



HOLD FAST

what you have

that no one may take your crown - Rev 3:11



MAHRAGAN ALKERAZA 2015

English Edition Gr 7-8

HOLD FAST
what you have



H.H. Pope Tawadros II
Pope of Alexandria &
Patriarch of the See of St. Mark



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INTRODUCTION

Mahragan Alkeraza 2015

As we celebrated the conclusion of last year's Mahragan with the distribution of the trophies for the first, second and third place winners, we were grateful for God's blessings for a successful 2014 Mahragan. His Holiness Pope Tawadros II said during the Awards Ceremony in Egypt, "I am happy to see the activities of the Youth Bishopric, I am glad that our beautiful Church that is 2000 years old is full of young youth and I am proud to see the creative work and achievements of the youth."

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

The theme for Mahragan 2015 is **"Hold Fast What You Have, That No One May Take Your Crown"** (Rev 3:11). This year, God is asking each one of us to grow in Christ by:

1. Having a Strong and Unshaken Faith
2. Reading our Precious Bible Daily
3. Being Faithful to our God
4. Being Successful
5. Honouring Our Home

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

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

✠ My best wishes for a happy
Festival

✠ Bishop Mousa

Hold Fast What You Have

“Hold fast what you have” (Rev 3:11)

That’s the advice that the Lord gave to St. John the Beloved when he was in exile on the island of Patmos. The Lord wanted to let John know that although the world will have many afflictions, if we are steadfast in faith, the final victory will belong to the Lord and His Church.

The Church went through many persecutions and although it was faced with resistance from many different empires throughout the ages, it was always victorious through God who loves it. Our Lord Jesus is the secret behind the victory of the Church, as Saint Paul the apostle said: “Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us” (Romans 8: 37)

Whatever tribulations we face on our way to the kingdom of heaven cannot be compared to the glory that we will receive there. We must pray, “Lord, strengthen me in order to endure everything that I encounter in the way, and be with me during my spiritual strive to the end”.

We must therefore hold fast to what we have:

1- Hold fast to our faith

The Church in the early centuries, and the Coptic Church in particular, struggled against many heretics and their heresies that rose against the Christian faith:

- Arius: against the divinity of the Son.
- Sabellius: against the Holy Trinity.
- Macedonius: against the divinity of the Holy Spirit.
- Eutyches: against the mystery of the Incarnation.
- Nestorius: against the unity of the divinity and humanity of our Lord Jesus.

And many others who fought but could not overcome the strength of the Christian faith.

The Nicene Creed confirms in clear decisive words the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, the mystery of His incarnation, His redemption, His death and His resurrection, His ascension into heaven, and His sitting at the right hand of the Father after giving us eternal salvation.

It also tells us about God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth and how He revealed himself to us through the Incarnate Son. After we heard about Him from the prophets, we see Him incarnated, as St. John said: "And the Word became 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).

The Creed also tells us about the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, who descended on the Apostles on the day of the Pentecost as tongues of fire divided on each one of them. They heard the sounds of mighty rushing wind declaring that this was the life-giving Spirit.

2- Hold fast to our Book

The Bible is the Word of God to man, and contains books, characters, events, and important lessons for us throughout the ages.

Gandhi said: "The Holy Bible is the crown of all books; the sermon on the mountain is the pearl of the Bible."

3- Hold fast to our doctrine

Faith is linked to a sound doctrine. The Mystery of the Church is the union between the "head", Christ, and the "body", the Church.

Orthodox thought, life, and behavior are all linked together. Our thoughts are responsible for our lifestyle. Thoughts lead to emotions, emotions lead to actions, actions lead to habits and habits become our lifestyle. This lifestyle will determine the quality of life and the relationships that we have in Church and in society.

4- Hold fast to our spirituality

In the sacrament of Baptism, the Lord gives us a garment of righteousness. The baptized person wears white clothes and is tied with a red ribbon. This is a sign of renewal and cleansing with the blood of Christ our Redeemer. During the rites of Baptism, the baptized person renounces Satan and declares his faith in Jesus Christ. The baptized person turns from the west to the east, symbolizing a turn from

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darkness to light, and from the north to the south, symbolizing a change from humiliation to dignity.

From then on, the baptized person strives to live a holy and spiritual life, bringing forth fruits of the Spirit. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal 5: 22-23).

5- Hold fast to our values

Whomever the Spirit renews is guided by the Spirit and lives a virtuous life. But this needs a spiritual struggle, daily spiritual practices and the guidance of a father of confession.

We also have to get used to examining ourselves. God tells us not to be negligent and beware of the “little foxes” (Song of Solomon 2:15). These little foxes enter through the smallest openings in the wall, but then begin to eat the fruit of the vine and cannot leave through those small openings anymore. They hide behind the big grape leaves, and the owner of the vineyard cannot see them. They keep growing little by little, and become a threat to the vineyard and the owner himself.

That’s why we have to examine our behaviour daily, just as St. Paul tells us. “Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.” (Romans 12:17). St. Paul says “all men” and does not only refer to the Church! In that, Jesus’ teachings are spread to others, “that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven”. (Matthew 5:16).

6- Hold fast to our Church

Our devotion and loyalty extends to our Church as we yearn to serve it, and are willing to sacrifice for its sake.

What's Our Excuse?

A man in Texas was injured in an explosion and lost his hands and eyes. He longed to read the Bible, and was told that there is a woman in England who was using her lips instead of her fingers, to read the Bible in Braille.

He ordered the Bible in Braille, but then discovered that the nerves of his lips were damaged. Finally he began to learn how to read by touching the letters with his tongue. He read the Bible over four times.

So...What's our excuse?

We often find excuses for ourselves for not reading the Bible. In reality, we need to put more effort in reading the Bible and say to the Lord: "Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears" (1 Samuel 3: 9).

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3: 16).

"The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63).

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

1- Important information about the Bible

The Bible focuses on Jesus our Savior. It was written over a period of 1600 years (1500 BC - 100 AD) in 3 different continents, by almost 40 writers with various jobs (e.g. kings, shepherds, farmers, doctors), "holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). It was written in Hebrew and Greek and was translated into more than 2,200 languages and dialects.

2- Books of the Bible

The Bible is divided into two testaments, which are each divided into books. Since it was difficult to

search for specific verses, it was divided into chapters in the year 1220 and then into verses in the year 1550.

There are 39 books in the Old Testament plus 7 deuterocanonical books and 27 books in the New Testament. This is a total of 66 books in the Bible plus 7 deuterocanonical books.

The Old Testament					
The Books of Moses	The Historical books	The Poetic books	Major Prophets	Minor Prophets	Deuterocanonical books
5	12	5	5	12	7

The New Testament			
The 4 Gospels & the Book of Acts	The Epistles and the Book of Revelation		
	Pauline Epistles	Catholic Epistles	Revelation
5	14	7	1

3- The similarity between the Old Testament and the New Testament

The Old Testament		The New Testament	
The five books of Moses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Called the Torah The work and the teaching of the Israelites in the Old Testament The story of humanity from creation to the entry of the Promised Land 	The four Gospels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The New Testament Law The work and teaching of the Church in the New Testament Takes us to the new life, the heavenly Jerusalem, the true Promised Land
The Historical Books	The history of God's work with the people in the Promised Land	The Book of Acts	The history of the Work of God in the Church through the Holy Spirit

4- The uniqueness of the Bible

- Unique in its unity: Despite the large number of writers, the length of time in which it was written, the different places where it was written, it is one book with one theme.
- Unique in its survival: Despite all religious movements throughout the ages that opposed the Bible, and despite being the most exposed book to attacks and criticism, it remains unaffected.
- Unique in its suitability: It is a book suitable for every generation and era.
- Unique in its comprehensiveness and its generality: It includes all variety of topics.
- Unique in its spread and distribution: It is the bestseller across all ages, and the first book to be printed in John Gutenberg printing press, the inventor of the typewriter.
- Unique in its strength and its effect on the souls: it is unique in changing the life of many.

5- The authenticity of the Bible

The authenticity of the Bible is proven through:

1. Authentic references: Many manuscripts were found, which support the validity of the Bible.
2. The books written by the first Church and the Fathers of the Church cite verses from the Bible, which confirms its existence in these old ages.
3. Modern science: Many scientific facts mentioned in the Bible, were confirmed by modern science later on (e.g. the spherical earth, water cycle in nature, etc.) and it did not contain scientific mistakes that prevailed at the time of its writing.
4. History and Archaeology: Events in the Bible have historical proof of taking place. Evidence was found of Noah's Ark on Mount Ararat, burnt remains from the city of Jericho as well as fossils and ancient manuscripts of the Bible.
5. Fulfillment of prophecies: The Book is full of prophecies about Jesus, about the spread of the Gospel, and about different kingdoms, which were all fulfilled
6. Sound reason and logic: Unity between the Old and the New Testaments, and the fact that there were no contradictions are found.

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." (Psalm 119: 105)

We must make a habit of reading and meditating on the Word of God daily. We should all have our own Bible where we highlight verses, and write our reflections.

Bishop Raphael said there are three types of verses:

- A Hazelnut: hard to crack –a verse that is difficult to understand and needs interpretation.
- A Pearl: A verse I was looking for and found.
- A Candy: A verse that I love and enjoy meditating on.

As we read, let us search for our own hazelnuts, pearls and candies.



The Book of Acts

There is no doubt that we are all invited to hold fast to our faith and the Holy Bible. The Book of Acts is an excellent example of how our fathers the Apostles held fast to their faith and handed it over to us, and teaches us what we should do to follow in their footsteps.

The Book of Acts and the four Gospels are considered the historical books of the New Testament. The Gospels tell us about the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ who came into the world to change the corruption of human nature, while the Book of Acts tells about the birth of the Church.

The Four Gospels	The Book of Acts
The life of Jesus Christ and His teachings from His birth to His ascension	How the mission that started in Judea reached the whole world
The work of God in humankind	The work of the Holy Spirit in the Church
The ministry of Christ	The preaching of the apostles and the disciples
The passion of Christ	The struggle of the Church for Jesus' sake

The sections of the Book of Acts:

Chapter 1 – 5: Jesus' Ascension and the descent of the Holy Spirit and the beginning of the ministry

Chapter 6 – 12: The first martyr and the spread of Christianity

Chapter 13-28: The witnessing of the Church to the end of the earth

The purpose of the Book of Acts is to teach us the history of the foundation of the first Church through the work of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit who works in the Church, that's why we can call this Book: The Acts of the Holy Spirit. While the Gospels tell us about the work of God, the son Jesus Christ, in us; the book of Acts tells us about the work of God, the Holy Spirit, in us.

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

The name of the Book: Its name in Greek is Praxis, which means acts. It tells us mainly about the work of the Apostles Peter and Paul.

We received Jesus' teachings through the Apostles who were steadfast in their faith and passed it down to the early Church fathers. This is known as the Church Tradition.

The writer of the book: St. Luke. He is also the writer of the Gospel according to St. Luke. His name means "Light Bearer or enlightened". He was a doctor from the city of Antioch and was also a painter. He drew the first icon of St. Mary, and from it, the painters drew the icons that we have in our Church.

Recipient: The book was written to Theophilus, whose name means "God's love". It is written to everyone who loves God.

It is the only book which does not end with the word "Amen" which means it is a story which the Church will keep writing until the end of times, as the Gospel spreads all over the world. This is shown in the liturgy readings, where, after the reading of the Book of Acts, we read the synaxarium (the biography of the saints) as if it is the continuation of the Book of Acts.

Chapter 1: Handing Jesus' teachings to the Church

Definitions:

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

Division:

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

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

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

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

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

Our Lord Jesus Christ handed down the liturgy, the Sacraments and the teachings to His disciples, and the disciples and apostles handed them over to the Church fathers, and thus reached us by the fathers. Through these Sacraments, we receive the Holy Spirit which unites us with Jesus Christ and helps us live a life of faith, holiness, purity and forgiveness.

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

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

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

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

Chapter 2: The Expected Church

Definitions:

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

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Division:

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

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

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

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

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

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

- The teachings of the Apostles - There was no written Gospel, but all teachings were verbal until the gospels were written.
- The communal life (prayer, fasting, and sharing)-"So continuing daily with one accord in the temple" (Acts 2: 46).
- The breaking of bread from house to house - They had meals at different houses as this was a chance to eat with the poor without hurting their feelings.



Chapter 3: Who deserves the praise?

Definitions:

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

Division:

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

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

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

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

Chapter 4: The Church in Jerusalem

Division:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 5: Watch out... Do not lie

Definitions:

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

Division:

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

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

(v. 12-16) The believers brought the sick in the streets that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them and heal them. But many did not follow the apostles because they were afraid of the Romans and the Jews.

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

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

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

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

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

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



Chapter 6: The first deacons

Definitions:

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

Division:

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

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

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

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

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

(v. 9) Synagogue is the building where Jews assemble for religious worship. In the synagogue, the worship was practiced without offering sacrifices. There were 480 synagogues in Jerusalem alone, each bearing a special name for the group that formed it. It seems that Stephen debated with Jews in a number of synagogues, to tell them about our Lord Jesus Christ and the Christian faith.

Chapter 7: The right name

Definitions:

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

Divisions:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 8: The persecution of the Church leads to her growth

Definitions:

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

Division:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Chapter 9: Saul becomes Paul

Definitions:

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

Division:

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

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

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

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

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

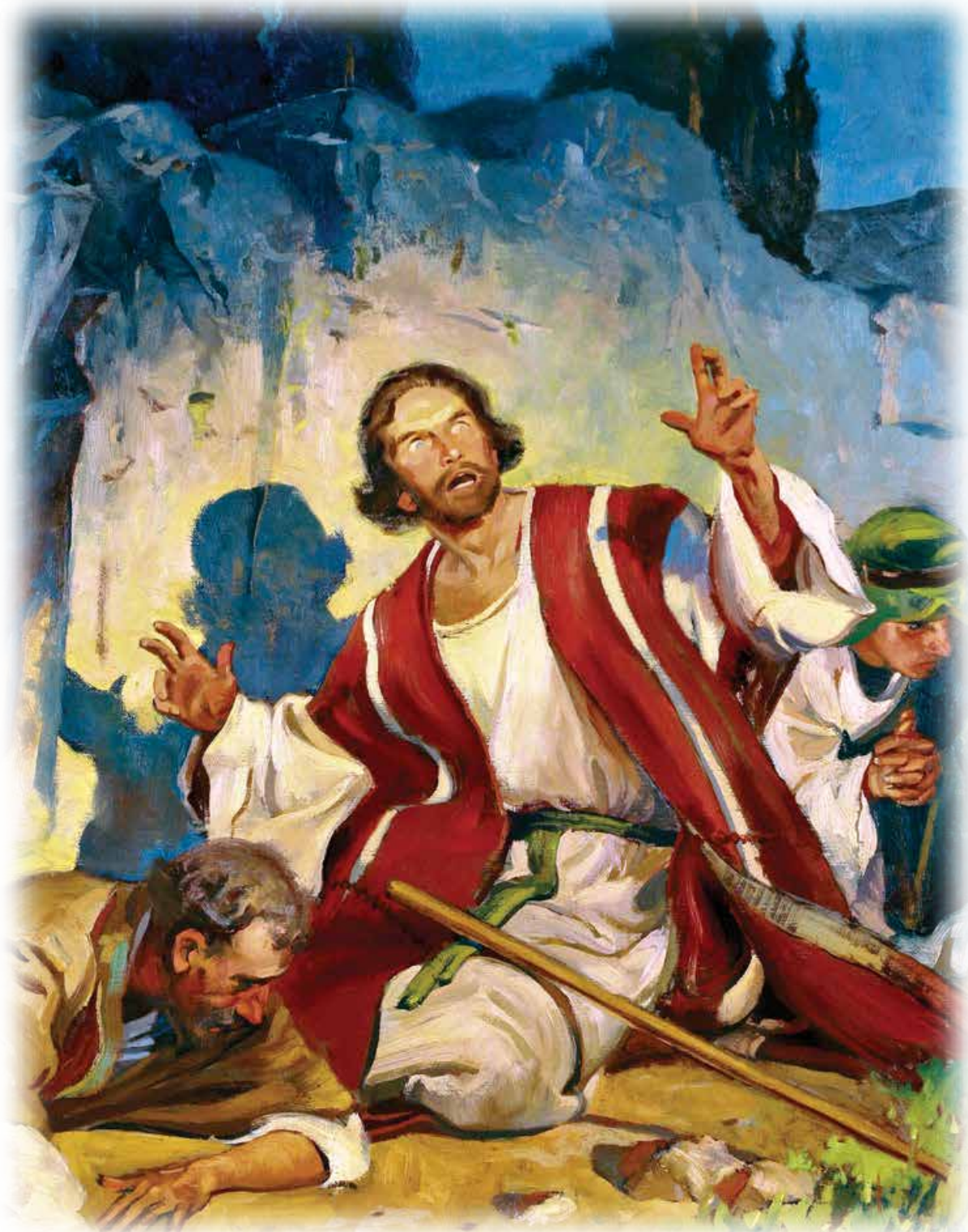
(v. 6) "Lord, what do you want me to do?" This is the question that Saul asked the Lord Jesus Christ who appeared to him. We must learn to ask God for His will.

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 10: General call

Definitions:

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

Division:

- v.1-8: Cornelius and the appearance of the angel of God to him
- v.9-16: Peter's vision
- v.17-48: Cornelius' faith

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

Cornelius was:

1. A gentile centurion, but he loved God and feared Him without knowing Him.
2. God was pleased with his faith "he prayed to God all the time" (v. 2), his actions "doing many good deeds" (v. 2), and his fasting (v. 3). His prayers and almsgiving went up to God like the smell of incense (v. 4).
3. He was searching for God and finally found Him. He loved everyone, so he was not far from the kingdom of God.

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 11: The Church accepts the Gentiles

Definitions:

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

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Division:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 12: Herod persecutes the Church

Definitions:

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



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Division:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

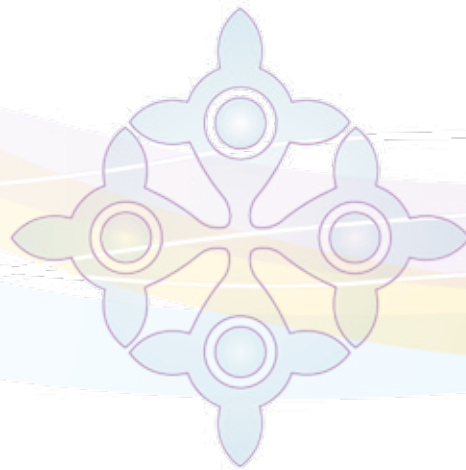
(v.20-23) When Herod had searched for Peter and could not find him for the angel of the Lord had freed him from the prison. He examined the guards and commanded that they should be put to death. Herod was very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon. They came out in one accord to ask him for peace.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

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

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



Know Your Sacraments

The Church is the body of the living Christ. The head of this body is our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. For this body to be built on the right foundation, our Lord Jesus instituted seven Church Sacraments.

A Sacrament is an invisible grace we receive by practicing a visible rite, and a visible sign or substance performed by a priest through the action of the Holy Spirit. Our Lord Jesus Christ instituted the Sacraments and handed them down to the disciples who in turn handed them down to the Church.

“For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you” 1Corinthians 11:23

Why should we have a visible sign?

Because as humans, we have an innate need to see something physical and tangible. St. John Chrysostom said: “Because we have a flesh, God’s gifts are given to us in a tangible way. Jesus therefore used clay to heal the blind. The bleeding woman was also healed by touching His robe”

The sacrament	The visible sign	The invisible grace	The supporting verse
Baptism	Water	Forgiveness of the original sin. A new birth.	“Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins” Acts 16:22
Chrismation (Myron)	The Myron oil	The dwelling of the Holy Spirit	“But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things” 1John 2:20
Repentance and confession	The confessor himself	Forgiveness of sins	“If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” John 20:23

The Eucharist	Bread and wine	Abiding in Christ	"He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him" John 6:56
Unction of the sick	The oil	Healing and forgiveness	"Anointed with oil many who were sick, and healed them" Mark 6:13
Matrimony	The bride and the groom	Union of two bodies	"They are no longer two but one flesh" Matthew 19:6
Priesthood	The ordained person	Ministering Church services	"whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them" Acts 6:6

1. Baptism: The door to all sacraments

Baptism is the only door that enables us to enter into heaven by faith. "Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3: 3).

Symbols in the Old Testament:

1. Flood at the time of Noah. 2. Crossing the Red Sea.

In the New Testament:

It is a symbol of death and burial with Christ, "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection" (Romans 6:3-5).



Philip baptized the Ethiopian Eunuch, “Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing” (Acts 8:39)

Baptism is performed by complete immersion in water three times in the name of the Trinity.

2. Chrismation: The Holy Myron

Myron is a Greek word meaning “sweet oil” or perfume. It is a Sacrament directly related to Baptism. In Baptism, we are born again and during Chrismation, we receive the seal of the Holy Spirit by being anointed with the Holy Myron. “But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things” (1 John 2:20).

Symbols in the Old Testament:

“And you shall make from these a holy anointing oil, an ointment compounded according to the art of the perfumer. It shall be a holy anointing oil.... And you shall anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that they may minister to Me as priests” (Exodus 30:25-30)

Symbols in the New Testament:

Although the people of Samaria received the Sacrament of Baptism, they did not receive the Holy Spirit. When the apostles in Jerusalem heard about it, they sent Peter and John, "Who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit." Acts 8:15

3. The Sacrament of Repentance and Confession



This is when the believer repents from his sins and confesses them in front of a father of confession who prays the absolution for him. In this Sacrament, the believer's sins are transferred from the person's account to Christ's account.

"And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds"(Acts 19:18).

Our Lord Jesus Christ instituted this sacrament.

True repentance has four conditions:

- A contrite heart and remorse for previous sins
- Confessing before God
- Reconciling with those we have wronged and forgiving those who wronged us
- Verbal confession of the sin before the priest who has the authority to loose and bind

"Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:19).

Although we speak to the priest, we confess our sin to the Lord Jesus Christ in the ears of the priest. The embarrassment that we feel during confession is in fact beneficial for us so that we don't repeat our sins. Also, we receive spiritual guidance from our father of confession, who helps us replace sinful habits with spiritual habits and also gives us the absolution. Confession is done in complete confidentiality and the father of confession is not allowed to disclose the believer's confession to anyone.

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We often complain of a certain sin that controls us, which we cannot stop. However, when we discuss them with our father of confession, he guides us and helps us to overcome it. He also supports us and prays for us, so we can bravely say like the prodigal son, "I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants" (Luke 15: 18-19)

We receive the absolution from our Lord Jesus Himself but we hear it from the mouth of the priest, because he was given the authority to forgive sin. "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (John 20:23)



How do I choose my father of confession?

1. You should be comfortable when talking to him
2. It should be easy for you to make appointment with him
3. He should have time in order to sit with you and guide you

In the meantime, you should:

1. Respect and revere him.
2. Do not hide anything from him during confession
3. Take his advice on everything in order to benefit from his guidance and experience. One of the Church fathers once said: "Those who are without a guide fall like the leaves of the trees"
4. Request his prayers
5. Respect his time.

Symbols in the Old Testament:

1. King Saul's confession to Samuel the prophet: "Then Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice. Now therefore, please pardon my sin, and return with me, that I may worship the Lord." 1 Samuel 15:24-25
2. David's confession to Nathan the prophet: "So David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." And Nathan said to David, "The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die. However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also who is born to you shall surely die." 2 Samuel 12:13-14

In the New Testament:

1. Jesus gave the authority to His disciples: Jesus said to Peter, "And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Matthew 16:19 and He repeated to all the disciples in Matthew 18:18
2. After Jesus' resurrection, He said to His disciples: "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." John 20:23

Steps to help us fight sin and lust:

- Avoid possible situations or places that could cause the sin (2 Timothy 2:22).
- Reject bad thoughts right away (James 4: 7).
- Keep yourself busy "Run for your life" (Genesis 17:19).
- Focus on the person of our Lord Jesus Christ (Hebrews 3: 1).
- Hold fast to God's promises (Matthew 11:12).
- Rejoice in Christ and His love (Psalm 90:14).



4. The Sacrament of Eucharist: the Crown of all sacraments

Also Known as:

- The Sacrament of Holy Communion
- The Sacrament of Thanksgiving
- The Lord's Supper
- The Mysterious Supper
- The Sacrament of Community

Our Lord Jesus Christ instituted this sacrament in which:

1. We abide in Him: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in Me and I in him" (John 6:56).
2. We obtain eternal life: "I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world" (John 6:51)
3. We obtain salvation and forgiveness of sins: " In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:14). We also say in the Divine Liturgy: "Given for us for salvation and remission of sins and eternal life to those who partake from it."
4. We have a covenant with God: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes." 1Corinthians 11:26. We also say in the Divine Liturgy "For every time you eat of this bread and drink of this cup you proclaim My death, confess My resurrection and remember Me till I come"

Symbols in the Old Testament:

1. The sacrifice of Melchisedek, which was bread and wine. He was the priest of the Most High God who blessed Abraham. (Genesis 14)
2. The Manna which came down from heaven: "This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever." (John 6:58)

In order to be worthy to partake of the Holy Communion, we must have the following:

1. True faith, repentance and confession
2. Reconciliation with others
3. Controlling the senses
4. Abstaining from food (fasting 9 hours).
5. Coming early to the liturgy because the readings and the liturgy sanctify us and prepare us mentally and spiritually for communion.

5. The Sacrament of Unction of the sick

Our Lord Jesus instituted this sacrament when He said to His disciples: "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8), and also: "And heal the sick there (in the city), and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you'" (Luke 9:10). This was practiced by the Apostles "And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick, and healed them" (Mark 6:13).

The oil for anointment is consecrated through certain prayers, seven in total, prepared by the Church for this Sacrament. Certain excerpts from the Bible are also read. Seven wicks of cotton are put in the shape of a cross in a dish that contains pure olive oil. Each wick of cotton is lit at the start of each prayer. At the end of the prayers, the priest anoints the sick person with a cross on his forehead, chest and hands.



St. James said: "Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven" (James 5:14-15)

6. The Sacrament of Matrimony

Since the beginning of creation, God said: "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him" (Genesis 2:18).

Our Lord Jesus instituted this Sacrament and blessed it when He attended the wedding at Cana of Galilee. There He manifested His glory to His disciples and performed His first miracle. God speaks highly of this sacrament, "He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the Lord" (Proverbs 18:22)

Moreover, it was used as an example to describe the relationship of Christ and the Church. "This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church" (Ephesians 5:32).

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for her" (Ephesians 5:25).

The family is an icon of the Church and is in itself a Church. Saint Paul writes to Philemon, "to the Church in your house" (Phil 1: 2).



7. The sacrament of Priesthood

Without priesthood, the Church cannot continue and no one can obtain the gift of the Holy Spirit.

God commanded that only priests should offer sacrifices. The Bible teaches us to submit to the elders, "Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders" (1Peter 5:5)

Therefore, we ought to respect the priests.

1. We kiss the priest's hand out of respect to the priesthood. In the Old Testament, we find many situations that emphasize the respect for priesthood. We find harsh punishment for those who did not respect priesthood. For example, the story of Korah, Dathan and Abiram . In the New Testament, our Lord Jesus Christ teaches us to respect the priests in the miracle of healing the leper. Our Lord Jesus said to the leper after healing him: "Go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them" (Matthew 8: 4).
2. The priest represents Christ on earth
3. To His disciples alone He said: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20) and to them alone He handed the mystery of His Holy body and blood and said to them: "Do this in remembrance of Me" (Luke 22:19).



Faith! It's Your Turn

Faith is a spiritual life with a strong relationship with God. It is based on the doctrine that people lived, experienced and adhered to. "The faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 1:3). It is not enough to be believers just because we were born Christians. We need to live and grow in the faith, strengthen our relationship with God, and increase our knowledge of the Orthodox faith handed down from Jesus, through the Apostles and from generation to generation.

The main principles of our Orthodox faith are:

- 1- One God
- 2- The divinity of Christ
- 3- The Holy Trinity
- 4- The incarnation
- 5- Christ's Redemption
- 6- Christ's Resurrection
- 7- Christ's Ascension
- 8- The Second Coming
- 9- Eternal life

But how did the faith remain unchanged through all these years? It was not an easy job for our Church Fathers and our faith heroes, who fought for the faith and sacrificed their lives to keep it unchanged. Our faith is the precious jewel that the Lord Jesus has placed in His Church, and entrusted the apostles and the Church Fathers with it from generation to generation. That's why our Lord Jesus Christ said, "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me" (John 14:1).

When faced with heresies and wrong teachings, the Church was calling for councils to defend the faith. A Church council is a formal meeting of bishops and representatives of several Churches who are brought together to regulate points of doctrine. There are 2 types of councils:

- 1- Single ecclesiastical community council: a meeting held in a local Church to discuss faith and pastoral problems. The first community council was held in Jerusalem in the era of the Apostles in the year 50 AD.

2- Ecumenical Council: a meeting of bishops and teachers of the Church from all over the world to discuss matters related to the Christian faith, such as heresy or schism. Ecumenical councils:

- Took place at the invitation of a Christian emperor.
- Was Attended by the majority of bishops of the Church of the east and the west.
- Made decisions on things that were not discussed previously. These were unanimous decisions.

These requirements apply to the three councils: the Council of Nicea and Constantinople, Ephesus.

We must take the heroes of these councils as our role models and imitate them, because it's our turn to keep the faith and pass it to future generations.

1. The Council of Nicea- Pope Athanasius: He was born in the city of Alexandria of pagan parents, between 295AD and 298AD. He received a Christian education in a Christian school. He loved Jesus Christ and believed in Him and was baptized. He was the disciple of Pope Alexander of Alexandria. He was ordained a deacon and was outstanding in theological science. He confronted Arius' heresy while he was still a deacon. He departed in 373 AD after many efforts and strives to keep the orthodox faith. Pope Athanasius is very well known all over the world, for maintaining the faith of the Church, and standing against Arius. We are all proud that he is one of the fathers of the Coptic Orthodox Church.

2. The Council of Constantinople- Pope Timothy I (the 22nd Pope of Alexandria): He sat on the throne of St. Mark after Pope Peter II (the 21st Pope of Alexandria) in 379 AD. He was called "Elfakir" (the poor), because he gave all his money to the poor. He was the disciple of Pope Athanasius. He supported Pope Athanasius when Arius's followers persecuted him. He confronted the heresy of Macedonius and continued to take care of his people faithfully until his departure.

3. The council of Ephesus- Pope Cyril I, the Pillar of Faith: He was born between 375-380 AD, he was the nephew of Pope Theophilus. He joined the theological school in Alexandria to study Christian theology and philosophy, which helped him defend Christianity against the heretics. His uncle (Pope Theophilus) ordained him a deacon then a priest. He was ordained Pope in 412 AD. He is known as the Defender of the Orthodox faith. He confronted the heresy of Nestorius. He departed in peace in 444 AD.

A comparison between the three ecumenical councils.

The Council	Nicea	Constantinople	Ephesus
Year	325 AD	381 AD	431 AD
Reason	Heresy of Arius	Heresy of Macedonius	Heresy of Nestorius
Attending Patriarch	Pope Alexander (19th Pope of Alexandria)	Pope Timothy I (22nd Pope of Alexandria)	Pope Cyril (the 24th Pope of Alexandria)
The king who called for it	King Constantine	King Theodosius (the great)	King Theodosius II (the younger)
The number of attending Bishops	318	150	200
The main champion	St. Athanasius	Pope Timothy and St. Gregory the theologian	Pope Cyril (the Pillar of Faith) and Anba Shenouda the Archimandrite
Heresy	Arius said that Jesus Christ is only human and denied the divinity of Christ. He said that He is not God incarnate and is not equal to the Father in essence, based on the verse that says: "My Father is greater than I" (John 14:28).	Macedonius denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit. He said that the Holy Spirit is not a Person of the Holy Trinity and that He is another creature that does not have any relationship with the Father and the Son.	Nestorius said that Jesus existed as 2 persons: the human and the divine. He denied St. Mary's title of "Mother of God" and said that she gave birth to a human and that she should not be called the Mother of God (Theotokos).

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<p>The answer to the heresy</p>	<p>St. Athanasius, who was very young at that time, was able to debate with Arius who was 55 years old. He used the following verses: "He who has seen Me has seen the Father; Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me?" (John 14:9-10) "All things that the Father has are Mine" (John 16:15) "I and My Father are one" (John 10:30)</p>	<p>Pope Timothy responded to Macedonius using verses from the Bible: "For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one" (1 John 5:7)</p>	<p>"Great is the mystery of godliness God was manifested in the flesh" (1 Timothy 3:16). St. Cyril said that Jesus is God incarnate through the dwelling of the Holy Spirit on St. Mary and that His divinity was united with His humanity. He gave the analogy of the union of the iron and the fire and how this union does not change the nature of the fire and the iron. In the same manner, the divinity was united with the humanity in the womb of the Virgin without mingling or alteration.</p>
<p>The outcome of the council</p>	<p>The holy Fathers confirmed the apostolic teachings about Christ's divine nature and wrote The Nicene Creed until "He is coming again in His glory to judge the living and the dead, Whose kingdom shall have no end." The heresy of Arius was exposed. Arius was excommunicated and exiled.</p>	<p>The Council condemned the Macedonians and explained the Doctrine of The Holy Spirit. The council adopted the part of the Creed starting from "Yes we believe in the Holy Spirit..." to the end.</p>	<p>The introduction of the Creed "We exalt you the Mother of the true light..." was written. Nestorius was disposed from his see and excommunicated and his doctrines were condemned.</p>

We have learned a lesson from St. Athanasius that we will never forget. There are things that are subject to change for the better and approved by the Church, and there are things that cannot be changed. We must adhere to our beliefs and our faith.

Now it is your turn! You may say: I am young, I have little knowledge or I have little talent, but God wants to work with our weakness!

“Do not say, ‘I am a youth,’ For you shall go to all to whom I send you, And whatever I command you, you shall speak” (Jeremiah 1: 7).

God can use you and make you like Athanasius and Cyril. All you gotta do is keep the faith and holdfast to it.

Memorization

PSALM 3 (AGPEYA)

O Lord, why have they who afflict me multiplied? Many have risen up upon me. Many say unto my soul, "There is no salvation for him in his God." But You, O Lord, are my supporter, my glory, and the elevation of my head.

With my voice I cried unto the Lord, and He heard me out of His holy mountain. I laid down and slept; and I arose; for the Lord is He who supports me. I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, who surround me; who have risen upon me. Rise, O Lord, save me, O my God: for You have smitten all who are enemies to me without cause. The teeth of the sinners You have broken. Salvation is the Lord's, and His blessing is upon His people. ALLELUIA.

PSALM 6 (AGPEYA)

O Lord, do not rebuke me in Your anger, nor chasten me in Your wrath. Have mercy on me, O Lord; for I am weak: heal me, O Lord, for my bones are troubled, and my soul is grievously troubled. But You, O Lord, how long? Return, deliver my soul: revive me for the sake of Your mercy. For in death there is no one who is remembering You: and in Hades who is able to confess to You? I became wearied in my groaning; I shall wash my bed every night; I shall wet my couch with my tears. My eye is troubled because of anger; I have grown old because of all my enemies.

Depart away from me, all who do iniquity; for the Lord has heard the voice of my weeping. The Lord has heard my petition; the Lord has accepted my prayer. All my enemies shall be put to shame and greatly troubled: they shall be turned back and put to shame speedily. ALLELUIA.

PSALM 12 (AGPEYA)

How long, O Lord, do You forget me, for ever? How long do You turn Your face away from me? How long do I put these counsels in my soul, and these sorrows in my heart for the whole day? How long does my enemy exalt over me?

Look, hearken to me, O Lord my God: enlighten my eyes, lest I sleep in death; lest my enemy say, "I have prevailed against him": those who distress me will rejoice if ever I stumble. But I have hoped in Your mercy; my heart will rejoice in Your salvation. I will praise the Lord Who has done good to me, and I will sing to the name of the Lord Most High. ALLELUIA.

PSALM 26 (AGPEYA)

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom will I fear? The Lord is the defender of my life; of whom will I be afraid? When the wicked drew near against me to eat up my flesh, those who distress me and my enemies, they fainted and fell. Though an army should fight me, my heart shall not be afraid: though war should rise up against me, in this I am confident.

One thing I have asked of the Lord, this also I will seek, that I should dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, that I should behold the fair beauty of the Lord, and visit His holy temple. For in the day of my afflictions He hid me in His tabernacle: He sheltered me in the secret of His tabernacle; He set me up on a rock. And now, behold, He has lifted up my head over my enemies: I went round and offered in His tabernacle a sacrifice of joy; I shall sing, and sing psalms to the Lord.

Hear, O Lord, my voice which I have uttered aloud: have mercy on me, and hearken to me. For You are He to whom my heart said, "I have sought Your face:

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Your face, O Lord, I will seek." Do not turn away Your face from me, do not reject Your servant in anger: be a helper to me, and do not forsake me; and do not overlook me, O God my Savior. For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the Lord has accepted me unto Himself. Set a law for me, O Lord, in Your ways, and guide me in a right path, because of my enemies. Do not deliver me over to the souls of those who afflict me; for unjust witnesses have risen up against me, and injustice has lied to itself. I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord: be of good cheer and let your heart be strengthened: and wait for the Lord. ALLELUIA.

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