



My Beloved Children,

I wish each of you a very blessed Coptic New Year abounding in love and goodness.

*"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).* Hope, opportunity, forgiveness, change, and joy are five features enjoyed in the prospects of every new year. The Coptic New Year marked the end of the worst era of persecution the Early Church had ever encountered. By an unlikely paradox perceived by unbelievers, this epic also marked the preeminent years of the Church. The pain of the past is solaced by a profound assessment of a deeper meaning etched in the hearts of Christ's disciples throughout the ages.

St. Cyril of Alexandria, the Pillar of Faith, humbly asks, "If we fear to preach the truth because that causes us some inconvenience, how, in our gatherings can we chant the combats and triumphs of our holy martyrs?" Today, we continue to celebrate the pride of our Christian heritage that was built upon the pain and suffering of thousands of martyrs who have since their martyrdom remain before the throne of God delivering our prayers unto

Him and accompanying us through our daily troubles and challenges when we call upon them to aid us. *"He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son"* (Revelation 21:7).

**HOPE**. We are confronted daily with heresies, blasphemes, hatred, intimidations, and catastrophes. The mental and emotional inflictions of pain have just as much impact, if not even more, on one's spiritual well being as much as on the physical. Hope is a potent remedy. *"So shall the knowledge of wisdom be to your soul; if you have found it, there is a prospect, and your hope will not be cut off"* (Proverbs 24:14). Though we may not think we are persecuted in these modern days with beheadings and physical tortures, Satan is relentless in desiring to sift us like wheat, as He would have to the apostle, Peter (Luke 22:31).

**OPPORTUNITY**. Vigilance is imperative in order to seize opportunities to offer benevolence unto our neighbors and our society. Today, there is a new social coliseum, and the entertainment is stacked with demolished principles in a less conspicuous den of lions and heated furnaces waiting to vehemently assault morals. *"Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith"* (Galatians 6:10). How else

can we be the light in the world (Matthew 5:14-16) if we insulate ourselves in shells? Retreating in these matters is not a form of self-denial or humility. We must put on Christ—hopeful, optimistic, and courageous Christians, bold to speak the truth and shed light on unrighteousness regardless of the fallout of taking a stand against controversial matters. This is how we as Christians ought to stand out—ready to share our voice for the good of the world.

**FORGIVENESS.** Be steadfast and ready to repent from all sin no matter the cause of any weakness. *"For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You"* (Psalm 86:5). Each day brings new challenges and some days our minds conjure up former shortcomings. It is a choice whether to succumb to past or present sins or to strive toward repentance daily. Forgiveness is at hand if you ask for it. What prevents you from asking for such a great gift as forgiveness? Seek, knock, and ask, and you will find the kingdom of God before you (Matthew 7:7). For by grace, we can be forgiven. Thus, every time we repent, it is a new year and a new beginning.

**CHANGE.** Nature teaches us a very important lesson—change. Even the seasons change and their beauty and luster are renewed because of the

transformations. The former dissipates and is refurbished by the new. At some point, we must realize the destructive patterns in the past that will undoubtedly curtail any progress in the future. We need to make changes in our lives—desiring a more purposeful outlook rather than clinging onto an unfruitful past. *"But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness"* (Ephesians 4:20-24).

**JOY**. As little children eagerly and joyfully cherish the presence of their parents, so do God's children when they are secure in their relationship with Him. Some days in this world are just harder to bear than others. *"Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day"* (2 Corinthians 4:16). Return to that trusting inner child that innocently places his little hands into the hands of a loving father and finds warmth and refuge and a gentle and assuring smile.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem illustrates how God is for us in every dimension of life for all that is good for us.

"The Savior comes in various forms to each man for his profit. For to those who have need of gladness He becomes a Vine; and to those who want to enter in He stands as a Door; and to those who need to offer up their prayers He stands a mediating High Priest. Again, to those who have sins He becomes a Sheep, that He may be sacrificed for them. He is made all things to all men, remaining in His own nature what He is."

May the Lord bless the crown of the year with His goodness, safeguard all the faithful struggling Christians throughout the world, and bring to repentance all who desire to do harm unto His people.

Bishop Youssef

Bishop, Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern  
United States