Chapters 13:8-24:33)

The setting of the first five chapters begins east of the Jordan as Joshua replaces Moses, crosses the Jordan on dry land and finally prepares for war west of the Jordan.

Joshua takes Israel from the wilderness to the Promised Land. Israel has now reached climatic point in fulfilling the centuries-old promise in Genesis of a homeland. The first half of Joshua (1:1-13:7) describes the seven years conquest of the land and the second half (13:8-24:33) gives the details of the division and the settlement of the land.

The first five chapters record the spiritual, moral, physical and military preparation of Joshua and the people of Israel for the impending conquest of Canaan. Joshua is given a charge by God to complete the task begun by Moses (1:2). After being encouraged by God, Joshua sends out two spies who come back with encouraging report (in contrast to the spies of the previous generation). Obedience and faith are united in the miraculous crossing of the Jordan River (3:1-4:24).

God then directed Israel to conquer the first city “Jericho”. He instructed His people to march once around the city for six days and on the seventh day they should march seven times and the priests shall blow the trumpets and all the people shall shout with a great shout that the wall of the city will fall down flat. And the people shall go up conquer the city (6:1-5). The Lord uses this to test the people and to teach them that Israel’s success in battle will always be by His power and might and not their own.

Joshua’s campaign in central Canaan (6:1-8:35) places a strategic wedge between the northern and southern cities to prevent a massive Canaanite alliance against Israel. Joshua utilized the divide-and-conquer strategy and God’s plan led him to Central Canaan (6-8), Southern Canaan (9-10) and finally northern Canaan (11-12).

After listing the areas yet to be conquered (13:1-7), Joshua undertakes the long task of dividing the Promised Land to all the tribes of Israel. Two and half tribes settled east of the Jordan and nine and half tribes settled at its west. Then he assigned six cities of refuge and 48 cities for the Levites, which are scattered among all the tribes.

The last chapters (22:1-24:33) record the conditions for continued successful settlement in Canaan. Access to God, as well as His forgiveness, comes only through the divinely established sacrificial system; and civil war almost breaks out when the eastern tribes build an altar that is misinterpreted by the western tribes.

Realizing that the blessing comes from God only as Israel obeys His covenant, Joshua preaches a moving sermon, climaxed by Israel’s renewal of her alliance to the covenant “The Lord our God we will serve, and His voice we will obey” (Josh 24:24).

Conclusion:

The Book of Joshua represents God’s commitment in fulfilling His promises to man even if man was not committed to Him. It also clarifies God’s hate to sin. It is the book of the new life, new land, new leadership and new gifts from God.

Applications:

- ❖ Search for the names of the tribes, which lived east of the Jordan and the ones west of it.
- ❖ Who followed Joshua in leading Israel?
- ❖ Write few lines about 5 of the 12 historic books of the Bible.

7 - Peace in Christianity

Objective:

- ❖ How to have peace in all circumstances.
- ❖ To have peace with others.

Memory Verse:

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7).

Introduction:

- ❖ Peace is “God-centered”
 1. Inner contentment and joy regardless of our circumstances
 2. Accepting what God has given you
 3. Calm assurance and trust in God
 4. Harmony with God and his plan for your life
 5. Realizing that nothing “bad” happens to Christians except being separated from God.
- ❖ Peace is not “Circumstance-centered”
 1. Emotional happiness
 2. Financial “security”
 3. The end of a difficult problem
- ❖ How to attain peace with ourselves and with others?

Lesson Outline:

I. Defining Peace

- ❖ Peace is inner contentment and joy regardless of our circumstances.
- ❖ Peace is tranquility. It is not worrying about the future, not regretting the past and not fretting over all the problems that occupy our minds every day. Peace is trust that our lives are not just a random series of events, but instead perfectly planned from beginning to end. True peace can only come from God and a personal relationship with Him. Material possessions and human relationships can be pleasant and bring us happiness, but they cannot give us true peace.
- ❖ When everything is going our way, it is very easy to feel peaceful. If we are healthy and our family is healthy then we feel peace. If our finances are in order and we feel like we are not in want of anything then we feel peace. If a difficult problem is solved in our lives, we feel peace. We can have peace of mind when we see police cars patrolling our neighborhoods at night or feel secure when we activate the house alarm before we go to bed. In these cases, we feel peace because our circumstances are pleasant, we are safe, our money is secure, and our

families are snug in their beds. The truth is that the peace we “feel” when things are going our way is not really peace at all, it is happiness. We feel happy when happy things happen to us, but peace is something on the inside that is not shaken by our external circumstances. Peace is something we should experience always, not just when we do not have any problems.

- ❖ Very often our lives are not so calm and ordered. We all face very difficult situations that we must deal with everyday. We can fail our tests, lose our health, lose our friends, lose our money, lose our jobs, and we can even lose our lives and the lives of those we love. In these situations, it is not so easy to have peace
- ❖ In fact hardships and persecutions are bound to happen to all of us. St. Paul says, “all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12). So if we know up front that we will suffer, then we must also learn how to have peace despite our circumstances. In John 14:27, Jesus says, “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” How to attain this peace is the topic of this lesson.

II. Accepting what God has given us

In order to have peace, we must be satisfied with what we have. It is very easy to look at our neighbor and desire or even envy what they have, but we must understand that God provides for each of us in His own way and what is good for one person might be harmful to another. God has a purpose and a plan for each of us that fit who we are and what He wants us to do.

God might make one person wealthy to allow him to glorify God through his wealth, giving generously to the poor and having the extra free time to serve. God might similarly choose another person to glorify God through his poverty, being an example to others of how to be content despite his circumstances. The poor man is poor for the glory of God and the rich man is rich for the glory of God, so how can the poor man say to God, “Make me rich” when it is God’s perfect will that he be poor. We should therefore always accept the gifts and talents that God gave us, and if we are responsible with small matters then He will place us in charge of larger ones; as it is written “Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities” (Luke 19:17).

God might allow one person to be healthy while another suffers from disease his whole life. Does God care for one more than another? Is God cold and unfeeling toward the sick person and warm and loving toward the healthy person only? No, God loves both the same. Sometimes we cannot understand why God allows certain things to happen, but if we believe that “all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28) how can we complain? His ways are not like our ways and His thoughts are not like our thoughts.

St. Paul says, “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor? Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him? For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.” (Romans 11:33-36) God’s thinking is above our own.

We might not understand God’s plan, but we should still have faith that God is in control of all the circumstances of our lives, as it is written: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths”

(Proverbs 3:5-6). We simply don't understand many of the things He does, but we should accept through faith that He is working all situations for our good.

III. Calm Assurance and Trust in God

To have peace, we need to fully trust God. When faced with a situation that seems out of control we must realize that God is in control. He is in control of every circumstance of our lives no matter how dire or painful. It is this faith that gives us a calm assurance that He is working to solve our problems and bring us through them safely.

We have the power of an infinite and loving God working in our lives. He wants to help us, He wants to comfort us, He wants to give us peace that surpasses all understanding, and He has the power to do so. Why do we continually worry? Do we feel that God is too busy for us? Do we feel that He doesn't care enough about us? Do we get too caught up in the details and the pain and all the obstacles that are in our way that we lose sight of the one who can remove all those obstacles in a blink of an eye? Don't we realize that He allows pain in our lives to help us grow and mature? And as we grow and become stronger we become more resilient to Satan's attacks. We stop worrying so much about the future and start enjoying life more. Our future is secure in God's tender hands.

Jesus said "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? 'So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble" (Matthew 6:25-34).

IV. Harmony with God and His Plan for Our Lives

The first step is to trust God unconditionally that He is doing what's best for us regardless of how it makes us feel. The first step is denying our will and saying, "Let Your will be done." It is one thing to concede to another that knows more than we do, but it is quite another thing to change the way we think so that we no longer have to concede to God, but that we desire His will above our own.

The next step is not to deny our will any longer but to make our will and God's will one and the same. St. Paul says, "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 12:2). As we grow and our mind is renewed we begin to desire the same things God desires. He wants to conform us to His likeness if we let Him. In doing so, He changes our minds from focusing on the things of the world to focusing on the things of God.

To have perfect peace in all situations we must place our focus completely on Him as it is written; "You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You" (Isaiah 26:3).

St. Peter saw Jesus walking on the water and said, “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.” Peter had great faith that he could do what no other human being has ever done...walk on water. He saw for himself the power of God as Jesus walked on the water. However, when Peter began to look at the wind and the waves around him, he realized that no human can walk on water. He doubted and began to sink. When we focus on God, we too can walk on water. We can do things that we never dreamed possible, but when we doubt and begin to focus on our problems we sink into despair, worry, and even panic. God is a problem solver, He allows problems in our lives to teach us His ways, and He also provides solutions to our problems once we have learned what He wants us to learn.

St. Paul also understood the power of trials and difficulties in life saying, “Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:10). God strengthened Paul and gave him peace throughout his life that was full of persecutions and ultimately death in the name of Jesus Christ. St. Paul who endured so much punishment for the sake of Christ said “Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:11-13).

If he enjoyed peace even as he wrote letters to all the churches from prison, what excuse do we have? God is the source of our peace. We cannot pursue it apart from Him. The world desires peace too, but they do not look to God for it. They look to philosophy, Yoga, entertainment, and other remedies to fill the gap in their lives that only God can fill. As a result, they have no assurance, hope, or peace. We must learn to be content as Paul did, not just for our own sake but so that we can spread the message of the Gospel to the world. Not just through our words, but also through our actions. If others see that we are peaceful despite hardships, then they will want the same thing for themselves and as a result start becoming more interested in learning about God.

V. Realizing That Nothing “Bad” Happens to Christians

The dictionary defines the word “bad” as “not achieving an adequate standard; poor.” Do we believe that God is inadequate? Does He not make the grade? Is His love for us sub-par? Certainly not! So then how, when faced with a difficult problem in our lives, can we say that this circumstance is “bad”? Painful things certainly do happen to Christians as well as to the rest of the world, but bad things only happen to non-believers. The only bad thing that can happen to a believer is to be separated from God. This is usually through sin or rebellious attitude against God. Similar to what happen with Adam and Eve when they fall to sin and broke the commandment of God.

If we truly believe Romans 8:28, then we know that ALL things God does are for our good. Not just the happy things that put smiles on our faces, but all things. This includes death, suffering, and persecution. “All things” means everything under the sun that can possibly happen to us past, present, and future is for our own good! He even transforms the negative consequences of other peoples’ sins into our own good. This is the truth that sets us free. It sets us free from worry about the future and regret about the past. Everything God does for us He does out of love.

We are like small children, not understanding what is going on around us. And God is our loving Father who does what is best for us no matter how it makes us feel. For instance, a small child can see a lit candle and want to grab hold of it. The flame looks nice playing in the wind, so the child reaches for it. The boy’s parents, however, know that the candle can burn the child so they take the candle away before he can reach it and the child begins to cry. Did the parents do a bad thing or a

good thing? Of course we would all agree that the parents love their son, want the best for him, and did the right thing by taking the candle away. So if we then, as adults, can understand such a simple example, why do we cry when God takes away the candle we are trying to reach for?

We too often reach for candles without knowing it. We see something that seems very pleasant and nice so we try to take hold of it, but God does not want us to have it. Instead, He takes it away and we cry and wonder how He could do such a thing. Remember, what the young boy thought. He too thought he was reaching for something good and he didn't understand that he was going to get hurt. We also do not understand. We don't have vision to see into our futures and know what is good for us and what is bad, but we don't need to! We've got God doing that for us already, all we have to do is trust Him and He'll take care of our whole lives as it is written, "For You are my hope, O Lord God; You are my trust from my youth. By You I have been upheld from birth; You are He who took me out of my mother's womb. My praise shall be continually of You" (Psalm 71:5-6). Also "The Lord shall preserve you from all evil. He shall preserve your soul. The Lord shall preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth, and even forevermore" (Psalm 121:7-8). This is why we are to have peace.

The world also reaches for many candles, and God just lets them. So instead of being angry or disappointed with God for not giving us what we want, we should praise His name and thank Him for His unbreakable promise that all things that happen to us are for our good.

VI. How to Attain Peace?

Just like all things in our lives, we cannot succeed without God's help. We need His help to have peace "Lord, You will establish peace for us, for You have also done all our works in us" (Isaiah 26:12). Peace is not something we create for ourselves. If we rely on ourselves, it is very easy to look at the problems around us, get discouraged and fall into despair. So how do we attain peace? St. Paul answers the question saying, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7).

So here we are told that we should not be anxious, but instead with thanksgiving ask God for help, and then His incomprehensible peace will dwell in us. So who here is making the bigger effort, God or us? God says that we are not to worry or be anxious, but to simply trust Him and bring our requests to Him. If we feel anxious about a situation, we are to simply ask for His help and have faith that He will indeed help us. In turn, He will give us peace despite the uncertainty we face. This is true regardless of the magnitude of our problems. To God all our problems, no matter how gigantic they seem to us, are infinitesimal compared to His power and glory. He not only has the absolute power to solve our deepest problems, but also promises to give us peace our entire life.

So our part is to ask His help and to "be anxious for nothing." Asking is easy...we ask God for things everyday. But in addition to asking for help, He tells us to not be anxious or worried. The only way we can do this is if we have faith and believe what He tells us. The strongest prayer is one that we know will be answered. We must know as we say the words, "Lord help me with this" that he will certainly help us. God's will is perfect, so we cannot ask for specifics and then hope God fulfills them. We do not know what is best for us; only He knows that. So instead, we should ask Him to increase our faith, to help us to trust Him, to allow us to be patient while He works in our lives, and to help us accept what He has done and will do for us because we know that no other love in the Universe can compare to the love He has for us.

He tells us to pray with thanksgiving. When we praise God for what He has given us, it takes our mind off of what it is we are seeking and focuses our attention on all the good things we already have. God wants us to see that He as already provided so much for us, He will continue to provide if we are patient and trust in Him.

Also, it is very important that at all times, whether happy or sad, we maintain a very close personal relationship with God. It is easy when things are going our way to pray a little less, read the Bible a little less, and go to church a little less all because we begin to feel satisfied with our lives. But at any moment, our lives can change and we can find ourselves needing God more than ever. At that time, we will need the closeness to God that we were neglecting before and it will be that much harder to have peace.

If, on the other hand, we seek out a personal relationship with God and make Him our highest priority everyday, regardless of our circumstances, then when problems come, we will be ready to face them through His strength. He wants to carry our burdens if we let Him.

St. Paul says, “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy--meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you” (Philippians 4:8-9). If we focus on these good virtues, meditate on the things of God and place Him first in our lives, then His peace will live inside each of us and will protect us from the despair we face when we wallow in our own problems and feel that God is so far away. Instead we will feel God so close to us, even through pain and hardship.

Again, the only way to have peace is to have a right relationship with God. Peace will come naturally as a result, “Let him turn away from evil and do good. Let him seek peace and pursue it” (1 Peter 3:11). We pursue peace by pursuing God, and when we find Him, He will give us not only peace, but also love, kindness, faith, hope, generosity, strength, comfort, discipline, humility, authority, and purpose. He is the source of all good things.

VII. Peace with Others

The natural result of true inner peace in any believer is to attain peace with others including friends and enemies. It is basically a reflection of the inner peace that a believer is experiencing. Christianity has spread through peaceful preachers who were able to convert nations to Christianity just by the word the Lord gave to them to testify.

Conclusion/Questions:

God desires that each one of us experience his perfect peace in our lives everyday. But we so often neglect Him and go our own way. We try to endure suffering alone, succeed on our own, and make decisions on our own...we so often fall into the pattern of the world. We often neglect the greatest resource we have, and that is God Himself. We struggle to love our enemies, struggle to suppress feelings of hatred or anger, struggle to raise our children, even struggle to seek God's will and pursue it. But our God, the God of infinite love and kindness, the God that created us from the dust of the earth understands all our worries and sorrows and He wants so much to help us. To each of us He offers, with outstretched hand, everything we need. Love, hope, faith, peace...all the things we spend our lives trying to attain, He wants us to have from the time we are still children. The reason we so often do not have peace or love or faith is not because He does not offer us an infinite supply of each, but because we refuse to accept His offer. He sees us struggling and says,

“Here...take my peace.” But we say, “No, I’d rather do it on my own.” He says, “Experience the love that only I can show you.” And we say, “No thanks, I already know how to love and be loved.”

And then when faced with tough times, we come to Him crying and saying, “My Lord, My Lord why have you forsaken me?” He has not forsaken us; it is we who have forsaken Him. Turned our backs on Him, neglected Him, He who gave us our very lives and our only hope for eternal life. But despite all we humans have done to Him, He still loves us. He still loves us even though we killed His Son. In fact, He turned His death into life for us so that we may live and be freed from sin’s grasp.

God so much desires a relationship with us, and if only we take one step toward Him, He will take one thousand steps toward us. Just as when the father of the lost son saw him a long way off, and ran out to meet him with open arms, so too does God desire that we turn from our ways and return to Him. And He will not rebuke us, but accept us as His children and rain down upon us all the blessings of His glorious kingdom. A relationship with God is not only the beginning of peace, but also of wisdom, knowledge, faith, and love “But as it is written: Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Corinthians 2:9).

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

Week 2- Types of Martyrs

Week 3- St. Basil

Week 4- The carrier of icons

Week 2 - Types of Martyrs

Objective:

- ❖ Understanding the motives for Martyrdom in Christianity.

References:

- ❖ Martyrdom in Christianity / Anba Youannis.
- ❖ The Spiritual Values of the Nayrouz / Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty

Memory Verse:

“Of whom the world was not worthy. They wondered about in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth” (Hebrews 11:38).

Introduction:

The Martyr is the true Christian who dies to the world in his lifetime and when he dies he lives forever. He is a unique heroic model that we should follow.

I. Before Martyrdom

These people died to social status and love of money. Such things did not have power to tempt them. They abstained from mortal earthly matters and realized that they did not belong to this world. Comfort, living in ease and luxury or earthly joys did not appeal to them or attract them.

They died to passions and desires and crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts thus they were able to shut the lions' mouths that were outside because they defeated the hyenas which were inside (we mean the desires of the flesh which fight the self). But the proud and the greedy could not make resistance in the arm of martyrdom.

Lesson Outline:

I. Martyrs for Keeping Faith

Emperors not only wanted to kill Christians but they also decided to destroy Christianity. So they put Christians to the torture to compel them to deny their faith (Examples from the church history: St. George, St. Mina of the miraculous deeds, St. Philopateer Mercorius Abu Seifein, St. Dimyana).

A. Examples of those attempts

- ❖ Threat.
- ❖ Promises of false earthly glories.
- ❖ Torture and repeating promises.
- ❖ Resorting to psychological oppressions and compelling parents and relatives who were unfaithful to make attempts to convince the faithful to deny faith out of pity especially by tormenting children in the sight of their mothers. But martyrdom was the only desire of those saints. Nobody could honor them and nothing could move them. St. Polycarp, Bishop of Izmin, when commanded to deny Christ, said, “I have been serving this Master for sixty eight years and He has been kind to me, so how can I blaspheme my King ‘who saved me?’ The

Emperor ordered his soldiers to burn him but the fire surrounded him and did not harm him. A soldier stabbed him and the blood put out the fire. The people were astonished at what they saw and glorified God for the firmness of those martyrs.

II. Martyrs for the Faith

Persecutions continued during the fourth century owing to internal schisms inside the church.

The Arians stirred a fierce storm of persecution against the Orthodox people. George, the Arian Bishop prearranged with Sepertian to make a great massacre in Alexandria. After the Arians took possession of all the Orthodox Churches, the people renowned them preferring to pray in the graveyards. This heretic bishop besieged the congregation who were praying and set fire around the place. The women were slapped in the face till their faces became swollen. Men were beaten with palm leaf stalks that were full of sharp thorns. Many men died, others took a long time to heal.

After the new schism in Chalcedon, Anba Macar, the old Egyptian bishop of Phau, one of the three saints Macarii, was martyred. When the king's messenger ordered him to sign the documents of the erroneous creed (the Tome of Leo), he refused to sign and encouraged the other faithful people to keep firm in faith. The messenger kicked him with his foot so violently that the man fell down dead due to his old age.

Pope Discorus was deposed and exiled. His beard was depilated and he was struck on the mouth until his teeth broke. He collected his teeth and hair, put them in a bottle, which he sent to Alexandria with a letter in which he wrote, "See how I endured for faith".

III. Martyrs for Chastity

- ❖ Martyrs preferred to die than to lead a defiled life. We read about a young man whom they tied to a bed and induced a woman to tempt him to sin. The young man bit his tongue and spat blood in her face. Seeing the blood the woman ran away in horror.
- ❖ We also read about St. Potamina when it was decided to pour boiling water over her naked body. She pleaded the governor saying, "By the head of the emperor whom you fear, do not allow them to strip me of the clothes but to let me get down into the fire step by step, little by little so that you may see the power of endurance given to me by that whom you do not know."
- ❖ In the story of Perpetua's martyrdom, historians refer to the purity of those martyrs. When they threw this saint to a wild ox which attacked her so fiercely that she fell half dead on the ground but even in this case she did not forget to cover her body with her torn cloak
- ❖ There is an interesting story about a virgin who lived in the eighth century. The soldiers looted a convent near Ackmim in Assiut... To protect her vow of virginity to the Lord, a young and beautiful nun told the soldiers that she had a sort of oil, which had great power; it could protect them from strikes of the sword. When they did not believe her, she spread some oil on her neck and asked the strongest of them to strike her neck with his sword. When he did so, the soldiers realized the trick when, to their surprise, saw the nun's head cut off. It was clear that the virgin martyr insisted that she would not defile herself.

Applications:

- ❖ Make a research about one of the martyrs. It would be better if the martyr is your church advocate or your own advocate.

- ❖ Draw a picture of one of the heroic stories you listened to in this lesson.
- ❖ Prepare a play to be presented in the Nayrouz Celebration.
- ❖ Learn some verses from chapter eleven of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Week 3 - Saint Basil the Great

(Born 330 - Departed 379)

Objective:

- ❖ To learn about the life and works of St. Basil as one of the main fathers of our church.
- ❖ To take the example of St. Basil in his works.

References:

- ❖ Coptic Church Review 1986; Volume 7 # 2 (Defender of the spirit By The Rev. James E. Furman).
- ❖ Lives of Eminent Saints 1880; Rev. Alban Butler (pages 752-771).
- ❖ The Catholic Encyclopedia (www.newadvent.org).

Memory Verse:

“To make all people see what is the fellowship of the mystery” (Ephesians 3:9).

Introduction:

I. Prayer of Saint Basil the Great

“O God and Lord of the powers, and maker of all creation, who, because of Your clemency and incomparable mercy, did send Your Only-Begotten Son and our Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of mankind, and with His venerable cross did tear asunder the record of our sins, and thereby did conquer the rulers and powers of darkness; receive from us sinful people, O merciful Master, these prayers of gratitude and supplication, and deliver us from every destructive and gloomy transgression, and from all visible and invisible enemies who seek to injure us. Nail down our flesh with Your fear, and let not our hearts be inclined to words or thoughts of evil, but pierce our souls with Your love, that ever contemplating You, being enlightened by You, and discerning You, the unapproachable and everlasting Light, we may unceasingly render confession and gratitude to You: The eternal Father, with Your Only-Begotten Son, and with Your All-Holy, Gracious, and Life-Giving Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.”

Lesson Outline:

I. His Life

The term “Christian soldiers” well describes the family of St. Basil the Great for their lives represent a history of disciplined spiritual combat. His father’s parents were Christian refugees forced to subsist in heavily forested hills north of their homeland for seven years. His mother was the daughter of a martyr. One brother became a semi-solitary recluse and a sister was a famous nun. He himself led the life of a general, bringing campaigns to successful conclusion all as a spiritual leader defending and expounding the doctrines of the church.

He ranks after Athanasius as a defender of the Oriental Church against the heresies of the fourth century. With his friend Gregory of Nazianzus and his brother Gregory of Nyssa, he makes up the trio known as “The Three Cappadocians”.

St. Basil was baptized and ordained as a reader in 357. Soon afterwards, he made an extensive tour of monastic centers in Palestine, Mesopotamia, Syria, and Egypt. He was impressed by what he saw “I admired their persistence in living, and their endurance in toil. I was amazed by their persistence in prayer, and at their triumph over sleep; ever keeping the souls high and free...they never yielded to the body;...always, as though living in a flesh that is not theirs, they showed in every deed what it is to sojourn for a while in this life, and what to have one’s citizenship and home in heaven” (Letter CCXXIII).

He was a practical lover of Christian poverty, and even in his exalted position preserved simplicity in food and clothing. He never had more than one tunic and one coat; lay on the ground; sometimes watched whole nights. About the year 359 he sold the remainder of his estate for the benefit of the poor during a great famine. St. Gregory of Nazianzus assures us that he lived in the greatest poverty possible, and that his resolution was as firm as a rock amidst the waters. Even when he was bishop he was content to receive his subsistence from the charity of his friends. In every monastic exercise and virtue, he strove to copy, and even outdo, the most perfect examples he had seen in the deserts of Syria and Egypt.

St. Basil was skillful in all the liberal arts and sciences. An insight into every different branch of them contributes exceedingly to improve and enlarge the faculties of the mind; he was a brilliant student and had a special interest in medicine, an unusual topic for the time. In his book, *The Six Days of Creation (Hexameron)*, it appears that his skill in the history of nature was more just and more extensive than that of Aristotle.

In a Commentary on Psalm 1, St. Basil said about life’s Journey: We read in the book of Psalms “Blessed is the one who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor follows in the way of sinners” (Psalm 1:1). Life has been called a “way” because everything that has been created is on the way to its end. When people are on a sea voyage, they can sleep while they are being transported without any effort of their own to their port of call. The ship brings them closer to their goal without their even knowing it. So we can be transported nearer to the end of our life without our noticing it, as time flows by unceasingly. Time passes while you are asleep. While you are awake time passes although you may not notice. All of us have a race to run towards our appointed end. So we are all “on the way”. You are a traveler in this life. Everything goes past you and is left behind. You notice a flower on the way, or some grass, or a stream, or something worth looking at. You enjoy it for a moment, and then pass on. Maybe you come on stones or rocks or crags or cliffs or fences, or perhaps you meet wild beasts or reptiles or thorn bushes or some other obstacles. You suffer briefly then escape. This is what life is like. Pleasures do not last but pain is not permanent either. The “way” does not belong to you nor is the present under your control. But as step succeeds step, enjoy each moment as it comes and then continue on your ‘way’.

St. Basil was ordained priest in 364. He served Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea, traveling throughout Cappadocia preaching and organizing response to famine and a drastic increase in the number of orphans. He accepted charitable tasks as part of his own priestly work. In 370, Bishop Eusebius died and St. Basil was ordained Bishop of Caesarea.

In a letter by St. Basil the Great to a monk who had sinned, he comforted him saying, “The Lord does not want the sinner to die, but to return and live. There is still time for endurance, time for

patience, time for healing, time for change. Have you slipped; rise up. Have you sinned; cease. Do not stand among sinners, but leap aside. For when you turn back and weep, then you will be saved.”

II. Liturgy of St. Basil

While in Egypt, St. Basil was exposed to new Eucharistic rites. He seems to have taken some of these back to Cappadocia in written form, later revising them for use in his church at Caesarea. This revision includes enrichments emphasizing the Holy Spirit in language and style found throughout his writings. St. Gregory of Nazianzus seems to allude to this editorial work in his *Panegyric*, mentioning “arrangements of prayers, adornments of the sanctuary.” In any case, it seems agreed that St. Basil shaped and enlarged the substance of the Liturgy that bears his name.

III. Writings of St. Basil

- ❖ After less than a decade in office, St. Basil died in 379. A large part of the saint’s monument is his correspondence, a collection that fills four volumes. In one of his letters about describing the true Christian behavior, “The Christian ought not to grudge another’s reputation, nor rejoice over any man’s faults; he ought in Christ’s love to grieve and be afflicted at his brother’s faults, and rejoice over his brother’s good deeds. He ought not to be indifferent or silent before sinners. He who shows another to be wrong ought to do so with all tenderness, in the fear of God, and with the object of converting the sinner. He who is proved wrong or rebuked ought to take it willingly, recognizing his own gain in being set right.”
- ❖ We have the truest image of St. Basil in his writings; the clearness of his understanding and the truth of his sentiments shine in whatever he writes. His two major books are *On the Holy Spirit* written in 374 and *The Six Days of Creation*, which begins with the praise of “the good order, which reigns in visible things.”
- ❖ Affirmation of this very basic Biblical understanding was quite important in a time when many condemned the world as the product of a dark and limited spirit “You will finally discover that the world was not conceived by chance and without reason, but for a useful end and for the great advantage of all beings; since it is really the school where reasonable souls exercise themselves, the training ground where they learn to know God: since by the sight of visible and sensible things the mind is led, as by a hand, to the contemplation of invisible things.”

Conclusion:

- ❖ St. Basil was justly admired, not so much for his extraordinary learning and eloquence, as for his profound humility and eminent zeal and piety. This is the only true greatness. True Christian virtue is the only solid glory and real good. St. Basil was only great, because he devoted himself and all his talents to the glory of God, with his extraordinary talents; he had made a fortune in the Kingdom of God.
- ❖ By common consent, St. Basil ranks among the greatest figures in church history. By personal virtue he attained distinction in an age of saints; and his purity, his monastic fervor, his stern simplicity, his friendship for the poor became traditional in the history of Christian asceticism.

Applications:

- ❖ Search for some of the writings of St. Basil on the Internet.

- ❖ Search for the history of other important figures in the history of the Orthodox Church.

Week 4 - The Carrier of Icons (Iconostasis)

Meditation:

O Lord, I thank You for giving us part of heaven on earth. I ask You to please remind me every time I go inside Your church that I am in a part of heaven that You left for us on earth. Please teach me how to fear Your place and respect it. Teach me how to love Your house and love all the details You gave us in its structure. Please show me how to benefit from all the details in the church and how to make them a way that I can see You in them.

Objective:

- ❖ To learn about the beauty of the church, and understand the wonderful meanings hidden behind all its symbolic parts.

Memory Verse:

- ❖ “I was glad when they said to me: let us go into the house of the Lord” (Psalm 122:1).
- ❖ “How lovely is Your tabernacle, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the Lord” (Psalm 84:1-2).

Lesson Outline:

I. The Sanctuary (Holy of Holies)

It represents Heaven and contains the Altar, the dome, the steps and the Eastern wall.

- ❖ The Altar: where the sacrifice is offered.
 - It is square in shape.
 - Made out of either wood or marble.
 - It has three coverings on top.
 - Must have a “holy board” on it or anointed by holy chrism.
- ❖ The dome: above the altar.
 - Based on four columns.
 - Painted in blue to represent Heaven, with angels drawn on it.
 - Curtains are suspended from between the columns.
- ❖ The Steps:
 - Seven semi-circular steps that lead up to the Bishop’s throne, underneath the Eastern wall
 - The Bishop would be sitting under the feet of Christ (after having climbed seven (complete) steps (virtues) and speaks to the people from behind the Altar, because his words and service is not due to his own righteousness, but to the righteousness of Christ.
- ❖ The Eastern wall: Is a semi-circular wall called the “Father’s bosom”
 - It has an Icon of Christ sitting, surrounded by Cherubim and Seraphim.
 - He carries in one hand the earth (because He is the controller of everything - Pantocrator).

- He carries a staff in the other hand to shepherd His people (John 10:11).
 - He is looking directly at the people and opening His chest to them to accept them all to Him.
 - Only the Icon of Christ should be in the Sanctuary as He is the only One who is in Heaven (along with the angels) right now.
- ❖ The gateway to the Sanctuary is called the “Royal Gate” from which only the priests should enter.

II. The iconostasis

- ❖ The Sanctuary is separated from the church by an iconostasis (carrier of the icons).
- ❖ It is not a divider (like in the tabernacle), but a means to get into the Holy of Holies (by the prayers of the saints).
- ❖ The Icons have a specific order as they are placed on the iconostasis:
 - On the right side: Christ, John the Baptist, the Saint of the church, any saint or martyr, or any biblical event.
 - On the left side: The Theotokos (Mother of God), the Annunciation (of Christ’s birth), Archangel Michael, St. Mark.
 - Above: The Last supper, surrounded by the 12 disciples.
 - Above them is Christ crucified, with St. Mary at His right and St. John at His left.
 - Ostrich eggs are suspended in between them. Eggs in general represent Resurrection (life inside a tomb).
 - Lighted oil lamps are hung in front of all the icons, except Christ, because He is the light of the world.

III. Icons in the Church

Around the nave of the church, the rest of the icons are placed in a specific order:

- ❖ From left to right: Angels, St. Mary, St. John the Baptist, Disciples (most of those mentioned above are already on the Iconostasis), Old Testament Saints, Apostles, Martyrs, Confessors, New Testament Saints.

Applications:

- ❖ Every time you enter God’s house, be glad that you’re counted worthy of entering such a holy place that resembles heaven.
- ❖ Be glad when people tell you “let’s go to the church” (as the verse says).
- ❖ Ask to always want to go to church, to make others glad also.

LESSONS FOR THE MONTH OF OCTOBER

Week 1- The Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist (I)

Week 2- The Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist (II)

Week 3- Peer Pressure

Week 4- Appearances of God in the Old Testament

Week 1 - The Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist (I)

Objective:

- ❖ Emphasizing the importance of this Holy Sacrament and being well prepared to receive it.

References:

- ❖ The Spiritual Values in the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist / Anba Gregory
- ❖ The Seven Sacraments – Habeeb Guirgis.

Memory Verse:

“When He had given thanks, He broke it and said: Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of me” (1 Corinthians 11:24-25).

Introduction:

After Jesus had performed the miracle of feeding and satisfying five thousand men with five loaves to draw the people’s attention to the true miracle for which He came, died and rose from the dead so He said to them, “Labor not for the meat which perishes, but for the meat which endures into everlasting life, which the Son of man shall, give to you: for Him has God the Father sealed” (John 6:27).

The Jews began to murmur against Him... because He said; “I am the bread, which came down from heaven” and they said, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph whose father and mother we know? How is it then that He says, I came down from heaven” (John 6:42).

But the Lord Jesus had previously emphasized that He is the Bread of Life when any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever, and the Bread that I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world” (John 6:51).

This started an angry argument among them “The Jews therefore strove among themselves;” How can this man give His flesh to eat? Then Jesus said unto them: “Who so eat My Flesh, and drink My Blood, has eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day. For My Flesh is food indeed and My Blood is drink indeed that eats My Flesh, and drink My Blood, dwells in Me, and I in him” (John 6:54,55).

Many of His disciples, when they heard it said, “This is a hard saying. Who can listen to it? After this many of His disciples drew back and no longer went about with Him” (John 6:60,66).

Lesson Outline:

I. He Gave Them The Order During The Last Supper

On Maundy Thursday when the Lord made the Passover and after making it, “He rose from supper, laid aside His garments, and girded Himself with a towel. Then He poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples’ feet” (John 13:4,5).

St. Paul told us about what he received from the Lord about His Divine Commandment, “For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when He was

betrayed took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said: This is My Body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of Me”.

In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood. Do this, as often as you drink it in remembrance of Me. For as often as you eat bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes” (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

This commandment was given to the apostles to practice this Divine Sacrament and all the believers should partake in it so that Christ would be our salvation, our life and our resurrection. The person, who does not obey the Lord’s Commandment and refrain from receiving Communion for a long time, cuts himself off from the holy fellowship and the holy Communion and becomes disobedient to the Commandment of God who gave that Sacrament to all believers.

II. Why Did The Lord Give His Body And Blood?

A. With the sacrament of Eucharist we attain forgiveness of sins

The Lord Himself said about His Body, “This is My body, which is broken for you and is given for you for forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 22, 1 Corinthians 11) - He is the unlimited expiation of the cross, which exists and extends through the ages.

In the prayers of the Holy Liturgy the priest prays: “Permit, O Lord, that this sacrifice for the sins and ignorance of your people will be acceptable unto You” and after bowing down and the invocation of the Holy Spirit (The Epiclesis) the priest prays: “Permit, O our Master, that we shall be worthy to partake of Your holy Body and honored Blood for the purification of our souls, bodies and Spirits.” The first sin of Adam, which we inherit is forgiven through baptism and the sin that we practice with our own will or in our weakness is forgiven through repentance and through our being united with the glorified sacrifice of the Golgotha set on the holy altar.

III. Through The Mystery Of Oblation We Unite With Christ And Attain The Power Of His Death And Resurrection

Through the Sacrament of Eucharist we unite with Christ; we eat Him and He abides in us and we abide in Him... and as the branch of a vine is joined to the tree by the juice coming to it from the origin (the trunk), the same is true with us, when we receive the Body and Blood of the Lord, we abide in turn and mate with Him. The more a believer receives the Holy Communion, the more he receives the gift of unity with the Lord according to the Lord’s promise: “We will come to Him and make our home with Him.” Step by step, the heart glows with bright light and the Lord reveals His glory and reveals Himself to the believer who unites with His Body and His Blood and through this unity, the believer feels the power of the Lord’s resurrection... according to the words of Paul the apostle: “I have been crucified with Christ” and rise with Him according to the words of the apostle of Struggle: “It is no longer I *who live*, but Christ *who lives* in me; and the life I now live in the flesh. I live by faith in the Son of the God, who loved me and *gave Himself* for me” (Galatians 2:20).

St. Cyril of Jerusalem said: “Through Communion we become one body and one blood with Christ. In this way we bear Christ in us as His Body and Blood go through our members and fill them and thus we become partakers of the Divine Nature as Peter the apostle said (2 Peter 1:4)”.

Questions:

- ❖ How did the Lord Jesus prepare the minds of the apostles for receiving the Holy Eucharist?
- ❖ Why were the words of Christ about His Holy Body and Blood too difficult for the Jews to understand?
- ❖ What did the Lord say on the night of the last supper?
- ❖ What is the relation between the mystery of Eucharist and the remission of sins?
- ❖ “Through the Holy Oblation we unite with the Lord” What does this statement mean?
- ❖ How can we attain the power of the Lord’s death and resurrection?
- ❖ Why is one who does not receive communion mistaken?

Discussion:

A non-orthodox young man may ask you and say: “It is better for us to feed on Christ through the Gospel and prayers only”, what will you say to him according to your study of the Lord’s commandment concerning the mystery of Eucharist?

Try to read the Coptic Liturgy to increase your knowledge of the spiritual blessing granted to us in the mystery of fellowship.

Go to confession and receive communion as often as you can (weekly or biweekly at most) so that you may grow in grace and become a living member in the church of God.

Applications:

- ❖ Quote all what is written in the Liturgy about the benefits of the oblation and contemplate the meaning of each benefit.
- ❖ Go to the Holy Liturgy with the spiritual meanings discussed above and record your contemplations later on.
- ❖ Accompany some of your colleagues to the church and urge them to go to confession and to receive the Holy Communion. It is a shameful conduct to play leaving the Holy Sacrifice of the Lord when it is offered to us?
- ❖ Be prepared to receive the Holy Communion. Go to confession. Examine yourself. Prepare your heart to receive this mystery

Week 2 - The Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist (II)

Objective:

Concentrating on hymns as a preparation for the Sacrament of Eucharist.

References:

- ❖ The Spirituality of the hymn of praise - Anba Mettaus.
- ❖ The daily hymn and the psalms of the hours.

Memory Verse:

“He who eats this bread will live for ever” (John 6:58).

Introduction:

I. Singing Hymns And Preparing The Soul To Receive The King

The church has been established on earth to praise her king, Savior and bridegroom. We give thanks for His grace. We remember His good things that He gives us. We glorify His holy name...

Since the apostolic age, the believers have been accustomed to gather as one soul to raise hymns of praise to the Lord joyfully and with a heart full of rejoice. Singing hymns of praise has been connected with practicing the Sacraments especially the Sacrament of Eucharist since the time of the early church. The church spent most of her time singing hymns and raising prayers to prepare the souls to receive the power of grace that lies in the sacraments.

Because of the important and great place of the sacrament of Eucharist, the church is spiritually prepared for it the day before it is practiced by praying and reading the evening prayer, the psalms the morning readings and the hymns. Our fathers the saints used to spend the whole night from evening prayer till the morning the next day in prayers and thanksgiving. In the early morning, those who were inflamed with the spirit of prayer and hymns were qualified to participate in the prayers of the Divine Liturgy.

This hymn singing is the service performed by angels and heavenly hosts and through it we are considered heavenly humans or angels on earth.

It is this service of praise that will remain with us in Heavenly Jerusalem so it is important to prepare ourselves for this.

Lesson Outline:

I. Hymns of Praise in the Sacrament of Eucharist

When St. John was taken up to heaven to see the church of the first fruit... he saw the hymns of praise and the service that is practiced in Heaven: “Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures, and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands saying with a loud voice, ‘Worthy is the lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!’ And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all therein, saying: To him

who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever” (Revelations 5:11-13).

This pleasing fact that John looked at and saw is the Eternity, which we shall live when the Lord grants us to rule with Him. As the Eucharist sacrifice is the visible image of the Heavenly Celebration and the heavenly Service, the church arranged that the prayers of the liturgy should be filled with spiritual and warm hymns. There is the evening hymn, which the people sing sweetly (Psalm 116).

There is also the fourth ‘hoas’ (hoas is a Coptic word meaning singing hymns) where the church sings psalms 148, 149, 150: Praise the Lord from the heavens. Praise Him in the heights. Praise Him all his angels. Praise Him all His hosts. Praise Him, sun and moon. Praise Him all you shining stars. Praise Him, you highest heaven, ... etc.

There are many sweet and beautiful hymns (Review the Book of the Holy Psalmody and study these wonderful hymns with your teacher... They are sweet in their tunes and deep in their meanings).

There is also the midnight hymn, which starts with “Rise O Children of light. Let us praise the Lord of Hosts so that He may grant us the salvation of our souls.”

There are the long hymns of the liturgy such as “Holy, Holy”, “Rejoice O Mary”, “O Lord the God of Hosts,” “The Cherubim Worship You”, The Psalm of the Holy Communion “Praise God in all His Saints”, etc.

That who enters the church and sees the deacons singing hymns of praise with one soul and one heart in the church feels that his heart is taken up to heaven “When we stand to pray we are counted with those standing in heaven.”

II. Thanksgiving in the Eucharist

The Sacrament of Eucharist is the Sacrament of praise and the deep love for God. It is also called the Sacrament of thanksgiving because when the Lord Jesus took bread in His pure hands, He thanked, blessed, divided and gave...

And because the believers, however holy they are, they are not worthy of becoming servants of God, but the Lord made them His beloved children. He gave them the right to partake of His holy Body and Blood.

This rich grace (abundant grace) is the greatest gift granted to Man by God... That is why this sacrament is called the Sacrament of Thanksgiving.

There are many Thanksgiving prayers in the holy liturgy (refer to the Euchologium ‘mass Book’ to select them and recite them in your prayer)... We refer to the prayer of Thanksgiving which the priest begins the Holy Liturgy “We thank the beneficent and merciful God...”

There is also the prayer of fraction and also: “Let us give thanks unto God, the Almighty Father of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ. For He has made us worthy, to stand in this holy place and raise hands and serve His Holy Name. Let us ask Him also, to make us worthy to share and offer His Divine immortal mysteries Communion and raising up of His divine and undying sacraments.”

We thank God because it is He who, through the sacrament of Eucharist, gave us:

- **Abiding in Him** and being joined with him: ‘He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood, abides in Me and I in him’ (John 6:56).
- Growth in grace and the eternal life, “He who eats this bread will live for ever” (John 6:58).
- He grants us the guarantee of life and the glories resurrection, “He who eats My Flesh and drinks My Blood has eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 5:54).

For this reason, the priest in his inaudible prayer after the communion says: “Our mouths are filled with joy and our tongues with rejoice after partaking, O Lord, of Your Holy and Immortal Sacraments. We thank You O, Lord for all Your gifts... You are worthy of every glory, honor, grandeur and thanks forever and ever, Amen”.

Conclusion:

Show the importance of praise as a preparation for the mystery of Eucharist.

Show the importance of singing praises through the practice of the Sacrament of Eucharist.

Why is the Sacrament of Eucharist called the Sacrament of “Thanksgiving”?

Applications:

From the Euchologium quote the prayers of praise and the prayers of thanksgiving, contemplate in them and recite some of them.

Prepare yourself for receiving the Holy Communion by prayers and praising the Lord so when you enter the church you can sing praises with those who sing hymns inside the church.

Keep away from literal forms, suspicion and routine when you sing hymns of praise. Always lift up your heart to God in praising the Lord with the spirit of thanksgiving and internal rejoice.

Week 3 - Peer Pressure

Objective:

Peer Pressure: How to avoid it and combat it.

Memory Verse:

“In the world you will have tribulations, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world (John 16:33).

References:

References documented within the text.

Lesson Outline:

I. Christians And Their Place In The World

It is very clear that Christianity is not and has never been the mainstream style of living in any society in history. It is also very evident that since the beginning, the world has been dominated by evil whether in thought, action, leadership, or even in ministry as with heresies. The Lord Jesus Christ found it necessary to point out these facts many times during His ministry. We find many verses in the four Gospels alliterating the same concept over and over again, never failing to point out that Christians are a unique breed of people that do not belong to any shepherd but to our Lord Jesus Christ. In Luke 10:3, Jesus Christ says *“Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves.”* The literary style of the Bible is amazingly beautiful and expressional especially in this last verse. A Christian in the world is compared to a lamb among a pack of wolves and for such a defenseless yet pure creature to survive, it has to follow behind its shepherd closely or else it is just another easy prey to the hungry, savage wolves. We also see in John 15:19 how Jesus once again states where we stand compared to the world when He says *“If you were of the world, the world would love its own, yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.”*

Does that imply we should try to achieve total separation from a society that we don't belong to and are rejected by? The answer is no. We see in John 17:15 that Jesus never requested from His Father *“to take them out of the world, but that you [the Father] keep them from the evil one.”* Here on earth, we have a very noble mission, for besides trying to love God with all our hearts and obeying His commandments, we have to also love one another and even, taking it further, love our enemy. That love that Jesus urges us to possess is not a passive love but an active one where it dictates us, Christians, to share our beliefs with the non-believers, our talents with the un-talented, our money with the poor, and our peace with the tortured in heart.

Conclusion: We, the Christians, are not of the world. But we are needed by the world for we are the light of the world.

II. Why Christians Are Exposed To Peer Pressure

Anyone, Christian or not, that does not follow the current (current since morality in this world is relative to time, person, and space) moral views of his society will feel peer pressured to ‘get back in

line and do what everybody else does.’ Since Christians do not belong to the world (refer to discussion above), they will always feel peer pressure in their life.

Peer pressure can be external or internal. External peer pressure is where friends or acquaintances urge you to do something that you do not usually do and would not have done it if they had not urged you to do so. Internal pressure is when you within yourself have an inferiority complex and feel alienated because you do not participate in the activities that people in your immediate surroundings participate in even if your peers do not urge you to participate with them. For example, religious beliefs, peer in this case can stand for one’s weakness, thoughts, or devilish mind games.

Conclusion: Since we, the Christians, are not of this world and do not belong to it, we are different, and that in turn causes us subject to peer pressure.

III. Expectations from a Christian

Does God expect Christians to be perfect? The answer is no. If God expects us to be perfect in our lives, none of us would be worthy of the eternal kingdom for *“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”* (Romans 23:3). The beauty of God’s love for us is that He is ready to accept us with our sins and imperfections, but we must accept Him. Jesus Christ conquered the world for us so although we can’t conquer this world ourselves, since we abide in Jesus Christ; we have and will conquer the world through Jesus as it is written *“In the world you will have tribulations; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world”* (John 16:33).

What does God expect from us? The answer to that question lies in many verses of the four Gospels. Firstly, Jesus Christ expects us to carry our cross and follow Him for *“he who does not carry his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me”* (Matthew 10:38). When the people standing around Jesus Christ on the cross asked Him to come down from the cross if He was really the Son of God, He did not. He did not come down not because He could not, but because He was the Son of God and He had to taste the torture of the cross to provide us salvation. The people’s reason for Jesus to come down is His reason to stay on the cross. We also as God’s children cannot come down from our cross for we are the sons and daughters of God. Here the cross means any tribulations we have to go through in this world because we are Christians.

Secondly, Jesus Christ expects us to love Him with all our hearts, so much that any other love we have cannot compare with the love we have for Him. He says *“he who loves father or mother... son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me”* (Matthew 10:37).

Thirdly, Jesus expects us, because of our love for Him, to obey Him at all costs. St. Peter says, *“we ought to obey God rather than man”* (Acts 5:29). So the next time we are faced with peer pressure, we should recall this verse, which we should know by heart, to strengthen us in our stand with Christ with our cross that Jesus happily carries for us.

Conclusion: Because of these three points, a Christian will go through tribulations in many forms, one of which is peer pressure *“We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God”* (Acts 14:22). Always *“remember that I said to you, ‘a servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you”* (John 15:20).

IV. Success stories

The best success story in the Bible relating to peer pressure is that of the lady of us all St. Mary. St. Mary was born in Nazareth, a city in Galilee (Luke 1:26-28). Although Nazareth is the city where Jesus Christ grew up, it might well have been the worst city that ever existed on the face of the earth, even worse than Sodom and Gomorrah. Because of Nazareth’s want of culture, its rude dialect, and

its contact with the Gentiles, the Galileans were lightly esteemed by the inhabitants of Judea. To this very day, Nazareth is regarded in Palestine with some sense of embarrassment (Ray C. Stedman---The Weakness of the World). Nothing good has ever been associated with Nazareth for when the news about Jesus spread, people could not believe that *“anything good can come out of Nazareth”* (John 1:46) for *“no prophet has arisen out of Galilee.”* Nazareth was even so evil that Jesus Christ himself *“could do no mighty work there, except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them”* (Mark 6:5). Nazareth was also the very first city to be violent toward Christ after He preached in the synagogue when they *“rose up and thrust Him out of the city; and they led Him to the brow of the Hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff”* (Luke 4:29).

The greatest unnoticed miracle that Jesus performed is how He brought about a pure virgin from such a city and found her deserving of being His mother, the Mother of God the *Theotokos*. The woman that found grace in the eyes of God, the woman who gave birth to Him, came from one of the worst cities in the region. If peer pressure can play any role in corrupting anyone, it would have been the peer pressure that St. Mary survived as she was growing up. Growing up in the temple helped St. Mary avoid some external pressures and endure temptations. If growing up sheltered in God’s Holy temple and altar protected St. Mary, it will definitely protect us in our struggles against peer pressure in this world. So let us learn to grow up in Christ and in His Church sheltered by Him when the enemy rages against our souls. He is the true shepherd and we are His flock. So let us follow Him very closely lest we lose sight of His glory and be an easy catch to the devil.

Another biblical story relating to peer pressure is that of Joseph. Joseph was *“handsome in form and appearance”* (Genesis 39:6). Because of Joseph’s pure heart, God loved him and blessed all his work in Potiphar’s house. But one day, Potiphar’s wife came to Joseph and asked him to commit sin with her. Anyone in Joseph’s place would have been so flattered for the proposal because she was his master’s wife and he was but a slave. One could have also easily accepted the proposal with the excuse that he was just a slave and could not refuse orders or else he would have been severely punished. But putting all those evil thoughts aside, Joseph decided that *“we ought to obey God rather than man”* (Acts 5:29) no matter what the consequences are. It is written in Genesis 39:10 *“so it was, as she spoke to Joseph day by day, that he did not heed her, to lie with her or to be with her.”* Joseph held steadfast to his beliefs and said, *“how can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God”* (Genesis 39:9). May we all have the same will power and fear of God to stand steadfast in Christ.

Conclusion:

Always remember we are not of this world. We are different and we should act differently. Be happy when we get persecuted for not bending under the pressure or when we get excluded from gatherings because we do not conform to worldly customs. *“Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you, and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man’s sake. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven”* (Luke 6:22-23). Let’s carry our cross to show God how much we love Him.

Lastly always remember, God does not want us to defeat the world for *“In the world you will have tribulations, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world”* (John 16:33). All He wants us to do is to use Him as a shelter when the enemy rages against us. Let us stay in His altar forever as St. Mary did and if we are rendered far from it, let’s remember how Jesus died for us and the least we can do to show Him that we love Him is to face tribulations and carry the cross.

Applications:

Prevention: Although God will carry our cross for us when we can no longer carry it, we should not put ourselves in situations that impose on us more crosses than necessary. Placing ourselves in bad environments and around non-God fearing people will definitely bring upon us peer pressure. God will provide us strength to keep our purity when faced with temptations but not with self-imposed temptations. Testing God in that manner will bring upon us nothing but condemnation. When the Church asks us to not go to worldly parties, night clubs, and to stay away from bad company, the Church is not automatically assuming that we are evil and will commit sin when we go there. But she definitely knows that because of our beliefs and our behavior as Christians, which is different from other people, we are aliens to this world and as a rational consequence we will be faced with peer pressure. We might overcome it and we might fall into sin, but why impose on ourselves more trials and tribulation than necessary. The devil is doing his best to tempt us and the closer we get to God, the stronger we become, and the more Satan tempts us.

- Psalm 1: Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law he meditates day and night, i.e. one is blessed if he avoids being close to evilness and cursed if he willingly dwells with evil doers and in evil places.
- St. Mary: St. Mary, growing up in the temple, protected herself from any form of external temptations or pressure. We should also use God's altar, body and blood as a shelter as long as we live on this earth. Once we become distant of it, we are easy prey to the hungry wolves lurking outside.

Achieving victory over peer pressure:

- Contemplating over Christ's wounds: If we are ever faced with peer pressure or tempted by any sin, we should remember that every sin we commit, we crucify Christ anew; every transgression we commit is yet another nail hammered in Jesus' hands. The Church fathers say that if we always have that picture in our minds, we will be less able to sin.

Week 4 - God's Appearances in the Old Testament

Meditation

O Lord ... my heavenly Father ... Please come unto me and change me to be your Holy Temple and allow the Holy Spirit to dwell and work strongly in me. Please God help me to follow Your footsteps and be worthy to see You. Help me Lord to see You in the form of the poor, hungry and thirsty people as I give unto them from Your richly hands. Help me to see You in the form of the sick people and prisoners I am visiting as unto You. I see You Lord wherever I go in the very perfect creatures You made and created. Open my eye O Lord to see You wherever I go ... Amen.

Objective:

To learn about God's appearances in the Old Testament and how the Lord Jesus Christ was symbolized by different characters in the Old Testament.

References:

The Lord Jesus Christ in the Old Testament, by the Youth Service in the Coptic Orthodox Patriarch.

Memory Verse:

"But," He said, "you cannot see my face; for man shall not see Me and live" (Exodus 33:20).

"Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" (John 14:9).

Introduction:

Can anybody see God? Mention three stories from the Old Testament that show the appearances of God? How did God appear? Why? Mention three prophecies and three characters in the Old Testament that referred to the Lord Jesus Christ?

Lesson Outline:

St. Bishoy and all the monks hurried up running to see the Lord Jesus Christ as was declared to them. St. Bishoy preferred to be the last one in order to help carrying another person, who cannot walk, who turned out to be the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

I. Examples of God's Appearances in the Old Testament

God appeared to Adam in the Garden of Eden and He was calling him and talking to him *"And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden"* (Genesis 3:8).

God and two angels appeared to Abraham as three men *"Then the Lord appeared to him by the terebinth trees of Mamre, as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day... And the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I surely bear a child, since I am old?' "Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son." But Sarah denied it, saying, "I did not laugh," for she was afraid. And He said, "No, but you did laugh!" Then the men rose from there and looked toward Sodom, and*

Abraham went with them to send them on the way. And the Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing" (Genesis 18:1, 13-17).

God appeared and fought with Jacob till the morning light and then blessed him and gave him the promises *"Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day. Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him. And He said, "Let Me go, for the day breaks." But he said, "I will not let You go unless You bless me!" So He said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." And He said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed." Then Jacob asked, saying, "Tell me Your name, I pray." And He said, "Why is it that you ask about My name?" And He blessed him there. And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: "For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved" (Genesis 32:24-30).*

God appeared to Moses in the clouds walking on it and all the Israelites saw Him *"Then Moses went up, also Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel. And there was under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, and it was like the very heavens in its clarity. But on the nobles of the children of Israel He did not lay His hand. So they saw God, and they ate and drank" (Exodus 24:9-11).*

The Lord appeared to a man of Zorah, of the tribe of the Danites, whose name was Manoah and to his wife giving them a promise that they will have a son called Samson *"And the Angel of the Lord appeared to the woman and said to her, "Indeed now, you are barren and have borne no children, but you shall conceive and bear a son. "Now therefore, please be careful not to drink wine or similar drink, and not to eat anything unclean ... And the Angel of the Lord said to Manoah, "Though you detain Me, I will not eat your food. But if you offer a burnt offering, you must offer it to the Lord. For Manoah did not know He was the Angel of the Lord. Then Manoah said to the Angel of the Lord, "What is Your name, that when Your words come to pass we may honor You?" And the Angel of the Lord said to him, "Why do you ask My name, seeing it is wonderful?" (Judges 13:3,4,16-18).*

The Lord appeared to Daniel in the shape of an old man *"I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed." (Daniel 7:13,14).*

God appeared to the three men in the fire as the son of man *"Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished; and he rose in haste and spoke, saying to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?" They answered and said to the king, "True, O king" (Daniel 3:24).*

II. Prophecies in the Old Testament

God appeared in the form of a man in many occasions. Also He declared Himself on the mouths of His saints and prophets before the incarnation through prophecies.

The prophecies declared the details of the life of Lord Jesus Christ from birth to Ascension. More than 300 prophecies are found in the Old Testament.

III. Characters from the Old Testament

Adam: The head of the old mankind representing the second Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ, the head of the new mankind.

Abel: The sacrifice with no reason or guilt representing the Lord, the great sacrifice, for our sins.

Isaac: The only beloved son, who presented himself a sacrifice and his father presented him joyfully and came back alive, represented the Lord who presented Himself as a pure lamb and He resurrected from death.

Joseph: Who was called the savior of the world saving his people from hunger representing the Lord Jesus who saved us from eternal death through His body. As the brothers of Joseph sold him, Judas sold his master.

Jonah: On his hands, the gentiles believed and spent three days inside the fish as the Lord spent three days inside the earth.

Applications:

Let us train ourselves to see God in His creatures and glorify Him. Let us experience seeing Him when dealing with everyone in need of any kind of help.

Conclusion:

God manifested Himself to mankind at all ages since the beginning of creation. God loves to manifest Himself to us and He is dwelling in us through His Holy Spirit, guiding us, comforting us and leading us into His kingdom. Are we willing to submit ourselves to Him under His mighty hands to shape us and mold us into His image?

LESSONS FOR THE MONTH OF NOVEMBER

Week 1- Incense and Tapers

Week 2- The Coptic Hymns

Week 3- Life of Circumspection

Week 4- The Great Teachers of the Church

Week 1 - Tapers and Incense in the Church

Objective:

The church rites help us to offer sincere worship.

References:

The life of the Orthodox Prayer.

Memory Verse:

“Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God” (Revelation 4:5).

Introduction:

The candle is a precise image of a worshipper standing in the presence of God. It is calm in appearance but it is burning in heart with burning fire that burns its cool body and melts it and pours it as tears that flow leaving a circle of light behind it, that pleases anyone who contemplates in it or walks under its guidance.

Its nature without the work of fire is trifle and useless the same way as the nature of man without the work of grace.

One candle lit in the House of God is an invitation to quiet, burning and shining worship. The candle is like the worshipper. It does not give light by itself but when it is lit, it burns and shines and in this case it lightens the darkness around it and gives forth heat and warmth to those who surround it.

Lesson Outline:

I. What Does The Use Of Candles Mean?

In the early church candles were not used for merely giving light as they were used during day time especially on feast days on different occasions... On those occasions the altar appeared bright and beautiful especially on the following occasions.

When celebrating the Holy Saturday and there was a special rite performed for the candles of the Passover Day where all the people participated joyfully in celebrating the light of the resurrection. Believers still bring the light from the Holy Tomb in Jerusalem on that night every year and take it to all parts of the world.

Candles were lit by the baptism font as a sign of enlightenment and the new shining nature worn by the baptized person. The new baptized persons used to go around inside the church after the liturgy and after receiving the Holy Communion. They put golden crowns on their heads and gird them with girdles. Candles were in their hands as a sign of rejoice and joy for the new birth.

Also when the Holy Bible is read, we see a candle in the hand of the deacon as a sign that the Gospel's light fills the universe and that the Gospel is man's lamp and the light of his way and that he who lives according to the (Bible) Gospel lives in light, walks in light and becomes the son of light and the son of resurrection.

Also on the Saints days candles are lit before their icons indicating that they “Shine like the brightness of the firmament” in the kingdom of God... This honor urges others to follow the example of those saints and imitate them till the end.

As for martyrs, people used to light a lampadae before their icons, and each lampadae was lit day and night. The remaining oil in them caused several miracles. We hear about a lame man who entered the church of St. Stephen and anointed his leg with the oil and was healed immediately. The man lit a candle and left his crutch as a present to the saint and it became as a shrine for people to visit.

Candles were used in funerals where deacons walked before the departed righteous and pious people and lit candles over their bodies.

In the Liturgy prayers there are two lit candlesticks set on the two sides of the altar referring to the two angels who were by the tomb of Jesus at the time of His resurrection. The lampadae set in the eastern side of the church refers to the star that drew our attention to the child Jesus.

The candle lit before the Icon of Christ declares that Christ is the Light of the World. “That was the true light which lightens every man that cometh into the world” (John 1:9).

The candle lit before the Icon of the Virgin declares that this is the Mother of light.

The candle lit before the Icon of the Saint declares that this is the lit decorated lamp that is put in an upper place in the house to give light to all those living in it.

Let us practice this rite and remember that the wise virgins who were ready to meet the Bridegroom had oil in their vessels and they lit their lamps when they met the bridegroom. Let us practice this rite in godliness and submission, and deep contemplation. We should be purified of sin. We should not be defiled. We have to lift up our eyes to the heavenly glory where the dwelling places of Light exist.

II. The Use Of Incense In The Church

St. Ephraim of Syria says, “I made a church of myself for Christ. The toils of my body burn as incense inside it.”

Incense was used in the past in the Old Testament each morning and each evening according to the commandment the Lord gave Moses (Exodus 30).

When the plague spread among the people of Israel, Moses and Aaron took fire from the altar and put it in a censer and poured incense on it. They stood between the living and the dead and made atonement for them (Numbers 16:44-48).

In the Old Testament the Lord demanded that censers should be kept as they were sanctified by raising incense before the Lord.

Its use was mentioned in a wonderful way in the Book of Revelation. The incense is the prayers of the saints. We should honor the fearful Presence of God by offering incense to Him (Revelations 8:3,4)

Many troubled souls entered the church and there they felt calm and comfort when the cloud of the holy incense rising from the censor that is in the priest’s hand came to them.

Many worried souls felt comfort when they followed and looked at the circles of incense smoke rising to heaven.

The simple eye sees incense as mere sweet smelling smoke which disappears in the air after a short time, but the eye of the inspired soul sees it going up to heaven carrying with it the prayers of the saints and the holy angels raise it with hymns of praise.

III. An objection and reputation

We have to notice that we offer incense to God only but giving incense to the High Priests is only for attaining their blessings so that they may raise with the prayers of the people who are members of one body. So incense is not offered to them as persons but to God who abides in them as St. Paul the apostle says, “You are the temples of God and the Spirit is dwelling in you.”

Some may object saying that offering incense to the Icons of Saints is worship to persons or to pictures and statues but in fact we do all this with the spirit of fellowship. As small grains of incense melt and send forth a sweet smell before God, the priest does the same when he gathers the prayers of the saints whether alive or dead and raises them to God in public worship and deep spiritual significance, thanking God: *“Who in Christ always leads us in triumph, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of Him everywhere”* (2 Corinthians 2:14,15). For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved....

Applications:

- Light a candle before the Icon of the Virgin or before the Icon of the Patron Saint of the church and ask them to intercede on your behalf to Christ that He may forgive your sins.
- Send the names of those who departed so that the priest may raise incense for them after the prayer of the Congregation in the Divine Mass.
- Make a wall magazine and write essays on “Tapers”, “Incense”, and “Icons” in the Orthodox Church, Make use of your readings and drawings in making this wall magazine.
- Quote verses from the Holy Bible that proves your sound belief about using candles, incense and icons in the Orthodox Church.

Week 2 - Coptic Hymns

Objective:

To learn about the origin and history of Coptic music

To appreciate the treasure preserved in our church.

Memory Verse:

“Sing to the Lord a new song, and His praise in the assembly of the saints” (Psalm 149:1).

References:

The Ancient Music of the Coptic Church, Uni Church Oxford 1932, by Ernest Newlandsmith

Institute of Coptic Studies Magazine 1958

Christmas 1995 Newspaper Article

Third Meeting with Coptic Music - Cairo 1993

Preserving Pharos Psalms For Christ, Egypt Today April 1997, Raymond Stock

Introduction to Coptic Music, Hossam Adeeb Nashed - Cairo 1997

The Coptic Liturgy Text (according to St. Basil)

Painting with scales, Hossam Adeeb Nashed - Cairo 1997

Introduction:

For centuries, Coptic music scholars and many archeologists tried to understand the roots of Coptic Hymns... They agreed that there may have been three influencing sources: Jews, Greeks and Ancient Egyptians.

Jews played a big role in the spread of Christianity, since the Old Testament and many rituals originated from them.

Greece produced many Greco-Egyptian musicologists who helped develop the rules, styles, and forms of the known musical culture. These include Dydimus of Alexandria, Pseudo-Demetrius of Phaleron (First Century), Claudius Ptolmy (Second Century), etc. Some Coptic hymn manuscripts from this period (Oxyrhynchus Papyrus) were found to have circles with different shapes and colors over the text of the hymn. This was interpreted as an ancient method of musical notation where the colors and the shapes represent the different tones and musical lengths respectively.

Ancient Egyptian music greatly influenced that of the early church. There seems to be a relationship between the Coptic Kyrie and the ancient Egyptian tradition of sun worship. Furthermore, the Antiphonal singing system was used between groups of priests and priestesses...Ancient Egyptian music was also characterized by the melismata (singing many notes over one of the seven vowels which were called “Magic Vowels”, giving an immense feeling of piety and humility in religious occasions). Ancient Egyptians also used professional blind singers and some percussion instruments during worship. Scholars have noticed many similarities between Egyptian village folklore and Coptic music.

Lesson Outline:

Coptic music has evolved through three different stages:

I. During the reign of the Roman Empire

During the reign of the Roman Empire, Coptic missionaries (such as the Theban Legion) in Northern Italy, Switzerland, the Rhine Valley and Western Europe, introduced Coptic musical culture along with the Gospel. The ancient Egyptian harp can be found in Ireland today. There is great similarity between Ancient Latin hymns and Egyptian hymns (e.g. *Crucem tuam adoramus, Flectamus genua and levata*, etc.). Music also spread through monasticism and mysticism.

II. After the Council of Chalcedon

After the Council of Chalcedon, the church was divided... The Copts cut contact with all other churches except the Syrian church in order to keep their Orthodox faith uncontaminated. This, although unpredictable had a very positive influence on preserving the ancient musical heritage.

III. After the Arab Invasion of Egypt

The Egyptian ability of preserving and maintaining their culture could be seen after the Arab invasion of Egypt. All Egypt spoke Coptic until the time of H.H. Pope Zacharia (1004-1032) and some villages in Southern Egypt maintained the language until the 19th century... Until this day, a big part of the Egyptian culture is still preserved. Three writers from the Middle Ages described the Church rituals and hymns: Ibn El-Assal, Ibn-Saba (13th Century), and Abul-Barakat Ibn-Kabbar (14th Century). Today, we find these rituals and hymns the same way as described in their books.

Because the clergy were not professional singers, the church decided to use talented singers (usually blind) ... The German archeologist Hans Hickmann proved that those cantors still move their hands and fingers systematically (Cheironomy) with the music as did their ancestors when conducting music in the Fourth Dynasty (2723-2563 BC). These cantors played a big role in transferring this heritage to us with great precision! They considered it a precious treasure to be kept for future generations.

At the time of H. H. Pope Kyrillos Father of Reformation (1854-1863), the senior Cantor at the Great St. Mark's Cathedral in Cairo, Moalem Takla was assigned to compile and revise the Coptic hymns from northern to southern Egypt through the assistance of Mr. Erian Mofteh, professor of Coptic language in The Cairo Theological Seminary. Moalem Takla taught seven cantors all the treasures he collected. These great men instructed the great Moalem Mikhail Gerges El-Batanony, who later became the cantor of the 20th Century.

In 1927, in an effort to preserve Coptic music heritage, a young man called Ragheb Mofteh, invited the famous British Musician Ernst Newlandsmith who transcribed 16 volumes of Coptic hymns to modern musical notation in 9 years... He also taped Coptic hymns sung by Moalem Mikhail and several others. By doing that, Dr. Ragheb Mofteh inaugurated the new age of Coptic Music. These records are considered to be the world's most precise, upon which most studies are conducted by scholars such as Hans Hickmann, the Hungarian ladies Ilona Borsai and Margerit Toth, and the Americans Martha Roy and Marian Robertson.

IV. Theses on Coptic Music

Several theses have now been written on Coptic Music:

Master Thesis-1975 on Coptic Music Bibliography by Salwa El-Shawan, Master Thesis-1976 by Nabil Kamal Boutros and the first Ph.D.-1986 by Nabila Erian in Baltimore County, Maryland State University. In 1989, the Coptic Encyclopaedia was compiled by the efforts of Professor Aziz Suriel Attia at Yota University and published with the most recent and elaborated information and research work about Coptic Music Studies. Fouad Asaad Attia submitted another Ph.D. thesis-ICS-Cairo-1995 on the Psychological effect of Coptic Music.

Conclusion:

What we need to stress here is that this strong and impressive music, inherited from one generation to another has begun to disappear and to be influenced by modern attractive media. Instead of using it in our daily lives and allowing it to flourish in universities, musical institutes, musicology, ethnomusicology, music therapy departments and choirs as one of the most precious and oldest music in the whole world, it is unfortunately ignored by many. We pray that it will last and not be forgotten along with ancient Egyptian secrets such as building the pyramids and mummifying the human body!

Applications:

Try to attend Coptic hymn classes in your church to learn few hymns or listen to tapes of Coptic hymns and try to memorize them.

Week 3 - Life of Circumspection

Objective:

Being faithful to God in word and deed, in small matters before the big ones.

References

Life of Circumspection / Fawzy Nimr Mina.

Memory Verse:

“Take thought for what is noble in the sight of all” (Roman 12:17).

Introduction:

I. Circumspection Is An Important Sign On The Road Of Spiritual Life

It shows the seriousness of our will and the type of our struggle. Circumspection means resisting sins even the small ones. It means chastity and abstaining from every form of evil (1 Thessalonians 5:22).

It means that we should hate all forms of defilement whether visible or invisible, as the apostle says: “Hating even the garment spotted by the flesh” (Jude 23).

Lesson Outline:

I. Types of Circumspection

A. Suspicion

A man may wash his hands several times and still think that they are dirty. The same is true with a man whose conscience is always bothering him and who confesses his sins to the priest, yet thinks that they have not been forgiven so he relates them several times. This is wrong. It is not circumspection but it is weakness and a disease.

B. Phariseeism

It is the circumspection based on formalities and carrying out the commandments literally such as circumspection in the ritual law as Pharisees used to be careful about outside purification such as washing jars, cups and beds and determining what should and what should not be done on the Sabbath and all such formal matters for which the Lord Christ reproached them many times:

“Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites: for you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith; these you ought to have done without neglecting the others. You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel” (Matthew 23:23, 24).

II. The Acceptable Circumspection

A. First: In deeds

The spiritual man looks carefully how he walks. He performs his work with great care and according to what the Divine Truth demands. The spiritual man cares for his apparent deeds and concealed

ones. He examines every behavior and every deed and asks himself: Is it fit? Is it for the glory of God? The scripture says: "Take thought for what is noble in the sight of all" (Roman 12:17). Also "We aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of men" (2 Corinthians 8:21).

Thus we perform our deeds to glorify God the Father who art in heaven. Many people behave foolishly and sometimes indifferently and carelessly, without care or circumspection and nowadays we often hear expressions such as: never mind... Don't worry... etc. Many people are not time minded they lie when they talk, they are cunning in talk and behavior, they are dissemblers and time servers and often dishonest. These are dangerous signs indicating that the spiritual life of man is out of control and that evil desires began to play their part even in the life of those who pretend to be spiritual people. We hear of Abba Anthony who listened to the Divine Word "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me" (Matthew 19:21) and sold all his property and obeyed the commandment literally. He left a small portion of wealth for his sister and when he went to church, he said, "Do not be anxious about tomorrow" and sold that small portion too and sent his sister to a nunnery. The commandment to him was a Divine Order that must be carried out and was not for argument or negotiation.

B. Second: In saying

The tongue is a small organ but it is like the boat rudder that moves the boat to the right or to the left. The following are selected scripture verses, which show the danger of careless talk.

i) Lying Words:

- "Idolaters, and all liars, their lot shall be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death" (Revelations 21:8).

ii) Revilement:

- "Nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 6:10).
- "And whoever says: 'You fool' shall be liable to the hell of fire" (Matthew 5:22).

iii) Silly talk and foul talks:

- "But now put them all away: anger, wrath malice, slander and foul talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old nature with its practices" (Colossians 3:8).

iv) Do not swear at all:

- "Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No' anything more than this comes from evil" (Matthew 5:37).

v) Careless words:

- "On the Day of Judgment, men will render account for every careless word they utter" (Matthew 12:36).
- "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits" (Proverbs 18:21).
- "Those who are killed by the tongue are more than those killed by the mouth of the sword" (Sirach 28:18).

- All what we say then should be useful, true, precise and serious... Let us commit ourselves to circumspection in talking and let our talk be as brief as possible as, “When words are many, transgression is not lacking but the who restrains his lips is prudent” (Proverbs 10:19).

C. Third: In Thoughts

The scripture says: “Be transformed by the renewal of your mind” (Roman 12:2) “take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5).

In this domain the following exercises benefit us:

- Resist evil looks, as they are the material on which the mind feeds.
- Do not listen to words that do not fit us as children of God as words transform into subconscious images that trouble the mind, and the feeling.
- Always pray and make use of the name of Jesus as a blessed means for driving away all evil thoughts.
- In this respect Anba Daniel the Hegomen says: “We cannot prevent *birds from hovering over our heads... but we can prevent them from making their nests in our hair*”.
- *Always* think of useful things, as the head of a lazy person is the devil’s laboratory.
- Do not resort to excuses such as the power of the devil in your passions and tendencies.
- Prophet Jeremiah says: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand it? I the Lord search the mind and try the heart, to give to every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings” (Jeremiah 17:9,10).
- There are sins of the heart such as spite, envy, hatred, jealousy, deception, anger and lusts. So we must watch our heart so that it may not deviate, to the right or to the left... For example we should not do good out of our love for appearance, and we must not be lazy in doing our duty because of illness. We must know that there are wrong motivations that may tempt our hearts to sin.
- It is said that Simon the borer (the shoemaker), while mending a woman’s shoe, looked at the woman and desired her. So he plucked his eye remembering that it was better for him to enter the eternal life as one-eyed man than being thrown into the fire of hell with his two eyes. The Lord rewarded him by performing the miraculous deed of moving the mountain of Mokattam through him.
- He was careful with small things so he could perform a great deed. It is not advisable that you should get rid of your eyes literally but you have to keep them away from evil look and from the stumbling programs on T.V.

III. Dangers of Carelessness

Little foxes spoil vineyards; a small hole may cause a big ship to sink; and a small stone in the traveler’s shoe can cause him to stop walking. The same is true if we are careless with small sins.

Lukewarmness, keeping away from prayers, and not having comfort in them is because our thoughts go astray, and the spiritual life is difficult, and we hate to struggle.

There is no growth in grace because the spiritual benefits such as meekness and purity are wasted at a moment of anger or a passing lust.

Causing others to stumble when they notice that we are double-faced and in the end the Holy Spirit is grieved and does not support man.

He who is not faithful in small situations cannot be faithful in important situations. He who is faithful in very little is also faithful in much as the Scripture says.

Questions:

Joseph the Righteous was a model of circumspection and Esau was an opposite example. Explain

How did the Lord correct Jacob's carelessness? What was the price Jacob paid because of his carelessness?

Show how one sin in David's life caused many troubles for him and how one mistake in the life of Lot's wife caused her destruction. What was that mistake?

Applications:

When an evil thought comes to your mind, remember the fear of God and say: "Be pleased, O God, to deliver me! O Lord, make haste to help me!"

When you suffer from the desire of the flesh bow down and make the sign of the cross and say: "The Lord answers you in the day of trouble. The name of the God of Jacob protect you."

When you err while talking as when you exaggerate tell the people that you are sorry and the correct words you meant were so and so... In this way you fight the devil of lying, pride and love of appearance.

When one of your friends ask you to swear that your words are true do not swear but say to him, "Believe me" and do not swear at all.

When you see a group of friends saying inappropriate jokes, keep away from them and remember the words of the Scriptures: "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers, but his delight is in the Law of the Lord and on his Law he meditates day and night" (Psalm 1:1,2).

"Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord, keep watch over the door of my lips" (Psalm 141:3). Get the reflections of the student on this verse.

Week 4 - The Great Teachers of the Church

Objective:

Being acquainted with the pillars of the Christian Theological Thought.

References:

St. Dioscorus / Anba Gregory.

St. John Chrysostom / Fr. Minassa Yohanna

St. John Chrysostom / Fr. Tadros Yakoub.

Makrina / Mr. Rudolf Yanny

The Story of the Coptic Church, Part 2/ Iris El Massry

Other books about sermons of St. John Chrysostom, his comments and his interpretations of the Bible.

Introduction:

The following are the life history of four great saintly church fathers. Their life and teachings played a vital role in the church growth. These saints are:

St. John Chrysostom the Bishop of Constantinople.

St Basil the Great

St. Gregory theologian.

St. Dioscorus.

I. St. John Chrysostom (347 – 407)

St. John Chrysostom the Bishop of Constantinople was famous for his sermons and wonderful teachings so he deserved the title of “Chrysostom” (Golden Mouth).

He was born of a rich family in the city of Antioch. After his father’s death, his mother raised him up. She taught him the Holy Scriptures and instructed him in sciences and he grew in grace and virtue. He spent two years in the legal profession defending the oppressed with great skill and proficiency. When he was twenty-five years old, he went to one of the monasteries. He lived as an anchorite in a cell. As an ascetic he led a life of severe self-discipline and the result was that he got very ill so he went back to Antioch and there he began to preach with rare eloquence. People came in great numbers, to listen to him and called him “Chrysostom”. He was ordained a Bishop. He was a good example for his people. He was an ascetic who used to wear rough clothes, distribute his money among the needy, and visit the sick people and those who were in prison. He established hospitals, houses for strangers and many orphanages.

Because of his courage, gallantry and boldness in bearing witness to the truth he reproached Queen Aphdokia for her evil actions so her heart became filled with anger, and hostility and she conspired against him to get rid of him. The Emperor sent him into exile. When the natives heard the news, they were deeply agitated and filled with anger. Some of them delivered fiery sermons saying, “Waves attacked us and a dangerous hurricane struck us, but we are not afraid, let the waves rise up to the sky for they will never break the ship. Let’s have a firm belief. Let’s stand firm, without fear

because God is with us. He is my staff, keeper, guard and shelter; if the whole world is against me, my heart will remain with my Savior.”

After he had left the city, an earthquake took place so the empress shook with fear and she sent to bring him back to the city. After a short time she sent him into exile in Mount “Kukaz” where he suffered from a lot of pains but his zeal for the church remained inflamed and he wrote to one of his priests saying, “If you see the Sea of Persecution in a state of agitation, keep calm and do not neglect anything that you have committed yourself to; destroy the pagan buildings and establish the church and be concerned with the salvation of the souls.”

Because of the mistreatment he received from his guards, he died in exile leaving a wonderful heritage of sermons and sayings to the church.

Thirty-one year after his death, his bones were carried to Constantinople in a splendid procession.

The characters of this great saint are distinguished by his wonderful enlightenment in interpreting the Holy Scriptures and his rare talent in preaching and teaching. He is distinguished among the hermits, the worshippers and the ascetics who refrain from the pleasures of the world. His character is like a high mountain in the way he bore witness, in his great courage and commitment to the truth before any person whomever he is. He was a man who never feared and never desired anything.

II. St. Basil The Great

St. Basil the great is the writer of the Liturgy of St. Basil. He is one of the three leading Cappadocian Fathers. St. Basil was born in Caesarea in A.D. 329.

He pursued his classical studies in the institutions of Caesarea and Athens. He was endowed many certificates. In Athens he met with his intimate friend St. Gregory the theologian who led the same life of asceticism. He organized the monastic life by setting rules for prayer, work, study and guidance so that his companions might follow them. He formed groups of nuns under the leadership of his sister St. Macrina.

He made a masterful defense against Arianism before Emperor Valens. He used to leave his solitary spot for Caesarea to resist the teachings of Arius. He established a charity institution to help the poor, treat the sick and comfort the travelers and the poor. When he became famous, he was ordained Archbishop of Caesarea of Cappadocia. Christians at that time suffered from afflictions and persecution aroused against them by the Arian Emperor Vales. St. Basil remained firm. He encouraged his people to remain firm in faith and heroically defended the Orthodox creed.

The Emperor threatened to confiscate his possessions, to send him into exile, to torture him and murder him. The Saint replied that none of these threats could frighten him, as he had nothing to be confiscated except some old clothes and some books... As for exile, the saint said to him, all the land are as a house of sojourn. As for torture, he said that it could not frighten a body that had already died. As for death, he said that it was a friend, which would come to accompany him on his final journey to the true homeland. The emperor arranged to send him into exile and that this order should be carried out by night to avoid the danger of the people’s revolt. A carriage was waiting for him at the door and suddenly the decree of exile was annulled because Valens’ only son was suddenly taken ill and his illness was serious. His mother believed that his illness was because of sending the saint into exile so she sent a letter to the saint asking him to pray for the child. The Saint prayed for the child and the child restored his health.

In AD 370, St. Basil was heard while raising his prayers to God saying, “In your hands I place my soul” and soon that great soul departed. The voice of the people weeping was louder than the religious hymns. The saint was buried in Caesarea where he joined his father.

The saint wrote many important books the most important of them all is the liturgy known as the Liturgy of St. Basil, which is used in our churches.

III. St. Gregory

St. Gregory, the Speaker of Things Divine is the writer of the Liturgy of St. Gregory, which is sometimes used in our churches, the whole of it or some parts of it... He is one of the three famous and leading Cappadocian Fathers.

This saint was born in Cappadocia. He came from a rich, pious and religious family. His mother was a good example of piety. When her son was still in her womb, she devoted him to God. Gregory was brought up in a Christian family from which he received the principles of the sound Orthodox faith

In Athens he led the life of fellowship together with his intimate friend Basilicas. They were partners in the unity of the soul. It was said that they were one mind in two bodies.

The saint said that when he was a young man he saw two beautiful decorous in white in a dream. One of them said to him, “I am chastity” and the other said, “I am wisdom”. Then the two decorous said that they were perpetually standing before the throne of Christ. When the saint awoke he felt a great love for chastity and that love was deeply rooted in his heart and remained with him all his life. St. Gregory is a good model for the ascetic worshipper and wonderful example of the minister who is filled with grace. At the same time, he is a wonderful pattern of a saint who experienced two types of life; the life of contemplation and reclusion and the life of religious service in the world.

When he became well known, he was ordained bishop. Arianism spread at that time so he went on preaching and teaching against it. He struggled hard till the banner of the Orthodox Creed was hoisted high. He played a vital role in confirming faith in the Holy Trinity.

Through his capacity, love, purity and modesty he showed people how important the life of holiness is. He was given the title of “Theologian” because of his unique ability in interpreting the Holy Trinity. He left us a valuable treasure of writings about Theology and they are characterized by preciseness and spiritual depth. The most important of them all is the Liturgy of St. Gregory.

IV. St. Discorou

He was the Patriarch of Alexandria and one of the leading heroes of faith. The name of this hero has a sweet sound as his name is accompanied with holy zeal for the Orthodox faith and sticking to the Fathers Creed.

He was St. Cyril’s disciple. St. Cyril was known as the pillar of the sound religion. St. Discorou was chosen to be Patriarch of Alexandria in AD 444 after the death of St. Cyril. It was a troublous period because of the spread of heresies especially the heresy of Nestor.

Emperor Theodosius asked him to assemble a council in Ephesus in AD 449 to look into the complaint submitted by Eutyches who made a petition to the emperor that his case should be re-examined after the Patriarch of Constantinople had excommunicated him because of his heresy. St. Discorou presided the Second Council of Ephesus to discuss and judge Eutyches who claimed that the divine nature absorbed the human one in the Incarnate Christ and manhood was totally lost.

Eutyches, gave up his heresy before the Council so the members of the Council accepted and readmitted him but once more he preached his heretical ideas so the saints excommunicated him.

The Roman Bishop, Leo sent a letter with his deputies to the Bishop of Constantinople. The letter was known as Leo's Tome. In his tome Leo wrote, "Indeed, Christ came, God and Man, the first fascinated us with miraculous deeds and the other was despised". This letter was not read to the council... So the Bishop of Rome began to attack Discorour because his letter was not given due consideration. He made many attempts to assemble a council and at last he could assemble a counter-council in the days of Emperor Marcianus.

In this Council the deputies of Rome demanded that Leo's Tome should be read but Discorour refused their proposal because Leo's Tome was full of heretical ideas. They rebelled against him and demanded that he should be banished. The sessions of the Council were postponed and the Roman deputies held a session. In that session they planned to prevent Dioscorous from attending the session by force and put him in custody. They decided to excommunicate him and send him into exile.

The emperor exiled Discorour in Gangra in Paphlagonia on the southern side of the Black Sea where he suffered from ill treatment and persecutions. He sent letters to his bishops saying "We should bear all this with courage for the sake of the sound Orthodox Creed and faith" The people remained firm in the Orthodox faith and suffered from the brutal military force of the empire which took the form of a series of bloody massacre where many were martyred for their Orthodox faith. St. Discorour died because of the cruelty and violence he suffered in his exile.

Applications:

- Make a wall Chart and write in it the wise sayings of the great teachers of the church as well as a summary of their life and works.
- Investigate why the Orthodox Church opposed the Eutychean creed.
- Study by heart some prayers from the Liturgy of St. Basil and the Liturgy of St. Gregory.
- Ask the church Psalmist to hand you the most important hymns of each Liturgy.

LESSONS FOR THE MONTH OF DECEMBER

Week 1- Explanation of the Orthodox Creed: One God

Week 2- Explanation of the Orthodox Creed: The Godhead of the Son

Week 3- Explanation of the Orthodox Creed: The Second Part

Week 4- The Sins of the Tongue

Week 1- Explanation of the Orthodox Creed (One God)

Objective:

God is One: understand the attributes of God and the work of the Father.

References:

- Trinitarianism and Monotheism / a sermon delivered by his Holiness Pope Shenouda III.
- A simplified interpretation of the Orthodox Creed / Anba Gregorious.
- Our Holy Faith / Anba Youannis.
- Interpretation of the Orthodox Creed/ Sermons delivered by Anba Bemin.
- The Trinity we believe in / Mofid Kamel.
- Truly we believe / Fr. Moussa Wahba.
- We believe in One God / Fr. Moussa Wahba.

Memory Verse:

“The Lord our God is One” (Deuteronomy 6:4).

Introduction:

The soldier who marches at the head of an army of fighters carries the flag and raises it to fix it at the highest spot. He may be wounded; he may die and become a martyr. In case this happens, another soldier succeeds in raising the flag and declaring victory. Similarly, our faith came to us through the saints' struggle and the martyrs' blood.

The main part of the Orthodox Creed was set by the Council of Nicene in AD 325. There were 318 Bishops who attended that Council and Pope Alexander, together with St. Athanasius the Apostolic (who was a deacon at the time), represented the Coptic Church. The Council was held to discuss the Arian heresy. Arius claimed that Christ was not the Everlasting Son of God, but that He was created as any other man. Pope Alexander did his best to bring Arius back to the correct faith but Arius would not be convinced.

Emperor Constantine attended the first meeting of the Council. St. Athanasius defended the Godhead of Christ and succeeded in having the Council's agreement to issue a creed to excommunicate Arius and dismiss him. Then he put the Orthodox Creed till the beginning of- “Truly we believe in the Holy Spirit”.

In AD 381, the Second Ecumenical Council, the Council of Constantinople was held because Macedonius denied the Godhead of the Holy Spirit, so the Council added the Second part of the Orthodox Creed.

So the Orthodox Creed was set by two Councils; the Council of Nicene in AD 325 and the Council of Constantinople in AD 381.

Lesson Outline:

I. One God

God is one and has no partner. We do not believe in three gods but we say: In the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, One God. If there were two gods, who would be greater and who came before the other? If they were equal, each one would possess half the kingdom! How can a limited being be a god? God is one Essence. The statement “The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” does not mean that they are three gods but they are three hypostases: One Essence and the Essence of God is Love.

A. An example

- Man is mind, body and soul; still one person not three persons.
- The sun is disc, ray and heat; still one sun.

B. Other evidence that God is one

There are countless number of clear verses that prove that God is One. These are some of the Scripture verses “The Lord our God is One” (Deuteronomy 6:4).

- “There is none holy like the Lord” “There is none besides thee” (1 Samuel 2:2).
- “For who is God but the Lord” (2 Samuel 22:32).
- “I am the First and I am the Last, besides Me there is no god” (Isaiah 44:6).
- “For thus says the Lord, who created the heavens (He is God), who formed the earth and made it. I am the Lord, and there is no other” (Isaiah 45:18).
- “There is none good but one, that is God” (Mathew 19:17).
- “Hear O Israel our God is one Lord” (Mark 12:29).
- “It is One God” (Romans 3:30).
- “There is none other God but one... But to us there is but One God” (1 Corinthians 3:20).
- “God is One” (Galatians 3:20).
- “Thou believe that there is one God” (James 2:19).

God reveals Himself: The Lord spoke to Adam and gave him a commandment. Adam heard the Lord’s voice walking in the garden. The Lord spoke to Noah, saved him and rescued his family from certain death.

He revealed Himself to Abraham, tested him and blessed him... It is He who gave Moses the Ten Commandments at Mount of Sinai. The mountain was burning with fire and smoke.

The Divine voice was heard when Christ was baptized in the Jordan and said, “This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased” (Mathew 3:17).

II. The Attributes of the Father

His Existence is a must. The Existence of God is a necessary obligation for understanding the universe. “For in Him we live, and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28).

He has no end. He is not confined in a certain place He has no end. He is boundless. “Thou art the same and thy years have no end” (Psalm 102:27).

He is a Simple Spirit. He has no flesh. He in Himself is a Spirit “God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and in truth” (John 4:24).

God does not change “Man changes but God does not change.” The Lord says, “For I the Lord do not change” (Malachi 3:6).

God is everlasting and eternal. He has no beginning and has no end. The Lord says, “I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending” (Revelations 1:8).

God exists everywhere. He is present everywhere. No place can confine Him.

God knows everything “Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight; but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do” (Hebrews 4:13).

God Almighty: “Whatever the Lord pleases He does in heaven and on earth in the seas and all deeps” (Psalm 135:6).

III. The Work of the Father

A. Fatherhood and choice

Fatherhood is one of the attributes of God the Father. He is our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Father of humanity and that is why we call Him God the Father. He created us and He cares for us.

Sparrows are without number but one of them does not fall on earth without the will of God who art in Heaven. He also cares for plants... He clothes them in a way that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of them. But God cares more for man.

B. Why does God let his children suffer?

God created man on the sixth day after He had provided him with all his needs. He also gave him a perfect, accurate, good-looking and beautiful body. He gave him an eternal soul, mind, intelligence,

Sufferings in our life are due to our sensitive advanced nature. Our feeling of pain distinguishes us from inanimate things. Sufferings make us escape to a better life. Some sufferings are the outcome of our behavioral mistakes and others are due to God’s purpose, which we do not know (The man who was born blind).

C. Choice

Because God is a Father, He chooses His beloved. This choice is according to man’s heart’s preparedness and response to the Divine Will. He chose us to be His children and this was a special call to us, as we believed in Him. The scripture says:

i) Pre-destination:

- “For those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, in order that he might be the first born among many brethren” (Romans 8:29).

ii) The Call:

- “And those whom He predestined, He also called, and those whom He called He also justified-, and those whom He justified He also glorified” (Romans 8:30).

iii) Our choices:

- “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him in love” (Ephesians 1:3,4).

IV. The Almighty God

God is our supporter. He opens and no one shuts. He shuts and no one opens. The sun rises in its appointed time. Stars do not sleep. Planets do not collide. There are laws, which control the universe. These Laws are so accurately set by the Lord that scientists find it difficult to discover their details. The Lord controls the universe.

“The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade on your hand. The sun shall not smite you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all evil; He will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and for evermore” (Psalm 121:5-8).

“How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!” (Romans 11:33).

The Lord also protects our life from dangers, lusts and deviations.

V. He Created the Heaven and the Earth

There is the wonderful nature which we see and enjoy its beauty and when we see a lovely thing we utter the name of God. The existence of a thing indicates that someone has made it and if that thing is perfect, we say that its maker has a great ability and skill. There are also the invisible creatures, which we cannot see such as atoms and electrons, which run through wires, but we feel their effects. There are also the remote stars and the tiny microbes. The greatness and majesty of God are beyond our thoughts. There are also the spiritual invisible creatures such as angels, archangels, cherubim and seraphim who are without number. Then thousand times ten thousand and thousands and thousands praising God but we do not see them. Those creatures help us. Man is a tiny drop in a big ocean but the Lord cares for him as if all that big universe had been made for man.

Applications:

Speak about the attributes of God.

Define the works of God the Father.

Week 2 - Explanation of the Orthodox Creed, The Godhead of the Son

Objective:

Understand the Godhead of Christ and His works.

References:

You are Christ, the Son of the Living God / Anba Gregory.

Titles and works of the Lord Christ / Anba Bemin.

Theology / Fr. Michael Mina

Memory Verse:

“Of his kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:33).

Lesson Outline:

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages.

There is a difference between sonship among people and the Sonship of Christ to God. The human father is older than his son and each one of them is separated from the other but Christ is Consubstantial with the Father everlasting and of the Same Essence. He said about himself, “I and the Father are One.”

The human language does not contain any words that can indicate the conformity and unity except “the Father and the Son”, that is why Christ is the “Son” but there is a big difference: “He is the only Begotten Son of the Father before all ages”.

There is another simile that can be used, i.e. the coming forth of the light out of a lamplight is generated but not through flesh.

I. Light Of Light; True God Of True God

He is of the same nature and essence of the Father. God is Love and we knew love through His Son. There is no difference in Essence.

II. Begotten Not Created

As water flows out of a spring and runs through a canal but the water is one, the same is true of the Son begotten of the Father before all ages.

III. In One Essence With The Father

The Scripture says: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made” (John 1:1-3)

IV. Incarnation

We know that the Son is consubstantial with God. He is everlasting and not made but He took flesh of Virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit. So Christ has two births, the first is everlasting and of the heavenly Father, and the second is of the Holy Spirit and Virgin Mary. He has not come of a man through the natural way of birth like us and this proves His Godhead.

V. He Was Crucified For Us Of Whose Kingdom Shall Have No End

Now comes the role of redemption, which we confess that it was fulfilled for our salvation. We also confess the Second coming for judgment and kingdom.

The angel says to the Virgin: “Of His kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:33). The following Schedule shows, Christ’s Tasks and brief:

Time	Place	Task (Post)	Quotation
1. Before all ages.	1. With God.	1. Divine Sonship.	1. Only Begotten Son.
2. The beginning of life. 5000 years before Christ.	2. In heaven.	2. He took part with the Father in the process of creation. Christ is the word and when God said, “Let there be light the Son (the word) took part with the Father in creation.	2. The only begotten Son of the Father before all ages. Begotten not created.
3. starting the new AD era.	3. In the virgin’s womb.	3. He was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary.	3. The word became flesh and dwelt among us.
4. Forty days after Resurrection.	4. From earth to heaven.	4. Going up to the Bosom of the Father and sitting at the Right Hand after fulfilling redemption. He is the Living Lord who intercedes for us.	4. He ascended into the heavens and has sat at the right hand of his Father.
5. Unknown	5. From heaven to earth.	5. The Second Coming of the Lord to judge the living and the dead and to reign for ever	5. He shall also come back in glory to judge the living and the dead.

Applications:

When we say in the church that we believe in One God, the Almighty God. Does this mean that He controls our tendencies, emotions and instincts?

When we confess that He created heaven and earth, do we offer worship to Him in awe feeling that our life is of Him and to Him?

When we confess that Christ is light out of light and True God out of True God, do we ourselves live in light and walk in truth, as we are the children of God who is light of light and truth of truth?

When we confess that the Lord Jesus came from heaven and incarnated for our salvation and suffered to redeem us, aren’t we ashamed of ourselves when we ignore and neglect such salvation? When we recite the Orthodox Creed, do we have real and practical faith in what we say?

The students are to be divided into 3 groups:

1. The first group proves the Godhead of Christ in His nativity.
2. The Second group proves the Godhead of Christ in His miraculous deeds and teachings.
3. The third group proves the Godhead of Christ in His crucifixion and His resurrection.

Quote the verses that prove this and you can make a wall chart.

Invite a priest or a minister who has a deep knowledge of theology and let the students ask questions about the difficulties they face in understanding the Godhead of Christ. Evidence should be given from Logic, reason, the Gospel and from different references.

Week 3 - Explanation of the Orthodox Creed

Objective:

To understand the Godhead of the Holy Spirit.

To learn about the unity of church and her tasks.

References:

The Holy Spirit / St. Cyril the Great, Translated by Dr. George Habib.

Memory Verse:

“Because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Peter 1:21).

Lesson Outline:

I. Truly We Believe In The Holy Spirit

This past was put by the Council of Constantinople, which was held to refute the heresy of Macedonius who denied the Godhead of the Holy Spirit. He said that the Holy Spirit is one of the creatures and hence the church excommunicated him.

We believe in the Holy Spirit and call Him “The Giver of Life.” When Ananias and Sapphira lied to St. Peter. St. Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land? You have not lied to men but to God” (Acts 5:3,4).

II. The Divine Tasks Of The Holy Spirit

He is called the Spirit of Life or God the Giver of Life. “The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters” (Genesis 1:2).

He is the creator; He was not made; “The Spirit of God has made me” (Job 33:4).

“By the word of the Lord, the heavens were made and all their host by the breath of His mouth” (Psalm 33:6).

Through the Inspiration of the Scripture and prophecy: “Who was spoken of by the prophets.”

“Because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Peter 1:21).

It is He who raised Jesus Christ from the dead, and it is He that raises us up from any sin and purges us.

“If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Jesus Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through His Spirit which dwells in you” (Romans 8:11).

He makes of us a new creation - created in the image of Christ.

The Lord breathed in the face of His disciples as He breathed a breath of life in the dust. If the image of Adam was corrupted, the Holy Spirit gave us a new nature through baptism so that we may be in the image of God once more.

Coming forth: As a ray of light comes from the sun, and as water flows out of a spring to pour into a lake, the same is true of the Holy Spirit who comes forth from the Father and dwells in the Son. The Father loves the Son and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of love that comes forth from the Father to the Son. In the Jordan River the Father said, "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased." "And behold the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and alighting on Christ."

As the water in the well, or in the canal or in a lake is the same water that we drink, the same is true of the Holy Spirit that is consubstantial with the Father and the Son.

III. One Church

All believers had one heart and one Spirit. The unity of the church is what Christ desires. In His final prayer of intercession He said, "that they may all be one, even as You Father, art in Me, and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You have sent Me" (John 17:21).

IV. Universal Church

She gathers all believers of every nation, language and tribe.

She gathers all the orders of priesthood of bishops, priests, deacons and also the laity.

She gathers men, women and children in one unity, which is the unity of the universal mission.

V. Apostolic Church

As she is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the Cornerstone" (Ephesians 2:20).

The Life of her members is an apostolic life based on abstention and Evangelic poverty.

It is impossible to recognize and confess the priesthood of anyone if the hands of legal heads are not set on him.

VI. A Holy Church

She is holy because Christ is her head.

The spring of holiness is the Holy Spirit working in her.

The life history of her members is pure and holy (the story of Ananias and Sapphira proves that the church rejects every corrupted and bad member).

VII. We Confess One Baptism For The Remission Of Sins

Christ said to Nicodemus, "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, One cannot enter the kingdom of God." (John 3:5)

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19).

Baptism is not repeated because it is like the death, burial and resurrection of Christ which happened only once: "You were buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead" (Colossians 2:12).

VIII. We Look For The Resurrection Of The Dead And The Life Of The Age To Come. Amen

We believe that our souls are eternal and will not die. When the body dies, the soul goes up to Paradise or goes down to the Hades.

On the Day of Judgment the Lord will come in awe and glory and will reward every one according to his deeds.

The evildoers will be sent to Hell where they suffer eternal torment and the righteous are sent to the kingdom of Heavens and the glorified eternal life.

Our bodies will be glorified and they will take the image of the body of the raised Son of God, to enter the kingdom as blood and flesh cannot inherit the kingdom.

Let us live on the hope of resurrection waiting for the coming of the Lord. Amen.

Applications:

Make a wall magazine about the attributes of the church (One - Holy - Universal - Apostolic).

Week 4 - The Sins of the Tongue

Objective:

To learn the importance of Holiness of thought and understanding.

References:

The Paradise of the Spirit / Part I - Anba Youanis.

Explanation of the Epistle of St. James / Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty

The Epistle of St. James / Chapter 3.

Memory Verse:

“If anyone does not stumble in words, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body” (James 3:2).

Introduction:

I. The Importance of the Tongue

It is a true expression of what is inside man: “For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks” (Luke 6:45).

No one can control it. It is evil and uncontrollable, full of deadly poison.

We use it to give thanks to our Lord and Father, and also to curse our fellow men, created in the likeness of God.

On the Day of Judgment, men will render account for every careless word they utter.

The measure you give will be the measure you get.

Family troubles and disputes among tribes in rural societies, and international wars, all result from formal declaration of the people in office. (Give examples from the Holy Bible and from the life history of the Saints).

Lesson Outline:

I. Examples of the sins of the tongue

The sin of judging others (give examples from the Paradise of the Monks and the Fathers’ sayings and what the Book of the “Paradise of the Soul” mentions).

The sin of cursing, insulting people and the impolite words.

The sin of despising others and bad jokes.

The sin of talkativeness and empty words, which are not for building.

The sin of tale bearing calumny, slander, backbiting and envy.

The sin of hypocrisy, simulation, insincerity, partiality and false praise.

There are many other sins that branch out of these main trunks and it is a good thing to tell a story of each branch of these.

II. How Can We Cure The Sins Of The Tongue

Repentance and seeking grace - renewal. Everything has become new. Out of it comes fresh water, not salty water.

Growth in grace through prayers and studying the Bible and practicing of Sacraments. We change our shape through renewing our mind.

Circumspection in conduct and in talk and keeping away from rashness and asking for the help of God when we talk.

Being fully convinced that the sins of the tongue are dangerous and by examining oneself one can keep away from such sins.

Confess these sins to your father of confession and study them with him so that he may help you overcome them

Do not imitate the children of the world but be distinguished from them, as you are the children of God.

Applications:

Train us to set a guard over our mouths, O Lord. Keep watch over the door of my lips.

LESSONS FOR THE MONTH OF JANUARY

Week 1- Nativity And Our Spiritual Life

Week 2- The Church Major And Minor Feasts

Week 3- Do Not Worship Men (Show Off)

Week 4- The Monk As A Messenger

Week 1 - Nativity and Our Spiritual Life

Objective:

How shall I receive the newborn Baby of Bethlehem?

References:

Contemplation on the Nativity of Our Lord / H. H. Pope Shenouda III.

Blessings of Incarnation / Anba Gregory.

Levels of Teachings Feasts / Anba Bemin.

Memory Verse:

“That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” (Ephesians 3:17).

Introduction:

We should be happy on the feast day and rejoice when we celebrate the newborn Baby of Bethlehem. It is a great feast on which we remember the coming of the Lord to our world and His incarnation and becoming man to live with us as one of us and to be like us in everything except sin.

The memories of Nativity are very pleasant indeed. Angels in heaven sing hymns of praise, the shepherds and the wise men offer worship to the Lord Jesus, and Jesus, in the manger, makes wonderful peace between those in heaven and those on earth but what is most important is the effect of the Lord’s Nativity on our Spiritual Life.

Lesson Outline:

Our Lord Christ was born of the Virgin and became man like us so that He may be spiritually born in every human soul that opens her heart to Him and receives Him. Jesus wore our flesh and His Spirit protects us. He was born of human flesh and we are spiritually born in Him.

I. Repentance

The grace of Nativity, then, dwells in us when Jesus comes to us and dwells in us “that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” (Ephesians 3:17).

Jesus does not dwell in us if we hold fast the desires of the world, as the Lord is not born in man unless he is born anew because the soul that is born anew is the soul that can be a dwelling place for the Baby of Bethlehem.

We attained the new birth through baptism but we make it perfect through true repentance.

True repentance is the devoted life. It is in the life that always looks up to heaven. It is the life that carries out what St. Peter said, “So put away all malice and insincerity and envy and all slander. Like newborn babes, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation” (1 Peter 2:1,2).

Only through this new birth can we meet our Lord Jesus Christ. Nativity has no meaning unless we hear the voice of the feast in our ears saying to us, “You have to be born anew. Be clean and pure as a new babe. Train yourself. Long for the milk of the Divine word. Taste it and enjoy it.”

II. Humility

The Nativity of our Lord changed all concepts. The strong is not necessarily the rich or the master as greatness lies in humility. The Lord has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degrees. So it is necessary for us to deny ourselves and follow the Son, “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself. We have to consider ourselves as nothing before God whatever our intelligence, abilities and positions may be. We have to feel that we are in dire need for the Divine help and humbly accept to deal with all people, even the sinners, as if they were far better than we are. We should bravely confess our sins and not to be proud of our talents as the Word of God dwells in the humble heart

The Lord who found comfort in the womb of Virgin Mary who was meek, humble and lowly still finds comfort in the heart of a humble and lowly person who is never haughty and never arrogant.

III. Purity

Without purity no one can see God... as how can Christ abide in a heart that is filled with bad desires and wrong emotions such as anger, lust and defilement. Jesus was born in a manger, and this indicates that He came to purify and sanctify the desires of the flesh. We have to clean our manger so that the Lord Christ may come and dwell in it.

When Nineveh repented, the animals fasted and in the manger the animals received Him. We should control our desires. Look at the Virgin who is the model of purity; such a heart is the only place that deserves Christ to dwell in. She was filled with grace. Her mind was pure. So the Lord chose her and sent His Spirit to give her Divine power for keeping her flesh, self and soul in the fear of God. She was the temple, the bride and the manger.

We have to watch our conduct and behavior especially in keeping the body pure and in abstaining from the desires of the flesh so that we may be worthy of receiving the baby of Bethlehem.

IV. Singing Hymns

The hearts which are filled with love deserve to see the Babe. The magi sacrificed and suffered. Simon the Elder waited for a very long time. The Virgin endured the pains and Joseph suffered a lot.

All waited patiently for the coming of Christ. When Jesus was born, the heavens opened and the heavenly hosts showed their happiness through their hymns and praise.

The church receives Christmas through a whole month of preparedness through hymns, worship and fasting in the month of Kiahk) (The praises of Seven and Four).

The entire world rejoices on that day as a new great event occurs in the world and in the life of the children of God.

O thirsty people, Come to the well of water. Let those who are tired rejoice and welcome the birth of the Lamb with hymns. Cast your burden on the Lord. Sing with joy. Praise His holy name forever.

Applications:

Nativity fasting should be accompanied by examining the self, confession, receiving the Holy Communion to take Christ in us, especially on the Feast Eve.

Study the pleasant Nativity hymns and attend the Nativity Eve Hymn of Praise.

You can put on the best clothes but your heart should be humble and show love to the poor.

On the feast day, go with your teachers to the orphanages and hospitals to visit the poor and the sick and in this way everyone will rejoice and be merry

When you make the Nativity Cavern, and when you put the animals in it remember that you must sanctify your instincts through grace. When you put the shepherds, remember the Spirit of Vigil. When you put the Virgin, remember her lowliness and humility. Let the Nativity Cavern be an object of contemplation and the new start.

Week 2 - The Coptic Feasts

Objective:

To appreciate the joy in the Orthodox church through its many feasts

To know what are the main feasts in the Orthodox Church.

Memory Verse:

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

References:

<http://www.stgeorge-sporting.org/church/copticchurch/thecoptic.htm>

“The Precious Jewel In Explaining Church Rites” (In Arabic: Al Dorra Al Nafesah fe Sharh Tokoos Al Kanesah).

Introduction:

Moses’ Law arranged seven major feasts (Leviticus 23), which had their rites and sanctity, as a living part of the common worship. These feasts are: the Sabbath or Saturday of every week, the first day of every month, the Seventh Year, the Year of Jubilee, the Passover (Pascha), the feast of the weeks (Pentecost), and the feast of Tabernacles (feast of the Harvest). After the Babylonian exile two feasts were added, the feast of Purim and the Feast of Dedication.

The three aims of these feasts were:

- To revive the spirit of joy and gladness in the believers’ live.
- To consecrate certain days for the common worship in a holy convocation (assembly) (Exodus 12:16; Leviticus 23).
- To remember God’s promises and actions to renew the covenant between Him and His people on both common and personal levels. The feasts symbolized the joy to come in Christ, the continuous “Feast” and the source of eternal happiness.

When the Word of God was incarnate and became man, He submitted to the Law and attended and celebrated the feasts. However, He diverted the attention from the symbol to the reality, and from the outward appearances to the inner depths (John 2, 5, 6, 7, 12).

Lesson Outline:

I. Feasts and Worship

Almost all days are feasts to the Coptic Church. Although she is known for bearing the cross, she is eager to have her children live in spiritual gladness even while toiling in the midst of earthly sufferings. She is capable, with the Lord’s help, to raise them above tribulations. In other words, the Coptic Church is continuously suffering and rejoicing at the same time. Her feasts are uninterrupted, and her hymns are unceasing.

II. A Church of Joy

One of the main characteristics of the Coptic Church is “joy,” even in her ascetic life. St. John Cassian described the Egyptian monks who spread from Alexandria to the southern borders of Thabied (Aswan) saying that the voice of praise came out perpetually from the monasteries and caves, as if the whole land of Egypt became a delightful paradise. He called the Egyptian monks heavenly terrestrials or terrestrial angels.

St. Jerome informs us about an abbot called Apollo who was always smiling. He attracted many to the ascetic life as a source of inward joy and heartfelt satisfaction in our Lord Jesus. He often used to say: “Why do we struggle with an unpleasant face? Aren’t we the heirs of the eternal life? Leave the unpleasant and the grieved faces to pagans, and weeping to the evildoers. But it befits the righteous and the saints to be joyful and pleasant since they enjoy the spiritual gifts.”

This attitude is reflected in church worship, her arts and all aspects of life, so that it seems as if the church life is a continuous, unceasing feast. Pope Athanasius the Apostolic tells us in a paschal letter that Christ is our feast. Although there are perpetual feasts, the believer discovers that his feast is in his innermost heart, the dwelling place of Christ the life-giving Lord.

The church relates and joins the feasts to the ascetic life. The believers practice fasting, sometimes for almost two months (Great Lent), in preparation for the feasts, in order to realize that their joy is based on their communion with God and not on the matter of eating, drinking and material desires.

The Coptic feasts have beautiful hymns and splendid rites that inflame the spirit. Their aim is to provide the living with heavenly and evangelic thoughts. They also reveal the Holy Trinity and Its redeeming work in the life of the church in a way that is simple enough to be experienced by children yet deep enough to quench the thirst of theologians.

III. Feasts of the Coptic Church

A. The seven Major Feasts of our Lord

1. **The Annunciation** (Paramhat 29, c. April 7):

In it we recall the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies, and the attainment, which the men of God had longed for across the ages, namely the Incarnation of the Word of God in the Virgin’s womb (Matthew 13:17).

2. **The Nativity of Christ** (Christmas, Kiahk 29, c. January 7):

It is preceded by a 43 days fast. Its aim is to confirm the divine love shown when God sent His only-begotten Son.

3. **The Theophany or the Baptism of Christ** (Tuba 11, c. January 19):

It is connected with the feasts of the Nativity and the circumcision. On Nativity, the Word of God took what is ours (our humanity). in the “circumcision” He subjected Himself to the Law as He became one of us. Finally, in the Epiphany, He offered us what is His own. By His incarnation He became a true man while still being the Only-begotten Son of God, and by baptism we became children of God in Him while we are still human beings.

In this feast, the liturgy of blessing the water is conducted, and the priest blesses the people by wetting their foreheads and hands to commemorate baptism

4. Palm Sunday:

It is the Sunday that precedes the glorious feast of the Resurrection. It has its characteristic joyful hymns (the Shannon - Hosanna (Matthew 21:9)), and its delightful rite. The church commemorates the entrance of our Lord Jesus into the Jerusalem of our hearts to establish His Kingdom in us and gather all in Him.

A procession moves towards the nave of the church where the people stand before the icons of St. Mary, the Archangels, St. John the Baptist, the Apostles, the martyrs, the ascetics, etc. The procession continues before the church doors and the baptismal basin, praising God who embraces all together in His Son Jesus Christ. The procession ends by re-entering the sanctuary, for the God of the Old and New Testaments meets with the saints in heaven (symbolized by the sanctuary) forever.

At the end of the liturgy of the Eucharist, a general funeral service is held, in which water is sprinkled on behalf of anyone who may die during the Holy Week, since the regular funeral prayers are not conducted during this week. By this rite, the church stresses her pre-occupation with the passion and crucifixion of Christ.

5. The Feast of the Resurrection:

It is preceded by the Great Lent (55 days) and is considered by the Coptic Church as "The Feast." Its joy continues for fifty days until Pentecost. The feast of the Resurrection is also essentially celebrated on every Sunday.

6. Ascension:

It is celebrated on the fortieth day after the feast of the resurrection, on a Thursday. In this feast we remember our Lord Jesus Christ who raises us up to sit with Him in heaven (Ephesians 2:6).

7. Pentecost:

It represents the birthday of the Christian Church. The Only-begotten Son paid the price for her salvation, ascended into heaven to prepare a place for her and sent His Holy Spirit to her, offering her guidance, sanctification and adornment as the Heavenly Bride.

In this feast, the church chants hymns, rejoicing in the resurrection of Christ, His ascension and the dwelling of His Holy Spirit in her. Thus she connects the three feasts in one whole unity.

B. The seven Minor Feasts of our Lord**1. The Circumcision of our Lord (Tuba 6, c. 14 January):**

It is celebrated on the eighth day after Nativity. In it we remember that the Word of God, who gave us the Law, was Himself subjected to this Law and fulfilled it, granting us the power to fulfill the Law in a spiritual manner. Thus we enjoy the circumcision of spirit and heart (Colossians 2:11), instead of the literal circumcision of the flesh.

2. The Entrance of our Lord into the Temple (Amshir 8, c. February 15):

We remember that the Word of God became man and does not want us to be careless about our lives, but to set our goals early from childhood. Thus we have to work and fulfill our goals in spite of our love and obedience to family and friends (Luke 2:24).

3. The Escape of the Holy family to Egypt (Pashans 24, c. June 1):

The Coptic Church is distinguished among all peoples through this unique divine work, the coming of our Lord to Egypt among the Gentiles.

4. The First Miracle of our Lord Jesus at Cana Galilee (Tuba 13, c. January 12):

As His first miracle, our Lord changed the water into wine at the wedding in Cana of Galilee, confirming His eagerness for our attaining the heavenly wedding and granting us the wine of His exceeding love.

5. The Transfiguration of Christ (Messra 13; c. August 19):

The unity of the two testaments is manifested in this feast, for Moses and Elijah assembled together with Peter, James and John. The glory of our Lord is revealed to satisfy every soul who rises up with Him to the mountain of Tabor to enjoy the brightness of His Glory.

6. Covenant Thursday:

This is the Thursday of Holy Week. In it we commemorate the establishment of the Sacrament of the Eucharist by our Lord Jesus, when He offered His Body and Blood as the living and acceptable Sacrifice, capable of sanctifying our hearts and granting us the victorious and eternal life.

This is the only day of the Holy Week in which the Sacrifice of the Eucharist is offered. The rite of the washing of the feet is practiced in commemoration of what Christ did for His disciples.

Also on this day a special procession takes place, starting from the south of the church nave, during which a hymn rebuking Judas for his betrayal is chanted as a warning to us not to fall as he did.

7. Thomas' Sunday:

This is the Sunday that follows the feast of the Resurrection. In it we bless those who believe without seeing so that all might live in faith through the internal touch of the Savior's wounds (John 20:29).

C. The Monthly feasts

The believers joyfully celebrate the commemoration of the Annunciation, Nativity and Resurrection of Christ on the 29th of every Coptic month. The commemoration of St. Mary is celebrated on the 21st and the feast of Archangel Michael on the 12th of every month.

D. The Weekly feasts

Every Sunday stands as a true Sabbath (day of rest), in which we find our rest in the resurrection of Christ. There is no abstention from food on Sundays after the celebration of the Eucharist, even during Great Lent.

E. Feasts of the Saints

Every day of the year is a feast, so that the believers may live in perpetual joy and in communion with the saints. In addition there are other special fasts and occasions:

- The Feasts of St. Mary:

The Coptic Church venerates St. Mary as the "Theotokos," i.e., the Mother of God, whom the Divine Grace chose to bear the Word of God in her womb by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35). Since she is considered to be the exemplary member in the church and the interceding mother on behalf of her spiritual children, she is exalted above all heavenly and earthly creatures. Therefore, the church does not cease glorifying (blessing) her and celebrating her feasts in order that we imitate her and ask her intercessions on our behalf. Her main feasts are:

- The annunciation of her birth (Messra 7, c. August 13);
- Her Nativity (Pashans 1, c. May 9);
- Her Presentation into the Temple (Kiahk 3, c. December 12);
- Her Dormant (Tuba 21, c. January 29);

- The Ascension of her body (Paona 21, c. June 28);
- Her apparition over the Church of Zeitoun (Paramhat 24, c. April 2);
- The apparition of her body to the Apostles (Messra 16, c. August 22).
- **The Apostles' Feast** (Abib 5, c. July 12):

This is the feast of martyrdom of the Apostles Peter and Paul. It is preceded by a fasting period, which starts on the day following the Pentecost. In this feast, the liturgy of the blessing of the water takes place, in which the priest washes the feet of his people (men and children) commemorating what the Lord did for His disciples. Thus, the priest remembers that he is a servant who washes the feet of the people of God and not a man of authority.

- **The Nayrouz Feast** (1st of Tute, c. September 11):

“Nayrouz” is a Persian word meaning “the beginning of the year.” The Egyptian calendar goes back to 4240 B.C. Copts restored the calendar with the beginning of Diocletian’s reign in AD 284, to commemorate the millions of Coptic martyrs. His reign is considered a golden era in which the church offered true witness to Christ, when the souls of martyrs departed to paradise and kept shining as living stars therein.

This feast, with its joyful hymns, continues until the feast of the Cross (Tute 17, c. 27 September). Thus the church announces her joy and gladness with the martyrs in bearing the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, the sufferings and martyrdoms were turned into a source of joy.

- **The Two Feasts of the Cross:**

The first feast is on Tute 17, (c. September 27). It commemorates the dedication of the Church of the Holy Cross, which was built by Queen Helen, the mother of Emperor Constantine. The second feast is on Paramhat 10 (c. March 19) and commemorates the discovery of the Holy Cross by the same empress in AD 326.

During these two feasts the church conducts a procession similar to that of Palm Sunday and uses the same tune in chanting (Shannon-Hosanna), to announce that the cause of her joy with the Cross is the openness of the hearts (the inner Jerusalem) to receive the Savior as the King who reigns within us.

Conclusion:

The Coptic Orthodox Church is a living and joyous church. She unites the heavenly and earthly churches together throughout the year.

Applications:

- ❖ Memorize the 7 major and 7 minor feasts of the church.

Week 3 - Do Not Worship Men

Objective:

- ❖ To understand that God is the focus for worship and not people.
- ❖ To shy away from trying to impress others during worship.

Memory Verse:

“God is Spirit and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24).

References:

- ❖ “Paradise of the Spirit” by Anba Youanis

Introduction:

We might be completely unfocused in our worship by the people surrounding us. We may even make them the purpose of our worship. Thus we are trying to appear righteous in the eyes of others. Hence we might end up being hypocrites, trying to show off our religious practices while the inner self is full of sin and darkness. The Lord warned us from this kind of worship many times and in many ways during the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:1-8, 6:16-18).

Lesson Outline:

Worshipping men can interfere with our worship to God in many ways and forms. The problem is that it can go unnoticed. We may be convinced and care to convince others that we are worshipping God when we are really worshipping others and through their compliments we are worshipping ourselves in the eyes of others. This kind of apparent warm worship and righteous behavior soon fades away when the people around us disappear. There are many examples of this kind of hypocritical worship that we have to watch for in our spiritual life. These examples are:

I. In Prayer

Choosing to pray in front of people and in places where we can be seen. The Lord specifically mentions that prayers should be away from the eyes of others *“And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly”* (Matthew 6:5-6).

Another form is to try to impress others with your words during prayer. Thus we put a lot of effort to choose and arrange the words so that when people hear us in prayers would be affected with our words and believe that we are very spiritual people. Thus, instead of focusing on God during prayer, we are focused on people listening to our prayer. In this regard the Lord said: *“And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words”* (Matthew 6:7).

II. In Fasting

Fasting also should be a private spiritual practice to strengthen our spirits. It is not a mean to get people's praise or sympathy. We should function in a normal or even better state than when we are not fasting. Fasting provides energy to the spirit and this energy proceeds to energize the body as well. The Lord said: *"Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But, you when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your father who is the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly"* (Matthew 6:16-18).

It is sad if we fast only when we are surrounded with spiritual people and break our fast when we are alone or with friends who are not fasting. Also, we may fast only when we find fasting food easily but break the fast when fasting food is not easily available.

III. In Donations and Tithing

Giving in front of others is another act of worshipping men. Money is often used to glorify its owner. And men tend to use it to get respect and honor from others. This is particularly true with non-spiritual people. They tend to donate and offer their money to God in a visible manner. This is completely against the teaching of the Lord who said: *"Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in Heaven. Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly"* (Matthew 6:1-4).

IV. In Confession

We also try to avoid confession because we do not want the priest to know our sins and weaknesses. Again making man as our focus instead of God by forgetting that we are confessing to God in the presence of the priest. It is unbelievable that we are trying to hide our sins from the priest and do not care about the fact that God knows everything. It is even worse that we try to hide from people when we are sinning and forget about God and His presence everywhere and that we cannot hide from Him. Adam did this mistake when he tried to hide from the Lord after he sinned, *"And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden"* (Genesis 3:8-9).

Some people say they can confess to God but not to a priest. They find it easier to confess to God than to confess in the presence of the priest. It is amazing that we have less shame and fear for God than for men. This is clearly a worship of man. Please read about confession and trespass offering in Leviticus (Leviticus 5:1-6).

V. In Faith

There is discrimination based on religion in many countries. One of the forms of discrimination is in maintaining good position of work for non-Christians. Another form is in giving money aid or food aid to people who convert from Christianity to the discriminator's religion. Changing our Christian faith when we are in the middle of non-believers is another form of worshipping men. It is very sad that Christians may change their faith to get money, job or a wife. Almost all the martyrs in the

history of the church were martyred because they worshiped God and refused to worship men or idols.

VI. In Communion

Many of the hypocrites would not have communion except in the presence of a Bishop or the Patriarch. These individuals have forgotten that they are receiving the body and the blood of the king of kings and that the bishop or the Patriarch is just a mean for receiving the Lord Himself in us. Again we are confusing the value of the unseen with the seen individuals around us.

VII. In Righteousness

Many try to wear the clothes of righteousness by words only and not by deeds. They act in humility while the inner self is full of pride and self righteousness, act in virginity while the thoughts are full of adultery and fornication, act in love while the heart is full of hate...etc. We may still simulate the Pharisees who *“are like the whitewash tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. Even, so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness”* (Matthew 23:16-29).

Conclusion:

Everyone has to ask himself: would I do it differently if I were alone...would I worship God in the same way?

What was Anba Paul, the first hermit, doing for 80 years in the wilderness without seeing the face of a single man? Eighty years, he was worshipping God away from any human interference. Let us take the example of St. Paul and stay away from every hypocrisy and self-righteousness.

“Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every work into the judgment, including every secret thing, whether it is good or whether it is evil” (Ecclesiastics 12:13-14).

Applications:

Pray in your room.

Make your charitable deeds in secret.

Purify the inner self with confession.

Week 4 - The Monk as a Messenger

Objectives:

Emphasizing the fact that the monk leads a positive life for the church, the service and the society.

References:

- ❖ Contemplations on the life of St. Anthony / Pope Shenouda III.
- ❖ Monasticism / Fr. Youssef Asaad.
- ❖ St. Anthony is an Evangelic hermit.
- ❖ Coptic Monasticism / Anba Macar Monastery.

Memory Verse:

“I have no silver and gold, but I give you what I have; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk” (Acts 3:6).

Lesson Outline:

I. Sayings of the Fathers

- ❖ “I stood on the top of the world when I desired nothing and feared nothing” St. Augustine.
- ❖ “The soul is truly wise and pious and this appears in man’s look and the way he walks, talks and smiles. The mind that loves God is like a watchful guard in keeping away the evil thoughts. (St. Anthony in the Philocalia).

II. The Works and Services of a Monk

A monk’s time is divided between worship, contemplative reading and work. Although these activities are private works, yet they offer great benefits to the church.

Note: How the church can benefit from the monk’s worship? The monks devote long times to prayers for the people and the world and they benefit the church by their readings when they brought to the world the original spiritual church heritage of the fathers’ writings, and when they recorded their deep tests to benefit others. Note also the monastic works which are connected with prayers and reading.

The monks wrote books about prayers, hymns, interpretations, sermons, the history of the church and many other writings. They copied these writings and sold the toil of their hands whether in the form of books or handiwork to the people and to the churches.

The monasteries became universities and scientific centers and their light of knowledge shine all over the world. People liked the writings of monks on all subjects and the libraries of the Monasteries contained the greatest books and references in all fields of knowledge. Many monks worked in the field of church service and many of them translated the church books into different languages. Thanks to these monks, the Christian faith spread all over the world.

In the 5th and 6th centuries, the Coptic monks sent missions to different parts of the world. History tells us of monks who went to Switzerland and the seven monks who reached the North of Ireland and preached the Gospel there and were great in art and language.

In the Irish liturgy, there is a prayer for them: “Remember O Lord the Egyptian monks who brought us the true faith.”

In the Coptic Church, we remember St. Anthony who resisted the Arian heresy and Anba Shenouda (St. Shenouti) the Head of Anchorites who was the leader of a rare spiritual, social and patriotic movement of renaissance in Egypt.

II. Monasticism is a Challenge to Luxury and Worldly Life

There was a time when the Christian church took aspects of luxury after the end of the periods of persecutions. The church began to compete with the kings of the earth in the material wealth and authority. At that time, the monks, in their monasteries, challenged the world by leading a life of abstinence and voluntary poverty. There is no doubt that their defiance was to the position of the world which affected the Christians’ life and kept them away from the original model of the Lord Christ who was meek and modest and who had no place to rest his head and who gave us the greatest example of the life of abstinence and simplicity in food, clothing and property. Those are the monks and the fathers who left the world behind sold all they had, deprived themselves of money and went to the desert to worship the Lord and pray to God the whole night, to have the sweetest talk between the lover and the beloved they dwelt in the wilderness, in the mountains and in the caves. All this was because of their great love for the king Christ.

III. Christianity Needs Monasticism Nowadays

Monasticism is the practical incarnation of the Divine Love. It is love for God, which is superior to any other love and sublimates with the soul in the life of hymns and prayers. It is love for the people who were created in God’s image and after His likeness. It is love that leads to sacrifice and giving.

Because of his love for God, a monk lives in solitude to worship, contemplate and keep his mind and feelings for the love of God. He gives up the worldly cares, and the joy of his heart and the desire of his soul are for God only and no one else.

Because of his love for his brethren, he gives the world all what he has. He has no material things to give, but he has spiritual gifts with which he can serve humanity, “I have no silver and gold, but I give you what I have; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk” (Acts 3:6).

St. Gregory says. “There are two facts which each man can see: the first is “work”, and the second is “contemplation”... The first makes us toil and work hard to purify the hearts, and the second we become quiet so we can see God. (Tell your students the story of Anba Bishoy who carried our Good Savior).

St. Gregory says “The Lord Christ, glory be to Him, set two kinds of life through His behavior. The life of service and work and the life of calmness and contemplation.”

So each one of us needs the two kinds of life: Service and Contemplation.

IV. The World Needs Practical Models of Holiness

God desires that each Christian would be a saint, who consecrates his own senses, body and soul. A monk devotes himself to the life of virginity to get rid of the means of earthly attractions, so his soul walks easily and happily in the way of Christ, and enjoys a perpetual wedding without end. The married people also can practice the life of holiness if they live with a holy heart and pure feelings, as marriage is a holy Sacrament.

But a monk who has dedicated his life to God prefers virginity to devote his heart to Christ and to serve His holy name. He has chosen God in whom he rejoices.

In the Old Testament there were sacrifices and burnt offerings. Why do we call the holy laity a sacrifice and the holy monk a burnt offering?

V. The World Needs Prayers

We all pray but the monk left the world and devoted his life to service, prayers and hymns. He does not offer these for himself only but also for the world and for all the people. While people are asleep, the Congregation of monks raises their prayers like pillars of light. You remember Anba Macary who saw a pillar of light coming out of the mouths of St. Maximus and St. Domadius as they were praying so that God might destroy wars, epidemics, evil deeds, things that cause people to stumble, doubts, suspicion and evil images. They were praying that the Lord might send His mercies to you and to the whole world.

VI. The World Needs Discipleship

A. Through a model

The world is in need of high ideals to raise the standard of conduct. Monasticism is struggling to reach the Christian perfection. Who can read the Paradise of the monks and does not long for virtue? Who can read the memoirs of saints and does not desire holiness? St. Isaac said, "Reproach the evildoers by the chastity of your conduct not by words."

For example, remember St. Augustine, who, while he was in Italy, was an evil man, but thanks to the memoir of the Egyptian St. Anthony, he was attracted to the life of repentance and became one of the bishops of the church.

B. Through growth virtues

Monasticism gives us models of virtue showing the possibility of carrying out Christ's commandments. A man with a demon struck a monk on his cheek, and when the monk turned his other cheek to receive the second blow, the demon went out of the man's body crying: "Woe be to us O monks, you terrify us by your obedience to the commandments of Christ."

C. Through discipleship to the writings of the fathers and their life

The church regards the writings of the fathers as treasures, as they are the fruits of the practical tests of their daily life. These tests were the results of their continuous relationship and long fellowship with God. They were filled with the Holy Spirit. We have to bear in mind that the fathers' teachings in their simplicity are the greatest source of Christian teachings.

The service of the monks was not confined to the teaching through books and letters, but they also transmitted this precious scientific and spiritual heritage to the next generations through discipleship. Whenever a monk was known for his knowledge and holiness, groups of disciples rushed to him in great numbers. Hence the idea of a university arose.

One of the writers of history said: "The renaissance that arose in the world of literature and thought during the 12th and 13th centuries, was associated with the rise of human sciences and universities in the Middle Ages". That renaissance was the fruit of those old monasteries, which were established by St. Pachomius the founder of the Cenobitic System.

Monasticism was, and still is a spiritual power in the church. This spiritual power supports the church by prayers and provides it with religious and dogmatic research and when necessary, the monks leave their monastery and go to the world to serve the people through spiritual power.

D. Through Obedience

A monk obeys God, the Holy Scriptures and the church and his slogan is “We must obey God rather than men” and through his obedience he offers a good method that suits the present generation and emphasizes the value of spiritual obedience, which is the basis of sound relationship in the family, society and church.

Conclusion/Questions:

- What are the main elements of monastic life? Show how monasticism was a challenge to the corrupt positions of the world.
- St. John Chrysostom says, “The monk’s vow should also be offered by the married people”. How can this be?
- Can a Christian lead a life of contemplation and a life of service at the same time?
- How can a monk do that? Mention some famous monks who performed great services to the church.
- How can the church benefit from monasticism and monasteries nowadays? What do we want them to do? How is the world greatly in need of them?

Applications:

- Pay a visit to a monastery, and together with some monks discuss the benefits of monasticism for society.
- Sit with one of the holy monks and try to benefit from his experience. Go into retreat in the House of Retreat.

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: Saul, the Powerful King

Week after Fast: David, the Prophet and King

Week before Jonah's Fast - Saul, the Powerful King

Objective:

The dangers of rashness in our life.

References:

❖ The Life of David / Translated by Fr. Marcos Daoud

Memory Verse:

"Because it has pleased the Lord to make you His people" (1 Samuel 12:24).

Introduction:

I. A People Who Want A King (Demand For A King)

God ruled the people of Israel through judges who led a spiritual life such as Prophet Samuel. Samuel used to declare the will of God to the people in all the important situations of life. When Samuel became old, the people asked him to appoint a king to govern them like all the nations. But that displeased Samuel, as he wanted the people to be distinguished from all the nations through receiving the purpose of the Lord directly. It did not please God to appoint a king for the people but when they insisted; the Lord gave them a King. Samuel prayed to the Lord, and the Lord said to him, "Hearken to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them make them a king."

Lesson Outline:

I. Samuel Anoints Saul As King

The Lord told Samuel that He would bring him a man from the Land of Benjamin and that Samuel should anoint him king of the people. When Samuel saw the man, the Lord said, "This is the man I told you about. He will rule my people." There was a talk between Saul and Samuel. Then Samuel took a jar of olive oil and poured it on Saul's head and kissed him. When Saul turned to leave Samuel, God gave Saul a new nature (1 Samuel 9:15, 10:9).

II. The Spirit Of God Took Control Of Saul

King Saul met a group of prophets. Suddenly the Spirit of God took control of him and he joined in their ecstatic dancing and shouting and he started prophesying. When the people caught sight of Saul among the prophets they said their word, which became a proverb "Has even Saul become a prophet?" (1 Samuel 10:12).

Samuel called the people together and told them that he anointed Saul as king. So the people gave Saul a warm welcome and Samuel said to them "Here is the man the Lord has chosen: There is no one else among us like him". All the people shouted, "Long live the King," Saul was a strong mighty man. The Lord was with him in all his wars and wherever he went, he defeated his enemies.

III. Saul Is Rejected As King

Saul was rash and did not obey the Commandments of God. It happened that Samuel did not come at the appointed time to offer the burnt offering and the peace offerings. Saul was rash enough to offer the burnt offerings and the peace offerings himself, although he was not a priest and no one but a priest of the Tribe of Levi was allowed to offer such offerings.

In this way Saul disobeyed the Lord's Commandment. As soon as he had finished offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came, and Saul went out to meet him and salute him. Samuel said, "What have you done?" and Saul said, "When I saw that you did not come within the days appointed I offered the burnt offering". Samuel said to Saul, "You have done foolishly, you have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God, which He commanded you, for now the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel for ever. But now your kingdom shall not continue; the Lord has sought out a man after His own heart, and the Lord has appointed him to be prince over the people."

The enemies gathered to fight Saul and God was not with him and the fighting was very heavy around Saul and he himself was struck by enemy's arrows and badly wounded. Saul took his own sword and threw himself on it and died. The enemies took him and put his weapons in the temple of their idols and fastened his head in the temple of Dagon.. But the people of Gilead took down his body at night buried it and fasted for seven days.

Conclusion/Questions:

- ❖ Why was the Prophet Samuel displeased when the people asked him to anoint them a king?
- ❖ How was the first king of Israel anointed?
- ❖ "Has even Saul become a prophet?" What does this saying mean?
- ❖ The life history of King Saul represents the history of Israel. When the people kept the commandment, the Lord supported them and when they disobeyed the commandment, the Lord rejected them. Explain.
- ❖ Note that there is a difference between the men of the Old Testament and the believers of the church in the New Testament when we speak about the coming of the Spirit of God to fill them. What is that difference?

Applications:

- ❖ If you make a comparison between king Saul and Christ the King of Kings, you can complete the following:
 1. King Saul was appointed and chosen by the people, but Christ was _____
 2. Saul as anointed with the holy oil by Samuel, but Christ was anointed with the Holy _____
 3. Saul disobeyed the commandment of the Lord, but Jesus obeyed the Will of God till _____
 4. When Saul died, his body was thrown in the temple of idols then it was buried but when Jesus died on the _____ he broke the gates of _____ and set free _____ and brought them back to _____
- ❖ If you make a comparison between the government systems in the Old Testament and in the New Testament you can note that: In the Old Testament there were the fathers, the Judges and the kings, but in the New Testament, we find that Christianity is not concerned with any system of governing, but she welcomes any advanced systems that may emphasize the social justice and serve the people's interests.
- ❖ Young men suffer from the problem of rashness. We saw the danger of this attitude in the life of

Saul. It is necessary, then, for us to re-examine ourselves.

- ❖ Do we seek the purpose of God before we start any new task or do we rush and follow our wrong thoughts?
- ❖ Do we think in the spirit of prayer before we do anything?
- ❖ Do we behave foolishly with others and quickly judge the attitudes affected by other people's words or by unsound emotions?
- ❖ If you are suffering from the problem of rashness, practice the following spiritual exercise: Raise your prayers every morning and say to the Lord "O Lord, guide me when I think and speak through me. Fill my life with your Spirit and be the Alpha and the Omega of my life, the beginning and the end. Do not allow me to be rash and do what I desire".

Week after Jonah's Fast - David the Prophet and the King

Objective:

To learn from David's innocence of the heart.

Reference:

❖ The Life of David / Fr. Marcos Daoud.

Memory Verse:

"The Lord says to my Lord: Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool" (Psalm 110:1).

Introduction:

I. The Shepherd And King

Prophet Samuel anointed Saul as King according to the people's desire, but Saul was not sincere and could not bear the responsibility granted him by the Lord and he disobeyed the Commandments of God. So the Lord deprived him of his kingdom and sent Samuel to search for a new king.

Samuel went to Jesse's house in Bethlehem and saw his sons but no one of the seven sons was chosen by the Lord so he asked Jesse, "Do you have any more sons?" Jesse answered: "There is still the youngest, but he is out taking care of the sheep." Samuel asked Jesse to send for the young shepherd and when the boy came, the Lord said to Samuel: "This is the one, anoint him."

Samuel anointed David in front of all his brothers, "Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brothers." The Lord was pleased with David because his heart was pure and he obeyed the Commandments of God.

"I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after My heart who will do all My will." (Acts 13:22).

Lesson Outline:

I. David the Hero

The Lord's Spirit left Saul and dwelt in David. Some days later, David challenged the mighty Goliath and decided to save the people of God from that evil man as he had saved his sheep from the mouth of the lion before. David went on to fight the mighty man Goliath but the mighty man laughed when he saw the young shepherd with a stick in his hand. But David said to him, "You are coming against me with sword, spear and javelin, but I came against you in the name of the Lord Almighty" (1 Samuel 17:45).

David killed that mighty man with his catapult and a stone. Goliath followers fled and the Lord rescued his people.

All the people were happy because they were saved and the streets became crowded with people, and wherever David went, people gathered around him and all the women sang this song "Saul has killed thousands, but David tens of thousands" (1 Samuel 18:7).

When Saul heard the song, he became jealous of David. Saul knew that David would become King so he hated him and wanted to kill him. But Jonathan, Saul's son loved David as himself. The Lord was with David and saved him, from Saul. Then the opposite took place as Saul without knowing fell twice in the hands of David who could have killed him and got rid of him but David refused to kill him.

II. The Anointed King

David became King instead of Saul. He was thirty years old. David was sorry for the death of Saul and mourned for him, and for his sons who died in the battle. He was very sad because he lost his friend Jonathan

David was a good king. God gave him power and support and helped him in everything he did. This was not the case with Saul who tried to establish for himself an earthly kingdom David always submitted himself to the Lord, always seeking to achieve the Will of God and glorify His Holy Name. He always sang his psalms praising the Lord.

It is clear that the Lord chose David in a way that was unique. He desired to make of him a symbol of a Greater Being, that is the Messiah the Expected king and to make of his kingdom a symbol of the everlasting heavenly kingdom. This is clear when the Lord of Hosts said to David, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince, over my people... And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever..." David replies, "Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house that thou hast brought me thus far?"

"And now, O Lord GOD, You are God, and Your words are true, and You have promised this goodness to Your servant. Now therefore, let it please You to bless the house of Your servant, that it may continue forever before You; for You, O Lord GOD, have spoken it, and with Your blessing let the house of Your servant be blessed forever" (2 Samuel 7:28-29).

In this spirit David ruled all his life. He knew that the Lord had given him a certain message to fulfill which is to prepare the way for His Incarnation. The earthly kingdom of David is a symbol of the heavenly kingdom, which Jesus Christ established and His holy church will continue forever in all parts of the world.

III. God's Promise to David

Justice and equality prevailed during the reign of King David. He cared for his people and loved them as he had loved his sheep when he was a shepherd.

Prophet Nathan announced the Lord's Covenant with David, "When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body and I will establish his Kingdom. I will be his father and he shall be My son" (2 Samuel 7:12-14).

The covenant was fulfilled by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ who descended from David, "From this man's seed, according to the promise, God raised up for Israel a Savior; Jesus" (Acts 13:23).

David sang happily rejoicing in the promise of God in his psalms: "The Lord swore to David a sure oath from which He will not turn back, one of the sons of your body, I will set on your throne" (Psalm 132:11).

This covenant was fulfilled when the Angel Gabriel said to Virgin Mary "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and

you shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and He will be called the Son of the Most High and the Lord God will give the throne of His father David, and He will reign over the House of Jacob for ever, and of His kingdom, there will be no end” (Luke 1:30-33).

IV. People often called Jesus the Son of David

“Bartimaeus, a blind beggar... began to cry out and say: Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me” (Mark 10:46).

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was thrown in an uproar. The crowds that went before Him and that followed Him shouted, “Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” (Matthew 21:9).

V. The Great Prophet

David was not only a great King, but he was also a great prophet. Guidance and inspiration came to him from the Holy Spirit. In the psalms that Prophet David sang, there are many prophecies of the coming of Christ, His Divinity, His life and His Resurrection.

“I will tell of the decree of the Lord He said to me: You are my son, today I have begotten you” (Psalm 2:7).

“Lift up your heads, O gates and be lifted up, O ancient doors that the King of glory may come in” (Psalm 24:7).

These psalms are mere examples of David’s prophecies of Jesus. In one of his sermons, St Paul the apostle explained the meaning of some of these prophecies (Acts 13:33-37).

Applications:

- ❖ Read the following psalms and contemplate the verses that refer to the Lord Christ: Psalm 2, Psalm 16, Psalm 22, Psalm 41, and Psalm 110.
- ❖ Make a comparison between Psalm 2, Psalm 16 and Acts 13:33-37.
- ❖ What does it mean to say that Christ is the Son of David?
- ❖ Together with your colleagues make a wall Chart about David the King and Prophet making use of his life history in first and second books of Samuel.

LESSONS FOR THE GREAT FAST PERIOD

Week 0: (Preparation week) - The Poor

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

Week 2: (Sunday of Temptation) - Temptation and the Three Kinds of Challenge

Week 3: (Sunday of the Prodigal Son) - Jehovah's Witness

Week 4: (Sunday of the Samaritan Woman) - Mormons

Week 5: (Sunday of The Sick of Bethesda) - The Sabbath of Lazarus

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

Week 7: (Palm Sunday) - No Lesson

Week 8: (Resurrection Sunday) – No Lesson

Week 0 - The Poor

Objective:

- ❖ As you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.

References:

- ❖ The Paradise of the Soul, Part 2 / Anba Youannis.
- ❖ Our love for our brethren the Poor / Fr. Tadros Yacoub.
- ❖ The Life of Anba Abraam, the Bishop of Fayoom. / Al Mahaba Library.

Memory Verse:

“Truly, I say to you as you did it to one of the least of these brethren; you did it to me” (Matthew 25:35-40).

Introduction:

I. How Great The Poor Are?

It is said that the Lord Christ appeared to one of the pious believers and talked to him and encouraged him to continue his struggle and during their conversation, a poor man knocked at the door and the man politely took permission and went out to give the poor man his needs. When the pious man came back, he apologized for leaving his Master but the Lord said to him: “You are blessed my beloved, if you had not left Me to serve him, I would have left you to serve him”.

No body knows the value of the poor except he who has the heart of the Lord Jesus Christ, glory be to Him, who made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men for us to make us free from the bondage of sin. He was made in the form of a poor man to enrich our souls with His righteousness and the gifts of His Holy Spirit and in this way, the poor makes us free from the bondage of material and the selfishness of our ancient man.

Lesson Outline:

I. Amos and James are the Prophets of Justice

In the Old Testament, Amos reproached people for their injustice and for robbing the poor and the weak of their money. He said: “Hear this you who bring the poor of the land to an end, saying that we may buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and sell the refuse of the wheat” (Amos 8:4-6).

In the New Testament we read the epistle of St. James the apostle: “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27).

“What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled’, but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (James 2:14-17).

II. Bishoy Who Serve The Poor

The church history tells us that Anba Sarabamon, Bishop of Menoufya (in the 19th century) used to walk, in disguise at night carrying a heavy basket full of needs for the poor. One of the servants of the Patriarchate in Cairo took him for a thief so he walked behind him, till he saw him stand at a door.

The bishop knocked at the door and the door opened. The bishop gave the basket to the man who opened the door and went back without saying a word. The man whose name was Hanna the Carpenter, arrested him, but to his astonishment he saw that he was Anba Sarabamon the Bishop of Menoufya. The Bishop used to carry flour and wheat to the poor families that were too shy to ask for charity.

Pope John II the Merciful devoted two days per week to serve the poor and visit the sick. Anba Abraam, the Bishop of Fayoum used to leave his cell open for anyone who needs charity. He used to raise his cushion under which he had put money and say to the poor men, "Go in and take what you want." God blessed his alms and his cell was always full of money and presents. It was also crowded with the poor who took what they needed and rejoiced.

Anba Sarabamon the monk went to Alexandria one day and there he saw a needy man in the market and the man was without clothes so he said to himself, "How do I, who is considered patient as a monk, wear clothes and this man is naked. I am sure that this man is Christ and He is suffering from severe cold. With a brave heart, he jumped up and took off his clothes and gave them to that needy man. Then he sat on the ground and the Gospel was in his hand. A rich man passing him, saw him in that state and he said to him, "Anba Sarabamon, who undressed you and made you naked?" Anba Sarabamon pointed to the Gospel and said, "It is this that made me naked."

After the man had dressed him, Anba Sarabamon left the place, but he found a man in debt and the creditor was taking hold of him and the man had no money to pay back his debt. So Anba Sarabamon sold his copy of the Gospel and gave the price to the man who was in debt. When his disciple saw him he said, "Teacher, where is your Gospel?" The man said, "My son, I sold it... It always said to me, "Sell your property and give the needy."

III. Why We Care For The Poor?

The Lord ordered us to care for the poor, as they are His brethren. The Lord said, "As you did it to one of the least of these My brethren you did it to Me."

It is He who said that on the day of Judgment, He will say to the righteous, "I was hungry and you gave Me food, I was thirsty and you gave Me drink, I was naked and you clothed Me,... Lord when did we see you hungry and feed Thee, or thirsty and give Thee drink? Truly, I say to you as you did it to one of the least of these brethren; you did it to Me" (Matthew 25:35-40).

Because almsgiving is one of the works of the Holy Spirit, and an indication that we have attained brotherly love, the apostle says: "Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep".

Almsgiving is evidence of our living membership in the Body of Christ, "If one member suffers, all suffer together, if one member is honored all rejoice together." (1 Corinthians 12:26).

The apostle wanted three things of us: to be completely united, not to be divided and to care for others.

St. Augustine says when he spoke about the spiritual and social cooperation among the believers that when gazelles wander in the pastures, each one of them leans her head on the other. The first gazelle

walks before them as a guide and the others follow it, each one of them leans its head over the one before it.

When the gazelle in front feels tired, it goes behind the herd to have rest by leaning its head over the gazelle in front of it and so on each in its turn. In this way our teacher St. Paul addresses us saying: *“Bear one another’s burden, and so fulfill the Law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2).*

Applications:

- ❖ Gather some essays about the problem of poverty, from newspapers and magazines.
- ❖ Practice visiting others and carrying presents and good things to the Brethren of Jesus and dedicate a part of your income to the service of the needy.
- ❖ Pray for the poor so that the Lord may give them what they need.
- ❖ Encourage the rich people and their relatives to employ the unemployed and to give them what they need.
- ❖ Think of some social projects for fighting poverty.
- ❖ Remember: If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled’, but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (James 2:15-17).

Conclusion/Questions

1. The Lord gives the poor a great position in the church, what is it?
2. Tell us some stories from the History of the Church to show that the church cares for the poor.
3. Why does the church care for the poor?
4. What is the best way that should be followed in serving them?

Week 1 - The Prayer Room

Objective:

Find solutions for the difficulties we face when we pray.

References:

The Garden of the Soul Part 2 / Anba Youannis.

Life of Prayer.

The Prayer Room translated.

The Prayer of Jesus/ A monk from the Eastern Church.

Memory Verse:

“Man ought always to pray, and not to faint” (Luke 18:1).

Introduction:

The most wonderful moment in life is the moment when a believer sits with himself in the presence of God. When he enters his room and shuts the door, God opens the gates of heaven.

Lesson Outline:

When he is alone, a believer can enjoy living with the Almighty for some moments at which the soul can taste the Holy fellowship when the Origin and the image meet and the hearts shouts: “Lord, it is well that we are here.” The Christian man should stand as a piece of stone before the Divine Sculptor and say humbly to Him: “Print your image in me.” We change from glory to glory if we go on praying, as praying is a school where we not only speak to God but we also listen to him.

A lady spent long years in her prayers and she prayed to the Lord many times to give her what she wanted. She complained that God did not answer her, but when she learned to be silent in her prayers, she began to listen to the voice of God within her. She thought that prayer was mere repetition of words before the Lord. Hannah, Samuel’s mother was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord, and wept bitterly. Eli the priest took her to be a drunken woman. He said to her, “How long will you be drunken? Put away your wine from you. But Hannah answered, “No, my Lord... but I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord.” In due time Hannah conceived and bore a son thus the Lord granted her petition which she had made to Him as Eli the priest said to her (1 Samuel 1: 12-18).

I. Hindrances in the Prayer Room

A. Not being accustomed to prayers

The devil hates seeing us praying with concentration as this means that we are free from his bondage.

Man may say to himself, I am tired now or he may lean against the wall and may feel that his body is heavy and not active. We are not used to long prayers or in other words we are used to no prayer. Solutions should start with steady fast steps. We have to train ourselves to overcome the devil and to control our thoughts. One of the saints said, “The good thing you do now with sadness and toil will be done one day with joy.”

B. Absence of the mind

You may need to control your thoughts and concentrate your mind on prayer only so that you may not think of any other thing. When you enter the church try to contemplate the icons and look at the altar contemplating the love and offering of God to partake of Him. When you feel that you are not praying well, do not deceive yourself as prayer means lifting up both mind and heart to heaven. Prayer has been the power to train the will and the whole being of man of self-control.

Reciting psalms and reading in a low voice are of benefit as your ear, tongue and eyes work together and this helps you to control your thoughts. If the devil continues fighting you, make use of the sign of the cross and bow down in worship and say “O Lord, I am not standing before you to repeat words so grant me pure prayer.”

C. The late coming of the Lord’s answer

Some people connect prayer to their personal interests. It is true that we should pray to the Lord to give us what we need but must not forget that He said, “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well”.

The Lord’s answer may come late as He tests our love for Him.

He may postpone His answer to teach us to be earnest in our prayer.

The free gifts of God are precious, not cheap so we have to seek them with toil.

We should have the spirit of faith within us as God is our Father and He will not be late.

“For still the vision awaits its time; it hastens to the end. It will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay” (Habakkuk 2.3).

So when you stand to pray, do not say, “I gained nothing” as God is always at work, in secret, in the heart.

D. Always busy at work

You don’t have any other necessary work to do except prayer so put it at the top of your list of work. Devote a certain time for it. Dedicate and sanctify the period devoted for prayer. The people of God used to pick up manna in the early morning so we have to devote the best part of our time for prayer. Let us begin the day with prayer. Let us devote a certain period every day for prayer as in doing this we establish the habit of prayer and when this habit is established, bad habits will vanish.

II. Prayer Is The Mother Of All Virtues

How wonderful prayer is. It is the gate of heaven. It is the key to the treasures of God. It is the mother of virtues. If you want to be meek, pure, smiling, calm like the angels, always pray. If you suffer from haughtiness, anxiety, boredom or ill treatment of friends, sit with Christ. If you want to learn and taste the Lord’s love sit with Him and live with Him, the Lord will give you more than what you want.

Only remember His commandment: “*Man ought always to pray, and not to faint*” (Luke 18:1).

Applications:

- Devote a certain time in the early morning for prayer and pray before you start studying your lessons.
- Practice using Psalms prayers (The Prayer Book “Agpia”).
- Tell your father of confession about your spiritual life in the light of your prayers.

- Practice reciting the Prayer of Jesus many times every day: “O Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me a sinner.”
- When you suffer from any temptation or an evil thought or any difficulty recite: “Be pleased, O God, to deliver me: O Lord make haste to help me.”

Week 2 - Contention and the Three Kinds of Challenge

Objective:

- ❖ To resist the desire of the eyes, the desire of the flesh and the pride of life by the power of He who conquered in the wilderness.

References:

- ❖ Contemplations and Studies on the Great Feasts- Anba Bemin.
- ❖ The Holy Lent / Anba Macary Monastery.
- ❖ The treasures of Grace part 4 / Archdeacon Banoub Abdu.
- ❖ Temptation of Christ / Translated by Iris Al Masry

Memory Verse:

“Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you” (James 4:7-8).

Introduction:

When Adam fell and was dismissed from Paradise, his sin implied three falls which were all fatal and led to Hades.

1. Pride of life (to be equal to God).
2. Lust of the flesh (He desired and ate).
3. Lust of the eyes (He wanted to possess knowledge and keep away from God, and possess wisdom and be independent of the Lord).

The First Adam was defeated in the battle and the Second Adam came to wage the battle again but is confident of victory and triumph as He is the Son of man, the Holy and the righteous who obeyed till death, the death on the cross.

Lesson Outline:

I. Between the First Adam and the Second Adam

Temptation came to the First Adam when he was in Paradise. He was healthy, strong and happy but when temptation came to the second Adam (the Lord Jesus), He was in a barren wilderness, He was hungry and very weak. Temptation came to the first as instigation and incitement but to the Second Adam it was a test and experience (in human views) so that He may give the power of His victory to all who believe in Him.

“For because He Himself has suffered and been tempted, He is able to help those who are tempted.”
“For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.”

The three kinds of challenge that met the Lord in the wilderness were not directed to the Lord only but we have to bear in mind that the Lord in that situation represented the whole humanity. The victory He achieved there was kept for the believers and saints who win victory through Him and with Him in every age and in every generation.

II. The First Battle

A. Why was the Lord hungry?

The church tells us that the desire for food is one of the most dangerous sins in the life of man that is why a monk is trained to lead a life of chastity, fasting and devoutness when he enters the monastery. The church teaches him how to control his stomach and larynx.

Many ascetics lived for months without food. We hear about many Buddhists, in India, who spend months without food. If this is so, the Lord then was able to adjust and control the hunger He felt in His body and it is He that said about Himself, "I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again."

But He did not do this to prove that humanity is united with His godhead, but to give the enemy the domain that suited him, so that, when the battle takes place, the fasting man is able to turn the enemy's arrows to his scabbard. The enemy attempted to convince Adam and his descendants that food, material and the world are the substance of life, but the Lord who knows the truth, truly knows that this is lie and deception. The Liar wanted to convince all men that our whole life is connected with the earth and earthly things and those who satisfy the desires of the flesh still lead a material life and what moves them is material motivation. Those people will die and will be destroyed if they keep away from the true source of life but the Lord Jesus knows that God is the Source of life, "In Him was life; and the life was the light of men." But food, material and the world will come to an end and the life of man exists in the Son the Logos by Him all things were made, and by Him, as St. Paul the apostle says to the Colossians, "All things consist."

III. Fasting And Chastity Against The Desire Of The Flesh

We fast to show the Lord that through our hunger and thirst there is hunger in the heart that material things cannot satisfy. The waters of the world cannot quench our thirst for His. In the past, the Lord said to Israel, "I give you the manna as food. You did not know this manna before, neither did your fathers know it so that you may know that Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."

"So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord" (Deuteronomy 8:3).

Today the church says to her Lord who won victory in the wilderness and conquered the enemy, "We fast and become hungry so that we may be satisfied by the heavenly manna, the bread of life. Whether through the word on the pulpit, or by the Logos put on the altar. Through this chastity, the believer's mortal and perfect unity comes back to him. It unites man's soul and body with God's love, and in this way man's powers work in harmony aiming at perfection and as a guarantee for true perfection that is expected in eternity and hoped for in heavenly Jerusalem. Lusts disperse, scatter and cut man from inside, but chastity and holiness gather the personality and grant her peace, happiness, satisfaction and comfort. Fasting is a means for achieving the life of purity, chastity, the holiness of the members of the body and overcoming the strong sex instincts inside us examples from the Garden of Monks).

IV. The Second Battle

After the enemy had been conquered in the battle of the flesh and the desire for food he took Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple and asked Him to throw Himself down as the angels would give charge of Him as it is written in psalm (91).

“For He will give His angels charge of you, to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stow.”

But the Lord Jesus refused the offer:

- Because it was not from the Father but it was from the enemy.
- Because He did nothing in His life to glorify Himself separate from the Will of His good Father, but all what He did was for the glory of God although He and the Father are one.
- Because these great deeds and the splendid aspects that stimulate emotions do not offer a spiritual message but offer an unsuccessful gospel and a curriculum that does not use the power of the Lord. If chastity is the virtue with which you fight the desire for food, we find that obedience is the virtue with which you overcome the temptation of the enemy, pride, haughtiness and false praise.

Obedience is to forsake our will till death, if we do not forsake ourselves, then we can forsake nothing.

Obedience is the sin of not listening to the voice of God.

Obedience is the obedience of the only begotten Son to His Heavenly Father.

Obedience dominates our will if we obey the truth and carry out the commandment.

Obedience means love for Christ and for Christ alone. In the book of Revelation, we see that the Redeemed practice obedience with joy and follow the Lamb wherever he goes.

V. The Third Battle

The Lord conquered the devil, in the temptation of the flesh by fasting and he defeated him in the temptation of haughtiness by obedience and modesty. But the third temptation is the temptation of owning and possessing which the Scripture refers to as the Lust of the eyes, “Ask of Me, and I will make the nations Your heritage, and the ends of the earth Your possession” (Psalm 2:8).

Christ is truly coming to fulfill this prophecy so that the whole earth will be the Lord’s and His Christ but the Cross was God’s means of salvation. The enemy wanted to alter the plan of salvation and the temptation was severe. The end was correct but the means was evil. People are destroyed because they think that the end justifies the means. But the Lord Jesus is the end and the means together. He is the way and life together. He refused to suspend hostilities with the devil. All those who live for truth accept death and do not give up the truth entrusted to them. In this battle we find that the virtue of voluntary poverty is the best virtue. The Lord helps those who struggle to separate themselves from everything and keep away from material things to find their true being in God, and God fills our hearts if we prepare them for Him and accept to give up the desire of possessing things for the sake of gaining spiritual life and Salvation (Like the man who sold the field and bought the precious jewel). In this, the Lord’s saying comes true: “He who finds his life will lose it and he who loses his life for My sake will find it”.

- In his sermon, James the Sirougi says: “In the first temptation: Let us resort to fasting and severe asceticism in our fight against our love for food, gourmandize and greediness. In the Second temptation: Let us cast away our love for false glory, so that

we, through humility, can live with God. In the third temptation: Let us flee from love for wealth, possessions and power as they tread and destroy all love for righteousness.”

Applications:

- Increase the period of fasting in which you abstain from food and resist the desires of the flesh and its lusts.
- Do not decorate your body with jewelry and perfumes.
- Devote a certain period every day for reading the Word of God. Resort to fasting and confession.
- Decrease the time you spend in listening to Songs and watching films. Listen to the word of God.
- Conceal your talents and skills. Do not speak about them or declare them and do not boast about having them.

Week 3 - Jehovah's Witnesses

Objective:

- ❖ To understand the beliefs of Jehovah's witnesses.
- ❖ To understand that the beliefs of the cults are considered heresies in the eye of the Orthodox faith.

Memory Verse:

"I and My Father are one" (John 10:30).

References:

- ❖ Cults at my door-An Orthodox Examination of the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses by Fr. John W. Morris
- ❖ Pope Shenouda III sermons and book about Jehovah's Witnesses

Introduction:

If you take the time to talk to Jehovah's witnesses or Mormons in some depth, you may discover (if they explain their faith candidly) that although they claim to bring new truths about Jesus Christ, their beliefs are really more similar to an ancient heresy than to the Gospel taught by Christ and His Apostles.

From her very beginning, the Church has struggled to defend the truth taught by Jesus Christ to His Apostles against false teaching. Two movements, Gnosticism and Arianism, arose during the first centuries of Christian history. Gnosticism, one of the first movements to threaten Orthodox Christianity, taught that Christ had left secret knowledge to be revealed only to the elect. Some Gnostics also believed that humans existed as disembodied souls before their birth on earth.

For almost three centuries, the Church led by such great theologians as Saint Irenaeus of Lyons, fought to prevent the wave of Gnosticism from washing away the Gospel taught by Jesus Christ. However, once Gnosticism had been cast onto the dustbin of history, another teacher arose to challenge Orthodox Christianity. Arius, a priest in Alexandria, gathered a large following for his teaching that Jesus Christ is not God Incarnate, but a creation of God. Arius also rejected the Orthodox doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

After a major struggle that shook the whole Christian world, the Church rejected the new teaching and reaffirmed its commitment to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Indeed, the conflict with Arianism gave the Church its basic statement of Faith, the Creed adopted by the first two Ecumenical Councils, Nicene in 325 and Constantinople in 381, which is recited at every Orthodox Divine Liturgy. The struggle with Arianism also gave the Orthodox Church some of its greatest theologians, Saint Athanasius and the Cappadocian Fathers, Saints Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus.

Although Orthodoxy eventually triumphed over these and other heresies, men and women have continued to reject the teachings of the Church and to follow their own doctrines. America has produced two major challenges to Orthodox Christianity: the Jehovah's Witnesses, whose teachings resemble ancient Arianism in many ways; and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, whose

beliefs and practices are very similar to, although not identical with, ancient Gnosticism.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Jehovah's Witnesses

Charles Taze Russell, the founder of the Jehovah's Witnesses, was born on February 16, 1852. He grew up in Allegheny and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and became a journalist. In 1875, Russell, who had left the Congregational Church, became the leader of a Bible class in Pittsburgh. Four years later, Russell began publication of Zion's Watch Tower, which quickly grew to a circulation of over 60,000.

By 1908, Russell had moved to Brooklyn, still the headquarters of the movement today. Despite his rather unorthodox views, he gained an enthusiastic following. Some flocked to study at his Bible School. Others worked on three Kingdom Farms that produced food, furniture, and other needs for the society and for Russell's publishing house in Brooklyn in return for room and board and an allowance.

Despite his success as a religious leader, evidence presented in courts when his wife divorced him and in unsuccessful suits he brought against his critics reveals that Russell was nothing more than a clever con man. Official court records show that among other things, Russell controlled a holding company that channeled the money of the organization into his personal accounts.

The leader of the Jehovah's Witnesses had also been involved in such schemes as selling his followers an inferior grade of wheat he called "Miracle Wheat" at highly inflated prices. Russell had thrilled his followers with published accounts of speeches before enthusiastic groups that never really took place. During one embarrassing testimony, an attorney forced Russell to admit under oath that he had lied when he claimed that he could read Greek, that he had been ordained to the ministry, and that his wife had not divorced him. Thus, court records reveal that Russell was anything but a normal man who sacrificed his personal wealth and comfort for his religious ideals.

A. Arianism reincarnated

Following Russell's sudden death on October 31, 1916, Joseph Franklin Rutherford assumed leadership of the organization until his death in 1942. Because Rutherford had been a special judge of the Eighth Judicial Circuit Court in Booneville, Missouri, his followers called him Judge Rutherford. Rutherford gave the growing movement the name Jehovah's Witnesses, from the incorrect translation of "Yahweh" or "The Lord God" in the King James Bible.

During many radio addresses, Rutherford expanded on Russell's ideas to create the beliefs of the Jehovah's Witnesses, while denouncing traditional Christian doctrine as "satanic." Today there are 3.8 million followers of the Jehovah's Witness cult. They publish their magazine, "The Watch Tower", in a hundred languages and are known for going door-to-door trying to persuade others to join their movement.

B. Jehovah's Witnesses Believes

Like the ancient Arians, Jehovah's Witnesses deny the doctrine of the Incarnation and the deity of Christ. They believe that God created Jesus Christ before the beginning of the world in the form of the Archangel Michael, who eventually came to earth as Jesus Christ - a created being who, despite his moral perfection, was only a man, not the Only Begotten Son of God.

They also believe that the Holy Spirit is merely Jehovah's invisible energizing force. Even today, followers of the Jehovah's Witnesses wage a relentless war against the doctrines of the Incarnation and the Holy Trinity through such forums as Internet news groups. Rutherford's successors released their own version of the Bible, The New World Translation of the Scriptures, in 1961.

The New World Translation makes subtle changes in the text of the Bible to support Jehovah's Witness doctrine. For example, it adds "a" to John 1:1 so that the text reads, "the Word was a god." However, the correct translation of this important verse is, "The Word was God." As correctly translated, the first chapter of Saint John's Gospel shows that the semi-Arian teachings of the Jehovah's Witnesses cannot be reconciled with the Holy Scriptures.

Although they deny the divinity of Christ, the Jehovah's Witnesses believe that Christ atoned for sin by his death. Significantly, they believe that Our Lord died on a stake rather than on a cross.

They also believe that only 144,000 will be saved (Rev 7:1-8). All others will either cease to exist or will rise with a physical body to everlasting life on earth. Jehovah's Witnesses also believe that Christ came again in 1914 and cast the devil and his angels down to earth, where they caused a great deal of trouble. Indeed, 1914 is a good date to cite for trouble, for the First World War began in that year .

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that four years later, Christ entered the spiritual temple to cleanse it in preparation for the resurrection of the 144,000 chosen to join him there. At the time of that resurrection, they believe, Christ and his armies will defeat Satan and his followers (including organized religion) at the great battle of Armageddon. ,

Following his victory Christ will then cast Satan and his followers into the abyss or a deathlike state for a thousand years, during which Christ and the 144,000 saved ones will rule over earth from heaven.

During this time there will be two resurrections. First the righteous of the Old Testament will rise and become princes on earth. Then all those who wanted to do right but died without the opportunity to hear the truth of Jehovah will rise and receive a chance to become faithful members of the Jehovah's Witnesses. Finally, Satan will be released from bondage and begin a campaign of deceit to lead a final rebellion against Jehovah. After Jehovah intervenes and casts Satan and his followers into annihilation in the lake of fire, Christ and the 144,000 will remain in heaven, while those who accepted the truth of the Jehovah's Witness religion will live in an earthly paradise.

They believe that God does not talk to women because Eve was the reason of the fall of man.

There is no difference between the death of the unrighteous and animal. They both will end with death with no eternal soul (Ecclesiastes 3:18).

They do not believe in the intercessions of saints or the sacraments

They believe that St. Mary has other children.

They do not believe that baptism cleanse us from sin (Titus 3:5, Colossians 2:12, Acts 2:28)

They do not pray in temples or churches

Although the Scriptures teach and the Orthodox Church affirms the Second Coming of Christ, there is nothing in the Bible that mentions the coming of Christ in 1914. Indeed, Our Lord said in Mark 13:32 that no one, not even the angels in heaven, knows when He will come again. There is no mention in the Scriptures of Christ coming into a "spiritual temple." Scriptures teach not that Christ will return in secret, but that He will return with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

The New Testament does not teach two forms of salvation, one for 144,000 (a number used in Revelation 7:1-8 to symbolize the Church as the New Israel), and another, lesser salvation for everyone else. Finally, it is evident that Russell was a less than honest man, who used religion as a means of personal enrichment. We believe that the soul is eternal (I Thessalonians 5:3, Ecclesiastes 12:5)

Week 4 - The Mormons

Lesson Outline:

Mormonism grew during a period of great change and social turmoil in America, the early nineteenth century.

I. Joseph Smith - Prophet or Profiteer?

This atmosphere of religious turmoil permitted Joseph Smith, Jr., an obscure man with little formal education, to gain a following for his claim to be a prophet of God with a mission to restore true Christianity.

Born in Sharon, Vermont, on December 23, 1805, Joseph Smith, Jr., moved in 1816 with his father and mother, Joseph Sr. and Lucy Smith, and his eight brothers and sisters to Palmyra, New York, in the heart of this area of religious ferment. There the elder Smith eked out a living as a farmer and peddler while spending his spare time looking for buried treasure or counterfeiting his own money. As he grew to adulthood, Joseph Jr. followed his father's example, claiming to locate buried riches with the help of a peepstone.

Stimulated perhaps by the religious excitement of his new home, Smith began to claim special visions, and shifted his concerns from the search for buried treasure to the proclamation of his new religion. In 1820, he claimed to have received a visitation by God the Father and Jesus Christ instructing him to avoid the rival religions fighting for men's souls in the area (such as Methodism and Presbyterianism), for they had forsaken the true Gospel. Three years later, an angel named Moroni supposedly appeared to lead him to the location of a set of buried golden plates containing the writings of the ancient inhabitants of North America. Aided by a set of large spectacles, the Urim and Thummim, which allowed him to read the "Reformed Egyptian" of the plates, Smith translated and published their contents as *The Book of Mormon* in 1830.

Smith's followers consider *The Book of Mormon*, a collection of fifteen books, which tell the story of two ancient peoples that immigrated to America from the Middle East long before the birth of Christ, a part of Holy Scripture. The first people, the Jaredites crossed the Atlantic in eight barges and settled in Central America over two thousand years before Christ.

In the New World, they established a great civilization. However, a terrible civil war resulted in the complete destruction of this ancient people. According to the Mormons, the prophet Ether left the record of their history on twenty-four plates which form the Book of Ether in the Mormon Bible.

The second people, the followers of the prophet Lehi, fled Jerusalem in 600 B.C. and settled on the West Coast of South America. However, Laman, one of the sons of the prophet, rebelled against God and became an outcast along with his family. The sons of Laman, whom God punished for their sins by turning their skin dark, are the ancestors of the American Indians. Lehi's other son, Nephi, followed the path of righteousness and led his people to establish a great civilization in Central and North America.

Indeed, the descendants of Nephi were so holy that Jesus Christ Himself descended from heaven in A.D. 34 to preach to them and to establish the church in the New World. However, the wicked descendants of Laman grew stronger and destroyed the descendants of Nephi in a terrible battle in A.D. 385. Moroni, the only survivor of this holocaust, recorded their history and buried it with the plates of Ether in Hill Cumorah, where Joseph Smith claimed to have found them in 1823-24.

No credible archeologist or anthropologist has found the slightest evidence to support the fantastic story of *The Book of Mormon*. Indeed, all authorities agree that the Native Americans are descended from Asiatic peoples who moved into the New World from Siberia through Alaska. The canonical Scriptures give no indication that ancient Jews migrated to the New World, or that Jesus Christ ever visited America. There is no record of the existence of such a language as “Reformed Egyptian,” much less of its use in America.

Suspiciously large portions of *The Book of Mormon* appear to be crudely reworded selections from the King James Bible. Indeed, there is very strong evidence that the real source of *The Book of Mormon* is the imagination of Joseph Smith, rather than a mysterious set of gold tablets. Significantly, the Mormons cannot produce the golden plates as evidence of the truth of Smith’s claims, for they no longer exist. There is even considerable reason to believe that Smith actually rewrote an unpublished novel by Solomon Spaulding entitled *The Manuscript Found*, using it as the basis for *The Book of Mormon*.

Spaulding, a retired Presbyterian minister, submitted his work to a publisher in Pittsburgh shortly before his death in 1816. Sidney Rigdon, an early associate of Smith, visited the printing house that year and showed a copy of Spaulding’s manuscript to several friends. Although the original work has disappeared, several of Spaulding’s relatives and friends have testified to the great similarity between *The Manuscript Found* and *The Book of Mormon*.

Regardless of whether *The Book of Mormon* came solely from Smith’s vivid imagination or from Spaulding’s work of fiction, the Mormon prophet utilized his claim of access to the mysterious golden tablets for personal gain. As a result, he became the leader of a growing religious movement that was much more successful than his fruitless efforts to discover buried treasure. So great was Smith’s desire for financial profit from his works that he persuaded one gullible follower, Matthew Harris, to mortgage his farm to finance the publication of the original edition of *The Book of Mormon* on March 26, 1830.

Smith also claimed that God spoke directly to him. Along with *The Book of Mormon*, Smith’s prophecies and sermons, published in *Doctrine and Covenants*, *The Pearl of Great Price*, and *The Teachings of Joseph Smith*, form the basis for Mormon doctrine. On May 15, 1829, Smith and Oliver Cowdery claimed Saint John the Baptist conferred on them the Aaronic Priesthood. A few days later, they asserted that Saints Peter, James, and John came down from heaven to admit them to the higher Melchizedek Priesthood.

Smith gathered five followers and organized the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints on April 6, 1830, in Fayette, New York. Stimulated by the publication of *The Book of Mormon*, the small group grew swiftly and moved to Kirkland, Ohio, where they formed themselves into a commune.

From Kirkland, the infant Mormon Church spread to other cities, including independence, Missouri. Here, Smith ordered the faithful to purchase land on the basis of a vision that Christ would establish His temple there following the Second Coming. Naturally, Smith, who did not hesitate to condemn all other churches as “apostate,” aroused a great deal of opposition.

Finally, Smith and his followers organized a town of their own in Nauvoo, Illinois. However, criticism of the new religion continued to grow, especially following Smith’s “revelation” of July 12, 1843, sanctioning polygamy. In an effort to crush opposition, Smith and his followers destroyed the plant of a newspaper that had published several critical articles. As a result, the “prophet” found himself in jail. However, the bars failed to protect him from the enraged populace, which attacked the

prison and killed Smith on June 27, 1844. Go West, Young Man

Following the “martyrdom” of their leader, the Mormons fell into a struggle between the various claimants to the leadership of the movement. After an unsuccessful attempt by Sidney Rigdon to claim the mantle of the prophet, Brigham Young emerged as the leader of the largest faction of Mormons. Young believed that Mormons could never practice their faith unmolested while surrounded by followers of other religions. Therefore, he led thousands in a grueling trek across the wilderness to Salt Lake City, Utah. Those who rejected Young’s leadership, especially following the introduction of polygamy, formed two smaller groups: The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and the Church of Christ (Temple Lot) in Independence. Young, who eventually had twenty-five wives, was a brilliant leader. He presided over the transformation of a desert wasteland into a well-planned city, and left an organization of 140,000 at his death in 1877.

Today, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints claims a membership of over two million throughout the world. Still centered in Salt Lake City, the Mormon Church consists of over six thousand parishes, called wards, which are organized into “stakes.” Advised by a council of twelve “apostles,” the president of the church exercises absolute authority and is considered a spokesman for God by the faithful.

In addition to its religious activities, the Mormon Church sponsors a very effective social services program for its members. “Storehouses,” a remnant of the movement’s origins in the age of communes, provide food and clothing for members in need. The body sends out thousands of missionaries, young men who give a year or two to spread their faith. Known for their white shirts, black ties, and bicycles, they go door to door in an effort to bring others into the Mormon fold.

II. The Mormon God

Based largely on the revelations by Joseph Smith, Mormon doctrine is radically different from traditional Christian doctrine. Like the Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Mormons reject the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. Ridiculing traditional monotheism, Smith believed that the god of this world is nothing but one of the many gods who populate the heavens.

Smith taught that the god of this world, the Elohim of the Old Testament, is really an exalted man who lived on a planet and had a father like any other man. Elohim is not a spirit, but possesses a human body of flesh and bones. Indeed, materialism is so important to Mormons that they affirm the eternity of matter and deny its creation by Elohim or any other god. The Father of this world, identified as Adam by some Mormon theologians, achieved godhood and sired a race of spiritual children. The Father has not reached perfection, but is in a state of constant growth.

Although Mormonism rejects the traditional doctrine of the Trinity, the followers of this religion believe in the existence of the Son and the Holy Spirit. However, they insist that these are separate from the Father, not “one in essence and undivided” as Orthodoxy teaches. Mormons believe that Christ is not the Only Begotten Son of God, but merely the firstborn of the Father and the elder brother of the human race. Identifying Christ as the Jehovah of the Old Testament, the Mormons believe that He organized creation at the command of His Father, Elohim.

Following the fall of man, Christ came to earth to offer Himself as a sacrifice on the Cross to save fallen mankind from eternal death. The Holy Spirit of Mormonism is a separate entity, which acts as the agent of Elohim in managing creation. Mormons believe that all humans are actually sons of god, and that their existence began long before physical birth.

According to their doctrine, Elohim gave birth to many spiritual children, some of whom became

men and some of whom continue to serve as angels until their physical birth. Before the organization of this world, Elohim met with his spiritual children to plan a place for their dwelling, that they might grow into godhood as he had done. As a result, the earth came into being.

However, Lucifer and a third of the sons of god rejected Elohim's plan and were cast out of heaven. Unable to assume physical bodies, necessary for their exaltation to godhood, they became disembodied spirits. Those who obeyed Elohim were allowed to come to earth to assume bodies so that they might grow into godhood. Adam was the first spirit to receive a body and became the father of mankind. However, his wife Eve fell through the temptation of Satan, thereby presenting Adam with a dilemma.

His mission was to have children by Eve to provide bodies for the spiritual children of Elohim. However, through her fall by eating of the forbidden fruit, Eve became mortal and her children would be mortal. Adam, according to Smith, unselfishly chose to become mortal himself by sin so that he might fulfill the Father's command to have children. Therefore, according to Mormon theology, every person born into this world consists of two parts. The first is the spirit, which was born of Elohim before the organization of this world. The second is the corrupt body inherited from Adam and Eve.

Because of the greatness of Christ's sacrifice on the Cross, Mormons believe that all mankind will have the opportunity to gain salvation. Following death, every person will await the Last Judgment in an intermediate place called Paradise. There the dead will have a chance to repent of their sins and become Latter Day Saints. The Mormons practice the baptism of the dead by proxy as a means to assist those in Paradise to become members of their church.

Following the Last judgment, only those who knowingly rejected Christ will spend eternity in perdition with Satan and his angels. The rest of mankind will inherit one of the three degrees of "Glory." Those who did not become Christians and who lived evil lives will spend eternity in the "Telestial Kingdom."

There, separated from Christ, they will receive the just rewards for their sins. Those who lived righteous lives and who became Christians following death will inherit the "Terrestrial Kingdom." Spending eternity in the presence of Christ, they will, however, be deprived of fellowship with Elohim and full exaltation to godhood.

Finally, the righteous Christians will be raised to the "Celestial Kingdom." There, in the presence of Elohim, they will share in his glory and will become gods themselves. Those in the Celestial Kingdom will even be able to have spirit children and to become gods of their own worlds, just as Elohim became the god of this world.

In order for a person to enter into the highest level of the Celestial Kingdom, he must fulfill certain obligations. He must be baptized by immersion in the name of "the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost," and must receive the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands from an elder in the Mormon Church. Every person aspiring to godhood must also enter into a "celestial marriage" for eternity in a special ceremony in a Mormon Temple.

As gods, men and women in the Celestial Kingdom will be able to give birth to their own spiritual children and organize their own worlds for them - just as Elohim became the god of this world, which he populated with his own spiritual sons and daughters.

III. The Priesthood and the Temple

Mormonism places great emphasis on its priesthood, claiming to be a restoration of the true

Church by virtue of its exclusive possession of the Melchizedek Priesthood. Before a person may advance to the higher priesthood, he must first pass through the three ranks of the lower Aaronic Priesthood. Named after the first Jewish High Priest, Aaron, the lesser priesthood of Mormonism consists of deacons, teachers, and priests.

Following advancement through the Aaronic Priesthood, a man is eligible to enter the Melchizedek Priesthood. Named for Melchizedek of Genesis, the higher priesthood of Mormonism consists of five levels: elders, seventies, high priests, patriarchs, and apostles. In each area one high priest has the office of bishop of the ward, a group of stakes. One high priest serves as the chief executive officer of the Mormon Church, the First President, who is believed to possess special prophetic powers and to act as a spokesman for God. Twelve apostles form a council to advise the First President.

The temples are central to the exercise of the Mormon priesthood. Here, in absolute secrecy, the faithful participate in elaborate ceremonies, complete with secret handshakes and special clothing, to receive the Endowments of the Priesthood and to be married for eternity. They also participate in baptism, ordination, and even marriage services for the departed. Mormons wish to extend the blessings of their faith to their ancestors and spend a great deal of time and effort in extensive genealogical research to learn the names of their ancestors. Then they are united in celestial marriage and prepared for exaltation to godhood in the world to come.

The Mormons have built sixteen temples, twelve in the United States and others in Canada, England, Switzerland, and New Zealand. The most famous temple is in Salt Lake City, the headquarters of the Mormon Church. Only members of the church in good standing may enter a temple, and no part of the ceremony may be disclosed to an outsider. Thus, like the ancient Gnostics, the Mormons teach that only those who are admitted to secret knowledge can achieve the highest level of salvation.

Actually, the rites of Mormon temples bear no resemblance to the worship of the temple of ancient Jerusalem or to the worship of any Christian Church. There is no praise of God or reading from Holy Scripture, or any other act usually associated with worship. Indeed, the services are more like the initiation rites of a fraternal organization than services of worship. Significantly, Joseph Smith, Jr., the author of the temple rites of Mormonism, was himself a thirty-second degree Mason.

IV. Recycled Gnosticism

Although there are important differences between ancient Gnosticism and Mormonism, the similarities are striking. They both replace biblical Christianity with a very elaborate set of legends and esoteric teachings found, for Mormons, in the fanciful tales of *The Book of Mormon* and the teachings of Joseph Smith.

Like some ancient Gnostics, Mormons believe in the preexistence of souls, a doctrine contrary to Scripture and condemned by the Church at the Fifth Ecumenical Council, Constantinople II in AD 553. The secrecy of the temple rites of Mormonism is parallel to the secret knowledge of ancient Gnosticism.

However, Mormonism differs from ancient Gnosticism in one major way. Gnosticism considered the physical world so evil that many Gnostics denied the Incarnation, teaching instead that Christ only seemed to have a physical body (a doctrine called Docetism). The Latter Day Saints, on the other hand, exalt matter over spirit, believing that matter is eternal.

Although the Scriptures teach that God is spirit (John 4:24), the Latter Day Saints believe that

God has a body of flesh and bones. Indeed, they believe that the god of this world is an exalted man who became a god. Finally, they believe that by following the beliefs and practices of the Mormon religion, they too may become gods ruling over their own worlds.

Conclusion:

We have to know and understand our faith first and strengthen our spirit before we engage in any interaction with a member of the cults. It is important that we arm ourselves with the verses that answer their misconceptions of the Bible and Jesus Christ.

Applications:

- ❖ Search for verses that support the divinity of Christ and the trinity.
- ❖ Search for verses to support each of the importance of the church sacraments.

Week 5 - The Sabbath of Lazarus

Objective:

- ❖ To understand the power of the Lord as demonstrated in the miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead.
- ❖ To understand that there is life after death.

Memory Verse:

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

References:

- ❖ John 11:1-44
- ❖ A Detailed Study of the Gospel of St. John / Fr. Bishoy Foaad Wasef

Introduction:

The Miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead is one of the strongest miracles of our Lord Jesus Christ. He demonstrated His ability to raise Lazarus 4 days after he was dead. This is a strong proof of the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. He also clearly stated, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?” (John 11: 25-26).

Lesson Outline:

The meaning of the name Lazarus is “God Helps”. The Family of Lazarus had special friendship relation with the Lord. Jesus Christ used to visit them frequently and spend sometime in their house. Their village “Bethany” was approximately 2 miles from Jerusalem, so the Lord used to rest in their house during the time of feasts. Mary the sister of Lazarus used to spend time under the feet of the Lord listening to Him (Luke 10:39-42). In another occasion, she wiped the Lord’s feet with her hair and fragrant oil (John 12:3). Martha - the other sister of Lazarus- used to do all that she can to meet the Lord’s needs and to provide the best for Him (Luke 10:40).

Lazarus was a dear friend to the Lord that Jesus loved in a special way (John 11:3). Yet, the Lord did not prevent death to happen to the person He loved. This demonstrates that God’s love does not prevent earthly losses but it gives heavenly rewards (Psalm 34:19; Romans 12:6). He also supports and gives strength during hardships (Genesis 26:24).

Mary and Martha sent and asked the Lord to come and heal Lazarus. This is a good example to turn only to Jesus Christ to ask for help. And although He is God who knows everything, Mary and Martha still sent to inform Him. Similarly we should make the Lord aware of our needs and difficulties even when we know that He knows everything. On the other hand, God did not respond to them immediately but waited to respond in the suitable time that will show the Glory of the Lord. Also, the Lord may delay His response to our needs or request for the perfect time to deliver His miracles in our life for His glory to shine in our hearts.

I. How Do Believers Perceive Death?

- ❖ They do not fear it: as the psalmist David said “Yea. Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil ” (Psalm 23:4).
- ❖ They consider it a gain and wait for it: St. Paul said “For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain...” (Philippians 1:21-23)
- ❖ They delight in the departure to heaven: “We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord...” (1 Corinthians 5:8-10).
- ❖ They prepare for it: Through the life of prayer, repentance, righteousness, struggle against evil, they are always prepared like the wise virgins who filled their lamps with the oil and were awaiting the Bridegroom with all the confidence that they will join Him in the wedding.

Sadness for the loss of a loved one should always be accompanied with the hope of eternal life and resurrection “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” (1 Thessalonians 4:13-16).

Conclusion:

This is a great miracle of our Lord Jesus who is able with His human nature to cry in front of Lazarus tomb and on the other hand with His divine nature is able to raise Lazarus from death after being in the tomb for 4 days.

Application:

- ❖ Always make sure to be available to comfort friends during the time of loss of a beloved person.
- ❖ Make sure that you are always prepared to depart to meet the Lord any time.

Week 6 - The Passion Week

Objective:

- ❖ Getting acquainted with the events of the Holy Week.

References:

- ❖ The Treasures of Grace, Part 5 / Archdeacon Banoub Abdu.
- ❖ The Text read in the Holy Week.

Memory Verse:

“The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified and the third day rise again”(Luke 24:7).

Introduction:

The Passion Week is the most wonderful week of the year in the church. In that week we can follow the last hours in the life of Christ till the resurrection.

It begins by the Lazarus Saturday, then comes the Palm Sunday and the prayers of the Holy Week continue as they are arranged according to the hours of day and night till Good Friday, the day on which our Good Savior was crucified. Then finally comes the great celebration of the glorious Resurrection and the Victory of Christ over death.

Lesson Outline:

I. Lazarus Saturday

On that day, we commemorate the bringing of Lazarus back to life. In the house of Lazarus in Bethany they prepared a dinner for Jesus. Many people came to Bethany to see the man whom Jesus raised from death.

II. Palm Sunday

The next day, crowds of people came out to meet Jesus when He entered Jerusalem. The crowds took the branches of Palm trees and went out to meet Him, shouting: “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.”

III. Public prayer for the Repose of the Dead (Requiem)

Prayers for the repose of the dead are forbidden in the Passion Week, so after the liturgy on Palm Sunday, the church performs a public requiem. The sanctuary doors are to be closed, the sanctuary veils are drawn, and prayers for the repose of the dead are raised.

IV. Prayers of the Holy Pascha

The word “Pascha” means “Passover” and it refers to the destroyer when he passed over the houses of the Hebrews which were sprinkled with the blood of the Passover lamb which in turns stands for the sacrifice of the Cross (“Pascha” in Coptic and “Fissh” in Hebrew).

“Pascha” is the name given to the period between Palm Sunday and Good Friday.

The Passover lamb was selected and kept from the tenth day of Nisan (Abib) till the fourteenth day Of Nisan, then, it was offered as sacrifice. That is why the doors of the sanctuary are shut after the Palm Sunday and are kept closed for four days without any liturgies till Maundy Thursday, then they are shut again till the celebration of the Holy Burial on Good Friday. The Pascha prayers are raised in the Second Chorus of Church indicating that Christ suffered and was crucified outside the camp. During Pascha prayers the church sings the hymn of “To You is the Power and glory”. This hymn is taken from Revelation 5:12.

A. Monday

Jesus left Bethany in the morning and on His way to Jerusalem, He was hungry and He cursed the fig tree, which did not bear fruit. Then He went to the temple and drove out those who were buying and selling and He spent the whole day teaching the people in the temple. He left the envious chief priests and went to Bethany to spend the night there.

B. Tuesday

Jesus left Bethany in the morning. As He walked along the road, He saw that the fig tree dried up and died.

A conversation took place between Jesus and the high priests. He warned the Pharisees and gave many parables about the kingdom of God.

C. Wednesday

The Lord of Glory retired in Bethany, as He wanted to be alone for sometime. The Council of the seventy high priests (the Sanhedrin) held and Judas made a plot and betrayed Jesus to the chief priests. Judas started looking for good chance to hand Jesus over to them. This day is called Job Wednesday because of the severe pains that Job suffered. Prophet Job was patient and in his patience, he became a symbol of Christ.

D. Thursday

- ❖ Jesus at the Passover meal in the upper room.
- ❖ He washed His disciples’ feet.
- ❖ He gave them the mystery of Eucharist.
- ❖ That is why in the arrangement of the prayers that are raised on Maundy Thursday, the prayer of the blessing of water and washing of the feet are performed then the Holy liturgy is celebrated.

E. The Good Friday

Caiaphas questioned Jesus and accused him of blasphemy because He said that He was the Son of the Living God.

Pilate questioned Jesus for the charge of being King but He said, “My kingdom is not of this world.”

The Lord of Glory was crucified. He accepted death on behalf of humanity, and He himself became our Pascha and He was offered as a sacrifice for us and His blood became eternal Salvation to us.

i) Some of the prayers raised on Good Friday

“You established the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. Your name was there long before the creation of the sun. O God Almighty, now I see you hanging on the cross. O Lord, how did wrongdoers find courage to do that?”

“O Lord who decorated the earth with flowers, they put a scarlet robe on your body. O Lord, in whose fist the heaven and earth are held; they put a reed in your right hand. You hung the whole earth by the word of your Mouth, and they hung you on a cross. You were crucified because of our sins and you put an end to the pride of death”.

“O righteous and pious people go out today. The Lord has gone down to Hades, took hold of Adam’s hand and raised him up, together with his children, and brought them back to Paradise, the dwelling place of continual happiness, rejoice and comfort.

Conclusion/Questions:

- ❖ How did the miraculous deed of raising Lazarus from the dead affect the crowds of people? What was the result?
- ❖ Explain the meaning of these words: Palm Sunday, Hosanna, Interpretations, rites, and angels.
- ❖ What Jesus did after He had entered Jerusalem?
- ❖ Write the conversation that took place between Jesus and Peter when Jesus was washing the disciples feet.

Applications:

- ❖ Always go to church, attend the Pascha prayers and follow these prayers in the Passion Week Guide.
- ❖ During the Passion Week, read the Holy Bible according to the following Schedule?

Monday:	Mark 11: 11-24	Luke 9:18-27
Tuesday:	John 8:12-20	Luke 9:28-36
Wednesday:	Matthew 26:1-16	Luke 13:22-35
Thursday:	Luke 7:7-23	John 16:12-24
Friday:	Matthew 27:1-66	John 11: 45
Saturday:	Mark 16:1-20	John 12:1-19
Sunday:	Luke 19:28-48	

LESSONS FOR THE PENTECOST PERIOD
(Fifty Days After Resurrection)

Week 1: Jesus Appears After Resurrection

Week 2: The Preaching Of St. Mark

Week 3: Christ Imparts Faith To The Two Disciples Of Emmaus

Week 4: St. John The Beloved

Week 5: The Book Of Revelation (I)

Week 6: The Book Of Revelation (II)

Week 7: The Holy Spirit Is At Work With Us

Week 1 - Christ Appears After Resurrection

Objective:

- ❖ How Christ solves problems through His glorious Resurrection.

References

- ❖ The Meeting in the Upper Room / Mar Mina, Shubra.
- ❖ The Meeting at Tiberias / Mar Mina, Shubra.

Memory Verse:

“If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:14)

Lesson Outline:

I. In The Early Morning

Mary stands for those active and energetic souls that hurry to meet the bridegroom among the garden trees, while the disciples shut themselves up because they were afraid.

Mary also represents the true feelings of love, which fill the hearts of sincere people. She searched for Jesus and sought Him in tears. She rejoiced when she saw Him and He delivered to her the happy news and the greatest message to the world. “Tell My brethren to go to Galilee and there they will see Me.”

Love gave Mary courage, energy and effectiveness. But Mary’s problem was that she was looking at the tomb and the tears made her unable to see. She sought Christ among the dead while He was behind her and speaking to her. Angels appeared to her. Those angels are a symbol of the servants of God and they attract us to Christ.

At that moment, Mary looked at Jesus and heard Him saying to her, in a gentle, calm and personal way “Mary”

Jesus can comfort the troubled soul and when she tries to hold Him, He says to her, “Do not hold Me” but He takes her and ascends to the depth of Godhead.

II. Portion of the Unbelievers

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you” (John 20:19).

Those who live in fear, sadness and defeat; those who suspect, deny and blaspheme, what will Jesus do to such people? To such people, as the scriptures says, “Jesus came”. Jesus goes to those who cannot come to Him because of their sins.

He neither punished them, nor did He reproach them, but He gave them the greatest gift. He spoke to them and His words gave them hope and made them rejoice when He said, “Peace be with you.” He gave them the peace of conscience, the peace of God, which surpasses any thought of mind. He

gave them confidence in themselves and in the mercies of God. Happiness filled their minds and amazement filled their eyes, and they remembered His words and promise of resurrection.

III. Now Thomas Was Not With Them

What is the role of that member who does not attend the meetings of the disciples (the church)? Of course, he will not see the Lord and will live in doubt for eight days.

The work of the church in this case is to transmit the happy news to him and those who have seen must tell him, the same as the disciples did when they said to Thomas, "We have seen the Lord."

What will the Lord give to this member who is slow at understanding and of little faith, He had no words to give; He only had a wounded open side and His heart was ready to receive and welcome all sinners and His naked chest embraces all people.

He had no instructions to give; He only had the mark of the nails which make everybody ashamed, and bridle the lukewarm hearts with love.

The wounds of Jesus cure and heal the perplexed and frightened souls. The wounds of Jesus comfort those who are tormented, and miserable. The wounds of Jesus teach us how to sacrifice. They opened the closed doors to those who do not know the meaning of sacrifice and self-denial.

The wounds of Jesus heal those who suffer from the sexual desire and those who seek the beauty of the flesh.

IV. By the Sea of Tiberius

There was still a serious wound in Peter's heart, which no one could see but the Lord. Peter had lost confidence and suffered from denial.

Peter forgot that he dedicated his life to the Lord. He went back to the worldly matters seeking his living: "I am going fishing."

And there, while we are busy working, Jesus appears in our daily life. He reminds us of our early life. He reminded Peter of the same miracle that was the cause of his first dedication (The miracle of catching a lot of fish).

Jesus gently reproaches His disciple who fell by saying: "Do you love me?" He said it three times as Peter denied Him three times. Love is always a remedy for sin and lack of love in the cause of sin.

Peter gives an eloquent answer to that critical questions and that was the only way he could answer: "Lord you know everything. You know that I love you."

God knows the circumstances that led you to sin, He also knows your repentance and He rewards you. The world knows only that you have sinned but Jesus knows everything.

V. Tend My Sheep

Jesus is the Good Shepherd who gathered His sheep after Resurrection. He is now bringing Peter back to his first order. So Peter lived and died for Christ who died and rose from the dead for him.

Conclusion/ Question

By His resurrection, how did Jesus Christ solve the following problems, and what remedy did He give? Doubt... Fear... Sin.

Week 2 - The Preaching of St. Mark

Objective:

- ❖ To learn the scope of St. Mark's Ministry and what he could offer for Christ.

References:

- ❖ St. Mark the Evangelist who Evangelized Egypt / H. H. Pope Shenouda III
- ❖ The History of Patriarchs / Severus the Son of Al Moquaqa.
- ❖ The Story of the Coptic Church / Iris Al Massry.

Memory Verse:

"And you shall be witness to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8)

Introduction:

Evangelism is a responsibility and duty. The Lord Christ likened it to a grain of mustard seed, which when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs. It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.

Lesson Outline:

Evangelism is carrying light and flambeau. The grace of God chose this young man St. Mark, to carry the Light to the entire World.

I. He Was One Of The Seventy Apostles

St. Mark was trained to announce the good news: The Lord Himself made him His disciple and taught him and the Lord is the Greatest Teacher and the source of true light. But the true preaching of St. Mark began when he saw the Living Lord in his own house, in the upper room, after His crucifixion and resurrection.

II. In Jerusalem and Judea

St. Mark accompanied St. Peter the apostle in his journeys. St. Peter's wife was cousin of St. Mark's father (Aristopolos was St. Mark's father). It was not easy for St. Mark to evangelize in Jerusalem where the Lord was crucified, and where James was killed and Peter was imprisoned. Such a young man could not face such perils unless he has a strong true faith and confidence in what he saw, heard and bore witness to.

St. Mark preached in Egypt, Libya, Cyprus, some countries in Asia, Rome and other European countries such as Lebanon, Syria, Antioch and Cyprus. He reached Paphos, Pamphylia, Rome, Colossi, Venice and Aquila. Tradition in Lebanon states that St. Mark was one of the first who evangelized there.

III. In Antioch

The Book of the Acts of the Apostles says that in Antioch, “As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said: Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. And when they arrived in Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. They also had John (the second name for St. Mark) as their assistant”(Acts 13:2-5).

This means that he evangelized in Antioch at first. Their service was successful. Then he accompanied Paul and Barnabas.

IV. To The Ends Of The Earth

He was a zealot young man, kindled with enthusiasm and jealousy in spite of his slim and weak body. The Lord Himself mended that weakness in his life.

St. Mark and Paul sailed from Antioch to Salamis. They sailed to Cyprus. When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God there. When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they helped the proconsul Sergius to believe but Elymas the magician withstood them, seeking to turn away the proconsul from the faith.

Then he went to Perga in Pamphylia in Asia Minor, a swampy place where diseases spread. Some believe that he was taken ill with severe fever and he was unable to continue his service.

He went back to Jerusalem evangelizing and preaching and in spite of the difficulties that surrounded him, he was sincere in his work. He attended the first ecumenical council in AD 50. He heard the apostles’ opinion and shared with them their rejoice and joy as the nations received faith. He was the first to preach the nations in Cyprus, with Barnabas.

On his second journey, Paul took Silas with him and refused to take Mark. But Barnabas who was older than Paul and Mark was sure of Mark’s sincerity, zeal and love, so he insisted that Mark should go with them. The two apostles separated and Barnabas took Mark with him to Cyprus, while Paul and Silas went to Asia Minor.

After the death of Barnabas the apostle, Mark stayed in Cyprus to strengthen the churches with the grace of God.

V. In Pentapolis (The Five Cities in North Africa)

After the death of Barnabas the apostle, St. Mark was sent by the Holy Spirit to preach the word of God in Cyrene, his birthplace in AD 50.

The gospel was known there through some believers who attended the miracle on the day of Pentecost and believed after listening to the sermon delivered by Peter. People of all nations attended from Egypt and the regions of Libya near Cyrene (Acts 2:10).

Those people helped St. Mark in his service and he established a church for them.

VI. The Light of Faith in the Land of Egypt

The Lord who blessed the people of Egypt sent us St. Mark the apostle. When St. Mark came to Alexandria he prayed to the Lord to help him in his mission. And there at the shoemaker’s shop, he sat. He was very tired and exhausted. He carried no rod, no purse, no bag no sandals but his heart was filled with faith, which is the greatest gift.

Drops of sweat began to water the new tree, which St. Mark planted in Egypt. He stayed with Anianus who received faith when St. Mark performed a miraculous deed to him. Anianus became the first Bishop of the church of Egypt. St. Mark stayed in Egypt for ten years then he left for Asia and Europe to preach the word of God there. Then he came back to Egypt to water his dear plant with his precious blood.

VII. The Lamp Gives Brighter Light

St. Mark left Alexandria for Pentapolis about AD 65 in North Africa (now Libya and Tunisia) to visit the churches there. On his way to Pentapolis he visited Ancient Cairo (Babylon) and some towns in Upper Egypt. He received a letter from St. Paul calling him to go to Rome to help him in his preaching especially after he had known of his sincere service in Egypt and Africa.

VIII. St. Mark in Rome

It is well known that St. Mark was one of those who laid the foundations of the Church of Rome, and his name is mentioned in the epistle to the Colossians and the epistle to the Philippians, which were written by St. Paul.

IX. In Venice

There is evidence that St. Mark not only went to Rome but he also went to Venice where he established its church. After his death, his head was buried in a big Cathedral bearing his name. It was St. Mark who preached them, saved them from darkness and brought them to light as the tradition states.

X. Profitable for the Ministry

Paul the apostle himself bore witness to St. Mark, in his epistle to Timothy when he was the apostle of the nations. He said: "He (Mark) is profitable to me for the ministry" (2 Timothy 4:11).

He also sent the Colossians letters of recommendations so that they might receive him and welcome him when he came to them. We see now that St. Mark evangelized in Asia (Colossi), Europe (Rome and Venice), Africa (Egypt and Libya), Cyprus, Lebanon and Syria.

XI. Before The Lamp Is Put Out

Mark stayed with Paul for a long time. He helped the mighty Paul till he (Paul) attained the crown of martyrdom in AD 67 together with Peter the apostle. Now Mark became a man, of experience, owing to the pains he suffered, and the power he obtained from the Lord Himself and His pure apostles. Now, it was time for Mark, that bright lamp, to reflect his last light to the world through his martyrdom.

St. Mark was happy to go back to Alexandria. He saw that faith was flourishing and the church was growing, but he realized that he would not escape from the angry people who rose against him. The angry crowds entered the church when he was praying on Ester Sunday. They tied his feet to a strong horse that dragged him through the streets of Alexandria, and then they put him in prison. At last he attained the crown of martyrdom while his face was bleeding and his flesh was scattered, and in this way one of the greatest churches of the Christian world was dedicated. He preached truth and light and in the end became a martyr.

XII. His Most Important Works

- ❖ In Rome, he wrote the first Gospel (It is said that he wrote his Gospel in Egypt). In his Gospel he was an eyewitness of the miraculous deeds of the Lord and His crucifixion and resurrection.
- ❖ He wrote the first Liturgy and handed it to Anianus and he used it in his prayers. St. Cyril the Pillar of Religion developed it and it is now what we call the Liturgy of St. Cyril.
- ❖ He established the first Theological Christian School in the world, to be a source of light and knowledge and to establish the Christian principles thus opposing the Pagan School of Alexandria established by Ptolemy.
- ❖ He ordained Anianus as the first bishop of the See of Alexandria which played a vital role in the history of the Christian world.

XIII. The Role of the See of St. Mark in the World

It is the See of St. Mark that:

- ❖ Resisted the Jewish Materialism by its internal spiritual life and its interpretative contemplative approach of the Holy Scriptures, which was against literalism.
- ❖ Resisted the Greek Pagan Philosophies by the Christian philosophy. This was due to the efforts of the teachers of the Theological School of Alexandria such as Clement of Alexandria.
- ❖ Resisted the heresies and confirmed the Christian Creed. It was the Coptic Bishops that put the Christian dogmas in their coned forms, and put the Orthodox. Creed and resisted heresies.
- ❖ Stood firm in faith during persecutions. The church of Alexandria gave the world the greatest number of martyrs where many were killed by the hands of persecutors. The See of Alexandria was the rock on which the hands of persecutors lost power. Pains became more severe after the Schism in the church and the interference of the emperors in the church policy as they desired to force people to believe in their strange beliefs.
- ❖ Established monasticism. St. Anthony the Great (the Egyptian) was the founder of monasticism. Monasticism spread all over the world and many people became his disciples and adopted his approach. Of those we have Helareon of Palestine, Augustine of Africa and Arsanus of Greece.
- ❖ Evangelized in Africa, Europe, and Ireland by sending Egyptian monks and bishops to those countries. The name of St. Mark will remain a great sign of a great See established by a great evangelist.

Applications:

- ❖ Draw a picture of St. Mark.
- ❖ Write a brief summary of the Life of St. Mark.
- ❖ Write an essay about the first church that he established.

Exercises:

- ❖ Contemplate how the Evangelist lived and how he devoted his life to the Lord and how he loved preaching and imitating Him.

Week 3 - Christ Imparts Faith to the Two Disciples of Emmaus

Objective:

- ❖ How can we have Jesus as our friend in our daily life?

References:

- ❖ The Meeting of Emmaus - Mar Mina Church, Shubra.

Memory Verse:

“Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see” (Luke 10:24).

Lesson Outline:

I. On The Way To Emmaus

The following conversation took place:

- ❖ What is this conversation, which you are holding with each other as you walk and why are you looking sad?
- ❖ Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?
- ❖ What things?
- ❖ Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers; delivered Him up to be condemned to death, and crucified Him. It is now the third day since this happened. Moreover some women of our company amazed us by saying that He is alive.
- ❖ O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer things and enter into this glory

This conversation took place between Jesus and two disciples on the way between Jerusalem and Emmaus in the morning of the Resurrection. Jesus draw near and went with them and spoke to them but their eyes were kept from recognizing Him. He blamed them and reproached them because they did not understand the words of God and the words of the prophets about Christ. They had to believe in the Scriptures because if they believed in the Scriptures, their eyes would open, their sadness would be no more and their grief would turn into joy.

II. Their Eyes Were Opened

- ❖ Jesus went in to stay with two disciples of Emmaus. When He sat at table with them, He took bread and blessed, and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized Him and dullness of the heart was removed.
- ❖ Dullness of disbelief, and dullness of sadness were no more. Suspicion and anxiety turned into faith and confidence in Resurrection and turned sadness into joy and hope of triumph over death. Jesus still cares for the weak soul that is perplexed, and strengthens its weak faith and stays with it till the end to encourage it and kindles its heart with hope.
- ❖ Jesus Christ vanished out of their sight and Cleopas said to the other disciple: “Did not our hearts

burn with us while He talked to us on the road, while He opened to us the Scripture.”

- ❖ Jesus’ support to the believers kindles their heart with love, and the word of God gives light to their spiritual senses and fills them with enlightenment, understanding and zeal so they become fervent in spirit.

III. Christ Accompanies Us In The Journey Of Life

In our life journey, we are in direct need of Christ as a friend as it is He who strengthens our faith and effort.

Christ in whom we believe is the Living God who rose from the dead and He still lives with us and accompanies us through all the ages and generations according to His promise: “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” This fact fades sometimes and we do not recognize it sometimes as what happened with the two disciples of Emmaus.

IV. How Can We See Jesus?

A. Desire of God

It is we that should always discover the desire of God and His will in our life. We see His power in His creation and understand His purpose in salvation through His only begotten Son. Through weakness (the cross), He revealed what was greater than power. The two disciples of Emmaus could not recognize this deep meaning and we ourselves are often slow at understanding the purpose of God and His wonders and His miraculous deeds in our daily life.

B. The Scriptures are at hand

Jesus explained the scriptures to the two disciples of Emmaus. He facilitated the difficult matters in their life. When we are unable to understand the purpose of God we have to resort to the scriptures and the attitudes of His holy men and apply them in the matters of our life.

C. Receiving the Holy Communion

Perfect enlightenment often comes to us when we receive the Holy Body of the Lord and His Blood and we all become one mind and one heart: “But we have the mind of Christ.” Let our purpose be in harmony with the purpose of God. We have to realize that what sometimes seems to be evil and weakness is what is good for us.

Receiving communion, complete preparedness, long prayers and continuous worship establish knowledge of the purpose of God in the life of a believer.

Questions:

- ❖ Give the real meaning of these words, which were mentioned in the story: Slow of heart to believe. Their eyes were kept from recognizing Him. Our hearts burnt within us.
- ❖ Give examples of situations in which our faith becomes weak and suggest how can we strengthen our faith.

Applications:

- ❖ Always remember the name of Jesus and pray to Him so that He may be with you in your prayers, and in your studies. Remember Him when you eat, when you play and when you sleep.
- ❖ Make a wall Chart about the two disciples of Emmaus: before their eyes were opened and after recognizing the Lord who walked with them.

Week 4 - St. John the Beloved

Objective:

- ❖ To contemplate the life and the struggle of St. John.

Memory Verse:

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

Introduction:

I. His Name

St. John was a native of Bethsaida on the Sea of Galilee. He was the younger of the two sons of Zebedee and Salome, St. James being his elder brother. St. Athanasius said that “John the Theologos” was named Boanerges - son of thunder - for his high rank, voice, and his glorious teachings. In Hebrew, John means God is gracious.

Lesson Outline:

I. His Early Years

In the Gospel of Mark (Mark 1:20), it is indicated that St. John came from a well-to-do family. His mother, Salome, was one of those women who served our Master with money and gifts necessary to sustain His ministry. Yet John, for all intents and purposes, was not impressed by his social rank or his family’s honor. We instead find him obedient to the Jewish tradition of adopting a trade. He was a fisherman, guarding against the “evil days” of Talmudic admonitions.

He was also a disciple of St. John the Baptist and was a witness when the forerunner cried, “Behold the Lamb of God.” At the age of 25, Jesus called John to Him. John then left the work of his father to join our Savior on the path of glory.

II. His Place In Gospel Events

After receiving the call of Christ, St. John and St. Peter became close companions. He and Peter were the first to go to the empty tomb of Jesus in confirmation of Mary Magdalene’s good news. And previous to this, he was witness to the healing of Jairus’ daughter and saw the transfiguration of our Lord at the Garden of Gethsemane along with Peter and James.

St. John was deeply loved by Jesus, and he has at different times been surnamed Beloved, Apostle, Disciple, Divine, Revealer, and Pure.

At the Last Supper, it was he who was intimate enough with our Lord to feel comfortable resting his head on His bosom. And without fear, he followed his Master until crucifixion, being appointed by Jesus to care for His Mother. Further, John was the first to recognize the Risen Lord at the Tiberius River.

St. John authored the fourth of the Gospels, three Epistles, and his Divine Revelation. He emphasizes such spiritual concepts as the bread and the water of life, the good shepherd, the new birth, the Incarnation, and the existence of the world from the beginning. He was also very selective

in the miracles he chose to record, but they surpass the rest in depth, specialty of application, and fullness of meaning.

St. John recorded seven miracles of our Lord Jesus Christ. Only one, the multiplication of the loaves is included in the other Gospels. The other six are the changing of water into wine, the healing of the centurion's son at a distance, the curing of the man lame for 38 years, giving sight to the man born blind, the restoration of Lazarus, and the draught of fish on the Sea of Tiberius after the Resurrection. These miracles demonstrate a higher display of Divine power and command over the ordinary laws and course of nature.

III. His Priestly Mission

Church tradition teaches us that St. John did not formally begin his ministry until the departure of the Mother of God, St. Mary. After her assumption, he went to Ephesus in Asia Minor and oversaw the Christian community. His sermons were characterized by their loving nature, and he strengthened the souls of many in the face of imminent persecution.

He found himself in discord with the Roman Emperor, Domitian, who ordered that St. John be boiled in oil. But by the grace of God the Father, St. John came through this test without injury of any kind. It was then that the infuriated despot banished him to Patmos.

On Patmos (a small, rocky, almost uninhabited island), St. John received his Revelation of the last days. After 18 months, he was allowed to return from his exile during the brief but tolerant reign of the Emperor Nerva.

IV. His Martyrdom

St. John died peacefully in Ephesus during the reign of Trajan at the age of 100. He had asked his disciples to prepare his burial site beforehand. This done, he prayed to Christ, giving thanks and reposed himself awaiting resurrection. It was not in death, but rather in life that he obtained martyrdom for his equality to the other disciples in his virginity and holiness.

❖ The Coptic Orthodox Church commemorates St. John on the 4th of Tuba.

Applications:

- ❖ Find the messages of love in St. John's epistles.
- ❖ Show love and kindness to the elders, as St. John took care of St. Mary.

Week 5 - The Book of Revelation (I)

Objective:

- ❖ Overview of the book of Revelation.
- ❖ All the prophecies are hidden and no body knows the exact times.
- ❖ The description of Heaven.

Memory Verse:

“To him that overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with my Father on His throne” (Revelation 3:21).

References:

- ❖ The book of Revelation / Fr. Tadros Y. Malati

Introduction:

Many people have misused this book in propagating wild theories. This is a lesson on how we read this book and what it means to us.

I. Importance Of The Book

The Bible starts with Genesis (where Man was cast out of paradise) and ends with Revelation (where doors are opened in heaven and believers inherit eternal paradise in new Jerusalem).

It is the book we find hope, victory, praise, and heaven. You start learning heaven’s language “praise” on earth.

II. Author, Place And Time

The author is St. John, the evangelist. He was the brother of James, and author of the gospel of John and three epistles.

It is written in a small island named Patmos (Revelation 1:9) 25 miles away from Asia Minor (Turkey).

The majority sees that it is written in AD 95.

III. The Unique Nature Of The Book

Revelation is certainly different from other books of the New Testament. Unfortunately, this has caused some people to shy away from the book; or on the other hand, to misuse it in propagating wild theories.

The word “revelation” (apokalupsis in Greek) means “an uncovering” or “unveiling.”

IV. The Difficulty In Understanding The Book

It is a prophetic book. It is the only prophetic book in the New Testament. It prophesizes on spiritual and heavenly facts that cannot be expressed with a human language. That is why it came in numbers, symbols, and colors.

If we knew the exact times we will be lazy and if we were not informed of what is going to happen, as persecution, we can fall in distress “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near” (Revelation 1:3).

V. Key Verse

“These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful” (Revelation 17:14).

Lesson Outline:

I. Vision Of Christ Among The Lampstands (Revelation 1:9-20)

- ❖ Clothed with a garment down to the foot.
- ❖ His head and His hair were white like wool, as white as snow.
- ❖ His eyes were as a flame of fire.
- ❖ His feet like fine brass, as if they were burned in a furnace.
- ❖ His voice as the sound of many waters.
- ❖ He had in His right hand seven stars.
- ❖ Out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was as the sun shines in His strength.

II. Letters To The Seven Churches (Revelation 2:1-3:22)

“He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says unto the churches”

A. The church at Ephesus (Revelation 2:1-7)

- ❖ I know your works, and your labor, and your patience.
- ❖ Nevertheless I have somewhat against you, because you have left your first love.

B. The church at Smyrna (Revelation 2:8-11)

- ❖ I know your works, and tribulation, and poverty, but you are rich.
- ❖ The devil shall cast some of you into prison.
- ❖ Be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life.

C. The church at Pergamos (Revelation 2:12-17)

- ❖ I know your works, and where you dwell, even where Satan’s seat is and you hold fast to My name.
- ❖ But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.

D. The church at Thyatira (Revelation 2:18-29)

- ❖ I know your works, and charity, and service, and faith, and your patience, and your works.
- ❖ You allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.

E. The church at Sardis (Revelation 3:1-6)

- ❖ I have not found your works perfect before God.
- ❖ If therefore you shall not watch, I will come on you as a thief, and you shall not know what hour I will come upon you.

- ❖ Few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments;

F. The church at Philadelphia (Revelation 3:7-13)

- ❖ I have set before you an open door.
- ❖ Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.

G, The church at Laodicea (Revelation 3:14-22)

- ❖ You are neither cold nor hot, I could wish you were cold or hot.
- ❖ I will vomit you out of my mouth.
- ❖ I stand at the door, and knock, if any one hears My voice, and opens the door, I will come in to him, and I will supper with him and he with Me.

Week 6 - The Book of Revelation (II)

Lesson Outline:

I. The throne scene (Revelation 4:1-5:11)

- ❖ God on the throne (Revelation 4:1-11).
- ❖ Twenty-four priests.
- ❖ Lightning and thunder out of the throne.
- ❖ Four Heavenly creatures (All eyes, 6 wings-Lion, calf, man, flying eagle).
- ❖ The Lamb prevailed to open the seven-sealed scroll (Revelation 5:1-14).

II. The Opening Of The Seven Seals (Revelation 6:1-8:1)

1) First seal: **The white horse and its rider (Revelation 6:1-2)**

- ❖ These are the apostles and preachers of the Bible, victorious over the devil.

2) Second seal: **The red horse and its rider (Revelation 6:3-4)**

- ❖ Wars and prosecution.

3) Third seal: **The black horse and its rider (Revelation 6:5-6)**

- ❖ Famine (Heretics).

4) Fourth seal: **The pale (green) horse and its rider (Revelation 6:7-8)**

- ❖ Death and antichrist

5) Fifth seal: **The martyrs under the altar (Revelation 6:9-11)**

6) Sixth seal: **Cataclysmic disturbances (Revelation 6:12-17) - before antichrist.**

- ❖ Great earthquake, sun became black, moon became as blood; stars of heaven fell unto the earth, heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.
- ❖ The kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb".

7) Seventh seal: **Silence in heaven for half an hour (Revelation 8:1)**

- ❖ Beginning of rest.

III. The Sounding Of Seven Trumpets (Revelation 8:2-11:19)

- ❖ First trumpet: Hail and fire, third of vegetation destroyed (Revelation 8:7) God's warning to Man.
- ❖ Second trumpet: Third of sea creatures and ships destroyed (Revelation 8:8-9).
- ❖ Third trumpet: A great star fell, third of rivers and springs become bitter (Revelation 8:10-11).
- ❖ Fourth trumpet: Third of sun, moon, and stars struck, affecting day and night (Revelation 8:12).
- ❖ Fifth trumpet (first woe): Locusts from the bottomless pit, sent to torment men (Revelation 9:1-12). Period before antichrist.

- ❖ Sixth trumpet (second woe): Four angels with an army of two hundred million, killing a third of mankind (Revelation 9:13-21).
- ❖ Another interlude (Revelation 10:1-11:14).
 - a) The angel with the little book (Revelation 10:1-11): Pain of church in antichrist period.
 - b) The two witnesses (Revelation 11:1-13): Elijah and Enoch will be killed, body left in streets for 3½ days and then resurrect.
- ❖ Seventh trumpet (third woe): The victory of Christ and His kingdom proclaimed (Revelation 11:14-19).

IV. The Great Conflict (Revelation 12:1-14:20)

- ❖ A woman clothed with the sun, the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: the church.
- ❖ Red dragon: The antichrist.
- ❖ And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceived the whole world; he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

V. The Seven Bowls Of Wrath (Revelation 15:1-16:21)

- ❖ “And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvelous are your works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are your ways, your King of saints”.
- ❖ God does this out of love to let people repent.

VI. The Fall Of Babylon, The Harlot (Revelation 17:1-19:10)

- ❖ The fall of Babylon the great proclaimed and mourned (Revelation 18:1-24): The Devil is defeated.
- ❖ The exaltation in heaven over the fall of the great harlot (Revelation 19:1-5).

VII. The New Jerusalem Described

- ❖ God with His people (Revelation 21:1-8).
- ❖ The New Jerusalem.

VIII. Conclusion (Revelation 22:6-21)

- ❖ The time is near, do not seal up the book (Revelation 22:6-11).
- ❖ The testimony of Jesus, the Spirit, and the bride (Revelation 22:12-17).
- ❖ Warning not to tamper with the book, and closing prayers (Revelation 22:18-21).

There are many things in the book of Revelation that are not completely understood yet. However, the day of anyone's death is actually the end of life, which could come at any minute and any time. Therefore, we should always be ready for the end of our life and the second coming of the Lord.

Applications:

- ❖ Search for the similarities between the book of Daniel and the book of Revelation.
- ❖ Read an explanation to the book of Revelation written by one of the fathers of the church.

Week 7 - The Holy Spirit is at Work with US

Prayer:

- ❖ Holy Spirit of God let my whole life be yours. Grant me the spirit of submission and repentance. Let my tears be pure and guide me so that I may not be alone in the wilderness of this world that is full of thorns and do not leave me in the middle of the road.
- ❖ I need your kind comfort and acceptable intercession, and your precious instructions. O King of life, I promise that I will worship You and obey your commandments all my life.
- ❖ Holy Father receive my soul, my life and my destiny.
- ❖ Holy Son, dwell in my heart.
- ❖ Holy Spirit, sanctify my body which is filled with sin and purify me of the defilement of both body and soul and grant me the spiritual life so that I may walk in the way of the Spirit and not complete the lust of the flesh.

Objective:

- ❖ The work of the Holy Spirit in the believers.

References

- ❖ The Holy Spirit and His work with the Soul / Fr. Matta Al Miskin.
- ❖ The Holy Spirit between the New Birth and the Continuous Renewal / St. George Church, Sporting.

Memory Verse:

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

Introduction:

I. Points Of Resemblance From Real Life

The fathers likened the work of the Holy Spirit in the soul to a treasure inside porcelain vessel: the vessel is our thick body. It is like a porous stone or a sponge filled with water and when you put it in your hand the water comes out of it spontaneously; the same is with the grace of the Holy Spirit when united with the believer; it fills his mind, thoughts and life. Since the body without a soul is dead, so man without the work of the Holy Spirit is dead.

There are several other similes that befit the secret work of the Holy Spirit and His support to the human soul. The following are examples:

Oil in the lamp is like the Holy Spirit that gives light to the soul. The threads of a textile and vertical lines of which are weak but when interwoven with the horizontal strong bright lines strengthen the textile and its good quality. Fire makes iron easy to shape and in the same manner the work of the Holy Spirit purifies the flesh.

Lesson Outline:

I. He Will Reprove Us Of Sin

As a woman lights her house with a lamp to search for the lost coin, thus the Holy Spirit reproves the repentant, and awakens their conscience. When Peter delivered his fluent speech the Holy Spirit pierced the hearts of the audience and those who crucified Christ was among them and when they heard it they were convicted by their own conscience.

“Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles: Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus, ask for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:37, 38).

The Holy Spirit give man hope and encourages him to practice the work of repentance so he rejoices in fasting, prayers and tears.

But if man resists the work of the Holy Spirit, repentance become impossible and salvation cannot be attained. He who blasphemes the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. Blasphemy means that man insists on resisting the work of the Holy Spirit and refusing repentance altogether, and adopting a sharp stand against the work of God as Ananias, Caiaphas and Judas Iscariot did.

II. He Sanctifies Us

The Holy Spirit is the good precious treasure and it is He that sanctifies the repentants and washes them then prepares them to become good vessels filled with virtues and gifts.

“But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:11).

In baptism we put on a new dress and the Holy Spirit helps us to keep that dress always new, clean and pure.

III. The Process Of Sanctification Means Continuous Struggle

A. To attain virtues

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control” (Galatians 5:22).

B. To attain gifts

“And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues...” (1Corinthians 12:28).

IV. He Guides

The Holy Spirit always gives enlightenment. No one knows your thoughts but yourself as the soul of man knows man and the Spirit of God knows the works of God and guide us to truth, all truth.

He reminds us of the words of Christ in the time when we need His guidance. This guide dwells in us and gives us advice.

“But the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you; and His anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie, just as it has taught you, abide in Him” (1 John 2:17).

The Spirit guided the apostles and the disciples and the martyrs during persecutions and they spoke and bore witness before governors, rulers, and tyrants and they were never weak and they never refrained from bearing witness and Jesus gave a promise saying: “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things” (John 14:26).

V. He Comforts Us

When the soul settles and rejoices with the work of the Holy Spirit in her, she becomes like a tree planted by streams of water that yields delightful fruit. The Holy Spirit gives her peace and rejoice so that grief are no more, toil appeals to her and the Lord fills our life with everlasting love and grants us good things. The joys of the world do not please the soul that was created in the image of God. The soul of a believer rejoices only in the Lord.

VI. The Spirit Intercedes For Us

This Greek word, “Paraclete” is composed of two syllables: “Para” meaning beside, and “clete” meaning the accused person in a court of law; meaning in general the defender or lawyer.

The Holy Spirit then defends us and intercedes for us and stands by us in the Divine Court of Justice, therefore He is our only Comforter and perpetual intercessor.

“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words” (Romans 8:26).

VII. He Sanctifies Us

We said that the work of the Holy Spirit in the soul is like the work of fire in flesh. He prints His mark in the flesh and His mark cannot be erased. This happens in the Mystery of Confirmation where man as a whole, body, thought, self-mind, and heart becomes the Holy Spirit’s possession. It is the fiery Spirit that prints the mark of king Christ in us.

“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were brought with a price. So glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20).

“Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? If any one destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and that temple you are” (1 Corinthians 3:16,17).

VIII. A Situation

When sin wages war against you and you hear the voice of the Holy Spirit shout in your heart and guide you, what will you do?

- ❖ Will you try to suppress the Divine Voice?
- ❖ Will you be indifferent?
- ❖ Will you be in favor with sin?
- ❖ Or will you be in favor with the Spirit, subdue yourself to Him and offer true repentance?

Applications:

From the Prayer Book, study by heart the third hour passages as they are all about the Holy Spirit.

Obey the Lord and follow His commandments. Seek the effectiveness of the Holy Spirit in your prayers all the time. When you live for truth, the flame of the Holy Spirit will move your heart. When

you love the commandment of the Lord Jesus Christ, your heart will be kindled with the fire of the Spirit.

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: Many Gifts And One Aim

Week 3: Nehemiah The Zealot (I)

Week 4: Nehemiah The Zealot (II)

Week 2 - Many Gifts And One Aim

Objective:

- ❖ To be acquainted with my gifts (talents) and my duty.

References:

- ❖ The Gifts of the Church.

Memory Verse:

“For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body. Jews or Greeks, slaves or free and all were made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:13).

Lesson Outline:

I. Like The Body And Its Members

One day the members of the body felt that they are not satisfied with their work. They do the same work all the time; the feet walk; the eyes see, the ears hear, the arms and hands hold things. All the other members of the body have functions. They all decided not to work and each member wanted to find a different work to do. The leg said: I want to be a hand so that I may have a higher position. I was always low and I always walked on the ground.

The hand said: And I also no more desire to do what I am used to doing. I always hold things and put food into the mouth, and write the homework and letters. I work all the time and I need rest. The ear said: I like to be an eye. I prefer seeing to hearing. I do not desire to hear any more.

All the members of the body began to talk in this way. Each member desired to do another job.

But the hand could not walk and the leg could not write. The ear made an attempt to see and the eye tried to smell flowers and breathe the air, but each member could not perform the others member's function.

Each member realized that he has an important role to do and each member could not live without the help of the other members, so all the members performed their original functions once more and they were all happy with their work (Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-26).

II. The Body Of Christ

St. Paul says that we are all members of the one Body of Christ. When we were little children, the priest baptized us and we became members of the One Body of Christ, and each one of us received the gifts of the Holy Spirit through the Sacrament of Confirmation.

We are then members in the church, which is the Body of Christ, and each member in the church attains certain gifts as there are several kinds of spiritual gifts and we receive these gifts from the Holy Spirit. These gifts are given to us to perform different services in the name of Christ. The Lord gives us special power to serve Him in the church and in the world. When anyone of us makes use of his gifts in his service, he gives evidence to show that the Holy Spirit exists in his life for the benefit of all people.

III. Using Gifts In The Church

The church is responsible for announcing the attributes of Christ and bearing witness to Him by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is at work in the believers through the different gifts they have such as; driving out demons, healing the sick, teaching, caring for building up the Body of Christ and supporting the church to bear true witness to the Lord. These gifts and miraculous deeds do not depend on men's intelligence or his personal abilities, but they are gifts that express the grace of God, his power, his mercy and goodness. The Lord gives them, according to His will, to whom He desires to give so that His name be glorified in His church all the time.

IV. Kinds Of Gifts

When we read the epistle to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 12:4-30), we find many kinds of gifts. These we shall discuss in brief and we shall refer to the function of each:

A. The gift of speaking God's message

This gift encloses the ability to speak in foreign tongues. Speaking in tongues was often accompanied by the gift of translation, which enabled the person to translate the message given to him by the Holy Spirit into other languages.

B. The gift of prophecy and the gift of teaching

These two gifts are concerned with teaching, explaining and elucidating the purpose of God and announcing his Divine sacraments, but these need inspiration and being acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to instruct us for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 3:15).

C. Gifts of administration

Under this title we have the gifts of administrating church affairs. These are given to patriarchs, bishops and priests. The gift of service is given to deacons who are the arms and eyes of bishops.

There are gifts that announce the glory of God to strengthen the believers and raise their spirit such as the gifts of driving out demons (performing miracles) and healing diseases.

St. Paul gathered all these gifts in these words "For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit. To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gift of healing by the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another diverse kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues. But all these works that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will" (1 Corinthians 12:8-11).

V. To Make Use Of The Gifts Is To Express Love

As all these gifts aim at our serving one another to build up the Body of Christ, these gifts, when they work in harmony, and through their conformity and connection, they play the role performed by the unity of the eye, the hand, the leg and the ear. In this the apostle says: "From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplication, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, makes increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love" (Ephesians 4:16).

So the different gifts by which we serve one another are an expression of love and "love" means that each one of us should use his gifts to serve others.

VI. Deviation In Using Gifts

Those who have gifts may be haughty. A believer who has attained a gift may become haughty and proud; this usually happens when man lives for himself and forgets that God has given him that gift not to glorify him but it is God alone that is to be glorified through his gifts. The Holy Spirit often gets the gift back from the haughty whose salvation in this case becomes very difficult unless he humbles himself and serves the believers with complete sincerity and contrition as the Lord Jesus washed the feet of His disciples and He did not pride Himself upon doing that although He is the Holy who deserves all glory and honor.

The second deviation lies in disorder and contradiction, as that who has the gift of teaching is not satisfied with it and desires to have the gift of administration and so on. St. Paul the apostle in his comment on these cases said: “If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body (Inferiority complex), “that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? (Desire for authority and looking down upon the gifts of others). But as it is, God arranged the organs in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single organ, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body” (1 Corinthians 12:5-20).

Pessimism, laziness and lack of diligence are examples of these deviations. This happens to those whose talents are few who desire to appear or who envy those who have many talents, although the body has small organs and big organs, hidden organs and visible organs... St. Paul said: “God has so composed the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior part” (1 Corinthians 12:24).

VII. What Should I Do With My Gifts?

Each believer should be acquainted with his/her spiritual and personal gifts, which the Lord has granted him/her. So everyone should examine himself so as to define his activities with the help of his father of confession, his spiritual guides and the sincere believers who work with him. He has to thank God for what he has taken and acquired and he must not think of other people's gifts or of imitating others. He has to thank the Lord and request Him to polish the gifts He has given him however few they are. He has also to make use of his gifts to serve the society and not to be selfish but “that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ, and individually members of it” (1 Corinthians 12:35-27).

I know a gifted boy who tries to make use of his gift of drawing. He decided to draw a picture of the Lord Christ and the saints. When you look at the pictures he has drawn, you have deep feelings of reverence for the spiritual meanings that the picture reflects.

Another person who cannot draw but can write, asked his friends in the class to cooperate with him to do something for those boys and girls who keep away from the church. They issued a small magazine one every three months. They wrote about the spiritual blessings of the church and Sunday school. Some wrote essays, some printed them, and others distributed the magazines between the colleagues and friends. One of the girls could not cooperate in writing as she could neither write nor draw but she could play music well. She decided to make use of that gift and she brought her musical instrument and sang hymns and melodies on Sundays. She taught some pupils and after a short time, they formed a band that played and sang the church hymns.

VIII. Know your gifts and use them

A young friend read the words of St. Paul the apostle about the spiritual gifts, then he asked: “I understood that each one of us has spiritual gifts, but I am not sure that I have any spiritual gifts. I go to Sunday school, but I do not participate in the activities of the boys and girls. I can neither draw nor write. I know nothing about music either. Sometimes I hate myself when I feel that I cannot benefit others.”

You can answer that young friend saying, “Well, my friend, I will try to help you. You will be surprised to know that the things you can do are more than the things your colleagues do. You love your friends and your friends love you. Your decent way of dealing with them helps you to solve the problems that may arouse among them. You give them a good example of Christian life and they try to follow your example. Don’t you know that meekness and love are the most important spiritual gifts? And that we, through love can bring the whole world to Christ? And that when each of us makes use of his individual gifts for serving people, he expresses his love for them in a practical way?

We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us in proportion to our faith: one gives aid with zeal, one does acts of mercy with cheerfulness, etc. Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good, and love one another with brotherly affection (Romans 12:6-10).

Questions:

- ❖ What is the function of the gifts in the church, and why is the church called the Body of Christ?
- ❖ What are the different kinds of gifts? Make use of chapter 12 of the First Epistle to the Corinthians and count these gifts.
- ❖ What distinguishes the use of gifts in the church by the holy children of God?
- ❖ How are gifts wrongly made use of?
- ❖ What is my duty towards my gifts? How can I know my gifts?

Applications:

I have to know the gifts I possess, thank God for them, and use them honestly to glorify God through my service to others.

Week 3 - Nehemiah the Zealot (I)

Objective:

- ❖ Developing the feeling of the holy zeal for the Service.

References:

- ❖ The Book of Nehemiah.
- ❖ Nehemiah / Translated by Fr. Marcos Daoud.

Memory Verse:

“Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer disgrace” (Nehemiah 2:17).

Lesson Outline:

I. The Suffering Of The People In Exile

- ❖ The people of Israel were in great trouble and shame, the wall of Jerusalem was broken down and its gates were destroyed by fire.
- ❖ When Nehemiah heard this news, he sat down, wept, and mourned for days and he continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven.
- ❖ “O Lord, I pray, please let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants who desire to fear Your name; and let Your servant prosper this day, I pray, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's cupbearer” (Nehemiah 1:11).
- ❖ (Notice his courage facing troubles of his brethren in spite of his great post and notice also that he resorted to the weapon of prayer and not to the earthy weapons).

II. The Meeting With The King

Why is your face sad, seeing you are not sick? Why should not my face be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchers, lies waste, and its gates have been destroyed by fire? “For what do you make request?” So I prayed to the God of heaven... “If it pleases the king... send me to Judah, to the city of my father's sepulchers, that I may rebuild it.” The king approved his request and supplied him with letters and timber. (Notice that Nehemiah prayed before he spoke to the King).

III. Grievous Conditions

- ❖ 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.
- ❖ (The minister must face troubles and meet with stubborn people inside the church. Remember the troubles that the Jews aroused in the face of the apostle.)
- ❖ He did not fall into despair in spite of the sad conditions outside (the buildings and the walls) and the sad conditions inside (hearts and people).

- ❖ He took courage and said to them: “Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer disgrace,” and they said, “Let us rise up and build.” So they strengthened their hands for the good work. (Notice that when a man is enthusiastic, jealous and faithful, his followers increase in number).
- ❖ He had trust in God who granted him success when he rose to build. (It is God that grants success. We have to work as hard as we can in our life, in our studies and in the spiritual, ecclesiastical, social and national domains without despair).
- ❖ Contemplate how the enemies resisted Nehemiah and how he stood firm in faith and how he carried out his message bravely (Chapter 4).

IV. Facing The Situation

- ❖ Do not fear those who resist you.
- ❖ We prayed to our God and sat guards against the enemies day and night.
- ❖ They worked with one hand and carried weapons with the other hand. (These are the attitudes of the children of God. They divide their time between studying and prayers. The Lord heard the prayer and blesses the work.)

Applications:

- ❖ Try to imagine the broken walls of Jerusalem and draw them after Nehemiah started building them.
- ❖ Draw the people who were building the walls: half of them were building and the other half were kept on guard against the enemies.
- ❖ Together with your teacher, make a study of the troubles that faced the following saints and how they overcame them: (1) Paul the apostle. (2) Athanasius the apostolic (3) St. Anthony the Great.

Conclusion:

- ❖ Learn zeal and sincerity to the church.
- ❖ Do not be afraid of troubles and take opposition into consideration.
- ❖ Stand firm in the face of these troubles by prayers and positive work not by disputes division and passive attitude.

Week 4 - Nehemiah The Zealot (II)

Objective:

- ❖ Developing the positive attitude towards facing the problems of life.

References:

- ❖ The Book of Nehemiah.
- ❖ Nehemiah / Translated by Fr Marcos Daoud.

Memory Verse:

“For the joy of the Lord is your strength “ (Nehemiah 8: 10).

Introduction:

God did not give us the Spirit of failure but He gave us the spirit of love, power, endurance, patience and guidance.

Lesson Outline:

I. Positiveness In Work

“So it was, from that time on, that half of my servants worked at construction, while the other half held the spears, the shields, the bows, and wore armor; and the leaders were behind all the house of Judah. Those who built on the wall, and those who carried burdens, loaded themselves so that with one hand they worked at construction, and with the other held a weapon. Every one of the builders had his sword girded at his side as he built. And the one who sounded the trumpet was beside me (Nehemiah 4:16-18). (Notice the persistence and insistence and hard work, which lead to success).

II. Rejecting Luxury, Selfishness And Exploiting The Post

“Moreover, from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year until the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes, twelve years, neither I nor my brothers ate the governor's provisions” (Nehemiah 5:14). (A model of leadership and shouldering responsibility that should be followed. and not exploiting the post for private interests).

III. Plots Against Nehemiah

- ❖ Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem put their heads together and plotted to destroy the great work.
- ❖ Nehemiah refused to negotiate with them saying, “I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?”
- ❖ They all wanted to frighten us thinking, “Their hands will be weakened in the work, and it will not be done. Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands” (Nehemiah 6:9).
- ❖ Should such a man as I flee? And what man such as I could go into the temple and live? I will not gain. (A model of true manhood. Manhood does not mean imitating those indifferent corrupt young men but it means determination and holding-fast to principles).

- ❖ He prayed for his enemy. This is the spirit of the Children of God.
- ❖ When the wall had been rebuilt I appointed an honest man who feared God to be in charge of it. (This is the spirit of responsibility. The best man in administration should be chosen).

IV. Prayer, Repentance And Humiliation For The Dedication Of The City Wall

- ❖ Read chapters 9 and 10 and you will find an excellent model of public repentance.
- ❖ On dedicating the wall of Jerusalem, the Levites carried cymbals and harps. The priests and the Levites performed ritual purification for themselves, the people, the gates and the city wall. They offered many sacrifices to the Lord and rejoiced because the Lord made them happy.
- ❖ How happy we are when we achieve spiritual and social success. The psalm says: “May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy.”
- ❖ He wanted them to keep away of foreign women and asked them to take Solomon as example of a man whom the foreign women led him to sin.

Applications:

- ❖ Make a wall Chart or write an essay about the virtues and aspects of heroism, which you admire in the life of Nehemiah.
- ❖ Nehemiah was a spiritual leader and an excellent administrator. Give examples to show this.

LESSONS FOR THE MONTH OF AUGUST

Week 1: The Book of Ruth

Week 2: Anger

Week 3: The Symbols of the Virgin in the Old Testament

Week 4: The Book of Joshua the Son of Sirach

Week 1 – The Book of Ruth

Objective:

- ❖ To learn and feel the importance of loving elders, respecting them and the reward of obedience.
- ❖ To understand that God accepted the Gentiles even in the Old Testament.

References:

- ❖ The Book of Ruth
- ❖ The explanation of Ruth / Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty.

Memory verse:

“Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God” (Ruth 1:16).

Introduction:

Request the students to read the Book at home the week before. Ask them about what can attract people to Christianity more: preaching or love, respect and service?

Lesson Outline:

- ❖ The best answer to this question can be found in the Book of Ruth. Note that Ruth is one of only three books in the Bible that is named after a woman (Ruth, Esther and Judith). It is the only Book named after a non-Jewish woman. She must be more than a great man or woman to deserve a place in the Holy Bible and be rewarded by becoming one of the grandmothers of our Lord Jesus.
- ❖ The story started with a famine in the Promised Land of Judah. The family went to Moab for food. Elimelech, Naomi’s husband, died. She dwelt there ten years until both her sons also died (lost all her support). Then she arose to return to Judah (to see whatever was left of her land). Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “...Go, return each to her mother’s house. The Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The Lord grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband” (Ruth 1:8) (she blessed them with the name of the Lord). “It grieves me very much for your sakes (self-denial). Orpah left but Ruth said: “...Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God” (Ruth 1:16) and she went with her.

I. What Made Ruth Cling To Her Mother-In-Law

A. Unlimited love

Pure and sincere without hypocrisy. Ruth would not have followed her if there were no love. Love is a strong magnet. Ruth must have felt it during the short time she was married to Naomi’s son.

B. Strong relationship with her creator

Naomi felt His presence all the time in her life and she passed this feeling on to her daughters-in-law. One of them (Ruth), with her free will accepted Him. She did not see Him as a carved image, but she saw His image carved in her mother-in-law and believed.

II. The Story

- ❖ They arrived at Bethlehem, and the entire city was excited because of their return. The women said, “Is this Naomi?” (Ruth 1:19) She answered sadly “I went out full, and the Lord has brought me empty...” (Ruth 1:21) Ruth went and gleaned in the field after the reapers in the field of Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech. Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said to the reapers, “The Lord be with you!” (Ruth 2:4). And they answered him, “The Lord bless you!” (Notice the greeting from Boaz to the reapers and their answer back, all blessings from the Lord.).
- ❖ Boaz said “Whose young woman is this?” (Ruth 2:5). The servant answered “It is the young Moabite woman who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab” (Ruth 2:6) Boaz called Ruth and said, “You will listen, my daughter, will you not? Do not go to glean in another field, but stay close by my young women...and when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn” (Ruth 2:8-9). (He immediately gave her all the rights of the young women in his team and not as a foreigner; he allowed her to eat from their food and drink from their jars).
- ❖ She realized it and fell on her face as a slave and asked him, “Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?” (Ruth 2:11). Boaz answered, “It has been fully reported to me, all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband...The Lord repay your work” (Ruth 2:11-12). (He did not take credit but affirmed to her that she came to the protection of the Lord Who was repaying her for her respect, obedience, love and service to her mother-in-law).
- ❖ Naomi gave her strange instructions based on the traditions: “Therefore wash yourself and anoint yourself, put on your best garment and go down to the threshing floor...uncover his feet, and lie down; and he will tell you what you should do” (Ruth 3:3-4). So, she obeyed and went down to the threshing floor and did according to all that her mother-in-law instructed her.
- ❖ Boaz recognized the tradition and said, “Blessed are you of the Lord...I will do for you all that you request, for all the people of my town know that you are a virtuous woman” (Ruth 3:10-11). (He blessed her by the name of the Lord, praised her actions and her virtues). *Note to the servant: Be prepared to answer a sudden comment from a child at this age by saying politely: “She was not a cheap girl throwing herself on him for sex, she was a virtuous woman asking for her right to have offspring in the same words she was taught by her mother-in-law, who knew the law of the Lord.”*
- ❖ Boaz did not rush to do her request. It was the honorable duty of another family member but he gave her a promise and sealed it with the name of God: “if he will perform the duty of a close relative for you--good; let him do it. But if he does not, I will, as the Lord lives!” (Ruth 3:13). He ordered her to wait and she obeyed and slept at his feet until morning. Boaz did not send her away empty-handed, he measured six ephahs (1 ephah = 3/5 bushels = 22 liters) of barley, and laid it on her and sent her to Naomi.
- ❖ Boaz searched and found the close relative, took ten men of the elders of the city as judges, and said to the relative, “Naomi...sold the piece of land which belonged to our brother Elimelech...If you will redeem it, redeem it (buy it back); but if you will not redeem it...I will” (Ruth 4:3-4) and “On the day you buy the field...you must also buy it from Ruth, the wife of the dead, to perpetuate (preserve) the name of the dead through his inheritance” (Ruth 4:5). The close relative said, “I cannot redeem it...you redeem my right of redemption for yourself (you do it)” (Ruth 4:6).

- ❖ So Boaz took Ruth for a wife; and the Lord granted that she conceives. The women said to Naomi, “Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without a close relative (Redeemer)...for your daughter-in-law, who loves you...is better to you than seven sons” (Ruth 4:14-15).

Conclusion/Questions:

- ❖ How many sons did Naomi have?
- ❖ What was the name of their father? To which tribe of the twelve did they belong?
- ❖ What is the name of Naomi’s daughters-in-law? Were they from the same tribe or foreigners?
- ❖ What do you think made them love Naomi? Who returned with her and who stayed?
- ❖ What did Ruth do to supply food to her mother-in-law after their return?
- ❖ What do you think of Boaz’s personality? The people who work for him? Why did he treat Ruth this way?
- ❖ What did Naomi instruct Ruth to do and why? How did Boaz react?
- ❖ Whose grandmother did Ruth become?

Applications:

- ❖ Love, respect and obedience especially to our elders have a reward from God.
- ❖ Search for the differences and similarities between Esther and Ruth.

Week 2 - Anger

Meditation or Prayer:

May the Lord give us the Holy anger and help us control the destructive anger.

Objective:

- ❖ To understand the reasons, roots, and masks of anger.
- ❖ To know the types of anger.
- ❖ To be able to control and handle our anger.

References:

- ❖ Exodus 32:19-20, Nehemiah 5:6, Ephesians 4:26-32, Ecclesiastes 7:9, Proverbs 19:11, Mark 11:15-16
- ❖ An article in “the power of the word” magazine by Joyce Meyer

Memory Verse:

“Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry for anger rests in the bosom of fools” (Ecclesiastes 7:9).

Introduction:

Everybody has to deal with anger from time to time. But what is the best way to handle it? To answer that question, we first must understand what anger really is. Anger is an emotion often characterized by feelings of great displeasure, indignation, hostility, wrath, and vengeance. Many times, anger is how we express our dissatisfaction with life. It is defined in the Greek language as the strongest of all passions. Anger begins with a feeling that often is expressed in words or actions. We feel something, and it causes us to say or do something

Lesson Outline:

I. Get To The Root Of The Problem

Anger is the fruit of decayed roots. One of the primary roots of anger probably stems from the family. Angry people come from angry families because they learn from their role models and perpetuate the same behavior in their own lives, eventually passing it on to their children.

II. Other Roots Of Anger

Injustice—When people mistreat us and we feel there is nothing we can do about it, we get angry because we feel it isn’t fair. As much as we would like to change the situation or the person who is treating us badly, we can’t. People can’t change people—only God can change people. So it’s best to put your energy into praying for the offender.

Strife—which is hidden, repressed anger begins with judgment or gossip, backbiting, and thinking too highly of one’s self. Strife is often exhibited in arguing, bickering, heated disagreements, and angry undercurrents.

Impatience—often produces anger when we can't get what we want when we want it. When others impede our progress or slow us down, it is easy to become impatient. Most of us struggle with impatience on a daily basis simply because of today's fast-paced world.

Abuse of any kind—sexual, physical, verbal, emotional, or mental—almost always leads to anger. All of these abuses are injustices, and injustice eventually leaves the abused feeling helpless and angry. Abuse of this kind cannot be ignored. You must deal with it and process it before you can get rid of it.

Unmet needs—can also produce anger. We all have needs that can and should **be** met by those closest to us. However, others cannot know and understand our needs unless we communicate with them. But even then they may sometimes fail to meet our needs. So the answer is to go to God with your needs and quit looking to other people.

Jealousy—Anger caused by jealousy was one of the first negative emotions mentioned in the Bible. Genesis 4 tells us that Cain killed his brother Abel because he was jealous to the point of being angry. This is one of the more extreme results of jealousy, but it serves to remind us of how dangerous jealousy can be.

Many people are afraid that someone else may get ahead of them. They think their importance in the world depends on their job or their position in the church. Jealousy causes them to try to be important in the eyes of man. If you have this problem, understand that God has you where you are now for a reason. He knows what is in your future, and **He** may have you in training for it right now. There is a big difference between being *able* and being *ready* to do a specific thing. So don't despise the days of small beginnings. Remember that we must answer to God. Our rewards come from obeying the specific callings He has placed on our lives—not from the great things we manage to accomplish as far as the world is concerned.

Other roots that lead to anger include insecurity, fear of confrontation, and a feeling of being controlled by a job or other people and their problems. I used to get mad at people who controlled me until God told me one day, "You are just as guilty as they are because you're letting them do it." We must not put excessive pressure on ourselves by making too many commitments just because we don't want to say no to someone.

III. Masks of Anger

- ❖ Sometimes we use masks to cover up something that we don't want anybody to see. If we are harboring anger, we think masking it will keep others from knowing the real us. So we hide behind a variety of masks in an attempt to trick people into thinking we're something or someone that we're not.
- ❖ People respect you more if you share your real self with them than if you try to hide everything and act like you've got it all together. After all, people can tell when something is not right. You may think you're hiding your anger, but it will eventually find a way to come out—either in voice tone, body language, or attitudes.
- ❖ Some people use the cold shoulder mask. When someone makes them angry, they may say they have forgiven them—but they become cold and show no warmth or emotion in dealing with that individual. These people live a lonely existence, because they are so afraid of being hurt that they avoid any close and meaningful relationship. This is a classic example of "choosing your pain." This kind of person chooses the pain of living an isolated, lonely life instead of working through the problem and determining to develop good friendships.

- ❖ Other people like to use the silent treatment mask. These are the folks who say they're not angry with you, yet they refuse to talk to you, or they communicate only when it is absolutely necessary usually with a grunt or nod. When people avoid being with, touching, or doing things for the individual they're angry at, they're hiding behind a mask. But this is not the answer.

IV. Face The Truth...And Choose Your Pain

- ❖ If you want the great and mighty things God has for you, you must get to the root of anger and deal with it. You must get rid of the masks and face the things that happened in your life to make you the way you are today. Admit that you can't change by yourself.
- ❖ Until the root is dealt with and removed, it will continue to produce one kind of bad fruit after another. Too often we spend our lives dealing with the bad fruit in our behavior, but we never dig deep enough to get to the root of the problem. Actually when we're faced with anger, we must choose our pain. Digging deep to take care of the bad root is painful, but it is the only lasting way to take care of the problem.
- ❖ We can either suffer positively, (doing what is right), or we can go with the devil's plan. But remember, the same devil that tempts you to follow your human feelings will later condemn you for doing it. You must decide if you want the pain that will take you into a new realm of glory, or if you're going to keep your same old pain, trying to hide it while it's rotting on the inside of you.
- ❖ Peter tells us to be well balanced and temperate, withstanding the devil at his onset (1 Peter 5:8,9). When you begin to feel anger, it's the perfect time to exercise the fruit of self-control. You may have good reason to be angry, but you must not use it as an excuse to stay that way. Instead of denying or justifying it, ask God to help you deal with it in a positive way.
- ❖ Romans 12:21 gives this good advice: *Do not let yourself be overcome by evil, but overcome (master) evil with good.* When Satan attacks you, instead of getting mad, go bless someone. Responding in a positive way is the direct opposite of what the enemy had planned, and it defeats his plan to keep you upset. It doesn't come naturally, and it isn't always easy, but "*when we do what we can do, God will do what we can't do. Do not be quick in spirit to be angry or vexed, for anger and vexation lodge in the bosom of fools*" (Ecclesiastes 7:9). If we hang onto anger, we're just being foolish. We must turn the anger—and the people who caused it—over to God and let Him take care of it. "*Vengeance is Mine, I will repay (requite), says the Lord*" (Romans 12:19). Trust God and He will take care of you and protect you. You can't change your past, but when you give it to God, He will use it to bring you a better future.

V. Is Anger a Sin?

Is all anger sin? No, but some of it is. Even God Himself has righteous anger—anger against sin, injustice, rebellion, and pettiness. Anger sometimes serves a useful purpose, so it isn't necessarily always a sin. Obviously we are going to have adverse feelings or God would not have needed to provide the fruit of self-control. Just being tempted to do something is not sin—it's when you don't resist the temptation but go ahead and do it that it becomes sin.

God sometimes allows us to feel angry so we can recognize when we are being mistreated. But even when we experience true injustices in our lives, we must not vent our anger in an improper way. We must guard against allowing anger to drag us into sin.

Ephesians 4:26,27 tells us, "When angry do not sin; do not ever let your wrath (your exasperation, your fury or indignation) last until the sun goes down. Leave no [such] room or foothold for the devil

[give no opportunity to him]. Refuse to give the devil an opportunity to get a foothold in your life through anger”.

All anger—regardless of its cause—has the same effect on our lives. It upsets us, causing us to feel pressure. Keeping anger locked inside and pretending it doesn’t exist can even be dangerous to our health. It usually doesn’t bother the person who makes us angry—it just hurts us. So we must take responsibility for our anger and learn to deal with it. Process it and bring closure to it, and that will relieve the pressure.

I have been through some rough times in my life, and for many years those experiences caused me to feel miserable. I was so mad about the abuse in my childhood that it was making me bitter and hateful. I was angry with everybody, but one day God confronted me and said, “Are you going to let that make you bitter or better?” That got my attention, and I eventually had to find a positive way to process my anger. That was a place of new beginnings for me.

When you face your anger and decide to deal with it God’s way you can overcome it. The Holy Spirit gives us the power to be stable and to walk in the fruit of the Spirit. We have the power to forgive those who do injustices in our lives and to love the unlovely.

VI. Take Steps Toward Freedom

People are born to be free—it is a gift from God. We are not to be free from responsibility but we are free to be led by the Holy Spirit. Any time our freedom is taken away or given away, we experience anger.

Are you willing to go through whatever it takes to get free...or do you want to stay in the mess you’re in for the rest of your life? If you want to be free, just start doing what God wants you to do—one step at a time—and you will eventually walk out of your messes.

When we battle anger, we must realize that we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, and against spiritual wickedness in high places (Ephesians 6:12). When Satan makes you angry, remember that he’s trying to keep you from accomplishing the will of God in your life.

St. Paul advised his disciple Timothy to “be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” (2 Timothy 4:5). This is a good advice for all of us. When we get angry, we should calm down and start doing what God has called us to do.

Applications:

- ❖ Flee from all situations that trigger your anger for the next week.
- ❖ Try to develop strategies to control your anger.

Conclusion:

You can be bitter or better - it’s up to you! If you’re mad about something, instead of letting it ruin your life, turn it into something good. Overcome evil - and anger - by praying for those who hurt and abuse you. Forgive them and be a blessing to them. It may not be easy at first, but when you make the decision and stick with it, God will take care of the rest.

Week 3 - The Symbols of the Virgin in the Old Testament

Objective:

- ❖ The value and importance of the Virgin in the church and in the Holy Bible.

References:

- ❖ The Daily Hymn of Praise.
- ❖ The Second Heaven / Anba Bemin.
- ❖ Our Lady and Queen of us all, the Holy Theotokos Saint Mary / Fr. Youssef Asaad.
- ❖ St. Mary in History, Rite and Creed / Fr. Sidaros Abdel Messeeh.
- ❖ Virgin Mary / Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty

Memory Verse:

“Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Emanuel” (Isaiah 7:14).

Introduction:

Christ is the pivot of the Old Testament. Prophets’ prophesied of incarnation and crucifixion. We shall speak of the symbols and signs of the Virgin in the Old Testament in brief. Many of the symbols of the Old Testament stand for the Virgin and refer to her order and role as she gave the Lord the dough of humanity. There were many symbols and signs that were interpreted by the fathers and understood by the following generations.

Lesson Outline:

The following is a brief presentation of the symbols of the Virgin in the Old Testament.

I. The Woman’s Seed (Genesis 3:5)

The prophecy did not say that salvation would be by a man, but it said that salvation would be by the woman’s seed and this indicates that Christ has no human father and the evidence of the virgin’s conception is clear. “He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel.”

II. Noah’s Dove (Genesis 5:11)

“The dove came back to him in the evening, and lo, in her mouth a freshly plucked olive leaf” This refers to the beautiful dove that gave birth to the Prince of Peace.

III. Jacob’s Ladder (Genesis 28:12,13)

“There was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven, and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.”

This stands for Mary as she conceived the Lord in her womb and the Lord rose on the cross and opened the heaven and muted the heavenly and the earthly into one. (In her hymn of praise the church says: You are the Ladder that Jacob saw set on the earth, the top of it reached to heaven and the angels of God are ascending and descending on it).

IV. The Bush (Exodus 3:2)

“And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush, and he looked, and lo, the bush was burning yet it was not consumed.”

This refers to Mary who bore the fire of Godhead and was not consumed and her virginity was kept. This also refers to the unity of the Lord’s Divinity and Humanity as the Lord’s Humanity is One with His Godhead without mingling, without confusion, nor alteration.

(In this, the church says in her hymn of praise: You are the bush that Moses saw burning yet not consumed and Godhead did not consume your body.)

V. The Rod of Aaron (Numbers 17:8)

“The rod of Aaron had sprouted and put forth buds, and produced blossom and it bore ripe almonds.” This refers to Mary who gave birth to the Lord Jesus at a miraculous level.

VI. Aaron’s Censor (Numbers 16:46)

“And Moses said to Aaron: Take your censor, and put fire therein from the altar, and lay incense on it”. The censor of pure gold is Virgin Mary and the ember stands for the bush that Moses saw in the wilderness, the bush was on fire. The bush refers to Blessed Mary the Mother of Light who bore the fire of Godhead in her womb for nine months without being harmed. The incense (the Godhead) is our High Priest who offered Himself as a sacrifice and an acceptable oblation on the cross, the scented fragrance rose up to the heavenly Father from Golgotha in the evening. The scented fragrance that spread is the Nativity of Christ and His Preaching to the world.

VII. The Ark of Covenant (Exodus 25:10,11)

“And you shall make an ark of acacia wood, two cubits and a half shall be its length... and you shall overlay it with pure gold, within and without shall you overlay it.”

The wood that never rots refers to her perpetual virginity, overlaying it with pure gold within and without, refers to the purity of Mary and to the fact that the Lord’s Divinity and His Humanity never part. The manna in the ark refers to Mary when she conceived Christ the heavenly manna.

VIII. The Jar of Manna (Exodus 16:33)

“And Moses said to Aaron: Take a jar, and put an omen of manna in it and place it before the Lord, to be kept throughout your generations.” Mary is the gold jar of manna. She carries the mental manna, the Bread of Life.

IX. The Rock of Horeb (Exodus 17:6)

“I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, that the people may drink”. This refers to the Virgin who gave birth to Christ in a miraculous way and Christ is the Living water and whoever drinks of it never thirsts.

X. The Prophecies of Isaiah (Isaiah 7:14)

“Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Emanuel.”

Another prophecy is, “Behold, the Lord is riding on a swift cloud and comes to Egypt” (Isaiah 19:1).

XI. The Outer Gate: Ezekiel's prophecy (Ezekiel 44:1,2)

"Then he brought me back to the outer gate of the sanctuary, which faces east; and it was shut. And he said to me: This gate shall remain shut; it shall not be opened, and no one shall enter by it; for the Lord, the God of Israel, has entered by it; therefore it shall remain shut."

This refers to the perpetual virginity of the Virgin. In the hymn of praise, the church says: "Virgin Mary is the gate that Ezekiel saw and it was shut. It shall not be opened, and no one shall enter by it; therefore it shall remain shut."

XII. Daniel's Dream (Daniel 2:34)

"As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand." The stone that was cut out by no human hand refers to Christ who was born of the Virgin, the everlasting mountain, without human seed. His kingdom will replace the fourth kingdom. This kingdom will never be destroyed and shall stand forever.

The church says: You are the mountain that Daniel saw. The stone that was cut from a mountain by no human hand and filled the whole earth is Christ.

XIII. All what is said of Zion in the Psalms of David (Psalm 49:2, 75:1, 131:10, 86:5)

Conclusion:

The Virgin was a model of the dwelling of God in man. So that Christ may not only be with us but also in us. This demands a higher level of purity and a higher standard of piety. No one could reach that level except Mary the Virgin. But we are all invited to reach that level so that we may be like Virgin Mary; a dwelling place for Christ, not in a symbolic way but in a practical way. He dwells among His people, abides in them, and become their God and we become His people and His beloved.

Applications:

- ❖ Draw all the symbols and write about how they refer to Virgin Mary.
- ❖ Read the church hymns that refer to the order of the Mother of Light and the Symbols that refer to her.
- ❖ Make a wall Chart to elucidate the symbols of the Virgin in the Old Testament and write your own contemplation on each symbol.
- ❖ Intercede with the Lord in your prayer and study some hymns that honor the Virgin.
- ❖ Practice glorifying the Virgin before her Icon in the church under the supervision of the priest, the deacons and the psalmist.

Week 4 - The Book Of Joshua The Son Of Sirach

Objective:

- ❖ To learn about the content and theme of the Book of the Wisdom of the Son of Sirach
- ❖ To learn about the church readings from this book during the holy fast and the week of Pascha.

References:

- ❖ Introduction to the Old Testament, Part II / Dr. Waheib G. Kamel.
- ❖ The second canonical books in Arabic and English.
- ❖ The Holy Pascha book.

Memory Verse:

“Fight to the death for truth and the Lord God will fight for you” (Sirach 4:28).

Introduction:

The Wisdom of the Son of Sirach is one of the canonical books that were not included in the Protestant translations of the Bible. It is a wisdom book with many similarities to Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. It can also be considered a poetic book. It was originally written in Hebrew by a wise man called Jesus the Son of Sirach during the period 246 to 221 BC. The Grandson of Jesus the son of Sirach thought that this book would be of great comfort and support to the Jews in exile in Egypt who did not know Hebrew. Therefore, he translated it into the Greek language in approximately 132 BC during the reign of Ptolomy the Seventh. A copy of this book in Hebrew was found in “Old Egypt” in one of the Jewish temples. Subsequently, this book was also translated into Latin.

Lesson Outline:

The name Jesus or Joshua means “Yahweh Saves” or “ Savior”. There are ten characters by the name of Joshua in the Old Testament. Jesus, the son of Eleazar son of Sirach, from Jerusalem used to sing the Torah. He asked for wisdom and sought her diligently from the time he was young (Sirach 51:13-22) and the Lord granted Him much wisdom.

This book contains 51 chapters, which are classified into 3 main themes.

I. Guidelines Of A Virtuous Life: Chapters 1 - 43

Contain many proverbs addressed to different groups of people including parents, sons, the rich, the poor, authorities, slaves, youth, elders, etc. They all focus on the importance of acquiring different virtues like being merciful, just, and pure. They also outline many acceptable dealings with others e.g. visiting the sick, sympathizing with the sad and depressed, avoiding swearing and lying, giving the first fruit and tithes, staying away from psychics, forgiving all people, avoiding self-pride...and many others. These chapters actually include advice for every situation a man can face during his life.

II. The Great Deeds Of The Fathers Of Israel: Chapter 44 - 50

List the fathers and prophets of Israel and enumerate their righteousness and good works. They list the zealous and courageous deeds they have done. At the end, the Son of Sirach mentions himself and the wisdom that was given to him (Sirach 50:29).

III. Prayer And Glory To God Who Gave Wisdom To The Son Of Sirach: Chapter 51

It is a closing chapter that includes a prayer and praise to the merciful God who granted him the wisdom that he asked for in his youth. He also thanks God for the purity, intelligence, steadfastness and the teaching skills that God has given him.

IV. Church Readings Of The Wisdom Of The Son Of Sirach

Many of the church readings during the holy fast and the Holy Pascha week are from this book. The following readings are read during the Holy Pascha week:

- ❖ Prime hour of Monday: Chapter 1:1-24 (All wisdom comes from the Lord, and is with Him forever).
- ❖ The eleventh hour of Monday: Chapter 1:20-30 (The root of wisdom is to fear the Lord).
- ❖ The third hour of Tuesday: Chapter 2:1-9 (My son, if you come to serve the Lord God, prepare your soul for temptation).
- ❖ The third hour of Wednesday: Chapter 22:7-18 (Whosoever teaches a fool is as one that glues a potsherd together).
- ❖ The sixth hour of Wednesday: Chapter 23:7-14 (Hear, O ye children, the discipline of the mouth: he that keeps it shall never be taken in his lips).
- ❖ The third hour of Thursday: Chapter 24:1-15 (Wisdom shall praise herself, and shall glory in the midst of her people).

Conclusion:

Wisdom is probably the last thing any youth at this age would ask for from God. We are probably continuously entangled with materialistic requests and desires that we ask God to grant us. My friend, let us stop for a minute and think of more spiritual things to ask God to grant us. He said “seek first the kingdom of God and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33).

Applications:

- ❖ Compare the similarities and differences between King Solomon and the Son of Sirach.
- ❖ Meditate on these verses which can make our faith as solid as the mustard seed.
- ❖ Consider the generations of old and ask: has anyone trusted in the Lord and been disappointed? Or has anyone persevered in the fear of the Lord and been forsaken? Or has anyone called upon him and been neglected? For the Lord is compassionate and merciful; he forgives sins and saves in time of distress (Sirach 2:10-11).

LESSON OF THE FIRST WEEK OF SEPTEMBER
Before the Coptic New Year

Week 1: Fathers of the Church

Week 1- Fathers of the Church

Objective:

- ❖ To be familiar with the heritage and Spiritual experience of our Fathers.

References:

- ❖ St. Ignatius, St. George, Sporting.
- ❖ The Roman St. Clement / Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty
- ❖ The Apostolic Fathers / Translated by Bishop Ilias Moawad, El Nur Circulars.

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)

Introduction:

In the Liturgy we remember the names of the church fathers. The Priest says, “Graciously, O Lord, remember all the Saints who have pleased You since the beginning, our holy fathers, the Patriarchs, the Prophets, the Apostles, the Preachers, the Evangelists, the Martyrs, the Confessors and all the spirits of the true believers who perfected in. their faith...”

The church remembers her fathers in every liturgy, celebrates their feasts, reads their stories from the Synaxarium and seeks their intercession. They played a heroic role in building the church and offered their life as a living model for a holy Christian life. To make the study easy, we shall divide them into categories:

- ❖ The Apostolic Fathers: They are the fathers who were contemporary with the Apostles and were their disciples. Among them was St. Ignatius, the bearer of the Divine, the Bishop of Antioch and St. Polycarp whom John appointed as Bishop of Izmir. Polycarp was tortured and in the end he gained the crown of martyrdom. St. Clement the Bishop of Rome helped St. Paul in his preaching.
- ❖ The Fathers of the Ecumenical Councils.
- ❖ Father Monks (for example: Anba Anthony the Father of the Monks, Anba Pachomius founder of the Cenobitic System).
- ❖ The Founders (The Great Teachers of the Church).

I. St. Ignatius

It is said that when he was a child, Jesus put him in the midst of the disciples as a model of meekness. When Ignatius grew up, his love for the Lord Jesus and his faith and zeal grew and he preached the name of Christ. The apostles appointed him bishop of the Church of Antioch.

A. His zeal and struggle

This father was known for his zeal for the church and the salvation of his people. He wrote letters to encourage the churches to stand firm in the Christian faith, which he saw, heard and received, from

the apostles themselves. He could, through his good reputation, attract many heathens to the Christians faith

B. His bravery and strong faith

Emperor Tragan was on his way to fight the Persians. He met Bishop Ignatius in Antioch and the following conversation took place between them

- ❖ Are you then Ignatius the Theophorus?
- ❖ I am he.
- ❖ What does your name mean?
- ❖ The bearer of the Divine.
- ❖ Don't we carry our gods to grant us victory in war, too?
- ❖ How can these idols, void of life, be called gods?
- ❖ Do you blaspheme our gods?
- ❖ O King. Let it be known to you that God is One, the Divine Trinity. The Father who created heavens and earth, the Son; Jesus Christ, was incarnate and became man to save us, and the Holy Spirit operating in us. If you believe in Him you will be saved.
- ❖ Forget these words now and do what pleases me to save yourself.
- ❖ Offer a sacrifice to my gods and you will be granted a high status and you will be the greatest among the priests.
- ❖ May the Lord increase your riches. I am the servant and priest of my Lord Jesus Christ and I offer Him a sacrifice every day.
- ❖ The king got very angry and ordered his soldiers to tie him in chains and take him to Rome where he would be thrown to the beasts in the arena to amuse the public.
- ❖ When the believers heard of that decision, they hurried to him to see him off with tears. On his way to Rome he went through Izmir where he met the Bishop of the city. The congregation of the churches in the vicinity came to him and asked for his blessing. He blessed them and wrote an epistle to them. The following are extracts from the epistle.

C. Quotations from the Epistle of Ignatius

"Let your good conduct be a teaching to the hypocrite and the wicked. With love and justice you can overcome their hatred and injustice and through patience and prayers you can overcome their slander, by being firm in faith you can overcome their unrighteousness. For Christ's sake you should endure every loss and insult. For his sake I don't worry about bonds but I prefer these bonds to all the treasures of the earth.... Remember me in your prayers so that I may live with Min. I like to stiffer for his sake so pray for me so that I may gain comfort in the House of Grace."

Before he left for Izmir he wrote the following to the Romans.

"I am tied with chains for my love for Jesus. I do not want your love for me to cause me harm. I don't like you to save me from death. If I am deprived of martyrdom now because of your love, gaining martyrdom later may be difficult. I desire martyrdom to show myself a Christian not in words but in action. Let me be food for the beasts and wild animals. I pray to God and plead that these wild animals will leave nothing of my flesh on the ground so that the remaining parts of my body may not cause suffering to anyone.

D. Bravery in martyrdom

The saint left Izmir for Rome. When he arrived in the City of Rome, the faithful surrounded him. They were pleased to see him but felt sad for his martyrdom. He stretched out his hands and blessed

them and prayed for the church. When he ended his prayer, the soldiers took him to the arena and threw him before two lions. The lions tore up his body and only his bones remained. The Christians gathered his relics and sent them to Antioch. May his blessing be with us. Amen.

E. His Sayings

“I am the wheat of God so I should be ground by the teeth of wild animals so that I may become pure bred for Christ”.

“I desire martyrdom to show myself Christian not in words but in action.”

“I am tied with chains to Jesus. No creature whether visible or invisible can separate us from Christ”.

II. St. Clement

He was born in Rome. He was one of the nobles. He completed his education and instruction in Greek. He knew Christ at the hands of St. Paul. He was contemporary with the apostles so he wrote the life history of the apostles and their struggle and what befell them at the hands of kings and governors. He preached in many cities and many people believed and received faith at his hands.

Then he was ordained a Bishop of Rome. He preached the Romans and brought many people to the faith of Christ. Clement struggled for the church not only in Rome but also in all the Dioceses in the vicinity.

A. His epistles

He wrote many epistles to preach people and establish them in faith, which he received from the apostles themselves. Once he heard about the schism that took place in the city of Corinth, He wrote the following to them.

“Modesty was your prominent virtue. You were subject to one another listening attentively to the preaching. You were keen to listen to the teaching. You used to pray for all the people forgiving one another. But now I see envy, disorder and persecution. Thus righteousness and peace are no more among you as everyone laid aside the fear of God and led the life of sin”.

B. Preaching in exile

King Tragan heard of him so he ordered him to be brought before him and the following conversation took place:

- ❖ Clement, do you still worship the crucified?
- ❖ Yes.
- ❖ Leave him and come and worship our everlasting gods.
- ❖ This will never be... These everlasting gods of yours... can they protect themselves if anyone thought of stealing and robbing them??...

The Emperor got angry and waited to torture him but he feared the people of the city so he ordered him to be sent into exile, to the Black Sea.

When he arrived at the place he found that the Christians in exile were about two thousand. They were happy to meet him. He comforted them and established them in faith. Water was a long distance away. He prayed and the Lord guided him to a rock with a spring of water. They all drank and thanked the Lord. This made all the people there believe in Christ. When the Emperor heard of what happened he sent a letter to the governor with orders to torture the saint and kill him. The governor tied his neck in an anchor and threw him into the sea. Thus he gave up his pure spirit and gained the crown of martyrdom. The blessing of his prayers be with us. Amen

Applications:

- ❖ How can we bear witness to Christ? Give quotations from the epistles of St. Ignatius.
- ❖ Which virtue do you admire in the life of St. Ignatius?
- ❖ Was St. Clement able to glorify the Lord before Emperor Tragan and in exile? Explain.
- ❖ Write an essay about St. Ignatius and St. Clement. Concentrate on the following points:
 - o The time when each one appeared and lived.
 - o The place of his service and the place of his martyrdom.
 - o One of the famous sayings of each.
 - o Draw a picture of St. Ignatius or St. Polycarp