# MIGHTY ARROWS MAGAZINE

LIFE.GOD.TRUTH.FOR COPTIC YOUTH.



VOLUME 8 NO. 5 SUMMER 2009

"Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth."

Psalm 127:4

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MIGHTY ARROWS SUMMER 2009


MIGHTY ARROWS MAGAZINE

A PUBLICATION OF THE COPTIC ORTHODOX DIOCESE OF THE SOUTHERN UNITED STATES

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## My Blessed Youth

I sincerely hope each of you is enjoying a peaceful and fruitful summer vacation. Summer is usually a time of relaxation, family, friends, and fun. Each of these components cannot be fully enjoyed without our Lord Jesus Christ in our midst. Here we know that this promise is fulfilled. "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20). During the academic year, you are obliged to study a myriad of articles, textbooks, formulas, research, and other interdisciplinary material. During these few months of summer, it is my hope that you use your time wisely, to enjoy a spiritual book, take a better look at God's creation of nature and the often overlooked simple beauty around you, set aside some time for meditation and introspection at the Abbey or Convent, write a poem or story for the Mighty Arrows Magazine, increase your Biblical readings, attend Divine Liturgies during the week, serve at your church's summer camp, or join an Evangelism/Mission Ministry with the Diocese. All in all, dare to come closer to Christ, know Him a little bit better, and you will surely love Him a whole lot more.

I would like to take this opportunity to discuss and share a few special events which take place during these summer months. July is a time when we celebrate the Feast of the Apostles and August brings us great joy with the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mother, the Theotokos, St. Mary. These two celebrations bring to mind the diligence and vigilance by which these great figures of Christianity helped change the world for the better. These are they who lived and died by the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ, who said regarding them and all who follow Him like them, "Here are My mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother" (Mark 3:34-35).

As Christians, we acknowledge that the crux of Christianity is the Beatitudes (Matt. 5; Luke 6). Like Christ, His disciples and all of His followers, i.e., you and I, have become a paradox to the world. St. Macarius offered this simple description of who we are: "Christians are of another world, children of the heavenly Adam, a new race, children of the Holy Spirit, shining brothers of Christ, similar to their Father, the spiritual Adam. They belong to His city, His race and power. They are not of this world, but of another one. For He Himself says: "They are not of this world, even as I am not of this world" (John. 17:16)." The believers are salt and light, two elements that bring beauty, taste, and meaning to an otherwise futile world. In order for your salt to have taste and for your light to shine bright, place yourself in the palm of His hand and let Him mold you into a lustrous arrow. This issue of the Mighty Arrows Magazine presents youth with a series of strengths to become spiritually minded and Christ focused, like radiant arrows, in purity, in thought, in presence, in honor, in speech, in aim.

"Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth" (Psalm 127:4)

God bless you,

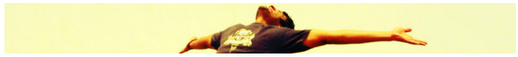


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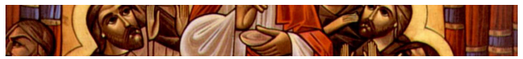
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# On a Mission

## The Apostleship of Saint Paul

Have you ever dreamed of becoming a missionary, a hard working servant of the Lord, or simply living a life of joy having a good relationship with God? Every youth dreams to grow closer to God and say proudly with Saint Paul the apostle: "it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me." (Galatians 2:20) As I think about the life of Saint Paul, the key to his successful spiritual life becomes clear. It was truly the power of the Holy Spirit in his life that guided him to live as Christ lived. The life of Saint Paul can be a great example for youth who are struggling in this world to maintain a good relationship with God. He was not born a saint but a regular human like us; however, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he became a saint. So, brethren, let us take a small journey through the life of St. Paul and learn how we also can abide in Christ.

St. Paul started his life with a mission to persecute and kill all Christians if they did not refrain from worshiping Christ. However, our Lord looked at St. Paul's heart and found a man willing to serve and obey Him. On the way to Damascus, God appeared to Saul and invited him to serve him and St. Paul accepted with joy. Many times we struggle trying to please God and wander along a wrong path. We get so caught up with an idea of how to please Him that we forget about Him. We fail to listen to His voice inside us, forgetting that He is only asking for our hearts.

St. Paul tells us that after his baptism the Holy Spirit directed him to go into Arabia. He spent time in the desert before returning to Damascus, where he remained for three years (Galatians 1:17-18). He wanted to get to know God better before he told others about Him. A great lesson for us to learn is that we need to know and experience the beauty of being God's children before we can tell others about Him. You cannot give to others something that you do not have yourself!

When St. Paul finally went to Jerusalem to start his service, he found himself rejected, "when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple." (Acts 9:26) Despite feeling rejected, he did not stop serving or preaching the name of Christ. He was strengthened by the Holy Spirit and "he spoke boldly in the Name of the Lord Jesus." (Acts 9:29) You may not be an intellectual or well thought of in your family circle, you may even be despised by others for your faith, but remember that those who are rejected of men are often beloved of the Lord. Allow the Holy Spirit inside you to comfort and strengthen you like St. Paul did.

St. Paul started his mission talking about the Christ he knew. Led by the Holy Spirit, his words were powerful, penetrating the hearts of his audience. As Father Matthew the Poor commented, "Words in Saint Paul are sometimes like pointed spears which are very difficult to escape, because it is the Spirit who aims and hurls them. For the Word of God in St. Paul is sharpened by the Spirit of God. It pierces the dividing line between soul and spirit, penetrating even the marrow of one's bones. It exposes, lays bare and reproves sin - then binds up [the wounds]." Moreover, the fact that millions of people submit to the guidance of St. Paul's words is in itself a testimony to the Holy Spirit taking hold of St. Paul's spirit and filling his mind with those words. Our lives are transformed the same way when we allow the Holy Spirit to work in us. Not only do our words become powerful, but our lives become a shining light to others as well.

St. Paul, guided by the Holy Spirit, started his first missionary journey from 45 to 51 AD. The apostle traveled throughout the island of Cyprus and also founded many Christian communities in the Asia Minor cities of Pisidian, Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, he carried out his second missionary journey from 51 to 54 AD. He initially visited the churches that he had founded in Asia Minor, and then he crossed over to Macedonia, where he founded congregations in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. In 55 AD St. Paul left for Jerusalem, visiting Ephesus and Caeseria, and from Jerusalem he went to Antioch. After a short stay in Antioch, Saint Paul undertook his third missionary journey from 56 to 58 AD, initially visiting churches in Asia Minor that had founded on earlier trips, then stopping at Ephesus, where he preached daily for two years in the school of Tyrannus. (Acts 13-28)

From the journeys of St. Paul we learn many great lessons. In particular, we as youth can learn perseverance. St. Paul was able to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit guiding him to where he needed to go. Also, as was his custom, he would go and visit all the other churches and communities he had started. He had to make sure the foundation he set was strong before he started another one. The same goes for us in our spiritual life. We must first listen for and hear the voice of the Holy Spirit inside us. This is the foundation of our spiritual life that will strengthen us in our trials and temptations.

"We must first listen for and hear the voice of the Holy Spirit inside us. This is the foundation of our spiritual life…"



# So That You Surely Rejoice

by Fr. Timotheus Soliman
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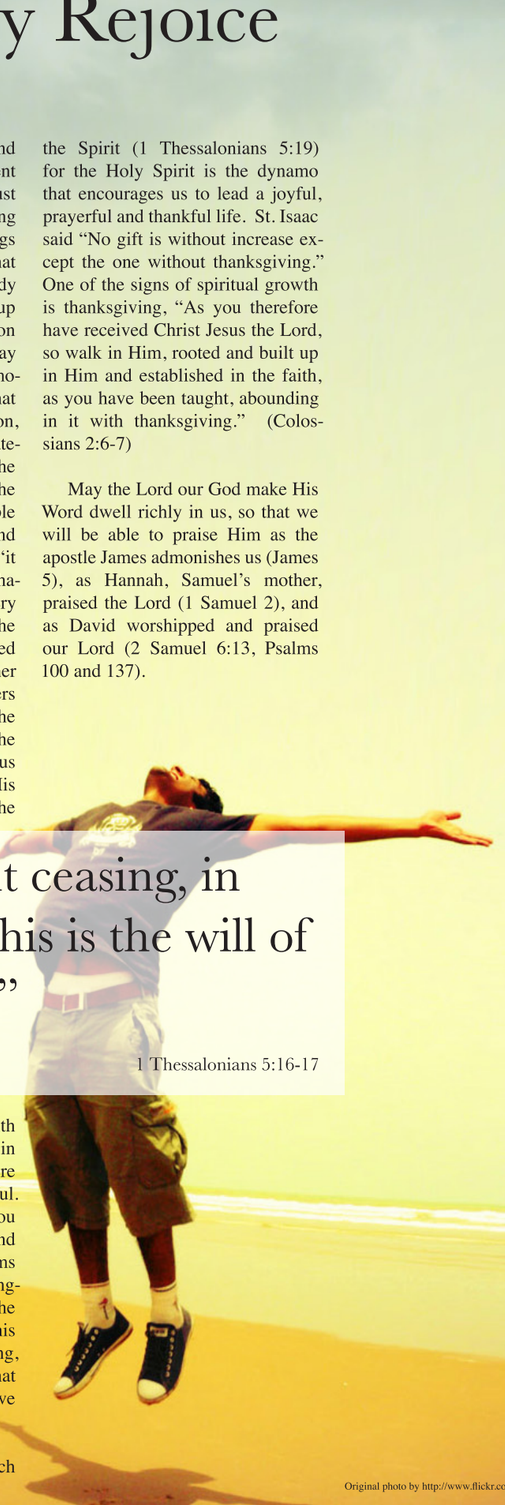
We read in the Word of God: "Seven days you shall keep a sacred feast to the LORD your God in the place which the LORD chooses, because the LORD your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you surely rejoice." (Deuteronomy 16:15) This verse appears in the fifth book of the law in the course of mentioning the three major feasts of the Jews: the Passover Feast, the Feast of Tabernacles and the Feast of Weeks.

During Old Testament times, devout Jews knew the book of Deuteronomy, which summarizes the whole Law, by heart. Even our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ quoted this book in His temptation by the devil (Deuteronomy 6:13-16 and 8:3). When the Lord our God said, "so that you surely rejoice," He really meant that He wants us rejoicing. Therefore, when St. Paul commanded us in his epistle to "Rejoice in the Lord always" (Philippians 4:4), he was not giving us a new commandment but one that was established long before his time. Also, in the Chapter of Blessings and Curses (Deuteronomy 28), after the Lord explained that blessings will result from obedience to Him and curses will result from disobedience of His Law, He said "Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joy and gladness of heart, for the abundance of everything." (Deuteronomy 28:47)

St. Paul admonishes us to rejoice always, to pray without ceasing, and to give thanks because that is the will of God for us (1 Thessalonians 5:16-17). We need to rejoice because joy will not come from riches but from thankfulness: "Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life." (1 Timothy 6:17-19) St. Athanasius said that the Christian is a Eucharistic person, meaning that a Christian is a grateful person. When we celebrate the Eucharist (i.e. thanksgiving) in the Liturgy, the priest tells the people "let us give thanks to the Lord" and the believers respond by saying "it is meet and right." We are a Eucharistic people thanking Him in every condition and for everything. The apostle Paul notes that joy is linked to love, "giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love" (Colossians 1:12-13), and he teaches that joy is associated with praising "let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." (Colossians 3:15-17) This triune command, rejoicing, praying, giving thanks, is so wonderful that our life cannot be the same if we heed it.

St. Paul then tells us not to quench the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19) for the Holy Spirit is the dynamo that encourages us to lead a joyful, prayerful and thankful life. St. Isaac said "No gift is without increase except the one without thanksgiving." One of the signs of spiritual growth is thanksgiving, "As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving." (Colossians 2:6-7)

May the Lord our God make His Word dwell richly in us, so that we will be able to praise Him as the apostle James admonishes us (James 5), as Hannah, Samuel's mother, praised the Lord (1 Samuel 2), and as David worshipped and praised our Lord (2 Samuel 6:13, Psalms 100 and 137).



"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

1 Thessalonians 5:16-17

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# The Church & The Role of Women

by Mimi Ignatius

Women from all over the world have made significant contributions. Their names are usually not known and they are certainly not celebrated worldwide, but it only takes one great woman to make a difference. Short and precious was the time that Moses' mother had to raise the child that she had given up to save his life (Exodus 2). This she did willingly because she felt that preserving his life was of greater value than the pain and sorrow she would have to face without him.

God purposely created woman to be a helper and a companion to man –to make her comparable to yet different from man (Genesis 2). A companion is often one who possesses complementary gifts relative to his/her partner. The mighty prophet Joshua is an exemplary figure of one who was second in command. His loyalty, dedication, endurance, respect, faith, worship, intelligence, and decency were not perceived as weaknesses but instead as strength above strength. Moses needed Joshua as much as Joshua needed Moses. In effect, they were co-servants, one was the leader and the other second in command. By each one carrying out his role to the fullest, success and victory were inevitable.

In the home, the woman takes the role of second in command. God carefully created her to be physically softer, intellectually perceptive, intuitive, and able to multi-task. Often, we mistakenly assume that different roles mean different degrees of value. However, that all depends on your viewpoint. Women are not inferior to men, but have different and complex needs and ambitions. Maternal instincts are present in nearly all female species. Most women yearn to have children and are often conflicted when they have to sacrifice their career to enjoy a family.

Interestingly, the feminine pronoun "she" is used to refer to wisdom and to the Church. What these have to do with women initially appears to be nothing more than linguistics. However, wisdom builds and fortifies while the Church nurtures and nourishes. These words sound quite similar to what comes naturally to most women. The apostle Paul described the Lord's love, care, and sacrifice for the church allegorically as a husband for his wife (Ephesians 5). The church, in turn, as the bride, should reverently respect and submit to her husband, i.e. to God. This submission is out of love and not out of fear or bondage. In all interactions, the Holy Scripture instructs all the faithful to be in submission to one another.

The Coptic Orthodox Church has painstakingly followed the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ for over two thousand years. When the Lord established the priesthood, it was strictly on the grounds of male ordination. Many women were referred to as disciples, deaconesses, or prophetesses. However, it was never mentioned that any woman was to be in the priesthood. Even the deaconesses had responsibilities different than the deacons. In the Old Testament, Deborah the Judge held a powerful position, but carefully advised Barak, only to a point. Then, she reminded him of the limits of her role (Judges 4). St. Mary, the Blessed Mother, was placed in the care of Christ's closest male servant, to care for her needs and well-being (John 19). Additionally, she was to care for him.

Let us all make the most of one another and not desire to have what is not ours to take. Let us women follow in this pattern and appreciate all the gifts which God gave us. May we use these gifts wisely to glorify His Holy Name.



# The Heat of Battle

by J. M. Stephanous

There is a story in The Sayings of the Desert Fathers that at first glance appears very strange, but on closer examination reveals an important truth about spiritual warfare.

Abba Poemen said that Abba John the Dwarf had prayed to God to take his passions away from him so that he might be free of worry. He went and said to an elder: "I find myself in peace, without an enemy." The elder said to him, "Beseech God to stir up warfare so that you may regain the affliction and humility you used to have, for it is by warfare that the soul makes progress." So he besought God; and when warfare came, he no longer prayed that it might be taken away, but said, "Lord give me strength for the fight."

It is by warfare that the soul makes progress. Such is the difficult but real truth that John the Dwarf came to learn. The story of John the Dwarf highlights a point that we must always keep in mind: the spiritual roughhousing we experience in life, if we struggle successfully, helps to raise us to higher ground. However, this certainly does not mean that we are to excitedly beg God to send us trials or temptations – this would be only an excuse to fall into the sins we enjoy. Recall that Christ taught us to pray "do not lead us into temptation." (Matthew 6:13)

In a heated epistle to Corinth, St. Paul said this about the devil: "lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices." (2 Corinthians 2:11) In previous articles, we spoke of the importance of wise behavior to avoid unnecessary temptations, but let's face it, we end up immersed in spiritual broils everyday. Satan may come to us at the beginning of these temptations and say very soothingly, "Look, you know very well the extreme inconvenience of resisting this sin. It might even be a little painful. Let's not allow things to get ugly. Why not lay down your weapons, yield to this sin for only a moment, and once it's over you'll move on with life and I won't bother you again." At this point your knees begin to shake, and you feel yourself giving in. This is not the time to feel discouraged! The idea that Satan tries to sell us, "You'll never win this one" is an absolute lie. Every single tiny battle can and should be won, because our victories add up.

Unfortunately, we are caught in the middle of two opposing forces, and our flesh is on the wrong side! "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Matthew 26:41) The book Spiritual Warfare addresses this exact situation:

You are now faced with a battle against your passions and against your other enemies. Fear not and be not afraid; let not this fear drive you to run from your post on the battlefield. For our Lord Jesus Christ, the Commander, is near you.

Despite your desire to "run from your post," running from the battle means giving in to the sin. Yielding is always the easiest and quickest way to get rid of an obnoxious temptation. But yielding is the surest way of causing the temptation to repeat itself. The only way to permanently stamp out a sin is to struggle against it courageously.

Such courage is of prime importance to face Satan's enticements because once you begin to feel that you cannot resist, that you cannot help yourself, then you will not resist – it is a self-fulfilling prophecy. St. Moses the Strong fell victim to this type of despair during one of his attacks, but in his good fortune he had a wise spiritual father:

It happened that Abba Moses was struggling with the temptation of fornication. Unable to stay any longer in his cell, he went and told Abba Isidore. The old man exhorted him to return to his cell. But he refused saying, "Abba, I cannot." Then Abba Isidore took Moses outside and said, "Look towards the West." He looked and saw hordes of demons flying about before launching an attack. Then Abba Isidore said to him, "Look towards the East." He turned and saw an innumerable multitude of holy angels shining in glory. Abba Isidore said, "See, those who are with us are more than those who are against us." Then Abba Moses gave thanks to God, plucked up courage, and returned to his cell.

St. Moses plucked up courage, similar to the growth of a plant, for it began as the size of a seed. And like all virtues, St. Moses buried it within his heart, watered it, tended to it, and watched it evolve from a tiny seed, to a tender shoot, to a thick trunk laden with branches, leaves and fruit.

Some of this fruit is the fruit of the Spirit, for it is the Holy Spirit who aids and comforts us in the midst of spiritual toils. This fruit, born out of the labor-pains of temptation's fires, is the sweetest, freshest reward a person can enjoy from any work. Christ has promised to send us help in the form of the Holy Spirit "And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever." (John 14:16) (Also see 3rd Hour Agpeya Gospel) The Holy Spirit will have His hand in every spiritual warfare, the presence and strength of which we will feel if we maintain open hearts.

by Patrick Williams

"At times, as I participate in the liturgy, I will look at the icon of Christ on His throne and, in my mind, I am whisked away to heaven."

# Conversion Factor

My transition to Orthodoxy has been filled with beauty, wonder, awe and hardships. I would like to relate and share some of experiences and observations of my conversion into the Orthodox faith so that you may gain insight into what a convert experiences when they come to orthodoxy – both the good experiences and the difficult experiences they may encounter.

After being a Protestant for nearly 27 years, I (along with my wife) became Orthodox Christians. I learned that the ancient church had not disappeared but had been here, without interruption, since Christ founded it (contrary to the reformation belief that Martin Luther had "recovered" the gospel).

One of the first things that struck me when I visited a Coptic Orthodox church was the beauty; both the physical surroundings and the liturgy. As a protestant, I considered such things as icons, incense, vestments, etc… as mere accoutrements of man-made religion – items designed to foster an outward form of religion that had no bearing on inward piety. Now, however, I have come to believe that God uses all of our senses – sight, sound, taste, smell, and touch to relate to us, mold us, love us, and to grow us into the image of His Beloved Son. At times, as I participate in the liturgy, I will look at the icon of Christ on His throne and, in my mind, I am whisked away to heaven. I imagine that I am with my Lord standing before His throne with the myriad of angels and saints who are worshiping their King and their God. Or, I look at Sts. Peter, Andrew, Mark, and Matthew and I am reminded that a great cloud of witnesses surround me (Hebrews 12:1) and encourage me to stay faithful and to continue along the path that is narrow and the road that few people have traveled (Matthew 7:13-14). Thus, many of the physical aspects in the church have helped me to concentrate on, meditate upon, and participate in the heavenly worship.

There is, of course, a flip side that I have experienced too. I still find myself not understanding everything or feeling a little awkward about some things. I sometimes worry about losing focus on the Lord in preference of a saint or crossing the line between worshipping St. Mary rather than venerating her. I know this may sound silly to some people but, as a Protestant, I never used icons or prayed to saints so this is still an adjustment for me. I still feel a little odd when I touch an icon that is being carried in a procession and have to remind myself that I am not touching a picture but, through the picture, I am fellowshipping with a saint and reaching out for the blessing from one who has already fought the good fight, won the race, and finished the course that was laid out before them (2 Timothy 4:7).

I find the liturgy to be very beautiful, but it was an adjustment to get accustomed to the length of the liturgy. The very first Coptic liturgy I attended seemed very, very long and I had no idea whatsoever what was going on around me. Since that first time, of course, I have learned, grown, and become accustomed to a longer liturgy but I must admit that this was something I had to get used to. I attended my first Coptic Orthodox Good Friday this past Paschal season and it was wonderful. I did not know what it would be like to be in church all day but the time easily passed as I journeyed with the Lord during this most holy day. The Resurrection (Easter) Liturgy was the most wonderful Easter I have ever experienced in my life. I loved the enacting of Psalm 23 and very much appreciated friends taking the time to translate the Arabic into English for my wife and I (or else it would have been nothing more than meaningless chatter to us). When they tolled the bells, it was like beautiful music - it was as if all creation was celebrating the resurrection of life and immortality! The bells announced that the eternal victory had been won - life had conquered death and the new creation had dawned. God, the great warrior, had triumphed over the enemies of humanity – sin, death, and the devil. When I consider why those bells tolled, it filled me with beauty, awe, and wonder at what our God did for us. I must stress at this point that it is imperative for church members to not only explain to newcomers what is transpiring in the liturgy but to also translate what is being said – it makes a tremendous difference.

The priests have been WONDERFUL – I have truly enjoyed their humble, gentle, and loving spirit. When I see them, I think about how Christ must have been when He was on this earth. Finally, I would be remiss if I did not mention all of the loving friends we have made at our Church; their love and patience through our learning process has been tremendous – may God remember their love on that great day when we will each give an account of our life (Romans 14:10-12).

These are just a few things that my wife and I have experienced since we have come to the Orthodox Church. Of course, there have been various joys and hardships. The language is one of the difficulties for us as well as some cultural differences. Sometimes, our family members do not know what to think of us being Orthodox but all of them accept it even if they are not sure if we are "true" Christians now or not. I have had to patiently explain to them that we are Christians and answer their questions as best as I am able.

Now, my heart's desire is for this holy, true, and ancient Orthodox faith to come to this country, to my people, and take root. I consider myself very fortunate that God allowed me to stumble across the Coptic Orthodox Church but yearn that my fellow citizens can hear about this ancient faith. It will be a challenge in this country, which values greed over goodness and possessions over love, but it is a worthwhile struggle. I encourage you to not be afraid of sharing your Orthodox faith and to share it with your family and friends in a loving and gentle spirit. Do not worry if you cannot answer all their questions, but concentrate on growing in love and reflecting the image of Christ in this world – that will speak volumes to them. If, however, you would like to deepen your ability to share your faith with others, I encourage you to attend the Evangelism Conference this August 15 at St. Mary & Archangel Michael Coptic Orthodox Church in Oviedo, Florida and to visit the website established by Victor Beshir at www.evangelismcopticorthodox.org. May God bless you, keep you, and strengthen you now and forever and unto the ages of the ages. Amen.

# Hurtful Words

by Mary Solomon

**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.**

1 Peter 3:8-9

A friend of mine approached me a few days ago during a discussion about words and their power. She said to me, "When I think about the power of words, I think about a phrase...I just well up with emotion as I remember all the times growing up that my father used the words 'You dummy.'" We all have been on the receiving end of hurtful words. The enemy can use our tenderness, sensitivity and memory to cause us to live in defeat and bondage because of words that have become lodged in our hearts. This can be very destructive and God does not intend for us to live under the bondage of hurtful words.

So what do the scriptures say about how we can respond to hurtful words? A number of passages come to mind. First of all, we have to go back to the Word: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God…And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:1,14). Jesus Christ, who is the expression and revelation of who God is, is the Word. Now, the ministry of Christ is multi-faceted. Of course, His purpose for coming to earth was to redeem us from our sins. He was to suffer and die on the cross, bearing the penalty for our sins. And part of what He bore on the cross was all the hurtful, hateful, ugly hearts that produced hurtful, hateful, ugly words - those we've spoken and those that have been spoken to us. He paid the penalty and it is by His "stripes you were healed." (1 Peter 2:24) That is part of why God sent His Word to us, so that His Word could heal us from all the damage that hurtful words have done to us.

Now, what do we do now that we're in Christ? How can we become instruments of healing in the lives of others? St. Peter gives us some very practical, wise counsel about responding to insults and verbal attacks: "Finally, all of you be of one mind." (1 Peter 3:8) We have said that those of us who are in Christ are one Body. This is why it is such a sin to speak hurtful, hateful, ugly, unkind, untrue, unnecessary words. When we speak such words, we divide friendships, we divide relationships, we divide marriages. St. Peter says that the issue with the words doesn't start with the words, but starts in the heart: "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." (1 Peter 3:8-9)

The first principle is to recognize that we are one body. The second principle is to let God's love fill your heart so that you react and respond by speaking out of the love you have for Christ, even for those who have spoken evil, hateful things. And finally, the third principle is to not return evil for evil. Make sure you do not respond in a reviling manner. And this is what often happens when we have been wounded - our natural reaction is to retaliate or to defend ourselves, but St. Peter tells us not to do this. (1 Peter 3:9) That we are one body and that we should operate out of the heart that God has put in us, a heart of love, a heart of courtesy, a heart of tenderheartedness. Do not return "evil for evil or reviling for reviling." And St. Peter doesn't stop there, and I think what he says next is one of the most liberating principles in all of God's Word. He says, "on the contrary," in other words, don't return evil for evil, don't retaliate, don't revile, but instead, give "blessing." Return blessing. Who is he talking about here? He is talking about the people who have done evil to you, the people who have reviled you, the people who have spoken evil to you. What do you give back? A blessing.

And as you give back blessings, you become an instrument of healing in the lives of those who hurt you and you yourself experience release from the bondage of those wounds. Now this does not mean that you never remember them, or that there will not still be pain associated with them, but there is a freedom and a release because you have given blessing in return for hurt. Furthermore, St. Peter says, "knowing that you are called to this, that you may inherit a blessing." (1 Peter 3:9) You have been called to inherit a blessing and, because you have been blessed, you can give this blessing to the one who has spoken evil to you. St. Peter also says, "He who would love life And see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, And his lips from speaking deceit." (1 Peter 3:10) He is not saying that the key to a blessed life is to stay away from people who speak evil to you. He is saying that the key to a blessed life is to watch your tongue and watch your words.

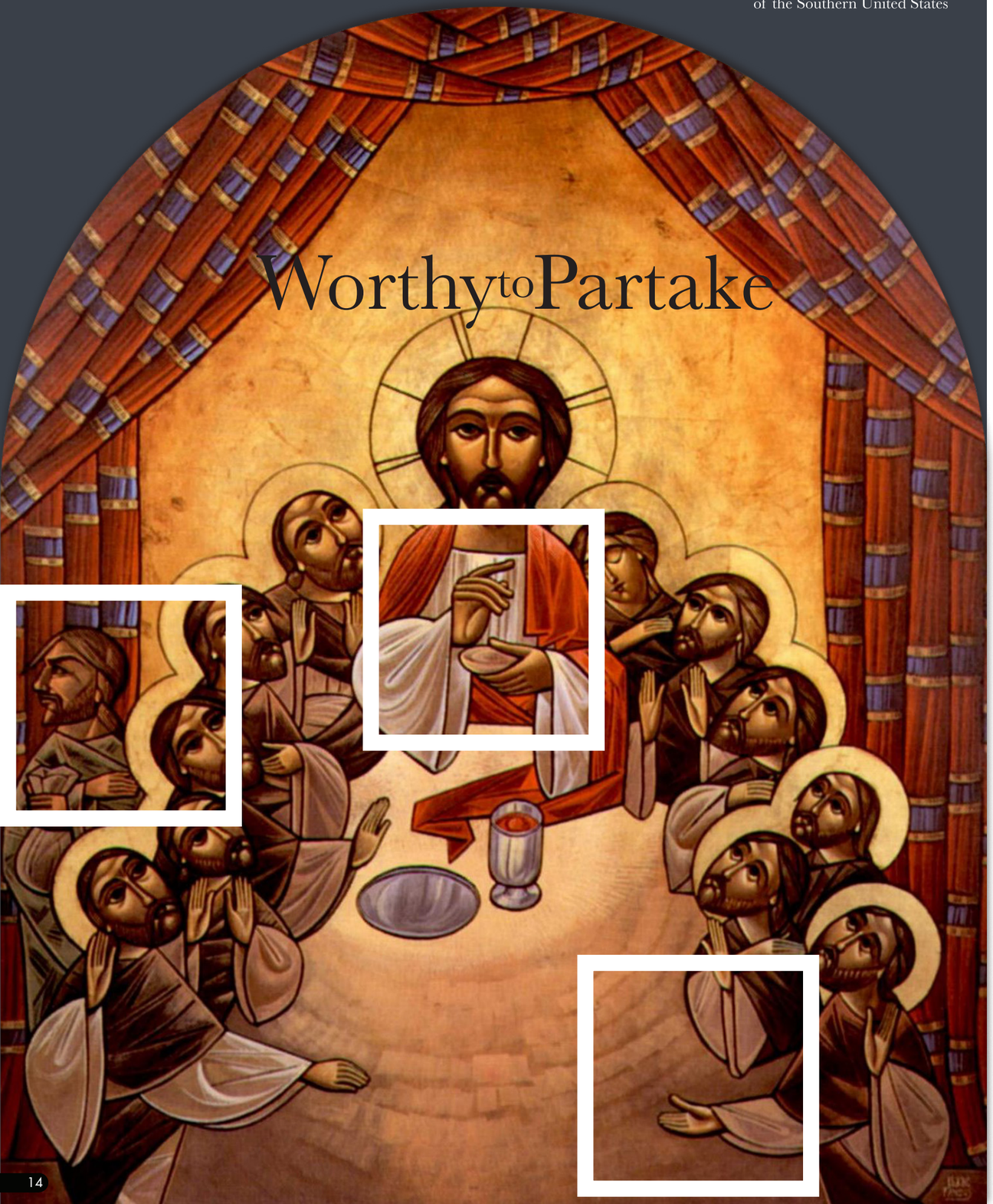
This reminds me of Proverbs 15:23, which I think is a wonderful insight into God's Word: "A man has joy by the answer of his mouth." See, we tend to think that our joy is determined by what others say to us. So when someone says something hurtful to me, boy, that wipes away my joy real fast. But Proverbs says a man has joy not by what others say to him, but by how he answers and responds to those who speak to him: "And a word spoken in due season, how good it is!" So joy comes when we respond with a blessing, when we give back blessing in exchange for reviling.

You think about that mate whose cutting words have wounded you, you think about that child who is speaking evil against you and whose words are like a knife, a sword in your heart. You think about your parents and the wound you carry of the words that were said to you as a child. I am not promising that God will put you in a place where you will forget such words - it may be the very memory of those hurtful words that God uses to keep your heart tender. But, I am saying that you do not have to live under the bondage of those words, that you can get your heart so full of the love of Christ, that you will have the power within you - by the power of His Holy Spirit - not to return evil, not to return reviling, not to dishonor those who have dishonored you but instead to return blessing.

Guard your tongue and keep your lips from speaking deceit, then you will have joy by the answer of your mouth. "He sent His word and healed them." (Psalm 107:20) And what do you do once you have been healed? Let this reminder be a source of conviction. You take up that Word and you become an instrument of healing in the life of someone else. When I get around people who are so negative and critical, I find myself feeling pulled down, dragged down, discouraged and reactionary. But then God reminds me to let the way those words affect me be my mirror to see how my words can hurt and affect others in ways I may not even realize. So instead, we should let God fill our hearts with the kind of love that speaks words of blessing and encouragement. This becomes a means of healing others.

H.G. Bishop Youssef
Coptic Orthodox Diocese
of the Southern United States

# Worthy to Partake



All the Holy Gospels record that the Lord Jesus Christ ate one final meal with His disciples on the eve of His arrest. The Eucharistic Meal and Words of the Lord Jesus Christ both symbolically represent that this final meal would be a foretaste of the great Messianic Feast which will occur at the end of all times. The Lord Jesus Christ reveals to His disciples at this final meal with them that He will neither celebrate the Passover with them again, nor drink of the fruit of the vine until the Coming of the Kingdom of God (Luke 22:15-18).

More than likely this detailed recording of fellowship and partaking of a meal was the final time the Lord Jesus Christ and His disciples would share in total assembly together prior to His Crucifixion. Following the final meal together, the Lord Jesus Christ proceeds to the Mount of Olives with His disciples and warns them that they will abandon Him.

There are two significant issues pertinent in the Last Supper that need contemplation upon during this Holy Great Fast.

First, the fourth Holy Gospel of St. John places the Last Supper before the Passover and tells of only one specific event that occurred during the Last Meal. The Lord Jesus Christ would lower Himself to the floor and wash the sandal clad feet of His disciples. Why did the Lord Jesus Christ wash the scantly covered feet of His disciples? Why would He choose such a lowly duty and St. John the Beloved feel compelled to vividly write of the act?

The open sandals of the Lord Jesus Christ earthly days necessitated that people had to frequently wash and clean their feet due to their dirty disposition. When someone entered a home as a guest it was a courtesy to provide water for them to clean their feet. But for a person to do this task for someone else was customarily performed with exceptional deference. To have washed the feet of His disciples transformed Him to the humblest in the room, both in position and task. It taught the disciples and us today that serving in His Holy Name often meant the lowliest and most humble of tasks belonged to those who sought out True discipleship.

Therefore through the exercise of the washing of His disciples' feet, the Lord Jesus Christ taught us to humble ourselves as He did prior to partaking of His Last Meal.

Second, the Last Supper was to contain symbolism of goodness and evil. A traitor sat at the table. A traitor whose interest was not solely in gaining money as 30 pieces of silver in that day did not represent a great deal of wealth, but even more than this, the thirty pieces of silver represented the power of evil. The sentence "and it was night" (John 13:30) accompanies the story of Judas departure to carry out his mission of betraying our Lord Jesus Christ. Could this mean that Judas loved darkness rather than light? Or did it more accurately represent his deed as evil? Certainly this evil would come to destroy Judas very life. Judas definitely did not appreciate the great Last Meal he was made a witness to.

Does the story of Judas' evil tell us we should be free from all darkness in our lives to partake of the Holy Communion? When we proceed to take of the Communion when we have no sins and our lives are free from all evil? Is this why many refrain from partaking of the Lord's Body and Blood although they would like to?

What exactly is the preparation for Holy Communion or the state of being worthy of it?

We need to humble ourselves as the Lord Jesus Christ did when washing the feet of His disciples and participate fully in repentance and confession. This makes us lowly, our hearts purer and will discourage evil from overtaking our thoughts and actions.

We cannot become righteous without the help of the Lord. In the Holy Book of Galatians 2:21 says, "If righteousness comes by Law, then Christ is dead in vain." St. Paul is emphasizing to us in this verse that if we wait until we feel that we are righteous enough to partake of the Holy Communion then we desire to become righteous through our own human efforts.

What should be done is that we proceed to Holy Communion participating in Confession at the very minimum of every 40 days, with all our weaknesses and imperfections ever before us, so that God will make us righteous as the father did with the Prodigal Son. The Prodigal Son went to the father just as he was, penitent, sorrowful, and unclean. He touched his father's heart with his remorseful repentance, received a new robe, shoes for his bare feet, and a gold ring for his finger. The Prodigal Son was reunited once again with his father and evil did not overtake his thoughts and actions permanently because of his repentance.

To partake of the Holy Communion also means to fear and appreciate the great honor of this great Sacrament of the Coptic Church. Often misunderstood in the Divine Liturgy is the saying "Holies for the Holy." It is not the people who are expected to be holy by themselves but through His grace and mercy. This is why we say, "We are not holy but we are sinners not worthy of that Name." The only Holy and the Holy of Holies is the Lord Jesus Christ who was crucified for our Salvation. That is why the response of the people is, "One is the Holy Father, One is the Holy Son, One is the Holy Spirit, Amen."

When the deacon chants, "Pray for the worthy partaking of this Holy Mystery," he encourages the people not to proceed to the Holy Communion without fear and thoughtfulness. St. Paul says he that eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks damnation upon himself not discerning the Lord's Body (I Corinthians 11:29). We are not to be negligent and are to examine ourselves and then eat of that Bread and drink of that Cup (I Corinthians 11:28).

> "Let no one proceed to the Holy Communion with laziness or negligence, but let all go to receive it with enthusiasm and preparation so that we may not be punished."

St. John Chrysostom said, "Let no one proceed to the Holy Communion with laziness or negligence, but let all go to receive it with enthusiasm and preparation so that we may not be punished. Do not be guilty of His Body and Blood as those who crucified Him."

Judas most probably was initially determined to lead a holy life as a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. He reverted to sinning, perhaps not deliberately in the beginning, but in the end carelessly and with a weak nature. If Judas had presented his weak nature to the Lord Jesus Christ and confessed and repented the Lord would certainly have been his advocate and he in the end would not have lost all hope.

"O God, as You accepted the repentance of the thief on Your right

> "To partake of the Holy Communion also means to fear and appreciate the great honor of this great Sacrament..."

while on the cross, accepts the confession of Your people. Forgive all their sins for the sake of Your Holy Name which is called upon us, and according to Your mercy and not on account of our sins."

In this prayer of the Divine Liturgy, the priest asks God to accept the confessions and repentance of his people, just as He accepted the confession and repentance of the thief at Golgotha.

Following the Doxologies and the Orthodox Creed during the Divine Liturgy, the priest holds the cross with the three lit candles to signify that He Who suffered Crucifixion is the Light of the world, humbly sacrificing Himself to give light to those who live in darkness and in the shadow of death. Standing in front of the Sanctuary the priest spreads both his arms, holding the cross with the three lit candles in his right hand while the left hand is being opened in supplication and humility.

While facing the East, and without making the sign of the Cross, the priest chants, "God have mercy upon; settle mercy upon us." Still facing the East, the priest makes the sign of the Cross and says, "Have compassion upon us." He then turns to the North and while signing the Cross again says, "Hear us." Then turns toward the West, gives the blessings to the congregation, and says, "Bless us." The congregation bows their heads to then receive the blessings. The priest turns toward the South and says, "Keep us" making the sign of the Cross. He turns toward the East once again and with the sign of the Cross says, "Help us". Still in the Easterly direction he completes this litany "The Prayer of God Have Mercy Upon Us", without signing and saying, "Take away Your anger from us, visit us with Your salvation and forgive us our sins."



St. John addresses forgiveness of sin in this manner, "My little children, these things write I unto you that you sin not. AND if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Righteous. And He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (I John 2:1-2).

In summary, no one is without sin. Every earthly person will stumble and fall occasionally, even in their spiritual lives. The Lord Jesus Christ reminds us that whenever we make mistakes we can repent and begin again if we are humble and have the desire to avoid evil.

Finally, just as we personally continually seek repentance we must also forgive others their trespasses against us to fully and wholly partake of the Holy Communion. This sometimes seems the hardest of all things.

"If another disciple sins, you must rebuke the offender, and if there is repentance, you must forgive. And if the same person sins against you seven times a day, and turns his back to you seven times and says, 'I repent,'you must forgive" (Luke 17:3-4).

Let us all pray during this Holy Great Fast to be humble and to strive toward worthiness through repentance and confession. Let each one of us actively seek God's mercy and to share this mercy with others through forgiveness attempting to avoid all evil.

"If another disciple sins, you must rebuke the offender, and if there is repentance, you must forgive. And if the same person sins against you seven times a day, and turns his back to you seven times and says, 'I repent,' you must forgive"

Luke 17:3-4



# Faith Questions

If God can be jealous, why can't we be? Why according to the Holy Book of Galatians 5:20 is jealousy wrong, whereas in the Holy Book of Exodus 20:5, God shows Himself a jealous God?

Jealousy as a passion in itself is considered a vice when exhibited in an evil destructive manner. However, it is not necessarily sinful in itself; and according to Holy Scripture, there is such a thing as godly jealousy. We find St. Paul declaring to the Corinthian Church, "For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Cor 11:2). He had an earnest, cautious, anxious concern for their holiness, that our Lord Jesus might be honored in their lives. Jealousy, like anger, is not evil in itself, or it could never be ascribed to God; His jealousy is ever a pure and holy flame.

In the Holy Book of Galatians 5:20 it is clear that St. Paul is talking about the evil jealousy; for it is mentioned along with "adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like."

God is jealous because He wants His people to be holy; and not to worship any other god. Instead of saying "why can God and not we be jealous?", we should say: "why can God and not we be holy?"; knowing that, "As He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy'" (1 Pet 1:15-16).

**I have been considering a life of celibacy for about 4 or 5 years. I need specific signs indicating that this is the right direction.**

There are many men and women that are inspiring examples of celibacy and marriage. A life of celibacy is not a refuge from responsibility but a detachment from materialism. The celibate is mentally, emotionally, and spiritually energized with a simplified material life and intensified solitary worship where Christ alone is the only goal. The account of the "Rich Young Ruler" (Matthew 19:16-22; Mark 10:17-22; 10:17-22) identifies three key criteria and not signs.

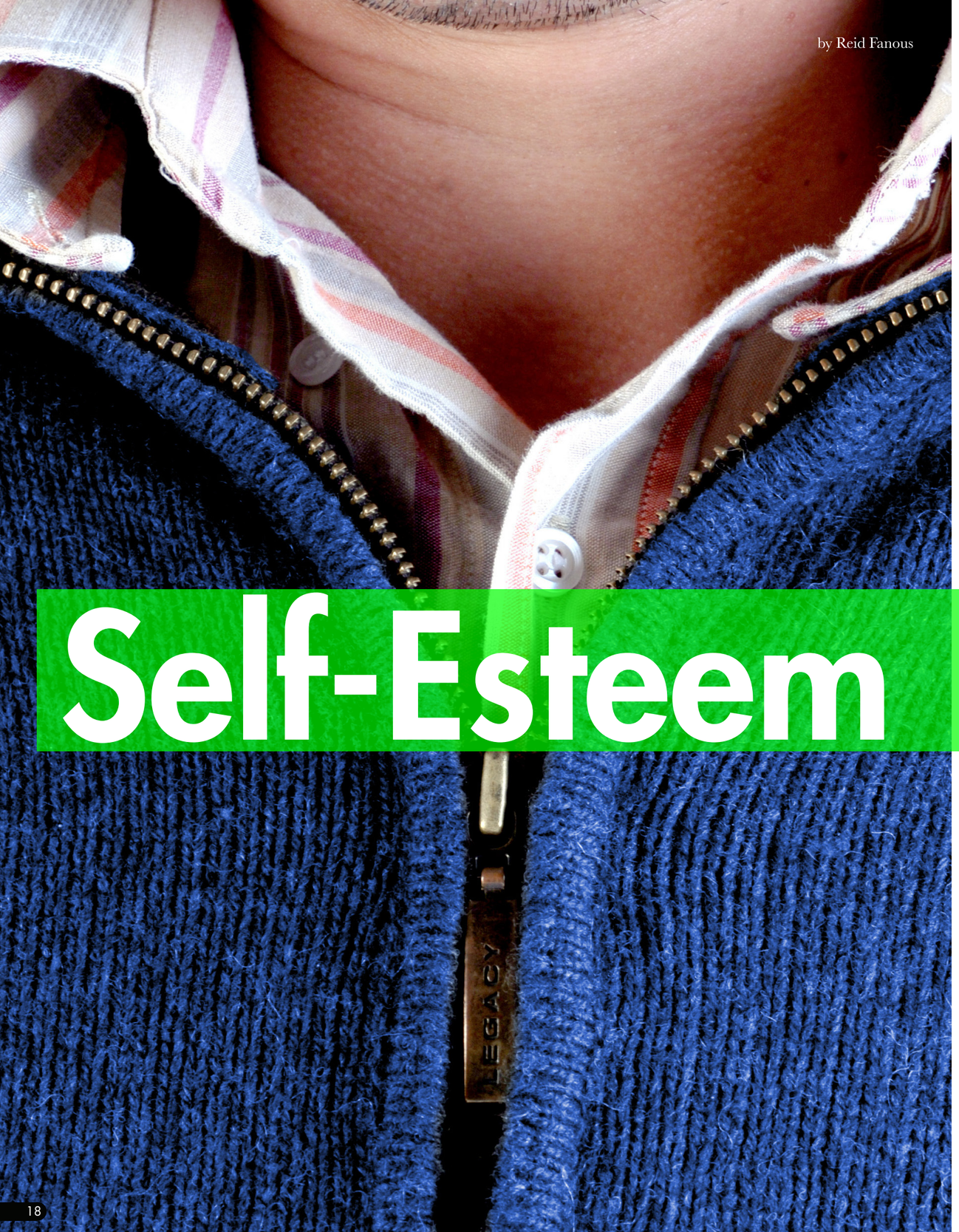
1. "If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments." (Matthew 19:16-22;)
2. "If you want to be perfect, go sell what you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven."(Mark 10:17-22)
3. "Come follow Me." (Mark 10:17-22)

So with the direction of your spiritual father, you need to examine your calling and start, with his direction, to practice some spiritual exercises pertaining to the three vows of monasticism (celibacy, poverty, and obedience).

*If you have a question about our faith, send it*

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by Reid Fanous

# Self-Esteem

"Look at her! Whether she's giving a speech, attending a meeting, or even doing her housework, she's always at ease with herself and others. She has such a contagious and positive disposition, doesn't she?" "You bet. I wish I would get infected! She sure has a lot of self-esteem!"

What's the secret to having high self-esteem? Is it important? How can we benefit from it? Let's shed some light on this highly sought after attribute.

## What is self-esteem?

Cambridge Dictionary defines self-esteem as belief and confidence in one's ability and value. The Encyclopedia Britannica defines self-esteem as a sense of personal worth and ability that is fundamental to an individual's identity. Meanwhile, the Merriam Webster Dictionary defines self-esteem as having confidence and satisfaction in oneself. Therefore, self-esteem can be described as confidently accepting oneself. It is important to note that self-esteem is also the means by which we evaluate our past experiences, personal growth, psychological development, purpose and meaning of our life, as well as our relations with others.

"A sense of personal worth and ability that is fundamental to an individual's identity"

## Why is self-esteem significant?

Psychologists have identified a number of distinct dimensions of mental health. These include self-acceptance, or self-esteem, characterized by a positive evaluation of oneself and one's past experiences; personal growth, reflected in one's sense of continued psychological growth and development; a sense that one's life has purpose and meaning; positive relations with others; environmental mastery, the capacity to manage effectively in the surrounding world; and autonomy, a sense of self-determination and the ability to control one's life. (Microsoft Encarta Reference Library) Self-esteem affects an individual's health, relationships, work performance, and attitude towards others. It follows then that self-esteem influences the manner (positive or negative and constructive or destructive) in which an individual interacts with others in pursuit of their goals and aspirations.

## How can I improve my self-esteem?

In attempting to improve "self-esteem" and "self-confidence" in a logical manner, a catch-22-like riddle emerges. The thought process goes something like this: Since self-confidence is part and parcel of self-esteem, it follows then that some level of achievement, i.e. works, is needed as a foundation to build self-confidence. But how can a person trust himself when he's just starting out? He has no experience and no assets on which to build his self-confidence? Put succinctly: I need self-confidence to work and achieve, but I need achievements to produce self-confidence. Sounds like a catch-22, doesn't it?

The observant reader following this series of articles may have already noticed the primary theme running throughout, namely that we, as Christianly-enabled and church-supported, should explore how to apply the scripture to meet our every day challenges. This time is no different, so let us take a peek under the hood of the self-esteem engine. We will turn on the scripture light to help us look and see clearly.

Let us start with "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:8-10) Note that "we are created in Christ Jesus for good works…that we should walk in them." Even though we may not have started doing good works yet, i.e. starting out with no experience, having faith that we are created for good works provides the foundation needed to build our confidence. Now hold on to that thought until we get back to it a bit later.

"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

At this juncture we turn our attention to what happened when Asa, king of Judah relied solely on his strength and personal expertise. "And at that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah, and said to him: "Because you have relied on the king of Syria, and have not relied on the Lord your God, therefore the army of the king of Syria has escaped from your hand. Were the Ethiopians and the Lubim not a huge army with very many chariots and horsemen? Yet, because you relied on the Lord, He delivered them into your hand. For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him. In this you have done foolishly; therefore from now on you shall have wars." (2 Chronicles 16:7-9) This reference points to a partnership between man and God. When this covenant is solidly maintained, victory follows as a natural outcome without equivocations. For this partnership to work there are three prerequisites for man: a sincere and whole-hearted desire to enter into this partnership; reliance on the Lord; and loyalty to the Lord. As a result of this covenant, the Lord shows Himself strong on behalf of man. Through baptism, such a partnership is elevated to the level of a Father - child union. Through man's union with the Lord the concept of "self" expands infinitely to include our Lord; while the faith that we are created for good works provides the "confidence" or "esteem" component. Given this new understanding of "self-confidence" or "self-esteem," the catch-22 riddle has just been solved, and a perfect self-esteem is ready to be lived.

Further examination of the "self-" portion, without the partnership or Fatherhood of God, reveals an incomplete entity. As William Shakespeare put it in Hamlet "You go not, till I set you up a glass where you may see the inmost part of you." Along the same vein Henry David Thoreau declared: "Explore thyself, Herein are demanded the eye and the nerve." Mark Twain put it this way, "When people do not respect us we are sharply offended; yet deep down in his heart no man much respects himself." Scripture concurs "But one testified in a certain place, saying: 'What is man that You are mindful of him, or the son of man that You take care of him?'" (Hebrews 2:6)

David explains that God's knowledge of man far exceeds man's knowledge of himself, and sums it up in Psalm 139:1-6 "O Lord, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising

"O Lord, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up…" Psalm 139:1-2

up; You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, And are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, But behold, O Lord, You know it altogether. You have hedged me behind and before, And laid Your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is high, I cannot attain it." For a Christian, the last verse may read "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is high, I cannot attain it by myself."

> "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth." Genesis 11:4

Importantly, there are many illustrations in scripture depicting the consequences of going it alone, or even harboring the thought of going it alone. Take St. Peter for example, outspoken and most confident of the disciples. "But he said to Him, "Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death." (Luke 22:33) We know now how he initially failed to follow through. Another example is found in Genesis 11:4 "And they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth." Again the utter failure and confusion that followed is well known.

This is an opportune time to address two diametrically opposed styles of individuals: The "go getters" and the "passives." The former may find it difficult to accept the "Father - child union" concept because of their desire to do it all by themselves or the feeling of "if God the Father does it all, what's left for me to do?" The latter style, at the opposite end of the spectrum, may get complacent with the notion "if God the Father does it all, I really don't need to do much." Both are extremes. The right balance may be described as: In this union, the son / daughter does his / her best, and God the Father does the rest.

In conclusion, whenever the prefix "self" is mentioned, warning lights should start flashing "warning" and "danger" to draw our attention to the Christian understanding of the meaning of "self." It is by God's grace and mercy, the appearing of Jesus Christ our Savior (2 Timothy 1:10-12), and the Holy Spirit that we are reborn through baptism. As offspring of the Father, we are in eternal union with Him who complements our short falls and weaknesses. Hence, if there is something for us to be proud of it is the cross of Jesus Christ. (Galatians 6:14) This pride, the confidence built on our faith, the love we constantly receive from Him and radiate to others all make for a healthy and sound new "self-esteem" full of wonder and joy.






Compiled by Fr. George Grube

# SAYINGS OF THE FATHERS

"He who parts and divides the Church of Christ cannot possess the seamless garment of Christ."
–St. Cyprian

"It is not meager income that constitutes poverty. Rather, insatiable wants constitute poverty. But the good man, being free from such wants, is truly rich."
–St. Clement

"Christ is the Rock Who granted to His Apostles that they should be called rocks. God has founded His church on this Rock, and it is from this Rock that Peter has been named."
–St. Jerome

"Enter into the Church and wash away your sins. For here is a hospital and not a court of law. Do not be ashamed again to enter the Church; be ashamed when you sin, but not when you repent."
–St. John Chrysostom

"Since you get angry with others when they speak evil against you, get angry with yourself when you speak evil against someone else."
–St. Augustine

"Seek out, with much care and thought, a teacher who will be a safe guide to you in your manner of life; one who knows well how to lead such as are journeys toward God, a teacher who is rich in virtues ... and wise in the Holy Scriptures."
–St. Basil the Great

"It is not the amount of learning that must be our aim, but the quality of learning. Better to learn two verses with understanding, than a whole page with wandering thoughts."
–St. John Cassian

"I saw the snares that the enemy spreads out over the world and I said groaning, 'What can get through from such snares?" Then I heard a voice saying to me, 'Humility.'"
–St. Antony the Great

"In the beginning there are a great many battles and a good deal of suffering for those who are advancing towards God and, afterwards, ineffable joy. It is like those who wish to light a fire. At first they are choked with smoke and cry, until they obtain what they seek. As it is written, "Our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:24); so we also must kindle the divine fire in ourselves through tears and hard work."
–Amma Syncletica






MIGHTY ARROWS MAGAZINE

First issue will take 4-6 weeks to arrive
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# Events & Activities

**Evangelism Conference:**
Saturday August 15, 2009
8:00am-5:00pm
St. Mary & Archangel Michael [FL]

**St. Athanasius theological Seminary**
Fall Registration: August 1
New Semester: Sept. 3-7
at the Abbey
www.suscopts.org/seminary/

**Family Ministry Program**
New Semester: Sept. 4-7
San Antonio, TX
www.suscopts.org/fmp/

**Arabic Youth Convention**
Oct. 30-Nov. 1 [FL]

**Family Convention**
Thanksgiving Weekend [FL & TX]
Nov. 13-15 [GA]

**WTL High School Conventions**
Dec. 21-24
[Boys-Panama City, FL]
[Girls-Destin, FL]

**WWF College Winter Convention**
Dec. 25-28 [FL]

**TCL Graduate Convention**
Jan. 15-18 [FL]

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Do you need help or resources from knowledgeable professionals in our Coptic Orthodox community? Place your request here: www.suscopts.org/svrm/assistance.html
If you are still a student, you can serve by volunteering as a tutor. If you are a graduate and wish to volunteer, register as a consultant in your professional field or area in which you could help.
www.suscopts.org/svrm/volunteers.html

**Pre-Marital & Newlywed Program**
Any couple planning to marry within the year must attend at least one retreat hosted by the SUS Diocese. Newlyweds are also encouraged to attend. (FL, TX, or TN)
www.suscopts.org/programs/pre-marital/

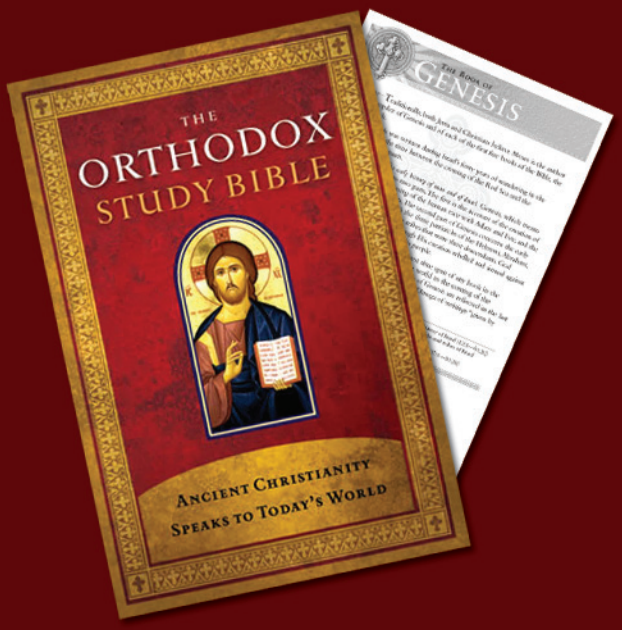


St. Mary, new curch opening by H.G. Bishop Youssef & H.G. Bishop Serapion, Nashville, TN. Photo courtesy of Maria Mansour.



The Mighty Arrows Magazine staff and readers joyfully congratulate Fr. Agathon Saleh (right), St. Mary and St. Mina, Clearwater, FL, and Fr. Pavli Ebrahim (left), St. Pishoy, Nashville, TN, on their ordinations into the priesthood. May the Lord bless their services and their congregations. Photo courtesy of Maria Mansour.

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