

THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

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INTRODUCTION

God gave special attention to the family, and established a strong basis for the marital relationship.

‡ In Creating Adam:

God created Adam in His own image and likeness, *“Then God said, let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness”* (Genesis 1:26), also, *“So God created man in His Own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them”* (Genesis 1:27).

‡ In Blessing Marriage and Child Bearing:

The Holy Bible says: *“Then God blessed them, and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it’”* (Genesis 1:28).

‡ In Creating Eve:

We notice that God did not create Eve to be any less than Adam, but to be, *“a helper comparable to him”* (Genesis 2:18). In creating her from one of Adam's ribs, the Lord is declaring that Eve is not only equal to him, but a part of him; a bone of his bones, and flesh of his flesh (Genesis 2:21).

Moreover, the verse goes on to say, *“And He brought her to the man”* (Genesis 2:22). In this expression, honour is bestowed on Eve for it is God Himself who takes her to Adam. The verse also honours the marital relationship, for God Himself cared about it from the very beginning.

For this reason, Adam felt the importance of Eve, for not only was she a part of him, but given to him by God. Hence Adam declared : *“This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman because she was taken out of Man”* (Genesis 2:23).

The Importance of the Marital Relationship

Concerning marriage, it is written in the same chapter of Genesis: *“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh”* (Genesis 2:24).

The Lord gives great care concerning marriage, and this is apparent in the example of Christ attending and blessing the wedding at Cana of Galilee, despite the fact that the time of His service had not yet commenced.

In accordance with God's care for marriage, the Church also cares deeply about this sacrament. It considers this rite, which is full of prayers and teachings, to be a holy mystery. During the rite, the Holy Spirit comes to bless the marriage, as God has blessed it since the beginning of Creation.

For the sake of our dear young men and young women, we will mention some key principles concerning Matrimony, which is a sacrament so important and so holy.

PART ONE

**INGREDIENTS FOR A
SUCCESSFUL MARRIAGE**

Chapter One:

“WHAT TO CONSIDER WHEN CHOOSING A PARTNER”

1. GENERAL CONSIDERATION

A person may search many years for a partner. But first of all, the question needs to be asked : On what basis do you choose your partner?

Do you search for a perfect person, or do you care only about certain aspects and ignore others?

A person may search for someone who is physically beautiful, and ignore the beauty of the spirit. Another may search for wealth, as if they are marrying money rather than marrying a person. A person may even exhaust themselves searching for their future partner amongst well known families, and turn a blind eye to their education or age, which may be inappropriate for them. A person may also search for a partner who has material assets, such as property, rather than searching for a person who has a loving and tolerant heart. Another person might search for someone to will enable him to migrate, and give no regard for their characteristics. Likewise, a person may travel to Egypt to find a partner, who is a total stranger, and find comfort in marrying a woman, for example, who has lived all her life in Egypt and so is customary and traditional.

We will find that with all these, further consideration is required.

Ø *To the person who seeks to marry beauty ...*

It is better to look, not only at physical beauty, but beauty and perfection in other things. Look at the spirit and the virtues, before considering the physical aspect. Consider wisdom, before giving attention to appearance, colour and image. Therefore, before giving consideration to external beauty, first search within for the spiritual beauty.

In the words of the wise King Solomon : ***“Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised”*** (Proverbs 31:30).

To him, I advise, do not look at physical beauty, which may cause her to be proud and boastful, but search for a humble heart that will raise you up, and accept you as her head and the head of the whole house. In her humility you will find wisdom, for the Holy Bible says, ***“Those who are of a perverse heart are an abomination to the Lord, but such as are blameless in their ways are His delight”*** (Proverbs 11:20).

Do not focus on physical beauty alone, for you will quickly become accustomed to their looks and consider it normal, but you will never become accustomed to their pride, or boastful nature, or their weakness in spirituality. Search for a partner who will care about your needs, rather than care about the way you look.

Although beauty is a gift from God, we must search for a person who is gifted in many areas, most importantly being adorned with the gifts of the Holy Spirit: *“love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control”* (Galatians 5:22-23).

Ø To the person who follows their emotions in choosing a marriage partner, I advise ...

Control your feelings with an enlightened mind. Do not let your feelings take priority. Let your emotions be reasonable, and with clear thinking. During the process of considering marriage, think, and allow others to share their thoughts with you, so that the decision is not made based on feelings alone.

In addition, it is noteworthy to mention that not every friend can be considered suitable as a partner. It is important to ask yourself, what attracted you first of all to them in order to take them as a friend? Do you feel comfortable with the thought of your friend becoming your partner? For the situation may be that what you liked in them as a friend is not so attractive in considering them as a partner. Think wisely, therefore, in order to make the right decision.

My beloved, marry one who is from the church, for they will give you both social and spiritual comfort. If, however, you marry a person of the world, based on their appearance, they will no doubt give you emotional satisfaction for a period of time, but this will be followed by instability, during your times of spiritual weakness.

Do not marry a person of the world, because regardless of how close you are, they will take you away from the church and lead you into the world. But those from the church will attract you to the church and bring you closer to God, thereby sharing your lives together unto eternity.

Ø *To the person who seeks after riches ...*

Consider the advice of the wise King Solomon, who despite his incredible riches, declared: ***“For wisdom is better than rubies, and all the things one may desire cannot be compared with her”*** (Proverbs 8:11).

Likewise, Abigail, who was very beautiful, was married to a very wealthy man (1 Samuel 25:2), but her real beauty was her mind and wisdom, and for this reason the Holy Bible praised her wisdom before her beauty: ***“And blessed is your advice...”*** (1 Samuel 25:33). Therefore, my beloved, when David later married her, he considered the beauty of her mind and wisdom, before considering her appearance and wealth.

So look for a pious wife whose richness is in her wisdom and not in her wealth, a wife about whom the Holy Bible says, ***“Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies”*** (Proverbs 31:10).

Wisdom may result in wealth, but wealth shall never ensure you wisdom. The wise King Solomon says: ***“Every wise woman builds her house, but the foolish pulls it down with her hands”*** (Proverbs 14:1). Hence, a wise woman may help you in

obtaining riches, whilst a wealthy woman lacking wisdom will ensure you lose the richness of your spirit.

Choose a partner who is compatible with you in:

‡ *AGE*

I advise that you consider marriage when you are at an appropriate age, for this will ensure stability in your married life. Do not rush to get married until you are mentally, emotionally and financially stable. At this time, you will be mature enough to bear the responsibility that comes with marriage. In regards to the man, the suitable age for marriage may differ from one to another, based on the level and type of education, and the type of bringing up and thinking.

Regarding the woman, three factors constitute the appropriate age for marriage :

Ø *She must be at a suitable age for marriage ...*

That is, being at an age where she can bear the responsibility of family life. It is impossible for a girl, who is not able to take responsibility for her own life, to be responsible, all of a sudden, for a household.

Ø *She must be at an age suitable for child bearing ...*

This is not the case, of course, during adolescent years, or in old age when difficulties in child bearing and associated risks with the conceived child, is most likely to occur.

Ø *She must be at an age that is relative to the age of the husband ...*

That is, the husband should not be much older than his wife, otherwise he may fall into the trap of treating his equal as his daughter, rather than his partner and, *“helper comparable to him”* (Genesis 2:18). Likewise, if the age gap is too big, the wife may feel that she is dealing with a father, instead of a close husband who can share her feelings. In addition, it is not advisable that the wife be older than the husband, because this can result in many psychological problems.

So before entering into the marriage process, think carefully whether your partner is compatible to you in age, and whether the woman is at a suitable age for child bearing.

‡ *EDUCATION*

Before rushing into marriage, the aspect of education requires deep and careful consideration. Therefore, when searching for your future partner:

Ø *Take into consideration their level of education ...*

There must be compatibility between the partners in terms of their level of education, or else conflicts may result. For example, it is not advisable that the woman be better educated than the man, or else the man may feel he is less than her and she also may humiliate him. Likewise, it is not advisable that she be less educated than him, or else there will result a gap in mutual understanding and common attitude.

Ø So too, take into consideration their type of education ...

The type of education can affect the way one thinks and deals with different situations. For example, those who are scientifically inclined tend to be characterised as being analytical and organised in their way of thinking, whilst those who have an inclination for the humanities, tend to be sensitive, and require a tender approach due to their sensitive and romantic way of thinking and behaving. Therefore, it is important to deal with your partner in a way which suits their characteristics, based on their line of study.

Ø In addition to the level and type of education, the place of receiving education may also impact a person ...

Those who were educated in private schools, differ from those who were educated in public schools. And those who studied at a city university differ from those who studied in a small country town. In addition, those who were educated in the same city where they have lived all their life, differ from those who moved away from home and lived in boarding homes, and youth hostels, thereby enabling them to mix with various types of people.

Hence, there are many factors which may influence a person's personality, based on their education and upbringing, and these factors must not be ignored when choosing a partner. People who spend their whole life living in the country, differ from those who were brought up in big cities; being exposed to many types of people. Therefore it is difficult for a person who has lived all their life in the country, for example, to marry a city person, for their concept of life would differ.

So think carefully before choosing your partner, and take into consideration all these aspects, regardless of how trivial you may think some of them are.

‡ SOCIAL COMPATIBILITY

Some youth may search for partners who are from families with high social standard, without even considering their own social level, but for those who seek happiness in marriage, I advise them to:

Ø *Consider a family whose social standing and lifestyle is compatible with your own ...*

For being associated with a 'name' will not bring you happiness. If you are socially incompatible with your partner, you may not be able to offer them the same type of lifestyle they are used to. We see this clearly when King Saul asked David the Prophet to marry his daughter: *"Here is my older daughter Merab; I will give her to you as a wife. Only be valiant for me, and fight the Lord's battles"* (1 Samuel 18:17). And rather than rejoicing in King Saul's words, David declared, *"Who am I, and what is my life or my father's family in Israel, that I should be son-in-law to the king?"* (1 Samuel 18:18).

David's response was from his heart, and it is likewise reflected in his words to Saul's servants: *"Does it seem to you a light thing to be a king's son-in-law, seeing I am a poor and a lightly esteemed man?"* (1 Samuel 18:23).

Therefore, search for a partner who is compatible with you in regards to both education, and social standing.

Ø *Social compatibility is not only in terms of materialism, but also lifestyle...*

For example, a wealthy person residing in the country, differs from a middle class person living in the city; lifestyle types differ. A farmer differs from a tradesperson, who also differs from a 'white collar' professional. Imagine the situation whereby a farmer who tills his land for a living, marries a city woman working, for example, in the tourism industry!

Social and family compatibility is just as important as being compatible in your personalities, so please do not disregard this important aspect also.

Therefore my beloved, do not haste in searching for a partner, by considering certain aspects and ignoring many more. Think carefully, pray constantly, ask for God's involvement, and seek the advice of experienced people.

2. SPECIAL CONSIDERATION FOR IMMIGRANTS

There are two types of immigrants :

1. Those who immigrate legally, and are permanent residents; they are more settled and have more of a chance to search for a partner, without the need to rush.

2. Those who travel overseas on either a study/work/visiting visa, with the intention of hoping to stay. These people rush into finding a partner for the main purpose of becoming permanent residents of the country.

Accordingly, marriage in the lands of immigration occurs for one of the following three reasons :

‡ *MARRYING FOREIGNERS (that is, non-Egyptians) ...*

For the purpose of personal gain - that is, to become permanent residents. For sure, these people commit a big mistake, for not only do they lose their lives on earth as also in heaven, but are also the cause of many marital problems. Imagine - which modern, western woman would consider marrying a traditional man, who has lived his whole life in a third world country, and possesses nothing?

Another scenario would be an older woman who has wasted her life living in sin, and is now wanting a youth to marry. Would you consider such an arrangement which would lead to your destruction, simply for the purpose of personal gain? Being older, she may not be able to bear you children, and thus you will inherit nothing, for, ***“Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord”*** (Psalm 127:3).

Regarding marriage for personal gain, this may take place in one of three ways :-

Ø PAPER MARRIAGE :

Marriage, on paper, is done by a solicitor, and he is paid accordingly. Hence, because it is only a 'paper' marriage, the consummation between the man and woman does not take place - it is just a marriage of convenience. However, do you consider this deception and dishonesty against the government, Christian in attitude? Countries, such as the USA, have finally woken up to such fraud, and have therefore imposed two conditions for local residents marrying non-citizens : 1. the couple must be together for at least two years prior to the marriage, 2. the husband and wife must live together after the marriage. From time to time, the government sends representatives to do spot checks, to ensure that the couple are residing together.

Ø CIVIL MARRIAGE :

Whereby the marriage takes place in an office rather than in a church. The reason for this is that after gaining residency, they can then divorce and marry another of their choice. However, during the period it takes to gain residency, how can these people live in adultery, during which time they will be unable to receive Holy Communion, and thereby lose their spirituality?

How can these people live in deceit for so many years? How can these men, for example, after gaining residency, abandon their wives in search for another? What terrible impression about Egyptian men would these women have ?!

How can a person, moving to a new country, begin a new life by living in deceit? How can this possibly be when we pray each morning, *"Let us enjoy a fresh start"*?

Ø CHURCH MARRIAGE :

A person living in the fear of God, may decide to marry in the church. The partner accepts to join the church, not because of their love to God or conviction about the church, but rather, because of their desire to marry. Many problems occur in such a marriage.

‡ *RUNNING AFTER AN EMOTION OR DESIRE ...*

There is no doubt that there are many good foreigners (that is, non-Egyptians), but the majority of them are not suitable for our youth, due to the great cultural gap in attitude and beliefs.

‡ *MEN MARRYING WOMEN FROM EGYPT ...*

Many Egyptian men who live in immigrant countries, travel to Egypt for the purpose of marrying an Egyptian woman, and so avoid the problems of marrying non Egyptians. However, they do not realise that in so doing, they will actually encounter many types of problems, due to the following reasons :

Ø *Haste in choosing a partner :*

Because time is limited, the man chooses his partner in haste, and many times, his choice is not the correct one. This is because there are usually incompatibilities in personality and characteristics, which he is not able to discover due to the shortness of time. Sometimes, he may even leave the choice of choosing a partner to his relatives, simply because he does not have the time to search. However, this is such a strange concept that a person who may refuse the advice of others concerning what he wears or what he eats, should allow them to choose for him his life time partner!

Ø *The quick marriage :*

Here lies another problem, not only is the choice of a partner made in haste, but so too the marriage. Hence, because of the short period of ('holiday') time, the couple are not even given the opportunity to get to know each other well, or have the chance to exchange thoughts and feelings. And what is even more surprising, is that at times the men come to Egypt during fasting periods, and ask the church to see to their circumstances, instead of them beginning a new life seeing to the laws of the Church!

Then after this quick marriage, one of two things occur :

1. If the man is a permanent resident, he straightaway takes his wife with him overseas, or;
2. If the man only has the green card, for example in the USA, he leaves his wife in Egypt, and goes back to finish all

the paperwork. Hence, this woman who is not only newly married, but also newly known to her husband, remains away from him for a period of about two years, following the quick marriage.

Regardless of which of the above two occur, the fact remains that the woman leaves her parents and family, and everything familiar to her, to live in a new society and new culture, with a man whom she has only known for a few days. It is possible also that because of the haste, the husband may feel that his wife is a stranger to him and not suitable for him after all. The wife may also feel that the new society is very foreign to her in terms of being:

- New in the quick pace of life, which is quite unlike Egypt.
- New in the lack of family and social ties, which in Egypt are warm and strong. In Western societies generally, these strong ties do not exist, in fact it is not uncommon to not know who your neighbour is.
- New in its language, everybody everywhere are speaking English, for example, and the dialect and accent spoken are different to what was taught in Egypt.
- New in the nature of its work, due to long working hours, the husband comes home tired, and so does not give any time to his wife. A woman who has spent all day by herself at home requires someone to talk to and share feelings with

her, and yet, the husband, due to his exhaustion, cannot offer her the appropriate care and attention.

So what is the result?

Ø Psychological problems and nervous breakdowns :

There is no doubt the wife will suffer these problems, because she has gone from an environment in Egypt which kept her busy, by working, socialising, going to church, and so on, to a foreign environment in which she cannot even talk to her husband. Even if she is dwelling in a palace and living in luxury, she will still suffer psychological distress, and this distress will in turn be placed on the husband, creating many problems.

Ø Homesickness:

Because of her loneliness, she will feel homesick for her parents and family, and hence, she will feel the need to call overseas frequently. This also results in two problems : 1. The high costs involved in frequently calling overseas, 2. The desire that her parents visit her frequently, which creates financial strain on the husband, and contributes thus to marital problems.

Ø The desire to stay with her parents in Egypt:

At times it occurs that the wife visits her parents, and despite her husband's plea, chooses to extend her period of stay with her parents. However, more destructive is when she refuses to return to her husband, and decides to remain in her homeland for good.

Ø *The need to work:*

The wife may decide to seek work due to either boredom, or her husband's push for her to share in the financial responsibilities. This also leads to many problems:

- Because she is not used to working such long and hard hours, she will come home exhausted, and not have the energy to see to the needs of the house or her family. This will result in her becoming nervous and stressed.
- Because of time constraints, the wife may neglect her children, and instead employ a nanny or housekeeper to care for them. But what shall the children learn from this person in terms of morality and spirituality? They may have totally different views in such matters, which in turn will affect the children. Likewise, what type of relationship would eventuate between the mother and children, who are not given the time to enjoy their mother's warmth and kindness and guidance? Rather, the children will be raised by caretakers, absorbing their behaviour and attitudes, and gradually distancing themselves from their parents.
- Through work, she may encounter colleagues who may negatively influence her concerning various thoughts and concepts, which are totally foreign to her, and because of her naivety, could be potentially destructive. These concepts may affect her dealings at home, with her husband and children. She will become enlightened concerning her rights rather than her responsibilities.

For this reason, I advise every wife migrating to a new country, do not rush into finding employment until :

- you feel close to your new husband
- you have raised your children, and so avoid the potential problems of finding for them babysitters
- you initially seek, part time work, rather than full time
- you find appropriate work, with good people

‡ *MEN FROM EGYPT MARRYING EGYPTIAN WOMEN FROM IMMIGRANT COUNTRIES*

A man, for example, visiting an overseas country, may decide to search for a partner amongst the Egyptian community within that country. He does this to avoid the problems which may occur by marrying a non-Egyptian, or being unable to return to Egypt to marry, because he has not yet received citizenship.

Although this option may be better, there are still associated problems with these marriages :

∅ *Non compatibility between the partners:*

Difficulties occur if the woman has been brought up in a western society, and the man (from Egypt) was brought up in a traditional society ...

- A situation may occur where the husband, for example, may feel like a stranger, when he sees his wife surrounded by familiar family and friends.
- And also the example of where the wife, for instance, may be on a better financial level than her husband, who is a new comer, thus making the man feel inferior and cause him to be more stubborn and sovereign.

Ø *The wife feels that it was a marriage of convenience:*

In such a marriage, the wife, for example, may feel that the husband did not marry her out of love for who she is, but rather for the purpose of gaining residency. This will result in the wife feeling insecure living with him, expecting him to leave her at any moment.

‡ Advice for our youth travelling abroad :

1) *Do not rush into marriage*

My dear brother travelling abroad, may your stay in that country be legal. Look to find an appropriate job and settle down, before considering marriage. Do not consider marriage as a means of gaining citizenship, but rather consider marriage as the means of you gaining citizenship in heaven! Therefore, refuse the paper marriage, and civil marriage, and marriage to non Egyptians. Even, refuse marrying an Egyptian woman brought up in the country, until you have found a stable job and feel settled. When you stay in the country legally, and find

work accordingly, you will be able to search for a suitable partner.

2) *Ensure the choice of marriage partner is mutual*

Choose your partner by yourself. Do not let someone else choose for you. Choose a partner compatible with you in personality and attitude.

COMPONENTS FOR A SUCCESSFUL MARRIAGE

For our youth travelling abroad...

‡ *Marry an Egyptian woman living in the country of immigration:*

The women living in immigrant countries are characteristics by many good aspects -

- Ø they have a balanced mix of Egyptian culture and traditions, as well as taking the good from western society;
- Ø they have no problems of visiting family who are living in Egypt;

In addition, by so doing :

- Ø you will have a greater opportunity of searching for the suitable partner;
- Ø there will be enough time for you to have a proper engagement period, during which you grow closer in love and understanding towards your partner, before marriage.)

‡ *If, however, you prefer to marry a woman living in Egypt, you should:*

- Ø Consider a woman whom you have known before, for example, a relative, a colleague, or a neighbour;

- Ø Consider a woman who is already known to you. They may be a friend, a colleague, or so on;
- Ø Allow enough time, during your stay in Egypt, to ensure you spend as much time with each other as possible for the purpose of being better acquainted with one another;
- Ø Following the marriage, remain in Egypt with your wife for as long as possible, before returning to your country to finish the paperwork;
- Ø When your wife finally joins you, ensure that you keep her close to the church and the Egyptian society, so that there will be no opportunity for boredom and feeling the sense of strangeness in the new country;
- Ø Try to ensure you live in close proximity to a church. When considering where to live, people always think of such things as being close to work, or being close to the water, and so on, but they never consider living close to the church. This aspect is so important because not only does Church give spiritual satisfaction, but also protection for the whole household, against the attacks of the devil.

To those who consider only searching for a beautiful house near work, or near the water, I ask you : *What is the best way?*

The answer is : Jesus Christ Himself, who says, "*I am the Way, the Truth and the Life*" (John 14:6). He is the door

leading to eternal life, saying, *"I am the door of the sheep"* (John 10:7). He is the door leading to a better life, *"I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly"* (John 10:10).

So to those starting a new life in a new country, please make a start with God, who protects, blesses and will make you a blessing in your new country. *"I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed"* (Genesis 12:3), and just as God blessed Joseph in the land of Egypt, *"The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian"* (Genesis 39:2), so too will He be with you.

The key to success in your marital life, and life in general, is to stay close to God.

I recall a person who worked in a very prestigious engineering company in the USA, however, his demanding work prevented him and his family from attending church. As a result, he resigned from that company and chose to live in a house nearby the church. People were astonished at his decision, but his preference was caring for the spiritual life and eternity of his family. It was shortly after, that another prestigious company, in close proximity to the church, called him and offered him an attractive position. It was as if the Lord was preparing the best for him because he chose God over his job.

My dear brother (beloved), rather than first seeking work, *“Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added to you”* (Matthew 6:33). Try hard to establish a church inside your home, for the safety of your family.

Chapter Two:

UNDERSTANDING THE MARITAL RELATIONSHIP

It may be that the marital relationship is misunderstood, and that the husband, for example, assumes that because he is the head, he should be obeyed in all matters regardless, even if they are at the detriment of his wife's personality.

Likewise, the wife may assume that because she is his equal, and that, for example, she may be better educated than he, or of better financial status than he, he should yield to her every opinion.

Due to the misunderstandings, many problems occur, and therefore it is important for the couple to be clear in understanding their marital relationship.

The Holy Bible addresses women saying, *"Wives submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord"* (Ephesians 5:22). Here the Holy Bible says to the wife, just as you are obedient to the Lord, so too be obedient to your husband, *"For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Saviour of the body"* (Ephesians 5:23). And so during the wedding ceremony, the priest reads the commandment to the bride saying, *"And you blessed daughter and happy bride ..., you have heard what was commanded to*

your husband. So you must honour and respect him, do not disagree with him but increase your obedience to him over what was commanded many times ... Do as our mother Sarah, she was obedient to our father Abraham ... and thus God looked upon her obedience to him, and blessed her..."

In obeying Abraham, our mother Sarah,

- left everyone and everything when Abraham left his relatives and departed,
- said that she was his sister when Abraham asked her to do so,
- did all he asked for, without being asked more than once.

The commandment to obey the husband is not only a biblical commandment, but also historical, as it has been present in our church throughout the ages. But before asking the wives to be obedient to their husbands, the Church commands the husband, through the priest in the wedding ceremony: *"Blessed son ..., may the grace of the Holy Spirit strengthen you to take unto yourself your wife, in purity of heart and in sincerity. Do all that is good for her. Have compassion on her and always hasten to do what gladdens her heart. Take care of her, as from now you are responsible for her after her parents..."* Do you, O husband, hasten to do what pleases your wife? Are you fulfilling what you were first commanded with, in order for our wife to also fulfil hers?

The Holy Bible says, *"For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Saviour of the body"*, and goes on to say, *"Husbands love your wives,*

just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her” (Ephesians 5:25).

In asking the wife to submit to the husband, as she submits to God, and as the Church submits to Christ, I ask the husbands - who was it that submitted first? The Church, or Christ?

Christ was the first to give:

- ✠ He gave us amazing love, by taking the form of a servant, and being like us in everything except sin, in order for us to regain our divine image and purify us from evil.
- ✠ He descended to us in order that He may lift us up. He became limited in the body, even though He is the Unlimited, in His divinity and love.
- ✠ He sacrificed Himself for His Church. He offered Himself for her and is still offering His precious blood which was shed on the cross, for her each day. Christ offered her love, even to death, so that the church may live in Spirit. He died in order to give His church eternal life.
- ✠ Despite her dishonesty, Christ gave unconditional love to His Bride, even when she preferred Barabas to live instead of Christ. And so for her sake, the Lord asked the Father, *“Forgive them for they do not know what they do”* (Luke 23:34).

By being head of the woman, this does not only bestow honour upon the husband, but also responsibility. To the husband I say : Consider our Lord and master Jesus Christ, consider what He gave, and in what circumstances!

And now ask yourself: Do you give? And do you continue giving to your wife, even during times of weakness and hardships? If she has upset you, do you forgive her and pray for her in the midst of your hardship, just as our Lord Jesus prayed for us when He was nailed on the Cross?

Before asking your wife for sacrificial love, I ask you, O husband, to first offer pure, sacrificial and forgiving love, which bears all. In this way, without even requesting anything from your wife, you will find her giving love to you. Plant the tree of love in your wife's heart, and it will bear the fruit of obedience and respect when dealing with you.

To the husband, I also ask: Seeing that you are the head of your wife, do you consider your relationship with her as the head being 'united' to the body, (that is, you relate and cooperate as one person), or do you just consider your relationship with her as being one of 'submission', (whereby she must submit to you as the head) ?

Indeed the body responds and submits to the instructions given it by the head, but let us contemplate on the head, for a moment ...

- The head is on top of the body, so too should be the husband over his wife and family, in spirit and mind.
- The head is the centre of the senses and the will, so too should the husband be sensitive and caring, towards the needs of his family, especially his wife, and others.
- Through the head enters all the body's needs, such as food and water. So too should the husband be a source of nutrition and satisfaction for his family, especially his wife. This satisfaction is not only bodily satisfaction, but more importantly, emotional and spiritual satisfaction. In this way, his love and kindness will overflow onto others in his family.
- The head contains the sense of sight, so too should the husband have spiritual and intellectual insight and deal wisely with all problems faced.
- The head contains the sense of hearing, not only that of speech. Hence, the husband should first be a good listener, so that when he speaks, others will be willing to listen, especially his wife.
- The head contains the intellect and leadership of the body, so too should the husband be a wise leader for his household.

Accordingly my dear brother, do you act as the head? By being the head in your house, do not forget that you are also a

member in the Church, which is the body of Christ. You should be an effective member, submitting to its only true head, which is our Saviour Jesus Christ, through whom we live, move and exist, just as the body does for the head.

If the Lord Jesus and His commandments are your lead, then you will be an effective leader and effective head of your wife and household. And by submitting to Christ, who dwells in you and is united with you, she will be submitting to you.

To the wife, I advise: If you want to be honoured in your house, and considered trustworthy and blessed by your husband and children, then take heed to the words of the wise King Solomon: *"Who can find a virtuous wife, for her worth is far above rubies? The heart of her husband safely trusts her, so he will have no lack of gain. So she does him good and not evil all the days of her life ... Strength and honour are her clothing, she shall rejoice in time to come. She opens her mouth with wisdom and on her tongue is the law of kindness"* (Proverbs 31:10-26).

Each day, do you try to help and co-operate with your husband, in a spirit of happiness? Do you speak with him in words of wisdom? Because in so doing, *"Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her"* (Proverbs 31:28), also, *"Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her own works praise her in the gates"* (Proverbs 31:31).

Chapter Three:

REPENTANCE BEFORE MARRIAGE

Repentance is not something we do only before receiving the Holy Communion, for example, but is the door through which we enter and receive all the sacraments.

✠ In the Sacrament of Baptism:

St. Peter preached by saying: *“Repent and let everyone of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”* (Acts 2:38).

✠ In the Sacrament of Anointing the Sick:

Our teacher St. James the Apostle correlates the forgiveness of sins with the healing of diseases: *“And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven”* (James 5:15).

For this reason, he goes on to say that the fulfilment of repentance is confession: *“Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much”* (James 5:16). Hence, this means that confession should not be made directly to God, but to other people, whom God has ordained for this purpose, and they are the priests. For to

them God has given the authority to bind and loose. So, he orders first to call the priests of the church. Thus, we clearly see the relation between the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick and its effect through repentance.

If this applies for all the Sacraments, how much more so the Sacrament of Marriage. The Holy Spirit works through the Sacrament of Marriage and makes it effective through the power that it is granted. Likewise, the Spirit works in the waters during the Sacrament of Baptism to grant it rebirth.

The Holy Spirit also works in the holy oil of Myron in order to grant us the gifts of the Holy Spirit, just as the Spirit works in the oil which is used to anoint the sick, in order to grant healing to every believing repentant. And it is the same Holy Spirit which transubstantiates the bread and wine, during the Divine Liturgy, to the holy Body and Blood of Emmanuel our God.

✠ Regarding Marriage ...

The Holy Spirit works in the Sacrament of Marriage to bless the couple and make them one, after having been two.

Therefore, how can the Holy Spirit work without first of all preparing the vessel in which it is going to work? Hence, repentance is necessary in the first instance in order for the Holy Spirit to sanctify and unite the couple. For this reason, in The Matrimony Prayers, the prayer of repentance for the

couple is first prayed, before the Invocation of the Holy Spirit.

✠ In the Prayers of Submission ...

The priest prays: *"Enlighten the eyes of their hearts and understanding, to yield to Your will at all times, because You are merciful, and plentiful in mercy to all those who cry unto You."*

✠ When Praying on the Oil ...

The priest prays: *"May this oil sanctify Your servants ...",* then adds, *"Grant them power, salvation and victory over all adversaries ... and salvation for their souls, bodies and spirits."*

✠ When Praying on the Crowns ...

The priest prays: *"Save them from every unchaste thought and impure desire, save them from all malice and Satanic tribulation. Let Your mercy be upon them."*

It seems so strange that ...

Couples always give great care and attention to preparing for the wedding day - the clothes, the flowers, the rings, organising for a place to live, buying furniture, and so on, and they neglect to care about the most important thing : which is preparing the heart through the cleansing of repentance, and adorning the soul with the pearls of virtues.

It seems so strange that ...

Before the engagement, the couple may individually be very close to God and the church, and regularly partaking of the Sacraments. But after engagement, they grow close to each other without feeling the need of being close to God and to the Church.

- Is the life of repentance reflected in the behaviour of the engaged couple? Sometimes, their behaviour upsets God and prevents them from confessing and partaking of the Holy Communion.
- Is the life of repentance consistent with staying out until late at parties and clubs, without any regard for attending church and enjoying its sacraments and teachings?
- Is the life of repentance - which should be the first pillar in their life - consistent with being preoccupied with the guests and photographers attending the wedding ceremony, and hence ignoring the Bible readings and commandments, and the descent of the Holy Spirit upon them?

During the ceremony, the priest prays: *"Lord, listen to the voice of their pleadings"*, but where is the voice of their pleadings, if they are too preoccupied with everything except prayers and pleadings?

- Is the life of repentance consistent with the reception parties which occur after the wedding ceremony, in which is much dancing and drinking?

Any person who is about to embark on a new thing in life, should first of all pray a lot, and ask God to bless the intention. So how much more the intention of marriage, in which is no alteration or separation?

Must we not then resort to God in true repentance? In so doing, the Holy Spirit will sanctify the engaged / married couple. So, any engaged or married couple should live so that the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit might sanctify them. As in the words of the wise King Solomon, *"He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy"* (Proverbs 28:13).

Repentance is not just confessing sins before God in the presence of the priest, but means giving up sins completely; not according to our human measurements, but according to the Holy Bible, *"But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgement. And whoever says to his brother 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire"* (Matthew 5:22), and, *"But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart"* (Matthew 5:28).

In addition, repentance is not only giving up sins, but refraining from all association with evil; whether it be going to inappropriate places, or having indecent friends. Accordingly, the Bible says, *“Do not be deceived, evil company corrupts good habits”* (1 Corinthians 15:33). Therefore, you may need to change your friends, and abandon visiting such sinful places.

A tree which does not bear good fruits, needs to be pulled out and re-planted in good soil. In like manner did our Lord God do with father Abraham, when He ordered him to leave his household and relatives, and in so doing, Abraham became a blessing unto many.

Repentance needs to be planted near the waterfall of the Church and the sacraments, and the wounded Christ, so that we may quench our thirst by His blood.

Repentance is not just a matter of giving up major sins, but also giving up the small sins, lest they grow. We must repent from sins committed, as well as sins that are in the thoughts, lest they become deeds.

This is a call to every engaged couple, to have a blessed life in the Lord, by beginning with having a deep relationship with God. This is a call for you to be united with Christ on a weekly basis through partaking of the Divine Sacrifice. In this way, the Holy Spirit will work in uniting the couple during the holy Sacrament of Matrimony.

This is a call for the couple to participate in prayers together, so that the Lord Jesus Christ will be in the midst of them, and so in this way you will receive double the blessing!

PART TWO

**"THE CHURCH THAT IS IN
YOUR HOUSE"**

Chapter One

THE CHURCH THAT IS IN YOUR HOUSE : ITS APPEARANCE

In the holy Bible, we find the Apostle St Paul writing, *“Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who have risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. Likewise greet the church that is in their house”* (Romans 16:3-5), and, *“Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea, and Nymphas and the church that is in his house”* (Colossians 4:15).

So What Is The Meaning Of :
“THE CHURCH THAT IS IN THEIR HOUSE” ?

During the Apostolic era, the ‘church’ consisted of the houses of the believers, where they would congregate to pray. We learn that the first church took place in the house of Mary, the mother of St Mark: *“...he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying”* (Acts 12:12). We also read that the believers congregated in the houses of Priscilla and Aquila, the house of Nymphas, and the house of Lydia the seller of purple (Acts 16).

If you cannot apply this verse literally, what are you doing in order that this verse be made effective in your life?

Once we enter a house, we are able to discern the personalities of those who dwell within, by the pictures and posters that are hung upon the walls. We are at once made aware of what their religion is (if any), and their hobbies and interests, as well as any personality, such as a sportsman or musician, they feel associated with, by what they display upon the walls in their house.

As for you, as a Christian, what kind of pictures and posters are displayed in your house? Where is the church that is in your house?

The Coptic Church gives much care to icons and pictures, as a source of spiritual benefit in the house, rather than for decoration.

- The icons in the church symbolise the heavenly church present with us here on earth. When we see the icons of the holy saints and angels, our minds are uplifted and inspired to contemplate and learn from their virtuous lives. When we pray, we ask for their help and intercession.
- The icons are a reflection of the (message of the) holy Bible. Both literate and illiterate are able to comprehend its meaning, through the language of colours (and expression), rather than the language of literacy.

- Icons, if portrayed accurately, are a representation of history. In particular, Coptic art, for its simplicity and deep, symbolic significance, reveal the spiritual and historical aspects of whom it is portraying.

Holy pictures in our homes present the most effective visual aids, for through them, unity is created between the members of the family, and the saints portrayed in the pictures.

Is there a church in your house, which is adorned with holy pictures? Do these pictures express your Christianity, as well as your Orthodoxy? For example, do you have pictures of God the Father, whom no one has seen? Do you have pictures of the Last Supper in which is portrayed a table filled with many types of food, and Judas being present, or is the picture simply portrayed with the single bread and chalice, and without Judas being present (for his great sin was the barrier which kept him from receiving Communion)? Do you display pictures of St. Mary sitting at the right hand of Jesus Christ, as mentioned in the Psalm: *“At Your right hand stands the queen in gold from Ophir”* (Psalm 45:9)? Let us be very careful in choosing the pictures in which we display in our houses.

My dear brethren, let us now take a walk through a Christian Orthodox house, in order to see what pictures lie within ...

Upon entering the house, we find the picture of the Archangel Michael, in order that he may guard the house and prevent any evil from entering, for it is a church and a place for the Lord's

comfort. Hence, the Archangel Michael, who is the chief of the heavenly hosts, guards the door from which the Lord enters to live with the family who dwell in the house.

. *In the entrance or foyer of the house ...*

We may find a picture of our Lord Jesus Christ stretching out His arms, as if calling out to us: ***“Come to Me all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”*** (Matthew 11:28). Hence the Lord is inviting all who enter the house, to cast their burdens and temptations and problems upon Him, and to embrace Him and so find peace.

We might also find a picture of the Holy Family's flight into Egypt, in which was bestowed great blessing upon the land of Egypt. In having such a picture at the entrance, I can imagine Christ entering into this house, with His mother and Joseph the Carpenter, and bestowing upon it and those who dwell within, the same blessing He gave to Egypt: ***“Whom the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying, ‘Blessed is Egypt My people’”*** (Isaiah 19:25). Let us enter our houses full of peace, awaiting the blessing of our Lord and Master Jesus Christ.

. *In the Living Room ...*

We may find a picture of our Lord preaching to the multitudes on the mount. When we see this picture, we will remember Christ's words, and so control ourselves so that our lives reflect His teachings. The family may even use this room as the place where they meet, as a family, or with guests, to talk about the Lord's commandments.

. *In the kitchen ...*

We may find a picture of the Lord feeding the multitudes with five loaves and two fish. When seeing this picture, we remember the great blessing of the Lord that does not weary with increase. Whilst preparing the meal, let the parent remember that Jesus first spoke to the multitudes about the Kingdom of Heaven, before feeding them, hence, He provided them with spiritual nourishment before giving them bodily nourishment.

You must ask yourself, what spiritual nourishment have I given my children? Or do you only give concern to their bodily nourishment? Do you spend time reading the Bible and learning from it in order that you may prepare a daily spiritual meal for your children, in the same way that you spend time preparing bodily food? In addition, we might find in the kitchen also a picture of our Lord Jesus Christ in the house of Mary and Martha. When seeing this picture we remember Jesus' words to Martha: **"Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her"** (Luke 10:41). In like manner, the parent must realise that before doing anything else, they must first deepen their relationship with God, and sit at His feet, just as Mary did. Therefore it is important for the parent to be the combination of both Mary and Martha.

. *In the Dining Room ...*

Instead of decorating the dining room with portraits of fruits or flowers, let your Christian Dining Room be adorned with the

picture of The Last Supper, for in it is portrayed our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Bread of life: ***“As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me”*** (John 6:57). When looking at this picture, we may be reminded that we are neglecting Holy Communion, and when noticing that Judas is not present in the Last Supper, we are reminded of our sins, and how they prevent us from receiving the sacraments, and having a share in the inheritance with the saints. While we eat, we see this picture and so our hearts partake of the food of the spirit.

• *In the Couple's Bedroom ...*

We may find a picture of our Lord Jesus Christ blessing the wedding in Cana of Galilee. Likewise, the Lord will bless this room so that the couple feel His presence, and Him blessing their thoughts, and binding them in love.

• *In the Children's Rooms ...*

Usually, we would find a child's room containing pictures of Mickey Mouse type characters, animals or birds. But within a Christian house, we would find a picture of the Guardian Angel above the child's bed, and on another wall, a picture of Jesus Christ lovingly embracing the children surrounding Him, saying: ***“Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven”*** (Matthew 19:14). We may also decorate the children's rooms with pictures of Baby Jesus in the manger, and young saints, such as St. Abanoub. In this way, our children will always feel their close association with Jesus Christ, and His saints, from their childhood years.

My dear brethren, not only is a Christian house to be decorated with holy pictures, but also crosses that may come in various designs. For those who are nature lovers, they may even choose natural pictures which may inspire them to spiritual contemplation: *"The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon"* (Psalm 92:12).

In this way, they may relate, for example, a picture of the palm tree (which is visible) to its supporting roots (which are not visible). In like manner, God, (who is not visible), supports, feeds, and strengthens humankind (who are visible), making them greater than all Creation. In addition, the inside of the palm tree is white, which symbolises the purity of the righteous person's heart, *"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good"* (Romans 12:21). And in the same way that the palm tree releases its fruits when it is shaken, or rocks thrown at it, so too does the righteous person release prayers for those who deal cruelly with them, in the same way that St. Stephen prayed for those stoning him: *"And he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, do not charge them with this sin'"* (Acts 7:60).

There might even be a picture of the stars and moon, for example, and so allowing the opportunity for meditating on the words of David the Psalmist: *"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork"* (Psalm 19:1).

My dear brethren, when a person visits you, do they find a church within your house? Are there spiritual pictures from which the family members may benefit?

Chapter Two

THE CHURCH THAT IS IN YOUR HOUSE : ITS ESSENCE

† Unity:

The Coptic Church specifies certain characteristics which must be reflected in a Christian house. The most important being the unity of the believers, who represent one body in the church.

In church life, individuality does not exist; our Lord spoke to the Father saying, *“Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are ... that they also may be one in Us ... I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one”* (John 17:11,22,23).

In the early church, this unity was very clear, as mentioned by St. Luke in the book of Acts: *“And the multitude of those who had believed were of one heart and of one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common”* (Acts 4:32), and, *“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their*

possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. And continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart” (Acts 2:42-46). On the day of the Pentecost, the Holy Bible relates, “And when the day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place” (Acts 2:1), and, “Fixing his eyes on him, with John, Peter said, ‘Look at us’” (Acts 3:4).

For the sake of this unity, the church prays in the Holy Liturgy, *“The unity of the heart which is love, let it be implanted in us.”* In this unity, everyone shares in the same sacrifice of the Holy Communion, for they are all members in one body belonging to the one Head, which is Jesus Christ.

The Apostle Paul says, *“And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the pre-eminence” (Colossians 1:18), and, “But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God” (1 Corinthians 11:3), and also, “For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Saviour of the body” (Ephesians 5:23).*

In this wonderful unity, we find that Jesus Christ, who is the head, sacrifices Himself for the sake of the body, which is the church. The act of sacrifice, which we partake of, is still active and continuous in every mass, it is not something that was only done in the past and is no more.

In the Liturgy, we see our loving Christ in His incarnation, His crucifixion, and His death for us. Through partaking of His holy Body and Blood, we proclaim His resurrection, and the Lord raising us up with Him.

✠ Love:

If you contemplate on the Church, you will find the Church resembles a beautiful icon, which expresses deep love for all the members, gathering them together in Christ.

Whoever attends the Holy Liturgy, listens to a symphony of love, for in it everyone is participating, including our Lord and Master Jesus Christ. On the altar, Christ is offering Himself to us. In a spirit of love, the priest prays for everyone : for the living, as well as for the dead, for those who are celibate, as well as for the married, and for the widows. He prays for those who are in attendance, as well as those who are travelling. He prays for the healthy, as for the sick, and for the poor, as for the rich. He even prays for the waters of the rivers, the winds, the fruits, and the vegetation, as well as praying for those people who have no one to remember them. He prays for the congregation of the Church, and for the leaders.

Truly the holy Mass is a symphony of love, and in love all the congregation pray for each other, serve each other, being one Church in Christ.

Where is the unity which is in the church in your house?
Where is the love which binds all the members of the family within your house?

When speaking about love which is in your house, we speak about four kinds of love:

1. Marital Love
2. Paternal Love
3. Filial Love
4. Brotherhood Love

♥ Marital Love ...

In the prayers of Matrimony, the priest prays asking God to bless the couple with the bond of love. Upon placing the crowns on their heads, he prays, *"Crowns of wisdom and understanding of heart, Amen. Crowns of comfort and strength, Amen. Grant Your servants who are wearing them the protection of the Angel of safety and the bond of love. Guard them against all evil thoughts and desires; let Your mercy be upon them."* A chapter from the Epistle of St Paul to the Ephesians is also read, which explains the mutual love between a married couple.

➤ *The love of the husband to his wife:*

St Paul asks husbands to love their wives, and explains the nature of this love: *"Husbands love your wives, just as Christ*

also loved the church and gave Himself for it" (Ephesians 5:25). It is the sacrificial love which always gives before it takes, and gives regardless of whether the person receiving is worthy of the love. In loving this way, they emulate Christ who sacrificed Himself to the point of death, and loved us and prayed for us, despite us rejecting Him: *"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do"* (Luke 23:34). During our betrayal and dishonesty towards the Lord, He still loved us, sympathising with our human weakness, because His nature is love.

Thus when the Apostle Paul explains the love the husbands must have for their wives, he takes into consideration their delicate nature.

Likewise, St. Peter advises: *"You husbands, dwell with them with understanding, giving honour to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers not be hindered"* (1 Peter 3:7). Thus a husband must love his wife with gentleness, bearing no harshness, and in so doing, obeys the words of the Holy Bible: *"Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them"* (Colossians 3:19).

In the Matrimonial prayers, the husband is commanded to: *"Do all that is good for her. Have compassion on her and always hasten to do what gladdens her heart. Take care of her, as from now you are responsible for her after her parents..."* St Paul explains this kind of love, to the Ephesians: *"So men*

ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself" (Ephesians 5:28).

In marriage they become one, and we have heard this from of old, when Adam said to Eve: *"This is now bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man"* (Genesis 2:23).

Not only must the husband love his wife as himself, but he must love her more than any other, even his parents. For this reason it is written in Genesis, *"Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother, and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh"* (Genesis 2:24), and during the prayers for the Sacrament of Matrimony, we hear the same Bible readings, *"For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So then they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no man divide"* (Matthew 18:5-6 and Mark 10:7-9).

The husband must love his wife, sacrifice for her sake and be patient. He must share with her his feelings and loving deeds, *"Let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth"* (1 John 3:18). Being the head of the woman, the man must also be aware that the body cannot function without the head. In addition, it is through the head that the body is nourished and moves. According to the messages that the head send the body, the body responds. Thus, it is important for the husband to co-operate with his wife in the duties of the house,

especially when the wife works and shares in the financial responsibilities.

➤ *The love of the wife to her husband:*

The wife also has to give and share love with her husband. She must offer...

- Yielding love. The Apostle St. Paul describes this love as follows:

📖 *"Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Saviour of the body"* (Ephesians 5:22-24), explaining the level of submission,

📖 *"Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord"* (Colossians 3:18),

📖 *"...That they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed"* (Titus 2:4-5)

Regardless of whether the wife is older, or more educated, or more cultured than her husband, she should paid heed to the Biblical commandments, and the commandments given her during the Matrimonial prayer, and obey her husband in all things: *"So you must honour and respect him, do not disagree*

with him but increase your obedience to him over what was commanded many times ... Do as our mother Sarah, she was obedient to our father Abraham ... and thus God looked upon her obedience to him, and blessed her..."

The words of the Matrimonial prayers are inspired by the Holy Spirit, just as the Spirit inspired St. Peter when he wrote, *"For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are as long as you do good and are not afraid with any terror"* (1 Peter 3:5-6).

There is nothing wrong with the husband, at times, submitting to his wife's opinion. The Matrimonial prayers addresses both partners, stating that they should know each other well and submit to one another: *"...So you too, follow the steps of our forefathers and submit yourselves to one another in love and purity."*

Through Divine Inspiration, the Holy Bible assures us of this many times: *"...There is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus"* (Galatians 3:28), and, *"Nevertheless, neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord. For as the woman was from the man, even so the man is through the woman; but all things are from God"* (1 Corinthians 11:11-12).

St Paul also speaks concerning the mutual submission of the body: *"The wife does not have authority over her own body,*

but the husband does. And likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another, except with consent for a time that you may give yourselves to fasting and to prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self control” (1 Corinthians 7:4-5).

According to Church Canons, no married man can leave his wife and enter monasticism without his wife's consent. Furthermore, a priest cannot decide to refrain from sexual relations with his wife, for the sake of asceticism, without his wife's consent.

- Supportive Love:

Not only should the wife love her husband in compliance, but should also be his source of support and help. One of the most important reasons for God creating Eve, was for her to be a helper to Adam: *“And the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that man shall be alone, I will make him a helper, comparable to him”* (Genesis 2:18). Therefore, in the Matrimony Sacrament the priest says, *“O Lord our great and eternal God, that made life out of nothing and created the universe by Your word, and formed man with Your immaculate hands, in Your image and according to Your likeness, and from one created the other, for You said that it is not good that man should be alone, so You caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam and took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh in its place. Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh, and what God has joined together let no man separate ...”,* and, *“O God who created woman from*

Adam's rib and did grant him that she should be his helper equal to him; we beseech You to hear us and have mercy upon us."

So a wife should understand that if God had granted her special characteristics that He did not bestow to the man, it is not for the purpose of making the woman feel proud, but for her to realise she is his helper, and should compliment him in what she does.

In the holy Bible we find that God gave some women certain gifts which he did not give to the man, and through these gifts, they served and complimented their husbands. Such an example is when the wise woman Abigail, pleaded to David, on her foolish husband's behalf: *"So she fell at his feet and said, 'On me my lord, on me let this iniquity be, and please let your maidservant speak in your ears, and hear the words of your maidservant .. Please forgive the trespass of your maidservant for the Lord will certainly make for my lord an enduring house, because my lord fights the battles of the Lord, and evil is not found in you throughout your days"* (1 Samuel 25:24,28).

Instead of imitating the pride her husband felt, Abigail responded in humility, bowed before David, and spoke words of humility and reverence; 'lord', 'maidservant'. Her humility and generosity made up for her husband's foolishness and greed: *"Then Abigail made haste and took two hundred loaves of bread, two skins of wine, five sheep already dressed, five seahs of roasted grain, one hundred clusters of raisin, and*

two hundred cakes of figs, and loaded them on donkeys” (1 Samuel 25:18), and she gave all these to David’s men.

I ask every wife to help their husbands, rather than burdening them. Help in the spiritual upbringing of your children, and in sharing financial responsibilities. Take decisions together, gently and humbly, caring for the salvation of your souls. And do not be a hindrance for him in his spiritual life.

In Proverbs, we read about the virtuous woman whose worth is far above rubies: *“She does him good and not evil all the days of her life. She seeks wool and flax, and willingly works with her hands. She is like the merchant ships, she brings her food from afar”* (Proverbs 31:12-14), and, *“She watches over the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children rise up and call her blessed, her husband also and he praises her well. Many daughters have done well, but you excel them all. Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her own works praise her in the gates”* (Proverbs 31:27-31). Both partners should live in mutual love, and their love for each other should be a reflection of their love to God, and not a hindrance for their love to God.

There are many ways in which the love between a wife and her husband is destroyed, through incorrect love ...

- Eve’s love to Adam: Because of the prevailing desire, Eve took from the forbidden tree, and in her love towards her

husband, she gave him to eat of the fruit of disobedience, which cost him greatly. Hence, Eve's love towards Adam, was a hindrance to his love for God.

- Jezebel's love: She loved her husband, but her love was far from God's love. In her love, she took vengeance, and made her husband inherit Naboth's field. Yet, she brought upon him evil: *"But there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do wickedness in the sight of the Lord, because Jezebel his wife stirred him up"* (1 Kings 21:25), and, *"You shall speak to him saying, 'Thus says the Lord, have you murdered and also taken possession?' And you shall speak to him saying, 'Thus says the Lord, in the place where the dogs lick the blood of Naboth, dogs shall lick your blood, even yours'"* (1 Kings 21:19).
- Hanania and Saphirah: They loved each other, and together agreed to sell their field and to give the money to the Apostles. But in the absence of perfect love, they together agreed to lie to the Holy Spirit, dwelling in the Apostles. Therefore, both of them suffered the consequences: *"Then Peter said to her, 'How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.' Then immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. And the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying her out, buried her by her husband"* (Acts 5:9-10). For this reason, the wise King Solomon says, *"Every wise woman builds her*

house, but the foolish pulls it down with her hands"
(Proverbs 14:1).

Therefore, we ask every wife to love her husband in the Lord, and in no way encourage him to do evil, even if this may be an expression of love. Rather, because of her love to God, she should prevent him from doing evil, and encourage him in every good deed.

Bear in mind the example of the righteous Job, who after being tempted with God's permission, having sores all over his body, his wife mocked him saying: *"Then his wife said to him, 'Do you still hold to your integrity? Curse God and die'"* (Job 2:9). But Job responded to her saying, *"But he said to her, 'You speak as one of the foolish women speak, shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?'"* In all this, Job did not sin with his lips" (Job 2:10).

Inasmuch as the husband must not pay heed to evil advice, but should guide his wife in good deeds, the wife must also not listen to her husband's instructions if there are disobeying God. Obey him only in what is for the good of the Lord. Do not follow the example of Sarah, who out of her love and obedience to Abraham, lied to Abimelek, claiming that she is Abraham's sister. She obeyed in love for Abraham, but her love for God was missing.

To every married couple we say, 'your love should be more noble and greater than any worldly matter!' Consider the

example of Zechariah, who loved his wife, though she was barren, and did not abandoned her, inspite of the shame of not having children: *“And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless”* (Luke 1:6).

Many spiritual servants, both males and females, begin being full of the spirit, and pleasing God with their lives. But after marriage, they live for the body only, considering how they may please their spouse, without any regard for their relationship with God, or the salvation of their souls!

My beloved, I once again ask: ‘Where is the church that is in your house, which is unified through love, and marital love?’

♥ Paternal Love:

In loving us, God set us an example, in that because of His love to humanity, He loved us before we were created. He created the whole world perfectly, and prepared it for us. And so when He wanted to create man, He created him in His image, *“So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them”* (Genesis 1:27).

Then He blessed him and gave him authority over His entire creation: *“Then God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it. have domination over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the*

air, and over everything that moves on the earth” (Genesis 1:28).

God gave us permanent, unconditional love. Even when we sinned, God loved us and will love us till the end. When Adam fell from grace, we read about God’s punishment, as well as God’s love: *“Also for Adam and his wife, the Lord God made tunics of skin and clothed them”* (Genesis 3:21).

We also see God’s kindness in speaking with Cain after he sinned: *“Surely You have driven me out this day from the face of the ground. I shall be hidden from Your face, I shall be a fugitive, and a vagabond on the earth, and it will happen that anyone who finds me will kill me.’ And the Lord said to him, ‘Therefore, whoever kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him seven fold.’ And the Lord set a mark on Cain, lest anyone finding him should be killed”* (Genesis 4:14-15). And most of all, in His wonderful love, we hear our beloved Lord Jesus Christ on the cross saying, *“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do”* (Luke 23:34).

He loves all people, without discrimination: *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life”* (John 3:16), and, *“...that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust”* (Matthew 5:45)

He loved man so He chastised him. And thus in the Holy Bible it is written, *“For whom the Lord loves, He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights”* (Proverbs 3:12). God chastises according to whom He is dealing with. For example, with David the Psalmist, *“The Lord has chastened me severely, but He has not given me over to death”* (Psalm 118:18).

The Church in its Rites declares her love to her children. In love, and without differentiation, the Church gathers the believers together so all may enjoy and partake of the sacraments, and together share in receiving the holy Body and Blood of our Lord. In a spirit of love, the church prays for all people : those who are alive, those who have departed, those who are sick, those who are in good health, those who are present, and those who are travelling. Those who lead and those who are being lead. Those in gaol and confinement, and those who are free. Those who are married, and those who are celibate. Those who are young, and those who are old, the repentants, and the sinners who are in need of repentance, and those who have no one to remember them. In addition, the Church prays for the blessing of the river waters, the fruits of the trees, the winds of heaven, and even the vegetation of the earth.

It is a wonderful, wholistic love, encompassing all who need it!

My beloved brother, and my blessed sister, where is your paternal and maternal love? Where is your gentle, fatherly love, and your wise, sacrificial motherly love? This love should

be an image of God's love to us, and a reflection of the church's love for her children.

By loving our children, we provide nutrition for their souls. It is through this love that they grow and develop. And just as a child grows physically through providing him with a healthy, balanced diet, so too does he grow psychologically through providing him balanced love. A child's capability is increased through the love we provide, and decreases through lack of love and harshness.

The characteristics of Paternal love are:

1. Love in giving:

As God loved us and gave us everything, even authority over the whole creation, so should parents love to give ...

Ø *We should give of ourselves:*

It is easy to give your child anything, but real richness is in giving him yourself, your time, your effort, your emotions and feelings, for it is the things which we give for the soul, which builds a person, that is more fulfilling than the giving of materialistic things. A person can be living amongst great riches and luxuries, but if the parents have not provided him with any love or time, because they were too preoccupied with making money, then this person will seek emotional care and attention from strangers. The result is that he may enter into relationships with unsuitable people who may ruin his life and his spirituality.

Ø *We should give abundantly:*

Our concern is not only giving them food for physical nutrition, but food for their spiritual nutrition. We should teach them about the rites of the Church, read with them the Holy Bible; explaining the stories and commandments. We should teach them about our church history and traditions. And as much care as we give for their homework, we should also care about them learning Bible verses and Psalms, church hymns, and prayers. It is the food of the spirit that will benefit them in this life and the eternal life to come, whereas the physical food is limited to their life on earth only.

Ø *We should give, even if we do not take:*

In being loving parents, we should give to our children, even if they do not appreciate or reciprocate our love. We should give to our children in love, regardless of the mistakes they commit. We should give, as the Church gives without expecting anything in return, and as our beloved Lord loved those who crucified Him in the cross.

Ø *We should give without first being asked:*

We should emulate God in giving, in that He never waits for us to ask of Him anything in order for Him to give: *“Therefore, do not worry saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly father knows that you need all these things”* (Matthew 6:31-32). Therefore, in order for us to show our children how much we appreciate them and love them, we should give to them and provide all

their needs, before they ask of us, or are even aware of being in need.

Ø *We should give without reproach:*

Even if our children do wrong, and seem to forget the love we give them, we must never cease to give, but rather increase our giving in order to remind them of our love.

2. Love without discrimination:

The Holy Bible commands us to love our children without differentiation or favouritism, for when we favour one child more than the others, it causes great problems. We see this in the example of Joseph, to whom his father gave him a colourful tunic. As a result of this favouritism, his brothers envied him: *“And when they saw him afar off, even before he came near them, they conspired against him to kill him ... Then they took him, and cast him into a pit, and the pit was empty, there was no water in it ... Then Midianite traders passed by, so the brothers put Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt”* (Genesis 37:18,24,28). When we treat each of our children differently, jealousy and aggression results. The children will become destructive; breaking things, hurting pets, and being rough with those in society.

When Rebecca favoured Jacob to Esau, the results were:

- Rebecca had no concern for Esau, for his grief, or for his losing his first-born,
- Esau's grief resulted in his jealousy of Jacob, to the extent that he was ready to kill him,
- The favouritism which Rebecca sowed, Jacob reaped with bitterness later in life:
- The blessing which Jacob took, was followed by the deceit of his uncle Laban,
- The favouritism which his mother had for him, he had for his son Joseph, and this favouritism caused him much grief and sadness, when he thought he had lost Joseph.

Ø *It also creates stubbornness:*

If a sibling notices the differentiation, they become stubborn, and refuse anything offered them, even if it is necessary. They become aggressive and disobedient, and will not be able to overcome these feelings, except through receiving love and kindness.

Ø *It creates depression:*

If a child cannot express his anxiety, and suppresses his feelings, he will feel depressed and experience low self esteem. This in turn results in him being a failure in life; whether it be academically, (socially), and even physically - such as in the situation of unconscious urinating. The means of curing such depression is through giving the child much love.

But this is to be done quickly and early, before such moods become part of his personality and nature.

If there is a need for providing favouritism, we must take into consideration the following:

- Take care as to which child needs the most attention;
- The favouritism should only be for a short period of time, for example, until the child recovers from his illness, or until an infant grows a little;
- This favouritism should be unnoticed by the other children, and should not affect the love we have for them;
- We must encourage our children to care for each other, for example, the older child can help in bringing up and caring for the younger child, the healthy child can care for their sick sibling, and so on. But this is on one condition - that as parents you praise them and thank them for their help, making it known how much you appreciate their kindness in them serving their brothers and sisters.
- The favouritism should not be done by both parents, that is, if the mother is paying more attention to the infant, for example, the father should be paying more attention to the older child, and if the mother is giving special attention to her sick child, then the father should give special attention to the healthy child.

3. Love without spoiling:

In order for parents to love their children, it does not mean that they have to spoil them by giving them everything they want. Likewise, it does not mean that they cannot chastise them or rebuke them.

Water is essential for a plant's growth, but too much water drowns the plant and destroys it. Therefore, excessive love will destroy the future of our children.

Chastisement and rebuke are essential at certain times, as advised by the wise King Solomon: *"Do not withhold correction from a child, for if you beat him with a rod he will not die. You shall beat him with a rod, and deliver his soul from hell"* (Proverbs 23:13,14). We also read that chastisement is a sign of love: *"For whom the Lord loves, He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights"* (Proverbs 3:12). In love, we rebuke our children, in order to prevent them from doing wrong, but then we rejoice with them in success and good deeds: *"Correct your son, and he will give you rest; yes he will give delight to your soul"* (Proverbs 29:17).

To the parents I advise, that negligence in chastising children, is a negligence in our responsibility towards God, and that we may be punished for spoiling our children. This is evident in the example of Eli the priest, in the Old Testament.

He effectively guided his congregation, and prayed for Hanna - Samuel's mother - in order that God grant her a child. But

despite Eli's righteousness, he faced a bitter end : his two sons Hophni and Phinehas died, his army was defeated, the Ark of God was taken away, and he died when he fell down and broke his neck (1 Samuel 4). You may ask, what was the reason for this bitter end? The answer is, that God was angry with Eli, because he spoiled his sons. His sons would sleep with women at the door of the Tabernacle, and Eli never rebuked or chastised them for their wrong doing. So in return, the Lord reproached him: *"Why did you kick at My sacrifice and My offering which I have commanded in My habitation, and honour your sons more than Me, to make yourselves fat with the best of all the offerings of Israel My people? ... Now this shall be a sign to you that will come upon your two son, on Hophni and Phinehas: in one day they shall die, both of them"* (1 Samuel 2:29&34).

Thus, we should love our children, without spoiling them, by giving them what is necessary, and beneficial for them, rather than giving them everything they ask for. In this way, they will grow up to be responsible. On the other hand, a spoilt person will always seek to be spoilt, will always seek attention, will always demand help from others, may even refrain from eating for attention purposes, and will always rely on their parents for everything, even homework. The spoilt person will consistently complain of the harshness of others towards him, and will always live in jealousy. If there is a new infant born into the family, the spoilt person may even become psychologically ill because the amount in which he is being spoilt, is reduced. This person will never be a responsible

person, even when he grows up and marries, because he has never had to depend on himself.

4. Love without harshness:

Some parents are too strict or too harsh with their children. They try to adopt some Bible verses, without understanding the depth of their meaning, and in the meantime ignoring other Bible verses: *“The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother ... Correct your son, and he will give you rest; yes, he will give delight to your soul”* (Proverbs 29:15&17), and, *“He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly”* (Proverbs 13:24). The word ‘rod’ is not to be taken literally, but rather, to mean:

- A sharp look: causing the child to feel embarrassed and so listen to his parents. This look is in silence, but is more effective than smacking or insulting.
- A firm attitude: whilst remaining calm. Hence, we give the child what is beneficial for him, rather than simply what he wants. We may deprive him of pocket money or a gift, for a while, in order for him to realise the wrong he has done, and once he is convinced and progressing correctly, we lift the punishment.

Therefore, before rebuking or chastising your child, take into consideration:

- Before smacking, look at the child with strictness, because if you constantly smack a child, they will become immune to this type of punishment, and it will result in it being ineffective. Inspire your child to love you, and in so doing, obey you. But if your child fears you, he will obey you, in your presence only, simply because of fear.
- When chastising your child, do not use harsh words, and use a loud voice, lest you lose your child's love. The wise King Solomon teaches us, *"Words of the wise, spoken quietly, should be heard, rather than the shout of a ruler of fools"* (Ecclesiastics 9:17). An insulting word may destroy the child psychologically and spiritually, and so affect his salvation. This treatment may also belittle you in the eyes of the child.
- Do not chastise at the time of mistake, because when you are angry, you will not be able to control your temper, and at the same time, your child will be more likely to answer you back and so not accept your advice because he will not be in the right psychological and spiritual frame of mind. Therefore, when you come home, do not listen to any complaint or problem (until you've had the chance to relax). Likewise, the wife should choose the appropriate time to discuss problems with her husband.
- When chastising your child, be mindful of his nature, not yours, and be mindful of his way of thinking, not yours, and also be mindful of the circumstances which caused him to do wrong.

- Always keep in mind the words of the wise King Solomon: *“Chasten your son while there is hope, and do not set your heart on his destruction”* (Proverbs 19:18). Hence, do not be too anxious about the wrong your child has done, but know that God will always do the best for him and for you. Be careful of being too harsh, lest you destroy him psychologically and spiritually.

Harshness results in ...

- Children who struggle in their thinking because of fear. These children will be afraid to do anything, fearing punishment.
- Children lying and becoming deceitful, in order to avoid the wrath of their parents. And if they are found out, they become even more deceiving the next time they need to cover up their wrong deeds.
- They become aggressive with others, even with animals and birds, and may destroy or break things they touch. They become harsh with those they deal with and work with, and are even harsh with their spouse and children. The reason for this is that the harshness they experienced in their younger years has frozen their sense and emotions, and so they are unable to feel the sufferings of others.
- Harshness will also result in the person seeking affection outside of the home. The person may even enter into a relationship with a non-Christian person, simply to fulfil this

need. Harshness is not only in terms of physically smacking a child, but also in terms of destroying and even cancelling your child's personality. This begins when the parent constantly gives orders to the child, without giving them any praise or encouragement. A parent may constantly give orders, and yet his own behaviour contradicts what he is saying. This leads to the child becoming either rebellious, or submitting as a result of weakness, and this behaviour will result in disrespect from others.

I say to the parents, it is wrong to want to keep your child attached to you all his life. If a ripened fruit on a tree is left there and not cut down, it will rot. But in order for the fruit to bear more fruit, it must be cut down, and its seeds sown into the ground. Thus it will bear a new tree with new fruits.

Thus we must build up the personality of our children gradually from childhood until maturity, when they will be ready for marriage.

5. Love without sovereignty:

Some parents deal with their children with sovereignty, as if their children have no mind, no opinions, and no personality. This happens when parents:

- Repetitively give orders

- Give orders, but have no regard to practice what they preach
- Give orders to their children in front of others; thus embarrassing their children
- Give orders, regardless of whether they are suitable or not
- Give orders, despite the fact that they may be irrelevant for life in the 21st century
- Give orders, regardless of their child's age; and so the order given may be inappropriate for the age of the child.

All this leads to children rebelling against their parents, or children submitting to their parents, not out of love and conviction, but rather because of their weak and damaged personality.

Another form of sovereignty, is the interference of parents in the lives of their children. They impose their opinions without any regard for their child's wishes, feelings or interests. For example, the mother may insist that her daughter marry a certain type of man, whom the mother thinks will be suitable. Likewise, the father may insist that his son study to enter a particular profession, regardless of whether his son has any interest in the vocation or not. It even occurs that this interference by parents continues after their children are married, and this creates lots of problems in their children's marital life.

I advise all parents to ensure that you bring up your children having a balanced and integrated personality. Make them an image of God, rather than a reflection of yourselves. And stop interfering in their lives.

♥ Filial love ...

To complete the image of family love, we must talk about the children's filial love towards their parents.

We now ask each son and daughter about their relationship with their parents:

- Is it a relationship in which you take all the time, or is it one of taking and giving?
- Is it a relationship whereby you are always taking love from your parents, or is it a relationship whereby the love is reciprocated? Do you consider your parents old fashioned, or do you consider them modern and relevant? Do you respect and accept their advice, or do you reject them? And do you trust their wisdom and experience?

This relationship you have with your parents should be:

➤ *With respect and honour:*

In regards to honouring the parents, who sacrifice their lives for their children, the Lord God Himself wrote with His finger

the first commandment concerning the relationship between human beings, which bears a promise: *"Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you"* (Exodus 20:12). This promise was also confirmed by our teacher St. Paul the Apostle in his Epistle to the Ephesians: *"Honour your father and mother,' which is the first commandment with promise: 'that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth'"* (Ephesians 6:2,3).

We find that in honour of the mother, who suffered greatly during pregnancy, and in raising her children, even our beloved master Jesus Christ honoured His mother, at the wedding at Cana of Galilee: *"Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come"* (John 2:4). And despite that His hour had not yet come, for the love and honour of his mother, He performed His first miracle and changed the water into wine. Hence, the Lord began His ministry by serving His mother.

Also, at the end of His ministry, whilst hanging on the cross, He showed His mother how much He cared for her, by giving her into the care of St John the Beloved: *"Behold your mother"*, meaning, take care of My mother as your own. And to confirm this, the Lord said unto St Mary, *"Behold your son."* After her death, the Lord then assumed her body, and honoured her as the world's intercessor, and a blessing to the whole creation. Another example of the mother being honoured, is in the example of King Solomon, when his mother came to see him, *"And the king rose up to meet her and*

bowed down to her, and sat down on his throne and had a throne set for the king's mother; so she sat at his right hand" (1 Kings 2:19).

My dear brethren, where do we stand with our ignorance, in comparison to King Solomon's wisdom? And with our poverty in comparison to Solomon's richness? And with our humble positions in comparison to him being a king? Though we are so little, do we treat our mothers with no or little honour? It is a lesson to every person in dealing with their mother. To whoever thinks himself wise, look at real wisdom in the example of King Solomon, and consider the way in which we bowed before his mother and honoured her. My dear brother, and my blessed sister, do you care to honour your parents? And if so, in what way?

Is it in the way we talk to them, by words of respect, in gentle voice, and by giving them presents on various occasions, such as Mother's Day, Birthdays, Lordly Feasts, and so on?

Do we honour them by words only or by deeds? Do we speak good about them in front of them and also behind them, out of deep love for them?

➤ *With obedience and submission to what is for the Lord:*

One of the most important signs that we love our parents is to obey them. Obedience means obeying their way of thinking, rather than just their words. We must obey them in their

presence, as well as in their absence. We must obey them while they are alive, and even after they have passed away. Remember that whoever disobeys his parents, disobeys God's commandment.

The question may arise: must I obey them in all things? Yes, you must obey them in all things, as long as it is not against the Lord's commandments, because it is written, ***"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right"*** (Ephesians 6:1). My beloved, the Bible does not ask us to obey our parents, in the same way that Herodias obeyed her mother and relayed her wish to Herod saying, ***"So she, having been prompted by her mother, said, 'Give me John the Baptist's head here on a platter'"*** (Matthew 14:8).

We do not ask children to obey their parents when they are asked to lie, disobey God, refrain from fasting and praying, or in any other thing that distances us from God. But rather, we ask children to imitate the example of King Solomon who, when his mother entered, he stood up, bowed before her and seated her on his right side in honour. But when she asked him to give Abishag the Shulammitite woman to his brother Adonijah as a wife, he refused, even though he initially told her: ***"Ask it, my mother, for I will not refuse you"*** (1 Kings 2:20). He refused her wish because it was against the Divine will - how could a son marry his father's wife?

Children must obey their parents in the Lord, in the same way that Isaac obeyed his father.

When God asked Abraham to offer his son as a sacrifice, we find Abraham obeyed. Isaac awoke early with his father, and followed him in complete obedience. When his father asked him to carry the wood for fire instead of leading the donkey, Isaac did not object. Then when Abraham built the altar and tied Isaac and laid him upon it, Isaac did not object or complain. And when Abraham raised the sword to kill him, Isaac opened not his mouth. And so, because of Abraham's obedience to God, and Isaac's obedience to his father Abraham, the angel of the Lord spoke to Abraham, from the heavens, saying, ***"Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him."*** For the Bible promises the son of obedience long life upon the earth.

Isaac even obeyed his father when he was a grown man. When preparing for marriage, his father Abraham decided that he should marry his relative, and Isaac obeyed. My brethren, how do we compare with the obedience of these great people? It was even said about our great Lord and master Jesus Christ that He was obedient to His mother St Mary, and to St Joseph the carpenter. This seems so amazing, that our beloved Lord obeyed His own creation in St Mary, simply because He created her to be His mother!

In obeying our parents, we receive blessings, but woe to him who disobeys. The Bible tells us, ***"The eye that mocks his father, and scorns obedience to his mother, the ravens of the valley will pick it out, and the young eagles will eat it"*** (Proverbs 30:17). In the book of Deuteronomy, it is mentioned about the child of disobedience: ***"Then all the men of his city***

shall stone him to death with stones; so you shall put away the evil person from among you, and all Israel shall hear and fear” (Deuteronomy 21:21).

But is it necessary for us to have all these warnings in order for us to honour our parents? Let us listen to the words of the wise King Solomon: *“My son, keep your father’s command, and do not forsake the law of your mother. Bind them continually upon your heart; tie them around your neck. When you roam, they will lead you; when you sleep, they will keep you; and when you awake, they will speak for you”* (Proverbs 6:20-22).

My dear brethren, do you tie these commands, as a necklace, around your neck? Or do you choose to ignore them? Are you proud of them, or do you mock them? Listen to your parents with trust, so that your wisdom might increase, for, *“Wisdom is with aged men, and with length of days, understanding”* (Job 12:12). Be sure that God provides wisdom to your parents, as mentioned in the book of Psalms, *“To bind his princes at his pleasure, and teach his elders wisdom”* (Psalm 105:22). For this reason, I remind you of King Solomon’s words: *“Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from evil”* (Proverbs 3:7), and, *“The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he who heeds counsel is wise”* (Proverbs 12:15).

➤ *With acceptance of the Chastisement:*

Filial love is not to just obey the advice and instructions of parents, but to also accept their chastisements, regardless of the magnitude, in contentment.

1. There is love in chastisement:

Our beloved Lord loved humanity; He created us in His image, gave us authority, continues to give us every moment of our lives, protects us, and chastises us in love.

We read in Hebrews, *“For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives”* (Hebrews 12:6), and in Proverbs, *“For whom the Lord loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights”* (Proverbs 3:12). Hence we see that the Lord, in His love, chastises His saints in order to preserve them. When God chastised David the Prophet, He said, *“The Lord has chasten me severely, but He has not given me over to death”* (Psalm 118:18). And God, in His great love, chastised the angels (bishops) of the churches, in the Revelation of St John. To the angel of the church of the Laodiceans, the Lord said, *“As many as I love, I love and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent”* (Revelation 13:19). So, Divine chastisement is a gift, and we praise the person who is granted this gift: *“Behold, happy is the man whom God corrects; therefore do not despise the chastening of the Almighty”* (Job 5:17).

Parents, in loving their children, resemble God, for they chastise for their children's benefit and salvation. The wise King Solomon said, *"He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly"* (Proverbs 13:24).

2. In obeying the chastisement of your parents, you are obeying God:

For this chastisement is beneficial to mankind; God asks us to accept it. In the book of Proverbs we read the divinely inspired words of King Solomon: *"My son, hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother"* (Proverbs 1:8), and, *"Hear, my children, the instruction of a father, and give attention to know understanding"* (Proverbs 4:1). For this reason, I ask you to please accept chastisement, for your own benefit and salvation.

3. In accepting chastisement, you will gain wisdom:

My beloved brethren, King Solomon talks to you saying: *"Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction will drive it far from him"* (Proverbs 22:15). Do you accept chastisement in order to rid yourself of ignorance and so gain wisdom? Solomon also says, *"Listen to counsel and receive instruction, that you may be wise in your latter days"* (Proverbs 19:20). If you want to gain wisdom, you will find the path through chastisement.

4. In accepting chastisement, there is richness and glory:

The Bible says, *"Poverty and shame will come to him who disdains correction, but he who regards reproof will be honoured"* (Proverbs 13:18). Thus God talks to us saying, *"Receive my instruction and not silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold"* (Proverbs 8:10). The saints yearned for rebuke rather than honour, because they were sure that there is heavenly glory in rebuke, and death and deterioration in honour. Regarding this, St. Seferniki once said, *"As the candle decreases before the fire, so too does the power in the soul of a person decrease before praise."* My dear brethren, do not rejoice when someone praises you, but flee from it, and rejoice rather in chastisement and rebuke.

Once a monk asked the Abbot of his monastery if he may leave and go elsewhere. When the abbot asked him for the reason, he replied, *"There is no toil here. All the fathers are saints, and I am a great sinner. I need to find a place where I will be chastised, because through humiliation, sinners are saved."*

My brethren, do you also remember the story of the great saint Anasimon, who pretended before all people that she was crazy and abnormal, when in actual fact because of her holiness and purity of heart, her fingers were aglow when she prayed. She rejoiced so much in humiliation that when people realised her saintliness, she fled from vain glory, fearing that she would be honoured rather than humiliated.

Not everyone who praises you loves you, but he who chastises you, cares for you and loves you. As a tree needs to be pruned so that it may bear more fruits, so too does the human soul need pruning through chastisement. In this way, all the bad habits and behaviours which consume our time, energy and emotions, are pruned and discarded, and replaced with the good fruits which are the good habits and spiritual virtues.

As the vine obeys the vinedresser's pruning, for the good of the vine, so too should children obey the chastisement of their parents, in order that they may bear more fruits.

5. Chastisement prevents destruction and being lead astray:

It is written, *"He who keeps instruction is in the way of life, but he who refuses reproof goes astray"* (Proverbs 10:17), and David the Psalmist also says, *"The Lord has chastened me severely, but He has not given me over to death"* (Psalm 118:18). David knew that the Lord chastised him because He loved him and did not want to give David over to death. Therefore, David rejoice in the chastisement of the Lord.

The wise King Solomon says, *"Harsh correction is for him who forsakes the way; and he who hates reproof will die"* (Proverbs 15:10). We see this in the example of Eli's sons who perished because their father did not chastise them.

My beloved, let me ask you, in what way do you accept chastisement? Do you like it, or hate it? Do you accept it, or reject it? Do you appreciate it, or belittle it?

What is your relationship with those who chastise you? Is it a relationship of love and obedience? Or is it of hatred and rejection? If you like and accept chastisement, blessed are you, for you love God and submit to His commands! You bear chastisement for His sake, and thus you will gain wisdom, wealth and personality. But, if you reject and abhor chastisement, then you are not working for your good, and you will be lead astray: *"He who keeps instruction is in the way of life, but he who refuses reproof goes astray"* (Proverbs 10:17).

If you pretend to accept chastisement, but in actual fact you abhor it, you resemble the ignorant person, who King Solomon says, *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction"* (Proverbs 1:7), and, *"A fool despises his father's instruction, but he who receives reproof is prudent"* (Proverbs 15:5), and, *"Whoever loves instruction loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid"* (Proverbs 12:1). You are heading in the direction of spiritual and moral death, for, *"Harsh correction is for him who forsakes the way, and he who hates reproof will die"* (Proverbs 15:10). I want you to love and accept him who rebukes you, not to mock him, because it is written, *"A scoffer does not love one who reproves him, nor will he go to the wise"* (Proverbs 15:12).

My dear brethren, I want to lighten the way to life before you, to make you understand your relationship with your parents, and accept their chastisement. I asked from them a lot for your sake, before asking anything from you.

6. Love which always gives:

This is another form of filial love which might not be considered in the thoughts of the youth. Children are accustomed to always take from the parents, whether it be materialistic or speculative, but there are some times when parents need their children to give to them.

Throughout the years, parents give and sacrifice themselves to their children, but as the parents grow older, they become in need for the filial love, which has many forms ...

➤ *Words of Love:*

Now, I want to ask you, my beloved, how many times have your parents encouraged and praised you throughout the years? In like manner, there are times when your parents yearn for words of love and kindness from their children, especially if they are sick or old.

➤ *Situations of giving love:*

Many times your mother stayed awake beside you when you were sick; and your father rushed you to the doctor, and, *what are you offering your parents in their old age?* Will they find

you next to them? Will you put happiness in their heart by offering them your love? Will they reap the love that they had planted in your heart? Or, will they repeat the verse in the book of Isaiah: *“Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me; the ox knows its owner and the donkey its master’s crib; But Israel does not know, My people do not consider”* (Isaiah 1:2,3)? How many times did your parents celebrate your birthday, and share in your children’s birthdays? Do you also care about their birthdays, and do your children also celebrate with them?

Your parents may also be in need of financial support; so will you help them without them asking you, in the same way that they always gave to you without you asking them?

Sometimes we see parents depriving themselves from essential things or clothing, in order that their children may have the best and feel proud of themselves amidst their friends.

➤ *Through good news:*

Children are inclined to talk to their parents about their troubles, illnesses or needs, but why don’t you also hasten to tell them about your good news concerning success or promotion, or even news about your son or daughter’s progress.

In their old age, parents might not be able to tolerate bad news, but they are ready to hear good news that might cheer them up

in their old age, as Solomon the Wise says: *“As cold water to a weary soul, so is good news from a far country”* (Proverbs 25:25).

Do you remember what Jacob did when he received the news about losing his son Joseph? *“Then Jacob tore his clothes, put sackcloth on his waist, and mourned for his son many days. And all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, and he said, ‘For I shall go down into the grave to my son in mourning.’ Thus his father wept for him.”* (Genesis 37:34-35). But upon hearing good news about him, it is written: *“But when they told him all the words which Joseph had said to them, and when he saw the carts which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob their father revived”* (Genesis 45:27). Also Eli the priest, when he heard about the death of his two sons and the losing of the Ark of the Covenant: *“So the messenger answered and said, ‘Israel has fled before the Philistines, and there has been a great slaughter among the people. Also your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead; and the Ark of God has been captured.’ Then it happened, when he made mention of the Ark of God, that Eli fell backward by the side of the gate; and his neck was broken and he died”* (1 Samuel 4:17-18).

My beloved, it is an invitation for giving true love to your parents, which is just like a drop in the sea of love which your parents enabled you to swim in and enjoy until you became an adult and enjoyed stability.

♥ Brotherly love ...

We have presented the sacrificial marital love, and the wisdom and kindness of parental love, and the submission and giving nature of filial love, and so finally, we speak about brotherly love. You are asked to love everyone as you love yourself, that is, your enemies as well as your relatives. And what is your relation with your brother and sister? The wise King Solomon said: *"A brother offended is harder to win than a strong city"* (Proverbs 18:19), and, *"A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity"* (Proverbs 17:17).

➤ *Brotherly love is not selfish:*

You are asked to love your brother or sister even more than yourself; to always sacrifice for their comfort. If we meditate on the life of David the Prophet, we will find a very clear picture of brotherly love, that bore no selfishness. When his father asked him to go and see his brothers because they were in battle (1 Samuel 17), we find him going early, in love, carrying food to them and exposing his own life to the danger of war: *"So David rose early in the morning, left the sheep with a keeper, and took the things and went as Jesse had commanded him"* (1 Samuel 17:20). We find the same love in the life of the righteous Joseph, who in spite of his brothers' envy, responded immediately to his father's call to send him to them, *"And Israel said to Joseph, 'Are not your brothers feeding the flock in Shechem? Come, I will send you to them.' So he said to him, 'Here I am.'"* (Genesis 37:13). In love, he hurried, and searched for them until he was lost: *"Now a certain man*

found him, and there he was, wandering in the field, and the man asked him, saying, 'What are you seeking?'" (Genesis 37:15). And Joseph persisted until he found them.

Through this love, we must deal with others daily. When, for example, one asks concerning an inheritance, whether the male takes more than the female, we must respond that the answer is reliant on the law of brotherly love; they must consider who is more in need, rather than considering the gender and so on. This love will enable brothers and sisters to share everything. This was the love of Abraham to Lot his nephew, *"So Abram said to Lot, 'Please let there be no strife between you and me, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are brethren. Is not the whole land before you? If you take the left, then I will go to the right; or, if you go to the right, then I will go to the left'"* (Genesis 13:8,9) and in love Abraham let Lot choose first, and he chose the land with more grass, *"And Lot lifted his eyes and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere (before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah) like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt as you go toward Zoar"* (Genesis 13:10). But in this rich land, he lost everything even his children and wife. As for Abraham, who dealt in love without being selfish, he became very rich, his servant witnessed his richness saying: *"I am Abraham's servant. The Lord has blessed my master greatly, and he has become great; and He has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male and female servants, and camels and donkeys"* (Genesis 24:34).

My dear brethren; did you see the fruits of brotherly love, which, if planted deep within your heart will bear you fruits and to others also?

➤ *Brotherly love is not jealous:*

Cain lost his love and was full of envy towards his brother, so he killed Abel. Cain was so full of jealousy: *“Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the Lord respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell”* (Genesis 4:4-5). This jealousy led him to kill his brother, thus the divine wrath fell upon him and the Lord said to him: *“So now you are cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand”* (Genesis 4:11). Even the land resisted him and he had no authority over it: *“When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth”* (Genesis 4:12).

The same happened with Joseph’s brother: *“Now when they saw him afar off, even before he came near them, they conspired against him to kill him. Then they said to one another, ‘Look, this dreamer is coming? Come therefore, let us now kill him and cast him into some pit; and we shall say, ‘Some wild beast has devoured him.’ We shall see what will become of his dreams!’”* (Genesis 37:18-20).

My dear brethren, do not give room to envy or jealousy inside your heart towards your brother or sister, regardless of

whether they be more successful, more academic, or even more favoured than you.

Think carefully about yourself, you might find things that they lack ... For example, if your brother or sister is wealthy in this world, try to be rich in the spirit, if they own a lot of land and property, try hard in order to own the everlasting Heavenly Kingdom. If you see that they are favoured by people, try hard that you may be favoured by God, who never changes. If they wear expensive clothes and jewellery, try hard that you may be adorned with the beautiful ornaments of virtues, before God and all the people.

Again, jealousy should not be given room inside your hearts, lest it should destroy you before destroying others.

➤ *Brotherly love does not envy:*

How would you feel if your brother or sister treats you without love? How would you feel if they hurt or insult you? Or return your love with rudeness? Would your love for them remain the same? Or would envy and anger enter your heart and control your attitude towards them?

I tell you, that people who are rude or nasty to you, are reflecting the measure and standard of your love...

True brotherly love is without envy, it just loves, even those who hurt you.

A person like the righteous Joseph, because of his great love to his brothers searched for them, but in envy and jealousy, they wanted to kill him, and finally they sold him as a slave. Money was more precious to them than their brother.

- A deep wound in the heart of the beloved Joseph:

In spite of the deep wound, Joseph's love never changed and he never envied his brothers. Love which filled his heart was like a medicine healing his psychological wounds. God, who loved Joseph, because of his love to his brothers, preserved him in order to save Egypt from the famine.

- Joseph Meeting his brothers:

This sublime deep love was seen very clearly when Joseph met his brothers. His love was void of any envy or revenge; it was a love higher than any wrong-doings done by others towards him.

- Amazing Love in meeting his brothers:

We see Joseph asking to empty the place in order to talk to his brothers privately, with all the emotions of love he burst into tears. He wasn't crying out of having revenge, but in amazing love, *"Moreover he kissed all his brothers and wept over them, and after that his brothers talked with him"* (Genesis 45:15).

- The beautiful words he said to his brothers:

"Then Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am Joseph; does my father still live?' But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed in his presence" (Genesis 45:3). They were terrified, because they recognised that they fell into his hands and that he was now stronger and more capable of avenging. They had not yet discovered that Joseph's heart was full of great love, which was stronger than all the power of Egypt which was under his authority. Joseph was quick to notice their feelings, and so asked them to come closer to him in order to relieve them from their fear and embarrassment, saying, "But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life" (Genesis 45:5).

Joseph's love is so strange, he never hurt or avenged his brothers, but rather welcomed them, assuring a very important fact: that God can change everything to become good, and for this reason Joseph said: *"... For God sent me before you to preserve life" (Genesis 45:5). Also, "So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt" (Genesis 45:8). He assured them that by selling him to the Ishmaelite merchant, God had done good to him so he said, "God ... has made me a father to Pharaoh" (Genesis 45:8).*

- The deepest love he gave was after their meeting when he sent for their father in love and honour:

He wanted them to enjoy the richness of Egypt, at a time when the famine was everywhere. In love, he gave them carts and provision for the trip. Joseph forgot all about the day when they threw him in the pit, and when they sold him as a slave. And even when he was a prisoner in gaol. And this was all possible because Joseph never forgot how God worked in him. His heart which was filled with love, was never affected by any painful memories towards his brothers.

Now, look at Joseph's love and compare it to the nature of love inside your heart. Is it true love? It will be so if it is void of envy.

My dear brethren, if you want envy to flee, you must:

1. Look at the love of our Master Jesus Christ toward us. He died on the cross for us sinners, He suffered the whips, the scourges and the wounds of human envy, and in return asked the Father, in love, to forgive His crucifiers' sins.
2. Contemplate on a personality such as Joseph, and consider their amazing love which surpassed all envy.
3. Remember how God worked with you, more than the works of people. Consider the divine love, which turns evil into good and do not consider people's evil.
4. Remember all the deeds of love done to you previously by others. Put them always before your eyes at the time of their

mistakes or weakness. Remember their love so that you may forget their faults.

5. Remember the love which God is asking from you towards others; this love which transfers you from death to life, as St. John says: *"We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren"* (1 John 3:14).

I want you to know also, that as love transfers from death to life, it also carries us on its wings to the eternal life.

6. Remember also that he who does not love, abides in death, as the Holy Spirit said through St. John the Beloved: *"He who does not love his brother abides in death"* (1 John 3:14).

My beloved, let us hasten to step into the chariot of love prepared for us, let us hasten towards it happily, to surpass any envy, and be lifted up to the heavenly Kingdom.

The Effect of Love :

The rays of love enlighten all the members of the one family, so they live as a church bound with the unity of golden love, and this love consequently binds them to the head, who is Jesus Christ. Through marital love, parental love, filial love and brotherly love, we might ask ourselves: Is love giving or taking? What do we gain if we give love? Thus, we need to talk about the effect of love for each member of the family.

➤ *Love gives us the right to be born from God:*

Through baptism, we become children of God, and through love we gain the honour of also being God's children. Thus the Holy Spirit says through St. John the Beloved: *"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love"* (1 John 4:7-8).

Are you a child of God? If so, where is His famous characteristic of love, present in all the children of God, stamped upon you?

➤ *Love makes us abide in God:*

As long as a baby is inside his mother's womb, he is connected to her, but after being born, he gradually becomes separated from his mother, until he is an independent adult. But as for love with which we are born from God, it develops as we grow and become closer to God, until we reach the point where we abide

in Him completely. Through love we are born from God, as St John says: *"And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him"* (1 John 4:16). Thus St Macarius said, *"If you love each other then God is abiding within you."*

➤ *Passing from death to life:*

Did you ever ask yourself, what transfers us from death to life? What lifts up our eternal punishment and makes us inherit the eternal life? The first answer of course is the Blood of Jesus Christ shed on the Cross which purifies us and makes us worthy of eternal life, but what makes you worthy? It is the Baptism. But again, do all baptised people enjoy eternal life? Here, the answer is no. Faith, baptism and salvation are all given free, but the struggle of love and the different deeds of love keep our baptism and transfer us from death to life: *"We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren"* (1 John 3:14). My dear brethren, do you love each other? Be sure that through your works of love you will enjoy eternity. Thus, love everyone, all your family members, especially the poor or the needy, so you will hear the voice of St Moses the Black comforting you saying: *"Love the poor, and through them, you will be saved at the time of affliction."*

Abide in love toward everyone, love will renew you, and give you the right of eternal inheritance, as St Augustan says: *"Through love you are renewed, to become a new man, inheriting a new testament, singing a new praise."*

➤ *There is no life without love:*

St John says: *“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life”* (John 3:14-15). Thus St Paul says: *“And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing”* (1 Corinthians 13:2). The Bible addresses the rich people saying: *“Many waters cannot quench love, nor can the floods drown it. If a man would give for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly despised”* (Song of Songs 8:7). Because of the great importance of love, the Apostle Paul places it before faith and hope (1 Corinthians 13:13). All our spiritual practices, offerings and service will never please God, unless they are all done in love, without which, no one will see the Kingdom of Heaven.

➤ *We gain the forgiveness of sins through our love:*

In order to witness the effect of love in forgiving sins, let us go to the house of the Pharisee who asked the Lord Christ to eat in his house. At the same time, a sinner woman entered; she started pouring fragrance on Jesus' feet and through tears, wiping them with her hair. Her tears were much more precious than the fragrance. She kissed His feet with a contrite kiss; everyone considered her a sinner but Christ announced to the Pharisee, *“Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many,*

are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little" (Luke 7:47).

No matter what people think of you, and regardless of how sinful you are, your repentance will be beautified because of your love to God and to others, and so your sins will be washed away. Thus, we find David the Prophet addressing God in love saying: *"Look upon me and be merciful to me, as Your custom is toward those who love Your name"* (Psalm 119:132). Because of his great love toward God, it is right that his sins be forgiven.

St Augustine prays to God saying: *"My Lord, my soul was smudged with sin, but it will become clean and pure if I love You."*

➤ *Love preserves you from sin:*

Love is like a boat saving you from drowning, a rod keeping you from falling; a shore to resort to amidst the troubled waves of the world; a light defusing the darkness of sin; a shield against the arrows of the enemy. Love keeps those who hold fast to it and preserves them from sin. David the Prophet says with confidence: *"The Lord preserves all who love Him, but all the wicked He will destroy"* (Psalm 145:20).

So, do you love others? If you do, it means you love God, and thus you will be preserved from every evil and saved from destruction.

➤ *Love gives us peace during our pains:*

St. Augustine says: *“Love makes pains and sufferings easy to accept, or even we might say, as if nothing has happening at all.”* So, we find that the martyrs, because of their love to God, never lost their peace during torture, but rather proceeded happily towards death. Likewise the apostles; we see St Peter sleeping in peace in gaol, even though they were about to kill him. St Stephen was asking for the forgiveness of those who stoned him: *“Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin”* (Acts 7:60). David, in his love to God, faced Goliath saying: *“You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, who you have defied”* (1 Samuel 17:45).

St Augustine says: *“The more you love, the less you will feel tired or weary.”* The mother suffers greatly, both in giving birth, and bringing up her children. But she is always peaceful because of her love which surpasses any pain. The peace of love which fills her heart prevents any trouble or disturbance.

➤ *Love dismisses fear from our hearts:*

A person whose feelings become tepid toward God's love, will have fear in his heart. For this reason the children of Israel addressed Moses the Prophet saying: *“ You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die”* (Exodus 20:19). With the same feelings Adam spoke to God

saying: *"I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself"* (Genesis 3:10).

But about love, St John the Beloved says: *"There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love"* (1 John 4:18), thus it was not strange at all when St Anthony said to his disciples, *"I do not fear God because I love Him."* His love to God filled his heart and dismissed all fear from his heart. St Augustine says: *"When love increases, fear decreases, and if love decreases, fear will increase."*

➤ *Love changes evil into good:*

Love in its effect not only preserves us from evil, but it turns evil into good, as St Paul says: *"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose"* (Romans 8:28).

Do not ever fear evil, but keep loving God, and through your love to Him, God will turn all the evil planned against you, into means of salvation.

Through the waters of your love, you can quench the fire of evil. Fire cannot quench fire, but water quenches fire, also evil is only conquered by goodness, not by evil, as written in the Bible: *"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good"* (Romans 12:21).

➤ *Love makes us the subject of God's love:*

John the Beloved loved the Lord dearly, and so God also loved him and enabled him to enjoy the heavenly scenes of Revelation. But even more, He gave him St Mary to be his mother : ***"When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing by, he said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son!" Then He said to the disciple, " Behold your mother!"*** (John 19: 26-27). The righteous Joseph had a special love in his father's heart so that his father gave him a coloured robe. God also loved him very much and so blessed him and made him successful in all things: ***"The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a successful man"*** (Genesis 39:3). Pharaoh witnessed for him to his servants: ***"And Pharaoh said to his servants, 'Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?'"*** (Genesis 41:38).

By loving all people, we will enjoy God's love: ***"I love those who love Me, and those who seek Me diligently will find Me"*** (Proverbs 8:17).

➤ *Love gives us the chance to enjoy being God's disciples:*

For this reason, the Lord Jesus Christ addressed His disciples saying: ***"By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another"*** (John 13:35). The main characteristic which differentiates us as being Christ's disciples is our love toward each other. The Lord Jesus considered love towards others as the first condition of being His disciples: ***"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me"*** (Matthew 16:24), also, ***"And***

whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:27). He who denies himself is the person who considers himself a servant to everybody, in love and sacrifice, and considers himself last.

➤ *Love makes us worthy of the Divine Blessing:*

Joseph was blessed because he loved his brothers in spite of all their evil towards him. God blessed Abraham because he loved God more than his only son Isaac, and even loved Lot his nephew more than himself, and so let him have first choice of the land. God blessed David's kingdom because of his love toward his enemies - including Saul who tried to kill David more than once.

So, anybody who loves his family and enemies as a practical sign of his love to God becomes worthy of the Divine Blessing. Thus, we hear God's voice saying: *"That I may cause those who love me to inherit wealth, that I may fill their treasuries"* (Proverbs 8:21). Also, *"Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you"* (Luke 6:38). He who gives love gains blessing. Jesus also says: *"For whoever has, to him more will be given; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him"* (Mark 4:25). Meaning, he who loves will receive more divine blessings and gifts, and he who has no love, whatever gifts and talents he has will be taken away from him.

➤ *Through love we become virtuous and noble:*

As St Augustine says: *“Rise up to God through love, the more you love Him, the more you will be lifted up with Him.”*

Love is like a chariot of light, carrying us above the world and the human nature, to see the glory of heaven. Through love, we live among the heavenly while we are still on earth, our dim nature becomes as bright as the stars lighting to others. Through our deeds of love, people can see the glory of Christ, thus praise Him: *“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven”* (Matthew 5:16).

My dear brothers, sisters, fathers and mothers.. Where is the church which is in your houses? Where is love, above which we require nothing? Finally, let us say with St Augustine: *“If love is present, we will not be in need. But if love is not present, then what is the use of our life?”*

Chapter Three

PRAYERS :

✠ Prayers in the family church:

The most important role of the church is prayer, through which it plants in our hearts the love of being in continuous touch with God. Thus our houses will be *"houses of prayers"*, and hence God will dwell among us. St Basil says about prayer: *"Prayer is to cling to God at all moments of our life, so life becomes one continuous prayer without any disruptions."*

Prayers are very important and no one can neglect them in their lives. St John Chrysostom says: *"He who does not pray to God is dead in spirit; he has no life in him."* He also says: *"Prayers are a great weapon, an endless wealth, it is a richness which would never let you down, a quiet harbour, it is calmness without weary."*

We need to guard ourselves with prayers so that we may be able to combat the devil. We can take from God's unlimited power, which can support our limited abilities. Through His power we can do everything. We will never find rest amidst this troublesome world surrounding us, except by putting ourselves in God's kind hands and being in His embrace. We resort to Him in our prayers, putting all our problems before Him, taking peace

and comfort from Him, and hence we also notice here the importance of prayers in our houses.

The importance of family prayers, where all members pray together (this is in addition to individual prayers), are highlighted below:

- God dwells amidst us in the family prayers : Our Master Jesus Christ promised us: *“For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them”* (Matthew 18:20).
- Family prayers encourage those members who are lazy or reluctant to pray individually, to participate.
- In the family prayers, all the members benefit from each prayer which the member's pray with fervency and warmth. Their spiritual enthusiasm would rekindle the hearts of the others present, and so the prayers might be accepted by God, because of their fervency.
- The family prayers unite us in a holy meeting; it unites us with the Lord Jesus Christ.
- It provides organisation and time we give to our relationship with God. The family prayers occur at a fixed time and place within the house.
- Family prayers are considered a school, where children learn to pray, how to pray, how to respect God, and how to stand in reverence.

Now, the question is always asked: what are we supposed to pray in the family prayer:

1. The Agbia Prayers

These prayers are very important because:

✠ The Holy Bible urges us to use the Psalms in our prayers: As St Paul says: *“How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification”* (1 Corinthians 14:26). Also, *“...speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord”* (Ephesians 5:19).

✠ The words of the Psalms are according to God's will. St James says: *“You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures”* (James 4:3). Also, God addressed the children of Israel: *“When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood”* (Isaiah 1:15). But as for the words of the Psalms, they are inspired by God, they are prayers according to His will. We pray with the words of the Psalms which were recorded by David the Prophet, whose heart was according to God's heart.

✠ The prayers of the Agbia allows us to spend more time with God: Many of us do not have the words or thoughts which may encourage us to spend time before God in prayer, talking to Him, but David the Prophet, because of his life-long experience with

God, was rich and deep in his spiritual thoughts and words, and so we use his words to enrich our prayers.

✠ The Agbia prayers are all encompassing: In it we find thanksgiving, pleadings, and praise. We start with the Thanksgiving prayer, which is very rich in its meanings. In this prayer we thank God for everything, even those things which we forget to thank God for. The Agbia teaches us to ask for the needs of others before ourselves; it also teaches us that we should ask for our salvation before asking for anything first. For this reason, we begin with praying Psalm 50, after the Thanksgiving Prayer, in order to ask God, in His great mercy, to have compassion upon us and forgive us our many sins.

✠ At the end of each hour, we conclude by praying: *"Have mercy upon us O God, have mercy upon us..."*, followed by:

"Sanctify our souls, purify our bodies, set right our thoughts, cleanse our intentions, heal our sickness, forgive us our sins and deliver us from every evil grief and distress. Surround us with Your holy angels that we may be guided and guarded with them to attain the unity of faith and knowledge of Your imperceptible and infinite glory, for You are blessed for every. Amen."

✠ In the Agbia prayers, we converse with God: We feel that our pleadings are being heard and being responded to, whilst we pray, especially in the Psalms, where we begin by asking and pleading, and end in a spirit of rejoice and thanksgiving. This is because we feel God's presence and response. Examples of Psalms are as follows :

Psalm 3: We begin with, *“Lord, how they have increased those who trouble me, many are they who rise up against me,”* and conclude with, *“I cried to the Lord with my voice and He heard me from His holy hill.”*

Psalm 6: We begin with, *“O Lord, do not rebuke me in Your anger, nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure,”* and conclude with, *“Depart from me all you workers of iniquity, for the Lord has heard the voice of my weeping. The Lord has heard my supplication, the Lord will receive my prayer.”*

Psalm 13: We begin with, *“How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily?”* and conclude with, *“But I have trusted in Your mercy; my heart shall rejoice in Your salvation. I will sing to the Lord because He has dealt bountifully with me.”*

Thus, by the end of the Agbia prayers, the person is full of peace.

✠ The Agbia prayers give us the chance to meet with Christ moment by moment, throughout the day:

In the Morning Prayer we enjoy the Divine Incarnation in our beloved Lord's birth.

In the Third Hour prayer, in addition to the descent of the Holy Spirit on the disciples on the day of Pentecost, we remember the unjust trial of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the Sixth Hour prayer, we witness the salvation on the Cross of our Lord's Crucifixion.

In the Ninth Hour prayer, we witness the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, for our sake in order that we may live.

In the Eleventh Hour (Sunset) prayer, we watch as Christ's Body is being taken down from the Cross.

In the Twelfth Hour (Before Sleeping) prayer, we follow as our Lord is being buried in the tomb, and we wait for His Resurrection.

In the Midnight Prayer, we arise to pray, in order that we may be ready for the Second Coming of Christ.

✠ The Agbia prayers contain prayers and teachings: we are taught through the readings from the Holy Bible; the Epistles and the Psalms: *"Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinner, nor sits in the seat of the scornful"* (Psalm 1:1).

For many reasons, it is very important for us to pray with the Agbia in our houses. We must give care to how we pray, rather than how long we are praying for. Mar Isaac says, *"If you want to enjoy the sweetness of the Psalms and the Holy Spirit in your service, do not count how many Psalms you have prayer, but instead, concentrate on what you are praying and understand it, then you will truly feel like praising the Lord."*

2. Individual Prayers

We have to care also for praying individual prayers in our houses; we might pray these between Agbia prayers or at the end of the Agbia prayers. These individual prayers should follow certain characteristics:

➤ In reverence because we stand in the presence of God:

a) In reverence:

We begin speaking with God by first prostrating before Him, hence resembling the twenty four priests in heaven: *"The twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: 'You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power'"* (Revelation 4:10-11). In doing this, we also resembling the heavenly hosts: *"All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God"* (Revelation 7:11).

b) As children of God:

Although He is the almighty God, in amazing love He humbled Himself and was incarnated as man for us. He freed us from the slavery of Satan and transformed us from being servants to being His children. For this reason, we pray, *"Our Father..."*. Through His loving sacrifice and crucifixion, He restored to us our heavenly image and made us His children.

c) In hope and confidence:

Confidence in His unlimited love, which was declared to us on the cross. If we ask of God, and He feels it is for our good and our salvation, He will not deprive us from it. We not only believe in His infinite love, but also in His unlimited ability. In His complete love He listens to us, and in His complete might He responds. ***“All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made”*** (John 1:3). Hence we believe that when we pray, the Lord will respond in His time.

d) In Submission:

As we trust in His love and might, we submit our lives into His hands, ***“Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven”***. At the Wedding in Cana of Galilee our beloved mother St. Mary put forward the problem before Christ: ***“They have no wine”*** (John 2:3), and in complete confidence said to the servants, ***“Whatever He says to you do it”*** (John 2:5). In love, He responded to her and turned the water into wine, even though His hour had not yet come. Therefore, we need only to present our needs before God, careful not to impose our wants on Him, but saying, together with St Mary who responded to the Angel Gabriel, ***“Let it be according to your word”*** (Luke 1:38).

➤ The prayer should be in words that all the family members participating can understand and benefit from:

a) In simple words that are easy enough for the young to understand.

- b) The words should be relevant concerning all the needs of the young and old alike.
- c) Everyone should have a turn to pray, because this encourages them to pray to God and to talk to Him. It also makes the young feel that there is a special relationship existing between them and God, and that God also listens to the young.

➤ Structured according to the Church's organisation:

Our church has taught us to start all our prayers and services with the Thanksgiving Prayer. Likewise, family members should also start by thanking God for everything, because He is the only one who knows our needs and what is good for us. Our teacher Paul the Apostle pleaded with God many times in order to be relieved from the thorn in his body, but God refused, granting him rather many gifts and talents. The Lord left the pain to exist in his body in order to remind him of the Lord's sufferings, and so partake in His sufferings. Thus St Paul says: *"That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death"* (Philemon 3:10).

In our prayers, it is important for us to teach our family members that it is first important for us to ask for God's kingdom and His righteousness. We ask God for the forgiveness of our sins, and we ask Him to make us worthy of enjoying His holy company. We ask Him to lift us above bodily and worldly desires, to give us purity of heart and an upright spirit: *"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit"*

within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me” (Psalm 51:10).

➤ In love:

A person who prays fervently, forgets about himself and prays for the needs of others. There was once a man who had a severe heart disease. When St Mary used to appear in her church in Zeitoun (Cairo) in 1968, he went to the church in order to see her and plead for his sickness. As soon as he saw her blessed apparition, he forgot all about himself and prayed for others instead. After a few days, he remembered that he had not taken his tablets for many days, and realised that he had been cured. If you cannot give to the poor, comfort the grieved, feed the hungry or turn back a sinner from his sinful ways; at least if you cannot do this, pray for him, and through the power of Jesus Christ, your prayers will work in him. My dear brethren, relieve the pains of others through your prayers. Remember the words of St Paul: *“Remember the prisoners as if chained with them - those who are mistreated - since you yourselves are in the body also”* (Hebrews 13:3).

- Remember that it is your responsibility to pray for others, moreover, not praying for them is a sin, as Samuel the prophet says: *“Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you; but I will teach you the good and the right way”* (1 Samuel 12:23).
- Let us teach our children to pray for everyone: for the safety of the church, the Pope, the Bishops, the priests,

their Sunday school servants. To pray for their country, its leader and people, to pray for anyone who helped them in any way. To pray for our enemies, as Jesus taught us: *"But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you"* (Matthew 5:44). St Stephen prayed for those who stoned him: *"Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, do not charge them with this sin'"* (Acts 7:60). Let us learn from our beloved Lord Jesus Christ, who prayed for His crucifiers: *"Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do'"* (Luke 23:34).

➤ Church Hymns and Praises:

It is also beneficial for the family prayers to contain hymns and praises, so that the tunes and hymns said in Church will not be foreign to our ears. My dear and beloved brethren, *Where is the church that is in your house? Where are the family prayers that gather all your family members together?*

Place and time for family prayers:

Being in close contact with God will ensure our prayers are said with spiritual warmth. They will enlighten us so that we may become unto others a light, as the Lord said: *"You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden"* (Matthew 5:14). Also we will be a means of spiritual blessing to everyone around us.

The Place:

There should be a specific room or place within the house that is used only for family prayer. The Lord Jesus used to go to an isolated place with His disciples to pray. He even spent forty days in a holy retreat in the wilderness before starting His ministry. Within this quiet place in the house, we can close our eyes and forget all about the world, in order to enjoy the presence and sight of He who is more beautiful than human beings, and so lift our minds up to the unseen world, living in the glories of Heaven. When we pray in this place, we feel as if we are on Mount Tabour, where we can see our Master Christ transfigured, but not with Moses and Elijah, as He did in the past, but rather with us, being inside us. Hence after our prayers, being enlightened in the spirit, we shall also be a light to others, leading them to eternal life. In the place of prayers, we can see, through the eyes of our heart, the ladder, joining heaven to earth and the angels ascending carrying our prayers to heaven and descending carrying the Divine gifts which fill our hearts and life. Thus, we can say with Jacob: ***“And he was afraid and said, ‘how awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven’”*** (Genesis 28:17).

- In the place of prayers, we enjoy the Divine Revelation, just as Moses did on Mount Sinai. Hence, not only will our faces be illuminated, like Moses, but likewise our hearts, minds and whole life.
- In the place of prayer, it will be as if we are alone with Jesus in Gethsemane. But instead of seeing Him praying with

tears for us, we see ourselves before Him in reverence, not reluctantly as the disciples had done, but in happiness, enjoying our prayers and praising Him saying: *"To You is the power and glory and honour and blessings forever Amen."*

- After a weary day, we stand before Him to pray, struggling as if in Golgotha. We are not present as an audience, but as sharers in His pain, crucifying ourselves and being united with Him on the Cross.
- We proceed in eagerness to this place early, as if we are going to witness Christ's Resurrection, but even more, we finish our prayers feeling resurrected with Christ and in Christ. Hence, we start our day with the power of Resurrection, defeating our enemy, the devil.
- We enter the place of prayer, as if ascending to the Mount of Olives, not to see Jesus ascending to heaven, but to enjoy accompanying Him to heaven. We meditate on eternity, and feel as if we are surrounding His throne in heaven, with the twenty four priests who praise Him who sits upon the Throne.
- In this place, it is as if we are in Paradise, enjoying the spirits of the saints and angels who attend our prayers. For this reason, it is important for us to prepare within our houses, a specific place for prayers. It should be in a quiet location within the house, and decorated with pictures of the Crucifix, the Transfiguration, the saints of intercession for each member of the family...

➤ The Time of Prayers:

The Holy Bible teaches us, *“Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart”* (Luke 18:1), and, *“Pray without ceasing”* (1 Thessalonians 5:17). For family prayers we need to appoint a time which suits everyone. It should be at least twice a day; morning and evening.

The Morning Prayers ...

Where all the family members meet God and His saints before meeting anyone else. We start with the, *“Our Father...”* in order to feel that God the Father is waiting for us and stretching His arms out to embrace His children. We conclude the Morning Agbia Prayer with, *“We thank You our eternal King, for You passed us through the night in peace and brought us to the beginning of the day. Therefore we ask You, our King, may Your light shine upon us, and may You enlighten us with the light of Your divine knowledge. Make us children of light, children of daytime, that we may complete this day in righteousness, purity and good order and that we may complete the rest of our life without any blame..”* in addition to, *“Enlighten our minds, hearts and understanding O Master.”*

The Evening Prayers ...

The Evening Prayer is very important no matter how tired we are. St Paul and Silas, after having been tortured and undergone several trials, were gaoled, being tied with chains, *“But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God”* (Acts 16:25). The pains and bondages did not

prevent them from praying but rather, they were praising with enthusiasm and fervency so that the other prisoners heard them. On the other hand, we saw how the disciples slept and could not stay awake with Jesus, to watch and pray. They became weak and, *"Then they all forsook Him and fled"* (Mark 14:50). They could not face the temptation without the Heavenly Grace which is gained from prayers.

We pray to God in the evening for many reasons:

- 1) To thank Him for looking after us during the day, as we say in the sunset prayers: *"Thank you, compassionate Lord, for You granted us to pass this day in peace, brought us thankfully to the night and made us worthy of seeing Your light until sunset."*
- 2) To give an account for all our deeds during the day, we pour ourselves before Him, and ask for forgiveness. Hence, in the Prayer Before Sleeping we pray: *"For the sake of Your holy name Lord, for Your goodness and love to mankind, forgive us those sins we committed against You this day, whether they are by action, by words, by thought or any of our senses."*
- 3) To ask for His grace and love to keep our sleep peaceful, hence we pray in the Sunset Prayer: *"In this coming night, give us peace without pain or anxiety or fatigue or illusion so we may pass through the night in peace and chastity."* Also in the Prayer Before Sleeping: *"Grant us a peaceful night and give us a sleep free of all anxiety,*

send us the guardian angel to protect us from every evil, temptation or the strike of the enemy."

As we prepare a place and time for prayers, we also need to prepare our hearts. Therefore it is not appropriate that we watch television, and then proceed to pray, for there would be no feelings of prayer. Likewise, we cannot proceed to prayer after having a heated argument with someone.

Let me tell you that if this is the case, we will never benefit from prayers, even if we continued praying until sunrise...

Therefore, everyone of us needs to experience a time of quiet and calm before praying; a time to sit at the feet of Christ through reading the Holy Bible. We have to prepare our hearts spiritually, in order to enjoy the transfiguration with our beloved Lord Jesus.

THE SPIRITUAL PRAYERS

The Coptic Church cares a lot about reading the Holy Bible

In its daily readings, the Church reads from many chapters of the Bible. In the Holy Mass, the deacons read from the Pauline Epistles, the Universal Epistles, (the Catholicon), the book of Acts (Praxis), and the Gospels. In addition, readings from the four Gospels are also read during Vesper prayers, and Matin prayers. The Gospel readings are always preceded by Psalms.

The readings from the Holy Bible depend on the occasion. For example, during the Holy Lent, readings focus on the Old Testament prophecies, and these readings are increased during Passion Week.

No Sacrament in the Church is complete without the relevant readings from the Holy Bible, be it a Baptism, Matrimony, Anointing of the Sick, and so on. Moreover, when studying the various Church prayers, we find that they are all Biblically rooted. The Agbia prayers, for example, consist of Psalms, and Gospel readings, and a Pauline Epistle. When meditating on the words of the Holy Liturgy, we will find that they are all citations from the Old and New Testaments.

If the Church cares so much about the Holy Bible, what about the Church that is in your home? The Christian home should also care a lot about reading the Holy Bible

It is our responsibility before God to read the Holy Bible and teach it to our children. As God spoke to the children of Israel in the past, so too should every father and mother speak to their children, *“And these words, which I command you this day, shall be in your heart: And you shall teach them diligently unto your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up. And you shall bind them for a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. And you shall write them upon the posts of your house, and on your gates”* (Deuteronomy 6:6-9).

Our responsibility as parents is not only to abide by the Divine commandments, but to teach them to our children, and enable them to walk on the path of these commandments. We must speak to our children at all times about God's commandments, even before they sleep so that it may be the last thing in the day affecting their hearts. As God spoke to Ezekial, so too is He speaking today to every father and mother saying, *"Son of man, I have made you a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at My mouth, and give them warning from Me"* (Ezekial 3:17).

When we pray, with David the Prophet, saying: *"Deliver me from blood- guiltiness O God,"* we are asking God to help us in caring for our children's spirituality through which they will be saved. In this way, by caring for them spiritually, God will not ask of their blood from us (meaning, that we will not be accused of being irresponsible with our children's spiritual life).

I ask every parent: What kind of books do you read and keep in your home library? Do you read poetry and literature, science and technology books? Magazines and newspapers? There is nothing wrong with reading such material, but not at the expense of excluding spiritual books. Reading is useful, but the danger is when we spend all our time reading things other than the Holy Bible and spiritual books. Books, in general, benefit us in our life in this world, but spiritual readings benefit us in this world and the world to come, which is eternity. Let us be God's disciples, who sit at His feet, and nourish ourselves with His life giving words, contained in the Holy Bible.

- Ø We need to read, in order to be able to teach our children.
- Ø We need to live according to the Lord's Commandments, so that our children bear witness in us the living Commandments.
- Ø We need to read, in order that our children will emulate us in reading.

When reading the Holy Bible, we should take into consideration the following:

- Ø Make reading the Bible a family occasion, whereby a time is set aside for the family to read the Bible together.
- Ø Dedicate a place or room within the house for reading the Holy Bible, which will hence convey the importance and holiness of Bible reading.
- Ø In addition to the family reading together, the father should also separately read and study, so that he may be able to explain any questions his family asks.
- Ø Before reading the Bible, we must pray, just as the Church teaches us to pray the litany of the Gospel before the Gospel reading

It is important for us to commence by prayer:

- Ø So that God might make us worthy to hear His holy word.

- Ø So that God may reveal the richness of His mysteries to us. Thus we pray with David the Psalmist: *“Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law”* (Psalm 119:18).
- Ø So that concerning the mysteries, *“God has revealed them to us by His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God”* (1 Corinthians 2:10).
- Ø So that God might help us to follow His commandments, and thereby our lives will be as a living Bible. Concerning praying before reading the Holy Bible, St. Isaac said: *“ We do not get close to the mysteries written in the Scriptures before praying and asking for God’s help. Ask God to grant you in the power in the words of the Bible.”* After praying, we say with Samuel the prophet: *“Then the Lord came and stood and called as at other times, ‘Samuell, Samuel!’ and Samuel answered, ‘Speak, for Your servant hears”* (1 Samuel 3:10).
- Ø So that our reading may be done in humility, thereby God might reveal His secrets to us: *“I thank You O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes”* (Matthew 11:25). St James the Apostle says, *“Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls”* (James 1:21). If there is any chapter or verse we do not understand, we should refer to the interpretations of the Church fathers.
- Ø So that our reading may be done with awe and reverence, for we are in the Divine presence of God. For this reason, before

the Gospel reading in the Church, the deacons asks us to, *“Stand up in the fear of God and listen to the Holy Gospel.”* If we respect those who are older than us, how much more so should we respect our Lord, being in His presence? The Lord spoke through His prophet Malachi: *“A son honours his father, and a servant his master. If then I am the Father, where is My honour? And if I am a Master, where is My reverence? says the Lord of hosts to you priests who despise My name. Yet you say, ‘In what way have we despised Your name?’”* (Malachi 1:6). Revering the word of God, we should never read the Bible while we are lying down, or eating, or being preoccupied with other things. We should treat the word of God with complete awe and respect.

- Ø We should choose to read Bible appropriate to the age and ability of the children reading with us, such as children picture Bibles, if the children are young. Such Bibles are simple and suitable for everyone.
- Ø It is important to give our children the opportunity to read, in order to give them the sense of responsibility and love for reading.
- Ø Whilst someone is reading, the remainder should listen attentively and concentrate, for it is the words of God calling us: *“Listen to Me, My people; and give ear to Me, O My nation: for law will proceed from Me, and I will make My justice rest as a light of the peoples”* (Isaiah 51:4).
- Ø Each person should follow the readings in their Bible.

- Ø Each family member should have a turn choosing a verse, which is then to be considered the verse of the day.
- Ø One of the children should write out the verse, and place it in an area visible to all household members. As a result, all members will be capable of memorising the verse: *“You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlet between your eyes”* (Deuteronomy 6:8).
- Ø This verse should be practiced throughout the day.
- Ø Each day, the family should discuss how the verse can be applied practically in daily life.
- Ø Our Bible reading must be done on a daily basis, regardless of the circumstances, lest we become spiritually lukewarm.
- Ø The weekend can be the time in which all the daily verses during the week should be revised, and a reward of encouragement given to those who have memorised the verses.
- Ø The family should give care, especially during holiday periods, to learn Bible verses. Verses can be memorised according to subject, for example, verses about virtues, verses about the Holy Sacraments, verses according to letters of the alphabet, and so on.
- Ø We can also encourage our children to participate in Sunday School Bible quizzes and competitions.

My beloved, if we yearn to see the church in our houses, then we must first practice reading the Holy Bible. We must first see the church in the houses of the servants, so that they might provide a role model for the congregation.

PART THREE

**“YOUR HOUSE THAT IS
IN THE CHURCH”**

After seeing the church that is in your house, we need to ask, what is the relationship of the family members with the church?

A person's relationship with the church could be one of four types:

- As a guest
- As a listener
- As a person who prays
- As a servant

1. *The Christian person as a Guest in the Church ...*

My dear brethren, do you and your family feel as guests when you are in Church, or do you feel that you are children belonging to the church?

It is very perilous to go to the church feeling as if we are guests, for many reasons:

- A guest visits, but does not dwell, and so the person who feels he is a guest in the church, would have the same feelings; that he is just visiting, but does not dwell therein or belong.
- As a guest, he may attend the holy Liturgy, but may not enjoy attending Vesper prayers. Furthermore, he is not nourished by the spiritual meetings and Bible studies.

- As a guest, he goes to church only on special occasions, rather than on a regular weekly or daily basis.

In addition, he may only come to church at the end of the Mass, mumble a brief prayer at the church's door, and so miss out on the depth of the life with God, as David the prophet said: *"How lovely is Your tabernacle, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God ... Blessed are those who dwell in Your house; they will still be praising You"* (Psalm 84:1,2,4). David experienced the beauty of dwelling with God, and enjoyed the continuous presence of God in His house; thus he said, *"For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand of my own choosing. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness"* (Psalm 84:10). If you and your family consider yourselves as guests in the church, then you will not enjoy the feelings which were experienced by the prophet David.

- The guest does not visit others at his own leisure: for example, he cannot go too early or too late. Likewise a person who goes to church as a guest, does not go early, even though our Lord Jesus Christ invited him and his family saying, *"I love those who love Me, and those who seek Me diligently will find Me"* (Proverbs 8:17).

In spite of the many commitments and responsibilities of King David, he nevertheless said, *"At midnight I will rise to give thanks to You ... I rise before the dawning of the morning, and cry for help"*, and, *"O God, You are my God, early will I*

seek You.” And he never felt bored with meeting with God, and so he said, *“Seven times a day I will praise You.”* My dear brethren the doors of the church are open wide for you and your family at all times, and the Lord stretches out His arms ready to take you into His embrace. Therefore, draw near to God, and deal with Him in closeness, rather than as a guest.

- The guest does not enjoy everything in the house: for whoever deals with the church as if a guest deprives himself from enjoying the unity with Christ, through the mystery of the Eucharist, Confession, and the light of the Holy Bible’s teachings.

As guests we enter, but we leave quickly, without enjoying the richness of the spiritualities of the church. A guest visiting his friend and leaving before dinner is exactly like one who attends the Mass, however leaves before partaking of Holy Communion. We deprive ourselves from enjoying the rites of all the various occasions such as the hymns of Passion Week, the praises of Kiahk, the joys of the Holy Pentecost, the liturgies during periods of fasts, and so on.

Whoever tastes life in the house of His heavenly father, shall always say with David the prophet: *“For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand of my own choosing”* (Psalm 84).

- Even though a guest may be warmly welcomed, he can still feel as though he is a stranger. So too is he who deals with the church as a guest; he never feels comfortable or settled

in the church. He may spend a short time within, and become anxious to leave in order to run outside into the world.

My dear brethren, you may feel like a stranger in the church because:

- Your ears are not used to the church tunes, because you have not been accustomed to them or learnt them during your childhood years.
- You have not tried to become accustomed to the Coptic language, which the priest and deacons chant during the holy Mass, or tried to learn it.
- From your childhood years, you have not been regular in your attendance at church.
- You are not confessing your sins or living a life of repentance, and so your sins have become a barrier between you and God. Bring down this barrier, by repenting and confessing, and in so doing, you will never feel like a stranger in the church any more.
- Your friends are those from the world, rather than spiritual people from within the church environment.
- You do not have friends from within the church, who may encourage you to come to church, and pray with them, and so on.

- Maybe you are on bad terms with the servants of the church, or the church in general.
- Maybe you have started attending services at other denominational churches, and so you feel strange when you come to the Coptic Orthodox church and listen to her teachings.
- Perhaps your senses have been corrupted by things of the world; your ears are full of the songs of the world, your mind is remembering inappropriate things seen in magazines and movies, thus you become a place for sin to dwell within.
- You may even be too preoccupied with making money, and so money becomes your love, and you cannot stop thinking about it, even in church.

However, the church offers you love, even when you still feel like a stranger.

My dear brethren, consider the reasons why you feel like a stranger in the church, and destroy these feelings from your life.

- The guest does not always take all the members of his family when he goes visiting; likewise are those who think the same about the church. He may go to church alone, for example, without taking his children. He may worry about taking them in case they will misbehave or be noisy, but he does not give any consideration to the child's feelings concerning when he

grows up away from the church environment. A child who is not accustomed to the church and its prayers from childhood, will always feel like a stranger.

Children are in more need of church than adults, so do not forbid them from going to church during their childhood years. Do not fear going to church in cold weather, but rather fear spiritual coldness. Do not fear going to church in hot weather, but rather fear the eternal flame. Do not be neglectful in going early to church, but rather neglect being quick to commit sin. Do not be neglectful in staying up late to pray and praise, but rather neglect staying up late for the purpose of watching television, and associating in other worldly things.

If you do not plant church life in your child during their early years, they will not give forth the fruits of righteousness in their life. If you do not allow your child to enjoy the work of the Holy Spirit in the sacraments, from their childhood years, they will not let you enjoy the fruits of the Holy Spirit in their life. You will not see the work of love, or the smile of joy, or peace in their heart: *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness"* (Galatian 5:22).

Destroy this sense of strangeness that you feel when in the church, for the church is your home, and your family's home. It is the house of your Father, it is the house of angels and saints, and it is the kingdom of heaven on earth.

The river of life passes through it (Revelation 22:1) and whoever plants his child beside this river, *"is like a tree that grows beside a stream, it gives fruit in the right time, and its leaves do not dry up"* (Psalm 1) For sure the church is the house of God, for He says: *"My house shall be called a house of prayer"* (Matthew 21:13), Jesus Christ being the master builder, *"On this rock I will build My church"* (Matthew 16:18).

2. The Christian person as a Listener in the Church ...

If we come to church to be passive listeners only, then we will miss enjoying many spiritual gifts.

Which brings us to question:

- What are the reasons for people coming to church to listen, rather than to pray?
- What are the characteristics of the listeners?
- What are the results of this type of relationship?

- *The reason for being passive listeners:*
 - We are not regular church attenders, for our parents did not take us to Sunday school, youth meetings, or holy Masses.
 - We did not learn the hymns or tunes of the Coptic language. We did not taste their sweetness, and so our hearts and

emotions are not touched with warm prayers when we hear them.

- We go to church physically, but our hearts and minds are preoccupied with other worldly matters, as our Lord, in the words of Isaiah the prophet mentioned, *“This people draws near to Me with their mouth, and honours Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men”* (Matthew 15:8).
- We have not repented from our sins, and so the doors of heaven are closed before us. Sin is what creates a barrier between us and God, and so we need to repent, and be renewed through prayer.
- The currents of our heart are not in accordance with the currents of Divine Love, and therefore cannot feel the love God gives us. If our hearts are not adorned with Divine Love, we will not be able to love others deeply, or enjoy the work of the Divine Love in our hearts. In this way, we miss the unity with God. The Holy Bible teaches us, *“He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes”* (1 John 10-11).

My beloved, it is important that you plant your household firmly within the kingdom of God on earth, which is the church. Teach

them the prayers and hymns of the church. If you personally have not learnt them, do this now, so that both you and your children will benefit. If you cannot teach, ask someone else who may be more experienced, to help them. Or at least, encourage them to attend the Coptic hymn classes at church.

Make use of the holiday times to encourage your children to learn psalms and verses from the Bible.

I address every parent, to ensure they encourage the practice of Repentance and Confession in the lives of their children. Ensure their close contact with a confession father, who will keep them pure and chaste. In this way, their hearts will be ready and willing to receive the word of God. They will also be capable to sending fervent prayers to God, which will penetrate heaven and reach God's heart.

➤ *The characteristics of the listeners:*

- Going late to church, and leaving early, for the purpose of spending as short time as possible.
- Not participating in the responses of the prayers.
- Being anxious; always looking around, not concentrating on the altar, and looking frequently at the time.
- Being restless; not being aware of what is happening around you, for example, you may sit while everyone else is standing.

While the congregation is concentrating on the prayers, raising up their hearts and eyes to heaven, or bowing in reverence, you may be thinking of other things outside the church, such as your house, your work, money, and so on.

- You may constantly talk to the person next to you, or go in and out of the church several times.

I wish you and your family can start from now to change your attitude towards the church as being a listener. As a listener, you will hear everything, but nothing will stay inside your heart, and nothing shall touch your feelings. Your prayers shall come only from your lips, not your heart, and so, they will never reach God. But the prayers that come from the heart, reach God's heart immediately. A listener cannot say with David the Psalmist: *"Out of the depths I have cried to You, O Lord; Lord hear my voice! Let Your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications"* (Psalm 130:1)

3. *The Christian as a person who prays..*

➤ *What are the results:*

- If we want to benefit spiritually from the church we must partake of the prayers, and not just be guests or listeners. Attending the Holy Mass in the church is like taking a journey in which one ascends on a great and noble journey to the Heavenly Jerusalem. The preparation for this journey begins at home, and concludes at church. At home, you must prepare your mind and heart to stand before the Divine

Throne, in purity. The Eve of the Mass should be a special time for you, different from any other night. You and your family should attend the Vesper Prayers, rather than be pre-occupied with bodily enjoyment. Pray and sing on the eve, make sure your body is clean, as well as your heart, through prayers and spiritual readings.

At church, our spiritual preparations are accomplished through the readings and prayers, and concludes with us being united with our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, when partaking of the Holy Communion.

In order to enjoy the depth of prayers, we must go to church:

✠ *With feelings of joy and earnest :*

With happiness and rejoice we go to church, so that together with David the Psalmist we may declare: *"I was glad when they said to me, 'let us go into the house of the Lord'"* and also, *"My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the Lord, my heart and my flesh cry out for the Living God."* We go to church to seek spiritual blessings, because it is within the church that we see God, and are united to Him through partaking of the Holy Communion. God is amongst us and is transfigured before us, in the Church. When Moses met with God, his face became enlightened like the sun. The Lord is manifested to us through the sacrifice of Holy Communion, and through this light that we receive, we become a light unto the world.

In Church, we also gain spiritual power: ***“They go from strength to strength; every one of them appears before God in Zion”*** (Psalm 84:7)

Hence, the apostolic fathers were strengthened when facing persecutions. St. Paul mentions, ***“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”*** (Philippians 4:13). In church, we are strengthened through the spiritual teachings which we hear, which support us in our lives. We gain strength through our prayers, to which God responds. ***“May the Lord answer you in the day of trouble; may the name of the God of Jacob defend you”*** (Psalm 20:1), and through the community of prayers with others, and the prayers of our fathers the priests for our sake. And through receiving the Holy Communion, we gain even more power, for our Lord Jesus Christ says to us, ***“He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood dwells in Me and I in him”*** (John 6:57).

† *Going early to church :*

God is addressing you and your family saying, ***“Those who seek Me diligently shall find Me”*** (Proverbs 8:17). Peter and John went early to the tomb of Christ, and they rejoiced in the happiness of the Resurrection. Also Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, were the first to enjoy talking with Jesus after His Resurrection. Moreover, it was to them that the Lord Jesus told to go and tell His Apostles about His Resurrection: ***“Do not be afraid. Go, tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me”*** (Matthew 28:10). Thus, David the Prophet prays saying, ***“O God, You are My God; early will I seek You; my***

soul thirsts for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water” (Psalm 63:1).

The church is not being harsh on you and your family when it forbids you from receiving the Holy Communion if you come to church after the Gospel reading. But rather, the church loves you, because she wants you to enjoy the heavenly journey, which occurs during the Mass, from the beginning. The church wants you to attend the readings and prayers, in order to prepare you to be a holy temple, ready to receive Jesus and be united with Him. In this way, you will feel a great spiritual power and you will rejoice.

✠ *With feelings of repentance :*

On your way to church, I want you to be adorned with feelings of repentance, by praying Psalm 14, said in the Morning Prayer. In this psalm, we are asking God, *“Who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill?”* and you will find God answering you in the same Psalm: *“He who walks uprightly, and works righteousness, and speaks the truth in his heart; he who does not backbite with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbour, nor takes up a reproach against his friend; in whose eyes a vile person is despised, but he honours those who fear the Lord; he who swears to his own hurt and does not change; he who does not put out his money at usury, nor takes a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things shall never be moved”* (Psalm 15:2-5). When you pray this psalm, do you feel these words reflected in your life? Do you really have contrite feelings of repentance?

Come into church with a humble heart: *"But as for me, I will come into Your house in the multitude of Your mercy; and in fear of You I will worship toward Your holy temple"* (Psalm 5:7), and in repentance bow before the altar saying, *"We worship you O Christ, with Your gracious Father, and the Holy Spirit, for You have come and saved us."* Proceed to kiss the curtain, remembering the woman with the flow of blood, who said, *"If only I touch His garment I shall be made well"* (Matthew 9:21). In like manner, ask the Lord, who is present upon the altar, the heavenly throne, to heal our spiritual weaknesses, and to grant us His power.

With feelings of repentance, you remember your sins during the prayers:

When the priest says, *"Lord have mercy on us,"* we should recall all our sins, and when we see the cross and candles which the priest is holding in his hand, we remember the blood which Christ shed for us on the Cross, and we remember the effect and work of the cross in our lives.

We also recall our sins when the priest prays the Absolution in the Vesper and Morning Incense, as well as when we chant *"Lord have Mercy"*, forty one times; which signifies the 39 scourges our Lord Jesus received together with the crown of thorns and the spear which wounded His side. We remember that it is because of our sins that our beloved Lord suffered for us. When the priest proceeds around the church with incense, he is taking all the sins we recall at that moment, and raises prayers on the altar for God to forgive our sins.

When he bows before his congregation, saying: *"I have sinned, forgive me"*, bear in mind that you also must bow before anyone whom you have sinned against, or whom you have hurt by any means. Let us apologise and be reconciled.

In repentance, remember your sins when the priest says, *"The Holies are for the holy"*; our sins may be the cause of us not partaking of the Holies, and so distance us from God. Therefore, let us say with David the Psalmist, *"Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean, wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow"* (Psalm 51).

✠ *In reverence :*

I want you to enter the church in reverence, saying with Jacob, *"And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven"* (Genesis 28:17). In order for your prayers to be done in reverence, I firstly ask you, where is it that you stand in church? Is it in a place where you can see all the people entering and exiting the church? Or is it in a place that may be cool or warm? Or is it perhaps where all your friends are gathered?

I ask you and your family members, to stand in a place where you are away from everyone else. In this way you will be able to meet and concentrate on the holy One. Stand in a place which encourages your prayers to be fervent in spirit and revering.

In reverence, remember that you standing before the Divine Throne, and try to resemble the reverence of the Seraphim who

covers his face with his wings because of God's glory. In reverence, close your eyes in order to see the glory of God. In reverence, pray while standing, as the deacon says: *"Stand up in fear and reverence."* You are not supposed to sit down during the Holy Mass, and most especially so, during the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Sacrifice. How is it that we are seated when the Lord is present upon the altar? We should not even talk during the Holy Mass. If speech is needed, sign language would suffice. The same applies to the priest, deacons and congregation. Deacons should not be proud of their voices, by exaggerating tunes and trying to be louder than the rest, for all this contradicts with reverence in prayer.

In reverence we should also be modestly dressed, for we are in the presence of God. We are not coming to church for the purpose of participating in a fashion parade, but we come to church, with a contrite spirit, in order to ask God for His forgiveness of our sins, and to earnestly seek salvation and eternal life.

4. *The Christian as a Servant in the Church ...*

There is no doubt that service in the church is a blessing and favour from God.

- Service is the work of angels; for it is said, *"Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?"* (Hebrews 1:14)

- Service is the way to greatness: *“But whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant”* (Matthew 20:26)
- Service is the way to be uplifted. The Lord Jesus Christ addressed His disciples saying, *“But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be abased, and he who humbles himself will be exalted”* (Matthew 23:11-12)
- Service is well pleasing to God: *“For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men”* (Romans 14:18)

Through service you are honoured by God; as our teacher St Paul said: *“For God is not unjust to forget your work and labour of love which you have shown towards His name, in that you have ministered to the saints and do minister”* (Hebrews 6:10), and also our Lord Jesus Christ said, *“If anyone serves Me, let Him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honour”* (John 12:26). Through service we inherit eternal life with God; for service is not only a blessing and honour bestowed upon us on earth, but also a blessing and honour in heaven. St Paul also assures us saying, *“knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ”* (Colossians 3:24).

My dear brethren, having heard now about the blessings of service, are you not eager for you and your household to serve God's church?

Maybe you want to serve, but feel you do not have the right abilities. For example, you may feel you cannot teach, or do not have a good voice for teaching hymns. But let me tell you, that there are so many other types of service available for you to do. Consider a human body, and see how each member of the body, and each cell, has a specific function. Consider how:

- Each function is unique to the specific member. For example, the function of the heart is different to that of the brain or the liver.
- The function can be visible, for example, the movement of an arm or leg, or it can be unseen, such as the function of the brain or the heart. You will also notice that it is the unseen functions which are more critical than the visible.
- You cannot consider some functions more important than others, because all members work together in unity for the benefit of the whole body.
- Each member has a specific function, and is therefore alive and active.
- If any member is malfunctioning, the whole body may be affected, and may even result in death. It is for this reason

that doctors amputate certain members of the body, in order that the rest of the body remains healthy.

Likewise, each Christian is a living member abiding in the one body, which is the Church. And the head of this body, which is the Church, is our beloved Lord Jesus Christ: *“Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?”* (1 Corinthians 6:15), and: *“For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones”* (Ephesians 5:30). Each one of us has a specific role, in accordance with our capabilities: *“For as we have many members in one body, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that I given to us, let us use them”* (Romans 12:4-6).

Hence, there are many services in the church, depending on various personality types:

‡ *THE SPIRITUAL SERVICE:*

- Teaching: This requires us to join a Servants Preparation class at an early stage, so that we may be equipped for serving in Sunday School.
- Hymns: This requires us to encourage our children, from their childhood years, to learn the church hymns and responses during the Holy Mass. In its wisdom, the church

does not impose a minimum age for ordaining deacons to be 'Epsaltos' (singers), in order to give the chance for ordaining deacons at a young age, so that they may be attached to the church and its service, from a young age.

- Prayer: Prayer may be done with others, or alone. They might be audible prayers, or silent. Prayer is our defence against the devil, and is the means of keeping Satan away from us and from the church. The service of prayers might be to attend Vespers and Matins, spiritual meetings, and revivals, and participating in the holy Mass. We can also pray in our homes as a family.

✠ *SOCIAL SERVICE:*

There are many fields of social service within the church, and this service can be done as a group or individually. You can serve your fellow brethren, and help them to satisfy their needs. You can also serve by visiting the sick. We can never forget the great example of St Mary, when being pregnant, went to serve her elder cousin Elizabeth, who was also pregnant, and how St Mary remained with her until Elizabeth gave birth to St John the Baptist.

✠ *ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL SERVICES:*

The church needs her children to organise administrative matters, to supervise projects and the various activities.

The fields of service in the church are numerous. Choose whatever suits you, for you must be a living, and active member in the Church.

Ensure that you also enable your children to be living members in the church, lest in time, they become members of sin requiring amputation. Listen to the advice of our teacher St Paul: *“And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God”* (Romans 6:13).

PART FOUR

**“THE CONDITIONS OF
MARRIAGE”**

The Christian marriage is a holy, religious, and permanent bond.

The sacrament is performed, openly, between a Christian woman, and a Christian man. It is important that the couple are capable of marriage life, so that they are able to establish a family.

Marriage is not lawful unless it is conducted through religious rites, performed by a Christian priest who has authority from his religious leaders to officiate the sacrament.

Marriage cannot be completed without the consent of both partners.

A man cannot marry before reaching the age of eighteen, unless with the consent of a guardian, according to section 4 of this law.

A Marriage is Prohibited between siblings, and when a man/woman wants to marry their aunt/uncle.

A widower cannot remarry to his mother-in-law, his step mother, his step daughters, his aunts, his sisters-in-law, or their daughters. He cannot marry his brother's wife or her daughters. He cannot marry his (deceased) wife's aunts, or her uncle's wife. He cannot marry his step mother/father's sister, or the sister of his son/daughters-in-law.

The same applies to a widow.

Marriage is forbidden:

- between the adoptee and the adopted, between children that have been adopted by the same parent.
- when a couple remarry whilst their marriage is still binding. If this occurs, the second marriage is declared void. Having more than one wife is forbidden in Christianity.
- when a person is divorced because they committed the sin of adultery.
- a Christian person marries a person that is of another religion, eg Jehovah's Witness, etc.

Marriage is forbidden in the following cases:

- If one of the partners has an illness which affects the sexual relationship
- If one of the partners has a psychiatric disorder
- If one of the partners has a serious illness, and has kept it secret from their partner before marriage
- For a widow/ or a woman whose marriage has been loosed, to remarry within ten months. The exception to this rule is if she delivers a baby within this time.

Being barren does not mean that a marriage is unlawful, even if the case is not subject to cure.

Procedures For Marriage ...

Marriage is recorded in a book by a priest who is responsible for maintaining and completing the records. It should include: the name, profession, address, date of birth (as mentioned in the birth certificate), of each partner. It should also include the name, profession, and date of birth of the parents or guardians. The records should also contain proof of the presence of both partners, and a guardian/parents if one of the partners are under eighteen years of age. The record must also include proof of consent of both partners, and of the guardian/parent, if one of the partners are under eighteen years of age. The record must include the names, ages, professions and addresses of the witnesses. A statement is then produced, which is denoted in section 7 of this law. If there is any objection to the marriage, this must be documented, together with what was done accordingly to rectify. Finally, there must be proof of the completion of the religious rites.

The priest responsible for completing these procedures, keeps a book in which is recorded all the marriage contracts, in subsequent serial numbers, and it must be stamped with the seal of the religious authority. Each contract contains three copies, plus the original. The marriage agreement is then read by the priest to all the attendants.

The partners, witnesses and priest sign the original and the copies. One copy goes to each of the partners, and the third

copy goes to the religious authority to which they belong. The original remains in the book, which the priest keeps for record.

Annulment of the Marriage Ceremony ...

- This occurs if the partners do not agree to marry;
- If the ceremony is not performed according to correct religious rites and before at least four witnesses;
- If the partners are not of a legal age for marriage, as stated in article number 16 of this law;
- If either of the partners has a reason for hindering the marriage, as stated in articles 18, 19, 20 and 25;
- If either of the partners is already married;
- If a Christian is married to a person from another religion;
- If either of the partners are divorced because of adultery;
- If the man threatened the woman to marry her.

A Marriage is loosened only under two circumstances:

- If one of the partners die
- In the case of divorce, according to the divorce circumstances stated in the articles of this law.

Divorce does not occur simply because the partners want or agree to divorce. Articles 113, 114 and 115 need to be taken into consideration before discussing a divorce case...

If either partner denied their Christianity and became atheist, or changed religions or denominations to what is not recognised by the Christian churches in Egypt, such as the Adventist Church, Mormons, etc.

It is considered adultery if either partner fled with a stranger, and is found in a suspicious situation.

If there are proofs, such as letters, between one of the partners and an outsider, suggesting the existence of an extra-marital affair.

If either partner encourages the other to commit adultery or dissipation.

If the wife falls pregnant under suspicious circumstances, for example, because of her husband's illness, or travel, etc.

In the case of homosexuality.

Divorce is not accepted when:

- the partners reconcile
- if either partner dies before the final decision is made concerning the case.

Following a divorce, the rights and responsibilities of the partners toward each other no longer exist. Neither partner can remarry prior to the final decision being made and released.

If a divorce occurs as a result of the husband's mis-doings, then he is liable to financially support his wife until she dies, or remarries.

Unless the court decides otherwise, the partner to whom the divorce is the result of, does not have the right to custody.

Divorce does not affect the responsibilities of children towards their parents.

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