

## “Take heed that no one deceives you, for many will come in My name<sup>1</sup>” ...

End of Coptic year sermon

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- ❖ As a year comes to an end, we ought to remember how quickly time passes.

It is almost scary how quickly time passes.

Everyone complains there isn't enough time to do the things they need to do. As the number of things that interest us and need doing increases, the time available to do them appears to be decreasing.

That is when we become more and more aware of what the Lord Jesus said about the end of the world.

- ❖ The world will end. That is a fact. It is a fact the world with all that is in it, in all its apparent glory is temporary—finite—and will end sometime.

We all know there was a generation before us, and many more before that. Many people lived before us, and many will come after us. Everyone lives for a limited time and then will go.

Everyone accepts this fact intellectually. If anyone asks how long you will live, we all say we won't live forever; we will go sometime.

In His wisdom, Jesus has not revealed to us when our lives will end. We know they will end, but we don't know when. Is it tonight? The middle of the night? Early in the morning? <sup>2</sup>

Will it be at the age of 20, 50, 70, or even 100? At the end, we are all the same, whether it is 100 years or 20 years. We know this fact for sure intellectually. We know we won't live forever. But knowing this as an intellectual fact doesn't necessarily mean it's the truth.

It is when a person realises the truth both rationally and spiritually.

Because if we accepted the truth, we would act or behave accordingly. The proof can be gleaned from one's actions, which are the fruit of one's true belief.

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<sup>1</sup> Mt. 24:4-5

<sup>2</sup> Mt. 24:42-44

If someone believes they are not going to live forever, that their days on earth are numbered, how would or should they behave?

For example—God forbid— if a doctor told someone, ‘You have no more than a month to live,’ how would they then behave? How would they live their last 30 days on earth? How would they even pray? How would they repent? Knowing life in all its glory—with all its splendour and apparent beauty—will soon end?

How would they act? If faced with a fight, would they fight? Why? It is not worth fighting now! If they were tempted to steal something of value that isn’t theirs, would they do it? Is it worth it?

Even if people praised or honoured you, so what? If you were offered the best things in the world, why should you bother to take any? With that very limited time left, life is not worth anything.

Now, isn’t a month the same as 20 years? Or 30 years?

If we really accepted the truth and realised our existence on earth is limited and finite, and life isn’t worth much, we’d behave in a way that proves we are not a worldly person who is ever concerned with material things or the glory of the world. We would realise there are much better things to do in life; my life is impermanent because time is against us.

Life is not going to last forever<sup>3</sup>. So, what should we do? We should attend to ourselves. There are many things that must be done. We must do as much as we can within our existence on earth. What can be done in a month; a year; 20 years? We must repair our relationship with the Lord as much as possible within the limits of the time available.

Strange thoughts sometimes come across our minds. ‘What am I doing now regarding my relationship with God?’ We might think we are doing fine. Looking around, we might look at people who live a ‘normal’ life and think everyone is doing the same as we are currently doing.

If we begin to compare ourselves with those equal to or less than us, we will be satisfied.

‘Everyone is doing the same things. Everyone is sinful’. Therefore we must be better because we are not as sinful or doing the terrible things they are. But if we compare ourselves with people who have a higher relationship with God, we will realise we ought to behave differently.

There are those who devoted themselves and their lives—even their youth—to Jesus, having sacrificed everything in life for Him. They left everything they owned and served Jesus all their lives in love.

Compare yourself with such people and your behaviour will be different.

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<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor. 7:29

Abouna Matta El Miskeen once told a story about giving a speech to some monks about living and totally sacrificing whatever is in one's life. He was telling them, "Because you left a normal life, you should never own anything. Your small room should have nothing in it". Having heard this, some monks were strongly affected and felt sorrowful. They came out of their small rooms or cells with all sorts of things they had kept there. Some came out with one pound in their hands; others came out with a small golden cross or icon. This was an example of their total and utter sacrifice of everything they had in life—an example of how someone would give up everything to avoid being attached to material things in their lives, or being distracted from devoting their life and all their love to Jesus.

Think of how you would behave if you compared yourself with the perfection of such people. Think of the fact life will not last forever. Some people work very hard all their lives to build a huge house, but when they come home, they go to bed to rest so they're ready for more work tomorrow.

They never have time to enjoy that house. In fact, it is said that the only people who enjoy the beautiful things in such houses are the maids hired to look after the house in the owner's absence. "For the form of this world is passing away."<sup>4</sup>

However, it is possible to own a house and more as long as our hearts are free and our thoughts and actions are with Jesus, and for Him. On the other hand, there are some very poor people who love the world and all it has to offer. Every part of their thoughts and hearts are attached to the material things the world has to offer. Therefore, the important thing is to have a free heart—that you are not enslaved to the material world. This is because when Jesus comes He will say, 'Lift your heads, for your redemption draws near<sup>5</sup>.'

When we leave our bodies and meet Jesus, we must be happy because we are as 'clean' as a hair pulled from dough. Remember, our lives will not last forever. Therefore we must be prepared, because our lives could end any minute.

I was once talking to some of my fellow priests. I asked them how we would serve a mass if we knew it is the last mass we would ever serve? With what feelings and love? With tears? We would otherwise serve a mass as usual.

Time is short and when it's gone it never comes back again. Therefore "walk circumspectly<sup>6</sup>."

A year always ends, as all the years in our lives do.

Therefore blessed are those who keep an eye on how quickly time passes. Don't keep saying, 'I will do better tomorrow', because tomorrow may never come. If you intend to do good, do it today; do it now. If you have

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<sup>4</sup> 1 Cor. 7:31

<sup>5</sup> Lk. 21:28

<sup>6</sup> Eph. 5:15

fair thoughts of doing something good, don't go to sleep before doing it. Once time passes, it will never come back. Even if you could pay a million—or even one hundred—dollars to bring back some of the time you lost, it will never come back. No matter how much money or effort you expend, yesterday will never come back. Once time is lost it will never come back. “Exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘today’<sup>7</sup>.”

That is why a wise person should never say, ‘I haven't got time now to do what I must do.’

Some people always think they have so much time on their hands, so much so that they don't know what to do with it. They waste their time doing absolutely nothing useful. What a waste! Time should be treated much more wisely. We should be devoting this time to serving God; to serving others; to loving others, “redeeming the time because the days are evil.”<sup>8</sup>

May the Lord give us all the wisdom to spend our time and our lives to serve Him and love others.”

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<sup>7</sup> Heb. 3: 13

<sup>8</sup> Eph. 5:16