

PARADISE
OF
THE SPIRIT

Part 3
Second Edition

By
His Grace Bishop Youanis
Late Bishop of the Province of Gharbia,
Tanta, Egypt

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- 1. Love of God to man**
- 2. Love of man to God**
- 3. Love of man to his brother**
- 4. Faith in God - Its power and fruits**
- 5. Belief in the miracles of the Lord Jesus**
- 6. Hope**
- 7. Life of peace**
- 8. Life of submission**
- 9. The principle of the narrow gate in spiritual life**
- 10. The Kingdom**

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(Picture of)
Saint Mark

(Picture of)
His Holiness Pope Shenouda III
117th Pope of Alexandria
Patriarch of the See of St. Mark

(Picture of)
Anba Youanis
Late Bishop of Province of Gharbia
Tanta, Egypt

FOREWORD

Bishop Youanis wrote over 20 books in Egypt in the Arabic Language between 1960 and 1987, before he rested in the Lord. These books are considered of great wealth to the Coptic (Egyptian) Orthodox Church and indeed to the whole Christian Church. The first of these books is "Paradise of the Spirit" which he wrote in three parts.

Part 1 of "Paradise of the Spirit" deals with the 'Life of Repentance' and contains 11 chapters on: Repentance, Confession, Communion, Humility, Pride, Honor, Purity, Anger, Speaking Out and Keeping Silent, Some Sins of the Tongue, and Condemnation.

Part 2 of the same book deals with the 'Spiritual Means' and contains 8 chapters on: Prayer, Fasting, Almsgiving, Spiritual Readings, the Holy Bible, Spiritual Exercises, Retreat, and Service.

Part 3 deals with the subjects of 'Advanced Spirituality' and contains 10 chapters which are on: Love of God to Man, Love of Man to God, Love of Man to his Brother, Faith in God, Faith in the Miracles of the Lord Jesus, Hope, Life of Peace, Life of Submission, the Narrow Gate, and the Kingdom.

St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church, in Chicago, U.S.A., published the English translation of the first two parts of this book.

The present book is second edition of the English translation of part 3 of "Paradise of the Spirit".

May this book become a blessing to our lives and help us to grow in the love of God.

March 2001

**Introduction of Part Three of
Paradise of the Spirit**

by

Bishop Youanis

It was intended that the book "Paradise of the Spirit" be in three parts: part one deals with 'life of repentance', part two deals with 'spiritual means' and part three deals with 'the advanced levels of spirituality'.

The first part of this book appeared in 1960, that is a quarter of a century ago. The second part appeared at the beginning of 1963, that is nearly three years later.

I was delayed in writing part three of this book "Paradise of the Spirit" as I was busy in publishing two other books which were needed for the Theological College. They are "The Church at the time of the Apostles" and "Martyrdom in Christianity". I was then occupied in the business of the Bishopric from late 1971. Since then we published eight other books which contain the sermons which we gave on Sundays of the Great Lent, every year.

In due time, and after a quarter of a century, we fulfilled our promise to the reader, publishing part three of "Paradise of the Spirit".

In this book, we speak about "Love" in three chapters, "Faith" in two chapters and in one chapter each of the following subjects: "Hope", "Life of Peace", "Life of Submission", "Principle of the Narrow Gate in Spiritual Life" and finally we end the book with a large chapter on "the Kingdom".

In the introduction of part one of this book, I wrote that this book, first and foremost, is one of the "fruits of pain". That was at the beginning. I thank God that part three which is now between your hands is also one of the "fruits of pain", after these pains of the body revisited me in a more dangerous way.

I experienced that the fruits of pain are sweet, and God in His wisdom knows how "out of the eater comes something to eat and out of the strong comes something sweet" (Judges 14:14). What I want to say is that as I have started this book with pain, God finished it with pain also. If pain has such blessings, we thank God Who said on the tongue of His faithful Apostle Paul "For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake" (Philippians 1:29)

I give thanks to God from the bottom of my heart Who helped me in producing this book.

His Hand has been certain with me in my writings, and His Grace overflows within me until I finished this work, which I end by the subject of "the Kingdom".

I put this book in the hands of God Who loved us to make it a means of blessing to all who read it. And may this book always remain a paradise of continuous greenery, in which each tired soul finds her comfort from the troubles of the world.

May the grace of God be with us all, and to His Greatness be all glory.

Youanis
by the Grace of God
Bishop of Gharbia

1 Tote 1702
11 September 1985
Remembrance day of the beginning of the Martyrs Year

Preface

Dear reader: In this book, we offer you the second edition of the English translation of the third part of the book "Paradise of the Spirit", by Anba Youanis, late Bishop of Gharbia, Egypt, who rested in the Lord in November 1987.

(Picture of)

Fr. Samuel Thabet Samuel

We wish to thank Jean Abdelmalek, Sharon Basta and Mervet Cook for reading the English manuscript and correcting it.

May this book be a blessing in your life and help you to grow in the love of God, by the prayers of the father of fathers **His Holiness Pope Shenouda III.**

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you

Father Samuel Thabet Samuel
St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church of Chicago

April 2001

CONTENTS

| | page |
|---|----------|
| Foreword | . |
| Preface | . |
| 1. Love of God to Man | . |
| a- The measure by God is love | . |
| b- What is love? | . |
| 1. God's love to all creatures | . |
| 2. God's love to man | . |
| c- Where do we sense the love of God to man? | . |
| 1. In His creation of man | . |
| 2. In His incarnation and redemption | . |
| 3. In His care to man | . |
| 4. In His love to sinners | . |
| 5. In the eternal glory for man | . |
| d- Why does God permit man to suffer? | . |
| 2. Love of Man to God | . |
| a- Love of man to God is the echo of His love | . |
| b- Value of love in the sight of God | . |
| c- Why should man love God? | . |
| d- Love of man to God and his love to the world | . |
| e- Where does the love of man to God show? | . |
| f- Virtues related to the love of man to God. | . |
| g- The marriage supper of the Lamb | . |
| 3. Love of Man to his Brother | . |
| a- Love of man to his brother | . |
| in the teachings of the Lord Jesus | . |
| b- Love of man to his brother | . |
| in the Apostles' teachings | . |
| c- Brotherly love in the life of the Church | . |
| d- New understanding presented by Christ | . |
| for the love of man to his brother | . |
| e- The teachings of Christ: who is your neighbour? | . |
| f- Love of the enemy in Christ's teachings | . |
| g- Features of Christian love | . |
| in the love of man to his brother | . |
| First: Negative side | . |
| Second: Positive side | . |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4. Faith in God - Its Power and Fruits | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| a- What is faith? | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| b- Mind and faith | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| c- Faith in the unseen matters | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| d- Our Christian faith in God | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| Does it embrace specific beliefs? | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| e- Does faith have degrees? | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| f- Faith and spiritual life | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| g- Some fruits of faith | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| h- Promoters and deterrents of faith | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| Promoters: | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| Deterrents: | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| | | | | | | | | |
| 5. Belief in the Miracles of the Lord Jesus | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| a- Meaning of miracle - | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| objections against miracles | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| b- The devil and miracles | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| c- How do we distinguish | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| between miracles and deceit? | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| d- Sorcery and sorcerers | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| e- The believers, sorcery and sorcerers | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| | | | | | | | | |
| f- Belief in the miracles of the Lord Jesus | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| 1. Healing of the paralytic | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| 2. Healing of the haemorrhaging woman | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| 3. Opening the eyes of Bartimaeus | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| 4. Healing the daughter of the Canaanite woman | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| 5. Healing the Centurion's servant | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| g- Stories about contemporary miracles | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| | | | | | | | | |
| 6. Hope | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| a- Christ is the subject of our hope | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| 1. Christ: Hope of the atheists | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| 2. Christ: Hope of the Jews before His coming | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| 3. Christ: Hope of the Jews and | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| the atheists when He was in the flesh | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| 4. Christ: Hope of all the believers | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| after His Ascension to Heaven | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| b- Hope and Christ in the Gospels | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| c- Relation between hope and other virtues. | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| d- Why do we put our hope in God? | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| e- What strengthens our hope? | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| f- Christ: Hope for tired people | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|--|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| g- Examples of persons who kept hold on hope | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| 7. Life of Peace | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| a- Christianity and peace | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| b- Peace and Christian faith | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| c- The Christian and peace | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| d- Experience of peace in the lives of God's men | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| e- Joy comes with peace | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| 8. Life of Submission | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| a- Life of submission is the most acceptable offering | .. | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| b- Virtues which precede the life of submission | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| c- Characteristics of the life of submission | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| d- Blessings of the life of submission | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| e- Matters which help man in the life of submission | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| 9. The Principle of the Narrow Gate in Spiritual Life | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| a- What is the narrow gate? | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| b- God's love and His call for us to enter by the narrow gate | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| c- The wisdom behind narrow gate | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| 1. It is Christ's command | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| 2. To imitate Christ | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| 3. It is the road of all saints | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| 4. It is the way which suits man spiritually | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| 5. It leads to eternal glory | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| d- The principle of the narrow gate in the life of repentance | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| e- The principle of the narrow gate in spiritual life. | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| f- The principle of the narrow gate in life's problems | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| 1. Family problems | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| 2. Problems of work | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| 3. Problems of sickness | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| 4. Worldly desires | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| 10. The Kingdom | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| a- Kingdom of God and kingdom of heaven | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| b- The idea of the kingdom in the Old Testament | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| c- The kingdom of Christ is spiritual not material | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| d- What is meant by the kingdom of God? | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| e- Christ's parables about the kingdom and their connotations | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| 1. The Sower | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| 2, 3. The Wheat and the Tare - the Dagnet | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4, 5. The Mustard Seed - the Leaven | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| 6. The Workers in the Vineyard | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| 7. The Wedding Feast | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| 8, 9 - The Hidden Treasure - the Pearl of Great Price | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| 10. The Virgins | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| f- Joy in heaven and everlasting life | . | . | . | . | . | . |

**ALL BIBLE QUOTATIONS ARE FROM
 "THE NEW KING JAMES" VERSION
 EXCEPT THE APOCRYPHA
 WHICH ARE FROM "THE NEW ENGLISH" VERSION**

CHAPTER 1

LOVE OF GOD TO MAN

- A) **The measure by God is love**
- B) **What is love?**
 - 1. **God's love to all creatures**
 - 2. **God's love to man**
- C) **Where do we sense the love of God to man?**
 - 1. **In His creation to man**
 - 2. **In His Incarnation and Redemption**
 - 3. **In His care to man**
 - 4. **In His love to sinners**
 - 5. **In the eternal glory for man**
- D) **Why does God permit man to suffer?**

When we talk about love, we talk about the greatest of all Divine commandments, all of them are collected into it. We talk about what is desired by the heart of God Who is Love Himself.

In the mean time we speak about something easy for man to fulfil. You do not need striving, toil, travels, troubles, riches or human interventions. All you need is the desire to love God and you will not encounter what stops or prevents you from doing that.

In spite of its superiority and greatness, love is easy. By this logic we understand the words of the Apostle Peter "For so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:11).

When the Lord Jesus Christ was asked: "Which is the great commandment in the law?" He immediately answered: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself". He then commented by saying **"On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets"** (Matthew 22:35-40). **This means that God included all His Divine commandments in two, even in one commandment of two parts, which is "Love"**. All the commandments are connected to love, the way the branches are connected to the root of the tree, and if separated from the tree, they wither and die.

From the comprehension that love is "The first and greatest commandment", and that all Divine commandments are tied to it, the Apostle Paul says: "Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith" (1 Timothy 1:5). This Apostle places love above faith which could remove mountains (1 Corinthians 13:2) and above hope in which we are saved (Romans 8:24), and makes it the first of the fruits of the Holy Spirit in the believer (Galatians 5:22) and for its power he calls it "the bond of perfection" (Colossians 3:14).

After the Apostle names different Christian virtues, he says: "But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection" (Colossians 3:14). In this understanding love resembles the cement which fastens the bricks in the building. Imagine bricks arranged in a building without cement, what would the result be?

Love binds man to God, binds man to his brother, and binds all the virtues together. By that, according to the Apostle's expression the ordinary human becomes "man of God" (2 Timothy 3:17). By binding the rest of the virtues, love becomes like the string of a rosary which goes through all the beads of the rosary and ties them together. **Hence if any virtue lacks love it is rejected, and with this we understand the words of the Apostle Paul: "For he who loves another has fulfilled the law" (Roman 13:8).**

All these meanings pressed **St. Augustine** to the saying: "**God is love, what else could be said? Love is praised in the first Epistle of St. John and in the other Books. If this is the only item said to us by the Holy Spirit, we need nothing else.** I consider love to be the pearl of great price about which the Bible said the merchant was looking for and when he found it, he went and sold all that he had and bought it (Matthew 13:46). Love is the pearl of great price, without which nothing will benefit you, **and if you have it, it is all you need**".

A) THE MEASURE IS LOVE

God values the virtue of love to the extent that He made it a measure for knowing Him. St. John the Apostle says: "He who does not love does not know God, for God is love" (1 John 4:8). **In that St. Augustine says: "God the father sacrificed Christ, and Judas delivered Him, and it seems that the two deeds are of one kind! Judas was a traitor and he delivered Christ. Is God the Father the same? God forbid. But the Apostle says: "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all" (Romans 8:32). God the Father sacrificed Him, and He gave Himself up, and if the Father sacrificed His Son, and the Son surrendered Himself, what about Judas then? It was a sacrifice from the Father's side and there Judas delivered Him. Yet what the Father and the Son did was for love, but what Judas did was a treacherous betrayal. A man's deed by itself does not count, but what counts is the intention by which he does it.** We see that God did what Judas did, yet we bless God and curse Judas? Why? Because we bless love and hate sin. **Love alone distinguishes between men's deeds**".

Man is rewarded for his good deeds as long as love is the motive. Thus deeds have no reward except for love. Valuable work without love is worth nothing, but things which are considered minor and trivial with love become great. A cup of cold water offered with love has its reward in heaven (Matthew 10:42).

B) WHAT IS LOVE?

Saints, fathers and men of God stood amazed and tense in front of love. They failed to express its essence and to contain it in words. They described it according to their own experiences.

The Spiritual Elder who was a hermit, says "What is love? It is the source of righteousness in the heart, a port of understanding, rivers of water for life, and knowing the secrets

of both the known and unknown worlds. Amazingly love is the language of angels, and is difficult to translate into words. **Love is the honored name of God, who can search or limit it? He who wishes to address the love of God proves his ignorance, because grasping the Divine love is not possible at all".**

Another father says about love: "It is the completion of good deeds, blessing of virtue, fulfilment of Divine commandments, finishing with sin, life of virtues, strength of striving people, and helper for the victorious. It returns life back to those who die in their sins. Faith reaches it and hope flies towards it. Under its wings, obedience grows, by it patience conquers **and without it no one pleases God. Real, true and complete love is what the Apostle calls "A more excellent way"** (1 Corinthians 12:31). Truly it is the way which leads those who walk in it to their real home land".

1. GOD'S LOVE TO ALL CREATURES

Because God is love, He loves all creatures, not man only. He cares for the animals and for the plants, even for the breathless objects. The Psalmist says: "He sends the springs into the valleys, they flow among the hills. They give drink to every beast of the field. He waters the hills from His upper chambers; **the earth is satisfied with the fruit of Your works. He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, and vegetation for the service of man, that he may bring forth food from the earth.** O Lord, how manifold are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all. The earth is full of Your possessions -- This great and wide sea, in which are innumerable teeming things, living things both small and great. **These all wait for You, that You may give them their food in due season.** What You give them they gather in; **You open Your hand, they are filled with good. You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; and You renew the face of the earth"** (Psalm 104:10-30).

When God initiated the law of the Sabbath day, he applied it to the animals also. He said: "But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. **In it you shall do no work:** you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, **nor your cattle,** nor your stranger who is within your gates" (Exodus 20:10). "But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. **In it you shall not do any work:** you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your manservant, nor your maidservant, **nor your ox, nor your donkey, nor any of your cattle"** (Deuteronomy 5:14). "Six years you shall sow your land and gather in its produce, but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat; **and what they leave, the beasts of the field may eat"** (Exodus 23:10, 11). "**And the Sabbath produce of the land shall be food for you:** for your male and female servants, your hired man, and the stranger who dwells with you, **for your livestock and the beasts that are in your land -- all its produce shall be for food"** (Leviticus 25:6, 7). "**You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain"** (Deuteronomy 25:4).

The Psalmist also says "Who covers the heavens with clouds, who prepares rain for the

earth, **who makes grass to grow on the mountains. He gives to the beast its food, and to the young ravens that cry"** (Psalm 147:8, 9). After the plant which shaded Jonah's head was damaged and he was very depressed, God said to Jonah "And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left -- **and much livestock?"** (Jonah 4:11).

It is clear from the above verses how God cares for the animals, livestock and birds, and how He prepares food for them.

There is an actual story published in the main newspaper in Cairo, Egypt, on July 23, 1952, reported by a police officer in the city of Minya, in Upper Egypt. In short, one day in the holy fasting month of Ramadan for the Muslims, an officer and a friend of his were awaiting to break their fast. They were leaning against a demolished wall, resting. They noticed a wasp carrying a grain of wheat entering a cavity at the top of the wall and coming out without the grain of wheat. This was repeated several times. They were curious to find out the relation between the wasp and the grains of wheat. They climbed the wall, and to their great astonishment they found inside the cavity a bird unable to fly. They then understood that God cared for the bird and sent it food by the wasp.

The Lord Jesus affirms these feelings towards the animals and the plants. He says: "Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which have neither storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them" (Luke 12:24). "Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God" (Luke 12:6). "Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these" (Luke 12:27).

If the above verses show the love of God to the plants and the animals and even to breathless creatures, how much more is His love to man whom He created in His image and according to His likeness be? (Genesis 1:26).

2. GOD'S LOVE TO MAN

In the Book of Song of Solomon, in the Old Testament, God uses an illustrative style to portray His love to the human soul in view of the love of the groom to his bride. The bride describes the love of her groom as "better than wine" (Song 1:2) and that "his banner over her is love" (Song 2:4). The Divine revelation ends this book by saying: "**for love is as strong as death, ... Many waters cannot quench love, nor can the floods drown it"** (Song 8:6, 7).

The Old Testament is full of verses which express the love of God to man, but this love focused on Israel as the people of God, though it was also shown to heathen nations such as the gentile people of Nineveh. As an example of God's love to His people, the story of getting

them out of Egypt with a strong hand and mighty arm in a miraculous way and how He cared for them for forty years during their journey in a barren desert from Egypt to the land of Canaan. All these years he fed them with manna and quails and brought them water from a rock! **God continued in the Old Testament to show His love for His people, sometimes by caring and helping them and sometimes by chastising them.**

This love of God was so clear in the Old Testament. However, the love of God in the New Testament which He revealed and proclaimed in the person of Jesus Christ our Lord, unveils for us the love of God in a way that has never been shown before. It is enough to meditate in the words of the Lord Jesus to Nicodemus: "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).

This expression "For God so loved", displays the inability of human language to describe the love of God to man. **Besides, it reveals the love of the three Persons of God to man.** The Lord Jesus did not say "For the Father so loved the world", but "For God so loved the world", confirming a valuable fact, that the salvation of man is the result of the love of the three Persons of God. This salvation was in the mind of the eternal Heavenly Father, and was fulfilled by His only Begotten Son by the Holy Spirit in the heart of each believer. In other words, **the salvation of man was prepared by the Heavenly Father Who is love, fulfilled by the Son of God Who is love, and we received its blessings by the Holy Spirit Who is love. What is love in the Divine Person? It is a mystery which the human soul can not explain, because if it is able to characterize the love of God, it would be able to characterize God Himself.**

Let us not be surprised at the description of the Apostle Paul to God's love in Christ "**passes knowledge**" (Ephesians 3:19). This is expressed in the liturgy of St. Gregory the Theologian: "**no manner of speech can measure the depth of Your love to mankind**". **In that St. Augustine says:**

"The love of God cannot be measured and is unchangeable. His love to us did not start at the time of our reconciliation with Him by the Blood of His Son, but He loved us before the creation of the world, before our being, so that we become His children with His Only Son.

We should understand the reality of our reconciliation with God by the death of His Son, that the Son reconciled us with Him from this moment, and He now started to love whom he previously hated, in the same way an enemy reconciles with his enemy to become friends and the lasting love replaces the constant hate. **Rather we were reconciled with Him Who loved us, and with Whom we were in enmity because of our sins. The Apostle says "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).** God loved us even when we were in enmity against Him and did iniquity. That is in spite of what is said rightfully about Him "You hate all workers of iniquity" (Psalm 5:5).

Accordingly, God has loved us in an astonishing and holy way - even when we scorned

Him. He hated us according to the change in our image, He hated in each of us what we did, and loved in us what He did. Truly it is possible to understand that from the verse "Thou hatest nothing that thou has created" (Wisdom 11:25). God does not hate anything from what He created, because He created His creatures without sin. He does not make the evil which He hates, and from evil He does what is good, whether by healing us with His grace or by chastising us with His justice. **Hence we see that He does not hate anything that He made, and who can measure the amount of His love to the members of His Only Begotten Son!"**

C) WHERE DO WE SENSE THE LOVE OF GOD TO MAN?

It is impossible to count the features which illustrate the love of God to man. The love of God to man existed before He created him. Did not Jesus say to the righteous people: "Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34), that is before His creation of man. The love of God surrounds man and cares for him from the beginning of the year to the very end of the year" (Deuteronomy 11:12). The Lord even declared that "he who touches you touches the apple of His eye" (Zechariah 2:8). **To what extent does God love man? He loved him to the end as the Lord Jesus said:** "Jesus ... loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end" (John 13:1). We try here to enumerate some of the aspects through which we feel the love of God to man.

1 - IN HIS CREATION OF MAN

Before God created man, he provided every thing for him. He created light, the two great lights; the sun and the moon and all the stars in the firmament of the heavens, the earth and all what is in it, and the sea and all its creatures. He created everything for man. He not only created creatures for man, **but He also made him master over all the creation. And when He created him, He did not create him like the rest of the creatures, but created him in His image and according to His likeness** (Genesis 1:26), a sage creature, free and pure.

God is love and in His love He created the life element in man, a breath from Him. It is the image of the Holy trinity and His likeness. Man is an eternal creature and because man is created in the image of God and according to His likeness, his soul is attracted to God and desires Him and does not find sufficiency except in Him.

God created man, not because He needed him or in order for man to worship Him. God does not need even the angels and all the heavenly creatures, but He created man in His image and according to His likeness and had "His delight with the sons of men" (Proverbs 8:31).

How truthful is St. Gregory the Theologian in what he says in his Liturgy:

"Holy, Holy O Lord and Holy in everything and exceedingly excellent is the light of Your Essence. Indescribable is the power of Your Wisdom, and no manner of speech can measure the depth of Your love to mankind. As a lover of mankind You have created me a man, for you have no need of my servitude rather I have need of Your Lordship. According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, You have brought me into where I was not. You have filled up the heavens for a roof to me, and established the earth for me to walk on. For my sake You have shut up the sea; For my sake You have manifested the nature of animals. You have put all things under my feet. You did not suffer that I want anything of the works of Your Honor. You have formed me and put Your hand upon me and wrought me in the image of Your Dominion. And granted me the gift of speech; and opened to me the Paradise to enjoy. And gave me the learning of Your knowledge. You have manifested to me the tree of life and have shown me the sting of death".

Saying that differently, **St. Augustine says: "My God, You submitted everything under the feet of man, so that he can consecrate himself totally to You. You did not appoint a master on him except You, and You made him a master over Your creatures. You created everything for his body, you made his body for his soul and his soul for You. How good You are my God! How kind You are. You know my body very well, as You have created it"**.

2 - IN THE INCARNATION AND REDEMPTION:

There is no exaggeration in saying that the summit of the love of God to mankind appears in the Incarnation of His Son for the Redemption of mankind. Mankind had fallen and was driven out of paradise, but God in His love prepared for his salvation in order to restore him to his original state. This was not possible except by one way; the Incarnation of the Son of God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. That is for Him to take a complete human body by which He pays - on behalf of man - the punishment of death which man deserved for his disobedience. This was fulfilled on the Cross.

In other words we say that for God to achieve this goal, He had to meet man, not in an outside encounter, but to share with him his flesh and blood, his pains and troubles, and to wipe his tears. This meeting, in this understanding, became the Incarnation of "Immanuel", which means "God is with us".

Hence the Incarnation was the most important proclamation of God's love to man. God Himself agreed to become one with the human element with all what man has from flesh and soul. **However, the role God did with man by the Incarnation is different from the role of Moses and other prophets of the Old Testament. God came with a new relation, impossible for evil to threaten nor for sin to overcome "But the free gift is not like the offense" (Romans 5:15).**

God honored man when He created him "in His image and according to His likeness", and He honored him even more when He Himself became - not like man and his likeness - but

a real human! Talking to God, St. Jerome said: "I am indebted to You my Lord for the insults by which You redeemed me, more than my indebtedness to Your Power by which You created me. You created me by one word, but redeeming me required insults and pains".

The same meaning is expressed by St. Augustine when he said: "The creation of the world did not cost God anything; He said to the object "Let be" and it is done. But the salvation of the world cost Him to come down from heaven and suffer mockery and shame, and finally to die on the Cross on our behalf".

In his liturgy, St. Gregory the Theologian says "You have turned my punishment into salvation. You are Who has ministered salvation to me when I disobeyed Your Law. You made Yourself of no reputation and took the form of a servant. And blessed my nature in You. And fulfilled Your Law on my behalf. You have shown me the rising again from my fall".

It is true that the Incarnation and Redemption are the summit of the love of God to mankind "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). This is exactly what Christ asserted when He said: "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13).

There are other precious blessings for man resulting from the Incarnation of the Son of God and His Redemption. Perhaps the most precious blessing is the gift of the Holy Spirit - the comforting Spirit of God - Whom the Lord Jesus promised the believers that He will abide with them forever (John 14:16, 16:13), and will teach them all things, and bring to their remembrance all things that Jesus said, His teachings and guide them to the Truth (John 14:26). This is the Spirit Who renews the creation, so that whoever believes in Christ and receives the Holy Baptism, becomes a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). It is the greatest miracle in Christianity.

The Holy Spirit - the Spirit of God - transfers to the believers in Christ (by means of the seven Holy Sacraments of the Church) the blessings of salvation which resulted by the death of Christ on the Cross; the Holy Spirit takes what is of Christ and declares it to them (John 16:15). As an example, it is the Holy Spirit Who sanctifies the water of Baptism to give a new birth to the baptized person to become a child of God. He sanctifies the bread and wine in the sacrament of Thanksgiving to become the Holy Flesh and Blood of the Lord. He also unifies the bride and groom in the sacrament of marriage to make from them one body.

There is however an immense blessing from the Incarnation and Redemption; the believer in Christ becomes a temple to the Holy Spirit in which He dwells. "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him" (John 14:23). "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16). Man became a child to God "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!" (1 John 3:1), and became a saint in Christ "just as He (the Father) chose us in Him (Christ) before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love" (Ephesians

1:4).

3 - IN HIS CARE FOR MANKIND:

The Books of the Old Testament are full of stories which record the care of God for His children, as a nation and as individuals. They are full of sayings of inspired prophets and writers expressing this care.

As examples, we mention the saving of Noah from the flood (Genesis 6:14-8:19), Lot from Sodom (Genesis 19:1-29), protecting Joseph in Egypt (Genesis 39:1-45:28), the way by which He brought the children of Israel out of Egypt and leading them by a pillar of cloud, destroying Pharaoh and his army, converting bitter water of Marah to sweet water (Exodus 15:23-25), caring for His people in the wilderness for forty years and feeding them the manna from the heaven, defeating nations stronger and more numerous than them as in the war with Amalek (Exodus 17:8-13), entering the land of Canaan, the fall of the walls of Jericho without war (Joshua 6:1-25), the care of God for Elijah and His support to the widow and her son (1 Kings 17:8-24), and guarding Daniel in the lion's den and the three young men from the blazing fire (Daniel 6:16-23; 3:19-30)).

The sayings of the Lord which the Divine Revelation recorded in the Old Testament are numerous:

The righteous Job says: "You have granted me life and favor, **and Your care has preserved my spirit**" (Job 10:12) and also: "He does not withdraw His eyes from the righteous" (Job 36:7). The Prophet Moses speaks about God guarding His people "**He encircled him, He instructed him, he kept him as the apple of His eye**" (Deuteronomy 32:10). The Prophet David says: "For the Lord loves justice, and does not forsake His saints" (Psalm 37:28), "For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways. In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone" (Psalm 91:11, 12) and the Psalmist says "I will lift up my eyes to the hills -- from whence comes my help? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber" (Psalm 121:1-3).

The Lord God says to His people Israel concerning giving rest (Sabbath) to the land: "And if you say, "**What shall we eat in the seventh year, since we shall not sow nor gather in our produce?**" **Then I will command My blessing on you in the sixth year, and it will bring forth produce enough for three years**" (Leviticus 25:20, 21). He continues saying: "If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments, and perform them, then I will give you rain in its season, the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit ..., you shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely. I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none will make you afraid; I will rid the land of evil beasts, and the sword will not go through your land" (Leviticus 26:3-6).

Again the Psalmist David says about the care of God for the human soul: **"Who heals all your diseases, Who redeems your life from destruction, who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, Who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's"** (Psalm 103:3-5), and: **"The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them"** (Psalm 34:7).

God reminded His people of His care for them during their sojourn in the wilderness for forty years by saying: **"... that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord. Your garments did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years"** (Deuteronomy 8:3, 4). The Prophet Isaiah says: "In that day sing to her, A vineyard of red wine! I, the Lord, keep it, I water it every moment; lest any hurt it, I keep it night and day" (Isaiah 27:1, 2).

In the New Testament we find that the Lord Jesus illustrates God's care for man in a very clear way. He says: "Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?" (Matthew 6:26-30), **"Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows"** (Matthew 10:29-31).

The Lord Jesus asks His Disciples whom He sent in training missions **"When I sent you without money bag, knapsack, and sandals, did you lack anything? So they said, "Nothing""** (Luke 22:35).

The New Testament, Church history and the writings about the saints and the children of God, are full of stories which demonstrate the care of God for all mankind of all times and in all places. His care is not only for the righteous and the pious, but includes all mankind. This is most appropriate about Whom is said "for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:45).

4 - IN HIS LOVE TO THE SINNERS:

God hates sin:

Holy is God Who created the first man in His image and in His likeness, and because He is holy He demands man to live a life of holiness. God said to Moses: "Speak to all the

congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them: **"You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy"**" (Leviticus 19:2). St. Peter affirms the same meaning **"but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct"** (1 Peter 1:15), **and thus God hates evil and sin.**

Joshua said to the people who deviated from worshipping God: "You cannot serve the Lord, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins" (Joshua 24:19). The Divine Revelation in the Book of Job says: "What is man, that he could be pure? And he who is born of a woman, that he could be righteous? If God puts no trust in His saints, and the heavens are not pure in His sight, How much less man, who is abominable and filthy, who drinks iniquity like water! (Job 15:14-16).

In the past, because of their sin, God told His people: "I will even appoint terror over you, wasting disease and fever which shall consume the eyes and cause sorrow of heart. And you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. I will set My face against you, and you shall be defeated by your enemies. Those who hate you shall reign over you, and you shall flee when no one pursues you" (Leviticus 26:16, 17).

God hates evil and sin so much that He said to Moses: "Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book" (Exodus 32:33). He also announced: "Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation" (Exodus 34:7). **Hence David said to God: "You hate all workers of iniquity"** (Psalm 5:5) and the Psalmist says **"You who love the Lord, hate evil!"** (Psalm 97:10).

Examples of God's hatred of evil: destroying the world in the past by the flood, burning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by fire and sulfur raining from heaven. St. Peter says: "For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly; and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, **making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly;** and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked, ... then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment" (2 Peter 4-9). **Let us meditate on the words of the Apostle Peter: "making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly"!**

God loves the sinners:

In spite of God's extreme hatred to evil and sin, we see wonders in the love of God to sinners in the person of Christ. We even say that the depth of the love of God to mankind shows in His love to sinners. This is what the Lord Jesus proclaims: **"For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance"**

(Matthew 9:13), **"There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance"** (Luke 15:7), and **"Those who are well have no**

need of a physician, but those who are sick" (Matthew 9:12).

Let us now examine some dealings of the Lord Jesus with sinners:

a - Christ and the Samaritan woman (John, Chapter 4):

The Samaritan woman was one of the sinful women whom Christ met, and His meeting with her was the cause of her salvation. Being a sinner was obvious from His saying to her "for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly" (John 4:18). The meeting of Christ with the Samaritan woman reveals the depth of His love to sinners. It is said that the Lord Jesus walked on foot for six hours to save this sinful soul.

"Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour" (John 4:6). **He being wearied in order to comfort us.** What really makes Him weary is our sins, and it was with a purpose that "the sixth hour" was mentioned. It was the same hour when the Saviour was hung on the Cross for our salvation and the salvation of the whole world "O Thou on the sixth day at the sixth hour was nailed to the cross because of the sin Adam dared to commit in paradise" (prayer from the Agbia).

Let us see how the dialogue began with this sinful woman. The Lord started by asking her **"Give Me a drink"** (John 4:7). **He spoke as if He needed to drink, but in fact He was anxious for the tears of the woman's repentance.** Yet the woman according to her way of reason denied Christ His request, thinking that He wanted some ordinary water "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman"! (John 4:9).

Then Christ continued His talk raising the feelings of her heart and soul "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, "Give Me a drink", **you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water"** (John 4:10). When the woman expressed her surprise about this living water, He explained and said to her, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, **but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life"** (John 4:13, 14). When the woman asked Him to give her this water, He said to her **"Go, call your husband, and come here"** (John 4:16).

When she answered that she had no husband Jesus unveiled her life that she have had five husbands, and the one whom she had was not her husband; and said to her "you spoke truly". **The request of Christ that she call her husband means that He wanted her to confess her sin.**

Christ then told her that God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth (John 4:24). Finally the Lord Jesus disclosed the reality of His personality, that He is the long awaited Messiah (John 4:25, 26). The woman left her waterpot and forgot everything after her heart was opened up, went her way into the city, and said to the men, as if she is the first Christian missionary "Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?"

(John 4:29). **And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified (John 4:39). It is interesting to notice that Christ was first called "the Saviour of the world" (John 4:42) from the mouths of those Samaritans who were traditional enemies of the Jews!**

The Lord, by His love and compassion, changed this sinful woman to an active missionary. She forgot her waterpot for which she came to the well, and went to announce that Jesus told her all she ever did. The Messiah Who was long awaited, **did not rebuke her by a harsh word for her devious behavior, in spite of His hatred of sin, but by His love and compassion He attracted her to the knowledge of the Real Living God.**

b - Christ and the woman caught in the very act (John, Chapter 8):

This is a stunning example; a woman caught in the act of adultery. The Scribes and Pharisees brought her to the Lord Jesus and said to him: "Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?" (John 8:4, 5). It was very critical and abashing for this miserable woman, whom "they had set in the midst" (John 8:3) to disgrace her more.

What did Christ do in this situation? He did not utter one word to those who brought her, but quietly He "stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger" (John 8:6). But in their hypocrisy, they pretended to keep the Law, and they continued asking Him about His ruling over this woman. **"He raised Himself up and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first".** And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground (John 8:7, 8). His words and His writing caused the accusers of this woman to go out one by one, beginning with the greatest even to the least. And Jesus was left alone, with the woman standing in the midst.

Christ said to those who brought the woman "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first". But what was He writing on the ground? All the commentators of the Holy Bible agreed that He was writing down the sins of each of those who brought the woman. No one knew these sins except God alone. They were ashamed of themselves and hastened to go for fear that they would be exposed.

What was the verdict of Christ on this woman who was caught in the very act of adultery? He did not rebuke her for her adultery, even when no one was around, rather He was gentle and merciful. He does not wish that anyone perishes but that all come forward and repent. He said to her "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord". And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more" (John 8:10, 11).

Christ Who will judge the world at the end of times, and Who said that all the judgment is given to the Son, did not condemn this adulterous woman, but without doubt He attracted her to the

way of righteousness. **No doubt that the loving words of Christ, which are full of compassion for this sinful woman were more forceful than the stones which Moses Law commanded she should be stoned with. What would anyone gain if the woman was stoned and died in her sin?**

Christ did not condemn this woman, yet He wooed the Scribes and Pharisees for their hypocrisy (Matthew 23), because they lived a life of pretence so that the people would praise and glorify them. That was their reward, they loved the glory of men more than God's glory. **This sinful woman with her repentance was better than them with their self righteousness, like the sinful publican who was better than the Pharisee, praying in the temple.**

c - Christ and Zacchaeus (Luke, Chapter 19):

Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector, and the word tax collector for the Jews at the time of Jesus was synonymous to the word sinner. The Scribes and Pharisees were always murmuring against the love of Christ to the sinners and against Him sitting with them. **The traditional accusation against His disciples was: "Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" (Matthew 9:11). The answer of Jesus to this complaint was: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: I desire mercy and not sacrifice. For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance" (Matthew 9:12, 13).**

Zacchaeus heard that the Lord Jesus was going to pass through the city of Jericho, and Zacchaeus was very eager to see Jesus, but could not because of the crowd for he was of short stature. So in order not to let this chance escape, he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Jesus, for He was going to pass that way.

When the Lord arrived at that place He looked up the sycamore tree where Zacchaeus was hiding. **Jesus overlooked the crowd, gazed up at Zacchaeus and told him: "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house" (Luke 19:5). What a surprise for Zacchaeus the sinful man? He desired to see the Lord Jesus, and now Jesus is addressing and calling him to make haste and come down, why? Not because He will pay him a quick visit, but to stay at his house. That is wonderful.** This kind of treatment was not common at that time in Jewish society. The righteous people - in their own eyes - did not deal with those whom they considered sinful or evil. Then how will Jesus stay a whole day in the house of a sinful man?

This is what actually happened; when the crowd saw that Jesus accepted Zacchaeus joyfully, they all complained, saying: **"He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner"!** (Luke 19:7).

Let us see how the love of Jesus affected Zacchaeus, the sinful man. Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, **"Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusations, I restore fourfold" (Luke 19:8).** Zacchaeus who

spent a lifetime of injustice and false accusations now declares that he gives half of his goods to the poor; and what next?, if he had taken anything from anyone by false accusations, he restores fourfold. The Law of Moses did ask for restitution for a trespass in full, plus only one-fifth of it (Numbers 5:6, 7). Yet Zacchaeus will restore fourfold to anyone he has taken anything from by false accusations. **Christ did by His love more than what the Law failed to do by its strictness and order.**

No wonder when we see Jesus declare that "Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham; for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:9, 10). **This is the message of Christ "To seek and to save that which was lost".**

d - Parable of the Lost Son (Luke, Chapter 15):

This parable is considered the summit of what Jesus revealed about the love of God for sinners. Jesus said this parable after saying two other parables: "the lost sheep" and "the lost coin". They are Jesus' response to the murmur of the Scribes and Pharisees that He receives sinners and ate with them (Luke 15:1, 2).

The parable of the Lost Son as Jesus presented consists of two parts. The first part explains the stages of sin which the son followed, to the extent that "he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything" (Luke 15:16). The fact that he ended by feeding swines, means that he reached the bottom of sin and he became its servant. **The second part of the parable explains the stages of repentance and returning back to God, which is what we will talk about.**

When this son found himself in great difficulty, "he came to himself" (Luke 15:17) and thought seriously to return back to his father who symbolizes the Heavenly Father. The son actually arose up and went to his father. **This was not strange. What was strange is that as soon as he returned to his father, he found his father waiting for him** "But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion" (Luke 15:20).

What multiplies our surprise is that the father - who symbolizes the Heavenly Father - behaved in a way which is appropriate to the young son who sinned, and not to the old father who was sinned against. What did the father do?, "ran and fell on his neck and kissed him" (Luke 15:20). **All that happened before the son who sinned open his mouth and said a word expressing regret or sorrow!** And when the son said to his father "I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son" (Luke 15:21), **the father did not let him complete what he wanted to say to his father "Make me like one of your hired servants"!** (Luke 15:19). **This meant even though he had gone astray he did not lose his sonship with his father.**

We also see in this parable the father flooding the son with his love, sympathy and compassion as he says to his servants "Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet, for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found" (Luke 15:22-24).

Is there love for the faulty person greater than this love? Christ with His love to sinners attracted and won them to Himself. Mankind was in a state of hostility with God when Christ died on the Cross for their salvation. They were not only in a state of hostility but also in a state of persistent evil and sin. This is what the Jews asserted to Pilate the Roman atheist ruler "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" (Luke 23:21), His blood be on us and on our children" (Matthew 27:25). In spite of that Christ completed His walk to the Cross, and from the top of the cross He asked His Father to forgive them "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34). Christ forgot their evil, all He asked for was the salvation of their souls. **This is our Christ Who still searches for the lost sheep, and when He finds it He carries it joyfully on His neck.**

5 - ETERNAL GLORY FOR MAN

The amazing love of God - through the blessings of Redemption and the work of the Holy Spirit - sanctifies the nature of man after his renewal and makes him a son of God by adoption: "For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father"" (Romans 8:15). Thus by the awareness of this sonship, all saved believers everywhere cry out and say: "Our Father Who art in Heaven".

This amazing love does not only make the believers children of God, but also makes them resemble the Son of God "that He might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8:29). **The matter does not end here, but the Apostle reveals for us what lies after that: "whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified"** (Romans 8:30).

Yes, God glorified man - in Christ - by His love. This is what the Lord Jesus declares in His talk with the Father "And the glory which You gave Me I have given them" (John 17:22). What an honor! **Further, the Lord Jesus in this talk asks the Father that those believers be with Him: "Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me"** (John 17:24). This is what made the Apostle Paul say: "For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings" (Hebrews 2:10).

God the Father, by His love, made the believers in His Son Jesus Christ heirs of eternal glory "Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ" (Galatians 4:7), "and if children, then heirs -- **heirs of God and joint heirs with**

Christ" (Romans 8:17). This is what made the same Apostle say: "**When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory**" (Colossians 3:4). He also writes to the Romans saying: "that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, **which He had prepared beforehand for glory**" (Romans 9:23). St. Peter the Apostle confirms the same meaning "**But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you**" (1 Peter 5:10)

D) WHY DOES GOD PERMIT MAN TO SUFFER

The difficulties and trials which come to a person are not a sign of the anger of God upon this person. St. James says: "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing" (James 1:2-4). **Trials, difficulties and pains do not contradict the love of God to man, but there is a wisdom behind the pains and difficulties. This subject requires a special analysis, but it is enough to refer to some main points.**

A - God permits man to endure pains and difficulties to rid him from self-righteousness. This matter is clear from the fall of some upright people such as Job, David and Peter.

Job was upright. He was also proud of himself and many times used to say: "I am blameless" (Job 9:21). The three friends of Job ceased answering him "**because he was righteous in his own eyes**" (Job 32:1). Then the wrath of Elihu, the son of Barachel the Buzite, of the family of Ram, was aroused against Job "**because he justified himself rather than God**" (Job 32:2). But after the pains that came upon Job, he said talking to God "**Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer You? I lay my hand over my mouth. I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes**" (Job 40:4; 42:5, 6).

Also David who was known for his chastity fell in the sin of adultery with the wife of Uriah the Hittite" (1 Kings 15:5). For this sin he was in great pains and shed many tears: "**my sin is always before me**" (Psalm 51:3). The Lord accepted his repentance and he became a man of prayer and the lovable Psalmist of Israel and from his descendant according to the flesh, Christ came.

Again Peter who was known for his courage, was scared in a disgusting way in front of a slave girl and denied Christ with curses and swearing, blaspheming Him (Mark 14:66-72). This trial made him vile in his eyes, and he was sorry and cried bitterly.

St. Paul was subjected to a certain trial. Did he not say about himself: "And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure" (2 Corinthians 12:7).

B - God permits man to endure pains and difficulties to chastise and free him from the bonds of sin and bad habits. The Psalmist says: "Blessed is the man whom You instruct, O Lord, and teach out of Your law, that You may give him rest from the days of adversity" (Psalm 94:12, 13). Eliphaz the Temanite one of Job's friends says an advice: "Behold, happy is the man whom God corrects; therefore do not despise the chastening of the Almighty. For He bruises, but He binds up; he wounds, but His hands make whole" (Job 5:17, 18).

St. Paul says to the Hebrews: "For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives. If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons" (Hebrews 12:6, 7). He then compares between the chastening of physical parents and that of God, and says about the latter: "for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness" (Hebrews 12:10). This meaning is confirmed by what the Lord Jesus said to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans: "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten" (Revelation 3:19).

The three young men who were thrown into the midst of the fire in Babel is an example which explains what we say. All what the fire did to them is freeing them from their ties. Then they were able to walk freely in the midst of the fire as if it is a park (Daniel 3:24, 25). The fire did a service to the three young men, as it freed them from their ties, but did not burn their clothes, not even a hair of their heads. This is exactly what pains do to the children of God.

The gold which enters the fire spends a certain time in the fire to be purified from its impurities. If it spends longer time it spoils and if shorter it is not purified. Hence God will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able or can bear (1 Corinthians 10:13). It is said that gold is purified when one sees in it his picture clearly. We also remain under the temptation until the picture of God appears in us.

C - Pains make man experience God and His dealings and comes closer to Him. When man feels the temptation, and that he is unable to escape from it, he turns to God to deliver him. In fact God urges us to do that "Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me" (Psalm 50:15). The Prophet David says from experience: "In the day of my trouble I will call upon You, for You will answer me" (Psalm 86:7). It is amazing that when all

the doors shut in front of us, we find one door stays open; the door of God.

D - Afflictions and tribulations do not contradict the love of God to us, but they are the glory of the saints in heaven. The Apostle Paul says "**Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory**" (Ephesians 3:13), and "**For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory**" (2 Corinthians 4:17). It is known that afflictions require patience, and St. Paul says: "But we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance" (Romans 5:3).

What does perseverance do, and what are its fruits. The Lord Jesus says: "**But he who endures to the end will be saved**" (Matthew 10:22) and "**By your patience possess your souls**" (Luke 21:19). Thus we are not surprised from what St. John wrote in the Revelation "**I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ**" (Revelation 1:9). **Here John speaks about the Kingdom of Christ and about tribulations and patience.**

What about the patience which accompanies the pains and tribulations? St. James writes to the believers and says "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials" (James 1:2). **The reason is that "knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience" and he immediately follows by saying: "But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing"** (James 1:3, 4).

The Lord Jesus says to His Disciples: "But you are those who have continued with Me in My trials. And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:28-30). **This made St. Paul say "If we endure, we shall also reign with Him"** (2 Timothy 2:12).

CHAPTER 2

LOVE OF MAN TO GOD

- A) Love of man to God is the echo of His love to man**
- b) Value of love in the sight of God**
- C) Why should man love God?**
- D) Love of man to God and his love to the world**
- E) Where does the love of man to God show?**
- F) Virtues related to the love of man to God**
- G) The feast of the marriage of the lamb**

A) LOVE OF MAN TO GOD IS THE ECHO OF HIS LOVE TO MAN

Love of God to Man throughout the ages shines in His care for His creatures captivating countless numbers of souls. In every generation there were souls who loved Him and lived in His obedience, even when the world was sinking in the darkness of idolatry.

From the descendant of Adam, Abel was righteous. Then there was Enoch the righteous, as the Holy Bible portrayed him: "Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him" (Genesis 5:24; Hebrews 11:5). Among the righteous people in the past, there were men who pleased God by their faith such as Abraham who - in his love and obedience to God - presented his only son Isaac as a sacrifice. Then there were Isaac and Jacob the father of the tribes, Joseph the upright, Moses who spoke with God and who "refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward" (Hebrews 11:24-26).

According to the expression of the Apostle Paul: "For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection ... of whom the world was not worthy" (Hebrews 11:32-38).

Some of those righteous people mentioned above lived before the time of the Law, and yet lived faithful to God, loving Him and obeying their consciences. When God gave written commandments at the hands of Moses, He specified the first four of the ten commandments for Himself. These are which the Lord Jesus summarized in: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37). In the past God said: "My son, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe My ways" (Proverbs 23:26). It is known that the heart holds in itself love and compassion.

In the thirty first Psalm, the Prophet and Psalmist David empties his feelings of love, gratitude and gratefulness to his God and calls everyone to the love of God saying: "**Oh, love the Lord, all you His saints!**" (Psalm 31:23). In another Psalm he says: "**Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart**" (Psalm 37:4). Again in a song of love, as if he is talking to every human soul, David says: "**Listen, O daughter, consider and incline your ear; forget your own people also, and your father's house; So the King will greatly desire your beauty; because He is your Lord, worship Him**" (Psalm 45:10, 11).

In yet another Psalm David says: "**My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and**

fatness, and my mouth shall praise You with joyful lips. When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches" (Psalm 63:5, 6). Again he says: "You hold me by my right hand. You will guide me with Your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You" (Psalm 73:23-25). "You who love the Lord, hate evil! He preserves the souls of His saints; He delivers them out of the hand of the wicked. Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart. Rejoice in the Lord, you righteous, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name" (Psalm 97:10-12).

The book "Song of Solomon" in the Old Testament speaks very clearly about the love of God to the human soul. It does so in symbolic expressions, making God as the groom and the human soul as the bride.

That was in the Old Testament. But as soon as the light of the New Testament shined upon the world, by the manifestation of the Sun of Righteousness, Jesus Christ our Lord, the Incarnated Love, God presented His love in its fullness in the person of His Son. This love was richly poured out by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the believers (Romans 5:5). This love had an indescribable profound effect in inflaming their hearts towards He Who loved them and gave Himself for them (Galatians 2:20). Hence it is true that the love of the believer is an echo of His love to them: "We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

Christian love is unique in its kind and in its depth, not like the love which the people of the world are acquainted with. The world knows love as a virtue. Yet it differs greatly from Christian love. Christian love which we mean is not born from an emotion of the flesh, but it is from God Himself: "The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Romans 5:5). It was the Holy Spirit Who was poured out in the day of Pentecost on the early believers in the early Church and inflamed their lives with faith, love and holiness. He descended on them as tongues as if from fire. Fire in some ways is a sign of power and inflamed love: "For love is as strong as death ... ; its flames are flames of fire, a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, nor can the floods drown it" (Song 8:6-8).

The love of God was strong and is still a fire which inflames the hearts of those who love Him and compels them to come near Him. "For the love of Christ compels us" (2 Corinthians 5:14). This confirms what Christ said: "I give to you; not as the world gives" (John 14:27).

I cannot find words more factual and compelling about the strength of Christian love in the heart of the believer than what the Apostle Paul said in his Epistle to the Romans: "**Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:35-39).**

He who wrote the "Song of Solomon" said in the past "Love is as strong as death" (Song 8:6). Yet in Christianity - in the person of Christ, by Him and by the work of the Holy Spirit - love became **stronger than death. Love through the Cross defeated death, and up till now, wherever the Cross is, love is found, because it is the sign of love which defeated death, conquered Hades, and scorned disgrace, shame and pain.**

The Apostle Paul whose heart was filled with love towards Christ, when the believers of Caesarea pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem fearing for his life after the Prophet Agabus prophesied that trials and tribulations were awaiting him, Paul answered them: "What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 21:10-13). **It is true that the love in the heart of Paul was stronger than the death which was awaiting him. He was dead to the world and alive to Christ Who filled his being and occupied his feelings.**

What do I say about the confessors and the martyrs who loved God more than themselves (Revelation 12:11). **The testimony of the blood is the greatest testimony to the most superior love** "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13). The greatest promises did not tempt them and the threats of the rulers and the cruelty of the torturers did not scare them. This was for no reason other than their exceeding love to Christ Who was living in them. They showed amazing courage and withstood incredible pains. This was proof that the love in them surpassed all earthly love, and was above the world and everything in it.

What do I say about the ascetic fathers and the monks - because of their great love to Christ - they mortified themselves, their members and their desires. By their own will, they died to the world and all that is in it. Let us listen to a sweet melody from one of the ascetic monks; **Father John Saba, known as the Spiritual Elder**, in which he converses with God:

"Who would not be surprised from the depth of Your mysteries which are beyond comprehension? While You are One in Yourself, You dwell inside thousands and tens of thousands of Your saints and those who do Your will, without being divided or partitioned.

Every one who loves You thinks that You are his alone, as he feels that he belongs to nobody except You. He thinks that You dwell in him alone and that he is worthy for Your dwelling, although You fill heaven and earth. Every one sees You whole in him as if in a mirror.

Let us welcome You inside our inner temple, in order to see You, enjoy You and eat from the tree of life which produce fruits inside us. **Lord, give me Your love, though I do not deserve the familiarity of love by which I call You "Father".**

The door is open and no one is coming in. Your glory is obvious but no one is looking at it. Your light is shining in our eyes and no one is enjoying it. Your hand is stretched to give and no

one is taking. You are calling with a loud voice and no one is hearing. You warn and advise and no one cares.

Give fuel to the fire of my heart which You ignited with Your love. Dear Good Lord abolish the love of the world from my heart, and replace it with my love to You. Qualify me Lord, that my heart melts in Your love and fear like the rocks when they are crushed. Open my heart like the graves which opened, that my soul rises from its sleep, like the dead who were raised at the frightening hour of Your crucifixion.

Blessed is he who never talks about the world, in order to talk with You, escapes from the sun to enjoy Your light, closes his door in order for You to open Your door, and keep away from people in order to sit with You.

Lord, make from my small heart a heaven for Your dwelling, in order that I raise my voice with joy like the heavenly creatures, and offer You continuous sacrifices of thanksgiving and praises on the altar of my heart".

Let us also listen to a sweet melody about love from **a ministering Bishop who lived an ascetic life; the saint and philosopher Augustine:**

"Lord, I know You because You have known me and I love You because You loved me. You are the joy of my soul, come near me for my soul to be filled from the source of Your love, because the comfort of my heart is in You. Make me eager for Your love, for You are my life. You, the Heavenly Groom, do not keep me far from You when I approach You and encompass me with Your arms.

Lord, purify my senses, and make them worthy to taste and sense the sweetness of joy which You offer for everyone who wants to enjoy the fragrance of Your giving. Make me fond of You always.

Give me a heart which beats with Your love, a soul which desires You, a spirit which clings to You, a mind which thinks in You always and unites with Your wisdom and knows how to love You, You are love full of every wisdom. In You love and perfection abide. Everyone who knows You loves You, he loves You more than himself, and leaves everything and follows You.

As the deer rush towards the current of sweet waters to satisfy their thirst, likewise my soul is thirsty for You Lord Who quenches the flames of my desires. Yes, my soul is thirsty for You, Who is the Source of Life always. Make me drunk with the joy of Your sweetness?!"

* * *

We have talked in some length about the love of man to God in general, and presented samples of meditations of a number of the men of God who loved Him, His love was their food, drink, and clothes. We now proceed to other points about the love of man to God

B) VALUE OF LOVE IN THE SIGHT OF GOD

God is love itself - "God is Love" (1 John 4:8; 4:16), and it is love which brought the Son of God from heaven down to our world. Also it is the first and greatest commandment (Mark 12:28, 30), the first Christian virtue and is greater than faith (1 Corinthians 13:13) without which it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). It is greater than hope (1 Corinthians 13:13) in which we were saved (Romans 8:24). **Hence if love is so powerful, no doubt, it is the virtue which pleases God, that he who abides in love abides in God and God abides in him (1 John 4:16), and he who does not love does not know God (1 John 4:8).**

In the past God said to His people: "And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, **but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him**" (Deuteronomy 10:12). The wise Solomon said "**If a man would give for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly despised**" (Song 8:7). This is the value of love in the sight of God.

In the life of the Lord Jesus, we read about a Pharisee called Simon who invited Him to a feast in his house. And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner (an adulteress), when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee's house brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears and wipe them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil.

Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he had some thoughts in his head which he did not reveal! Jesus knowing his thoughts, told him a parable "There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. **"Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?" Simon answered and said: "I suppose the one whom he forgave more"**. Then Jesus started to make comparison between the way this Pharisee dealt with Him concerning the formalities of hospitality and the way which this sinful woman behaved to show her repentance. **Jesus ended His talk saying: "Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much"** (Luke 7:36-47).

This sinful woman showed an amazing love to the Saviour, whom she believed could free her from her sins and grant her peace. She did not utter a word, but by her tears and kissing the Saviour's feet and the fragrant oil by which she wiped them expressed her amazing love, which won for her - forgiveness, salvation and inner peace "Your sins are forgiven ... Your faith has saved you.

Go in peace" (Luke 7:48-50).

We all know **about the tragedy of the Apostle Peter who by cursing and swearing denied the Saviour** (Mark 14:66-72). After the Holy Resurrection, the Lord showed Himself to some of His Disciples and Peter with them at the Sea of Tiberias where the Lord asked Peter: **"Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?"**. He repeated this question three times. The answer of Peter each time was: "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You" (John 21:15-17). It is a strange attitude from the Lord Jesus, as if He is begging the love of Peter! **There is nothing that gratifies the heart of God more than love.**

In the Book of Revelation, the Lord Jesus sent a message to the angel and minister of the Church of Ephesus in which He said:

"I know your works, your labor, your patience, ... and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. **Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.** Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place-- unless you repent" (Revelation 2:2-5). **Consider the value of love in the sight of God: The minister of the Church of Ephesus had good works, labor, patience, and perseverance in the ministry for the Lord's sake. All what the Lord found against him is that he had left his first love!**

What is the first love which the Lord points to? The first love is the strong personal bond which ties a person to his God, whose basis, subject and aim is love. Works have no value without love. "Many will say to Me in that day: "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?" And then I will declare to them: "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!" (Matthew 7:22, 23). **Real love searches for the beloved. God awaits love searching for Him, and for Him alone. There is nothing which satisfies the heart of Christ more than love to Him.**

St. Augustine says: "What was the question which the Lord posed to Peter after the Resurrection other than "Do you love Me?" Was it not enough to pose this question once and not three times? Three times fear denied and three times love confessed. Here Peter loves the Lord, but what would he do to the Lord? Whatever you offer to the Lord, you have received from the Lord in return".

We should know that God wants to be loved for His sake and not for His gifts. One of the fathers once said: "Lord, My glory is to please You, and my agony is to see You insulted by me. If I am appalled from hell, it would not be because of the tortures in it, but because its inhabitants are Your enemies. And if I love heavenly glory it is not for my sake, but because those who enjoy it are those who love You. Lord, Your glory is for those who love You. The Apostle Paul says: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Corinthians 2:9)". **It is true that the glories of God are alone for those who love Him.**

We know how hard the betrayal of Judas His Disciple was on the heart of Jesus. To add to the cruelty of the situation, Judas made from a kiss, which expresses love, a sign by which he delivered Him to His enemies! All the Lord did was to say a word of reproach to Judas: "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?" (Luke 22:48).

In a story about St. Bimen, who was one of the great fathers of the desert, a vender of fish used to visit him and was accustomed to stay every Sunday with him in the desert. One day, St. Bimen asked him to say a word of benefit to the brethren the monks. After resisting because of shyness, he yielded and said: "There were three friends of a certain man. He wanted to visit the king of the land but he was not competent to do so, so he asked his friends to go with him. The first friend promised to accompany him half the way only; the second friend promised to accompany him to the door of the king's palace; the third friend agreed to go with him all the way, enter the palace and speak on his behalf to the king".

The vender then explained these words: "The first friend refers to asceticism without love "And though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:3). The second friend refers to holiness without which nobody can see God (Hebrews 12:12). **But the third friend is love the greatest of all virtues, without which no one will benefit from his striving whatever it is, and however great his sacrifices are.**

C) WHY SHOULD MAN LOVE GOD?

1 - BECAUSE THE HAPPINESS OF MAN IS IN GOD, AND HIS SOUL WILL NOT REST EXCEPT IN HIM:

Love of man to God is the source of his happiness, indeed the happiness of the human race. If love is taken out of society, injustice, deception, corruption, hypocrisy, stealing, embezzlement, fraud, betrayal, evil doing and wars will spread. These will undoubtedly cause hardships, catastrophes, dangers and iniquities for the members of the society. God in His supreme wisdom provides everything that can bring happiness to man. And when He commanded us to love, and to love Him with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind, that was not because He is in need of our love, but to give man all that makes him happy. This love is affirmed by the word "**all**" each time, which shows the necessity of love to man.

The Book of Ecclesiastes says: "Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, **and the spirit will return to God who gave it**" (Ecclesiastes 12:7). **And since the spirit is from God, it does not get rest except in Him. The Psalmist says: "Return to your rest, O my soul"** (Psalm

116:7).

St. Augustine who lived the life of sin and impurity to its depth, and then experienced the life of grace to its superiority, said in his confessions, talking to God: "**Lord You created us for Yourself, and our souls will not get comfort until they rest in You**". These words agree with the saying of the Lord Jesus: "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). Christ, Who created man knows his nature that he will not find rest far from Him. He called all who labor to come to Him to give them rest, knowing that rest is under His wings and in the life with Him.

There is no rest for man except in God his creator, and his spirit will not rest except in Him. The dove which Noah sent from the Ark to check the dryness of the land after the flood, found no resting place for the sole of her foot, and returned back into the Ark (Genesis 8:9). Likewise, the meek soul created in the image of God in goodness and true holiness, does not find rest except in Him. He is our fullness as He is the bread of life, our living water, and the only way to the Father. He is the delight of our life as He is the light of the world and the good shepherd Who leads us to the source of living water.

2 - FOR ALL HIS BENEFITS:

The Prophet and Psalmist David says: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits" (Psalm 103:2). He then mentions some of these benefits: "**Who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases, Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, Who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's... He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities... As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him**" (Psalm 103:3-13). The Psalmist also says: "**What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me? I will take up the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord**" (Psalm 116:12, 13).

St. Augustine comments on the above verses by saying: "The Psalmist who said this Psalm, showed how great were the deeds which the Lord did with him. He also searched for what he should render to the Lord, and found nothing! Because whatever you give, it is what you already got from the Lord in return. What did the Psalmist find to render to the Lord for all His benefits? Take up the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. Who gave him the cup of salvation, except He Who wants him to render to Him something for His benefits".

The Prophet Jeremiah says: "This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, **because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness**" (Lamentations 3:21-23). "**He gives to all life, breath, and all things... for in Him we live and move and have our being**" (Acts 17:25, 28).

From the beginning God displayed Himself to Moses as **"merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin"** (Exodus 34:6, 7). He also said on the tongue of Prophet Isaiah **"For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but My kindness shall not depart from you, nor shall My covenant of peace be removed, says the Lord, who has mercy on you"** (Isaiah 54:10). And the Prophet David speaks to God and says: **"Remember, O Lord, Your tender mercies and Your lovingkindness, for they are from of old"** (Psalm 25:6).

3 - FOR HIS AMAZING LOVINGKINDNESS

The amazing lovingkindness of God gets complete hold of man. He is like a father who is kind to his children, and like the bird who gathers its offsprings. The Lord Jesus, grieving over Jerusalem said: **"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing!"** (Luke 13:34).

He has not dealt with man according to his sins, nor punished him according to his iniquities (Psalm 103:10). God says by the Prophet Isaiah: **"For a mere moment I have forsaken you, but with great mercies I will gather you. With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment; but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you, says the Lord, your Redeemer"** (Isaiah 54:7, 8). And He says to the Prophet Moses: **"For the Lord your God is a merciful God, He will not forsake you nor destroy you, nor forget the covenant of your fathers which He swore to them"** (Deuteronomy 4:31).

Solomon said in the prayer of consecrating the Altar: **"Lord God ..., there is no God in heaven above or on earth below like You, who keep Your covenant and mercy with Your servants who walk before You with all their hearts"** (1 Kings 8:23). And the Psalmist says: **"Lord, You have been favorable to Your land; ... You have forgiven the iniquity of Your people; you have covered all their sins. You have taken away all Your wrath; you have turned from the fierceness of Your anger"** (Psalm 85:1-3). God in His lovingkindness also says: **"I have stretched out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, according to their own thoughts"** (Isaiah 65:2).

The Lord Jesus says about the lovingkindness of God: **"For He is kind to the unthankful and evil"** (Luke 6:35). And St. Paul says **"when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared ..."** (Titus 3:4), and calls Him in another place **"The Father of mercies"** (2 Corinthians 1:3). **When all the doors are shut in our faces, God's door always remains open and will not shut in the face of the most evil person, " ... the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out"** (John 6:37).

The sick man of Bethesda who had an infirmity thirty-eight years was asked by Christ

"Do you want to be made well?" The sick man answered Him, "Sir, I have no man" (John 5:6, 7), for this reason Christ came to him. Christ is the helper for he who has no help and the hope for he who has no hope. Again the woman who had a flow of blood for twelve years, and had suffered many things from many physicians, had spent all that she had and was no better, but rather grew worse (Mark 5:25, 26). As soon as she touched the garment of Christ she was healed. When the world aggravates or annoys us from any side, we find the eternal arms of Christ opened to carry and enclose us.

God meets our sins with love, kindness and mercy. No wonder He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities (Psalm 103:10). Peter has denied Him cursing and swearing that he did not know Him. After that a rooster crowed, and Peter remembered the words of the Saviour and he went out and wept bitterly (Matthew 26:74, 75). **What happened after that? Christ met him after His Resurrection and asked him three times "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" And when he answered with the affirmative, Jesus told him "Feed My lambs" (John 21:15). Christ restored him back to his Apostolic status after denying Him. Was this the right reward for a Disciple who had denied, cursed and sworn?**

Saul of Tarsus (The Apostle Paul) who persecuted the Church of God in excess and was destroying her, who used to bring the Christians bound to the prisons, and said about himself "I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man" (1 Timothy 1:13), Christ dealt gently with him. Christ met him near Damascus and asked him: "Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" (Acts 9:4), and when Saul replied: "Lord, what do You want me to do?" (Acts 9:6), the Lord made him a chosen vessel of Him, to bear His name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel (Acts 9:15), he was truly an Apostle for the whole world. He is our kind God Who does not deal with us according to our deeds and many sins.

4 - OUR LACK OF LOVE TO GOD IS AN INSULT TO HIM

Our lack of love to God in response to His love is considered an insult to Him. In more than one place in both the Old and the New Testaments Christ presents Himself as the groom and the human soul as the bride. The Holy Bible contains a whole book; Song of Solomon, in which God presents His love to us in a symbolic picture as the love of the groom and the bride. He also presents it in the New Testament in more than one place as in the parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13).

Christ has betrothed us to Himself: "For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:2). **The Groom wants His bride to be for Him, and for Him alone. She is not to look to someone else, nor to give her love to another. As God is the Groom for our souls, He wants us totally to Himself, and He considers our lack of loving Him as an insult to Him.**

From the expressions which God used in the Old Testament to portray His people who used

to deviate from His worship to other worships: **"My people played the harlot with other gods"** (Judges 2:17), **indicating that they gave their love to other gods, or belonged to other gods.** St. Paul says: "if, while her husband lives, she (a woman) marries another man, she will be called an adulteress" (Romans 7:3).

5 - LOVE OF MAN TO GOD MAKES HIM FEEL THE INSIGNIFICANT AND TRIVIALITY OF THE WORLD

The person who loves God is always occupied by Him, his desires are to heaven, and consequently desires a better world, i.e., a heavenly one (Hebrews 11:16). St. Paul says "So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord... We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:6, 8). He also expressed his desires by saying "... having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better" (Philippians 1:23).

When Simeon the Elder took the Child Jesus in his arms in the Temple, he blessed God, and said: "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; For my eyes have seen Your salvation" (Luke 2:29, 30). The Psalmist says: "Woe is me, that I dwell in Meshech, that I dwell among the tents of Kedar!" (Psalm 120:5), and "I am a stranger in the earth; do not hide Your commandments from me" (Psalm 119:19). When Jacob stood in front of the Pharaoh of Egypt, the Pharaoh asked him "How old are you?", he answered: "The days of the years of my pilgrimage are one hundred and thirty years; few and evil" (Genesis 47:8, 9).

Solomon who was the wisest among all the people of his time, after experiencing all worldly affairs said: "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. What profit has a man from all his labor in which he toils under the sun?" (Ecclesiastes 1:1, 2).

The saints and righteous people became ascetic and lived like outsiders and strangers for the love of Christ the King because of their feeling of the triviality of the present world. The more the love of man to Christ grows, the more man detests everything in the world. **By that we understand the words of the Apostle: "Do not love the world or the things in the world"** (1 John 2:15).

6 - LOVE OF MAN GUARDS HIM AGAINST FALLING

Love binds the person to whom he loves, whether the beloved is present or absent. The deeper the love is, the stronger it holds his feelings and senses. **If this kind of love is between a person and God, the person feels himself always in the presence of God, in any place and at all times. He converses with Him, is careful to do what pleases Him, and avoids what displeases Him.** This love protects the person from falling into "the sin which so easily ensnares us" (Hebrews 12:1).

The words of the Prophet David: **"I have set the Lord always before me;** because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved" (Psalm 16:8), express his deep love to God, and thus the constant feeling of being in His presence. **Likewise, the words of the Prophet Elijah: "As the Lord of hosts lives, before whom I stand"** (1 Kings 18:15), **and those of the righteous Joseph when the wife of his master Potiphar pressed on him to sin with her "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"** (Genesis 39:9).

We may be surprised from the words of Joseph! After what happened to him at the hands of his brothers he did not say: "Where is God? If God is there, then why has He forsaken me and let my brothers do what they did and sell me as a slave when I am a son of Jacob and a descendant of Abraham and Isaac". Joseph was different, his feeling of being in the presence of God was immense, that is how he was rescued from a cruel temptation and a fatal sin.

We wish to add a point here, that the hard circumstances of life, its strong currents, desires and difficult temptations push many people who are not established in the love of God, to abandon the Christian principles. Some end by stealing, accepting bribes, cheating or embezzling, and some end in leaving their faith entirely in fear of something or for running after the flesh and the world. What leads people to such behaviour is not the pressure of the world alone, but more their lack of love for Christ.

From the time of the Apostles, the believers were subjected to such pressures and more, and in spite of that, nothing could alter their faith or shift them from their love to God which is in Christ Jesus. Let us listen to the Apostle Paul saying to the Corinthians "To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat" (1 Corinthians 4:11-13). He also said about himself and about the believers: "We stand in jeopardy every hour" (1 Corinthians 15:30) and said that he dies daily (1 Corinthians 15:31).

There is no explanation for that except that love bears all things for the sake of the beloved and endures all things (1 Corinthians 13:7). **Moreover, these pressures and difficulties result in victory for those who love God: "Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us"** (Romans 8:37).

7 - LOVE OF MAN TO GOD DELIVERS HIM FROM SPIRITUAL THEFTS:

By Spiritual theft we mean anything which can steal your love to God, even if it is good and valid! This is a sensitive and important point, since a thief usually steals when no one is noticing him. He does not steal a house unless he is sure that its inhabitants are absent or asleep. Here the thief is Satan.

We should not disregard this matter since what steals our love to God may be legitimate, such as our love to our parents, wife or children. The Lord Jesus says: "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me" (Matthew 10:37). Beware of anyone or anything that can steal your love to God. It could be a member of your family, money, prestigious position, or a scientific degree which you are studying for. It could be a person whom you befriended for a long time, or pleasures of life which are many these days.

St. Augustine says: "Be careful, else Satan steals you and says to you that God created all things for you to enjoy. The people forget their only creator and neglect Him when they do not use the created things graciously but obscenely. The Apostle described those people by saying: "... who worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, Who is blessed forever" (Romans 1:25).

D) LOVE OF MAN TO GOD AND HIS LOVE TO THE WORLD

The word "world" has three meanings: it means the world in its geographical sense, the world meaning the creation as the Lord Jesus instructed His Disciples saying: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, ... teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19, 20), and the world meaning sinful desires and worldly evils as the Apostle John says: "For all that is in the world-- the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life-- is not of the Father but is of the world" (1 John 2:16). **What we mean here is the third meaning as the Apostle says: "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one"** (1 John 5:19).

The Holy Bible speaks clearly about the dangers of loving the world: "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world-- the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life-- is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever" (1 John 2:15-17). And the Apostle James says in an enquiring manner: **"Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God"** (James 4:4).

St. Augustine says: "There are two kinds of love, the love of the world and the love of God. If the love of the world gets hold of us, there is no way that the love of God will be in us. Let go of the love to the world, in order for the love of God to replace it. No one says in his heart that this is not true. The Holy Spirit says that by the Apostle John and nothing could be more truthful: "If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15). Possess the love of the Father in order to share the inheritance with the Son.

You are a vessel, empty it in order to receive the Holy Spirit. It is good not to love the

world, in order that the Church sacraments would not be for our destruction, instead of being a means to strengthen us for salvation. What strengthen us for salvation is to be rooted in love "a form of godliness" not its image (2 Timothy 3:5). The form of godliness is good and holy, but it is useless without the root.

Do we not throw the severed branch in the fire? Posses the root not the image. But how are you rooted? By possessing love as the Apostle says: "that you, being rooted and grounded in love" (Ephesians 3:17). And how is love rooted in the barren desert of the world, when "all that is in the world-- the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life-- is not of the Father but is of the world" (1 John 2:16), and the question is: Why do I not love what God made?

You either love the mortal things which vanish with time, or you do not love the world and live forever with God. Does the love of the world fold you under its wings? Get hold of Christ fast. For because of you He was mortal in the world, in order for you to live forever. He was mortal on earth without losing His eternity. But you were born mortal and by sin you became mortal. You became mortal by sin, but He was mortal on earth by grace for the forgiveness of sins. What a difference between the two cases, between the criminal and He Who came to visit him! Sometimes, a person goes to visit his imprisoned friend. The two of them sit in the prison cell, but they are totally unlike. One is in the prison cell because of breaking the law, while the other is in the prison cell because of his humanity. Likewise, in our case, we were caught sinning and deserve death, and He in His mercy came down to us as a Saviour and was imprisoned with us".

The Holy Bible makes a clear distinction between the love of God and the love of the world, between light and darkness, as between good and evil. We should not mix between the love of God and the love of the world, and one's own behaviour exhibits his kind of love, whether it is for God or for the world. Solomon says in his songs "Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is as strong as death" (Song 8:6). The command of Christ is: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37), and we should not share this love with another, or any worldly matters. But our love to the people should be through our love to God, which sanctifies, strengthens and purifies it.

Two women came to Solomon, King of Israel, over a quarrel. Each of the two women claimed that she was the mother of a living child. As Solomon wanted to give his judgement, he said "Bring me a sword and divide the living child in two, and give half to one, and half to the other". The true mother spoke to the king, for she yearned with compassion for her son; and she said, "O my lord, give her the living child, and by no means kill him!" But the other said, "Let him be neither mine nor yours, but divide him". So the king answered and said, "Give the first woman the living child, and by no means kill him; she is his mother" (1 Kings 3:16-27). The untrue mother did not care if the child died. But the true mother accepted only to see her son alive and well. **Likewise, God wants the heart of man and his total love. But Satan, because he is a thief, is happy with whatever he can get.**

Many may ask: "How can a person live in the world without loving and dealing with it?"

St. Augustine says "Love God and do what you like". In this case you will not do what you want, but what God wants, for "the love of Christ compels us" (2 Corinthians 5:14), as the Apostle says. Let your love to God be first, and then you will know what to do not to offend it. Friendship with the world is enmity with God (James 4:4), and often Christ is wounded in the house of His friends (Zechariah 13:6). Let us beware that "because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold" (Matthew 24:12).

E) WHERE DOES LOVE OF MAN TO GOD SHOW?

Where does the love of man to God show?

a) In his love to God more than his love to anyone or anything, even if it were pure or legitimate. We spoke about this point previously.

b) In his love to all creation, especially, mankind. We also mentioned this point before, and we shall elaborate on it in the next chapter.

c) In sharing the suffering of Christ. Sharing the suffering and difficulties of another person, or bearing his afflictions, shows the love to this person. Christ has completed the Redemption on the Cross, but His suffering is not completed up till now. St. Paul said to the Colossians: "I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church" (Colossians 1:24).

The believers in Christ fill up His afflictions up till now. In His message to the minister of the Church of Ephesus, the Lord Jesus said: "**I know your works, your labor, your patience, ... and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary**" (Revelation 2:2, 3). The Lord Jesus made from carrying the cross, a characteristic of discipleship by following Him. When does a man carry the cross? Christ says : "daily" (Luke 9:23), and when do we carry the cross in the true and spiritual meaning? Everywhere, and in all occasions. It is the live testimony that we are His disciples and we follow Him "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).

All the afflictions which comes to the believer, as long as they are not because of his sins,

are for the sake of Christ, whether they are spiritual or physical. The Lord Jesus foretold us saying: "And you will be hated by all for My name's sake" (Matthew 10:22), and it is clear that this hate is not because of an iniquity we committed, but "for His name's sake".

d) In serving Christ: Service in general, in the spiritual meaning, is the practical expression of the love of man to God. Christ completed His Redemption on the Cross, and established the Church on the day of Pentecost. But He left the task of extending His Kingdom on earth to His Disciples, and to those who are disciples at their hands. We say every day in the Lord's Prayer which Christ taught us: "Thy Kingdom come"!

Service or ministry is not a monopoly for a group of people, nor it is of one kind. The Apostle Paul says: "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord" (1 Corinthians 12:4, 5).

The ministry of teaching is only one of many kinds of ministries. **We do not exaggerate if we say there are countless kinds of ministries. Ministry could be a nice word of comfort to someone, consoling a sad person, helping a person in his difficulties, or giving a sincere advice. We should understand that ministry in any form, is an expression of love. Hence, a loving person knows how to minister well, contrary to a person who lacks love and has many gifts.** The Apostle Paul says: "through love serve one another" (Galatians 5:13) and points in his Epistle to the Thessalonians "their work of faith, and labor of love" (1 Thessalonians 1:3). **As we serve our brethren, we serve God "inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me" (Matthew 25:40).**

F) VIRTUES RELATED TO LOVE OF MAN TO GOD

We mentioned earlier that all virtues are connected to the virtue of love. We said that love in comparison to other virtues resembles the string of a rosary which goes through all the beads, to make from them one unit. For this reason the Apostle Paul calls love "the bond of perfection" (Colossians 3:14). We shall speak about some basic virtues such as humility, purity of heart, patience, longsuffering and giving in their relation to the love of man to God.

1 - HUMILITY:

Humility and love go hand in hand and support one another. St. Augustine says:

"Where love is, there is peace, and where humility is, we find love". St. John El-Dargy says: "There is nothing more superior than humility and love, for God exalts the lowly (Luke 1:52) and love keeps the exaltation, as the Apostle says: "love never fails and never ceases (1 Corinthian 13:8).

Humility strengthens and supports our love to God. When one realizes his many sins and bad character, and also senses that God is still faithful in His love and care for him, the feeling of humility and lowliness inflames his heart with the love of God. Such feelings inflamed the fire of love to God in the hearts of many saints, and still move many others to this splendid aim.

If humility is an important factor in supporting love, love in turn strengthens humility and supports it. This seems so in our relation with God and with people. Our feeling of the strong and deep love of God to us, makes us more lowly. On the other hand, our humility induces the love of God to us. The same thing happens with our relation with others.

2 - PURITY OF HEART:

The Lord Jesus in His sermon on the mount blessed the pure in heart, for they shall see God (Matthew 5:8), and the Psalmist says: "Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart" (Psalm 24:3, 4). The pure heart is the heart which is purified from sin and transgression, and bears the fruits of the Spirit. The first fruit of the Holy Spirit is love (Galatians 5:22). **And if the Lord Jesus blessed the pure in heart for they shall see God, seeing God needs first of all love, because God is love.**

3 - PATIENCE AND LONGSUFFERING:

Love of man to God and also our love to others - does not show itself except by patience and longsuffering, since love bears all things (1 Corinthians 13:7). Besides, love makes it easier for us to bear difficulties, pains and troubles. For the sake of the love of God, one is ready to accept pains and all its consequences. The Apostle Paul says: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Romans 8:36, 37).

We have an excellent example in the Old Testament in the marriage of Jacob (the father of the tribes) to Rachel. When Jacob wanted to marry Rachel, his uncle Laban asked Jacob to first serve him for seven years. Jacob did, and the Bible says: "So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed only a few days to him because of the love he had for her" (Genesis 29:20). The story did not end here, because Laban deceived Jacob and made Jacob marry Leah, Rachel's older sister. Again when Jacob requested to marry Rachel, Laban asked him to serve

another seven years, and Jacob did. So, Jacob served his uncle Laban fourteen years for his great love to Rachel.

4 - GIVING:

Giving is tied to love, and when we speak about giving we do not mean material giving only, but giving in all its forms. We do not exaggerate when we say that material giving is the lowest kind of giving. Giving consists of different levels, from material giving to giving one's time and effort, until, for some people, it amounts to giving of self when one dedicates himself totally to God, such as living the life of chastity in monasticism, or the ministry of priesthood in the world, or being dedicated in one form or the other.

God does not accept our giving and offerings unless they are done in love: "If a man would give for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly despised" (Song 8:7). The Apostle Paul says: "And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:3). The beloved Apostle John relates between giving and love: "**But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth**" (1 John 3:17, 18).

The Apostle Paul says: "So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7). **No doubt that cheerful giving shows what is in the heart of the giver from his love to God**, because as he gives to someone, he feels that he gives to God Himself.

There are many stories in Church history which show us that the more one loves God, the more he increases his giving. **We mention here one of these stories which is about St. Peter the worshipper.**

ST. PETER THE WORSHIPPER:

He started his life harsh in his dealings, and extremely miser and mean and people called him the merciless. One day a poor man came asking him for alms and he refused him, but the poor man continued asking him. It happened that the servant of the rich man arrived carrying loaves of bread. So he took one loaf and threw it in the face of the poor, aiming to hit him not to be merciful to him. But the poor man bent down, took the bread and went away.

The Lord wanted to change the heart of the rich man from his great love of money. That night, he saw a dream, as if it was the day of judgement and he was standing in front of the angels.

He had no good deeds except the loaf of bread with which he hit the poor man. He woke up terrified and trembling from his dream and kept thinking and blaming himself for his ruthlessness.

This was how his meanness and nastiness changed to great mercy, **to the extent that after he distributed all his wealth to the poor, he did not find anything else to give except his robe. So he sold it and gave its price to the poor.** It was said that when he did not find anything else, he left his town, sold himself as a slave and gave the price to the poor.

When the news of his virtues spread, he went to the Sheheit Desert and spent the rest of his life in ascetic worshipping. That prepared him to know the time of his departure from this world. The Coptic Church celebrates his feast on 25 of the Coptic month of Tobah every year.

G) MARRIAGE SUPPER OF THE LAMB

While we speak about the love of man to God, we ask about the reward of this love.

St. John in the Book of Revelation says: "Then a voice came from the throne, saying, "Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both small and great!" And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thundering, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! **Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready**". And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, "Write: **Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!**" And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God" (Revelation 19:5-9).

What does the call to the marriage supper of the Lamb mean? Its meaning is beyond any expression or thought. All the joy and happiness in this world do not compare with the marriage supper of the lamb. It is the great jubilee of love. The King of kings and Lord of lords makes the supper of His marriage with the bride of His love which is the Church and her members. Countless number of angels, thousands and tens of thousands, come to serve: "Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?" (Hebrews 1:14). These angels ministered to people on earth, and now do the same in heaven.

Who is this bride which was given to sit beside the Lord Jesus the slain Lamb? How beautiful and amazing she is? The blood of the Lamb converted sinners and they now form His bride and they carry His image and sit with Him.

In this inexpressible glory the bride is as if in a dream. But because of her true love, she can only look to her beloved - the Lamb Who is in the middle of the throne - her Groom. There are praises by the angels and heavenly hosts, but she does not listen except to one voice, that of her Groom, the King of kings. **Now she can stay with Him forever and can see Him face to face. She now realizes His glory which was as in a mirror** (2 Corinthians 3:18). On earth she used to see in a mirror, dimly, but now face to face (1 Corinthians 13:12). **The train to heaven took the bride to the last station, the greatest one, the station of love.**

She will see the Groom in His glory: "fairer than the sons of men" (Psalm 45:2). He will tell her "How fair is your love, my sister, my spouse!" (Song 4:10).

When the bride remembers her past and realizes that her Groom is the King of the kings of the earth, she falls at His feet worshipping Him. But He raises her up to sit beside Him: "And the glory which You gave Me I have given them" (John 17:22). **She is His bride about whom is said: "at Your right hand stands the queen in gold from Ophir"** (Psalm 45:9). **The bride realizes all that by her love to her Groom. Who can now recognize the previous sinner in the person of this bride? She puts on the dress of the queen in white linen, crowned by the crown of righteousness, in place of the humility and shame suffered for His sake, in patience, lowliness and love, as she carried the cross joyfully and followed Him all the way.**

It is a great joy for the Heavenly Father to see the fruits of the sufferings of His Beloved Son. His bride are those who were the sinners, but now they carry the image of His Son Who gave Himself for them, and died for their sake. He freed them from the grip of sin and its power, so that they reflect the glory of the Creator. All of them are the sinners whom the love of the Son of God transformed into saints, their first virtue was love.

Blessed is he who can stand in the presence of the Lord that day. His great love qualifies him for this inexpressible glory, by the power of Redemption completed on the Cross at Golgotha. Indescribable glory is for the redeemed. They came from the great tribulation and washed their clothes and whitened them in the blood of the Lamb. "Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (Revelation 7:15-17).

Lord, what a glory! It is the everlasting life which you promised all those who love You.

CHAPTER 3

LOVE OF MAN TO HIS BROTHER

- A) Love of man to his brother in the teachings of the Lord Jesus**
- B) Love of man to his brother in the teachings of the Apostles**
- C) Brotherly love in the life of the Church**
- D) Christ presents a new understanding for the love of man to his brother**
- E) Christ's teaching about "Who the neighbor is?"**
- F) Love of enemies in Christ's teaching**
- G) Features of Christian love in the love of man to his brother**

God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. In Him there is no variation or shadow of turning (Hebrews 13:8; James 1:17). And if God is love as proclaimed in the New Testament (1 John 4:8; 6:14), He was also love in the Old Testament, and indeed from the beginning. In His characteristics, God never changes. **When we realise the love of God in the New Testament in its fullness and depth, that does not mean that He was not loving in the past.**

God said by the Prophet Moses: **"You shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord. The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God"** (Leviticus 19:18, 34) and **"Therefore love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt"** (Deuteronomy 10:19).

The Wise said: "Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all sins. **Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a fatted calf with hatred. He who covers a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates friends"** (Proverbs 10:12; 15:17; 17:9). He also said: **"Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles; Lest the Lord see it, and it displease Him"** (Proverbs 24:17, 18).

When the children of Israel sinned and made for themselves a moulded calf of gold and worshipped it, Moses showed his love to the people and interceded for them to the Lord saying: "Oh, these people have committed a great sin, and have made for themselves a god of gold! **Yet now, if You will forgive their sin-- but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written"** (Exodus 32:31, 32).

The Psalmist says: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, running down on the edge of his garments. It is like the dew of Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion; for there the Lord commanded the blessing-- life forevermore" (Psalm 133:1-3).

We mentioned that the teaching of the love of man to his brother was in the Old Testament. Yet the clear and full understanding of this command is only seen in the New Testament, where God demonstrated His love in its fullness, whether in His love to mankind or in His teachings about the love of man to his brother in the Person of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord. The Apostle Paul says: **"But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another"** (1 Thessalonians 4:9). We notice the expression which the Apostle used **"for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another"**.

A) LOVE OF MAN TO HIS BROTHER IN THE TEACHINGS OF THE LORD JESUS

Numerous are the teachings of the Lord Jesus about brotherly love: **"You shall love your neighbor as yourself"** (Matthew 19:19; Galatians 5:14), and in the Sermon on the Mount He says: "And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away" (Matthew 5:41, 42), "And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise" (Luke 6:31). **"This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. These things I command you, that you love one another"** (John 15:12, 14, 17).

He who does not love his brother isolates himself from the Church, and it is known that there is no salvation for him outside the Church. The Lord Jesus says: "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that "by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established". **And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector"** (Matthew 18:15-17).

Then the Apostle Peter came to the Lord Jesus and asked Him: "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, **"I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven"** (Matthew 18:21, 22). **Immediately after that Jesus gave us a parable in which He explained the consequences for him who does not love his brother. He said:**

"The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, "Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all". Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt. But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, "Pay me what you owe!" So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you all". And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt.

So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. **Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, "You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?" And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother**

his trespasses" (Matthew 18:23-35).

More than that, the Lord Jesus makes practical love the qualification for inheriting the Kingdom of Heaven:

"When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me". Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, "Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?" And the King will answer and say to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me".

Then He will also say to those on the left hand, **"Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me".** Then they also will answer Him, saying, "Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?" Then He will answer them, saying, **"Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me".** And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (Matthew 25:31-46).

The Lord Jesus says: "And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward" (Matthew 10:42). Perhaps a cup of cold water is trivial in the eyes of the people. But when it is given with love, it becomes a great thing and has a reward from God, because it fulfils the command.

B) LOVE OF MAN TO HIS BROTHER

IN THE TEACHINGS OF THE APOSTLES

Our teacher the Apostle Paul says: **"Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.** For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, You shall not covet", **and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, You shall love your neighbor as yourself"** (Romans 13:8, 9). He adds: **"Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilment of the law"** (Romans 13:10).

He writes to the Corinthians saying: **"Pursue love, ... Let all that you do be done with love"** (1 Corinthians 14:1; 16:14). And he says to the Galatians: **"Through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself"** (Galatians 5:13, 14). **And he relates our love to one another through Christ's love to us: "Walk in love, as Christ also has loved us** and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma" (Ephesians 5:2).

This Apostle speaks about Christian virtues and crowns them with love as he says to the Colossians: "Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. **But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection"** (Colossians 3:12-14). **He makes love the purpose of all God's commandments:** "Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith" (1 Timothy 1:5).

The Apostle James calls brotherly love the royal law: "If you really fulfil the royal law according to the Scripture, You shall love your neighbor as yourself, you do well" (James 2:8).

The Apostle John - the Disciple whom the Lord Jesus loved - speaks in length about brotherly love:

"For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, ... We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:11, 14-18). He also says: **"Beloved, let**

us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love" (1 John 4:7, 8).

It is mentioned that the Apostle John was the Apostle of love, in his preaching, his sermons, his Epistles and his Gospel. As he became old and unable to preach, they used to carry him to the church and let him stand between the believers to whom he repeated the phrase "My children, love one another". As the believers heard this phrase many times they asked him why he repeated these words? His answer was: "Because it is the Lord's command, and it is sufficient for our salvation if we kept it".

The Apostle Peter says: **"Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart. Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing. And above all things have fervent love for one another, for love will cover a multitude of sins"** (1 Peter 1:22; 3:8, 9; 4:8).

The Apostle Paul, the Philosopher of Christianity compares between knowledge and love: **"Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies"** (1 Corinthians 8:1), **and makes love the first fruit of the Spirit in the believer's soul:** "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22, 23).

In dealing with one another, he advised the Romans saying: **"We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak,** and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification. For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me" (Romans 15:1-3).

C) BROTHERLY LOVE IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

The divine commandment has no value without fulfilling it in a practical way. The purpose of the commandment is living by it, as we obey it. The Apostle Paul expresses that by saying: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal" (1 Corinthians 13:1). That is, such a person becomes like an empty drum. There is no value for the theoretical knowledge, as it does not advance the person in his spiritual or practical life. John, the Apostle of love said: "My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18). **No wonder that the early Church which received from the Apostles of Christ the teachings of brotherly love, applied it practically.**

The early Christian society consisted mostly of poor members and the Church used to care for the needy, the widows and the like of its members, by distributing a daily meal to them. This service used to be called "the service of tables" (Acts 6:2). And as the Church members increased in number, the Church appointed seven deacons to be responsible for the service of the poor.

The Book of Acts gives us practical proof of the belief of the early Church members in brotherly love. It mentions those who sold their houses and their lands, and gave the proceeds to the Church to distribute to the needy (Acts 4:34). Among them were Barnabas and Ananias and his wife Sapphira (Acts 4:36; 5:1, 2). It also mentions a disciple named Tabitha, who was full of good works and charitable deeds, especially for the widows (Acts 9:36-39).

Again when the number of believers increased the Church organized financial aid for the poor, fulfilling the commandment of brotherly love. **The Book of Acts expresses that by saying: "Nor was there anyone among them who lacked"** (Acts 4:34).

As the believers kept the commandment of brotherly love, the common or communal life was established as the Book of Acts indicates: "Neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common" (Acts 4:32). We notice that early Christianity was the result of a great spiritual understanding by the work of the Grace of God in the heart. **All the Christians became members of one body, whose head is Christ, and they were of one heart and one soul** (Acts 4:32; Romans 12:5; Colossians 1:18).

As a result, they sensed the pains of the needy among them. The Church did not ask its members to give their alms, as they gave by themselves. More than that, they implored the Church to accept their gifts. This is what the Apostle reveals about the Macedonians: "For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the

saints". The secret of that is mentioned by the Apostle in the following verse: "but they first gave themselves to the Lord" (2 Corinthians 8:1-5).

Besides caring for its needy members the Church showed brotherly love in other areas, such as caring for the ministers and the teachers according to the commands of the Apostles in their instructions and canons. The Church ministers cared for the sick, the elderly, the disable and the crippled through praying for them and visiting them. That was mentioned in the message of Clement to the Corinthians and in the book "The Shepherd" by Hermes.

Again the Church cared for the imprisoned as there were many imprisoned members, some because of their faith and others because of debts they owed. Both groups were visited with charity and love. This was accomplished by the Church deacons and the lay believers. That was clear from what the Apostle Paul said: "Remember the prisoners as if chained with them-- those who are mistreated-- since you yourselves are in the body also" (Hebrews 13:3). That is the teaching of the Lord Jesus "I was in prison and you came to Me" (Matthew 25:36).

Brotherly love was also demonstrated to those who had difficult times and experienced disasters. The Church was praised from early times because she bravely endured persecutions and tribulations (See Hebrews 10:32-34).

The Church also cared for and entertained strangers (Romans 12:13; 16:1, 2; Hebrews 6:10; 13:2; 1 Peter 4:9; 3 John 5-8). In the Epistles and documents of the early Church we find prayers and petitions presented for the strangers and the needy. Perhaps this is displayed clearly in the Liturgy of St. Basil: "Bless the crown of the year with Your goodness **for the sake of the poor of Your people, the widow, the orphan, the traveller, the stranger, ...**"

Brotherly love was also obvious from the early stages of the history of the Church, in caring for poor Churches in hazardous situations. That was clear from the Book of Acts and from the Epistles of St. Paul. Offerings were collected for the poor of Jerusalem, Paul himself gave this matter his personal attention and collected offerings from the Churches of Antioch, Galatia, Macedonia, and Achaia, for this reason (Acts 11:27-30; 2 Corinthians 8:1-5; Romans 15:26; Galatians 2:10).

There is a final point in the subject of brotherly love in the early stages of Church history; the Christians called themselves brothers and sisters, confirming this fact. They had one spirit and one soul (Ephesians 4:1-6), **and they greeted each other with a holy kiss** (Romans 16:16); 1 Corinthians 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:26; 1 Peter 5:14). The love of Christians to each other astonished the Jews who used to say: "Look how they (the Christians) love one another!" And when a Christian stranger arrived in any town he was accepted as a brother, was offered shelter, and the saintly widows washed his feet. He was treated with brotherly love.

This subject is big - and there is not enough space to cover it. It is enough to say that the spirit of brotherly love carried with it the sense of equality; as there was no distinction because of color, race or place of origin. They all followed one Lord, sat side by side at the eating tables, stood in the churches praying, free men and slaves together: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3: 28).

After the era of the early Church we still find the same brotherly spirit in the lives and teachings of the Church Fathers, and also find it clearly in the lay believers from the following two stories:

It is written in a book entitled "Paradise of the Monks" a story in the life of **St. Macarius the Great, the father of the Skete monks in El-Natroon Valley**. Once he had some haughty thoughts that he was the greatest among all men in his time. The Good Lord wanted to teach him a lesson. The Lord informed him that he did not yet acquire the virtues of a certain woman who lived with the wives of her sons in Alexandria, Egypt, at that time; the Lord told him that he could find out for himself. The saint was moved by holy zeal; how could he a man who left the world to live an ascetic life in the wilderness not yet acquire the virtues of a married woman living in the world!

He left right away to Alexandria and arrived there on Sunday morning. He went to the church, and at the end of the liturgy he went as a lay person to take communion from the hands of the Patriarch. He noticed on one side a woman praying fervently. The saint thought that the woman was in difficulty and was moved to help her. As he was asking her why she was upset, the Spirit informed him that she was the woman whom the Lord wanted him to see.

The saint enquired about the life of the woman. She mentioned that her two sons were married to foreign women, and that they all decided to live with love. She did not favour either of her daughters-in-law over the other one. They all decided that a bad word would not be uttered from any one of them that provoked the other. They lived in this manner for a long time. For her two sons there was one saving pot under her care and they did not know how much money it contained. As to why she was praying fervently in the church, she thought that God was not pleased with her sons because they had not entered into temptation for a long time! Her story was very useful for the saint and he realised the value of brotherly love in the sight of God.

The second story is about the conversion of St. Pachomius, the father of the monks' communal life. He built the first monastery in the world, which is the model of present day monasteries, had thousands of disciples and wrote the rules of monasticism which were adopted by monks in the western world.

St. Pachomius was born to pagan parents and grew up as a pagan. At the age of twenty, he was inscribed as a soldier in the army of Emperor Constantine the Great in the war against Maximian in 310 A.D. The war did not last long as Maximian was defeated and killed and Pachomius left the army to live a civilian life.

What concerns us here is that during that war Pachomius' battalion was stationed at the city of Esna in Upper Egypt where he was acquainted with the Christians and their religion in that city. Although soldiers were in general disliked and hated because of their callous behaviour, the Christians of Esna went out to the soldiers carrying food for them, and dressed the wounds of their wounded men. They did that in modesty and gentleness which attracted the attention of Pachomius, who in turn asked for the source and reason of the kindness of those people. He was told that they were the Christians who kept the commandments of their religion.

As a result, as soon as he left the army he started to study this "new religion" and he was converted to Christianity in the year 314 A.D. It was not enough for Pachomius to become a Christian, but he decided to sanctify himself, left the world and became one of its greatest guides.

D) CHRIST PRESENTS A NEW UNDERSTANDING FOR THE LOVE OF MAN TO HIS BROTHER

In His teaching about love, the Lord Jesus said: **"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another"** (John 13:34). **What is the meaning of the words of Christ that love is a new commandment? Is love a new commandment, and we previously mentioned that this commandment existed in the Old Testament ... what does Jesus mean? St. Augustine gives us the answer. He says:**

The Lord declares that He is giving His Disciples a new commandment that we love one another, yet this commandment was previously given in the Old Testament where it was written "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18). Why then does the Lord call it a new commandment when it was that old? That is because He transferred us from the old and put on us the new man. It is not just any kind of love that renews us, it is the love which the Lord gives us. In order to distinguish it from other kinds of love, the Lord adds saying: "as I have loved you".

Husbands and wives love each other, parents their children, and all human relations which bind people. What about the love of adulterers and adulteresses? **For this reason Christ gave us a new commandment that we love one another; as He has loved us. It is the love which renews**

us and makes us new persons, inheritors of the New Testament, songsters of the new song. This is the love which renews the nations and the human race which fills the whole world. It works and gathers new people which form the body of the newly married bride for the Only Begotten Son.

For this reason, the members of this body have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it (1 Corinthians 12:25, 26). It is not like the wicked when they love one another, or as people love one another in a worldly manner. Rather they love one another as God's people, and are all the children of the Almighty and brothers to His Only Begotten Son. He who loves his neighbor in a holy spiritual way, loves God in him. This is the love which differs from worldly love, as the Lord distinguished it when He said: "as I have loved you", because what does He love in us except God?".

In summary, brotherly love in Christianity is not like the bodily love of the people of the world. Christian love in its first degree, in all its patterns and forms, is love which has been poured out in the hearts of Christian believers by the Holy Spirit Who was poured to us from above (Romans 5:5). It is the same kind of love by which Christ has loved you. This love does not want anything except love itself and it has no limit. But as Christ loved us to the end, likewise is the Christian love. It is not for a benefit, but it is a pure unique distinguished love "love your neighbor as yourself".

E) CHRIST'S TEACHING ABOUT WHO THE NEIGHBOR IS?

The Lord said in the past by the Prophet Moses: "You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, **but you shall love your neighbor as yourself**" (Leviticus 19:18). **It was thus settled in the minds of the children of Israel that the meaning of "neighbour" is confined to bodily relatives, whether as the same family, or as the Israelites who formed a nation which descended for one father, Abraham.**

The "love of neighbor" was the summary of the commandments written in the second tablet of the Ten Commandments. That was clear from the words of the Apostle Paul: "Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery", "You shall not murder", "You shall not steal", "You shall not bear false witness", "You shall not covet", and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself". Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilment of the law" (Romans 13:8-10).

But the Lord Jesus gave us a new understanding to the meaning of neighbor. The neighbor is no more a brother in the same family or the same nation, but is beyond this human understanding. That is, the neighbor is any other person, since all the people descended from one father, Adam. The Apostle Paul says: "And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth" (Acts 17:26).

The Lord Jesus gave us this new understanding about the neighbor in the parable of the "Good Samaritan".

A certain lawyer stood up to test Jesus, and not to learn from Him saying: "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?" So he answered and said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself". And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live". But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:25-29). Then Jesus answered and said to him a parable **known as the "Good Samaritan"**.

He said: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, "Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you". **"So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" And he said, "He who showed mercy on him". Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise"** (Luke 10:30-37).

The parable of the Good Samaritan is full of deep and useful contemplations. But what concerns us here is the definition of the word "neighbor". The Jews felt that they were all brothers, since they all descended from Abraham, and that they formed the people of God at that time.

Let us now review what happened to this Jewish man who was travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, badly wounded him, and departed. **A certain Jewish priest came down that road.** And when he saw his state which required help and compassion, he passed by on the other side. **Likewise did a Levite, who was also a minister of faith.** Then a certain Samaritan came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion.

We should realise that there was an ancient animosity between the Jews and the Samaritans, and that the worst swearing is for a Jew to call someone a Samaritan. This swearing was once directed to the Lord Jesus by the Jews when they answered and said to Him, "Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?" (John 8:48). In spite of that, when this Samaritan saw him, he had compassion, went to him bandaged his wounds; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he gave money to the innkeeper, and asked him to take care of him; and whatever more he spent, when he came again, he would repay the innkeeper.

That parable was clear and powerful. Hence the Lord Jesus asked the lawyer: "So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" And he answered right away, "He who showed mercy on him".

Christianity teaches and calls for love. Though love starts in one's own family, but it does not stop there. It includes all men and collects them between its compassionate arms. National patriotic spirits created huge barriers between different nations (Jews, Gentiles, Romans, Greeks and Barbarians, ... etc), to the extent that they were like strangers to each other. Then Christianity came to demolish all these barriers and to teach that God "has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth" (Acts 17:26).

By lauding the idea of humanity and placing it above national patriotism, Christianity gradually changed the image of the old world. It implanted the rigid idea of national patriotism with noble feelings and better concepts. Christianity infiltrated the civil and social lives of people by its virtues and goodness and led them towards the road of true civilization. The spirit of Christianity is a universal catholic spirit, which demolishes the barriers of enmity and hatred between different races and different nations.

F) LOVE OF ENEMIES IN CHRIST'S TEACHING

Christianity introduced a new commandment which never existed in the teachings of the philosophers nor the wise of this world. The Lord Jesus said in His sermon on the mount which contained the teachings of Christianity : **"You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy". But I say to you, "love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect"** (Matthew 5:43-48).

Yet what is the meaning of the saying of Jesus: "You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy"? Was this what the Old Testament Law taught?

The teaching of the Old Testament to the Jews was not to have personal hatred toward their enemies. The Law commanded them to treat their enemies well. The Lord said: "If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall surely bring it back to him again. If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden, and you would refrain from helping it, you shall surely help him with it" (Exodus 23:4, 5) and "You shall not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother. You shall not abhor an Egyptian, because you were an alien in his land" (Deuteronomy 23:7).

The Wise said: "Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles" (Proverbs 24:17) and also: "If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; For so you will heap coals of fire on his head, and the Lord will reward you" (Proverbs 25:21, 22). The same words were also commended by the Apostle Paul (Romans 12:20).

In fact the real enemy to the Jews was he who resisted and opposed God and thus God

opposed him and commanded His people as His governing body on earth to exterminate this person without mercy (Deuteronomy 23:3-6; Joshua 6:2, 20, 21). Yet when the era of these governments ended, the teachers of the Jews used these rules for their own personal vendetta, and that was what Jesus exposed and criticised in His teachings.

No doubt, to love one's enemy is a noble degree of Christian perfection for which we should all strive to achieve. At the end of His teaching about the love of the enemy, the Lord Jesus called us the real sons of God imitating our Heavenly Father Who makes His sun shine on both the good and wicked. The Lord ended His teaching by saying: "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48).

Indeed, man needs the work of God's grace in him to be able to fulfil this commandment. It is not an impossible commandment, as the saints lived with it in their lives. We have many examples:

Stephen, the first Christian Martyr, as his enemies were stoning him to death, he "cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin" (Acts 7:60). Indeed many martyrs and confessors displayed real love to those who persecuted and tortured them, and raised prayers for them. These prayers attracted them afterwards to the faith. At the same time the love of those martyrs and confessors to their enemies was a true proof for the superiority of Christianity and its teachings. They are not just theoretical teachings, and made many nonbelievers declare their faith, for which they paid a heavy price.

We do not deny that keeping the commandment of loving the enemy is not easy, and its fulfilment needs help:

a - Help from God for this commandment is necessary for the Lord Jesus said: "Without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Divine help is given to us by prayer and supplication. No doubt that God will help us because He knows our human nature which inclines to take revenge and to feel important.

b - By being full of love to God, we keep His commandment: "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). Besides that we should be filled with brotherly love towards him who acts as our enemy. We should look at him as a sinful, sick person, whom the devil got hold of and denied him the love of God and his brethren.

c - True humility helps us to imitate our Lord Jesus and to remember His saying: "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master" (Matthew 10:24, 25). What did the enemies of Jesus do to Him? They falsely accused Him, cursed and insulted Him, and He is God. Their

animosity kept increasing to its summit when they crucified the Lord of Glory. What was Jesus' response in the darkest moments when He was hung on the Cross: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34). It might have been said that delivering Himself to His enemies was a kind of weakness, but what could be said about Jesus asking forgiveness for His enemies?

d - Repaying evil with evil increases hostility and has very bad consequences, both physically and spiritually. From here we understand the wisdom of the Apostle as he says: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21).

On the other hand we say that to meet evil with love and charity tends to eliminate hostility.

It was said about Moalem Guirguis El-Gohary, that someone insulted him. So he went to complain to his brother **Moalem Ibrahim El-Gohary** who was one of the highest ranking civil servants at the time of the Mamlouks at the end of the eighteenth century. After listening to his brother, Moalem Ibrahim told him that he will cut the tongue of this person (meaning he will never insult his brother any more), called his servant and commanded him to take amounts of wheat, butter, cheese, and other goods to this person who insulted his brother.

Next day, Moalem Guirguis was passing by the house of this person who insulted him, and was astonished to find the same person who insulted him a day ago, now welcoming and esteeming him. He went to his brother and told him what happened. His brother Moalem Ibrahim explained that by doing kindness to this person, evil words will never again be uttered from his tongue!

G) FEATURES OF CHRISTIAN LOVE IN THE LOVE OF MAN TO HIS BROTHER

At the time of the Apostle Paul, the Church of Corinth in Greece was rich in spiritual gifts. Yet some of the members of this new Church used to boast of these gifts, or attempt to desire them more as something important. Such boasting and desiring of the gifts for the sake of the gifts themselves was wrong and the Apostle Paul elaborated to them on that matter.

In the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth chapters of his first Epistle to the Corinthians, St. Paul spoke about the spiritual gifts or the Grace as they were called. **At the end of the twelfth chapter he wrote: "But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way" (1 Corinthians 12:31). The more excellent way is to desire "Love", about which he wrote in detail in chapter 13 (1 Corinthians, Chapter 13).**

In that chapter, after speaking about the importance of love as the first Christian virtue, he pointed out that it is more important than the gifts of speaking in tongues, of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, of faith which moves mountains, of feeding the poor, or the gift of living an ascetic life.

Love as St. Paul explained in that chapter has two sides: one side demolishes all walls of sin and evil and we call that the negative side. The other side which we call the positive side builds every virtue in the Christian believer on the basis that love is the virtue of all virtues. We now consider both sides:

FIRST - The Negative Side:

By this we mean the effect of love in eliminating all faces of sin in the life of the believer.

*** Love does not envy:** (1 Corinthians 13:4)

Envy is a feeling of shortage, while love is the feeling of overabundance. Envy is an eye which looks down, but love looks up towards heaven which is the source of its overabundance and fullness. To realise how envy is evil, it is enough to know that the Jews delivered Jesus because of envy (Matthew 27:18; Mark 15:10) and also the brothers of Joseph sold him to the Ishmaelites because of envy.

The monk named "Befnotius" (known as "Bebnoda") was a disciple of St. Macarius the Great the father of the monks in the Skete Desert in Egypt. While he was a young monk he was able to acquire many spiritual gifts, that later qualified him to become the father of the monks of Skete after St. Macarius.

One day envy entered the heart of an old monk. One Sunday morning when all the monks left their cells and went to the church, this old monk entered the cell of Befnotius and hid his Bible between the palm leaves in the cell, went to the church and there he announced that his Bible was stolen. Abba Isidore the priest in charge asked to inspect the cells and the Bible was found in the cell of Befnotius. The only reaction of Befnotius was to shed tears and to ask the brethren to pray for him. He accepted the accusation and intensified his prayers, fasting and humility.

The rest of the story was that an evil spirit entered the old monk and he was tormented for a long time. Abba Isidore had the gift of casting out evil spirits but could not cast out the spirit in the old monk. When he was questioned the old monk confessed his sin. God wanted to honor Befnotius, and the evil spirit could only be cast out by his prayers.

*** Love does not parade itself, is not puffed up**

(1 Corinthians 13:4)

"Puff up" is pride and to parade one's self is the act and fruit of puffing up. He who parades himself, his capabilities, his gifts or anything he has, has forgotten that God is the source of all goodness and of everything he owns. And because God is the source of love, love glories in God the Giver as the Apostle says: "But he who glories, let him glory in the Lord" (2 Corinthians 10:17).

He who puffs himself up sees himself as important and righteous. He loves to glory himself more than to glory God. In fact this person does not know the reality of himself and that he is but a handful of dust from the earth. All goodness he has comes down to him from God, because: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights" (James 1:17).

We here mention an incident about **Arsenius, the great Roman saint**, known as the tutor

of the sons of kings because he was the tutor of Arcadius and Honorius, the two sons of Emperor Theodosius I. It was said that once he was sitting with an elderly simple Egyptian monk, listening and benefiting from him. Another monk saw that and was surprised that the tutor of king's sons was trying to benefit from this simple monk. St. Arsenius said to the monk that even though he had perfected Roman and Greek studies, he was ignorant of the elements of spirituality of the Egyptian monk.

*** Love does not behave rudely:** (1 Corinthians 13:5)

Discourteous behaviour becomes rude behaviour and leads to insulting others. **But because love has a simple eye which sees only what is good, it sees the Creator in His creation. Because it is pure it sees what is surrounded with purity.**

It was mentioned about a saintly monk that if he enters the cell of another monk and sees it clean and tidy, he says to himself that this monk must live a tidy life. And if he enters the cell of another monk and sees it untidy, he says to himself that this monk prefers to be occupied in his worship than in tidying his cell.

*** Love does not seek its own:** (1 Corinthians 13:5)

He who seeks his own is a selfish person who lives in his own world. But love is giving and sacrificing. It does not seek its own because it lives for others.

It happened in the time of St. Macarius the Great that the monk who was responsible for planting the field saw a bunch of grapes which grew out of its season. He carried it to his father St. Macarius. But Macarius thought about an old sick monk in the monastery who might be in need of it and carried it to him. The old monk thought about a simple newly ordained monk thinking that the young monk is not yet accustomed to the monastic life and might be in need of it. The young monk took it to another monk and the bunch of grapes were carried from one monk to the other until it reached St. Macarius once more.

It has been said about Saint Abba Sarabion that once while he was walking down a road he saw a poor person poorly clothed and cold. The saint took off his robe and gave it to him. The saint was then met by a rich man who surprisingly asked him "Where is your robe?", the saint answered "The Bible my son?". The rich man took off his robe and gave it to the saint. Going his way St. Sarabion met another person who owed a debt, and the debtor was torturing him. The saint had compassion and as he had nothing at that time but his valuable Bible, he did not hesitate to sell his Bible and give the money to the debtor. He continued his walk without his Bible and met another poor person, so he took off his robe and gave it to him.

He returned to his cell without his Bible and without his robe. When his disciple saw him he

asked about the robe. The saint answered "My son, I keep it in a safe place until I need it" and pointed upwards to heaven. The disciple again asked about the Bible, knowing that its words comforted him. The saint replied: The Bible told me "go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and come, follow Me" (Matthew 19:21; Luke 12:33).

*** Love is not provoked:** (1 Corinthians 13:5)

He who is provoked delivers himself to anger. Yet love is tolerant.

*** Love thinks no evil:** (1 Corinthians 13:5)

He who thinks evil does not have a pure heart nor a simple eye. Evil thoughts are his direct impression. Because love is from God, it has seeing eyes, knows that all things work together for good (Romans 8:28), and likes the life of peace.

Father Daniel - who was one of the elderly fathers - went once to a convent to hear the confessions of its nuns. In that convent there was a nun whom they called "idiot" because of her behaviour. As soon as this father entered the convent, mother superior and all the nuns except this nun, went to greet him and take his blessings. Mother superior apologised to him saying: "many times I wanted to cast this idiot out, but did not want to commit a sin".

Father Daniel sighed because he had known by the Spirit the secret of this "idiot". He asked his disciple to stay with him that night in order to discover the wonders of God in His saints. In the night this fool got up to pray and to pray tearfully, and her face was shining. She was praying quietly and if she felt someone was coming, she pretended to be asleep. The father called mother superior to observe the scene. Mother superior wept saying: "Wo to me a sinner, how many times I shouted at and insulted this nun".

When this nun discovered that the other nuns in the convent found out her reality, she left the convent after writing a note in which she said: "Your insults to me were the fruit for my soul, your despising me was my gain. Blessed was that hour in which you started calling me "idiot". You are innocent from any sin you committed against me. I shall give account to you about myself in front of the Heavenly Throne. None of you is defiled, because you are all pure".

When this note was read, father Daniel explained that his stay in the convent the previous night was exactly for this matter.

*** Love does not rejoice in iniquity:** (1 Corinthians 13:6)

He who rejoices in iniquity is himself evil and wishes all people to fall as he did. But

love raises up fallen people, unties fastened people and covers sin.

Once St. Paul the Simple went to the church to watch people entering; he was given the gift of knowing secrets. He saw the guarding angel of each brother looking happy, except one whose guarding angel was looking unhappy and a host of devils around that brother. He understood that this brother was tormented by sin. The saint wept and prayed for this brother. The Lord heard the prayers of the saint and as this brother heard the readings in the church he repented and decided to sin no more.

When people were leaving the church, St. Paul the Simple saw the guarding angel of this person rejoicing.

*** Love never fails:** (1 Corinthians 13:8)

Man fails when he is alone, and when no one is beside him to raise him when he falls. As for love, God supports it, and it thus never fails. Real love leans on the love of God and never fails, no matter how many troubles and difficulties it encounters. But temporary enthusiasm soon fades away.

We have a parable in the Bible about the rich man who came running, knelt before Jesus, and asked Him: "Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" and when Jesus said to him: "One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me", he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions (Mark 10:27).

Poor was this man who exhibited enthusiasm at the beginning, but soon his love failed because his love of money was stronger than his love to God.

SECOND - The Positive Side:

By this we mean the positive attributes of love.

*** Love suffers long and is kind:** (1 Corinthians 13:4)

It is not surprising that St. Paul writes down these two complementing attributes on the top of the list of the positive attributes of love, pointing to their divine origin. God in His nature is very long-suffering. Likewise should his children be.

Long-suffering is the attribute which deals with the weak and sinners, and it makes

the person successful in his ministry. Kindness is the complementary attribute. The fathers say "Long-suffering is the pride of the saints". By its long-suffering and kindness, love wins the souls.

It was said once that St. Tadros, a disciple of St. Pachomius, knew that a certain monk was going to leave the monastic life because he did not like St. Pachomius. St. Tadros went to St. Pachomius and agreed with him secretly that he would bring the monk to him pretending that he was very annoyed with St. Pachomius.

St. Tadros and the monk went to St. Pachomius and St. Tadros charged his father Pachomius with many accusations, but St. Pachomius only listened quietly. Finally the monk was embarrassed and prevented St. Tadros from continuing his charges, he then bowed before St. Pachomius and went back to his monastic life.

*** Love rejoices in the truth:** (1 Corinthians 13:6)

If love does not rejoice in iniquity, it rejoices in the truth; and truth is God Himself: "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). The truth does not separate from God because it is one of His attributes, it is God Himself. When the truth is achieved in a certain case, God shows Himself in that case. When truth prevails among a group of people, God is certainly among them. And if I am a man of God, and the truth is against me, I rejoice.

+ Love bears all things: (1 Corinthians 13:7)

This attribute insures that love is exhausted to its limit. It helps the person bear insults to the limit without reacting, in order to keep his inner peace.

St. Glasius who was a father to a group of monks, had a valuable Bible which he put in the church of the monastery for the benefit of all the monks. The devil moved one of the visitors to steal it, and to go quickly to sell it. He showed it to someone who valued books and who offered to buy it for eighteen Dinariis, on condition that he consults someone else who has knowledge of the holy books. He went and showed the Bible to father Glasius, who recognized it as his Bible which was stolen from the church. In spite of that, Father Glasius encouraged this man to buy the Bible for that price.

The man went to the thief and told him that he showed the Bible to Father Glasius and that he had advised him to buy the Bible. The thief was shocked to hear the name of Father Glasius and asked if Father Glasius said anything else, and knew that he did not.

The thief went right away to Father Glasius and took the Bible with him after refusing to sell it. He confessed his sin to Father Glasius, returned the Bible and asked for forgiveness. Not only that, but he stayed with Father Glasius and consecrated himself to live a monastic life.

*** Love believes all things:** (1 Corinthians 13:7)

Once a tigress crossed the road to one of the monasteries. The head of the monastery called one of the simple monks and commanded him to bring it. The monk obeyed and as he arrived there the tigress submitted at his feet. He told it that my master ordered me to bring you to him and he carried it to the head of the monastery. The head of the monastery was then concerned about the vain glory which might enter the monk, and ordered the monk to release the tigress saying "I wanted you to bring me a tigress and you went and brought a dog". Then he released it.

*** Love hopes all things:** (1 Corinthians 13:7)

Moalem Fanous was one of the Copt's leaders in Egypt, at the time of the Mamlouks' rulers Ibrahim and Mourad Bek, in the second half of the eighteenth century.

On the eve of one of the big Coptic feasts, one of the friends of Moalem Fanous was unfairly arrested. The wife of this man went and informed the wife of Moalem Fanous. To give her support the latter cancelled all kinds of celebration for the feast. When her husband, Moalem Fanous came home he was told by his wife "how can we celebrate this feast and our friend is in prison!".

Moalem Fanous used his influence and released this friend. That took several hours and he went to bed late that night.

Meanwhile it was the custom that the Copt's leaders go to the Patriarch on the feast day to congratulate him with the feast. And it was arranged that **Moalem Ibrahim El-Gohary** (another leader) collect Moalem Fanous to go together to the Patriarch. Yet because of what happened the previous night, Moalem Fanous apologized to Moalem Ibrahim for being late and explained the circumstances. Moalem Ibrahim was upset that Moalem Fanous did not ask for his help so as to share the blessings of releasing this friend.

They both arrived late at the Patriarch and when they told their story, the Patriarch said to Moalem Ibrahim "Moalem Fanous released this man from prison and you will find a job for him".

*** Love endures all things:** (1 Corinthians 13:7)

Love has to endure whatever it meets from difficulties, troubles and obstacles. Patience leads us to eternal glory: "But he who endures to the end shall be saved" (Matthew 24:13) and "By your patience possess your souls" (Luke 21:19). By its long-suffering, love is able to be patient.

Two brothers lived in harmony in the desert together. When the devil, the enemy of every good, was tired from seeing them living in accord he tried to separate them.

One evening, the younger brother lit a lamp and put it in its place as usual. The devil let it

fall and it was extinguished. The older brother was angry, blamed and hit the younger brother. However, the younger brother was full of love, apologised to his older brother and asked him to be patient until he lit the lamp once more. **Because of the love and patience of the younger brother the devil was tormented till the morning.**

The devil went to a chief devil who was in an idol's temple and told him what happened, and there was the priest of this temple listening to the talk of the devil who was tormented because of the patience and love of the younger brother. **The priest was overwhelmed by this love which overcomes evil and defeats the devil. He decided to become a Christian and later he became a monk.**

CHAPTER 4

FAITH IN GOD

ITS POWER AND FRUITS

- A) What is faith?**
- B) Mind and faith - Faith and unseen matters**
- C) Our Christian faith in God -
Does it embrace specific beliefs?**
- D) Does faith have degrees?**
- E) Relation between faith and spiritual life**
- F) Some fruits of faith**
- G) Promoters and deterrents of faith**

Faith is the entrance to a healthy relationship between man and God. The Apostle Paul says: **"But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him"** (Hebrews 11:6). The same Apostle adds: **"for whatever is not from faith is sin"** (Romans 14:23). Since lack of faith is a sin, no relationship between man and God can be based on a lack of faith.

From here we find that faith is very valuable. The Apostle Peter expresses that as he writes his second Epistle **"to those who have obtained like precious faith with us"** (2 Peter 1:1). Indeed there is nothing more precious than faith, because by faith we come close to God and we are bound to Him: **"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God"** (Romans 5:1, 2).

And by faith, Jesus dwells in the heart of man. This is what the Apostle Paul says openly to the Ephesians: **"that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith"** (Ephesians 3:17), **and it is the means by which the righteous lives:** **"Now the just shall live by faith"** (Hebrews 10:38). **Besides, it is one of the main Christian virtues; faith, hope and love** (1 Corinthians 13:13).

No doubt that faith is considered the greatest free gift which God gave to man, and by it we gain salvation from the slavery of sin and from eternal death. The Lord Jesus says: **"He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned"** (Mark 16:16). After the miracle which took place in the prison of the city of Philippi where Paul and Silas were kept, the prison keeper asked them what must he do to be saved - the answer of the two Apostles was: **"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household"** (Acts 16:30, 31).

The Apostle John concludes his Epistle by saying: **"but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name"** (John 20:31). St. Ambrose was right when he said: **"Faith is a continuous daylight, for which no night follows"**.

A) WHAT IS FAITH?

Faith is life by which man lives "Now the just shall live by faith" (Hebrews 10:38), else it is a theoretical faith, which may be summarized and limited to adopting certain dogmas which man repeats as in the "Creed". **There is no need for "faith in God" without a personal relationship with Him, which leads us to love and obey Him, and becomes a fellowship which begins here on earth and is continued in the eternal Kingdom. There is no use for "faith in a life after death" unless we prepare ourselves for it by repentance, love and striving. This is the life of faith, the practical faith which saves the soul, and whose fruits show in our lives, not the theoretical one** which does not save the soul but brings condemnation upon it.

Faith is not by pretence, belonging or by inheritance, such as claiming to have faith because of one's name or that one belongs to a believing pious family. **Again, faith is not a theoretical dogma, but it is life:** "You will know them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:16-20). **It is tested by the life of obedience to God:** "Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, "I know Him", and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:3, 4).

Faith in God does not require theological knowledge, but first and foremost requires trust in God and belief in His words and promises. In the eleventh chapter of his Epistle to the Hebrews, the Apostle Paul presents to us examples of men of faith. None of them was a philosopher, or a theologian. Among them was **Enoch**, about whom we all know that he "walked with God" (Genesis 5:22) and "that he pleased God" (Hebrews 11:5), and **Abraham** who "obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going" and offered up his son Isaac, "concluding that God was able to raise him up" (Hebrews 11:8, 17-19). **Sarah** was also on the list of the heroes of faith "because she judged Him faithful who had promised" (Hebrews 11:11).

The Apostle Paul defined faith as "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). In this case faith is trust in God, in His words and in His revelations. The same Apostle after he defined faith said: "By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God" (Hebrews 11:3), and because faith is an absolute trust in God, His words and His revelations: "for whatever is not from faith is sin" (Romans 14:23), because lack of faith means lack of trust in God, His words and His revelations.

B) MIND AND FAITH

Therefore, faith is not just a feeling, sensation or an emotion. Neither it is a vague call for mysterious matters, or forcing of the soul to surrender to the unseen or to what cannot be perceived by senses. Faith is not the cancellation of the mind, rather it is belief in the facts of faith with acceptance. **But for the mind to accept the facts of faith and submit to faith without resistance or search, it needs humility of thought on the side of man.**

The Christian saint and philosopher Augustine said:

"If you wish to reach up to the supremacy of God, first look for Him in His humility. Be humble if you wish, as humility is useful for you, for God humbled Himself for your sake and not for His sake. Take the humble Jesus and learn humility from Him. When you take His humility you will be lifted up with Him.

Believe in His commandments, and keep them so that He gives you the ability to understand. Do not lean on your knowledge and do not prefer it to the commandment of God, else you lose your ability and become weak. Christ dwells in your heart by faith. Remember the testimony of Christ: "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and has revealed them to babes" (Matthew 11:25). He hid them from the wise and prudent and has not revealed them to the ignorant nor the fool **but to the babes, that is, the humble.**

Do not seek what becomes haughty in your heart, but what is worthy for your heart to rise up to. If you learn to glorify the Crucified One, you will get glory from the King. **Many people knew what they wanted, but could not get it because they were not humble. Do not be proud, faith is a free grace from God, and not a reward for something you do, but a benevolence from God. Your faith is a gift from God and not a right you deserve.**

Listen to the words of the Lord Jesus: "No one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father" (John 6:65). Believe and you will come near, love and you will be called. Come to Christ and do not worry about the length of the road. Believe and come".

When the mind submits and completely surrenders to the facts which faith calls for, the Holy Spirit, through this wanted obedience which resulted from humility, unveils to the mind all what relates to these facts of faith: "The Holy Spirit, He will teach you all things" (John 14:26). In the light of the new spiritual knowledge, the Holy Spirit leads the mind to the truth. The Lord Jesus said to Martha before He raised Lazarus from the dead: "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" (John 11:40).

Then comes the role of the mind. After it accepts the facts of faith in humility and submission, and is enlightened by spiritual knowledge, it can search these facts. In this case, the

search by the mind increases the clarity of these facts of faith.

It is necessary here to point to **these facts of faith which the mind accepts. To start with, they are matters which God has proclaimed from the very beginning which no one else could reveal or proclaim. They are matters which are above our human nature to comprehend for they belong to the unseen and the supernatural, for no one can conceive of them by his mind and senses.**

Saint Paul says: "For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? **Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.** Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him". But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. **For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God"** (1 Corinthians 2:11-13, 9, 10).

About the relationship between mind and faith, the Saint and Philosopher Augustine said:

"Believe and you become worthy to understand. Faith comes before understanding, so that understanding becomes part of the faith. It is better to believe with simplicity in what you preach, because the goal of the mind is to discuss details. By faith you unite (with God) and by mind you live. Before anything you have to unite by faith so that you live by mind. If you do not unite, you will resist, and if you resist, you are not a believer. And if you resist, how can you live? You make yourself an enemy to the ray of light inside you. **If someone says: "I want to understand, it is my duty to understand in order to believe". I answer: "Believe and you will understand, understanding results from believing, and understanding is part of faith"**.

God gave you two physical eyes and a mind. Awaken the mind of your heart, and lift up Him Who dwells in your inner eyes, in order to open its windows and meditate upon the creation of God. Believe in what you do not see for the sake of what you see. **Faith reaches to what the human mind does not understand, and where the mind fails, faith succeeds and grows"**.

We conclude that the mind has its worth and by it God has distinguished man from animal. But the mind has its limits and cannot think more highly than it ought to think (Romans 12:3). Matters which are beyond the comprehension of the mind have to be accepted by faith. The mind may lead to the beginning of the road, but faith will lead you all the way to God. Hence, faith does not contradict the mind, but it surpasses it to far reaching stages, which the mind alone cannot reach".

C) FAITH AND THE UNSEEN

In his definition of faith, the Apostle Paul says: "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, **the evidence of things not seen**" (Hebrews 11:1). The word "evidence" indicates strong confidence and without doubt. **In this instance we say that there is a difference between men of faith and men of scientific research.** Men of faith believe the unseen and trust in it, but men of scientific research want to submit everything to what their minds accept. Here we remember the words of the Lord Jesus to Thomas when he was doubtful about the Lord's glorious Resurrection: "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29). But what are those unseen matters which the Apostle Paul points out to in his explanation of faith?

Among the unseen are God and His attributes: "No one has seen God at any time" (John 1:18), and when David for example said: "I have set the Lord always before me" (Psalm 16:8), no doubt, the setting here was by the eye of faith. Among the unseen also are the promises of God. "These (men of faith) all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Hebrews 11:13).

Among the unseen are the warnings of God about matters that are going to happen, such as the flood at the time of Noah (Genesis, Chapters 6-9) and the burning destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:24-28).

Also among the unseen are the blessings of God and His Graces within man, such as to become the temple of God and the dwelling of the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19). **And among the unseen are the Heavenly Hosts,** according to what happened in the war of the King of Aram with Israel at the time of the Prophet Elisha. His servant Gehazi saw an army surrounding the city with horses and chariots. But when Elisha prayed to the Lord to open the eyes of Gehazi, the Lord opened the eyes of the young man and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha (2 Kings 6).

Again among the unseen are the matters related to the world to come, the glory which awaits the believers and the woes which await the wicked. Also among the unseen are the work of the Holy Spirit in the Sacraments of the Church, ... etc.

D) OUR CHRISTIAN FAITH IN GOD

Does it embrace specific beliefs?

God in the faith of the Christians is not a mere unseen Supreme Power which manages the Universe and plans the lives of the people. The Christians believe in one God of three Hypostases, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. They believe that the Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity, in the fullness of time was incarnated and became man. He took flesh from the pure Virgin Mary and became a full man after He made His body one with His Divinity, without mingling, confusion, nor alteration. Hence, God Who was unseen in the Old Testament, became seen in Christ in the New Testament: "And the Word became (took) flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

There is no contradiction between that and what God said to the Prophet Moses in the past when Moses asked to see His glory: **"You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live"** (Exodus 33:18, 20). In fact John the Evangelist who started his Gospel by talking about the Son of God Who was from the beginning and of His Incarnation assured us by saying: "No one has seen God at any time" (John 1:18).

Yet, the matter is very simple. What is meant by the impossibility of seeing God, is the impossibility for man to see the Divinity of God. Thus when the Son of God, the Word, the second Hypostasis, wanted to accomplish the work of redemption He took a body in which He hid His Divinity and with which He accepted sufferings on behalf of Man. **This is a basic belief in the Christian faith, which connects our salvation, forgiveness of our sins, being worthy of eternal life in Heaven, and the pouring of Divine Grace by the work of the Holy Spirit. It gives humanity the blessings of salvation through the Holy Sacraments of the Church.**

Christians attach great importance to the dogma of Incarnation, their belief in it and in its blessings. By the Incarnation our human nature was blessed and we became partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). In fact the Christian Church is built on the rock of faith that Christ is the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:18).

Christian faith is belief in the Incarnation, Redemption and the blessings which resulted from them: "He who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16). "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 who believes in Him (Christ) is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already" (John 3:18). The Lord Jesus rebuked the Jews saying: "For if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins" (John 8:24).

In the Christian faith, Jesus is the Saviour, hence he who believes in Him and in His redeeming work is saved. When they were in prison in the city of Philippi, Paul and Silas said to the prison keeper: **"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household"** (Acts 16:31). It was for the faith in Jesus Christ the Saviour, that the Gospels and the Epistles of the Apostles were written and evangelized with. St. John says at the end of his Gospel: **"But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name"** (John 20:31).

DOES CHRISTIAN FAITH EMBRACE SPECIFIC BELIEFS?

We ask: Is Christian faith a naive belief in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Salvation supported by a life of worship, pure piety and nothing else? Or are there specific beliefs inside the circle of Christian faith?

To say that there are no specific beliefs inside the circle of Christian faith implies a wrong understanding of genuine Christianity "for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 1:3). From the beginning - since the time of the Apostles - the Church had, besides its general Christian faith, certain definite basic beliefs. She formulated them in a creed known as the "Creed of the Apostles" which had to be learned by any one who wished to be baptized. He had to announce it at the moment of his baptism, promising to keep it. When doctrines and heresies appeared at later times the Church in the Ecumenical Councils formulated the Creed for every Christian in the world, which we recite up till now and by which we declare our faith.

Once a non-Orthodox professor of theology said: "To imagine early Christianity as a way of life without theological beliefs - portrayed by the "Sermon on the Mount" (Matthew 5-7), and nothing else, is not fair and is not supported by historic references".

A common faith existed and was mostly referred to in the New Testament as "the traditions" (1 Corinthians 11:2), "that form of doctrine to which you were delivered" (Romans 6:17), "the apostles' doctrine" (Acts 2:42), "the pattern of sound words" (2 Timothy 1:13), "the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 1:3)".

The Apostles of Christ defended these Christian beliefs within the one faith, and they fought against those who deviated from it "who will secretly bring in destructive heresies" (2 Peter 2:1). **The Apostle John even commanded the believers to totally boycott them so that they would not share in their evil deeds** (2 John 1:10, 11).

FAITH WORKING THROUGH LOVE:

There are two kinds of faith: the first is a mental theoretical faith which millions of people share as well as the demons themselves. The Apostle James says **"You believe that there**

is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe-- and tremble!" (James 2:19). This kind of faith is what the Apostle describes as dead by itself (James 2:17).

The second kind of faith is practical and it is precious and rare. About this kind of faith, the Lord Jesus said: "For assuredly, I say to you, **if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, "Move from here to there", and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you"** (Matthew 17:20). The Apostle Paul wrote about it to the Galatians saying: "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, **but faith working through love"** (Galatians 5:6). **The literal exact meaning of "faith working through love" is the faith which expresses itself by love, or the faith which works by love.** Because unless faith expresses itself and its presence in man, it becomes a worthless theoretical faith, or in other words a dead faith.

A true believer has his behaviour in complete accordance with his faith, and there is no contradiction between his conduct and his beliefs. He exceeds in the works of love because his faith is alive. A living faith is a working faith, while the faith which does not work is a dead faith which has no value: **"Faith without works is dead"** (James 2:20), and each time the Holy Bible mentions faith, it means faith "working through love".

The necessity of good works for the salvation of man is a subject of dogmatic contention, but we will not discuss it here. We simply say that good works is like the fruits of the living faith, and the tree is known from its fruits (Matthew 12:33). In His everlasting sermon on the mount, the Lord Jesus said: "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Matthew 7:19). The Apostle James asks: "What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?" (James 2:4) and he continues saying: "You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only" (James 2:24).

Our Lord Jesus says: "For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, **and then He will reward each according to his works"** (Matthew 16:27), and also: "For the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice **and come forth-- those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation"** (John 5:28, 29).

St. Paul speaks about God who **"will render to each one according to his deeds"** (Romans 2:6), and says: **"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). The Lord Jesus concludes the New Testament in the Revelation which He proclaimed to John and says: **"And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work"** (Revelation 22:12).

E) DOES FAITH HAVE DEGREES?

The Apostle Paul says: "For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, **as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith**" (Romans 12:3). **Perhaps this verse explains that faith varies from one person to the other. The matter is not as some may portray when they refer to lack of faith as being weak or they say that this person is a believer and that person is a nonbeliever!**

In his talk about the qualities of the bishop, the Apostle Paul states a condition that the person chosen to be a bishop should not be "a novice" (1 Timothy 3:6).

The Lord Himself referred to those who are weak in their faith or who have little faith. As He was speaking about the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet our heavenly Father feeds them (Matthew 6:26) and the lilies of the field, how God covers them with beauty (Matthew 6:28, 29), He said: "will He not much more clothe you, **O you of little faith?**" (Matthew 6:30). He rebuked Peter as he doubted when he was walking on the water as commanded by the Lord and said: "**O you of little faith, why did you doubt?**" (Matthew 14:31), and He rebuked the Disciples in the ship when they were terrified from the waves and said: "**Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?**" (Matthew 8:26). **Here we notice that fear and doubt are features of little faith.**

As he was talking about those who stumble from eating what is sacrificed for idols, the Apostle Paul points out to a fourth kind which he calls "weak in the faith" (Romans 14:1).

There are people who have a restricted or limited faith. Such were Mary and Martha who believed that Jesus could only heal. That was the limit of their faith: "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died" (John 11:21, 22).

There are others who have a slow faith because of lack of understanding knowledge. Among those were the Disciples of Emmaus, to whom Jesus said: "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!" (Luke 24:25).

There are others whose faith is in a state of growing. The Apostle Paul wrote to the people of Thessalonica, thanking God for them **because their faith "grows exceedingly"**, (2 Thessalonians 1:3), and he wrote to the Corinthians describing them as they abound in everything-- in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence (2 Corinthians 8:7).

There are yet others who are described as **full of faith, such as Stephen (Acts 6:5, 8).**

Finally, there are those **whose faith is dead**, as the Apostle James describes them (James 2:17) and those who abandon faith completely: "Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Timothy 4:1).

F) RELATION BETWEEN FAITH AND SPIRITUAL LIFE

The Christian faith is a working faith through love, it is closely related to man's spiritual life, or as St. Augustine calls it "Head of the righteous life". One of the fathers says: "I believe that nothing can make our spirit grow stronger and faster than faith. By faith, I do not mean the theoretical belief that God exists, but the living faith dwelling inside. This faith makes the soul able to believe and to win for her the joyous stature of saints, while she is living on earth".

In true faith, man is subservient to his faith, not the other way round. If faith is subservient to man it changes according to man's mood, physiological status and thoughts. But when man submits to faith, faith works gradually to purify him. Hence we and faith change and grow. Even by faith we go beyond ourselves. **The following are examples:**

1- Faith affects man's conscience and his will: Desires and pleasures enslave man and he who submits to them becomes in a way unable to yield to his mind and behaves in an irrational way. He has a mind which serves his desires. As desires enslave the mind, the mind labours and thinks for his desires. Then the mind justifies devious desires, or as it is said: "the mind is a faithful servant to the soul", and by the soul here we mean its desires and devious tendencies.

Yet faith makes the mind firm and sows in it the seeds of a new and holy plant, by which man resists fulfilling his desires and yielding to them. As a whole, faith lifts up the will.

St. Augustine says: "You will not lead a virtuous life until you start to believe, and when you care for your faith you receive the rest of God's gifts in abundance. Every good work done by man is not good unless it is related to the reverence of God. Unless faith precedes there is no goodness in life. **Listen to the Apostle Paul when he says: "But without faith it is impossible to please Him"** (Hebrews 11:6), **and unless your faith is candid you would not be righteous, as "the just shall live by faith"** (Hebrews 10:38)".

2- Faith is strongly connected to prayer: About the relation between faith and prayer
St. Augustine says: "If you do not have faith, there will be no room for prayer, how do you pray for whom you do not believe. Faith is the source of prayer. In this the Apostle says: "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed?" (Romans 10:14). The conclusion is believe in order to pray, and pray to keep your faith by which you pray. Faith multiplies prayer and prayer in abundance strengthens Faith".

If the above is said about prayer in general, faith is closely related to accepted prayer. The Lord Jesus says: "And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive" (Matthew 21:22) and "Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them" (Mark 11:24). Thus the Apostle James says: "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 5:15).

3- Faith produces patience in us: What man gets by patience he cannot get by any other means. The Apostle James says: "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, **knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.** But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing" (James 1:2-4).

4- Faith offers us strength in times of trials and difficulties: The weaker our faith becomes, the stronger the trial is upon us. The firmer our faith is, the better we resist the temptation and overcome it. **Pure faith lives amidst the temptations and difficulties of this world. The world shakes but faith does not shake, it is firm,** as the Apostle Peter calls it: "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, **steadfast in the faith"** (1 Peter 5:8, 9).

By faith we know that we are not alone in our wars and strives. Faith sustains the trust of man in his striving and strengthens his hope in God. Our Messiah is called "Immanuel" which means "God with us" and "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31).

5- Faith increases our trust in God's promises which fills the Books of the Holy Bible: All God's promises are for us, and we receive them by faith. Faith in Who? Faith in "Jesus,

the author and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2). The expression "the author of faith" means the beginning of faith. Hence Christ is the basis of our faith, the beginning of our faith and the finisher of our faith. By trusting in Him we receive everything according to His true promises, if we keep His commandments and live in obedience to the faith in God and His Church : "the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15).

6- As a whole, faith is related to many aspects of man's spiritual life. For example, man is shy of doing wrong in front of an important personality. He also disdains from doing wrong in front of a person lower in rank than him, for self respect. That is why people commit sins secretly. Hence it is said about sinners "men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). Man is afraid of another person who sees him sin. **Faith makes us feel that we are always in the presence of God and that He sees us.** This was what kept Joseph the righteous from sinning with the wife of his master Potiphar in Egypt: "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9). This is what keeps us also and bestows modesty to the heart.

If we believe in eternity and keep that in front of us, our consciences are awakened, and if we believe in the love of God, we are careful not to injure it: "And one will say to him, "What are these wounds between your arms?" Then he will answer, "Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends" (Zechariah 13:6). If we believe in virtue as our way of life, we walk in the road of piety and virtue. If we believe in the perishability and triviality of the world we abstain from doing wrong. Faith leads us to forsake worldly matters: "and those who use this world as not misusing it. For the form of this world is passing away" (1 Corinthians 7:31). And by faith we overcome the world with all what is in it: "And this is the victory that has overcome the world-- our faith" (1 John 5:4).

G) SOME FRUITS OF FAITH

Faith has many spiritual and blessed fruits, among which are the life of submission, peace, joy, contentment, thanksgiving, and overcoming life's difficulties.

1 - Life of submission: It is a fruit of faith. **If faith in God is trust in Him, then this faith**

or this trust leads me to submit my life to God Whom I trust. If trust is lacking, there could be no submission because it is obeying faith.

The believer submits his life to God without reservation, conditions or guarantees. He is sure of His love, wisdom and power. Many do not submit to God until their human means fail. This is not faith, but it is a compulsory coming to God. The Lord Jesus says: "for without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). **What threatens man's spiritual life most is when he tries to behave independently of God, relying on his own thinking and plans away from the guidance of God. He considers that he is not in need to let God share with him what he does.**

God granted man a mind and a will, but not to use them independently. The Wise says: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5). The first sin of man was when he tried to obtain knowledge independent of God.

The true believer does not only depend on God but submits everything to Him, because God made foolish the wisdom of this world (1 Corinthians 1:20). True knowledge is from God "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3). **The life of submission means that man confesses his lack of knowledge.**

A life of submission does not know complaint or murmur, but accepts everything with contentment, joy and thanksgiving. He who lives a life of submission does not yield to the will of God with pressure, obligation or sadness, but from inside he shouts with acceptance: "Thy will be done", because how unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! (Romans 11:33).

The following are examples of men of God who lived the life of complete submission:

Noah when God commanded him to build an ark because He would bring floodwater on the whole earth and destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life. Everything that is on the earth shall die (Genesis 6:17). Thus Noah did; according to all that God commanded him, so he did (Genesis 6:22). In complete surrender Noah built the Ark for things not yet seen (Hebrews 11:7).

And when God called Abram (Abraham) to get out of his country, from his family and from his father's house, to a land that He will show him (Genesis 12:1), he did not object, but obeyed in complete surrender and he went out, not knowing where he was going (Hebrews 11:8). **And another time when God asked him to offer up his only begotten son Isaac as a sacrifice,** he obeyed in complete surrender, though God promised him that in Isaac his seed shall be called: "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called" (Hebrews 11:17, 18).

And when Abraham sent his oldest servant Eliezer of Damascus to find a wife for his

son, Isaac said to him: "The Lord God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my family, and who spoke to me and swore to me, saying, "To your descendants I give this land", He will send His angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there" (Genesis 24:7).

When Moses crossed the Red Sea with God's people he behaved in complete obedience to the Creator of the supernatural. How would the water of the Sea split enabling them to walk on dry land at the bottom of the Sea (Exodus, Chapter 14). **Again the sojourn of God's people in the wilderness for 40 years was an example of a life of submission.** They did not question where they were going, what they would eat, what they would drink or what they would dress in this long journey!

The pure Virgin Mary is an example of a life of obedience and submission; in spite of her love for a life of virginity she accepted to be betrothed to a man named and to live with him. And when the angel brought to her the good tidings, she said to the angel: "Let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38).

Submission and obedience show in the life of the Apostle of Christ and His Disciples. When Jesus saw Levi sitting at the tax office and said to him "Follow Me", he arose and followed Him (Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27). The Apostle Peter summarizes these events by saying to Jesus: "See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?" (Matthew 19:27; Luke 18:28).

From among the examples of the life of submission is Joseph the Righteous who in spite of the dreams he had and all the hardships he faced, he did not doubt, but submitted to God.

Another example is David who was shepherding his father's flock, when God sent Samuel to anoint him king, yet he did not hand him the kingdom. He continued shepherding the sheep without grumbling. He was then chosen a servant to Saul the rejected king from God: "But the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and a distressing spirit from the Lord troubled him" (1 Samuel 16:14). David did not object or say that he was the chosen king by God, how can he serve this rejected king (Saul), but in complete submission he accepted the situation. He used to calm King Saul when the evil spirits troubled him. And Saul continued to chase David from wilderness to wilderness trying to kill him out of envy and jealousy. David never protested against God and did not say for example, "what evil have I done to deserve all this". He was waiting calmly for the salvation of the Lord. God had His wisdom in all. David was a young boy when he was chosen and anointed king. Waiting was to his benefit, to grow up, to mature and for the love of the people for him to increase day by day.

Without any exaggeration, a life of complete submission is a life of Christian perfection. In it God is working in man and with him. This is what the Apostle Paul mean when he says: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself

for me" (Galatians 2:20). In this case man does not fulfil his will but he becomes a tool of righteousness by which God accomplishes His will, the same as Jesus did when He said: "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me" (John 6:38).

2 - Life of peace and joy:

Peace accompanies faith. The person who feels that he is alone becomes afraid, but he who believes that God is with him does not fear: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me" (Psalm 23:4).

Peace and joy are two splendid fruits of faith. St. Paul said to the Romans: "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Romans 5:1, 2). The Apostle Peter says: "Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory" (1 Peter 1:7, 8). After the prison keeper in Philippi believed and was baptized at the hands of Paul and Silas "had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household" (Acts 16:34).

In the prayer of thanksgiving we mention three of God's attributes: Beneficent, Almighty and Lover of mankind. Our belief in God and His attributes gives us peace and joy.

Our belief that He is Beneficent means that He does not do other than what is good. He never does anything evil to anyone, because evil does not agree with His Nature. And He wants to do good to you because He is the Lover of mankind, He is capable of doing that because He is the Almighty. And what is impossible for man is possible for Him. If you truly believe in that you live in peace, confident that God will provide all what is good and useful. Nothing will come to you which is not good and useful to you. Then peace will dwell in your heart, anxiety will disappear, and great joy will overcome you, because you trust in He Who holds you life.

If you feel anxiety and fear then realise that your faith is not steadfast. It is because of your weak faith you fear, the same as Peter when he walked on the water when the Lord commanded him. When Peter felt his feet sinking into the water, he cried out, saying: "Lord, save me!" And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" (Matthew 14:30, 31).

If you do not fear God but you fear the devil and evil spirits and the harm they can do, be sure that they are only creatures subject to God, and they can do nothing beyond the limit of what God permits. That was clear from the story of Job and his temptation (Job, Chapters 1, 2).

The following are examples from the Holy Bible of peace and fearlessness as a result

of faith:

a - The encounter of David and Goliath. David said: "For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God? Let no man's heart fail because of him. Then David said to Goliath: "You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you and take your head from you. And this day I will give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. Then all this assembly shall know that the Lord does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the LORD'S, and He will give you into our hands" (1 Samuel 17:26, 32, 45-47).

b - The encounter of Elijah and Ahab the King of Israel. After praying, Elijah closed the skies and there was no rain nor dew on the earth for three years and six months, then the Lord commanded Elijah to go and present himself to Ahab and tell him that He would send rain on the earth. Then it happened, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said to him, "Is that you, O troubler of Israel? And he answered, "I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father's house have, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord and you have followed the Baals" (1 Kings 18:17, 18).

Let us meditate on how Elijah stood firm and was not afraid of the king because of the peace which overwhelmed his heart. This was the result of his faith in God, in whose presence he felt he was always standing.

c - The three young men whom Nebuchadnezzar King of Babel ordered to cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace heated seven times more than it was usually heated. The king challenged them by saying: "And who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?". But the three young men answered and said to the king: "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king" (Daniel 3:15, 17).

d - Daniel whom the king cast in the den of lions. When the king went the following morning to the den of lions to see what happened to Daniel, he cried out with a lamenting voice to Daniel, and then Daniel said to the king: "O king, live forever! 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 6:21, 22).

e - St. Peter the Apostle in prison. King Herod intended to kill Peter the next day. But that night Peter was sleeping, bound with two chains between two soldiers; and the guards before the door were keeping the prison (Acts 12:6).

This situation demonstrates a soul filled with peace with no traces of fear. The story concluded with the angel of the Lord standing by him, and a light shining in the prison; the angel struck Peter on the side and raised him up, saying, "Arise quickly!" And his chains fell off his

hands. He then followed the angel and the prison gate was opened for them (Acts, Chapter 4).

3 - Contentment and thanksgiving:

A believing person lives in contentment. He is always thankful for his condition which God allowed him to be in. He believes that there is no better condition for him than the one he is in. For if there is a better one, God as the Beneficent one knows everything would have provided him with it. God said by the Apostle James: "To him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin" (James 4:17), would He not fulfil this Divine command?

A man of faith knows also that God in His wisdom, if He wanted to transfer him to a better condition, would chose a suitable time and condition that is best for him. Hence he lives in contentment with his condition, believing in the love and wisdom of God. He always thanks God upon every condition, for every condition, and in whatever condition. Such thanksgiving is not only expressed by words in prayer, but it is a constant feeling in the heart which overflows with joy and happiness all the time.

4. Overcoming difficulties:

There is nothing that stands in the face of a believer, no difficulties can hinder him from reaching what he wants, provided that what he wants is good. Faith makes miracles and overcomes evil powers: "Your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith" (1 Peter 5:8, 9). St. John wrote in his first Epistle a strong phrase about faith: "And this is the victory that has overcome the world-- our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John 5:4, 5). The victory over the world here points to the victory in everything and over everything. These words apply to individuals as well as the Church, which by the faith of her people stood steadfastly in front of all the oppressive attempts to destroy her and to erase the Christian faith.

H) PROMOTERS AND DETERRENTS OF FAITH

Like any other virtue faith grows, gets stronger and advances, and sometimes gets weaker and dissolves. It has promoters and encouragements, and as well there are causes which weakens it, knowing that in each stage of a person's life his faith has a certain strength.

FIRST: PROMOTERS OF FAITH:

Among the promoters of faith are knowledge, simplicity, reading about God's wonders in His saints, boldness (courage), prayer, ...

a - Knowledge:

St. Isaac says that there are two kinds of knowledge, one precedes faith and the other results from it. Man, according to his knowledge, character, mental abilities believes in God and leans on Him. As man enters into the practical life of faith, and as he faces temptations, has experience, and as he is firm and sees the help of God in difficulties and distresses he gains from the experience of his faith a new kind of practical knowledge, different from the theoretical knowledge he started with. The latter knowledge is stronger and firmer and it encourages him and makes him grow stronger in faith. Hence as one's practical knowledge increases, his faith grows, and as his faith grows more he is thrown into more difficult experiences, his knowledge, increases more and his faith also.

b - Simplicity:

If knowledge is one of the promoters of faith, simplicity also encourages it. There is no contradiction here between knowledge and simplicity. By simplicity we mean simplicity of faith and keeping away from the doubts of the mind. We always ask: Why and how?! A man of God simply believes that God is capable of doing anything, and that he does not allow human wisdom (which is ignorance to God) to weaken his faith. God is above all wisdom and human knowledge, and if He can do things beyond the human mind, why would we place this limited mind as a barrier that blocks our faith.

c - Reading about the wonders of God through His saints:

Such kind of reading strengthens man, encourages him and inflames his heart with faith to rely on God and trust in Him. Man should seek the will of God in all matters of life. Two persons may go through the same situation. One analyzes it mentally trying to relate it to natural or personal causes, logical consequences or to mere chance; this person does not benefit from this matter spiritually. The second person considers the matter from the faith point of view and relates it

to the work of grace in him, and that is how his faith increases.

d - Boldness and courage:

There are believing matters which require courage and boldness of heart. We mean the boldness of heart which is built on trust in God and belief in His promises. A fearful person feels cowardly to get involved in such matters and his faith remains weak. He keeps standing on the shore of the Red Sea and is scared from dipping his feet into the water lest he should drown. Another person does not fear and plunges himself into difficult matters - in faith - and that results in acquiring new practical faith. That is why "For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance" (Matthew 13:12). Yet God does not leave the weak in faith in their weakness, but He sustains them gradually. If they can not depend on Him in risky or even difficult matters, He will get them to start with easy matters.

e - Prayer:

While we were discussing the relationship between faith and a spiritual life, we referred to prayer. **Now we add that when man's faith gets weaker, he either slackens and loses his crown or feels his weakness and becomes contrite at heart and asks for help from God.** As St. Isaac says: "If man becomes humble, he will be immediately surrounded by grace. His heart will feel Divine help and will be filled with faith". That is why man should always ask God to give him faith, and to strengthen this faith. After all, faith is a gift from God and not a human action: "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him" (John 6:44). In everything you do, you should begin with prayer, so that as God helps you to accomplish it, you rejoice in the help of God and your faith increases. But if you do any task without prayer and you succeed you may attribute your success to your personal effort, or to external reasons, and this makes you forget God's help which was with you without you being aware of it.

SECOND: DETERRENTS OF FAITH:

There are three main reasons that hinder faith and its growth; relying on natural knowledge alone, fear and doubt.

a - Relying on natural knowledge alone: Relying on natural knowledge alone delays faith. There are natural laws such as the impossibility of walking on water, moving mountains, rebuking winds and waves to calm them down, or raising a dead person by saying one word. Faith does not submit to these natural laws, and man's clinging to them hinders the work of faith which can do everything: "All things are possible to him who believes" (Mark 9:23).

Besides denying miracles, the natural laws create fear in the soul, and fear does not give room to faith.

In the miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead, as Martha realized that Jesus was about to raise her brother from the grave, she said to Him: "Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days". That means it is useless, probably if You had come right after death there could have been some possibility to raise him from the dead. The answer of Jesus to Martha was: "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" (John 11:39, 40), and He did raise Lazarus from the dead.

And the Apostle Peter walked on the water and He calmed down the Sea and the wind by saying one word.

It is known that serpents and scorpions are very harmful and deadly. But faith annuls the effect of their harm: "Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you" (Luke 10:19). Science says that poison is deadly, but faith annuls its effect: "And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them" (Mark 16:17, 18). **How many miracles still happen now and every day by the power of faith. Science has its own circle and laws, and faith has another circle which does not submit to the logic nor to the laws of science.**

b - Fear: Fear stands against faith that relies upon the power of God and His promises. Abraham offered his son Isaac as a sacrifice "concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead" (Hebrews 11:19). **The three young men whom Nebuchadnezzar King of Babel, ordered cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace** rose above fear and said to the king: "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king" (Daniel 3:16, 17).

Likewise Daniel while he was in the den, was not harmed by the lions, which was exceptional beyond their nature: "and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no injury whatever was found on him, because he believed in his God" (Daniel 6:23).

In his Revelation, St. John refers to a list of those who have no part in the eternal Kingdom of Christ and says: "But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death" (Revelation 21:8). We notice that the cowardly were put on the top of this list, before the murderers, sexually immoral, and idolaters!

c - Doubt: Doubt is a strong barrier against faith. It is a sin pointed directly against God, because doubt is unbelieving in the promises of God. When Peter, who was walking on the water in response to the command of Jesus, saw the strong wind he became afraid and began to sink. The Lord Jesus said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" (Matthew 14:28-32). **We should notice here that fear resulted from doubt.**

The Apostle James says: "But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord" (James 1:6, 7).

The Lord Jesus says: "For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, "Be removed and be cast into the sea", and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will come to pass, he will have whatever he says" (Mark 11:23).

CHAPTER 5

BELIEF IN THE MIRACLES OF THE LORD JESUS

- A) Meaning of a miracle**
- B) The Devil and the miracles**
- C) How do we discern between the miracle and the deception - the witchcraft and conjuration**
- D) The believers, sorcery and sorcerers**
- E) Belief in the miracles of the Lord Jesus**
 - 1- Healing of the Paralytic who was carried by four men**
 - 2- Healing the Hemorrhaging Woman**
 - 3- Opening the Eyes of Bartimaeus**
 - 4- Healing the Daughter of the Canaanite Woman**
 - 5- Healing the Servant of the Centurion**
- F) Contemporary miracles**

Before we speak about the subject of "Belief in the miracles of the Lord Jesus", we find it necessary to speak first about "What is a miracle" and the difference between a Divine miracle and the deception of the Devil. That leads us to speak about witchcraft and conjuration. We will then discuss the subject of the Divine miracles, about which there are many debates, and whether these miracles took place only in the early era of Church history. Also, what conclusion we draw from the miracles happening today by the intercessions of the saints?

A) MEANING OF A MIRACLE

A miracle is the wonder which causes astonishment, and is called a miracle because men are unable to perform its parallel. There are three synonyms to the meaning of a miracle in the New Testament: "wonders, mighty deeds and signs". As the Apostle Peter was talking about the message of Christ, he said: "Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by **miracles, wonders, and signs** which God did through Him in your midst" (Acts 2:22). Also as the Apostle Paul was talking about the legality of his apostleship, he said: "Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in **signs and wonders and mighty deeds**" (2 Corinthians 12:12).

We notice that the surprise caused by the happening of a miracle is not meant for itself, but as the sign which witnesses the nearness of God, His presence, and His work of intervention in making the miracle. It does not happen except by Divine intense power, and could not be from the work of man or the act of a human being.

We can summarize by saying that a miracle is the Divine work of God either directly or through one of His prophets, disciples or saints in a way which exceeds and surpasses all human discipline, arrangement or power. They are not a source of amusement or a phenomenon for curiosity, rather God has a noble purpose in every miracle he makes.

A miracle is any unusual, rare and uncommon occurrence. Normal means may be used in the miracle, yet these means could not end in astonishing results except for the actual intervention of God. **The purpose of the miracle is to reinforce or strengthen the witness for religion, or as a help or a rescue in which ordinary means do not work.**

The Old Testament presents to us a variety of Divine miracles such as the ten Plagues by the hands of Moses against Egypt; crossing the Red Sea; feeding the Israelites for forty years in the wilderness; making the sun stand still over Gibeon by one word from Joshua the successor and disciple of Moses; making the moon stand still in the Valley of Aijalon

until the people had revenge upon their enemies (Joshua 10:12, 13); raising the son of the widow of Zarephath by Elijah (1 Kings 17:17-24); raising the son of the Shunammite woman by Elisha (2 Kings 4:18-37); the angel of the Lord in the camp of the Assyrians killing one hundred and eighty-five thousand in one night (2 Kings 19:35); delivering the three young men from the burning fiery furnace (Daniel 3:15, 17), and shutting the lions' mouths so that they would not hurt Daniel in the lions' den (Daniel 6:21, 22).

The New Testament is full of miracles performed by the Lord Jesus and His Apostles and Disciples. In this chapter we shall talk about some of these miracles.

OBJECTIONS AGAINST MIRACLES:

Some people do not believe in miracles at all because they do not believe in God; they are atheists. Some others do not believe in miracles because they assume that it is impossible for God to change His natural laws which He laid down to manage the universe and His creatures. Rather He asserts these natural rules because He created them, and they function forever as they should.

Some people believe in miracles because they were recorded in the Holy Bible to prove the intervention of God and His dominion over the universe, and to insure the declared Divine Right. Others believe that miracles do not happen any more after the Divine Right was realised and acknowledged and after Christianity was established in the world. Hence miracles would not reoccur since their purpose and goal was established. This means that the era of miracles has ended.

There are some who insist that miracles are true, and still happen till now and that their message in testifying for God, His existence and His power did not end yet. There is nothing in the Bible which indicates that miracles happened for a limited period of time.

We now respond to the above points of view.

FIRST - concerning the atheists, we do not need proof for the existence of God in this research, it is not our aim in this book. The fact that God exists is stronger and more powerful than any claim an atheist can imagine.

SECOND - the claim that it is not likely for God to change His natural laws which He laid down to manage the universe and His creatures, is not acceptable. This claim means that natural laws are like another god which is equivalent to God and independent of Him, and are not subject to supervision and they are above all control and should not be interfered with.

This claim also means that God laid down these natural laws to look at them as a spectator, and is unable to do anything about them. It is like an engineer who constructed a huge machine and after making it run he stands watching its motion without being able to stop it or to increase or to decrease its speed as he wishes.

There is another matter of great importance, **that "material law" is but among many laws which God created, and not the only one. There exist for example the "humanities laws" which deal with the characters of human beings and their conducts whether in their own lives or in dealing with others. Such laws in the sight of God are superior to material laws, and throughout the ages God had intervened to correct and perfect them.** After healing the Paralytic at the Pool of Bethesda on a Saturday, the Lord Jesus said to the Jews: "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working" (John 5:17). These words were directed to the Jews who accused Him of breaking the commandment of keeping the Sabbath, which is one of the humanities laws.

On the other hand, what can we say about the recent ingenious scientific inventions which resemble miracles, such as sending rockets beyond the scope of the earth's gravity, and the astronauts who walk in space in weightless atmosphere, and recalling rockets to earth at the exact point and time which the scientists predetermine. **Can we say in such cases that the law of the earth gravity has been broken?** Let us illustrate by using another example: if we hold a piece of iron by our fingers and let it go, it falls down by gravity. Yet if we let this piece of iron be subject from above to a strong magnet, the piece of iron will not fall down, defying the law of gravity.

If the human will with its limited ability can defy the natural laws, could God with His complete and infinite will and power not defy any known or unknown laws? For God, a miracle is concluded by a simple command from Him.

The whole issue concerns the difference between man's wisdom and power and God's wisdom and power. What man considers unusual in his sight and for his abilities, on the contrary is simple and normal for God with His wisdom and power.

In summery there is no contradiction or breaking of laws in making miracles, but it is enslaving or controlling the laws by Him Who made them.

THIRD - the claim that miracles occurred only in the early history of the Church for the purpose of establishing and spreading of Christianity, there are no verses in the Holy Bible, specially in the New Testament, which specify a period for the occurrence of miracles. On the contrary the Lord Jesus said to His Disciples: "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. **And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink**

anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover" (Mark 16:15-18).

The history of the Church after the time of the Apostles and up till now, is full of the miracles which God did at the hands of His saints and the righteous people in every generation. Hence we say that miracles occur as long as there is a man or a believer on the surface of the earth. From the side of God, they are to help man, rescue him from difficulties, and to strengthen and encourage him. Besides, miracles witness to God that He still cares for His creatures in realization to His promises. Miracles will occur as long as man needs them, which is actually the case.

No one hesitates in confessing that there are numerous miracles which occur every day, such as the miracles of healing which happen after the doctors fail to cure chronic diseases, confirming the promise that what is impossible for man is possible for God: "But Jesus looked at them and said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26; Mark 10:27; Luke 18:27).

God is glorified not only in the miracles of healing but also in the miracles which He makes with His people as a Church. The God of miracles works up till now as he did in the Old Testament and in the beginning of Christianity. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). What the Apostle Paul says: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13) does not refer to Paul only but to everyone who believes, as Christ said: "All things are possible to him who believes" (Mark 9:23).

B) THE DEVIL AND THE MIRACLES

It is important to mention here that whatever man does using methods of deceit, inspiration, hypnotism, conjuration, or communication with the spirits is not considered a miracle. The basis of a miracle starts when all human power fails. **We now ask: "Can the Devil make miracles and wonders?"**

As a fallen angel, the Devil has the power to make wonders. This happened many times in order to show off his power in response to the real miracles of God. But at the end, victory is for God and for His power. We have a clear example in the miracles which God made at the hands of Moses in the ten Plagues. The Egyptian magicians tried to match with their magic

what Moses did. But what was the end result?

Before the first Plague, every magician threw down his rod and they became serpents. "But Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods" (Exodus 7:12). In the first plague the waters of Egypt became blood. "Then the magicians of Egypt did so with their enchantments" (Exodus 7:22). In the second plague the frogs smote Pharaoh's territory. "And the (Egyptian) magicians did so with their enchantments, and brought up frogs on the land of Egypt" (Exodus 8:7). **In the third plague which was about the lice, the Egyptian magicians stopped and declared their inability to match: Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God" (Exodus 8:19). That was the end result; failure of the magicians in front of the power of God.**

We would like to explain here that because of his nature the Devil has the power to make wonders which astonish people. This is what the Lord said to the people of Israel by the Prophet Moses: "If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, "Let us go after other gods -- which you have not known -- and let us serve them, you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul" (Deuteronomy 13:1-3).

The Lord Jesus said: **"Many will say to Me in that day, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name? And then I will declare to them, I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!" (Matthew 7:22, 23). The Lord also said: "For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect" (Matthew 24:24).**

St. Paul said that the coming of the lawless one **"is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders"** (2 Thessalonians 2:9). St. John speaks in the Book of Revelation about the Dragon saying: **"He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived"** (Revelation 13:13, 14). He also says about the false prophet: **"Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped his image"** (Revelation 19:20).

C) HOW DO WE DISCERN BETWEEN THE MIRACLE AND THE DECEPTION

How do we discern between the deceit of the Devil and the miracle? We have to study the unusual event from three sides: the maker of the wonder, the means by which it is concluded and its aim.

The maker of the wonder should have a holy life and live the life of piety. If he were an evil sinner, then he is a liar, belongs to the Devil and his action cannot by any means originate from the Holy God. Also the means by which the wonder happened can tell and unveil its nature. Sorcery, soothsaying, witchcraft, conjuration, or the like, are devilish means and could not be from the will of God and from His Holiness.

We have the Holy Bible with its Old and New Testaments and we have the life stories of the pious and righteous saints, by whom we can discern how God made miracles and wonders through them. They made miracles by prayers which we all know or by a word uttered from the mouth of the saint.

Finally, the aim of the wonder or its intent shows to a great extent whether it was from God or from the Devil. Miracles, wonders and signs are not meant to astonish people or the like. Anything which separates man from God or from a holy life cannot come from God. Anything which leads to nonsense, deceit, amusement, cannot come from God. Would God the Wise perform a miracle or a wonder without a holy propose? Absolutely not. God performs a miracle for either glorifying His name, or for reinforcing peoples' faith, or for easing the pains of sicknesses, calamities and the like. Numerous are the deceits which appeared and still appear in our days, which unfortunately are believed by simple naive people and by even the educated as well.

We complement this subject in a brief way by talking about sorcery and conjuration and conclude by telling some stories from past and contemporary times concerning the Devil and sorcery, showing that they have no authority over the believers

D) SORCERY AND CONJURATION

Is sorcery true and does it exist? The answer is yes. But to start with we have to distinguish between sorcery and deceit. Many of the deceivers pretend to be sorcerers. They take advantage of the simplicity of some people and the difficulties which they go through and trap them in their deceits. **True sorcery is doing unusual work which is beyond human capacity, and which no one can do without the power of the Devil. That is why sorcery is a sin!**

The New Testament mentions Simon the sorcerer "who previously practised sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the great power of God. And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time" (Acts 8:9-11). **The Book of Acts mentions that because of the active preaching of the Apostle Paul in Ephesus "Many of those who had practised magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all" (Acts 19:19).**

The Apostle Paul mentions that sorcery and idolatry go hand in hand and are among the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19, 20). **In the Book of Revelation St. John mentions that sorcerers and idolaters shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone (Revelation 21:8), and they will be outside the heavenly Jerusalem (Revelation 22:15).**

In the island of Cyprus, in the city of Paphos, St. Paul resisted Elymas the sorcerer: "Then Paul filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, "O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord? And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time". And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand" (Acts 13:9-11).

The above is what is recorded in the New Testament. Yet there are many complementing verses in the Old Testament. God said to Moses: "And the person who turns to mediums and familiar spirits, to prostitute himself with them, I will set My face against that person and cut him off from his people" (Leviticus 20:6). In this regard, the attitude of God and His wrath is clear and obvious, as He commanded Moses saying: "You shall not permit a sorceress to live" (Exodus 22:18).

Concerning conjuration we say that we believe in the existence of the spirits and their immortality and we call upon the saints seeking their help and ask for their intercession on our behalf, their assistance and prayers for us. That is without asking for their appearances to us to answer our questions. The spirits of the departed saints are not subject to the dominion of the living. They are entirely subject to the dominion of God and do not relocate except by His Holy will. **Hence it is not permitted for us to conjure the spirits of the dead by reciting a prayer or a psalm.**

In the Old Testament, the spirit of the Prophet Samuel appeared to King Saul, not via the woman medium whom he sought at En Dor but by the command and the will of God, so that He caught Saul red-handed committing the crime of going to a medium against the commandment of God (Deuteronomy 18:10; 1 Samuel 15:23). "When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice" (1 Samuel 28:12) indicating that she saw the spirit of the Prophet Samuel which completely differed from the evil spirits which she conjured by the power of the Devil or the jinn who accompany them.

We mention again that we are allowed to communicate with the spirits of the saints by prayers only. They may come to us and be of help to us according to the will of God which control them. **We have no authority over them and no one has the authority to conjure them or release them as he wills, as some people claim.**

Our Saviour explained this issue in the Parable of the "Rich Man and Lazarus" (Luke 16:19-31). When the Rich Man being tormented in Hades asked Father Abraham to send Lazarus from the world of the spirits to the world of the living, to the brothers of the Rich Man in order to warn them, lest they also come to this place of torment, Abraham said to him "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them" (Luke 16:29). That is they have the books of Moses and all the prophets and these are sufficient for them to learn.

Again it is not permitted for the saints to speak about anything in the other world, outside the limits drawn for them from God and revealed in the Holy Books. St. Paul had the chance to be caught up into Paradise by his spirit, but he did not permit himself to speak about the world which he saw. He only said that he "heard inexpressible words, **which it is not lawful for a man to utter**" (2 Corinthians 12:4).

Moreover, in order to guard the believers against deceit, the Divine Revelation warned us not to receive from the spirits any teaching or knowledge outside the teachings which are proclaimed to us in the Holy Books. The Apostle Paul says: "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8, 9). That means that the Divine Revelation prohibits the believers from receiving knowledge other than those designed by God, or to listen to an angel or a spirit whose teachings differ from those received from the Church.

The deceits into which simple people fall are numerous, and they are from the Devil. The

Devil and his troops are strong fiery spirits which enjoy power, knowledge and fast movement. The Devil appeared to many saints, sometimes in the form of a man, woman, child, animal and sometimes in the form of a saint or a pure angel. St. Paul refers to this by saying: "**And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light**" (2 Corinthians 11:14).

In any case it is not proper for the children of faith to consult the spirits in order to enquire about something or to know the answer of a question. The Lord's command is: "There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to the Lord, and because of these abominations the Lord your God drives them out from before you" (Deuteronomy 18:10-12).

The vengeance of God from those who seek sorcery or soothsaying is great. We have a stern example in the Old Testament of what happened to Manasseh the King of Judah who "caused his sons to pass through the fire in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom; he practised soothsaying, used witchcraft and sorcery, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger" (2 Chronicles 33:6). The vengeance of God upon Manasseh was the following: "The king of Assyria took Manasseh with hooks, bound him with bronze fetters, and carried him off to Babylon (2 Chronicles 33:11).

To justify seeking the sorcerers, some people say that there is sorcery for doing evil, that is rejected and forbidden. Sorcery is used for doing good, such as to bring two people together to love one another, and the like. That is all deceit, evil and rejected by God. The decree is that one should not seek except God and His help. Anything else is from the work of the Devil.

There is an important question which we pose here. Have the sorcerers authority over the children of God? The answer is: If sorcery is from the Devil, the Devil has no authority over the Children of God and the believers. If the Lord Jesus has given the believers the authority to cast out demons, would it be reasonable for the demons to have authority over the believers? The Seventy returned (to Jesus) with joy, saying, Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name" (Luke 10:17). He said to them: "And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; ... they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them: (Mark 16:17, 18).

E) THE BELIEVERS, SORCERY AND SORCERERS

We said that demons have no authority over the believers. Jesus said to His Disciples: "Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you" (Luke 10:19). As long as sorcery depends on the power of the Devil and is concluded by him, the sorcerers have no authority over the children of God.

We present some stories about the Devil and sorcery, showing that they have no authority over the believers.

a) The story of Justina and Cyprianus the sorcerer: Cyprianus was clever in his knowledge and sorcery. In the city of Antioch he met a young man from a famous family. The young man lusted for a Christian virgin who was called Justina. He tried to gain favor with her but could not succeed. He sought Cyprianus the sorcerer who promised to fulfil his desire.

Cyprianus used all the work of his sorcery and failed. Finally he called his devils and said to them: "If you do not bring Justina to me, I shall adopt Christianity". Here one of them tried to deceive him by disguising himself and to take the form of Justina. When Cyprianus saw that, he rejoiced and rose up to embrace her and as soon as he called her name, the disguised devil melted away and an unpleasant smell came out of his body. Cyprianus thought about his devils who could not stand to hear the name of a Christian virgin. He rose up at once, burnt his books of sorcery and became a Christian. The Coptic Church commemorates his feast on the twenty first day of the Coptic month of Tute.

b) The wonder which appeared at the hands of St. Basil the Great, Bishop of Caesarea of Cappadocia: A hired young man loved the daughter of his master and his heart was flamed with love for her. As it was impossible for him to marry her, he went to one of the sorcerers who wrote something for him on a piece of paper. He commanded the young man to go to the graves of non-Christians, stand there and raise his hand while holding this paper. The young man did that and Satan took the paper from him, asked him to write a covenant on another piece of paper to deny his Christian faith, and to never change his mind after granting him his wish. The young man agreed.

Satan kindled lust in the heart of the girl. She informed her father and asked him insistingly not to object to her marriage to this young man and threatened to kill herself if her father refused. Finally her parents married her to this young man, but they were praying with tears for God to lift up their sadness.

God answered their prayers. God opened the girl's mind and eyes and she found out that the young man was not a Christian because he did not practice any worship. She started to regret and weep over what she did. She revealed to him her doubts about his faith. At first he denied but soon he told her everything. The girl hurried to the Bishop of her city, St. Basil the Great, told him her story and asked him to rescue her. The Bishop called the young man, heard his story and asked him if he was eager to return to Christ.

The Bishop prayed over him, kept him in a nearby room and asked him to pray for three days. When the Bishop visited him, he told the Bishop that the evil spirits did not cease disturbing and troubling him. The Bishop strengthened him, prayed over him, and asked him to continue to pray in the nearby room. After forty days the Bishop went to visit him, and asked him about his state. The young man told him that he saw the Bishop fighting the Devil for him and that he defeated the Devil.

The Bishop gathered all the monks and the priests who prayed over him all that night. In the morning he led him into the church and asked the people of the city to attend the church. He asked everyone in the church to cry with a loud voice and say "Lord have mercy on us". As they continued to cry out, a paper fell from above. It was the covenant which the young man wrote to deny his faith which he gave to the Devil. The Bishop read this paper to the people, blessed the young man, gave him Holy Communion, returned him to his wife and blessed both of them. The Coptic Church commemorates this wonder on the thirteenth day of the Coptic month of Tute.

c) The story of St. Georges and Athanasius the sorcerer: Christian martyrs and confessors amazed their torturers to how they withstood pains and suffering, the torturers related it to the power of magic.

In the story of the martyrdom of St. Georges, a sorcerer named Athanasius was asked to prepare a strong poison for St. Georges to drink that would kill him at once. When they presented the cup to St. Georges he drew the sign of the cross over the cup, drank it and was not hurt. They related that to the magic sign, meaning the sign of the cross! In order to prevent St. Georges from drawing the sign of the cross, they tied his hands and gave him a cup of a stronger poison. Because of his strong belief in the sign of the cross, he looked to the cup and asked them: "Do you want me to drink from here or from there, from here or from there". By his head he was drawing the sign of the cross over the cup. He then drank it and was not hurt.

Besides drinking the cup of poison, St. Georges raised to life a person who was dead for a short while. All that was reason for the sorcerer Athanasius to become a Christian and was later

martyred by King Deocledian.

d) In this century a lady from the family of Bedard from the city of Nacada in Upper Egypt was ill for a long time: She was desperate and she called a sorcerer to heal her. When he entered her room he told them that the room was dark and not fit to do sorcery. They wanted to open the windows of the room, but he still refused. **When they insisted to know the reason, he said: "Frankly a pious man once slept in this room". They knew who this person was, he was the late Anba Marcos Bishop of Luxor, Esna and Aswan who reigned for 56 years and was a saint. He slept in the room 20 years earlier and obviously he prayed and read his Psalms in this room.**

e) This event happened in 1969 at the hands of the late Father Bishoy Kamel, Archpriest of St. Georges Church in Sporting, in Alexandria, Egypt: One of his daughters in confession named "Fawzia" was a student in the "Institute of Cotton" in Alexandria. She was in the last year and she used to fear sitting at her exams.

One day on her way to the Institute, which was located in a narrow street, she met at the beginning of the street a black woman. With a foreign accent the woman said to Fawzia, not to worry and to trust in God. Fawzia started to open up to this woman. The woman then told her some information about the Institute and also said: "Do not worry, I shall answer for you the examinations at the end of the year".

When Fawzia returned home that day, she told her mother about this woman. Her mother was pleased to hear the news about the examinations at the end of the year. Fawzia then contacted Fr. Bishoy by phone and when she did not find him she told her story to his wife. The wife of Fr. Bishoy was upset and told Fawzia that the black woman was a devil and next time you meet her ask her: "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ who are you?".

Next morning Fawzia met the black woman and asked her: "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ who are you?". The woman made loud noises and waved her necklace in the face of Fawzia to frighten her. But Fawzia drew the sign of the cross over the woman and over the necklace which then fell from the woman's hand, and went to her Institute shaking. Fawzia went to Fr. Bishoy in the same day. In a gentle manner Fr. Bishoy asked to hear her confession, gave her the Holy Communion and told her that he would make a "Candeel" for her.

The following day Fawzia again met the black woman who told her: "If Fr. Bishoy makes a "Candeel" for you I shall demolish a wall over both of you. Also your mother is restless at home (her mother was praying)". With courage, Fawzia told the woman: "You will not be able to do anything except by the permission of Christ".

The following morning Fr. Bishoy went to the flat of Fawzia, made a "Candeel" in the

presence of the picture of the Virgin Mary. He then sprinkled holy water in the flat. Fawzia then went to her Institute and saw the black woman paralysed. The woman said to her: "When Fr. Bishoy made the Candel for you, the light of the Virgin blinded my eyes and I cannot see except in your bathroom. The bathroom was the only place in the flat in which Fr. Bishoy did not sprinkle water. When Fawzia informed Fr. Bishoy, who prayed over a glass of water and asked Fawzia to sprinkle the water in the bathroom. In the last meeting with the black woman, she said to Fawzia: "See how I am now completely paralysed?".

F) BELIEF IN THE MIRACLES OF THE LORD JESUS

We mentioned that faith does miracles: **"All things are possible to him who believes"** (Mark 9:23). **In the New Testament there are many miracles which the Lord Jesus did by the faith of whom the miracle was made to; we realize the degrees of faith through their behaviour.** The Apostle James was correct to say: "I will show you my faith by my works" (James 2:18). **To illustrate that we speak about five of the miracles of the Lord Jesus which show the progression of faith and its levels.**

1 - HEALING OF THE PARALYTIC WHO WAS CARRIED BY FOUR MEN: (Matthew 9:2-8; Mark 2:1-12; Like 5:17-26)

This miracle happened in Capernaum. A paralytic lying on his bed was carried by four men who brought him to the house where Jesus was.

That house was full of people and more people were standing outside the house. As the four men could not find a way to enter the house, and as they were determined to seek Jesus and not to let this chance escape, they ascended to the top of the house and uncovered the roof. And when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying. **When Jesus saw their faith,** He said to the Paralytic: "Son your sins are forgiven" (Mark 2:5).

Immediately, an argument took place between a group from the Scribes and Jesus concerning His authority in forgiving sins. As Jesus wanted to give them pragmatic proof of His authority to forgive sins, He said to the Paralytic: "I say to you, arise take up your bed and go your way to your house" (Mark 2:11). And immediately he arose, took up his bed, and went out in the

presence of them all, "so that all were amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this" (Mark 2:12).

Bible commentators, including St. John Chrysostom a leader in explaining the Holy Bible, agree that the verse: "When Jesus saw their faith", does not only point to the faith of the four men who carried the Paralytic but it includes the faith of the Paralytic.

In this miracle we see faith which overcomes the difficulties it meets until it gets what it wants. It would have been easy for the four men to abandon their effort of seeking Jesus when they found themselves unable to enter the house where Jesus was. Rather, pressed by strong faith, they thought how to reach Jesus and presented their patient to the Great Physician. So they ascended to the roof of the house and when they had broken through, they let down the paralytic and the miracle took place.

2 - HEALING THE HEMORRHAGING WOMAN: (Matthew 9:20-22; Mark 5:25-34; Luke 8:43-48)

A woman was having a flow of blood for twelve years. According to the Old Testament Law, this woman was perpetually unclean, and whoever touched her shall be unclean and everything that she laid on shall be unclean; also everything that she sat on shall be unclean, and whoever touched her bed shall be unclean (Leviticus 15:19-32). Accordingly, because of being unclean, she was not allowed to take part in the worship. The teachers of the Jewish Law gave a legal opinion that such a woman be divorced from her husband. We can easily imagine the misery of this woman as she lived isolated from the society.

This woman heard about the Lord Jesus, about His great miracles and about His healing power. And she had suffered many things from many physicians and she had spent all that she had. Moreover, she was no better, but rather grew worse (Mark 5:26). But this woman said to herself, "If only I may touch His garment, I shall be made well" (Matthew 9:21).

That was what happened. This miserable woman collected all her psychological strength, and she came behind Him in the crowd and touched His garment; and immediately the fountain of her blood was dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of the affliction (Mark 5:27-29). She was healed instantly and her body was freed from its suffering.

Jesus turned around in the crowd and said: "Who touched My clothes?" These words of the Lord Jesus indicate that someone of a strong faith got hold of Him and that this person received the healing power which had gone out of Jesus as a result of this faith, and not as His Disciples answered Him: "You see the multitude thronging You, and You say, "Who touched Me?"

The question of the Lord "Who touched me?" shows that there is a difference between the multitude thronging Him, and the touch of the believing soul which needed Him!

Next the woman "fearing and trembling, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him and told Him the whole truth". The story did not end here, as Jesus revealed the reason behind her healing (her faith): **"Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction"**. This is the only occasion in the Bible where the Lord Jesus said the word "Daughter". **This story shows complete faith in the Lord Jesus.**

3 - OPENING THE EYES OF BARTIMAEUS: (Mark 10:46-52)

This is the story of a blind man who met Jesus on the road. As Jesus went out of Jericho with His disciples and a great multitude, blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the road begging. And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Jesus was in His way from Jericho to Jerusalem before the events of the Cross. As many warned him (Bartimaeus) to be quiet; but he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" So Jesus stood still and commanded him to be called. Then they called the blind man, saying to him, "Be of good cheer. Rise, He is calling you". **And throwing aside his garment, he rose and came to Jesus. So Jesus answered and said to him, "What do you want Me to do for you?". The blind man said to Him, "Rabboni, that I may receive my sight". Then Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your faith has made you well". And immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus on the road.** Perhaps he was the last person to follow Jesus!

The blind Bartimaeus represents the insistence of faith which does not allow chance to escape.

4 - HEALING THE DAUGHTER OF THE CANAANITE WOMAN: (Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30)

This miracle was performed in the region of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a woman of Canaan who was a Greek, a Syro-Phoenician by birth, a Gentile atheist and she kept crying asking Jesus to cast the demon out of her daughter saying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed". But the Lord answered her not a word. That was a strange and uncommon behaviour from Jesus whom the people knew as compassionate and gentle! He made miracles to many people without them asking Him first. But this woman kept crying and He answered her not a word!

The woman cried even more. And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, "Send her

away, for she cries out after us". But He answered and said, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel". What did the woman do after she heard the verdict of the Lord Jesus? She did not despair. She came and worshipped Him, saying, "Lord, help me!". Again His response was unexpected. He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs". In spite of the exterior cruelty in the words of the Lord, she said in humility, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table".

The Lord Jesus did not mean to insult this woman. He is the Holy and He is Perfect. But He meant to display the faith of this Gentile atheist woman. She showed great lowliness. She fell at His feet worshipping Him and by her persistence and her demand she showed her strong faith in Him and her insistence to get what she wanted. Nothing would deviate her from what she wanted.

How did the story of her meeting end? She displayed a profound and complete faith. Then Jesus answered and said to her, "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire". And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

When faith reaches this level, it gets what it wants "Let it be to you as you desire". **The story of the Canaanite woman is the story of perfect faith which is supported with patience, humility and no despair.**

5 - HEALING THE SERVANT OF THE CENTURION: (Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 7:2-10)

This miracle happened in Capernaum, the unbelieving city, upon which the Lord Jesus said: "And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you" (Matthew 11:23, 24).

The inhabitants of Capernaum were all Jews. Yet the Lord praised an atheist who was there and said: "Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!" (Matthew 8:10). That person was a Roman atheist centurion and he was an amazing person who represented the conqueror. Yet he loved the Jewish people and they loved him, that they came to Jesus, and begged Him earnestly, saying that the one for whom He should do this was deserving, "for he loves our nation, and has built us a synagogue" (Luke 7:4, 5). This centurion was also a humane person as he loved his servant and wanted him to be healed.

The story is centred around the centurion's servant who was very sick and about to die. With great humility, this centurion felt that he is not worthy to meet the Lord Jesus, though he wanted to heal his servant. He asked the elders of the Jews to mediate and to ask the Lord Jesus. And Jesus answered their request saying: "I will come and heal him". **The Lord went with them towards the house of the centurion. While Jesus was near the house, the centurion sent his friends to tell**

Jesus: "Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed" (Matthew 8:7, 8). As if he was saying, as a leader I can do what I want by giving a command and You (Jesus) can do what you want by giving a command.

When Jesus heard it, He marvelled, and said to those who followed, "Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!" Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go your way; and as you have believed, so let it be done for you". And his servant was healed that same hour. It was the discerning humble faith which exceeded the faith of those who believed in the God of Israel, that the Lord rebuked the Jews saying: "Many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 8:11, 12).

G) CONTEMPORARY MIRACLES

1 - The mother of Bishop Gregorius was a pious woman who loved the Virgin Mary greatly, and used to ask for her intercession and the Virgin Mary used to answer her requests and to appear to her.

Once her face was swollen and pus collected under all the skin of her face. As she did not like to show herself to physicians, she tried all kinds of home made means, but without any success. One day one member of her family insisted to show her to a physician. She asked him to wait for one more day. That night she fervently asked the Virgin Mary to heal her. During the night the Virgin Mary appeared to her in a dream, and stretched her hand to the face, as if the Virgin was trying to collect the pus to the lower part of the face, under the chin. In the morning, they found all the pus under the chin. They broke the skin, removed the pus and she was healed.

Again when she was on her death bed, she asked the Virgin Mary to heal her. St. Mary appeared to her in a dream and said to her: "I have asked my Son, and the matter is out of my hand". She knew then that she was going to die and that was what actually happened.

2 - The following miracle happened to a young lady named Yvonne Selim Rizk-Allah. At the time of the event she was living in the city of Tanta, and now she lives in the city of Beni-Sweif in Upper Egypt.

In the morning of May 5, 1946, she woke up with great pains in her right leg. That was twelve days after she gave birth to her first daughter. The doctors reported that the pain was the result of a clot in the right leg. They treated her without success. Two weeks later, the doctors told her father that the chance of her recovery was one in a thousand, and if she recovered she would be

using a cane to walk with.

In the room where she was lying, there was a big picture of the Virgin Mary sitting on a chair and over her legs was the body of the Lord Jesus after they took Him down from the Cross. Every time the pains intensified, the patient looked to the picture and said: "I have to break up this picture of the Virgin Mary because the Virgin Mary is not caring about me".

One day her condition totally deteriorated and three of the doctors reported to her relatives that she would die within two hours. She experienced low blood pressure and lost the ability to hear and to see. At that moment as she looked to the picture in the room, the picture was getting bigger and bigger until the Virgin had the normal size of a human. The Virgin Mary then stood up and put the Lord Jesus on the chair on which the Virgin was sitting. The room was filled with a very strong light similar to moon light.

The Virgin Mary started to talk to Yvonne with a frown saying: "What do you want? What do you want from me?". Yvonne replied: "Why are you frowning, I want to recover and be able to walk again". The Virgin responded: "You want all that!". Yvonne answered: "Yes and now". The Virgin Mary smiled and looked very very beautiful and said to Yvonne: "Take half a tablet and a capsule and you will recover". The Virgin held the capsule in her hand, it was the size of a 25 cent piece and was very hard. Yvonne said to the Virgin Mary: "There is a nearby glass of water, bring it, and let the capsule soften in the water before I swallow it". The Virgin did that and then said to Yvonne: "Now take the remaining half tablet". Yvonne replied "Put it inside the glass of water, so that I can drink it easily and be able to walk right now". The Virgin broke the half tablet into two quarters, dissolved one quarter in the glass of water which Yvonne drank, and gave Yvonne the other quarter to hold in her hand and said: "It is now soft, keep it so that you may remember me".

Yvonne answered: "I do not perspire at all and the doctors said if I perspire I shall recover". The Virgin replied: "You will perspire now". The Virgin then brought Yvonne a towel which was near the bed and put it on Yvonne's head and said: "Wipe your sweat with this towel.

After that, the Virgin Mary started to walk backward and become smaller in size, while she was smiling gently, until she reached the picture. She took the Lord Jesus and put Him on her legs and sat on the chair in the picture as before. Tears appeared on her face and the light went off. The patient said: "Why is the light off? I want some water to swallow the quarter of the tablet so that I can walk now". Her father heard her and asked for the tablet in her hand but could not find it. She then said: "I want to sleep, the pains are gone". She had a quiet sleep, perspired a lot, and in the morning she had a normal temperature.

Her father informed one of the doctors who treated her of what happened. The doctor could not believe himself and testified that what happened was a miracle. Next day she left her bed and was walking normally.

3 - A miracle which happened by Anba Marcos, the late Bishop of Luxor, Esna and

Aswan, after his death: He was a cousin to Anba Kyrillos the fifth, the Patriarch. Bishop Marcos reigned on his chair for 56 years and was known to be a pious man.

A girl named Anita Khalil from the city of Luxor became very ill around the year 1934 or 1935, and was about to die. They called all her relatives to bid her farewell. The relatives waited in the house for her to die. Her father was in a nearby room and he had great fondness of the late Anba Marcos who was dead for a short while. Yet before his death, a dispute erupted between him and Anba Marcos. In that room there was a picture of Anba Marcos. The father looked to the picture and said to Anba Marcos: "I know that you are still upset with me because of that dispute. Otherwise you would come and heal my daughter!". The father went into a light sleep and saw Anba Marcos saying to him: "Did not I tell you that I am not upset with you at all. Go, bring my shawl and put it on Anita (the father had kept the shawl of Anba Marcos, as a blessing in his cupboard). and I shall come in and anoint her.

Present in the house at that moment was a man named "Toma", an uncle-in-law to Anita who saw Anba Marcos with his own eyes outside Anita's room. This man said to Anita's father: "Would you not hold the hand of Anba Marcos?". The father asked: "Where is Anba Marcos?". Toma answered: "There near the stairs". They entered the room of Anita and found her well and healthy!

4 - The miracle with Mr. Daria a wealthy man from the city of Luxor, Upper Egypt, who was very sick with a third degree T.B.

At that time, around the year 1930, T.B. was a serious illness. This man went from Luxor to Cairo and then to Alexandria, looking for clever doctors to treat him, but without success. Finally he was advised to leave Alexandria to Switzerland for treatment. From Luxor some of his friends went to Alexandria to say goodbye to him and to encourage him.

In Alexandria they found that Bishop Marcos, the Bishop of their city (Luxor) was in Alexandria, in the Patriarchate there, so they went to greet him. They found Bishop Youanis, Bishop of Behera with him. One of the friends said to Bishop Marcos: "You Bishops are not making any efforts these days, you are letting Mr. Daria go to Switzerland for treatment and you should be able to heal him". The two Bishops went to the Pope at that time, Patriarch Kyrillos V, and asked him to pray over the patient. The patient came and knelt in front of the Patriarch who prayed over him for a whole hour. Finally the patient felt heat flowing in his body and was completely healed.

CHAPTER 6

HOPE

A) Christ is our hope

1- Christ: hope of the atheists

2- Christ: hope of the Jews before He came

**3- Christ: hope of the Jews and the atheists when He
was in the flesh**

4- Christ: hope of all believers after His Ascension to Heaven

B) Hope and Christ in the Gospels

C) Hope and other virtues

D) Why do we put our hope in God?

E) What strengthens our hope?

F) Christ the hope of the tired people

G) Examples of persons who kept hold on hope

Hope is one of the great virtues - faith, hope and love (1 Corinthians 13:13). Faith begets hope and he who has hope in God loves Him. And by love one reaches the summit of his relation with God. Hence we see the strong ties between the three great virtues. It is not possible to separate them, though it is possible to distinguish between them. Love depends on faith and hope, faith depends on hope and love, and hope depends on faith and love.

The importance of hope is obvious, since he who loses hope loses everything with it, even life itself. That is, when he loses hope he falls into despair and depression. **It is hope which pushes man to toil and strive, whether in his physical or spiritual life.** If the feeling of hopelessness and despair get hold of him, he will completely stop working and striving. **Thus hope is a driving force in the life of man.**

As hope is tied to faith and love, **it is also tied to joy.** One may fall into a certain sin, yet hope fills him with the Spirit and as a result his sadness disappears and is replaced with joy.

Hope is a free gift from God. The Apostle Paul says: "Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us **and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace,** comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work" (2 Thessalonians 2:16, 17).

The opposite of hope is despair or hopelessness. Our salvation is by hope, and if hope is a free gift from God, it is tied to the free salvation of man. The Apostle Paul says: "**For we were saved in this hope,** but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance" (Romans 8:24, 25).

In this subject we deal with the virtue of hope, its effect and importance in the life of man on a personal level. **Yet, as the Apostle Paul says, before anything else, this personal hope is tied to the hope in the "Lord Jesus Christ, our hope"** (1 Timothy 1:1). **Without Him we can do nothing** (John 15:5), **Christ, all things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made** (John 1:3).

St. Paul who experienced Christ said: "**I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me**" (Philippians 4:13), **Christ is our hope - not only in the present life but also in the life to come - otherwise we are of all men the most pitiable** (1 Corinthians 15:19). **Because of this strong tie, we find it necessary to speak first about the Lord Jesus as our hope.**

A) CHRIST IS OUR HOPE

In his Epistle to the Colossians the Apostle Paul reveals "The mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations" which is "Christ (is) the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:26, 27), and in his first Epistle to his Disciple Timothy he speaks about: "The Lord Jesus Christ, our hope" (1 Timothy 1:1).

Jesus Christ our Lord is the hope of all the world: before He came in the flesh, when He was in the flesh and He is still the hope of millions after He completed the Salvation and ascended to Heaven. We notice that God from the beginning gave man hope after his fall in His promise that "the seed of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent" (Genesis 3:15).

1 - CHRIST: HOPE OF THE ATHEISTS:

It was not only the righteous people of the children of God in the Old Testament who expressed their hope in the coming of the Saviour **but also the atheists!**

We read that a vision appeared to the Apostle Paul at night when he was in the city of Troas. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, "**Come over to Macedonia and help us**" (Acts 16:9). **The words of this atheist were none other than the cries of the multitudes of the Gentiles asking for help, with or without knowing of the unknown Saviour Who will free them. Simeon the Elder expressed that about Christ by the spirit of revelation: "A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles"** (Luke 2:32).

Anthropologists discovered that atheist nations were anxious for a champion, and a saviour to free them. **They found that the people of Galia (most probably in present France) were keeping a statue and an altar to a virgin who will give them a child who would free them! How was that? We do not like to think that Christianity extracted some of its dogmas from atheistic beliefs.**

We say that when God created the world, the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of waters, though the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep (Genesis 1:2). **We should not think that God deals only with His people, and not with atheist nations. God visits the atheists by His own means. Besides, all different nations inherited one legacy from the first father of humanity, Adam, who was promised by God that a Saviour would be coming.**

Something similar was found in Mexico. Mexican people had carved in the rocks and on public buildings statues of a god who would crush the beast. **Again similar things were found in**

China, India, Iran, Greece, Italy and Ancient Egypt. Plato was waiting for this person (god) and said: "When this person comes he will teach us everything, I am waiting anxiously to know him".

The Roman poet Virgil rejoiced for the coming of this Saviour and said: "Time has come, a young child is sent from heaven for us, and in his time the traces of our crimes will be wiped out. The earth will no more experience fear. He will take his place among the gods and will rule the quiet world by the power of the virtues of his father. Welcome dear son, the son of Jupiter, look at the Universe, it stands respectfully in front of you greeting you. Look, everyone is glad and is rejoicing by the coming of the new era".

Hence the ancient world, its different nations and religions -in spite of their diversities and misunderstandings - were waiting and hoping though in a vague way - for the arrival of this Saviour who will be sent one day from heaven to free them. The younger son in the story of the Prodigal Son (Luke, Chapter 15) refers to the atheist nations which were suffering from bad conditions yet had hope that God (the father of the Prodigal Son) would accept them.

St. Athanasius the Apostolic speaks about the way by which Christ died and says: "**The invitation was for all the nations because it is not possible for a person to die with his arms stretched apart except on the Cross. It was appropriate for the Lord to suffer this death, and to stretch His arms so that with one hand He draws the ancient people, and with the other he draws the Gentiles and the two unite in His Person. This was what He Himself said, referring to the kind of death by which He would redeem everyone: "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself"** (John 12:32)".

2 - CHRIST: HOPE OF THE JEWS BEFORE HIS COMING:

The Jewish people in their great hope for the coming of the Saviour Christ were eager to express this hope when they stood to pray, or when they went to the temple to present a sacrifice or an oblation. That was a reflection of the Jewish religion which expressed hope and exhibited weakness, asked for help and waited at the same time, and continuously looked for the future.

The enormous building of the Temple was erected on the high rock upon which the city of Jerusalem was built. The Temple as a unit symbolised the one sacrifice of the Cross. Meanwhile the different sacrifices and burnt offerings which were presented every day declared the ineffectiveness of man's efforts and called for the perfect sacrifice of the Cross, referring to the power which will appear one day in the sacrifice of the Incarnated God.

Many righteous men of God in the Old Testament expressed their hope in the coming of the Saviour Christ, for whom they waited since the time of Adam. The Psalmist said: "You who dwell between the cherubim, shine forth! Before Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh, stir up Your strength, and come and save us!" (Psalm 80:1, 2). The Prophet Isaiah said: "Yes, in the way of

Your judgments, O Lord, we have waited for You; the desire of our soul is for Your name and for the remembrance of You" (Isaiah 26:8). **The longing of Isaiah for the coming of the Saviour intensified as he expressed his hope to Him by saying: "Oh, that You would rend the heavens! That You would come down!"** (Isaiah 64:1).

The Lord Jesus summarizes all that by saying: "For assuredly, I say to you that **many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it**" (Matthew 13:17).

Hope in the coming of the Savior was realized for some righteous people in the Old Testament and they saw Him with their own eyes. Among them was Simeon the Elder who lived a long time: "So he (Simeon the Elder) came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said: "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; For my eyes have seen Your salvation" (Luke 2:28-30).

Simeon the Elder was not alone in bearing witness to the Redeemer. There was also **a widow; Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fasting and prayers night and day.** She gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem" (Luke 2:36-38).

3 - CHRIST: HOPE OF THE JEWS AND THE ATHEISTS WHEN HE WAS IN THE FLESH

When Lord Jesus, the hope of the world, was in the flesh on earth "He went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd" (Matthew 9:35, 36). These verses by Matthew are collective verses which describe the work of the Redeemer and His ministry among the multitude. He looked for the people and some people looked for Him.

He went to the Samaritan woman, and as He was talking to her she said: "I know that Messiah is coming (who is called Christ). When He comes, He will tell us all things". Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am He" (John 4:25, 26). The worship of the Samaritan people was Jewish in nature combined with atheism. They were also waiting for the coming of the Messiah (who is called Christ).

Jesus looked for Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector (Luke, Chapter 19), **and for Levi a tax collector** sitting at the tax office and called them to be Disciples for Him (Matthew 9:9). **He cared for the man who had an infirmity thirty-eight years at Bethesda** (John, Chapter 5)

and looked for the man who was born blind (John, Chapter 9), and many other people. His call for all of them was: "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

Multitudes of Jews looked for Him and gathered around him, a fact which aroused the feeling of rivalry of the Priests and their chiefs as well as of other Jewish religious denominations .They said to each other: "You see that you are accomplishing nothing. Look, the world has gone after Him!" (John 12:19). As an example, **in the miracle of the healing of the paralytic who was carried by four men**, St. Mark wrote: "He (Jesus) entered Capernaum ..., and it was heard that He was in the house. Immediately **many gathered together, so that there was no longer room to receive them, not even near the door"**. And when they (the four men) could not come near Him because of the crowd, they uncovered the roof where He was. So when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying (Mark 2:1-4).

Again after the miracle of the healing of the mother-in-law of Simon Peter, when His news spread to the surrounding regions around Galilee **"the whole city was gathered together at the door"** (Mark 1:33). Once more when the Samaritan woman was amazed at what Jesus told her and how He unveiled the secrets of her life, she went to the city and told the people. Then they went out of the city and came to Him. And they urged Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days (John 4:30, 40).

St. Mark the Evangelist presents a remarkable picture for the coming of the people to Jesus and says: they "began to carry about on beds those who were sick to wherever they heard He was. Wherever He entered, into villages, cities, or the country, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged Him that they might just touch the hem of His garment. And as many as touched Him were made well" (Mark 6:55, 56). And when He had come into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday: "all the city was moved, saying, "Who is this?" (Matthew 21:10).

That was about the multitude of the Jews seeking Jesus. Yet the Holy Gospels are full of events of Jewish persons who came to Him and He healed them and gave them rest.

Again many of the Gentiles came to Jesus such as the Canaanite Woman who persisted in asking Jesus with great faith. He said to her: "O woman, great is your faith!" (Matthew 15:28), **and the Centurion whose servant was ill and deserved that Jesus witness to his faith: "Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!"** (Matthew 8:10).

4 -CHRIST: HOPE OF ALL THE BELIEVERS AFTER HIS ASCENSION TO HEAVEN

In the first chapter of the Book of Acts, St. Luke describes the event of the Ascension of the Lord Jesus to Heaven, forty days after His Resurrection. After recording the last words of the Lord

to His Disciples, St. Luke says: "A cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, "This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner". Then they returned to Jerusalem" (Acts 1:9-12).

That overwhelming scene - the scene of the Disciples of the Lord gazing up to Him as He was ascending to Heaven - pictures the hope of the Christians in Christ Who ascended to Heaven. In a spiritual sense they are still gazing to Him whom St. Paul calls: "Christ the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27), and He Himself said: "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself" (John 12:32). He is the hidden treasure for which a man goes and sells all that he has and buys it (Matthew 13:44), and if Christ is the hidden treasure, we are reminded about the fact: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Luke 12:34).

We perceive the hope in Christ and the longing for Him from the words of St. Paul to the Philippians about himself: "Having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better" (Philippians 1:23). The Apostle John says: "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 John 3:2, 3). St. John also describes that as a conclusion to the Book of Revelation which is the conclusion to the whole of the New Testament: "Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:20).

In fact at the time of the Apostles the Christians lived in the hope of the near second coming of Christ. They understood in a literal sense the words of the Apostle Paul: "The Lord is at hand" (Philippians 4:5). In the same way they understood the words of St. John in his Revelation: "... for the time is at hand" (Revelation 22:10), and "Behold, I am coming quickly!" (Revelation 3:11; 22:7, 12, 20).

That understanding was reflected in the life of some of the Christians in that era as they stopped going to their work in order to find time for worship as they were waiting for the near second coming of the Lord! Such misunderstanding and style of life prompted the Apostle Paul to expound correcting that matter. He wrote to the Thessalonians saying: "Now, brethren, **concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you**, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, **as though the day of Christ had come**. Let no one deceive you by any means; for that day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition" (2 Thessalonians 2:1-3).

Nevertheless, that feeling and longing for the coming of Christ did not stop, as He is the hope of all the believers and their desires are always directed to Him. The Church expresses that each time she celebrates the Eucharist at the moment of consecrating the bread and wine. The priest says: "Therefore as we commemorate His Holy passion, His Resurrection from the dead, His Ascension into heaven, His sitting at Your right hand, O Father, and His second

coming which shall be from the heavens, awesome and full of glory; we offer unto You Your oblations from what is Yours for every condition, concerning every condition and in every condition".

B) HOPE AND CHRIST IN THE GOSPELS

The word hope (elpise in the Greek language) never occurred in the Gospels in the spiritual theological sense as a virtue. It occurred five times in the Gospels in different meanings (Matthew 12:21; Luke 6:34; 23:8; 24:21; John 5:45).

The absence of this word from the Gospels and from the teachings of Christ attract our attention, particularly when we remember that Judaism, which was the religion of the Lord Jesus in the flesh and of His Disciples, was a religion of hope. Moreover, the results of the teachings of the Lord Jesus were to strengthen and deepen the hope with what the richness of the Christian faith offers. **We see clearly that the religious hope in the Old Testament was great. Yet that hope is very little when it is compared to the "better hope"** (Hebrews 7:19), which is based on the Royal unchangeable Priesthood of Christ.

No doubt that the Disciples anticipated great future. They were like captives of the greatness of the personality of the Lord Jesus and His profound love. They realized that the hope of Israel was in Him. **If Simeon the Elder, who carried the child Jesus in his arms, felt that his hope had been realized, the Disciples were without doubt overwhelmed by Him and were not thinking of any aspirations or expectations related to the future.**

But why was Jesus, Who taught about the necessity of faith (Mark 11:22; John 3:16), and of love (Matthew 22:37-40), silent about Hope. **The reason is that as Jesus was training His followers the first requirement for them was to concentrate on His blessed personality. He taught them clearly about what awaits them - the glory in the world to come. Therefore the meaning of hope was in deed implicit in the teachings of Christ, even though the word "hope" as a spiritual virtue did not occur in the literal sense.**

C) HOPE AND OTHER VIRTUES

Hope is related to other virtues: to our love to God and faith in Him, to repentance and to joy and comfort.

1 - LOVE:

Hope is a motivation and support for love - our love to God. It is like waiting for dawn and the first rays of daylight. Yet we have to know that we shall not realize our hope all at once. There is an important difference between the way we count time and that of God. **We measure the day starting from the morning, with the beauty of the sunrise. Then the day ends with darkness, sadness and tragedy at night. Yet the first chapter of the Book of Genesis shows us that God, the creator of the six days, started His count from the evening: "So the evening and the morning were one day" (Genesis 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 31). He starts from the evening and proceeds to the morning until He reaches the powerful midday.**

Hence, it is worthwhile for our lives to proceed with such grading: from limited hope and limited love which resemble morning light to the intense heat of midday which represents unlimited love. We enter to the unlimited love by "the door of hope", about which God says in the Book of Hosea: "I will give her vineyards from there, and the Valley of Achor as a door of hope; she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, as in the day when she came up from the land of Egypt" (Hosea 2:15). This entering is considered the beginning of the possession (of the unlimited love), not the total possession (we should realise that unlimited love can possess us while we cannot possess it).

We also remember the word of Christ to the Angel of the Church of Philadelphia: "See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it" (Revelation 3:8). This open door which no one can shut is the door of hope and is itself what God pointed to in the Book of Hosea. It is the door which leads us to the Kingdom of Heaven!

In loving God, we must have had many chances escape from us. Yet hope intervenes and stops us from grieving. It whispers in our ears saying: Those chances which were lost do not compare with the new chances which God will offer us. If before my death God gives me one chance only, it is possible for me to use it for the salvation of my soul, like the right hand thief on

the cross. If I make good use of it, it will compensate for all the previous lost chances. God opens the door of hope for us every day and every moment.

2 - FAITH:

Hope is the virtue which mediates between faith and love. Faith reveals our sonship to God, and by its very nature, sonship is a relation of trust and dependency. As in our life on earth, this relation is strengthened by hope and as a result, love is established. This means that faith approaches love through hope. The Apostle Paul says: "But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us" (1 Thessalonians 5:8-10).

Talking about the relation between hope and faith, St. Augustine says: "Hope is a companion to faith. It is necessary as long as you do not see Whom you believe in, lest you despair from lack of seeing and you lose faith. You grieve because you do not see, but you get comfort when you hope to see. **Then let your hope accompany your faith.** There are difficulties in the present, but there is hope in the future. If you do not find comfort in the hope of the future about the difficulties which you now encounter, you will no doubt perish.

You believe in the present and you see in the future. As long as you believe, hope is alive. As long as you are in the flesh, you are away from Christ. **You are a passenger who proceeds by faith and not by seeing. Your salvation now is based on hope and not on what was promised because you did not yet get what was promised to you, but you hope for it.** Christ tells you: "The hope of the unbelievers is in the present, and yours is in the future. Their hope vanishes but yours is guaranteed. Their hope is not real but yours is true".

Build hope in your heart and expel the lack of belief. The believer says: "Lord, I believe in your promises. I believed in the past promises, and I know the present promises, and I hope in the future promises. You are my hope here, Lord, and you are my share in the land of the living".

3 - REPENTANCE:

At the beginning of the road of repentance Satan confronts man with despair. On one hand he makes the road of repentance hard for man and on the other hand he uncovers his past which contains terrible sins. Satan does his best to let man fall into despair, so that he returns back to sin.

At this stage hope is very useful for man; Satan pulls him backward and hope gives him a good push forward. Judas Iscariot and Simon Peter committed terrible sins; the former sold his Master for thirty pieces of silver and the latter denied Christ and blasphemed with

curse and swearing in front of an ordinary servant girl, not even in front of a ruler, governor or a king. Yet Simon Peter realised his sin, was terribly sorrowful, and wept bitterly. The Lord accepted him and restored him to his Apostolic status by telling him: "Feed My Lambs ..., Tend My sheep ..., Feed My sheep" (John 21:15, 16, 17). Yet Judas Iscariot lost his hope and went and hanged himself. Had Judas regretted what he did and repented, Jesus would have accepted him as He did Peter.

Peter expressed his hope in his first Epistle by saying: **"Rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you"** (1 Peter 1:13) and **"Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defence to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear"** (1 Peter 3:15).

The Book "Paradise of the Monks" mentions a story of a brother who lived in a monastery and used to fall many times into the sin of adultery. He hated himself and was ready to leave the monastic life. Yet he was careful to complete his daily worship by saying the Psalms, fasting and prostration. In his prayer he used to say: "Lord, You see my bad state and my sadness, pull me up Lord whether I want it or not. I am like mud, I desire sin and I like it. But You are strong Lord, make me abstain from this filth. It would be strange if You have mercy on the saints only, or You only save the pure who deserve to be saved. Show Your amazing work of mercy in me who is not worthy. I submit myself to You". He used to say this prayer every day whether he sinned or not.

One day Satan was irritated by his hopefulness and appeared to him when he was reading his Psalms and said to him: "Are you not ashamed to stand between the hands of God and call His name with your unclean lips?". The brother replied: "You do one thing and I do another thing. You let me fall in sin and I ask the Merciful God to have compassion on me. I fight you in this manner until death reaches me and I do not abandon my hope in my Lord. I do not cease preparing myself to stand against you and we shall see who will win, you or the mercy of God".

When the devil heard that he said to him: "From now on I shall not wage a war against you, in order not for you to win a crown because of your hope in your God", and the devil left him from that day.

The brother came back to himself and wept bitterly for his past sins. Whenever he fell haughty, he used to remember his past sins and whenever he felt in despair he hoped in God and remembered His love to sinners.

St. Augustine said: "If sin is not pulled out of you, hope in forgiveness should not be pulled out of you. The waves of the sea trouble us, yet we drop our anchors on the land of hope".

4 - JOY AND COMFORT:

Hope brings peace and joy to the heart, as the Apostle Paul says to the Romans: "Rejoicing

in hope" (Romans 12:12). Sin takes away the peace from the soul and lack of hope causes anxiety. Hope calms down the heart and replaces sadness with joy and fills the heart with comfort.

St. Augustine says: "Hope is necessary for you as you travel and is a comfort on the road. When you get tired you remember that after some times you will reach your destination. If you take away the hope of arriving, you soon lose your energy and will be unable to continue. You do now what you hope will be fruitful and that you will enjoy these fruits. You are happy when you strive and you are even happier when you reap the harvest. If hope has this sweetness, reality is sweeter".

The subject of the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus from the dead presents to us an important thought about hope. Christ changed the sadness of His Disciples to joy. He calmed those who were afraid and who locked the doors and windows of the Upper Room. He stood in their midst and said to them: "Peace be with you" (John 20:19, 21, 26). Likewise, when our situations darken, matters complicate, difficulties intensify, enemies increase and people say: "There is no hope for him in God" (Psalm 3:2), we still have hope in Christ the Saviour and joy encounters hope.

On the first day of the week Mary Magdalene brought spices and went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and when she saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb she ran and told Peter and John (John 20:1, 2). When the two Disciples found the tomb empty they went away. But Mary sat at the tomb weeping (John 20:13). She did not leave at once because she hoped to see her Lord and Beloved. She was rewarded for her hope. She saw two angels at the tomb and then she saw the Lord Jesus Himself and He spoke to her. She was the first person to see the Lord after His Resurrection and the first person to spread the good news to the Disciples (John, Chapter 20).

D) WHY DO WE PUT OUR HOPE IN GOD

We put our hope in God because of His attributes and His promises:

1 - THE MIGHT OF GOD:

Among God's attributes is His Almightyness, being able to do everything. We hope in Him because of this. Obviously a man does not hope for anything or any matter from a weak person who has no power. The men of God experienced the power of God, realized it and praised Him.

The Psalmist says: "Seek the Lord and His strength; seek His face evermore!" (Psalm 105:4) and the Prophet David says: "Your saints shall bless You. They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom, and talk of Your power, **to make known to the sons of men His mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of His kingdom**" (Psalm 145:10-12).

In the Book of Isaiah, God asks in astonishment: "Is My hand shortened at all that it cannot redeem? **Or have I no power to deliver?**" (Isaiah 50:2). The Apostle Paul prays for the people of Ephesus so that God the Father may give them the spirit of wisdom in the knowledge of Him that they may know "what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, **and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power**" (Ephesians 1:16-19). Again when the Apostle Peter speaks about God, he points to the fact that "**His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness**, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue" (2 Peter 1:3).

When man feels that he puts his hope about a certain matter in the hands of the Almighty, he calms down and is rested, knowing that his matters are in the hands of a mighty God. God is able to keep us from evil people and their conspiracies and from the devil and all his traps. In total, God is able to take care of us according to His promises.

2 - THE LOVE OF GOD:

Our belief in the love of God for all humans in general, and for sinners in particular, makes us come to Him with hope. **We trust in the love of God to us, and for that we have hope in Him.** The word of the Lord Jesus to the angel of the Church of Philadelphia encourages us and fills our hearts with hope. It unveils the Divine Love which increases and strengthens our hope in Him: "These things says He who is holy, ... He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens, I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; ... **Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial**" (Revelation 3:7-10).

3 - GOD'S PROMISES:

Numerous are the promises of God for us. The Holy Bible with its two Testaments are full of God's promises, which St. Peter describe as "exceedingly great and precious" (2 Peter 1:4). **God is truthful in His promises because "God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent"** (Numbers 23:19) **and He is not slack concerning His promise** (2 Peter 3:9). All the good promises of God are for you if you love Him: "All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). **St. Paul says: "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful"** (Hebrews 10:23).

God is faithful in all the promises which He gave us. In the prayer of consecration of the Temple which Solomon built, he was correct when he said: "Blessed be the Lord, who has given rest to His people Israel, according to all that He promised. **There has not failed one word of all His good promise**" (1 Kings 8:56). Joshua was also correct when he became old and said to Elders of Israel in his farewell speech: "Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth. **And you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one thing has failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spoke concerning you; not one word of them has failed**" (Joshua 23:14).

4 - GOD'S CARE:

We trust in God for His care for us. He said: "I will never leave you nor forsake you. So we may boldly say: "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?" (Hebrews 13:5, 6). When He was incarnated, God chose a name for Himself showing that He is with us always: "and they shall call His name Immanuel, which is translated, "God with us" (Matthew 1:23).

Sweet are the promises of God which express His care for His children. He says in Isaiah: "Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? **Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands**" (Isaiah 49:15, 16). He also says by the Prophet Zechariah: "**He who touches you touches the apple of His eye**" (Zechariah 2:8).

The last promise which the Lord Jesus gave to us in the person of His Disciples was: "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). The Psalmist says: "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes" (Psalm 118:8).

The Lord Jesus promised that "**the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it (the Church)**" (Matthew 16:18) and said about the believers: "**neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand**" (John 10:28, 29).

John saw Him in the Revelation "In the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, ... He had in His right hand seven stars" (Revelation 1:13, 16). Yes, the Lord Jesus Christ is still in the midst of His Church and still holds by His Hand the ministers of the Churches and His children.

E) WHAT STRENGTHENS OUR HOPE?

Like other virtues, hope grows. The Apostle Paul said to the Romans: "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, **that you may abound in hope** by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13). **If hope grows, how do we strengthen our hope?**

a - By realizing the attributes of God and thinking about them, particularly His love, mercy and His care for His children. We mentioned this point earlier.

b - By reading the Holy Bible: The Apostle Paul says: "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Romans 15:4).

c - Difficulties and patience will strengthen our hope in God. The Apostle Paul says: "**Knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint**" (Romans 5:3-5).

In the fourteenth year of **King Hezekiah, Sennacherib, King of Assyria, came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and took them.** Then Hezekiah, King of Judah, sent to the King of Assyria at Lachish saying, "I have done wrong; turn away from me; whatever you impose on me I will pay". So Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the house of the Lord and in the treasuries of the king's house. At that time Hezekiah stripped the gold from the doors of the temple of the Lord, and from the pillars which Hezekiah King of Judah had overlaid, and gave it to the King of Assyria.

Then the King of Assyria sent the Tartan with a great army against Jerusalem, to King

Hezekiah. Then the commander of the army said to the men of Hezekiah: **"Say now to Hezekiah, "Thus says the great king, the King of Assyria: "What confidence is this in which you trust? And in whom do you trust, that you rebel against me?" and he reproached the Living God of Israel"**.

And so it was, when King Hezekiah heard it, that he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth and went into the house of the Lord. Then he sent Eliakim, who was over the household, Shebna the scribe and the elders of the priests covered with sackcloth to Isaiah the Prophet, the son of Amoz. And they asked him to raise up his prayer for the remnant (of Israel) that was left.

Then the commander of the army of Sennacherib send to Hezekiah threatening him saying: **"Do not let your God in whom you trust deceive you". And Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it; and Hezekiah went up to the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord. Then Hezekiah prayed before the Lord, and said: "O Lord God of Israel, Incline Your ear, O Lord, and hear; open Your eyes, O Lord, and see; and hear the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to reproach the living God. Now therefore, O Lord our God, I pray, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You are the Lord God, You alone"**. Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, "Thus says the Lord God of Israel: "Because you have prayed to Me against Sennacherib King of Assyria, I have heard".

And it came to pass on a certain night that the angel of the Lord went out and killed in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and when people arose early in the morning there were the corpses-- all dead. **So Sennacherib, King of Assyria departed and returned home and remained at Nineveh. Now it came to pass, as he was worshipping in the temple of Nisroch his god, that his sons struck him down with the sword; and he died** (2 Kings, Chapters 18, 19).

We see that the great difficulty which Hezekiah faced was a source of strengthening his hope. He went up to the house of the Lord, and spread the letter of Sennacherib before the Lord, as if he was saying to the Lord: "To whom can I go, You are help to those who have no help and hope to those who have no hope".

d - By reading spiritual books, specially about the lives of the men of God. That is to understand His dealings with them. The saints - in spite of the spiritual attacks and the temptations which they faced - their hope in God never diminished. They never doubted in His love and His care.

They were certain that God was tempting them for their good and for their wellbeing, that they may become partakers of His holiness (Hebrews 12:10). **They waited on Him until He lifted the temptations from them: "My soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the**

morning-- yes, more than those who watch for the morning" (Psalm 130:6), "Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the Lord!" (Psalm 27:14).

F) CHRIST: HOPE FOR THE TIRED PEOPLE

1 - HOPE FOR THE SICK:

Many are the sick who hoped in Christ and He healed them. **We here present three cases; healing of the sick of Bethesda, the daughter of the Canaanite woman the hemorrhaging woman.**

a - The Sick of Bethesda (John 5:1-14):

This man had an infirmity for a very long time, for 38 years. Besides physical pain, it seemed that he also suffered from psychological pain. Jesus unveiled that the secret of his illness was sin. After healing him, Christ told him openly: "See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you" (John 5:14).

The Jews did not deal with the sinners, especially the Jews who thought that they were righteous. They were surprised to see that Jesus sat with sinner and ate and drank with them. Hence the paralytic of Bethesda - as a sinner - was isolated from his own people. When Jesus asked him: "Do you want to be made well?", the sick man answered Him, "Sir, I have no man ..." (John 5:6, 7). It seems that because of the length of the illness, 38 years, the people left him all together. Christ alone was his hope. The hope of this man was to find someone to put him into the pool when the angel stirred up the water. The God of the angels knew of his case and came to him by Himself and healed him with one command: "Rise, take up your bed and walk".

b - Healing the Daughter of the Canaanite Woman (Matthew Mark 7:24-30):

15:21-28;

The Canaanite woman was a Gentile atheist. Her daughter was severely demon-possessed which made her notoriously mad. This woman had amazing hope in the Lord Jesus that He would heal her daughter. The dialogue between her and the Lord Jesus did not appear friendly or full of compassion. It was the opposite of what we are accustomed from His dealings with other people. Even when he compared her to the dogs, she did not lose her hope and persisted until in the end she got what she wanted: **"O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire". And her daughter was healed from that very hour.**

c - Healing the Hemorrhaging Woman (Matthew 9:20-22; Mark 8:43-48):

5:25-34; Luke

Again this woman suffered from both physical pains and psychological pain. She was having a flow of blood for twelve years. She had spent all that she had going to doctors and she was no better, but rather grew worse! (Mark 5:26). That was beside suffering from her isolation from the society.

According to the Old Testament Law, this woman was perpetually unclean, and "whoever touched her shall be unclean and everything that she laid on shall be unclean; also everything that she sat on shall be unclean, and whoever touched her bed shall be unclean" (Leviticus 15:19-32). If she were married, then the teachers of the Jewish Law gave a legal opinion that such a woman be divorced from her husband. In her misery, this woman had no hope. She heard about Jesus and said to herself: "If only I may touch His garment, I shall be made well" (Matthew 9:21).

She had no courage to come to Jesus and ask Him to heal her, as she was considered unclean and rejected from society. She had no choice but to come behind Him in the crowd and to touch His garment. She thought that Christ would not realize what she was doing. When Jesus turned around in the crowd and said: "Who touched My clothes?" His Disciples answered Him: "You see the multitude thronging You, and You say, "Who touched Me?" But Christ felt the touch of the faith of the woman who put her hope in Him.

Christ was the hope of this miserable woman and He healed her from her infirmity with the words: "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction".

2 - HOPE FOR THE SINNERS:

The Lord is the hope for the sinners as He is the hope for the sick. The best example

which the Bible presents to us is that of the sinful woman in the house of Simon the Pharisee, as recorded by St. Luke (Luke 7:36-50).

St. Luke says: "And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner (an adulteress), when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the house of Simon the Pharisee, she "brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears and wipe them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil".

This woman had no hope of a holy life. Her character was known to all the city, and because of her sins the people rejected her. The story says: "Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, and that Jesus did not reject or shout at her, he spoke to himself saying: "This man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner" (Luke 7:39).

The unholy thoughts of this Pharisee and his disapproval of the behaviour of the Lord Jesus towards this woman made Jesus unveiled the love of this sinful woman to the life of repentance, and to Him. Jesus is able to win her soul and offer her forgiveness, as compared to the little love of this Pharisee for God!

This sinful woman realized her many sins and came to Jesus feeling great shame, as she stood at His feet. **But Jesus Who came to deliver the sinners and Who searches the hearts, knew that this woman had put all her hope in Him, and being rejected from society, He did not disappoint her. He exposed her love and her great sorrow and repentance and forgave her sins. He added: "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace".**

3 - HOPE FOR THE SUFFERERS:

We present two events; Christ raising the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-17) and the feelings of Jesus towards the sister of Lazarus (John, Chapter 11).

a - The Widow of Nain Who Lost Her Only Son:

The travels of the Lord Jesus from one place to the other were for a purpose. One of His travels was from the city Capernaum to the city of Nain, where He knew that a weeping widow had lost her only son.

We have to comprehend the magnitude of the sorrow of this woman. Her son was a young man and he was her only son. Was anyone able to comfort this woman? I do not think so. Those who tried to comfort her might have aggravated her. Job was right when he said to his friends who came to comfort him: "Miserable comforters are you all!" (Job 16:2). Jesus saw the dead man being

carried out on the way to the grave. St. Luke says: "When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep". Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried him stood still. And He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise". So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother" (Luke 7:13-15).

I do not think that this grieving mother had any hope that her son would be alive again. What was the use of weeping? But Christ Who is the hope for those who have no hope had compassion on her, asked her not to weep, raised her son and presented him to her alive.

b - Mary and Martha the Sisters of Lazarus:

The second encounter is that of Mary and Martha the sisters of Lazarus who from the first moment of the sickness of their brother had hope in Christ. When Lazarus became sick, the sisters sent to Jesus, saying, "**Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick**" (John 11:3). When Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was, in order to be glorified by raising Lazarus from the grave. So when Jesus arrived, He found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.

As soon as Martha met Jesus she said to Him: "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You" (John 11:21, 22). And when Mary met Jesus she also said the same words of her sister: "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died" (John 11:32). These verses show the great hope which the two sisters had in Jesus. This hope did not stop at Jesus healing Lazarus when he was sick, but extended to after Lazarus' death. We know the result of this hope. Lazarus rose from the dead by the ordering word of Jesus: "Lazarus, come forth!" (John 11:43).

4 - HOPE FOR THE CAST-OFF:

We spoke about the sinful woman in the house of Simon the Pharisee under the title "Christ is the hope for the sinners". **Yet at the same time she is an example of the hope in Christ for the outcast.** The sins of that woman were open and were known to the city. Surely she was cast out from her society. We saw how Jesus accepted her and put her back on the right way.

a - The Man Born Blind:

This is the story of Jesus giving sight to the man born blind, the great miracle in which the Lord Jesus created eyes for him from the mud and put in them light by His word (John, Chapter 9).

This miracle was concluded on a Sabbath. The Pharisees conducted many discussions with the man born blind and with his parents, because in their sight, "Jesus is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath" (John 9:16). The attitude of the parents was shameful when they did not want to speak about the miracle because they feared the Jews, for the Jews agreed already that if anyone confessed that He was Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue (John 9:21, 22).

Yet the attitude of the man born blind was great. He confessed all what Jesus did to him and defended Him and His righteousness: "Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind. If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing". And they cast him out (of the synagogue) (John 9:32-34) **(to be cast-out of the synagogue was a severe punishment for the Jews).**

What did Jesus do? "Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when He had found him, He said to him, "Do you believe in the Son of God?" He answered and said, "Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?" And Jesus said to him, "It is He who is talking with you". Then he said, "Lord, I believe!" And he worshipped Him" (John 9:35-38).

Surely Jesus was the hope for him whom the Jews cast out from the synagogue. That punishment is like ex-communication now.

b - The Adulteress Caught in the Very Act:

This is the story of the woman who was caught in adultery, in the very act, whom the Scribes and the Pharisees brought in order to hear His verdict (John 8:3-11).

The Law commanded them that such a woman should be stoned. But what did Jesus say to her? He gave a hard lesson to those who condemned her. He taught that they should instead save themselves. He stooped down and wrote their sins on the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear them. So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first" (John 8:7).

They all withdrew in shame when the Lord uncovered their hidden sins, and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. He then said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord". And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more" (John 8:10, 11).

This woman escaped death by a miracle. When she fell into the hands of those Pharisees surely she was going to be stoned to death. Jesus was her hope, He rescued her from the death of the body and the death of sin.

G) EXAMPLES OF PERSONS WHO KEPT HOLD ON HOPE

1 - Monica the Righteous:

She was the mother of St. Augustine who slipped down to the depth of sin and later he repented and reached great heights in virtue. God visited this soul for the sake of the prayers and perseverance of his righteous mother. **What concerns us here is to speak about her hope in the repentance of her son, which was realized by her continuous prayers for him.**

It was not only her son for whom she hoped in God, but also her husband. The fruits of her hope appeared first in her husband, and then were realised in Augustine. She married an atheist evil man. His mother and even the servants were like him. Yet she considered it as her cross which she should carry with thanksgiving and she put her hope in Almighty God. Finally she was able to win her husband and he became a Christian. In her hope in God and His love to save sinners, she used to encourage other women who had husbands like her's.

After the death of her husband, her son Augustine deviated badly. She went to the Bishop of her city, Hippo and asking him to give some advice to her son. The Bishop declined because it was useless for him to deal with someone who leaned on his mind and his intelligence, such as Augustine.

Augustine left Hippo in North Africa and travelled to Rome to seek fame. She begged him to stay near her but he refused, and it appeared that there was no hope in his salvation after he had

lived a very sinful life.

For twenty years Monica did not lose hope and kept praying for him with tears - as she followed him from one city to the other - asking him without grumbling or despair to leave the life of sin. Finally her hope was realized and her prayers and tears brought forth their fruits. He accepted the faith and was baptized at the hands of Ambrose, the great Bishop of Milan. She went to Milan to attend his baptism and she rejoiced triumphantly.

After his baptism they set out to return to Africa and the desire of her heart was to die. Five days later she fell ill and died at the port of Ostia on the Tiber, at the age of fifty six.

In talking to God, Augustine speaks about his mother and says: "My pious mother had spoken and as I perceive, her voice was the echo of Your voice. She used to insist that I give up the harlots and all kinds of impurity, and I did not listen to her in the least, and cared not of what she said, as these were the words of a woman, while they came from You. My disrespect for her was disrespect for You, and my disregard for her was disregard for your words. My mother used to weep in a way which surpassed the weeping of women who lost their sons by death. Lord, you listened to her and the tears which she shed in her prayers are still in your hands. She used to wet the face of the earth with her tears".

2 - The Late Mr. Gindy Fam:

This man was a contemporary righteous man. He worked as a chief of a railways station in Egypt and he died around 1970. As I used to complain from digestion in my stomach he told me: "I used to have pains in my stomach, even from drinking water, but after St. Georges put his hands inside me, all these pains disappeared". So I asked him to tell me the story of this miracle.

He had a abscess in his liver and that was around 1925. The doctors agreed that the only way to cure him is by a medical operation. Yet at that time the rate of success of such an operation was one in a thousand and as a result he refused to have the operation done to him.

On a Sunday morning he had great pains and was unable to get up and go to church and he was expected to preach in the church that day. As he was very tired he gave up the idea of going to the church and fell asleep. He saw in a dream a man dressed in white like the doctors in the operating rooms. The man told him: "Get up it is Sunday and you should go to church". Mr. Fam answered: "I am sick and unable to get up". The man responded: "A sick person should go to the doctor to be cured and then go to church". Mr. Fam answered: "I went to many doctors who said that an operation is necessary". The man replied: "You should have the operation then". **Mr. Fam replied: "If God is unable to make the operation for me, I go to the doctors, but if He is able to make the operation for me, I shall never go to the doctors". The man asked: "You insist?", he answered: "Yes".**

Mr. Fam continues: "Then the man who looked like a doctor put his hands in my belly from

the right side near the liver and as if he undid a zipper, took the liver out and eliminated the abscess. After he finished this operation, he worked on my belly and then as if he did the zipper again. At this moment I woke up without any pains". Mr. Fam was also cured from troubles in his stomach. **The man in a white dress was none other than the Martyr St. Georges who made the operation and eliminated the abscess in a miraculous way.**

CHAPTER 7

THE LIFE OF PEACE

- A) Christianity and peace**
- B) Peace and Christian faith**
- C) The Christian and peace**
- D) Experience of peace in the lives of God's men**
- E) Joy comes with peace**

"Peace, perfect peace". What nice words are these, they overflow like music. Mentioning these words fills the hearts with emotions. Sometimes we succeed to quieten these emotions, like a mother who quietens her crying child for a little while. These emotions, however, rise up again and are more eager to be calmed down.

We find peace in nature. There is peace in the clear blue sky, and in the quiet lake with the mountain shielding it from the gales and winds. We also find peace in the vast fields in spring time, with their green visage and in other faces of nature.

Thank God that there is peace for the human being. Jacob the father of the Fathers was lying sick in bed near death in the land of Egypt. His face radiated the heavenly light to which he was going. **He prophesied about "Shiloh" the Prince of Peace** (Genesis 49:10), **and His coming to the world to establish accord among the people.**

Many generations passed before "Shiloh" came. **Finally a man appeared among the people whose life was full of afflictions and sorrows: "A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief"** (Isaiah 53:3). **Yet He had a serene face which displayed the perfect peace that filled His heart. The Fathers prophesied that He was the Giver of peace to the people. His heart was full of peace and hence He was able to say: "My peace" (John 14:27). He had the power to give peace to others when He said: "My peace I give to you" (John 14:27).**

A) CHRISTIANITY AND PEACE

Is Christianity a call to tribulations and sorrows as many imagine?: "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). **Is the road of Christianity a road of tears?:** "Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy" (Psalm 126:5). **Is there anything else in Christianity? What calls us to this difficult road and encourages us to walk in it?**

Christianity is not a call to a life of tribulations and sorrows. On the contrary it is a message for freedom and joy: "For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17). This kingdom of God is not

only the one expected in the life to come, but also the one in which we live here and now and we are enjoying its tributes: "For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21).

Christianity is the message of joy: "Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, **you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory**" (1 Peter 1:7, 8). The Epistle to the Philippians which the Apostle Paul wrote in his first imprisonment in Rome expresses the most joy among all Paul's Epistles. In it he says: "**Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!**" (Philippians 4:4).

Even the tears which a believer shed - he who lives for God and in God - are not tears of sorrow, but of joy, because through these tears he sees God and his heart is filled with joy. St. Isaac says: "Blessed are the righteous because through their tears they always see the face of God".

Joy accompanies the inner peace of God which fills the heart of man: "The kingdom of God is but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:7). **What is this inner peace which is enjoyed by each soul who loves God?**

It is not easy to talk about the peace of God. The Apostle Paul who was caught up to the third heaven and heard inexpressible words (2 Corinthians 12:2-4) could not adequately describe it. All he said is that it "surpasses all understanding" (Philippians 4:7). If it surpasses all understanding, how can we talk about something which is beyond our comprehension?

What is peace then?

All we can say is that peace is a state which accompanies the dwelling of God in the heart, a state of joy in the heart. Wherever peace and joy are, God Himself is: "The kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21), "Glory to God in the highest, **and on earth peace**" (Luke 2:14). **When did peace come to earth except when the Lord Jesus the Son of Man was born and brought goodwill toward men!** (Luke 2:14). In conclusion, peace is the heart's comfort and inner quietness, the result of the dwelling of God in our weak temple.

B) PEACE AND CHRISTIAN FAITH

Peace is the first fruit of faith: "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). It is the first fruit of faith because it is based on the Blood of the Redeemer and Savior: **"Having made peace through the blood of His cross"** (Colossians 1:20). **Peace is considered one of God's greatest gifts to the human being in the Person of Christ.** We regain the peace which we lost through our disobedience by our faith in the Incarnation of the Son the Word.

The mark which Christ chose when He greeted His Disciples to express His message was: **"Peace to you", and He commanded them to use it**, when He sent them before Himself in training missions: "But whatever house you enter, first say, "Peace to this house" (Luke 10:5).

In fact the words "Peace to you" are not as much greeting words as they are the grace and power which Christ "the Prince of Peace" gives to all who believe in His name. This is the title which Isaiah, in the past, prophesied about Him saying: "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, everlasting Father, **Prince of Peace**" (Isaiah 9:6).

We mentioned that the words "Peace to you" are not as much greeting words as they are grace and power which Christ gives to those who believe in Him. The Lord Jesus said to His Disciples: **"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you"** (John 14:27). **Then, peace is a spiritual gift and an inheritance to the sons.** Expressing peace was the greeting of the Archangel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary: "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you" (Luke 1:28).

Again the expression "Peace to you" is not just words, but it is power moulded into human words. The expression of peace which the Lord used after His mighty Resurrection was to fill their hearts with peace, joy and comfort.

Peace is a holy gift which God gives to His children. In the past the Psalmist said: **"The Lord will give strength to His people; the Lord will bless His people with peace"** (Psalm 29:11) and **"I will hear what God the Lord will speak, for He will speak peace to His people and to His saints; but let them not turn back to folly"** (Psalm 85:8). In the New Testament our teacher the Apostle Paul says: "And as many as walk according to this rule, **peace and mercy be upon them**" (Galatians 6:16).

C) THE CHRISTIAN AND PEACE

We mentioned that peace is the first fruit of faith in Christ, and it is a spiritual gift and a holy inheritance which the Lord Jesus left to us: "Peace I leave with you". **In fact the life of peace is the true evidence that we have a holy fellowship with Him.**

If peace is among the fruits of true faith, the loss of peace is a fruit of sin which when it ripens leads man to despair and hopelessness and sometimes even to suicide.

What does the Holy Bible say about wicked people and peace? The Holy Revelation says by the Prophet Isaiah: "But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest. **There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked**" (Isaiah 57:20, 21). After he sinned, the Prophet David said: "**There is no health (peace) in my bones because of my sin**" (Psalm 38:3).

The words which Cain said to God after he killed his brother Abel expresses this point very clearly: "My punishment is greater than I can bear! Surely You have driven me out this day from the face of the ground; I shall be hidden from Your face; I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth, and it will happen that anyone who finds me will kill me" (Genesis 4:13, 14). Evil desires and devious passions destroy the peace of the heart, like fire to wood and moth to wool.

There is no comfort and peace for man in the desires of the world, only anxiety and troubles. This is compatible with the ever changing nature of the world. But the true peace of God stays with us because it is from God "with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning" (James 27:1). He who seeks peace from the world is like a bird who flies over the waves of the sea, there is no place for its feet to stand until it is tired from flying and gliding.

Peace which a Christian enjoys is like a referee in a football match! When the referee blow his whistle, the play stops because an error has occurred and the error has then to be corrected. Likewise when we lose our inner peace, it is like the whistle of the referee which God installed inside us, to warn us that an error has occurred! What should we do then? We should stop and correct the error which we committed and raise our heart to God in repentance. But if we do not recognise the error, we should humble ourselves in front of God asking Him to show us the reason for this warning which echoed inside us. It is true that there is no peace for the wicked. After we correct our error, peace will return to us.

Did you experience that in your life? I am sure that you did. There is no peace for the wicked. Some people whom we know who walk in the road of sin and live in impurity, seem in front of others to be joyous and laughing. **It is all deceitful. If they tell you about the misery and bitterness that is inside their hearts you will realize that their laughter and clowning are but a curtain which hides the bitterness of their souls!** In many cases, such people use ways and

means which bring them joy and happiness. That is an escape and these means are like temporary pain killers which can not remove the anxiety and trouble that is inside them.

Peace comes with inner purity: The person who does not submit his body to the dominion of the Spirit has in him "the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh and these are contrary to one another" (Galatians 5:17). It is not possible for such a person to enjoy peace because he suffers from inner division. However if he reaches a degree of purity in which bodily desires cease and its graceless movements stop and the control of the body is returned to the Spirit, peace will return to him. This person becomes again one identity instead of being two quarrelling ones.

D) EXPERIENCE OF PEACE IN THE LIVES OF GOD'S MEN

The depth of inner peace was felt in the lives of the saints and the righteous people of God. The Lord God dwelt in their hearts and His word lived richly in them.

The Psalms of the great Prophet David reveal the depth of peace in him. He says: "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 may encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war should rise against me, in this I will be confident" (Psalm 27:1-3). **In another Psalm he says:** "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling. There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High. God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved" (Psalm 46:1-5).

The experience of peace for David was not only at times of rest, but also at times of danger and trouble, as is perceived from his Psalms. If you ask David why will he not fear, even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling, he answers: "Because there is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High. God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved" (Psalm 46:1-5). The city of God is none other than the heart of the believer in which the Most High dwells. The streams of the rivers are none other than the sign of the Holy Spirit and His work in man. Did not the Lord Jesus say: "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He

who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive" (John 7:37-39).

The peace of Christ is like a river with clear water. It continues to flow and its path quietly becomes deeper and goes forth until it pours in the endless sea: "Oh, that you had heeded My commandments! **Then your peace would have been like a river**, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea" (Isaiah 48:18). **As the river deepens its path by the factor of time, likewise the peace of God increases in its depth and in its flow as time goes on.** "All your children shall be taught by the Lord, and great shall be the peace of your children" (Isaiah 54:13). Mountains may disappear and hills are uprooted, but the peace of God remains forever.

The music of Divine Peace is louder than the turmoil of a storm. It is an experience presented to us at the Sea of Galilee. The peace of the Lord Jesus, which from its riches He gives to His own, can calm down the strongest windstorm and most violent tempest. As the Lord arose He rebuked the wind and said to the sea "Peace, be still!" and the wind ceased and there was a great calm (Mark 4:35-39). **"Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble"** (Psalm 119:165).

E) JOY COMES WITH PEACE

Great joy always accompanies peace, which the Apostle Peter describes as: "Inexpressible and full of glory" (1 Peter 1:8). It is inexpressible because it is inside the innermost part of the soul. It is not revealed easily and does not show on the outside. It is a deep joy established in the heart: "And your joy no one will take from you" (John 16:22). It is also inexpressible because no one can describe it. To a great extent, it may be pictured as our teacher Paul recounted: "surpasses all understanding" (Philippians 4:7).

When the angels were singing the Eternal Song: "And on earth peace" (Luke 2:14), another angel was "bringing good tidings of great joy" to the shepherds (Luke 2:10). The birth of Christ brings both joy and peace which is to us from Him and through Him.

We nearly feel the same joy and peace in the house of Zachariah the Priest. When the Virgin Mary visited her relative Elizabeth and gave her peace, immediately Elizabeth said: **"For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy" (Luke 1:44).**

One may say: "How can peace and joy accompany the believer, when previously our Lord prophesied that we can only follow Him with trials and that He commanded us to carry the Cross the sign of pain?"

There is no contradiction in that. The trials and difficulties which the Lord spoke about, are outside difficulties which do not seep to the soul of the believer who is a temple to the Lord. But peace with exceeding joy is a picture of the inner state of man. The Apostle Paul said: "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing" (2 Corinthians 6:10). Notice the word "as" before the word sorrowful and in fact we are always rejoicing! The world has its means in measuring joy, yet for the believer his joy is an inner one.

From this point the Christian resembles the green Bush from which God appeared to the Prophet Moses (Exodus 3:2-4). The Bush was burning with fire, but it was not consumed. Its beauty was not gone and its greenery did not disappear. Likewise for the believer, the difficulties which surround him are like the fire from the outside which is not able to let him lose his inner peace and joy!

Do you know that he who goes to the Mount of Olive (Mount of Resurrection) has first to go through the Garden of Gethsemane, and with difficulty goes higher to the summit of Golgotha, then goes down to the Garden of the Tomb? In doing that we can keep our peace like Our Lord who

at the time of His severe suffering was keeping His perfect peace and His calmness, to the extent that He made a miracle at the time His enemies came to arrest Him. He healed the right ear of the servant of the high priest which Peter had hastily cut with his sword (Luke 22:50, 51; John 18:10, 11).

The saints lived the life of peace and inner joy. Hence they disregarded everything. They lived on earth with their bodies as if they had no bodies. All their care was for the inside, not for the outside, and thus they lived the life of peace and joy. Their literal and speaking abilities did not help them to express their feelings.

John Saba (the Spiritual Elder) tried to describe the state of peace, joy, pleasure and glory of the saints which reflected on them as a result of their life with Christ, but he could not. Finally he did his best and said:

"I wished to write down but I could not. I tried different ways but still I could not. That which fills everyone, I tried to describe on paper as food for my people, but I could not. There is nothing like it in the outside world, and no body knows about it in the inner world. There is nothing like it in our world and no body can match what is in the spiritual world. I do not know how to douse my inflamed heart which burns and boils. You cannot express it by words, no one sees the signs, it can not be pictured, and no one hears the movement of the conscience. I am totally defeated. I do not talk about it like a person who is not good enough for it. I am very sad as I do not know how to picture or describe it. And if it cannot be described, ask for it dear brothers. Ask for it to be part of you. The blessing of its grace is greater than all other blessings. It does not resemble anything else in its pleasure. That is the explanation. It is said, you my father are in me and I in you, and also so that they become one in us. Blessed is he who enjoys its blessings. Blessed is he whose soul with his flesh and bones enjoy this pleasure which can not be explained"

And now dear brother, you knew that the Lord of Glory gave you the gift of peace which is inexpressible. Do you feel this peace inside you and do you enjoy this holy gift? Know well that the only thing which takes away peace from your heart is sin. If you still suffer from anxiety and difficulties, sit down with yourself and search it well. Be open with yourself, and if you have failed to know the reason for the loss of peace, lift up your heart to God in prayer so that He will show you your weaknesses and unveil to you your iniquities and sins. God's love will work in you and He will give "peace which passes all understanding" according to His Holy and true call.

CHAPTER 8

THE LIFE OF SUBMISSION

- A) The life of submission is the most acceptable offering**
- B) Virtues which precede the life of submission**
- C) Characteristics of the life of submission**
- D) Blessings of the life of submission**
- E) Matters which help man in the life of submission**

A) THE LIFE OF SUBMISSION IS THE MOST ACCEPTABLE OFFERING

In Christianity giving is important and is acclaimed and it is a command from the Lord Jesus Himself. The Apostle Paul said to the Priests of Ephesus: "I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. **And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive"** (Acts 20:35). We notice that the words of the Lord Jesus which the Apostle Paul points to here were not mentioned in the Four Gospels. Yet these words were known to the believers and the Apostle Paul was reminding the believers of them: "And remember the words of the Lord Jesus". **Being known to the believers confirm that "giving" was an important agreed upon Christian principle.**

It is nice to present to God alms and material donations, and it is nicer to present to Him spiritual gifts and offerings. It is even nicer still for man to present himself to God. I do not mean by the latter, a life of consecration. Rather I mean an offering which exceeds all other offerings. That is surrendering your will to God and submitting your whole life to Him. It is the best offering because in the other offerings we give to God part of what we have. In submitting our will to the will of God we mortify our will and our personal desires **and in total we present ourselves as live oblations on the altar of submission.**

I might give alms to a person or money to the Church. In this case I give part of my riches, not all of my riches. I might serve God honestly, and in this case also I give God part of my time, not all of my time. I might strive for a certain holy matter, and in spite of that my offering is a part of my effort, not all of my effort.

Hence the life of submission is surrender of the whole life to God, such that all the deeds of man, his behaviour and his sayings are according to the will of God. The Apostle Paul expressed that by saying: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20).

This matter is distinct in the life of the Lord Jesus Who presented to us an example of a perfect man. He said: "**For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me**" (John 6:38). In His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, the night of His suffering, He addressed the Father and said: "**O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will**" (Matthew 26:39). He said that in spite of the fact that He had no will except the one will which He had with the Father. But He wanted to teach us a lesson at that time.

When His Disciples asked Him to teach them how to pray, He gave them a "model prayer" in which He cared to exalt this virtue. He said to them: "In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven ... **Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven**" (Matthew 6:9, 10; Luke 11:2).

We notice here that He taught us to ask the Heavenly Father that His will be done in our lives as it is in heaven. There are no obstacles to hinder the will of God in Heaven. But on earth, because of the free will of man by which God distinguished him, man can disobey God, and this is regrettable indeed!

The Apostle Peter exalts this virtue in the life of the Lord Jesus by saying: "Who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously" (1 Peter 2:23).

B) VIRTUES WHICH PRECEDE

THE LIFE OF SUBMISSION

We have to mention that to live the life of submission is not an easy matter. **There are obstacles to it, among which are personal desires, feeling of the ego, the mind, ... etc.** Three virtues are to precede the life of submission:

1 - Disposition of one's desires: He who does not dispose of his desires cannot submit his life to God, because he has already surrendered himself to his desires. And if he submits his life to God, it will be conditional, and his submission is not complete. **It is necessary for him first to dispose of each wish and each desire, even in spiritual matters.** Spiritual desires should have one aim, to be one with God. The detail of this union with God and the means to achieve it have to be left to God, and man should have no special aim in it.

2 - Humility: It is not possible to live the life of submission without humility. He who is sure of himself, leans on his own thinking and depends on his own mind, cannot submit his life to God in the simplicity of faith. In most cases he submits his dealings to God under the watch of his mind in which he trusts. He accepts from these dealings that which his mind accepts and rejects the rest. He does that by arguments and discussions.

Such a person may err as he thinks evil of what God intended for his good. He might relate some of what happens to him as evil from wicked people or the devil. **He may resist God's will, and his mind pictures for him matters which appear correct, because he is wise in his own eyes. The pride of his thinking cannot sway him to submit his life totally and completely to God.**

3 - Faith: o one can submit his life to God unless he is sure that God cares for Him and takes care of all his matters. He trusts that whatever God does, He does with wisdom and that God does not need his interference. But if he doubts in the pastorship, love and care of God, how can such a person live the life of submission? If faith in God is trusting in Him, it is obvious that a person cannot submit to him whom he does not trust. We mentioned this point in the chapter about faith.

C) CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LIFE OF SUBMISSION

Submission is an inner life, yet it has characteristics which we sense.

a - Submission of one's will is such that a person has no other will which differs from that of God: In other words, such a person is like soft wax which accepts the imprint of a picture on it. He does not live divided on himself, sometimes submitting his life to God, and sometimes wanting to execute his own will.

Saul of Tarsus (the Apostle Paul before his conversion) asked God when He appeared to him near Damascus: "Lord, what do You want me to do?" (Acts 9:6). These words express complete submission, and were the turning point in the life of that great Apostle, who was led by the Spirit from that point on. We realise the same from Paul's sayings: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

We again listen to what St. Paul said to the Priests of Ephesus: "And see, now I go bound in

the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:22-24).

St. Paul lived in complete obedience to the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God. Although he knew that chains and tribulations awaited him, he did not dispose of his obedience to the Spirit, and the life of submission which he vowed to live.

b - Also the thought becomes that of God: The Apostle Paul who lived and experienced a life of submission said: **"But we have the mind of Christ"** (1 Corinthians 2:16), **and that is a normal result of the life of submission.** If a person submits his life completely to God, God will guide his thoughts. The Psalmist said: "I was so foolish and ignorant; ... you hold me by my right hand. **You will guide me with Your counsel"** (Psalm 73:22-24).

c - In total, all the behaviour of man will agree with the will of God: The Divine Revelation said about the Prophet and King David: **"I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will"** (Acts 13:22). **David deserved this great testimony because he lived a life of submission. He always used to shout: "My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast"** (Psalm 40:8). That was the testimony of his willingness to obey God completely, and to surrender to Him totally.

d - Reacting gladly and with thanksgiving to different events: Flaring up concerning a certain matter shows that we were shocked because a personal desire did not materialise and resulted in becoming nervous. But he who knows how to submit his life to God, does not get anxious nor depressed. **He accepts gladly whatever happens and with thanksgiving, knowing that it was for his good, whether in its appearance it looked good or bad.**

D) BLESSINGS OF THE LIFE OF SUBMISSION

What does a person gain from submitting his life to God and what are the blessings which he reaps?

1 - Perpetual joy with no grief nor agitation, complete peace without anxiety or fear: That is the result of the feeling that God's will is done. The Psalmist said: "I delight to do Your will, O my God" (Psalm 40:8) and "But let all those rejoice who put their trust in You; let them ever shout for joy, because You defend them; let those also who love Your name be joyful in You" (Psalm 5:11). Joy is from the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22) and sadness is from the fruit of sin.

The source of joy for man and what accompanies it from peace is the fulfilment of the will of God and the faith which follows it: "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). **The Wise expressed it by saying: "No grave trouble will overtake the righteous"** (Providence 12:21).

Joy and peace which accompany the submission of the will to God does not mean that the person who enjoys them will not meet difficulties in his life. Maybe the contrary: "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all" (Psalm 34:19).

To a great extent, such a person resembles the three young men in the burning fiery furnace in Babylon. They were seen midst the fire walking joyously as if in a picnic. The fire had no power over their bodies; the hair of their head was not singed nor were their garments burned, and the smell of fire was not on them. All the fire did was loose them and they were able to walk in the fire. The secret was in the presence of a fourth Person with them Who was like the Son of God (Daniel, Chapter 3). This is our God about Whom is said: "In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the Angel of His Presence saved them" (Isaiah 63:9).

b - Total serenity: The person who knows how to submit his will to the will of God is serene and nothing inflames him. He submits all his life to the Almighty "for of Him and through Him and to Him are all things" (Romans 11:36). Such a person always feels that his life is in the hands of God Who loves him and Who is able to rescue him from difficulties and tribulations.

The Psalms of the Prophet David are full of these emotions which filled his heart: "Yea, 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" (Psalm 23:4), "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 may encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war should rise against me, in this I will be confident" (psalm 27:1-3) and "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea" (Psalm 46:1-2).

Another source of serenity for the person who lives the life of submission is his feeling that God, to Whom he submitted his life, will bring to him only that which is good and right. The Apostle Paul says: "All things work together for good to those who love God" (Romans 8:28). And when he is surprised by something which he does not expect, he realises at once that God has a purpose and a useful ending for him.

It was said about one of the saintly fathers who experienced the life of submission, that he went to the city of Alexandria, Egypt. There, some atheists surrounded him and kept insulting, swearing and beating him. All the time he was keeping his serenity without any anger. Then one of them asked him: "What are the wonders and miracles which that Nazarite in which you believe in did?" The saintly father broke his silence and said: "One of the miracles is that you have beaten and insulted me while I stayed happy and joyous".

It was also said about a saintly monk who used to perform miracles and wonders, that the head of his monastery - in spite of these miracles - noticed that the striving of this monk was no more that those of other monks in the monastery. He was surprised and asked the saintly monk about his life. The monk answered that he did not pray, fast, or keep vigil more than the other monks, but that he did not get annoyed from anything at all. The head of the monastery asked him: "Did you not get angry when our enemies attacked our monastery and set fire to the store of wheat?" The monk replied: "I am accustomed to accept everything with thanksgiving, submitting the matter to God".

The head of the monastery realised that the secret of the serenity of this monk and the wonders he performed were in submitting his whole life to the will of God.

3 - We said earlier that humility precedes the life of submission. We add that the life of submission in the long run lets the virtue of humility grow. Humility is the strong foundation upon which our spiritual building stands.

4 - Among the blessings of the life of submission is being sure of the final judgement of God. The fact that I submitted my life to God means that there is no condemnation on me.

How would I be condemned on fulfilling the will of God? The whole spiritual striving for man is to reach this point - not to be condemned in the last day. If the life of submission leads me to this conclusion, this is enough for me.

5 - Among the blessings of the life of submission is that we oblige God to care for us. The more we submit ourselves to Him the more we oblige Him to care for us. The Psalmist says: "Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him on high, because he has known My name. He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him, and show him My salvation" (Psalm 91:14-16). The first lesson in swimming is for a person to submit himself to the water without fear. The more he submits the more the water carries him.

6 - A life of submission cultivates in us the love of God. Love is not considered complete until our will agrees with the will of whom we love. The practical evidence on our love to God is submitting our lives to Him and His will be done in us: "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15).

7 - A life of submission gives us a chance to acquire other spiritual virtues such as obedience, patience and endurance. My own will stands against acquiring these virtues. A person who does not submit himself to God cannot be obedient, because obedience is in submission. Submitting myself and accepting a certain matter even when it appears not for my advantage cultivates in me the virtue of patience, and patience enriches my life, and produces perseverance (Romans 5:3, 4).

8 - A life of submission gives me possibilities for holy experiences in the life with God. God created man with a free will. Man with his full freedom deprives himself from many graces when his will contradicts the will of God. The Lord Jesus said to the people of Jerusalem: "How often I wanted to gather your children together, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate" (Matthew 23:37, 38). **If I submit my will to the will of God I see wonders.** Besides, man will receive many graces from God as a result of not hindering the work of the Spirit of God in him.

E) MATTERS WHICH HELP MAN IN THE LIFE OF SUBMISSION

1 - One should convince himself that nothing will happen in his life or even in the life of the whole world, except by either God's will or by God's permission. The Lord Jesus said to Peter in the evening of His suffering, when Peter cut the ear of the servant of the High Priest with his sword: "Put your sword into the sheath. **Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?"** (John 18:11). The Lord did not say "the cup which Judas and the Chief Priests have given Me", but He said: "the cup which My Father Who controls the whole world and Who holds everything in His hands has given Me". In another event, Pilate said to Jesus: "Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?", **the Lord Jesus answered: "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above"** (John 19:10, 11).

Herod, the Jewish King, tried to kill the Lord Jesus when He was a child by putting to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts from two years old and under, but without success, because the hour of the Lord Jesus had not come yet (Matthew 2:16). The Jews also tried several times to kill Jesus, but they could not fulfil their wicked desire. Once the people of Nazareth rose up and thrust Jesus out of the city; and they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff. **"Then passing through the midst of them, He went His way"** (Luke 4:29, 30). **But when His time came, which He designed according to His eternal knowledge, He said to those who came to arrest Him: "This is your hour, and the power of darkness"** (Luke 22:53).

King Saul tried his best to kill David, but failed in all his efforts. The reason is that "God did not deliver him into his hand" (1 Samuel 23:14). **The brothers of Joseph tried to get rid of him, but God sent him to Egypt before them to preserve life for many people. Later when he met his brothers, Joseph said to them: "But now, do not therefore be grieved nor angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life ... And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt"** (Genesis 45:5-8). Joseph also told them: "Do not be afraid, ... you meant evil against me;

but God meant it for good" (Genesis 50:19, 20).

How nice to feel that our lives are in the hands of God, the loving, kind and mighty. If we really realise that, we will submit ourselves to Him willingly and in obedience. **St. Kebrianos** commented on the verse "Do not lead us into temptation" (Matthew 6:13) by saying: "We come to God and not to the devil - in order not to be lead into temptation". That is how the saints understood the life of submission.

In one of the attacks of the devil against St. Antony the Great, the father of the monks, he appeared to St. Antony in the form of many beasts. St. Antony looked at him with confidence and said: "If you have power over me, it would be enough for only one of you to fight a man like me. But God took away your power".

2 - One should not be annoyed when he faces matters which he does not like. Instead he should come to God to correct what is lacking in him. The children of Israel, disliked eating the manna in the wilderness, and desired eating meat. So God gave them plenty of meat. But that was for their destruction: "So they ate and were well filled, for He gave them their own desire. They were not deprived of their craving; but while their food was still in their mouths, The wrath of God came against them, and slew the stoutest of them, and struck down the choice men of Israel" (Psalm 78:29-31). **It would have been better for the children of Israel - after all the wonders that God did with them - to continue to eat the manna and thank God for His great gifts in the bare wilderness.**

CHAPTER 9

THE PRINCIPLE OF THE NARROW GATE IN SPIRITUAL LIFE

- A) What is the Narrow Gate?
- B) The love of Christ and His call for us to enter by the Narrow Gate
- C) The wisdom behind the Narrow Gate
 - 1 - It is Christ's command
 - 2 - To resemble Christ
 - 3 - The road for all saints
 - 4 - It suits man spiritually
 - 5 - The road to eternal glory
- D) The principle of the Narrow Gate in spiritual life
 - First: In repentance
 - 1 - Doing away with worldly desires
 - 2 - Giving up bad friendships
 - 3 - Ridding of bad established habits
 - 4 - Remembering old sins
 - Second: In spiritual exercises
 - 1 - In prayer
 - 2 - In fasting
 - 3 - In reading the Holy Books
 - 4 - In confession
- E) The principle of the Narrow Gate in life's problems
 - 1 - Family problems
 - 2 - Problems of work
 - 3 - Problems of sickness
 - 4 - Worldly desires

Someone posed a question to the Lord Jesus: "Lord, are there few who are saved?" He said to them: "**Strive to enter through the narrow gate**, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able. When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, "Lord, Lord, open for us", and He will answer and say to you, "I do not know you, where you are from", then you will begin to say, "We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets". But He will say, "I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity" (Luke 13:23-27).

In His sermon on the Mount, the Lord Jesus said: "**Enter by the narrow gate**; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. **Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it**" (Matthew 7:13, 14).

A) WHAT IS THE NARROW GATE?

What is the narrow gate which the Lord asks us to go through?

The "narrow gate" or the "difficult road" means the willing control over the soul, and bearing afflictions and pressures which come to us, with patience, joy and thanksgiving. It is what the Lord means by carrying the cross.

B) CHRIST'S LOVE AND HIS CALL FOR US TO ENTER BY THE NARROW GATE

In the first chapter of this book we expanded on the strong love of God for man, the love which passes all understanding. Here is a question which presents itself: "**Does the strong love of God to man contradict with - I do not say God allowing His children to be afflicted and to suffer - His call for them to freely enter by the narrow gate and carry the cross?**"

Jesus said there are many difficulties of different kinds which will come to His children and those who believe in Him. **He called His followers to enter by the narrow gate and to go**

through the difficult road and He made carrying the cross and walking behind Him a condition for Christian Discipleship. He said that He sends His Disciples "as lambs among wolves" (Luke 10:3), in the world they will have tribulation (John 16:2), the time is coming that whoever kills them will think that he offers God service (John 16:2), they will be hated by all for His name's sake (Matthew 10:22) and that they will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice (John 16:20).

The question which presents itself is: **"How does the call of facing and enduring afflictions agree with the assured love of God? It is possible to pose the question in another form: "If God really loves us, does He not care about our afflictions?"**

The answer to this question is found in the saying of Isaiah about the Lord God: "In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the Angel of His Presence saved them; in His love and in His pity He redeemed them" (Isaiah 63:9). That means God is afflicted by our afflictions. That is strange; and if this is so why does He allow the affliction to happen and He is able to prevent it? There must be a Divine wisdom in these afflictions; else He would have not allowed them.

The afflictions which come to man are for his good and this agrees with the love of God, His goodness and His righteousness. He said: "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered" (Matthew 10:30; Luke 12:7) and in the past He said by the Prophet Isaiah: "See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands" (Isaiah 49:16) and by the Prophet Zechariah: "For thus says the Lord of hosts: "For he who touches you touches the apple of His eye" (Zechariah 2:8).

In the beginning of Christianity, the mere belief in Christ and following Him meant entering into the circle of afflictions and enduring persecutions which in most cases led to death - martyrdom. "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12).

In spite of that the Christian faith spread in every part of the world. The Christians preferred to follow Christ and endure pains and sufferings, than to deny Him for the vain glories of the world. There must be a mystery behind the difficulties and sufferings. In fact there are blessings behind the tribulations, since the martyrs and confessors were not naive or foolish to bear afflictions for nothing.

C) WHAT IS THE WISDOM BEHIND THE NARROW GATE?

1 - IT IS THE COMMAND OF CHRIST AND HIS WAY:

We have mentioned the command of the Lord Jesus concerning entering by narrow gate. The difficult road through which we enter by the narrow gate is the road of the cross. **Christ walked this road and experienced it with His blessed feet. It is the road from Bethlehem to Golgotha. If the difficult road is the road of the Cross, the difficulties themselves are carrying the cross. What did the Lord say about that?**

"He who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me" (Matthew 10:38), "Whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:27) and "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34).

Some people might think that these commands are only for the Disciples of the Lord and His Apostles. St. Luke explains that these commands are for all. He said: **"Then He (Jesus) said to them all,** "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke 9:23). To confirm this point, when the Lord was asked by the rich young ruler: "Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" the immediate response of the Lord was: "Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; **and come, take up the cross, and follow Me"** (Mark 10:17, 21). It is clear from these words that following Christ requires carrying the cross, meaning, accepting difficulties and bearing pains with gladness of heart.

The narrow gate is the gate which Jesus entered from His birth in the flesh, and the difficult road is the road which He walked through from Bethlehem to Golgotha. It is easy to perceive that when we follow the life of Christ in the flesh on earth.

Here are some of the trials and difficulties which the Lord endured: His birth in a stable of animals, like the most inferior person in the world, His flight to Egypt from the tyrant King Herod who wanted to kill Him, the challenges of the resistant Jews in the three years of His ministry, bearing oaths and insults like the most despised of His creatures, betrayal of Judas Iscariot who knew what he was doing, and accepting suffering on the Cross with His freewill for the salvation of mankind.

All these were forms of the narrow gate by which Jesus entered with His freewill when He

was in the flesh on earth.

2 - TO RESEMBLE CHRIST:

The Lord Jesus is our highest model, Whom we imitate and walk after the steps of His feet. "Christ suffered for us, **leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps**" (1 Peter 2:21). We are expected "**to be conformed to the image of His Son**, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8:29). What is the image of the Son of God except the image of holiness and suffering: "He is despised and rejected by men, **a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief**" (Isaiah 53:3).

The Lord Jesus loved and desired suffering: "But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am till it is accomplished! (Luke 12:50). About Him St. Paul said: "**For the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame**" (Hebrews 12:2). The Lord Jesus asked James and John the sons of Zebedee: "Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" **They said to Him, "We are able"** (Matthew 20:22).

One of the fathers once said: "**The joy in enduring suffering is the measure of the temperature of the love of the soul to Christ. The perfect man welcomes suffering and has joy in it. The lukewarm person escapes from the difficulties. The Lord Jesus verified His love for mankind by suffering for us. Hence it is appropriate and just for man to prove his true love to Him by suffering for His sake**".

The greatest offering a Christian presents to God is **offering himself a spiritual sacrifice together with the sacrifice of Christ His crucified Savior**. This is what St. Paul meant in his command to the Romans: "**Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God**" (Romans 12:1).

3 - THE ROAD OF ALL SAINTS:

The Lord Jesus said in a general way: "He who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me" (Matthew 10:38; Luke 14:27). **All the righteous people went through the difficult road by the narrow gate carrying the cross, as the Lord made of carrying the cross and following Him a condition for becoming His disciples.**

The Apostles who were the firstborn believers in the New Testament entered by the narrow gate like their Teacher, and went through the road of the cross with joy.

The Apostle James says: "**My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,**

knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing" (James 1:2-4).

The Apostle Peter says to the believers: **"If you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind (likewise), but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you"** (1 Peter 3:13; 4:1, 13, 14).

In the introduction of the Book of Revelation, St. John directs his talk to the believers saying: **"I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ"** (Revelation 1:9). It is clear from these words that the tribulation is a companion to the kingdom **"the tribulation and the kingdom of Jesus Christ"**.

Again in the conversion of St. Paul to Christianity, we read that the Lord Jesus appeared to Ananias the Bishop of Damascus who baptized Paul and said: **"For I will show him (Paul) how many things he must suffer for My name's sake"** (Acts 9:16). We notice that these words were not a kind of punishment for Paul because of his persecution of the Church of the believers. But they were an unveiling of the blessings which await Paul from the tribulations for his faith and ministry.

That is strange! **Are the tribulations counted among the blessings?** Yes, that is what the Lord Jesus said. When Peter told Jesus on behalf of the Disciples: "See, we have left all and followed You". Jesus answered: "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time-- houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, **with persecutions--** and in the age to come, eternal life" (Mark 10:28-30). **We see how Jesus counts the persecutions among the blessings which man receive in this life!**

The Apostle Paul wrote about the suffering and tribulations and what accompanies them from blessings:

Paul considers them fellowship with Christ in His sufferings: "That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death" (Philippians 3:10).

Paul rejoiced in the sufferings: "I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church" (Colossians 1:24). This is a strange expression in which Paul revealed that the believers form the mysterious unseen Body of Christ. They are now suffering and by doing that they complete what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ.

When Christ said on the Cross: "It is finished!" (John 19:30), He meant that the salvation of mankind has been completed by His death on the Cross. But the sufferings of Christ and His afflictions are not completed yet. The believers complete them with their endurance of anything which come to them for the sake of Christ and believing in Him.

Again St. Paul reveals that tribulations and enduring them are our qualifications for the eternal kingdom. He used to strengthen the souls of the believers in Asia Minor, telling them about the blessings of the tribulations and their consequences. He said: **"We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God"** (Acts 14:22).

To the Thessalonians Paul wrote: "I sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith, that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know" (1 Thessalonians 3:2-4).

More than that, we see that Paul has passed the stage of enduring the afflictions patiently. He now glories in the tribulations as a companion to faith: "And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope" (Romans 5:3, 4). **Not only he glories in them but also rejoices in them:** "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10).

In the afflictions, the help of the grace of God appears and it is comforting that they we share the sufferings of the Lord. **Even more than that, the Apostle Paul raises the tribulations and sufferings and make them spiritual gifts from God to man:** "For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake" (Philippians 1:29).

If we now leave the Apostles of Christ and go to the saints in general, we find that they all agree about the blessings of the narrow gate and the difficult road, the road of the cross. The sayings of the saints express their own personal experiences.

The Church books which contain the sayings of **St. Paul the Simple** the disciple of St. Antony the Great, contain one saying only by St. Antony: **"He who escapes from the affliction escapes from God"**.

In a farewell sermon by St. Macarius the Great to his children the monks he said: "Who would ever be crowned without striving? Who would become rich without working? Who would win without first toiling? Is any lazy man able to collect money, or any idle person preserve his riches? **With many tribulations we enter the kingdom of heaven. Let each one of us toil with joy, knowing that behind it there is every riches and comfort"**.

St. Pachomius the Great the father of communal monasticism said: **"Accept all the trials with joy anticipating the glory which follow them. If you realise that you will not spare enduring them, to the extent that you ask God not to take them away from you"**. He also said: **"Do you thing that only burning and cutting the body members are confession for the Lord? No, but also the toil in worship and the attacks of the devil and the illnesses. He who endures all that with thanksgiving is the martyr. Otherwise, there was no need for St. Paul to say "we are killed all day long" (Romans 8:36). Paul did not die an apparent death every day but he endured with patience whatever came to him"**.

St. Isaac El-Soriany said: **"Do not abhor difficulties because by enduring them you gain honor, and by them you come nearer to God. The Divine cry is inside them and the good person endures the disasters with joy"**.

St. Barsnofious said: **"Why do you shrink from the afflictions like a worldly person? Do not you know that the afflictions are for the saints? Did you not hear that "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, But the Lord delivers him out of them all"? (Psalm 34:19). Do you not know that the righteous is tested by the affliction like gold by fire? If we are righteous, we are tested by afflictions and if we are sinners we are chastised by the afflictions"**.

One of the fathers said: **"I have faith that each person who guards himself strongly by his will for the sake of God, God counts him as a martyr. The tears he sheds in the difficulties, are counted by God as blood"**.

4 - THE WAY WHICH SUITS MAN SPIRITUALLY:

If God permits tribulations for mankind, it does not mean that He is content with the suffering of man. God on the contrary wants the spiritual good for man. **God knows the nature of man, and his desire for the earthly and bodily matters, and He deals with man in a way which suits him.** After God drowned every living creature by the Flood at the time of Noah and after Noah left the Ark and built an altar for the Lord, **the Lord smelled a soothing aroma.** Then the Lord said in His heart, **"I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done"** (Genesis 8:20, 21).

The Apostle Paul says: **"Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish"** (Galatians 5:16, 17).

St. Paul also says about the nature of man which inclines to do evil: **"For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I**

will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:18-24).

Hence we see that man is weak according to his nature and formation. Besides there are many strong factors which pull him to every earthly and fleshly desire. **As a result, tribulations are useful for man because they warn him, waken him up and bring him back to his right senses. As a result, man lifts up his heart and mind to God.** The Psalmist says: "My help comes from the Lord" (Psalm 121:2).

The Prophet David says: "Now in my prosperity I said, "I shall never be moved". Lord, by Your favor You have made my mountain stand strong; you hid Your face, and I was troubled" (Psalm 30:6, 7). The Psalmist says that in the time of his strength he is not shaken. Then immediately God hid His face and His help from him and he became worried and troubled. Immediately after that the Psalmist says: "I cried out to You, O Lord; and to the Lord I made supplication. Hear, O Lord, and have mercy on me; Lord, be my helper! You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; you have put off my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness" (Psalm 30:8, 10, 11).

Man is so weak and his will disappoints him, though he knows what is right. Except for the grace of God which supports us many times and which warns us by various ways and means, we would have become in a bad state. In His dealings with His creatures, God handles each one in a way which suits him, for his best. Unfortunately, man does not wake up except through tribulations. **Someone says: "Tribulations is the language of God for the sake of His love!"** Hence we see that the tribulations which man face are useful for his salvation.

Also by tribulations God purifies man from his errors and weaknesses. The Lord says: "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit" (John 15:1, 2). The process of purifying needs sometimes cutting parts of the branches and pruning. If the plant is able to speak and express its feeling, we realise that it suffers when it is pruned. Some plants leak juices, like tears, when they are cut!

This is what God does with His children whom He loves, He prunes them that they may bear more spiritual fruit. **One of the fathers says: "When the branch is pruned, its juice flows as if it is weeping. Yet soon its buds sprout, open up and become beautiful flowers then delicious ripe fruits. Likewise, the Christian, as a mysterious branch in Christ the True Vine, when he is surrounded by pain appears - at the beginning - as if crushed by the pain. But soon he is renewed, his vitality increases and the fruits of the Holy Spirit in him multiply".** St. Augustine says: "The chaff is different from the wheat. When the threshing machine go over both of them it crushes the chaff and purifies the wheat".

5 - THE ROAD TO ETERNAL GLORY:

The Book of Acts tells us about the Apostles Paul and Barnabas after they had preached the gospel in some of the cities in Asia Minor "strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, **"We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God"** (Acts 14:22). The word "must" indicates the need of the many tribulations!

The Thessalonians showed willingness to accept the Christian faith and their faith and virtues grew exceedingly. The Apostle Paul wrote to them encouraging and explaining that the tribulations which they endure are but manifest indicators for them that they may be counted worthy of the kingdom. He said: "We ourselves boast of you among the churches of God **for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer;** since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us **when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels"** (2 Thessalonians 1:3-7).

The Apostle Paul writes also to the Corinthians saying: **"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory"** (2 Corinthians 4:17).

The Apostle John pictures for us in the Book of Revelation in the world to come the glory of those who endured the tribulations. He says: "After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, saying: "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen".

Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?" And I said to him, "Sir, you know". So he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (Revelation 7:9-17).

Pain and tribulations are sure signs of being worthy of eternal joy. This is what our Lord

revealed when He said to His Disciples: "Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy" (John 16:20).

D) THE PRINCIPLE OF THE NARROW GATE IN SPIRITUAL LIFE

The principle of the narrow gate is not limited to the tribulations and pressures which meet man from the outside. It also includes the freewill efforts which man chooses to fulfil in his spiritual striving. We here present some of these efforts in the spiritual life.

FIRST IN REPENTANCE:

Certainly, repentance is one of the narrow gates which man goes through with his free will. In repentance man is watchful with himself and does not give in to unholy desires. Let us understand the command of the Lord Jesus: "**Strive to enter through the narrow gate**" (Luke 13:23) as Jesus speaks about something which man does with his free will.

St. John Saba (the Spiritual Elder) says: "Adam of the flesh born from Eve has children born for him which resemble him in the world of the flesh. Likewise Christ the Spiritual Father - from the Baptism and repentance - has children born for Him which resemble Him in the spiritual world. How do we find it (repentance) if it is near? **Lord, show it to us, it is at the gentle narrow gate. He who is patient and enters by its dark gate immediately faces the kingdom of light and will rejoice.**

This gate is the entrance of life. Whatever chamber is inside you, its gate is repentance. No one hopes in you (repentance) and goes to hell. No one goes to heaven without you. Who sees God without you? He who hopes in you does not fall in the hands of the devil. He who is purified has been washed by you. He who waters a plant from your rain gathers the fruits of joy. He who puts drops from your water in his eyes sees God in his heart. He who takes you as an intercessor, the doors of the riches of God open for him. You saved David from sin. The verdict of destruction passed over the people of Nineveh, but you stood up and saved them".

DIFFICULTIES OF REPENTANCE:

The Lord Jesus calls all who labor and carry heavy burdens to give them rest. He calls them to carry His yoke and depicts it as easy and light (Matthew 11:28-30). No doubt, evil people and sinners are among those who labor whom He calls to give rest.

Rest does not come without repentance. The saying of Jesus that His yoke is easy and light does not mean that repentance is without difficulties. On the contrary, it has assured difficulties because it signifies entering by the narrow gate and walking on the rough road. On the other hand Jesus accompanies all those who walk in the road of repentance. He comforts, supports and strengthens them. Also the feeling of the company of Jesus, His compassion, gentleness and sweetness make the repentant person forget all the troubles of the road.

WHAT ARE THE DIFFICULTIES OF REPENTANCE?

1 - Doing away with desires:

We can not deny the role of the grace of God in any good work man does. The Lord Jesus said: "Without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5) and "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him" (John 6:44). Hence repentance needs the grace of God to accompany the person who wants to repent. Jeremiah cries out to God saying: "Restore me, and I will return, for You are the Lord my God" (Jeremiah 31:18). **This however does not cancel the role of man in saving himself by his own will, his toil and his determination to live with God.**

We remember the saying of St. Augustine: "God who created you without you, does not save you without you". It means that you did not participate in creating yourself (created you without you), but as for the salvation of your soul, you should have a role in it with your will and by striving and the rest. The grace of God does not save you if you are passive and do not do the works of repentance.

There are desires which man loves and which have enslaved him. To get rid of them needs resistance, determination and trust in the help of God, as well as trust in one's self.

Put the whole world with what it has on one side of the scale and put Christ, His love and His glories on the other side. Then make up your mind of whom you chose, Barabbas or Jesus (Matthew 27:17). Barabbas is a symbol of the present world which is put in the evil. Be ware to resemble the Jews in their choice of Barabbas in front of Pilate the Roman ruler.

I do not know the desire or the desires which enslave you, they might be many. But I remind you of the command of Christ to love Him with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength" (Deuteronomy 6:5; Matthew 22:37; Mark 12:30) and He who loves father or mother more than Him is not worthy of Him. And he who loves son or daughter more than Him

is not worthy of Him (Matthew 10:37). If this is the case about genuine love (love of fathers, mothers and sons), what do we say about the love of lust and the unholy love?

I also remind you of the saying of the Lord: "He who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it" (Matthew 10:38, 39).

Listen to what I say to you: "If you really wish with all your heart to live for God, He will give you the strength and the victory", "all things are possible to him who believes" (Mark 9:23), and "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). **The child is weaned with difficulty from breast feeding. Yet he cannot gradually eat the food of adults and grow before he is first weaned.**

Striving is important in every stage of life and there is no rest from striving at any time in one's life. Spiritual attacks for man may vary in the different stages of his life. But striving is man's weapon by which He wins and conquers.

The Apostle Paul says: "But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified" (1 Corinthians 9:27). The Apostle Paul was discerning not to become disqualified. That was in spite of all the labours he presented to his Master, the toil of his ministry, the many divine revelations which he saw and were revealed to him. The same Apostle again writes to the Hebrews saying: "You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin" (Hebrews 12:4). If that was the measure of striving of this giant Apostle, what would we do?

2 - Giving up bad friendships:

Friends and friendships can be very critical because of their strong influence on man. The words of the Teacher Paul are very true: "Do not be deceived: Evil company corrupts good habits" (1 Corinthians 15:33). When a dirty unclean hand holds an object, it contaminates it. On the contrary, good friendships which Christ confirm are great blessings to man, and great help to him in his spiritual life and striving. One may be attached to a friend from his youth - the time of innocence - and it happens that this friend deviates as he grows up. If this friendship continues, it has serious consequences and it mostly leads to the corruption of the second party.

By his formation and nature, man is attracted to evil, and thus the Holy Bible advises us to escape from evil and sinful situations. This is what was said to Lot when he was living in Sodom and Gomorrah: "Escape for your life! Do not look behind you nor stay anywhere in the plain. Escape to the mountains, lest you be destroyed" (Genesis 19:17). He was warned from even looking behind lest his heart will be attracted to something in the city. He was also warned from staying anywhere in the plain.

3 - Ridding of bad established habits:

A habit - any habit - is established in man by exercising it and for a long time. It is like a tree which could be pulled out with its roots when it is still young, but it is very difficult to pull it out when its roots are established in the ground.

As we acknowledge what we said and the extent of the effect of some of the bad habits on man, yet we say that nothing is impossible to change. The Apostle Paul says: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13) and if man with his strong deep faith is able to move mountains and make miracles and wonders, would he fail to get rid of a bad harmful habit?

We are unable to name all the bad habits, but certainly they are all known to us. We shall not deal here with the bad habits related to sexual problems. Instead we shall point to some of the bad habits which many people take lightly, as they may not consider them bad enough habits, such as smoking, drinking a little, and drinking tea and coffee and the like.

The harm to health from the habit of smoking and drinking are well known and do not need a proof. Someone may say that smoking and drinking and other narcotics are harmful when they become habits. But what about the excess in drinking tea or coffee?

We say that the danger from any habit is that it enslaves man. The habit of drinking tea and coffee and not doing without them, have in many cases restrained those who drink them from nice spiritual practices such as fasting by abstaining from food and drink for a period of time. These people are accustomed to drink something as soon as they wake up in the morning, and they deprive themselves of the blessings of fasting without food or drink and the wisdom behind that.

Do not take habits lightly - any habit - since bad habits enslave man and deprive him from his freedom which Christ gave him as a gift. Our Savior came to free us from all the ties which we enslaved ourselves to by our free will. Thus we know that only Christ is able to free us completely: "Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed" (John 8:36).

The above words are not only directed to those who are enslaved by some bad habits, but also are a warning to every person who is taking the first step in that direction. We should remember that a huge building starts with one stone, and a large book starts with a word written on the first line of the first page, followed by lines and lines then pages and pages.

If you enjoy the freedom in Christ, beware not to be enslaved to anything at all. Be careful and be diligent. Before the Apostle Paul said: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13), he said: "I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need" (Philippians 4:11, 12).

4 - Remembering old sins:

Among the difficulties which face repentance is remembering old sins, which one may have got rid of. The devil waves them in front of him and uses them to excite unholy emotions in him which result in defiling his feelings.

The Church prays for this matter in the prayer of reconciliation in the Holy Eucharist and asks God to cleanse us from all blemish, all guile, all hypocrisy, all malice and the remembrance of evil entailing death. If the devil is able to lead man to the atmosphere of sin once more - even by thought - he leads him to evil entailing death.

Overcoming such matters requires will, toil and patience. We should not be scared from our spiritual enemies and not be weakened by them. We are nothing without God, and if we feel the presence of God near us, let us say: "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31) and "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

SECOND IN SPIRITUAL EXERCISES:

The principle of the narrow gate in the subject of repentance concerns passive matters. Yet there are essential constructive matters for the spiritual life to man which are like the spirit to the body. There is no sense in resisting passive matters without supporting life with positive ones which are the food for the spirit of man. Perhaps the most important constructive spiritual matters are prayer, fasting, reading the holy books, and confession. Obviously our talk will not detail each of them, but our subject is the principle of the narrow gate for each of them.

The saintly fathers advised us about an important principle in spiritual life, which is the principle of "forceful advancing". They extracted this principle from the teachings of Christ: "The kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force"; [has been forcefully advancing and forceful men lay hold of it (New International Version of the Bible)] (Matthew 11:12). It is not an easy principle as some may imagine.

Everything in life - anything - is not obtained except with difficulty, toil and effort, specially if it is a valuable matter. **Each of the student, the merchant, the farmer and the worker do not get what they want if they do not work hard, toil and labour. What about heaven which we are struggling to go to? If the student, for example, studies hard and resists his body desires for rest and sleep for the sake of the certificate which he studies for, how much toil and striving heaven deserves from us?**

1 - IN PRAYER:

We read about our Lord Jesus that He used to spend all night long in prayer. He is the Holy One Who was not in need of prayer used to pray with such depth and continuity. But, we are deceived by our physical body, which shows weakness and heaviness in its members, and as we yield to it, we stop practising prayer.

What did the fathers who practised spiritual life say about this point?

St. Isaac El-Soriany says: "Do you work only when you have the desire to work, or you labour even if you do not have the desire to work? **Know well that to force yourself to work is important in both worldly and spiritual lives.** It is essential in prayer, reading the holy and spiritual books and attending the Eucharists in the church. Do not obey the lazy deceitful body which is full of sin. The body desires to rest all the time, not caring about eternal destruction which it pays for its little vanishing rest".

He also says: "**The more man toils, labors and forces himself for the sake of God, the more is the Divine help which is sent to him, surrounds him, facilitates his striving and paves the road in front of him.** If you ask to what limit I force myself? **I tell you to the point of death for the sake of God. It is better for you to die while you are striving than to live defeated**".

Man should never slacken. Instead he should force himself in prayer even if he does not feel the power of prayer or the inner comfort (spiritual dryness).

St. Aphram El-Soriany says: "Pour tears in front of God so that your prayers become like incense in front of Him. Water is needed to put out fire and tears are needs for the times of temptations. Water puts out fire and tears put off evil desires". St. John El-Dargy says: "The weeping eye is a permanent baptismal font for repentance and renewal".

2 - IN FASTING:

If forcing the self is essential for practising prayer, it is also essential for fasting - specially by abstaining from food and drink - as many are the blessings of fasting. What are the experiences of the fathers concerning fasting and forcing the self to it, which is entering through the narrow gate?

St. Macarius the Great says: "Longsuffering is patience, and patience is victory, and victory is life, and life is the kingdom, and the kingdom is God. A deep well has sweet nice water. **The gate is narrow and the road is difficult,** but the city is full of joy and happiness. The tower is high and strong, but inside it are valuable treasures. Fasting is heavy and hard, but it leads to the kingdom of heaven. Doing good is difficult and demanding, but it saves from fire by the mercy of our Lord to Whom be glory".

St. Pachomius the Great the father of communal monasticism says: "**Great is the victory of patient people**". All our teachers the fathers as well as the Holy Books command and encourage patience. Be patient and strong, because the saints who had patience received the promises. Have a big heart in order to be crowned together with His pure soldiers. Be steadfast in fasting and continue in prayer. **Wait for the Lord until He lifts up the tribulations from you. To this extent, God does not forget the dry saliva in your mouth when you are fasting. You need that in the difficult time** when you are leaving this world".

St. Isaac El-Soriany says: "Every person who strives against sin and its desires should begin with fasting, specially if the striving is for an inner sin".

He also says: "After our Good Saviour showed Himself to the world at the River Jordan, He started from this point (fasting). When He was baptised, He was immediately led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where He fasted forty days and forty nights. Those who want to follow His steps, should build the foundation of their striving following His example".

St. Eronimos (Jerome) answers those who do not fast lest they their bodies weaken and says: "It is better for your stomach to get sick than for your soul to get sick, and for your knees to shake than for your purity to shake. Control and enslave your body else you be rejected".

3 - IN READING THE HOLY BOOKS:

If we spoke about forcing the self for prayer and fasting, it is necessary to speak about spiritual readings, the forefront of which is reading the Holy Bible. The word of God is the best support for man in his sojourn in the world and his continuous striving. St. Paul says: "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Romans 15:4). The Holy Bible is the best guide for us as strangers in this world.

4 - IN CONFESSION:

Certainly, confession of sins to a priest is entering through one of the narrow gates. Shyness prevents many people from confessing their sins and practising this holy sacrament, by which we gain forgiveness of sins. They deprive themselves from the blessings of this sacrament by standing in front of and not entering through the narrow gate.

Shyness, hard and painful as it may be, is useful for man. It makes us realise the ugliness of sin and the extent of sorrow it brings us when we fall in it. It also makes us perceive the shame and failure which result from sinning. All such feelings are essential and useful for man and for his repentance.

It is useful for man to suffer because of his sin as he acknowledges and confesses it; he has already enjoyed it when he was committing it. For this the saintly fathers said that the sacrament of confession is a strong leash which controls man and prevents him from returning to sin.

Jesus Ben Sirach says: "Never be ashamed to admit your mistakes" (Sirach 4:26). **One should go through the wall of shyness, force himself to enter through the narrow gate**, in order for him to win the comfort of his conscience, when the Holy Spirit transfers our sins in the sacrament of confession and put them on Christ Who carries the sins of the whole world and in Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, which He completed on the Cross (Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14); Hebrews 7:25; 1 John 1:9; 2:1, 2).

F) THE PRINCIPLE OF THE NARROW GATE IN LIFE'S PROBLEMS

Many are the problems which face man in his life. Some of them are resolved one way or the other. **The other problems are not solved except by entering by the narrow gate and going through the difficult road. We shall deal with some of the basic problems of life in a brief way:**

1 - FAMILY PROBLEMS:

By this we mean the problems of marriage and divorce. When problems occur between a married couple, one of the parties might prefer to end the marriage by going to court to get a divorce.

This attitude is against the law of Christ which indicates no divorce except for adultery. **It is possible for this marriage to continue if the unjustly treated party carries his/her cross, enters by the narrow gate and go through the difficult road.**

Those who attempt to dissolve the marriage as a quick solution to their problems, tread on the law of Christ. At the end, they will reap the fruit of what they did in other kinds of problems which will affect them as well as their children.

2 - PROBLEMS OF WORK:

The problems of work are also numerous. There are the problems of employment, promotion, occupying key positions, transfer to other cities, ... etc.

The feeling of injustice may lead a person to do something wrong, physical or spiritual. He may even fall in the sin of condemnation, anger, wrath and other sins. Beside the spiritual error, he might harm his health and get high blood pressure, sugar diabetes, heart and/or psychological troubles, which might lead to bad consequences.

If man follows the steps of his Lord and enters with his free will by the narrow door - the door of forbearing injustice - he would gain the blessings of patience, forbearance and all the good promises which the Lord promised those who are persecuted for His sake.

The person who experiences injustice should realise well that Christ the God accompanies all those who enter by the narrow gate and go through the difficult road carrying their cross. He should also be sure that God will compensate his material loss by other material and spiritual blessings in his life, health, family and in every thing he extends his hand to.

The blessings which God gives cannot be counted and they include all kinds of blessings.

It is worthwhile to look at Christ and meditate in Him. About Him is said: "He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth" (Isaiah 53:7). We should also remember what Jesus said: "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master" (Matthew 10:24, 25), "If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you" (John 15:20), and "For if they do these things in the green wood, what will be done in the dry?" (Luke 23:31).

God will not let injustice prevail, as if there is no God Who rules this Universe. Listen to the Prophet David as he says: "Do not fret because of evildoers, nor be envious of the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb. Trust in the Lord, and do good; Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass. He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday. Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him; do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; do not fret-- **For evildoers shall be cut off; but those who wait on the Lord, they shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while and the wicked shall be no more; But the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace"** (Psalm 37:1-11).

3 - PROBLEMS OF SICKNESS:

Forbearing the sicknesses of the body is a narrow gate for man to enter by his free will and he gains great rewards. One of the saintly fathers reported that he saw four high grades in heaven. The first **was for a forbearing patient thanking God.** The second was for a healthy

person who is hospitable to strangers and courteous to the weak. The third was for a striving hermit in the wilderness. The fourth was for a disciple who is obedient to his spiritual father for the sake of God.

The forbearing patient is like he who presents his body a sacrifice to God. The late Fr. Bishoy Kamel the Priest of St. Georges, Sporting, Alexandria, Egypt, as he was suffering from the horrible illness of cancer, he used to smile and call this terrible illness "The illness of paradise".

4 - WORLDLY DESIRES:

Worldly desires are numerous, and they take many forms, which hide many risks and dangers. **Our saintly fathers saw in front of them the open comfortable road which they refused to walk through. They rather entered freely through the narrow gate knowing that blessings await them there. Christ waits for all His beloved at the narrow gate, enters with them as they walk through the difficult road.**

The book "Paradise of the monks" mentions a story about an elderly monk who lived in the wilderness. He used to drink water from a source twelve miles away from where he lived. Once as he was going to the source of water we said to himself: "Why do I trouble myself this way? I should move and live near the source of water". As he was thinking about that, he looked behind and saw an elderly person counting his steps. He asked him: "Who are you?" He answered: "I am the angel of God, sent by God to count your steps, for God to give you your reward!" When the elderly monk heard that, he rejoiced and lived five miles further from the source of water.

CHAPTER 10

THE KINGDOM

- A) The Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven**
- B) The idea of the Kingdom in the Old Testament**
- C) The Kingdom of Christ is spiritual not material**
- D) What is meant by the Kingdom of God?**
- E) The parables of Christ and their connotations**
 - 1 - The Sower**
 - 2, 3 - The Wheat and the Tares - the Dragnet**
 - 4, 5 - The Mustard seed - the Leaven**
 - 6 - The Workers in the Vineyard**
 - 7 - The Wedding Feast**
 - 8, 9 - The Hidden Treasure - the Pearl of Great Price**
 - 10 - The Virgins**
- F) Joy of the Kingdom and everlasting life**

Thinking about heaven and longing for it was the moving thought for all the saints and the men of God in every generation and in every place. The mere thought of its glories and what awaits the saints there, gave them a spiritual push and made them belittle their toil here on earth. The Apostle Paul expressed to the Philippians that longing when he was imprisoned in Rome: "Having a desire to depart and be with Christ (in heaven), which is far better" (Philippians 1:23).

That was what lead the saints to bear tribulations and troubles - not only with endurance but also with joy: "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:17, 18). Several centuries before Paul, the Psalmist said: "Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You" (Psalm 73:25).

Everyone who lived on earth as a stranger and wanderer and looked forward to everlasting life has already tasted this marvellous eternal joy: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Thinking about heaven helps the soul to labor and achieve its best. Longing to heaven frees the heart, not only from clinging to worldly matters, but also from all earthly and bodily desires.

Before His suffering the Lord Jesus prayed: "Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24). That was the heart's desire of Jesus for His saintly children. **The children of God who sojourn on earth until they reach their heavenly home:** "So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:6-8).

A) THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

Mark the Evangelist introduced his Gospel by saying: "Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the **kingdom of God**, and saying: "The time is fulfilled, and the **kingdom of God** is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:14, 15; Matthew 4:17).

Matthew the Evangelist speaks about the preaching of John the Baptist in the wilderness of Judea: "Repent, for the **kingdom of heaven** is at hand!" (Matthew 3:1, 2; 9:35)

From the beginning of His public ministry until He was put on the Cross, the Lord Jesus preached about the kingdom of God and spoke about it in His parables and His teachings. We do not exaggerate when we say that the life and teachings of the Lord Jesus concentrated on the subject of the "Kingdom".

In the New Testament we find two expressions about the kingdom: The kingdom of God (in Greek: "Basilea Tou Theou") and the kingdom of heaven (in Greek: "Basilea Toun Oranoun").

The Lord Jesus said to His Disciples: "It has been given to you to know **the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven**" (Matthew 13:11). In a second place He said to them: "To you it has been given to know **the mysteries of the kingdom of God**" (Luke 8:10) and in a third place He said to them: "To you it has been given to know the **mystery of the kingdom of God**" (Mark 4:11).

We realize from the three Gospels that the "Kingdom of God" and the "Kingdom of Heaven" are two expressions for one name. The "kingdom of heaven" refers to the throne of God in this kingdom: "Heaven is God's throne; and the earth, is His footstool" (Matthew 5:34, 35). The kingdom of God is on earth and the ruling of heaven is over it. **Perhaps this is what the Lord Jesus meant in the first three petitions in the Lord's Prayer: "Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven"** (Matthew 6:9, 10).

In the Gospel according to St. Matthew the expression "kingdom of heaven" appears 32 times while the expression "kingdom of God" appears 6 times only. The word "kingdom" by itself appears 5 times. In the two Gospels according to Saints Mark and Luke only the expression "kingdom of God" exists. Also the Gospel of St. John mentions only the "kingdom of God"; in the Lord's talk to Nicodemus (John 3:3, 5). Again in the Book of Acts the "kingdom of God" appears 6 times and the word "kingdom" twice.

In the Epistles of St. Paul, the expression "kingdom of God" appears 8 times. In the first Epistle to the Corinthians, Paul mentions that Christ delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power (1 Corinthians 15:24). In Ephesians he mentions the expression "the kingdom of Christ and God" (Ephesians 5:5) and in Colossians he mentions "the kingdom of the Son of His love" (Colossians 1:13). Paul mentions the word "His (Christ's) kingdom" twice in 2 Timothy 4:1, 18. In Hebrews he mentions the kingdom related to the Son (Hebrews 1:8) and the "kingdom" alone in Hebrews 12:28.

The Apostle James mentions the "kingdom of God" once (James 2:5). St. Peter mentions the expression "the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:11).

In the Book of Revelation the expression "kingdom of Jesus Christ" appears in Revelation 1:9, and in Revelation 11:15 it says: "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!". Lastly it says: "Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come" (Revelation 12:10).

We now pose the question: "Why did St. Matthew in his Gospel use the expression "kingdom of heaven", not only more than the other Evangelists, but also more than all the Books of the New Testament?"

It is known that Matthew wrote his Gospel to the Jews. The scholars of the Holy Bible say that the Jews in their later times before the coming of Christ, as a gesture of honoring God, were accustomed not to use the word "God". They went to the extreme in their understanding to the third command: "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain" (Exodus 20:7). They went even further and excluded God totally from worldly matters. They denied that He related to anything material and replaced His name with other names which they used when they wanted to refer to Him.

In His testimony in front of the Chief Priests of the Jews, the Lord Jesus accepted from the Jews the word "Blessed" instead of the word "God". They asked Him: "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? And Jesus said, "I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven" (Mark 14:61, 62). The Lord Jesus might have followed the same pattern in "the Parable of the Prodigal Son", when He said that the son said to his father: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight" (Luke 15:21). The word "heaven" was used to replace the word "God".

We return to the word "Kingdom" and say that **the linguists affirm that in the Hebrew and Aramaic languages the word which is translated "kingdom" means the "ruling of God and His dominion".** With this meaning such a word appeared in some places in the Old Testament. In other places it appeared to refer to the dominion of God and His ruling over a special group of people which belonged to Him and with whom He entered into a holy covenant, apart from the rest of the nations.

WHEN DID THE KINGDOM OF GOD START ON EARTH?

This kingdom appeared in an obvious manner **in the call of God to Abram (Abraham)** to leave Ur of the Chaldeans to become a father of many nations. **The kingdom of God took its official form in the nation of Israel** when God brought them out of the land of Egypt to become for Him a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:6). Hence when the Lord Jesus spoke about the kingdom, the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven, His hearers from the Jews understood Him. **But the Jews understood the kingdom in a worldly manner, while the Lord Jesus meant a pure spiritual kingdom.**

As well, **the Jews restricted the kingdom to the descendants of Abraham, deprived the Gentiles by closing the door in front of them.** They were badly shocked when the Lord Jesus praised the faith of the Gentile centurion whose servant the Lord healed: "Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel! And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness" (Matthew 8:10-12).

B) THE IDEA OF THE KINGDOM IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The word "kingdom" is the word "Malekuth" as it is pronounced in the Hebrew language, which means kingdom or nation. The word kingdom appears 91 times in the Old Testament. It appears first in Numbers 24:7. **The word "kingdom" or "nation" however has more than one meaning in the Old Testament. What concerns us here is that it means Israel as a nation of God or kingdom of God:** "And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6). **God ruled His chosen people by David:** "And your house and **your kingdom shall be established forever before you**" (2 Samuel 7:16), and David said: "Yours, O Lord, is the greatness, the power and the glory, the victory and the majesty; for all that is in heaven and in earth

is Yours; **yours is the kingdom**, O Lord, and You are exalted as head over all" (1 Chronicles 29:11).

The Jews understood "Yahweh" as He Who rules over Israel: "But Gideon said to them, "I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; **the Lord shall rule over you**" (Judges 8:23). **The Lord said to the Prophet Samuel:** "Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; **for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them**" (1 Samuel 8:7).

The mind of the Jews was saturated with the idea of the coming of the Messiah. The daily prayer of a Jew included a phrase which said "Let Your kingdom reign, Your redemption be extolled, let the Messiah come and save His people". The majority of the Jews believed that the era of the Messiah would be an era of satisfaction and material blessings.

According to the scholar Alfred Edersheim (a Jew who became a Christian) in his book about the life of the Messiah: "The land will produce by itself the best and most beautiful clothes, the most desired and delicious food. The wheat will grow to the height of the palm tree, even to the top of the hills. Then the wind will convert it to flour and it will be tossed in the valley to be well baked and delicious bread. In that era every tree will carry its fruits, and drop them daily in order to carry new fruits".

They waited for a Messiah or a King Saviour to free them from Roman bondage, to reign as an earthly king, bring back the kingdom of David, and to make the people of Israel the greatest nation on earth. They were disappointed when they found Jesus meek and humble. He did not quarrel nor cry out, nor did anyone hear His voice in the streets (Matthew 12:19). **His teachings appeared to promote weakness - in their view - such as when He said: "But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also"** (Matthew 5:39; Luke 6:29).

The Old Testament is full of prophecies about the Messiah the King. An example is the second Psalm: "Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the Lord has said to Me, "You are My Son, today I have begotten You". Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession" (Psalm 2:2-8).

C) THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST IS SPIRITUAL NOT MATERIAL

We mentioned that the Jews were waiting for the Messiah (Christ) as an worldly King Who

would establish an earthly kingdom. Perhaps this understanding was behind the fear of Herod the Jewish King who knew from the Wise Men about the birth of the King of the Jews: "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him". When Herod the King heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. (Matthew 2:2).

The Holy Bible mentions two events where the Jews saw Jesus as an earthly king and they wanted to make Him a king over them: the first one is the feeding of the multitudes from the five loaves and two fishes. St. John says: "Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world". Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone" (John 6:14, 15). **The second event was on Palm Sunday when Jesus entered Jerusalem like a victorious king.** The crowds were crying out: "**Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that comes in the name of the Lord!** Hosanna in the highest!" (Mark 11:10; Luke 19:38).

But the Lord Jesus refused that earthly kingdom. Hence as He drew near the city of Jerusalem He saw it and wept over it saying: "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation" (Luke 19:41-44).

Because the Lord Jesus refused the worldly kingdom, and disappointed the Jews when He did not fulfil their worldly dreams at the material level, they cried out in front of Pilate the atheist Roman ruler: "We have no king but Caesar!" (John 19:15). They stripped Jesus and put a scarlet robe on Him, which was the royal dress. When they had twisted a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, as if a crown of a king and a reed in His right hand, and they mocked Him (Matthew 27:28, 29, 31).

There are many Christians who want the Church to use worldly arguments and fight in its dealings with others. Yet Christ said to Pilate who was passing a verdict on Him: "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here" (John 18:36).

Christ came to the world to establish in it a spiritual kingdom which He called the "Kingdom of God" or "Kingdom of heaven", and He is the spiritual King of this spiritual kingdom. Pilate asked Jesus: "Are You a king then?" Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth" (John 18:37). The kingdom of Christ is the kingdom of the truth in the heart. He came to reign in the hearts of the people, and He rules by love not by violence. He does not raise

a sword or declare war. He was a King without weapons, except the spiritual weapons, and a King without might except the might of love!

Once one said: "The Jews cried out : "If He (Christ) was the king of Israel, let Him now come down from the Cross, and we will believe in Him" (Matthew 27:42; Mark 15:32). But we say: "We believe in Him and we worship Him because He refused to come down from the Cross because by doing so He redeemed us and showed that He loved us!"

D) WHAT IS MEANT BY THE KINGDOM OF GOD?

What did Christ mean by the "Kingdom of God"? Christ cared about the state of holiness and righteousness which qualifies man to enjoy the eternal paradise of God as a result of Him ruling over his life. Man receives the pledge of the kingdom while he is still living in the world. This is exactly what the Lord Jesus explained to the Pharisees when they asked Him: "When would the kingdom of God come", He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, "See here!" or "See there!" For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:20, 21).

Jesus answered the Pharisees the same way He answered Nicodemus: "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:5, 6).

These answers are summarized in that the kingdom of God is spiritual and does not come with observations, meaning that it is not a material thing which is bound by geographic limits, nor it is within the range of sight, because it is too large to be contained in a place "nor will they say, "See here!" or "See there!" (Luke 17:21, 23).

We mentioned that the "kingdom of God" or the "kingdom of heaven" is the dominion of God on earth or the dominion of heaven on earth. **In fact heaven did not dominate on earth up till now. It is the devil with his might, influence and sway who dominates on earth "the ruler of this world"** (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11).

We live in a strange world full of upside down predicaments. The wicked are rewarded and the righteous are punished, the worshippers of God are ridiculed and the worshippers of Baal are honored. How many innocent people are thrown in prisons and how many wicked people are committing evil freely. This is not the dominion of heaven on earth, but the dominion of the devil on earth, though what occurs is by the permission of God, Who permits evil to happen according to His wisdom. Nevertheless, this will last for a while. **Heaven has dominion on earth through the righteous, the saints and the pious people who submit their lives to God.**

We notice through the verses in the New Testament about the "kingdom of God" and the "kingdom of heaven", that they form three domains linked with each other. The first one describes the kingdom of heaven as a seed in the heart of the believer. The Lord said "the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21). **The second domain** describes the kingdom as a tree - after it was like a seed of mustard. It is a large tree, and many people and nations are shaded by it. **The third domain** describes the "kingdom of heaven" in the stage of perfection like a ripe fruit for the believers to enjoy in the eternal glory, as it is written in the concluding chapters of the Book of Revelation about the New Jerusalem.

The first domain - the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven - as a seed, is a spiritual state in the heart; it is not seen or felt. It is not a material thing "for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17).

In the second domain, the kingdom of God is like a tree which takes patience to grow: "If we endure, we shall also reign with Him" (2 Timothy 2:12).

In the third domain - the kingdom of God is like a fruit - God will take us to this kingdom when we move to His eternal glory and the centre of joy in heaven. After all, the joy of heaven has entered our hearts here on earth.

The expression of the Lord: "The kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21) describes completely and accurately the whereabouts of His spiritual kingdom. **This kingdom started in a stable in Bethlehem, neither any of the great people, the rich nor the wise of that generation detected Him. Then He appeared suddenly in the Temple in Jerusalem. No one recognized Him except Simeon the Elder and Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel** (Luke 2:25, 36).

Thirty years after His birth, a few fishermen and some of the tax collectors in Galilee recognized Him. The Jewish Priests, their chiefs, the Scribes and the Pharisees had no eyes to see Him. The King came to His own, and His own did not receive Him (John 1:11). This happened when the Jews claimed that they were waiting for the kingdom. Their mistake was in looking in the opposite direction. They waited for signs when the kingdom was amidst them. They did not recognize Him because of their ignorance and stupidity.

We here mention another point. St. Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:5 the expression "the kingdom of Christ and God" and in Colossians 1:13 "the kingdom of the Son of His love". What did Paul mean by the kingdom of Christ?

The kingdom of Christ is the spiritual dominion of Christ over the hearts of the believers. This dominion materialized when the Lord paid the price for our souls on the Cross. In order for some one to own something, he has to pay its price "for you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6:20),

"You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men" (1 Corinthians 7:23). St. Peter also said: "knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you" (1 Peter 1:18-20).

E) THE PARABLES OF CHRIST AND THEIR CONNOTATIONS

The Lord Jesus told many parables which described some of the attributes of the kingdom of God. He told 7 parables about the kingdom in Chapter 13 of the Gospel according to St. Matthew. Namely, **the Sower, the wheat and the tares, the mustard seed, the leaven, the hidden treasure, the pearl of great price and the dragnet**. In Chapter 20, Matthew presented the **parable of the workers in the vineyard**, in Chapter 21 he presented the **parable of the wicked vinedressers**, and in Chapter 22 **the parable of the wedding feast** and finally **the parable of the Virgins** in Chapter 25.

Certainly each of these parables explains to us some of the attributes of the kingdom, or some of the spiritual virtues which the Lord wants us to sustain in our lives. Besides, some of these parables are addressed to His holy Church which is also His Dominion and congregates the members of His unseen mystical Body. We review ten of these parables.

(1) The Sower: (Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23; Luke 8:4-15; Mark 4:1-9, 13-20).

This parable explains the obligation of man to let God rule over his heart. In it we notice 4 elements: **the sower, the seed, the soil and the result.**

The Sower Who sows the good seed is the Lord Jesus the Son of Man (Matthew 13:37). **The seed** is the word of God, and the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12). **The soil refers to the heart of man and it relates to the result.**

In this parable the Lord points to the freedom of man to accept or reject the word of God. He refers to four kinds of soil which resemble: a wayside, a stony place, a land full of thorns and the good soil. The soil symbolises the heart which is man's office. **It is assumed that God created man to be good** "for in the image of God He made man" (Genesis 9:6). **How did the good soil become a wayside upon which people tread until it became solid, how was the good soil**

neglected that thorns grew in it and how did the good soil become stony? No doubt this is all the responsibility of man.

In this respect we notice that it is possible to change each of the first three kinds of soil to good soil again. In our times we see sandy desert land converted to land good for irrigation. This conversion requires effort and patience. The Lord said: they "bear fruit with patience" (Luke 8:15).

No one should despair, no matter how bad his life is, how many stumbling stones it contains or how discouraging the thorns of lust are. It is possible to convert this life and cultivate it to become good soil which brings forth good fruit.

(2, 3) The Wheat and Tares - the Dragnet in the Sea: (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43; 13:47-50)

In the parable of the wheat and the tares it is said that the seed of the tares is similar to the mustard seed, and as it grows the plants of the tares look similar to that of the wheat. Thus it is difficult in the early stages of growth to distinguish between the tares and the wheat. The difference between them becomes obvious after their heads develop. Yet in this late stage the roots of the wheat and of the tares are intermingled inside the soil, and it is not possible to dig out the plants of tare without uprooting some of the wheat plants with them.

What do each of the wheat and the tares refer to in this parable? The wheat refers to the righteous and the pious, but what do the tares refer to? The tares refer to evil people. Some of the great Church fathers like John Chrysostom and Augustine said that the tares also symbolize the false teachings concerning faith.

The field in this parable refers to the world, not to the Church, as some understood. The Lord Jesus said openly: "The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one" (Matthew 13:38).

The parable conveys that as a matter of fact there is evil in the world, and its existence is by the permission from God. Hence we should realize that we live in the world and deal with people among whom are evil ones (the tares). The Lord Jesus said to the Jews: "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do" (John 8:44).

Who planted the tares? The Devil planted them. How and when? while men slept (Matthew 13:25), in a moment of carelessness and spiritual snooze. The kingdom inside us needs vigil. Beware of the devil. He planted and still plants tares among the wheat. This is his job!

What should our attitude be towards the tares? It is not our job to gather up the tares. Our Job is to perpetually grow up. The Lord said: "Let both (the wheat and the tares) grow together to the time of harvest (Matthew 13:30). By "both" He means the good and the bad. **God teaches us that as we gather up the tares we also uproot the wheat with them** (Matthew 13:29).

Over the years many people were occupied in gathering up the tares. While they did that they had no time to build their own lives and they hurt both themselves and the Church! God does not concede to eliminate evil and wicked people, though He hates both. That is because He cares for the good and He loves them. **When we prune the dry branches of a tree we should beware not to kill the tree. There were corrupt priests among the Jews and bad teachers like the Scribes and Pharisees, yet the Lord Jesus criticised their corruption not their religious jobs.**

We notice that **after the enemy came and sowed the tares "he went his way"** (Matthew 13:25), as not to be seen. **The style of the devil in his work is to hide himself or to transform himself.** "For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14). The devil went his way because the tares do not need any care like the good plants; as they say "devilish plants". You do not require any effort to fall down, just leave oneself to fall down. But to get up and to stand up, requires effort.

The tares and the wheat will always coexist in this world. **The good and the bad will always be together until the end of the world "the time of harvest". The time of harvest is the end of the world:** "And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, "Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe" (Revelation 14:15).

The Dragnet:

The parable of the dragnet in the sea gives the same meaning: "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire" (Matthew 13:47-50).

Again the sense here is the existence of good and bad people together till the end of the ages (the two are in one net). Evil will not be eliminated from the world until the last day. Bad people will mix with good people in the kingdom of God on earth until the last day.

(4, 5) The Mustard Seed - the Leaven: (Matthew 13:31, 32; Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18, 19); (Matthew 13:33; Luke 13:20, 21).

In the parable of the mustard seed the Lord says: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches" (Matthew 13:31, 32).

St. Jerome says that the kingdom of heaven in this parable is preaching the Gospel. This parable refers to the growth of the kingdom and its expansion. Christianity started in a modest way by small groups. But soon: "There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world" (Psalm 19:3, 4).

Daniel prophesied about that saying: "I was looking, and behold, a tree in the midst of the earth, and its height was great. The tree grew and became strong; its height reached to the heavens, and it could be seen to the ends of all the earth. Its leaves were lovely, its fruit abundant, and in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, the birds of the heavens dwelt in its branches, and all flesh was fed from it" (Daniel 4:10-12). **The birds of heaven here refer to the atheist nations.** This analogy was common and known in the Jewish books of literature at that time.

Thus the parable of the mustard seed refers to the spread of Christianity. The mustard seed which became a big tree still extends its branches in spite of the material and heretic currants which oppose it all over the world. In this parable the Lord Jesus may have been encouraging the little flock, for it is their Father's good pleasure to give them the kingdom (Luke 12:33).

The Leaven:

If the parable of the mustard seed refers to the expansion and the spread of Christianity, the parable of the Leaven refers to the work of Christianity and its effectiveness by Grace inside man. "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened" (Matthew 13:33). The leaven works inside the dough without us seeing what is happening. All we notice is that the dough rises and its volume increases by the leaven.

"Leaven" referred to evil in the Holy Bible (1 Corinthians 5:7; Luke 12:1; Galatians 5:9) **and the Law of Moses forbade using it in the offerings, except in one case mentioned in Leviticus 23:17. In the feast of the Passover, the Jews used to empty their homes from the leaven for seven days. In spite of that "Leaven" could be used to refer to "good" as in this parable.** That is, the same word can refer to the good or the bad, each from a special angle.

The Lord Jesus was described in the Bible as a lion: "Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals" (Revelation 5:5), and the devil was described as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8).

Again Christ was symbolized by the bronze serpent which Moses lifted up in the wilderness (John 3:14). Meanwhile it was the serpent which tempted Eve in the beginning. At the same time the Lord asked His followers to be wise as serpents (Matthew 10:16).

St. Augustine said that the three measures of meal in which the woman hid the leaven refer to the three sons of Noah who inhabited the earth after the flood. Other fathers said that they refer to the three known continents in the old world at that time. Accordingly the three measures of meal refer to the whole world. The Lord Jesus said to His Disciples: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). The whole world was the three known continents at that time (Asia, Africa and Europe) and all men are the descendants of the three sons of Noah.

St. Jerome however said that the three measures of meal refer to the three substances which form man, the spirit, the body and the soul. When Grace works in them, it works in harmony. Jerome also said that the woman here refers to the Church and the three measures refer to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. St. Augustine said that the three measures refer to man's heart, his soul, and his mind (Matthew 22:37).

The above different explanations mean that the message of the Gospel and the work of Grace are a changing force which work in the world and it is sufficient to renew it.

(6) The Workers in the Vineyard: (Matthew 20:1-16)

The summary of this parable is: A landowner went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. He had agreed with the laborers for a denarius a day and sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and he hired them and sent them into the vineyard. **Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did likewise.** And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing idle, and said to them, "Why have you been standing here idle all day?" They said to him, "Because no one hired us" and he hired them.

So when evening had come, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, "Call the laborers and give them their wages, beginning with the last to the first. And when those came who were hired about the eleventh hour, they each received a denarius. But when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they likewise received each a denarius. And when they had received it, they complained against the landowner, saying, "These last men have worked only one hour, and you made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the heat of the day". But he answered one of them and said, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what is yours and go your way. I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things?" The Lord concluded the parable by saying: "So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen".

In explaining this parable the scholar Origen said that the world is like a long day. Early morning refers to the period from Adam to Noah, the third hour to the period from Noah to Abraham, the sixth hour to the period from Abraham to Moses and the ninth hour

to the period from Moses to the coming of Christ. We notice that the Lord combined the sixth and the ninth hours together: "And he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour"; in these two hours He was calling the Jews and visiting mankind to establish His covenants, as time was advancing for the salvation of man. The eleventh hour refers to the period from the coming of the Lord to the end of the world".

Origen also said that the period from early morning to the ninth hour refers to the Jewish nation. But in the eleventh hour, the Gentiles were called (because Christ died on the Cross on the ninth hour). The workers of the eleventh hour said to the landowner: "No one hired us". That is no one came to us like the Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob), and the prophets; no one has preached to us the way of salvation.

The vineyard is the Catholic Church from the time of Abel the righteous to the last of the chosen born in the world. In this long period, God did not stop sending workers for His vineyard to teach His people righteousness. This was done first by the Patriarch fathers then by the Law teachers and the Prophets and finally by the Disciples.

So when evening had come, the owner of the vineyard started to give them their wages. Evening refers to the end of the world. He did not say next morning, because it is the eternal rest.

The workers of the eleventh hour took their wages first, pointing to the Gentiles who glorified God for His mercy (Romans 15:9), and mercy relates not to a sequence: "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion" (Romans 9:15).

St. Augustine said that each one took an equal wage because the kingdom is for all. But each one had a different job because "In My Father's house are many mansions" (John 14:2) and "one star differs from another star in glory" (1 Corinthians 15:41).

He who serves Christ based on estimating time, wages and the like hoping for a better reward in this life or in the life to come, does not understand the spirit of Christ. We should understand service to God as paying of a debt. Besides, Christian service is done for the sake of love.

(7) The Wedding Feast: (Matthew 22:1-14; Luke 14:16-24)

St. Matthew presents this parable as a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, while St. Luke presents it as a certain man gave a great supper and invited many. In both presentations the guests were not willing to come.

The Lord Jesus aimed from this parable to teach us the necessity of accepting the invitation of God without excuses for the reason of being busy or occupied. The invitation cannot be postponed.

In this parable according to St. Matthew, the wedding refers to the Church in the world and according to St. Luke the supper refers to the eternal supper. Many people in our time attend the wedding, that is they attend the Church and then they leave it. But those who attend the last supper will not leave it.

The King sent out his servants who were the prophets. He sent his servants out twice. In the first time they were the prophets and in the second time they were the Disciples. The scholar Origen sees the servants in the second time as another group of prophets. The King refers to the Heavenly Father. The Son for Whom the wedding was arranged is Christ and the bride is the Church.

Again according to St. Matthew "when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. What is the wedding garment?"

They explain the wedding garment as love - and this is the view of Origen who relates it to the words of St. Paul: "Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection" (Colossians 3:12, 14). **They also explain that by the sinner** who does not put on the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 13:14). That is the sinner who does not change his ways and live the new life.

When the man who did not have on a wedding garment was asked "How did you come in here without a wedding garment?" He was speechless (Matthew 22:12), which means that he had no excuse or an answer to give for his life of sin.

(8, 9) The Hidden Treasure - the Pearl of Great Price: (Matthew 13:44); (Matthew 13:45, 46)

By these two parables the Lord Jesus wanted to tell us that nothing on earth is as valuable as the kingdom of heaven.

In the parable of the treasure hidden in the field the Lord Jesus says: "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field" (Matthew 13:44).

The Lord starts this parable by the words "is like" because there is nothing like it in the material world. Talking to God, David says: "Among the gods there is none like You, O Lord;

nor are there any works like Your works" (Psalm 86:8).

The hidden treasure in the field - what is this field?

Perhaps the treasure is the Gospel hidden in the world, like milk in the chest, marrow in the bone, manna in the desert, water in the well and honey in the comb! It is not in a garden with walls around it but in an open field in which people go every day. Thus he who wants to get the treasure should dig the field until he finds the treasure. The Lord says: "You search the (Holy) Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me" (John 5:39).

Some one may say that he reads the Holy Bible but does not find this treasure. For such a person we say that the richest mines are found in the most bare lands and in great depth under the ground. Do not expect to find the treasure on the surface or in a shallow depth. **You need to dig deeper. The Lord told Simon Peter: "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch" (Luke 5:4). Many people read the Bible in a superficial way and do not value it. As expected they do not find anything on the surface and they pass their judgment on this basis, such as "the words of Christ are not superior to the teachings of Buddha or Confucius"!**

Perhaps the field which hides the treasure is the world in which we live. The Lord Jesus said openly in the parable of the Sower: "The field is the world" (Matthew 13:38). This is confirmed by the words of the Apostle Paul **"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, so that they are without excuse" (Romans 1:20). **The might of God, His greatness, superiority and many of His attributes may be realised by meditating in His creation:** "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork" (Psalm 19:1). Even the birds, the animals and the material creation praise God (Psalms 66; 97; 98).

You can find the hidden treasure - the Lord Jesus - embodied as a poor man who deserves alms. You can also find it in an ill person or one in need of a word of comfort, etc. The Lord Jesus said: "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me" (Matthew 25:40)!

When the rich young man came to the Lord Jesus and asked Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" So Jesus said to him, "Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have **treasure in heaven;** and come, take up the cross, and follow Me" (Mark 10:17-21). **On this basis monasticism emerged in Christianity.**

But how is the treasure hidden like that?

Yes, it is hidden! Who would think that the penniless poor is the Lord Jesus? Who would think that the prisoner is the Lord Jesus? Who would think that the sick and crippled is the Lord Jesus? Using the logic of the world, the Magi went searching until they found the

Baby Jesus. They found Him though they did not comprehend His nature and reality. They found the Divine King. Where? Laying down in poor clothes in a stable surrounded by the animals. Yet, with the state like that, with what they saw, they worshipped Him and offered Him their presents. Who would think that the King of kings would be born in a stable? Is He not a hidden treasure?

A man found this treasure and hid it

A man found it. What man? Any man. Christ came for everyone; whether he is a Jew, Greek, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free, illiterate or wise (Colossians 3:11).

Why did the man who found the treasure hid it?

The Pharaoh of Egypt instructed the Hebrew midwives to kill every male born Hebrew child. But when Moses was born, his mother hid him three months and he lived. **The virtue is born from inside the soul. We need to hide it from the spiritual Pharaoh who is the devil.** When coal glows it is covered with a layer of ashes and it appears as if it were not burning. But as you draw near to it you feel the heat and warmth. **Likewise a Christian person should be careful to hide his treasure. That was how the saints lived: "The royal daughter is all glorious within the palace"** (Psalm 45:13).

"And for joy over it he went and sold all that he had and bought that field" (Matthew 13:44).

"For joy" refers to the motive and desire. **The joy of this man over this treasure was more than his joy over all his properties.** After numbering his tribulations in his ministry, St. Paul said: "As dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and yet not killed; **as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing**; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things" (2 Corinthians 6:4-10). **Although a man has nothing, at the same time he owns everything because he owns the Real Treasure.** This is what the pious people did. They lived in the deserts and in the desolate places disposing of everything. Yet they carried inside themselves the Real Treasure, our Lord Jesus.

"He sold all that he had and bought it" (Matthew 13:44)

What does a man sell to buy the treasure? Not necessarily possessions which he sells and gives the proceeds to the needy in order to own the treasure. I may have no riches but I own tears, reverence to God and poverty in the spirit. With all that and with other things I can buy the treasure. I may sell my bodily desires and everything which impede my life with God. That is, I leave them and buy the field where the treasure is.

This man who found the treasure **"went and sold all that he had"**. **This refers to the positive steps which he took in order to own the treasure.** Giving away lusts, freeing oneself

from all the ties of sin: "We have left all and followed You" (Matthew 19:27).

What after that? The man went and bought the field in which he found the treasure. The Apostle said: "**We are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ**" (Romans 8:17)!

The pearl of great price:

Again the Lord Jesus said: "The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it" (Matthew 13:45, 46).

Here the merchant is a model of the person who searches for Christ until he finds Him. We notice four attributes in this man: First: He seeks beautiful pearls, that is he searches for them. Second: He finds one. Third: He goes and sells all that he has it. Fourth: He buys it.

This merchant who seeks and searches for beautiful pearls may differ from the man who found the treasure in a field without searching for it. Maybe this man was looking for something else and he found the treasure instead. In this case he is like the person to whom Jesus declared Himself without him seeking Jesus: "I was sought by those who did not ask for Me; I was found by those who did not seek Me" (Isaiah 65:1; Romans 10:20).

Yet this merchant is a more noble type and has a more superior mind. He searches for beautiful pearls, and as a result of his toil, search and noble desire, he found the pearl of great price. He was busy searching, all his effort was directed to this cause.

This merchant had a defined goal: to seek and to search for beautiful pearls, and to own them. We need to specify the goal and not to waver between God and the world. If the world with all its desires deserves your service and toil, go and be at its service. But if the Lord Jesus Who saved you deserves your service, walk in that ways.

We do not know the value of this pearl. All we know is that its price equals all the possessions of this merchant; he went and sold all that he had to buy it. This is what happens when a person finds Jesus because he finds all his needs in Him. Is there a risk for a man to sell all he has to buy the pearl of great price which refers to Christ. The matter does not afford any hesitation.

When this merchant sold all that he had, he became poor in the eyes of the people, and poverty brings with it misery. But in fact he became the richest and the most joyous man in the Universe.

(10) The Virgins: (Matthew 25:1-13)

This parable is very clear and it concerns the second coming of Christ.

St. Augustine says: "This parable concerns the whole Church - not the clergy alone nor the lay people alone, but all: "For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:2). The Virgins are the souls who have the orthodox faith and do good works in the Church. In spite of that, five of them were wise and five were foolish.

Why five and why Virgins? The human soul is symbolised by the number five because it uses five senses and we can not do anything without at least one of our five bodily senses.

Both groups were virgins and were members of the Church by Baptism and by the other sacraments. Why then were five of them accepted and five were rejected? It is not enough to be virgins and to have lamps. They were virgins because they controlled their senses from prohibited (bad) desires. They had lamps because of their good works.

About the good works, the Lord says: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). "Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning; and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately" (Luke 12:35, 36). **Virginity is in the "girded waists" and good works are in "the shining lamps". Few are virgins in their bodies but the virginity of the heart ought to be for all".**

Augustine also said: "The wise virgins did not differ from the foolish ones except in the oil. The oil refers to love. Why? The Apostle called love: "A more excellent way" (1 Corinthians 12:31). Oil symbolises love because oil floats over all liquids. If you pour oil over water, the oil will float and if you pour water over oil, again the oil will float "Love never fails" (1 Corinthians 13:8). Oil also refers to the Holy Spirit that illuminates the life of man".

"They went out to meet the bridegroom" (Matthew 25:1)

Christ is the Bridegroom of the soul and He is full of sweetness. The bride says: "Your name is ointment poured forth; therefore the virgins love you" (Song 1:3). **What does the bridegroom expect from His bride? He expects her with all her emotions to be for Him:** "Listen, O daughter, consider and incline your ear; forget your own people also, and your father's house; So the King will greatly desire your beauty; because He is your Lord, worship Him" (Psalm 45:10, 11).

"And at midnight a cry was heard" (Matthew 25:6)

Why at midnight? It is the time when no one anticipates it and there is no warning. The

Lord advised us many times to keep up our guards: "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority" (Acts 1:7). The Apostle Paul says: "The day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night" (1 Thessalonians 5:2), and the thief does not notify us about his coming. At midnight one would be fast asleep. **If the life of man symbolised by the night, midnight refers to him in the peak of his youth.** In this age, a young man does not expect to die. Yet at that time Christ might come.

"Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out" (Matthew 25:8).

These were the words of the foolish virgins and this request is impossible after death. When the wise virgins reply: "Go to those who sell, and buy for yourselves" (Matthew 25:9), they do not mean that at all.

During the absence of the foolish, the bridegroom came and those who were ready went in with Him to the wedding, **and the door was shut** (Matthew 25:10). It was futile for the foolish virgins to knock on the door after it was shut. It is true that Christ said: "Knock, and it will be opened to you" (Matthew 7:7; Luke 11:9). These words are only meant for the time of mercy, during the life time of man on earth. But in heaven, there will be justice. The mercy of God on earth does not cancel His justice in heaven.

It was final for the foolish virgins. They lost everything and that was the end. It is a frightening and terrifying matter because it concerns eternity which has no end. For this reason, the Lord concludes this parable by saying: "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming" (Matthew 25:13).

The Lord Jesus does not mean that we be watchful with our bodies, though that is useful for spiritual practices. **He especially asks us to be watchful with our hearts, watchful in our faith, in hope, in love and in good deeds. The bride said: "I sleep, but my heart is awake"** (Song 5:2).

We are now in the season of engagement, because we are betrothed to Christ: "I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:2). **The period of engagement is the time of knowing one another and the time of growth of emotions in preparation for the day of the wedding which will be in heaven** (Luke 14:16-21)

F) JOY OF THE KINGDOM AND

EVERLASTING LIFE

Finally, we do not find words to conclude our subject about the kingdom better than what St. Augustine said:

"In eternal life we know God and live with Jesus. The Lord Jesus Himself said: "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3). In eternal life people know, watch and realise what they believed in on earth and they get what they could not get here. The mind sees what the eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man (1 Corinthians 2:9). They hear the voice saying: "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34).

We shall see God. This is a great thing beside which every thing is trivial and insignificant. On earth we feel lucky if we live in peace with one another, though it is difficult to achieve that. Yet if we compare our happiness here to our eternal happiness in heaven, we perceive ourselves here as poor and miserable.

Joy in the home of God is eternal and the feast is with the hosts of angels in the presence of God. Such a feast has no beginning nor end.

In Heaven, there is no need to be prudent because there is no evil to avoid, no need for justice because there is no injustice, no moderation because there is no desire to control, and no need for endurance because there is no pain.

Beautiful are the works of mercy, yet they are not needed because there is no misery there. There is no one to feed or to give drink to, no one to clothe because every one is clothed in eternity. No one is a stranger because they all live in their home land. No one to visit because no one is sick or imprisoned. No one to bury because every one is alive. No peace to make because every one is in peace with everyone else. No one to comfort because there is no sadness but eternal joy. No one needs anything or asks for anything. Your great wealth is God Himself.

You will be content because you will not need anything. You will be satisfied by your God, and you will find all you desire.

You ask for food and God is food for you.

You desire to cuddle some one and there "it is good for me to draw near to God" (Psalm 73:28). There you look for riches, and you need nothing because there is the maker of everything.

But you say: what shall I do? It seems that there is no work for me: No sight, no love and no praise.

The holy days after the Resurrection of the Lord symbolise our life after our resurrection.

The forty days before the Passover (Resurrection of the Lord) refer to our life of toil in our experience with death. However, the fifty days after the Passover symbolise the other life in the kingdom with the Lord.

Our present life is like the forty days before the Passover. But the fifty days after the Passover will not exist any more. We hope for them and by hope we love them - and praise God with the same love - and He promised us with them".