

THE CROSS OF CHRIST

By

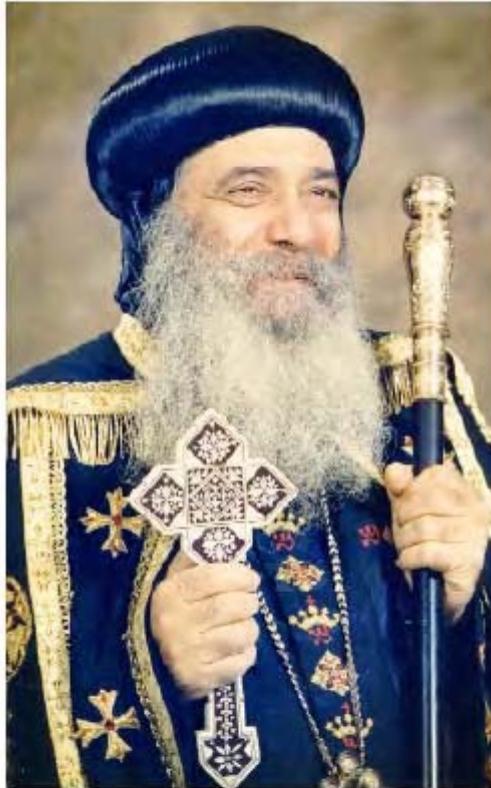
MAGED ATTIA



**Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, King of Kings and
Lord of lords**



**THE BEHOLDER OF GOD
MARK THE EVANGELIST
SAINT AND MARTYR**



*H.H. Pope Shenouda III, 117th Pope of
Alexandria and the See of St. Mark*



**His Grace Bishop Daniel
Bishop of Sydney and Affiliated Regions**

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Introduction..... 3

Preface..... 4

Chapters:

1. Why the CROSS?
2. The Sacrifice of the CROSS
3. The Joys of the CROSS
4. The Blessings of the CROSS
5. The Power of the CROSS
6. The Symbols of the CROSS
7. The Procession of the CROSS
8. The Feasts of the CROSS
9. The Carrying the CROSS
10. The Hymns for the CROSS

INTRODUCTION

By His Grace Bishop Moussa
Bishop for Youth Affairs

Why the Cross? What about the Sacrifice, Joys, Blessings and Power of the Cross? The Symbols, the Procession, the Feast of the Cross? How to carry it in our everyday life? What are the Hymns of the Cross? This book is important for every Christian. The Cross is the core of Christianity. It was the reconciliation between humanity and God. Through His Humanity, united with His Divinity our Lord could die on our behalf and through His Divinity, united with His Humanity, He could renew our spoiled nature.

Important topics covering an important subject, written in a clear and simple; Orthodox Biblical way.

May God reward our blessed son Maged Attia and benefit every reader through the prayers of our beloved Patriarch His Holiness Pope Shenouda III. Let God's grace fill our hearts.

Bishop Moussa
February 2002

PREFACE

THE CROSS OF CHRIST

At the centre of our Christian life is the sacrifice of the Cross when God the Father offered his only Son for the salvation and redemption of mankind.

What is the Cross? Is it two pieces of wood that cross each other? Is it merely the sign which we use in prayer? Is it what we wear to decorate ourselves? Is it a sign that a church uses to place over its domes? The meaning of the Cross is deeper than all this. The Cross is love...sacrifice... life.

The Cross therefore plays a critical role in the life and mission of the Church along with lives of the believers. If we are to be true Christians and follow the crucified Christ we must, “take up the Cross daily and follow Him.” (Luke 9:23). Indeed, the characteristics of being a disciple of Christ is clear, “whoever does not bear his Cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14:27).

According to Tertullian, the North African lawyer and theologian: “In all our undertakings when coming in and going out, before putting on our clothes, before bathing, when at a table, when lighting our lamps in the evening, before retiring at night, when sitting down to read, in all our ordinary occupations of our daily lives, we furrow our foreheads with the sign of the Cross”.

May the blessings of the Cross of our Saviour, nourish our souls, revive our spirits and grant us eternal life.

Maged Attia BA LLB
Sydney, Australia
January 2002 AD
Touba 1718 AM
Feast of St. Anthony the Great

CHAPTER 1

WHY THE CROSS?

For centuries, both Christians and non-Christians frequently repeat the following questions: Why did Christ die on the Cross? Could Christ have chosen some other method of death? Why did Christ insist on carrying the Cross and His disciples doing likewise?

The Fall of Humanity

When Adam and Eve disobeyed the divine commandment and sinned against the Lord, two consequences followed:

- (i) The death sentence was imposed, “For the wages of sin is death.” (Romans 6:23).
- (ii) Their nature was corrupted by sin and death.

As a result, three options were opened to God:

- (i) Adam die forever – this is contrary to God’s immeasurable love for His children. Should Adam die then the devil defeated God’s creation. This is impossible.
- (ii) God forgives Adam – this is against God’s justice for He declared, “Once you eat of the tree you die.” (Genesis 2:17).
- (iii) God saves Adam – the best solution is to save Adam, but this requires:
 - a. To save Adam from the death penalty
 - b. Someone dies on behalf of Adam
 - c. To renew Adam’s corrupted nature

We pray in the Gregorian Liturgy:

“When he fell through the seduction of the enemy and disobedience to Your Holy Commandment, and You wished to renew him and raise him to his

original honour, You entrusted neither an angel nor an archangel, a patriarch nor a prophet with our Salvation. But rather You took flesh without alteration and became man, and resembled us in everything but sin alone. You became our advocate to the Father, You have dissolved the intervening barrier, and destroyed the ancient animosity. You reconciled the heavenly with the earthly, and made the two as one, and completed Your purpose in the flesh”.

What are the Characteristics of the Saviour?

In his book, “God’s Journey to Man”, Bishop Moussa summarizes and articulates the characteristics of the Saviour as follows:

- (i) Must be a man – to represent humanity which fell.
- (ii) Must die – for the wages of sin is death.
- (iii) Must be unlimited – as Adam’s sin was against the unlimited God.
- (iv) Must be sinless – otherwise he is carrying sins and cannot save.
- (v) Must be Creator – to be able to renew and restore man.

Who but the Lord Jesus Christ, “the author and finisher of our faith,” (Hebrews 12:2), “who was Incarnated and came to seek and save that which is lost and give His life as a ransom.” (Luke 19:10). Saint Paul confirms this that God our Saviour “desires all man to be saved and to come to the knowledge of truth.” (1 Timothy 2:4). “For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all.” (1 Timothy 2:5-6).

Central to our redemption and salvation was the Blood of Christ. For it was written in Deuteronomy, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree” (Deuteronomy 21:23). Hence, Christ chose the Cross to fulfill the following:

- (i) To die on behalf of all humanity who was deserving of death.
- (ii) To shed His blood on the Cross, for without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness (Hebrews 9:22).
- (iii) To ascend on the Cross carrying the curse of humanity and wash and purify man from his sins.

In his famous book, *"The Incarnation of the Word"*, Saint Athanasius the Apostolic writes, "Christ did not die like John the Baptist who was beheaded, nor die like Isaiah who was cut by the sword. His body is preserved in order to preserve the unity of the Church, His Body. Christ stretched out His two hands on the Cross that He might draw His anointed people with one hand and the Gentiles with the other and join both together in Himself."

The Crucifixion and Death of Christ

Christ ascended to the Cross, carrying the sins of humanity and the curse of mankind. From the Cross the Lord made 7 profound statements:

- (i) "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34).
- (ii) "Today you will be with Me in Paradise." (Luke 23:43).
- (iii) "Woman, behold your son...behold your mother." (John 19:26-27).
- (iv) "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:45).
- (v) "I thirst." (John 19:28).
- (vi) "It is finished." (John 19:30).
- (vii) "Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit." (Luke 23:46).

The reader is referred to Pope Shenouda's book *"The Words of Christ on the Cross"*, which provides spiritual contemplation and theological explanation about the meaning and depth of these life giving words. During the hours of Christ's crucifixion and death even nature was effected by this extraordinary event. All the Gospels confirm that there was darkness all over the earth from the sixth hour to the ninth hour. The earth quaked, the rocks were split and the graves were opened, "and when the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that happened, they feared greatly, saying, 'Truly this was the Son of God!'" (Matthew 27:54).

The Liberating Power of the Cross

Saint Basil the Great, in the Holy Liturgy says, "Christ descended into Hades through the Cross". This is the liberating power of the Cross. In a

majestic procession Christ the Lord descended to Hades immediately after His life giving death on the Cross (with His humanity and divinity inseparable) and opened the gates of Hades to free Adam and his righteous children from the bondage of Satan. Christ then tied Satan. The Church, every night in the Epsalia of the 3 youth in the furnace, declares, “Chant unto Him who was crucified and defeated death and humiliated it, praise Him and exceedingly exalt Him.”

In the sixth hour of Good Friday, the Church reads the following sermon by Saint Athanasius:

“For Christ came Himself, and through love died for us. He untied the chains and thus by the Lord Christ’s death for us so that we may live with Him forever. If the Lord had not participated with humanity in her suffering, then how can man be saved? For death fell beneath the feet of Christ and was defeated, made captive and Hades with its power was turned back when they heard the Lord calling the souls saying ‘come out of your bondage O you who are sitting in darkness and the shadow of death – come out of your bondage for I preach you with life for I am the Christ, the Son of the Eternal God. Amen.’”

In the sixth hour of the Agbia prayers we say:

“O Mother of the Lord, full of grace, Virgin Mary, we praise you, because of the Cross of your Son, Hades has fallen and death destroyed. We were dead before, but we have been raised, and made worthy to inherit eternal life and regain paradise, for this we thankfully glorify our immortal Lord Jesus”.

On the Feast of the Glorious Resurrection we chant the ancient church hymn, Christ rose from the dead and by His death defeated death and granted life to those in the graves. For this reason the Orthodox Church refers to the Saturday preceding Resurrection Sunday as Joyous Saturday or Saturday of Light. For Christ the King’s redeeming work on the Cross transformed:

- All our sorrows ... into joy
- All our darkness ... into light (Ephesians 5:14)
- All our failures ... into success
- All our anxieties ... into comfort

The Church offers prayers and praises and reads Biblical passages on Good Friday night, concluding with the Holy Liturgy on Joyous Saturday. Among the prayers recited is that of Habakkuk who says: “You went forth for the salvation of Your people, for salvation with Your anointed. Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer’s feet, and He will make me walk on my high hills.” (Habakkuk 3:13,18-19).

CHAPTER 2

THE SACRIFICE OF THE CROSS

The Lord Jesus Christ offered himself a living sacrifice on the Cross. St. Paul says, “For indeed Christ, our Passover was sacrificed for us.” (1Corinthians 5:7). Similarly, St. John the Apostle sees Christ in heaven sacrificed, “And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth.” (Revelation 5:6).

The Church chants the following hymn on Holy Thursday (Matins), twice on Good Friday (6th and 9th hour) and the Feasts of the Cross. “He who lifted himself as an acceptable sacrifice on the Cross for the salvation of our race. He was accepted by the good Father in the evening on Golgotha.”

The Sacrifices of the Old Testament

We can trace the biblical practice of making sacrifices back to God’s killing of an animal to provide coverings for Adam and Eve after their sin (Genesis 3:21). Later, Cain is rebuked because in bringing fruits of the soil to offer God rather than an animal of the flock, as his brother Abel did, Cain failed to “do what is right” (Genesis 4:3-7). Thus, Scripture suggests that early man’s practice of bringing animal sacrifices was rooted in a tradition established immediately after man’s Fall. Animal sacrifices continued to be the norm, as illustrated by the offerings of Noah (Genesis 8:20-21) and Abraham and the other patriarchs (Genesis 12:8; 13:4; 26:25), long before Moses’ Law was established.

The Law, however, formalized the practice, identifying a number of personal and community animal sacrifices to be made by God’s covenant people. “The life of a creature is in the blood”, Leviticus 17:11 explains, “and I have given it to you to make atonement... for one’s life.” At the time the Law was given, the priesthood was established for the purpose of offering sacrifices on behalf of the Israelite community.

During the wilderness years and the era of the judges, sacrifices and offerings were to be made only at the tabernacle. After David established

Jerusalem as Israel's capital, and particularly after Solomon's Temple was constructed there, sacrifices were to be made only at the site (Deuteronomy 12:5,6,13,14). The symbolism affirms Israel's God as the one God and indicates that there is only one way to approach Him.

The Holy Eucharist

The Eucharist is the continuous redeeming action of the Cross; the offering of salvation to all mankind continues. In the Sunday Theotokia we say, "Through Mary the daughter of Joachim, we have come to know the true sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins."

The sacrifices of the Old Testament which were symbols of Calvary and the Eucharist consisted essentially of the slaughtering of animals.

Thus we look upon the redemption on the cross not as something of the past but as something that still goes on. It is imperative, liberating people of successive generations from their enslavement to sin. This mystery of the Cross is a continuous sacrificial action of Christ. This is summarized by St. John Chrysostom: (Anamesis) Do this in remembrance of me...does not mean a remembrance of the sacrifice of Christ as something purely of the past, something that was done, but a real and present sacrifice which has its effect on us. It is an efficacious commentation. Furthermore, St. Augustine states: "What you will discover in the bread is hanging on the Cross, what is in the Cup has trickled from His side". Thus the Cross represents the presence of the crucified Lord. It is placed on the Holy Altar for the Eucharist is a presence of the Church into the Golgotha to enjoy the unity with her Bridegroom who offered His blood for her.

"The wounds of Christ are most precious. The Church took them and placed before our naked eyes in the (Holy Korban Bread). Upon baking the Holy Bread, we pierce it with five holes symbolizing: The Crown of Thorns, the nails to the right and left hand, the nail to the feet and the piercing at the side.

We pray in the Liturgy thus: "O Wounds of Christ, pierce me with the spear of God's love, O death of Christ, fill me with love of Him who died for me. O Blood of Christ purify me of all my sins." (Fraction of the only Son).

What does the Sacrifice of the Cross Accomplish?

The Blood sacrifice on the Holy Cross grants the believers the following blessings and joys:

(i) Blood of Christ Forgives

”In Him we have redemption through His Blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace”. (Ephesians 1:7).

(ii) Blood of Christ Purifies

”If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the Blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin”. (1 John 1:7).

(iii) Blood of Christ Sanctifies

”To the pilgrims elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father in Sanctification of the Spirit, for the obedience and sprinkling of the Blood of Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 1:2). Similarly, Saint Paul says, “Therefore, Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own Blood suffered outside the gate”. (Hebrews 13:12). “We have been”, writes Saint Paul, “sanctified through the offering of the Body of Jesus Christ once for all”. (Hebrews 10:10).

(iv) Blood of Christ Grants Eternal Life

Most assuredly I say to you unless you eat the Flesh of the Son of Man and drink His Blood you have no life in you. Whoever eats My Flesh and drinks My Blood has eternal life and I will raise Him up at the last day.” (John 6:53-54).

Holding the paten carrying the Body of Christ in his hands the priest in the confession says: “Given for our salvation, forgiveness of sins and everlasting life to all who partake of them”.

(v) The Blood of Christ Grants Abiding

”For My Flesh is food indeed and My Blood is drink indeed. He who eats My Flesh and drinks My Blood abides in Me and I in him.” (John 6:55-56). Thus we approach the Holy Communion with awe and

reverence and receive the Lord's Body and Blood in thanksgiving, saying with Saint Paul, "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gifts". (2 Corinthians 9:15).

CHAPTER 3

JOYS OF THE CROSS

The Cross of our Saviour has granted us multiple joys. Thus we join the Psalmist saying, bless the Lord all my soul and forget not all His benefits. “Who forgives all your iniquities, who heals your diseases, who redeems your life from destruction.” (Psalm 103:2-4).

(i) Salvation and Redemption

All of mankind was stained and corrupted by sin, Christ came to earth “and bore our sins in His own body on the tree,” (1Peter 2:24). In Him, says St. Paul, “we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.” (Ephesians 1:7). In the sixth hour we say “You gave salvation to the whole world when you opened your undefiled hand on the Cross.” As it says in Revelation, “Through the blood of Christ we were redeemed.” (Revelation 5:9). This salvation is a priceless precious gift that the Father offered to humanity through His only Son. St. Paul warns says, “Our salvation is nearer than we first believed. The night is far spent. The day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness and let us put on the armor of light.” (Romans 13:11).

These powerful words transformed the heart of St. Augustine and converted this great Christian Philosopher, to the delight of his mother St. Monica, who wept for him for 20 years. Subsequently, Augustine was baptized by St. Ambrose of Milan and went on to be Bishop of Hippo and a great shepherd and scholar of the Church.

St. Athanasius in the Nicean Creed clearly said, “for us and for our salvation, Christ was incarnated of Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary and became man. He was crucified for us at the time of Pontus Pilate.”

St. Peter teaches, “you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold...but with the precious blood of Christ.” (1 Peter 1:18-19).

(ii) Reconciliation

”And by Him”, writes St.Paul to the Colossians, “to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him whether things on earth or things in Heaven, having made peace through the blood of the Cross.” (Colossians 1:20). In the fraction of the Joyous Saturday we pray: “you came, our Master, and rescued us by the knowledge of your true Cross, you graced us with the Trees of Life which is your divine body and true blood.” In the Syrian Fraction we say: “by the blood of this Cross, He rescued us, unified and harmonised the heavenly with the earthly and the people with the peoples, the souls with the body and on the third day He arose from the tomb.” Christ’s reconciling work is significant, “as He broke down the middle wall of divisions between us...that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the Cross thereby putting to death the enmity.” (Ephesians 2:13,16). St. Paul stresses reconciliation “For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.” (Romans 5:10-11).

(iii) Freedom from Sin

In the beginning God created man in his image and likeness and made him free as a son/daughter of God. When man willingly fell he was dominated by the Ruler of this World – Satan. The Son of God incarnated to be crucified and restore man to his freedom. “If the Son makes you free,” said Jesus, “you shall be free indeed.” (John 8:36). This is the Gospel of the Vespers the Feast of the Cross. Through this Cross the Lord Jesus descended into Hades to free the imprisoned souls giving freedom to the children of God. Thus, on Joyous Saturday, the Church signs the following Epsaleya through your Cross, you gave us freedom and we received the true life, Holy Immortal who doesn’t die have mercy on us.

The Lord Jesus confirms, “whoever commits sin is a slave of sin and a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever.” (John 8: 34-35). St. Paul experienced this freedom and said, “knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin

might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.” (Romans 6:6).

(iv) **Forgiveness of Sins**

”Without the shedding of blood,” states St. Paul, “there is no forgiveness of sins.” (Hebrews 9:22). The Lord ascended on the Cross and proclaimed forgiveness to all, “Father forgive them for they do not know what they do.” (Luke 23:34). St. John the Beloved writes “To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own Blood.” (Revelation 1:5). Christ stipulated that we must forgive each other and our Heavenly Father shall forgive us. How sweet are the words of Christ to the sinful woman, “Your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.” (Luke 7:48). In the Fraction we pray, “He was tied with ropes to free us from the bonds of fetters for our sins. He was raised on the Cross to cover us with the garment of righteousness.” (Fraction of the Only Son). In the conclusion of the Theotokia of Adam we chant saying, “There is no servant without sins and no master without forgiveness, it is only from You.”

Having experienced forgiveness, we too are required to forgive and forget all who sin against us. Joseph the Righteous forgave his brothers and said to them, “But now, do not therefore be grieved and angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.” (Genesis 45:5, 7). Similarly, Esau forgave Jacob for deceiving him and after 20 years, they met and embraced each other, “but Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.” (Genesis 33:4). Then Jacob said, “In as much as I have seen your face as though I had seen the face of God.” (Genesis 33:10). St. Stephen, the first Martyr and Archdeacon echoed the same words of his Lord and Master when as he was stoned said, “Father, do not charge them with this sin.” (Acts 7:60).

(v) **Victory & Triumph**

If man is defeated by falling he cannot then stand against the might of Satan, but the Lord Jesus incarnated to conquer death and the Devil and grant victory to us. Thus, death is swallowed up in victory (Isaiah 25:8), “O death where is your sting, O Hades where is your victory”

(Hosea 13:14). “But thanks be to God,” says St. Paul, “who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Corinthians 15:16). In the doxology of the Feast of the Cross, we chant: “Hail to the Cross, weapon of our victory.” Christ gave the believers victory as He promised, “Now the Ruler of this world will be cast out.” (John 12:31).

(vi) Deep Love

In the Cross God confirmed his tremendous love for humanity. “All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” (Isaiah 53:6). God who is love, declares “greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.” (John 15:13).

St. John the Beloved, the faithful disciple who stood at the feet of the Cross states, “God’s love has been perfected in us.” (1 John 4:12). Further, “In this, the love of God was manifested towards us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be a propitiation for our sins.” (1 John 4:9,10). St. John concludes this chapter thus, “We love Him because He first loved us.” (1 John 4:19).

Love therefore became the sign of the children of the Cross. Accordingly, St. Paul says, “Walk in love as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us as an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.” (Ephesians 5:2).

CHAPTER 4

BLESSINGS OF THE CROSS

In the Cross of Christ there are many blessings for our daily life. Should we carry the Cross and follow the Saviour then many blessings follow:-

(i) **Self Denial**

To crush arrogance and pride and to defeat self righteousness from our lives we are held firmly to the words of Christ, "If you wish to be My disciple, deny yourself, take up the Cross and follow Me." (Mark 8:34). Christ Jesus, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a Man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death on the Cross." (Philippians 2:5-8). The story of St. Anna Simone the Queen who was known as the crazy nun by everyone in the convent, in self-denial, concealed her identity (as Queen) and her virtues for fear of vainglory. Then one day, when Anba Daniel the Archpriest of the wilderness of Sheheet visited the convent, he revealed to all the nuns the spiritual depth of this Saint who subsequently became a hermit.

(ii) **Endurance and Struggling**

"Looking to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the Cross, despising shame... and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." (Hebrews 12:2). We sinned and He bore our punishment. We were condemned and He bore the death sentence for our sake. He preferred death to glory and burden to rest. He loved the Cross more than His throne which is carried by the Cherubim." (Fraction of the Only Son).

St. Marina, the Monk/Nun, carried the Cross struggling and enduring shame and humiliation as she was accused of sinning with a woman in the village. For thirteen years, St. Marina raised the child Ephraim outside the walls of the Monastery in the blazing heat of summer and the cold of winter with minimal food. St. Marina did not defend herself. Upon her death, the Monks in shrouding her body discovered she was a

woman. Blessed is St. Marina who silently accepted public humiliation. St. Marina reflected the words of Christ, “Blessed are you if people revile you, persecute you and tell all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad for a great reward is kept for you in heaven.” (Matthew 5:11-12). St. James, cousin of Christ says, “Indeed, we count them blessed who endure.” (James 5:11).

(iii) **Obedience**

”And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on the Cross.” (Philippians 2:8). Obedience is a great virtue that renders blessings to all who pursue it. Obeying the commands as St. Peter says, “We ought to obey God rather than man.” (Acts 5:29). St. John the dwarf obeyed his spiritual father, Anba Bemwa and planted a dead stick in the desert and watered it daily for 2½ years until it budded and flowered. Anba Bemwa told the brethren, “come and eat from the fruits of obedience.” In his epistle to the Hebrews, St. Paul says, “Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.” (Hebrews 5:8-9).

(iv) **Fellowship with Christ**

”I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20). In similar view St. Paul says, “that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His suffering, being confirmed by His death.” (Philippians 3:10).

In carrying the Cross we share the sufferings of the Saviour but also enjoy the victory of His glorious resurrection. St. Paul, who experienced this declared, “If indeed we suffer with Him that we may also be glorified together. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” (Romans 8:17-18).

(v) **Humility**

In humility Christ left the heavenly throne and took the form of a servant and ascended to the Cross to crush our pride. St. Peter warns,

“Be clothed in humility.” (1 Peter 5:5). St. John the Baptist lived all his life in true humility. He introduced Christ to the world as, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29). St. John made it clear that he is only “a voice crying in the wilderness.” (Mark 1:3). When Christ was manifested in the Jordan, John immediately ordered his disciples (John and James) to follow Christ (John 1:35-39). This great Saint declared in meekness, “He must increase and I must decrease.” (John 3:30). As a consequence of his humility Christ exalted John, saying, “Among those born to women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist.” (Luke 7:28). Accordingly, St. James teaches us that, “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord and He will lift you up.” (James 4:6,10).

St. Macarius the great defeated Devils through his profound humility. As he was returning to his cell, carrying palm leaves, the devil met St. Macarius with a sharp sickle and would have struck him but he could not. He cried out, “Great is the violence I suffer from you, Macarius, for when I want to hurt you, I cannot. But whatever you do, I do and more also. You fast now and then, but I am never refreshed by any food; you often keep vigil, but I never fall asleep. Only in one thing are you better than I am and I acknowledge that.” Macarius said to him, “What is that?” and he replied, “It is because of your humility alone that I cannot overcome you.”

In true humility Bishop Sarapamon of Mounofeya cast out demons through the Cross. When Pope Peter Elgawilly delegated Bishop Sarapamon to heal the daughter of the Ruler of Egypt who was demon possessed, Bishop Sarapamon proceeded but requested the Pope’s Cross out of humility and submission. Out of deep humility, St. Peter the Seal of Martyrs never sat on the Throne of St. Mark, but rather on the bottom step of the Throne stating he is undeserving and unworthy of such honour.

CHAPTER 5

THE POWER OF THE CROSS

The Cross of Christ is powerful, “for the message of the Cross is foolishness to those who are perishing,” writes St. Paul, “but to us who are being saved it is the Power of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:18).

Indeed the Power of the Cross is not understood properly as St. Paul says, “for the Jews seek a sign and the Greeks seek after wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block, to the Greeks foolishness but to these who are called Jews and Greeks, Christ the Power of God and the wisdom of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:22-24).

What power is felt by the believers? It’s the power to conquer three enemies: sin, temptation and evil.

“The wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 6:23). The Power of the Cross granted the believers triumph and victory. For this reason St. Paul says, “Now thanks be to our God who always leads us in triumph in Christ” (2 Corinthians 2:14). Indeed, the Fathers of the Church consistently stated that the more you gaze and contemplate the Cross, all temptations, particularly lusts of the flesh shall gradually diminish in your daily struggle.

For this reason, St. Athanasius the Apostolic says, “Christ gave us the Cross as a weapon that goes through fire, air and water and nothing obstruct it. It is the irresistible power of God, the Devil’s escape from it out of fear.”

Strength & Praise

Indeed, Christians are powerful not weak and St. Paul confirms this, “Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.” (Ephesians 6:10). This spiritual power is derived from the Cross. Accordingly, the Church chants on Good Friday the hymn: Omonoganees (a Greek word meaning O only One), O only begotten Son in which it says: “Holy Almighty who showed by His weakness what is greater than strength. The Lord is my strength and my praise and He has become my salvation (Exodus 15:2), this is our Pascha Doxology”.

For the world, Christ crucified at Golgotha appeared weak. However, He was at the height of power to accomplish salvation for mankind. Empowered by the Holy Cross the disciples gave witness to the Risen Lord. Thus, the Cross became our glory and honour as St. Paul says, “But God forbid that I should glory except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus.” (Galatians 6:14). St. Ephraem, the Syrian says, “instead of carrying weapon or something to defend you carry the Cross, print it on your body and heart, draw its sign on yourself, not by moving of the hands only but also through your mind, draw it in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

The Sign of the Cross

The sign of the Cross is profound in the daily life of the believers. We do the sign of the Cross before and after prayer, we bless our food with it before eating, we strap it on our wrists, we place it in our homes and rooms, we hang it on Church domes and pillars, we decorate all vestments and Church cloth with it.

The sign of the Cross is a source of tremendous blessing. The great St. Anthony, Father of all Monks, advises us bravely, “draw the sign of the Cross, let the devils mock at themselves, but you fortify yourself with the Cross.”

Theological Concept

We hold our fingers in a special way. The three fingers formed together (thumb index and middle fingers) and say, “In the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit, One God Amen.” We remember that God descended from Heaven to earth and transferred His people from left to the right that is from darkness to light or from death to life. In so doing, we profess our belief in the Holy Trinity. It is deeply saddening to see that the making of the sign of the Cross has disappeared in the lives of many Christians.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem writes, “Let us then not be ashamed to confess the Crucified. Be the Cross our seal, made with boldness by our fingers on our brow and in everything, over the bread we eat and the cups we drink in our coming in and in our goings out; before we sleep, when we lie down and when we awake when we are traveling and when we are at rest.”

St. George and St. Christodolous

The Prince of Martyrs, St. George (Feast day 1st May), who endured sufferings and trials out of tremendous love for his Saviour, experienced the power of the Holy Cross. He was offered a poisonous drink in a cup. Recognizing the power of the Cross, St. George did the sign of the Cross on the cup and confidently drank it and no harm befell him.

St. Christodolous (the Jeweler) was saved by the power of the Cross. When Satan failed to overcome him, he appeared to evil men, in the form of a barbarian, and told them, “There is a great treasure in the valley, a man found it and is living beside it. Come with me, I will show it to you.” They followed him to the mountain but they were not able to go down to the valley. The devil went in a monk’s attire to St. Christodoulos and told him, “On the top of the mountain, there are some monks who lost their way; they are tired and will die of thirst. Go to them and give them something to eat and drink so that they may survive.” The saint made the sign of the cross over his face as was the custom of the monks and immediately the devil turned into smoke and disappeared. In this way, St. Christodoulos was always able to overcome the devil with the sign of the cross.

CHAPTER 6

THE SYMBOLS OF THE CROSS

Since the fall of Adam from grace, the Cross was in the plan of salvation. Several symbols in the Old Testament alluded to the glorious Cross of the Saviour.

(i) The Wood Carried By Isaac

The wood which Isaac carried when he was going to be offered as a sacrifice by his Father Abraham at the command of the Lord symbolizes the Cross carried by Jesus on the road to Golgotha in obedience to the Heavenly Father (Genesis 22).

Accordingly, the Church on Holy Thursday uses the fraction of the sacrifice of Isaac which concludes thus:-

”Thus the slaughtering of Isaac was a sign of the shedding of the blood of Christ, the Son of God on the Cross for the salvation of the World that as Isaac carried the wood for the burnt offering, likewise Christ carried the wood of the cross.”

In the ninth hour of Holy Thursday the Church reads this powerful story.

(ii) Jacob Blessing his Grandsons

”And Joseph took them both, Ephraim with his right hand towards Israel’s left hand, and Manasseh with his left hand toward Israel’s right hand, and brought them near him. Then Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on Ephraim’s head, who was the younger and his left hand on Manasseh’s head, guiding his hands knowingly for Manasseh as the first born.” (Genesis 48:13-14). In so doing, Jacob formed the sign of the Cross by both arms. This prophesy is read on the third hour of Good Friday.

This blessing of the Cross is used by the Priest in the final phase of the wedding ceremony as the Bride and Groom kneel before the Altar.

(iii) The Bronze Serpent

The bronze serpent which Moses the Prophet raised on a stand, at the command of the Lord, whoever was bitten by a serpent and gazed at the bronze serpent would not be hurt by the venom. This symbolizes the Cross whoever is bitten by evil and gazes at the Cross will not be affected by the venom of the bite (Numbers 21). Everyone who looks at it, who was bitten, shall live.

Christ the Lord stated, “and as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:14-15). All Orthodox Patriarchs carry the staff in the form of the Bronze Serpent during the celebration of the Holy Liturgy.

(iv) The Staff of Moses

The staff that desalinated the water while the Israelites were in the desert of Sinai, “they became thirsty.....they came across a well that contained salty water...they cried out of thirst. Moses prayed to the Lord who ordered him to throw a stick from a tree branch into that water and it was turned into drinking water.” (Exodus 17:1-7). All our problems, material, physical, psychological, emotional become easier through the Cross of our Lord.

(v) Iron Float

During the time of Elisha the Prophet, some men were felling the trees and lopping the branches, a rod of iron fell into the water. They all started to shout and sought the advice of Elisha the Prophet, a man of God. He advised that they throw a log of timber into the water and the rod of iron would float. (2 Kings 6:1-7). With the wooden Cross, we carry everything that is heavy, floats and thus breaking the law of nature. Whatever is impossible for man is possible for God.

CHAPTER 7

THE PROCESSION OF THE CROSS

Thrice annually, on Palm Sunday and the Feasts of the Cross (19th March and 27th September), the joyous procession of the Cross takes place, in Matins after the Priest prays: “God have mercy upon us (with the Cross and three candles in his right hand).

It is a great celebration in which the Priests and Deacons go around the altar and the nave of the Church chanting, ‘Lord have mercy’, followed by the hymns of the Cross.

Through the joyful procession the Clergy and Deacons read 12 selected gospel passages together with 12 Psalms. The number 12 (4 x 3) refers to the Kingdom of God on earth, as maintained by St. Augustine, the Holy Trinity (three hypostasis) reigns over the four directions of the world. The Tribes of Israel, the disciples of the Lord (Matthew 10:1) and the gates of the Heavenly Jerusalem (Revelation 21:12) are twelve in number. Following each reading the Deacons lead the congregation chanting a small hymn in honour of the Angel or Saint followed by the chorus:

- **Palm Sunday**
Hosanna in the highest, this is the King of Israel, blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord of Hosts.
- **Feasts of the Cross**
Through His Cross and resurrection, restored man again to Paradise.

The procession is preceded by the Tarah (explanation) which is read by the head Deacon:

- Hail to the Cross, the sign of triumph, that is given to Christians for strength.
- Hail to the Cross, the tree in the Paradise, that its perfumed branches give life to everybody.
- Hail to the Cross, the sign of salvation, that Constantine saw shining in the heaven.

- Hail to you, Cross, that Helena the Empress, searched for unceasingly until she found it with the nails.
- Hail to the Cross that converted the bitter water into drinkable water for the believers.
- Hail to the Cross that God was crucified on it and stretched His hands to attract everybody to Him.
- Adam was dismissed from Paradise because of one tree, and because of the Holy Cross he regained his original rank!

The Procession

- (i) The MAIN DOOR OF THE SANCTUARY opposite to the altar, is the Cross itself, from which we communicate of the Lord's Body broken for us, and drink His Blood shed for us.
- (ii) The Icon of ST. MARY, the first person to Bear the Cross and follow Jesus her Son and God. This is the Cross of Faith submission: Let it be done to me according to your Word. It is the Cross of endurance; A sword will pierce your soul also (Luke 23:35).
- (iii) The icon of ANGEL GABRIEL who preached the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception. He is the servant of the mystery of Incarnation: this represents the path of the Cross.
- (iv) The icon of ARCHANGEL MICHAEL, who preached the Resurrection. He is the servant of the mystery of victory.
- (v) The icon of ST. MARK, represents the cross of Mission and Evangelism.
- (vi) The icon of the APOSTLES, ST. PETER & ST. PAUL represents the cross of service and martyrdom.
- (vii) The icon of ST. GEORGE represents the cross of martyrdom, subjection to persecution and blood-shedding.
- (viii) The icon of ST. ANTHONY, represents the cross of spiritual struggle, monasticism and perfect honesty in seeking the Kingdom of God.
- (ix) The NORTHERN DOOR of the Church, from which entered the catechumen who believed in Christ and wished to join the Church: Christ's body. It represents the Cross of hearty faith and being protected by the Only Redeemer.
- (x) The SOUTHERN DOOR, from which the deacon in the early centuries used to receive the donations of the Christians to their poor brethren. It

represents the cross of donation: the donation of love and perfect sacrifice.

- (xi) THE BASIN, represents the cross of humility and washing feet in perfect self-denial.
- (xii) The icon of JOHN THE BAPTIST, represents the cross of bearing witness to the truth and abstaining from the world and its authority.

Thus our hearts rejoice very much for we can bear the cross, each according to his mission, potentialities and conditions of life. We rejoice and boast very much of the sign of our Kingdom and the motto of our King!

A Heavenly Icon

The procession commences and concludes in the Sanctuary around the Altar. The Altar is God's place from which He declares His love of the Holy Trinity to all mankind. Thus it is the most joyous meeting between the heavenly Bridegroom and His blessed Bride. This meeting starts from the Sanctuary of the Altar in other words achieved by the Holy Trinity (three rounds) through the sacrifice of the Cross.

Our salvation starts from heaven (the Sanctuary resembles heaven). "While we were still sinners", states St. Paul, "Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him." (Romans 5: 8-9).

Christ willingly entered Jerusalem heading towards the Cross to His Bride's house with emphatic will, determination and incredible love. On the way, He told the disciples, "Behold we go up to Jerusalem and the Son of Man shall be betrayed to the chief priests and the scribes and they will condemn Him to death, and they shall deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him and on the third day He shall rises again." (Matthew 20:18-19).

CHAPTER 8

FEASTS OF THE CROSS

The Coptic Church celebrates two Feasts of the Cross: One on 27th September (17th Tout) and the other on 19th March (10th Baramhat).

First Feast

As for the first feast, it happened that Empress Helena had a vow to visit Jerusalem, if her son Constantine believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. Constantine at that time was preparing for a war. He saw the sign of the Cross in a dream, and a voice told him, “By this sign you will conquer”. From that moment Constantine was converted to Christianity.

To fulfill her vow, Empress Helena traveled to Jerusalem, accompanied by her soldiers. When she arrived there, she asked about the place of the Cross. Nobody could help her but she was referred to an old Jewish Rabbi named Jude, who knew where that Cross was. At the beginning, he denied knowing anything about it, but when she insisted, he guided her to the place. The Cross was buried under a huge hill of garbage, where the Jews wanted it to remain, for fear of the power of the Cross and the Crucified.

After digging for many days, three Crosses were brought to light. The Empress wanted to know which one was the Lord’s Cross. It happened that a funeral was passing by and the people were carrying the coffin. So they put the first and second Crosses on the coffin, but nothing happened. When they put the third Cross, the dead rose again. So it was known that it was the Lord’s Cross. In the place where the Cross was found, the Empress built the Church of the Resurrection (the Holy sepulchre). The Church was consecrated by Athanasius, the Pope of Alexandria.

Since then the Church celebrates the feast of the discovery of the Cross on 17th Tout (27th September) and runs for three consecutive days to 19th Tout (29th September).

Second Feast

The second Feast, which is on 10th Baramhat (19th March) celebrates the 'finding' of the Cross once more, by the Emperor Hercules, in the year 628A.D.

When the Persians were defeated by Hercules, they were forced to leave Egypt and return to their own country. On their way back, they passed by the Holy Land. One of their Princes entered the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which was built by Empress Helena. He saw light coming from a piece of timber that was kept in a golden frame. The Prince was about to touch it, when fire came out of it and burnt his fingers. When he investigated the Christians told him that it was the base of the Lord's Holy Cross and nobody could touch it, except a Christian. He tricked and bribed two Deacons who were in charge of guarding this part of the Cross. So they stole it and carried it to the Prince's country.

When the Emperor Hercules heard what happened, he fought the Persians and defeated them. He searched everywhere looking for this piece of the Cross but could not find it. The Persian Prince hid it in the garden of his palace, then killed the two Deacons.

The daughter of a Jewish Rabbi who was taken captive, saw that happened and hurried and told the Emperor Constantine. He accompanied her with some Bishops and Priests. After some digging, they found the base of the Cross in the year 629 A.D. They wrapped it in a rich piece of material and it was carried by Emperor Hercules to the city of Constantinople, where it was kept.

CHAPTER 9

CARRYING THE CROSS

Why do we carry the Cross?

(i) **Carrying the Cross = Condition of Discipleship**

It is a divine commandment from the Lord, “Whoever does not bear his Cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.” (Luke 14:27). Carrying the Cross is a precondition for being a disciple of Christ. “God is love.” (1 John 4:8). God manifested His love for us in that He descended to earth to save humanity, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16). God’s immeasurable love is demonstrated in that while we were still sinners He died for us. Thus, love became the symbol and motto of Christianity. Christ reinforced this to His disciples saying, “This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” (John 15:12). “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:13). In carrying the Cross we carry love and the visible sign of God’s infinite love for all mankind.

(ii) **Carrying the Cross = Fellowship with Christ**

We carry the Cross because Christ carried the Cross. Thus we have fellowship with the suffering Saviour of whom Isaiah the Prophet prophesied saying, “He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, everyone to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgement, and who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people He was stricken. And they made His grave with the wicked; but with the rich at His death, because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth. Yet it pleased the

Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand. He shall see the travail of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.” (Isaiah 53:5-12).

(iii) Carrying the Cross = Road to our Salvation

With content we carry the Cross because it is the only way to redemption and salvation. As St. Peter said, “nor is there salvation in any other for there is no other Name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12).

(iv) Carrying the Cross = Source of Glory and Honour

We carry the Holy Cross for it is the source of our power and glory. Regarding the power of the Cross St. Paul says, “For the message of the Cross is foolishness to those who are perishing but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:18). Concerning the glory of the Cross, the Apostle Paul says, “But God forbid that I should glory except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Galatians 6:14).

Thus, the Cross is central to the Christian life. As Father Bishoy Kamel states: “There is no Christianity without the Cross. It is like a bride without a groom. Those who carry the Cross fall into one of three categories:

(i) Grumbling

Some carry the Cross grumbling day and night. Consistently complaining and whinging about their life circumstances, precarious financial status, physical appearances etc. An example is the left thief on the cross who blasphemed and said, “If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us.” (Luke 23:39). St. Paul instructs us “Do all things without murmuring and disputing that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault.” (Philippians 2:14-15).

My Cross is Heavy

A woman was asked to accompany a friend to an orthopedic shoe specialist so that she could have her orthopedic shoes adjusted. They had to wait for a while in the reception room, during which time she did not stop whinging and whining about her bad fortune and her poor share in life, repeating every now and then, “My cross is heavy. Oh, how heavy is my cross.” Suddenly a door of one of the rooms opened. All heads turned to the sound of laughter and giggles. Out of that door came a young girl (possibly in her mid-twenties). She was being shown how to walk in her artificial leg. The limb expert was explaining to her the theory of how the stump fitted “better than a glove” in the cavity of the artificial leg through a modern technique of suction.

The girl had an indescribable happiness all over her face and eyes and a smile that revealed the most beautiful teeth. Her joy brought tears to the eyes of all those present. She was taken to an adjacent room to be shown how to sit on a chair, how to stand and how to walk. The woman could not help overhearing the girl's conversation with her companion, neither could she suppress her admiration for her sense of humor despite her tragedy. She was saying to her companion, “Now I can literally say, ‘I am back on my feet again’. Oh, I can't wait to go back to ... (a neighboring Asian country). I will have my children under my wings again, I will be back to my job and back to a new start in life.”

The woman was silent for the rest of the afternoon. Possibly out of embarrassment or a reduced sense of self-centeredness.

This incident brings to mind the scene of the crucifixion: three people were crucified, two who had their crosses carried for them, one was cursing, one was contrite and remorseful, begging to be remembered in the Kingdom. The only innocent one of the three had to carry His own cross.

(ii) Contently

Others carry the Cross contently like Simon of Cyrene and Demas the thief on the right hand side of the cross who rebuked the other thief and

said, “Do you not even fear God seeing you are under the same condemnation. And we indeed justly for we receive the due reward of our deeds, but this Man has done nothing wrong”. (Luke 23:41-42). With faith and humility, Demas then tilted his head and said to Jesus, “Lord remember me when You come into Your Kingdom”. And Jesus said to him, “Assuredly I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise.” (Luke 23:42-43).

The blessed Father Bishoy Kamel says the left thief desired physical salvation; hence, he went to Hades, whereas the right thief sought spiritual salvation thus he ascended with the Cross to Paradise. Between the prayers of the sixth and ninth hours on Good Friday the Church prays the right thief’s creed in which we say, “Blessed are you, the blessed thief, and blessed are your well spoken words, by which you truly deserved the Heavenly Kingdom, and the Paradise of Delight. The disciple denied, and the thief cried saying, ‘remember me O Lord, when You come in Your Kingdom.’ Blessed are you Demas, the thief, more blessed than all others on earth, for you have been granted what no other has ever been granted. All your life, you were a thief, in the hills of Jerusalem. And by one word you uttered to the Lord, He sent you to Paradise.

(iii) Joyfully

The first person to carry the Cross joyfully was the Lord Jesus, “Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of faith, who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the Cross, despising the shame and has sat down at the right hand of the Throne of God.” (Hebrews 12:2). From Pilate’s Pratorium commenced the long and painful journey of the Cross to Golgotha. In agony and pain Christ fell three times. The Lord endured the blaspheming, “You who destroy the temple and build it in three days save Yourself”. “If You are the Son of God come down from the Cross”. Likewise the chief priests also mocking with the Scribes said, “He saved others, Himself He could not save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the Cross and we will believe in Him. He trusted in God, let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him for He said I am the Son of God.” (Matthew 27:39-43).

How should we carry the Cross?

(i) Crucifying the Lusts of the Flesh

The children of God are inwardly powerful and strong. They are not defeated by the weight of sin, lusts of the flesh, various temptations or the strikes of the devil. “Those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” (Galatians 5:24). “Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” (Galatians 5:19-21).

(ii) Suffering and Hardships

Carry the Cross by quietly enduring sufferings and hardships. On the night before His death on the Cross, Christ warned His disciples, if the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. “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.” (John 15:18). Christ added, “Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy.” (John 16:20). However, joy and victory in the Cross of Christ will follow as promised by the Lord: “In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33).

From the Apostolic era it was established that carrying the Cross is integral to the Christian life. “We must”, says St. Paul, “through many tribulations enter the Kingdom of God.” (Acts 14:22). St. Stephen, the first martyr and archdeacon was stoned to death (Acts 7:59). St. John and St. Peter, on the day of Pentecost were imprisoned (Acts 4:1-4). St. James, the brother of St. John was beheaded by Herod (Acts 12: 1-2). St. Peter was imprisoned (Acts 12:5-19). St. Paul, together with Silas, was imprisoned at Phillipia (Acts 16:25-34). In Jerusalem, St. Paul was imprisoned and the Lord appeared to him and strengthened him (Acts 23:10-22).

(iii) Loving Your Enemies

No religion in the world except for Christianity calls for loving your enemies. On the Sermon on the Mountain, Christ taught us to love our enemies, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.” (Matthew 5:43-47).

How can we fulfill this challenging commandment? As we are weak and limited we require the power of the Holy Spirit. As St. Paul puts it: “For the love of God has been poured into our hearts through His Holy Spirit.” (Romans 5:5). Also, by living under the feet of the Cross, like St. Mary and St. John the Beloved. The latter wrote in his first epistle: “In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifested: “Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother. For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.” (1 John 3:10-11). Love is the golden sign and St. John says, “If someone says, ‘I love God’, and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?” (1 John 4:20). In so doing we fulfill the Scripture which says, “let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.” (1 John 3:18).

(iv) Life of Submission

A blessed form of carrying the Cross of Christ is submitting your entire life and surrendering your will at the feet of the Cross. The Holy Mother of God, St. Mary, is the great example who said to the Archangel Gabriel: “I am the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done to me according to your words.” (Luke 1:38). Consequently, she was exalted by her cousin Elizabeth: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed

is the fruit of your womb, blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord.” (Luke 1:42,45).

Abraham the father of fathers, lived a life of submission, leaving his own country and kindred and fathers house at the old age of 75 (Genesis 12). In tremendous submission Abraham sacrificed Isaac on Mount Moriah (Genesis 22) and subsequently the Lord blessed him saying, “By Myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son, in blessing I will bless you, and in multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.” (Genesis 22:16-18). St. Paul highlights this work of Abraham by stating that it was accounted to righteousness.

(v) **Serving the Brethren**

We carry the Cross of service like St. Paul who declared “For I am determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” (1 Corinthians 2:2). At Ephesus, before returning to Jerusalem, he gathers the elders and says, “You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; and how I kept nothing back that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race and joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.” (Acts 20:18-24).

Empowered by the Spirit of God, and filled with zealousness to spread the kingdom of God, St. Paul wrote 14 epistles and established several churches in Asia Minor, ordained Bishops like Timothy and Titus for

Ephesus and Crete. Indeed St. Paul carried the Cross of ministry and focused sharply on his task saying, “My little children for whom I labour in birth again until Christ is formed in you.” (Galatians 4:19).

In his second letter to the Corinthians St. Paul highlights the marks of carrying the Cross of the ministry, “We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed. But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in sleeplessness, in fastings; by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.” (2 Corinthians 6:3-10).

St. Paul then describes the suffering endured by God’s servants in the course of service; “From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils amongst false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness – besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.” (2 Corinthians 11:22-28).

Today, more than ever, the Church of Christ, which the Lord purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:17), needs dedicated men and women, youth and children who are willing and ready to carry the Cross of Ministry and serve the Lord faithfully and diligently in many and varied fields.

(vi) The Ego

Our number one enemy is the ego. Pride is the cause of all our sins. It is the cause of the fall of Satan (previously a rank of Angels). Even the righteous and the Saints fell in this sin. The disciples grumbled who

was the greatest. The Lord taught us, “But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself, will be abased and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Matthew 23:11-12).

In crucifying our egos we seek to be meek and humble knowing that God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble (Proverbs 3:34, James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5).

Elijah the prophet felt he was the only one faithful to God and his covenants and he complained saying, “I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; because the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life.” (1 Kings 19:14). Then the Lords said to Elijah to return to the wilderness of Damascus, “Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.” (1 Kings 19:18).

Full of confidence in his mind and heart, St. Peter disputed the Lord’s words and said, “Even if all are made to stumble yet I will not be.” (Mark 14:29). When Christ confronted Peter and said, “Before the cock crows twice you will deny me three times.” (Mark 14:30). St. Peter replied more vehemently, “If I have to die with You, I will not deny You!” (Mark 14:31).

Even these who excel spiritually are tempted by pride. St. Anthony the father of Monks thought that he alone had risen to such a high spiritual level, then the Lord directed him to the inner desert to visit St. Paula who had dwelt in the desert for 80 years without seeing a human person. St. Macarius the Great was struck by pride and the angel of the Lord appeared to him and directed him to Alexandria to visit two simple women living with each other caring for each other’s babies. St. Macarius was bewildered with their simple love and meekness.

For this reason Christ, the King of Glory washed the feet of his disciples and ascended to the Cross to crucify our egos and arrogance and thereby liberate us from the bondage of the self.

In short, unless we accept to crucify our ego, we become enemies of the Cross, we begin to pursue self righteousness instead of looking to the

Cross for justification, self indulgence instead of taking up the Cross to follow Christ, self advertisement instead of preaching Christ crucified (1 Corinthians 1:23), self glorification instead of glory in the Cross (Galatians 6:14).

(vii) Family

We carry the Cross in the family by fulfilling our duties towards each other. It is imperative that the husband carry the Cross of sacrifice and endurance. He must love his wife just as Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for it (Ephesians 5:2) and (Colossians 3:19). This requires self denial searching diligently for the comfort and joy of his wife. The husband does not seek his status and prestige rather the welfare and advancement of the family even at his expense.

Similarly, the wife carries the Cross of submission, “wives submit to your own husbands as to the Lord.” (Ephesians 5:22) and (Colossians 3:18). The wife seeks not her own wishes and rights but her duties and responsibilities. The submissive wife is not weak and passive but wise as Solomon says: “She opens her mouth with wisdom and on her tongue is the law of kindness” (Proverbs 31:26), “Her children rise up and call her blessed, her husband also and he praises her.” (Proverbs 31:28).

Should both the husband and wife carry their respective Cross (sacrificing and submitting) without grumbling and complaining, a beautiful Christian home will be established. It becomes a house of prayer, a house of blessing and a house of purity. It develops into a heavenly Icon. If the family lives under the Cross then King Solomon’s words are fulfilled, “through wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established; by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches.” (Proverbs 24:3-4).

(viii) The Narrow Gate

We carry the Cross by choosing the narrow and not the wide gate. “Enter by the narrow gate”, says Christ, “for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.” (Matthew 7:13-14). St. Peter for example could not comprehend that Christ must suffer many things

from the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed (Matthew 16:21). Thus St. Peter took Christ aside and began to rebuke him saying, “far be it from You Lord, this shall not happen to You!” (Matthew 16:22). Immediately thereafter Christ began to enlighten his disciples about the significant role of carrying the Cross, “if anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matthew 16: 24-26).

At the expense of their health and comfort, their status and positions, their opinions and views, the children of God prefer the narrow gate of the Cross for it leads to heavenly joys. In so doing they “are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed – always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.” (2 Corinthians 4:8-10).

When asked what is the narrow gate, Anba Amonius replied: “To control your thoughts and to strip yourself of your own free will for the sake of God.”

CHAPTER 10

HYMNS FOR THE CROSS

We are the sons of the Christian people
We bow unto the holy cross
In which our Lord saved us all
Hail to you the holy cross

St. Paul the apostle mentioned the honour
Of the cross saying I shouldn't glory
Except in the cross of Jesus Christ
Hail to you the holy cross

O come all of you faithful
To praise our Lord Jesus Christ
Bow to the immortal holy cross
Hail to you the holy cross

We are proud of you O holy cross
On which Jesus was crucified
Through you we became free
Hail to you the holy cross

The Christians and the seven hosts of angels
Are proud of you O holy cross
That is our good saviour
Hail to you the holy cross

We carry you on our shoulders
O you the victory of the Christians
In all courage we cry saying
Hail to you the holy cross

You are the joy of all Christians
You are the victory against enemies
You are our strength, we believers
Hail to you the holy cross

You are the comfort of all believers

You are the power of the martyrs
Until they endured their sufferings
Hail to you the holy cross

Hail to you the holy cross
You are the weapon of victory
You are the throne of the King
Hail to you the holy cross

Hail to you the holy cross
You are the sign of salvation
You are the bright shining light
Hail to you the holy cross

Hail to you the holy cross
You are the sword of the Spirit
You are the source of all grace
Hail to you the holy cross

Hail to you the holy cross
You are the treasure of goodness
And to the ages of ages
Hail to you the holy cross

Hail to you the holy cross
Constantine carried you in the war
And conquered the Barbarians
Hails to you the holy cross

Great honour is for the sign of the cross
Which is for our Lord Jesus Christ
Our true God and our King
Hail to you the holy cross

On the cross our Lord was crucified
To redeem all the human race
And we glorify him saying

Hail to you the holy cross

The cross is our weapon

The cross is our hope

The cross is our strength in afflictions

Hail to you the holy cross

THE CROSS IN MY POCKET

I carry a cross in my pocket
A simple reminder to me
Of the fact that I am a Christian
No matter where I may be

This little cross is not magic
Nor is it a good luck charm
It isn't meant to protect me
From every physical harm

It's not for identification
For all the world to see
It's simply an understanding
Between my Savior and me.

When I put my hand in my pocket
To bring out a coin or key
The cross is there to remind me
Of the price He paid for me.

It reminds me, too, to be thankful
For my blessings day by day
And to strive to serve Him better
In all that I do and say.

It's also a daily reminder
Of the peace and comfort I share
With all who know my Master
And give themselves to His care

So, I carry a cross in my pocket
Reminding no one but me
That Jesus Christ is Lord of my life
If only I'll let Him be.

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THE HOLY
CROSS

BY

MAGED ATTIA