

Sermon of Vespers of the Sixth Sunday of Lent, April 20, 2024 |
"Rejoicing, Passing Over with the Suffering Christ" | Father Tadros Jacob.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, one God, Amen.

Tonight, the Church has chosen the Gospel of our teacher Luke the Evangelist, chapter 13. This chapter prepares us all on how to receive the week of the conclusion of fasting and welcome the week of Pascha or Passover.

Lord Jesus says, when one said to Him, "Lord, are there few who are saved?" And Jesus said to them, "Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able. When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open for us,' and He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know you, where you are from.'" Saint Luke 13:23-25.

This passage from Saint Luke 13, urges us to be serious in our spiritual lives and not be deceived by outward appearances, but to be ready to enter and enjoy what the people of God enjoy.

The first observation for us on this day is that we are preparing for a week called by some the 'Passion Week', but it is actually the week of Pascha or Passover; essentially means the same thing originally, which is passover or crossing.

If we were to ask Lord Christ why did You incarnate, became human, and accepted the cross? and You said Lord that the Father so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son? He would say "to prepare Humanity to meet Me in the Great Day of the Lord".

While we live in the world, Christ's invitation to us is that as we live in the flesh here, we should live in the spirit of Eternity.

Therefore, the term "Passion Week" is not necessarily wrong, but it does not achieve the objective of this week. Our Lord Jesus is coming to tells us: "I am coming to carry your burden, to carry the pains for you, to bring you to eternal life, and the doors of heaven will be opened for you".

The word 'Passion Week', some may say, what is our guilt to carry sorrows? But The Pascha Week, or Passover Week, He tells us: Yes there are sorrows, but not all sorrows are the same. The sorrow within is difficult for humans to accept, but if pain accomplishes what Christ did for us, leading us through earthly sorrows to the glory in heaven, then pain turns into joy.

If we were to ask those who crossed from Egypt to the land of Canaan, "What do you think of the long, difficult journey?" They would say, "It is enough for us that we were slaves and under bondage, and on the journey, we were not alone, but we held hands with Christ, and He carried us and led us to enter heavenly Canaan."

The children of our Lord look forward to this week, starting from the coming Friday, the preparation day for the Pascha week. This Pascha week is the most beautiful week in human life.

If we were to ask anyone who lived in the land of Egypt and went out under the leadership of Moses and then under the leadership of Joshua until they reached the land of Canaan, what they think of this journey? They would say it is wonderful, it has sorrows, but not sorrows that break the soul, these are sorrows shared with Christ.

Thus, the person who suffers and feels that he is a partner with Christ in His sorrows becomes happy, feeling that the most beautiful week in his life is the Pascha week, because he is passing from the land of bondage. Instead of labouring in the mud, working as a slave, and carrying many burdens, he looks forward to walking with the suffering Christ, the only one who, when he takes his hand, will carry him through to the promised land or lead him into the heavenly Canaan.

Therefore, the Week of Pascha for the true believer is a departure for him to complete the rest of his days in happiness, beyond all understanding.

If you ask someone like Arsani, (or Arsanios), the teacher of the children of the kings, "What are you doing, O Arsanios?" He would say, "I start from the sunset, I pray, and suddenly I am with our Lord in extreme happiness. I am surprised that the sun rises after dawn immediately. So I say to it, 'Have you emerged so quickly? We say to him: you were praying all night!' He says, 'I was in a glorious joy that cannot be expressed.'

There is a difference between a person who is suffering and his hand in the hands of Christ and feels that he is moving from the land of slavery to the land of freedom, and a person who takes these matters as injustice.

Sorrowfully, noticed, especially in these past weeks of fasting, as someone was speaking to me says, 'I fasted the entire fasting from beginning to end. Having Holy Communion, almost every day, and serving The Lord. Why did the Lord is permitting for me this illness or why did the Lord is leaving me with this pain?'

As if it is something bad. The person who felt that his or her sufferings is shared with Christ says, 'What beauty is this? My Lord, you turned pain into joy, to sweetness, and praise from the heart.'

Among the beautiful things that were in the life of our father Bishoy Kamel that one cannot forget is when someone comes and confesses with a sad face. Father Bishoy would say to him, 'Why are you frowning?' He says to him, 'Because you don't know the sins I have committed.' Father bishoy would says to him, 'Instead of talking about the sins you have committed, talk about what Christ did with you, and He will lift you up and bring you into paradise.'

There is a big difference between a person who looks at his past and says, 'I am sinful and wicked,' and a person who looks ahead and says to himself addressing the Lord: 'Who am I to gives me this comfort? Indeed, I will rise with you and go to live in the atmosphere of the angels, filled with joy and praise'.

The measure by which you know a true believer; is the presence of inner joy. No matter how intense it gets, or what will happen?

Once, Saint Augustine said to some of the afflicted, 'What is wrong with you?' They said, 'There is much pain, diseases, labour, and troubles.' He said to them, 'Why are you looking at the sorrowful scene? Look for that you are sharing with Christ and progressing from glory to glory, and that the angels are praising your coming with Him, and the gates of paradise are open to you, and you feel that you are in glory.'

The children of our Lord are always joyful and always live with the spirit of hope. Unlike a tired person who lives with the spirit of despair. So what does he start to see in front of him? What is happening in sickness, fatigue, injustice, hatred, or sin that works in him; instead of thinking about negative things, let's think about positive ones.

That's why I don't like to call Holy Week the week of sorrows. Sorrows are external, but it is the week of Pascha, is the week of Passover, from the life I live, always feeling miserable and distressed, to a person who is filled with the spirit.

What is more beautiful than us seeing Christ, the Holy Bible calls Him the Firstborn Brother. It means He comes and remained a human like us, and He is the Firstborn, and we hold His hand, and He holds ours, and He launches with us.

The children of our Lord do not know distress, but the children of our Lord are always joyful with the spirit. You can know this story after any phone call or a meeting with any person.

I always used to say to Sunday School servants, I wonder, after you finish your lesson in Sunday School, whether for young children, young men, older youth, men, women, or elders, does the sitting with them filled their lives with joy and praise?

This is the measure that I know if I am living in Christ or not, and that is why it is appropriate for us not only to rejoice but to make others rejoice in Jesus Christ. The person who is not happy with

Christ says, 'You say we ate in front of you and drank, and You taught in our streets.' Jesus says to them, 'I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.' Saint Luke 13:26-27. If you are really my sons and daughters, you should be joyful in the spirit.

This reminds me of something that happened in the church here in this area that I will never forget. A young man came to me and said, "Father, I want to confess." He said to me, 'Since I was in preparatory school, I didn't enter the church. This is the first time I enter the church after I finished university, and started working.' I said to him, 'Why, my dear?' He said to me, 'I entered the church in one of the holy liturgies while I was still learning the hymns, It was my first time to enter the Alter, stuttered in a response, so the Father told me, "If you're not sure what to say, what are you doing here praying, in the Alter?" So I went and pulled off my Tonia and left. I didn't go back to church until I finished university.

I even thought to myself, "Oh God, I hope I didn't do something wrong like that."

The children of God always give hope. Whenever a priest speaks to me, he says, "What advice do you give me?" I tell him, "The first advice is that whoever you sit with must rejoice in Christ, no matter his sins and weaknesses, his shortcomings, or whatever he did." "There is no comparison between the pains caused by sin and the glories and joys brought by divine grace or the cross of Christ, his death, resurrection, and ascension to heaven".

So, I hope this week, if God wills, and if we live until Friday, the conclusion of fasting, we start waking ourselves up to stand in every day, whether morning, noon, or night, saying, "Lord, we want to be your children, filled with your hope. Let not the spirit of despair enter our hearts, minds, or eyes, nor the surrounding circumstances".

God's grace that we are filled with, transform believers into angels, so we must place ourselves as one of God's angels. It's not pride, it's abiding in Christ, the lover of mankind. He came, not to give us a routine, but to rejoice our hearts internally and the hearts of those who interact with us.

The person who is joyful in the Lord Jesus even when he greets someone, transfers the joy in his heart to the hearts of others. That's why we always say that the Christian is a herald and a proclaimer because in Jesus Christ the joy of hearts. Preaching, not by verses, but by his/her rejoicing self, bringing this joy to everyone around.

We always warn servants, priests, and even also the bishops. It's not our right to destroys a person. For Christ didn't choose me to be a servant, deacon, priest, bishop, or patriarch to scold people.

He chose me to assure him or her that the way of Christ is open to them. Even for matters that seem difficult, when we come inside, I find themselves saying, "Who is happier than me, feeling that I carry all the happiness?"

My beloved, the sin we do, is raising our children or dealing with others from a young age, showing sadness on our faces. So how do I talk to them about the Jesus the joy of hearts?

I hope every husband and wife will sit together and say, "We will take a vow this year, that we are not going to upset our children in anything. We should always in-still the spirit of hope in our children".

Our shortcoming's is reflected in the lives of our children. The man/the woman of God will fill their homes with joy, even if the child is sulking and upset. It's the duty of the father and mother, or the grandparents, to show how children can rejoice in spirit.

I wish I could look at the Church and find it transformed into a gathering of angels. We can't ascend and find angels above; we find Archangel Michael labouring with the little angels under him. When any angel meets Archangel Michael, he looks at him and says, "I see our Lord in your image." Even though our Lord didn't take the form of an angel, For us, Christ took our form and became one of us. He was considered our firstborn brother. What greater hope can we have than

when our Lord takes our form and lives in the world we live in, sharing our food, drink, sleeping, and our lives!

Is there a deep thanksgiving sacrifice we offer to our Lord who gave us these blessings? I'm not thanking him because my children succeeded in their studies. Nor I am thanking him because we're in good health, but I'm thankful because God dwells within us and works in our entire household, making our children remain His children. He transforms our house to be His house, where one feels happiest. Christ takes us in His arms, consoles us, kisses us, and imparts joy.

Our role is important, by upbringing children filled with joy, praise, and sound spiritual thinking, it is impossible for Satan to enter into their lives.

May the Lord give us grace and blessings. Let's ask the Lord to change our thinking and fill us with the spirit of joy, praise, proclamation, and evangelism.

May the Lord give us grace and bless us, and may we live holy lives in truth, bearing witness to our Lord, to whom belongs all glory and honour from now and forever. Amen.