



MAHRAGAN ALKERAZA | 2020

“MY CHURCH IS SPIRIT AND LIFE”

GRADE 6-8  
Middle School





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**H.H. Pope Tawadros II**

Pope of Alexandria &  
Patriarch of the See of St. Mark



**H.G. Bishop Michael**

Bishop of Virginia  
& its affiliated regions

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# INTRODUCTION

## MAHRAGAN ALKERAZA 2020

As we celebrated the conclusion of last year's Mahragan with the distribution of the trophies for the first, second and third place winners, we were grateful for God's blessings for a successful 2020 Mahragan. His Holiness Pope Tawadros II said during the Awards Ceremony in Egypt, "I am happy to see the activities of the Youth Bishopric, I am glad that our beautiful Church that is 2000 years old is full of young youth and I am proud to see the creative work and achievements of the youth."

Last year, in addition to the usual participation from Egypt and Sudan, we had a great worldwide participation from 192 Churches representing more than 20 countries and 8 languages.

The theme for Mahragan 2020 is "My Church Is Spirit & Life". This year, God is asking each one of us to grow in Christ. To do this we will learn about the following topics:

1. My Church Is Spirit And Life
2. Born Again
3. The Hero Of Orthodoxy & The Pride Of Alexandria
4. Know Your Talents
5. The Book Of Acts

We hope that all of you will participate in the Mahragan activities this year, and encourage everyone you know to join us in one of the greatest annual events, presented by our mother, the Coptic Orthodox Church.

May God bless Mahragan Alkeraza this year and the efforts of all the participants and coordinators, through the prayers of our beloved father Pope Tawadros II.

✠ My best wishes for a happy  
Festival

✠ Bishop Nousse

## *The Anthem*

My precious Church  
Heaven on earth  
A fortress in the world  
A refuge for all. (x2)

Since Adam humanity's fallen  
Separated from our calling  
But Christ came, died and rose  
And through Him we were restored. (x2)

My Church you are my strength  
Treasury of heavenly wealth  
(Sound doctrine, living rites  
Leading us to the light) (x2)

House of God, a fruitful vine  
My Church, spirit and life (x3)

# My Church is Life:

## 1- Personal life:

The Church arranged for us means by which we can grow spiritually within the Church.

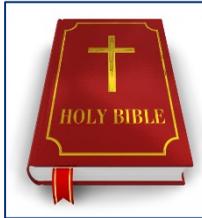
a. **Confession:** Confession should be regular and honest paired with true repentance and obedience of the instructions of the priest, with complete faith that the Spirit of God is working in the Sacrament.

b. **Prayer:** It is our relationship with God through which we are fed spiritually.  
We have:



- The Divine Liturgy, the peak of all prayers.
- The Agpeya prayers that provide us prayers for every feeling.
- The Jesus Prayer: **“My Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me the sinner”**.
- Our own prayers where we can talk freely with God about anything.

c. **The Holy Bible:** The food to our spirits that gives us joy and guides our paths.  
**“For the commandment is a lamp, and the law a light.” (Proverbs 6:23)**



d. **Spiritual gatherings:**

We meet as a congregation to pray and praise God and grow spiritually.

e. **Fasting and asceticism:**

To control the body in order for the spirit to soar.

## 2- Serving others:

- Leadership and teaching
- Acts of mercy, such as visiting the sick and giving to the poor
- Acts of love and having good relationships with others
- Acts of worship, such as praying for others, etc.

By serving our communities, we become witnesses for the Lord Jesus Christ. He wants us to be the light of the world and salt to the earth. Service helps us grow and benefits others in our families, church, and communities. **“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16)**





# My Church Is Spirit And Life

## Our Coptic Orthodox Church is:

- A Church of Theologians: St. Athanasius, St. Dioscorus, and St. Cyril.
- A Church of Monasticism: St. Anthony, St. Macarius, St. Shenouda, and St. Bakhoumios.
- A Church of the Martyrs: The only Christian church that has, besides the Gregorian calendar, the Calendar of Martyrs because of the large number of martyrs in its long history, and continues to have martyrs until today.
- An Evangelic Church: preached throughout the world. For example, St. Maurice and St. Verena have many churches, monasteries, institutions, and cities in Europe after their names. The church is still spreading today in all the continents of the world, yet the church is one body in Christ, with the same faith, rites, and history.

In the Divine Liturgy, we hear the deacon say: "Pray for the peace of the One, only, Holy, Catholic, and apostolic Orthodox Church, the Church of God."

1. One: There is only one church in the mind of God from eternity. The body of Christ is one. The bride of Christ (the church) is one.
2. Only: "unique in its kind", nothing else is similar to it. It is the holy place where God meets with His people, where Heaven and earth unite.
3. Holy: The Holy Spirit of God is the essence of the holiness of its members. It is He who dwells in each one making us the temple of the Holy Spirit, sanctifying our thoughts, conscience and behavior.
4. Universal: If the Old Testament focused on one group of people, the children of Israel, the New Testament expanded to include the whole world, from all nations, all peoples, tribes, and tongues. "For God so loved the world" John 3:16 and "



desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" 1Timothy 2:4

5. Apostolic: The Church has "been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone." Ephesians 2:20. The Church is an extension of the Apostles, in its faith, its teachings, and its preaching.
6. Orthodox: "Ortho" means straight. The life of the Church is straightforward and glorifies God at all time. There is no opposition between our faith and our life.
7. The Church of God: The Church is not the property of anyone, not even itself, but rather a pure property of God, who loved her, redeemed her with His blood, and acquired her as a pure bride for Himself. "For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." 2Corinthians 11:2 – "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine." Song of Solomon 6:3

The Church is the community of the believers gathered in the consecrated house of God, led by the clergy in the presence of the angels and the saints around the Holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus.

1. The community of believers: The word "ecclesia" means "congregation," and the church - according to the Bible - is "the body of Christ", as St. Paul says: "Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually." 1Corinthians 12:25
2. Gathered in the consecrated house of God: The church is "the house of God, the door to heaven" the altar has become like heaven because of the presence of the Lord of Glory in it with His angels and the saints. "And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" Acts 2:47
3. The leadership of the clergy: When the Lord established the sacrament of the priesthood after His glorious resurrection, "He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any they are retained" John 20:22-23. He then sent them to minister.

4. In the presence of angels and saints: When we put icons of saints and angels in the church, we feel their presence in the house of God, the house of the angels. Therefore the priest prays saying: " Before Whom stand the angels, the authorities, the thrones, the dominions, and the powers"
5. Around the Holy Body and Blood of the Lord: The Eucharist is the foundation of the whole church. It is the Body and Blood of Emmanuel our God, the head and the bridegroom of the church. As our Lord Jesus said "I am the Bread of life" John 6:35) which is why we receive many blessings when we take communion.

## What are the blessings of communion?

1. We abide in Christ: Man is weak before sin and Satan and before the world, but when he partakes in Communion as our Lord Jesus said, "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him." John 6:56, he becomes stronger with God's grace.
2. We become united with the heavenly: angels and saints are present in the church. They pray and intercede on our behalf before God. We are in unity with them as we are all members of the Body of Christ, the Church.
3. We become united with each other: We all partake in the Body and Blood of Christ. As St. Paul said "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread" 1Corinthians 10:16-17
4. We receive forgiveness: During the liturgy, the priest holds the Holy Body saying: "Salvation, remission of sins and eternal life to those who partake of Him". As long as we repent from our heart and faithfully confess our sins, our sins are forgiven.



5. Salvation: It is not merely forgiveness, but purification and sanctification from sin, freedom from slavery and the acceptance of the dwelling of the Lord of glory within us so we may abide in Him and He in us.
6. Eternal life: The Lord said: "Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" John 6:54
7. We proclaim His death, confess His resurrection and remember Him until he comes

The work of the Holy Spirit in the church:

"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." Romans 8:14

After the Lord's ascension, the Holy Spirit descended on the apostles on the day of the Pentecost. They established the Church and Christianity spread throughout the world and many churches were built.

## The Holy Spirit and his work in Church Sacraments:

The Seven Sacraments of the Church were instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ. They are visible signs by which we receive invisible grace.

1. The Sacrament of Baptism: With it we are born a second birth by immersing in water three times in the name of the Holy Trinity. It is door of all the sacraments by which we enter the kingdom of grace. "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." John 3:5
2. The Sacrament of Confirmation: By which we receive the seal of the Holy Spirit, 36 anointments to sanctify the whole person "But you have an anointing from the Holy One" 1John 2:20
3. The Eucharist: We receive the Body and Blood of the Lord to unite with Him and

abide in Him and He in us. (John 6:53-56)

4. Sacrament of Repentance and Confession: It is the return of the sinner to God and the reconciliation with Him by confessing his sins before the priest. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1John 1:9
5. The Sacrament of Unction of the sick: In it, the priest anoints the sick with oil and prays for him that through God's grace they obtain recovery from the spiritual and physical illness. "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 Matrimony: Marriage is a natural law that God established first from the beginning with Adam and Eve. The Lord Jesus blessed it by attending the wedding of Cana of Galilee and sanctified it and said: "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh"? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let not man separate." Matthew 19-5-6
7. The Sacrament of Priesthood: The Holy Spirit comes upon the person when the bishop lays his hand on him and gives him the grace of the priesthood. "He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit." John 20:22

# Born Again

Our Lord Jesus Christ instituted the sacraments in the church so that the believers would receive blessings and gifts that would show the way of the Kingdom of Heaven to them and help them follow His path. Our Orthodox Church has seven sacraments. Four of them are essential for salvation: Baptism, Confirmation, the Eucharist and Repentance and Confession.

## The Sacrament of Baptism

Baptism is essential for salvation, as without it we cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven. We are all born with the original sin and baptism cleanses from it.

The Sacrament of Baptism is the door of all sacraments, without baptism we cannot practice the rest of the church's sacraments. It is a new birth from water and spirit. There is no salvation without baptism. "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." John 3:3

The Apostles practiced baptism since the day of the descent of the Holy Spirit (Pentecost), and we are still following in their footsteps. "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Acts 2:38

This second birth of water and the Spirit is the birth from the church. This new birth is life in Christ "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." Galatians 3:27

# The Institution of the Sacrament

Our Lord Jesus instituted the sacrament of Baptism when He came to the Jordan River and was baptized by John the Baptist (Matthew 3:13-17)

The Lord commanded His disciples: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"  
Matthew 28:19

Christ emphasized the importance of baptism in His conversation with Nicodemus, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." John 3:3

Through physical birth we became children of Adam through baptism we became children of God.

# The Rite of the Sacrament of Baptism

The Baptism rite is divided into four sections:

## **1. The Woman's absolution**

This prayer gives permission to the woman to enter the church and partake in the church sacraments after she gives birth. It starts with the Lord's Prayer and ends with the priest praying and asking God to look at her, fill her with the Holy Spirit, purify her from all her sins. The priest then anoints her with simple oil or Apocalypse oil.

## **2. Renouncing Satan and Confessing**

The priest prays the litany of the Catechumens



### **A. Renouncing Satan**

The mother takes off the baby's clothes and carries him/her on her left hand, looks at the west and raises her right hand and repeats after the priest: "I renounce you Satan and all your profane deeds, and all your evil followers, and all your bad debts, all your power, and all your detested worshipping, all your evil traps and your army and your dominion and the rest of your deceit. I renounce you, I renounce you, I renounce you"

The priest breathes three times on the child, and orders the profane spirit to come out from this child's life, by the order and power of the Holy Spirit.

### **B. Confessing Christ**

The mother looks towards the East with her child on her left arm, and raises her right hand to repeat after the priest: "I confess to you O Christ my God and to all Your redeeming laws and enlivening service and Your life giving works. I believe in one God the Father the Almighty, and His Only Begotten Son Jesus Christ and the Life-Giving Holy Spirit, and the resurrection of the body, and the One, Holy, Universal and Apostolic Church, Amen."

The priest then asks her three times: "Do you believe on behalf of this child?" And three times she responds, "I believe".

Undressing the child reminds us of the nakedness of Adam and Eve when they obeyed Satan and disobeyed the commandment of God, so they were put to shame before Him and hid from Him (Genesis 3:7-10) when they realized their nakedness. Such is what sin and Satan do to human beings, they strip them from all virtues and the protection of grace, and hence put them to shame before others.

Facing the West symbolizes exile and separation from God, and submission to the dominion of Satan, who was the first to be exiled and separated from God; falling from his angelic rank due to pride. The direction of the West signifies the end, death and

darkness, just as how the sun sets in the west.

Renouncing Satan means that we are breaking the covenant with him, which is the covenant of obeying him, which he had with our first fathers. When Adam and Eve submitted to his will and obeyed his evil counsel, they disobeyed God and fell from grace, just like Satan. Hence he grabbed them to do his will. It also means that the person is refusing to remain under the bondage of Satan.

When the mother believes on behalf of her child, this means that she believes in the grace the child gets in the sacrament of Baptism which is the blessing of becoming God's child. She pledges to nurture her child with all the foundation of the faith the church teachings and doctrine.

Rising of the right hand is a sign of covenant to be with Christ.

The priest takes the holy oil (Ghaliloun) and anoints the baptized on their heart, back and arms with the sign of the Cross saying: "I anoint you (the baptized Name) by the ointment of joy, opposing all the deeds of the adversary to implant you in the pleasant olive tree, in the One Holy Universal, and Apostolic Church of God"

### **3. The Baptism Liturgy (sanctification of the water)**

The priest prays inaudible prayers on the water asking God for the baptized to make them worthy of this great grace to be born a new birth so that they may be transformed from sons of the flesh into children of God, and with the power of the Holy Spirit get to know the Lord Jesus.

The priest takes the simple oil and pours it into the baptismal water making the sign of the cross three times and with every time, the deacon says "Amen". Then the priest pray the Baptism Liturgy starting with the Lord's Prayer till the absolution (includes readings, litanies, the creed...)

The priest takes the Ghaliloun oil, pours some of it into the Baptismal water three times

with the sign of the cross to sanctify the water.

He finally pours the oil of Myron in the Baptismal water 3 times in the name of the Holy Trinity stirring the water with the cross as a reminder of the angel who was stirring the water in the pool of Siloam, as well as the Spirit of God who was hovering over the face of the waters. Then the priest says parts of the psalms.

### **Three kinds of oil are used in Baptism:**

**Simple Oil:** pure olive oil, most probably the oil upon which the Apocalypse Vigil of Easter Saturday was prayed.

**Ghaliloun Oil:** called an ointment of joy. It is oil in which is boiled the remainder of the Myron oil after clarifying it. It is used in anointing the baptized persons.

**Myron Oil:** The first who made the Myron were the fathers the Apostles as they kept certain fragrant oils which were on the body of the Lord Jesus during His burial, and they added the spices that were brought by the women who prepared them to anoint Jesus, but Christ had risen.

## **4. Baptism by Immersion**

The priest holds the child from under the arms while facing the baby towards the West. He gradually dips the child into the water, until the child is completely immersed, while saying: "I baptize you in the name of the Father..." - this is the first immersion. He lifts the child from the water and breathes into them, then immerses the child again saying: "And the Son..." - this is the second immersion. Then he lifts the child from the water and breathes into them again, then immerses the child for the third time in the water while saying: "And the Holy Spirit" - this is the third immersion. He then lifts the child from the water and breathes into them for the third time.

The priest receives the child from the left, and then after baptism, he gives the child to the mother from the right. This action signifies that Baptism transforms us from the side of rejection, which is darkness, to the side of acceptance, which is the light.

Finally, the sacrament of confirmation takes place and the priest uses Myron Oil to anoint the child 36 times in three groups of 12.

The first group: on the head, face, heart, abdomen and back.

To sanctify the thought:

On the head (1)      Then to sanctify the senses:      On the nostrils (2-3)  
On the mouth (4)      On the ears and eyes (5-8)      To sanctify the feelings:  
On the heart and abdomen (9-10)      To sanctify the will:      On the back (11-12)

The second group on the arms, to sanctify the deeds:

Two crosses for each joint, the arms, from the back and the front (13 to 24)

The third group on the legs, to sanctify the steps:

Two crosses for each of the joints of the legs, from back and front (25 to 36)

Thus, the baptized turns into a temple for the Holy Spirit, in which the Spirit of God dwells sanctifying their thoughts, senses, feelings, will, deeds and steps.

After the Myron, the baptized wears new white clothes, new as a sign of the new life and white as a sign of purity.

The priest put red ribbon (Zinar) around the baptized. The word Zinar is a Syrian word meaning belt, which symbolizes that the baptized has become a soldier of Christ. It is also a sign of the bond and covenant with Christ who shed His blood to save us.

### **Archon Ibrahim El-Gohary**

His Upbringing:

Archon Ibrahim El-Gohary was born in the 18th century to pious parents. He excelled in writing and arithmetic. He transcribed religious books and brought them to Pope Yoannis



He was pleased with his devotion and blessed him. The Pope encouraged him to become a scribe in the government. He continued in this position until he became the chief scribe of all of Egypt, a position equivalent to a prime minister today. This position increased in his humility and piety. He was loved by many.

Distress and Troubles: .

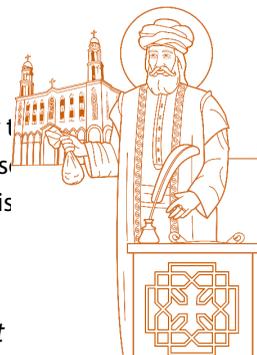
He remained in his position until a coup took place in the government and he was forced to flee to Upper Egypt. The new governor took all his possessions and persecuted the Christians and robbed their homes. By the grace of God, circumstances improved later and Archon Ibrahim El---Gohary returned and was able to get orders allowing Copts to reconstruct all the churches that were destroyed.

### **His piety and spirituality:**

- He donated money and paid special attention to transcribing the Church books at his own expense and gave them to the churches and monasteries.
- **Do not overcome evil with evil:** Once his brother Girgis complained to him that some young men insulted him in the street and asked him to do something about it. He promised him that he will shut their mouths. The next day Girgis received great respect from the same young men. When he asked his brother, he replied that he sent them many gifts and provisions that cut their tongues from the evil words. **“Therefore, if your enemy is hungry feed him; if he is thirsty give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” (Romans 12:20N 21)**

**Serving Everyone At All Times:** One day, Archon Ibrahim returned home after the Liturgy of the Resurrection Feast, his wife told him that a family of a Coptic prisoner was in need of food and clothes. He went with his wife to Archon Fanous who succeeded in getting him released. Archon Ibrahim got a job for him but the man refused saying “I have a friend who is in need of the job more than me.” Ibrahim rejoiced at his nobility and was able to get a job for both of them.

- **Helping Those in Need:** He found out one day that a man was in need, so he stopped him and asked him how he's doing and sent all what he needed to his house. He asked him to let him know whenever he needs anything.
- **A Cheerful Giver:** A beggar asked him for money multiple times in one day. When he never refused to give him money at any time, the beggar said: "Bless with you." Archon Ibrahim answered him saying: "Do not be surprised. This entrusted to me by God. I am repaying Him."



### **Consolation from Heaven:**

*His son departed to heaven and his wife was unable to be comforted. It the Great appeared to her and comforted her. She told her husband who said he saw the same thing. They were both comforted and thanked God.*

### **His Love for the Church:**

*He always cared for rebuilding and renovating churches. He used to buy properties and donate it to the Church. It is believed that he had a role in almost every church in Old Cairo, whether it was to transcribe books or any other needs of the Church.*

### **His Love for Prayer:**

*He wrote a letter to the heads of monasteries encouraging them to pray when a problem relating to the churches occurred. This is kept in El--Syrian Monastery.*

### **His Departure:**

*He departed in peace in the year 1796 A.D. and was mourned by the governor who participated in his funeral. His eulogy was given by Pope Yoannis. He is buried in a private tomb beside the Church of St. George in Old Cairo.*

*Archon Ibrahim and his brother Girgis pleased the Lord Jesus Christ with their piety, good works, almsgiving, and their patience in the face of hardships and temptations. They are considered saints because they obeyed the Lord Jesus Christ who commanded us all*

*"Be holy for I am holy." (1 Peter 1:16)*

# The Hero Of Orthodoxy & The Pride Of Alexandria

Pope Dioscorus was the 25th Pope of Alexandria. We call him a hero and champion of faith as he suffered in order to preserve and maintain a sound Orthodox doctrine.

## **Origin:**

He was born in Alexandria in the beginning of the fifth century AD. He received his education in the Theological school of Alexandria and excelled in theological sciences. Pope Cyril (the 24th Pope of Alexandria) chose him to be his disciple and took him with him to attend the council of Ephesus in 431 AD (the third Ecumenical council).

## **Reason for holding the Council of Ephesus 431 AD**

- To respond to the heresy of Nestorius, who said that Christ has two natures, and that the Virgin Mary should not be called the Mother of God.
- To respond to the heresy of Pelagius, who said that Adam's sin is limited to him only, not to mankind, and that man with his own strength can reach the highest degree of holiness without the help of grace.

## **Most important outcome of the council of Ephesus**

- Excommunication of Nestorius
- The introduction of the Creed was introduced: We glorify you, O Mother of true Light..."

After the departure of Pope Cyril (the 24th Pope of Alexandria), St. Dioscorus was chosen to be the patriarch in the year 444 AD during the reign of Emperor Theodosius

He is commonly surnamed as Theodosius the Younger. St. Dioscorus had a huge burden on his shoulders due to the many heresies at that time.

## **Eutyches**

He was the abbot of one of the monasteries in Constantinople. At this time, as Eutyches was trying to respond to the heresy of Nestorius, he fell into another heresy, he claimed that Christ has one nature only, the divine nature, and that the human nature was lost in the divine one like a drop of vinegar would be lost in the ocean. This is against the Coptic Orthodox Church belief.

We believe that our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ, is the incarnate Word (logos). He is perfect in His divinity, and perfect in His humanity, and He made His humanity one with His divinity, without mingling, without confusion and without alteration. His divinity did not part from His humanity for a single moment nor a twinkling of an eye.

Perhaps the closest analogy to this unity is the analogy provided by Saint Cyril the Great, who gave the example of the iron united with fire. In this union, the qualities of fire remain, and the qualities of iron remain, and neither of them has changed to the other.

So Pope Dioscorus commanded the bishop of Constantinople, named Flavianus, who was a Nestorian, to hold a Synod meeting in Constantinople, to excommunicate Eutyches and strip him of his monasticism.

Eutyches objected, and raised a memo to Emperor Theodosius the Younger, and to the Pope of Rome called "Leo". At the request of Emperor Theodosius the Younger to address the heresy of Eutyches, a second council of Ephesus was held.

[The Coptic Church accepts 3 councils only – Nicea- Constantinople and Ephesus]

Pope Dioscorus, President of the Second Council of Ephesus, 449 AD:

The goal of Pope Dioscorus from attending the council was to preserve the sound Christian faith.

Eutyches drew back (it seems in appearance) from his false teachings in front of the council, and acknowledged the correct teachings that Christ's divinity did not depart from His humanity for a single moment nor a blinking of an eye. So Eutyches was restored and Flavianus was exiled.

After the Second Council of Ephesus, the Pope of Rome began to seek a local council where he rejected the outcome of the Second council of Ephesus, and re-accepted the heresy of Nestorius (which denied that the Virgin Mary was the mother of God and was fought by Pope Cyril Pillar of Faith). Because of this, Pope Dioscorus excommunicated the Pope of Rome.

The Pope of Rome asked Emperor Marcian and Empress Pulcheria to hold another council in Chalcedon in 451 AD under the pretext of discussing the issues of the severed bishops and the teachings of Pope Leo Pope of Rome. This was because the Pope of Rome did not accept the decisions of the Second Council of Ephesus in 449 AD, which acquitted Eutyches. The Pope of Rome sought to isolate Pope Dioscorus, to try to control the Church of Alexandria.

The council held about 15 sessions, during which Pope Dioscorus kept saying: "I do not accept that Christ be divided into two and this is confirmed by the teachings of the Fathers." He refused to allow the reading of Tome of Leo (the teaching of the Pope of Rome), and they could not stand before him because of the strength of his arguments. The political authorities were unsuccessful in threatening him.

The Tome of Leo refers to a letter sent by Pope Leo I to Flavian of Constantinople explaining the position of the Papacy in matters of Christology. The text confesses that

Christ has two natures and was not of or from two natures. The letter was a topic of debate at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD.

Empress Pulcheria failed to convince Pope Dioscorus to stop resisting the king. She said to him: "Oh, Dioscorus at the time of my father there was a man of opinion like you, so he was deprived and exiled from his chair (She was referring to St. John Chrysostom).

He said to her, "Yes, and I know what happened to your mother, and how she was afflicted with the disease that you know, until she went to the body of Saint John, and asked him for forgiveness then she was healed."

Pulcheria was infuriated by his words and punched him and his teeth fell. The men of the palace attacked him together with the severed bishops, and they beat him painfully and plucked the hair of his beard, but he remained silent, and he said: "For Your sake we are killed all day long" (Romans 8:36), so he sent the hair of his beard and his teeth to his children in Egypt saying: "This is the fruit of the struggle... know that I have received many sufferings in order to preserve the faith of my holy fathers, but you who built your faith on the rock do not be afraid of torrents, heretics and tornadoes."

Among the decisions of the council:

1. Revoking the decisions of the Second Council of Ephesus.
2. Excommunication of Eutyches.
3. Pope Dioscorus was dismissed and exiled.

Pope Dioscorus refused to sign the "Tome of Leo", unlike other bishops who fell under pressure to sign. He said: "If you cut off my hand I will not sign." When Pope Dioscorus learned that the Council of Chalcedon issued a judgment against him under the pressure of Marcian and his wife, and the deputies of the Bishop of Rome, he was in deep sorrow and he felt that his mission was not yet complete and that he

should warn the whole world about the corruption of the doctrine of this council. He wrote a message to the whole world, saying that anyone who adds or changes any of the decisions of the councils of Nicaea, Constantinople and Ephesus should be excommunicated.

Emperor Marcian was irritated, and considered killing St. Dioscorus. However, those present prohibited him from doing so, so he ordered his exile to Gangra.

### **The Departure of the Pope**

Pope Dioscorus stayed for five years in exile, working in the midst of the pagans. He departed in the year 457 AD.

His life is a milestone in the history of the Christian Church. He defended the Christian faith against the heresy of the two natures (Nestorius).

This marked the end of the stage of the one church, and the beginning of the first church schism in 451 AD, in the Council of Chalcedon. This was also the beginning of the era of persecution from the Byzantine church against the Orthodox Church. The

church celebrates his departure on the 7th of the month of Tut.

# Know Your Talents

God created us to perform a role on earth, and each of us must discover their role and mission in life to contribute to building themselves, their family, their church, and their community.

“ For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Ephesians 2:10

In order to be fruitful and influential, we must know what we want from God. ““What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked him.” Mark 10:51 and what God wants from us ““Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.” Acts 9:6

Each of us has one or more talents that differentiate us. We use them for our own benefit and for the benefit of others.

We need to ask ourselves, why did God create me? And what does He want me to do?

God gives us talents, skills, time, etc. according to our capabilities, and we are expected to invest them wisely, until He comes, we are responsible for making good use of what He gave us to enter the kingdom of heaven and to help those around us to enter the kingdom of heaven. The problem is not with the number of talents but how we invest them.

## **1. What is a talent?**

It is a divine gift, every opportunity that God has given me in my life is a gift from Him and a talent, which I must invest in for the glory His name. There is no person without a talent.

## 2. Type of talents

A. **General talents: Free divine gift for all people, it does not belong to a person in particular, such as:**

- Life: The life that I live now is a gift from God: “ For to me, to live is Christ” Ephesians 1:21
- Time: We all have time (24 hours a day), but each of us uses it in a different way. We can either deal with time as a divine gift or neglects it and waste it.
- Our body: a temple of the Holy Spirit.
- Our Mind: How to develop it, and saturate it with what is constructive and beneficial, so that it is an enlightened mind.
- Emotions and feelings: disciplining our emotions and feelings and using them in a constructive and beneficial way.
- Health: we should preserve it and serve others with it
- Our membership in the church: The greatest gift is that we are children of God.

B. **Special talent:**

playing instruments, painting, drawing- acting – Music- leadership – being social - poetry – reading - academic – sensitivity - optimism – silence and listening.

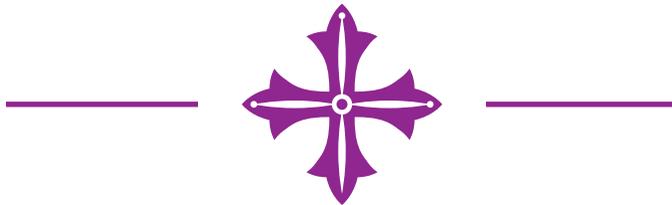
## 3. How to discover your talents?

- A. Ask yourself: You are the best person to know yourself.
- B. Reading and research: Because discovering talent is very important, so you

have to make an effort to read and research, until you discover the field that interests you.

- C. Ask those around you: You can ask your father of confession, your servants, your parents, your siblings or your friends as they may have recognized your talents and can provide you with an external perspective on yourself and your capabilities that you might not be aware of.
- D. Try: Experience is a good way to reveal a person's talent. Try new things as you will never know what you are good at unless you try it yourself.
- E. Beware of comparison: You have to discover your talent, but do not compare yourself with others as you are a unique person and unique in your talent. God is able to use your small talent for His glory.

Finally, once you know your talent, you must use it and nourish it in order to further master the talent and bear fruit in it.



# The Book Of Acts

The book of Acts together with the Four Gospels represent the historical books in the New Testament.

The Gospels narrate the life of Christ, while the Book of Acts tells the story of the Church, the work of the Holy Spirit in it, and the preaching of the Apostles.

The Book of Acts could be divided into two parts

- Acts of St. Peter (Chapter 1-12)
- Acts of St. Paul (Chapter 13-28)

The book of Acts is the story of the beginning, success, and spread of the Church from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria, then to the ends of the earth.

But who is the real champion in Book of Act? It is the Holy Spirit who was working through the apostles,

- He founded the Church
- He gave them the words they spoke
- He filled them with courage
- He drove their decisions
- He gave them authority to perform miracles and speak in tongues

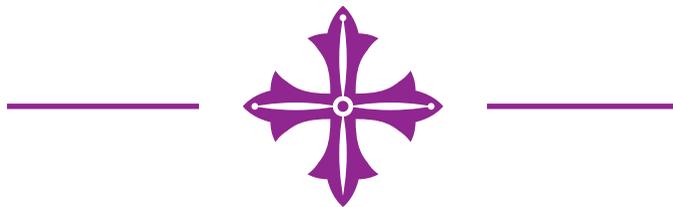
The writer is Saint Luke, whose name means “the bearer of the light” or “the enlightened”. He was a doctor from the city of Antioch and was also a painter. He painted the first icon of St. Mary from which the painters took the pictures that we have now.

He wrote the book to Theophilus whose name means “Lover of God”. Therefore, this book is directed at every person who loves God.

The Book of Acts is the only book that does not end with the word “Amen”, as it is an extended story. The Church continues to live its events and complete it to the end of the world as the preaching continues throughout the world

The purpose of the book is to show how the church was able to stand in the face of the storms of Jewish and Roman persecutions, and how it grew through the work of the Holy Spirit. This book is open for us to complete the work of preaching and witness to Christ until death. The Church’s mission continues to spread in the world and until this day we are blessed with contemporary saints.

The book shows that the church continues to preach the word of God guiding people to the life of repentance. Therefore, a chapter of the Book of Acts is read in the liturgy followed by the reading of the synexarium as a continuation of the Book of Acts.



## Chapter 1: The Promise

### Definitions:

- The Promise of the Father (v. 4): The descent of the Holy Spirit
- Sabbath day's journey (v. 12): The distance allowed to travel on Saturday, which is less than one kilometre
- The Upper Room (v. 13): A room on top of the house for prayer and retreat

### Division:

- v. 1-11: The ascension
- v. 12-14: The disciples gathered in the Upper Room to pray
- v. 15- 26: Matthias is chosen instead of Judas

(v. 1) The former account is the Gospel of Luke.

(v. 2-3) Show them Himself alive by many infallible proofs to confirm the Resurrection, and that He was not a ghost or spirit.

(v. 4-12) During the 40 days from His Resurrection to His Ascension. The Lord Jesus handed to His disciples everything related to the Church teachings, rites and Sacraments and it has been handed from generation to generation until it reached us. That's what we call the Church Tradition.

The Lord promised His disciples, saying: " But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1: 8).

Our Lord Jesus Christ handed down the liturgy, the Sacraments and the teachings to His disciples, and the disciples and apostles handed them over to the Church fathers, and thus reached us by the fathers. Through these Sacraments, we receive the Holy

Spirit which unites us with Jesus Christ and helps us live a life of faith, holiness, purity and forgiveness.

(v. 12-14) The disciples gathered in the Upper Room to pray. Jesus ascended on the fortieth day of His Resurrection. He told His disciples and the believers about His return in His glory. But He did not leave us alone, but ascended to send us the Holy Spirit, who would stay with us and the Church forever .

(v. 15-26) Matthias chosen instead of Judas: "Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown" Revelation 3:11. This is what Judas did not do and he did not hold fast to what he had, and left it with ease, and Matthias the Apostle replaced him and took his crown.

Judas was numbered as one of Jesus' disciples, but his heart was far from Christ and he sold Him.

(v. 24) The disciples prayed and asked the Holy Spirit to guide them.

(v. 26) The apostles prayed and cast their lots. Matthias means (the gift of Jehovah).

## Chapter 2: Power From Above

### Definitions:

- Perplexed (v. 12): Confused
- Maidservant (v. 18): Slave or maid
- Attested (v. 22): Proven

### Division:

- v. 1-13: The descent of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues
- v. 14-41: St. Peter's sermon and its impact
- v. 42-47: The first Church



(v. 1) The feast of the Pentecost for the early church coincided with the Harvest feast of the Jews. The Harvest feast is kept in the sense of bringing people into the faith and repentance. This is the harvest of the prophets and apostles and the missionaries. During this feast the Jews come to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast. They come from different places and countries, speaking different languages and dialects. On this day, the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples. The descent of the Holy Spirit on the disciples was accompanied by several manifestations, including:

- A Stormy wind (v. 2): To draw the attention of those gathered outside to celebrate the festival.
- Fire (v. 3): Evidence of the presence of God.
- Tongues (v. 3): To go around the world and preach the good news of the Gospel.

(v. 7-13) Like the apostles, God gave each and every one of us a talent. We have to discover our personal talents and not try to imitate others in their talents. We must hold fast to what God gave us, and work on the development of our talents, and use them always to serve God.

(v. 14-15) St. Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit, stood with all courage to witness for Jesus Christ, starting from the prophecies of Joel and David to the Messiah, who was crucified, ascended to heaven, and sent His Holy Spirit on the day of the Pentecost so the disciples can speak in tongues, prophesize and perform miracles. St. Peter's sermon was very powerful. As a result 3000 believed and they were the first believers of the Church. St. Peter explained to them that to accept the gift of the Holy Spirit, they have to repent from their sins (renewal of mind) and be baptized.

(v. 42-47) The first Church was characterized by the following:

- The teachings of the Apostles - There was no written Gospel, but all teachings were verbal until the gospels were written.
- The communal life (prayer, fasting, and sharing)-"So continuing daily with one



accord in the temple" (Acts 2: 46).

- The breaking of bread from house to house - They had meals at different houses as this was a chance to eat with the poor without hurting their feelings.

## Chapter 3: Who Deserve The Glory?

### Definitions:

- Solomon's porch (v. 11): A courtyard in the temple

### Division:

- v. 1-10: Healing the lame man
- v. 11-26: The testimony of John and Peter

(v. 1) The apostles and disciples used to pray regularly at specific times. That's why the Church teaches us to pray at specific times using the prayers of the Agpeya.

(v. 2 - 10) This was the first miracle mentioned in the Book of Acts to confirm the promise of our Lord Jesus to them. Peter and John did not have any money to give to the lame man (v. 6). However, they were rich in the name of the Lord Jesus, and gave the man a new life in His name. He went on praising God and thanking Him (v. 8).

(v.11-26) The testimony of Peter and John: God is the One who deserves to be praised always in our success, our health and our life. We have to always give glory to God, as Peter and John did, after healing the lame man (12-15) and not steal God's glory for ourselves and attribute the success to our intelligence or personal ability. Peter and John witnessed to Christ and His suffering and what the Jews did to Him as it was prophesied about Him. They were very bold and courageous

## Chapter 4: Satan Raises The High Priests

### Division:

- v. 1-22: Peter and John testimony in front of the chief priests
- v. 23-31: Peter and John, praying with the people
- v. 32-37: The communal life in the Church

(v. 1) The commander of the temple is responsible for the security in the temple. He was a priest but not a military officer. The Sadducees, some of which are chief priests, had good relations with the Roman authority. They did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, so they were against Christ and caused the arrest of Peter and John.

(v. 4) Although the miracle was clear, we note the difference between the reaction of the priests and the Sadducees. The Sadducees refused the word and went against Peter and John. The people on the other hand believed in Christ and their number reached 5,000 men.

(v. 5) The Sanhedrin, is the council of the Jews, this is the council who judged our Lord Jesus Christ. It consists of the chief priest and 70 elders. It had a great authority.

(v. 7-22) The charge against the apostles was: "By what power or by what name have you done this?" (Acts 4: 7), perhaps they thought that it was the name of one of the prophets or witches, but Peter confirmed to them that the name of Jesus is the only one capable of such acts and miracles. That is why the Church put in the Tasbeha in Saturday Psalms the name of Jesus, such as: "O my Lord Jesus Christ, help me" to strengthen us.

(v. 23-30) The apostles and believers began their prayers from the psalms (Ps. 2) and then in a special prayer asking the Lord to strengthen and help them to complete their testimony about Jesus.

(v. 31) And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. The believers need to be always filled with the Holy Spirit. The continuous spiritual strive is required for the continuation of the work of the Holy Spirit in us.

(v. 32) Emphasis on the spirit of unity in the life of the Church. Keep repeating the name of Jesus in your prayer saying: "O my Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me a sinner." It will give us strength in our spiritual life.

## **Chapter 5: Do Not Lie To The Holy Spirit**

### **Definitions:**

- Furious (v. 33): Strongly indignant
- Take heed (v. 35): Beware
- Census (v. 37): Count of population and statistics

### **Division:**

- v. 1-11: The lie of Ananias and Sapphira
- v. 12-16: The shadow of Peter heals diseases
- v. 17-40: The trial of the apostles and Gamaliel's advice

(v. 1-11) The sin of Ananias and Sapphira was not that they did not give, because God does not force people to give. But it was that they lied to the Holy Spirit. They did not give out of love for God and for the poor and for the Church, but they wanted to have a good image in front of the people and the Apostles. They thought they could hide things from God and that's why their punishment was severe. We always think of God's mercy and forget about His justice.

(v. 12-16) The believers brought the sick in the streets that at least the shadow of



Peter passing by might fall on some of them and heal them. But many did not follow the apostles because they were afraid of the Romans and the Jews.

(v. 17) While the Sadducees and the chief priest were full of jealousy, the apostles and believers were filled with the Holy Spirit. The devil fills the hearts of his followers with evil and jealousy.

(v. 19-32) The Lord sent His angel who opened the doors of the prison. God never leaves His children without support. He is a very loving Father, but sometimes allows His children to share in carrying His cross, for the glory of His name. When people see how the children of God endure for His name's sake and see how much they love Him, they can be converted in the faith.

(v. 33-40) Theudas and Judas of Galilee were rebels and their uprisings against the Romans failed.

(v. 41) The Apostles felt that to suffer for the sake of Jesus Christ was an honor that they did not deserve. Whoever suffers with Him, will also be glorified with Him, so they returned rejoicing because they deserved to suffer shame for His name.

The descent of the Holy Spirit on the apostles had a huge change in their lives. They bore many fruits, such as:

1. The living faith in God's promises
2. Real peace, despite all their troubles
3. Acceptance of pain with joy
4. Steadfastness in Christ

## Chapter 6: The First Deacons

### Definitions:

- Tables(v. 2): Place for distribution of funds/food to the needy
- Stephen(v. 5): Greek name meaning “crown”
- Freedmen(v. 9): The Jews of Rome
- Induced(v. 11): Succeed in persuading or influencing
- Customs(v. 14): Worship intended habits

### Division:

- v. 1-8: The choice of seven deacons
- v. 9-15: The wisdom of Stephen

(v. 1) The word “disciples” here means all the believers. The Hellenists are the Jews who spoke Greek, and Hebrews are the Jews who spoke Hebrew. A problem occurred between them because inadvertently the widows of Hellenists were neglected.

(v. 3) The choosing of the deacons was by election and not by casting lot, signifying that after the descent of the Holy Spirit on them, they were guided by the Spirit. The deacons had to be men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.

(v. 6) The rites for the ordination of deacons are the same as what the Church is doing now, when the bishop puts his hand on the head of the deacon for his ordination.

(v. 8) Although the Apostles elected the seven deacons to perform a service that seems simple, Stephen was full of the Spirit and was performing miracles. He also bore witness to Christ before the synagogues of the Jews bravely.

(v. 9) Synagogue is the building where Jews assemble for religious worship. In the

synagogue, the worship was practiced without offering sacrifices. There were 480 synagogues in Jerusalem alone, each bearing a special name for the group that formed it. It seems that Stephen debated with Jews in a number of synagogues, to tell them about our Lord Jesus Christ and the Christian faith.

## Chapter 7: The First Martyr

### Definitions:

- You stiff-necked(v. 51): Disobedient
- Gnashed at him with their teeth(v. 54): Clenched their teeth

### Divisions:

- v. 1-53: Stephen's speech
- v. 54-60: The stoning of Stephen

(v. 1-53) Stephen began his speech to the Jews in a Christian manner, from a heart filled with divine love. He ended his life demonstrating the life of Christ, emphasizing that whoever is given a privilege, his judgment is greater if he deviates from the right path.

(v. 1-8) He mentioned Abraham, who is a source of pride to Israel, because he obeyed the word of God and came out of the land of the Chaldeans (currently Iraq) to a land that he did not know. He trusted the word of God and His promise to give him land for him and his children.

(v. 20-40) He mentioned Moses who brought them out of the land of slavery (Egypt) to the land flowing with milk and honey (Palestine). The Jews loved Moses because he spoke to God and took the Commandments from Him. With the inspiration of the Holy Spirit he wrote the Torah, and in spite of all that, the Jews rebelled against him many times in their hearts and minds and actions.



(v. 51-53) Stephen rebuked them for their disobedience, and that they are uncircumcised in hearts and ears. Circumcision refers to cutting sin from human life – It is a covenant between God and His people. But the Jews were circumcised according to the flesh only, while their hearts were far from God, filled with evil and impurity.

(v.55-60) His courage came from his vision of the Lord. Martyrdom is only a door to get to the Lord. He received the crown of martyrdom and became the first martyr.

Despite the fact that Stephen was appointed to serve tables, he had deep knowledge of the Bible, which helped him debate the Jews. The Bible is full of great treasures and is essential in our life.

Stephen's courage was also because of his love for Christ and his strong relationship with Him. That's why he forgave the people who stoned him (v.60), just as our Lord Jesus Christ forgave the people who crucified Him. Stephen held fast to Christ and His teachings. It is profitable for us to have an example and role model of people who loved Christ and held fast to His teachings.

If we encounter pain because of our steadfastness in God's commandments, we ought to accept it with love for Christ. Christ sacrificed His life for us so it is not much to accept everything for Him, and to consider this pain a blessing and honour and a chance to share in carrying our Saviour's cross.

## **Chapter 8: The Persecution of the Church Leads To Her Growth**

### **Definitions:**

- The bond by iniquity(v. 23): Committed to evil
- Eunuch (v. 26): A man working in the service of Queen
- Scattered (v. 40): Dispersed

## Division:

- v. 1-8: The persecution of the Church and the scattering of the faithful
- v. 9-25: The sorcerer's acceptance of faith and his great sin
- v. 26-40: Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch

Satan moved Saul against the Church (v. 1). He entered homes dragging men and women, and put them in prison (v. 3), and the result of that was:

(v. 1-4) The dispersion of everyone in the areas of Judea and Samaria. What Satan intended to be evil, God used it for the benefit of the Church. Those who were scattered preached the word of the Gospel and were the reason of the spread of Christianity. This was the plan that our Lord set before His ascension which was the preaching in Judea and Samaria (v. 5). The persecution strengthened the Church, as our fathers the Apostles, courageous and faithful, rejoiced in the pain for Christ's sake. History repeats itself, and God is always honest in His promises. Christ is above time, above places, above humans and above events.

(v. 6-8) The Lord supported the Apostles with miracles so that the people may believe the word of God. Their knowledge of the Lord Jesus was the real reason for their joy.

(v. 9-25) When we are far from God, Satan can deceive us with his evil works. But when the word of God works in us, it is like the light that disperses the darkness, and reveals the deception of the devil and his evil deeds.

(v. 9-13) The effect of Philip's preaching on Simon the sorcerer

(v. 14-17) Through baptism, man is born again and obtained a new life. Through the Holy Myron, man obtains the grace of the Holy Spirit. In the early Church, the Holy Spirit came upon the baptized through the laying of the Apostles' hands.



(v. 19) Although Simon was baptized, his thoughts were evil. He wanted to buy the talent of the laying of hands to serve his evil deeds.

(v. 26-35) If we strive to understand the Bible with all our hearts, God will help us just as He helped the Ethiopian eunuch. He sent him Philip to help him understand the Bible and to guide him.

If we are in the Church since our childhood, let us not despise those who were away and finally returned to it. This person might grow in the love of Christ and precede us to the kingdom. Let us not boast with our religious knowledge but humble ourselves at the feet of Christ.

(v. 36-39) The faith of the Ethiopian Eunuch was not enough for him to enter Christianity, he had to be baptized. Our Coptic Church still adheres to the teachings of Christ and the Apostles, and performs baptism by immersion.

(v. 39) After his baptism, the Ethiopian Eunuch went his way rejoicing.

(v. 40) The Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so he found himself in Azotus, which is about 20 miles north from Gaza. This means that the Spirit carried Philip to where God wanted to use him.

## **Chapter 9: The Wolf Becomes A Lamb**

### **Definitions:**

- Breathing threats and murder (v. 1): Threatens to kill violently
- Goads (v. 5): Plural of goad, a spiked stick used to make an animal move forward.
- A chosen vessel of Mine (v. 14): Referring to Saul

## Division:

- v.1-9: The Lord changes Saul
- v.10-30: The baptism of Saul and his persecution by the Jews
- v.31-40: The growth of the Church and its support with miracles

(v1-9) Paul becomes the Apostle to the Gentiles: Saul was a Jew, from the city of Tarsus; he was a Pharisee (very strict Jew). His father received the Roman citizenship, so he was also a Roman citizen. He learned at the feet of Gamaliel, the most famous teachers of the Jews at that time.

As a Pharisee he studied the Law and the prophets, which helped him later in his preaching. He was a very zealous Jewish and disliked Christians. He was guarding the clothes of those who stoned Stephen. "Now Saul was consenting to his death" (Acts 8:1). He persecuted the Church, entering homes and dragging men and women..

After the Lord Jesus' call to Saul, he discovered that everything he had studied from the Old Testament prophecies have been fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. He believed that Christianity is the true religion, and he started to defend it even if he had to suffer for Christ's sake (Acts 9: 16).

(v. 4) "Why do you persecute me?" Although the persecution of Saul was directed to the believers, Christ considered that the persecution was directed at Him personally. God feels the suffering of His children and considers them as His sufferings.

(v. 6) "Lord, what do you want me to do?" This is the question that Saul asked the Lord Jesus Christ who appeared to him. We must learn to ask God for His will.

(v. 18) Scales fell from Saul's eyes symbolizing that whatever was preventing Saul from seeing that Christ is the true God has now been removed.

(v. 23-30) Satan was astonished that the tool he used to strike the Church (Saul),



become a tool used by the Church to beat the devil (Paul). He enticed the Jews to kill him. In the meantime Saul was getting stronger (v. 22).

(v. 31) The Church was growing despite the persecutions and tribulations.

God gave the Apostles the gift of miracles to confirm their preaching that Jesus Christ is God. Peter healed Aeneas the paralytic (v. 34), and raised Tabitha after she died (v.40).

## Chapter 10: God Shows No Partiality

### Definitions:

- Centurion (v. 1): The commander of hundred soldiers
- Creeping things (v. 12): Animals that crawl on their belly like a snake
- Wondered within himself (v. 17): Confused about the meaning of something

### Division:

- v.1-8: Cornelius and the appearance of the angel of God to him
- v.9-16: Peter's vision
- v17-48: Cornelius' faith

(v.1-8) After the word of God spread from Jerusalem to Judea and to Samaria, it was the gentiles' turn (the non-Jews). The Jews despised the Gentiles, so the Jews who became Christian refused to share their Christian faith with them unless they become Jewish first and followed the Jewish tradition. However, God had come for everyone, who is willing to accept Him.

### Cornelius was:

1. A gentile centurion, but he loved God and feared Him without knowing Him.



2. God was pleased with his faith “he prayed to God all the time” (v. 2), his actions “doing many good deeds” (v. 2), and his fasting (v. 3). His prayers and almsgiving went up to God like the smell of incense (v. 4).

3. He was searching for God and finally found Him. He loved everyone, so he was not far from the kingdom of God.

(v. 9-16) It was hard for Peter as a Jew to realize that God will accept the Gentiles in the faith. God revealed this to him through a vision.

(v. 14) In the vision, the unclean animals symbolized the Gentiles from the Jewish point of view. In Christianity, there is no difference between people, Jesus loves all and accepts all.

God came for each one and not for specific people. As Christians, we should not be in isolation within our community but rather act together to show God’s love to all.

(v. 24-33) In the Old Testament, God prevented the Jews to deal with the gentiles, because He did not want them to follow their pagan worship or immoral habits, nor eat what was forbidden (profane or blood or animals sacrificed to idols). But after God cleansed everyone, all became believers representing the universal Church.

(v. 34-35) God shows no partiality. He does not differentiate between one person and another just because of his race or his nationality, but He accepts whoever does His will.

(v.36-43) Peter’s sermon to Cornelius’ household summarized that the coming of Christ to the world was the result of God’s love for man. He came to take away all pain and sorrow. The people took the Lord Jesus and crucified Him, but He rose from the dead. We have to witness to the risen Lord Jesus to feel the strength of our life with God.



(v.44-48) God announces the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the gentiles. He gave them the gift of tongues, as what happened with the apostles themselves to confirm that God accepts everyone whether Jews or gentiles. Let us not despise anyone, but learn to love all people and pray for their salvation.

## Chapter 11: The Son Of Encouragement

### Definitions:

- Uncircumcised(v. 3): Refers to the gentiles
- Prophets(v. 27): A person who speaks by divine inspiration through whom the will of God is revealed
- The elders(v. 30): The teachers

### Division:

- v.1-18: Objection of the converted Jews to the acceptance of the Gentiles
- v.19-21: The result of the dispersion
- v.22-30: The mission in Antioch

(v.1-3) The fanatic Jewish Christians (Christians of Jewish origin) rose against Peter when they heard what he did and that the gentiles were accepted in the faith. So when Peter went to Jerusalem, they quarrelled with him. This reveals the extent of hatred of the Jews to the gentiles; even after those Jews became Christians they remained fanatic. They wanted to put the condition of circumcision on the gentiles (i.e. to become Jews before they can become Christians)

(v.4-18) St. Luke repeated Peter's vision, to confirm the acceptance of God to the gentiles.

(v.19-21) After the stoning of Stephen, there was great persecution. But the people who were scattered because of the persecution were the same who spread the word. Their names are not mentioned in the Bible but are written in the Book of Life.

(v.22-26) Antioch was the third largest cities in the world at that time after Rome and Alexandria. There, the first Church of the gentiles was founded and the believers were called Christians for the first time.

Barnabas, whose name means “son of preaching”, was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and lead many to the faith. He was the uncle of St. Mark and brought Saint Paul to the disciples and accompanied him during his preaching. He was sent by the Church in Jerusalem (the mother Church) to Antioch to outreach the believers.

(v.27-30) Here we see the first meaning of the Church as members of one body. The Church of Antioch felt the distress of the Church in Jerusalem and sent them aids.

## Chapter 12: The Arrogant Eaten By Worms

### Definitions:

- Four squads of soldiers(v. 4): Four guards, 2 chained to the hands of Peter and 2 guarding the door
- Constant prayers(v. 5): Earnest prayers
- Gird yourself(v. 8): Meaning to get ready (put belt around the waist)
- Guard post(v. 10): Place in prison

### Division:

- v.1-5: Peter in prison
- v.6-17: Escape from prison
- v.18-25: The turmoil

(v. 1) King Herod was the grandson of Herod the Great, who ordered the killing of the children of Bethlehem.

(v. 2) James, son of Zebedee was martyred and became the first martyr among the apostles and the disciples.

(v.3-5) In the time of need and distress, we resort to prayer, and this is what the Church did when Peter was in prison.

(v.6-7) In prison, Peter was at peace, and was not afraid. Although handcuffed to soldiers with chains, yet he was sleeping so deeply that the angel had to strike him in his side to wake him up. There is no doubt that the confidence and faith in the Lord Jesus gave him this peace

(v. 15) The apostles thought that it was Peter's angel who was knocking on the door, thinking that he died.

(v. 17) James, son of Alphaeus, who was called the Lord's brother (his cousin), was the head of the Jerusalem Council, and the author of the Epistle of James. He is not James, the son of Zebedee, who was martyred in the beginning of the chapter.

(v.20-23) When Herod had searched for Peter and could not find him for the angel of the Lord had freed him from the prison. He examined the guards and commanded that they should be put to death. Herod was very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon. They came out in one accord to ask him for peace. As he was speaking to them, the people kept shouting, "The voice of a god and not of a man!" Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died.

Sometimes when we succeed in our life, we attribute this to our personal ability, our strength and our intelligence and we forget to thank God and give Him the glory. Herod was watching over the destruction of the Church, but God always watch over its growth. Herod died, but the Church spread throughout the whole world.

We owe our faith to the effort, love and honesty of those who received the teachings of Jesus Christ and handed them over until they reached us. We too must live with these teachings and keep them, hold fast to them and hand them down to our children.

# Atheism

## Introduction

Atheism is the rejection or the lack of the belief that God exists. Atheists believe that God is a man-made myth or legend. The word "atheism" comes from the negative "a" which means "no" and "theos" which means "God". Hence, atheism in the most basic terms means "no God". Studies show that there are hundreds of millions who identify as Atheists around the world making Atheism one of the most growing "belief systems" in the modern world.

## Brief History

The attempt to deny the truth of God's existence is an ancient yet modern phenomenon; it existed hundreds of years before Christ. King David mentions in his Psalms those who reject the presence of God, **"The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.' (Psalm 14:1)** Modern atheism began as a phenomenon with the beginning of the European Renaissance (14th to 17th centuries). By the 18th century, disbelief in God was getting more popular, and by the end of the century, many philosophers in England, France, and Germany were openly opposing all religious figures and asking to establish laws protecting the right to unbelief.

In the 19th century, in spite of all the scientific development, science was still unable to explain all truths. Man started developing theories that explain the creation of the universe and the existence of human beings such as Darwin's Theory of Evolution. Darwin and those who followed his school of thought spent a great deal of effort to prove that science and religion cannot be reconciled, and that religion is holding back scientific development. By the 20th century, many outspoken Atheists became more popular; authors, politicians, movements, etc. leading more people to become skeptic of God's existence.

However, scientific progress is not the actual cause of atheism! It is an individual problem that is built on man's adherence to certain behavior that disturbs the conscience in order to deny God's existence. It is an attempt to get rid of God's voice which calls us to repentance. Hence, no one can truly find peace in their life except through God and in living their life in His fellowship as St. Augustine said, **"You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in You."**

## Atheism arguments

Atheists claim that God does not exist, while Agnostics argue that there is not enough evidence to prove God's existence. Atheists typically rely on some arguments and questions that are unanswered in their minds which make them question the existence of God, for example:

### **1. Intellectual arguments**

- a. **Using what seems to be logical questions to support their views, atheists struggle with believing in a god who they cannot see? Forgetting that we believe in many things that we do not see like having Oxygen in the air we breathe; we do not see it yet we never question its existence!**
- b. **Another argument Atheists use is, "who created God?" And why does He allow suffering and pain? Forgetting that we as humans are a creation and can never fully comprehend our Creator. The same way a robot cannot fully comprehend its builder, or a computer program cannot fully explain its programmer; a god that can be fully comprehended is not God. We learn about God through His revelation to us not through our advanced intelligence.**

### **2. Scientific arguments**

- a. **Many scientists go out of their way to develop scientific theories regarding the creation of the universe, misunderstanding the Holy Bible, and arguing that Christianity is in conflict with science; forgetting that such theories are only experimental theories subject to flaws and errors and that the Holy Bible is not a science book. It is the word of God for our edification and salvation and is not meant to be taken on trial against scientific theories which are not proven as facts to this day!**

### **3. The flaws of the religious community**

- a. **Atheists often point out the weaknesses of the believers and religious leaders in an effort to disregard their validity and authority. Forgetting that a true Christian would never claim perfection and holiness of life but rather would admit his weakness and be in constant pursuit of perfection according to God's commandments. St. John Chrysostom said: "The church is a hospital for sinners, not a museum for saints".**

### **4. Other misconceptions about God**

Atheists often spread many misconceptions about God as a restrictor of humans' freedom and against human creativity and independent reasoning. Forgetting that God is the one who gave humanity its reasoning accompanied with free will: whether we choose to obey His commandments or not and bear the consequences that follows our behavior.

a.

# God's existence is proved by His revelation

The Holy Bible does not ask us to accept the existence of God blindly. Instead, it shows us how God, by His Spirit, has revealed Himself to us, both in the past and in the present.

## **1. God is revealed through His creation**

Clement of Rome said, **“God is manifest even by the operations of the world which He has made, using the evidence of His creation”**

There is no doubt that the universe reveals to us its creator and artist; its complexity and order teaches us about our wonderful God and His amazing work of creation as St. Paul declared, **“For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead” (Romans 1:20)** How can anything run in such great order without a perfect Creator who allows it to be and live. King David also shows us how contemplating on nature shows us God's handiwork and increases our knowledge of Him.

**“The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, And night unto night reveals knowledge.” (Psalm 19:1N 2)**

God Himself declared His power and eternity to Job pointing at His work of creation when He spoke to him from a whirlwind; World's formation (Job:38:4P 6) The heavens (v.7) The balance between seas and land (v. 8P 11) The dawn (v.12) The seas' depths (v.16) The lifeP death cycle (v.17) The origin of light (v.19) The winds (v.24) The hydrological cycle (v. 25P 30) Animals nurturing their young (v. 39P 41)

**“By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.” (Hebrews 11:3)**

## **2. God is revealed through His communication**

As mentioned earlier, our knowledge of God is through His revelation to us.

Since the beginning of time, God revealed Himself. He did not cease to communicate with His most sophisticated creation: mankind. He communicated with mankind both in direct and indirect ways.

He directly spoke with Adam and Eve. Cain heard His voice clearly and answered Him. More Godly men had direct conversations with God like Enoch, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses. God's existence was obvious to them as they heard from Him in a way that made His existence undeniable.

God also spoke to many through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. God revealed Himself by the inspiration of His Holy Spirit to 40 authors and prophets over about 1500 years to write a series of books that later were collected which we now call "the Holy Bible"!

**"Prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." (2 Peter 1:21)**

Through these scriptures, God revealed to us more and more about Himself, His commandments, His will, His works, and what pleases Him.

**"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16N 17)**

When we look at the Holy Bible, we realize that it is not a mere collection of writing by common people. It is a perfectly orchestrated story woven throughout the books even though there was no way of collaboration between the authors. As St. Augustine put it, "The New Testament is in the Old Testament concealed, the Old Testament is in the New Testament revealed." The Holy Bible tells us the story of God's love for us and His marvelous economy of our salvation, amazingly preserved through thousands of years leading us to realize how miraculously the Holy Bible has been safeguarded.

### **3. God is revealed through the incarnation of Christ**

**“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son” (Hebrews 1:1N 2)**

Although God revealed Himself to mankind either by speaking directly or indirectly through His prophets, the ultimate revelation was through the incarnation of the Logos, our Lord Jesus Christ! During His life on earth, the Lord Jesus Christ revealed the personality and character of God to us. People saw the Lord walking, talking, teaching, healing the sick, and raising the dead and they had a true human experience with God. He was loved and followed by many as He touched their hearts and changed their lives. Hence everywhere He went, He was followed by multitudes. St. John proclaimed this truth in his first epistle **“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life” (1 John 1:1)**

Therefore, by looking at our Lord Jesus Christ and learning from His life on earth, we know more about God and His existence.

### **4. God is revealed through our own consciences**

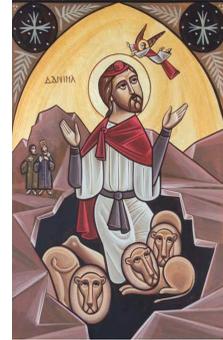
An interesting event took place in the book of Acts, Chapter 17; when St. Paul went to Athens and wanted to preach the One true God to the Athenians. He stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, **“Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you” (Acts 17:22N 23)**

This is no surprise as mankind always had the longing to know its creator. From the beginning of time, man always searched for God. It is in our nature, to long for Him who created us, loved us, and holds the whole world in His hand. We see this longing in the story of St. Moses the Strong when he was enslaved by people who worshipped the sun. In spite of his sinful life, one day he lifted up his eyes and looked towards saying, *“O Sun! If you are God, let me know it.”* Then he said, *“And you O God whom I do not know, let me know you.”* One day, he heard a voice saying to him, *“The monks of Wadi Ela Natroun know the real God. Go to them and they will tell you.”* That was the spark of his life of repentance and sainthood.

St. Paul explained this truth extensively in his epistle to the Romans, **“because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them” (Romans 1:19)** Meaning that, while all humans were born with a knowledge of God’s existence, some may choose to proclaim it, and some choose to **“suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (Romans 1:18).**

# Daniel the Prophet

## Who is Daniel the prophet?



- God called him **“The man greatly beloved.” (Daniel 10:11)**
- He was of the tribe of Judah.
- He was from the royal family.
- He was sent to exile when he was 18 years old.
- Daniel witnessed Ezekiel the prophet in his youth. Ezekiel mentioned his wisdom (Ezekiel 23:8).
- He lived a righteous life from a young age and was a man of prayer.
- Some say that he lived about 84---90 years from 618 to 534 B.C.
- He had many prophecies.
- He is the father of the history of the Gentiles. He recorded many precise prophecies about the kingdoms which follow one another, through God’s plan.
- God granted him wisdom and grace. He served during the times of the kingdoms of Babylon, Medes, and Persia.
- Daniel was faithful to the kings while still being faithful to God.
- He rejected the worship of idols.
- He served his people, not with the spirit of fanaticism, but with the spirit of holiness; humility; and with love to all people.
- He saw the future through the work of the Holy Spirit inside him.
- He is the prophet of dreams and visions, who enjoyed a divine gift; a heavenly wisdom; and a surpassing understanding.
- God granted him many visions. He was courageous in explaining visions and dreams to kings without complimenting them.
- The Book of Daniel is the only book in the Old Testament that prophesied in detail about kings and kingdoms. These kingdoms were declared by name like Persia and Greece.

Daniel, Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael were captured as slaves during war and were sent to Babylon, a city in a faraway country, to serve the king of Babylon.

### **Daniel and the Three Sainly Youth**

As ordered by the king, they were given new names, related to the false Babylonian gods. **“To them the chief of the eunuchs gave names: he gave Daniel the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abed---Nego” (Daniel 1:7)**



Godly Name	Godly Meaning	New Babylonian Name
Daniel	The Lord is my judge	Belteshazzar
Hananiah	The Lord is kind	Shadrach
Azariah	God is my help	Abed-Nego
Misrael	Who is like God	Meshach

The king ordered their names to be changed from names relating to the One God to names referring to the false gods of Babylon. Also, he dismissed them from speaking Hebrew, the language of their forefathers, and made them speak

Even with all their struggles, their hearts remained faithful towards their faith. **“But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile” (Daniel 1:8)**

The spiritual friendship that Daniel and the three youths shared allowed them to seek the path of righteousness and the will to overcome all

emotional struggles and physical desires.

Their fasting was a nourishment for their souls that gave them strength as it is written: **“Man shall not live alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” (Matthew 4:4)**

### **Nebuchadnezzar and the Dream**

King Nebuchadnezzar had a very agonizing dream that none of his wise men nor scholars were able to explain. When Daniel learned about the matter, he discussed it with his three friends and they decided to pray with the hope that God will listen to their tender hearts. They were certain that God will have mercy on them and reveal His glorious work.

As the Lord revealed to Daniel the dream and he was able to interpret it, they all stood up offering praises and thanksgiving to Him.

Daniel stood before the king with steadfastness and told him that through the one true God, he can help him. The king marveled and said, **“Truly your God is the God of Gods, the Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets.” (Daniel 2:47)**

It is important to work on our needs and not forget that through God, the impossible is possible. Daniel preserved his faith in God and trusted in His limitless love and countless mercies. He was certain that God will not leave him.

## Nebuchadnezzar and the Three Youths

The king quickly forgot what God had done for him and put up a statue of himself made of gold. He ordered that all should bow down to it. If they didn't, they will be thrown into a fiery furnace. (Daniel 3:6). Nebuchadnezzar used everything possible to get people to worship the statue.

The three youth knew that it is better to obey God than to obey men. The Chaldeans complained to the king and asked that the three youths be cast in the fiery furnace (Acts 5:29). They were thrown in the furnace and by looking into the eternal fire, they did not fear the temporal fire, as they knew that God was with them. The fire did not affect them, and the Lord appeared to glorify them.

In the midst of the fire, the three youths praised God and glorified Him and chanted their famous prayer which we chant in the Third Canticle in the Midnight Praises. The fire changed to dew, and the king ordered his soldiers to get them out.



Although they were amid tribulations, their hearts glorified God knowing that He is always with them and they shouldn't fear anything. Remember during hard times that the Lord our God is powerful and almighty. Let your praises and thanksgiving be constant without hesitation.

**St. Basil the Great said: "The three youths have manifested themselves above all the lusts of the flesh and despised the wrath of the king. They were very courageous and did not fear the fire, but proved that the golden image is a worthless god. How did the three youths have victory over the power of fire? By their persistence!"**

### Daniel in the Lion's Den

Two governors told King Darius that Daniel believed in God not idols. When the king knew of this, he threw Daniel in the pit and he was in agony for he shared great love and respect for Daniel.

Darius said to Daniel, **"Your God, whom you serve continually, He will deliver you."** (Daniel 6:16)

King Darius fasted the night Daniel was inside the den.

**"My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths, so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him; and also, O king, I have done no wrong before you."** (Daniel 6:22)

Do not fear evil, and do not give up during adversities. The Lord our God is always protecting us. He promised us that He would not leave us, even to the end of the ages.

**Memorization**

Level 1

## FRIENDSHIP

1. “A friend loves at all times” Proverbs 17:17
2. “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up.” Ecclesiastes 4:9-10
3. “For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.” Matthew 18:20
4. “A man who has friends must himself be friendly, But there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.” Proverbs 18:24
5. “Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.” Romans 12:15
6. “Ointment and perfume delight the heart, And the sweetness of a man’s friend gives delight by hearty counsel.” Proverbs 27:9
7. “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” Psalms 133:1
8. “Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.” Philippians 2:4

**Memorization**

Level 2

# THE PRAYER OF THE 3<sup>rd</sup> HOUR

## PSALM 19

May the Lord answer you when you are in distress; may the name of the God of Jacob protect you. May He send you help from the sanctuary and grant you support from Zion. May He remember all your sacrifices and accept your burnt offerings. May He give you the desire of your heart and make all your plans succeed. We will shout for joy when you are victorious and will lift up our banners in the name of our God. May the Lord grant all your requests. Now I know that the Lord saves His anointed. He answers him from His holy heaven with the saving power of His right hand. Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God. They are brought to their knees and fall, but we rise up and stand firm. O Lord, save the king! Answer us when we call! Alleluia.

## PSALM 22

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters, He restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Alleluia.

## **THE HOLY GOSPEL**

### **JOHN (14:26-15:4)**

But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach You all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. You heard me say, 'I am going away and I am coming back to you.' If you loved Me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe. I will not speak with you much longer, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold on me, but the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded Me. Come now; let us leave.

I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in Me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you."

Glory be to God forever, Amen.

## **THE LITANIES OF THE THIRD HOUR**

Your Holy Spirit, O Lord, which You sent forth upon Your holy disciples and honored apostles at the third hour; this take not away from us, O Good One, but renew Him within us. Create in me a pure heart, O God and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from Your presence or take Your Holy Spirit from me.

“Zoksapatri ke lyou-ke agi-you epnevmaty” (Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.)

O Lord who has sent forth Your Holy Spirit upon Your holy disciples and honored apostles at the third hour, this take not away from us, O Good One, but renew Him within us. We beseech You, O our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Word. A steadfast and life-giving Spirit, a Spirit of prophecy and chastity. A Spirit of holiness, justice and authority, O Almighty-One. For You are the light of our souls. O Who enlightens every person that comes into the world have mercy upon us.

“Kenin ke aa-ee ke-ic-touce e-on-ace ton e-onon Amen.”(Both now and ever and unto the ages of ages, Amen.)

O Mother of God, you are the true vine bearing the cluster of Life. We ask you, O full of grace, together with the apostles for the salvation of our souls; Blessed be the Lord our God. Blessed be the Lord day by day. He prepares our way as He is God of our salvation.

“Kenin ke aa-ee ke-ic-touce e-on-ace ton e-onon Amen.”(Both now and ever and unto the ages of ages, Amen.)

O Heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, who is present everywhere, and fills all. The Treasury of goodness and Giver of life, graciously come and dwell within us, purify us of every blemish, O Good One, and save our souls.

“Zoksapatri ke lyou-ke agi-you epnevmaty” (Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.)

As You were with Your disciples, O Savior, and gave them peace, come also and be with us and grant us Your peace, redeem us and deliver our souls.

“Kenin ke aa-ee ke-ic-touce e-on-ace ton e-onon Amen.”(Both now and ever and unto the ages of ages, Amen.)

Whenever we stand in Your holy sanctuary, we are counted as standing in heaven. O Mother of God, you are the gate of heaven, open to us the door of mercy.