

THE SPIRITUAL MEANING OF

RESURRECTION

The Spiritual Meaning Of Resurrection

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Bishop, Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

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His Holiness Pope Shenouda III

117th Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch
of the See of St. Mark

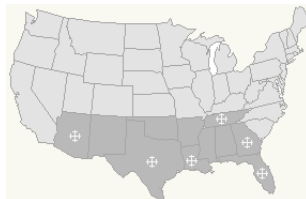


ABOUT THE DIOCESE

His Holiness Pope Shenouda III is the 116 Successor of St. Mark the Evangelist. His Holiness' era is marked by a remarkable growth in the number of Coptic churches abroad. To address the needs of these churches, His Holiness felt the urgency to establish dioceses abroad. Thus the first Coptic Orthodox Diocese to be established in the United States is the Diocese of the Southern United States in 1993. H.H. Pope Shenouda III appointed His Grace Bishop Youssef to oversee this Diocese.

The Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States is composed of the following states:

- * Alabama
- * Arkansas
- * Georgia
- * Mississippi
- * Oklahoma
- * Texas



- * Arizona
- * Florida
- * Louisiana
- * New Mexico
- * Tennessee

There are currently 33 priests serving the 27 churches, and 26 Coptic communities located in the Diocese.

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Introduction



FEAST OF THE HOLY RESURRECTION

The Resurrection of our Lord Jesus is our resurrection (Ephesians 2:6). God has created man to live, not to die. We were raised with Him, and accordingly we should set our minds on things above “*the new everlasting life*,” not on things the earth has to offer “*the old mortal life*” (Colossians 3:1-2). To die with Christ is the end of the “*mortal life*” and the resurrection with Christ is the beginning of the “*everlasting life*”. Believing in the Resurrection leads to a life of righteousness and virtue. Love of eternity makes the righteous long for something greater and more eminent than the world.

The Resurrection gives Christians hope and trust in the heavenly world. With the Resurrection we realize that nothing is impossible. St Paul, the apostle said, “*Eye has not seen, no ear has heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for these who love him*” (1 Corinthians 2:9). The Resurrection is indeed joy and gladness.

As the gate to eternity, the Resurrection has three powerful effects upon our lives. It promises us

- 1) A New Life,
- 2) Eternal Glory, and
- 3) Restoration to the Image of God.

These effects provide the faithful with a desire and passion to want to live with God.

“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

The Resurrection brings us a NEW LIFE *“Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the father even so we also should walk in newness of life”* (Romans 6:4).

Our life now is hidden with Christ in God *“For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory”* (Colossians 3:3,4).

Thus, the new life starts here on earth but we will enjoy its fullness in eternity. The Resurrection proves that in man’s journey of life, death is but a phase.

“There is no death for your servants but a departure”
(The Divine Liturgy).

The Resurrection is the gateway to the lasting victory. It is a promise of ETERNAL GLORY. When Christ appears in glory, we will appear with Him in glory too (Colossians 3:4).

What a wonderful thing to look for! *“But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light. And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. Its gates shall not be shut at all by day, (there shall be no night there). And they shall bring the glory and the honor of nations into it. But there shall by no means enter it, anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life”* (Revelations 21:22-27).

Setting our minds on things above, not on things of the earth means seeking the ultimate spiritual glories of the age to come. Remember your baptism. Live according to His Resurrection! Seek true life in Christ. Put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him (Colossians 3:10). Thus the Resurrection restores to us the IMAGE OF GOD that we had lost due to sin.

In the Creed we recite, “we look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the coming age. Amen.”

Let us all pray for the peace of the Church and the world, for our Pope, H.H. Pope Shenouda III, and above all for our unity with God and with one another.

Chapter One



THE SPIRITUAL MEANING OF RESURRECTION ENACTMENT

In the Divine Liturgy of the Resurrection feast, after reading the Praxis and chanting the resurrection hymn “all you heavenly choirs”, the church lights are turned off signifying the darkness that had surrounded the world before the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ *“The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, And upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death. Light has dawned”* (Matthew 4:16); and the doors of the sanctuary are closed signifying the closed doors of the Paradise.

The priest or the bishop stands inside the sanctuary symbolically guarding the body of our Lord Jesus Christ, *“I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world”* (John 6:51), just as the Cherubim stood in the Garden of Eden guarding the tree of life, *“So He drove out the man;*

and He placed Cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life" (Genesis 3:24).

Two deacons stand outside the sanctuary with the resurrection icon. This signifies the angels that accompanied the Lord Jesus Christ during His life on earth ministering to and serving Him *"Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him"* (Matthew 4:11).

The resurrection icon represents the Lord of Glory Who descended to Hades through the cross and led captivity captive; and now He is ascending to Paradise to restore our father Adam and his children to it *"Therefore He says: 'When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men. Now this "He ascended" what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth?"'*" (Ephesians 4:8-9). The rest of the deacons symbolize the spirits of the righteous ascending with the Lord Jesus Christ to Paradise.

The resurrection enactment starts with a dialogue between the angles accompanying the Lord Jesus Christ (the two deacons standing outside the sanctuary) and the cherubim inside the Paradise (the priest, or the bishop inside the sanctuary). In this dialogue they declare the good news of the resurrection by chanting three times.

“CHRIST IS RISEN. INDEED HE IS RISEN”

Then the two deacons chant three times Psalm 24:7 *“Lift up your heads. O you gates and be lifted up, you everlasting doors, And the King of Glory shall come in.”* The kings are the cherubim who are guarding the way to the tree of life and the angels guarding the heavenly Paradise *“Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel”* (Revelation 21:12).

The everlasting doors are the doors of the Paradise. The King of Glory is our Lord Jesus Christ *“Which none of the rulers of this age knew for had they known, they would not have crucified the lord of glory”* (1 Corinthians 2:8).

The priest, or the bishop replies from inside *“who is the King of Glory?”* (Psalm 24:8). This question is not out of lack of knowledge but a rhetorical one of amazement; as it is written in Isaiah (63:1-3) *“Who is this who comes from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? This One who is glorious in His apparel, traveling in the greatness of His strength? I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save. Why is Your apparel red, and Your garments like one who treads in the winepress? I have trodden the winepress alone; and from the peoples no one was with me.”*

The two deacons from outside answer saying *“Who is this king of glory? The Lord strong and mighty. The Lord mighty in battle”* (Psalm 24:8).

The Lord triumphed over Satan in the battle of the Cross *“Having disarmed principalities and powers He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it”* (Colossians 2:15). He is the mighty and strong God Who bounded Satan, that was perceived as strong; entered his house, Hades; *“and plunder his goods unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house”* (Matthew 12:29).

Then the doors of the sanctuary open just as the doors of the Paradise were opened and the lights are turned on symbolizing the light of Resurrection that has enlightened not only Paradise but also the whole cosmos *“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light”* (Ephesians 5:8).

The deacons with the icon of resurrection enter the sanctuary and proceed around the altar three times while chanting the resurrection hymn “CHRIST IS RISEN” as the Lord Jesus Christ has entered the Paradise with His angles and the souls of the righteous *“Open to me the gates of righteousness I will go through them, And I will praise the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord through which the righteous shall enter. I will praise you for you have answered me, And have become my salvation. The stone which the*

builders rejected. Has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing; It is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it" (Psalm 118:19 - 24).

After that, the procession goes three times around the nave of the Church symbolizing the apparitions of the Lord Jesus Christ after His holy resurrection *"And that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time"* (1Corinthians 15:5-8).

And the apparition of some of the saints after the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and their entry to the Holy City *"And the groves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised and coming out of the groves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many"* (Matthew 27:52-53).

At the end, the procession goes again inside the sanctuary for one more time around the altar signifying the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ to the Heavens forty days after His holy resurrection, the resurrection of all the believers and their entry to the Kingdom of Heavens at the last day.

This wonderful rite has its deep spiritual meaning too. The sanctuary represents the believer *"Do you not know that you*

are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16). When a believer shuts his doors before the Lord, he will live in spiritual darkness *“All the bright lights of the heavens I will make dark over you, And bring darkness upon your land; says the Lord God”* (Ezekiel 32:8) but when he accepts the Lord Jesus Christ, Who rose from the dead, this person will be transferred by Him from the power of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of His love *“He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love”* (Colossians 1:13).

O my Lord Jesus Christ, Who have enlightened the world by Your holy resurrection. O You, Who give light to every man coming into the world *“That was the true light which gives light to every man coming into the world”* (John 1:9); raise us from the death of sin, enlighten the eyes of our understating, and grant us alertness in order to do what is pleasing to You always, that we may know what is the hope of Your calling and what are the riches of the glory of Your inheritance in the saints. Amen

O true lamb of God the Father, Who rose from the dead on the third day, straighten our feet into the way of peace, keep us from every evil all the days of our life, and grant us the forgiveness of our sins.

St. Athanasius said:

“As He Himself, who sanctifies all, says also that He sanctifies Himself to the Father for our sakes (John 17:19), not that the Word may become holy, but that He Himself may in Himself sanctify all of us, in like manner we must take the present phrase, “He highly exalted Him” (Phil. 2:9), not that He Himself should be exalted, for He is the highest, but that He may become righteousness for us (Corinthians 1:30), and we may be exalted in Him, and that we may enter the gates of heaven, which He has also opened for us, the forerunners saying, “Lift up your gates, O ye rulers, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in” (Ps 24:7). For here also not on Him were shut the gates, as being Lord and Maker of all, but because of us is this too written, to whom the door of paradise was shut”.



Chapter Two



THROUGH HIS DEATH, HE TRAMPLED UPON DEATH

The most important blessing that the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ brings about is victory over death; as we chant in the Resurrection hymn, through His death, He trampled upon death.

A commonly asked question is Why did God create death? The answer is that God did not create death. On the contrary, He created us to live eternally with Him *“God did not make death, and He does not delight in the death of the living. For, He created all things so that they might exist; the generative forces of the world are wholesome, and there is no destructive poison in them, and the dominion of Hades is not on earth. For, righteousness is immortal”* (Wisdom of Solomon 1:13-15).

However, death entered into the world through the envy of the devil (Reconciliation Prayer of St. Basils Liturgy). Death passed to all those who were deceived by Satan and did evil *“therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all*

men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12). Every human being is involved in that fall.

Satan deceived us into disobeying the Lord, falsely promising us equality with God *"Then the serpent said to the woman 'You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God knowing good and evil'"* (Genesis 3:4,5). So, through this deception we fell from Eternal Life, and were exiled from the Paradise of Joy. As a result, our original nature changed from being pure and eternal to becoming sinful and mortal; *"For the wages of sin is death"* (Romans 6:23).

Thus sin entered our world separating us from our Creator the source of life; and subjecting us to corruption and death which are both the cause and effect of sin *"do not invite death by the error of your life, or bring on destruction by the works of your hands"* (Wisdom of Solmon 1:12), *"God created us for incorruption, and made us in the image of his own eternity, but through the devil's envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his company experience it"* (Wisdom of Solmon 2:23,24).

After the fall, Satan who had the power of death became the ruler of the world, and procured dominion over us. Consequently we became fearful of death even before experiencing it and thus subject to its bondage all our lifetime *"Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He himself likewise shared in the same,*

that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Hebrews 2:14 - 15).

This power of death enslaved us to three enemies i.e. the world, the flesh, and Satan *“For all that is in the world-the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life-is not of the Father but is of the world”* (1 John 2:16). Because we are mortals we have an inherent tendency to want to enjoy the world as much as we can and to care for our flesh so we may live longer on earth., and we became self conceited just like Satan; only to die after all of that, and return to the source from which we came. Thus death and fear from death became our biggest and most enduring enemy *“The last enemy that will be destroyed is death”* (1 Corinthians 15:26).

After the fall, God promised Adam and Eve that the seed of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent who had the seed of death *“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel”* (Genesis 3:15). Then, in order for God to keep His promise vivid in the minds of people and hence maintain in them hope for permanent restoration of life and complete victory over death, God gave glimpses of victory in the lives of some Old Testament figures who had proven to be godly and pleasing to Him.

The first man who defeated the power of death was Abel. Death just was not able to stop him from bearing witness to God. There is a secret behind Abel's victory. St. Paul described the secret behind Abel's victorious attitude saying: *"by faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks"* (Hebrews 11:4).

Another example of a man who walked in victory and was exempted from death because of his faith, manifest in works, is Enoch. For *"by faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, and was not found, because God had taken him; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God"* (Hebrews 11:5).

Another victory designed by God was through the blood of the Passover lamb *"when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt"* (Exodus 12:13).

Among the Old Testament famous figures to whom the victory of the Cross and Resurrection was revealed is King David. Through his prophetic eye, the psalmist David saw this victory and wrote: *"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me"* (Psalm 23:4).

These incidents of victory over death consolidated faith in the hearts of the Old Testament godly people causing them

to look at death from a different perspective. Hence when physical death came, *“these all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth”* (Hebrews 11:13).

The final, wholesome, ultimate, long-awaited-for, death-liberating and fear-removing agent dawned on humanity with the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. This He accomplished through His Crucifixion and Resurrection. However St. Paul said, *“by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel”* (2 Tim 1:10).

The Lord chose the cross to be the way of His death in order to defeat death in its ugliest and strongest form; thus defeating all others forms of death, leaving no room nor chance for death to rule once again. *“Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us for it is written, Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”* (Galatians 3:13).

Through His Death and Resurrection our Lord Jesus Christ destroyed Satan and set us free from the fear of death *“in as much then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage”* (Hebrews 2:14,15).

Why is then death still considered as an enemy and consequently so much feared?

Any enemy can only bring fear into our hearts as long as we do not decide to bravely face, define and confine his weakness. Now realizing the magnitude of our weapon, the Cross of our Lord, which we have with us all the time, we can confront our enemy (death) with all bravery and courage, and disarm it from all its seemingly frightening attempts, claiming through faith, our victory which resides in the Resurrection of the Lord. St. Paul himself, out of personal experience recorded *“who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Romans 8:35-39).

The stages through which our Lord had passed till He reached the Cross passing through the valley of death but emerging resurrected and victorious, are the same stages that true believers go through. For during the journey of our life, we go through the stages of dying to the world, the flesh and

ourselves, get buried with our Lord Jesus Christ in Baptism, pass through the valley of trials and spiritual warfare but then emerge triumphant able to shout victoriously with our Lord Jesus Christ: *“O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?”* (1 Corinthians 15:55).

St. Paul beautifully sums these stages up in his epistle to the Romans saying, *“therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life”* (Romans 6:4). Thus Death is replaced by life and fear by joy.

That explains why death has lost its meaning and definition. We don't fear death anymore because it does not separate us from God nor end our life *“for to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain”* (Philippians 1:21), nor stop us from serving God or praising Him. The new prospect and dimension that the Resurrection has added to our definition and understanding of life and death is that ... *“if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's”* (Romans 14:8). Death does not conclude my joyful journey in Christ but rather deepens it *“having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better”* (Philippians 1:23).

Moreover, it became clear to us that after the victory that we have gained in our Lord Jesus Christ's Resurrection, the physical death of the body is just temporary until the second coming of our Lord; for, in His second coming, He will raise

our bodies because He is the savior of the body *“For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the savior of the body”* (Ephesians 5:23). Through the Resurrection of the Lord the *Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire* (Rev 20:14) and the song of resurrection became *“O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?”* (1Corinthians 15:55).

May the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ and His glorious Resurrection empower us against all evil, liberate us from all bondage to the world, the flesh and ourselves, and allow God to reign and rule over our hearts.

All glory and praise be to our Lord and savior, the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ.

St. Athanasius said:

“Now that the Saviour has raised His body, death is no longer terrible; for all who believe in Christ tread him under as nought, and choose rather to die than to deny their faith in Christ. For they verily know that when they die they are not destroyed, but actually [begin to] live, and become incorruptible through the Resurrection. ... Their contempt for death is so great that they even eagerly rush upon it, and become witnesses for the Resurrection the

Saviour has accomplished against it. ... And so, death having been conquered and exposed by the Saviour on the Cross, and bound hand and foot, all they who are in Christ, as they pass by, trample on him, and witnessing to Christ scoff at death, jesting at him, and saying what has been written against him of old: "O death, where is thy victory? O grave, where is thy sting?"



Chapter Three



GLORIFIED THROUGH SUFFERING

Crucifixion entailed extreme suffering and excruciating pain. The thoughts of being nailed to a cross through ones ankles and wrists makes a person envision horrific agony. Death slowly overcoming a person through suffocation after becoming too exhausted to pull oneself up in order to breathe makes one wonder how could our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ have to suffer this form of execution. This manner of bringing about death was only set aside for the most violent of criminals in ancient Rome.

The Lord Jesus Christ spoke about His suffering to come as “*an hour of glory*.” Such glory that perhaps only He could set the precedent for. This “*hour of glory*” would be one which would manifest the supreme Divine splendor of God. Immediately before the Lord Jesus Christ’s suffering, He said, “*The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified*” (John 12:23). The Lord Jesus Christ did not mean the glory found within the Resurrection, but the actual suffering as “*an hour*

of glory". The next verse in the Holy Gospel of St. John tells us, "*Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain*" (John 12:24).

Truly there is no glory within the actual suffering of the Lord Jesus Christ. No one can dispute this fact. But what occurred in His hour of suffering and what the Lord Jesus Christ completed on the Holy Cross glorified God the Father and His Son the Lord Jesus. Only this glory can be associated with His suffering. In the Lord Jesus Christ's prayer to the Father, He prayed, "*Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son that Your Son also may glorify You*" (John 17:1). Definitely, the hour of Crucifixion was this hour.

The Lord following His glorious Resurrection spoke of His glory of Crucifixion to the Disciples on the road to Emmaus. "*Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?*" (Luke 24:26). How did the Lord achieve His glory? Clearly, glory was achieved through His suffering.

The three disciples present with the Lord Jesus Christ at the Transfiguration saw the glory of this spectacular event. They were privileged to see Moses and Elijah the prophets speaking with the Lord Jesus Christ "*and spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem*" (Luke 9:31). The Lord blessed these three disciples with a preview of eternal glory. No one can begin to imagine the magnitude of what these three

disciples beheld. Following the glorious Resurrection though it became possible to realize and further understand eternal glory. For before the glorious Resurrection the Lord Jesus Christ told the three present with Him at the Transfiguration, *“Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead”* (Matthew 17:9; Mark 9:9; and Luke 9:36).

The apostle St. Paul explains to us further the concept of glory which followed the Lord Jesus Christ’s suffering. *“...looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God”* (Hebrew 12:2). What this means, *“who for the joy that was set before Him”* is that the Lord Jesus Christ was anticipating the glory which followed the suffering upon the Holy Cross. For the glory He endured the Holy Cross, its shame, and its pain.

Another example of St. Paul illustrating that the glory followed the suffering can be found in Hebrews 2:9,10, *“Jesus was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting for Him, for who are all things and by who are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.”* Apparently St. Paul’s message here was saying that suffering and glory will follow one another.

For us as children of God, suffering on this earth should represent only one side of life, the earthly. The glories which will follow suffering represent the other, the Heavenly. Suffering cannot be viewed separately from glory. They both go hand in hand.

To serve and worship God is how we glorify Him here on earth. Heavenly glory is what we strive for. St. Paul said to the Romans, *“if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together”* (Romans 8:17). Again to the Ephesians St. Paul teaches about the Lord Jesus Christ, *“and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus”* (Ephesians 2:6). For the faithful, the Lord Jesus Christ suffered and was crucified and *“He raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places.”*

In the Holy Book of Revelations St. John reveals this great and magnificent vision of heavenly places to us,

“And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals. Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, ‘Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?’”

“And no one in Heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it. So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open

and read the scroll, or to look at it. But, one of the elder said to me, John, ‘Do not weep. Behold the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals.’

“and I looked, and behold, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain.”

“a Lamb as though it had been slain” represents the Lord Jesus Christ in this context.

“Then He came and took the scroll. Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the lamb each having a harp, and they sang a new song, saying, ‘You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals’;

(Why?)

“For You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation.” They said with a loud voice, ‘Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing!’

“And every creature which is in Heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that

are in them, I heard saying, 'Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!'" (Excerpts from Revelation 5)

Truly this is very strong imagery and clear evidence of the suffering on the Holy Cross and the glory behind His suffering.

Let us pray that as we all contemplate the sacrifice of the Holy Crucifixion and the liberation of man from death by the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ that we also reflect upon the glory brought about through the manifestation of the two events.

St. Cyril the Great said:

“Our Lord Jesus Christ consecrated for us a new and living way ... It is not then that He may present Himself to God the Father, that Christ has ascended up on high: for He ever was and is and will be continually in the Father, in the sight of Him Who begat Him, for He it is in Whom the Father ever takes delight. He ascended on this occasion as man, for a strange and unaccustomed manifestation, the Word who of old was without humanity. For us and for our sakes He did this, in order that, man that He was, He might hear addressed to Him in His wholeness, as Son in

power and with flesh, the words “Sit at my right hand” (Ps. 109: 1), and transmit the glory of sonship to the whole race through Himself. ... He manifested Himself as man, in order to set us once more in the sight of the Father, we who had gone from His gaze by reason of the primeval transgression. He sat down as Son, that we too might be called sons through Him and children of God. For this reason also Paul, who insists that he has Christ speaking by his voice, teaches us to regard the events that happened in the life of Christ alone as common to the whole race; saying that God “raised us up with Him, and made us to sit with Him in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 2:6)”.



Chapter Four



DO NOT WEEP

D*o not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed* (Revelation 5:5).

The scene of Mary Magdalene, weeping before the Lord's tomb that had been sealed by the order of Pontius Pilate, reminds us of the scene of St. John the theologian weeping before the scroll that had been sealed with seven seals "*So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it*" (Revelation 5:4); and no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll or to look at it. All the seven seals had to be loosened before all the kingdoms could become the Lord's kingdom "*Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying 'The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!'*" (Revelation 11:15).

The similarity between the reason for Mary Magdalene's tears and that for St. John's is prominent. Mary was weeping because "*they have taken away the Lord out of the tomb and*

we do not know where they have laid Him” (John 20:2). For her, the Lord who was once the hope of Israel’s redemption was dead; and his tomb sealed through Pilate’s decree to ensure and proclaim His death to everybody. To Mary, there did not seem any more hope in redemption, salvation, or life. The Master was dead and so were she and all of Israel.

St. John the theologian wept for the same reason. Humanity was delivered to the sentence of death (the sealed scroll) and no one was found worthy to open the scroll or loosen its seals (Revelation 5:3). Such were the consequences of our sins and the subsequent death sentence which reigned over us; whereby we were bound and sold as slaves.

Both seals, the one before Mary’s eyes and the other before John’s send the same message: We are hopelessly dead!

But the heavenly hosts had some good news for both; Mary Magdalene and St. John the theologian. At the tomb, the angels said to Mary, *“Woman, why are you weeping?”* (John 20:13) and in the revelation, one of the elders said to John *“Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed”* (Revelation 5:5).

Mary turned around and saw the Lord, but thought He was the gardener. In the same manner, St. John turned around expecting to see the Lion; but, to his surprise, he saw a Lamb as though it had been slain.

In a matter of few minutes, both of them came to a new realization. Mary knew that the gardener is the Risen Lord, and John knew that the slain Lamb is the prevailing Lion.

Praise and worship have filled heaven and earth because of the glad tidings of the Resurrection of the Lord. On earth, Mary spread the good news to the disciples and the disciples in turn to the rest of the world. Similarly, in heaven, praises and worship started among the four living creatures and the twenty four elders (Revelation 5:8) and then spread to the rest of the angelic hosts numbered by thousands of thousands and ten thousands times ten thousands (Revelation 5:11). After that the praise and worship spread to include every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them (Revelation 5:13).

Today we rejoice because the slain Lamb has risen becoming the prevailing Lion. Let us call upon all the heavenly orders and earthly ranks to praise with us because the Lord has broken death seal; trampling upon it by His death granting us a new life in Him.

During the Divine Liturgy, right after the Thanksgiving Prayer, the priest covers the altar and the mysteries (the to-become-body-and-blood) with the Prosphering (the latter representing the stone on the tomb of the Lord) and then he places on it a small mat that represents the seal on the stone.

The symbolic significance of the mat:

If we follow this mat from the beginning of the Divine Liturgy we will find that:

- It is the same mat that the priest uses when choosing the lamb. Here the mat represents Abraham's knife that he had taken with him to offer his son Isaac.
- It is the same mat in which the priest wraps the bread before the procession of the Lamb. Here it represents the sin of the whole world that the Lamb of God took away.
- It is the same mat that the priest places on the Prospherine. Here it represents the seal on the tomb of the Lord.
- It is the same mat the priest holds before his face while praying the Reconciliation Prayer. Here it represents the veil that separated God from us because of our sins.
- It is the same mat the priest places on his left hand, after the Reconciliation Prayer, while praying "meet and right". Here, holding the mat representing the seal is a proclamation to the whole world that the seal is loosened and the Lord is risen.
- It is the same mat the priest moves from his left hand to the right hand and finally places it on the chalice in the east till the end of the Divine Liturgy.

He does that before drawing the sign of the Cross on himself and the congregation while saying “holy” three times, thus indicating that our sins, which had: (a) incurred the death sanction on all of us, (b) become a separating veil between God and us, (c) constituted the knife that slew the true Lamb of God on the cross, have been finally washed away completely by the precious Blood of the Risen Lamb.

Praise the Lord, He is risen and the slain Lamb is alive. This means we are also alive in Him, by Him, and through Him. The Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ has indeed wiped away and cancelled our sins. Therefore, my brethren, with St. Paul’s words echoing in our ears that “*if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins*” (1 Corinthians 15:17); let our mouth be truly filled with joy and our tongue with gladness because the Lord Jesus Christ has risen from the dead.

St. Cyril the Great said:

“In what manner can man upon earth, clothed as he is with mortality, return to incorruption? I answer, that this dying flesh must be made partaker of the life-giving power which cometh from God. But the life-giving power of God the Father is the Only-begotten Word: and Him He sent to us as a Saviour and Deliverer. And He became flesh ... in order that, having implanted Himself in us by an inseparable

union, He might raise us above the power both of death and corruption. ...

For He clothed Himself in our flesh, that by raising it from the dead He might prepare a way henceforth, by which the flesh which had been humbled unto death might return anew unto incorruption. ... And Paul testifies “For as by man is death, by man is also the resurrection of the dead” (1Corinthians 15:21). ... The Word therefore, by having united unto Himself that flesh which was subject unto death, as being God and Life drove away from it corruption, and made it also to be the source of life... When therefore we eat the holy flesh of Christ, the Saviour of us all, and drink His precious blood, we have life in us, being made as it were, one with Him, and abiding in Him, and possessing Him also in us”.



Chapter Five



THE PASSOVER

The Glorious Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ is a blessed occasion for joyous celebration and jubilation in remembrance of Him, the first fruit of the Perfect Resurrection. This Resurrection historically and for the ages to come earmarks the passing over of our Lord Jesus Christ's physical body into His new glorified one. It is this transition that announces Christ's eternal immortality without ever having to be subjected to death again; for death has been humbly trampled over, through the Lord's Crucifixion and heroically conquered by His Glorious Resurrection.

"Pascha" originally describing the Jewish Passover, presently refers to the Glorious Feast of the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Our precious Lord is the Lamb of God Whose sacrifice delivers the faithful from condemnation and death, just as the sacrifice of the Passover lamb had delivered the ancient Jews from slavery and death in Egypt "For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment:

I am the Lord” (Exodus 12:12). St. Paul specifically instructs us, “*therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth*” (I Corinthians 5:7-8).

This deliverance of the faithful and righteous from a death-bound earthly life to a death-free eternal one is the essence and joy of Salvation.

An Ante-Nicene Father, Tertullian (c. 210) writes, “the operation of death is plain and obvious; it is the separation of body and soul”.

We Christians know that the reunion of the soul and body after death is what transforms the physical body into the spiritual one we are now aspiring for. The soul of the faithful will not die; as is written in the Holy Gospel of St. Matthew “*And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell*” (Matthew 10:28).

Passing over from the corrupted human nature to the renewed man is the essence and morale of the Glorious Resurrection. Prior to that, the universal condition of fallen humanity was corruption, immorality and mortality. Now, we the blood-saved believers are no longer under, nor do we want to maintain the status quo of fallen humanity. Instead,

in the light and joy of the Glorious Resurrection, we must continuously choose to shed our corrupted human nature and desire to put on the new man. It should become our goal and objective in life to constantly renew our thoughts and mind, yielding to the Holy Spirit, allowing Him to work in us in order to transform us into the new creature worthy of communion with God *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new”* (2 Corinthians 5:17).

St. Paul taught the Galatians *“But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God. From now on let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus”* (Galatians 6:14-17).

The process of renewal or passing over brings about reconciliation among enemies, peace instead of war, tranquility in the midst of turbulence; and greatest of all it brings one into harmony with God, self, family, church life, service, and friends. Ultimately, passing over into the new man, made possible through the Glorious Resurrection, unites human beings to God and to each other *“for the Kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit”* (Romans 14:17).

Let us remember that the transitioning of mortality to eternal immortality in the Lord Jesus Christ is a status converter, changing us from foreigners to citizens. Without controversy, the church can be said to exist in a sinful world. Christians are heavenly citizens of the Kingdom of God and are therefore strangers in a foreign land regardless of residence. So, they must always be on guard lest they fall and make the wrong choice of adopting the ways of a fallen society (Matthew 5:48, Romans 3:23). We are called through the glorious resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ to be free from anger, worldly coveting, hatred, and gloom. We must shun evil, do good, and pray for our friends as well as our enemies. We are called to grow in the perfection of the new man.

During the celebration of this glorious Feast, I urge you to choose happiness and gladness over worry and sadness. Establish yourself in the ongoing process of renewal in spite of the challenges you may meet in life. The Passover from the old-man-earthly state to the new-man-heavenly state has been made possible to us all through the Crucifixion and Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. The old nature, which has not been transformed by the Holy Spirit, is still enslaved to sin and death missing out on true joy or happiness. I encourage you to find and capture all the happiness that earthly life can afford through the deliberate and progressive passing over from the defiled, corrupt nature to the renewed, refreshed one.

Finally, during this most joyous times; as Christians, let us all live the Resurrected life of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us renew our inner man and encourage others to pledge to do so; just like St. Paul, who even while under house arrest in Rome, told the Philippians, *“...Christ will be magnified in my body whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain”* (Philippians 1:20-21).

May the abiding love, joy, and eternal peace brought about by the Crucifixion and Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ be with us all.

St. John Chrysostom said:

“Today [Christ] our First-fruits has ascended into heaven. He who assumed our flesh is risen to the Father’s throne, so as to consummate the slaves’ reconciliation, abolish the old enmity and grant the earthly humankind peace with the heavenly host. Today we have won victory over demons, we have won the prize, we have won rewards, crowns and glory! For this reason let us all rejoice, looking at the First-fruits of our race seated on high, and to our humanity [in Christ] which has ascended to the throne at the right hand of God!

Consider, Beloved, how far the goodness of our God now extends, and his ineffable economy toward our race, which has fallen from paradise by

Satan's guile, and which was sentenced to such an eternal damnation, to what height [God] has raised us. We who were previously unworthy of the earth, today have ascended into heaven. Our nature which was not considered worthy of paradise has now been raised to first seat in heaven, and which was a toy in the hands of demons is now being worshipped [in the Person of Christ] by the angels and the hosts on high".



Chapter Six



GLORIOUS FEAST OF THE RESURRECTION

On this blessed event the glorious Resurrection feast by which and through which we have been granted lots of blessings. For, by the death of our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross, death was defeated and it lost its grip and power over humanity. By the descent of our Lord of glory into Hades, the guards of Hades were terrified having realized that the forthcoming was not a normal person but the Lord God of Hosts Who cannot die and before Whom the gates of Hades were destroyed. Thus He entered with mighty power to lead captivity captive and liberate from the authority of death.

The Lord entered Hades to proclaim to those who died on the hope of resurrection that He had offered Himself a living sacrifice acceptable before God the Father thus fulfilling His promise to Adam to crush the serpent's head, and washing all of humanity's sins with His precious blood. Hence propitiation was procured and reconciliation was settled between heaven and earth.

Adam and Eve and all the captives of Hope rejoiced at the Lord's proclamation of Salvation from eternal death and Satan's grasp. They rejoiced at the opening of the gates of paradise and many of the reposed rose and entered the holy city of Jerusalem.

Then the Lord rose from the dead on the third day granting the church life, triumph, and enlightenment. He also gave us the power of His Resurrection and the partaking of His sufferings through the holy mystery of Baptism from which we emerge renewed in His image and likeness and become a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit.

The Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ has granted enlightenment to the believers. For, the door to the Paradise of Joy was opened forth before them, the wall separating God from humanity was broken down, and the Cherub guarding the Tree of Life with a fire sword was removed and we were given to partake of the Holy body and blood of our Lord through the Mystery of the Eucharist.

The Resurrection of our Lord renewed the once lost Hope in eternal life. Fear from death dissipated as death is no more the end of life but the beginning of a better one. That is why the martyrs hurried with love and joy to shed their blood for the sake of the Lord in order to obtain a better resurrection.

The Resurrection of our Lord restored power to the disciples and all those who believed in His name. For instead of the terrible fear they were in after the crucifixion and burial of our

Lord, they were proclaiming powerfully and courageously. The forty days after Resurrection that the Lord had spent with His disciples were the reason behind their boldness and open defense of the Resurrection so firmly and steadfastly.

The Resurrection of our Lord granted us the heavenly wisdom foretold in Solomon's prophecy: Wisdom (the Logos) built her house (the church) and carved her seven pillars (the holy mysteries) and slaughtered her offerings (Jesus Christ) and mixed her wine in her cup (the precious blood) and prepared her table (the Holy altar) and sent forth saying "*whoever lacks wisdom let him come to me*" and I say to the short of understanding "*come eat from my food and drink from my wine*" (the Holy Communion).

The outcome of the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ is powerful, effective and everlasting extending to the end of ages to all those who believe in it. On the other hand, those who reject and deny it will not have a Resurrection of life but one of condemnation.

May the light of the Resurrection remain shining in our life in order to kindle the Holy Spirit in us so that we may grow in good deeds and virtues keeping away from the darkness of sin where there is no fellowship between darkness and light. Let us trust in the power of the Resurrection because with it we can trample over serpents and scorpions and all the powers of the enemy. Let us guard ourselves against all attacks from the enemy with the Lord's powerful Cross and Holy Gospel

which have proclaimed the good news to us. Let us delight in the reconciliation with God, the forgiveness we have received through His holy Resurrection and the eternal inheritance prepared for the saints so that we may rejoice always with the disciples who rejoiced for having seen the Lord.

St. Athanasius said:

“The Lord came to cast down the devil, and clear the air and prepare the way for us up into heaven, as said the Apostle: “Through the veil, that is to say, His flesh” (Heb. 10:20) ... For thus being lifted up He cleared the air ... as He says: “I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven” (Luke 10:18); and made a new opening of the way up into heaven as He says once more: “Lift up your gates, you princes, and be you lift up, you everlasting doors.” (Ps 24:7) For it was not the Word Himself that needed an opening of the gates, being Lord of all; nor were any of His works closed to their Maker; but we it was that needed it whom He carried up by His own body. For as He offered it to death on behalf of all, so by it He once more made ready the way up into the heavens”.



Books by
Bishop Youssef

The Spiritual Meaning of Resurrection (English)

The Nativity of Christ (English)

Meditation on the Cross (English)

Virgin Mary An Icon of Simplicity (English)

Fruits of the Holy Spirit (English)

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