



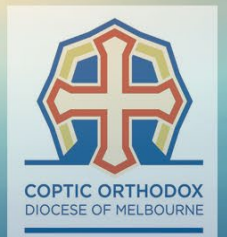
Summer Festival | 2024 / 2025

# The Lord is My Light and



Adults (30+ yo)  
English Edition

# My Salvation (Psalm 27:1)



**“ THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION ”**

## **His Holiness Pope Tawadros II**



## **118th Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of The See of Saint Mark**

## Table of Contents

The Lord is my Light and my Salvation	4
The Second Epistle of St. Paul to Timothy	14
From the Fall to Redemption and Resurrection	24
The Spirituality of Prayer with the Agpeya	32
Stations in Church History	41
Memorization	51

# “ THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION ”

## Topic 1 "The Lord is my light and my salvation"

"The Lord is my light and my salvation" (Psalm 27:1)

-This is the theme of our Summer Festival for the year 2024, God willing. It is the first verse of Psalm 27 by our teacher, David the prophet, during a time of distress when he was pursued by King Saul. The Lord brought light into David's life. He did not despair in the darkness, as his life was filled with the presence of the Lord, and thus his life was filled with light and hope.

-The Lord brought salvation into David's life, saving him multiple times.

-Whoever has the Lord as their light will see God's power and salvation from fear, the sorrows of this world, and its worries, as well as from sin.

-This psalm is a declaration about God as our light, our salvation, and the stronghold of our life on a personal level. It saves the believer from their spiritual enemies, enlightening their inner vision to behold heavenly glories. Thus, it is a psalm of confidence and triumph, as the Lord is our light and our salvation.

\*\*\*These are the main themes of this year's motto:

1. The Lord.
2. The Lord is my light.
3. The Lord is my salvation.

### First: Who is the Lord?

We believe in one God in a Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit... Meaning that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. Not three gods, but one God. This is our faith of the Holy Trinity.

God has revealed to us in the Holy Bible in both Testaments (Deuteronomy 6:4, 1 John 5:7) that He is One, and triple in Persons. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are equal in Essence, but the Father is not the Son, nor is the Son the Holy Spirit. Each Person has a distinctive attribute that distinguishes Him from the other Persons, meaning they are different in personal attributes.

The Father = the source or the fountain. The Son = begotten of the Father. The Holy Spirit = proceeding from the Father. These faith truths are the teachings of our Coptic Orthodox Church about the Holy Trinity, and they empower us with grace to be ready to answer everyone who asks us about the reason for the Hope that is in us.

"No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him" (John 1:18). The Scripture says, "Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh" (1 Timothy 3:16). While some believe in God who exists in heaven, which is good and true, others reject the existence of God or deny Him altogether due to the darkness and weakness of their pitiable hearts. Our faith is that the Incarnation is the solution to all human problems. In the Incarnation, the mighty, loving God and the wise teacher came down to enlighten the path for humanity and save it, washing it from the mire of sin and raising it to heavenly immortality. \*So, let us understand: who is God?\*

# “THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION”

1. God is Eternal (Everlasting): God has no beginning and no end; He is eternal (everlasting). "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God" (Psalm 90:2 NKJV). God alone is eternal, having neither beginning nor end. No other being is eternal because all creatures have a beginning and an end. Their beginning was the day they were created, found, or born. Before that, none of these creatures existed. All of this universe is created, has a beginning, and will also have an end. Nothing within it is eternal. God, however, differs in that He is from everlasting, from the beginning, before the earth itself. (REVISE)"The Lord possessed me at the beginning of His way, Before His works of old. I have been established from everlasting, From the beginning, before there was ever an earth. When there were no depths ... Before the mountains were settled, Before the hills, I was brought forth;" (Proverbs 8:23-25). God had no beginning in time and will have no end. "But You are the same, and Your years will have no end" (Psalm 102:27).

2. God the Creator: God alone created everything. The term "created" means bringing into existence from nothing. God created the entire universe by His word; "Let there be" and there was. God not only created matter and everything material, but He also created spirit and intellect, and He created angels, who are spirits. God created life\*. As the Creator, He alone can also take away the life He granted. He holds life and death in His hands. He also created nature. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). He can also destroy it.

-Here we talk about the beginning of creation: earth, the firmament, the sun, the moon, the stars, plants, animals, and humans. All of this happened in time when God created the heavens and the earth and everything on it. Those who deny the existence of God are blind and cannot see.

3. The Necessity of God's Existence: A unique attribute of God is that He is imperative, meaning that His existence is essential. All things require the existence of a higher being, all-powerful, who created them and is the original cause of all things. No being other than God can be described as necessary. "For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself" (John 5:26).

4. God is Infinite, and His Power is Infinite:

God is not limited by space or time. He exists in every place and time, in heaven, on earth, and in between. No place is devoid of Him, no place can contain Him, and no place can limit Him. He is ever-present in every location. "Who fills all in all" (Ephesians 1:23). Throughout all times and beyond, He is infinite in everything, and His power is limitless. No one among humans or angels shares this attribute. "Jacob said to Joseph: 'God (is) Almighty'" (Genesis 48:3).

5. God Knows Everything:

God alone knows everything about everything. He knows everything at all times and in every place. He also knows things before they happen, meaning He knows the future, the unknown, and the innermost things. He knows the past, the present, and the future, all of which are before Him at the same time. He knows the hidden and the visible. His knowledge is complete, comprehensive, and certain. "And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:13).

6. God is Sovereign [Pantocrator is better be translated almighty, all-powerful or Ruler of all] : Nothing can happen in the universe, whether big or small, without God's permission and consent. Everything that happens in the universe is under divine management. "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered" (Matthew 10:30).

# “THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION”

7. God never Changes: God's standards are constant and unchanging. "With whom there is no variation or shadow of turning" (James 1:17). God never changes. He does not increase (grow) because there is no increase (growth) to be reached since He is infinite and perfect in everything. He does not decrease (diminish) in anything because deficiency does not align with His divinity. He does not change because there is no better state than what He is to change into.

8. God is All-Holy:

God's holiness: is His infallibility, meaning the inability to err. His holiness is absolute and unlimited. The word 'infallibility' consists of 3 parts: In-fall-ability, meaning the complete inability to fall or be wrong. This absolute, unlimited holiness exists only in God alone, as "there is none holy like the Lord" (1 Samuel 2:2). This is one of the essential proofs that the Lord Jesus is the 'Logos', God 'the Word' manifested in the flesh, for "He knew no sin" (2 Corinthians 5:21), and He challenged the Jews saying, "Which of you convicts Me of sin?" (John 8:46).

9. God Incarnate for Our Salvation:

Some may think that incarnation is unacceptable when attributed to God, but the truth is that incarnation:

- Does not contradict God's holiness.
- Does not contradict God's power.
- Does not contradict God's honour.
- Does not contradict God's wisdom.

It was necessary to have a Redeemer who had the following attributes:

- Be human ... to represent fallen humanity.
- Be mortal ... because the wages of sin is death.
- Be infinite... because Adam's sin was infinite, as it was directed against an infinite God, and the required Redeemer must be infinite to atone for the sins of all humanity throughout the ages.
- Be without sin ... because one who lacks something cannot give it.
- Be a Creator ... to renew the creation of man. The only one who could meet all these qualifications is God, who could incarnate in the form of a mortal man, being infinite, holy, sinless, and the Creator capable of renewing man and restoring him to his original image.

10. God the Immortal Who never Dies:

God is life itself. Can life die? Can the giver of life die?... Never! ...He said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live" (John 11:25). After dying for us in the flesh and redeeming us on the cross, He raised Himself and will never die, having overcome death, "who lives forever and ever" (Revelation 4:9, 10:6, 15:7)

# “THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION”

## 11. God Who Dwells in Us:

Immanuel = God with us. Christianity = God in us.

This enormous transition from the high God dwelling in His heavens, who came down to us as "Immanuel," becoming God who descended to be with us, "who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:6-7), after which, another significant transition came: Immanuel dwelling in us! This is the essence of Christianity! And God's Spirit dwells in us, and we have become holy temples inhabited by the Holy Spirit. "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27)

## Second: The Lord is My Light

1. God is the true light and its source: "God is light .. He abides in light .. and the angels of light .. sing unto Him ... The Light has shone .. from Mary ..." (Ninth Part -Monday Theotokia). For God is the light, the Creator and the source of light: A-God is light: He who said, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness" (John 8:12)

"This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5).

In the Book of Revelation, it is said of the Lord Christ when He appeared to Saint John the Beloved: "His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength" (Rev 1:16).

In the First (Morning/Prime) Hour Prayer we say: "O True Light, that enlightens every man, that comes into the world... When the morning hour approaches, O' Christ our God the True Light, shine upon us..."

Indeed, God is the Father of lights and the source of light (James 1:17), and "who dwells in unapproachable light" (1 Tim 6:16).

### **God is the source of light:**

He who created it when He said, "Let there be light," and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness" (Gen 1:3-4). This is the first act of God for humanity, by which they can see, understand, and enjoy what the divine love offers... The Church teaches us to walk in this divine light through...

## 2- The Teachings of the Holy Bible:

Our Holy Bible, with both its Testaments, is the word of God, His commandments, and promises, written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and it is the light of our lives... We received it through tradition... so we preserve it and live by its commandments:

- "The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes" (Ps 19:8).
- "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Ps 119:105)
- "For the commandment is a lamp, and the law a light" (Prov 6:23)

So we can discern the good from the bad... Our Lord Jesus Christ commanded us:

- "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works" (Matt 5:16)
- "Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you" (John 12:35)

# “ THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION ”

## 3- The Church and Its Liturgies:

### A. The Church is a spiritual liturgical beacon:

resembling the heavens in its stars and angels, its interior is full of many lights, like heaven on earth, indicating the presence of God who dwells in the light, and it is an indication of the glory and splendour of the Church. Wasn't the interior of the tabernacle lit up during the assembly... Therefore, the Church is lit, especially when reading the divine scriptures. For we cannot imagine heaven being dark. It is "the dwelling of God with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people" (Rev 21:3)

This is evident in the liturgical prayers:

B. In The Prayers of Baptism (The Sacrament of Enlightenment)... Since we have been baptized, we have been enlightened, and since we have been enlightened, we have become children of God, and since we have become children, we have been perfected... -The priest prays for the baptized: "Call your servants to Your pure light" -"Open their hearts to shine by the light of the Gospel of Your Kingdom" -"who has made the darkness of delusion in us to shine by the coming of Your Only-Begotten Son in the flesh". (The Rite of the Sanctification of the Baptismal Water- Other Prayers)

C. In the prayers of the Fraction in the Divine Liturgy, we pray: "O God, the Father of Light, the Prince of life... Who uplifted us from the depth to the light... Who caused the darkness of deceit which is in us to shine, through the coming in the flesh of Your Only Begotten Son". (A Fraction to the Father Anytime)

- "You are the merciful God... who has enlightened us, the sinners".
- "O You who opened the eyes of the blind, open the eyes of our hearts".

### D. In the Prayers of the Agpeya:

- In the Absolution of the Morning Prayer, we ask: "O' Master of all, to enlighten our minds, hearts and understanding... may You enlighten us with the light of Your divine knowledge. Make us children of light, children of daytime, that we may complete this day in righteousness, purity and good order and that we may complete the rest of our life without any blame".
- In the Absolution of the Midnight Prayer, we ask: "Enlighten our minds to understand Your life giving words. Raise us from the darkness of mortal sin".

### E. The Glorious History of the Church:

Through the ages, it is also a light for us on the path, with the heritage of the Fathers from laws, decisions, and outcomes set by the Ecumenical Councils, which cannot be altered or ignored... The lives and sayings of the Great Fathers of the Church and their interpretations of the Holy Scriptures are lights on the path and the way to reach Eternity. Hence, the Coptic Orthodox Church strives to preserve the orthodox faith, the sound teaching, and our firm doctrine as received from these great Fathers, such as Saint Athanasius the Apostolic, Saint Cyril the Great, Saint Dioscorus, and others... etc.



# “ THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION ”

## 4- The Light of the Saints' Lives:

The Lord Jesus came to enlighten the world, and He made His disciples reflect His light just as the moon reflects the light of the sun... He commanded us to live a holy life: "Be holy, for I am holy" (1 Pet 1:16), so the Church was filled with saints who became a light for us, and we listen to their lives in the Synaxarion daily...

During Holy Week, when we finish reading a chapter from the sayings of one of the Fathers, we say: "Let us conclude the homily of our holy father (name), who has enlightened our minds with his beneficial teachings". Therefore, we follow in their footsteps according to the commandment: "Consider the outcome of their conduct and imitate their faith" (Heb 13:7)

## 5- The Life of the Righteous is Light:

The first thing said in the praise is: Arise O children of the light, let us praise the Lord of hosts" . Because "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light" (Eph 5:8). This is a symbol of the radiance that emanates from the believer in his words, actions, movements, behaviours, and all his activities, through all of which the light of Christ dwelling in him shines, defeating the forces of darkness and guiding the steps of those around him.

## 6- The Light of Eternal Life:

And as the beginning of the Holy Bible speaks about the creation of light that God created on the first day, the end of the Holy Bible also speaks about the illuminated heavenly Jerusalem, where it is said: "The glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light" (Rev 21:23). In the resurrection, the righteous will rise with: luminous, spiritual, heavenly, and holy bodies to Eternal Life with the Lord Jesus and the Saints. The light shining in the world, which is necessarily:

A- The radiance and reflection of Christ's light upon us: just as the light of the sun reflects on the moon.

B- The indwelling and settlement of God's light within us, therefore, the Lord Christ likened His bride to the pure sun (Song 6:10). Let us thank the Lord, who made us a light to the world, as He dwells in us, and He shines through us with His divine image. He is capable of illuminating our lives from within and from without, and guiding our path to the kingdom.

# “ THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION ”

## Third: The Lord is My Salvation

### 1- What is the meaning of "salvation"?

Salvation in our Coptic Orthodox understanding is based on the Holy Bible and the Church Fathers:

- The word 'Salvation' is derived from the word "Save".
- Humanity sinned and transgressed the commandment, resulting in the penalty of sin and death. Consequently, humanity (all mankind) was sentenced to death, and human nature was corrupted as a result of sin. Therefore, mankind needed a Saviour to redeem them from this condition and to return them to paradise to dwell with God once again.
- Salvation is a lifelong process that begins in the Church through the practice of the essential sacraments for salvation: Baptism, Chrismation, and the Eucharist. It is completed through repentance and confession, and ultimately concludes with the transformation of our bodies into spiritual, heavenly bodies. This is why we reject the phrase "I am saved" and the concept of "instant salvation", not out of a love for doctrinal debate, but out of an understanding of the dimensions of the "process" of salvation. His Holiness Pope Shenouda III states in his book "The Heresy of salvation in a moment: "You, my brother, were in the loins of Adam when he sinned, when he was punished, and when death entered into him. You inherited all this from him, and you received the sentence of death as part of him. Sin entered into your nature, and you lost your divine image. You need salvation from this original, inherited sin and all its consequences and penalties, as our teacher Paul the Apostle said: 'Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.' (Romans 5:18)"

We need the Lord Jesus Christ who:

- Saves us from the original sin: which we inherited from our father Adam and our mother Eve.
- Saves us from the corruption of our human nature: which became inclined to sin after the fall.
- Saves us from the fourfold death:
  - a. Physical death: by the resurrection of the dead.
  - b. Spiritual death: by entering into a relationship with Him and having Him dwell within us.
  - c. Judicial death: by becoming His children and partakers of His divine nature.
  - d. Eternal death: by entering the Kingdom of Heaven.
- Saves us from actual sins that dominate us due to frequent falls: sins of the mind, senses, emotions, body, relationships, etc.
- Saves us from the sorrows and tribulations of this world: by the work of His Holy Spirit dwelling in us, as He promised: "In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)
- Saves us from the body of weakness: which does not cease to fall until the last breath, until it is transformed -by the power of the resurrection -into a glorious, luminous body.
- Saves us from the wars of the devils: and the deception of the enemy of goodness, who desires nothing but our destruction. We trust that "the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly." (Romans 16:20)

# “THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION”

## 2 -The Foundations of Salvation (How are we saved?):

Through the Birth of Jesus Christ, not only was the Saviour born... but was also Salvation itself. Jesus is both the Redeemer and the Ransom at the same time.

There is no salvation without redemption, no redemption without incarnation, and no incarnation without birth!

Jesus Christ offered salvation sufficient for all sinners, in all places, and in all ages... but not all are saved, only those who believe in Him are saved.

### **The acceptance of salvation comes with specific conditions:**

1- Faith in Jesus Christ, the only Saviour: Therefore, St. Peter the Apostle said: "Nor is there salvation in any other" (Acts 4:12).

"That whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16).

In the annunciation of the birth of Jesus Christ, it was said: "And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21).

And when the angels announced His birth, they said: "For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." (Luke 2:11). Thus, Christ is the Saviour, and there is no salvation for anyone without believing in Christ the Saviour.

Salvation from our sins is not merely through belief in the existence of God, as even Akhenaten believed in the existence of God. But salvation occurs when we believe that our great God incarnated in the form of a human, from the Virgin Mary, was crucified on the cross, died, and rose again for our salvation. He then ascended with His glorious body to heaven, sent us the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, established for us the Holy Church, and instituted within it the salvific sacraments, without which there is no salvation for mankind.

Clearly, faith in Jesus Christ is essential for salvation, as the Lord said: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)

He also said: "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." (Mark 16:16, NKJV), "Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John 5:5)

2- Practicing the Holy Sacraments: Because the Holy Bible teaches us about the importance of the sacraments for salvation:

- The Sacrament of Baptism: "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." (John 3:5). "He who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16).
- The Sacrament of Chrismation: "But you have an anointing from the Holy One." (1 John 2:20), so that we may be holy temples in which the Spirit of God dwells.

# “THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION”

- 3- The Sacrament of Repentance and Confession: "Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." (Luke 13:3-5)
- 4- The Sacrament of the Eucharist: "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him." (John 6:56). The four previous sacraments are necessary for salvation.
- 5- The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick: "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. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven." (James 5:14-15).
- 6- The Sacrament of Marriage: Holy marriage is a union between one man and one woman (as God intended) in purity and chastity for life, with the goal of establishing a family. It is a holy sacrament in which the Holy Spirit descends upon the bride and groom (man and woman), uniting them so they become one heart and one body. From the beginning, God created Eve for Adam as "a helper comparable to him" (Genesis 2:18).

The Bible says about the Sacrament of Marriage: "This is a great mystery" (Ephesians 5:32). Our Church has taught us a life of purity, thus we reject what is called "same-sex marriage" which conflicts with the Holy Bible.

- 7- The Sacrament of Priesthood: Priests are the servants of the mystery of salvation, appointed by the Church to undertake pastoral care, teaching, and the administration of the holy sacraments.
  - "A bishop then must be...able to teach" (1 Timothy 3:2)
  - "Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you." (1 Timothy 4:16)
  - "Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God." (1 Corinthians 4:1)

## 3 -Good Works:

"Faith without works is dead." (James 2:20). "Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works." (James 2:18)

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:10). Good works are essential for salvation as they prove the authenticity of faith and are the fruit thereof.

# “THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION”

## 4- The Transfiguration of the Body:

Our bodies, which we live in on earth, have been defiled by sin, causing us to sin from time to time. Even though a Christian strives not to sin, due to the sinful body we live in, he may weaken and sin. However, he quickly repents with remorse, faithful confession, and tells sin: "Do not rejoice over me, my enemy; when I fall, I will arise." (Micah 7:8)

As long as we are in this sinful body, the heavy body prone to fall, illness, and death, our salvation is not complete. We must shed this earthly body, the body of shame and weakness, to be clothed with a luminous, heavenly, glorified body that is not susceptible to illness, fall, or death.

Thus, we are freed from this sinful body at the Resurrection! When we rise at the second coming, we will rise with new bodies: spiritual, luminous, heavenly, glorified, just like the body of Christ that rose from the dead. The term "Transfiguration" refers to the change in the form of our bodies into that luminous and spiritual image... This is the body with which we will ascend when Christ comes at His second coming to take us on the clouds. All believers in Him will rise with luminous bodies.

"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body." (Philippians 3:20-21)

"And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man." (1 Corinthians 15:49)

These, then, are the four pillars of salvation:

- Faith in Christ: Let us live for Him, believing in His incarnation and redemption for us.
- The Holy Sacraments: Let us practice them faithfully to sanctify us.
- Good Works: As evidence and fruit of the authenticity of our faith.
- The Transfiguration of the Body: This is what the Lord grants us at His second coming.

Thank our God, the Lord Jesus, the light of our lives, and the Saviour of our souls, who gives us strength, hope, comfort, peace, and steadfastness. Therefore:

We do not fear any tribulations, no matter what they are. The Church has gone through many wars, doubts, and doctrinal deviations throughout history. All these have vanished, and the Church remains strong, unique, unshaken, a light to the world, a shining sun, and a terrifying army that all the demons fear. "The gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." (Matthew 16:18, NKJV)

We do not fear because we are united with the Lord within us through partaking of the Holy Sacraments. Thus, we abide in Him and He in us, thereby receiving God's grace which preserves us, grants us peace and assurance, defeats the forces of evil, and illuminates our path.

We do not fear because we are the children of God. "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." (Romans 8:14). He grants us the power of His Cross for victory and triumph, so we boast in Him as He is the power of God for our salvation (1 Corinthians 1:18)

This was the faith of all the Church's martyrs throughout the ages, as witnessed by the world in the martyrdom of the 21 martyrs in Libya.

We do not fear because we have hope in eternal life. "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne." (Revelation 3:21).

May the Lord grant us a spiritually enriching festival, full of peace, making us fruitful branches in the Lord's vineyard, and satisfying our lives with good things, so we live for Him and witness to His holy name all our days.

**To Him be the glory forever. Amen.**

## Topic 2 “The Second Epistle of St. Paul to Timothy”

### Introduction to the Epistle:

This epistle is the last writing of our teacher Paul the Apostle from his final imprisonment in Rome, just before his martyrdom. He conveyed all that was in his heart to his beloved disciple Timothy, who was a bishop in Ephesus, feeling that he would not see him again. Timothy was the most beloved disciple to Paul the Apostle.

The Apostle wrote it around AD 67 or 68, and he was martyred in AD 68. Paul was imprisoned in Rome twice during the days of Nero: the first time in AD 63 when he was released, and the second time when he was martyred.

In his first imprisonment, he expected to be released (Philippians 1:24 + 2:24 + Philemon 22), but in his second imprisonment, he expected martyrdom (2 Timothy 4:6).

The Apostle here requested Timothy to come and bring Mark with him to meet him in prison before his martyrdom. But he feared being martyred before their arrival, so he provided in this epistle fatherly farewell instructions, emphasizing the necessity of striving, with a spirit of power rather than a spirit of despair, to maintain true faith and firmly oppose heresies with meekness and love.

As the church was approaching an era of martyrdom, the Apostle encouraged the church to endure suffering without complaint or doubt. He repeatedly said, "Do not be ashamed," as tribulation does not bind the word of the gospel but supports many to work without shame of the cross of our Lord Jesus.

This is an epistle from a victorious servant, bidding farewell to a world filled with tribulation, declaring the completion of his struggle and his keeping of the faith deposit until the end, awaiting the eternal crown.

Paul wrote this second epistle to Timothy because he had promised in his first epistle that he would come to him "hoping to come to you shortly" (1 Timothy 3:14), but he could not because he was arrested and imprisoned in Rome. So he sent him this epistle to comfort him.

### Purpose of the Epistle:

This is one of the pastoral epistles, meaning it is sent to individuals to arrange matters related to pastoral care and service. Saint Paul the Apostle wrote four pastoral epistles among his fourteen epistles: two to his disciple Timothy, one to Titus, and one to Philemon. These epistles touch on pastoral matters such as the qualifications of bishops and deacons and the organization of church affairs.

#### ***Some qualities that Paul the Apostle saw in Timothy and pointed out to him:***

1. His youth: This made him feel that he did not know how to serve, how to speak with those older than him, or how to behave in some situations.
2. His shyness: He was shy about declaring his faith, especially among the Gentiles, because he was originally a Gentile, so declaring his faith among them was difficult and unacceptable.
3. His many ailments: He had stomach issues, poor eyesight, and frail health.
4. His gentle and emotional personality: He was very gentle and emotionally attached to his family. Paul the Apostle turned his weaknesses into strengths, saying to him, "Your family taught you and entrusted you with the faith, so cling to them for what they have entrusted you with, not for their persons."

# “THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION”

## Chapter One

### a. Opening (2 Timothy 1:1-4):

In moments of crucifixion, the spirit of the power of our Lord Jesus Christ was revealed, showing his concern for all humanity, offering his life as a ransom for all, asking for forgiveness even for his crucifiers, without forgetting to care for his mother, the blessed Virgin Mary, entrusting her to his disciple, Saint John the beloved, as her son. It is a manifestation of love that transcends pain, even the bitterness of the cross. Thus, Paul the Apostle imitated his teacher, carrying "the spirit of power," which is "the Spirit of Christ," through which (knowing that he is being poured out as a drink offering) he does not instruct his disciple about personal matters, nor does he speak of his imprisonment and sufferings, but in power, he speaks of his deep concern for him, saying: "I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers did, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day, greatly desiring to see you, being mindful of your tears, that I may be filled with joy" (2 Timothy 1:3-4).

Thus, the spirit of power is truly evident in the lives of believers, through the expansion of their hearts with love for their brothers and spiritual children, not thinking, even in their moments of departure, about what is for themselves but what is for others, showing all love and attachment to them, not only through visible actions but also in continuous prayers and supplications to God. Perhaps Paul the Apostle, while writing to his disciple, reminding him that he grew up in the embrace of a pious mother and grandmother, also recalled his forefathers, saying: "whom I serve from my forefathers with a pure conscience," for he is a person who does not deny favours. Even if he had persecuted the church of God and blasphemed against Christ, which he often repeated, he did not ignore the blessing of his ancestors who entrusted him with the true faith until the coming of the Messiah. Paul the Apostle saw in his ancestors the good roots of God's vineyard, which flourished in the New Testament with Christ Jesus.

#### *What does the Apostle mean by "with a pure conscience"?*

Indeed, the Apostle was a blasphemer and persecutor, but even in this, he was of good intention, thinking he was serving God, desiring to act with a good and pure conscience. This purity was realized even more when he met the Holy One and enjoyed union with Him in Christ Jesus our Lord. Hence, he boldly says: "I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day" (Acts 23:1). He also declares that he trains himself daily to have a conscience without offense (Acts 24:16). By "conscience," Paul the Apostle refers to the inner life, which reflects on his outward behaviour. Finally, through the spirit of power revealed through love, he expresses his deep longing to see him. As I mentioned before, he sees in tender human emotions sanctification, without suppressing or stifling them.

### b. The Apostle's Attachment to His Children (2 Timothy 1:3-7):

The image of his disciple weeping at their separation or during the Apostle's imprisonment never leaves his mind, as he says: "greatly desiring to see you, being mindful of your tears, that I may be filled with joy." The lives of the Apostle and those close to him were filled with sacred emotions, shedding tears at their separation (Acts 20:37-38, 21:31), and he expresses his longing for all his children: "For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:8).

"But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavoured more eagerly to see your face with great desire..." (1 Thessalonians 2:17-18).

Paul the Apostle does not stop at these emotions alone, but he uses them through the Holy Spirit to urge his children to strive with a spirit of power. He encourages him in verses (5-7) to act with a spirit of power, love, and sound mind, reminding him of three important things:

# “ THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION ”

## *First, regarding his family:*

Saint Timothy owes his grandmother and mother for the unfeigned faith that he received from childhood. This is what rejoices the Apostle's heart: seeing holy families as a living church where God's children are nurtured in true faith, inheriting it every day, not as theoretical knowledge or formal worship. Here is a message for every family to provide their children with genuine and unfeigned faith, away from the heresies that are currently spreading against the true faith and steadfast doctrine in our holy church.

## *Second, regarding his relationship with him:*

"I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands." If I have laid hands on you to receive the gift of priesthood and pastoral care, our relationship, which is aflame, is in the Lord, the holy fire. Your love for me appears in kindling (or stirring up) this divine fire by responding to the fiery work of the Holy Spirit dwelling in you.

## *Third, his relationship with God:*

If his relationship with his family is in the Lord, and also his relationship with the Apostle is in the Lord, the Lord himself also gives him the spirit of power, love, and sound mind, not the spirit of fear (timidity).

Thus, Paul the Apostle supports his disciple by looking to God himself, not to the surrounding circumstances, so he does not fear or dread but rather is filled with power, love, and sound mind

## *Surrounding Circumstances*

can be summarized in the following points:

- 1. His young age for the Great Responsibility:** In the previous letter, he said to him: "Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Timothy 4:12)
- 2. Imprisonment of Apostle Paul:** Saint Timothy was aware of all the sufferings that the Apostle endured during his imprisonment.
- 3. Feeling of Emptiness:** Caused by the Apostle's departure from the world.
- 4. Presence of Opponents:** From Judaizers and proponents of Gnostic heresies that corrupted pure Christian faith.
- 5. Despite all this, he still remembered the Teaching:** Adhering to the sound doctrine as instructed by his teacher.

## **c- Preaching with the Spirit of Power (2 Timothy 1:8-14):**

The Apostle instructs him to serve God and testify to the Gospel amidst sufferings, enduring hardships and pains according to God's power. The Apostle encourages his disciple not to preach with human zeal or fervor but through the strength derived from the cross. To clarify that enduring hardships alone does not bring about our salvation and sanctification, the Apostle asserts that we owe this to God's divine purposes and free grace, stating: "not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began" (2 Timothy 1:9 )

Indeed, the cross, our longing for salvation, and our acceptance of the divine call drive us to bear the hardships of the cross practically. However, these hardships are not the price for these gifts; the true source of strength lies in God's work for our salvation and sanctification: "for it is God who works in you ..." (Philippians 2:13). The Apostle Paul presents himself as an example of enduring sufferings for the sake of preaching without shame, saying: "For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed" (2 Timothy 1:12)



# “THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION”

## *a. What is this Commitment in (verse 12)?*

It is the faith and the preaching of the Gospel: God, who entrusted it, will keep it safe. He says: I endure all things to preserve the treasure, and I am not ashamed of these matters as long as they are kept unharmed. Perhaps he means by the commitment is to the believers themselves, whom God has entrusted to him. He entrusts the fruit of the commitment/mission into the hands of Timothy.

Truly, the Apostle Paul exemplifies a teacher who preserves the mission -whether it is the true faith or the believers themselves -by continuously enduring hardships and passing it on to his disciples to follow in the same spirit, bearing hardships for the mission. The Apostle Paul presents himself as a living example of a faithful shepherd, not only in preserving the mission but also in his ability to disciple people capable of continuing his work, following his method of preserving the mission by enduring sufferings. How much we need today for all servants to be like our teacher Paul...

## *b. How do we hold fast and preserve the commitment/mission*

"By the Holy Spirit who dwells in us." Meaning, if the Spirit dwells in us, if we do not reject grace, God will stand with us. For "Unless the Lord builds the house, They labor in vain who build it; Unless the Lord guards the city, The watchman stays awake in vain" (Psalm 127:1). This is our fortress, this is our stronghold, this is our refuge! If the Spirit dwells in us, He is our guardian.

Some deserted the Apostle when he was in prison at critical moments, and the Apostle considered this action a new kind of suffering he endured for the sake of Christ, while others stood by him. This action was etched in the Apostle's tender heart, so he prays for them to be rewarded with heavenly blessings.

## Chapter Two

### *a. Striving and Grace (verses 1):*

"You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus": He advises his disciple, as a spiritual son, to be strong in striving, not with human zeal and fervor, but with the grace given to us in Christ Jesus our Lord, so that he may be able to strive lawfully. He speaks to him with gentleness and affection, saying: "my son". When the Apostle Peter relied on his human zeal, he fell into denial, despite his inner desire to strive, but when God's grace supported him, he was able to testify to the Lord Jesus, enduring sufferings with joy.

### *b. Discipling New Servants (verse 2):*

The Apostle's faithfulness does not stop at his own striving and concern for the salvation of others, nor at discipling others to care for the same work, but he also desires that these disciples disciple a generation capable of teaching and delivering the true faith. This is true striving, or sound spiritual leadership, which is to establish disciples capable of discipling others themselves. This is our understanding of holy tradition; it is unbroken discipleship through generations for receiving the living practical faith without deviation.

### *c. Spiritual Warfare (verses 3-13):*

The Apostle Paul presents three examples of spiritual striving in the paragraph (verses 2-6):

**1. The Good Soldier:** Who takes pride in his loyalty to his country and fights for his homeland. Similarly, a Christian in spiritual warfare fights against Satan and sin under the leadership of the Lord of glory Himself, who armed him. It is a great honor we do not deserve, and for His sake, all hardships and sufferings are bearable. Having accepted this spiritual enlistment, we must not entangle ourselves in everyday affairs, as they are not fitting for those who have dedicated their entire lives to serving the word.

# “ THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION ”

**2. The Athlete:** Competes for the prize, enduring daily training, and abstaining from certain foods and pleasures to win; we too must strive lawfully, according to the law of our Lord Jesus Christ, to enjoy spiritual victory. Indeed, many strive, but not lawfully, like those who train for sports without a wise coach. These often fail and may even deviate in another direction, causing them health problems and failure in competitions and winning the prize. Thus, the believer must strive, not by himself, but under the leadership of his Master, in the spirit of his Church, and with her evangelical apostolic thought, so that he does not deviate to the right or left in extremism or exaggeration. Lawful striving is painful and joyful; full of labors, but it offers peace to the soul as it looks to the true coach and its membership in His Church.

**3. The Hardworking Farmer:** If the farmer is the first to strive in planting, tilling the ground, he deserves his share in the fruit, even if another sows and another reaps. Likewise, in our striving, we work and have our reward, even if the fruit is not harvested until after we are gone, for we plow and others sow, or water, or reap, but our share in the fruit is reserved in the Lord. These are the three examples the Apostle presents to encourage his disciple to strive. In the first example, he emphasizes our obligation to strive for the King Himself, in the second, we strive lawfully according to the Lord's law, and in the third, we strive for the fruit even if it is delayed.

## d. Avoiding False Disputes (verses 14-20):

A true Christian who walks in the spirit of power does not engage in false disputes but urges believers to avoid them so as not to be spiritually destroyed.

The Apostle says: "Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers" (2 Timothy 2:14). He asks the Apostle to remind the people and advise them before the Lord to leave idle talk that destroys the soul. He also advises: "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

Let all his thoughts be directed towards approval before God, not victory in words with people, and to exert all efforts to be like a worker who does not need to be ashamed of enduring hardships for the Gospel, that is, enjoying the word of truth.

No matter how many heresies and evils enter and spread, God's foundation is firm and His Church stands, remaining with the divine promise that "the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18).

## e. Striving and Inner Life (verses 21-22):

If in a great house there are vessels of honor and others for dishonor, and God is glorified in both, one might think they are not to blame for any sins they commit because they are a "vessel for dishonor," as if they were created to be so.

Therefore, the Apostle reaffirms human free will, which the Lord sanctifies and honors, saying: "Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work" (2 Timothy 2:21).

This is nothing but confirmation of human freedom and the rejection of the notion that people are created with inherently good or corrupt natures. The Apostle affirms that the human being, in their complete freedom, can transform from a vessel for dishonor to a vessel for honor, though this is achieved not by their own capabilities, but through the rich grace of God if they seek it.

# “THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION”

The Apostle pays attention to both the negative and positive aspects of the spiritual growth of the shepherd. From the negative aspect, he is obliged to flee from stumbling blocks or youthful lusts. On the positive side, he must pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace. It is not enough to merely flee from evil; it is also necessary to be filled with goodness. It is insufficient to leave sin behind; one must acquire Christ, who is our righteousness, our peace, the source of our love, and our faith.

It befits the true Christian servant to beware of youthful lusts. He should not presume that he is immune, regardless of his pure past or advanced age, and should not consider his caution as weakness but as a sign of strength and seriousness.

## f. Struggles and Corrupting Quarrels (Verses 23-26):

The sanctification of inner life does not stop at fleeing youthful lusts and pursuing righteousness but also involves rejecting quarrels that corrupt the purity of the soul under the guise of defending the truth. As it says, "But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient" (2 Tim. 2:23-24)

The duty of the shepherd: to rightly divide the word of truth and to keep the trust without deviation. Thus, it is not proper for him to present the truth through entering into a quarrel; for meekness—even in discussions and rebukes—is more effective in the lives of others than violence or quarrels, even for the sake of truth.

If our Lord Jesus Christ, the greatest teacher who knows the secrets of our hearts and has the right to judge and rebuke us, was said of Him, "He will not quarrel nor cry out, nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets" (Matt. 12:19), how much more fitting is it for us to be gentle with our brothers in their teaching, knowing that we share their weaknesses!

***In this passage, the Apostle Paul presents four important qualities of the true teacher:***

- Firstly: gentleness with everyone, never losing hope in anyone, and not quarreling with anyone.
- Secondly: being "able to teach," for God, who is wisdom itself and the teacher of the world, wants His shepherds to learn and teach, so that they do not perish nor cause others to perish.
- Thirdly: patient in suffering, like a farmer who may toil for years waiting for the fruit of the trees, and likewise endures to gather the fruit of his planting in his children.
- Fourthly: gentle in his corrections, so that with the spirit of his gentle Master, he can restore the sinners who have been ensnared by the devil in his traps.

## Chapter Three

### a. Heresies and Evil (Verses 1-5):

By the "last days" is meant the period after the coming of the incarnate Word, the Son. Just as in the fullness of time God revealed His love by achieving our salvation through the cross of His Son, the devil, in turn, stirs up his agents to resist the truth. It is a time of grace for believers and a difficult time for those deceived by the devil's tricks and delusions. St. John Chrysostom noted, in his commentary on the previous phrases, that every sin leads to the next one, as he says, "Love of money arises from self-love. From love of money stems love of greatness, and so on. Love of greatness leads to pride, and pride to blasphemy, and blasphemy to defiance and disobedience. Thus, sins are generated, ascending from the lowest to the highest."

Therefore, let us not despise one another, for this is an evil experience. As the saint observed, sins started directed against people and ended directed against God Himself.

In summary, we mention the major evils that the Apostle lists here: (self-love, love of money and greed, love of greatness and pride, blasphemy, disobedience to parents, ingratitude, unholiness, lack of natural affection, implacability, slander, lack of self-control or chastity, brutality, hatred of good, treachery, recklessness, and love of pleasure).

### b. Corrupt Teachers (Verses 6-9):

The Apostle gives an example of deceitful teachers by what happened in the days of Moses and Aaron when the two deceitful magicians, Jannes and Jambres, resisted them. The Apostle knew their names not from the Holy Scriptures but from Jewish tradition. These magicians deceived the Egyptians by performing acts similar to those done by Moses and Aaron, but they were in reality corrupt men, filled with folly, wanting to lead people into foolishness through their deceitful appearance. The Apostle assures us that in every age, where there is divine work, there is satanic deceit. Moses and Aaron were sent by God, so the devil raised against them deceitful magicians.

### c. Enduring Their Harassment (Verses 10-13):

St. John Chrysostom comments on the Apostle's words, saying: "Be strong! For you were not just present with me but followed my teaching closely..." By saying "followed my teaching" (2 Tim. 3:10), he refers to doctrinal discussion, and by "conduct," he refers to his behavior, and by "purpose," he refers to his zeal and steadfastness. As if he is saying to him: I do not speak of these matters without practicing them. I was not a philosopher (wise) in words only.

By "faith...longsuffering" he means that none of these things disturbed him. He speaks of "love" that these (corrupt teachers) do not have, and "perseverance" that they lack. He demonstrated long-suffering towards heretics and patience in afflictions.

His reference to the persecutions he suffered in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra was only a few examples of what the Apostle endured, not an enumeration of all his hardships. He intended to provide examples for his disciple, not to boast for the sake of seeking honor. His experience in these sufferings is summed up in the beautiful phrase: "And out of them all the Lord delivered me" (2 Tim. 3:11). This is the essence he wants to convey to his disciple.

These sufferings caused by corrupt teachers, or rather by the devil himself, were not unique to the Apostle Paul alone, but "all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12).

# “THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION”

As St. John Chrysostom says: "No one can lead a virtuous life without encountering sorrow or toil or trial, for how can anyone escape it who walks the narrow and difficult way, and who hears that in the world he will have tribulation (John 16:33)? If Job said in his time...that the life of man is a trial (Job 7:1), how much more will those in these days endure? He also speaks through the Apostle, saying: 'Do not let such a thing trouble you if (the corrupt teachers) are at ease and you are in trials, for this is a natural matter.

In my own example, you learn that it is impossible for anyone, while struggling against evil, not to face distress. No one can be in battle and walk in luxury, nor fight while enjoying pleasures. Let no spiritual fighter seek an easy and joyful life! The present life is a state of struggle and warfare, distress and anguish, trials and tribulations. It is a stage for spiritual battles. Now is not the time for rest, but for toil and striving."

## d. Relying on the Word of God: Young people gathered to read (Verses 14-17):

The Apostle seems to want to declare the secret of the spiritual man's strength amidst tribulation, which is to be fortified in the Word of God. The Holy Bible is the support of the shepherd, as it is the support of the flock, in the midst of hardships, and an aid against the attacks of deceivers.

He says: "You have the Holy Scriptures instead of me. If you want to learn something, learn it from them." He wrote this to Timothy, who was full of the Spirit, how much more should it be for us!

No person is so affected by the advice of any saint as he is by the words of the Lord Himself, the Lover of mankind. This is His work, His only work, the salvation of man. Therefore, He urges them to salvation and rejoices, saying: "The kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21)... for faith leads you, experience teaches you, and the Holy Bible trains you.

## Chapter Four

### a. Persistence in Preaching: Youth Read (Verses 1-5):

He urges him, saying, "Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season" (2 Timothy 4:2).

It is fitting for the shepherd to speak in Christ (2 Corinthians 2:17) without ceasing. He may stop at some point and miss another opportunity for the soul he met, thus losing it forever. Saint John Chrysostom says, "In season and out of season" means that there is no specific time; let every time be your time. So, preach not only in times of peace and security, while sitting in the church, but also when in danger, prison, or chains, and even when you are going to death.

The apostle continues: "Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching" (2 Timothy 4:2). Saint John Chrysostom comments on this phrase, saying, "Your rebuke will be very appropriate when it is successful, and when it restores the truth. He says, 'Rebuke,' that is, be like doctors who, when they see a wound, they cut and bind it. If you omit anything from this, your work will be of no use. If you rebuke others without convincing them, you act recklessly, and no one will bear such behaviour. But if you prove your rebuke with logical persuasion, they will accept the rebuke from you... If you convince someone and rebuke him but harshly without using kind words, your effort will be in vain."

It's as if he says; preaching must be with a spirit of strength at all times, in season and out of season, firmly but with patience and kindness... Why? Because there will come a time when hearts become hardened, necks stiff and proud, and people will not tolerate listening to sound teaching. As if the apostle advises him to hasten the spiritual work, for every delay in preaching means people entering a state of greater hardness. It is as if time is not on our side if we neglect the service! The heart ready now to accept the word may reject it tomorrow if we do not serve it today! Today, people may accept true teachers, but if teachers neglect their care, people will fall into many lusts, and then they will seek teachers according to their desires and find crowds of teachers deviating from the truth, full of corruption, with whom their hearts find rest.

# “THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION”

But you be watchful in all things:

- Endure afflictions -for things are not easy.
- Do the work of an evangelist -for this is your mission.
- Fulfill your ministry -do not say that you are too young.

## b. The Apostle Anticipates His Departure (Verses 6-8):

The apostle says: "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand" (2 Timothy 4:6). He is like a bird in a cage, even if golden, wishing to fly away. The secret of his joy is his awareness that the Lord has made his mission successful and accepted his good and legal struggle. What goal did the apostle speak thus? He was eager to comfort his disciple and remove his sorrow, advising him to rejoice, for he is going to where his crown awaits after finishing all his work and receiving a glorious end. He says to him: You should rejoice, not grieve; why? Because I have "fought the good fight" (2 Timothy 4:7).

He speaks like a father sitting beside his son, who is lamenting his orphanhood, comforting him by saying: "Do not cry, for we live a good life, and I have reached old age. Here I am leaving you, and we depart in glory. You should rather admire our works, for our King seems to owe us. Or it is as if he says: We have raised victory signs, we defeated enemies!" He says this not to boast of himself but to uplift the spirits of his son Timothy, who is distressed, encouraging him to endure what is happening (his departure) steadfastly, instilling in him good hope.

So, the apostle wrote this to comfort him... He says, "I have fought the good fight" (2 Timothy 4:7)... Is this fight good while it included prison, chains, and death? Yes, because it is a fight for Christ, through which we enjoy great crowns!... There is no fight greater than this! Its crown is endless, not of olive leaves, and the judgment is not human, and the spectators are not humans, but the theatre will be crowded with angels!

## c. His Final News: The apostle provided some of his news to his beloved disciple:

**1. Calling His Disciple:** The apostle was gentle and wise in his call, as he did not say, "I want to see you before my departure," so that if it did not happen, Saint Timothy would not be saddened and depressed, but he announced that his need for him at this moment was because many had left him.

**2. Some Left Him:** Since Demas had forsaken him, he asked Timothy to serve him instead. "Demas has loved the present world and has departed, preferring to live in his home luxuriously rather than to share with me the hardships of preaching and service. He did not blame Demas for the sake of blaming himself but to strengthen us not to act indulgently, avoiding labours and dangers, as this is considered a love for the present world. On the other hand, he wanted to attract his disciple to him."

**3. Request for Mark the Apostle:** During his second missionary journey, Apostle Paul refused to take Mark with him because he had previously left him on the first journey at Pamphylia, possibly due to illness. Because of Paul's refusal, Barnabas separated from him and went with Mark to serve in Africa, with Alexandria as the center of their ministry. Here, the apostle testifies that Saint Mark is useful to him in ministry.

**4. Request for the Cloak:** He asked for his cloak, possibly to avoid having to borrow one in his last days, as he did not want to burden anyone. His request for the books and parchments was to hand them over to the believers in Rome who were witnessing his martyrdom, as they would be a source of comfort for them. Indeed, even in his last moments, he cared not for himself but for the comfort of others.

# “ THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION ”

**5. Evil of Alexander the Coppersmith:** He wrote about Alexander the coppersmith not to condemn or accuse him, nor to seek revenge but to prepare his disciple for the struggles he would face and endure them steadfastly. As he says: "May the Lord repay him according to his works" (2 Timothy 4:14). It does not carry a desire for revenge, especially since the apostle knew his departure was very near. He was preparing his disciple, who would face the same troubles from Alexander and others, to not be disturbed, leaving the matter in God's hands, who does not leave the wicked without discipline or punishment.

**6. All Forsook Him at His First Defense:** This is hard on the soul. Anyway, the apostle prayed for his friends, asking the Lord's forgiveness for their neglect in difficult moments. He realized that everyone had forsaken him, with no one to support or help. The Lord appeared in these moments: "But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me" (2 Timothy 4:17).

## d. The Apostolic Blessing:

Sending peace to his beloved: Prisca and Aquila and the household of Onesiphorus. "Erastus stayed in Corinth, but Trophimus I have left in Miletus sick" (2 Timothy 4:20). This explains the apostle's need for his disciple. The apostle repeats the invitation: "Do your utmost to come before winter" (2 Timothy 4:21). He kindly did not say: "before I depart" but "before winter" so as not to arouse sorrow in him if he arrived and found him already departed.

## Topic 3 “From the Fall to Redemption and Resurrection”

Some have tried, from ancient times and even recently, to undermine the sanctity of the Old Testament, claiming that its books are not inspired by God. Other religions ask their followers to study the Torah and the Gospel, acknowledging the sanctity of both the Old and New Testaments. How much more should the children of the New Testament, having heard their immortal teacher, the Lord Jesus, instruct them, saying:

"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled" (Matthew 5:17-18).

"If anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life" (Revelation 22:19).

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Timothy 3:16).

The Scripture here refers to the Holy Bible with both its testaments, as indicated by the words of our teacher, the Apostle Peter: "No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:20-21).

**Firstly:** The New Testament has an organic and essential connection with the Old Testament, and our Christ is the Christ of both testaments:

-As Saint Augustine said: "The New Testament is hidden in the Old, and the Old Testament is revealed in the New."

-Therefore, to attack the sanctity of the Old Testament is to attack the sanctity of the New Testament as well.

-In our modern era, many heresies and false teachings have spread, attacking our Christian faith, whether in doctrine, or the Holy Bible. With the rise of materialism and atheism in the West, starting from the 17th and 18th centuries, many distorted ideas against the Christian faith began to spread, attempting to undermine many of the fundamentals of the Christian faith from time to time. There has been a lax attitude towards Christian faith truths and the Holy Bible, including the stories mentioned by divine inspiration through the prophets who wrote the Bible, inspired by the Holy Spirit. These books have spread widely on many groups and websites on the internet, explicitly attacking the Holy Bible! They deny the story of Adam and Eve, claiming it is symbolic and not real! Unfortunately, this teaching has even reached some of our churches, and some have started promoting this distorted and strange view about our Holy Bible, our Christian faith, and the faith of our Coptic Orthodox Church!



# “THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION”

**Secondly:** Proponents of this view do not only claim that the story of Adam and Eve is symbolic or mythical but also the creation story in general, and the story of the Flood. They deny the first 11 chapters of the Book of Genesis!

1. These heresies and distorted ideas are against the faith of our Coptic Orthodox Church and against the Christian faith as a whole, which affirms the reality of Adam and Eve.
2. The New Testament mentions that Adam and Eve are real characters, the tree is real, and the fall by eating from it is a historical reality, as Apostle Paul says: "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12).
3. This claim undermines the doctrine of redemption and salvation from its foundation. If Adam and Eve are symbolic characters, then the fall story will also be symbolic, and consequently, the incarnation of God the Word for our salvation is also from symbolic stories!!! So, how did man sin? What is sin? What type is it? And who sinned?
4. According to divine inspiration in the Holy Bible, Adam and Eve are real characters, as mentioned in both the Old and New Testaments. We will provide the verses indicating this.

**Thirdly:** Since the beginning of creation:

1. When God created the animals, He created them from dust and gave them a living soul, meaning that the animal = body + soul.
2. When God created Adam, He also created him from dust, as Genesis says: "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground" (Genesis 2:7). But it also says: "And breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being" (Genesis 2:7). This divine breath was not given to animals; it is called "the rational spirit" because "God is Spirit" (John 4:24), and the breath that He breathed into Adam's nostrils is a "rational spirit" from God, making Adam immortal because he possesses this divine breath.
3. The rational spirit = spirit + mind.
4. In this way, man resembles animals in body and soul, but with the addition of the breath of the Almighty: mind and spirit.

## **A- God Created Man in His Image**

The Holy Bible says: "So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him" (Genesis 1:27). What does this mean?

1. It means that God is Spirit, and man is a spiritual being, thinking about eternity and immortality, and wants to transcend death.
2. It means that God is "Logos," meaning infinite wisdom, and man is also a rational being.
3. It means that God is free, not subject to anyone's authority, and man is also created free to choose his eternal destiny, free in many decisions, although he is determined in some temporal matters, such as sex, color, features, and some social and intellectual levels, which can be continuously developed for the better, and they have no connection to his eternal life, which is available to all.

# “THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION”

4- And its meaning is that God is sovereign over the whole universe. God also gave humans authority over other creatures, saying to humans: "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 1:28).

5- And just as God is "holy" with infinite holiness, He granted man a portion of His righteousness and holiness. Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden, living a life of holiness and communion with God, enjoying His continual companionship (this was, of course, before the fall).

6- God is eternal and immortal. The rational spirit within humans also made them immortal beings, i.e., they have eternal life, whether happy or otherwise, depending on their choice. Human life does not end with physical death like animals because "the life of all flesh is its blood" (Leviticus 17:14). Humans have eternal life, which they choose through their free will during their lifetime, to spend eternity with God in the kingdom of heaven, or in eternal torment if they stray from the path of eternal life! God gave us the freedom to choose but advised us, saying: "I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live" (Deuteronomy 30:19).

## **B- The Fall Came... and Death Came With It!**

The Lord commanded Adam and Eve to eat from every tree in the Garden of Eden except one, saying to them: "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:16-17). This was a command of love and advice from God, who loved Adam and Eve and knew the consequences of the fall.

- God knew in advance that Adam would eat from this tree because He created him with free will.
- God also arranged for Adam's salvation after he falls, allowing him to exercise his freedom in falling, rising, tasting the bitterness of sin, and the sweetness of repentance (if he wished)!
- Thus, God said: "I have set before you life and death... therefore choose life" (Deuteronomy 30:19). This is sincere divine advice—not an obligatory command—evidenced by the fact that he could choose death and bear the consequences of his choice, which indeed happened in the fall.

## **C- The Saviour Came... and Conquered Death**

The Lord Jesus came incarnate, fulfilling His ancient promise to Adam and Eve when they fell and repented, saying to the serpent that deceived them: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel" (Genesis 3:15).

- Indeed, the Lord Jesus came incarnate, born of the Virgin Mary, then taught us the way of salvation and redeemed us with His pure blood on the cross, blood that cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7).
- Thus, the offspring of the woman (the Lord Christ, born of the Virgin Mary) crushed the head of the serpent (i.e., Satan)
- And Satan bruised the "heel" of Christ, i.e., the serpent bit His heel, causing His blood to be shed on the cross, for "without shedding of blood there is no remission" (Hebrews 9:22), indicating that the Lord Christ redeemed us with His blood on the cross.

# “ THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION ”

## D- By His Death, He Killed Death that Killed Everyone

- Thus we pray in the fraction of the Divine Liturgy: "O Christ our God, who by Your death killed death, which killed everyone, by Your power raise the death of our souls."
- Undoubtedly, the Lord Jesus, when He became incarnate, made it possible to die for us. The divinity is immortal, so the incarnation was a comprehensive divine solution for sinful humanity and the fallen human race, inheriting original sin. 1- The Lord Christ, by His humanity united with His divinity, died for us and lifted the judgment of death from our shoulders. 2- By His divinity united with His humanity, He was able to renew our creation, carrying away the corruption that afflicted our nature due to inherited sin. He rose and raised us with Him!
- Thus, the Lord of Glory, by His incarnation and redemption, was able to remove the two dangerous effects of the fall, which are: 1- The judgment of death: imposed on us because "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23), and "the soul who sins shall die" (Ezekiel 18:20). Death has passed upon all the descendants of Adam and Eve from the beginning to the end of the world (since we were in Adam's loins, the crown of creation and its head). 2- The corruption of nature: that entered us after our nature was polluted with sin, falling away from God. We became subject to physical death and even to eternal death.

## E- The End of Death in Its Four Forms!!

### 1- From Physical Death to the Glorious Body:

When man was created from a rational spirit and a material body, the spirit was a holy breath from God, immortal with His immortality. Thus, when man sinned and deserved punishment, the dust must return to dust as it was, and the spirit return to God who gave it to man. The signs of physical death appeared after the fall in many forms, such as:

- The complications of old age...
- The invasion of disease into the human body...
- Natural disasters: earthquakes, volcanoes, floods, and torrents...
- Some animals acquired a wild nature, able to prey on humans...
- Human beings killing each other.
- Thus, human lifespan decreased, becoming a fragile entity bearing death within its core, cells dying and others being created anew until the final moment comes, as "it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27).
- Hence, "through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12).  
It is noted that death spread to all because all sinned. Death was a judgment on humans because they sinned, in addition to being a result of the corruption that afflicted human nature.
- But thanks be to God, for when the Lord died on the cross and rose, He rose with a glorious, incorruptible, heavenly, immortal body. By His resurrection, He will grant us to receive this glorified body, with which we will live forever in the heavenly Jerusalem after the general resurrection. As St. Paul says: "who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body" (Philippians 3:21)

# “THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION”

## 2- From Spiritual Death to Living Fellowship:

Sin separated us from God, creating enmity between heaven and earth, not because of any hardness in God's heart—God forbid—but because of man's distance and his flight into the paths of earthly life and sin, and because of the vast difference between the Holy of Holies and fallen humans!

Man died spiritually, and heaven became like iron and brass. Thus, people needed a Saviour! Job cried out: "Nor is there any mediator between us, who may lay his hand on us both" (Job 9:33), and Isaiah cried: "Oh, that You would rend the heavens! That You would come down!" (Isaiah 64:1).

Everyone awaited the Saviour, who eventually came and rescued humanity from the mire of sin and the bondage of Satan. The Lord proclaimed: "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Luke 10:18), "the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me" (John 14:30), and He commanded us: "Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7), promising: "And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly" (Romans 16:20).

Instead of the spirit of evil and sin, the Holy Spirit dwelt in the human being to sanctify his thoughts, senses, heart, will, and actions (36 anointings in the Chrismation). Thus, humans became a temple of the Holy Spirit, with Christ dwelling in them.

## 3. From Moral Death to the Glory of the Children of God:

After humans were expelled from the Garden of Eden, they became prey to an angry nature, wild beasts, human disgrace, and satanic bondage. Their dignity ended, and the divine image in which they were created became marred. Adam, the crown of creation, fell prey to a small virus, a raging volcano, or a destructive flood. From fellowship with God and angels, Adam became a slave to the enemy of goodness. From continuous praise and hymn-singing, he started to drink the cups of pain and groaning.

He ate his bread by the sweat of his brow, and the earth produced thorns and thistles for him. Eve, then and still, bore children with pain.

These are the consequences of sin, which humiliated humans and brought them down from a pure paradise to a desolate land!

So, the Lord Jesus came, fulfilled the redemption, brought salvation, rose, ascended to heaven, and sent us the Comforter, who dwells in us, making us children of God!

And the human dignity that was lost returned, and the beautiful divine image in which he was created... Yes... he strives on the path of salvation, which will not be complete except by the transformation of the corrupt body into a luminous body, but we have received the earnest of this.

1. When we were baptized... we became children of God...
2. And when we were anointed with the Myron... (36 anointments), we became a temple for His dwelling...
3. And when we partook of His holy Body and Blood... He abides in us and we abide in Him!!

And so, when we gather for the Eucharist...

1. A. We unite with the Lord... the Head of the Church!!
2. B. And we unite with the saints... (the victorious church) intercessors of the believers!!
3. C. And we unite with each other... as one body by partaking of one loaf which is the Body of Christ!!

Thus, we can say with our teacher Paul the Apostle: "And if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:17).

# “THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION”

And this fulfills His true and faithful promise: "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne" (Revelation 3:21).

Yes... we have moved from disgrace to glory!!

## 4. From eternal death to eternal life:

Did not the Lord of glory say with His pure mouth: "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life" (John 5:24).

And just as sin was the cause of eternal death in hell, and the final separation from God, with terrible regret and painful torment... so the resurrection became the reason for the new life, stored up for us in Christ, who became our path to immortality and joy.

Therefore, our teacher John the Beloved says in the Book of Revelation: "Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection (repentance). Over such the second death (eternal death) has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ" (Revelation 20:6)

## F- The reality of Adam and Eve is established through

1. The testimony of the Holy Bible itself about the reality of Adam and Eve, as it is evident from the Book of Genesis.

2. The divine revelation speaks about the creation of Adam, saying:

"And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being" (Genesis 2:7).

"The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed" (Genesis 2:8)

"Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to tend and keep it" (Genesis 2:15).

3. God giving Adam the commandment and speaking to him as a real existing person:

"And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die'" (Genesis 2:16-17).

"Then the Lord God called to Adam and said to him, 'Where are you?'" (Genesis 3:9).

4. For those who claim that Adam is a myth or a symbol ... how can this be when the name Adam is mentioned about 159 times in the Old Testament and also 7 times in the New Testament, starting from the genealogy of Christ:

- "the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God" (Luke 3:38)
- "Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come" (Romans 5:14)
- "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:22)
- "And so it is written, 'The first man Adam became a living being.' The last Adam became a life-giving spirit" (1 Corinthians 15:45)
- "For Adam was formed first, then Eve" (1 Timothy 2:13)
- "And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression" (1 Timothy 2:14)
- "Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, 'Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints'" (Jude 1:14)

# “ THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION ”

There are also many verses in the Bible that refer to the inheritance of the "results" of the original sin and the "corruption of nature" that has prevailed over all humanity since Adam's sin, such as David the prophet's saying in the Psalm: "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me" (Psalm 51:5), and Saint Paul the Apostle's saying in his Epistle to the Romans: "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12).

## **G- Thus, from what is mentioned in the Book of Genesis about Adam, we conclude the following:**

1. Adam was the beginning of God's creation and he is the father of all mankind.
2. Adam is a real person... created by God, given the commandment, and God spoke to him. As the Scripture says: "And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die'" (Genesis 2:16-17), and as stated in (Genesis 3:9-10).
3. Adam disobeyed God's command which told him: "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat" (Genesis 2:16-17), and he fell and received the punishment, not only him but also Eve. The Lord also punished the serpent that deceived Eve and lied to her saying, "You will not surely die" (Genesis 3:4), thus all humanity inherited the original sin from our forefathers Adam and Eve, and the punishment which continues to this day... with its results being the corruption of nature and death.
4. Adam and Eve had children, and they lived for specific years mentioned in the Bible.
5. The sayings of the Fathers in the early centuries all affirm the existence of Adam and Eve and their fall into the sin of disobedience, thus these are real events.

## **F- In the liturgical prayers and the ritual prayers:**

The liturgical and ritual prayers in our Coptic Orthodox Church are a recording of our doctrines and our Christian faith. Therefore, we find in the prayers; (the Liturgy -the Midnight Praises -and the hymns) the story of Adam and Eve, the fall, and the redemption of our Lord Jesus Christ for us.

1. The reality of the existence and creation of the persons of Adam and Eve.
2. The reality of the fall of Adam and Eve through the deception of the serpent...
3. The sentence of death upon them... "For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23).
4. The incarnation of the Lord of glory "Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh" (1 Timothy 3:16).
5. His teaching us the words of eternal life "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68).
6. The redemption of the Lord for us on the cross "who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24).
7. His death on our behalf after bearing our sins in His body on the cross "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

# “ THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION ”

8. His burial for three days "that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:4). These three days are counted as follows: part of Friday, the whole of Saturday, and part of Sunday, as known in Jewish law, and this is what we follow to this day in official calculations of birth, death, and conscription.

9. His glorious resurrection from the dead "He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay" (Matthew 28:6).

10. His multiple appearances after His resurrection from the dead. The New Testament records 11 appearances as follows:

- A. His appearance to the disciples in the upper room: (John 20:19-23).
- B. His appearance to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary; (Matthew 28:1-10).
- C. His appearance to Mary Magdalene; (Mark 16:9, John 20:11-18).
- D. The appearance to Peter; (Luke 24:34).
- E. The appearance to Cleopas and another disciple on the way to Emmaus; (Luke 24:13-32).
- F. The appearance to the disciples (without Thomas); (John 20:19-23).
- G. The appearance to the disciples (with Thomas); (John 20:24-29).
- H. The appearance to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias; (John 21:1-24).
- I. The appearance to the eleven disciples in Galilee; (Matthew 28:16-20).
- J. The appearance to the apostles and more than 500 brethren; (1 Corinthians 15:6).
- K. The appearance to the apostles after the resurrection and before the ascension; (Acts 1:4-8).

11. The promise of His Second Coming: "9 Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. 10 And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, 11 who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."

And for this, we chant many times every day in the Creed: 'We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.' May the name of the Lord Jesus be glorified, and His loving, redeeming person, as we believe and confess: 'that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures' (1 Corinthians 15:3), 'For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive' (1 Corinthians 15:22)."

## Topic 4 “The Spirituality of Prayer with the Agpeya”

The word "Agpeya" is derived from the Coptic word "agp," meaning "hour." The Agpeya comprises the canonical hours of day and night prayers designated as official prayers that believers recite daily according to the rites of the Coptic Orthodox Church. Praying the Psalms is an apostolic and patristic tradition that should not be neglected due to its numerous benefits and countless blessings.

### **Firstly:** The Church's Wisdom in Arranging the Agpeya Prayers

The principle of preserved prayers was introduced to us by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself when His disciples asked Him, "Lord, teach us to pray," and He gave them the Lord's Prayer. The Church derived the Agpeya prayers from three sources:

1. The Psalms.
2. The Gospels.
3. The petitions and prayers of the holy men of God.

The Psalms hold the primary place in these prayers, as each prayer typically contains 12 Psalms, one Gospel chapter, three or six excerpts from the prayers of the Fathers, and a suitable absolution from the prayers of the holy Fathers.

The apostles urged the use of Psalms in prayer: "Whenever you come together, each of you has a Psalm, has a teaching" (1 Corinthians 14:26). The Apostolic Constitutions state: "Let most of the prayers every day and night be from the Psalms, because they include thanksgiving, praise, supplication, confession of the one God, and acknowledgment of sins."

Saint Athanasius the Apostolic said, "Praising with the Psalms is a remedy for the healing of the soul."

Mar Isaac said, "Have an insatiable love for reciting the Psalms because they are the food of the spirit."

Saint Nilus the Ascetic said, "Continue to recite the Psalms because their remembrance drives away demons."

The Church arranged them around the significant events related to our Savior Jesus Christ to make the arrangements of salvation and redemption always present and lived in the memory and lives of its children.

Pope Shenouda III said, "Keep the Psalms... the Psalms will keep you."

### **Secondly:** A Brief Overview of Each of the Seven Agpeya Prayers

#### 1. The First Hour Prayer:

It is arranged to commemorate the Resurrection of the Lord of Glory, Jesus, from the dead. In it, we thank the Lord who has granted us the night in peace, kept us safe until the morning, and brought us to a new day. We ask Him to keep us from sinning on this day and to grant us a peaceful day. The apostles commanded it in their canons.

- In the First Hour prayer, the Church teaches us to pray with persistence and urgency, beginning with:

- "Come let us kneel, let us ask Christ our God" (the level of asking).

- "Come let us kneel, let us beseech Christ our King" (the level of beseeching, which is stronger).



# “THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION”

- "Come let us kneel, let us implore Christ our Saviour" (the level of imploring and persistence in asking, which is the strongest).

This is in accordance with our good Saviour's teaching: "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened" (Matthew 7:7-8).

The Church also outlines our actions and dealings throughout the day in this prayer, directing our attention to Ephesians 4:1-6 so that we may contemplate and apply it in our daily interactions: "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism."

- Since we pray the First Hour at the start of the day, we recite the Gospel passage "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1).

- As the sun rises at this time, it reminds us of the Lord Jesus, the Sun of Righteousness with healing in His wings. He is the true light that gives light to every man coming into the world. This is stated in the first segment of the First Hour prayer: "O true light...".

- In the second segment, we ask the Lord to illuminate our senses and thoughts: "When the morning hour comes upon us, O Christ our God, the true light... Let our enlightened senses and luminous thoughts shine within us, and do not cover us with the darkness of passions."

- In the third segment, we honour the Virgin, the Mother of the true Light who came into the world, saying, "You are the honoured Mother of Light. From the rising of the sun to its setting, praises are offered to you, O Theotokos, the second heaven."

- We then recite the angelic hymn, joining with them in glorifying the Creator, saying: "Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth, goodwill toward men. We praise You. We bless You. We serve You."

- In the absolution of the First Hour, we implore the Lord: "Let the light of Your face shine upon us, and let the light of Your divine knowledge enlighten us... So that we may pass this day in purity, peace, and good conduct, and complete the rest of our days without stumbling."

- Thus, the Lord guards and accompanies us throughout the day, keeping us safe in our going out and coming in, our travels, and our resting until He brings us to the evening safely, soul, body, and spirit.

- When you pray the First Hour, remember that the Lord loves those who rise early to pray as a sign of their love and concern to stand before Him: "I love those who love Me, and those who seek Me diligently will find Me" (Proverbs 8:17).

- Also, remember David the prophet who continually prayed early in the morning, saying: "O God, You are my God; early will I seek You; my soul thirsts for You" (Psalm 63:1), and: "O Lord, in the morning You shall hear my voice; in the morning I will direct it to You, and I will look up" (Psalm 5:3). Both of these Psalms are part of the First Hour prayer. Remember also that the Lord Jesus Himself practiced this prayer, as it is written about Him: "Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed" (Mark 1:35).

# “ THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION ”

## 2. The Third Hour Prayer:

The Church arranged this prayer to commemorate three events concerning the Lord Jesus Christ:

A. The trial of our Lord Jesus Christ: before Pontius Pilate and His sentencing to be crucified, despite Pilate's declaration of His innocence, and immediately after, the preparations for the crucifixion began. In all this, Jesus bore it silently.

B. The ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ to heaven: Thus, the one praying says in one of the Psalms of this hour, "Lift up your heads, O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle" (Psalm 24:7-8). This Psalm is the Psalm of the Ascension Feast Liturgy. As the last Psalm says: "God has gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet."

C. The descent of the Holy Spirit on the disciples (Acts 2: 15): The one praying says in the Psalms of the Third Hour: "The voice of the Lord is over the waters; the God of glory thunders ... And in His holy temple every one speaks of glory" (Psalm 28).

- Also, the Gospel of the Third Hour speaks of the Lord's promise to send the Holy Spirit upon His disciples: "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you" (John 14:26).

- In the Litanies , we ask the Lord not to take His Holy Spirit from us but to renew it within us. We also ask the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, through the intercession of the Virgin Mary and the holy apostles, to cleanse us from all defilement and grant us His divine armour.

- In the absolution, we thank the Lord, the God of all compassion and comfort, and ask Him to send upon us the grace of the Holy Spirit to cleanse us from all defilement of body and spirit. Amen.

## 3. The Sixth Hour Prayer:

The Church arranged this prayer to remind us of the incident of Christ's crucifixion for our salvation after the suffering of scourging, striking, and spitting inflicted upon Him. Therefore, we find in the Psalms of this hour many phrases that reveal to us through prophecy the extent of the physical and emotional pains our good God endured, such as:

- "Save me, O God, by Your name, for strangers have risen against me, and oppressors have sought after my life" (Psalm 52).

- "Their teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword" (Psalm 56) .

- Incline Your ear, O Lord, and hear me; For I am poor and needy. Preserve my life, for I am holy; You are my God; save Your servant who trusts in You. (Psalm 86:1-2)

- The cross was the throne of glory upon which our Saviour reigned. The psalmist says in the last psalm of the Sixth Hour: "The Lord reigns, He is clothed with majesty" (Psalm 93:1).

- The Gospel of the Sixth Hour, which begins the famous Sermon on the Mount, speaks to us about the blessings and beatitudes that every believer who shares in the sufferings of the cross will receive. For example:

- Christ was on the cross in the depth of being poor in spirit and humility. Thus, He teaches us to share in these virtues, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3).

- Christ was on the cross in the depth of sorrow, so much so that He said: "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death" (Matthew 26:38). Therefore, He blesses those who mourn, saying: "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Matthew 5:4)

# “ THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION ”

- Christ was on the cross in the utmost meekness: "He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth" (Isaiah 53:7). He wants to teach us this meekness, saying: "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5).

- Christ on the cross hungered and thirsted not for bread and water, but for the salvation of our souls, even crying out: "I thirst!" (John 19:28). Therefore, He blesses those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, saying: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled" (Matthew 5:6).

- The crucifixion of Christ is the pinnacle of divine mercy for our fallen race, for on the cross: "Mercy and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed" (Psalm 85:10 from the Psalms of the Sixth Hour). Thus, the Lord blesses the merciful, saying: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy" (Matthew 5:7).

- The Lord Jesus is the One with a pure heart free from any evil, and this purity was manifested on the cross when He asked for forgiveness for His executioners, saying: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34). He wants to encourage us to live a pure life like His, saying: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8).

- On the cross, the Lord Jesus made great peace and united the heavenly and the earthly: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:19). He wants us to be peacemakers like Him, thus saying in the Gospel of the Sixth Hour: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Matthew 5:9).

- The Lord Jesus lived all His days on earth persecuted and chased for the sake of the truth and righteousness He preached, and the pinnacle of this persecution was on the cross. In His love, He wants us to share in His sufferings so that we may be glorified with Him, saying in the Gospel of the Sixth Hour: "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Then He speaks to us with comfort: "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven" (Matthew 5:10-12).

And if we leave the Gospel of the Sixth Hour with all these wonderful reflections, and move to the litanies, we find them all focusing on the event of Christ's crucifixion at the sixth hour, addressing the Crucified by saying:

- Tear the handwriting of our sins, O Christ our God, and save us.

- Put to death our pains by Your healing and life-giving passions, and by the nails with which You were nailed. Rescue our minds from thoughtlessness of the earthly deeds and worldly lusts, to the remembrance of Your heavenly commandments, according to Your compassion.

- In the absolution, we thank God who raised us to pray before Him at the time of the remembrance of His sufferings and crucifixion for us. We ask Him to give us a blameless and radiant life, a holy and peaceful life, to please Him always.

# “THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION”

## 4- Prayer of the Ninth Hour:

The Church has ordained it to commemorate Christ's redeeming death on the cross for our salvation, where the darkness that had covered the whole earth since the sixth hour dissipated, indicating the end of Satan's dark kingdom after Christ's victory over him in the decisive battle on the cross. Therefore, we say in one of the Psalms of this hour: "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.'"

- The Gospel of the Ninth Hour is called the Gospel of Blessing because it tells us about the Lord Jesus blessing the five loaves and two fish, and it is also called the Gospel of the Feeding of the Multitude, where the Lord fed five thousand men, besides women and children, from this small amount of food.

- The Church specifically chose this Gospel for the prayer of the Ninth Hour because the majority of the Church's fasts officially end at the ninth hour (three in the afternoon), so that when we eat our food, we remember the Lord's blessing that enriches without adding sorrow, and we ask for His blessing on our food and on all that our hands achieve.

- The litanies of the Ninth Hour are extremely powerful and spiritual; we ask from Him who died for us and rose again to kill our bodily desires and to guide us and bring us into paradise as He brought the repentant right-hand thief, and to visit us with His mercy, without which we are nothing.

- In the absolution, we ask the Lord to turn our minds away from harmful worldly concerns and destructive bodily desires, to the remembrance of His saving and life-giving judgments and statutes, to accept our prayers, and to make us walk according to our Christian calling, as is fitting for the Gospel of Christ.

- When you pray the Ninth Hour, my brother, remember Cornelius the centurion, who was praying at the same Ninth Hour when an angel of the Lord appeared to him and said: "Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God. Now send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter... He will tell you what you must do." (Acts 10:4-6). Indeed, Cornelius sent two of his servants and a devout soldier from those who attended him to the Apostle Peter, who came and spoke to them about the salvation the Lord accomplished on the cross, and about His victorious resurrection. The Holy Spirit descended upon Cornelius and all those present from his household, relatives, and friends, and they all believed in the Lord Jesus and were baptized in His name (Acts 10).

## 5- Sunset Prayer:

The Church has ordained it to commemorate the taking down of the body of our Lord Jesus Christ from the cross at sunset for burial and to remind us that the sun of our life must set one day to be with Christ in eternity, so we must be ready for this day with all diligence, vigilance, and repentance.

- The Gospel of Sunset shows us how the Lord Jesus raised Peter's mother-in-law from her severe fever, and how He cast out demons from many sick people, so let us take this opportunity to ask Him to heal us from our physical, psychological, and spiritual diseases, and to remove from us the demons of lusts and vices that fight us and try to make us fall into sins and illnesses.

- In the absolution of Sunset, we thank the Lord who has passed the day in goodness and brought us to the evening gratefully, asking Him to accept our prayers and save us from the tricks and snares of the opposing devil, and to grant us a peaceful and quiet night without toil, worry, or fantasy, so we may pass it in peace and chastity.

- When you pray the Sunset Prayer, remember the words of the Psalmist: "Let my prayer be set before You as incense, the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice." (Psalm 141:2) and offer the Lord a pure prayer, lifting up your hands before Him imploring and beseeching, and with your hands lift up your heart, mind, feelings, and your entire being, thus offering Him the sweet aroma of your prayers as Nicodemus offered spices and myrrh at this hour to place on His body before burial.

# “ THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION ”

## 6- 12th Hour (Compline) Prayer:

The Church has ordained it to commemorate the burial of the body of our Lord Jesus Christ after His death, His descent from the cross, and His shrouding with spices and myrrh on His pure body, and it is also called the Prayer of the Twelfth Hour. The Church also ordained it according to the Psalmist's words: "When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches. Because You have been my help, therefore in the shadow of Your wings I will rejoice." (Psalm 63:6-7) and also: "The Lord will command His lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night His song shall be with me — A prayer to the God of my life." (Psalm 42:8), meaning during the day the Lord commands His mercy to guard me and watch over me in all my deeds, movements, and travels, and at night before I sleep I offer Him a prayer of thanks and praise for this mercy, care, and protection.

- Because it is the last hour of the day before sleep, and considering sleep as a small death as it is called, the one praying in the Gospel of 12th Hour Prayer repeats the same words of Simeon the Elder who asked the Lord to take his soul to enter eternal happiness in peace saying: "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word." (Luke 2:29), and indeed, it was granted to him, and his soul departed in peace and joined his people. No one can make such a request unless he is fully prepared, presenting a pure repentance with good deeds.

- Therefore, the 12th Hour Prayer is a prayer of repentance, in which a person offers the Lord at the end of each day a heartfelt repentance for all the sins committed during the day, asking the Lord for forgiveness and pardon, and also asking the Lord to graciously keep him during the night without sin.

- Humanity offers this repentance to God before sleeping, as advised by the psalmist: "When you say it in your hearts, be sorry for it on your beds" (Psalm 44 :4 ). Also, it is said: "Weeping may endure for a night (repentance and remorse for sin), but joy comes in the morning" (Psalm 30:5 )

Thus, we find that the Psalms of the bedtime prayer incline towards crying out, tumult, contrition, and repentance, such as:

- "Out of the depths I have cried to You, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice! Let Your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications" (Psalm 129).

- "O Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor my eyes lofty. Neither do I concern myself with great matters, nor with things too profound for me" (Psalm 130). Humility is the foundation of repentance.

- "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept when we remembered Zion" (Psalm 136). Zion represents heavenly Jerusalem, and weeping is the weeping of repentance.

- "The Lord lifts up the humble; He casts the wicked down to the ground" (Psalm 146). The humble are those with repentant hearts, regretting their sins and slips.

The Litanies of the Compline hour is filled with feelings of repentance, contrition, and remembrance of the dreadful judgment. It urges the soul to rise from the slumber of laziness and delight in sin to offer pure repentance before it is too late. Then, we implore God's mercy without which no one will be saved, even if their life on earth were only one day.

- The prayer of "Have Mercy, O Lord" contains many feelings of repentance and contrition.

- Analyzing the 12th hour Absolution reveals deep requests if prayed with calmness and meditation. However, it is essential to know that daily repentance in this form does not substitute for confessing these sins before the priest, the keeper of God's secrets, to hear the solution from him according to the authority given to him: "Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven" (Matthew 18:18).

# “ THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION ”

## 7- Midnight Prayer

The Church organizes it at this time, as the psalmist says: "At midnight I will rise to give thanks to You because of Your righteous judgments" (Psalm 119:62). The purpose of midnight prayer is vigilance in contemplating divine words, leading one to a life of repentance and preparedness for the second coming, fearful and glorious in majesty. Midnight prayer consists of three services, as Jesus Christ prayed in Gethsemane three consecutive times (Matthew 26:36 -44 )

### *A. The First Service of Midnight Prayer:*

The Great Psalm (119), which is dedicated to the word of God and its various synonyms such as commandments, sayings, law, rights, judgments, and more. This psalm emphasizes the necessity of caring for God's commandments in daily life and implementing them practically to amend our ways and establish our paths according to the decrees of our God.

- Then Comes the Parable of the Ten Virgins, its purpose is to encourage believers to be vigilant and prepared to receive the true Bridegroom, our Lord Jesus Christ, as He said: "Therefore, watch, for you do not know either the day or the hour in which the Son of Man is coming" (Matthew 13:25). This vigil in studying the will and preparing for the heavenly Bridegroom like the wise virgins leads us to a life of repentance and purity. This is the theme of the second service.

### *B. The Second Service of Midnight Prayer:*

We find the Psalms of Vespers, except for the first two Psalms. These Psalms guide us with their Gospel to repentance, which is the goal of every believer, to resemble those women in their repentance, resisting sin even to bloodshed (Hebrews 12:4). Through repentance and righteous deeds, the believer becomes a faithful servant and laborer in the Lord's vineyard, ready to meet the Lord Jesus at His second coming, to attain the reward and reach the goal, which is to reign with the Lord in His eternal kingdom. This is the goal of the third service.

### *C. The Third Service of Midnight Prayer:*

We find the Psalms of Bedtime Prayer, which include many Psalms of praise and glorification due to the imminent coming of the Lord to reward His faithful and diligent workers. In the Gospel, the Lord reassures us, saying: "Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32). However, the kingdom is given only to faithful servants in their master's possessions, who execute His commandments, are vigilant for the salvation of their souls and the souls of their fellow servants. As for the negligent slaves who are concerned only with the pleasures of this world and neglect their spiritual duties, their master will unexpectedly cut them off from his own and assign them their portion with the demons and the wicked.

Therefore, the believer warns himself in the third service saying: "Behold, the righteous judge is standing at the door. Therefore, take heed, O my soul, be watchful and understand that fearful hour, for there is no mercy in judgment for those who did not practice mercy." Thus, the daily prayers end peacefully.

# “ THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION ”

## Thirdly: The First Church's Interest in the Hourly Prayers\*\*

Since its inception, the Christian Church has been concerned with prayers and Psalms of the Hours at their designated times, as they learned from their Lord and teacher, the glorious Lord Jesus. It is written about the apostles and disciples: " So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, ... praising God and having favor with all the people ." (Acts 2: 46 -47).

Similarly, the apostles and disciples in the upper room continued in praise and the hourly prayers. It is written that when Cornelius sent his servants to summon Peter the Apostle, as commanded by the angel, on their journey approaching the city, Peter went up to the housetop to pray about the sixth hour. While he was praying, the Lord showed him a vision and then went to the house of Cornelius. Peter spoke to them about the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit fell upon them, and they all believed and were baptized (Acts 10).

- Also, as it is written: "to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." (Acts 1:3) There, He healed the man lame from his mother's womb.
- Likewise, the apostles practiced midnight prayer even in the most difficult times of distress, imprisonment, and pain. It is written about the apostles Paul and Silas that they were preaching in the city of Philippi. Around midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly, there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken (Acts 16:23-26).
- Regarding the prayers of the morning and the evening, the Didascalia instructs the bishop, saying: "O bishop, teach your people to frequent the church both in the morning and in the evening for prayer, and not to be absent from it."

## Fourth: Benefits of Prayer According to a Specific System

If we do not have a specific system or regular law in our prayers and leave ourselves free to pray whenever we feel the desire to pray, this poses a significant danger to our spiritual life and often ends in complete neglect of prayer, as prayer is one of the most difficult spiritual exercises on the body, which inclines naturally towards comfort or preoccupation with material matters suitable for its nature.

- Therefore, when Saint Agathon was asked, "Which virtue is greater in the struggle?" he replied: "No struggle is greater than praying earnestly to God, because when a person wants to pray all the time, the demons try to prevent him because they know that nothing nullifies their power except prayer before God. Whatever struggle a person makes in life and struggles in, he must reap rest from it in the end except for prayer. For those who pray, earnest prayer requires struggle until the last breath" (from The Paradise of the Fathers).

Therefore, the holy fathers unanimously agreed on the necessity of adhering to an organized law because they saw that this suits everyone, especially beginners in their spiritual lives, so that they become accustomed to order in their prayers, which helps them in their spiritual lives in general. Saint Jerome says, "We must assign times for prayer so that when we are occupied with any work, the time itself reminds us of our duty."

## Fifth: The Ideal Way to Pray with Psalms

Pray the Psalms with a correct, model prayer method. You can benefit from and find comfort in the Psalms without feeling heaviness or routine in performing them. There are conditions and rules for this, as mentioned below:

1. Have a personal Psalter in your prayer corner that no one else uses, and write on its margins some interpretations, meditations, and notes on the Psalms and Gospels from your reading and hearing of sermons and teachings. This helps you understand and meditate during prayer.

# “THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION”

2. Let the recitation of prayers from the Psalms of the Hours be, even if you have memorized them by heart, because this allows you to use several senses in prayer, which gathers the mind and prevents scattered thoughts. For the eyes are looking at what is written, the tongue speaks, and the ears listen.

3. Recite your prayers audibly to prevent yourself from daydreaming and scattering your thoughts. When the Lord Jesus said, "But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly." (Matthew 6:6 NKJV), He did not mean that we should perform our prayers in complete secrecy from people's hearing and sight, and try not to be heard or seen by anyone, even our family members who live with us in the house, as if performing a dirty or inappropriate act. Rather, He meant not to pretend to pray and perform it.

4. St. Athanasius tells the Apostle: "We must not miss the reason that necessitates the chanting of the Psalms with a tune, not just a mere recitation, because it is fitting to praise God with poetic books, just as chanting the Psalms leaves a good impression on the chanter himself."

5. It is very important to remember at the beginning of each prayer the purpose of the Church for its arrangement. For example, the prayer at the sixth hour was arranged by the Church to commemorate the crucifixion of Christ and the ninth hour to commemorate His resurrection. Thus, try to live in the atmosphere and meditate on the Psalms, Gospels, and the sections of the Hour, which speak much about the occasion for which they were established.

6. Read some interpretations and meditations specific to the Psalms and Gospels that you pray, so that you understand the obscure verses and specific situations mentioned in each Psalm or Gospel. This will help you to pray with the Psalms and endear their recitation to yourself. You can pray with the spirit and mind according to the advice .... # \*

7. Raise your hands as much as you can during prayer, along with your eyes, especially at verses that mention raising the hands or eyes, such as: "I will lift up my hands in Your name. My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, And my mouth shall praise You with joyful lips." (Psalm 63 – First Hour Prayer)

"Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, And bless the LORD." (Psalm 134 – 12<sup>th</sup> Hour Prayer)

"Let my prayer be set before You as incense, The lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice." (Psalm 140 - 12<sup>th</sup> Hour Prayer)

"Unto You I lift up my eyes, O You who dwell in the heavens. Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their masters, As the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress" (Psalm 122 – 11<sup>th</sup> Hour Prayer)

"My hands also I will lift up to Your commandments" (Psalm 119 – Midnight Prayer)

8. Repeat Certain Phrases: Repeat phrases that comfort your soul and suit your condition during prayer. While you are praying the psalm, gospel, or hymn, and you come to a powerful phrase that suits your situation at that moment, repeat it several times and interact with it, then continue the psalm you are praying. This is guaranteed to elevate the mind and generate spiritual warmth in the heart and conscience.

Saint John Chrysostom says about praying with psalms: "Praying with psalms makes the earth heaven, and men angels, and adorns life with its treasures, and raises children with discipline, and calls young men to sound reason, and gives virgins chastity, and grants old men preservation, and calls sinners to repentance."



## Topic 5 “Stations in Church History”

### Coptic Identity:

**Identity is:** the reality of something and its distinction from others, who he is and what he is. Identity generally connects a person with a place and time. Identity is also individuality and privacy; it is the values, ideals, and principles that form the foundation of the personality or society.

An individual's identity is his creed, language, culture, civilization, history, gender, customs, and traditions. The Copt combines sound faith and the sound Coptic Orthodox creed; he enjoys the sacraments, takes pride in sacred history, martyrs, saints, love for monasticism and monasteries, fervent worship, asceticism, honoring the priesthood, noble origin, and love of the homeland.

#### ***As for the external features:***

- The Pharaonic features in the facial characteristics.

- The church building and its interior have a distinctive Coptic style influenced by Pharaonic architecture as well.

- In worship... candles, icons, crosses, the attire of the fathers, priests, and deacons, hymns, incense, and spices for anointing bodies.

- Even the expressions themselves have a distinctive character, such as: "Absolve me -Holy Father -Remember me in your prayers -Prayers of the saints." Our country was initially called by the Semitic peoples "Egypt," meaning borders, while the Egyptians themselves called it "Kemet," meaning the black land. The Assyrians used another name (also of Egyptian origin) "Hwt-Ka-Ptah," meaning House of the Spirit (the god) Ptah, pronounced by the Greeks as "Aigyptos," from which Egypt is derived, and thus Copts, meaning Egyptians.

- After the rule of the Pharaohs, which lasted for thousands of years, came the Ptolemaic rule in 333 B.C., lasting for three hundred years during which many Greeks settled in Egypt. Alexandria flourished as the largest center for culture, trade, and arts in the ancient world. Perhaps the greatest achievement of this era was the Septuagint translation of the Bible.

- Then came the Romans from 30 B.C. to 395 A.D., known more for their power than the arts, and they severely persecuted the Copts, especially during the era of Diocletian, whose accession year 284 A.D. was adopted by the church as the starting year for its "Coptic calendar" or "Calendar of Martyrs." Later, Emperor Constantine ended the persecution with the "Edict of Milan" in 313 A.D.

- After that began the Byzantine era in 395 A.D., which ended with the Arab conquest of Egypt in 641 A.D. Despite the influx of these various peoples into Egypt, it did not lose its authentic culture and civilization, nor could they erase the Pharaonic features from the faces of Egyptians. Despite the many persecutions Christians suffered, they could not be deterred from their true faith.

Reviewing church history over the years, we find the following: In the first century, the church faced attacks from pagan philosophers, especially those of the Alexandrian school. Thus, Saint Mark founded the Theological School of Alexandria, which, thanks to its eminent scholars, was able to counter every opposing thought and philosophy.

# “THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION”

## 1. The Era of Martyrdom The third century is called "The Era of Martyrdom,"

during which the church faced the harshest forms of torture, persecution, and killing by the Roman emperors and governors, especially during the time of Diocletian (284 -305 A.D.).

The Era of Martyrdom began in the first year of that tyrant's rule due to his horrific acts, despite the church facing many persecutions since the first century (Nero -Domitian -Trajan, etc.).

Reviewing the reasons for these persecutions, we find that some were incited by personal matters (Nero), others out of fear for paganism (Decius), or due to specific beliefs they wanted to preserve (Marcus Aurelius), or because of uprisings against them for which they blamed the Christians, and also due to the class of beneficiaries (priests and others) surrounding the emperor (Diocletian).

Despite the severe persecutions faced by the church during the ten major persecutions (Nero to Diocletian and his aides), the church grew in breadth, depth, and number, producing countless martyrs and saints whom we proudly honor, such as: (Saint George -Saint Mina -Saint Demiana, etc.).

## 2. The Era of Councils Councils

were held in the Coptic Church over several centuries, but the fourth century is specifically known as the Era of Councils due to the significant councils held in that century. Councils in the church are of three types: Ecumenical Councils -General Councils -Local Councils. For a council to be termed "Ecumenical," it must meet certain conditions, including:

1. Attendance by the majority of bishops worldwide.
2. Convened by the emperor's order.
3. Decreeing something new not previously established.
4. Addressing a new heresy. The Ecumenical Councils recognized by the Coptic Church are: (Nicea - Constantinople -Ephesus I). General Councils are those where bishops gather to examine matters concerning the church, such as: (The Holy Synod of the Coptic Orthodox Church).

## 3. The Schism of the Church

The schism in the church dates back to the fifth century after the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. due to the Nestorian heresy, proclaimed by Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople, who claimed that Christ's divinity was not united with His humanity and denied that the Virgin Mary was Theotokos (Mother of God).

This schism involved many personal considerations, including the desire of Leo, Bishop of Rome, to dominate the church and subject the Church of Alexandria to his authority, and the favoring of Bishop Leo by Empress Pulcheria after he blessed her marriage to General Marcian despite her prior vow to the Lord.

**The Council of Chalcedon** resulted in the first schism in the church, dividing it into Chalcedonian churches believing in the Nestorian view of "two natures and two wills in Christ" and non-Chalcedonian churches believing in one nature and one will in Christ, including: the Church of Alexandria, Ethiopia, Syria, Armenia, India, and Eritrea.

### Pope Dioscorus:

After the repose of Pope Cyril the Pillar of Faith, the twenty-fourth patriarch in 444 A.D., the clergy and the people unanimously elected his secretary Dioscorus to succeed him on the Alexandrian See. Dioscorus had accompanied his teacher to Ephesus (where the First Council of Ephesus was held against Nestorius, who claimed that Christ had two natures after the union).

# “THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION”

Saint Dioscorus was beloved for his great humility, coupled with fervent zeal, courage, and quick wit. It goes without saying that he was educated at the School of Alexandria, which produced all the eminent men of his era, excelling in spiritual and philosophical sciences, making him the best successor to Pope Cyril the Great.

## His Time:

He was ordained in the year 444 A.D. during the reign of Theodosius the Younger, at a time when the Christian churches were not in harmony, primarily due to the insatiable ambition of the Bishops of Rome to have supreme authority over the entire Christian church.

The Bishop of Rome feared no church leaders except the Pope of Alexandria. Bishop Leo of Rome sought to unite with the Pope of Alexandria through a letter requesting mutual cooperation on critical matters, asserting that they were equals in rank.

However, the Pope of Alexandria rejected this due to Leo's malicious intentions. It was not only the Bishop of Rome against the Alexandrian See but also the Eastern bishops, who envied the reliance of the emperors on the opinions of the Popes of Alexandria in ecclesiastical matters, and who were jealous of their renown for defending against heresies (such as Arianism, Macedonianism, and Nestorianism), so much so that the views of the Alexandrian patriarchs were those of the empire itself.

## *The Heresy of Eutyches:*

In his time, the Nestorian heresy did not end with the decisions of the First Council of Ephesus but continued to provoke many church fathers to defend the orthodox faith and dismantle Nestorian views. Among these zealous defenders was the abbot of a monastery near Constantinople named Eutyches, known for his knowledge and virtue. However, Eutyches went to an extreme in expressing his faith, falling into a grievous heresy claiming that Christ's human nature was absorbed by His divine nature, resulting in one blended nature, entirely denying His incarnation (asserting that the divinity swallowed up the humanity as a drop of vinegar in the ocean)!

## *The Local Council in Constantinople:*

Due to Eutyches' persistence in his views, Flavian, Bishop of Constantinople, convened a local council in 448 A.D. during the reign of Emperor Theodosius the Younger. After discussing Eutyches' beliefs, the council condemned him and removed him from his abbacy, but it affirmed the belief in two natures and two wills after the union.

## *The Council of Ephesus:*

The council concluded with the following decree regarding the faith: "For the second time, we declare the belief in one nature after the union of the Incarnate Word without mixing, change, or division."

## *Dioscorus and Bishop Leo:*

News reached Pope Dioscorus about Leo's position on the decisions of the Second Council of Ephesus and his rejection of them, as well as his adherence to the letters sent by Flavian, which showed him to hold the same views as Flavian, who had been excommunicated by the council. Additionally, Leo extended his support to the innovators among Nestorius's followers, who had been condemned by the ecumenical councils.

In light of this, Dioscorus could not stand idly by in the face of these errors that threatened to undermine the faith. He convened a local council of his bishops in Alexandria, which resulted in the excommunication of Leo after the council was fully convinced of the reasons warranting his excommunication.

# “THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION”

## *Pope Dioscorus, Pulcheria, and Marcian:*

The death of Theodosius in 400 AD provided Leo with an opportunity to renew his efforts to convene a general council in Rome. He indeed sent envoys who met with Queen Pulcheria and Marcian, whom she married, and who was one of the army's commanders. Emperor Marcian held a council in his palace in Constantinople, inviting many bishops, most of whom were Nestorians. He also sent a letter to Pope Dioscorus, inviting him to attend this council.

Pope Dioscorus attended and was greatly astonished at the number of bishops gathered without reason. When it was said that the emperor aimed to clarify the faith, Pope Dioscorus boldly declared, "The faith is in utmost perfection and needs no further clarification. It has been established and affirmed by the fathers such as Athanasius, Cyril, and others."

During this council held at the imperial palace, one of the attending bishops addressed Dioscorus, urging him to comply with the emperor's wish and not oppose him, so he might remain in his position. Pope Dioscorus responded, "The emperor has no need to delve into these intricate matters; rather, he should concern himself with the affairs and governance of his kingdom, leaving the priests to discuss the correct faith, for they know the Scriptures. It would be better for him not to be swayed by desire or follow anything other than the truth."

Everyone was astonished by Dioscorus's boldness. Some attempted to persuade him to agree to Leo's Tome, which affirmed the two natures after the union. But he said, "The Church's belief should neither be added to nor diminished. Christ is one in nature, essence, mind, and will, as the fathers preached." He then began to explain to them the correct belief and the error of the new teaching they sought to establish, illustrating his words with many examples, including the analogy presented by St. Cyril the Great about the union of the divinity with the humanity in the person of Christ, likening it to the union of fire with iron. If iron is struck with a hammer, it is the iron that is affected, but the fire remains unaffected.

## *The Convening of the Council of Chalcedon:*

The council was convened in 451 AD in Chalcedon. Among the notable fathers who attended were Pope Dioscorus with some of his bishops and Flavian, the Bishop of Constantinople. Leo, the Bishop of Rome, was represented by three persons (2 Bishops and a Priest).

The council unjustly decreed the deposition of Pope Dioscorus from his episcopal rank, removing him from priestly service and exiling him to the island of Gangra, accusing him of being a partner of Eutyches.

We respond by stating that Pope Dioscorus's acceptance of Eutyches at the Second Council of Ephesus cannot be taken as evidence of his participation in heresy, as Eutyches's confession appeared orthodox and in line with the faith of the previous councils. When the true nature of Eutyches's beliefs became known, Pope Dioscorus rejected him.

Furthermore, the concept of the one nature advocated by Eutyches differs entirely from the concept of the one nature after the union, as taught by Dioscorus, Pope of Alexandria. Eutyches claimed that the divine nature absorbed the human nature. In contrast, Pope Dioscorus affirmed that Christ has one nature after the union, possessing all the attributes of both humanity and divinity without mingling, mixing, or alteration—the nature of the Incarnate Word of God.

After Pope Dioscorus spent five years in exile on the island of Gangra, during which he converted the island's pagans to Christ and the heretics to Orthodox faith, he departed to the joy of his Lord, fulfilling the words of Christ, "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10)

# “THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION”

## 4- After Chalcedon:

Sectarian conflicts arose between the usurping patriarch and his followers, who attempted to impose the Chalcedonian faith on the Coptic Church by force. This led to severe persecutions of the Copts, with 24,000 martyrs during this period. The sectarian disputes lasted for about 190 years, beginning with the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD until the Arab conquest of Egypt in 641 AD.

### Famous Martyrs of the Third Century:

St. Mina the Wonderworker, St. Demiana, St. Catherine, St. Mercurius (known as Abu Sefein), and St. George the Roman.

### Famous Saints of the Fourth Century:

St. Didymus the Blind, who was born in Alexandria in 313 AD. He lost his sight at the age of four due to an illness. However, due to his great love for learning, he learned the alphabet on a carved tablet. This method allowed him to study grammar, literature, rhetoric, philosophy, logic, mathematics, and music, excelling in all of them. He was a close friend and defender of St. Anthony the Great.

Pope Athanasius appointed him as the head of the School of Divinity in 346 AD, a position he held for more than fifty years. He was a staunch opponent of Arianism and its followers. He authored numerous works and provided many commentaries on the Holy Scriptures. Many philosophers and teachers were his disciples. He reposed in peace in 398 AD at the age of 85, having spent 52 years as the head of the Alexandria School of Divinity.

### Famous Saints of the Fifth Century:

St. Shenouda the Archimandrite, St. Bishoy the Beloved of Christ, and St. Moses the Black.

## 5- Heroes of the Seventh Century:

### 1- The Patriarch Who Was Exiled from His Throne for 28 Years:

Pope Theodosius the 33rd was chosen for the patriarchal throne in 536 AD during the reign of Emperor Justinian I. He was known for his chastity and renowned for his brilliance in ecclesiastical sciences. After his ordination, he convened a council that condemned the Council of Chalcedon and Leo's Tome.

This angered the heretic Julian, who, along with other evildoers, conspired against him. They persuaded the aged Archdeacon Gaius of the Church in Alexandria that he was more deserving of the patriarchate.

Pope Theodosius endured many hardships from these opponents. The governor made efforts to save him from them, fearing for his life. The Pope remained in exile for two years. The conspirators then reported to the empress about what had happened, and she sent to the governor of Alexandria to inquire about the legality of Pope Theodosius's ordination. When the delegation arrived in Alexandria and began investigating what had occurred, those who had been bribed by the hypocrites claimed Gaius was the rightful patriarch. However, upon further investigation, it was confirmed that Pope Theodosius had been ordained two months before Gaius. Even Gaius himself admitted to the wrong that had been committed, confessed his trespass, and announced his repentance, declaring that he would serve obediently under Pope Theodosius. The people rejoiced and glorified God for the safe return of their blessed patriarch.

# “THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION”

After returning to his patriarchal seat, the emperor feared that Pope Theodosius might not support his heretical teachings and Leo's Tome. Therefore, he sent a message to the Pope, promising to grant him the patriarchal throne and governorship in Egypt with all the bishops under his authority if he complied, but threatening him with expulsion from the church if he refused. The faithful Pope replied, "Satan took our Saviour, lifted Him onto a high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory, saying, 'All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.' So, too, you come offering me to forsake Christ, the true King, for the sake of worldly glory." He then raised his hands before everyone and declared, "Indeed, I anathematize Leo's Tome and the Council of Chalcedon, and whoever accepts them is excommunicated from now and forever. Amen."

+ He then said to the governor and the emperor's soldiers: "Your master has no authority except over my corruptible body, but my soul is in the hands of my Saviour. Behold, the church and everything within it are before you; do with them as you will, but I will follow the faith of my fathers —Athanasius, Cyril, Dioscorus, Timothy, and others, whose unworthy successor I am."

+ He then departed, saying: "Whoever loves God, let him follow me." The Orthodox people followed him, and the governor chose not to arrest him, allowing him to go to Upper Egypt. There, he stayed for four years, teaching the believers, strengthening them in the faith, and encouraging them to endure persecution even unto death.

When the emperor learned of what had happened, he appointed a man named Paul of Nisibis, ordaining him in Constantinople and installing him as the Patriarch of Egypt in place of Pope Theodosius.

However, the Copts of Egypt paid no attention to this, and they did not recognize him as their patriarch but continued to follow the teachings of their father and patriarch, Pope Theodosius. This angered the usurping patriarch, who sent word to the emperor.

The emperor then ordered the closing of all the churches. The Copts were saddened by this, but they began building churches in other places. This infuriated the usurping patriarch, so he opened the churches in front of the Chalcedonians.

The enemy of good continued to persecute the church, and events repeated themselves. Here is Maximus the Cynic, who claimed to be patriarch, was married, ordained bishops on his own, and had few followers. These are trials that fought against the holy Church of God that He redeemed with His blood.

After the death of Emperor Justinian I, his successor Justinian II began to pretend to be affectionate towards the Orthodox. He reinstated their patriarch, Pope Theodosius, and granted them some freedom. However, because this emperor hated the Orthodox more than his predecessor, he feared the spread of true Orthodox teachings. Therefore, he pretended to hold a council in Constantinople and invited Pope Theodosius to attend. The Pope went and met with the emperor, who spoke with him at length, trying to persuade him to agree to the Chalcedonian Council, and he promised him much. However, this faithful patriarch replied, saying, "Neither life, nor death, nor persecution, nor nakedness, nor sword will turn my heart away from the faith of my fathers." The king became angry with him and threw him into prison in Constantinople for a while. After this, he exiled him, and he remained in exile until he passed away in peace.

This patriarch spent 32 years, 28 of which were in exile. He wrote many articles and teachings of the true Orthodox faith and passed away in the year 568 AD.

# “THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION”

## 2- Saint Jacob the Parthenius intervened with the queen for three bishops:

Saint Jacob the Parthenius was born in the city of Raha in Italy in the late fifth century. He came to Egypt during the papacy of Pope Peter IV. He was called Parthenius because he wore the cloth of the Parthenon and was very devoted and ascetic. He was ordained bishop of the city of Raha in 041 AD.

He went to Constantinople to defend the Orthodox faith and missed the holy fathers who were imprisoned for their faith. By the holy queen Theodora, he succeeded in ordaining one of the three deposed patriarchs (Pope Theodosius of Alexandria, Pope Severus of Antioch, and Pope Antimus of Constantinople) to be a general bishop of all Orthodox churches.

He served as a bishop for 33 years, defending the nature of the One Nature. He toured the Roman provinces in the clothes of a beggar to strengthen the believers and to unite the stray sheep with the Coptic Church, as the Roman kings persecuted the followers of the One Nature and drove them into slavery and death. This father was known to historians as a righteous, pious, eloquent man. At his death, Orthodoxy was at its peak.

## 3 -Saint Abba Daniel, the Priest of Scetis:

The life of this saint is a living testimony to the vitality and glory of Coptic monasticism in the sixth century. This saint was a pure and complete father, serving his country with the greatest service by offering the Church prominent bishops through the educational programs that were offered in the monasteries with the aim of preparing monks to fulfill their mission effectively. This saint was one of the teachers there, along with other elder monks renowned for their knowledge and piety. His care also extended to the virgins, whom he shepherded with great care.

### • *His Life:*

He was born in the year 480 AD and traveled to the desert of Scetis while still young. He was captured three times in his early monastic life, possibly due to his passion for entering the inner desert. On the third occasion, he struck a captor with a stone, killing him, and fled. However, he remained tormented by his conscience for the rest of his life. He sought penance from Pope Timothy III, who tried to convince him that it was an act of self-defense, but he was deeply grieved. He sought advice from many bishops, and when he was not satisfied, he surrendered himself to a judge, who released him, wishing that he had killed seven of these violent barbarians.

### • *With Deaconess Anastasia:*

When his reputation spread, the noble Anastasia, one of the deaconesses who had fled to Egypt in 518 AD, came to him. She was very wealthy and came disguised in men's clothing. She confided in him, revealing that she had fled from the Emperor of Constantinople, who sought to marry her. She took up a hermit's life in a cave for twenty-eight years. No one knew of her presence except one of Father Daniel's disciples, who would bring her bread and water once a week, leaving them at the entrance of her cave. Whenever she was troubled or beset by thoughts, she would write them on a stone and place it at the entrance of the cave, and the disciple would take it to Saint Daniel, who would write a reply and send it back with the disciple. The saint chose a messenger who was ignorant of the script in which Anastasia wrote, so her confessions remained a closely guarded secret.

# “ THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION ”

- **With Eulogius the Stone Cutter:**

Around the year 525 AD, it happened one day that Father Daniel went to the city to sell the baskets he made by hand. He saw a man named Eulogius, who would cut stones daily, living on meager earnings and giving the rest to the poor, without saving anything. When the saint saw this, he admired his life and prayed that God would grant him wealth to increase his good deeds and acts of mercy. God heard his prayer, and Eulogius found a treasure while working with the stones. He took it and went to Constantinople, where he rose to high rank and became a minister, widely known for his charity. The saint attempted to meet him, but the guards refused him entry. He then saw a vision of the Lord Christ seated, judging the people, and it seemed as if He ordered that Father Daniel be hanged and asked for Eulogius's soul. When he awoke, he returned to his monastery and asked God to restore Eulogius to his former state. An angel of the Lord appeared to him, forbidding him from interfering in God's judgment. After this, a conspiracy arose against Justinian in 533 AD, involving Eulogius, who, fearing the emperor's wrath, fled to Egypt. He returned to his old trade of stone cutting. Father Daniel met him, explained the consequences of his actions, comforted him, supported him, and restored him to his love for the poor.

- **Saint Anasimon:**

She disguised herself as a foolish person to live humbly in one of the convents in Egypt. Saint Daniel revealed her true identity as Saint Anasimon the Queen.

- ***His Persecution:***

The saint was beaten almost to the point of death because he denounced the Tome of Leo and the Council of Chalcedon before the emperor's envoy, Justinian. He was forced to flee to the city of Tamoula (now Shubrakhit), where he established a monastery and stayed until Justinian's death in 565 AD.



## 6- Key Events of the Eighth Century:

### • The Rising of the Nile’s Waters During the Papacy of Pope Michael I:

During the Abbasid era, when Abu al-Abbas ruled Egypt from 751 AD to 754 AD, the Copts suffered great distress as the Nile’s waters fell two cubits below their usual level, showing God's power. When the Feast of the Cross arrived, the bishops gathered at the patriarchate, as was customary to hold two synods annually. On the seventeenth of the month of Tout, which was the Feast of the Cross, the bishops decided to hold special prayers, pleading for God’s mercy to increase the Nile’s waters. They were accompanied by the priests of Giza and many of the people of Fustat, carrying the Gospels and censers, and they entered the Church of St. Mark, which was founded on the banks of the river. The church was overflowing with people, who spread out into the surrounding gardens and fields. Pope Michael I, the 46th patriarch of the Coptic Church (ordained in 739 AD), led the bishops, priests, and people, carrying the Gospels and crosses, and they went to the riverbank before dawn, continuing to chant "Kyrie Eleison" for three full hours. The Lord had mercy on them, and the Nile’s waters rose by one cubit. The governor was enraged and summoned the other religious groups in Egypt, ordering them to pray the next day to raise the Nile’s waters as the Copts had done. Unfortunately, the waters did not rise, and the Nile gauge showed that the water level had fallen back to its previous state. The governor ordered all prayer activities to cease. But as the danger of the country running out of water increased, the governor, Abu al-Abbas, was forced to ask the Coptic Christians to pray. Pope Michael I and all those with him came to offer the Eucharist, and they continued until the sixth hour of the day (12 noon). When they poured the water used to wash the sacred vessels into the river, the water level began to rise, eventually reaching three cubits. The governor grew fond of the Coptic Christians and did good for their churches. (This event occurred again during the papacy of Pope Peter El-Gawli, the 109th patriarch of the Coptic Orthodox Church).

During His Time, the Chalcedonians attempted to take the Church of St. Mina the Wonder Worker in Mariut, claiming it belonged to them. The governor appointed a representative to demand proof of ownership from each party. The Chalcedonians offered gifts, but Pope Khalil presented documents proving the Coptic Orthodox Church’s ownership, and the church was returned to them.

Also during his time, some people had developed the habit of eating before partaking in the Holy Sacraments. He issued a decree forbidding anyone from receiving communion without proper preparation.

Pope Michael I used to travel to various cities, strengthening the believers and bringing back those who had gone astray. This great father endured much suffering, persecution, and imprisonment, yet he remained steadfast in his faith and found true solace in God.

This father passed away on the 16th of Baramhat in the year 777 AD, after serving on the Markian throne for 23 years, filled with suffering, hardship, and severe persecution.

## 7 -Key Figures of the Tenth Century:

### • Pope Abraham Ibn Zar’a and Saint Simon the Tanner:

The moving of the Mokattam Mountain is one of the most significant events of the tenth century. It occurred during the time of Pope Abraham Ibn Zar’a, the 62nd patriarch of the Coptic Orthodox Church, who was ordained as patriarch in the month of Toba in the year 975 AD, during the reign of Al-Muizz li-Din Allah of the Fatimid Caliphate. There was a man named Jacob Ibn Yusuf, who worked as a tax collector and was originally Jewish. He harbored deep hatred for Christians and spread malicious rumors about them. He requested the caliph summon the Christian leader to debate and prove the falsehood of their religion. The caliph summoned Pope Abraham, who brought with him Bishop Severus of Ashmoun. The debate began, and this father quickly silenced Jacob with strong arguments, leaving him humiliated before the governor. In his anger, Jacob sought to bring disaster upon the Christians. He pointed to the verse: "If you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move" (Matthew 17:20). He hurried to show this verse to the governor, saying, "If the Christian faith is true, let them move the Mokattam Mountain, and we will believe them; otherwise, they are deserving of expulsion from these lands." The caliph summoned Pope Abraham and presented him with the matter, declaring that the Christians had three days to fulfill the task or face expulsion from the land. The rest of the story is well known to us, how the Virgin Mary appeared and informed Pope Abraham of Simon the Tanner, and the Pope requested a 3 day fast with prayers ... and the mountain was moved.

Since then, the Patriarch has added 3 additional days of fasting prior to The 40 days of the Nativity Fast (Advent), which are the 3 days the people fasted at the time to move the Mokattam Mountain.

He also added the Fast of Nineveh, the three days which at that time only the Syrians observed. From then on, it has also been observed in the Coptic Orthodox Church.

He reposed in peace in the month of Kiahk, in the year 979 AD, having served on the See of Saint Mark for three years and six days.

# “ THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION ”

## Memorization

(From the Prayers of the First Hour - Agpia)

### PSALM 27 (26)

The LORD is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; Of whom shall I be afraid? When the wicked came against me To eat up my flesh, My enemies and foes, They stumbled and fell. Though an army should encamp against me, My heart shall not fear; Though war should rise against me, In this I will be confident.

One thing I have desired of the LORD, That will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD All the days of my life, To behold the beauty of the LORD, And to inquire in His temple. For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion; In the secret place of His tabernacle He shall hide me; He shall set me high upon a rock. And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me; Therefore I will offer sacrifices of joy in His tabernacle; I will sing, yes, I will sing praises to the LORD.

Hear, O LORD, when I cry with my voice! Have mercy also upon me, and answer me. When You said, “Seek My face,” My heart said to You, “Your face, LORD, I will seek.” Do not hide Your face from me; Do not turn Your servant away in anger; You have been my help; Do not leave me nor forsake me, O God of my salvation. When my father and my mother forsake me, Then the LORD will take care of me.

Teach me Your way, O LORD, And lead me in a smooth path, because of my enemies. Do not deliver me to the will of my adversaries; For false witnesses have risen against me, And such as breathe out violence. I would have lost heart, unless I had believed That I would see the goodness of the LORD In the land of the living. Wait on the LORD; Be of good courage, And He shall strengthen your heart; Wait, I say, on the LORD!

**Alleluia.**

T  
H  
E  
L  
O  
R  
D  
I  
S  
M  
Y  
L  
I  
G  
H  
T

## Anthem 2024/2025

(Our God is eternal  
Our God is One in Three  
Pantocrator, The Logos  
Redeemer and Holy) x 2

All generations witness for Him  
His creation gives Him praise  
Tells of His might and His wonders  
How this world His hands have made

We're peaceful in His promises  
Guided by His teachings  
We live by His commandments  
We seek Him and His blessings

Our Church fathers and martyrs  
Kept Tradition to this day  
A life of Sacraments  
My Church unique and firm in faith

My faith and my doctrine are glory  
Unchanging the teachings and Holy  
The Lord is my light and my salvation  
The Lord is my light and my salvation

A  
N  
D  
M  
Y  
S  
A  
L  
V  
A  
T  
I  
O  
N

### Contact us on:

**Website:** [www.sfmelb.org.au](http://www.sfmelb.org.au)

**Email:** [info@sfmelb.org.au](mailto:info@sfmelb.org.au)

**Facebook:** SummerFestivalMelbourne