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# **Blessings Upon Blessings**

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**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

By His Grace Bishop Moussa  
Bishop for Youth Affairs

# Preface

Throughout our lives Christ showers us with blessings upon blessings. The Church and the Sacraments bring forth special blessings in our daily lives. The intercessions of the Saints and their relics and shrine are a great blessing experienced by all. The enlightening words of the Holy Scriptures grant multiple spiritual and material blessings upon us daily from God the Father of Lights (James 1:17).

Some people are decent and pleasant, others are placid and friendly in various spheres of life. However, very few are blessed in character. Be a blessed person in all you do and wherever you go so that the fragrance of Christ is smelt. The blessed person has certain qualities:

- i Faithfully keeps and lives by the power of the word of God.
- ii Endures temptation quietly and sincerely.
- iii Makes acceptable offerings to the Lord and His Church.
- iv Is consistently vigilant about his salvation and eternity.
- v Is pure in thought and deeds.
- vi Leads a repentant life.
- vii Has unshakable faith in the Lord.
- viii Fears the Lord God his creator and redeemer.

May the Lord Jesus Christ, source of all blessings, bless our lives, our homes, our families, our careers, our works and our services for the glory of His Holy name and the edification of His Church.

MAGED ATTIA B.A. LLB  
Feast of the Holy Cross  
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# Chapter 1

## What is Blessings?

Blessings is difficult to define but we may attempt to describe it. Blessings is God's special gift to mankind from the dawn of creation: *"So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'" (Genesis 1:27-28).*

As Christ ascended to heaven He blessed His disciples, *"And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them."* (Luke 24:50).

Often God's blessing sit accumulating in His storehouse, just waiting to be claimed, because Christians don't realize they can have their own inheritance now. "The blessings of the Lord," says Solomon, "makes one rich and He adds no sorrow with it." (Proverbs 10:22).

### The Lords Name is Blessed

The Lord God is blessed. In the conclusion to the Sunday Epsalia we say, *"And whenever we gather for prayer, let us bless the Name of my Lord Jesus. We bless You, O my Lord Jesus, save us through Your Name, for we have hope in You." Upon entering Jerusalem Christ was received as King and the people joyfully received Him saying, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord."* (Matthew 21:9). The blessed Name of the Lord is critical in our daily life.

i The Blessed Name of the Lord Performs Wonders and Signs  
*"Then Peter said, 'Silver and gold I do not have; but what I do have I give to you: In the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.'" (Acts 3:6).*

*"And grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal and that signs and wonders may be done through the Name of Your Holy Servant Jesus." (Acts 4:29-30).*

ii The Blessed Name of the Lord is Frightful to the Demons

*"Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your Name!" (Luke 10:17).*

*"And these signs will follow those who believe: In My Name they will cast out demons; and will speak in new tongues." (Mark 16:17).*

*"I command you in the Name of Jesus Christ to come out of her', and he came out that very hour." (Acts 16:18).*

iii The Blessed Name of the Lord Comforts us in our Troubles

*"The Name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous run into it and are safe." (Proverbs 18:10).*

*"All nations surrounded me, in the Name of the Lord I will destroy them." (Psalm 118:10).*

*"Our help is the Name of the Lord, Who made heaven and earth." (Psalm 124:8)*

*"Through Your Name we will push down our enemies." (Psalm 44:5).*

*"Save me, O God, by Your Name." (Psalm 54:1).*

In the Saturday Epsalia, we say: *'The mention of Your Holy Name grants joy to our souls, O my Lord Jesus Christ, my Good Saviour.'*

iv The Blessed Name of the Lord gives us the Gifts of the Holy Sacraments

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

*"Repent, and let everyone of you be baptised in the Name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38).*

*"Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the Name of the Lord." (James 5:14).*

In the introduction to the commemoration of the Midnight Praise we say:  
*“Bless the Lord all you nations, the tribes and all kinds of tongues, praise Him and glorify Him above all forever”.*

### You Blessed My Nature

In the Gregorian Liturgy we pray: “You blessed my nature in You.” Christ blessed our nature through Baptism. *“If anyone is in Christ He is a new creation, old things have passed away.” (2 Corinthians 5:17).* Jacob wrestled with God all night until the Lord blessed him: *“I will not let you go until you bless me.” (Genesis 32:26).*

St. Athanasius, in his famous book, *The Incarnation of the Word*, states that sin resulted in two major consequences, the change of human nature and the fall of man into the grasp of death. God therefore, in the economy of salvation, had to share our humanity in order to transform our nature to recreate it and to make it incorruptible. Christ, in blessing our nature, restores us to the Father and sanctifies our human nature (theosis). It is a process of deification. *“Through these,” writes St. Peter, “He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.” (2 Peter 1:4).*

In sharing our humanity Christ blessed our nature in a variety of ways:

- God blessed our Work – He was a Carpenter
- God blessed our Service – He is Gentle and Lowly
- God blessed our Struggles – He Ascended to the Mountain of Temptation
- God blessed our Victory – He Ascended to the Cross
- God blessed our Suffering – He Suffered Injustice
- God blessed our Humanity – He took Flesh
- God blessed our Poverty – He had no where to Lay His Head

### The Blessed Person

Several people were tremendous blessings to their family, friends, ministry or community. Jacob was a blessing to his uncle Laban. Following the birth of Joseph, Jacob was determined to leave his uncle and return to his own country. Laban said to his nephew Jacob, *“If I have found favour in your eyes, please stay. I have learned by divination that*

*the LORD has blessed me because of you.” (Genesis 30:27). Joseph was a blessing to Pharaoh’s house. “The Lord blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. The blessing of the LORD was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field.” (Genesis 39:5).*

Ruth was a great blessing to her family and community as acknowledged by her mother-in-law Naomi and Boaz. Ruth’s character is acknowledged by Boaz who says to her, “*The LORD bless you, my daughter,” he replied. “This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier. You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor. And now, my daughter, don’t be afraid. I will do for you all you ask. All my fellow townsmen know that you are a woman of noble character.” (Ruth 3:10-11).*

### God Blessed Egypt

The Lord conferred a special blessing on Egypt when He visited it: “*See, the LORD rides on a swift cloud and is coming to Egypt. The idols of Egypt tremble before Him, and the hearts of the Egyptians melt within them.” (Isaiah 19:1). The Lord of Hosts blessed Egypt saying: “Blessed be Egypt My people.” (Isaiah 19:25). This left an indelible mark on the life and ministry of the Egyptian Orthodox Church. It became the Mother Church of Africa introducing the Gospel to Ethiopia, Sudan and all of Africa. This Church of Alexandria gave the Christian world Monasticism. The Monastic tradition traces its roots to St. Anthony, whose pioneering work in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century produced the Angelic life on earth. The Egyptian desert was converted into heavenly sanctuaries filled with prayer and praises, meditation and contemplation. The Coptic Church was a Pillar of Theological and Biblical Scholarship. The School of Alexandria became the leading seat of learning in the world.*

Every year a special Feast is celebrated in the Church commemorating the Flight of the Holy Family into Egypt (1 June/24 Bashans). A special doxology is prayed saying, “Rejoice and be happy O Egypt and all your children and your borders for the Lover of mankind has come to you who exists before all ages.”

# Chapter 2

## Sources of Blessings

The sources of blessings are many and varied: the Sacraments, the Saints, their relics and shrines, the parents, the tithes, serving the poor and needy, the holy water, the altar vessels.

### God = Source of all Blessings

*“Blessed be the Lord Jesus Christ,” writes St. Paul, “who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing.” (Ephesians 1:3).*

God the Father, the Creator; God the Son, the Redeemer; and God the Holy Spirit, the Sustainer, is the source of all blessings in our daily lives. *“Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits.” (Psalms 103:2).*

According to St. Ambrose, “In Christ we have everything. If you want to heal your wounds, He is the doctor; if you are burning with fever, He is the fountain; if you are in need of help, He is the strength; if you are in dread of death, He is life; if you are hungry, He is food.”

### The Holy Sacraments

We believe that after the Invocation and Descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Bread and Wine, they are mystically (yet non apparently) transformed into the Holy Body and Honoured Blood of Christ. We believe that our Lord Jesus is present on the Altar, not as a symbol or metaphor, but totally and fully. We receive the Holy Communion, declaring that it will forgive us our sins (Matthew 26:26-28), grant us eternal life (John 6:54) and bestow salvation and redemption for us.

The following two stories manifest for us that the Body and Blood are truly those of our Lord Jesus Christ:

There was an elderly, righteous, holy priest, full of the fruits of the Spirit ministering in the countryside. During the sanctification of the Sacraments, a deacon came to him and told him that a person was travelling to Jerusalem. The righteous priest asked: “Why my son?” The deacon answered: “To see the Light of Christ that emitted from the Holy

Tomb.” The priest asked the deacon to get an extinguished candle and when he took it, he lifted the corporal (Veil) on the chalice and moved the candle toward the chalice and it became lit, so he gave it to the deacon saying: “This is the Light of Christ with us every day on the altar.”

One of the ladies entered faith and tasted the grace of sonship so the Lord wanted her to abide in faith and become free of doubt. Once she advanced to Holy Communion and when she opened her mouth and received the Body. The Lord enlightened her eyes and she felt that there was a piece of flesh (meat) in her mouth and not a piece of bread as seen by eyes. She glorified Lord Jesus who granted us to eat Him who is the Bread of Life and token of salvation and Holy supply of eternal life.

Upon receiving Holy Communion a person receives indescribable blessings in their life. They are united to the Lord. St. Paul talks of the cup of blessings (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

In confession and repentance a person receives profound blessings: *“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.” (Psalm 32:1-2).*

In baptism we obtain the blessings of a new life in Christ: *“if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” (2 Corinthians 5:17).*

In confirmation we receive the blessings of the Holy Myron, anointed 36 times with Holy Oil and thus becoming temples of the Holy Spirit.

In the sacrament of marriage, the priest blesses the rings and crowns saying: “Crown them Glory and Honour, O Father, Amen. Bless them, O Son, and Sanctify them, O Holy Spirit, Amen. The concluding prayer is, “May the Lord bless you as He blessed Noah and his wife when they came out of the ark to start a new life. May He bless you as He blessed Abraham with Sarah, and Isaac with Rebecca, and Jacob with Leah and Rachel. May the Lord, who began His divine miracles at the wedding of Cana of Galilee, bless you in your new life and bless your house and fill your hearts with spiritual love. May He continue His support to you and grant you a long and happy life, with blessed children.”

## The Saints

A tremendous source of blessings is the lives, relics and shrines of the Martyrs, Confessors and Saints. From the Churches monasteries and convents come the holy oil and spices which people embrace so devoutly recognising their source of empowerment in their daily problems and concerns. After the prayers of the commemoration reciting the names of the Saints who pleased the Lord since the beginning, the congregation responds: “May their holy blessings be with us all. Amen.”

## The House of God

The House of God is a spring of blessings. In the morning doxology we say: “Hail to the Church, House of Angels.” In the prayers of consecrating of the Altar we say: *“May this Church be a harbour of salvation, a Holy Altar, Amen. A harbour of troubled souls, a guiding place for every thought and deed, Amen. A refuge from sin, voluntary and involuntary, Amen. A deliverance from the intentions of ignorance, Amen. An interest in the heavenly welfare, Amen.*

Filled with love towards God’s House and recognising the many blessings which flow from it, David says: *“How lovely is your tabernacle, O Lord of Hosts!” (Psalm 84:1). “For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness. For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly.” (Psalm 84:10-11).*

The Church which Christ purchased with His blood (Acts 20:28) is a tremendous blessing to the world and it is the light that shines in a dark world.

## Pope Benjamin

Pope Benjamin was a blessed Patriarch of Alexandria. When he was consecrating the Church of St. Macarius in the Monastery, and was about to consecrate the altar, he saw the Hand of Christ anointing the altar with him. He fell upon his face in great fear, and one of the Cherubim angels raised him up and comforted him. Pope Benjamin said, “Truly this is the house of the Lord and this is the door of heaven.” He looked to the west side of the Church and he saw an elder standing there with a shining awesome countenance, and his face looked like an angel. He said to

himself, “Truly, if there was a vacant chair for a bishop, I would make him a bishop.” The angel told him, “Would you make this man a bishop? He is St. Macarius, the father of Patriarchs, bishops, and all the monks. He has come today to attend by the Spirit, and rejoice with his children, and this place will be ever filled with righteous monks, and it will never be short of leaders and spiritual fruits.” Pope Benjamin said, “Blessed is he and blessed are his children.” The angel said, “If his children obey his commandments and follow his orders, they will be with him in glory, but if they disobey, they will have no share with him.”

Then St. Macarius said, “Do not decide, my lord, what would happen to my children this way. For if one grape in a bunch remains, the blessing of the Lord will be on it. For if love for one another remains among them, I believe that the Lord will never keep them away from His Kingdom.”

### The Sign of the Cross

The sign of the Cross is a profound blessing 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.”

### The Tithes

*“Bring all the tithes into the storehouse”, says God, “that there may be food in My house and prove Me now in this”, says the Lord of Hosts, “if I will not open for you the windows of Heaven and pour out for you such blessings that there will not be room enough to receive it.” (Malachi 3:10-11). The Lord taught His disciples, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” (Acts 20:35). Indeed, “God loves a cheerful giver.” (2 Corinthians 9:8). Blessed are the faithful people who diligently offer their tithes to the Lord and His Church, Convents and Monasteries.*

In the Book of Haggai the Prophet the Lord of Hosts rebukes the people for not making offering, *“Now therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘Consider your ways! You have sown much, and bring in little;*



*you eat, but do not have enough; you drink, but you are not filled with drink; you clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; and he who earns wages, earns wages to put into a bag with holes.’” (Haggai 1:5-6).*

### The Parents

Isaac blessed his son Jacob: *“May God Almighty bless you, and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may be an assembly of peoples; and give you the blessing of Abraham, to you and your descendants with you, that you may inherit the land in which you are a stranger, which God gave to Abraham.” (Genesis 28:3-4).* Similarly, Jacob blessed Joseph and his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, saying, *“God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has fed me all my life long to this day, the Angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads.” (Genesis 48:15-16).* The Ten Commandments clearly state: *“Honour your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, that your days may be long, and that it may be well with you in the land which the LORD your God is giving you. (Deuteronomy 5:16).*

In Proverbs, Solomon clearly states: *“My son, hear the instruction of your father and do not forsake the law of your mother, for they will be graceful ornaments on your head, and chains about your neck.” (Proverbs 1:8-9).* *“The disobedient are not blessed but rather foolish, bringing grief to their father and bitterness to their mother.” (Proverbs 17:25).*

### The Fathers of the Church

We obtain blessings from kissing the Cross in the hand of the Priest/Bishop/Patriarch. We request he place the Cross on our heads and pray for us or anoint us with holy oil. It was said about Father Mikhail Ibrahim, parish priest of St. Mark’s Church Shoubra, that he was a great blessing to all his children in confession. Many flocked to him for words of benefit and spiritual guidance. Similarly, the saintly Pope Kyrillos VI was a spiritual pillar from whom thousands received blessings in their lives, solutions to their problems, answers to their questions, comfort to their anxieties.

### The Holy Water

The prayers of the Lakan (celebrated on the Feast of the Apostles, Feast of the Epiphany and Holy Thursday) sanctify the waters.

The Priest signs the water with the Cross and says,

*Bless this water. Amen.*

*Let it be a fountain of blessings. Amen.*

*ϕ A pure gift. Amen.*

*ϕ Absolution from sins. Amen.*

*ϕ To chase away sickness. Amen.*

*ϕ To be terrifying to devils. Amen.*

*ϕ To have none of the opposing powers come near it. Amen.*

*ϕ To be full of the evangelical powers. Amen.*

*ϕ Make it, for whoever drinks or takes from it, a purification for the soul, the spirit and the body. Amen.*

*ϕ Healing from pains and sanctification for the dwellings. Amen.*

*ϕ Useful for every purpose. Amen.*

*You, our Lord Jesus Christ, renewed our nature once more, which was contaminated by sin, through water and the spirit.*

*You are the One who submerged the sin by the water which rose in the days of Noah.*

*You are the One who freed the Hebrews from Pharaoh's slavery through Moses and the sea.*

*You are the One who separated the Israelites from the trickery of Belial through water and fire at the time of Elijah.*

The Priest crosses the water three times and says,

*Now, our Master, make this water holy by Your Holy Spirit, and grant it to be for all who use it by any means or those who touch it, or those who drink from it, or those who wash with it, a purification, a blessing, a cleansing and a salvation.*

*Let Your name, O Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be glorified from all the elements, the angels, all the people, and all the seen and unseen. Now and forever and to the end of all ages. Amen.*

This water becomes a great blessing to those who drink from it (whether ill or well). The Holy water is used as a blessing in the home.

### The Family Altar

That special corner of prayer in the house is known as the Family Altar. It constitutes the blessed pillar in the Christian Orthodox home. The parents together with the children raise prayers and hymns to the Lord for

His gifts and blessings. Thus, the home becomes a house of prayers, a house of blessings, a house of purity.

His Grace Bishop Moussa, in his booklet “The Family and Relationships”, writes: “This ‘family altar’ will keep the Lord watching over us with His love, present in person in the house. His words will ring in the ears of young and old and will lead to a renewed and quiet repentance. The prayers will be an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to work in the hearts, to renew and sanctify them and guide them to what is good. This altar will be a chance for the family ties to be strengthened at the spiritual as well as at the emotional level. Thus, the family will not be divided, neither the spouses nor the children, but all will behave with love and in a giving spirit, not in a spirit of egotism.”

### The Altar Vessels

The Holy Vessels which contain the Body and Blood of Christ are a great source of blessings. Pope Peter VII El-Gawly, the 109<sup>th</sup> Patriarch of Alexandria, was a righteous shepherd through whom God performed many wonders. The most famous is the incident of the Nile Inundation. One year, the flood of the Nile was not enough to provide water for the people, land and animals. The masses were worried about famine, inflation and high prices if the land could not be cultivated. They went to the Governor of Egypt, asking him to order the clergy to pray and supplicate God Almighty that He might bless the water of the Nile and increase the floodwater.

Pope Peter VII called the bishops and clergy and went with them to the banks of the river. There he celebrated the Divine Liturgy, and after the service he washed the Holy Service vessels with water from the river. Then he threw the water and a blessed Kourbana (Holy Bread) in the river. The waves of the river roared. The water was disturbed and flooded, so the deacons, in haste, removed all the altar vessels used in the celebration, for fear of drowning. This incident glorified the Patriarch’s position before the Basha, the Governor who made him close to him, and honoured the men of his nation, and increased their authority and grace.

### The Vestments

The liturgical vestments worn by the holy fathers are a source of blessings. When St. Paula told St. Anthony that the time of his death approached, St. Paula requested St. Anthony return to Alexandria and bring the cloak of St. Athanasius to shroud him. This St. Anthony did

and St. Athanasius received from St. Anthony the garment of St. Paula, which he used to wear during the Great Feasts. At one time St. Athanasius wanted to demonstrate to the people the blessedness and holiness of the owner of that garment. St. Athanasius put it over a dead man and the dead man rose up instantly. The news of this spread all over the land of Egypt.

St. Shenouda the Archmandrite (Feast Day – 14<sup>th</sup> July) was a shining Pillar of Monasticism. One day an army commander asked him to lend him his garment to wear during the war so that God might make him victorious. The Saint gave it to him and the commander overcame his enemies.

# Chapter 3

## The Beatitudes

Our Lord Jesus Christ chose to introduce His Sermon on the Mount by introducing a radically new view of blessedness. Each Beatitude begins like the Psalms with 'Blessed are...'. Like the Psalms, each focuses on an attitude or action that brings blessings. The blessings, however, envisioned in the Old Testament are primarily material. In Jesus' Beatitudes, the blessings are basically spiritual and the reward is found in the relationship engaged with God Himself and in His service.

Only the poor in spirit, those who mourn, who are meek, who hunger and thirst for righteousness, who are merciful and pure in heart are truly in fellowship with God and will inherit the Kingdom. The Church reads the Beatitudes everyday in the Sixth Hour Gospel of the Agpia, the hour in which we commemorate the crucifixion of our Lord and Saviour.

### **Blessed Are The Poor In Spirit For Theirs Is The Kingdom Of Heaven**

Such people are very rich in spirit yet they appear poor (through true meekness) to deflect the attention from their lives. Just as the water constantly pours itself into the lowest part of the earth that is accessible to it, so God pours His healing, strengthening, sanctifying Grace into the poor in spirit.

St. Mary, the Mother of God, is the greatest example of a person who inherited the Kingdom of Heaven because she was poor in spirit. The Holy Mother says, "*My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my saviour for He has looked down on the lowly state of His maidservant.*" (Luke 1:46).

St. Annasimone left her throne and palace and headed to the inner desert for a life of worship and prayer, contemplation and quietness. However, she didn't want any vainglory, thus she disguised her virtues and character and presented herself as a crazy nun. Upon visiting the convent it was revealed to Anba Daniel the true identity of this holy woman who went on to be a hermit.

Father Abdel-Messih El-Maqary (1892-1964) lived his life poor in spirit, in order to avoid vainglory. This saint lived as a fool in words and deeds

in order to disguise his virtues. The Lord performed great miracles and wonders through Father Abdel-Messih, including raising the dead and healing the sick.

St. Paul captures the meaning of the first beatitude in, *“We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are 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. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death is working in us, but life in you.”* (2 Corinthians 4:8-12).

### Simon the Tanner

When this Saint was practicing his work as a shoemaker, a woman came to him to mend her shoes, and this woman was beautiful. It so happened that when she was taking off her shoes, her legs showed and he looked lustfully at her. At once he drove the awl into one of his eyes, thus plucking it out in keeping with the commandment of the Lord, *“But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.”* (Matthew 5:28-29).

### **Blessed Are Those Who Mourn For They Shall Be Comforted**

Christ was indeed the great Mourner. Old Testament prophecy contemplated Him as “a Man of Sorrows, and acquitted with grief.” (Isaiah 53:3). When contending with the Pharisees over their slavish observance of the Sabbath, and while seeking to teach them, by precept and example, a proper understanding of God’s holy institution, He “grieved for the hardness of their hearts.” (Mark 3:5). Behold Him sighing before He healed the deaf and dumb man (Mark 7:34). We notice Christ weeping by the graveside of Lazarus (John 11:35). Hear His lamentation over the beloved city: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem...how often would I have gathered your children together.” (Matthew 23:37).

Draw near and reverently behold Christ in the gloom of Gethsemane, pouring out His petitions to the Father “with strong crying and tears.” (Hebrews 5:7). Bow down in awe and wonder as you hear Him crying from the Cross, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Mark

15:34). Hear His plea, “Is it nothing to you, all you that pass by? Behold and see if there be any sorrow like My sorrow.” (Lamentations 1:12).

### St. Mary

St. Mary experienced sufferings in which she mourned after carrying the Lord Jesus. Simon prophesied to St. Mary saying: “*A sword shall pierce your heart. St. Mary saw Christ carry the Cross to Golgotha and the three heavy falls. Yet at the foot of the Cross Christ entrusted His mother to His disciple St. John saying: “‘Woman, behold your son!’ Then He said to the disciple, ‘Behold your mother!’ And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home.*” (John 19:26-27).

His Holiness Pope Shenouda says: “Christ entrusted His virgin disciple with His Virgin Mother. He confided His Mother, who nursed and cherished Him dearly, to His beloved disciple who in many instances enfolded Him with a loving embrace. He entrusted His Mother who stood beside His Cross, to the only disciple who followed Him to the Cross. He confided His Mother who carried in her womb the smouldering ember of His Divinity to His disciple who wrote a book to establish this Divinity.”

In the 9<sup>th</sup> Hour Prayer, the Church says:

*“When the mother saw the lamb, the Shepherd and Saviour of the world, hanging on the Cross, she said: ‘the world rejoices at the acceptance of salvation, but my heart burns when I look at your crucifixion which you endured for the sake of all; O my Son and my God.’”*

### St. Monica

For over twenty years this great Saint cried for the return and repentance of her son Augustine. St. Ambrose of Milan assured Monica that the son of tears would not perish. St. Augustine says plainly in his *Confessions*,

*“And thou didst send thy hand from on high, and thou drawest my soul out of that profound darkness, when my Mother, thy faithful servant, did weep for me in thy presence more bitterly than mothers are used to bewail the corporal death of their children. Thou didst hearken to her and didst not despise her tears which, flowing down, did water the earth in all the places where she prayed.”*

Successive generations of Christians have invoked St. Monica and venerated her as patroness of married women and a patron for Christian mothers. She gained her sanctity and fame because of St. Augustine, whom she gave to the world and with whom always appears in her pictures and icons. Not only did she give physical birth to the greatest church theologian, but she has always been credited for being God's principle instrument in bringing about his spiritual birth by grace.

In all our afflictions and problems we cry to the Lord with David saying: "When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought joy to my soul."

### St. Peter

St. Peter wept bitterly for his sin of betraying his Lord and Saviour three times in the presence of servants. These tears of repentance and deep regret were acknowledged by Christ who restored Peter to his Apostolic rank. Christ comforted Peter and asked him, "*Do you love Me?*" *Although broken, Peter responds, "I do." Christ then asks him to focus on His ministry saying, "Feed My sheep." (John 22).*

### **Blessed Are The Meek For They Shall Inherit The Earth**

Christ is the meekest person ever to have lived. The Lord said, "*Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.*" (Matthew 11:29-30).

In humility Christ was born in stables in a manger. Christ had nowhere to lay His head. In meekness Christ bowed His head before John the Baptist at the waters of the Jordan and said: "Permit it to be so in order to fulfil all righteousness." Our Lord Jesus Christ sought not the limelight but shunned advertising and disdained popularity. When the crowds would make Him their idol, He avoided them (Mark 1:45; 7:24). "*When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take Him by force, to make Him a king, He departed again into a mountain Himself alone.*" (John 6:15)

When His brethren urged Him, saying, "*Show Yourself to the world.*" He declined and went up to the feast in secret (John 7:2-10). When He, in fulfilment of prophecy, presented Himself to Israel as their King, He entered Jerusalem in a most lowly fashion, riding upon the foal of an ass (Zechariah 9:9; John 12:14).



### St. John the Baptist

St. John the Baptist was meek yet courageous, filled with the Spirit of God from his mother's womb. When the disciples of John came complaining that people were following Christ and that He was baptising (although He did not), St. John said: "*I must decrease and He must increase.*" *The Lord exalted John saying: "Among those born to women there is none greater than John."* (Matthew 11:11).

St. Peter advises us, "*Be clothed with humility, for 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'* *Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time.*" (1 Peter 5:5-6).

### King Uzziah

God has resisted the proud by ruining their success. In 2 Chronicles 26 we are told something of the story of King Uzziah. His amazing success as a ruler, administrator and commander-in-chief takes us right through to verse 15, where we read, 'His fame spread far and wide, for he was greatly helped until he became powerful. But after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall. He was unfaithful to the Lord his God, and entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense.' Now the burning of incense was exclusively reserved by divine law for the Levitical priests, God having added the clear warning: 'Anyone else who comes near the sanctuary must be put to death.' (Numbers 18:7). The arrogant Uzziah decided to override God's law, but even as he stood in the sanctuary, defying the courageous priests who remonstrated with him, the deadly disease of leprosy broke out on his forehead and his reign was at an end.

### King Belshazzar

God resists the proud by removing their status. Like Uzziah, King Belshazzar was successful, opulent – and arrogant. He also had recent history as a warning, for Daniel reminded him that although the king's father, Nebuchadnezzar, had been equally exalted, 'When his heart became arrogant and hardened with pride, he was deposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory.' (Daniel 5:20). Refusing to learn from history, Belshazzar was doomed to repeat it and in the midst of his careless revelry he was violently done to death. Let us learn the lesson that God has power both to give and to take away. None of our positions in business, social or church life, are so secure that God cannot end them,

and if we do not hold them in humility we may be forced to leave them in humiliation. This then is the first law by which grace is governed – the proud in spirit are resisted.

Pope Kyrillos says, “He who runs from honour it will follow him whilst he who runs after honour it will flee from him.” It was said of the Saintly Pope Kyrillos that a monk has become a Patriarch and the Patriarch has remained a monk.

Having reminded them of the disasters that befell their ancestors in the desert, St. Paul added, “So, if you are thinking you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!” (1 Corinthians 10:12). The permanent presence of the old nature guarantees that in the Christian life there is no victory without vigilance; “A wandering heart needs a watchful eye.” No person is so far advanced along the Christian pathway, so knowledgeable in the Scriptures, so experienced in Christian service, so prominent in Church affairs, that he is beyond the reach of Satan or the treachery of his own heart. The deadly subtlety of sin should constantly drive us to our knees.

### **Blessed Are Those Who Hunger And Thirst For Righteousness For They Shall Be Filled.**

Christ, the Good Shepherd, searches for the lost sheep. He said, “*Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.*” (Mark 2:17).

With power and might the Lord Jesus sought the weak and vulnerable. He said, “*I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent.*” (Luke 4:43).

Before the Incarnation, the Holy Spirit announced, “And righteousness shall be the girdle of His loins.” (Isaiah 11:5). When Christ entered this world, He said, “Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God.” (Hebrews 10:9). As a boy of twelve He asked, “Did you not know that I would be about My Father’s business?” (Luke 2:49). At the beginning of His public ministry He declared, “Think not that I have come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I have not come to destroy but to fulfil.” (Matthew 5:17). To His disciples He declared, “My food is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work.” (John 4:34). Of Him the Holy Spirit has said, “You love righteousness, and hate wickedness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness above Your companions.”

(Psalm 45:7). Well may He be called “The Lord our Righteousness.”  
(Jeremiah 23:6).

### St. Paul

St. Paul diligently worked for the Kingdom of God “*always ready to be poured out as a drink offering.*” (2 Timothy 4:6). Despite innumerable obstacles and problems the Lord stood with him and strengthened him, saying, “*But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear. And I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom.*” (2 Timothy 4:17-18).

He was a chosen vessel, most keen to proclaim the Gospel of Christ to Jews and Gentiles. He established numerous Churches in Asia Minor, wrote 14 epistles, ordained Bishops like Timothy and Titus and yet he considered himself the least of the Apostles.

### Father Bishoy Kamel

The very blessed Father Bishoy Kamel (1935-1979) diligently and faithfully hungered for righteousness. He gave particular care for the youth, especially those away from home studying in Alexandria. Delegated by Pope Kyrillos to Los Angeles in 1969, Father Bishoy laboured for his children to ensure they are entrenched in the love of God and preserving the rich heritage of our Orthodox Church. In Father Bishoy’s ministry the words of David the Psalmist were manifested, “*Surely I will not go into the chamber of my house, or go up to the comfort of my bed; will not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids, until I find a place for the LORD, a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob.*” (Psalm 132:3-5).

### **Blessed Are The Merciful For They Shall Obtain Mercy**

The Lord Jesus is the most merciful person. Jonah the prophet experienced this and cried saying: “*You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in loving kindness.*” (Jonah 4:2).

Christ was merciful to the sinful woman and the Canaanite Woman whose daughter was demon possessed. The Lord said, “*Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.*” (Luke 6:36).

In the raising of Incense (both vespers and matins) the priest, carrying the Cross with three candles and standing at the foot of the sanctuary, says: “God have mercy upon us, settle Your mercy upon us, have compassion upon us.”

The conclusion to the Adam Theotokia (said on Sunday-Tuesday) is: “Your mercies O my God are countless and exceedingly plenteous is Your compassion. For you are good and merciful, let your compassion speedily come to us. Have compassion upon us all, O Lord God our Saviour and have mercy upon us according to Your mercy.”

### St. Peter the Worshipper

He was at first a tax collector, who was very cruel and had no mercy. Because of his stinginess, he was nicknamed ‘the merciless’. The Lord Jesus had compassion upon him and wanted to turn him away from all his bad deeds. He therefore sent him a poor man to ask for a little food, and it thus happened that his servant arrived at the same time with bread. The tax collector took a loaf of bread and hit the poor man with it on the head, not as an act of mercy, but to get rid of him so that he might not come back again.

That same night, he saw a vision in his sleep, as though he was in the last day, where the scale of justice was erected, and he saw some people clothed in black in the ugliest forms. They came and put his sins and his injustices on the left pan of the scale. Then a group of the angels of light, with beautiful countenances and in white clothes, came and stood beside the right pan of the scale. They appeared perplexed, for they did not find anything to put in the pan. One of them came forward, and put the loaf of bread with which he hit the head of the poor man and said, ‘There is nothing for this man except this loaf of bread.’

At this moment, Peter woke up from his sleep trembling and afraid. He started to rebuke himself for all that he had done. He started to be exceedingly merciful and compassionate, and he even gave his own tunic away. When nothing was left of his property, he left his town and sold himself as a slave, and paid the price to the poor. When his good deeds became well known, he fled to the wilderness of St. Macarius, where he became a monk and lived an ascetic life with great devotion and good repute, which made him worthy to know the day of his departure. He called the elders of the monks and bade them farewell and departed in peace.

### Bishop Abraam of Fayoum

Two priests, who were servants in the church, had a serious quarrel and sought the intervention of Bishop Abraam to resolve their differences. St. Abraam commenced by praying the Lord's Prayer and he stopped at "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." Both servants turned around and questioned the saintly Bishop as to why he had stopped and did not continue. Anba Abraam turned and said to them, "You seek forgiveness from God but you are unwilling and unprepared to forgive. How can this be? Have you forgotten the words of Christ, *"unless you forgive your brother from your heart."* (Matthew 18:35).

### St. Macarius the Great

A weak monk fell into the sin of adultery. The monks, upon learning of this shameful matter, reported it to St. Makarius the Great who ignored it. Several weeks later the monks noticed that the weak monk invited the girl into his cell. Outraged they headed to St. Makarius requesting he come and witness for himself. Sensing the arrival of St. Makarius and monks the weak monk panicked and did not know where to hide the girl. He found a large barrel and hid her beneath it. Upon arrival into the cell with the monks, St. Makarius (being foretold by the Spirit) knew the girl was beneath the barrel so he sat on it while the monks conducted a thorough search of the cell. The monks were bewildered as they saw the girl enter but now she was gone. As they left St. Makarius warned the weak sinful monk. A voice came from heaven: "Blessed are you Makarius for you are like your Master, covering peoples sins not condemning the monk for falling into adultery."

### **Blessed Are The Pure In Heart For They Shall See God**

This was perfectly exemplified in Christ. He was the "Lamb without blemish and without spot." (1 Peter 1:19). In becoming man, He was uncontaminated, contracted none of the defilements of sin. His humanity was, and is, perfectly holy (Luke 1:35). He was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separated from sinners." (Hebrews 7:26). "In Him is no sin." (1 John 3:5). Therefore, He "did no sin." (1 Peter 2:22) and "knew no sin." (2 Corinthians 5:21). "He is pure." (1 John 3:3). Because He was absolutely pure in nature, His motives and actions were always pure. When He said, "I seek not Mine own glory." (John 8:50), He summed up the whole of His earthly career.

The pure in heart are those who are free from everything that keeps them back from God. Such persons can see and choose goodness. Their judgement is unclouded by passions and they can discern the things of God. For this reason David implores God saying, *“Create a pure heart in me O God and put a new and loyal Spirit within me.” (Psalm 51:10).*

The heart is the most important of all organs. The Lord seeks a pure and clean heart, *“My son, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways.” (Proverbs 23:26).* Solomon declares, *“Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.” (Proverbs 4:23).* And *“Truly God is good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart.” (Psalm 73:1).* *“Defilement”, says Christ, “comes from within the heart.” “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man.” (Mark 7:21-23).*

### St. Yustina

This great female Saint was pure in heart and mind to the extent that the devils fled upon the mention of her name. A rich man was in love with Yustina and, as he could not attract her, he engaged a magician called Kyprianus. The magician, Kyprianus, called upon the devils saying, “If you do not bring Yustina to me I shall adopt Christianity”. The Chief of the devils thought a device to deceive Kyprianus. Thus he ordered one of his soldiers to disguise himself as Yustina and then go to Kyprianus. He then hastened to make known to Kyprianus her coming. He rejoiced waiting for her. When he appeared to Kyprianus, disguised as Yustina, Kyprianus welcomed her. At the mere mention of her blessed name, Satan melted away and disappeared like smoke. Upon learning that this was a deceitful trick of Satan, Kyprianus burnt his books of magic and was baptised by the Patriarch of Antioch.

### St. George

The Prince of Martyrs, St. George endured incredible sufferings for seven years. Then the Emperor ordered his imprisonment and placed a prostitute to seduce him. The following day the Emperor was surprised to learn that the sinful girl was converted to Christianity through the blessed personality of St. George. Blessed is the person who overcomes lustful desires and temptations through the power of the Holy Spirit.

## The Weak Monk

One day someone knocked on the door of Sts. Palamon and Pachomius. The visitor spent the night with them. Pride and self-reliance had overcome that person. While they were talking about the words of God before a fire, for it was winter, the guest told them, "Whoever of you has strong faith in God, let him rise up, stand on these blazing embers and recite the prayer which the Lord has taught to His disciples." When the old man St. Palamon heard that, he admonished him saying, "Cursed is the defiled devil who planted this thought in your heart. So stop talking." The guest did not heed the words of the old man and said, "I would." He rose up and stood on the blazing coal while saying the Lord's Prayer slowly. Then he stepped out of the fire, which did not harm his body at all, and went to his abode with arrogance.

Pachomius told Anba Palamon, "God knows that I marvelled about this brother who stood on the embers and whose feet did not burn." The old man replied saying, "Do not be amazed for there is no doubt that this is the work of the devil. The Lord allowed his feet not to be burned. As it is written, to the crooked, God sends crooked ways. Believe me, O my son, if you knew the torment that is prepared for him, you would be weeping for his wretchedness."

The devil came to this man in the form of a woman and enticed him to allow her to enter his cell. Because of the pride and the blindness of his perception, he did not realize the danger that surrounded him. Lust filled his heart toward her, and immediately the devil struck and threw him on the ground and he remained as a dead man for a day. When he regained his consciousness and his faculties, he went to Abba Palamon weeping and remorseful for what he had done. He asked for their help and prayers, for the devil had captivated him by his own free will. While he was talking to them, the old man and his disciple wept, and the evil spirit suddenly came over him. He went to the mountain, and he lost his mind. He was astray for a period of time, and then he threw himself in a fire, which burned him. When the old man knew that, he was grieved. His disciple asked him, "How did God allow this to happen to him after he confessed and asked for repentance with tears and remorse?" The Abba answered, "God, with His foreknowledge, knew that the repentance of this brother was not sincere, so He allowed him to reap what he did."

## **Blessed Are The Peacemakers For They Shall Be Called Sons Of God**

Christ is the King of Peace and we address Him in the litany of peace saying: “*O King of Peace, grant us Your Peace for You have given us everything.*”

Christ, through His Incarnation, made peace between heaven and earth. At His birth the heavenlies sang: “*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!*” (Luke 2:14). Through His crucifixion and resurrection, Christ reconciled the heavenlies with the earthlies.

At the end of the Doxology, we pray that we may be worthy of that Heavenly peace, saying, “O Christ, the Word of the Father, the Only God, grant us Your peace which is full of joy. As when You gave it to Your Holy Apostles, so also say unto us what You said to them, ‘My peace I give to you...My peace which I have taken from My Father, I now leave with you until the end of the ages.’” The peace which Christ gives us and which the world cannot give is the peace that comes from the cross, from the forgiveness of sins and from the Reconciliation with God. Even at the height of His suffering and hardship the Lord established peace between two hostile, arrogant governors. The Lord implants peace between Herod and Pilate – that very day (Luke 23:12). He is our peace (Ephesians 2:14).

### **Abigail**

In wisdom she restored peace with David. This wise woman is described as a beautiful and intelligent woman (1 Samuel 25:7). David was pursued by Saul and had protected the flocks and herds of Nabal. At harvest time Nabal insulted David’s messengers and refused to share from his abundance. Angry, David determined to wipe out Nabal’s household. Abigail, Nabal’s wife, acted wisely and promptly to convert conflict into peace. She met the marching David with provisions and urged him not to take revenge. David accepted Abigail’s wise advise and thanked her, “*Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, who has sent you today to meet me. May you be blessed for your good judgment and for keeping me from bloodshed this day and from avenging myself with my own hands.*” (1 Samuel 25:32-33). When Nabal died ten days later, David invited her to be his wife and she accepted. She travelled with David during the difficult years while he fled from Saul and she bore him one son called Kileab.



## Ambassadors of Peace

One of the titles of God is to describe Him as “The God of Peace” (Hebrews 13:20), but this is not just a passive characteristic. The Son of God came into the world to “Guide our feet into the path of peace.” (Luke 1:79), so that we might have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1). We as children of the King of Peace must be ambassadors of peace. We must preserve peace, “with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (Ephesians 4:2-3).

We are required to promote peace and also pursue peace. The Bible uses these precise words: “Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.” (Psalm 34:14). St. Paul stresses the same: “Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.” (Romans 14:19). “Make every effort,” says St. Paul to the Hebrews, “to live in peace with all men.” (Hebrews 12:14), “if it is possible.” (Romans 12:18).

Some, however, may say that such a thing is impossible, that human nature, being what it is, with some people, peaceful co-existence is impossible. St. Paul recognises the difficulty of living at peace with some people, but asks whether we are pursuing the possibility with every power at our disposal.

Perhaps the greatest single thing a Christian can do to promote peace in the world is to share with others what the Bible calls the Gospel of Peace (Ephesians 6:15).

## **Blessed Are Those Who Are Persecuted For Righteousness’ Sake For Theirs Is The Kingdom Of Heaven.**

The Lord Christ endured persecution, abuse and blasphemy. Christ was subjected to six fraudulent religious and civil trials, from 9:00pm Thursday night to 9:00am Friday morning:

- i Before Ananias – in the darkness of the night, the first conspiracy trial was conducted in the house of the Father-In-Law of the current High Priest. False witnesses were recruited and their testimonies were inconsistent. (Mark 14:53-59).

- ii Before Caiaphas – He asked, “Are you the Christ, the Son of God?” Christ replied, “It is as you said.” Caiaphas tore his clothes and declared that Christ has blasphemed. (Matthew 26:63-65).
- iii Before Sanhedrin – early on Friday morning, members of the highest Jewish religious body convened, ready to deliver Christ to Pilate for crucifixion. They established three false grounds: that Christ subverted the nation, had forbidden them to pay taxes and that He claimed to be King.
- iv Before Pilate – who found no case against Christ (John 18:38) and referred the matter to Herod.
- v Before Herod – was delighted to see Christ and invited Him to perform any miracles (Luke 23:8). When he discovered He was achieving nothing he referred Christ back to Pilate.
- vi Before Pilate – when Pilate could not find any charges and felt it was out of jealousy (Matthew 27:18) the Jews delivered Christ to Him. He ordered Christ to be flogged and set free. Pilate was put on notice by His wife, not to deal with Christ in an unjust manner (Matthew 27:9). Finally, Pilate washed his hands and handed Christ to the Jews to be crucified.

In the Fraction of the Son we pray: *“For my sake my Master you accepted disgrace and blaspheme and you accepted shame, insults and blackmail and slapping. The sinful people hit you over the head, they spat at Your face because of me. They placed a crown of thorns on Your head and a rod in Your right hand, they dressed you in a purple robe and made fun of you, and You bore all this because of me.”*

#### St. Paul in journeys and perils

The great Apostle of the Gentiles endured multiple persecution and insults for the sake of the Kingdom. Before Felix, St. Paul delivered a speech following which the Governor said to St. Paul: *“That’s enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you.”* (Acts 24:25).

Some two years later St. Paul addresses Festus who dismisses the Apostle saying: “You are out of your mind, Paul!” he shouted. “Your great learning is driving you insane.”

### St. Athanasius the Apostolic

This great man was the 20<sup>th</sup> Patriarch of Alexandria. St. Athanasius was the Great Father of Orthodoxy and Defender of the Faith. He played a key role in formulating the Christian Creed at the Council of Nicea in 325 AD. He presided over the Coptic Church for 46 years, of which over 17 were passed in exile on account of his vigorous opposition to the spread of Arianism, which had the support of Emperors. Arius was an Alexandrian priest who denied the divinity of God the Son. In his defence of the true Orthodox Faith, St. Athanasius was exiled 5 times. St. Athanasius used the periods of exile as a great opportunity to enjoy solitude and seclusion, praying for his flock and writing to them pastoral letters.

St. Athanasius' strong stand against the Arian heresy attracted fierce opposition to the Saintly Patriarch. When told, "The whole world is against you Athanasius", he replied, "And I am against the world." But for St. Athanasius' efforts, teachings and writings, the whole world may have embraced Arianism.

St. Gregory of Naziarzen says about the great Alexandrian Patriarch: "When I praise Athanasius' virtue itself is my theme, for I name every virtue as often as I mention Him who was possessed of all virtues. He was the true Pillar of the Church. His life and conduct were the rule of Bishops and his doctrine the rule of the Orthodox Faith." *"If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you."* (1 Peter 4:14).

### St. Stephen

St. Stephen, who was filled with faith and the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:5), and stood bravely before 3 Jewish Councils giving witness to the Risen Lord. He was full of zeal and those who rose up against him could not withstand the wisdom of the Spirit with which he spoke. They started plotting against him and sent men to accuse him of blasphemy against God and Moses. They set up false witnesses who said that they heard him speaking against the law and the temple. These complaints were presented to the Sanhedrin and Stephen was taken to the Synagogue.

Stephen stood up in the Synagogue and gloriously defended himself. He proved to them that he did not insult Moses but honoured him and that he respected the law, the tent of witness and Solomon's Temple. But

Stephen made it clear that God does not dwell in houses made with hands.

Stephen was brave and courageously described them as stiff-necked people who resisted the Holy Spirit like their fathers did before them, and how they persecuted the prophets then betrayed Jesus Christ and crucified Him.

This talk enraged the Jews but Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into Heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father. His face became like that of an angel. Then he was cast out of the city, as they did with the Lord and they stoned him.

The Christian Church in general and the Coptic Church in particular has innumerable martyrs and confessors. These great heroes of faith received heavenly crowns for their indescribable sufferings.

### St. Dimiana

The exceedingly deep love of Christ inflamed Dimiana's heart and she would not deny the Lord Jesus; preferring to suffer barbaric tortures for three years. Bravely, she endured many brutal tortures such as, having her body smashed with iron spouts, being placed in a kettle of boiling oil, being mullied on her head and boiling oil mixed with pitch poured inside, and having her eyes gouged out. Throughout her torments she was continually strengthened by appearances of the Lord Jesus, Saint Mary the Virgin and Archangel Michael.

The demise of her tortures, was being placed between four pegs, having her limbs pulled until her body was torn apart. As her pure, dismembered body lay upon the naked earth, the Lord Jesus, surrounded by His angels, appeared with St. Mary the Virgin saying, "Blessed daughter Dimiana, I say to you get up without rotteness." At once, she arose and worshipped Him. He then said to her, "Be mighty my chosen daughter, I have prepared your heavenly bridal crown in perpetual joy and will make your name exalted in this place. A church will be built on your name and people from everywhere will come to this place. My blessing and that of Virgin Mary's will be here forever." The Saviour then gave her His peace and ascended into the heavens.

Witnessing the immovability of her unshakable faith in the face of any conceivable tortures, orders were given to behead her and the forty virgins. They all received the crown of martyrdom on 13<sup>th</sup> Tooba (21<sup>st</sup>

January). It is believed that approximately four hundred souls who believed in Jesus Christ by witnessing her tortures were also martyred. Saint Dimiana received three crowns: virginity, martyrdom and monasticism.

### St. Samuel the Confessor

Several attempts were made to force St. Samuel to accept the misleading doctrines of the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD. The Coptic Church vehemently opposes the decrees of this Council, which stated that the Lord Jesus Christ had two natures and two wills, this council also condemned the courageous Patriarch of Alexandria, St. Discoruous, who was tortured and exiled for his invincible faith. St. Samuel tore the Tome of Leo (ie the decree of Pope Leo of Rome) and consequently paid the price of losing his right eye at the hands of the Roman oppressors. St. Samuel, together with his monks, were exiled to the mount of Kalamoun. *“But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you are blessed. And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.” (1 Peter 3:14).*

“There shall come a time”, says St. Anthony the Great, “when men will go mad and when they see someone who is not mad, they will attack him saying, ‘You are mad, you are not like us.’”

## The Beatitudes

(Matthew 5:3-10)

Jesus' Words	Kingdom Values	Human Values
Blessed are those who are:		
(v.3) poor in spirit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• self-abasement</li> <li>• humility</li> <li>• dependence on God</li> <li>• reliance on God's Word</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• self-esteem</li> <li>• self-confidence</li> <li>• self-sufficiency</li> <li>• self-reliance</li> </ul>
(v.4) mourn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sensitivity to personal weaknesses</li> <li>• concern for others</li> <li>• contriteness</li> <li>• desire to forgive and be forgiven</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• pleasure</li> <li>• personal comfort</li> <li>• entertainment</li> <li>• self-justification</li> </ul>
(v.5) meek	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• courtesy</li> <li>• obedience to God</li> <li>• willingness to serve</li> <li>• gentleness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• pride</li> <li>• power</li> <li>• self-importance</li> <li>• prestige</li> </ul>
(v.6) hunger for righteousness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• desire to grow</li> <li>• moral purity</li> <li>• self-control</li> <li>• self-denial</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• self-satisfaction</li> <li>• personal rights</li> <li>• vengeance</li> </ul>
(v.7) merciful	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• compassion</li> <li>• generosity</li> <li>• forgiveness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• self-righteousness</li> <li>• personal rights</li> <li>• vengeance</li> </ul>
(v.8) pure in heart	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• moral sensitivity</li> <li>• separation from worldliness</li> <li>• integrity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cosmopolitan attitude</li> <li>• sophistication</li> <li>• broad-mindedness</li> </ul>
(v.9) peacemakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• social concern</li> <li>• justice</li> <li>• reconciliation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• competition</li> <li>• defensiveness</li> <li>• assertiveness</li> </ul>
(v.10) persecuted because of righteousness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• involvement in doing good</li> <li>• endurance</li> <li>• dedication</li> <li>• loyalty</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ability to compromise</li> <li>• popularity</li> <li>• 'don't rock the boat'</li> <li>• opportunism</li> </ul>

Adapted from, "The Applied Bible Dictionary"

# Chapter 4

## Blessings and Temptations

Blessed are the many people who endure various temptations for they shall obtain many heavenly crowns. St. James salutes them saying, *“Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him”*. (James 1:12).

### i St. Marina the Monk

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).

### ii St. Macarius the Great

When Satan saw St. Macarius’ growth in virtues; he brought on him a severe temptation. He inspired a girl that had defiled herself with a man to claim that St. Macarius was the one who had defiled her. When her family heard that, they went to him, insulted and beat him severely, inflicting much pain on him, which he endured silently. Macarius reproached himself, saying, “O Macarius, now you have a wife and child, and it is meant for you to work day and night for your own food and for that of your child and wife.”

He worked continually at weaving mats and baskets, and he gave them to the man who ministered unto him; he sold them and gave the money to the woman. When the day of her delivery drew near, her labour was exceedingly difficult. She continued to suffer for four days and did not deliver until she confessed her false accusation

against the Saint and named the man that had defiled her.

When the family of the girl heard that, they decided to go to ask for his forgiveness. When St. Macarius heard that, he fled, running from the vainglory of this world.

iii Job the Righteous

Incredible were the temptations that Job endured. His house was burned, the cattle were destroyed and his beloved children died. In all this, Job did not sin or charge God with wrong (Job 1:22). Rather, he says, *“Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.”* (Job 1:21).

Most frustrated, Job's wife said, *“Curse God and die.”* (Job 2:9). In Meekness Job replied, *“‘You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?’ In all this Job did not sin with his lips.”* (Job 2:10).

St. James exalts Job saying, *“Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord - that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.”* (James 5:11).

iv Joseph the Righteous

The pure and righteous Joseph was humiliated by his brothers and sold as a slave to Egypt (Genesis 37:28). The Lord was with Joseph and the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake and the blessings of the Lord was on all that he had in the house and in the field (Genesis 39:5). Pharaoh's wife then plotted shamefully against Joseph and set him up, resulting in Joseph being imprisoned. The chief butler in prison received assistance from Joseph but did not remember Joseph but forgot him (Genesis 40:23). Years later, pharaoh had dreams which only Joseph could interpret. *“Can we find one as this”, said Pharaoh, “a man in whom is the Spirit of God.”* (Genesis 41:38).

v St. Sarabamoun Abu Tarha (The Veiled) of Menofia

This blessed and great Saint was a contemporary of Pope Peter El-Gawly and one of his famous bishops. God had granted him the gift



of healing the sick and casting out evil spirits.

He was called Salib. When he was a young man, some evil women seized him and accused him of murdering a young baby they had killed. In the court, he lifted up his heart to God, and with tears he asked for the intercession of St. Mary and the Saints. He looked to the slain baby and asked him to confess before the judge who killed him. The baby rose up and told the judge about the murderesses. The judge was astonished and set Salib free. Salib left the court and went immediately to St. Antonious monastery to become a monk, and later Pope Peter VII ordained him Bishop for the diocese of Menofia.

vi St. Paphnotious

This Saint was popular in the monastery. Jealousy and envy filled the heart of another monk who sought to destroy St. Paphnotious. Thus, the jealous monk plotted the following: He took his Bible and Agpia and Psalmody and placed them in the cell of St. Paphnotious. He then began screaming and yelling, "Someone has stolen my books, there is a thief among us." The Abbot, at the request of the jealous monk, ordered an investigation. The books were found in the cell of St. Paphnotious who was then punished by the monks. In humiliation he would attend the church and stand at the back, precluded from receiving the Holy Communion.

Without complaining or attempting to clear his name St. Paphnotious endured this heavy trials. Later, the jealous monk fell ill almost to the point of death. No medication or prayers of the monks produced any results. St. Daniel the Protopriest of Sheheet, visited the monastery and attended to the seriously ill monk. Anba Daniel said to the monk, "It appears you have committed a sin which you have not repented from." Anba Daniel said, "The only person who can pray for you and forgive you is Anba Paphnotious." Thus, Anba Paphnotious attended to the call of the ill monk and upon seeing him the monk wept and sought forgiveness and admitted, before all the monks of the monastery, his evil conduct which resulted in shame and humiliation for Anba Paphnotious.

# Chapter 5

## Blessings and Offerings

Our Lord Jesus Christ taught us “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” (Acts 20:35). The more you give the more spiritual and material blessings descend upon you. “*Blessed be the Lord,*” says the *Psalmist*, “*who daily leads us with benefits. The God of our salvation.*” (Psalm 68:19).

### i Cain and Abel

Abel offered to the Lord from the firstlings of his flock and of their fat (Genesis 4:4); whereas Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the Lord (Genesis 4:3). The Lord who searches the hearts and intentions respected Abel and his offering but he did not respect Cain and his offering (Genesis 4:5). The result was Cain was very angry and his countenance fell (Genesis 4:5). Jealousy and envy spread within the heart of Cain to the extent that Cain killed his own brother. The Lord rebuked Cain saying: “*What have you done? The voice of your brothers blood cries out to me from the ground.*” (Genesis 4:10).

Blessed is Abel the righteous who offered to the Lord the special and precious gifts of his possessions rather than Cain who negligently offered the inexpensive and minor offerings (i.e. From the ground). It should be stressed that God does not accept and bless only the expensive offerings and despise the cheap, rather if a person has the opportunity and the capacity to present to the Lord the best yet does not then this is unsatisfactory.

To this day, in every liturgy, the offering of Abel is remembered. In the litany of the Oblation, the Priest says: “Accept them upon Your holy and eloquent altar of Heaven, for an aroma of incense before Your greatness in the heavens, through the service of Your holy angels and archangels. As You have accepted the offerings of the righteous Abel, the sacrifice of our father Abraham, and the two mites of the widow, accept also the offerings of thanks of Your servants; those which are in abundance or scarcity, hidden or visible.”

In the prayers of Incense, the Priest also says: “O God who accepted the offerings of Abel the Righteous, the sacrifice of Noah and

Abraham and the incense of Aaron and Zachariah, accept this incense from our hands. The priest places five spoonfuls of Incense in the censor, symbolising the following five Old Testament offerings: i. Abel (Genesis 4:4), ii. Noah (Genesis 8:20-21), iii. Melchizedek (Genesis 14:18), iv. Aaron (Leviticus 9:24) and v. Zechariah (Luke 1:8-22).

ii Elijah and the Widow

The poor and simple widow offered to the man of God all she possessed, namely a handful of flour and a little oil in the jar. As a consequence of her offerings she was blessed, *“For thus says the Lord God of Israel: ‘The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry until the day the Lord sends rain on the earth.’”* (1 Kings 17:14). While the drought continued for three and a half years and many died, the house of blessings was preserved by the Lord, for this widow made an offering from the depth of her heart.

iii Woman Anoints Christ

When in Bethany at the House of Simon the Leper, the Lord, with His disciples, rested prior to the celebration of the Passover. There came an unknown woman full of love and honour to the Saviour, offering the most expensive and precious item she possessed. The woman entered the house carrying an alabaster flask of very costly fragrant oil and she poured it on Christ’s head (Matthew 26:7). This oil was preserved by the Israelite women to be used on their wedding day. Christ accepted and blessed her offering saying: *“Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her.”*

iv The Widow’s Two Mites (Luke 21)

When Christ was teaching in the temple He saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury so people could see them and honour their deeds. Then came a poor widow who discretely and quietly deposited two mites. The Lord exalted and blessed the depth of her offering saying, *“Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all, for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings to God but she out of her poverty has put in all the livelihood that she had.”* (Luke 21:4). On the Sermon on the Mountain Christ stated, *“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 6:3-4).

Many blessed people offer to the Lord. Recognising the relationship between blessings and offerings, the Church concludes the Litany of the Oblation as follows: *“Fill their houses and their stores with all goodness, surround them, O Lord, with the power of Your Holy Angels and Archangels. As they have remembered Your Holy Name on earth, remember them also O Lord in Your Kingdom and in this time also do not leave them behind.”*

v Feeding of the Five Thousand

Amidst the five thousand persons who were listening to the Lord, a young boy had a lunch box containing only five loaves of bread and two fish. With profound love and sincere meekness the boy offered his little box to the Apostle Andrew. The Lord took the simple offering, blessed it (Mark 6:41), and gave it to the people who ate and were filled. The Lord commanded that the disciples gather up the fragments that remain so that nothing is left. The disciples did so, filling up twelve baskets with fragments. Such signs and wonders reaffirm the relationship between offerings and blessings in the lives of the believers.

vi Cornelius

Cornelius was an Italian Centurion whom St. Luke describes as a devout man and one who feared God with all his household. He gave alms generously to the people and prayed to God always (Acts 10:1-2). The Lord blessed his almsgiving and answered his prayers and sent him an angel saying: *“Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God.”* (Acts 10:4). Thereafter, the Lord directed St. Peter in a vision saying: *“What God has cleansed you must not call common.”* (Acts 10:15). St. Peter, in meeting Cornelius, says, *“But God has shown me that I should not call any man common and unclean.”* Gods grace descended upon the household of Cornelius and was baptised and saved and became the first of the Gentiles to confess that Christ is the Son of God and the Saviour of the world. How great and varied are the blessings of God upon His servants and children who make offerings.

vii The Apostles and Disciples

St. Peter asked Christ, *“See, we have left all things and followed You. Therefore, what shall we have?”* (Matthew 19:27). The Lord assured St. Peter and the disciples that in offering their lives and consecrating their hearts they will be immeasurably blessed, *“And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.”* (Matthew 19:29). Empowered by the Holy Spirit the Apostles and disciples carried the

Gospel to the four corners of the world. Blessed are they and their effective message: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings glad tidings of good things, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’” (Isaiah 52:7).

viii St. Anthony the Great

The Father of all Monks, the Great St. Anthony fulfilled the Lord’s words, “*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). St. Anthony sold his 300 acres of land and entered the inner desert for a life of worship and prayer, devotion and contemplation offered to Christ the King. Commenting on this, Pope Shenouda III asks, “Did Anba Antonious take or receive blessings?” “The answer”, writes the great Patriarch, “the more he gave the more he received in multiple blessings.”

ix St. Abraam of Fayoum (1829-1914)

This great Bishop of Fayoum lived his entire life in the service of the poor and needy. The high ecclesiastical office of Bishop never alienated this pious man from his flock. St. Abraam opened the doors of his diocese/bishopric for the impoverished and marginalized. On one occasion Anba Abraam was given a donation for the renovation of the diocesan office. Instead of applying these funds to such a project, he gave it to the poor. When questioned about the donations, Anba Abraam said, “I have purchased a heavenly property.” The Lord blessed the life and ministry of Anba Abraam and granted him the gift of healing and casting out evil spirits.

In the doxology of St. Abraam we say,

*“You witnessed the truth and you ate with the poor, with great humility you loved your sheep. The lovers of worldly things sought for new buildings, but you build in heaven many heavenly buildings. How many are your miracles, you healed the sick, you prophesied great things, and you cast out demons. You became a type for us, by your pure ways, by love and mercy and testimony of the truth. Pray for us our holy father Abba Abraam, the Bishop of Fayoum, that Christ may forgive us our sins.”*

x Joseph of Aramethia

This rich man desired to take the body of the Lord and anoint it with

spices and bury it in his tomb. Not afraid of the authorities, he approached Pilate who consented. Joseph, together with Nicodemus headed to the Cross and went up the ladder, washing the body of our Saviour from the wounds and blood and took it down. The Lord rewarded their blessed work and they heard the angels sing the most ancient prayer in Christendom,

*“Holy God, Holy Almighty, Holy Immortal who was born of the Virgin, have mercy upon us. Holy God, Holy Almighty, Holy Immortal who was crucified for our sake, have mercy upon us. Holy God, Holy Almighty, Holy Immortal who arose from the dead and ascended to the heavens, have mercy upon us.”*

The Church honours these two righteous Fathers in the penultimate paragraph of the final hymn of Good Friday, Golgotha, saying: *“The righteous Joseph and Nicodemus came and took Christ’s Body and placed on it ointment, wrapped Him and placed Him in a tomb.”* Throughout the Pentecost season we chant a special Hiten for them: *“Through the prayers of the two righteous Saints, Joseph and Nicodimous, and Saint Mary Magdeline, O Lord grant us the forgiveness of our sins.”*

xi Mary Magdeline

With enthusiasm and haste Mary Magdeline went to the tomb, early on Sunday morning when it was still dark, carrying spices for the Lords Body. Upon seeing the empty tomb, she returned to the upper room calling upon Peter and John, who came to the tomb and then returned. But Mary stood weeping and then Christ called her, “Mary”. She replied, “Raboni” (Teacher). Her selfless giving was rewarded by being the first person to see the resurrected Lord. Before the conclusion and the Adam Theotokia we say,

*”So Mary came forth to the disciples and told them she has seen the Lord and that He told her so. Truly indeed it was good caring of Saint Mary Magdeline. She came to the grave on one of the Sabbath days seeking earnestly the Resurrection of the Lord. She saw the angel sitting on the stone proclaiming and saying, ‘The Lord is risen, He is not here.’ Wherefore we glorify Him, proclaiming and saying, ‘Blessed are You O my Lord Jesus, for You have risen and saved us.’”*

xii The Lord's Brethren

The Lord made it clear that His brethren are those who are poor, needy, weak and vulnerable (Matthew 25). On judgement day, Christ will judge us according to the degree of pure love we offered to His brethren who were hungry and thirsty; imprisoned and naked; strangers and sick. Our love for the brethren must be practical and effective. *"My little children," writes St. John, "let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth."* (1 John 3:18).

a. Hungry and Thirsty: Many dedicated people, over the centuries, established Orphanages, Nursing Homes, Retirement Villages, the Lord's Brethren, Vocational Training Centres and Food Vans, all to ensure they provide a service of love or touch of mercy to the needy.

Few things in Scripture are more striking than the number of times it speaks of God's compassion for the poor. Here are some examples taken from just one book: "From Your bounty, O God, You provided for the poor." (Psalm 68:10); "The Lord hears the needy." (Psalm 69:33); "God stands at the right hand of the needy one, to save his life from those who condemn him." (Psalm 109:31); "God raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap." (Psalm 113:7); "I know that the Lord secures justice for the poor." (Psalm 140:12). Insulting the poor was not only contrary to God's special, saving mercy extended to many who lacked this world's riches, but also his general attitude of mercy to all who were in need.

*"Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in the power of your hand to do so. Do not say to your neighbour, 'Go, and come back, and tomorrow I will give it,' when you have it with you."* (Proverbs 3:27-28).

b. Prison: St. Paul, who experienced false and unjust imprisonment states: *"Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering."* (Hebrews 13:3). In the Litany of the sick the Church prays for those imprisoned saying:

*"Those who are in prison or exile and those who are in captivity or harsh slavery, O Lord, free them and have mercy on them. For you are the One who unties the bound and lifts the fallen, the hope of those who are without hope, the refuge of those who are helpless, the comfort of the faint-hearted, and the harbour of those caught in*

*the storm.*

*The souls of those which are tormented or constrained, grant them mercy O Lord, provide them with rest and cool their hearts. Assist them and bestow upon them grace. Grant them salvation and forgive them their sins and iniquities.*

c. Stranger: “So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said, ‘Quickly, make ready three measures of fine meal; knead it and make cakes.’ And Abraham ran to the herd, took a tender and good calf, gave it to a young man, and he hastened to prepare it. So he took butter and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree as they ate.” (Genesis 18:6-8). Commenting on the warmth and hospitality of our great father Abraham, St. Paul states: “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.” (Hebrews 13:2). Do we warmly welcome new persons to our youth meetings, to the service or to the diaconate?

St. Bishoy:

The righteous St. Bishoy, whose heart was inflamed with the love of God, was approached by his disciples seeking to meet and see the Lord Jesus Christ. St. Bishoy placed this request before the Lord in his prayers. Several months later the Lord accepted the petition and guided St. Bishoy to a certain mountain in the desert where He would manifest Himself to the monks. St. Bishoy gave instructions to his disciples to meet at the designated place. As the monks passed on their way they saw an old man, feeble and worn out, asking to be taken along by the monks. But the monks, anxious to meet Christ, ignored the pleading of the old man. In the last group of the monks was St. Bishoy. When he saw the old man he was moved with compassion and carried him on his back to the destination. When St. Bishoy met the monks at the place where they were to meet Christ, he straightened his back, and the stranger disappeared. Christ had sat at the roadside, waiting to be helped. In their haste to see Christ the monks had forgotten to be Christians.

d. Sick

In the Litany of the Sick we pray thus:

*”As for us O Lord, heal the ailments of our souls and bodies also. O*



*You, the true physician of our souls and bodies, the administrator of everybody, oversee us with Your salvation.”*

In the conclusion of the Batos Theotokia (recited on Wed – Sat), we say:

*“O our Lord Jesus Christ, who carries the sin of the world, count us with Your sheep, those who are to Your right. And when You come again, in Your second fearful appearance, may we never fearfully hear You say, ‘I do not know you’. But rather may we be made worthy to hear the voice full of joy of Your tender mercies, proclaiming and saying, ‘Come unto Me, O blessed of My Father, and inherit the life that endures forever.’”*

### Spiritual Starvation

Another contemplation and application of these verses by which we shall be judged by the Lord is spiritual and not merely material. There are millions of people who are suffering from spiritual starvation (hunger and thirst) and others are spiritually sick by the weight of sin and its adverse consequences. It is our duty to supply the spiritual nourishment for those who are malnourished. Some are spiritually imprisoned by drugs, alcohol, pornography or gambling addictions. They need the powerful hand of God to liberate them. Sadly there are many who are strangers to the Lord and His Church. They have not tasted the beauty of the love of God (John 4:7-11) or embraced the light of God (John 9:5) or felt the peace of God (John 14:27).

Similarly, the people who are naked, that is, they have not borne fruits worthy of repentance. Our responsibility to the Lord’s brethren is great and the blessings we receive in such ministry is immeasurable. Let us be proactive as St. James says: *“If one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: ‘Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.’”* (James 5:19-20).

### The Story of Olagi

During the time of Anba Daniel the Hegoman of Sheheet, there lived a poor and simple person called Olagi. He was a stonecutter by occupation. Olagi would cut stones and then sell them to builders to

assist with construction. Olagi earned enough to accommodate for his weekly budget of food and rent and what ever was left over, which was most minimal, he would divide equally between the poor and needy and himself. Anba Daniel consistently prayed for Olagi, requesting that God would protect and assist him in his struggles and bless his simple life by giving him more money. Anba Daniel reasoned that if Olagi had more money he would give more money to the poor.

One day, as Olagi was cutting stone, he found a box that contained expensive jewellery. Excited and somewhat frightened, Olagi carried the box under his arms and ran home to consider his fortunes. He began saying, "I can now kiss poverty goodbye." Thrilled with his new material blessings, Olagi decided, within days, to sell the jewellery and with the money, travel abroad and make a great living outside of Egypt.

A new chapter in the life of Olagi had commenced. Abroad, he used all his money on futile and sometimes evil activities. He eventually became penniless. Olagi subsequently had enough money to return to Egypt and meet the people of his village and tell them about his imprudent conduct.

The Lord sent an angel to Anba Daniel saying: "You prayed for Olagi's material blessings and prosperity but you forgot to pray for his spiritual welfare and advancement."

Olagi returned, requesting the prayers of Anba Daniel. Olagi went to the people in the village saying, "I searched for earthly treasures and failed to seek heavenly treasures." Anba Daniel knelt in prayer, weeping, "Have mercy upon me O God. I prayed for his body not for the purity of his soul. Have mercy on him and lead him to the right path."

### xiii Sudanese Women

During the time of His Grace Metropolitan Daniel of Khartoum (1928-2000), his diocese experienced a huge financial crisis. There were insufficient funds for the administration of pastoral commitments of the diocese. The pious Metropolitan knelt in prayer seeking the intervention of God. Within days Metropolitan Daniel received envelopes carrying money. He enquired from where did

the people obtain money, knowing that they were in financial strife. Finally, the secret of the love of the people was disclosed. The women had sold their jewellery (some of which was of sentimental value) and forwarded the funds to the Church.

# Chapter 6

## Blessings and Obedience

The Lord made it clear that there is a great relationship between blessings and obedience. In Deuteronomy the Lord says, “*Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the LORD your God.*” (Deuteronomy 28:1-2).

Obedience, say the Church Fathers, responds to obedience. When someone is obedient to God, God obeys his request.

### Adam and Eve

Both Adam and Eve were created in the Image of God, “*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*” (Genesis 1:27), and they were blessed by Him, “*God blessed them.*” (Genesis 1:28). Both disobeyed God’s commandment and ate from the tree and therefore fell from purity and righteousness. Adam and Eve had always been at ease with one another as God had created them to be. But now they were suddenly shy and defenceless. The protection of their innocence was gone. They discovered they could not have a free and easy relationship. They began to hide things from one another. They discovered that they not only stood naked to one another – they were naked before God! Their purity was gone. Their sinless nature had been destroyed. Their intimate relationship with God was broken. Instead of becoming like Him as Satan had promised, they became afraid of Him and fled from Him.

Instead of blessings Adam received cursings, “*Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.*” (Genesis 3:17). In his Epistle to the Romans St. Paul captures the theme of death in Adam and life in Christ. He writes, “*Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned.*” (Romans 5:12). St. Paul then explains, “*For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.*” (Romans 5:19).

## Abraham

In obeying the voice of God and offering his son Isaac as a sacrifice Abraham was blessed. The Lord said, *“By Myself I have sworn”, says the LORD, “because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son, 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.”* (Genesis 22:16-17).

## St. Mary

In obeying the message of God and fulfilling God’s will in her life St. Mary was blessed by both the heavenlies and the earthlies. St. Mary said to the Archangel Gabriel, *“Let it be done to me according to your word.”* (Luke 1:38). Thereafter, St. Mary headed over the hills to visit her cousin St. Elizabeth who exalted her saying, *“Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Blessed is she who believed that there shall be a fulfilment of these things.”* (Luke 1:42). The Fathers have consistently contrasted St. Mary’s obedience with Eve’s disobedience.

St. Irenaeus, the father of Mariology, writes, “Just as Eve, while wife of Adam, was still a virgin and became, by her disobedience, the cause of death of herself and of the whole human race; so Mary too, espoused yet a virgin, became, by her obedience, the cause of salvation of both herself and the whole human race. The knot of Eve’s disobedience was loosened by Mary’s obedience. For what the Virgin Eve had bound in unbelief, the Virgin Mary loosened through faith.”

In the Morning Doxology of the Virgin the Church says, *“Blessed are you O Mary, the Prudent and the Chaste, the Second Tabernacle, the Treasure of the Spirit.”* In the Friday Theotokia we say, *“You are blessed, more favoured than heaven and more honoured than earth; you exceed every thought, who can speak of your honour.”* In the Kiahk praises many hymns are chanted in honour of St. Mary, among them, *“Blessed are you O Virgin and Bride”,* and another is, *“Blessed are you Pride of Humanity.”*

## Lots Wife

As the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah multiplied before the Lord and as Abraham pleaded with the Lord the final solution was the salvation of

Lot's family. In spite of His anger, God's heart was moved toward Lot's wife and her family. He wanted to save her from the claws of death, which were already outstretched toward the city. He wanted to render grace to her, to offer her a favour that she didn't really deserve. He even sent His angels to her doorstep to try to save the few people who did not need to be destroyed.

In spite of this, she wavered. She wasted precious time. The angels waited impatiently for her to move but finally could not linger a moment longer. The cup of God's wrath was filled to the brim, up till the last drop. Every second they waited meant playing with their lives.

God had done everything He could to save Lot and his family. Even though Lot's love for his Lord had cooled off, God still considered him a righteous man (2 Peter 2:8). But now the family had to listen to His messengers and take their warnings to heart. They had to leave their city of sin behind.

Suddenly one of the angels grasped the hand of Lot's wife and led her out the door of her own home. His voice urged her on, "Don't look back. Keep moving. Escape to the mountains, so that you won't be destroyed." (Genesis 19:17).

She could have escaped death, for God had warned her in time. But she did not take His warning seriously. She ignored His grace, thus committing a grave error. To use David's words, she cared nothing for God or what He had done (Psalm 28:5). The words of Isaiah might also be directly applied to her, "Though the wicked is shown favour, he does not learn righteousness; he deals unjustly in the land of uprightness, and does not perceive the majesty of the Lord." (Isaiah 26:10).

That negligence cost her her life. She didn't allow God to save her. She didn't accept the saving hand that He had stretched out toward her. She died because of her unwillingness to obey and act on faith, rather than because of the sins of Sodom, She had received the grace of God in vain." (2 Corinthians 6:1).

Jesus later used her as an example of warning, "Remember what happened to Lot's wife!" He said to His disciples, in view of the final judgement still to come. (Luke 17:32).

Lot's wife has passed the point of being saved. Her doom has been sealed. Yet her memory can still be a blessing if people who read her

story are willing to accept the grace God is still offering. There is a fullness of grace in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:7-8), and people who believe in Him receive grace, an undeserved gift of God. (Ephesians 2:8).

The Lord's command was clear, *"Escape for your life! Do not look behind you nor stay anywhere in the plain. Escape to the mountains, lest you be destroyed."* (Genesis 19:17). The price of disobedience is often expensive. Many have regretted not listening and following the advice they received from their parents, confession fathers, Sunday School servants or spiritual and wise friends.

### Hanania and Saphira

Both Hanania and Saphira had a holy zeal towards the Church. They sold a parcel of land with a view to donate the money to the Church. Satan tempted them. Hanania and Saphira kept back part of the proceeds of sale. St. Peter rebuked them saying, *"Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."* (Acts 5:3-4).

### Jonah

The man of God, directed to convey the message of repentance and salvation to Ninevah, declined the Divine instruction. Instead of heading to the Great City of Ninevah, Jonah makes his tracks towards Tarshish. Commenting on Jonah's disobedience, Pope Shenouda says: "The Lord shamed Jonah by the obedience of the Ninevites, the faith and righteousness of the Mariners and also by the obedience of the inanimate objects and the irrational creatures." "The most important obedience," Pope Shenouda adds, "God requires from us the obedience of the difficult missions, and He gave us an example by the obedience of all the other creatures (wind, sun, worm etc)."

The disgruntled Jonah disobeyed the Divine commission probably because He feared that God's grace would extend to the gentiles. The rational Jonah disobeyed as he knew that God would deliver the Ninevites from punishment saying: *"There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death."* (Proverbs 14:12).

### St. John the Dwarf

This Saint was a shining pillar in the desert and when he was ordained a priest by Pope Theophilus a voice from heaven was heard by the people present saying, “Axios, Axios, Axios,” that is to say he is worthy. 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.”

The tree still exists in its place in his monastery. St. John was a great blessing to the entire Church. As the day of his departure approached, the Lord sent him His two righteous Saints, St. Macarius and St. Anthony to comfort him and to inform him about his departure. The night before Sunday, he fell sick and sent his attendant to bring him something from the village. The angels and the host of Saints came and received his pure soul and took it up to heaven.

At that time, his servant came back and saw the soul of the Saint surrounded by the host of Saints and angels singing before them. Before them all, there was one shining like the sun and singing. The servant marvelled at this magnificent sight. An angel came to him and told him the name of each one of the Saints. He told him, “This is St. Pachomius, this is St. Macarius and so on. Then the servant asked the angel, “Who is this one in front of them all, who is shining like the sun?” The angel replied, “This is St. Anthony, the father of all the monks.”

### Sayings of the Fathers

Four monks of Scetis, clothed in skins, came one day to see the great Abba Pambo. Each one revealed the virtue of his neighbour. The first fasted a great deal; the second was poor; the third had acquired great charity; and they said of the fourth that he had lived for twenty-two years in obedience to an old man. Abba Pambo said to them, “I tell you, the virtue of this last one is the greatest. Each of the others has obtained the virtue he wished to acquire; but the last one, restraining his own will, does the will of another. Now it is of such men that the martyrs are made, if they persevere to the end.”



# Chapter 7

## Blessings and Word of God

Blessed is the person who hears, lives and transmits the word of God. In the Old Testament the Lord says, “*Blessed are they that do His commandments.*” (Deuteronomy 28:1-5). In his ministry Christ says, “*Blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it.*” (Luke 11:28). In the book of Revelation the Lord says, “*Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy and keep these things.*” (Revelation 1:3).

Christ opens our ears and minds to understand His life giving words. On the Road to Emmaus the Lord said: “*O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.*” (Luke 24:25,27). Therefore, prior to reading the Bible, pray saying, “*Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law.*” (Psalm 119:18).

### The People of Ninevah

Over 120,000 constituted the population of the Great city of Ninevah (Jonah 4:11). At the call of Jonah they immediately responded and repented. From the King to the youngest of persons, they lay in sackcloth and ashes, weeping for their conduct. They fulfilled the Divine commandment in their lives. Powerful is the Word of God in your life. “*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.*” (Psalm 119:105). Truly the people of Ninevah experienced the words of the Psalmist: “*Unless your law has been my delight I would then have perished in my affliction.*” (Psalm 119:92). The word of God is living and powerful, “*For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.*” (Hebrews 4:12).

### King Agrippa

St. Paul was given an opportunity to address King Agrippa on his live before and after the conversion on the road to Damascus. St. Paul even told the indifferent king about Christ and articulated the message thus, “*to open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light and from the*

*Kingdom of Satan to God that they may receive forgiveness of sins.”*  
(Acts 26:18).

Subsequently, in his epistles, St. Paul says, *“Today, if you hear His voice, harden not your hearts.”* (Hebrews 3:15). In similar vein St. James urges us to receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls, *“but be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”* (James 1:22).

Cynically King Agrippa said to St. Paul, *“You almost persuaded me to become a Christian.”* (Acts 26:28). *“Not only you,”* replied St. Paul, *“but also all who hear me today.”* (Acts 26:29). Hear the words of God, *“So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.”* (Isaiah 55:11).

### Sermon on the Mountain

For probably over three hours Christ delivered the famous Sermon on the Mountain to a very attentive congregation. Christ spoke on a variety of subjects including: power of prayer, the acceptable fast, importance of almsgiving, the role of the Kingdom of God in our lives etc.

At the conclusion of the Sermon, Christ divided His listeners into two camps, one wise and the other foolish. The Lord said, *“whoever hears My words and does them, I liken him to the wise person who built his house on the rock. The wind blew, the rain fell and the storms came but it did not affect the house. Conversely, the foolish person is the one who builds his house on the sand. When the wind blows and the rain falls and storms come, the house falls. Indeed great is its fall.”* (Matthew 7:24-27).

In the book of Revelation the Lord says to us, *“He who has ears to hear let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches.”* (Revelation 2:7). Before reading the Gospel, the Church prays the litany of the Gospel thus: *“Grant that we become eligible to hear and perform according to Your Holy Gospel the petitions of Your Saints.”*

### Heavenly Blessings

Blessed are those who read the word of God in reverence, read it with understanding, read it with depth and spirit. They become an open Bible

read by all. Isaiah the Prophet says: “*Search from the book of the Lord and read, not one of these shall fall.*” (Isaiah 34:16).

“Blessed”, says Christ, “*are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city.*” (Revelation 22:14).

As Joshua took over the leadership role from Moses, he was apprehensive about the weight of the responsibility. “*Be strong and very courageous,*” said the Lord to Joshua, “*Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.*” (Joshua 1:7-8).

The Great St. Abraam of Fayoum used to read the entire Bible every 40 days. This great and blessed Saint became an open Bible, a living sermon, touching the lives of many, particularly the poor and needy.

#### From the Paradise of the Fathers

A young monk went to his confession father and said: “I don’t benefit from reading the Bible! Most times I forget what I have read or I don’t understand the meaning of the stories.” The wise confession father instructed his disciple thus: “Get a large straw basket and go to the river, fill it with water and bring it to me.” Reluctantly the junior monk did so and returned with the empty basket, as it could not hold any water. The wise spiritual father requested that the monk do this again. Unconvinced the monk headed to the river with the basket and returned again without any water.

The spiritual father then asked, “No water at all?” The monk replied, “It is impossible to gather water as the straw basket has holes.” “Do it one more time,” commanded the spiritual father. Most unimpressed the junior monk carried out the instructions and returned to the spiritual father who said, “You dipped the basket but received no water three times. However, don’t you think every time you dipped the basket in the water it made it a little cleaner?” The monk replied, “Probably.” “It is exactly the same with your Bible reading; every time you read the Bible you become a little cleaner and purer,” said the spiritual father. This is what Christ said, “*You have been made clean already by the teachings I have given you.*” (John 15:2).

# Chapter 8

## Blessings and Repentance

*“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.” (Psalm 32:1-2).*

His Grace Bishop Moussa outlined the elements of the Orthodox repentance as: I regret doing this sin, I insist on not repeating it, I believe in the blood of Christ, which cleanses me, I confess before God in the presence of a priest. In the end I receive solutions to my problems and absolutions to my sins. The Lord, in the Book of Jeremiah says: *“I will cleanse them from all their iniquity by which they have sinned against Me, and I will pardon all their iniquities by which they have sinned and by which they have transgressed against Me.” (Jeremiah 33:8).*

Blessed are the many people who offered true repentance to the Lord. In true love and great mercy the Lord received them and renewed their nature, for He desires that *“all men be saved and come to the knowledge of truth.” (1 Timothy 2:4).*

### Woman at the House of Simon

Despite her sinful character, this woman came into the house of Simon the Pharisee and sat at the feet of Christ and began washing His feet with her tears and wiping them with the hair of her head. Acknowledging her sincere repentance, the Lord said to the critical and cynical Simon, *“I say to you her sins which are many are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven the same loves little.” (Luke 7:47).* Then the Lord said to her, *“Your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you, go in peace.” (Luke 7:49-50).* The Church reads this Gospel every night in the Second Service of the Midnight Prayer of the Agpia and then prayers saying: *“Give me Lord fountains of many tears as You did in the past to the sinful woman. Make me worthy to shed my tears on Your feet which took me to the right path and offer You the best of perfumes. Grant me to live pure and repentant, so that I can hear a joyful voice: ‘Your faith has saved you.’”*

## The Right Thief

Many people's lives have been transformed but none were radically and totally changed than the right thief. Recognising his sinful and wicked deeds, he implored Christ, "*Lord, remember me when You come into Your Kingdom.*" (Luke 23:42).

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.*"

## St. Paessa

St. Paessa was a righteous lady who, after her parents' death, turned her house into a shelter for the poor and needy. She accepted everyone that came to her fulfilling their every need until she ran out of money. Evil people gathered around her and turned her mind to the ungodly way. She turned her home into a house of prostitution. When this news reached the elders of Sheheet, they greatly sorrowed for her. The elders called upon St. John the Dwarf and asked him to go to her as an act of mercy and to aid her in saving her soul, in turn for the good that she had done for them.

The Saint obeyed the elders and asked them to support him with their prayers. When St. John came to where she lived, he asked her maid to announce his presence. When the maid informed her, Paessa adorned herself and called him in. As he was walking, he was saying, "*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil for thou art with me.*" (Psalm 23:4). When he sat down, he looked to her and said, "Why did you belittle the Lord Christ, and do this evil deed?" She trembled, and her heart was melting from the words of the Saint who bent his head and started weeping. She asked him, "Why do you weep?" He answered, "Because I see the devils playing on your face, and therefore I weep for you." She asked him, "Is there any repentance for me?" He replied, "Yes, but not in this place." She said to him, "Take me wherever you wish."

The he took her to one of the convents close by the wilderness of Sheheet. On their way it became dark. St. John told her to sleep in one place, while he slept far away from her. When he stood up to pray the midnight prayer, he saw a pillar of light coming down from heaven to earth, and the angels of God were carrying the soul of Paessa. When he approached her, he found that she had departed. Then he knelt down and prayed fervently with tears asking God to reveal to him concerning her fate. He heard a voice saying, “Her repentance was accepted in the moment that she repented.” After St. John buried her, he returned to the Elders and told them what had happened. They all glorified the Lord who accepts the repentant and forgives all their sins.

### St. Augustine

This Great Father of the Universal Church lived a life away from the love of God. At the age of 16, he commenced a lustful relationship with a woman and from it had a son called Adeodatus. The light of Christ entered his dark heart and converted this philosopher into a devout Christian person. He was baptised on Easter Eve by St. Ambrose of Milan and subsequently returned to Africa. He became the author of 113 books, 200 epistles, and delivered over 500 sermons. St. Augustine’s famous saying: “Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in You.” When St. Augustine made his great renunciation, he states in his famous book *Confessions* of the sudden happiness that flooded his life, “How sweet, in a sudden, was it to be without the sweets of those toys. And what I was before and much afraid to lose, I now cast from me with joy; for you expelled them and came to yourself instead of them, sweeter than any pleasure, brighter than any light, higher than any dignity.”

### St. Moses the Black

This great man lived a life of sin at all levels until finally the Lord visited him with his salvation. At the feet of the Great St. Macarius, Moses underwent a huge transformation. St. Macarius assigned St. Isadore to be his spiritual father and counsellor. Truly repentance converts adulterers into virgins, “*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.*” (1 John 1:9-10). St. Moses went on to become a great monastic pillar in the Wilderness of Sheheet and the Father of over 500 monks.

## Nineveh

The Great City of Nineveh received a sharp warning: within 40 days the city will be destroyed. Immediately the entire city, from the eldest to the youngest, offered true repentance to the Lord and invoked His mercy and love. Every year the Church observes three days of fasting before Lent, remembering and inspired by their shining example of true repentance. St. Isaac the Syrian says: “There is no sin that can not be forgiven except the one without repentance.”

*“But if a wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed, keeps all My statutes, and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of the transgressions which he has committed shall be remembered against him; because of the righteousness which he has done, he shall live. ‘Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?’ says the Lord GOD, ‘and not that he should turn from his ways and live?’ ‘But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and does according to all the abominations that the wicked man does, shall he live? All the righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; because of the unfaithfulness of which he is guilty and the sin which he has committed, because of them he shall die’”. (Ezekiel 18:21-24).*

## David

The Great King of Israel and the author of 150 Psalms fell into the sin of adultery with Bathsheba and subsequent murder of her husband. David’s activities and disregard for his duties as Israel’s King, proved to be easy prey for Satan’s temptations. He had never, like Job, made covenant with his eyes not to look with desire on other women, (Job 31:1). He had never made a deliberate stand against the sin of lust that becomes a destructive fire in the life of the man who commits it.

Similar to that fatal time in paradise, Satan was not original temptation again made use of the eyes. Like Eve, David’s heart desired what his eyes saw. He did not renounce the desire immediately and radically and so the devil could not be curbed. Bathsheba was an unusually beautiful woman. Her father, Eham, was one of David’s heroes. Her husband, Uriah, was a dedicated and courageous officer in the King’s army.

The Lord sent Nathan who told David a parable. Then David said, “*I have sinned against the LORD.*” And Nathan said to David, “*The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die.*” (2 Samuel 12:13). St.

John Chrysostom says: “Examine yourself if you remember your sins, God will forget them, but if you forget them God will remember them.”

### The Prodigal Son

Blessed is the work and repentance of the younger son, who returned to himself (Luke 15) and proceeded to his father’s house saying, “*Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.*” (Luke 15:18-19). Everyday in the eleventh hour of the Agpia the Church uses the repentant words of the Prodigal Son. His father warmly received and embraced him and slaughtered the calf (symbol of Holy Communion) and put a ring on his hand (bond of eternal love) and sandals on his feet (Gospel of light). With joy the Father declared, “*for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.*” (Luke 15:24).

St. John Saba writes: “Repentance is the mother of life. Blessed is the one who is born of it for he will never die.”

### Christ Converts Sinners to Saints

“*The Son of Man*”, says Christ, “*came to seek and save that which is lost.*” (Luke 19:10). This became the motto and work of the Church of Christ, the mission of the priests and the aim of the servants, that all may come, sinners and sick, to the Lord Jesus. Christ is the Spring of healing, the Comforter of the tired, the Giver of gifts, the Caller of everybody to the eternal Kingdom.

Christ invited the tax collector Matthew (Levi), saying, “*Follow Me.*” (Luke 5:23), who responded by leaving all. Christ attracted Matthew to His splendid love, changed his heart and life and made him an Apostle and preacher of repentance. Christ made him an evangelist who wrote a Gospel addressed to the Jews.

Matthew invited all the tax collectors and sinners to his own house and hosted a special reception for Christ the King. He gave an opportunity for all people to meet his beloved One who transformed his life from darkness to light.



# Chapter 9

## Blessings and Faith

*“Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord.” (Jeremiah 17:7) and “Blessed is that man who makes the Lord his trust.” (Psalm 40:4). When Joshua succeeded Moses as leader to the Israelite children, the Lord said to him, “Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.” (Joshua 1:9).*

### Lean On God Your Saviour

*“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).*

#### i Do not lean on riches

*“He who trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like foliage.” (Proverbs 11:28).*

*“Those who trust in their wealth and boast in the multitude of their riches, none of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him.” (Psalm 49:6-7).*

*”Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God.” (Mark 10:24).*

*“Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.” (1 Timothy 6:17).*

#### ii Do not lean on yourself

*”He who is of a proud heart stirs up strife, but he who trusts in the Lord will be prospered. He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, but whoever walks wisely will be delivered.” (Proverbs 28:25-26).*

#### iii Do not lean on man

*“It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man. It is*

*better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes.”*  
(Psalm 118:8-9).

*”Thus says the Lord, ‘Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the Lord.’”*  
(Jeremiah 17:5).

*“Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar.”* (Romans 3:4).

iv You will be Blessed if you Lean on God your Saviour

*”Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him.”* (Psalm 2:12).

*“Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him.”* (Psalm 34:8).

*“O Lord of Hosts, blessed is the man who trusts in You.”* (Psalm 84:12).

v Place your Confidence in the Word of God your Saviour

*“Every word of God is pure, He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him.”* (Proverbs 30:5).

*“He who heeds the word wisely will find good, and whoever trusts in the Lord, happy is he.”* (Proverbs 16:20).

*“Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it.”*  
(Revelation 1:3).

vi Lean on God your Saviour in Times of Trouble

*“Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”* (Matthew 11:28).

*“The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knows those who trust Him.”* (Nahum 1:7).

*“The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in Him and I am helped.”* (Psalm 28:7).

*“Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You.”* (Psalm 56:3).

*“Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you; and you shall glorify Me.” (Psalm 50:15).*

vii Lean on God your Saviour for the Salvation of your Soul

*“I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.” (John 10:10).*

*“The Lord redeems the soul of His servants, and none of those who trust in Him shall be condemned.” (Psalm 34:22).*

*“For to this end we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, Who is the Saviour of all men, especially of those who believe.” (1 Timothy 4:10).*

*“The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my delivered; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.” (Psalm 18:2).*

Thomas

On Resurrection Sunday in the evening, the Lord appeared to His disciples in the upper room and absent was Thomas (John 20:25). The Lord reappeared eight days later especially for Thomas and said to him, *“Reach your finger here and look at My hands.” (John 20:27-28)*. The Lord exalted the faith of the believers saying, *“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”* The First Sunday after the Resurrection the Church celebrates Thomas Sunday which is a Lordly feast.

Similarly, when St. Mary died and ascended to heaven, St. Thomas was not present with the Apostles. He saw St. Mary taken to heaven surrounded by Angels and Archangels. Upon his return to Jerusalem, the Apostles told him that St. Mary died. St. Thomas said, *“You know me, that I don’t believe until I see”*. The Apostles took St. Thomas to the tomb to discover that St. Mary’s body was removed. They cried and wept and then they commenced to fast that God shall reveal to them what happened to the Holy Theotokos. They fasted for 15 days. For this reason the Church fasts from 7<sup>th</sup> August to 22<sup>nd</sup> August. The Apostles saw a vision of St. Mary ascending to heaven in a glorious and victorious procession.

### The Canaanite Woman

A great enmity existed between the Canaanites and the Israelites. With tremendous faith this Canaanite woman ran to Christ saying, "Have mercy on me Lord, Son of David my daughter is severely demon possessed. Christ ignored her completely. In desperation she cried again. This time the disciples intervened, "*send her away for she cries out after us.*" (Matthew 15:23). Christ responds by saying, "*I was not sent except for the lost sheep of the House of Israel.*" (Matthew 15:24). The woman persists in faith. Christ answers her, "*It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs.*" The woman replies, "*True Lord, I am nothing but even the dogs eat from the bread which falls from their Masters table.*" Recognising her faith the Lord said, "*Woman, great is your faith.*"

### Zechariah the Priest

Why was Zechariah the priest made mute for nine months? For his failure to believe Archangel Gabriel's divine message about the birth of St. John the Baptist. As a priest, learned in all the Law and Customs, Zechariah should have, gratefully and delightfully, accepted the Divine message. He could not comprehend that what was impossible for man was possible for God. On the birth of John the Baptist, he opened his mouth praising and glorifying God saying: "*Blessed be the Lord God of Israel for He has visited and redeemed His people.*" (Luke 1:1-3).

### The Blind Nun

At the time of Anba Daniel the hegomen of the Wilderness of Sheheet, a blind nun was living a simple, meek life in the convent. One day, as the blind nun was in the kitchen, a thief entered the convent (coming down the walls and windows). Upon hearing rattling she inquired who it was. The thief, a little disturbed, paused but then replied, "I am Anba Daniel." The blind nun was overjoyed and cried out, "Anba Daniel, what a great blessing, what a great blessing! Let me wash your feet." She insisted the thief be seated whilst she brought a large basin, filled it with water and began to wash his feet.

Although becoming increasingly agitated, the thief went ahead with the matter and the blind nun began to take some of the dirty water and splash it over her face, saying, "Heal me Lord, heal me." Within minutes the nun's vision was gradually restored and she began to see and she said, "Lord I can see." Then, raising her eyes she saw a strange man who was

not Anba Daniel. She cried, “Who are you?” The thief replied, “I am not Anba Daniel. I came to steal from the convent. Please forgive me, I believe, I repent.” Thereafter the thief said to her, “Now that I have seen your faith I believe.”

Faith is a powerful expression of our relationship with God. When God saw the nun’s faith, he healed her from physical blindness and when the thief saw the faith of the blind nun he was healed from his spiritual blindness.

# Chapter 10

## Blessings and Vigilance

*“Blessed are those servants whom the Master, when He comes, will find them watching”.* (Luke 12:37). Most concerned about our spiritual welfare and our eternity, the Church offers the Midnight Prayer in anticipation of the Second Coming. It calls us to be watchful and vigilant.

### Five Wise and Five Foolish Virgins

The parable of the Five Wise and Five Foolish Virgins stresses the importance of vigilance in the spiritual life. Both the wise and foolish virgins had the following similarities: both were virgins, both were invited to the wedding and both slumbered and slept. The main distinction is having sufficient oil to meet the bridegroom. The advise from the Lord is watch (Matthew 25:13). The church reads this parable every night in the First Service of the Midnight Praise and then prays: “Behold the Bridegroom comes at midnight. Blessed is the servant whom He finds awake, but he who is found in slumber does not deserve to go with Him. Keep your watch my soul, lest you go to sleep and be thrown outside the Kingdom. Keep awake and shout: ‘Holy, Holy, Holy are You God, for the sake of the Mother of God, have mercy upon us.’” There are many tragedies but none more acute and penetrating than missing out on the Kingdom.

### The Midnight Prayers

At Gethsemane the Lord pleaded with His disciples to pray that you may not enter into temptation. The Lord rebuked His disciples saying that, “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” (Matthew 26:41).

The Lord said: *“Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed.”* (Revelations 16:15).

The Church calls upon her flock saying: “Rise Children of light to praise the Lord of Hosts that He may bestow upon salvation of our souls. When we stand up in the body before You, take away from us the sleep of carelessness. These prayers are divided into three services.

i The First Service

The Church recites the longest Psalm 119 and divides it into 22 parts, concluding each part with: *“Glory be to You O lover of mankind.”* The Gospel is about the Five Wise and Five Foolish Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13). *“Remember my soul,”* we pray, *“that awesome day, awake and light your lamp with oil of joy for you do not know the voice will call, here comes the Groom. Watch my soul that you do not fall asleep.”*

ii The Second Service

The Sunset Psalms are repeated followed by the Gospel of the Sinful Woman at the House of Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7:36-50). We pray thus: *“When I think of Your Judgement, I fear and tremble and run to You, O God, do not turn away my supplication.”* One of the Saints said, *“I fear three things; the moment my soul departs from my flesh, the hour I stand before the just judge and the moment I hear His judgement.”* If the Saints, who have attained a high level of purity, are afraid how about ourselves?

iii The Third Service

We repeat the Psalms of the Prayer Before Sleeping and read the Gospel of the Kingdom (Luke 12:32-46). We say, *“O Lord look at my weakness with a compassionate eye, for my life is nearing its end and with deeds like mine, I shall have no salvation. Wake up, my soul and be careful, your judge is present.”*

In the Absolution we say, *“When you come to judge the world, grant us to hear the joyful call; ‘Come you that are blessed by My Father! Come and inherit the Kingdom that has been prepared for you since the creation of the world!’”*

St. Arsenius

St. Arsenius was always vigilant about his death and meeting his Lord and Creator. When he felt that the days left for his life were few, he told his followers to pay more attention to the salvation of their souls and not to weep for his departure. He spoke these words while he was crying, so they asked him: *“Are you afraid?”* He answered: *“The fear of this hour followed me since I came to the wilderness”.*

And that is how St. Arsenius died, he died with tears in his eyes and so his followers wept a lot for him and started kissing his feet as if he was a strange man leaving for his country. When St. Benjamin heard of his death he said: “Blessed are you Arsenius for you wept in this world, for whoever does not cry in this world will cry a lot after his death, for on this earth crying is our choice, but over there crying will be due to our sorrow, and in both cases we will not escape crying, so it is better for a man to cry in this world”. When Pope Theophilus attended his funeral he said: “Blessed are you Arsenius because for this hour you wept all your life”.

### Care and Caution

#### i Vigilant about the eyes.

Careful that you do not have jealous eyes, lustful eyes, judgemental eyes, greedy and selfish eyes. The eyes are most important, as they are the gateway to all our senses. “*If your eye is good*”, says Christ, “*the whole body is good. If your eye is evil then the whole body is evil*”. (Matthew 6). Let us have a spiritual not a materialistic horizon, a heavenly and not earthly vision. “*We do not look at the things which are seen*”, says St. Paul, “*but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*” (2 Corinthians 4:18). Similarly, David says, “*Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things.*” (Psalm 118:37).

#### ii Vigilant about the tongue.

Not swearing and lying, not being deceitful and dishonest. “*Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth and keep watch over the door of my lips.*” (Psalm 141:3). The wise King Solomon writes: “*When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise. The tongue of the righteous is choice silver, but the heart of the wicked is of little value.*” (Proverbs 10:19-20). “*He who guards his lips guards his life, but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin.*” (Proverbs 13:3). “*Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths,*” writes St. Paul, “*but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.*” (Ephesians 4:29).



iii Vigilant about the ministry.

Ensuring one is faithful and diligent in building the Kingdom of God and searching for the lost sheep. St. Paul advises his disciple Timothy when he ordained him Bishop for the city of Ephesus thus: *“Take heed to the ministry.” (1 Timothy 4:16)*. Similarly, St. Paul also says: *“Take heed to the ministry which you received in the Lord that you may fulfil it”.* (*Colossians 4*). The faithful Sunday School servant who prepares his/her lesson properly, who prays for his/her students, who regularly visits them, who arranges activities and implants within them the spirit of fellowship is certainly vigilant about the ministry.

iv Vigilant about ones salvation and eternity.

*”And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when 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 armour of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil its lusts.”* (*Romans 13:11-14*).

Some are indifferent and careless about their eternity and salvation. Esau, for example, said, *“I am about to die, so what is this birthright to me.”* (*Genesis 25:32*). And the Bible commented on that saying, *“Thus Esau despised his birthright”*. But Jacob used this opportunity not to get a materialistic reward in return for the food that he gave to his brother, but rather he asked for something spiritual: *“the birthright”*. So Esau, therefore, represents the careless man who does not care about spiritual things and heavenly glory but only cares about the lusts of the body.

St. Augustine said, about the fall of Esau, that it was not because of the dish of stew but because of carelessness.

v Vigilant about ones family.

Their spiritual welfare and advancement. One time Pope Athanasius requested from Anba Bemwa to come down from the desert to Alexandria. He went, and seeing an actress, he began to weep. Those who were present asked him the reason for his tears and he

said, “Two things make me weep: one the loss of this woman and the other that I am not so concerned to please God as she is to please wicked men.

The blessed parents are vigilant about their children’s spiritual nourishment and growth. Keen and proud to see their children succeed academically and materially they are ever concerned that their children are growing in the grace and knowledge of God (2 Peter). A vigilant mother and father observe the fasts of the Church, kneel in prayer, read their bibles together and receive Holy Communion regularly. Such parents ask their children what book in Scripture they are reading or when they last had confession. A blessed family emerges and it becomes a beautiful icon of heaven.

# Chapter 11

## Blessings and the Fear of the Lord

*“Blessed is every one who fears the LORD.” (Psalm 128:1).*

### Fear of the Lord

This is a reverential awe, which leads the believer to love the Lord and obey His commandments. The person who fears the Lord and has an awareness of God’s power and authority will live a godly life out of respect for the glory and majesty of God. St. John saw the Angels praising God saying, *“Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, for Your judgments have been manifested.” (Revelation 15:4).* *“Let us have grace, says St. Paul, “by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.” (Hebrews 12:28).*

The nature and outcome of reverential awe of God is most clearly expressed in the words of God admonishing Israel, saying, *“And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the LORD and His statutes which I command you today for your good?” (Deuteronomy 10:12-13).*

David highlights the relationship between the fear of the Lord and obeying the commandments saying, *“Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who delights greatly in His commandments.” (Psalm 112:1).* Solomon reiterates this theme: *“Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's all.” (Ecclesiastes 12:13).* St. Pimen says, “These three things are most helpful to all: the fear of the Lord, praying, and doing good to ones neighbour.” Blessings upon blessings descend upon the person who walks in the fear of the Lord.

### i Protection

*“Behold,” writes David, “the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him, on those who hope in His mercy, to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine.” (Psalm 33:18-19).*

*”The Angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him and*

*delivers them.” (Psalm 34:7).*

ii Prolongs Life

*By keeping one away from evil, “By the fear of the Lord one departs from evil.” (Proverbs 16:6), also “The fear of the Lord leads to life, and he who has it will abide in satisfaction, he will not be visited by evil.” (Proverbs 19: 23)*

iii Uplifts Quality of Life

*“By humility and the fear of the Lord, are riches and honour and life.” (Proverbs 22: 4)*

*”Then I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me forever, for the good of them and their children after them. And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from doing them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me.” (Jeremiah 32:39-40).*

iv Strong Confidence

*“In the fear of the Lord there is strong confidence, and his children will have a place for refuge.” (Proverbs 14: 26).*

v Grants Overflowing Experience

*Every day you can start afresh, “The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, to avoid the snares of death.” (Proverbs 14: 27).*

vi Receptive to the Word of God

*“But fools despise wisdom and instruction.” (Proverbs 1: 7).*

Losing the Fear of God

The world today has lost the fear of the Lord. As Christians let us think carefully about the common practices of society today – its immorality, its dishonesty, its greed, its selfishness, its violence, its envy, its arrogance, its blasphemy, its cruelty, its materialism, its obsession with pleasure and above all its careless or calculated rejection of God. Can there be any question in his mind that these things are not only polluted but polluting? Can we seriously imagine that we can walk in that kind of

atmosphere, breathe in that kind of air every day of our lives and not become affected by it? We would be fools if we did and it is precisely for that reason that James gives us the directive he does here. Nor is he alone in this. Paul tells us, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of you mind.” (Romans 12:2) and John says, “Do not love the world or anything in the world”, adding the serious warning, “If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” (1 John 2:15).

### Fear as an Enemy

Fear is a foe when it robs us of strength or motivates us to make wrong decisions. Adam and Eve hid in fear from God after eating from the forbidden fruit because they were afraid (Genesis 3:10). Sin alienates us from God and creates anxiety within us. Jacob was petrified of his brother Esau whom he had deceived (Genesis 32:7). Joseph’s brothers were scared of him following their father Jacob’s death, lest he take revenge against them. When Moses killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand (Exodus 2:12), he was afraid when one of the two Hebrews he was fighting confronted him. “*Do you intend to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?*” (Exodus 2:14).

In the days of Saul, the Israelites hid in caves and thickets, among the rocks and in pits and cisterns, rather than face a Philistine army (1 Samuel 13). Their fear robbed them of courage and faith. Saul violated God’s command to destroy the flocks of an enemy people because “*I feared the people and obeyed their voice.*” (1 Samuel 15:24). His fear of anticipated fear led him to disobey God.

The parents of the man born blind whom the Lord healed were afraid that the Jews would put them out of the temple. The fearful parents said: “*He is of age; ask him. He will speak for himself. His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had agreed already that if anyone confessed that He was Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, ‘He is of age; ask him.’*” (John 9:21-23).

The disciples upon seeing a detachment of troops and officers from the Chief Priests and Pharisees carrying their lanterns, torches and weapons in order to arrested Christ at the Garden of Gethsemane, became very fearful and fled (John 18:3).

## Do not Fear

Scripture reminds us of God's love and His trustworthiness. *"Fear not for I am with you," says the Lord*, (Isaiah 43:5), to His children. The Lord reassures us, whether we pass through waters or rivers (Isaiah 43:2) or fire we shall not sustain harm. *"Fear not," says the Lord, "for I have redeemed you."* (Isaiah 43:1).

*"Do not fear," says the Lord, "nor be afraid for I will pour My Spirit on your descendents and My blessings on you offspring."* (Isaiah 44:3 & 6).

As we are fearful of the unknown, Christ reassures us not to be constantly worried and anxious. We become afraid of academic exams and results, medical tests, surgical operations, unstable job environment, mounting debts, legal cases, the welfare and future of our children and youth.