

# My Church is Spirit and Life

## A. My Church

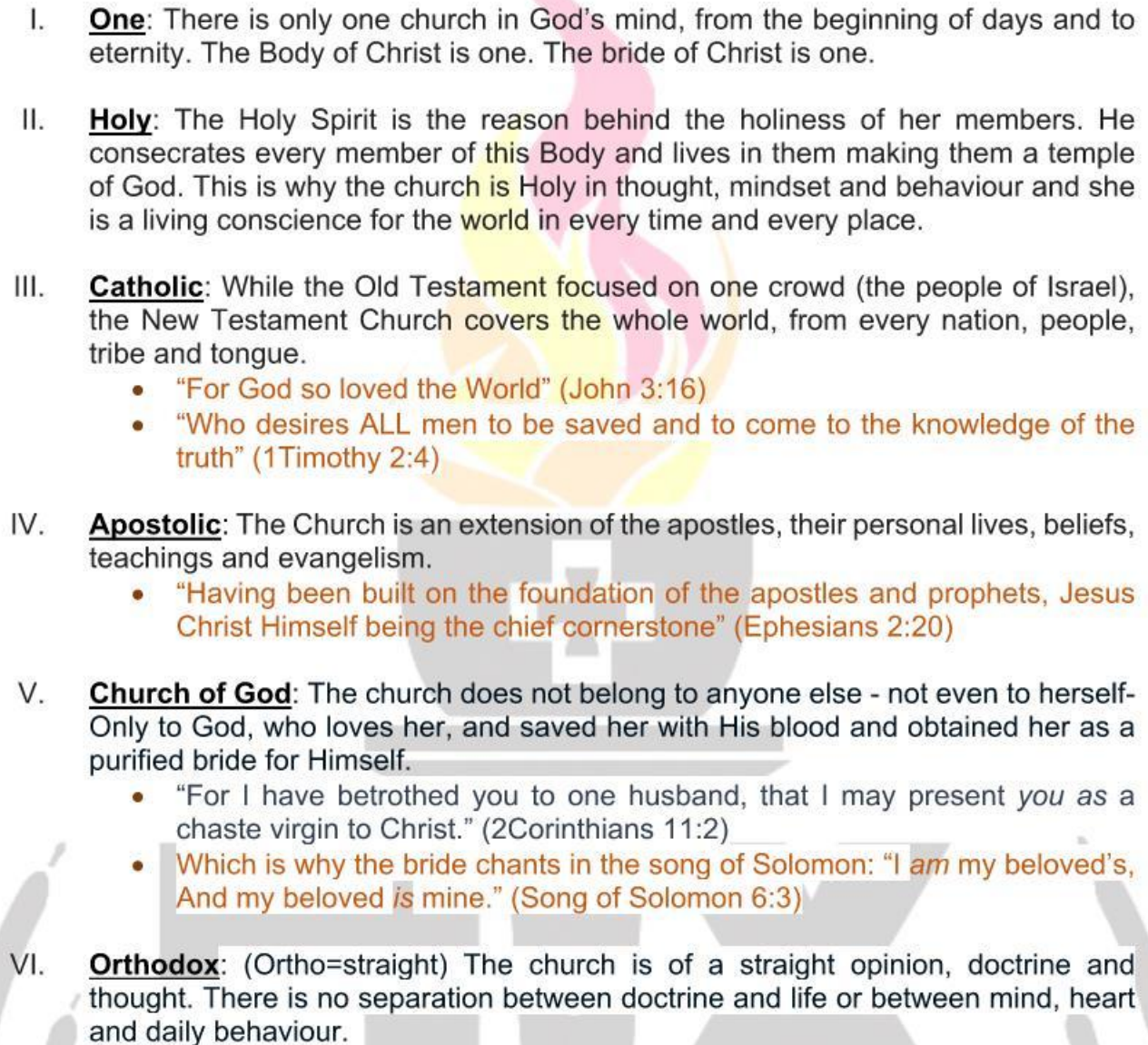
### 1- My Church is Coptic:

*Our Coptic Orthodox Church has a unique Coptic identity. Our church is a:*

- ❖ **Church of Theologians**: St. Athanasius, St. Dioscorus & St. Cyril
- ❖ **Church of Monks**: St. Anthony, St. Makarius, St. Shenouda & St. Bakhomios
- ❖ **Church of Martyrs**: The only Christian church that has, aside from the Gregorian Calendar (A.D.), the Martyr's calendar, because of all the martyrs she offered throughout her history and to this date.
- ❖ **Church of Evangelism**: Evangelised around the world. St. Maurice & St. Verena, for example, have many institutions, monasteries and cities named after them in Europe. Until today, our Church is still expanding in every continent of the world. In the age of planes, satellites, and telecommunication, though the Church is worldwide, the Church is still one body, one church, with the same rites, beliefs and history.

### 2- My Church is Orthodox:

*As the deacon chants in the holy liturgy, "Pray for the peace of the One holy, Catholic and Apostolic Orthodox Church of God", our Coptic Orthodox Church is:*

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- I. **One**: There is only one church in God's mind, from the beginning of days and to eternity. The Body of Christ is one. The bride of Christ is one.
- II. **Holy**: The Holy Spirit is the reason behind the holiness of her members. He consecrates every member of this Body and lives in them making them a temple of God. This is why the church is Holy in thought, mindset and behaviour and she is a living conscience for the world in every time and every place.
- III. **Catholic**: While the Old Testament focused on one crowd (the people of Israel), the New Testament Church covers the whole world, from every nation, people, tribe and tongue.
- "For God so loved the World" (John 3:16)
  - "Who desires ALL men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1Timothy 2:4)
- IV. **Apostolic**: The Church is an extension of the apostles, their personal lives, beliefs, teachings and evangelism.
- "Having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone" (Ephesians 2:20)
- V. **Church of God**: The church does not belong to anyone else - not even to herself- Only to God, who loves her, and saved her with His blood and obtained her as a purified bride for Himself.
- "For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present *you* as a chaste virgin to Christ." (2Corinthians 11:2)
  - Which is why the bride chants in the song of Solomon: "*I am my beloved's, And my beloved is mine.*" (Song of Solomon 6:3)
- VI. **Orthodox**: (Ortho=straight) The church is of a straight opinion, doctrine and thought. There is no separation between doctrine and life or between mind, heart and daily behaviour.



## Who is the Church?

It is the congregation of believers in Christ, gathered in the consecrated house of God, led by the priestly ranks, with the presence of angels and saints around the Holy Body and Blood of Christ.

- 1- **Congregation of believers:** The word "Ecclesia" means assembly of members, and the church -according to the Gospel- is the Body of Christ. St. Paul says, "**Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.**" (1 Corinth 12:27)
- 2- **Gathered in the consecrated house of God:** The church is the house of God and the doorway of Heaven. The Altar has become a heavenly place because of the presence of God in it, surrounded by angels, saints and the congregation.
- 3- **Led by the priestly ranks:** God established the Sacrament of Priesthood after His resurrection, "And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "**Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.**" (John 20: 22-23).
- 4- **With the presence of angels and saints:** We fill the church with icons as they represent the presence of angels and saints in the House of God. This is why the priest prays, "Before whom stand the angels and the archangels".
- 5- **Around the Holy Body and Blood of Christ:** The Eucharist is the foundation of the entire church. As our Lord said, "**I am the Bread of Life**" (John 6:35,48) so whoever receives communion with physical and spiritual readiness will receive many blessings.

## What are the blessings of communion?

- 1- **Steadfastness in Christ:** Man is weak against sin, the devil and the world. However, when he receives communion, he becomes strong through the grace of God and prevails against evil and the evil one.
- 2- **Unity with the Heavenly:** Angels and saints attend liturgy with us and offer their prayer and intercession on our behalf before God. They are our role models and through communion, we unite with them as members in the Body of Christ which is the Church.
- 3- **Unite with one another:** We receive communion from the same bread and the same cup, just like St. Paul said "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, *though* many, are one bread *and* one body; for we all partake of that one bread." (1Corinthians 10:16-17)



- 4- **Receiving forgiveness:** As long as we have offered true repentance and an honest confession, our sins are forgiven by receiving communion. During the liturgy, the priest lifts up the paten and says: "Given for us for salvation, remission of sins and eternal life to those who partake of Him."
- 5- **Receiving salvation:** We receive not only forgiveness of sin, but also sanctification and purification from sin, getting rid of its effects and our enslavement under it. Instead, we accept the Lord's dwelling inside of us, so that we remain in Him and He in us.
- 6- **Eternal life:** The Lord said, "Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." (John 6:54)
- 7- **Proclaiming our Lord's death:** When we partake of His Holy living Body and Blood, we proclaim His death and Resurrection until His second coming

### 3- My Church is Spirit:

Spirit is the main element in spiritual life. It is what connects us to God, the spiritual world and eternity. Through it, we can believe in God.

There is a difference between the Holy Spirit and the human spirit. The Holy Spirit works through our human spirit, which God has put in us as a connection between Him and us. Thus, the spirit is the first element in Christian life, which we always call spiritual life... the body submits to the human spirit, and the human spirit submits to the Holy Spirit.

#### **The work of the Holy Spirit in Church:**

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

After Christ's Ascension into heaven, the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, was upon the disciples on the 50<sup>th</sup> day (the Day of Pentecost), so they established the Holy church and spread Christianity all over the world and churches were built.

The seven sacraments of church are Holy works and Divine Gifts. With them, we receive unseen imperceptible blessings from seen practices, through the work of the Holy Spirit in sanctifying the sacrament and delivering its effect through Christ. The seven sacraments are:

- A- **Baptism:** Baptism is a Holy Sacrament by which we are born again by being immersed in water three times in the name of the Holy Trinity. The Sacrament of Baptism has the first rank among the Seven Holy Sacraments, as it is the door by which the believer enters the church and has the right to partake in the rest of the Sacraments. "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of Water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God" (John 3:5).



- B- **Chrismation (Confirmation):** The Sacrament of Myron is a holy Sacrament, with which we receive the seal of the Holy Spirit. The word 'Myron' is a Greek word which means 'ointment' or 'fragrant perfume'. "But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things." (1John 2:20).  
The Baptized is anointed with **36 signs** on his joints and senses so that the Holy Spirit can dwell within them.
- C- **Eucharist:** In the Sacrament of Communion, we partake of the Holy Body and Precious Blood of Jesus Christ, to unite and remain in Him and He in us. (John 6:53-56)
- D- **Sacrament of Repentance and Confession:** Through this sacrament, the sinner returns to God, confessing their sins before the priest to be absolved by the priest through the authority granted to him by God. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1John 1:9)
- E- **Unction of the sick:** In this sacrament, the priest anoints the sick person and asks for God's grace to remedy his psychological and physical diseases.  
"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)
- F- **Matrimony:** Marriage is a natural law established by God in the beginning with Adam and Eve. Jesus blessed it by attending the wedding of Cana of Galilee. He sanctified marriage and said, "So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate." (Matthew 19:5-6)
- G- **Priesthood:** In this sacrament, the bishop lays his hands on the head of the elected candidate, so that the Holy Spirit will descend on him and grant him one of the priestly ranks and gifts. "And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." (John 20:22-23)

#### 4- My Church is Life:

Our spiritual life and service to others is a translation of our membership in the Body of Christ (the church) and the work of the Holy Spirit in us. In our personal life, the church has drawn for us multiple outlets for spiritual growth including:

- A- **Confession:** With honest, regular confession with readiness and sincere repentance to God before meeting the priest, the confessor receives absolution of his sins. The confessor has complete trust that this holy sacrament is the



work of the Holy Spirit and commits to follows the advice and spiritual exercises given by the father of confession.

- B- **Prayer:** This is the umbilical cord that connects us to God, through which we receive spiritual nutrition.

The Eucharist is at the top of these prayers, since, through it we unite with God, with the saints and with one another and in it we find all kinds of prayers: thanksgiving, the diptych, litanies, praise, etc.

The Agpeya, containing the fruit of King David the prophet and others, comprises topics covering different spiritual and psychological needs, uniting us with important events in the life of Christ and the Church: His Resurrection (1st hour), Descent of the Holy Spirit (3rd hour), His Crucifixion (6th hour), His Death (9th hour), taking down His Body from the Cross (11th hour), His Burial (12th hour) and awaiting the second coming (Midnight Prayer).

The “Jesus prayer” - **“My Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner”**, which St. Anthony taught to his disciples, gives us a way to pray without ceasing.

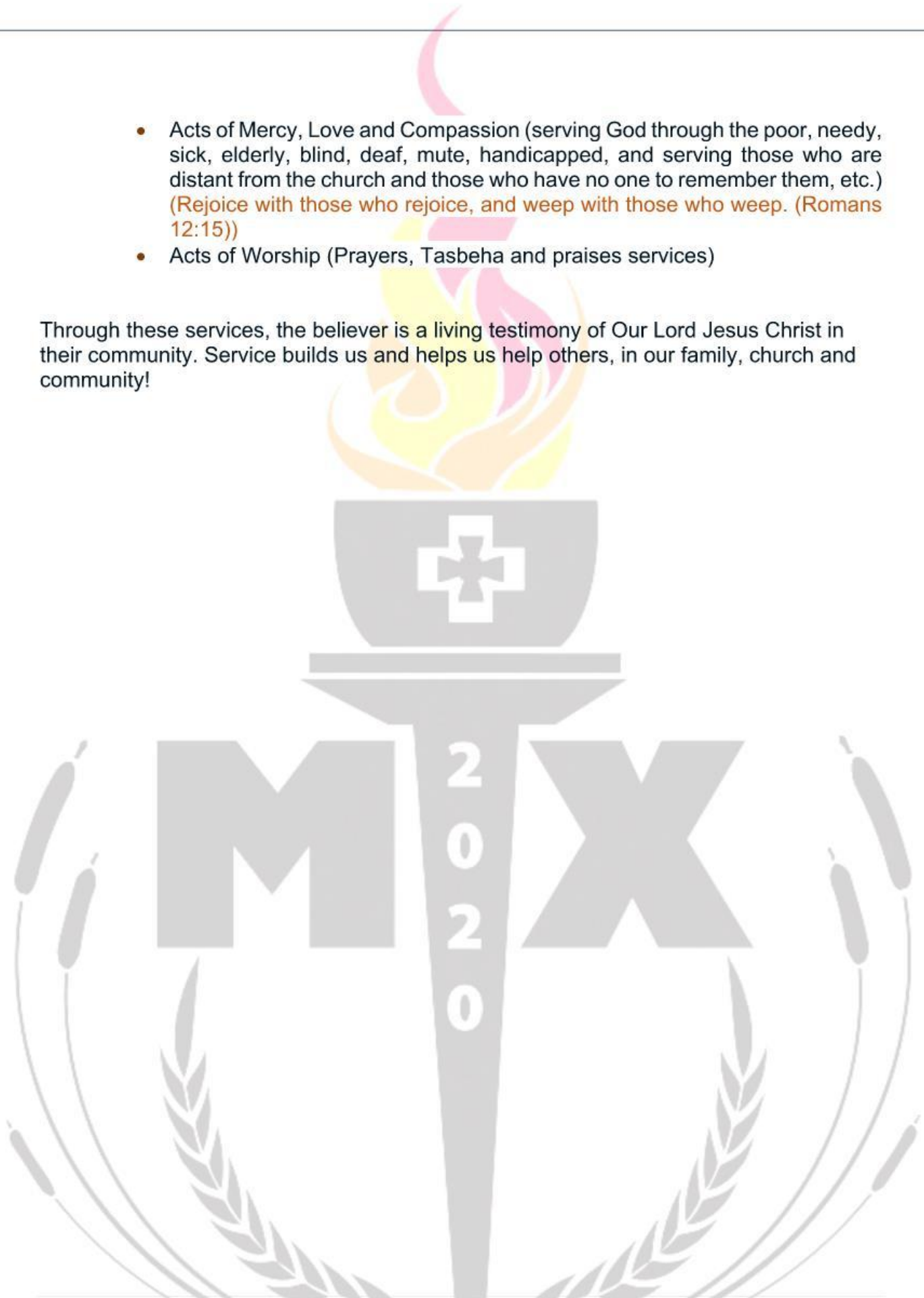
Finally, our open spontaneous prayers is a time where we can openly talk to our Lord Jesus about anything; regretting our sins and our determination to repent, confirming our hope in Him, professing our love for Him, thanking Him for all his spiritual and timely gifts and remembering others in love and honesty so that God works with and in them.

- C- **The Bible:** The Word of God is our spiritual bread that gives joy and helps the spirit grow. It is the light that lights our path.
- “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” (Psalm 119:105)
  - “For the commandment is a lamp, And the law a light” (Proverbs 6:23)
- D- **Spiritual Meetings:** This is where we meet other members of the congregation, praying, praising, singing songs, and reflecting on the words of God, It is a chance to walk into an atmosphere of spiritual education, comforting prayers and joyful company.
- E- **Fasting and Asceticism:** We submit our body so that the spirit can soar. Fasting is exercising control over the flesh and working on filling the spirit. It is a contribution of both body and soul in holy unity and acceptable worship.
- F- **Our service to others:** It is dangerous if our lives are void of serving others (family, church, community...) and there are many areas of service in the church:
- Teaching, giving and management (administrative, organizational and leadership areas)



- Acts of Mercy, Love and Compassion (serving God through the poor, needy, sick, elderly, blind, deaf, mute, handicapped, and serving those who are distant from the church and those who have no one to remember them, etc.) (Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. (Romans 12:15))
- Acts of Worship (Prayers, Tasbeha and praises services)

Through these services, the believer is a living testimony of Our Lord Jesus Christ in their community. Service builds us and helps us help others, in our family, church and community!



# A Bond of Love

The Holy liturgy is the core of prayer and congregational worship. It is a time spent in heaven on earth with God, the angels, and heavenly powers who are present with us.

We can think of liturgy as a love story between our heavenly Bridegroom Jesus Christ and his beloved bride (the church). Christ came down from heaven to connect us in an eternal love bond and in every liturgy, He says to each one of us “Behold I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.” (Rev 3:20)

The liturgy can be divided into **10 parts**:

- Raising of Incense
- Offering of the Lamb
- Liturgy of the Word (Readings)
- Prayer of Reconciliation
- Anaphora
- Sanctification / Epiclesis (Institution Narrative)
- Litanies
- Commemoration of the Saints
- Fraction
- Submission and Communion

## 1. Raising of Incense:

- ❖ The church starts with the **thanksgiving prayer** to thank God for everything
- ❖ The Mystery of Incense – the priest puts five spoonfuls of incense representing the 5 men in the Old Testament who offered acceptable offerings to the Lord: Abel, Noah, Abraham, Aaron, and Zachariah.
- ❖ The priest prays these Litanies:
  - Vespers: Litany of the Departed.
  - Matins:
    - Weekdays: Litany of the travellers and the sick.
    - Saturdays: Litany of the Departed to remember Christ in the Tomb.
    - Sundays and major feasts: Litany of the Sick and the Oblations (not travellers). This tradition comes from the notion that Sunday is the day of worship, so it is expected that no one is travelling.
- ❖ **Efnouti Nai Nan (Have Mercy)** – the priest holds a cross and three lit candles to signify that:
  - Christ is the light of the world
  - Christ sacrificed himself to give light to those who live in darkness
- ❖ Litany of the Gospel and the Gospel
- ❖ The **five** short Litanies:



- The litany of Peace
- The litany of the Fathers **OR** the litany of the departed patriarch
- The litany of the Place
- The litany of the Air, Plants, and Waters (three seasons)
- The litany of the Assemblies

❖ Absolution

**Reflection:**

- Opening the curtains of the altar is a symbol of heaven doors being open to all the believers gathered together
- The incense is a declaration of God's presence and a symbol of when Aaron bless the people and stopped the plague from among them (Numbers 16)
- During the Gospel reading, the priest goes around the altar with the censer symbolizing the spread of the Gospel throughout the four corners of the world.
- During processions, the priest walks in a **counter-clockwise** direction to signify that the Church is above time, and during prayer we connect with heaven.

## 2. Offering of the Lamb:

❖ **Psalms** are prayed because they prophesy the incarnation of Christ the Lord. The priest then prays the **Agpeya (Book of hours)**:

- Third and Sixth hours – Saturdays, Sundays, and non-fasting periods
- Third, Sixth, Ninth hours – fasting periods
- Third, Sixth, Ninth, Eleventh, and Compline – Great lent and Jonah's fast

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❖ The priest washes his hands three times before going outside the Sanctuary to choose the lamb as a preparation for touching the bread that will turn into the Holy Body.

❖ The Priest then examines the oblation bread to choose the most suitable one for offering. He then places his hands over the tray in the shape of a cross saying: "May the Lord choose for Himself a lamb without blemish." Note that the number of bread must be odd (3,5,7) as the sacrifice of the Lord is unique

❖ During this time, we should confess our sins and ask for God's mercy saying, "Kyrie Eleison". **The moments of offering the lamb are moments of humility and repentance. Lift up your heart confessing your sins and ask for God's mercy.**

❖ The priest enters the Sanctuary while holding the Lamb and takes water on his right hand to wash the Lamb from top to bottom a symbol of our **Lord's baptism**.

❖ The priest puts his hand on the Lamb and mentions the names of those who asked him to pray on their behalf placing the congregation's burdens on this Lamb

❖ The procession around the altar is a symbol of the Salvation of Christ for the whole world about to happen on the Altar. **The priest carries the cross slanted as a symbol of Christ carrying His cross. Also, it's a symbol when Simeon carried baby Jesus in the temple to fulfill the requirement of the law.**



- ❖ The Priest then places the bread in the **paten** (tray) and the wine in the **chalice** (cup) while praying the thanksgiving prayer. He covers them with the **Prosperin (the veil of the oblation)** representing the death and burial of Christ. Then, he folds one linen in the shape of a triangle and puts it on to symbolize the seal that was put on the tomb

### 3. Liturgy of the Word:

- ❖ The church has prepared five readings for each liturgy:
  - The Pauline Epistle (14 Epistles of St. Paul)
  - The Catholic Epistle (Epistles of James, John (1,2,3), Peter (1,2), Jude)
  - The Praxis (Book of Acts)
  - The Synaxarion (story of the saint(s) of the day)
  - The Psalm + The Gospel
- ❖ Prior to the Gospel, we sing the hymn **Agios** that reminds us of the glory of God in heaven.

#### Reflection

- During *the Pauline procession of incense*, the priest goes through the altar **three** times then the whole church, just as St. Paul preached the Gospel to all nations. The priest greets the saints in front of their icons and takes people's requests/confessions as he is walking around the church. This is an open invitation for everyone to repent with a pure heart.
- During *the Catholic Epistle procession of incense*, the priest does not go outside the sanctuary (prayed as part of the Pauline procession).
- During *the Praxis procession of incense*, the priest only encircles the first chorus, reminding us of the Disciples evangelism mainly in Jerusalem and in Judea.

### 4. Prayer of Reconciliation:

- ❖ The first part of the Prayer of Reconciliation consists of meditations on the creation of man, without corruption, followed by the fall of man by the envy of Satan
- ❖ The priest asks God to fill his heart and the hearts of the congregation with His heavenly peace and the deacon calls on all those assembled in the church to "greet one another with the holy kiss". The whole church becomes one heart and one mind in preparation for participating in the Divine Liturgy. "Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:23-24)



- ❖ The priest lifts up the prospherin to declare that the resurrection of the Lord has been fulfilled through reconciliation with God by repentance and reconciliation with our brothers with the holy kiss and our willingness to sacrifice for them
- ❖ We do not pray the prayer of Reconciliation on **Covenant Thursday** signifying that the true reconciliation was obtained only by the Cross.

## 5. Anaphora:

- ❖ The Priest raises his hand and says: “Agios” and does the sign of the cross three times. First, he makes the sign of the cross on himself, then on the deacons, and third on the congregation
- ❖ When the priest says “Lift up your hearts”, as if to lift ourselves into heaven and we’re being united with God so we start praising like the angels saying “Holy Holy Holy”
- ❖ We then give thanks to the Lord who blessed us to be standing in His presence

**“As if every person, indeed, went to heaven; and is standing by the throne of God, flies with the Seraphim and signs the Holy song” – St John Chrysostom**

**“All the powers of heaven come to sing this new song, the altar is filled with angels, so how dare you, Christian, come to the offering without the proper respect. The church is heaven indeed” – St John Chrysostom**

### Reflection

- When the priest says “Lift up your hearts”, we need to ask God to give us the grace to focus solely on Him during the liturgy
- When the priest says “Incarnated, and became man” he puts a handful of incense in the censer and the aromatic fragrances serve as a reminder of the incarnation of Jesus Christ in the womb of the Virgin symbolized by the censor, and the burning fire symbolizing the fire of Divinity that did not burn her womb.

## 6. The Sanctification/Epiclesis:

- ❖ This is the most important part of the liturgy. The Holy Spirit descends on the bread and wine; transforming them into the Body and Blood of our Savior
- ❖ This prayer is taken directly from Christ’s words during the institution of the Eucharist that took place on **Holy Thursday**
- ❖ The candles are lit around the altar during the sanctification of the bread and wine signifying that this sacrifice has brought light to the world

- ❖ The priest calls the Holy spirit while he is kneeling because it was Christ himself who established this sacrament and He is the one sending His Holy Spirit now onto these oblations. At this point, the priest points with his hands covered with the two veils to the bread and says, “He instituted for us this great mystery of godliness.”
- ❖ Then the priest does the sign of the cross on the bread three times and says: “He gave thanks; He blessed it; And he sanctified it.”
- ❖ He then puts his hand over the rim of the chalice and crosses it three times saying: “He gave thanks; He blessed it; And he sanctified it.”
- ❖ **When the deacon says, “worship God in fear and trembling”, the priest invokes the Holy Spirit to transform the bread into the Body of Christ and the wine into the Blood of Christ by saying “And this bread He makes into His Holy Body” and “and this cup also, the precious blood of His New Covenant”**

## 7. The Litanies:

- ❖ Litanies are requests for several matters from the Church to her Bridegroom
- ❖ We all pray for love and unity of heart in fellowship (in one body)
- ❖ The priest prays the **seven** short litanies:
  - The litany of Peace
  - The litany of the Fathers
  - The litany of the Clergy
  - The litany of Mercy
  - The litany of the Place
  - The litany of the Air, Plants, and Waters (three seasons)
  - The litany of Oblations

## 8. The Commemoration of the Saints:

- ❖ After the litanies are prayed, the priest prays the Commemoration of Saints
- ❖ The commemoration of saints is the presence of the whole church by being one body with the Son of God. It is the “**communion with the victorious church**” where we ask for their prayers
- ❖ We then remember our those who have departed.

**“It is fit that we pray for the believers who passed away and to offer a mysterious sacrifice, so God would have compassion on them.”**

**- St Cyril the pillar of Faith**



## 9. The Fraction:

- ❖ The Fraction is offering thanksgiving to God for His inexpressible gift. God freely gave us His Holy Body and Honoured Blood as the way to eternal life for those who worthily partake of them.
- ❖ There are many types of Fraction Prayers. There are annual ones and others that pertain to major or minor feasts of our Lord, or feasts of the Virgin Mary, the angels, the saints, or periods of fasting, etc.
- ❖ The priest divides the Holy Body around the **Despoticon** representing the passions of Christ.
- ❖ The priest then smears the Holy Body with the Holy Blood in the shape of a cross representing that the Lord was immersed in His passions/sufferings. Also, it resembles the blood that came out of His side.

## 10. Prayer of Submission and Communion:

- ❖ The deacon proclaims “Bow your heads to the Lord” and the people answer “Before you O Lord” – This is a moment of repentance! It prepares us to receive the absolution from the priest.
- ❖ The priest then proclaims “the Holies for the Holy” and the people answer “One is the all-holy Father, One is the all-holy Son, One is the all-holy Spirit” – We proclaim that we are not holy. In fact, we are sinners and unworthy and no one but God the Trinity is holy.

**“One should not prevent himself from partaking of Communion daily because in it is healing for the soul”- St Augustine**

# Ephesians (Part 1)

## Introduction

Ephesus is the capital of the Roman province called Asia, and it is located in Asia Minor (present-day Turkey).

Ephesus was a crossroads of trade routes, and it is famous for its great temple of the goddess Artemis - a goddess who represents a mother. Artemis, the goddess of the moon in Greece, was equivalent to the Roman goddess Diana.

The people of Ephesus were interested in paganism, magic, and indecency (**Acts 19:19**).

The epistle to the Ephesians was written by the Apostle Paul from his prison in Rome (**first prison in 62 - 63 AD**) where he was authorized to rent a house to be confined to for two years (**Acts 28:30**). There, he wrote a group of Epistles: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon making his years of imprisonment yield teachings that have spread across generations and for thousands of years.

## Major Theme of the Epistle

The principal theme of this epistle is the **Church** and Christ's relationship with it & St. Paul uses several metaphors to show the unity of the believers in Christ. In discussing the concept of the Church, St. Paul describes how each one of us is not simply an isolated individual, but rather each of us is a member of the Holy body of Christ. Unlike other churches, the people of Ephesus had no doctrinal or behavioral errors for St. Paul to tackle therefore, there is no tone of anger in this epistle rather he seeks the spiritual growth of the believers.

Also, the purpose of the epistle is to announce God's plan to create a holy people for God, a new community, united with Christ - the head of the body. This is the "mystery of God's love for humanity", as shown in **chapters 1-3**, where St. Paul affirms the generality of salvation: meaning that salvation is not only for the Jews, but also the Gentiles (**Eph 2:14**). Generally, God created the world in unity.

Finally, he explained in the last three (**chapters 4-6**) that the unity of faith, holiness, personal and social behaviors, as well as the believer's spiritual weapons, must be exercised through and within the Church.

## Meaning of the word Ephesus

Desirable.



### How & when was the church of Ephesians established

Many Jews with Roman citizenship lived in Ephesus and St. Paul preached to them on his visit to Ephesus around the year 54 AD at the end of his second missionary journey. St. Paul preached in the Jewish synagogue and let Aquila and Priscilla complete his work (Acts 18:21). In his absence, Apollos (a disciple of John the Baptist) came from Alexandria and declared what he knew about Christ in the council, however he only knew about the baptism of John. Aquila and Priscilla taught him the way of the Lord more closely (Acts 18:26) and the Apostle Paul returned to Ephesus according to his promise in the fall of the same year during his third missionary journey. There he found some of the disciples who only accepted the baptism of John, and he preached to them the Lord Christ and their baptism, and when he laid his hand on them the Holy Spirit came upon them, so they spoke with tongues (languages) and prophesied (Acts 19:3-9).

Paul the Apostle preached at the Synod of the Jews for 3 months, and when the Jews resisted, he departed (Acts 19:8-12). He then taught at the school of Tyrannus for two years to the Jews and Greeks and many Jews and Gentiles accepted the faith. As a result of their faith, many witches burned magic books (Acts 19:19). A great church was established in Ephesus, with its priests (Acts 20) (Miletus is located to the south of Ephesus). After St. Paul left Ephesus, his disciple Timothy served in it (1 Ti 1:3). Paul sent this letter to Ephesus in the hands of his student, Tychicus (Eph 6:21).

Ephesus is one of the seven churches to which Jesus sent messages in the book of Revelation. Ephesus now has no Christians in it, in fulfillment of the prophecy of Christ, that He would remove its lampstand from its place because the people had left their first love (Rev 2:5).

### Metaphors that St. Paul uses to describe the church

Find them in Ephesians 1:23, 4:15, 5:23-32, 2:20.

## Chapter 1

This chapter carries two clear themes: “Redemption in Christ” and “The knowledge of the Mystery of God.” We are the Church of God or His Holy People because we are in Christ. As for the purpose of our faith, it is divine knowledge, not on the level of philosophy or controversy, rather on the level of God's revelation to us about Himself and His mysteries.

### Verses 1-2: Greeting

#### ❖ Verses 1-2:

- The Apostle presents himself to the Church to which he writes in simple words, as he begins to present the Apostolic Blessing that is God's gift of Himself to the Church, presenting himself as a Messenger "by the will of God" and giving them grace and peace from God.
- He calls them “saints” even though he writes to people who are originally Gentiles, and some Christians of Jewish origin were still not quite comfortable to join them, so the Apostle wanted to confirm that God, who had previously chosen the Jewish people as his own sacred people, had opened the door to all to join the faith - this is the secret of referring to them here as “faithful” - to include the Gentiles and also because the Ephesians were distinguished by the strength of their faith.

### Verses 3-14: Redemption in Christ

#### ❖ Verse 3:

- We bless God, meaning we praise Him, and say good words about him: that He is good, kind, and merciful. The word "blessing" is a Hebrew word meaning to speak well of someone. And when we bless God (praise Him) - we have nothing but this to offer to God.
- When God blesses us, He gives us His material and spiritual goods. From Him alone come the blessing and to Him we return with praise and thanks. Paul blesses the Lord, that is, to glorify him, because He gave us every blessing - a person is blessed when he gives blessings (praises) to God.
- He called the blessings of the New Testament a “spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” to distinguish them from the blessings that Jews enjoyed in the Old Testament - temporary and materialistic. Rather, this blessing is spiritual in Christ, that is, Christ is the cause of our receiving these spiritual blessings that we have in the heavens, and without him we would not have any blessing. We received the blessing because we are in Christ, and we became the temple of the Holy Spirit through baptism and confirmation (Myron).

#### ❖ Verse 4:



- Undoubtedly, it is not intended to ignore "human freedom" in accepting faith, because God in his love for man does not deal with him as with a machine or chess pieces that he controls with his finger, rather he deals with us as mindful creatures whom he granted liberty. God in His wisdom and love invites all human beings to salvation, for God wants all to be saved but each person has the right to accept God and respond to His love or refuse without being obligated.

❖ **Verse 5:**

- Here we understand that God chose us and sanctified us to restore our sonship to Him that Adam lost and we regained through baptism in which we died and rose united with Christ. God is pleased with our return to him as children, and we rejoice in our return to the divine embrace as children.

❖ **Verse 6:**

- The more we glorify and praise God the more we realize the glory of God and the glory of his grace. Glorifying and praising God is imperative for the believer to be happy with God.

❖ **Verses 7-9:**

- Redemption is a pure blessing from God, a gift from Him, but is Christ's redemption like the sun to all people? If redemption was just a blessing, then all human beings should have received forgiveness and redemption, but that is not the case... why? Because humans have a role in it... what is this role?
- We know the secret of the Lord's will ... Knowledge is an important and necessary thing, we must know God, and He also wants us to know Him, and believe because it is through believing (faith) that we will know God. God's will is that everyone be saved and receive a share and an inheritance in Heaven, His will is to gather everyone in His person, and for us all to be in Christ. His will is for humans to accept the redemption and blood of Christ, whoever accepts and believes will fulfill God's will and inherit His kingdom.
- When we become children of God by adoption, this makes us praise and thank Him and praise His grace, which He bestowed upon us, for the Father loved the Son and by joining us with the Son, we also became loved by the Father, and He blessed us with His grace. **The primary goal of all spiritual practices is to be in Christ.**

❖ **Verses 10-11:**

- The term "fullness of the times" means that God arranged the times to carry out his purpose, which is the completion of redemption, to gather all things in Christ (all that is in the heavens and on earth, He will gather all believers who are the body parts of Christ, the saints who are in heaven, and who are on earth, for Christ is the head of all, and he is the head of the Church).



- The Holy blood that was shed on the cross was meant for the reconciliation between the earthly and the heavenly, for God loved us from eternity and planned our salvation in the fullness of the times.

❖ **Verses 12-14:**

- All those who believed received the gift and the seal of the Holy Spirit, as a token of eternal inheritance. The seal was a general sign of ownership, so Baptism in the Spirit is a sign of entering into God's ownership and protection, compliance with Christ, and finally as an eternal seal that cannot be broken.
- As a token (guarantee) of our inheritance: a token here can also mean to give part of the whole. In the Holy Spirit, we received some eternal good. But in eternal life, we will receive heavenly glory. God gives us the Holy Spirit to comfort us, reassure us, fill us with joy, and to give us a taste of what is prepared for us above - the type of life that we have been called to. So, what we have on earth is a sample of what we will receive above.

**Verses 15-23: St. Paul's prayer (intercession) for spiritual wisdom**

❖ **Verses 15-19:**

- St. Paul makes sure to point out that he heard of their faith in the Lord Jesus and their love for all the saints. Our teacher Paul here gives thanks to God who works with them, for their faith and love, for God deserves all thanks as every good gift is from God.
- St. Paul prays that God grants them a "**spirit of wisdom**", and he also asks for "**revelation in the knowledge of Him.**" He did not say "in knowing his secrets," but rather "in knowing Him", as he yearns for the people to get to know the Lord personally and to recognize that they unite with Him. We need God to give us the spirit of wisdom and knowledge, for if we walk with the mind alone without resorting to God, we deviate from wisdom and true knowledge.
- Next, St. Paul asks for the enlightening of their inner eyes, meaning that they gain the spiritual insight that allows them to see God by faith and stick to his promises, and realize the riches of the glory of his inheritance prepared for the saints, so the soul is filled with hope and strengthened by divine power.
- Baptism is called the "mystery of enlightenment", during which our inner insight opens with the light of the Holy Spirit to realize the three things mentioned here:
  - **The hope of His calling:** as we enter membership into the body of Christ with baptism, we know - with living experience - His calling for us to be the children of the Father and heirs with Christ, and our heart is filled with hope in it.
  - **The glory of His inheritance in the saints:** by baptism we are blessed with a token of eternal inheritance prepared for saints, during which we experience the eternal riches.



- **The exceeding greatness of his power toward us who believe:** for baptism raises us as from death, and makes us His children.

❖ **Verses 20-23:**

- The believer looks to the word of God who through His incarnation, He came down to us and became one of us, He was raised from the dead, and sits at the right hand of the Father in heaven. It all happened for our benefit, that is for the benefit of every believer, so that each one of us can be blessed with these capabilities "in Christ", that is, through his steadfastness in Him as a member of His body.

Final Note:

- Think of the titles of Jesus Christ as mentioned in this chapter:
  - Beloved (1:6).
  - The Father of glory (1:17).



## Chapter 2

### ❖ Verses 1-10

- St. Paul starts off Chapter 2 mentioning the effect of the sin that ruins our humanity, staining the holy image of man as God created man on His own image. By abandoning God, the source of life and accepting the slavery to the devil, we fell to death and lost life. St Paul names the devil as “the prince of the power of the air” and he called us the fallen “the sons of disobedience”.
- God confirmed his **absolute** love towards man even after the fall. Hence, he says “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us” (Verse 4). St. Paul emphasized on “Richness” of God’s mercy towards man, repeating the word “rich” five times throughout the epistle.
- Not only is God merciful but he is also rich in mercy. This mercy was practically proven. He did not show mercy through gentle words or sincere emotions, but He came down to earth so that we are alive together with Christ, raised with Him through his resurrection and sit with Him in the heavenly places.
- In **verse 8**, “He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus”, the word “Show” does not indicate “exposing” or “reveal” but it rather means “Proof” as Christ’s resurrection and dwelling in the heavens are proofs of God’s exceeding riches of grace.

### ❖ Verse 9

- Everyone who boasts of their works denies that Christ granted us salvation through his cross even if we did not deserve it. God sent the Holy Spirit, the comforter, giving us the good will. It is true that we have to strive spiritually but it is God’s grace that altered our nature into this new nature. St. Paul warns us from boasting as St. Augustine says “Once you boast, you immediately lose everything you attained”.

St. Paul mentioned that it is God’s grace that leads us to salvation but that does not marginalize the importance of our deeds. **We, the believers, do not attain salvation through our deeds. However, we cannot attain salvation without our deeds.**

### ❖ Verse 10

- God created us in the beginning when we were born to our parents. We were created a second time through baptism and the second is greater since it is the new creation that is in Christ. In the first creation, God said “let there be ...” but the second creation required the cross.

#### **How do we attain the second creation in Christ?**

1. We reunite in Christ in baptism
2. We abide in Christ through the Eucharist
3. Good behaviour that is appropriate to the new life we acquire in Christ.



For each one of us a message and role in life, Christ has prepared for us that we carry out as in verse 10 “good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

❖ **Verses 11-13**

- This is the image of the gentiles before accepting the faith in Christ the Lord, they were uncircumcised. They do not carry the symbol of the covenant that God had with Abraham and his descendants. The Jews, having been circumcised in the flesh, went astray away from God. They were circumcised in the flesh but with no deeper inner relationship with God. The bible says “Circumcision made in the flesh by hands”.
- But now, there is no allowance for the Jews to boast through the circumcision since it is “made by hands”. In the New Testament, we all attained new circumcision through baptism.

❖ **Verses 14-19**

- **In verse 14, “For He Himself is our peace”**. It is mind-blowing how the Spirit did not say through Him we find peace. For if we find peace in Christ means that Christ is away from us but on the contrary, when we have Christ in us, we have peace in us for Christ lives in us.
- **“who has made both one”**, notice how the book said he has made both one. The Gentile did not become a Jew but He has made them both one. He gave a new creation to both.  
He used the word “made” not “altered” or “changed” to show the power of God’s work in our life.  
**“16 and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.”**, Christ put the enmity to death on the cross, Christ did only resolve the enmity but completely destroyed that it may not arise again.  
**“For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father”** The reconciliation is approaching God the father through the incarnate son in the Holy Spirit.  
**“Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God”**  
It is as if the gentiles and the Jews are two stranger kids whom Christ has acquired in His Body through the Holy Spirit in brotherhood so that they become sons of the father “of the household of God”. The Gentiles, just like the Jews, became members in the household of God. Truly we have become relatives to

God in the flesh through the Son Jesus Christ.

❖ **Verses 20-22**

*20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.*

- We see the work of the Holy Trinity in establishing the church for it is the house of God. The believer is shown as a live stone by which the house of God is being built.

The building of the church consists of two stages:

1. Inner building of every believer so that he becomes a live stone valid to become a part of the house God full in the Spirit.
  2. Physical building of the church that keeps growing by the growth of the number of its members, being connected in love by the Holy Spirit.
- Thus, the Church is not content with a person who lives in isolation, as this becomes a dead member. God desires a holy society (the church) where He dwells in its midst.



## Chapter 3

### ❖ Verses 1-8

- **Verse 1** - For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles
- When St. Paul says I am a prisoner of Christ, he means that he has been a captive and prisoner because of his preaching of Christ amongst the Gentiles. He didn't picture himself in the hands of the Jews and the Romans but he saw himself in the hand of the Pantocrator, he's a captive of Jesus' love and surrounded by the love of Jesus.
- Reflection: St. Paul did not see himself as a captive of Nero or the High Priests, or tied to soldiers with chains; instead he saw himself in the hands of God. We should also think like St. Paul; just as God allowed the imprisonment of St. Paul, the same goes with everything in our life. We are not under the authority of any human being no matter what their position is, but we are in the hands of Jesus and He protects us. Even the Devil's temptation is by allowance from God.
- **Verse 2** - What is the dispensation of the grace of God? Well when God sent St. Paul to the Gentiles, that was the dispensation of the grace of God. God wanted His church to be inclusive of both the Jews and the Gentiles.
- **Verse 4** - The Mystery of God. The salvation the Gentiles was not made known to the people in the Old Testament. It is a mystery that has been revealed by the Spirit to the apostles and prophets.
- **Verse 7** - St. Paul became a servant of the gospel by the grace of God and the effective working of His power. It wasn't by his own power, but by the power of God that changed him from a church persecutor to a minister to Christ.

### ❖ Verses 9-13 A Godly Invitation from Heaven that requires work

- St. Paul wants to make everyone see just like he has seen the richness of God. The fellowship of the mystery which was hidden from everyone, even from the principalities and powers in the heavenly places. God has a plan and timing for everything. Everyone will inherit the Kingdom of Heaven, even the gentiles. The sinners who repent will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.
- Through Jesus Christ we have boldness and access to the Father; we can talk to Him with confidence saying: 'Our Father who art in heaven...' and through our faith we are able to reach Him.

### ❖ Verses 14-19

- St. Paul starts this verse by bowing down on his knees and says for this reason
- For this reason: because of the love that God has for us.
- This love and trust of God made St Paul pray for them by kneeling in front of God.

- **Verse 16-17:** “grant you according to the richness of His glory...” is meant to say that the grace of God is based on His richness and the blessings He gives us is according to His glory and not according to what we deserve. “...through His Spirit in the inner man,” the inner man means the mind, the will, the conscious, and the principles a person has. This inner man can grow if it’s filled with the Holy Spirit to support it for the mystery of this strength is through His Spirit in our hearts by faith.
- **Verse 18:** St Paul is trying to describe how God is limitless
- **Verse 19:** If we taste the love of God we will understand and comprehend things that are beyond our comprehension. It’s not only about knowing the glory of God but knowing who God is and what He does for me. The more we know God, the more we will understand that He is the only one that can bring us joy and fill us and thus we will ask to be filled with more of Him. Unfortunately, we do not know how we can be filled and we look at earthly things to make us happy, not knowing that our true happiness comes from being filled with God.
  - Example: a beggar will usually eat from the garbage because he doesn’t know what good food should be like. So when someone rich comes and tells them I will offer you this kind of food if you stop eating from the garbage, the beggar will probably refuse because he doesn’t even understand the name of this food. But when the beggar tastes this good food, he will obviously want to leave the food from the garbage and keep filling himself with the good food.
- What is the fullness of God? Imagine that the body of Jesus is a huge water tank and imagine that we are tiny pots attached to this water tank. This attachment happened because of the incarnation of Jesus and His salvation, and through baptism we die and rise uniting with Him then through the Holy Spirit in us and by taking communion, He is able to fill us just like the huge water tank is able to fill the small pots attached to it.



# Ephesians (Part 2)

## Chapter 4

### ❖ Verses 1-3:

- God is calling us to be His children, but there are conditions for this calling. These conditions are mentioned in verses 2 and 3 in order for us to walk worthy of the calling.

### ❖ Verse 6: 'one God and Father' who is:

- Above all: His eyes are on all of us and He is taking care of all of us as a father
- Through all: He works in us, we are members of the body of Jesus Christ
- In you all: He lives in us, He fills His church and unites everyone as one body

### ❖ Verse 7: '...to the measure of Christ's gift'

- This means that the grace of god is according to Him and not according to what we deserve. So then why do some people receive more than others do? Talents are not given to honour someone more than the other, but each is given a talent to be a part of the church and to build it and help others. God's grace is given according to His wisdom and measures

### ❖ Verses 8-11

- Due to Adam's fall, we were all Satan's captives and whoever died would go to hell. Therefore, when Jesus Christ was raised on the cross and saved us from this captivity, He descended into the lower parts of the earth in order to ascend and take us with Him. He fills all things and he granted some to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, etc.
- When the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles on Pentecost, it gave everyone a different talent:
  - Apostles: Jesus chose them to minister to the whole world
  - Prophets: not only do they tell us about the future but in the new testament they are those who talk about our future and eternal life, thus they teach us about spiritual life and guide us to the Kingdom of Heaven.

- Evangelists: they are called to preach the gospel
- Pastors and teachers: Like the Pope, Bishops, priests and servants who protect and guide the church.

❖ **Verses 12-13**

- All those different gifts are to equip us for the work of ministry to come to the unity of the faith. If we work as one body in Christ with that goal in our minds and hearts then we will reach the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

❖ **Verses 14-17**

- We are then no longer children who are not aware and can be tossed back and forth by deceitful doctrines, but the truth in love will make us grow in Him who is the Head of our church. Just like every member of the body has to grow naturally in order for the body to be presentable, we also have to grow to show Christ in us and in the church. We grow by our firm faith in Jesus who is the head of the church, but those who were separated from God by sin are unable to grow. We will not be able to grow by walking in the futility of the mind like the gentiles, we have to let go of earthly things and focus on our eternal life and keep our minds set on God.

❖ **Verse 20**

- St Paul did not say you have not learned from Christ, he said you have not learned Christ. Christ who teaches us lives in us, so we don't learn from outside, we learn from Him. However, in order to hear Christ and learn from Him we have to be persistent. To learn Christ is to have the life of Christ, His actions, His virtues, simply to wear Christ.



## Chapter 5

### ❖ Verses 1-14

- **“Be imitators of God”**: As God is Love, let us forgive one another as God forgives us, for we, as loving children, must imitate our Father in His love and forgiveness. It is Saint Paul’s commandment for us to walk in love in every word and conduct. He also says **“in love”** and not “with love”, meaning that love has to be the path we travel, and outside it, we do not conduct anything.
- The evident works of the darkness, the ones that are **“not fitting”** for the children of light, but are rather not even named among us, are the ones that we used to practice as we were once in darkness, but now we are light in the Lord. He also focuses in his letter on the works of darkness on three sins, which are: **“fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness”**, these three matters that are not fitting to even mention among us if we were in truth saints in the Lord, and that we must cease all unclean, immoral behaviours as we did with the idolaters (and that applies to indecent images on the internet and Television), as well as refraining from greed which is the lack of satisfaction and contentment with materialistic matters (And that is related to fornication, as they both unleash themselves either with desire of money or sexual desires until there’s no longer room for God)
- It would seem that the apostle, Paul, when he was presenting the works of evil, he is placing our hands on the defectiveness of these works or their start which might seem like an insignificant matter then escalates, such as one might start with joking words then they transform into offensive words, arousing man’s desire towards fornication, uncleanness and covetousness, and the apostle meets the **“filthiness, foolish talking, [and] coarse jesting”** with counteractions that are suitable to the children of the light, which is **“giving of thanks”**.
  - **“Not that which I gained by labor and toil, but that which I found from grace”** ~ St. John Chrysostom.
  - **“As you were once in darkness you were not in the Lord, but now if you are illuminated, you are light in the Lord”** ~ St. Augustine

- Christian morals are not commandments, but rather a search for God's satisfaction, and He is a loving God that longs for His children to have His same exalted characteristics in order to please His heart. Therefore, what distinguishes between those who follow the works of darkness and those who follow the works of Light, is that the former ones practice what brings pleasure to themselves or others, as for the children of the Light, they give importance to pleasing God, which comforts them, for when God rejoices He fills the hearts of those who pleased Him with Joy, Peace and fulfillment.

### Verses 15-18

- We may notice that it doesn't suffice to examine our behaviour, but that wisdom in our actions is also necessary. As some may assume that depending on God may mean that thinking and wisdom should be ignored, that is why the apostle emphasized on wisdom and knowledge, as he says" [...]but understand what the will of the Lord is."
- A sign of rationality and wisdom, along with examining our behaviour is **"redeeming the time"**. For a believer should realize that his temporary life is his true treasure, on account of it being the cause of his eternal crown or his damnation; if he redeemed his time, his temporary efforts transforms into an eternal heavenly crown, and if he was neglectant in his limited days, his eternity is rightly destroyed!
- **"The days are evil"** as they deceive man, so that he may be compelled to temporary things as if the world was everlasting, in order to find his soul asked to stand in front of the just Judge, given account to its stewardship.
- Alcohol is one of the evil tricks for people to forget their pain and have some hours of joy, but it's fake joy, nothing good comes from it other than ruining your life and having an absence of mind.
- Instead of being drunk on alcohol, let's be filled with the spirit of God who lives in us so our souls are drunk with the love of God.
- ❖ **Verses 19-21**
- Praising and thanksgiving are works of the heavenly. If we accept in Christ the life of heaven, praise will be coming naturally from the heart.



- Thank God all the time, if you thank God only when you're happy and everything is going well then what's great about that. You have to thank God even when they're in tribulations or are sad.
- **Understanding of Submission:** is being like Jesus Christ who submitted till death. We have to submit in the fear of God to those we serve, without selfishness. For if we fear the earthly authorities then we should fear God first. Let's be in the image and likeness of Jesus Christ and serve others and that's going the extra mile by submitting to one another in the fear of God.
- ❖ **Verses 22-33**
- A family is a social entity standing on its own, but it is an example of the unity of church. St Paul clarifies the relationship between the husband and the wife and the role of each one towards the other. The husbands should love their wives as themselves and wives should respect and honour their husbands.
- Just like Christ is the head of the church and the church is the body of Christ, the husband is the head of the wife. And just like Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her, so shall the husband take care for the peace of his wife and make her happy. This is why he was given this privilege, not to control the wife or treat her with aggression. For the image of a family is an image of love and the love of the husband for his wife is shown by how he sacrifices himself for her. And the love of the wife for her husband is shown by her submission to him.
- The great mystery: the relationship between Christ and the church was a mystery until God revealed it to us. Just like the unity of the church with Christ is a great mystery, so is the unity of the husband and the wife. This is why marriage in the church is a sacrament.

## Chapter 6

### ❖ **Verses 1-4 The Keys to a Happy Family**

- Obey in the Lord: obedience is derived from Christ, just like Christ obeyed His Father till death and taught us to obey Him. This is the first commandment with a promise, you may live long on the earth as in you will be blessed while you are living in this world.

### ❖ **Verses 5-9**

- St Paul then talks about the servants after he talks about the family, and this is to include the servants in the family. He did not ask the servants to rebel against their masters, but he asked them to be obedient and serve with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ. He also tells the masters to do the same thing and not to threaten, remembering that their Master is in Heaven watching as well and He has no partiality but He has justice and treats everyone accordingly. If a master is merciful with his servant God is merciful, if a master threatens his servant he will be dealt with the same way.

### ❖ **Verses 10-20 - The Spiritual Weapons**

- During war we have to know the enemy, how to fight them, and what are the weapons used in this war.
- Our strength comes from the Lord, we have to put on the armor of God in order to fight the battle against the devil. Without God we will never be able to beat the devil as he does not fight us only with flesh and blood, but his battle is deceitful and has so many hiddens. Thus St. Paul asks us to put on the armor so as to stand against and defeat the wiles of the devil.
- There are two kinds of struggles required from us to be in Christ:
  - Prayer, fasting, bible study, good works
  - To stand against sin and be completely immune to it.
- Weapons are the continuous struggles of staying on the right path and being with Christ just like He is in us. In order to defeat the devil we have to make sure that we know how to use these weapons:
  - In order to be good with those weapons, we have to practice using them



- By always using these weapons whether we win or lose a previous battle. By winning the devil in one battle that does not guarantee we will win the next one, always be on guard and have your armor on.
- ❖ **First Weapon: Gird your Waist with Truth**
- Gird your waist with truth - this is what the Roman soldier would do, gird his loin to give his back strength. A traveler would also gird himself as a preparation for travel. Therefore: girded waist can be worn for two things:
  - To prepare for travel, as we are sojourners in this place waiting to travel to heaven for our eternal life.
  - To prepare for hard labour, we are in a continuous battle against Satan
- ❖ **Second Weapon: Breastplate of Righteousness**
- The Breastplate is a metal piece worn from neck to waist front and back and protects your chest, heart and back.
  - The heart is the centre of our spirituality and represents our will, desires and conscience. It is also the core of our feelings and reactions which is what the devil usually like to control
- Righteousness is what we get from God as He is the only righteous one, when you get close to Him you will be impacted by His righteousness because what guards me is His presence.
- ❖ **Third Weapon: Shod your Feet with the Preparation of the Gospel of Peace**
  - A soldier would wear the shoes to protect his feet from any thorns or from falling, so is the gospel that provides us with a solid ground to stand on during the battle.
  - We have to be ready and the peace of God is what allows us to be prepared. Preparation for the gospel of peace is by having our actions corresponding to the teachings of the bible so we can step face the struggles of the world with confidence.
- ❖ **Fourth Weapon: Shield of Faith**
  - The shield is made out of copper and the soldier ties it to his hands in order to block anything coming his way. Our faith is like a shield, it helps

us block the darts of the evil one. Our faith comes by being with God, trusting in Him and having hope in Him.

❖ **Fifth Weapon: Helmet of Salvation**

- The helmet is worn to protect a soldier's head. In this case it means to protect our mindset, our thoughts and understanding because the devil will always play in our head and try to make us forget God's promises to us, His power, righteousness and love for us and will put doubts in our heads against God's care for us. In order to protect our thoughts such as (lust, judgement, hatred...) we have to wear the helmet of salvation since Christ is the hope of our salvation and thinking of Him will save us from the snares of the devil.

❖ **Sixth Weapon: The Sword of the Spirit**

- What is meant by the sword here is the Holy Spirit, or the word of God which was written by the authors of the bible, through the Holy Spirit. With the sword we can cut out any sin in us and confronting those thoughts with the word of God (even Jesus confronted the devil with the word of God when He was tempted)
- St Paul concludes his speech about the spiritual weapons by saying pray, 'praying always by prayer and supplication' because those weapons are a gift from God that we cannot obtain without praying.
- If God's conversation with us (the Word of God) is the sword of the spirit that we can fight temptation with, then our conversation with him is (prayer) where we can get help and support in all things we do.
- A person who prays from the depth of his heart does not feel the time or does not feel weary, but will get strength from the spirit that will provide him with words and thoughts and this comes to a person by growing, diving deep, being knowledgeable and by experience.
- St Paul was imprisoned in Rome and the people in Ephesus were worried about him, therefore, he sent them Tychus, his disciple to reassure them and comfort their hearts.



# A Relationship with God

Our relationship with God should be a person-to-person type of relationship initiated by faith, believes, & discipline. This relationship should grow & be influenced through your own experiences with GOD. It achieves maturity when it is a personal, "Him and I relationship".

As any valid relationship, our relationship with GOD should be day-to-day. We need to build a connection with Jesus Christ the loving, compassionate GOD who is vitally and personally interested in each one of us.

St. Paul, in his words to the Galatians, described his relationship with GOD as Him and I; "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

St. Augustine also described his own relationship with GOD as though he is the only person living on this Earth; "Indeed, a GOD Who loves us as if there were only one of us in the universe."

Many years before Jesus Christ, GOD revealed himself to Abraham. Abraham had a personal relationship with GOD that started with faith & belief. A relationship so strong, Abraham could communicate with Him. This bond grows just as any bond would between 2 friends who know each other inside and out. Abraham left his country, trusting GOD, who called upon him to find the new nation in Canaan. Abraham trusted GOD and was willing to sacrifice Isaac, his own son, because that is what GOD had simply asked of him. The personal relationship between Abraham and GOD was a strong relationship shaped by trust, promises, and a covenant. For this reason, Abraham obeyed God without a doubt.

When GOD talked to Moses, through the burning bush, GOD introduced Himself, "I am the God of your father the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Exodus 3:6).

If GOD can be the 'GOD of Jacob', a sinful man who has done evil acts in his lifetime, and God still referred to Himself as the 'God of Jacob', we should believe and trust that HE can be our GOD as well. No matter how sinful we are, all we truly need is a personal relationship with GOD that can guide & support us to always repent and live our life in unity with Jesus Christ. Jacob repented and was later blessed by GOD. He spent a full night praying to the LORD, remembering GOD's promises to him, and seeking GOD's strength to deliver him from his brother Essa. This personal relationship between GOD and Jacob was defined when Jacob said, "So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: "For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." (Genesis 32:30)

GOD is looking for a personal relationship with us, He is always talking to us, "I will take you as My people, and I will be your God."(Exodus 6:7)

Moses' relationship with GOD is also a personal relationship between 2 people; GOD & Moses: "So the LORD spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend" (Exodus 33:11). We see this again in the book of Deuteronomy, when Moses died, "But since then there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face" (Deuteronomy 32:10)

This face-to-face personal relationship with God is what we are called for. We need this personal relationship to fulfill our humanity. The presence of God in our life gives it great meaning.

- You can't fulfill your purpose on Earth without a relationship with God.
- God created us in His image and granted us the ability to talk to Him and build a sound relationship with Him.
- After St. Augustine studied all the sciences of philosophy and wisdom, he said in his confessions that he had tried everything in life to satisfy his desires. However, in his spiritual experience, he said that God has created us to serve Him. Our souls and hearts will rest only in God.
- Man can never find his joy and peace away from God.

The personal relationship with GOD is a relationship of Love and Knowledge

- He loves us and wants us to love Him.
  - ❖ Isaiah 45:22  
"Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth"
  - "Look to Me" means that God is asking us to give Him more attention, more time, and more emotions.
  - We are busy with everything except our Lord Jesus Christ.
  - The Lord is inviting us to come to Him, do you think the Lord needs us? Are we going to add anything? Why does He insist on us coming to Him?
  
- Our love to God is a consequence to the realization of his great love for us.
  - ❖ 1 John 4:19  
"We love Him because He first loved us."
  - ❖ John 13:1  
"He loved them to the end."
  - God loves us because we are His children.
  - He loves us and was crucified for us.
  - The devil wants us to doubt God's love for us.
  - The devil wants to increase the gap between us and the Lord Jesus Christ and become doubtful of the word of God. Making us question ourselves by thinking "why did God create us? or why are we here?..."
  - We have heard about this love, but we may have not experienced it.
  - We might not feel that love, though the Lord Jesus Christ has said
    - ❖ Malachi 1:2  
"I have loved you"
    - ❖ John 15:9  
"Abide in My love."
  
- Know Him and enjoy His gifts:
  - There is a big difference between knowing a person only by name and knowing them by meeting them and dealing with them.
  - The knowledge of God means that you not only hear about Him but get to know Him personally.
  - St Paul said,
    - ❖ 2 Peter 3:18  
"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ"
  - It is necessary for us to implement this command.



- We need to know more about our Lord Jesus Christ not only through the Holy Bible but also through prayers and having a strong personal relationship with Him.
  - ❖ Jeremiah 9:24
    - “But let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, That I am the Lord, exercising loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight, says the Lord.”

#### Building a Personal relationship with God:

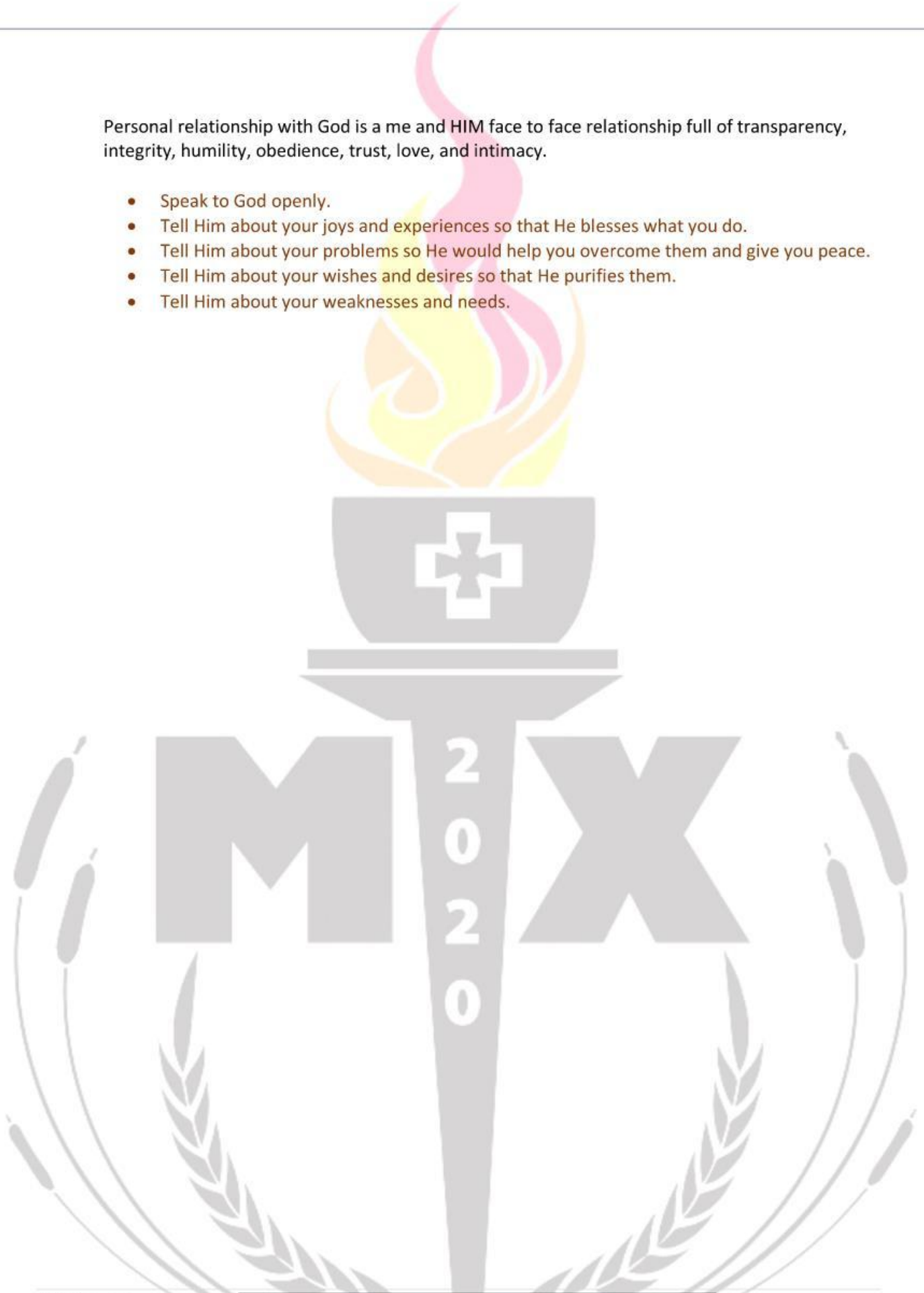
- The disciple whom Jesus loved is not just John or Lazarus but each one of us.
- To personally know God, one needs to experience Him through faith and submission to His Will by:
  - Prayer (Our father, Jesus short prayers, Agbeya, liturgy.....)
  - Continuous repentance.
  - Personal interaction and participating in the Holy Sacraments.
  - Reading His word in the Holy Bible as it is personal promise, message or command.
  - Setting a spiritual cannon for yourself with your father of confession to guide you in strengthening your relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.
  - Set daily, weekly, and monthly goals for your spiritual life.

#### How do you spend half an hour with our Lord Jesus Christ?

- Begin by singing a spiritual song or hymn
  - ❖ Psalms 100:2
    - “Serve the Lord with gladness, come before His presence with singing”
- Pray the Agpeya Prayer for the time of day.
- Give thanks to the Lord for all the material and spiritual blessings.
  - ❖ 1 Thessalonians 5:18
    - “In everything give thanks”
- Examine yourself daily.
  - ❖ Psalms 66:18
    - “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear”
- Read the Holy Bible with contemplation using some verses in your prayers. Contemplate on a verse that touches you and use it as a subject of prayer to God.
- Pray for others.
  - ❖ 1 Timothy 2:1-2
    - “Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all Godliness and reverence”
- Pray for your personal needs.
  - ❖ Matthew 7:7
    - “Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened to you”
- Quiet your mind to hear the voice of God. Say a few words like I love You O Lord, my strength, I want to feel Your presence.
- Finally, conclude your prayer with a hymn such as one for the saints or your intercessor.

Personal relationship with God is a me and HIM face to face relationship full of transparency, integrity, humility, obedience, trust, love, and intimacy.

- Speak to God openly.
- Tell Him about your joys and experiences so that He blesses what you do.
- Tell Him about your problems so He would help you overcome them and give you peace.
- Tell Him about your wishes and desires so that He purifies them.
- Tell Him about your weaknesses and needs.





# Relationships – Give & Take

*God created us as social beings. Therefore, everyone needs to have healthy and fulfilling relationships in order to fulfill God's purpose for our lives. Relationships in one's life can take several forms; such as one's relationship with the Church, the Bible, friends, the other gender, media, and how one carries themselves.*

## 1. Myself: Loving Yourself in a Spiritual Manner

❖ Sirach 30:24

*"<sup>24</sup> Have pity on your own soul, pleasing God, and contain yourself: gather up your heart in his holiness: and drive away sadness far from you."*

❖ 1 Timothy 4:7

*"<sup>7</sup> But reject profane and old wives' fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness."*

*Reflection:*

- God created each one of us wonderful and unique and loves us as we are; so love and accept yourself as you are, and don't compare yourself to others.
- Keep close to God, and get filled by Him and grow in Him. Use the talents He gave you to glorify His name and build His kingdom within you.
- Know your talents and use them to benefit yourself and the others.
- Know your weaknesses and work to change whatever you can and never give up on yourself.
- Build yourself in all aspects, learn new things, play sports, be part of community activities, learn new hobbies.
- Use your time wisely to grow and benefit yourself and the others.

*Prayer:*

*Teach me O Lord to love myself and offer it to You with love. Teach me to live according to Your will for You are my God and in You I trust. Help me accept myself as You gave it to me, for I am created in Your image and am precious in Your eyes. Lead me in Your way and help me obey Your commandments.*

## 2. My Church:

The Church gives us an image of what Heaven will be like. Therefore, it is important to have a strong relationship with the Church.

### *Regular Attendance:*

- Is the cornerstone in building my spiritual life. It is where I receive the means of grace to support me on my spiritual journey by leading me to continuous repentance and enlightening my understanding with God's word and wisdom.
- No wonder then that the devil tries to hinder my attendance in church. He tries to stop me from going to church in the first place. He tries to stop me from benefiting from my attendance by distracting me from focusing on God.

### *Congregation:*

- Church connects me with the other members of the body of Christ and prepares me for eternal life with God, the angels and saints.
- The Church is the congregation of believers, gathered in the sanctified house of God, led by the clergy, surrounded by angels and saints, around the Holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- Church cannot be a place for mere social interactions or just fun. It is the place where we meet with our Lord Jesus Christ, hear His word, and receive His Body and Blood.

### *When in Church...*

- Arrive early. You are coming to meet God
- Do not sit when we are supposed to stand.
- Do not be distracted by your phone or talking with others.
- Do not be distracted by looking at others around you. Focus on the prayers you are attending.
- Participate in worship with all your senses.
- Dress modestly, wearing clothes appropriate for church.
- Do not leave until the priest says, "Go in peace".
- Do not move too much, and if needed, walk slowly and quietly.
- Learn about the liturgy so you can focus and be engaged.
- Prepare to attend the liturgy from the night before, sleep early, read a spiritual book, listen to spiritual songs or sermons. Prepare your mind to attend the liturgy



### 3. My Holy Bible:

My relationship with the Holy Bible starts with owning it and revolves around reading it, understanding it, contemplating on it, studying it, memorizing it, and living its commandments.

- **Own it:** Everyone should own a Holy Bible and use it all the time, never forgetting to read it.
- **Love it:** Love the Holy Bible because it's God's message to you that you want to keep reading and re-reading.
- **Make it a habit** to read your bible daily. Set a specific time to read your bible. Do not rush and read with concentration. You will benefit from the Holy Bible when you read it regularly and make it a habit. Regular reading of the Holy Bible will help keep God's word on your mind
- **Make an effort** to understand what you are reading, search for interpretations, attend bible study, listen to sermons explaining the bible.

*Find out why we love the Holy Bible in these verses:*

❖ Psalm 19:10

“<sup>10</sup> More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb”

❖ Psalm 19:96

“<sup>96</sup> I have seen the consummation of all perfection, But Your commandment is exceedingly broad.”

❖ Psalm 119:103

“<sup>103</sup> How sweet are Your words to my taste, Sweeter than honey to my mouth!”

❖ Psalm 119:127

“<sup>127</sup> Therefore I love Your commandments More than gold, yes, than fine gold!”

❖ Psalm 119:140

“<sup>140</sup> Your word is very pure; Therefore Your servant loves it.”

❖ Psalm 119:162

“<sup>162</sup> I rejoice at Your word As one who finds great treasure.”

❖ Psalm 1:2

“<sup>2</sup> But his delight is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night.”

❖ Joshua 1:8

“<sup>8</sup> This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.”

#### 4. My Friends:

Your choice of friends today will affect your future. This is what the Holy Bible says,

❖ Proverbs 13:20

“<sup>20</sup> He who walks with wise men will be wise, But the companion of fools will be destroyed.”

- The Holy Bible mentions many people that had friendships. There is one whose friendship saved his life (1 Samuel 19). There is another whose friendships caused his destruction (1 Kings 12).
- Friendship is a relationship between two or more people that is characterized by love and serenity and filled with harmony.
- Therefore, it is important to make sure of the following before choosing a friend:
  - Look for someone who has common goals, hobbies, and plans.
  - Look for someone who is pushing you towards God not away from him
  - Do not neglect your parents' opinion about your friends.
  - Obey God in ending any friendships that do not please Him.
  - Start friendships yourself. Do not wait for others to like you, but be the one who initiates friendship with others.
  - See the influence of your friends on you and be wise to stop the negative ones.
  - Build your friends up and do not continue in a relation that puts you down or makes you feel bad about yourself.
  -

Here are the characteristics of a successful friendship:

- **Being there in the time of hardship.** During hardships, this is the most important time for your friends to be there, like the friends of Job. (Job 2:11-13)
- **There are levels of friendship.** It is wrong to get close to others at the same level by opening up to everyone and sharing your deepest secrets.



- **There are conditions to friendship.** One of which is to not harm the individual or delay one's relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord commanded us to cut our hand if it makes us sin (Mark 9:43). He meant in this verse to get away from anyone who would make us sin.
- "Show me your friends and I will tell you who you are." We are a product of the people we surround ourselves with. As much as our family's shape who we are, friends are responsible for a big portion of who we have become and who we will be.

Find out how these verses explain the principals of successful friendships:

❖ Sirach 6:14

"<sup>14</sup>A faithful friend is a strong shelter, and whoever has found one has found a treasure."

❖ Sirach 7:20

"<sup>20</sup>Do not betray your friend for the sake of money, and you should not spurn your dearest brother for the sake of gold."

❖ Sirach 19:13-18

"<sup>13</sup>Correct a friend, though perhaps there was a misunderstanding, and he may say, "I did not do it." Or, if he did do it, correct him, so that he may not do it again.  
<sup>14</sup>Correct your neighbor, for perhaps he did not say it. But if he did say it, correct him, so that he may not say it again.

<sup>15</sup>Correct your friend. For often a fault has been committed.

<sup>16</sup>And do not believe every word. There is one who slips with his word, but not with his heart.

<sup>17</sup>For who is there who has not offended with his words? Correct your neighbor before you reprimand him.

<sup>18</sup>And make a place for the fear of the Most High. For all wisdom is fear of God, and it is wise to fear God, and in all wisdom is the orderly disposition of the law."

## 5. The Opposite Gender:

Dealing with the opposite gender is an important skill necessary for life. We begin to acquire it gradually starting from the age of maturity. Here are some important guidelines for dealing with the opposite gender.

- **Socially:** It must be in a group without placing more emphasis or attention to one person. It must be equal to all as much as possible.
- **Treating all with respect:** It must be based on respect to all without ruining the friendship by joking inappropriately or seeking attention by inappropriate attire or conduct.

- **Having limits:** There must be limits to the time spent. There are also place limitations. Also, there are topic limitations.
- **In a Christian way:** dealing with the opposite gender is characterized simply by viewing everyone as the image of God. The way we talk should be holy and our conversations should not be full of profanities or attention-seeking or pretending to be someone that you are not.

## 6. The Media:

Media can have positive effects; however, its negative effects surpass them. These negative effects are apparent in:

- **Socially:** Spending hours on social media, affect your social relationships. Makes you more closed on yourself, hinders your social skills.
- **Cultural effect:** Spending several hours on the media turns one's mind into a passive receiver instead of an active critic that chooses what edifies their life and rejects what destroys it.
- The Holy Bible tells us to pray,
  - ❖ Ephesians 1:17-18  
 “<sup>17</sup> that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, <sup>18</sup> the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,”
- **Behavioral effect:**
  - i) One can learn negative behaviors from what is presented to them through the media.
  - ii) All the time virtual life we see on the screens, can create comparisons and refusal of your life although the reality is not what we see on screens.
  - iii) Pretending to be someone else on the screen, faking your personality or even your look.

Reasons for the great effect of media:

- **The vast availability:** Media is readily available via the social media, television, internet, and newspapers.
- **Media uses multiple senses:** the eyes to see, the ears to hear, and the fingers to feel the keyboard or screen.



- **Internet:** With the internet, it is easy to access movies, shows, books, and news quickly and easily. The cost is usually little or nothing at all.
- **Media moves the soul.** Drama, comedy, or action movies speak to the soul and move one's emotions.

❖ 1 Corinthians 6:12

"<sup>12</sup>All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any."

❖ 1 Corinthians 10:23

"<sup>23</sup>All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify."

*Signs of Addiction to the Media/Internet:*

- Wasting too much time on media throughout the day
- Neglecting responsibilities and duties.
- Gradually increasing the time spent on media.
- Lacking communication with others.
- Isolation
- Grumbling and rejection of everything and neglecting a life of obedience.
- Leads to anxiety, depression, and anger.

**It becomes a battle within a person that requires great strife and needs the grace of God to support and help them to conquer.**

# Memorization

## 1. Second Watch of the Midnight Hour of the Agpeya – The Gospel according to St. Luke (Luke 7:36-50)

*Then one of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him. And He went unto the Pharisee's house, and sat down to eat. And, behold, a woman, in the city, who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat to eat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at His feet behind Him weeping, and began to wash His feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head, and kissed His feet, and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he spoke within himself, saying, "This man, if He were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is who touched Him, for she is a sinner." And Jesus answered and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he said, "Master, say it." "There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he freely forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him more?" Simon answered and said, "I suppose that he, to whom he forgave more." And He said unto him, "You have rightly judged." And He turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered into your house; you gave me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. You gave me no kiss, but this woman since the time I came in has not ceased to kiss My feet. My head with oil you did not anoint, but this woman has anointed My feet with ointment. Therefore I say unto you, 'Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much, but to whom little is forgiven, the same loved little.'" And He said unto her, "Your sins are forgiven." And they who sat to eat with Him began to say within themselves, "Who is this who forgives sins also?" And He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."*



## 2. Sayings of the Fathers

- ❖ “When we converse of spiritual things, let there be nothing secular in our souls, nothing earthly, let all such thoughts retire, and let us be entirely given up to the hearing the divine oracles only.” ~ St. John Chrysostom
- ❖ “By Scripture we may disprove what is false, be corrected, be brought to a right understanding, and be comforted and consoled.” ~ St. John Chrysostom
- ❖ “The Spirit, the Comforter, is sent by the Son, not as Angels, or Prophets, or Apostles are sent, but as the Spirit must be sent which is of one nature with the Divine wisdom and power that sends Him.” ~ St. Didymus the Blind
- ❖ “Pride extinguishes charity: therefore, humility strengthens charity; charity extinguishes sins. Humility goes along with confession, the humility by which we confess ourselves sinners: this is humility, not to say it with the tongue, as if only to avoid arrogancy, lest we should displease men if we should say that we are righteous.” ~ St. Augustine
- ❖ “The Spirit reveals all things. He is going to set forth the mysteries of God. Now the knowledge of the mysteries of God, the Spirit alone comprehends, who also searches the deep things of Him.” ~ St. John Chrysostom