



"By continuing to persecute us you grind us like powder. Our numbers increase as you grind us. The blood of Christians is the seed of their crop. Their stubbornness is by itself a teacher. Everyone is moved by what you do to them and the government is unable to stop. Everyone enquires about the matter, and after joining them, they have the desire to suffer with them---The Teacher Tertullian who lived through the pagan persecutions of the second and third centuries."

Since the creation of the sphere in which we live, suffering has been endured by man. Whether because of sin and disobedience or religious beliefs, the afflictions imposed on each other have not changed in their aim of deliverance to cause harm and/or death. Suffering has not been restricted to or targeted towards age, gender, or nationality.

The history of this earthly world is full of tragedies, persecutions, and sufferings. The Lord Jesus Christ carried punishment-inflicted sufferings to the Cross converting them from penalty to blessings. St. Paul proclaimed *"For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but to suffer for His sake"* (Philippians 1:29). Therefore

when we look at and analyze persecution we must not lose sight of its grandeur. As extreme forms of persecution which embodied masses of people engulf us we must search out the benefits disguised in the death and disabilities resulting thereafter.

"For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter"(Romans 8:36; Psalm 44:22).

More often than not peaceful Christian populations in the Middle East generally and Egypt specifically are targeted. The logic behind persecution, elusive as it is, yet, it does not cause Christians to abandon their religion and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It does, however, steal safety and security, end up in untreated or untreatable physical and emotional debilitation and anchor awkward feelings and situations for individuals coexisting and functioning daily in a dual religion society that must live and work together for the productivity and welfare of their country.

Horrible sufferings benefit no man except those who perhaps sadistically find pleasure in witnessing human affliction, death and destruction. Such deranged people lack wisdom and soundness of mind. What problems can be resolved through man-imposed inflictions and sufferings? These satanic

methods are nothing but resolutions to splinter and multiply more problematic severing of people who share living in the same nation. Certainly persecutions will not eradicate a religious population from existence.

Strangely enough, It has never been known or recorded in history of Coptic Christians persecuting non Christians. It is reported that one in five Egyptians is Coptic Orthodox. The surprising question is how has orthodoxy survived all the old and recent persecutions? Could it be simply because they have persecuted no one? Is it not true that we reap what we sow (Galatians 6:7)?

While we rejoice and envy the martyrs of the massacre that took place at St. Mark and St. Peter the seal of the martyrs Coptic Orthodox Church in Alexandria the night of New Year's Eve 2011; our hearts go out for the believers who had witnessed that atrocious, inhumane incident during their presence at the house of God, the place they normally come to for refuge and fellowship. The holiness and peacefulness of a devout night of worship must have become marred forever in the minds of those Christians attending the Divine Liturgy.

Certainly those who have suffered death will taste the sweetness of the Lord Jesus Christ, have relinquished their earthly tolls and troubles and left martyrdom legacy for themselves and their families. Suffering and death are closely related to the Holy Cross. Those who suffer for their Christian faith help restore us and promote our faith.

"You can see clearly that when our heads are severed, we are being crucified, thrown to wild animals, bound with chains, cast in fire and suffer all kinds of afflictions, we do not abandon our religion and faith in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philosopher Youstinos first century).

Anonymous persecutors are cowards. It takes courage to stand up and defend one's beliefs. To die in suicide bombings or to torture another and run off is no sign of valiancy; but rather a manifestation of lack of responsibility and dignity. As the martyr Kibrianos of Carthage said,

"Those who were persecuted were more courageous than those who persecuted them. The battered and torn members overcame the tools which battered and torn. The whips were used frequently, but they could not overcome the unseen faith" (The martyr Kibrianos of Carthage).

We, Coptic Christians, need to ask ourselves:

1. Is there anything we can do through our faith to deter persecution?
2. Should we request protection for the Coptic Communities in Egypt from the Egyptian government?
3. Consider the fact that since 9-11 in the United States no further large-scale instances of violence have occurred. why is it that repeated violence frequents the Coptic populations of Egypt specifically? What can be done to improve this?

St. Paul our beloved teacher found strength and solace in persecution and afflictions...

"And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the off scouring of all things until now" (I Corinthians 4:12-13).

"Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (II Corinthians 12:10).

Caution and discretion must be practiced during the times of persecution. Employ security in your

churches; encourage as many of the nightly activities that are non-liturgical in nature to a daylight schedule, be aware of your surroundings, report any strange activities that are uncommon to your church's normal ones and pray for our enemies that they may come to know the Truth and thus obtain peace and reconciliation with God and themselves.

Just as the Lord Jesus Christ was cursed, demeaned, dehumanized, and tortured so should we be ready to receive and accept persecution knowing that in this way we share in His sufferings and follow the example of our forefathers the confessors and the martyrs.

"Who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing" (I Peter 2:23; 3:9).

May it be according to God's will and not ours. Let us all pray for those who spitefully use us and persecute us all. May the Lord Jesus Christ be with all those families who suffered the loss of their beloved ones and may the numbers of Christians multiply upon

the face of the earth for the honor and glory of our
God and Lord Jesus Christ.

Bishop Youssef
Bishop, Coptic Orthodox Church of the Southern
United States