



*"Keep the traditions as I delivered them to you" (I Corinthians 11:2).*

With the ongoing process of the patriarchal candidate selection, many are inquiring why so long, so intricate a process, and so much deliberation? Though most are patient with the process, it seems immediacy is often the expectation. Immediacy does not bring out the best nor quantify a process. Immediacy does not address nor accompany historical traditions, particularly those that will profoundly affect the leadership of our beloved Coptic Church.

While the mechanism of any historical church process is certainly important and its specifications are exact, it must be remembered that the final outcome of any time honored process is the ultimate goal. While I have been asked to speak about the process of the selection of a patriarch numerous times, it is not the selection process that is the focus but the final outcome. The process is knowledge based on church canons and bylaws and a means to a final Godly given outcome. All those involved in the

candidate selection for a patriarch are the vehicles to an Apostolic succession.

It is often said that the "sum is equal to its parts". The sum, a patriarch chosen by the will of God, equates with the process or the parts of the electoral process with God as the Supreme Selector for the Patriarch of the See of St. Mark. It is through the will of God that a new patriarch will be selected among the candidates chosen by His people. A patriarch is the "first bishop among equals".

Show Me your authority,

"If you are an ordinary Christian (not an apostle) believe what has been handed down to us...That which had been handed down was true. For it has been transmitted by those whose duty it was to hand it down. Therefore, when you rejected that which had been handed down, you rejected that which was true. You had no authority for what you did" (Tertullian c. 210).

We must look toward the goal, an ultimate gift from the Holy Spirit. How do we anticipate the goal and not clock the time of the "first bishop of all bishops", the 118th Pope and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark?

### **Wait upon the Chosen**

First, we must seek the final outcome. It is a process-

-one that requires honoring the canons and bylaws of 1957. We must remember that the electoral process is one of asking the God of Peace to be among us.

*"The thing which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you" (Philippians 4:9).*

It is our Coptic Church adherence to the selection of a patriarch in the same manner as the reposed His Holiness Pope Shenouda III and before him--His Holiness Pope Kyrillos VI that assures us continuity in supreme papal leadership. Solicitation of the peace of God to be imparted upon the leadership will procure the ultimate goal. The process is the vehicle to the success and end of the extraordinary journey.

Many say the longer the journey the more precious is the end of the journey. One must believe and understand the need to wait upon the process of choosing the next patriarch or Bishop of Alexandria and Cairo.

St. Augustine teaches us to believe that all good things come to fruition. "Believe and you become worthy to understand. Faith comes before understanding, so that understanding becomes part of faith."

If we believe with simplicity in what we are taught and in the tradition before us, then we will understand the details. Our minds often want the details and details encompass time. The papal selection process is faith based and "above time". By faith we unite with God, and by mind you then live Godly. If you do not unite with faith, with God, then resistance takes seed in your heart.

Believe in God and be among the faithful examples in your Coptic Church. The mind may start your journey while your faith will take you upon it and your belief at the end of the journey will demonstrate your faith. The end of the journey is an unseen destination until we arrive at it. It is not good to want to arrive at a destination and miss the journey.

The late Bishop of Gharbia, Bishop Youannis taught if a person says "I want to understand, it is my duty to understand in order to believe," He would instruct them,

**"Believe and you will understand, understanding results from believing and understanding is part of faith."**

### **Affects Will Be Felt Worldwide**

Second, this process is affected by those worldwide and will be affecting those worldwide,

"It is within the power of all, therefore, in every church who may wish to see the truth to contemplate clearly the tradition of the apostles manifested throughout the whole world. And we are in a position to reckon up those who were by the apostle's instituted bishops in the churches, and the succession of these men to our own times. For if the apostles had known hidden mysteries...they would have delivered them especially so those to whom they themselves were also committing, the churches" (Irenaeus c. 180).

The imagination cannot capture the growth of our beloved Coptic Church. The apostles were the firstborn believers within the Holy New Testament. Their teachings affected the world two thousand years ago and continue to affect the world today. Preaching and their teachings were instrumental in spreading the faith. It must have been a daunting task yet they envisioned the destination and went upon the journey without even a whisper of murmurings.

A task of immeasurable proportion was the spreading of the Holy Gospel within the holy apostles in which our Lord Jesus Christ came to earth a perfect man to perfect within them. Could they have imagined the possibility of continental

knowledge of the Word of God throughout the world?

St. James teaches us,

*"But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lack nothing" (James 1:4).*

Let the electoral process abide in its appropriate work and not be hindered so that in the end we will see its perfect works.

### **Be Supportive of the Process**

Third, how can we contribute to the process as a Coptic congregation of faithful? St. James (2:20) admonishes,

*"Faith without works is dead" (James 2:20).*

Do not be discouraged and personally work toward the fulfillment of the patriarch selection for the See of St. Mark.

St James says, *"Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray"* (James 5:13). If you are perplexed and questioning the church's time span, pray for the church. This is indeed a time for prayer, for God's will to be done in the election process of the patriarch of the See of St. Mark, and for the need to remain steadfast and faithful to our Coptic Church.

1. It is essential to lift up prayers for those who are participants in the selection process and certainly the dwindling number of candidates. One must increase readings particularly in Biblical and spiritual Coptic readings, and attend the Divine Liturgy and partake of the Holy Communion with our Lord Jesus Christ with the supplication of God's will with the selection of a patriarch.
2. *"Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others"* (Philippians 2:4). The way of the faithful is calmness and orderliness. Do good to others, abide in love, and support one another. This is a time of thinking not of us but of the spirituality of the whole.
3. Our Lord said to His holy apostles *"...learn from Me"* (Matthew 11:29). Our Lord Jesus Christ's selection of the holy apostles and their teaching encompassed time in years not months.
4. Be cognizant of all the countless blessings and traditions that abound in Coptic Orthodoxy. In Psalm 77:11-12 we find, *"I will remember the works of the Lord; surely I will remember Your wonders of old. I will also meditate on all Your work, and talk of Your deeds."*



5. Know that while feelings come from thoughts and beliefs we hold, faith can overcome faltering and a new patriarch begins a new season as he receives his staff from the "*...King of kings and Lord of lords*" (1 Timothy 6:15) from upon the Altar at his enthronement.
6. Use personal insight, minimize negative and critical thoughts they construct nothing but more of the same and can often tempt us to incur criticalness in others. Awareness of personal vulnerability is essential here. The creation of the earth was in God's time and the patriarchal selection will be as well. The patriarch must be of one heart and one mind with his congregation of faithful and our negative thoughts will not be productive to this end.
7. Continue in the faith believing God that through His intervention in your life and your efforts that you will continue to abide for eternity and not time. The prophet Isaiah 7:9 tell us, "*If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established.*"

We want to be able to hear "worthy, worthy, worthy".

## **Summary**

This is a time on earth that will be recorded in books throughout the span of time, a period of life denoting



great historical importance and an advent that will earmark Coptic heritage. A time in which canons and bylaws must be closely and carefully followed. At no one time before in the history of our beloved Coptic Church has it been challenged to involve such a continental and all-encompassing worldly congregational scope of the faithful. While challenging it is also fulfilling to know that the Coptic Church has followed in the footsteps of the apostles and the faith has spread throughout the world.

While the spread of Coptic Orthodoxy has happened in the blink of an eye, it must be accounted for in the papal selection process of voting. Let us all pray with the same love and conviction that His will be done with the selection of the 118th Pope and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark.

"They preserved the tradition of the blessed doctrine derived directly from the holy apostles, Peter, James, John and Paul. So the sons received it from the father, but few were like the fathers. And it came by God's will to us also to deposit those ancestral and apostolic seeds" (St. Clement of Alexandria, c.195).

May we all pray for a patriarch who will say, "*I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own*" (John 10:14).

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