

STORIES FOR THE YOUTH

1-15

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FORWARD

Once again, I have had the blessing and the pleasure of reading one of Fr. Tadros Malaty's wonderful contributions to the spiritual life of the Coptic Church. While the books are no real substitution for meeting our beloved Fr. Tadros in person, I was glad to have another taste of the love, wisdom and experience that emanates from this loving father. The results of years spent with the beloved Father Pishoy Kamel are clearly evident in his work.

I am glad that this book was translated from Arabic into English. But I am even happier that I was given the opportunity to edit the English translation before it went to press. I hope this trend of editing continues. This editing step is absolutely necessary for the books translated from Arabic for publication and distribution in our Coptic churches in the lands of immigration.

A few years back, John Watson of Oxford University did a review of Abouna¹ Tadros' book Councils and Conciliatory for The Coptic Church Review. The Coptic Church Review is the premier scholarly journal put out for the educational and spiritual benefit of English speaking Copts around the world. It is no surprise, then, that Fr. Tadros is on the publication's editorial board.

Watson gave a favorable review of the book's content, but he also had this to say: "My appeals for careful English-language editing of Fr. Malaty's books have fallen on deaf ears. This is a sad mistake. There are no less than 63 elementary errors of spelling or syntax in the volume under review. Fr. Tadros deserves better. It is a fundamental law of translation that the translator translates into his first language. An English-Language editor, at the very least, is needed for Fr. Malaty. I am sure the Arabic is excellent. The practice of using Arabic speakers for English 'translations' should be abandoned. It is inexcusable. It is no service to the Church. The same problem arises in many poor translations of books by Pope Shenouda.

Once again, a booklet by Fr. Tadros has no index. I continue to hope for better days!" John Watson

I am a member of the "Second Generation" of Copts in the lands of immigration. I cannot possibly agree more with John Watson's sentiments. Our Church in U.S.A and other lands of immigration is in serious need for books written by their fathers to be translated and edited properly. Unfortunately, many of the people translating the books don't have English as a first language; for this reason, many translations have grammar, syntax (sentence structure), and spelling mistakes.

I fear that many youth that may have benefited from their extensive vocabulary were inhibited because they were unable to follow the translations.

I urge any English speaking youth who shares my sentiments to respectfully speak up and express him/herself through whatever media in their Church community. We urgently need people who speak English as a first language to volunteer their time and effort to serve the Church as translators. Even if they don't read or write Arabic, they can serve as editors of writings that have already been translated. Finally, I hope that my request is not ignored or swept under the carpet.

Again, I thank God for the blessings he gives us through the pen of Fr. Tadros and pray that God will keep him with us for many years so that we may benefit from his words and

¹ Abouna" is a term used by the Coptic people to address their fathers the priests. It is equivalent to the English "Fr."

enjoy his contemporary contributions to the spiritual and intellectual heritage of the Coptic Orthodox Church.

A Youth of the Coptic Church

Virgin Mary & St. Pachomius

Coptic Orthodox Church

Story No. 1

Keep One Picture, Drop the Other

On the Sunday following the commemoration of the departure of Fr. Pishoy Kamel (March 26, 1995), a woman who wanted to make confession came to the church of St. Mark (Jersey City, N.J). She was extremely penitent. She said to me, "I was in love with a person years ago and I desperately wanted to put an end to this sinful relationship, but I couldn't get over my feelings towards him, so I kept his picture in my pocketbook."

A few days ago, on the commemoration of the departure of Fr. Pishoy (Mar.21), his picture was given to me. So, as many people do to receive the blessing of his prayers, I put his picture in the same pocketbook with the other one.

That night, in a dream, Fr. Pishoy appeared to me and began rebuking me saying, "How could you put Fr. Pishoy's picture with that other person's picture? You have to make a choice. Keep one and drop the other."

Immediately, I woke up in the middle of the night, took the picture of this person out and tore it to pieces, deciding to live in repentance. Three years after the sinful relationship, I had come for the first time to confess with sincere repentance. I decided to live as our father Pishoy lived, in the spirit of purity, having no communion with sin."

Truly, our beloved father was known for his great love for repentance. He longed to give his whole life to see every soul getting closer to our Holy Savior and experience the joy of communion with God. The World, with its events, joys, and sorrows could not affect his fiery spirit.

Even after his rest and departure from this world, the spirit of preaching did not leave him. He longs for the repentance of all people and prays for the purity of all, in the Holy Christ.

Often our father preached with the evangelistic principle:

"For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness, and what communion has light with darkness" (2 Cor. 6.14)?

He used to say, "Christianity does not agree with half solutions."



*O my Savior, grant me to keep Your picture within me,
This which You engraved with Your own Blood in my heart,
This which Your Holy Spirit formed inside me.
Let my soul be an icon of You, and become ready for the eternal wedding.
My soul, which will be Your bride, carries Your icon,
O my Heavenly Groom.
O God, please take from my heart every picture of corruption
And every earthly thought so that I may fly into Your Heaven.
You would not allow Your Son's image to be kept with corrupted pictures.
You did not allow communion between Your righteous light and abominable darkness.*

*Then, how would I have the audacity to carry both pictures together,
The picture of the Holy Heavenly with the picture of the mortal earthly?*

Please break every earthly picture and statue inside me.

Let Your Holy Spirit carry my spirit to You to become a living icon of Your Holiness.

Story No. 2

Give me A Piece of Smoked Fish

Once, an intense battle ended with the victory of Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte. Therefore, he wanted to reward those valiant soldiers of different nationalities who performed outstanding acts of bravery. "My brave soldiers," shouted Napoleon, "tell me what you desire and I'll be obliged to fulfill it."

The Polish hero said, "Give Poland its independence."

The emperor agreed and said, "I will."

The poor Czechoslovakian said, "I'm a farmer, give me a piece of property to plant."

The emperor said, "It's yours, my friend."

The German said, "Give me a bar in which to drink beer."

The emperor said, "Grant him a bar."

Then it was the Jewish soldier's turn, so the emperor looked at him smiling and said, "What about you, my friend?"

The Jewish person looked at him timidly and with hesitation said, "My lord, if you don't mind, give me a piece of smoked fish."

The emperor, surprised shrugged his shoulders with disapproval and said, "Give this man a piece of smoked fish."

After the emperor had left, the other soldiers surrounded the Jewish man and said to him, "You fool, how dare you ask the emperor for a fish? Is that any way to treat the emperor?"

The Jewish soldier immediately answered, "You'll see who the fool is! You asked for Polish independence, a field, and a bar. The emperor won't give you these things. As for me, I'm realistic. I asked for a piece of fish; maybe he'll give it to me!"



GOD, GRANT ME TO BE REALISTIC.

From the earthly, I can ask for dust,
But from the heavenly, I can ask for heaven.
I am asking each according to his abilities.
Maybe the human will give something,
But often it is given without humility.
But the Heavenly, with love, longs to give even Himself with joy.
Cursed is he who depends on human help.
The human souls come out and they turn to dust.
But whoever depends on You gets very close to You
And is elevated by Your Holy Spirit to live with You forever.
What can I ask of You? You gave me Yourself!
You are the Bread of life, who satisfies me.
You are the spring of life that waters me.
You are the king who leads me.
You are the eternal light and by knowing You, You light my darkness.
You took away every feeling of loneliness.

You became my elder Brother, Heavenly Groom, Divine Friend,
And my Companion Who carries me in my fatigue.
You are all my satisfaction.
O Beneficent! What more can I ask? You gave me Yourself. *O Lord, just grant me to be realistic.*

Story No. 3

Transparent Glass

A rich man once wondered, “What good would all this wealth do to me when I feel this awful emptiness deep down? What does my soul long for in order to have rest?” He then went to a wise man, explaining his problem and seeking his advice.

The wise man took him to the window and both of them looked through the glass towards the heavens. The wise man then asked the rich one, “What do you see?”

“I see the beautiful blue sky.” answered the rich man.

“Look at the street. What do you see?”

“I see many people.”

Then the wise man gave him a valuable mirror and asked him, “What do you see in it?”

“I see my image.”

Then the wise man said, “Through the cheap window glass you were able to see clearly both the beautiful blue sky and the people outside. However, through the image of the mirror you were only able to see yourself. The silver frame around this mirror is like the prison of the ego which is the killer of the soul. This is what the love of silver does.”



Give me Your simplicity

And take away from me the love of the bright silver.
O my Savior, give me Your simple eyes,
They are like the transparent glass, which looks inexpensive.
Let me have Your eyes,
Through them, I can see the beauty of the sky within me.
I can see You with Your Good Father and the Holy Spirit
And long for communion with You,
And the work of Your Spirit inside me,
To find a place in Your Father's bosom.
Yes God, take away from me the love of bright silver
Which looks valuable in the eyes of many.
Many of whom try to work hard for it.
But the truth is: That it controls them, possesses them
And they become its slaves.
It prevents them from the vision of the sky,
So eternity becomes a shadow in their eyes,
And the heavenly glory a mirage.
And the communion with the angels becomes a psychiatric problem
And an abnormality.
Yes, it prevents them from seeing their brethren.
They ask for what is theirs and not for others.
They become prisoners in the prison of the “ego,”
And they lose the glory of the freedom of the sons of God.
My Savior, give me the simplicity of Your eyes,
And take away from me the love of the bright silver.

Story No. 4

Your Father is Sick Come after the Exam

Once, as I was going through the college dormitories, I found a student in a state of great perplexity.

“Why are you so upset?” I asked.

“Our fellow student”, answered one of the students, “is disturbed by an idea that might destroy his future.”

“What is this idea?”

“He is insisting on leaving during his exams and going to Upper Egypt, because he has the idea that his father died today even though it isn’t true. He’s a pre-med student and his absence may result in his failure. He would lose his chance to join college.”

He said to me, “I’m sure that my father died today. I can’t finish my exams, I’ve to leave today.”

Then one of his fellow students intervened saying, “We all suffered from homesickness in our first year away from home and imagined that we had relatives who died, got sick, or even got involved in accidents.”

Nevertheless, the student said, “I’m sure my father died today.”

I tried to calm him by saying that we could send a telegram to his father, asking how he was doing and then wait for an answer. He liked the idea and therefore wrote a telegram to his father. Afterwards, he began studying for the exam. The next day, the answer to his telegram came, “Your father is sick in the hospital. Come after the exam.”

The student completed his exam and got there to find that his father had indeed died. He had actually passed away at the same hour that the student had shouted, “My father’s died!”

This is what psychiatrists call the sixth sense, where a person feels things, which are invisible as if they were visible and definite. This is a true event that I experienced.

If you can, through the sixth sense, join your loved ones and experience their feelings while they are here in the flesh, how much more can you experience this with those whose spirits have departed to paradise where they have joined God. In all their love, they feel your presence and ask that you participate in their glory. Their heart is enlarged and filled with love towards you. You should have friends in paradise who share with you your feelings and who work for you so that you don’t live totally isolated.

Father Pishoy lived among us as a friend to the Archangel Michael and many others. This gave him power and filled his life with hope. This friendship gave him his characteristic smile.

A lot of those who lived among us had the spirit of friendship. The first among them was the late St. Pope Kyrillos VI who was famous for his deep friendship with St. Mina. It has been said that he had been seen in his company, now he is with him in supporting others.



I am not alone

*I suffer a lot from loneliness.
It is as if my parents have left me,
Even my closest friends do not understand my feelings.
O God, You fill my heart. You fill my life and grant me power and victory.
Talk to me and let me talk to You because You are the desire of my heart.
Through You, God, I am close to Your angels.
I can be a friend to Your Saints, love them deeply and suffer no more from loneliness.*

Story No. 5

They Are All Impure, They are All Pure

At the end of a Youth meeting at St. George's Church (Sporting, Alexandria), a young man who came to the meeting for the first time came and said to me seriously, "This is the first time in my life that I long for a confession."

As I welcomed him, he said to me, "I want to lead a pure life, but I am unable."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because it's impossible to find a young man without a sinful relationship with the other sex." the young man said.

"How come? Many are pure."

"If you weren't wearing that black robe, you would find out that all of these young people are at night clubs doing evil. All of them are unclean."

"All of them?"

"I say all of them because there's no man who can live without a sexual relationship."

Then I started talking to him about God's power in man's life. Concerning pure living, I gave him practical examples from the Holy Bible, the history of the church, and examples of contemporary youths.

"Do you think that I can lead a pure life?" he asked.

"This is the work of Jesus Christ within you by His Holy Spirit."

"What can I do? I love sin. Every morning and every night I ask Jesus Christ, 'Is life with You better than sin? I want to live in purity with You.'"

A few weeks later the young man came back with the same seriousness saying, "Do you remember me?"

"Yes," I said, "I remember you."

"I want to tell you," he said, "that all these young people are pure, I don't think that there's one among them who is not."

"How come? Didn't you say a few weeks ago that all of them are impure?"

"When my heart was impure, I thought that it was impossible that a young man could live purely. But, now after my experience of purity in Jesus Christ, I don't think that any person can live in the mud of impurity. I see all of them enjoying purity and chastity and how they hate corruption."

This is a real story that I present to each believer, so that he may experience for himself the richness of our Christ's grace who gives us His righteousness and who fills our heart with love.



*O You who saves me from this body of death
My depth is complaining to You about myself.*

*My body suffers, and all of my senses and feelings are shouting.
The corruption gets to me. Can I be pure again?
The sin is sweet, but with its deadly sweetness,
It carries the poison of death.
O God, make it taste bitter in my mouth.
Here is my body in Your hands, make it holy.
Make my eyes, ears, and all my senses and feelings holy.
In You I can see everything around me holy,
So I may live in the promise of Heaven, even during the battle against sin.*

Story No. 6

A Friend for Eternity

This is the story of a famous leader named Joshua who had 80 disciples. All of them became good leaders.

Once, Joshua lifted up his heart and asked God about what He had prepared for him in eternity. In a dream, Joshua heard a voice telling him, “You and Nenes will be with me in Paradise and both of you will receive the same reward.”

Joshua woke up upset, wondering how he could dedicate his whole life to the ministry of God and still get the same reward as a butcher who had not fully dedicated his life to God. He called his 80 disciples to him and said to them, “Until I find this Nenes, I will neither teach you nor discuss with anyone any religious matter.”

They began to search everywhere for this Nenes until they discovered that there was a very poor man named Nenes living in an extremely poor village. Joshua went to the nearest city to the village. The entire multitude gathered with him and he asked them about Nenes the butcher. “Why do you ask about this rustic and unknown man? He is nothing,” they replied.

When they went to bring Nenes, he said to them, “I think you misunderstood the Joshua’s message. I am not the man. Who am I to be called for by the enlightened teacher and Rabbi Joshua who filled Israel with his teachings?”

At the end, he refused to go with them.

Joshua determined to meet him and when he heard that Nenes refused to come with them, Joshua decided to go to him. As Joshua drew near the house, Nenes saw him and hastily said to him, “Why do you want to see me, O crown of Israel?”

“I just want to know one thing, what kind of goodness do you do in your life?” Joshua asked.

“I don’t do anything extraordinary,” Nenes replied.

However, Joshua insisted to find out the details of his life.

“I lead a normal life,” said Nenes, “I have my old, sick parents living here with me. I wash their feet and hands and dress them. I do this work joyfully and that I have the desire to serve them and give them all that they need.”

When Joshua heard this, he bowed down before him. He kissed his forehead and said to him, “O blessed son Nenes, blessed are your deeds and your life. How happy am I to be in your company in paradise!”

This simple story may reflect how heaven weighs the deeds of people. The calculation of heaven is different from that of this world. God wants us to be engaged in practical love. It is not the rank, the position, or the religious order that counts. None of them are nearly as important for our salvation as are honesty and love to Him.

Story No. 7

He Alone Remained with me

As Fr. Pishoy sat beside the man he said to him, "I hope all your problems have been solved. You seem happy."

"No," he responded, "everything is the same, but I realize that Jesus is dwelling in me when I go through some tribulation and struggle. I'll tell you of a dream, or perhaps a vision, that filled me with joy."

"I went to sleep very broken hearted, so broken hearted that I was at the point of committing suicide. I decided to throw myself from a very high mountain. On my way to the mountain, I encountered many of my friends. They all gave me comforting words, but I didn't feel that I could share my agony with any of them.

As I continued on my way towards the mountain, I met a priest who gave me good words, but the agony in my heart increased as he spoke of the promises of God. I wasn't even able to accept his words.

Further along on my way, I met an angel who told me about the joys of heaven and how the faithful are waiting for their brothers and sisters to join them in the life of praise and joy in heaven. He also talked to me about life on earth, with all its agony, but in my stupidity I insisted to continue on my way to suicide.

As I continued on, I reached the top of the mountain. From there I could hear the voices of my friends, the priest and the angels weeping over me. But I was too distressed to pay them any attention. I realized that all of them loved me, but none of them was able to solve my problems.

Finally, I threw myself from the mountain. My body slammed into a rock and I started to bleed. Before I knew what was going on, I heard a sound, as of a man who had fallen beside me.

It was Jesus. He threw Himself after me to save me from my certain death. Everyone tried to save me, but it was Jesus alone who was able to come to me, even to the point of death, to give me life. By His wounds, He healed my wounds. He is the Only One who can go to my tomb to offer me the resurrection. He has the power to convert my darkness into light and my agony into joy."



Always With Me

I will never fear

I will never lose hope.

You are with me.

Allow me, O Lord, to see Your arms open to embrace me.

Yes Lord, I see You in the depth of my heart

Where Your Holy Spirit lifts my heart to You.

I hear Your voice through the world around me,

Through my family, through my father confessor and through my brethren in Christ.

I see You transfigured before me

And enter into a deep conversation with You

Through Your Bible that is full of joy and Your holy Church.

Story No. 8

I Carried His Cross with Him

A youth used to come to Father Pishoy Kamel looking for work. Finally, an owner of a factory hired him and made him carry a tremendous amount of paper on a bicycle to deliver to various places. One day, this youth came to Fr. Pishoy and said, "Today I carried Jesus' cross with Him."

"How?" asked Fr. Pishoy⁽¹⁾

The youth answered, "I was carrying a heavy load of papers on my bicycle and I came to a steep hill at the end of Port Said St, Alexandria. I tried hard to pedal up the hill, but my strength failed and suddenly I found myself falling under a huge pile of papers, I wasn't even able to move."

"No one approached me or offered any kind of help. I found Jesus lying down beside me beneath the weight of His cross, and sweat was dripping from Him. I realized that at that moment I was sharing Him His sufferings and I was exceedingly glad. I felt myself not worthy of this great honor. With joy, I started to pray to Him thankfully, "O my Lord do I deserve to carry Your Cross? I am exceedingly glad for the sufferings of Jesus in me.

I carried His cross with Him.

No, it is His cross carrying me."



*O Jesus, when every hand seemed cold to me,
I found Your hand stretched out with great love to me!
When I found Your way narrow,
I found that You were my companion in the way of the cross.
You converted the bitterness of the road,
To the sweetness of Your life.
I hear Your loving voice whispering:
"My yoke is easy and My burden is light."
I kneel before the Cross,
And my earthly life is converted into a heavenly one,
Your Cross is wonderful, lifting me up to You.*

Story No. 9

I Am Upset with God

Fr. Pishoy Kamel² visited a sick person who was complaining from severe back pain. Fr. Pishoy started to comfort him, but the man answered, “I’m not asking God to take away my illness. I only ask Him to give me the strength to stand up for prayer and to take from me the severe headache that hinders me from praying the Lord’s Prayer. As long as the headache is there, I can’t concentrate on one word.”

Fr. Pishoy replied, “Don’t be upset if you’re not able to attend church or stand up for prayer, or even say the Lord’s Prayer because you participate in Jesus’ suffering. Give thanks for this participation as Jesus also suffered back pain under the heavy burden of the cross.”

Some days later, when this sick man came to the church, Fr. Pishoy greeted him with his usual smile. The sick man said, “I’m upset with God because after I got used to the pain and felt the sweetness of the suffering and counted myself unworthy of that suffering, He cured me.”

Fr. Pishoy Kamel considered suffering with Jesus the greatest kind of worship.¹ In our case, the man fell short of being in the church, as far as attendance and prayer are concerned. But, through suffering, our bodies become a temple for the Crucified and our life becomes a continuous prayer.

I remember that I had a friend who was serving with me in the church. He was looking forward to being a monk. He loved the monastic life. His father-confessor was also a monk and he told him not to be hasty, “Be patient. Don’t be rash.”

Once, this friend came to his father confessor and said, “I don’t have enough time for labor and service. I feel that I’m wasting time. I want to devote myself to worship. However, I’ve had so many troubles in work.”

The father replied with great wisdom, “The time will come for you to devote yourself to worship, wait and be patient. Train yourself now to exercise patience since. It’s a very good opportunity to share in Jesus’ suffering and crucifixion. It’s very easy to pray, to meditate, and to praise God, the thing that is important and necessary in Christianity. But without suffering, how will you share in Jesus’ great love?”

² Fr. Pishoy suffered from cancer at the end of his life. “The Coptic Church, when celebrating the Feast of the Cross chants its tunes according to those of the Palm Sunday hymns, i.e. the tunes of joyous exultation. In conformity and identification with his beloved Church, Fr. Pishoy overcame the pain by rejoicing, for even before being attacked by cancer, he called it ‘the disease unto the Kingdom.’ While he lay in bed with pain with patience, silence and a fixed gaze on the Cross. As for the interval between the brutal attacks of pain, they were spent in chanting hymns of praise and glorification.

Another means by which this ardent disciple of Christ soothed his agony was listening to a recorded tape of the five chapters of The Book of Lamentations. This joyous endurance of Abouna filled all the hearts with comfort and joy. They too, saw in him the Apostle Paul who offered his pain as his credential (2 Cor. 11:21-33), for he transformed pain into a life with God, and disease into evangelism.” (*The Story of Father Pishoy Kamel: Magnetic Radiation*; by Iris Habib El Masry, pp. 25,26; Pub. St. George Church Bookstore, Sporting, Alexandria, Egypt).

Other books by or about Fr. Pishoy Kamel include, *The Cross: As Lived by Rev. Fr. Pishoy Kamel* (two short booklets- St. George Church Library, Sporting Alexandria, Egypt and The Holy Apostles & St. Apanoub Church, Black Town, N.S.W., Australia),

Pastoral Work in the Life of Father Pishoy Kamel, by Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty (St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church-St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church, Jersey City, New Jersey and St. Peter & St. Paul Coptic Orthodox Church, Santa Monica California)

From the Fruits of Paradise: Sayings by Fr. Pishoy Kamel (St. George & St. Joseph Coptic Orthodox Church, Roseboro, Quebec, Canada).

*O Long-suffering, Give me Your long-suffering.
Give me joy in Your Cross
Mix my worship with Your suffering,
My depth rejoices with You forever.*

Story No. 10

Atomic Bomb

In Lebanon, after the civil war had ended, an art teacher asked the students to draw whatever came to their minds. The teacher walked around the classroom to see what the little children had drawn. The first one she saw was of a tank, the second was of canons, the third was of a dead person, the fourth was a child crying after losing his father, and the fifth was of homes that had been destroyed. The teacher felt sad for what she saw, because the bad memories that the children had of the war traumatized them emotionally. It was as if the society had destroyed these little kids and ruined their hopes and their joyful outlook.

Finally, she came to a girl who had drawn a picture of an apple. She cheered up by this and wondered to herself about what made this child different from the other children. "Why did you draw an apple?" she asked.

"It's not an apple." the girl answered. "It's an atomic bomb."

It is very difficult for me to express the feelings of this teacher, and how negatively the society affected the lives of those children.

Dear reader! Don't be surprised that this child drew an atomic bomb and not an apple. The war destroyed her psychological state as well as that of so many youth and people in the entire country.

I am worried about you that the world may, with its great weight, enter your heart, creating in you an atomic bomb. This may destroy your energy, talents, and feelings instead of offering an internal apple, to taste and to take a benefit from.

You might ask me, "Do you want me to escape from my surroundings? Don't you want me to live in the world?"

"Yes, God created the world for us to live in and enjoy it as a joyful gift. However, beware of misconceptions or defilement. Don't convert the world into a corrupt valley and a hidden battlefield. Use the world to thank the creator. Open your heart with love to all and Jesus will be your companion. Your life will be an everlasting wedding."



Through You, My Depth Rejoices,
O Victorious Giver!

*I cry in love to You, O Wonderful!
The world around me becomes a center of corruption.
My body and its lusts fight my soul and thoughts.
My friends around me push me to sin.
Who can save me from my surroundings?
You are the only Holy filled with love.
Attach me to You and deliver me from every sin.
The corrupted world becomes a joyful bridge, taking me to You.
Instead of lust, the body kneels down with all its ability to support my soul.
I will no longer condemn my brothers and sisters.*

*I will commit myself to lead them to Your heavenly Kingdom.
With You, there is no spirit of despair, but the spirit of love,
Counseling and power.
Through You, my depth rejoices O victorious Giver.*

Story No. 11

A Friend from Heaven

The young monk knocked gently on the door of the cell of the solitary monk saying, “Agape³ (Love).” But the solitary monk didn’t answer. He repeated himself a second and a third time, but still there was no response. The monk had no choice but to enter, as he knew that the solitary was very sick. The monk was surprised when he found a very distinguished man sitting next to the solitary.

The solitary asked the monk, “Why did you enter without permission?”

But the visitor interfered saying, “Let him in, for God wants him to take the blessing.”

The visitor then asked permission to leave and saluted the two monks. The monk then asked the solitary, “Who was that foreign visitor?”

“The customs of monasticism,” said the hermit, “provide that you don’t ask questions about matters that don’t concern you!”

The young monk, however, insisted on knowing who the distinguished visitor was because when the man saluted him he felt strength filling him.

At last the solitary said to him, “I’ll tell you under the condition that you don’t tell anyone until the day of my departure. I suffered from severe pain and felt unable to rise up to open the door of the cell. That’s why I left the door opened to allow you to enter.

As the pain became very severe, I held the Holy Bible, the source of my consolation which I thought of not as a book for reading but for meeting God the Logos, His angels, and Saints in both the Old and New Testaments. I became accustomed to combining the reading with prayers, entering into gratifying conversation with my Lord, for He’s the Source of my happiness, joy, and consolation.

I held the Holy Bible and, as the pain became so severe, I felt that I needed a friend to comfort me. I needed to talk with Jeremiah⁴, the “Weeping Prophet.” I opened the Book of Lamentations then I raised my eyes to God and cried, “Send me Jeremiah the prophet to comfort me.” And as I started to read in the book of Lamentations, Jeremiah the prophet appeared to me and we entered into comfortable conversation. You came to the cell and found him talking with me and had the chance to meet him.”

My beloved, there is no doubt that you are like me and in need of friends to accompany you and support you. There is not a friend greater than God the Logos. You meet Him when you read the Holy Bible or the written Divine declarations. Through the Bible, you enter into a conversation with your Friend, as He is the Logos, who grants life, and who is the Giver of pleasure and gratification to the soul. Then you say with the Psalmist,

“With Your words I am delighted.

With Your words I live.

I found Your word sweet, so I ate it” (Ps. 119).

Through the written heavenly declaration, the Holy Spirit lifts up your heart, your thoughts, and all your depths to Heaven so that you hear the heavenly voice that says, “You are

³ “Agape” is the Greek word for “Christian Love.”

⁴ Jeremiah is known as the “Weeping Prophet” because of the mourning nature of his prophecy and his sadness over the sinfulness and rebellion of his people and the subsequent calamity that befell them. This is even more evident in the book of Lamentations which Jeremiah authored and which follows the Book of Jeremiah in the Holy Bible.

heavenly and to heaven you will return!” And you won’t hear again the voice that says, “You are dust and to dust you shall return!”

Do not let the reading of the Holy Bible be a routine job that you are obliged to do, or simply a quieting of your conscience. But rather, through it, you meet the heavenly people and the Saints who all love and support you.

Story No. 12

A Rich Man in Paradise

One of the pious rabbis lifted his eyes to Heaven and asked God to reveal to him his position in the afterlife. To his surprise, he heard a voice telling him that he would be in paradise with one of the rich people.

After his long spiritual strife since childhood, his dedication to learning and teaching, and his love and care for his people, this pious rabbi was surprised to hear that he would attain what the rich man living a luxurious life would attain. The rabbi met the rich man and started to ask him about his spiritual life and his behavior.

The rich man told him that he lived a normal daily life just like any of his other rich friends. As the rabbi tried to find out more about him, he answered that he always used to give some of his money to the poor. The rabbi told the rich man that it is impossible to attain the same inheritance in Paradise as he had attained by simply giving alms to the poor. Therefore, he asked the rich man about some of his acts of love.

The rich man told him that he used to meet one of the ship owners, who used to bring and sell to him some jewelry or precious articles from time to time. Once, he met the ship owner and asked him if he had brought anything precious with him. The ship owner told him that he did not bring anything but 200 slaves that he wanted to sell for 10,000 pieces of gold. The rich man felt that the price was not important, but that setting free 200 slaves of his own race was more precious than gold. Without hesitation, he gave the gold to the ship owner and took the slaves. He offered them all what they needed of houses, food and drinks and also prepared the weddings for some of their sons. The whole city was transformed as if into a great feast.

The rich man saw that one of the girls among those whom he set free was characterized as being very gentle and beautiful, so he wanted his son to marry her. His son agreed and when he proposed to the girl, she agreed as well. A great ceremony was held for the engagement of the son of the rich man. The entire city was happy, especially the slaves who had been set free.

The next day, the rich man noticed that one of the slaves who had been set free was sad, and when he asked him why he was sad he did not answer. He told him that he was thankful that he set him and his fellow slaves free and provided for their needs, but that something distressed him a bit. This was the marriage between his son and the beautiful girl. The young man was upset because he and the girl had made arrangements to get married before they were set free. The man was quiet for few moments and then asked, "Why didn't you tell me this before the engagement of my son?"

The young man answered, "I was shy because of your immeasurable kindness to me and my fellow slaves."

"What can I offer you," asked the rich man, "to compensate for your loss?"

"I don't think that gold or silver could compensate for the girl."

The man was quiet again and then went to his son and explained the situation to him. The son then declared his desire to leave the girl, because he could not be happy at the expense of someone else's happiness and the ceremony of the engagement was cancelled. The rich man, his son, and all those around them rejoiced for the happiness of the youth and the young girl who were once slaves but were now engaged to be married.

When the rabbi listened to the story he kissed the rich man and realized that by the largeness of his heart and by his love, he attained this great position in the eyes of God.

Story No. 13

A Kid with A Strong Personality

A lady came to me complaining of her son who joined the day care center. “For the last few days,” she told me, “I’ve been patiently scolding him for doing something wrong, saying, “Don’t do that.” But he kept answering me, “No, I’ll do it.” I’d tell him gently, “Honey! that’s wrong.”

“But he insisted, “I’ll do this. I’ll do it.”

I was surprised to hear this because I know this kid to be a very gentle boy. He loves me and we get along well together. I ignored the situation (so that he would not get used to having violent arguments with me or with others) and left the place pretending to be smiling.

The next day, as I was joking around with him, I asked him, “What’s your opinion about what you were doing yesterday?” He answered, “Hmm. I know that what I did was wrong.”

I asked him, “Then why did you insist on doing it even though you knew that it was wrong?”

He answered immediately, “I’d to do this otherwise, my personality would be weak. Whatever I want to do, I’ll do, even if it’s wrong.”

I got surprised of his answer because this was a kid who wasn’t even six years old. “How could he consider listening to my advice-while I am his beloved mother- to be a sign of weakness of personality?” asked his mother. “What can I do to correct his misconception without losing him?”

Since I found that the lady was confused, I said to her, “I advise you to do something wrong in front of him, on purpose. If it happened that he said to you, ‘This is wrong.’ say to him, ‘You’re right,’ and correct the fault. Then after one or two days, ask him, ‘What do you think of me when I obeyed you? Do you think that I’ve a weak personality?’”

Dear youths, many times we have the same attitude as this kid. So, we think that to have a strong personality is to insist on our own opinion without listening to the opinions of others, especially those who love us, like our parents. The strong personality is that which is not stubborn as the children without getting the benefit of the experience of the fully-grown. It was said about our Lord Jesus Christ that he was “**subject to them**” (Luke 2:51). That is, to St. Mary and St. Joseph, while He is not only their Creator, but is the Wisdom of God Himself!

Adhere to the Lord so that you may have the spirit of humbleness which will support your strong will in Him and grant you a good personality, allowing you to learn how to deal with everybody, and how to benefit from the experience of many!



How hard it is for me to be obedient!

I want to have authority, not to be ordered.

I think that by this I have a strong and good personality.

You came to our world
You were obedient to Your mother as well as to St. Joseph.
You are the Creator and You, with love, obey the created.
You, whom Heaven and earth obey!
Your obedience doesn't diminish Your authority.
Sanctify obedience in me.
Yes, bind me to You so that I would not run away from obedience.
I will obey in order to feel that I am a partner with You in obedience
How bitter is obedience, for in my sight it is being beaten,
But with You I find it so sweet.
Teach me, train me, and grant me the experience of Your obedience,
So that I may see You working in me, You who are truly obedient!
You who became obedient, representing us, practicing righteousness.

Story No. 14

A Metropolitan on my Shoulder

In one of the meetings of the East Coast Churches Assembly, I heard a story from one of the metropolitans ⁽⁷⁾ from Coptic reclusive literature which really moved me and still occupies my thoughts:

A youth joined a monastery and the Abbot of the monastery handed him over to a pious and sober solitary so that he would be his disciple. The solitary started to care for the youth in regards of his spiritual life, directing his thoughts to the adherence to God as a Savior and Friend who kindles the heart with love.

It seems that the youth was lazy to a great extent and the solitary kept encouraging him to enter into the spiritual strife, pushing him in the way of deep love and not simple dependence on formalities and exercises without spirit.

Suddenly the youth died and the solitary was very sad over him because he knew his laziness in his strife. As he was crying and wailing over him one day, he saw him in a dream. He was standing with the hellfire reaching his feet.

As the solitary saw this vision, he cried sorrowfully for his son. As for the son, he looked at the solitary and said, "Don't cry for me, for a metropolitan is standing on my shoulder."

The solitary woke up shaken from the vision and sat alone for days, contemplating on the depth and meaning of the vision. He asked himself, "If this was the case of a careless metropolitan, what then will be my condition? The clothing of monasticism doesn't intercede for the lazy ones."

Maybe this was a symbolic story narrated by the Coptic reclusive literature to urge believers to concentrate on the inner depth and vigor of the soul and to stop practicing spiritual exercises without spirit.



THE WORDS OF A YOUTH

*I claim You as my Savior
I read the Bible regularly,
But in stupidity I can't see You behind the letters.
I pray each morning and each night,
But I don't know how to talk with You on a personal level.
I practice a lot of worship but my depth is like a stone.
Teach me how to enter into the depth
To meet You through Your written word.
And interact with You in my prayers,
To see Your Cross shining upon me in my repentance
To enjoy becoming firm in You as I partake in communion.
I enter as if into heaven when I am in Your church.
Let Your right hand catch my soul,
And take it into Your happy chamber,
To rejoice with You O the desire of my heart.
To be filled with the hope that death cannot destroy,*

*And to comfort in Your Kingdom that the doors of Hades cannot overcome.
Yes, I do not rely on self-righteousness or on a position in the Church,
But on the abundance of Your grace.*

Story No. 15

Worried About Myself

After about 20 years, I met one of my beloved sons while I was in California and he asked me to visit him in his magnificent house. When we sat down together, he said, “Do you remember when I started my life here in California 20 years ago? I was struggling with all my effort and now God has given me above and beyond what I asked for.”

“It’s the gift of God,” I said, “and we thank Him for it. He cares for us.”

“Do you know how abundantly He poured His great riches on me?” he said, “For the last few years I’ve asked myself, ‘What shall I benefit if I succeed here and don’t enjoy the inheritance of Heaven?’ I knelt down and prayed before my Lord and made an oath not to touch the tithes, no matter what my circumstances were, because that’s the money of the Lord. Moreover, I said to Him, ‘I’ll also give to the poor-either in Egypt or in the States - from the nine tithes⁵, for I don’t possess anything. It’s Your gift to me, my Lord!’

I started to give generously, and thus the doors of heaven were opened before me, He gave me more than I needed. I would kneel and cry, ‘Enough, enough! I am worried that the abundance of riches will captivate my soul and destroy it.’ And when I would cry, he would open his doors more and give me more.”

That is how this brother expressed the way that God deals with us. When we open not only our depositories, but also our hearts and our souls first to our weaker brethren, He opens the doors of His heaven before us and generously gives us more than we can imagine.

When our Lord Jesus Christ spoke of His little flock, the object of the Father’s pleasure, He said,

“Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell what you have and give alms” (Luke 12.32-33).

The believer says this in the third watch of midnight praises. It is as if, in the last seconds of midnight, we are expecting the coming of Christ. We desire to be from the little flock that the Father is happy with. He opens to the flock His Divine, Fatherly bosom for them to rest in. The way of free membership into this flock is to open the doors of our hearts for the weak. We sell our possessions and give alms. When the door is opened with love and joy to the hungry, thirsty, naked, exiled, jailed, and all of the weak and needy people, we find the heart of God opened for us to be a holy flock of God.

I whisper in your ear: “Do you want to be a member of this small holy flock? Give love to the weak. Open your heart to everybody, especially your parents. You will see how the grace of God will grant you the spirit of holiness as a sign of joining the flock of Christ who is the Beloved of the Father.



⁵ The word “tithe” comes from the Old English word for “tenth.” The tithe is literally the “tenth part” of something. Here it refers to donations or gifts (usually, but not always, of money) for the poor or needy and for the support of the church. It usually amounts to the tenth part or 10% of a person’s income. The “nine tithes” refers to the other nine parts (or 90%) of what the person has after they have given the traditional tithe of 10% from their income. It should be noted that although the part we give is called the “tenth part,” it should really be called the “*first* part” because we give back to God the “*first* fruits” of what he gives us.

Consider me a member of Your small flock.

I'm wailing for my sins and the lusts of the body.

Why don't I live in the holiness of Your small flock?

Grant me Your Holy Spirit to open my heart with love to the young,

The poor, the needy, the weak, the disturbed.

Let my heart be also opened to my parents with the obedience that is full of joy.

So that You may open the doors of Your heaven before me.

May I join Your small flock,

So that I may be sanctified for You and live in the bosom of Your heavenly Father.

A Repentant Youth

SHORT STORIES FOR THE YOUTH

16-28

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Story No. 16

A Prisoner's Stupidity

Stephan loved the emperor much for what he had heard about the emperor's grandeur, magnificence and wealth. He frequently placed the emperor's picture before him and spoke to it with much respect and reverence.

Once, Stephan was jailed for committing a certain crime. He spent his days miserably in a cell, suffering from isolation and bitterness. Nevertheless, he remained faithful to the emperor, and spoke about him for a long time to all the visitors and the other prisoners.

The emperor also loved Stephan; his love was so great that he disguised himself, removing his royal crown and clothes, and gave himself up to the authorities, asking to be imprisoned in Stephan's place. The emperor thus started living in the cell, wearing the shabby attire of the prisoners, mixing with the criminals, eating the bread of suffering and drinking the water of bitterness, while Stephan was released and was free to wear expensive clothes and spend his time with family and friends.

It was therefore with much surprise and shock that many who saw this freed prisoner, whom the emperor loved to the extent of imprisoning himself in his stead, witnessed him not only disowning the emperor, but also demeaning him, despising his prisoners' clothes and mocking at the fact that he gave himself up for him.

St. John Chrysostom, the narrator of this story of ingratitude, was thus puzzled with the attitude of the Jews and the Greeks: they despised Him who was crucified for their sake. In this context, he recalled the words of St. Paul the Apostle,

"But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness"

(1 Cor. 1.23).

They were unable to accept the love of God the Word, and His condescension to enter the cell of their lives, thus elevating them to the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

The cross remains the mystery of divine caring; to be experienced by those who know the infinite divine love and who, rather than seeing God in isolation, love Him in return.

May the mouth therefore be silenced of the French philosopher, who once said, "Our Father who art in heaven may You remain in Your heaven and may we remain on our earth...!"



*We, humans, resort frequently to modern science and medicine,
To hide our scars, which are considered to be disfigurations.
But You, my Saviour, have risen from the dead,
Carrying in Your glorified body the scars of the Cross.
These scars, O Lord, are not disfigurations that must be hidden,
Rather, they represent the wounds of extreme love,
The wounds of glory and power,
That will remain the mysteries of great and Divine love.
Your Cross and Your wounds are the power of God for salvation.*

*They are not offensive; rather, they are the symbol of love for my soul.
They are not foolishness; rather, they are the revelation of Divine wisdom.
Your Cross with its wounds has opened the gates of heaven.
It has united me with the heavenly hosts,
And has enabled me to enjoy the heavenly life,
And to share the heavenly hosts in their chants and praises.
You have extended Your wounded hands,
To embrace all the world's peoples,
And to create, from all races, members in Your one body.*

*Wounds of glory and power
Your Cross has destroyed the edict written against me.
You have redeemed me, and changed me from being the son of Satan,
To being a Son of God.
You have replaced the bitterness of bondage, with the freedom awarded to the children of God.
Your Cross has put the prince of this world to shame.
It has crushed his dominance and wrenched away his kingdom.
I have become free, bearing within me the kingdom of light.
You offered me Your righteousness that protects me from the devastation of sin.
You have granted me dominion that allays all my fears.
Your marvellous Cross has revealed to me Your loving self.*

Story No. 17

A Scorpion's Sting

When I was a young man, a monk in Upper Egypt narrated to me this true story.

"I led a very religious life in my youth. I prayed and went to church frequently. The church was a home to me where I found rest. Although I was assaulted by lustful thoughts, I managed to ward them off, to satisfy my desire for a life of chastity and purity.

I met a girl, who was humble, sweet and chaste. Since life in our village was as though we were all members of one family, an innocent friendship started developing between us. I saw in her everything that was pure and throughout time, I was attached to her. But I felt that the place she occupied in my heart was not hers. I never had a similar experience before.

I pleaded constantly to my God to protect me from going astray from my spiritual life but alas! My attachment to her was too strong. One day she invited me over to her house where there was no one else. I hesitated at first, since I had been never alone with a girl, with none of her family members present; but again my strong feelings prevailed, and I found myself on my way, against my will. At the same time I kept praying for guidance from my Saviour.

As I arrived at her doorstep, I reached for the knocker; suddenly, a hidden scorpion stung me.

I cried saying, "I thank You God for giving me Your message; I thank You, O my Saviour for leading my life. What do You want of me, O Lord?"

I hurried back home, not to treat the scorpion's sting, but to do some significant soul-searching. After long hours of deep pondering on the Lord's wish, I made my decision with no hesitation. I went to the monastery to dedicate all my life to Him Who loves me.

The scorpion's sting completely changed the course of my life."



*Speak to me O Lord - even through a scorpion's sting.
May Your caring for me be proclaimed - here I am at Your disposal.
What do You want of me, O Lord?
I neither ask to be a monk nor a married person,
Rather, dedicate my heart wholly to work for Your kingdom.
Descend, O Holy One, into my depths,
And may my works bear witness for the consecration of Your Bible.*

Story No. 18

A Dialogue with an Ant

King Solomon was known for his love to nature. He would, every now and then, take a stroll either through his gardens, on the banks of the river, or on the mountains. He would watch with interest the animals, the birds, the fish, and even the insects, and perceive in their behaviour how their wisdom, manifested in their natural instincts, proved God's caring for them.

One day, his attention was drawn to a tiny ant, which was carrying part of a grain of wheat that in turn greatly outweighed the ant itself; the ant was transporting it towards its hole, for storing. The King wondered, "Why can't I make this ant happy?" Seeing that it is expending all this effort to transport half a grain.

"The great wealth that God has given me is for bringing happiness not only to my people, but also to the animals, birds and insects."

The king then took the ant, put it in a golden box lined with smooth silk, put with it a grain of wheat and said to it with a smile, "Toil no more, for every day I'll give you a grain that you can eat without labouring. The abundance in my silos is sufficient to feed millions of humans, animals, birds and insects."

The ant thanked him for taking such good care of it.

When Solomon returned the following day he was surprised to notice that the ant had eaten only half the grain. He put a second grain - but again the following day the ant had left half a grain. When this was repeated day after day, Solomon asked the ant, "Why do you always leave half a grain?"

The ant replied, "I always leave half a grain as a reserve. I know how much you care for me, and I know of the abundance in your silos. But you are human, and your daily pre-occupations could lead you to forgetting about me. I therefore retain half a grain to avoid going hungry in that case. God who leaves me to toil for my food won't forget me, but you might."

The king therefore released the ant to resume its natural way of life, after realising that God has given it that which He has not given to humans.



You never forget me

A mother might forget even her suckling, but You, O Lord, will not forget me.

You may permit that my life be full of hardships,

But a hair from my head shall not fall without Your permission.

Your ways in shepherding Your creation are indeed wondrous and outstanding,

But I will only understand them in their fullness on the day of my glory.

You grant me the communion of eternal glory,

Which makes me perceive that the moments of bitterness that I have lived,

Were but the road to my salvation.

I discover Your outstanding wisdom and Your unique Fatherhood.

Truly, You do not forget me.

*My many pre-occupations may lead me to forget even the needs of my body,
And to neglect my lonely soul.
But to You, my soul is more precious than the whole world.
You descended to our world to redeem me,
And You offered Your precious blood for my salvation.
You granted me Your Holy Spirit to renew my depths.
Truly, though I forget myself, You will never forget me.*

Story No. 19

Let Us Live like Humans

While a lion, -the king of the jungle- was taking a stroll, he noticed that all the other animals feared him and fled from him. His mighty roar echoed through the jungle and many lions, lionesses and cubs hurried to him. They saw that he was silent. The following conversation then took place between the tribe and the lion:

“We heard you roaring, so we all came to work with you, or to rescue you from danger.”

“Thank you I’m not in any danger. I am the king and all the animals fear me. But I have an idea that I would like to suggest to you.”

“What is it?”

“Let us live like humans.”

“But what are we lacking, that would make us want to live like humans? Our bodies are stronger, and we’re free to walk anywhere in the jungle.”

“We don’t fight against each other and we don’t devour each other. These are some of the human traits.”

“But we can’t do that. We always work together, we share our preys, and we give the elderly, sick and young their shares, even if they hadn’t toiled with us.”

“Come, let’s disagree and break up into different groups; we’ll fight each other and eat each other up.”

“That’s impossible! Because if we ate each other up, we’d eradicate ourselves, since our bodies and teeth are not as weak as those of humans.”

“Let’s try! This will give us some of the experience that humans have.”

“We can’t disagree, since by nature, we work together.”



This imaginary story, written by St. John Chrysostom, stipulates that humans have fallen to a level of baseness that makes them inferior to animals and insects. The Holy Bible requires us to learn toiling and industriousness from the ant, and to learn co-operation even from wild animals such as the lion. Those animals, despite being predators, they work together rather than devour each other. In this respect, humans behave differently, even with close friends.

I recall having been asked to intervene to resolve a problem between a father and his son, who were living in North America. The two had embarked on a joint project, which turned out to be a success. The father unfortunately sued his son, claiming ownership of the entire project, and denying any partnership. He did this to his own flesh and blood!

How macabre is sin! Humans commit sins with no shame which even the wild animals won’t do.



To You I have become as a beast.

The prophet, perceiving what sin had made of him, cried:

*“Do not marvel, O Dear One, when I say,
That to You, I have become as a beast.
Since animals follow natural laws, and their behaviour is better than many humans.”
You have granted me, O Lord, the faculty of reasoning.
You have given me the gift of free will.
These, with Your grace, will elevate me to Your heaven,
And will liken me to Your angels.
I know You, and I enjoy Your mysteries,
And I live in superb glory.
Sin has devastated me because of my stupidity.
It has humiliated me and led me to the abyss.
But in Your love You descended to me,
To carry me in Your arms.
I live, in truth, a holy and blessed son,
Not to learn from animals, but from heaven itself.
I see the entire creation at my service,
Because of Your great love for me.*

Story No. 20

A Trivial Sin

I experienced this unforgettable true story many years ago. A wealthy lady, who gave generously to the poor, told me shyly once that she struggled with herself for three months on whether to confess a certain trivial sin that she had committed. Upon my encouragement, she stated that throughout her life she had taken great care to avoid committing three sins in particular: lying, regardless of the circumstances; theft, since God had given her much wealth; and adultery. She went on to say that one day while shopping, she placed an item worth about one dollar in her purse, and left without paying for it; however she felt so uneasy about it that she went back and returned the item to its place. The lady nevertheless continued to cry bitterly and to ask herself for the reasons behind doing such a thing despite her lack of need and her generosity towards the poor.

I then asked her, “Are you crying because of your sin, or because of your wounded pride, even though you are the only person who knows about this?”

She replied, “I’m lamenting my own self; I never expected myself to commit such a trivial sin.”

I said, “This is a lesson for all of us; sin should never be taken lightly, especially in view of our weakness. We are only able to conquer it through the richness of God’s grace, regardless of our age, capabilities, social status or degree of purity.”

Indeed, although sin knows no age or gender boundaries, we should not fear it, for He who is with us is greater than he who is against us.

On the other hand, sin should not be taken lightly for, if we are separated from the grace of God, our fall will be unforeseen.



My salvation is through Your support.

I bear witness to the richness of Your great love,

And to the manifestation of Your Holy Spirit in me,

With which I revel in Your righteousness.

I confess my sins to You,

Since without Your grace, I fall, even in the most trivial sin.

I greatly despise my weak self, and I sense the weakness of my will.

Who but You can grant me a strong will?

Who but You can sanctify my senses and feelings?

Who but Your Holy Spirit can carry me to Your heaven?

Story No. 21

A Lesson from A Fallen Old Man

Once during the early days of my priesthood, an old man, whom I had never met before, came to me and asked to make confession. He whispered in great embarrassment that for the first time in his life he had committed adultery. I interpreted that to mean that he had looked at a woman and thought of her in a way that would be considered adulterous. Nevertheless, he assured me that he had physically committed that sin which is something that I had never imagined anyone would do.

Feeling very bitter and broken-hearted about this story, I went and narrated it to an elderly priest, who was also a dear friend, who happened to be visiting Alexandria at the time. Seeing me visibly shaken, he said,

“Do you know why God sent you this fallen old man? He wants you to learn several lessons at this early stage of your priesthood. First: don’t trust your body even in your old age, or even if you’re a priest. You must always be careful and on your guard. Second: Don’t judge a fallen youth harshly. Sin is powerful and knows no age limits. You must constantly support and encourage young men throughout their struggle to overcome sin.”



Your grace is my support

*How great is my need for Your grace to support me!
Which support prevents me from falling.
I will neither rely on my past experience,
Nor on purity that I had previously lived,
Nor on any position that I may have in church.
Your grace, and Your grace alone, will protect and immunise me.
Many have fallen - strong, great, and elderly.
Help me to complete my sojourn in this world in peace.
Open my heart with the love that will help me understand all young men,
And that will enable me to support and encourage them all,
Without judging anyone, whatever their sins are,
Since I am their partner in human weakness.*

Story No. 22

A Vigorous Old Man Building the Church

Problems developed during the negotiations preceding the purchase of St. John's Church in West Covina. Members of the congregation started worrying, since time was of the essence to firm up the deal, which in turn was necessary to accommodate the growing congregation and the increase in the church's activities.

However, the flame of the Holy Spirit filled the heart of one of the senior deacons, by the name of late Alfred Hanna to such an extent, that his heart beat within his disease-weakened body as though it was a healthy heart beating in the body of a strong youngster. He repeated with his Christ:

"The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matt. 26. 41).

What could such a deacon do, with his frail body, yet rich and strong soul? Although he was neither a priest nor a member of the church's board of deacons, he felt he had a responsibility as a member of the church and as a member of the body of Christ. He therefore resolved to buy the building.

This matter occupied all the deacon's thoughts and dreams, but he felt powerless. One early morning he went to the site, looked towards the church and raised his hands in prayer, asking for Divine help.

In his strong belief that that was the church of Christ, with Whom nothing is impossible, he knelt on the grass and worshipped, asking for the Lord's mercy, and stood up. This he repeated four hundred times despite his illness.

Our deacon returned to his home, with his heart full of joy. He felt as though the gates of heaven had opened in response to his prayers. He felt as though he had reaped countless benefits. He continued to worship daily at the site, as he had done the first day. God thus heard his voice and looked favourably upon his faith, love and meekness.

The church was finally bought, and the first contributor was this deacon, who offered his heart, his love, and his spiritual way before any material offering.

When I learned of what had happened, I was ashamed of myself. Too often do I use human methods to solve the church's problems, whereas Christ watches over His church and heeds those hearts full of vitality, that know how to open the gates of heaven, so that God may listen to their prayers which emanate with love and humbleness.

Story No. 23

A New Church And A New Heart

“Our heart is the temple wherein the Spirit of God dwells” (1 Cor. 3.16). We rejoice each time a church is built, giving thanks to God who permits that a new house be built for Him, bearing witness to the existence of God amid His people, and seeking daily renewal in the Spirit of God.

Where should the house of the Lord be built?

It is said that a brother, on seeing the abundance of his harvest, thanked God for His gifts, and wondered, “My married brother is in greater need than I for this harvest. I’ll give him from what my God has granted me. I’ll give him from that which doesn’t belong to me!”

True to his word, he carried some of what he had and placed it with his brother’s harvest. In doing so, he had such a feeling of great happiness and inner joy that he decided to repeat what he had done the following night. This made him feel even more joyful, and he continued to do it repeatedly. his harvest in the meantime was increasing.

One night, while praising God and carrying his harvest to his brother’s silo, he saw a shadow approaching him in the darkness. As he got closer, it turned out to be his brother who was also carrying his harvest. They both dropped what they were carrying and embraced. They discovered that they were each giving the other, believing that the other’s need was greater. Both praised God and thanked Him for the love in their hearts.

According to the Jewish tradition, that was the spot on which the temple of Solomon was built.

Do you want to participate in the house of the Lord?

Do you want to build the house of the Lord?

Offer love to your brother. If you give up your life for his sake, God will accept your worship, your praise, and your thanksgiving. He will establish His kingdom within you (Luke 17. 21) and proclaim His heavens in you. You will partake in the Divine Nature (2 Pet. 1.4), thus partaking in God’s overwhelming love for humanity. Finally, you will enjoy communion with the heavenly hosts, who speak the language of unceasing love, joy and praise.

The Lord will proclaim His glory and build His invisible house wherever true brotherly love is found. The whole world will thus be the Lord’s.



During a visit to one of the patients at the University Hospital in Alexandria, I met a university professor who happened to be non-Christian. He told me that he had befriended Pope Kyrillos VI, and that he, along with the rest of his family, had known the Pope for many years. He said,

“We’ve loved him a lot since he was still a monk in Old Cairo. At that time I was a child. Together with my friends, we feared him, but we ran to him, since we considered him to be like a father to us.

We enjoyed his good-naturalness and his charming company.

Do you know what my parents and their friends used to say of him?

He is not of this world!”

This is how the Lord builds His house within us, making us bear witness to the world that we are a heavenly house.

Story No. 24

They Paid Much

It is said that a certain emperor decided to bear all the costs of building a huge cathedral. He spared no expense throughout the project. After the completion of construction, a memorial plaque was installed at the entrance, mentioning the emperor as the person who consecrated and inaugurated the cathedral. The following day, the authorities noticed that the emperor's name had been erased from the plaque and replaced with two other names. They were quite surprised, and removed the plaque and replaced it with another one bearing the emperor's name. This process however was repeated several times, until the emperor heard of it. He immediately prayed to God asking Him to reveal the reason for what happened. An angel then appeared to him and told him that two children deserved, more than he, to have their names inscribed on the plaque, since they had paid much. The emperor wondered how two children could have paid much, when he was the one who paid all the expenses. The angel said that the two children deserved this honour because they loved God so much, that they longed to offer something towards building His house. Seeing that all they possessed in this world were two hearts full of love, they resolved to carry a container of water to the camels carrying the stones to build the Lord's house; thus they toiled every morning, offering their labour and their love.

Truly, the house of the Lord needs unseen soldiers - young, old, men and women - capable of offering pure, precious love.

The house of the Lord is neither built by the priest nor the deacons alone; rather, by every living member. When Jeremiah belittled himself, he heard the Lord's voice saying,

"Say not, I am a child ... for I am with you to deliver you" (Jer. 1.7-8).

Do not say that you are not up to participating in the house of the Lord because God's work will be manifested in whatever you give. Do not worry about the lack or abundance of your means, for God who created our tongues spoke through Moses' mouth, who said,

"... But I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue" (Exod. 4.10).

I recall an incident of a lady who came to me, gave me about one hundred dollars and, to my astonishment, asked that the money be used to build a church consecrated to Archangel Michael. I gave the money to another senior priest (Father Pishoy Kamel of Alexandria) who also expressed surprise, and who put it in safekeeping. A few months later, under very unusual circumstances, that sum was used to build a church consecrated to the Archangel Michael.

If you want to build a church for the Saviour, listen to the words of St. John Chrysostom: "Teach those who are on the outside that you were in the presence of God, that you were with the Cherubim, the Seraphim, and with all the heavenly hosts." The Saint expects every man to build a house for the Lord within his wife's heart, and every wife within her husband's heart, and every slave within his master's heart. Each day, all those who attain the new life in Christ will join the Lord in a life full of love, joy and rejoicing.

With a true, mature love, enriched with meekness, we can build houses for the Lord in many hearts, regardless of age, talent, or social standing.



What do we offer to the Lord's house?

It suffices here to quote from Origen:

My Lord Jesus Christ, make me worthy to participate in building Your house... The temple of the Lord, that He wants us to build, is holiness; this is how a tabernacle for God can be erected within each person's heart.

In this tabernacle, various precious stones and pure materials refer to the variety of good deeds and traits:

Gold refers to faith, silver to spreading the word of God (Ps. 12.6), copper to patience, fine woods to the knowledge that a believer enjoys in the solitude of the wilderness, hemp to virginity, turquoise to love, onyx to the love of martyrdom, and sapphire to the quest for the kingdom of heaven.

These are the materials with which the tabernacle is built.

May the soul have an Alter in the middle of the heart.

On this Alter, the burnt offerings of prayer and mercy will be raised.

The bulls of pride, the rams of wrath, and the goats of lust will be slaughtered on this Alter with the knife of humbleness.

The soul will thus know how to build within the holy of holies of its heart, a beacon that shines unceasingly."

Story No. 25

Father Pishoy! ***Father Pishoy!***

During the period that Father Pishoy Kamel spent in London for medical treatment, one of his spiritual daughters used to call him regularly to enquire about his health. After his departure from this world, that young lady was subjected to a vicious attack, on a New Jersey street, where a man stabbed her twelve times. She was subsequently hospitalised, being in a very critical condition. Although she had lost conscience, she kept murmuring: “Father Pishoy! Father Pishoy! Don’t leave me!” Since she used to serve with Father Pishoy Dimitri in East Brunswick, those who heard her contacted him saying that she was looking for him to pray for her. Father Pishoy Dimitri therefore visited her, prayed for her and anointed her with holy oil. She then regained conscience and said, “I thank my God who didn’t forsake me, but sent the holy virgin, Pope Kyrillos and Father Pishoy Kamel who prayed for me. Father Pishoy never left my side and stayed with me till the end.”

One of the American surgeons who operated on her said, “I’ve treated many non-fatal cases. But during this one, where hope for recovery had been lost, I felt that an invisible hand was performing throughout the operation.”



Friendships from the other world

*You have descended, O Wonderful One, to save me,
And to establish with me a unique friendship .
To me, You became a brother in the depths of my soul,
Deeper than my soul .
I see You, I hear You, and I feel Your love.
You have granted me friendships from the other world.
You opened for me the gates of heaven, to let me befriend Your angels
And the heavenly hosts.
You opened for me the gate to Paradise,
Making me perceive that death did not destroy my brothers’ love,
Those who pray and intercede for me,
Seeking my salvation and awaiting my crossing over to them.
Truly, Your works with us are wonderful.*

Story No. 26

He Slapped Me

One day, after Father Pishoy had reposed, a young girl told us the following story:
“I once almost lost my faith because of loving, and living with, a non-Christian man. Father Pishoy had gently and with loving kindness counselled and supported me, until I had ended that relationship and whole-heartedly rejected it. After his departure, sin overpowered me and I resumed my relationship with that young man. One night, Father Pishoy appeared to me in a dream and, for the first time, he was angry. He slapped me and rebuked me saying, “Didn’t I tell you to leave that young man and to stop living in sin?” I woke up fully repentant, and decided that, with God’s help, I would not return to sin.”



*Dear Father, your fiery heart will not be quenched.
Your expansive love for every soul embraces all.
Your work in the Lord’s name will never stop.*

Story No. 27

My Car Destroyed, I Filled with Happiness

A young man, whom I once met in a European city, narrated to me the following true story:

“I used to own a new car which was destroyed completely in an accident; I then bought the one that I am using now. I was very happy when the first car was destroyed because I felt I deserved that. It all started when I arrived to this city. I’d resolved to refrain from any sinful activity that would defile my body. My first job was, like many others newly arrived immigrants, in a restaurant. My boss was a lady who never missed an opportunity to get close to me. She told me of her wish to divorce her husband and to marry me. I refused and expressed full disagreement with such a relationship. However, she asked the manager that I accompany her on some errands, believing that our being alone in the car would influence my decision. I nevertheless insisted on my initial course of action and managed to rebuff all her advances until one particular instance, when I weakened, but not to the extent of falling completely into sin. I was quite upset and felt that I had lost much. She, on the other hand, thought that I was a very insensitive person.

Although I repented, confessed and promised God to resign from that job, my sin remained before my eyes and I felt that I deserved some form of Divine chastisement.

A few days later, while driving with a friend, we started listening to some trashy songs. I quickly replaced the tape with one that had a recording of the liturgy of the Eucharist. At the point where the priest was saying, “Worthy and just, worthy and just ...”, a drunk jumped towards the car; I swerved to avoid hitting him, but lost control in the process. The car rolled five times in the ditch. Miraculously, though my friend and I found ourselves out of the car, despite the fact that our seat belts had been fastened. I looked at my friend and said, “I am very happy!” My friend thought that I was hallucinating because of the accident. Nevertheless, I continued saying, “I know that God has permitted that the car be destroyed. I thank Him for His love and caring.”

The policeman who subsequently came to investigate the accident was quite surprised to find that we emerged unscathed. He remarked that a week earlier, another car had a similar accident in that location and its occupants had perished.

I returned home rejoicing and feeling that I had gained much even though I didn’t have enough money to buy a new car and my insurance coverage was inadequate for that accident.

I didn’t immediately quit my job, though. My female boss then started a different tactic: she started applying various means of pressure such as yelling at me in front of my colleagues and accusing me of being too slow. Things finally came to a head and I resigned despite her attempts to dissuade me.

I eventually found a much better job. I felt that the hand of God has rewarded me since I considered that the salvation of my soul was of primary importance despite the difficult circumstances.”

Story No. 28

Be More Mature

Once during a teenager's confession to me, he confessed his father's sins instead of his own. He said, "Because of my father's temper and violent behaviour, living in our house has become unbearable and I've become ill-tempered. He's also caused much bitter suffering for my mother and sister. His temper is so bad, that even our friends have stopped visiting us altogether. What can I do?"

I really felt that the boy and his family were in need of guidance. I therefore asked him with a smile, "Whom do you think is at fault: yourself or your dad?"

He answered quickly, "My dad of course; everybody is a witness to that."

I continued, "Don't you believe that God can change your father's behaviour?"

"I do believe," he said.

I went on, "Have you discharged your responsibilities towards him? Do you pray for him? Do you beseech God every day to change him?"

"No," he replied.

"You're therefore not discharging your responsibilities towards him. Try to be maturer than him. Pray for him, meet his anger with a smile and offer him your love."

The boy shook his head, promised to be maturer and to try carrying out my advice.

A few weeks later, he came to me with a big smile, saying that he had really felt the grace of God in his life as well as in the lives of the rest of his family. He said,

"Everything has changed. My dad is now very sweet, not only with me but also with my mother, sister and friends. I've learnt how to be more mature and how to absorb his anger with love and understanding."

My dear young friends, this true story shows how mature youngsters can give love, even to their parents. They are in need of your love and your prayers just as much as you are in need of theirs.

One day we will all meet in heaven; we will all be brothers and sisters regardless of age. The only thing that matters is how great your love was during your life on earth.



My Saviour let me hear Your voice:

"Do not say, You are but a boy!"

I have often belittled myself,

And thought that being a young boy absolves me of any responsibility.

Many of us have children's bodies, but grown-ups' spirits,

And many are advanced in age, yet are spiritually inexperienced.

My Saviour, may You live in my heart,

And may You grant it love through Your fiery Holy Spirit,

And may it not rest until peace reigns over the world, through You.

Grant me the strength whereby I can worship You every day,

*Asking that my weak soul be sanctified,
That the souls of all the members of my family be sanctified,
That the souls of all humanity - my real family - be sanctified.
May I die, and may all live.
May I suffer and may all live in peace.
May I carry shame, for the glorification of all.*

SHORT STORIES

FOR THE YOUTH

29-45

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Story No. 29

A Little Girl Saving her Parents

The little girl's eyes became wet. Tears filled her eyes and fell down her cheeks. The little girl's hoarse voice came louder when she spoke to her Sunday school teacher, "What do you mean? Will Mom and Dad go to Hell because they drink alcohol? Will I go to Hell with them too?"

The teacher felt cornered since he did not know how to answer her question then. He had told the children before that whoever drinks alcohol will end up in Hell.

The little girl's tears drew the attention of other children in the class. Her teacher had to take her to the Communion Sanctuary next to the Altar where there was peace and quietness. He finally said in a reasoning voice, "Don't worry dear, The Lord God can make Mom and Dad abstain from drinking."

"But how?" asked the little girl.

"By praying for them."

"If we pray for them now, when do you think that God will make them stop drinking?"

"In about a month."

"If we pray longer, will God make them quit drinking sooner, say in a week?"

"God is able to realize everything passive."

"If the prayer is more heartily, can God make them quit tonight?"

Taken by the faith of the little girl, the teacher assured her that it is certainly possible.

He said to the little girl, "If you see Mom or Dad bringing alcohol at home, all you have to do is go to your bedroom, kneel before The Lord and ask Him to avert Mom and Dad from drinking."

Full of faith and hope, the little girl returned home while thinking that God will make her parents stop drinking that very night.

When darkness fell, the little girl saw her Dad returning home and holding a bottle. She rushed to her room and knelt on her knees. She started crying and speaking with God, "O Jesus, please prevent Mom and Dad from drinking."

The little girl's mother has prepared the table for supper. When her Dad put down the bottle on the table it flipped-over and fell from the table. The glass shattered and the alcohol spilled all over the place. Mom started to clean the mess while Dad went to the store and bought another bottle. The same scene was repeated again and, when it happened for the third time, he pledged not to drink alcohol ever again.

When the father noticed that his little daughter was not present for supper, he went to her room to check on her. He found the little girl kneeling and weeping fervently. He tried to listen to her mumbling words and heard her saying, "Dear Jesus, my beloved Savior, please prevent Mom and Dad from drinking alcohol. I'm longing to see that they have a place with You in the glory of the eternal heaven."

Dad embraced his little daughter and asked her about the reason behind her sadness. She told him what happened in the Sunday school that morning.

Dad and Mom cried bitterly for their sins. They took the little girl at that same night to visit the Bishop of Luxor in Upper Egypt. The parents made confession before the bishop for the first time and asked for forgiveness.

From that point on, their home became a little church for worship. I heard about this true story that happened in Luxor when I was still a student. As we can see, although the teacher did not teach his lesson in a suitable manner, neither did the father practice his Christian life in an appropriate manner; the little girl overcame both shortcomings by her faith. Her faith has exceeded the faith of her hesitant teacher and enabled a significant change in the lives of her parents. Likewise, a little boy, a youngster or a chap can realize a lot of changes in the life of his family or his church through his faith.



*Teach Me Lord to be interested in the Life of my Parents.
While my parents are trying to meet all my needs
I, too, can offer them something valuable.
Grant me to be a living image of You before them,
To testify to Your love and my obedience to my Savior.
Teach me to pray, while I am so young,
For the sake of my family,
And for the sake of the whole human race.
Teach me to offer my kneeling to Your Glory for my family,
And for the sake of all my friends and all men.
Amen.*

Story No. 30

Believe Me, I Love him

Years ago, while I was in my way to Cairo to teach Patrology (the science of studying the writings and quotations of the church forefathers), I met with a person, sitting next to me in the train. He seemed to be in his sixties. He told me the following story:

“My job is a manager at... My relationship with all my colleagues and subordinates is excellent. We all live in a family atmosphere.

My supervisor started to annoy me for no apparent reason. He was so arrogant with me to an extent that irritated even my subordinates, since we were all engaged in a caring relationship.

He intensified his pressure more and more every day. I contemplated taking an early retirement, as my only way out of a heart attack, or another serious illness caused by excessive stress.

The idea started to take hold of my mind but I decided to take a two-week vacation. I wanted to have an opportunity of seclusion with my God before taking a final decision. Therefore, I went alone to my apartment in Abu-Keer, Alexandria.

I dedicated the two weeks entirely for prayer, especially using the Book of Psalms, in a quiet and enjoyable atmosphere. I forgot all my problems and tribulations and asked my Lord for direction. My prayers resulted in taking the decision of continuing to work, regardless of what my superior can come up with in terms of antagonism. It's up to me to tolerate him cheerfully.

I'd forgotten all of my superior's actions, and I went to work the day after my vacation with longing to see him. God has put in my heart a tremendous love for that man.

I met with my colleagues and subordinates who greeted me with sincere warmth as a family member. Then, they said to me, “What have you done with your supervisor?”

When I exclaimed the nature and tone of their question, they explained, “Today is his funeral.” I was shocked. Out of my shock, I wept profoundly. Everyone felt that I was sincere in my love for him. I told them, “Believe me, I love the man.”

They were all surprised to hear that from a person who was always a target for his enmity.” “They have not realized that prayers granted you a heart that is big enough for loving everyone. Prayer makes your heart not to succumb to tribulations.”



My dear youth,

It seems that every human being in the world faces perturbations, not because life is a constant source of pain but because our hearts are too narrow to accommodate the tribulations of life. The real need is not for the nuisance to go away, but for our hearts to grow broader and make room for any tribulation regardless of its size.

Acquaintance with God is **“total love. It gives your heart perseverance and joy amongst distress.”**

We do not deny the realities of life with all its agonies. But prayer gives you support that converts your tears to **“heavenly healing.”**

“We glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation works patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope makes not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us” (Rom. 5.35).



Will my heart be bothered with tribulations?

*Will my heart be bothered with tribulations while You live in me?
As You inhabit my heart, You convert it to a heaven,
So the agonies of life cannot capture my soul,
And people's malice cannot hurt me.
I meet Thee; I talk with Thee and my heart then gets broader with Your love,
I love, in righteousness, even my adversaries.
I seek, in righteousness their safety and salvation,
So, I enjoy my life, in spite of pain
Teach me how to communicate with Thee.
Grant me the privilege of embracing You,
So, I bear a true love for every man.*

Story No. 31

Father Mina Passed Away

In my informal conversation once with the late Nazmi Bottros (an Egyptian writer), he asked me, “Do you know how my friendship with His Holiness Pope Kyrolos VI, developed?”

I answered that I did not know. He then said, “In the beginning, I didn’t know him very well, but rather I knew of him, and I had heard controversies about him. When he was a candidate for papacy, I attacked him violently in editorials of some newspaper. When he was chosen and ordained, I went to congratulate him for pontification.

After greeting him, while noticing how cheerful he was, I thought that he’s never read my editorials. Then, still cheerful, said to me with a smile, “They say so and so about me”, thus mentioning my accusations. I answered by asking his forgiveness since I did not really know him that well. His Holiness then smiled and said, “You haven’t attacked me, you’ve attacked ‘Father Mina the Recluse.’ Father Mina passed away. I’m Kyrolos, the father of all.”

I felt how large the heart of this holy man is; and, from that point on, we became buddies; our relationship was that of great affection.”

This is a story of a big heart that knows how to win people with his love, and to convert even his adversaries to friends. He internalized the fact that the greatness of a human being lies not in his status or his popularity, but in his interest towards everyone, so to make of him a personal friend.

Do not say that because he was a pope and patriarch, his job was to win everybody and should be able to forgive. Indeed, the big heart is not necessarily a symptom of a church rank or of age. It is a manifestation of how roomy the heart is to accommodate God.



My small heart shall vanish

*May my small heart vanish,
So I can bear Your big heart
My small heart has become an exceedingly narrow grave,
That cannot tolerate the nuisance of others,
And frequently misunderstands them.
Replace the small grave in me with a big sanctuary,
So the doors of heaven would open wide inside me.*

Story No. 32

I Need Three Hours

In 1987, in West Covina, California, after finishing the vespers prayers and the bible study, a person came to me saying, "Don't you know me? I am (...) from St. George church in Sporting, Alexandria."

After I saluted him he said to me, "I will tell you about my first meeting with Father Pishoy Kamel. I met him at church and he affected me very much. I went to him and said to him, "Father, I need to confess."

"Let it be now."

"But I need three hours to tell you about my whole life. Then, I can confess and may be I can have communion. Whenever you are free for three hours, just tell me."

"Let it be now."

I sat by his side talking about my sins and weaknesses, and with his smiling face I felt that all my burdens were taken-off me. All his comments were very short but full of hope in my Christ. After 5 minutes I found nothing to say but I felt longing to have communion so I asked him, "Can I have communion now?"

He said, "Yes, why not?"

I left him full of joy. I thought that confession is a great burden and needs long hours but now I knew my Christ's love to me and his rich blessings. Father Pishoy has given me hope in Christ and by that my whole life has changed."



*I saw You, So I loved You.
I saw You my Savior on the Cross.
I knew You O the sin Forgiver.
You, open the doors of hope in front of me.*

*I no more fear the sin.
With You I enjoy victory.
I confess to You all my sins,
And with Your Holy Spirit,
I am filled with Your righteousness.*

Story No. 33

I will listen to both sides

I saw him sitting at the back of the church, full of sadness and bitterness. I called him and asked for the reason behind that sadness. He answered narrating the following story: “Today is Friday. I’d to go to work for some delayed work, so I told my wife that I’ll take our son with me and we’ll return at noon. As I started working, I remembered that I forgot an important paper at home, so I returned home with my son. As I opened the door and entered my bedroom, I found my wife betraying me in my bed. I found nothing to do except to come here and ask, “What shall I do?””

I told him, “I listened to you but I’m used to listen to both sides and never do I judge in any matter by listening to one side only even if it’s very clear.”

He answered, “I don’t mind. I used to trust her and I think that she won’t lie. I also thought that she’s very loyal and pure till I saw what I can’t believe.”

We prayed together. Then, I went to his house to find his wife crying bitterly. I said to her, “I want to know the reality of what he says about you.” For I thought she is crying because he accused her of adultery.

With the pure repentant spirit she said, “All what he’s told you is right. There is no witness. Now I don’t care about my prestige in front of the people or even the continuity of my family life, the only thing I care for is my eternity that I lost because of my sins. I don’t want to apologize, for in all cases I’m a sinner. I’m not scared of divorce; rather I am ready to say the truth in front of the court and the church. If he wants to divorce, I won’t defend myself rather I’ll help him. If he wants to get married, it’s his right but for me, I’ll live the rest of my life in tears. Maybe God will forgive me.”

She was crying bitterly that her husband could not bear it so he cried and said, “God has covered me in my youth and He always covers my impure thoughts and dreams. Now it’s my turn to cover you.”

He kissed her saying, “Let’s start a new life, with our Christ between us, blessing us with His spirit.”

The couple lived a blessed life for years, without anyone blaming the other. That is how the young husband succeeded to benefit his wife with his forgiving love living with her in repentance and God filled their life with peace and love.

Do not rush judging others, and do not close the door of repentance before anybody, to let God open the door of mercy before you. Be honest with yourself as this young wife. If you sinned do not cover it with a nice cover of cheating. Rather, cover it with Christ’s love that works in the true repentant life. Put your life in the Holy Spirit’s hands who blames the sin and deliver you to the Father’s bosom.



*You covered me and You still do,
Grant me to cover my brethren.*

*With Your love, You showed me my brethren's weaknesses.
Give me to cover them, not to reveal them.
You cover my disclosed thoughts and weaknesses.
Give me to cover the sins of my brethren.*

Story No. 34

Are you sure it is her voice?

Late father Mikhail Ibrahim told us the following story that happened to him.

One day a young man came to me complaining of his wife, saying, “She insults me with very bad words for no reason.” As the husband finished saying some of these bad words, Father Mikhail asked him, “Are you sure that these words came out of your wife?”

“Yes, I’m not lying.”

“Is it her voice?”

“Yes it is!”

“Are you sure?”

“She’s my wife, I’ve lived with her for long time ago and I know that she is the one insulting me.”

Father Mikhail smiled and said, “It isn’t you wife. Satan talks on her mouth to ruin your life and family. She’s virtuous and pure but Satan wants to destroy both of you. Go back to her and be nice.”

The husband went back home praying for his wife and himself. He was nice to her with pure love and their house turned out to be a small church full of peace and love.



Do not give Satan any space in your family or social life. If anyone annoyed you, rebuke Satan and be nice to your brother so that you benefit him as well as yourself. The real strong person, is the one who resolves the problems from the root. He never gets angry but nicely solves every problem.



*God! Give me a strong and wise personality,
So that my heart would be opened with love even to my enemies.
To know that we have only one common enemy, namely, Satan.
Love everyone; help all, so we can all live with one spirit.*

Story No. 35

A rich poor

I remember in my youth an old woman, in her seventies, who lived in Esna, Upper Egypt. She had a paralyzed son, unable to work, married and has ten children. Some people used to support her financially for the sake of her son and grandchildren who had nothing. She used to travel to her son in Luxor, in Upper Egypt, weekly to give him his needs and return in the same day. I never saw her asking for help from anyone. She never missed a mass and she used to come to church to pray not to ask for help.

This lady died, and her funeral was held in St. Mary's Church which is huge yet full with people, specially the poor. The poor were crying as if they have lost their mother and when one of the priests asked them, they said to him, "She's our mother. She gives us a monthly salary and she gives us from what is given to her for her son."

This is a real picture of the rich in great love to the poor and needy. She was never sad because of her son's situation rather her concern for others made the doors of heaven be opened in front of her; she takes and gives others who need.



This lady full of love helps us not to reject others and at the same time she blames us for worrying about tomorrow with all its needs.

And you, is your heart full of love? Remember that the love of giving gives you strong personality. It opens heaven's doors before you as it makes others love you.



*As my hands are stretched lovingly to give.
I see Your hands opened to hold my offerings.
You give me Your existence in me,
You! Who exists in the loving hearts.
You put in me great love and peace.
You offer me hundred times in this world,
And a share in Your eternity.*

Story No. 36

Under the Rain

Around 6:30 PM, I said to the Bishop, "Let's move now to the Catholic Bishop's residence as our meeting is at 7 PM and it's raining heavily. Maybe we'll have to drive slowly."

He started being late saying, "What will happen if we are late a quarter or half an hour?"

I said to him, "I'm not used to being late, but if you aren't ready I can go and apologize on your behalf."

At last he came with me and at seven exactly we were there. As the bishop opened the door of the car he found that the catholic bishop left his palace and waited for us in the garden under the heavy rain. The bishop was surprised and said to me, "You were right, we were going to be late while the old bishop was standing in the heavy rain."

Why don't we respect others and never be late even for a second? For being late means you don't respect others' precious time.

This reminds me of a story that a priest told me:

"I went with twelve persons to a monastery in the states. The monastery is around 1000 Egyptian Acre, only 250 Egyptian Acre is used. To my surprise is that though the monastery is huge in distances, yet all the monks along with their father gather every day seven times from 4:30 AM to 8:15 PM for prayers and they're all fixed, they're always on time. Once our group was late for supper only three minutes. I was surprised to find the monks with their father waiting for us to start praying. We were ashamed of ourselves. I learnt to be on time or even before it as it reflects respect to others as well as to oneself."

Story No. 37

I left a blessing to my daughters!

At midnight while I was with Father Mikhail Ibrahim and Father Pishoy Kamel at Father Marcos Basilios's house on his wife's death, Father Marcos asked Father Mikhail, "Do you think that those who departed can feel for us?" referring to his wife.

Father Mikhail told us the following story that happened to him:

In village (...), a jeweler died leaving seven daughters with their mother. His wife was crying bitterly over him. After few days, while she was alone in her bedroom crying, she found her husband in front of her asking her, "Why are you crying?"

She answered, "How don't I cry when you left me alone with seven girls to look after them and be responsible for their marriage?"

Her husband said to her, "Don't be afraid. Open the drawer in the cupboard and you'll find a blessing that I left to be spent on their marriages."

He left and she did not believe that what she had seen was true but she opened the drawer and to her surprise, she found a bag. She asked her brother in law to come over and she told him what happened with her saying, "This is the bag I found. I didn't open it as according to the Egyptian law you've a share as I've got no sons. Open the bag and take your share."

The man started crying and said, "How can I take from the blessing that my brother left to his daughters? I should contribute in their expenses not take what is for them."

Under the wife's pressure, he opened the bag to find in it some jewelry. They agreed that he'd take the jewelry to put it into business and spend from it on the daughters. Truly, all the girls got married with the help of their uncle."

This is a true story that shows us how the departed people feel for us and love us. It also shows the honesty of this widow who abided by the law and did not escape it under any conditions.



I am not alone

*Many times I feel lonely.
I think I am alone,
Nobody feels for me or shares with me my burdens.
I do not know, even if those who departed love me.
Pray for me and care for me.
And me too, I love and will always love.
Never will death be able to take love out of me.
I love others even when I meet the Lord.
I am not alone even if I am in the grave.*

Story No. 38

Bless me my Son!

While Father Mikhail Ibrahim was on a visit he suddenly decided to pray so he can leave. Every body was surprised and they said to him, “Why are you in a hurry, Father?”

“My son Ibrahim went home.”

“And so what? He went back to his home.”

“He went to Paradise.”

They knew that at this moment his son, Dr. Ibrahim, died.

I can remember what Father Mikhail said about Dr. Ibrahim after his death. He once told us the following story:

While I was sitting in the reception at home awoken. I was thinking of a specific problem that nobody knows about its truth except my son Ibrahim.

I looked up and said, “Isn’t it possible to send me my son Ibrahim to tell me the truth?”

And suddenly I found my son Ibrahim in white clothes standing in front of me saying, “What do you need father?”

I looked at him. I was very happy and I said to him, “You wear the white clothes my son and I don’t want to dirty it with our worthless worries. I just need you to pray for me and bless me.”

Father Mikhail ended the story by saying, “He blessed me and left.” and may be he covered some of the blessed conversation they had with each other.

In heaven, we are all lovers. The fathers and grandfathers meet with the sons and grandsons without any boundaries in age or relations, for the bond of love is harder. We are all parts in the sole body of the heavenly church.

There a star is better than another in the glory, yet there is no jealousy or envy. As every one sees the glory of others as if it were his own, happy for the salvation of all.

Remember the martyr Arianos, the ruler of Ansana, who killed whole countries of Christians and tortured princes, bishops, priests, monks, women, men and even children. How did they welcome him in paradise when he was martyred and went there? Definitely they were very happy and they considered his glory as theirs. How great is real love!

Story No. 39

The tears of an old monk

In the sixties, one of the old monks used to visit St. George church in Sporting, Alexandria. He used to attend the entire Liturgy sitting on the floor with his hands on his face crying bitterly. One of the youth noticed him and one day he drove him to his relatives and there the young man insisted to know what was behind all these tears.

The old monk said, “I never remember that from my youth I had any relation with any woman nor I had any wrong passion. I loved purity and enjoyed chastity. I joined a monastery and lived in real happiness. As I got sick, they insisted that I had to go to the hospital. There a nurse took care of me as her father, but as her care increased I had some impure thoughts. I insisted on leaving the hospital and since then I’m always crying over my weakness. I put my sin ever before me for not to fall.”

The young man told him, “These are only thoughts that occurred many years ago. Why are all these tears?”

“My impure thoughts hurt Him. He who loved me and still loves me, so how shouldn’t I cry? My eternity is very precious. I am scared of losing my glory in God.”

“Do your tears destroy your peace?”

“My tears fill me with happiness and peace and give me hope in my Savior who prepared for me a place in His Father’s bosom.”



Make me happy with tears of repentance

God! Give me pure tears.

Mix the tears of repentance with those of happiness.

I remember my sins and weaknesses ever,

And I always remember Your great love.

Your Holy Spirit blames me for my sins.

Your Holy Spirit gives me happiness and peace.

Make my heart happy with the honest tears of repentance.

Story No. 40

A Deacon reading with his heart

The heathen ruler was infuriated when he saw a young deacon encouraging many of the confessors to bear pains for their faith in Christ. The ruler wanted to humiliate him. As he knew of the deacon's love for reading the bible and church books, he ordered to knock out his eyes. The soldiers rejoiced over him and executed the order cruelly imagining that this should by necessity destroy his morale. Shortly after the governor met the deacon to find him rejoicing by the Spirit, thus he was astonished. And as they talked, the deacon said, "I thank you so much. Before, I used to read with my eyes to know more about the secrets of my Lord. However, when you knocked out my eyes my Lord granted me an insight. I now read much with my heart's eyes. Instead of the physical eyes, I now enjoy having spiritual ones. I've known and enjoyed many heavenly matters which books couldn't reveal."

The governor wondered, "What shall I do?"

I knocked out his eyes yet he saw with his heart what is invisible.

I imprisoned him but he changed the prison into heaven full of joy and praises.

When I torture him he rejoices for sharing with his Christ His pains.

If I kill him, he'll rejoice more for he yearns to see his Lord.

What to do then?"

This reminds me of the meeting between St. Anthony the great and St. Didymus the blind who lost his eyesight when he was four years.

"Do you grieve for losing your eyesight, Didymus?" St. Anthony asked.

St. Didymus kept silent. Therefore, St. Anthony repeated the question twice. As St. Didymus did not reply, St. Anthony said to him, "Do you grieve for losing your eyesight which all creatures share, Didymus?"

Don't you rejoice with the insight bestowed upon you, which you share with the angels and the heavenly hosts?"



Let my heart rejoice with You

When I possess You, I possess true joy

Which no one can take it from me.

With You my soul rejoices O, the desire of my heart.

How can the world harm me!

During my illness, I see Your hands curing my soul.

And in my pains I converse with You O, The Afflicted.

Even if I am deprived of the bodily eyes,

You grant me Spiritual insight to see You.

If death draws near, the gates of Paradise will open widely before me.

If the world deprives me of its riches,

I will possess You O, the richness of my soul.

*With You my joy is full.
When I look forward to the past, I see You changing my faults into good.
Then I look to the present to find You in my bosom.
I look forward to the future joyfully for, You will necessarily come to me.*

Story for the Youth 41

A Big Smile at the Altar

I heard this from Mr. H. who was a personal friend of Pope Kyrillos (Cyril) since the beginning of his service (Father Mina the Solitary). Mr. H used to attend with him, as a deacon in St. Mina's church in old Cairo to pray the daily holy mass. He said:

I went with his holiness the pope to St. Mina's monastery in Mariout, Alexandria and I attended with him the vespers prayers. The only attendees were his holiness the pope, a monk as the cantor, worshipers and I as the deacon. While the monk was saying the "Doxologies", his holiness the pope stood silent at the Altar and suddenly he smiled such a big smile that almost made it a faint laugh.

I was really astonished by this scene as I lived with him all these years during which I always saw him strict with himself and others at the Altar. After the prayer I went to him and asked him, "Tell me your holiness why did you laugh during the service? Ever since I've known you, I've never seen you laughing while in church."

Even though, he tried to evade answering me in every possible way, I insisted.

Finally he said to me, "I'll only tell you if you promise that you keep it secret until the day I leave this world."

I promised him and he continued, "I stood at the Altar with a bitter soul because of a problem concerning the Copts. Suddenly, St. Mina revealed himself to me and said, "Why are you sad?" I told him the reason and he replied, "Do you think that you're alone? We're all with you and supporting you" and then he stretched his hand and nudged me gently and I couldn't help laughing."



Friendship with the Saints

*Many a time do I suffer from bitter loneliness!
While You are inside me, even deeper than the depth of my soul.
You fill my depth,
And in my stupidity I think that I am without aid.
Your saints support me.
They share with me my feelings, they pray for me.
They are a cloud of witnesses that surrounds me.
Open my eyes O Hallowed of all saints, so that I may see You.*

Story for Youth 42

Father, My Colleague Lies

On her first day in University, this girl returned from school and was continuously crying. Her father and brothers tried to find out the reason but they could not. It was only her first day in university and they could not imagine why she was crying. Finally, after huge efforts till 11 PM she said to her father, “Guess What!”

“What happened dear?”

“Can you imagine that I saw one of my colleagues lying?”

The father was astonished of his daughter’s lack of experience to the extent that she thinks that no one ever lies. The father gathered his children and said to them, “Tell me what to do? Your sister was crying all day because she saw a young man lying. How can she survive in this world?”

Well, she survived; she got married and she succeeded in her profession as a teacher as well as being a good wife. Moreover, she had her positive impact on many either at her school or among her friends and loved ones.

I remember when I was visiting her while she was suffering the cruel pains of cancer in addition to being hemi-plegia. She said to me, “Why are you visiting me? I’m fine. Visit the youngsters as they’re more in need of your care than me.”

It was with this spirit that Fawzaia the simple hearted lived.



Create in me a Clean Heart

*O’ Lord grant me a pure heart,
So that I may see everyone pure,
So that I may not imagine any person crooked or lying,
But to see everyone in You
And love the salvation of all.
Grant me tears so that I would weep over our human weaknesses,
And a big heart so that I may not ask for condolence for myself
But salvation and escalation for every soul.*

Story for Youth 43

Condolences in Advance

In the midst of her cruel pains, Mrs. Fawzia said, “I rejoice that God is offering me condolences in advance.”

“What do you mean by condolences offered to you in advance?”

“At night my Lord offers me marvelous condolences to support me in advance, and as the condolence increases I know that tomorrow’s pain will also increase. So I thank Him for supporting me in advance.”

I never heard her moan during her severe cancer pains and hemi-plegia. The Lord himself consoled her. I remember visiting her on the first day of the disciples fasting when she said to me, “Do you know what happened yesterday night?”

“No!”

“My brother Kamal came to me. He hasn’t visited me for two weeks since he was not in Alexandria. I missed him, but I asked, ‘What day is it today?’

‘Sunday.’

‘Which Sunday?’

‘Sunday of Pentecost.’

‘How could you come to me and leave the church prayers?’

I insisted that he takes my husband and children and goes to the archangel Michael’s church in Mostafa Kamel Street (a few blocks away from home).

They tried to leave behind one of my children in case I needed anything or a guest comes, but I insisted that they all take part in the prayers.

As soon as the last one left and closed the door, my Lord opened to me the gates of heaven.

I enjoyed unspeakable matters until they put the key in the key hole to open the door I found myself back in my room.”

I tried to talk with her about what she had seen but she never satisfied my question.



The open Heavens

When the earthly doors are closed I see the Heavens’ doors open.

When I refuse to lean on a human chest,

I find the Lord’s chest full of love for me.

O’ Lord open my eyes,

So that I may see with St. John an open door in heavens.

I enter to Your Divine holy mysteries,

And enjoy partnership with the heavenly.

I rejoice in the midst of my pain,

And joyfully await my eternal stay with You.

Story No. 44

I Read It Twenty Times

On a visit to a family in one of the American cities, I asked one of its members, “Which book of the Bible do you read?”

“I don’t read the Bible.” He answered. “I read the Old Testament about twenty times. As for the New Testament I read it so many times. I know all the commandments and the stories mentioned in the Bible.”

I kept silent for a while then I said, “A man had read one verse and kept on reading it for more than eighty five years until he died.”

“Who is he?”

“St. Anthony.”

“Which verse?”

“He entered the church when not yet eighteen years old and heard the verse,

“If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in Heaven; and come, follow Me” (Matt. 19.21).

He heard the saying and considered it a personal message sent to him. He kept on reading it trying to apply it all his life. However, he found it very broad. As if repeating what the Psalmist had said,

“I have seen the consummation of all perfection, but Your commandment is exceedingly broad” (Ps. 119.96).”

Our Bible is not to be read for memorization or for knowing the commandments and the stories. It should be read in order for the believer to meet with the Word of God, the Savior and the Friend, to have a conversation of love and enjoy living with Him.

We should read the commandment and practice it not as a mere ethical behavior but to become an icon of Christ. We should follow His example and acquire His characteristics. Our souls would then be decorated with the richness of His grace, so that they would be prepared as a bride for her Groom.



May Your Bible be open before my eyes.

May I read it with my heart and live it.

May I see You hidden behind the letters.

May I meet You and get to know You.

I shall then know You, love You and be united with You.

Your Holy Spirit enlightens the eyes of my heart

And attracts me to run towards You.

I shall bear witness for You so that all people may enjoy You.

Story No. 45

Two Kids Consecrating Fasting

On visiting the families in Hollywood, California in 1971, a pious lady, who had two young daughters, asked me, “Father, what do you think of swimming in our private swimming pool during the fasting?”

“Why do you ask?”

“My daughters refused to swim today in the pool and when I asked them they said, “How can we swim while fasting!”

“Fasting doesn’t forbid swimming”, I said.

“How can it be? Ask father””

This conversation between the mother and her young daughters reveals their simple pious concept along with a spiritual touch.

I do not want to get into a discussion of the possibility of swimming in a private pool during fasting. What truly draws my attention is the piety of two kids living with this spirit in the states. On the contrary, during the summer, many people ask, “In the summer resort, can we swim after communion? After how many hours can we swim?”

This issue requires neither harsh rules to be controlled nor an absolution to be given by a priest. It only requires a pious heart, heavenly thinking and a serious soul that seeks its continuous spiritual edification.



*Grant me O Lord a pious heart,
So that I would not seek the wide path but the narrow one.
My soul rejoices as it accompanies You.
I would not seek luxury and spoiling.
I would rather be strict and serious.
With joy and happiness, I shall live consecrated for You.*

SHORT STORIES FOR THE YOUTH

46-64

**Prepared by
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Short Story No. 46

Gift or Insult

Jessie entered her friend Lucy's house saying to her, "Is Mrs. Martha the servant of the girls meeting here?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Her Mercedes is outside the door."

"Maybe she's buying something."

"Does this millionaire buy from modest stores like us?"

While the two were talking there was a knock on the door. Lucy opened the door and found Martha's chauffeur standing at the door. He presented to her a beautiful box saying, "Mrs. Martha sent you this box. She asks about you."

Lucy thanked him and asked him to enter. He excused himself saying that Mrs. Martha was waiting for him because he was going to take her somewhere.

Lucy asked him to thank Mrs. Martha and said to him, "Tell her that I'm going to the girls meeting tomorrow and I'll thank her myself."

Lucy called her mother and her siblings happily saying, "Look, Martha is interested in me. She sent me this gift."

Her mother asked, "And what is the occasion for this gift?"

She answered saying, "She's full of love; that's why she gave me this gift."

When she opened the box, she was astonished. She found dried up flowers with withered leaves.

"What's this?" Jessie asked angrily.

Her mother said, "Don't be upset Lucy. Maybe she meant to put something different, something better, than the dead flowers."

Jessie commented, "I know Martha. She's a sensitive and generous person; she wouldn't do that."

She paused then continued, "Maybe it's the chauffeur's fault. He might have been given the gift a week ago and neglected to bring it then."

The mother answered, "Tomorrow is the girls' meeting go and thank her. Then, ask her why she sent this gift."

The following day, Lucy went to the meeting. There she met Martha and started a long conversation with her,

"Thank you for caring about me and sending me this gift."

"You're welcome. It's a very simple gift."

"I received your gift. Did you send it yesterday?"

"Why do you ask? I sent you this gift yesterday. You look a little astonished."

"Yes, because you sent me flowers that were completely withered."

"I know that they're withered. One day as I was walking in the garden, I admired some beautiful flowers and I picked them for myself. I put them in a vase and I put it on the table so I would enjoy their beauty and their nice smell. Later on when the flowers withered away, I thought of getting rid of them. Then I thought of sending you these flowers, as my friend, instead of throwing them away."

“Do you consider me a friend when you give me withered flowers that deserve to be thrown away? Is that because I’m poor that you insult me by sending these dried up flowers?”

“Don’t feel insulted my friend. This is to express my love to you.”

“Is this gift an expression of love or is it an insult to me?”

“Do you think this is an insult?”

“Yes, I won’t attend this meeting and I won’t talk with you anymore.”

Martha smiled and patted Lucy on her back kindly saying, “Don’t be upset Lucy.”

“How can I not be upset? Do you think I’ve no feelings or pride?”

“Lucy! I love you. I know that you are a sensitive person, but I wanted to reveal to you something about your life.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, if you consider my gift an insult, then you insult God everyday.”

“But how?”

“Don’t you spend most of your time at school and with your friends; then when you go home, you only relax and watch T.V; then at the end of the day when you are very tired, you remember to give God the remains of your time; you then spend minutes for prayer and reading the Bible? In this way, you insult God as if he doesn’t deserve anything but the remains of your time. This is the gift that you give to God everyday. Unfortunately, you don’t realize that God loves you and He’s proud of you as His daughter, or that He asks you to be His heavenly bride.”

“What should I do now?”

“Remember that the Father presented to you His First Born Son as a sacrifice for you. Don’t you then want to spare your best time to God? The Divine word Himself

“Emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found In human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross”

(Phil. 2.7-8).



You offered me O Master Yourself as a gift,

So what should I offer You?

You asked that I own You so that You can own me.

Yet in my stupidity I offer You the remains of my life.

I am too selfish to give You the better part of my time and my talents.

You offered me Your heavens a home for me.

You made Your heavenly creatures friends for me.

So prepare me for Your dwelling in me.

Construct Your heavenly creation inside me.

You loved me first.

Give me that I may love You above all.

Give me to surrender to You my heart, my thought and my feelings.

Short Story No 47

Don't Withdraw Your Friendship From Me

It was said that Shah Abbis, the king of Iran was very loving to his people. One night, he had an idea to take off his royal cloths and wear a cheap and tattered gown. With these cheap cloths, he went in the night to meet with the poor in the street. There, he talked with them and befriended them.

He snuck out of the back door of the castle, so that no one would identify him.

The disguised king met with a poor fisherman wearing tattered cloth and sitting in the dark with a fire, grilling a few small fish for dinner.

With a kind smile the king greeted him and sat beside him and started talking with him. The fisherman was reassured by his conversation. The conversation extended late at night, the fisherman asked if the disguised king would eat with him from the fish. The king showed his gratitude to the fisherman and accepted his invitation; they talked together as they ate the small fish.

The fisherman talked with him about fishing and the king listened to him with great interest. The fisherman told the king stories from his life as well as the life of his friends. At times, the fisherman told the king of the nation's economy and its international policy. The king was listening to him the whole time and commented in a way that attracted the fisherman's heart and thoughts and corrected much of his understandings.

At the end, the fisherman said to the king, "I admire you my dear friend. I'd like to spend the whole night with you but I have to return to my family. I believe you too have to return to your family. I'm pleased with your friendship and love. I also learned a lot from your wisdom. I'd be very happy if you find the time for us to meet again and talk with each other."

The king thanked him saying, "I thank you my dear brother for I've enjoyed talking to you and getting to know you. Now I've a friend who is pleasant, wise, generous, open-minded and kind. I'd like to see you everyday and have a good conversation with you."

The King returned to his palace happily and continued meeting with the fisherman till they both became very intimate friends.

One night, as the king was on his way to the fisherman, he said to himself, "It's time to reveal myself to the fisherman so that if he needs a particular service or money, I'd help him, his family or his friends. Undoubtedly, it will be a joyful night for this friend to have much of what he dreamt of. It will also be a joyful night for me to please this man along with all those around him."

The king revealed his identity to the fisherman. The fisherman, as a result, was astonished and troubled, but the king calmed him down. He then asked the fisherman to ask for whatever he or his acquaintances need.

The fisherman looked at him surprisingly and said to him, "I've heard much about you, your highness. I've heard of your love to your people and your generosity. Yet, I wouldn't have imagined that you'd come down to live with me like this, these pleasant moments. You've offered a lot of services and gifts, a plenty for many. I'm the luckiest of them because you've given me yourself as a friend and a brother. My request to you is that you don't withdraw your friendship from me."

The king was surprised because the poor fisherman did not ask for anything of the king's wealth but he asked for the king himself as a friend to him. This is what our Lord Jesus Christ did with us, The King of Kings that left His glory and His heavenly palace and descended to us. He was born as a child in a manger for us to surround Him, talk to Him and listen to Him.



*Dear Jesus,
Thank You for descending to my earth.
You became a child talking with the children,
Lived with them in their world O Creator of all creation.
Thou descended from Your heavens to take us with You to it.
We do not ask for anything.
We want You O heavenly one.
We want You O amazing Friend.
Do not withdraw Your friendship from us.*



Green, See M.P. *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*. Baker Book House, 1992. 48-49.

Short Story No 48

Mercy To Those Who Do not Deserve It

It was said that a woman stood in front of Napoleon Bonaparte pleading with tears for her son who committed an awful crime that deserved a severe punishment.

"I know you're a merciful person. I beg you to forgive my son this time."

"I love mercy and I forgave him last time."

"Forgive him this time as well."

"He doesn't deserve mercy. He depreciated my mercy before."

"I know he doesn't deserve any mercy but you're merciful enough to forgive him."

"How can I have mercy upon those who don't deserve it?"

"Well, you can't consider it true mercy if you're merciful to those who deserve it. The real mercy is to be kindhearted to those who don't deserve it."

Napoleon kept silent for a while, then he said to her, "You know what! I think you're right. This is the true mercy. I've decided to forgive him."

This is the feeling of St. Paul as he has said,

"For while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son"

(Rom. 5.10).

Jesus Christ manifested His mercy to us when He forgave us our sins and reconciled us with God. Although we resisted God and turned our back to Him, God turned His face to us and poured His mercy upon us. Although we resisted Him with all our power, He gave us His life. He loved us first and in His love He invites us to taste His mercy and accept Him in us. With such mercy, our hearts would then be filled with love and kindness for God and for all mankind. We would then be merciful to those who do not deserve mercy. We would then love all those who do not deserve love.



*Thank You God for You are truly merciful.
You had mercy on me, the one who does not deserve any mercy.
You open to me the gate of love so that I could reach Your bosom,
I, the one who escapes from Your face.
Your love attracted me to Your viscera which is inflamed with the fire of love.
You smolder my harsh nature and renew it.
I am now sharing the Divine nature in my mercy to others.
Mercy streams from my depth to those who do not deserve mercy,
And love pours from inside of me towards those who do not deserve my love.
Overwhelm my depth with unlimited mercy,
And inflame my nature with fiery love that all of the water of the world cannot put out.
You are the whole love. Make me loving and merciful.*

Short Story No. 49

Where Is the Furniture of Your House?

It was said that on a visit to some European cities, an American tourist met a worshiper who did not own anything but few books and a mat made of straw. The American asked the worshiper surprisingly, "Where is the furniture of your house?"

"First, you've to tell me where the furniture of your house is."

"Well, I'm a foreign tourist in this city, and that's why I don't have my furniture here, my furniture is in my home country, namely, the States."

Then the worshiper smiled at him and said, "I'm like you."

Poor is the person that while being a foreigner in this life occupies his heart and thoughts and spends most of his time immersed in the furniture of the world.

Live in this world with a free spirit that wanders speedily as a tourist until it crosses to the Heavenly Jerusalem. This Jerusalem is your home country, in which you find the bosom of your Father full of utmost glory prepared for you to rest in.

Whoever sets his eyes upon the heavenly Jerusalem does not carry any worldly burden rather happiness. He/she is not troubled with the weight of the world but flies with the wings of the Spirit ascending from glory to another with continuous pleasure.

Short Story No 50

I Am Unconvinced Following you

A believer entered the tombs of India. He walked contemplating on the life of the dead who lost this world. While he was immersed in his thoughts, he found a hundred year old grave with writings on it by the person buried in there. It reads,

Remember you stranger, who cross me,
You are now where I was once,
And as I am now you will once be someday.
Prepare for death and follow me.

As the believer thought about what was engraved on the tomb, he found another writing on the same grave made by one of the people who crossed that grave before. It says, "I am not convinced that I should follow you until I know what road you are taking."

Truly how hard it is to be convinced to follow a dead person to the grave unless one is aware that one can cross from the grave to a new life. The one who will never be trapped by the grave is our Lord Jesus Christ who says,

"I am the resurrection. I am the way."

Let us follow Him until we enter the grave. Then we would enter the bosom of the Father singing,

**"O Death, Where is your sting?
O Hades, Where is your victory?"**

SHORT STORY 51

A Match Stick

In one of the villages of upper Egypt, a few of the servants of the church thought of a project to serve the children of the village. Since they did not have any resources they thought of going to one of the rich people of the village. One of them said,

“So and so is a rich man and he can share in the total cost of the project, but ... Well, I don't want to judge this person anymore.”

“But what?”

“You know what I want to say.”

“You mean what is known about him that he's a stingy person?”

“We all hear that about him.”

“Anyway, let's go to him as sons and present the project to him. Maybe God's hand will intervene and work in his heart.”

The servants went together and the rich man greeted them smiling and welcomed them. As his son wanted to light the gas lamps he lighted the first one and tried to light the second one using a second matchstick, his father yelled at him saying, “Why do you use two match sticks? Use the first match stick by lighting it from the first gas lamp to light the second gas lamp, for now, isn't it wasting?”

The son was greatly embarrassed because his father yelled at him because of a matchstick that has no value. The servants looked at each other as if to say, “The one who yells at his son over a match stick will surely not share in a project for the children of the village.”

The rich man observed the glances of the servants without saying a word but he welcomed them smiling. Patiently, the servant began to present the project to the rich man who followed his words with great interest and lastly asked the servants, “What is the cost of the project?”

They told him about the cost.

In a few moments, the rich man brought the whole amount that was needed saying to them, “It's a blessing for me that I can share in this project for the good of my children, the children of the village. I thank you for allowing me to participate with you in this work. I offer a little of what God has given me but you're the soldiers working with your hearts and efforts for the children. I hope that you don't deprive me of participating with you in any work for our children.”

The servants were surprised of the rich man's actions and they looked at each other disbelieving what has happened to them. As the rich man noticed them, he said, “Why were you surprised when I reprimanded my son for wasting a matchstick and when I offered you the cost of the project? It's with the likes of this matchstick that I've collected what's offered to God for serving Him! I'm careful about everything not to hoard it, but to use it for myself, my family and for the service of others.”

They all went out happy and blaming themselves for they accused him of stinginess unjustly. Moreover, they learned not to waste anything that they may use for the service of others.



*Grant me to save in the little,
 That I may give much to others.
You blessed the two fish and the five loaves, O Lord,
So You fed thousands.
But You asked that the crusts be collected.
It is an important task that Your apostles did themselves.
Teach me not to waste resources that You have offered to mankind,
But that I may be honest in the little things,
So that You may trust me in the many.*

Short Story No 52

The Singing Birds

On an early morning, Mark went to his father, who turned his face from the window and hugged and kissed his son. Mark started a conversation with his father:

“Dad, why do I always see you looking out of the window every morning?”

“I like to watch those singing birds that stand together at the telephone wire, sing a little and then fly away. It is as if they start their morning by praising God joyfully and then go to work with the spirit of community.”

“What else do you like about these birds, Dad? The harmony of their songs!”

“Yes, I listen to the harmony of their songs as they sing together and I feel that there is no creature on earth happier than these singing birds.”

“And what is the secret behind that?”

“Well, they stand on the telephone wires with their claws fixed in their position and not being affected by the transfer of waves throughout the wires. Undoubtedly, these wires carry many telephone conversations with happy as well as sad news. Yet the news passes under the feet of the birds without affecting the birds themselves or letting them lose their inner peace. They put their hearts in the hands of God and they fix their feet on His road. They rejoice and sing in His ears fixing their eyes towards the sky. My dear, I hope you become as one of those birds placing the news of the world under your feet. You would then be walking in the world like a bird on the telephone wire without breaking your heart or preoccupying your thoughts with the world. Start your life with happiness and work with the Holy Spirit so you would live your life as if you were in Heavens.”



*God, grant me that I may rest in Your palms,
That I may see You with my heart and be preoccupied with talking to You,
While not be distracted with the conversations of the world,
Or be disturbed by its concerns.
My spirit sings to You O the desire of my heart.*

Short Story No 53

Won't Escape From His Fingers

In 1994, a young woman came to me crying bitterly and asking me to pray for her recounting her story:

As she was holding her only infant, he fell from between her hands and some of his bones were broken. She took him and rushed to the hospital where the doctor treated him. Yet the hospital considered the mother to have abused the child. In response, it called the "Child Abuse Agency" so they would take care of the infant instead of the mother. The mother was put to trial because she neglected her infant. The agency demanded to take care of the child, depriving the mother of her motherhood to her only son. It justified its position saying that since the child fell from his mother's hands; she is not responsible enough as a mother to take care of her child. As a result, the mother loses her rights to be with her infant in her house or to raise him. Rather, she should be judged harshly for her negligence.

Truly, we may slip from the hands of our mothers but we can never slip from the hands of our Savior Jesus Christ. How can we slip from between His fingers when we, ourselves, are parts of Christ's body?



*Preserve me, part of Your body, O beloved Head.
Carry me in Your palms.
Place me in Your heart that I may rest there.
There I will not slip from Your hands.
I will not fall from Your fingers,
But I will be preserved by Your great love.*

Short Story No 54

Give Him your Keys, He Gives you His Heart

It is said that a righteous man sat with his wife with a rejoicing spirit and a cheerful face. There, a conversation arose between them:

“You look very happy today. Is there any joyful news that I don’t know of?”

“I’m just happy because of our son’s love and confidence in us.”

“What happened to remind you of his love?”

“Before going to his military service, he handed me all the keys of his room and the upper floor and even his personal closet. He also asked me to record a summary of all his phone calls. He’s a righteous son who never hides anything from us. He’s no secrets. That’s true, he gave us all his keys and he allowed us to manage all of his affairs during his absence. Do you know that the only key he took with him was the front door key of the house?”

“Why did he especially take this key?”

“He told me that he won’t tell us when he’s coming. It will be a surprise.”

“He carries that key. It’s the key of his parents’ house. He’s opened his heart and we’ve opened our house to him as well as our spirits and we give him all our lives.”



*God, receive all the keys of my heart, my daily thoughts, feelings and actions.
May You manage all of my daily affairs.
I will not hide anything from You.
I gave You all of my keys, so grant me Yourself,
And offer me Your bosom.*



Barnhouse, Donald Grey. *Let Me Illustrate*. 1995. 16.

Short Story No 55

The Gift of Pain

A baby named Beverly Smith, born in Akron, Ohio, was a very peaceful infant. Her mother noticed that she would never cry unless she was hungry or upset. The mother was very proud of her daughter who spent most of her day without screaming or crying. Later on, the mother noticed that her child never expressed any signs of pain. Once, the child fell on the floor but she did not cry. Another time, she hit her head against the wall but she did not show any sign of pain. She even put her hands in the fire once and she did not even cry.

At this point, the mother was very worried about her child. She took her child to the doctor to examine her. The doctor found that Beverly suffered from a disturbance in the central nervous system, a condition that has no treatment. One symptom of this condition is the numbness of pain that the child experienced.

The doctors requested from the mother to always accompany her child and observe her closely. The reason is that the child may break one of her bones, hurt herself with a knife or even burn herself without expressing any pain.

Life without feelings is dangerous. It pushes man to his demise. This is also true with the spiritual life. Pain, as described by St. John Chrysostom, is the school of philosophy and wisdom. St. Paul said,

“For the Lord disciplines him whom He loves, and chastises every son whom he receives”
(Heb. 12.6).

God grant us the sensitivity to feel the pain when we commit sin,
So we may cry out to You, our savior, to help us.



*My spirit thanks You, O Lover of mankind.
You gave me every spiritual, heavenly blessing,
And You gave me earthly offerings without limit,
But I will not forget to thank You for Your gift of feeling the pain.
You granted me to feel the pain of hunger, so I would eat
And the pain of thirst, so I would drink.
You let me feel the pain of the wounds caused by sin
So I would take refuge in You, O Healer of the wounded spirit.
My spirit suffers from hunger and thirst.
Who can satisfy it, but You!
You are the living bread that descends from heaven.
You are the source of the living water that never runs out.*



Barnhouse, 21.

Short Story NO 56

The Sad Artist

Once, an artist and his friend entered a museum that contained two of his artistic pieces. One of them was a picture that he drew in his early youth and the other was after decades.

The artist looked at the two pieces of art and his countenance was saddened. His friend then asked him, “Why are you so sad?”

The artist shook his head and didn’t say a word. His friend continued, “You should be happy and proud of the great progress that you achieved along the years and is seen in your old and new work.”

With a sad smile, the artist replied, “I’m sad because I remembered what I promised myself when I was young and I’ve only fulfilled little progress of what I desired.”

Let us be happy for the work of God’s grace in us that continuously molds us to be images of Christ, the Creator, as we carry His picture within us. At the same time, let’s regret our inadequate submission to His grace. Let us not forget that we have not yet offered the picture of Jesus in our hearts what it deserves.

“Until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature Manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”
(Eph. 4.13).



Barnhouse. 36.

Short Story No 57

The Cost of Maturity

When a cub grows a little, the lion captures a deer and brings it to his cub. He leaves the deer in front of the cub so that the two would engage in a fight. The lion watches the struggle between them and if he sees the deer beating the cub with a dangerous blow, he interferes quickly and saves his cub. From this fight, the cub learns to go with his father on hunting and to attack the prey. When the cub grows and matures, he leaves his father and leads his own mature life.

This is an image of maturity; the cub is not left in the lion's cave to play continuously. Rather, he enters into a struggle by which he learns and gradually reaches maturity.

In the same way, the eagle teaches his young how to fly. The eagle carries his young with his beak and flies to the heights thousands of feet above. The eagle then lets the young go. The young as a result, struggles with its weak wings to fly. Yet when the young starts to fall, the eagle flies under the young, extends its wings and carries it. The eagle, then, picks up its young with his beak one more time and repeats the same lesson over and over again until the young learns to fly. Then, the eagle leaves it to fly alone and to pursue its own mature life.

We can say that God, in His kind paternity, wants us to get mature. He said to us,
This is the road of My love and My continuous care for you.

I leave you sometimes but I extend My wings under you
And pick you up that you may not fall.

I want you to learn to fly.

I raise you up high but I don't leave you alone.

Don't be a child in faith forever.

Rather, reach the maturity of righteousness.

This is the experience of the singer saying, “Don't leave me until the end.” For he feels that God carries him to the heights and leaves him but for a moment to carry him again until he learns how to fly.



God, I often crave for the immature roads of childhood.

I want to rest and play continuously.

And You in Your fatherhood get me into a war against Satan, You the Lion.

You want me not to remain a small cub but to become a strong lion.

Carry me up high.

Teach me with Your Holy Spirit how to fly.

Do not let me rest in the nest but soar high in the sky.

Short Story No 58

Race in Love

It was said that an Argentinean hero won the world championship in car race. He was able to reach the speed of 150 miles per hour. This champion won all the prizes for the world races in the roads of Europe at that time.

That hero was a loving and caring man. When some youth try to race with him in a highway, he would slow down his speed so they would win. Although he had the ability to beat them easily with his amazing speed, he still did not try to win them. Instead, he offered himself as an example of love. He also represented himself as a role model of how to use freedom wisely. He meant to say to those youth:

You race slowly.

You cannot speed up like me.

I can change the speed of the car in a few seconds.

Without any harm, I can do all these things.

If you try to imitate me, you might kill yourselves.

I will pity you and I will not enter a race against you.

This is the freedom that the believer has. He does not use it to satisfy his ego, but to care for his brethren. He races not to show off his superiority and abilities but his love for his brethren.



Barnhouse. 39.

Short story No 59

Talented Fishermen

Donald Barnhouse tells of the wonderful view that he saw when he went to Cifu in Japan.

As night came and darkness fell, fishing boats floated in the river with fire lit in steel cages fixed at the front of each boat. The fire attracted the fish to the surface and at once each fisherman let go a dozen seagulls, each fisherman had a ring fixed around the neck of each bird and held the ring by a rope in his hands. Birds were drawn back to their boats, because the fish can not cross from their beaks to their stomach through the ring, while the small fish crossed so the birds may eat it. This is how the birds ate the small fish and the fishermen got the big fish. What surprised the writer was how masterful each fisherman was in not having the ropes knotted together and their abilities to draw back the birds at the right moment while they are holding big fish in the beak, especially that at times two birds would hunt one fish.

Our lives are continuous fishing, but from where do we get the abilities that our ropes do not knot together and that we may pull the birds at the right moment? It is the ability of our Master Jesus who guides us in the procession of victory.

He is God Almighty who knows how to move everything according to His superior Divine while giving all the members of His body the ability to share in this. Moreover, He knows how to balance their spiritual lives and their physical, social, academic, intellectual and emotional lives without knotting of the ropes. He grants them with His Holy Spirit the distinction and ability to differentiate.



Barnhouse. 43.

Short Story No 60

A Show Without Smell or Beauty

In Los Angeles, Paul, a new immigrant to the U.S, talked with his friend about the beauty of the flower show that attracts many. The next day he turned on the black and white T.V to enjoy the show. Paul noticed that his friend was bored.

“What do you think of the show?”

“It is surprising that thousands crowd the roads to watch the show.”

“Isn’t it a beautiful and wondrous show?”

“I can’t smell the flowers and I can’t see their beauty.”

Paul became silent a bit and realized his mistake that he did not take his friend to the road to watch the parade in person that he may see its beauty with all its beautiful colors and gorgeous arrangement.

At once he asked his friend to come along with him in his car and he took him to a place near one of the roads where the parade goes by and they descended to go between the public assembled to enjoy the parade.

Truly how often we carry the name of Jesus Christ without His habitation, so that we neither carry His nice smell nor the beauty of His presence. Let us truly be participants in the parade ascending to heaven to rest in the bosom of the Father and not offer a show as the one through the television without smell or true Divine presence.

Short Story No 61

How Wars Start?

A boy asked his father, "Tell me father how do wars start?"

Father answered, "I'll tell you about the First World War as an example; the war started when Germany attacked Belgium."

At this point the mother interrupted and said sharply, "Tell your son the truth, the war started when some people got killed."

The father could not tolerate the mother's intrusion in such a way and he looked at the mother to reprimand her saying, "He didn't ask you, he asked me and why are you interrupting me?"

Mother became very angry, left the room quickly and slammed the door shut so hard that a shelf on the wall shook and some of the expensive art pieces fell on the ground and were broken.

The silence was then interrupted by the son saying, "Now I know father and mother how wars start.

I don't need an answer."



Green, M.P. *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*. Baker Book House. 1992. 19.

Short Story No 62

Plants Overcome the Weeds

Peter asked his young son to come with him to the garden so that they may plant some flowers seeds and imbed some new plants in the garden of their new house.

The son said to his father, “There is still some weeds on the ground despite us preparing it and removing all the weeds before and I fear that we’ll waste our efforts in trying to plant the seeds and imbed these plants.”

“We removed the weeds as much as we could.”

“Let’s wait until the weeds appear once again and remove them again, thus we’ll ensure that they won’t appear again.”

“That is impossible. As long as the ground is not planted the weeds will appear time after time.”

“What is the solution?”

“If we plant the ground, the plants and the trees will appear and some weeds will appear with them and we’ll try to remove them. Throughout the time, the plants will overcome the weeds until they’re almost gone.”

That is the case of our spiritual lives, if we concentrate on the negatives alone, by trying to remove evil, it will not be completely removed. Let us start with the spirit of the Lord in the positives: doing good and practicing the righteousness of life with the Lord. Then, the light may overcome darkness and our Jesus will rule in our hearts so that sin may not have a place.

A lot of youth concentrate on the negatives, which destroy their psyches and they feel hopeless about enjoying chastity. The compensation of continuous crying over the putrefied smell of sin draws us closer to Jesus’ sweet smell that is able to lift us on the high, making up for our being in the mud of the world.

Short Story No 63

A Look from her Father Is Enough

The father noticed the sign of worry on his young daughter Sherry, when the doctor held the needle to inject this four-year girl. This was the first time for the child to be aware that she will be injected. She thought that this needle is enough to kill an elephant not only a young child like her.

The father held his daughter's hand and looked at her with a look of love full of compassion. She did not hear a word from him but it was enough for her to feel his presence and to enjoy a look from him to give herself over to the doctor to do what he wants. How needy we are to feel the divine presence in our trials to see the eyes of our Savior looking upon us.



Green, M.P. *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*. Baker Book House. 1992. 21.

Short Story No 64

In the Path of his Father

Charles was careful that he had to be a good example for his young son Kim in all of his actions, so he prayed every morning and evening and before eating and after, and he was careful to always remain happy, joyous and offering every love to his wife so that Kim feels the family warmth. At Christmas, the loving Father decorated his house even the street with Christmas decorations. As he went to his garden to decorate it, he had neglected to clean its paths from the ice; he walked carefully carrying the decorations. Suddenly he heard his son Kim behind him calling him, "Father, I'll help you in putting the decorations."

The father was greatly disturbed as he looked behind him to see his son walking with joy.

As Kim noticed the signs of his father's apprehension, he smiled saying, "Father, I'm walking in a safe path, I'm following your foot steps completely."

At this point, Charles held his son's hands and felt that he should have cleaned the path from the ice because his son surely walks in the path of his father.

It may be that our physical, or spiritual father, is living examples but not in everything, but our Jesus is "**the Way, the Truth and the Life.**" He alone is the perfect example for us that we may look at Him following His steps without fear. He carries us and crosses with us to safety in the bosom of His Father.

SHORT STORIES FOR THE YOUTH

65 -82

**Prepared by
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Story No. 65

The Needy Millionaire

Donald Barnhouse¹ tells us the following story:

On a Sunday Morning, as he was preaching in a southwestern United States church, the pastor whispered to Barnhouse, “Do you see that lady in the shabby dress, wearing the worn out shoes and sitting in the front pew?”

Barnhouse looked at the sixty year old lady who was dressed in an extremely old and patched up outfit. As he looked at her, the old lady stretched out her foot which revealed a big hole in her shoe. Out of pity, Barnhouse considered giving her some money to ease her misery.

However, the pastor said to him, “This lady and her husband lived in a mobile wagon and owned a lot of barren land on which cattle used to graze. When oil was discovered on their land, a company approached them with a contract to utilize their land. However, her husband died before agreeing to the contract and she was hesitant about signing it herself.

Although she’s the potential of making millions in the oil extraction process, she opposes signing it even though she’s in need of the money. She’s still wandering in her wagon and living in misery.”

This is the case of many believers who have the opportunity to inherit God’s Kingdom and share in His glory. Jesus’ blessing becomes theirs so that they may attain every spiritual blessing in Heavens (Eph. 1.2). God the Father presents them with all the riches to enjoy. However, they fall short of reaching them. They do not even ask for a fraction of what God wants to give them.



Reveal to me Your Treasures in me

*How many times I seek for the compassion of others,
And crave for a complement to cheer my heart,
Or an emotion that fills my soul,
Or an encouraging word to support me!*

*I live in humiliation.
I beg for flattery and love of others,
And You are all the love.
You are the only and real support.
Reveal Your treasures in me.*

*Let Your Holy Spirit lead me to Your hidden treasure in me.
Hence, I will realize my richness in You and with You.
I long for abundant giving instead of soliciting.*

¹ Cf. Donald Grey Barnhouse. *Let Me Illustrate*, 1995, pp. 51-52.

Story No. 66

Better Than you and me²

The wealthy physician would often get angry at his young brother, Mina, because he would show up at his office in cheap clothes, embarrassing him. Although the doctor presented his brother with expensive clothes to wear, Mina would simply give it all away to the poor. He would keep his simple and humble attire to wear.

Mina received special appreciation and love from Pope Kyrillos V, who ordered his disciple, “Mina may enter my room without permission any time he visits the Cathedral. Also if I’m asleep, you may wake me up.”

The Pope loved Mina so much that he went to eat at his house. On such occasions, the young man would wash the Pope's feet and serve him food. One day after having dinner, on his way out, he told Mina's mother, “God be with you and give you support.”

The lady then began to wonder, “No one else said anything to me, so why did the Pope? Does he know of something that is happening to us?”

She was hesitant to ask him about it. After three days, the Pope thus ordered the people at the Patriarchate, “Prepare the church for a funeral. I’m going to console Mina's mother.” Upon arriving at the house, the Pope found Mina's mother crying out in pain. When she saw the Pope, she said, “Why didn't you tell me that Mina would die?”

The Pope answered, “Mina is better than you and me.”

She was then comforted as she realized her son's ranking in God's eyes.

This simple story shows how this Pope's standards coincided with heavenly ones.



*O God, give me the heavenly standards,
So that I don't complement or flatter,
But love everybody.
May I love the pious and spiritual so that I meet with them in Your glory.
Support me with their prayers whether they were children or young men.
May I be patient with the powerful, for their own salvation.
My heart widens with love for everyone.*



² Narrated by Fr. Antonius Younan from his father that knew a great deal about the personal and hidden life of Pope Kyrillos V.

Story No. 67

*Forgiveness, Not Authority*³

The creed of the general assembly insisted upon changing the ruling that denied rights in managing church affairs. However, Botros Basha Ghali, the Egyptian Prime Minister, opposed this change. Elections took place in the Patriarchate where Botros B. used police force to bar all entry and evicted all workers, students, and teachers inside.

The Pope expressed his disapproval of what had happened and appealed to the government. However, nothing changed. The assembly gathered to elect a substitute Patriarch and a president for the general assembly.

None of the bishops accepted this position, except for Bishop Athanasius, Bishop of Sanabo in Upper Egypt. On his way to Cairo, he was obstructed by the Bishop and people of Beni Suef at the train station. As Bishop Athanasius looked out the window to greet them, he was reprimanded by the Beni Suef Bishop who warned him that if he did not get on the next train back home, he would be excommunicated by the Holy Trinity and by the Pope's words.

The Bishop of Sanabo was officially received in Cairo, even though the Patriarchate was locked up as the people shouted, "You, the excommunicated! You, the excommunicated!"

In Alexandria, the Bishops and Priests agreed upon excommunicating Bishop Athanasius. However, the wicked and worldly powers were successful in passing a law that would exile the Pope to the Baramous Monastery and the Metropolitan of Alexandria to the monastery of St. Paul.

After delivering all the appropriate items to the Patriarchate, the Pope headed to the monastery without putting up any resistance whatsoever. He lived there working happily in his small plantation.

The doors of the Patriarchate were opened to the Bishop of Sanabo and Fr. Philothaeus. On September 4, 1892, during his first mass there, the Bishop mistakenly read the story of Judas from the Bible. During the same mass, Fr. Philothaeus dropped the holy bread. At the same time, the priest in Alexandria dropped the wine. In addition, the censer was dropped the following week and some of the carpets of Alexandria's church were burnt. The people became concerned because of what was happening.

The people decided to boycott all church services including masses, baptisms, marriages and funerals. Instead, they went to the Roman church where they were welcomed and prayed in Arabic.

On January 20 1893, the ruler of Egypt enacted a law to bring back the Pope and the Bishops, after realizing how critical the situation had become.

The throngs of people received the Pope with singing and praising God, much to the surprise of the Governor in Cairo.

The Pope declared his great love to everyone and out of generosity he forgave all his opponents. In addition, he promoted the Bishop of Sanabo. The people greatly appreciated their Pope who earned a higher evaluation not only from them, but in God's eyes as well

³ Also narrated by Fr. Antonius Younan and appeared in the history of the Coptic Church written by the then Deacon Mansi Younan, 1982, pp.634.

He was not only strict with Botros Pasha Ghali and others, but also with the Bishop of Sanabo who accepted to run the Patriarchate when Pope Kyrillos was in exile. However, he showed much kindness after his return. He forgave all the wrong that was done and promoted the Bishop of Sanabo who was, in fact, a traitor.

Although he was strict with powerful people, he held a very intimate relationship with such a pious and pure young man. He cherished those, whose prayers shook the heavens and cared less about complementing powerful people.



*God, grant me a heart that does not fear people or any evil powers.
Grant me not to depend on anyone,
But to ask for heaven's support.
Grant me love, not authority,
So that I do not abuse others, but love them.
Bend with love to wash their feet,
And carry them to the first row,
So that when I go back,
I find You waiting for me.*

Story No. 68

A Beautiful Flower Amid The Grass

John and his family were so excited about moving to their new home that they spent some time in the balcony contemplating on its location and surroundings. John spoke with his son Simon and asked him, “What are we going to do with this tall grass that was left unattended for several years?”

“I’ll do my best to beautify the garden and plant some flowers.”

“Look, Simon, there is a beautiful white flower in the midst of the grass.”

“Where?”

“On the right side about a meter from our neighbor’s fence,” replied John.

“One can hardly see it with all this grass. It’s so beautiful. I’m going to get it since it’s the only one!” exclaimed Simon.

Simon headed to the right side of the garden. However, he could not see the flower because of the tall grass. Eventually, he was able to find it after his father directed him from the balcony. He was amazed to find such a flower. He realized that it had grown in his neighbor’s garden.

“How wonderful to find such a beautiful flower in the middle of the tall grass!” Said Simon to his parents after giving them the flower.

“Why are you so amazed Simon? There are so many nice flowers in the wilderness of this world. These are the believers’ souls whose roots extend to the heavenly garden that God looks after. The real Christian extends his roots into heaven, while his feet are planted in this world where he plants a beautiful flower radiating God’s presence.

“For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who Are perishing” (2 Cor. 2.15).”



I am certain that even if the whole world appeared as grass,

There would definitely be beautiful flowers in it.

You have true witnesses in every generation, O my Lord.

Grant me O God to be a flower amidst the grass.

To hear Your sweet voice saying:

“Like a flower among thorns,

Likewise is my beloved among the virgins.

All beautiful, without blemish.”

Story No. 69

The Path in the Snow

In Ottawa, Canada, children get very excited when the snowfall season arrives. They play in the parks and build snow sculptures that stay intact until the warm weather returns.

The park was all white in the beginning of the winter snow season. Three friends went to the park to play. They devised a game in which each person would engrave a line in the snow by walking to the fence. They would then judge whose line was the straightest and most direct.

They spread out and started walking, making imprints in the snow. The first one went completely off track and missed the fence. The second one thought that his line was straight. However, when he looked back, he discovered that he had gone to the left and to the right along the way.

The third one was right on target and maintained the straight line they were all after. They wondered why the first deviated and the second ended up with a crooked line while the third was successful. The third friend answered, "While you were concentrating on your feet, I was focusing on the tree that was in front of me beside the fence. I didn't look in any other direction; that's why the line was straight."

One's life is a marathon among people. Whoever takes the royal path will reach heaven without deviating in this world's 'snow'.

Many young people aspire to attain straight behavior. However, they fall short of it, blaming everything on human weakness and emotions. In fact, the reason for distorted or zigzag behavior is the lack of concentration on the tree of life, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Although it is a virtue to confess our weakness and avoid the world's delusions, we need to concentrate on Christ. This positive aspect supports us in our spiritual growth and replaces all negative behavior.

If we hope to become honest in our dealings, we cannot desire the earthly things, which are a diversion from the royal path in which Jesus carries us all. As St. Paul said,

**"Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus,
The author and finisher of our faith" (Heb 12.1-2).**

Story No. 70

Rest Peacefully

While everyone moaned inside and some even wept, Peter gladly made the sign of the cross over himself. Then, he rested peacefully in God's hands.

His brother tried to control himself and patted Peter's shoulder saying, "I wonder, my brother, how you went through life without forsaking your sweet smile. Now, I'm even more amazed that you receive death as like someone who sleeps peacefully. Tell me, what's your secret?"

Peter's barely opened his eyes and peacefully said, "Don't marvel, dear brother. I lived a life filled with peace and happiness. I leave this world accompanied with a heart full of joy and a jubilant soul. The reason is that I used to lean on three pillows:

The pillow of God's compassionate fatherhood,

The pillow of His omnipotent power

And the pillow of His unique wisdom.

I used to sleep calmly every night and wake up joyfully every morning. My Lord attended to me even in my dreams and here I'm going to Him so that I may rest in His Divine arms. I see Him face to face and enjoy His wonderful and wholesome secrets."

The people rejoiced and said; "Rest peacefully on the comfortable Divine pillows."



I am joyful through Your Divine Fatherhood of power and wisdom.

I see You pouring forth love and working to help me.

I know You have a special place in Your heart, O compassionate One.

I have a special share in Your arms, Father.

I have the right to enjoy the dwelling of Your Holy Spirit in me.

Who can deprive me of Your peace?

Story No. 71

The Art of Mountain Climbing

Matthew was very amazed at the site of people climbing the Alps Mountains. They tied themselves to each other for support. Some people reached high peaks on the mountains.

Matthew's father discouraged him from doing any climbing saying, "We came to tour Switzerland and look forward to going back home safely."

Matthew asked, "But why don't we enjoy this great sport?"

His father replied, "Because we don't have any climbing experience."

"I won't leave Switzerland without enjoying this, so I'll ask some of my Swiss friends about it!" Matthew exclaimed.

"Please, my son, it's a dangerous sport", his father pleaded.

Matthew met some of his friends and inquired about the sport.

They said, "You've two hands and two legs. In other words you have four limbs. Make sure three of those are always solid on the rock. This is the major safety rule in mountain climbing. However, the second rule is, never climb mountains alone, but tie your waist with a rope connecting others. This is so that if you slip, the others will support you."

This piece of advice applies to spiritual climbing also. The soul will climb to the top of mount Tabor where it can envision Christ in His glory. The soul would also comprehend the sacraments of the church extending through the Old and New Testaments. Then it can enter into a dialogue with Moses, Elijah, Peter, James and John.

First, the soul has to fix its hands and legs to Christ, the eternal rock. It moves serenely guided by the Holy Spirit. It endures through spiritual exercises for a while then ascends peacefully while adhering to its support and guide: Jesus, our Lord.

Second, in our spiritual advancement, we do not rely on our own isolated thoughts. On the contrary, we act with our brethren in the context of a congregational spirit where if one falls, the others support him.



*God, grant me to rise with You on Tabor's Mount.
Hold on to me and guide me to envision Your glory.
I have no one to elevate me except You, the Heavenly One.
Let Your Holy Spirit hold me with Your saints,
So that I enjoy Your bright glory.
There, I would say loudly,
"It is great, O God, to be here."*

Story No. 72

*Painting My Lord's Facial Features*⁴

It was once said that Leonardo DA Vinci, the artist, was preoccupied with the painting of the Holy Supper when he scolded someone in conflict with him over some matter. After that person had left, the artist was so hesitant and nervous that he could not paint any longer.

He was very embarrassed so he threw aside his painting materials and caught up with the man to render him an apology. After making up, the artist was filled with peace and started to paint the joyful portrait of Jesus Christ.

Likewise, we cannot reflect Jesus' picture in our lives if we are filled with anger. Who can present an icon of Christ, the peacemaker with God, when he is full of hatred and anger?



*Let Your Holy Spirit hold its brush.
May the greatest artist paint His living icon in me.
Cleanse me from all anger through repentance.
Provide me with Your love and Meekness.
Renew my nature and thoughts
To become a true icon of Jesus.
How Unfortunate It Is To Become Angry!
How easy it is to become angry!
However, to be angry for a good reason,
For the right duration
At the right time
In the right manner.
This is not easy.
How difficult it is to become angry in the "right" way!*

⁴ See Michael P. Green: Illustrations for Biblical Preaching, Baker Book House, P. 20

Story No. 73

*Injuries of Wrath*⁵

Alexander the Great was born in 356 BC in Pella, capital of Macedonia. Although his main interest was in the military, he also liked medicine, geography, politics and moral science (ethics).

He changed the whole course of history when he had conquered the modern world before he died at the age of 33. Alexander was famous for his courage and sharp intelligence. He was not irritable, exercised self-control and never avenged himself.

However, one of his dear friends, who was diabetic avenged himself in front of his people. The emperor became so enraged that he killed him with a sword on the spot. He then fell into deep remorse and held the sword ready to kill himself but was stopped by his people. In a state of deep sadness and remorse, he became ill and called out loudly to his friend and called himself a criminal before many people.

Although Alexander the Great virtually conquered his contemporary world, he was caught in weakness and sorrow when he could not defeat his anger.

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“As long as anger thrives, it becomes a mother bearing miserable offspring.”
St. John Climacus

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⁵ Green, Michael P. *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*. Baker Book House. 20.

Story No. 74

Can't See your Brain

In the context of the Russian Revolution, the denial of faith and the existence of God, a teacher asked his primary students,

“What are these?”

“Eyeglasses!”

“Do you see the eyeglasses?”

“Yes, we can see them!”

“You can see the eyeglasses. Therefore they exist! However, do you see God?”

“No.”

“You can't see God. Therefore, God does not exist.”

At this point, a child said, “We can't see your brain. Hence, your brain does not exist.”



Gratitude and Atheism

The atheist is unable to be grateful. This is because when he is inundated with blessings and wishes to express gratitude, he does not know whom to thank⁶.

The best explanation to an atheist is to present him with a delicious meal and then ask, “Do you believe that there's a cook who prepared this food?”

If it is inevitable that there is a cook behind a meal, is it feasible that this world with all its wondrous laws existed by coincidence?

⁶ See Michael P. Green. *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*. Baker Book House. 25.

Story No. 75

Dove's Contest

Although Muallem⁷ Ibrahim El Gawhary came from a modest family, he was greatly blessed by God and became principal of the Egyptian region under the Mamluks. This is comparable to the current position of a prime minister. Before heading to work, he went to St. Mary's church at Zewela lane in old Cairo to attend prayer. He sent a messenger to the priest, Fr. Ibrahim Asfoury, asking him to hasten and finish early so that he could leave for work.

The priest understood how pious, generous and friendly the Muallem was with the Pope. So he answered him, "The real Muallem (teacher) is the One in Heaven and the Church is subject to God and nobody else. If he doesn't like it he can build another church."

The Muallem got the message. He was not enraged nor did he complain to the Pope or isolate himself from the church. Instead, he accepted the priest's words as if they were God's. He built a church for the great Martyr Abu-Sifin (the Martyr with the two swords) to the north of St. Mary's church.

Afterwards, Fr. Ibrahim Asfoury went to commend him and said, "Thank God your dissatisfaction led to building another church adding to your inheritance and good deeds."

This is the spirit with which believers deal with one another. Even though they may differ in opinion, they act like doves, picking at one another and then afterwards uniting to eat and fly together. Jesus said,

"Be innocent as doves."

Also, St. Augustine said, "May we fight like doves and never love like foxes!" Pigeon fighting is gentle while fox friendship holds malice.

⁷ This term, (pronounced "moo-A-lim"), means literally teacher. However, it is actually used to signify that the individual referred to is a learned and respected person.

Story No. 76

Never Anticipated My Arrival

After a five day fishing trip, the ship approached the shore. The crew peeked out eagerly to find their loved ones among the crowd. The captain held his binoculars and said, “I see a group of ladies looking fervently at the ships: Miriam Tony, Nancy Peter, Margaret Andrew and Lucy Stephan.”

However, one of the crewmembers was very upset when the captain failed to mention his wife’s name because she was not among the group. As soon as they reached the shore, he hurried to his house and felt relieved upon seeing the light in the window. He opened the door to find his wife approaching him quickly saying, “I’ve been waiting for you!”

“You were waiting for me. However, you weren’t watching for my arrival like my colleagues’ wives,” he told her.

Christ will not come in fishing ships with friends, but on the clouds with His angels looking forward to meeting you. He sacrificed His life to find you and let you share with Him His glory. He likes to see you longing to meet with Him anytime He is joyfully expecting you to meet Him face to face.

Many people wait for Jesus Christ on a mental level with no internal yearning towards Him. However, those who are spiritual in nature watch for His coming and dash to meet with Him.

He left His Father to meet us. Likewise, we watch for His arrival. Jesus says, “**Blessed are those servants whom the master, when He comes, will find watching**” (Luke 12.37).



Green, Michael P. *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*. Baker Book House. 50.

Story No. 77

Farewell, Microscope!

On his visit to London several years ago, a wealthy man purchased some gems and jewelry. He also decided to buy a microscope after he had become fascinated with it when a salesman showed him the jewelry under the microscope. After returning home, he presented the microscope to all his guests and asked them to examine what he had bought. The wealthy man became so overwhelmed with the microscope that it was turning into an obsession.

One day, his son asked him to look through the microscope. Upon looking, he was amazed at the scene of moving living creatures.

“What's this?”

“I placed a tiny amount of food on it.”

“What are all those creatures that are moving everywhere?”

“It's invisible in the food we eat.”

The father could not even eat after he was presented with other food. He had seen the same sight under the microscope. He abstained from eating for a day or two until he finally got so hungry that he forcefully broke the microscope to pieces on the floor.

This is an example of an insensible act, as the man became angry over a microscope that revealed scientific facts. Many people do the same thing with God's word and attempt to get rid of it. That is because it reveals their weakness and corrupt nature.

The word of God is the Divine microscope where the soul discovers its sins through the Holy Spirit. In addition, it discovers God's kingdom that Jesus provided inside us. Ironically, it is a microscope that at the same time both exposes and supports.



Green, Michael P. *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*. Baker Book House. 29-30.

Story No. 78

*A Straight Canal
Or
A Winding River*

A student asked his teacher, “Why is it that most canals are straight, while most rivers are winding?”

The teacher answered, “People exert a lot of effort in digging canals, digging even through solid rock so that no water would get wasted in the curves. On the other hand, river water tends to take the easy route, bypassing obstacles. That is why water runs around hills and elevations without penetrating them.”

Many people are like rivers. They live in a relaxed and immature way, avoiding obstacles and problems without exerting any effort following God. They find it much easier to watch TV, read the paper or call friends than to pray, talk to God and enjoy the word of the Bible.



Green, Michael P. Illustrations for Biblical Preaching. Baker Book House. 30-31.

Story No. 79

Learn And Be Filled

It was said that a small village lived on fishing. Even the birds lived on what the fishermen left behind. Suddenly, the fish became scarce and the fishermen left for another area to catch more fish. The birds could not find food because they totally depended on fish. Since they had never learned how to feed themselves, they eventually died.

Sometimes, our situation is like that of those birds. We depend on what we can get from others, but we do not have daily encounters with the Bible. We depend on others' experiences instead of our own with God. This is how we sentence ourselves to death like the birds that did not learn anything.

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*Grant us to follow the footsteps of the Saints,
Carried by Your Holy Spirit in us,
To be blessed with daily experiences with You God,
To realize Your works in the Church throughout the generations.*

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Green, Michael P. Illustrations for Biblical Preaching. Baker Book House. 32.

Story No. 80

Don't Let Them Take Jonah from you

Before heading to Europe to study abroad, a son received advice from his father, "Beware son, don't let them take Jonah from you."

Father was worried about his son jeopardizing his humble faith, as he would deal with atheist professors. The father asked his son to experience the life of repentance that Jonah called for. In addition, he did not want his son to doubt the words of the Bible about Jonah.

After two years the son came back home. His father asked,

"Do you still have Jonah in your Bible?"

"Jonah!" the son replied. "That's not a story in your Bible?"

"Yes, it is indeed," the father said.

"Father, you don't have it. Show me your Bible."

It was so embarrassing when the father could not find it in the Bible that he referred to it in the index. Then he confirmed that it had been carefully taken out. The father asked, "Who cut this part out of my Bible?"

"Two years ago, I had taken it with me to Europe. However, you missed out on more than I have, even though I dealt with atheist professors. You didn't look for it in two years," he exclaimed.

Although atheist philosophers have tried to criticize the Bible, the word of God has never changed. What changed the Bible is the obstacle in the lives of some Christians who have denied the Bible by their behavior, even though they are proud of the Bible and have preserved it, preached it and explained it. The corrupt Christian is worse than the atheist who struggles against God's word.



Green, Michael P. *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*. Baker Book House. 33.

Story No. 81

My Father's Version

Four deacons were debating over which version of the Bible they liked best.

The first said, "I like the King James Version because I admire the dignified Old English language."

Another said, "I prefer the New American Standard Bible because it's very similar to both the Hebrew and Greek texts."

The third said, "I like the Living Bible since it is practical among the youth I serve."

The fourth paused a bit before saying, "As long as we're talking about different versions of the Bible, I'd like to mention that I like my father's version best. His acts and behavior reflect the words of the Bible. I am personally convinced that this is the best version that one can understand."

We are in desperate need of our fathers' noble models, which incorporate God's word in their worship, behavior and inner feelings.

Let us enrich our souls with our church's literature, which reflects an open Bible in many people's lives.



*God, please open my eyes to Your word.
Grant me to read Your Bible and the lives of Your Saints.
Grant me to translate it into my own life,
So that Your words would be proclaimed to all generations.*



Green, Michael P. Illustrations for Biblical Preaching. Baker Book House. 34.

Story No. 82

A Unique Empire

Napoleon was so successful and powerful that he widely expanded his empire and was greatly admired by all leaders. However, when he reflected on his own life, he wrote the following:

“It’s amazing how my dreams, those of Caesar and those of Alexander may evaporate. However, a humble Jew can control the destiny of peoples and countries. Jesus Christ is not like any other human being. No words can compare Him to any other man. Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne and I have established several empires. However, these were only created based on intelligence and power. Jesus alone founded His Empire on love. People are willing to sacrifice their lives for His sake.”



How often have I created an empire for myself?
How often did I have lost in foolish dreams about it!
I thought I was wise and powerful,
Only to discover my ignorance and weakness.
O Lord, grant me to unite with You.
Build Your Empire inside me.
Give me the power to defeat all evil,
And destroy Satan’s empire,
To live truthfully as a winner.
Place Your empire in my heart,
So that I may consider it my own.
I feel happy over every empire,
That You have founded in people’s lives.
Indeed, the earth and all its creatures belong to the Lord.



Green, Michael P. *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*. Baker Book House. 47.

SHORT STORIES FOR THE YOUTH

83-99

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In the first three parts, stories from the Eastern Hemisphere contemporary culture were introduced, as well as stories from the Eastern heritage in general. I preferred to introduce some stories in the following parts to depict the Western Hemisphere heritage as well as Eastern.

As I mention a reference to the story, I make no claim indicating my commitment to its original detail, but indeed I introduce the story with some modification including spiritual commenting and introduction of fictional dialogue.

Story No. 83

I'm Afraid of Dogs

A certain bishop told me this contemporary story mentioning the names, but I forgot them:

In the city of Nagaa-Hamaadie, in Egypt, one of the pious elders used to cross the Nile River at the dawn on the twelfth day of every Coptic month to partake in the Tasbeha (Midnight Praises) and the Holy Liturgy. Once, the moon was full and the weather was very hot that the elder slept in the open spaces. When he awoke at midnight, the moonlight was so bright he thought it was dawn and he was too late to cross to the monastery and join the Tasbeha. The man held his walking stick and headed for the shore and began to walk to the other side of the river. When he came close to the other side he called out to one of the mariners by name. Many of the sailing boat owners and their workers awoke, at the voice of this elder, and they watched in astonishment this man who was walking on the water towards the shore.

The elder said to one of them, "Please send this boy (...) to accompany me to the monastery, as I am afraid of the dogs."

The boat owner answered him saying, "How can you be afraid of the dogs at the monastery whilst you are walking on the water?"

The old man was amazed at what he heard and began to strike the water with his stick while saying, "What water, my son? This is land!"

The old man, without realizing, perceived the Nile as firm ground to walk on. When the old man persisted in beckoning the boy, to accompany him to the monastery for fear of its guard-dogs, the boat-owner said to him, "May God be with you. Pray for me. Don't be afraid of the dogs."

The old man was then compelled to finish his journey.

How amazing! In his piety he unsuspectingly walked on water, whilst in his human weakness he feared the barking of dogs, which does not intimidate a small child.

Thus, my beloved, every saint has a point of weakness in which a child may not stumble. God, however, allows this to preserve him from pride. He may then cry with the Psalmist,

"My sin is ever before me" (Ps. 51.3).

Do not falter if you see and touch the weaknesses of the saints. This is naturally allowed by God so that all humans may be reminded of their continual need for the work of the Savior in their lives, regardless of their attainments in holiness.



*If the righteous are only saved through struggle,
Where do I, the sinner, appear?
If the saints have prominent weaknesses,
What is my situation?*

*Grant me, O Lord, that if I see the weaknesses of my brethren,
To pray for, and not judge, them.
To remember that they have glorious deeds that have been concealed from my eyes,*

And so honor them and not take them for granted.

Grant me, in my weakness, to expect Your glorious salvation.

And grant me, in moments of spiritual strength, to glorify You, my Divine Support.

Grant me to humbly remember Your wonderful work.

Story No. 84

A Treasury of Psalms

A Sunday school servant once asked me to visit his grandmother (his father's mother) who had contracted the condition of arteriosclerosis (hardening of the arteries). During the visit the grandson tried in vain to introduce me to her, but she had completely lost her memory.

I tried to speak to her about God's love for us, our closeness to Him, our prayers and the enjoyment of the communion, but all my attempts failed. Her whole conversation revolved around her beloved son who, years ago left for Germany and his share in her inheritance.

In the same week, I visited the other grandmother of the same servant. She was a pious individual who loved the Psalms, but suffered from the same illness. I could not converse with her but she continually recited the Psalms. When she awoke at dawn, she would begin reciting the Psalms and would not stop except for her meals.

Thus the first treasured her worries and the second, her Psalms. The time came when each would reveal what they had stored throughout the years.

This is what happens with you and me. What you treasure for yourself all day will be served to your day and night dreams by your weak subconscious mind.

The thoughts you treasure for yourself during the week will prevail over you during your worship in the Holy Liturgy.

What you treasure for yourself during your childhood and youth will filtrate into your old age or during your sickness.



*Grant me O Lord that You become my treasure,
Let me acquire You, be occupied with You and enjoy communion with You.
You are my everlasting treasure.
You appear in my thoughts and also in my dreams.
You fill my whole being in this world,
So that I will enjoy the communion of Your glory in the coming world.
May Your Holy Spirit work in my depths
And prepare for You a new abode, O Holy,
To dwell, with Your Father within me.*

Story No. 85

*Midnight Visit*¹

Mexican jails are known for their disorder. Shortly after taking office, the President of Mexico, Luis Echeverria, decided to do something about the prisons. Without prior notice, he visited the jails at midnight. He found guards away from their posts; prisoners not taken care of; and the condition of the jails extremely distressing. He decided to dismiss the prison workers and to clean up the system.

If the president of a country cares for the condition of the prisoners, who are temporarily there as punishment, how much more will our Christ, the King of Kings, care for His church who prepares mankind for the communion of glory with Him!

Christ, in His patience, is kind with us, but He will come suddenly, perhaps at midnight. If He finds us lax in our responsibilities, He will deal with us accordingly.

¹See Michael P. Green: Illustrations for Biblical Preaching, Baker Book House, p50-51

Story No. 86

The Alpha and Omega

Young Mark inspected his father's library and found the Encyclopedia Britannica with its huge volume set. He then asked his father, "How did the authors of these books find letters to fill these thousands of pages of interesting researches and studies?"

The father smiled and explained to his son, "All these volumes contain but 26 English letters. Of these letters, the scholars composed for us this valuable encyclopedia."

As Mark was astonished at this, his father continued, "Jesus Christ called Himself the Alpha and Omega. If we read the Book of Life, we find the names of those who enjoy the eternal inheritance. They're all in Christ Jesus and nothing outside of Him. He's the Alpha and Omega with whom our names will be recorded in the Book of Life."



*Grant me to hide in You,
So that You would engrave my name on Your Divine Palm,
And record it in the Book of Life.
You are the Alpha and Omega.
Without You my name will not be written in heaven.*

Story No. 87

The Carpenter's Daughters²

An American scholar once heard a preacher speaking on the topic of common brotherhood. The preacher revealed God's remarkable love for mankind and His yearning that all mankind be united as brothers and as sons of the One God. This scholar believed in the salvation of all souls regardless of their faith. This philosophy, which has spread during this century in the western world, has given faith a looseness. Many ask the questions: "Do you suppose that God would destroy all these millions of atheists? Will whole nations perish because they are Buddhists?" Etc.

That scholar wanted to embarrass the preacher, so he entered into a discussion with him:

"Are not all men descendants of Adam and Eve?"

"Yes, they're their descendants."

"Is God not the Creator of Adam and Eve?"

"God is their Creator."

"Therefore, all people are the children of God
Because they are the work of His hands."

Then, the preacher pointed to the seats in the hall and asked the scholar, "Who made these seats?"

"A local carpenter."

"Are these seats the sons and daughters of the carpenter?"

"Definitely not."

The preacher then continued, "They aren't the daughters of the carpenter because they don't bear his life within them. Similarly, not everyone is the child of God, even if he's called a Christian and practices Christian rites. Only he who bears the life of God within him is God's son.

This story reminds me of an incident that happened twenty years ago. I was standing beside the departed Father Mikhail Saad in the courtyard of Saint Mark's Church in Alexandria. In a fatherly glance he observed one of the church cleaners who was standing at the door of the church.

Father Mikhail approached him and gently asked about his spiritual life. He felt that the man did not enjoy a living communion with God, neither in his prayers, nor in his Bible reading, nor his repentance and Communion. The priest shook his head in sadness and said to the man, "I'm sad, my son, for your salvation is precious. You stand at the door of the church but you don't enter it with your soul. You're like the carpenters, the blacksmiths and the workers who helped Noah build the ark. Noah, his family and all the animals entered but the carpenters and workers did not enter. They made the ark for those who would enjoy it but deprived themselves of salvation."



*Grant me, O Lord, to ask myself the question: Am I truly Your child?
Do I bear Your life protected within me?*

²Banhouse, Donal Grey. *Let Me Illustrate*. 1995. 337.

*Being a Christian will not intercede for me.
My baptism will not save me if I have neglected my growth in You.
My worship judges me before Your Divine throne.*

*May Your Holy Spirit work in my heart,
To convict me of my sins so that I may repent and confess all my weaknesses.
That the joy of Your salvation may be declared to me, to enjoy Your life within,
And live a life befitting the Son of God.*

Story No. 88

What Does the Wall Say to its Sister?

In an atmosphere of love and affection, the father would sit after dinner, with his only son, to discuss the daily events. The young child felt that these moments were the happiest in his life. He eagerly awaited them to sit with his father and have a candid talk in a cheerful spiritual atmosphere.

During one of these evenings, the son wished to put some riddles to his father so he asked, "What did the wall say to her sister wall?"

With a smile, the father tried to evade answering the question by saying to his son, "I don't know. Tell me what the wall said to her sister wall."

The child answered, "Let's meet at the corner."³
The father was silent for a moment. Then, he said to his son, "You're right and I should have known the answer. Every true believer should say to his brother, 'Let us come closer together at the Chief Cornerstone our Lord Jesus Christ. We'll be united in Him and through Him. He supports and unites us so that we may become God's living house.'"



*The more I come closer to You, the rejected Cornerstone,
The more I become closer to my brethren,
And become one with them.*

*Without You I am alone,
I feel isolated from God and people,
Even when I am surrounded by all.*

*With You I feel warmth
Even if I am deserted by all.*

*By Your Holy Spirit, draw me to You,
To run with my brethren towards You,
To rejoice and praise You.
How joyous is my soul!*

³Banhouse, Donal Grey *Let Me Illustrate*. 1995. 336.

Story No. 89

HE DOESN'T INSULT ME

During one of my visits to families in Santa Monica, California, I stopped my car and was greeted happily by a boy and his dog, which had been playing in the front garden. I then began this conversation with him:

“I see that you’re happy with your dog.”

“Yes, I love him very much. We play together.”

“What do you call him?”

“Lucky, and he has our surname.”

“Do you love him more than your sister?”

“Of course!”

“Do you love him more than your friends at school?”

“Yes, because he doesn’t insult me. He doesn’t call me fat like my friends do.”

The words were bitter and came from deep within the child. He found love from that small dog. The dog, unlike the boy’s family, had time to play with him. Unlike the boy’s friends, he expressed delight and not insults when they played together. This child’s emotional needs were satisfied by the small dog in a way his family and friends failed to do.

Many a heart is in need of affection and time without the hurt of insults even those in jest.



*Grant us, O Lord to satisfy our brethren’s hearts with love,
That they may not seek it from a dog or a cat,
Or resort to solicit it by other means.
Fill us with the joyous wok of Your Spirit,
That we may overflow with joy towards our brethren,
That we may not utter a hurting word,
Or express a look of mockery.
Grant us to respect every human soul,
And not take any child for granted,
O who carry us in Your Fatherly bosom.*

Story No. 90

Laws are Enacted As Kings Desire

An Old Spanish proverb *Alla reyes van leyes do quieren* means that man uses his authority to realize his desires under the guise of abiding by the law.

Behind this proverb is a true story that goes back to the beginning of the twelfth century, when King Alfonso VI had to decide whether his country would use the Spanish or the Roman liturgies. He declared that he would throw both books into a fire and use whichever book that was not burn. The king wished to use the Roman liturgy. Therefore, when the Spanish book would not burn he threw it back into the fire until it burned. He then declared that the Roman liturgy would be used. From that time on, this proverb was used and spread by the Spanish people.⁴

It is a proverb that not only reveals the abuse of authority to establish laws suited to personal desires, but also reveals the ego in a person's life, even in his dealings with God.

In all our prayers we say, "Thy will be done not ours", but we are persistent in our prayers so that God may fulfill our own wishes. Many times we insist on pursuing a path determined by the ego or the body and we attempt to give it a religious perspective justifying it by all means.

⁴Banhouse, Donal Grey *Let Me Illustrate*. 1995. 339.

Story No. 91

*It Fears its Own Shadow*⁵

Alexander the Great was known for his extraordinary intelligence and ability. At the age of sixteen he was deputy to the King (his father Philip) as administrator of Macedonia; at eighteen he was a victorious commander of international renown; and at twenty, he became a king.

A man by the name of Philonicus the Thessalonian was responsible for the royal stables. One day he came to King Philip to inform him that the mare Bucephalus was so rebellious and fierce that no one could ride it and so he had decided to sell it.

When Alexander heard this, being a youth, he said to his father, "I'll go with Philonicus to see this wild mare."

His father tried to dissuade him, out of fear for him, but Alexander gently said to his father, "Don't be afraid, my father. There's a reason or a cause behind all violence. I'll try to tame it."

The king answered his son, "I don't think you've the experience of Philonicus, who has spent most of his days taming and training animals, especially horses."

Alexander answered, "I haven't been trained to tame horses, but give me a chance to get to know the reason for the wildness of Bucephalus."

The youth Alexander went with the great horse-trainer, Philonicus, to the stables. When the trainer approached the mare, it became wild and dangerous.

The youth rushed to the mare and seized its bridle changing the direction of its head. The mare quieted and Alexander rode it easily. Alexander then rode the mare to his father who congratulated him on his ability to tame the mare in such a short time. The King then asked Alexander, "What did you do, my son?"

Alexander answered, "The matter is very simple. The mare became frightened whenever it saw its own shadow. When I turned its head toward the sun, the shadow was cast under its hoofs and so it was no longer frightened and became calm."

Truly, millions of people are afraid of their own shadow, but as soon as they turn their sights to the Sun of Righteousness; they no longer have shadows. Their shadows fall away and they are filled with trust and assurance of God's providence.

Truly, those who follow the Sun of Righteousness do not walk in darkness but have the light of life.

Let us come near to our Christ so that our shadows may fall under our feet. May we hear the voice of the Lord saying,

"Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; ... While you have the light, believe in the Light, that you may become sons of light" (John 12.35-36).



⁵ Naismith, Archibald 2400 Outlines, *Notes, Quotes, Anecdotes for Sermons*. Vol. 2. 136.

*O Sun of Righteousness shine on my soul,
That my shadow may fall under my feet.
I will no longer fear my shadow
But I will rest in Your bosom embrace that is full of love and compassion.
I will be comforted between Your hands, O my Refuge.*

Story No. 92

The Insanity of A Preacher

The American preacher, Rowland, noticed that he was frequently accused of being insane and unrealistic. He spoke much of eternity, especially eternal condemnation of the wicked, a matter not widely accepted by the contemporary Americans. When a person wishes to silence his conscience whilst sinning, he will ridicule anyone who speaks of hell and the eternal damnation as outdated beliefs that promote fear and self-destruction.

This preacher would often tell the following story to his listeners:

As I was once walking along a hilly and rocky path, I suddenly heard human voices coming from a rocky hole along the side. Very cautiously, I walked towards the voices to find three men who had virtually been buried in this hole. Instinctively I began to scream for help at the top of my voice, although the town was about a mile away. Some people heard my cries and rushed to me and find me appealing for help but unable to rescue the men in strife. These people then exerted all their effort to rescue the men and we rejoiced.

The thing that astonished me is that no one accused me of insanity then, when I saw these men being buried alive and screamed and appealed for their help. Many, however, accuse me of it when I find multitudes of sinners perishing and sliding to their eternal death and I scream so that they may escape to the Lord Christ, the Divine way, that they may not perish.⁶

Truly many will ridicule us when we care for the salvation of our brethren as the people and their leaders ridiculed Jeremiah the Prophet for, he says,

“For when I spoke, I cried out; I shouted, ‘Violence and plunder!’ Because the word of the LORD Was made to me a reproach and a derision daily. Then I said, ‘I will not make mention of Him, nor Speak anymore in His name.’ But His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not”
(Jer. 20.8-9).

⁶Naismith, Archibald 2400 *Outlines, Notes, Quotes, Anecdotes for Sermons*. Vol. 2. 144.

Story No. 93

I Wish to Possess What you Possess

A wealthy man felt torment plaguing his soul, for his worries had suffocated him despite his enormous wealth. He left his castle which was surrounded by a vast land, and hired some workers to dig a lake and establish some canals to convert all this land to gardens that would surround his castle.

The wealthy man then heard one of these workers singing. He stood from afar listening to this worker and he heard him say:

“My father is rich with all the castles He has prepared for my family and me,
Generous in giving, He gives freely without reproach.
All the riches of the world are in His hands.
His treasures are full of precious stones and gems,
With silver and gold and all that is precious.
I am truly the son of the King, the son of the great King.
My Savior Jesus prepares for me an inheritance and glory.
Who is happier than I am!
Who is richer than me!”

The heart of the miserable rich man was moved before the words of this worker, which came from a joyful heart. The rich man approached the worker, greeted him then asked, “Timo, why are you singing meaningless words? You’re but a worker digging canals but you claim that you’re rich, happy and the son of a rich king.”

Timo answered, “My lord, I don’t say meaningless words, but truth I live and sense with every breath in my life. God is my Father. He gives me much. Thus, I sing praises to Him. My hut is small and is on the outskirts of the city, but I’m happy with it. When I finish my working day, I return to my hut and find my wife and children awaiting me. They kiss me and I embrace and kiss them. We sit together, pray, thank God and then we eat with gladness. Why shouldn’t I sing to my rich God then?”

The rich man sighed saying to himself, “He’s a simple and poor worker, but he’s rich with his God who fills his heart and the hearts of his family with love. I’m wealthy. I possess a castle and land and fields, but I’m poor. His family is happy and rejoice with him, while mine awaits their inheritance.”

The rich man looked at the worker, Timo, and then said to him, “Timo, I wish to possess what you possess.”⁷

“Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He Promised to those who love Him” (Jam. 2.5)?



*You are my richness, You who fills my heart with love.
You are my life, You who bestows resurrection to my soul.
You are my praise and joy, O the desire of my heart.*

⁷Naismith, Archibald. 2400 *Outlines, Notes, Quotes, Anecdotes for Sermons*. Vol. 2, 205.

*I would possess You and ask for nothing else.
May I carry You within me, You who fills heaven and earth.
Let me see You face to face, my Good Savior.*

Story No. 94

The Richest Man in the Valley Will Die Tomorrow

The wealthy man stood in the balcony of his palace proudly gazing at his land vast in every direction, for he possessed the whole valley. He was saying to himself, "These are my fields and lands. I'm the richest man in the valley."

He began to utter, in a loud voice, the thoughts of the rich man in the Lord's "Parable of the Rich Fool":

"What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops? I will do this: I will pull down my barns And build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, You have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry'"
(Luke 12.17-19).

He raised his voice in pride and arrogance. While looking here and there, and in the midst of the quietness, he noticed an elderly worker sitting under a tree, not far from the balcony, who had a cheerful expression and a sweet smile. He had a small bundle containing a small piece of dry bread and a small portion of cheese to eat for lunch after hard work in the rich man's garden.

The wealthy man, who was comforted when speaking to the old man, greeted him from the balcony and the old man returned the greeting.

"Did you hear me speak, Sam?"

"No my lord. I didn't notice that you were in the balcony. My eyes are dim and my ears heavy due to my old age."

"I see that you're happy this evening, Sam."

"I thank God for His endless gifts, my lord."

"For what do you thank Him? For the dry bread and the piece of cheese!"

"Yes my lord, for God my Father has bestowed upon me food to fill me and He supports me in my work. He's given me a tunic to wear, a bed to sleep in and a roof over my head. These are much more than what my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ had when He was on earth."

"I wonder how you could be happy with such simple food as this!"

"My God gives me sweetness in my mouth whilst I use His gifts to me. This sweetness is a Divine gift."

Sam suddenly changed the subject to tell his wealthy employer of a dream he had the night before:

"I'd like to tell you, my lord, of a dream I had last night. I dreamt that I'd risen to heaven and found its gates open. I saw the great city, the heavenly Jerusalem, and its unspeakable glories. I'm unable, my lord, to describe the beauty of what I saw. I desired to stay there, but what amazed me was that I heard a voice from within saying, 'The richest man in the valley will die tonight.' After that I heard the sounds of the heavenly hosts praising and singing. I had woken from my sleep, but I wished not to wake up. My lord, I heard these words very clearly, and wondered how I would meet with you to tell you of what I had seen and heard."

The rich man's face became pale. He tried to hide his feelings and fears, but he retreated from the balcony to his room and threw himself upon a nearby seat whilst repeating, "The richest man in the valley will die tonight? Was this merely the dream of an old man? Was it a prophecy

of a Divine vision? Was it a reflection of the feelings of a worker towards the richest man in the valley? He's after all a loving, pious and righteous old man."

Only hours had passed when Sam felt a rise in his temperature. He tried to conceal his sickness so that he would not bother anyone. His sickness increased and the old man began reciting his Psalms and calling upon God and his face was filled with joy.

When his condition worsened, his friends hurried to call a doctor to treat him. Whilst the doctor was treating him, Sam retold his dream to him. At this the doctor laughed saying, "Don't worry for the richest man in the valley is very well and he will not die tonight."

At a very late hour, the rich man heard his doorbell ringing. He went out to open the door only to find a laborer at the door apologizing and saying, "I'm sorry, my lord. Sam has died and we know that you loved him and wondered what we should do."

The rich man was astonished at what had happened and began to say to himself, "The richest man in the valley will die tonight. Yes, Sam seemed very poor in my sight, but in the eyes of God he was the richest in the world. He was rich in faith. He possessed the richness of heaven, which is priceless and enjoyed the better life. I believed within myself that I was the richest man in the valley, but I have discovered who was truly rich. And now return, O my soul, to your God and possess Him and you will possess all riches."⁸

⁸Naismith, Archibald. 2400 *Outlines, Notes, Quotes, Anecdotes for Sermons*. Vol. 2. 205.

Story No. 95

We've No Need of Him

James Smithson was born in 1765 in France. He was an illegitimate son of a famous English duke and a direct descendant of King Henry VII through his mother. As an illegitimate son, James was denied British citizenship and the rich inheritance of his natural father.

When James, as a youth, felt this rejection, he put all his effort into succeeding in life. He became a leading English scientist and a member of the Royal Society when he was only 22 years old.

James died in 1829 without getting married and he left great wealth to his nephew. In his will, James had made a provision in the case of his nephew dying without heirs.

The English scientific community had believed that James left them large bequests in his will. The reading of the will, however, shocked everyone. James had written, "Just as England has rejected me, so have I rejected England." Around this time, England had fought two fierce wars with its rebellious American colonies. Therefore, to declare his contempt for those who had mistreated him, James bequeathed all he possessed to the United States Government to establish a scientific institute. This institute eventually gained international renown.

England had been very mistaken in scorning this young man because he was illegitimate. England had believed that she had no need of him and in the process lost much.⁹

Let us not disdain anyone regardless of his capabilities or position.

How splendid the expression I would hear from the departed Father Pishoy Kamel, "The church is in need of the fingernail of each child." He so appreciated every soul and never disdained a child.

As St John Chrysostom said, "If any of the hairs of our eyelashes and eyebrows is plucked out, they are good for nothing but to be thrown in a rubbish basket. Despite this, the whole body generally, and the eyes specifically, need this hair. Without eyelashes or eyebrows, the body loses its beauty and the eye is endangered. So, if you are an eye, do not despise the eyelashes that give you protection and the eyebrows that lends you beauty."

⁹ Green, Michael P. *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching* Baker Book House. 69.

Story No. 96

Escape for your Life

A certain strong dog was boasting to other dogs of his ability to run. Then one day, as he hunted a rabbit, it escaped and the dog could not catch it. The other dogs ridiculed him saying, “Where is your running prowess? This weak rabbit could escape and outrun you.”

He was quiet for a moment and then replied, “Don’t forget that the rabbit was running for its life, while I was running for my dinner.”

The rabbit outran the dog because it was escaping to save its life. The dog, however, was running to hunt the rabbit down and eat it. When you are running for your life, you will have exceptional abilities so that the enemy is unable to catch and devour you.

Escape is power and courage if we understand that sin is deadly to our souls and a destroyer of our eternal lives.¹⁰

¹⁰Green, Michael P. *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*. Baker Book House. 70.

Story No. 97

Giving up A Tablecloth

Many members of a church, in a town in the North of England, had moved away leaving behind only a small number of elderly families. As a result the buildings of the church were neglected for years.

Before Christmas, 1985, some of the congregation met. They decided that, to prepare for the feast, they would undertake the renovation of the buildings. They exerted a great effort, only to have it destroyed by a severe storm. A large section of plaster had broken off to reveal a large crack and gap in the wall.

The congregation cleaned the church and the furniture, but was unable to do anything about the crack that had appeared in the wall. At noon, the pastor of the church was passing by an auction hall and noticed a beautifully embroidered white tablecloth. He felt that it would be most suitable to cover the crack and bought it with a few shillings.

Then, at a bus stop, the pastor noticed a woman who was weeping and realized that she was deeply distressed. He asked her to go with him to the church and there he heard her story. She suddenly stopped speaking and concentrated her gaze on the white tablecloth. The pastor asked her about her silence and she replied that the tablecloth had belonged to her. Her husband had given it to her and it had the first three letters of her name. She then told him how she and her husband had lived in Vienna.

During the war, her husband had been placed in a camp, and she had received news of his death. She had come to Great Britain to work as a nanny in a city close to this church. When she came to the city, however, she found that she had lost her job opportunity.

The pastor was very moved by her story and asked her to take the tablecloth as a memory of her husband's who died during the war. When she realized that the tablecloth was intended to cover the crack in the church wall, and especially at Christmas, she refused to accept it. She said that she wished to give something to any person or family, during this season, but as she had nothing to give she would give up this tablecloth for the church.

The pastor tried very hard to give her the tablecloth but she refused. She felt that if the pastor refused to accept it, she would be deprived of giving a very dear thing to her to God in this blessed feast.

A few hours after the woman left the church, it was filled with people for Christmas celebrations. At the end of the service, everyone returned to his/her homes except for one man who approached the pastor asking, "Where did this tablecloth come from?"

"I bought it from an auction. Why do you ask?"

"It was a gift from me to my wife when we lived in Vienna."

"Do you still live there?"

"No. My wife and I were separated during the war. My wife was sent to a camp and they informed me of her death. I came to England to repair watches in this city."

The pastor was astonished at the amazing events that were unfolding before him. He informed the husband that his wife was at church only hours earlier and that she believed her husband had died. He told him that she had come to England to work as a nanny and gave him the address of the family for which she had come to work.

The husband went to the family and learned of his wife's address from a letter she had sent after her arrival.

In the early morning, the husband met with his wife after many years' separation. They rejoiced that their marriage had been restored as a result of the wife foregoing her tablecloth to cover a cracked church wall.

She came to realize that because of her love, God had repaid her many times over. The couple felt that the unseen hand of God would provide for all their needs.¹¹



*Many times we believe that our affairs are in ruins,
And do not discover the unseen hands of God that is working for our benefit,
The hand of the Almighty who has even numbered our hair.*

*The works of love to God and people lead our lives secretly.
God accepts them as fragrant incense.
And because of them He directs events in our favor, without our discernment.
Let us throw our bread upon the face of the waters, that it may return to us one day.*

¹¹Naismith, Archibald 2400 *Outlines, Notes, Quotes, Anecdotes for Sermons*. Vol. 2. 40.

Story No. 98

HE SAID NOTHING TO ME, HE WAS TALKING TO THE BUTCHER¹²

An old farmer ploughed his land using an ox and a mule to pull the plough. These two, who worked together very hard, formed a strong friendship. The ox said to the mule, "We've toiled many days in plowing the land and the farmer has not given us sufficient rest. Let's play sick that the farmer may care a little and give a little rest."

The mule replied, "No. How can we play sick while the season is short and the days are few? The farmer cares for us all year long, and gives us all our needs. Let us work diligently so that we may finish our work and the farmer may be happy."

The ox then said, "You're a fool. You can work hard and the farmer will abuse you, but I'll act sick."

When the ox played sick, the farmer brought him fresh hay and corn, cared for him and left him to rest. The mule returned tired from plowing, as he had pulled the plough on his own. The ox asked him, "How did you do?"

The mule answered, "The work was hard, but the day passed in peace."

Then the ox asked, "Did the farmer say anything of me?"

To which the mule replied, "No."

In the morning, the ox continued to play sick, thinking that he had succeeded in his plan to live in leisure - eating, drinking and sleeping without working. At the end of the day the mule came in exhausted. As for the previous day, the ox asked the mule about his day and the mule answered, "It was a very exhausting day, for I tried to exert more effort to compensate for your absence."

The ox rejoiced greatly and ridiculed the mule because he refused to play sick along with him.

The ox then asked the mule, "Did the farmer say anything to you about me?"

The mule replied, "He said nothing to me because he was too busy talking to the butcher." At this the ox became agitated as he realized that the farmer would slaughter him the next day because he was no longer useful.



*Many times we believe that our rest is in laziness and idleness,
So we act sick and create excuses for ourselves,
Not realizing that we are preparing ourselves for slaughter.*

*Many times we indulge in bodily lusts,
Believing that in this we have rest and profit,
But moments come when we realize that we slaughter ourselves.*

Let us work and struggle,

¹²Green, Michael P. *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*. Baker Book House. 71.

So that we may live, and overcome and be crowned.

Story No. 99

Fire on the Ships

On the 1st of January 1996, a believer woman passed away after struggling with cancer for nearly two months. The cancer had spread quickly in the brain.

I asked myself, “Why does God allow many of His believers to suffer from such malignant diseases before passing from this world?”

God allows this to happen so that the believer may place all his hope in heaven. That he may desire not what is carnal, rather what is for his eternal glory. As if He is assuring His beloved of the importance of placing one’s hand on the plough, aspiring to the heavenly Canaan and never looking back.

This reminds me of what Green tells of the Spanish explorer Cortez.¹³ He landed his ships at Vera Cruz in 1519 to begin his conquest of Mexico. He had a small troop of only seven hundred men. Once his men were ashore he quickly set fire to his eleven ships that were in the Gulf of Mexico. He set fire to his ships before his men to make them realize that they have no means of retreat from battle. The only direction to move now was forward into Mexico to confront the situation whatever it was.

So also does our Lord Jesus Christ allow the destruction of our means of comfort to make us realize that there is no other way to enter heaven except to engage in battle with the enemy of peace. That our hearts may not be attached to anything except victory and receiving the crown. Many times Christ permits that every broad path before us be blocked so that we have no choice but to take the narrow path.



*I thank You, O amazing and wise Leader.
You bring me to the spiritual battle.
You take me under Your leadership, O grantor of victory.
You burn around me all the ships so that I have no means of retreat.
I will find all my comfort and victory in You not in the ships of this world.
You enter with me into confrontation with the enemy of peace, the devil.
You hide me so that I do not become a side in the battle.
With and through You I will always win,
For You have promised,
“Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16.33).*

¹³Green, Michael P. *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*. Baker Book House. 71.

SHORT STORIES FOR THE YOUTH

100-115

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Short Story no. 100

*Don't Close
The Door of our Lord*

Theodore tells us the story of two heroes who understood the real meaning of bravery.

Bishop Ambrose heard about the decree of Emperor Theodosius and realised that it will result in the shedding of innocent blood. The Bishop went to the Altar of the Lord to receive God's guidance. He lifted his eyes to God as if to say,

"Who in this world can oppose the Emperor?"

But, I say with the Prophet Jeremiah,

"Fire is kindled in my bones and I can not keep quiet."

Also David said with a strong voice,

"I speak in front of the kings and without fear." Therefore, I'll prevent the Emperor from entering into the holy places, even if I pay my life on earth as a price."

Bishop Ambrose met with Fr. Rofinus whom the Emperor respected and quietly told him, "Please tell the Emperor that his decree will result in the shedding of innocent blood. Tell him that even if the people supported him God would not excuse him. Let him know that I'll prevent him from entering the holy places, even if the price was my life."

Fr. Rofinus was very much disturbed and went quickly to inform the Emperor of what Bishop Ambrose told him. He knew about the power of the Emperor and also about the determination of the Bishop.

The Emperor had already marched from his palace towards the Cathedral. Though he heard what Fr. Rofinus told him, he did not return but continued on his way.

The Bishop saw the Emperor coming. He stopped him and rebuked him for his unfair decree. He expected the Emperor to become furious and punish him. On the contrary, the Emperor with humility told the Bishop,

"I didn't come here to defy the rules, I'm not going to enter the holy places by force. Rather I came that you may give me absolution. Don't close the door of our Lord which He opened for all who come to Him repenting."

"How can I give you absolution and your hasty decree will result in the shedding of innocent blood? If you wish, you may put off your decree for the time being until you study the matter carefully and justice prevails. He who deserves to die, let him die but don't shed innocent blood."

"I've no objection. I'll study the matter carefully this month, as I've hastened in writing this decree."

Then the Bishop gave permission to the Emperor to enter the church of God. The historian Theodore said, "As the Emperor entered the church to pray, not caring for his dignity or position, he fell on his face crying with the words of the Prophet David,

"My soul clings to the dust; revive me according to Your word" (Ps. 119.25).



*The Emperor made a mistake and was about to shed innocent blood.
He did not care for his position or power,*

*But with the spirit of humility he opened the doors of God's mercy.
He did not rebuke the Bishop for his firmness,
But blamed himself for his own evil.
God, let me search the depth of my soul,
In order not to be occupied with this world,
But with Your kingdom inside me.
I confess my sins, trusting in Your great mercy.
Grant me the heart of Bishop Ambrose,
Not caring for my earthly life,
But for the salvation of my soul and the salvation of my brethren.
I fear You and thus I fear no one else.
I please You and thus I do not seek to please any one else.*

Do we tell You "We love nothing?" "No." for if you do not love, you have no feelings,
you are dead, detested and miserable.

Love but make sure whom you love.

St. Augustine.

Short Story no. 101

The Time Machine

During the Second World War, a German military leader, who was known for his military success and might, was arrested. His military enemies were very glad to put him in a military prison. Their eyes were full of glee expecting to see him have a nervous breakdown. On the contrary, they saw him quiet, calm and he was even laughing as he bowed down to enter his cell, as if he was in a military parade.

They asked him, "Why were you laughing as you entered your cell?"

"I was laughing at the time. Yesterday, I was riding high, but today, I'm down with the time machine. Tomorrow you also will go down with the time machine which plays with all of us."



The time machine will play with him who joins it.

It takes him up, and then it puts him down to take him up again

And then puts him down once more.

Lord, grant me to cling to Your Divine Word which is the same forever.

It takes me up day after day until I rest in Your bosom.

By Your Cross, fasten me to Your word and loosen my soul from the time machine.

Short Story no. 102

The Goldmeddal *Removed my Pains*¹

In the Olympic Games of 1976, the Japanese player Shun Fujimoto, while training for the games, broke his right knee a week before the games started. The Japanese people were very concerned as they had great hopes that he would win the gold medal in gymnastics. All people lost hope except him. He assured the people around him that he would not withdraw no matter how much it would cost him.

The following week, Shun Fujimoto joined the games. The people were surprised to see that he had put three ties around his broken knee. How could he compete in the games?

He did enter the games and won the gold medal. When he was asked to explain himself, he said, "The pains in my knee were like that of a thrusting knife. I tried to hide my tears, but as I'd now won the gold medal, my pains had gone away."



*Lord, uncover the glory, which You prepared for me,
And the heavenly crown which awaits me.*

Then I cry with St. Paul the Apostle saying,

**"Forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead,
I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus"**
(Phil. 3.13-14).

The mouth speaks by means of the words and the heart speaks by means of its desires.
Your prayer is the desire of your heart.
God does not ask for words but for your hearts.
St. Augustine.

¹ Cf. Michael P. Green: Illustrations for Biblical Preaching, p. 72.

Short Story no. 103

Freedom behind the Bars

The British nationalist Henry Thoreau fought against the slavery system. He refused to pay the election taxes to the country which supported slavery. He was arrested and put behind bars. His faithful friend Ralph Waldo Emerson hurried to visit him in prison. He said to Thoreau, "Henry, what are you doing inside the prison? You're missing your chance to work on behalf of those who are suffering."

Thoreau responded with courage, "No Ralph, the question should be, "What are you doing outside the prison?"



I do not give an opinion concerning Henry for not participating in the elections. This is not my job as a priest. Rather, I admire him because he is behaving as a free man inside the prison because he is sharing the misery of those who are mistreated under slavery. As St. Paul says,

**"Remember the prisoners as if chained with them-- those who are mistreated—
Since you yourselves are in the body also" (Heb. 13.3).**

Instead of condemning those who have fallen, we consider their falls as if they are ours and we see our hidden weaknesses in their visible weaknesses. Hence we identify with them and help them by prayer and service with prudence and love.



*With everyone who falls, I see myself falling.
I see the weakness of my nature in my brethren.
Who would help us except You, Saviour of the world?
Who would support us except Your fiery Spirit?
Who would fill our souls except the bosom of the Father?*



Prayer is reaching of the mind, full of love to God,
It occupies the mind, the heart, the thought, the desire, the knowledge and the love.
St. Augustine.

Short Story no. 104

Expensive Perfume

Johanna took her small daughter Mary to her dear friend Lucy. As Mary saw a beautiful perfume bottle, she left her mother and went towards the bottle. The mother tried to stop her daughter for fear of breaking the perfume bottle. Lucy quickly held the bottle in her hand and proudly said that her husband brought her this bottle last summer from Paris on the anniversary of their marriage.

Johanna did not give the matter any importance, but Lucy asked her, "Do you know its make?"

"No." said Johanna.

Lucy said, "It's the most famous perfume in the world. It costs so much."

Johanna was surprised to know its price.

"This was its price without tax because he bought it from the free shop in Paris airport", said Lucy.

"How could he pay such a price?"

"It's his love and appreciation for me."

"May I smell the perfume?"

"I'm sorry that the bottle is completely empty. I kept the bottle by itself."

Lucy noticed that Johanna tried to hide her sighing. She asked Johanna, "Did it bother you that this perfume was bought with such a high price and all the perfume was used, leaving the empty beautiful bottle by itself?"

"No Lucy, you deserve better than this perfume. What bothers me is my fear that I'm like this beautiful empty bottle which has no smell. It's true that I carry the name of Christ, I've learned many of the Biblical verses and I practice many of the spiritual worship, but I ask myself, 'Do I carry the pure perfume of Christ?' The perfume of this world is used and is consumed, but the pure perfume of Christ when used, increases inside us as well as outside us."

The conversation changed from the talk about the perfume of this world to the amazing perfume of Christ. At the end of the visit, Johanna stood up to pray saying,

"We thank You Lord because You made us heavenly perfume, so that You're perfume inside us and also those around us smell it.

Your perfume is never consumed. Rather it spreads and increases.

With every beauty You put in us, grant me to be a beautiful bottle from the outside and empty from the inside so that You may fill my life by Yourself.

You're the secret of my richness, beauty and sweetness."

Short Story no. 105

Body Relaxation

In the sixties, I was visiting someone, who had no connection with the church nor did he used to read the Bible. I started to talk to him about the sweetness of the life with Jesus and the enjoyment of the fellowship with Him. I came across the talk about the Bible and spiritual church practices.

"Do you think that God would not listen to me as I'm relaxing on my bed smoking a cigarette? Is it necessary to stand up for prayer and sit down to study the Bible or share in the church worship?"

I answered that it is important for the body to share with the soul in the worship, whether the private worship or the worship in the church. It is important for the whole human being to express his/her desire to enjoy God, talk to Him and listen to Him.

When one's body is sober, the soul will share with the body this sincerity; but when the body relaxes, the soul finds its chance to relax.

Yet in the case of sickness or under certain circumstances, the body may not be able to do such practices, but the soul strives and enjoys the life with Christ. Hence, as long as the body can strive soberly, the effect of carelessness reflects on the soul.

This is what the sheep teach us. Did you ever see a sheep eating while it is lying on the ground relaxing? Grass may be an inch away from its mouth, but it does not eat from it. For it to eat, it stands up, bows its head down or kneels with its front legs to eat. The Lord took us to His green pastures so that we may bow down our heads as well as our knees, and thus our souls bow down with humility, eat and drink and be filled.



*Lord grant me to worship you with all my being.
My body with its feelings and talents worship You.
My soul with all its energy bows in front of You.
My whole being does not know relaxation,
In order to share with You eternal glories.*

Short Story no. 106

Obedience *For A Five-Year-Old Boy*

Donald G. Barnhouse tells us that once he was in a big hotel and heard a mother telling her five-year-old son that she was going to leave him for a moment to attend to someone standing outside the room. The boy answered in a loud voice and in a way which attracted attention and with bad manners saying, "No."

The mother begged her son two or three times to leave the room for a while and come back. The boy answered her saying, "If you go out I won't eat my food for a whole day."

The mother had to stay beside him wondering what to do.

It is true that the moderate or the middle road is a royal way to virtue. We love our children, respect their personalities and create in them the spirit of leadership, but without neglecting the firmness of love.

I remember when I was in New Jersey I visited one of the families when the father told me the following story:

"When my young son went to elementary school, he learned from the children there that if one of the parents spanked the child, the child should call the police for him/her. Indeed my son made this mistake. As I warned I would spank him, I was surprised to hear him threatening to call the police for me.

I told him that I didn't expect him to call the police for me; rather, I took him to the police station. There I met a policeman and asked him in front of my son, "What if your son made a mistake? Wouldn't you chastise him?"

"I've to let him understand that he made a mistake and if he insisted I chastise him."

"Would your son threaten to call the police for you?"

The policeman laughed, was nice to my son and said to him, "Obey your parents."

As we returned home, my son never tried to threaten to call the police for his parents. The boy listened to the policeman. While we do not obey the Divine commandments.



My Lord, fill my heart with love to all.

Teach me to respect every soul, even the soul of a suckling baby.

Let me see You in every soul and rejoice in You.

Grant me to share the features of Your love.

Grant me to die so that every other person may live.

Grant me Your Divine wisdom,

Then my love would not change to decrease or slacken.

Grant me love full of firmness.

And firmness full of love, You are love, You the Word of the Father.

+ As we love God we love ourselves

+ He who does not value his own self can not ask a valuable gift from God.

+ You will not find a more valuable gift than Him.

- + But if you see a more valuable gift ask Him by any means.
 - + Is there no reward in the hands of God? There is none but His own self.
- St. Augustine.**

Short Story no. 107

*The Gift of
Losing the Eyesight*

Once St. Anthony went to visit St. Didymus the Blind, the Dean of the School of Alexandria, who lost his sight at the age of four years. Moreover, he was the one who invented the method of carving letters on pieces of wood so that one can read by his fingers instead of his eyes. He was ahead of the Frenchman Braille by more than 15 centuries in inventing carving the letters on wood for those who lost their sight.

St. Anthony asked, "Are you sad for losing your sight?"

St. Didymus was silent for a while, so St. Anthony repeated the question twice. Finally St. Didymus answered, "I thank God for every condition. Nevertheless I'm sad that I lost the gift of sight and was denied seeing many things, specially reading books."

St. Anthony commented by saying, "How do you grieve over the loss of your sight which man shares with the animals, and even with small insects? You should rather rejoice that God granted you the inner sight, which you share with the heavenly hosts, which makes you comprehend the superior heavenly mysteries."

Truly we thank God for the gift of sight and taking it back is to offer a sharp insight spiritual sight. We thank Him for the gift of losing the bodily sight and for enjoying a greater and eternal sight.

This story, which occurred in the fourth century, reminds me of what happened in the twentieth century when a young officer lost his sight in the war. A saintly nurse in the military hospital took care of him and it ended by marrying each other.

One day he heard someone talking about him and his wife saying, "She's lucky because he's blind. He married her without seeing the features of her face; if he was not blind he'd have not married her."

The officer moved closer to where the talking came from and said, "I thank God from the bottom of my heart for taking away the sight of my eyes and granting me an inner sight by which I see the beauty of this superior wife's soul. She's a wonderful person, the best one I ever met in my life. If the features of her face aren't like her inner beauty, that is like a mask which hides the beauty of her soul. I've won greatly by losing my sight."

The man lifted up his heart to cry out, "I thank You God because You took away the sight of my eyes, and granted me the inner sight of the heart. You granted me Your eyes by which I see the beauty of the soul and not of the body. Before, I used to see what was from the outside, but now You gave me to see through You what is in the heart."



Do not look to any other way by which you go to Him.

If He did not allow by His grace to keep this way, we would have been totally confused.

I am not asking you to look for the way; the way itself came to you.

Stand up and march.

St. Augustine

Short Story no. 108

Disloyal Tutor

It was said that a Christian man heard that the tutor who used to work for him and left him, was very sick. The man went to visit her. When she knew that he was going to visit her she kept asking herself, "Is he coming to admonish me? Is he gloating over me that I met his nice treatment with unfaithfulness? Or is he coming to visit me because he's truly a good man and he loves me?"

When the man saw the tutor he asked about her health.

She replied shyly, "Forgive me because I gave myself to the devil."

The man kept quiet for a while and said to her, "God forgives us all, but I want to ask you..."

She was afraid that he might ask her why she left his home suddenly, but with a smile he asked her, "What if you had taken one of my children and went to sell him in the slave market?"

She replied, "Never, how can I do that? He's your son and I've no right to do that."

The man responded, "Don't you know that your soul is the daughter of God? How can you kidnap it and present it freely to the enemy of God?"



With stupidity, I many times say to myself,

"I am free to do what I wish."

My soul is Your daughter.

You did not buy her with gold or silver,

But with Your precious blood.

You granted me to be the son of the Father.

I have the right to share His eternal glories with You forever.

I have sinned because I stole from You my soul which is Your daughter.

Grant me to return her by repentance back to You, Saviour of my soul.

Short Story no. 109

Unique Genius

The boy Matthew went with his father to visit an international exhibition. When he entered the music section as they both were walking around the musical instruments, Matthew was enjoying the quiet music.

"What wonderful music!"

"It's of the great musician Beethoven who lost the gift of hearing."

"I wonder if I buy a musical instrument shall I be like Beethoven, compose beautiful music like this?"

"Musical instruments help, but what Beethoven presented is the fruit of his genius with patience and effort."

The boy kept listening to the music of Beethoven and went and bought some records of this musician.

The father and the son entered together the section of arts. The boy stood in front of the great statues and the international paintings, unable to express his feelings.

In a gentle dialogue the boy expressed to his father his desire that God may grant him talent to be able to do great works of art.

The father told his son, "I'm very happy Matthew to hear about your desire to discover your talents. But I'd like to tell you also about a unique eternal genius."

"What is it, father?"

"One can't excel in every thing, it's necessary to know one's talents, but there exists a unique genius which we can achieve and it is within reach for all of us."

"What is it?"

"To carry inside us the Lord Jesus, the Wisdom of God and the righteousness. We carry Him and enjoy His life inside us. We live holy and practice the wonderful life that is why He was called wonderful and make wonders from those who believe in Him.

Our hearts with their emotions, our bodies with their feelings and our minds with their powers work with powerful heavenly force."



*My God, You can tame my tongue.
You can control my thoughts and cleanse them.
You can purify my feelings.
Who can bless my aspirations!
I shall acquire You Holy Lord then I acquire my life in You.*



He sent us His Word, His Only Begotten Son, Who by taking flesh, was born, suffered on our behalf, in order that man be edified.

St. Augustine.

Short Story no. 110

Isolation

In 1953, after the Egyptian revolution, a teacher of Arabic was transferred to the city of Esna, in Upper Egypt, as a kind of punishment. He was greatly distressed, as he had never visited Upper Egypt. Sarcastically, he wrote to one of his friends in Cairo and described the state of the city of Esna at that time. He said,

"Here we live isolated. We don't know the current news of the country. Some people are loyal to King Fouad, former ruler of Egypt, thinking that he's still in power, not knowing that he's died and his son King Farouk replaced him and that the revolution erupted to abolish the royal system in Egypt."

I was in the last year of High School at that time when I heard what this funny teacher wrote to his friends in Cairo. What this teacher said describes what actually happens in some countries.

It was said that at the end of the Eighteenth Century, many of the conquerors left the state of Virginia in the USA and went up the hills trying to cross to the plains for fear of the American Indians. But as many horses had died and many carriages were damaged, they were forced to stay on the hills. There they lived for 20 years during which they did not see the face of any man at all until some travellers crossed the hills.

They were very happy to meet those travellers, especially that they now could hear the news of the outside world and speak with them about different matters.

The travellers asked those who were living on the hills about the Congress of the U.S.A. and about the Republican Party. Those who were living on the hills never heard that there was a Congress nor of a Republican Party. They never heard about the President of the U.S.A. George Washington or about the Civil war. The travellers started to describe to them bit by bit what had happened in the previous 20 years. By such information they were able to become American Citizens.

That was what happened with some of the Jews who returned to Jerusalem from some of isolated areas and met with John the Baptist, heard him and responded to his message. They confessed their sins and were baptised in the River Jordan then they returned to their isolated quarters.

The Lord Jesus started His service, continued until he was crucified, rose from the dead, ascended to heaven and poured His Holy Spirit over His Disciples and followers. But those who lived in isolation never heard any of this news at all.

When St. Paul the Apostle met them and told them about the Holy Spirit, they said, "We never heard that there was a Holy Spirit". The Apostle explained every thing to them and they joined the membership of the church and the new life as members in the body of Christ.



*I thank you my Saviour for You did not leave me in isolation.
You came down to share with me my life,
And presented Your Holy Spirit to me.
I am no more isolated from You or from the heavenly hosts.*

*You taught me that love is the language of heaven,
And You uncovered Your mysteries to me,
So that I may be a member in Your body for which You are the head.*

+ + +

In order to receive this happy life, He Himself is the desired life, teach us to pray
St. Augustine.

Short Story no. 111

I Haven't Read the Bible For a Long Time

In the sixties, when the church of St. George in Sporting, Alexandria registered and before it was being built, I went to visit a youth who went astray. I knocked on the door. A lady opened and asked, "Whom do you want?"

"So-and-so."

"He won't return before midnight."

I felt that she spoke in a sharp voice, though I was asking about her son. I had a feeling that this might be the last time in which I see this lady, why do not I speak to her about her salvation and her eternity? I was then a shy person yet I asked her if I might speak to her. She agreed but without enthusiasm.

As I entered the guestroom, she started to watch the TV (which very few homes could buy then in Egypt). She also started to smoke as if there was no guest in the room. I waited for a while then asked her if it is possible to lower the voice of the TV so that we could read the Holy Bible.

I was astonished from her quick response. She put off the cigarette, put off the TV, sat quietly and said, "I haven't read the Holy Bible for many years. I'm eager to hear the voice of the Bible."

I started to read a chapter from the Bible and she kept asking eagerly and with great care about what I read. Before I left she asked me, "Which church do you attend?"

"It's very near to you, near the tramway, between Ibrahimia and the small Sporting."

"I didn't know that there was a church there."

"We pray in a temporary building, like a garage, until we get the building permit."

"Is there a Bible Study meeting?"

"Every Saturday evening."

The life of this lady changed completely as she practised the life of true repentance and she started to live by the living word of God. I learned a lot from this encounter: so often we judge a person from the outside appearance because we do not see the readiness of his heart. Many people who do not live the holy life are waiting for a small invitation, "May we read the Holy Bible?"

Many people, who appear to live outside the church, become greater than those whom we think live inside it.

God will condemn us because we neglect to invite our brethren to enjoy the sweetness of the spiritual life and the true friendship with the Saviour of the soul, her Groom and Physician.



Lord, grant me the desire to save every soul.

Convert my desire to prayer and work.

Many souls are waiting for a word of love from me.

Grant me that I search for these souls and invite them to live with You.

Instead of condemning my brethren, grant that I serve them.

*Give me courage with faith to present Your Gospel to my brethren.
Let every breath in me work to support my brethren,
For the glory of Your Name, You, who are amazing in Your love.*

Short Story no. 112

In the Service of the Public

It was said that in one of the American cities, a pastor of a church did not find a place to park his car, so he left it in a place where a policeman may give him a parking ticket. He wrote a message to the policeman and left it under the windshield wiper. In this message he wrote,

"Dear policeman:

I am a pastor of a church and I toured the block many times but could not find an empty parking spot in which to park my car.

I have a very important meeting to attend soon, "Forgive us our trespasses.""

After a while, a policeman arrived and read the message of the pastor of the church. He was struggling with himself, should he accept the excuse of the pastor or not? He, as a policeman, should respect the law and issue a parking ticket for this car.

He issued a parking ticket for the pastor and wrote him a message which he left under the wind shield wiper. He wrote,

"Dear Pastor:

I read your message and I am in the service of the public.

I did not want to issue you a parking ticket, but I am afraid I might lose my job, "lead us not into temptation.""

The pastor quoted a verse from the Lord's Prayer which may support his excuse to the policeman. Likewise the policeman quoted another verse from the same prayer to issue a parking ticket to the pastor.

Yesterday I read this story, written briefly by Green, which moved me deeply. The pastor was in difficulty and he asked the policeman to share his feelings. But the policeman was afraid to lose his job and was compelled not to accept the pastor's excuse.

We also, every morning, noon and evening, cry to God asking Him to accept our endless excuses. In turn, He with His amazing love listens to us and wants to forgive our sins and remember them no more.

Who can accept me with my daily weaknesses, except He Who has opened His heart, which is full of love and gentleness?



My friends, my relatives and those who love me, listen to my words.

They notice the features of my face and all my movements.

They try to share my joys and my sorrows.

But, it is only You Who listen to the inaudible heartbeat,

And realise the language of my feelings and my emotions.

You share my innermost not only by the words,

But You come to it, dwell into it and fill its void.

As I begin to pray, Your Divine command:

"Your sins are forgiven."

You are amazing in Your love and patience.

You forgive my sins as long as my heart speaks the truth.

*And You remember my trespasses no more as long as I repent.
Who loves me like You do!*

Short Story no. 113

Butterfly in Safety

Jack suddenly heard knocks at the window over the garden. Quietly he opened the door and saw an amazing scene. He saw a bird outside the room trying to catch a butterfly inside. The glass of the window stood between them.

The bird tried as much as it could to catch the butterfly without seeing the glass. Meanwhile the butterfly tried to escape, not realising that the glass protected it.

As the bird tried in vain, the butterfly was protected from it. Jack lifted up his eyes towards heaven and said,

"Thank You God because Your Divine unseen presence stands between me and the enemy of mankind.

Satan wants to hunt me by his killing beak, but he can not touch me as I am preserved between Your hands.

I'm safe because no one can snatch me out of Your hand (John 10.28-29).

Truly, I am like a helpless butterfly.

I cannot stand in front of the beak of a powerful bird.

Do not let me miss Your care or else I perish.

Guard me by Your divine presence,

Then I will not fear sin or Satan with all his might,

Nor evil people with all their ways,

Nor sad circumstances nor the unknown future.

I am comfortable and safe with Thee, O the fortress of my life."

Short Story no. 114

It Doesn't Love me

Kim noticed that his wife had spent a long time in her daughter Mary's room and that she came back very happy. He asked her, "Why have you stayed such a long time with Mary?"

The mother was silent for a while and then her tears started flowing from her eyes. She then said, "When I returned from work, I opened the door very quietly and went to Mary's room to kiss her as is my custom. I was surprised to find Mary sitting crying at a corner of the room.

She ran, hugged and kissed me. I also hugged and kissed her and asked her,

"Why are you crying? Did one of your brothers hit you?"

"No."

"Is your doll broken?"

"No."

"What had happened?"

"I love my doll, talk to her, kiss her face, hands and feet and hug her. But she doesn't kiss me. I love her so much but she doesn't love me."

I felt that my daughter needs a heart that loves her and to a person who hugs and kisses her so I gave her longer time today to speak and argue with her.

I felt that she needs our love and care. She also needs to discover the great love of God for her."

Then Kim asked his wife, "What did you speak about with Mary?"

"I spoke to Mary about the love of God to all of us. He descended to our world and spoke to us. He loved the children and they loved Him.

He ascended to heaven to prepare a place for us. He sent His Holy Spirit Who dwells in our hearts.

Finally I told her, "Mary, are you sad because the doll does not hug and kiss you?"

She replied, "I was, Mom."

I said to her, "When we don't pray, we become like the doll, which does not kiss God Who loves it."

Mary knelt down and prayed,

"My beloved Jesus,

You love me and I love You.

You are in my heart and I want to be with You.

You kiss me and I want to kiss You

Forgive me because I am often like the doll, I used to forget to pray.

I did not kiss You, You Who always kiss me."

Short Story no. 115

Tragedy in the Honey

Once, a young man asked me, "Why doesn't God permit the thoughts which give us sexual pleasure? They don't hurt anyone. I can't sleep without having such thoughts, even for few minutes. What is wrong in sexual thoughts as long as they don't lead to wrong practices?"

To such young man, I tell the following story which I inducted from some phrases by St. Augustine.

In the spring, we see the trees blooming and enjoy nice smells from the fields. A bee spread its wings and was flying to the next field from one flower to the other with great freedom.

The scene was very beautiful and the smell compelling, while the bee was working hard to collect the juice and carry it to the honey cells, and come back to collect more.

The bee remained many days collecting the juice with great joy until the amount of honey was great.

One day, the bee found some honey in a container. It stopped to meditate over it and said, "How sweet is the honey that I collected! Why do I fly any more to collect more of it? Why don't I enjoy this honey and live in it?"

The bee threw itself in the honey and at once became unable neither to get out of it nor to fly between the flowers. Soon it died in the honey.

This is not fiction; it is the story of many people. Instead of carrying the free thought, which sails by the Spirit to collect pure juice, they fall under the pleasure of desires. Then the thought loses its freedom, its balance and its superiority and gets stuck in the desires, which kill the soul.

God gave you mind in order to elevate you and raise you to heavenly joy, not to sink in the honey of desires which destroys it and the life which is inside you.

I thank You Lord, You, Who granted me the gift of thinking,
And presented me a spirit with two wings by which my thoughts fly.
I rise to You and throw myself in Your bosom.
Grant me that my thoughts collect pure juice.
Do not permit that I sink in the honey like the bee.
My Lord grant me to control my thoughts,
Not my thoughts control me.
Purify my will in You,
Then it will direct my thoughts towards You by Your grace.
Let not my thoughts destroy my will,
Making me a slave to corrupting lusts.
Do not remove from my memory the scene of the bee, which perished in the honey.



**WHEN DOES MY BEING AND NOT MY TONGUE
SAY THE "LORD'S PRAYER"?**

I confess to You Lord that I lie to You when I pray the "Lord's Prayer" with my mouth and not by my whole being:

- * Grant me that I do not live for myself only and that my inside cries out with the voice of the group, "Our Father..."

- * I do not carry the icon of Your Son yet, how can I then call You as a son and say, "Father?"

- * I have not yet transferred my treasures to heaven, so why do I say, "Who art in heaven?"

- * Let my inside cry, "Yes, come...Lord Jesus, "Thy kingdom come."

- * Grant me to listen to the Divine Word, doing Your will: "Thy Will be done."

- * Remove any pleasure inside me, and then I ask for the heavenly bread: "Give us this Day Our daily Bread."

- * Woe to me, as I carry hateful thoughts, why then I lie when I say, "As we Forgive those who trespassed against us?"

- * I often do not care about my salvation, how can I cry, "Lead us not into temptation?"

- * Grant me to have the perfect weapon of God so I can truly say, "Deliver us from Evil."

- * May You be the King of my soul, then it rejoices in You saying, "Thine is the Kingdom."

- * Take away from me every human glory so that I sing, "Thine is the Glory."

- * Save me from the dust of this earth then I praise You, "For Ever. Amen."

SHORT STORIES FOR THE YOUTH

116-130

Prepared by

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YOUTH MEETING

*St. George's and St. Anthony
Coptic Orthodox Church
Of Ottawa*

Edited by

Irene S. Abdelmassih

Story No. 116

Voice or Sound

Trying to reconcile between a man and his wife, I asked the wife to phone him, talk to him lovingly and gain his favor with kind words for the sake of the peace of the family.

I asked the man, "Did your wife phone you?"

"She phoned yesterday."

"I hope she expressed her love for you."

"As she started to record me a message on the answer machine I left the in order not to hear her voice."

"She cherishes and loves you."

"I can't even bear to hear her voice on the phone. I feel that her voice enrages me and makes me nervous."

"Why?"

"I feel that she's acting; her behavior doesn't express her words...I can't bear her hypocrisy."

I felt sorry for, no one knows the heart save God. I could not say she is hypocrite. Moreover, I pitied the man for having such feelings. It needs the Divine hands to work in their hearts.

I then remembered that conversation which takes place among a family members or friends; that is, when someone hears his brother's kind voice as if it were noisy disturbing sound. As St. Paul the Apostle says,

**"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love,
I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal"** (1 Cor. 13.1).

St. Augustine expressed this practically when he differentiated between the voice and the sound. The voice is the dialogue of love and understanding between two persons while, the sound causes annoyance and disturbance. He illustrated it as follows: many people pray to God with sounds instead of the loving voices of the heart. Those who pray using harmonious words which are not typical to the language of the heart, their words become just sound. Therefore, the Lord says,

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 7. 21).
In the Old Testament, God says,

"Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear" (Isa. 1. 15).

God seeks the language or the voice of the heart not that of the tongue, thus the psalmist says,

"Hear the voice of my supplications" (Ps. 28.2),

as if it was not enough to make supplications but the voice of supplications which is the language of prayers that shakes heaven.



*My beloved Lord, teach me the language of the accepted prayers,
So that the words of my mouth may support the voice of my heart,
And my prayers would not be a disturbing sound to heaven.
In Your wonderful love, You call my soul saying,
"Let Me see your face, let Me hear your voice;
For your voice is sweet, And your face is lovely"* (Song. 2. 14)
You desire to see my inner man,

*And to hear the voice of my heart, my silent prayers.
Many a time, I lengthen my prayers with the words of my mouth not my heart.
People hear me; however, my words do not reach even the ceiling of my room.
Grant me the language of the heart,
Which no one can hear, but shakes heaven,
And pleases You O who hear the voice of Your children.*

Short Story No. 117

The Flying Doves

Kiriako the simple young man stopped to wipe his face and to rest for a while since his feet were heavy. He felt that he was not able to carry his suitcase which contained nothing but his clothes. He felt tired. The young man resumed his walk reciting the name of Jesus Christ, assuring himself that he was getting nearer to the monastery, where he was going to get the blessing of the fathers. Sure enough the domes of the monastery started appearing in the horizon, he was very excited when he saw the crosses on top of the domes. Kiriako bowed to the ground and lifted his heart to heaven saying, thank You Lord Jesus for You made me worthy of seeing the monastery, allow me to receive the blessing of the fathers.

Do You accept me as a servant to the fathers? Do You accept my whole life as a sacrifice of love for You who loved me? Could I fulfil my days of my expatriation in Your bosom? I don't wish for more than You to be with me and I with You. Tears ran down from his eyes however, his longing for the monastery made him resume his journey soon. His heart was full of gladness as if carried by clouds to go to paradise. He wished he had wings of a dove to fly to paradise.

His tiredness left him and he rushed to the monastery for, this was the moment he was waiting for. Kiriako rang the doorbell. He heard a voice asking, "Who is at the door?"

"Your son Kiriako, father"

"What do you want?"

"Let me in father since I am coming from far place to receive the blessing of the monastery and the fathers."

"There are many churches and many fathers to take your confession."

"I heard a lot about you all father and I need to receive your advice, allow me to meet the head of the monastery for few minutes."

"Forgive me son I can't open."

"For the sake of love, take me in please. I've suffered a lot to get the blessing of the monastery."

"Where do you come from so I can inform the Abbot of the monastery to let you in for a short period?"

The Abbot entered the guestroom to meet Kiriako, who was very pleased. He ran to kiss the father's hand asking for his prayers.

Kiriako started talking to the father about his desire to become a monk.

The father started asking him about his spiritual life, his readings, etc. After a long discussion, he said to Kiriako, "I can't promise you any thing but you'll stay here for a trial period, because becoming a monk is not easy. I'll look after you myself but promise to be honest with yourself and me, since becoming a monk is not a target in itself rather your eternity and your life in Christ is above all."

As the meeting was about to end and the Abbot was leaving Kiriako to prepare a place for him to live under probation.

"Don't you recognize me father?" Kiriako asked.

"What do you mean?"

“I’m Kiriako, your nephew.”

The father examined his face and asked him, “How are your parents?”

“They’re fine, father.”

“Does your father approve your becoming a monk?”

“He also went to a monastery to become a monk as well.”

“And your mother, where is she?”

“She departed to Paradise.”

The Abbot shook his head and said, “Your mother reposed and your father escaped for his life.”

The Abbot asked his nephew to forget about the kinship and concentrate on worshipping God. Kiriako was very happy.

Years passed during which Kiriako was growing in grace and love for eternity. People started to come to the monastery asking for his prayers. Some people envied Kiriako because of his fame in many places in Armenia. They told the Abbot lies about him saying that the simple Kiriako pretended to be holy and ascetic.

Some strangers asked the Abbot to introduce them to Kiriako as guests and they will show him how he pretended holiness. The Abbot did what they asked for. Kiriako received them with love and cared for them. After speaking to them about the kingdom of God, he asked for their blessing and invited them for dinner and they accepted. Kiriako prepared them a meal of pigeons. It was Wednesday but he did not realize that because he used to fast all year. Yet he used not to fast for the sake of hospitality. One of the guests went to the Abbot and told him to come and see how Kiriako ate meat on Wednesdays. One of the guests asked Kiriako in front of the Abbot to embarrass him, “Don’t you know father that today is a Wednesday? Why did you serve us pigeons?” Kiriako was silent for a while. Then, he asked the Abbot, “Is it really Wednesday?” The Abbot did not answer. Kiriako said, “I’m sorry; I didn’t know that. Would you allow the pigeons to fly?” The guests laughed mockingly as they saw him making the sign of the cross on the plate, where the grilled pigeons were, Saying, “Since it’s a fasting day why are you staying? You should fly.” They stopped laughing, as they found the pigeons flying off the plate.

Short Story No. 118

The Two Donkeys of the Bishop

Some Arians thought to play a trick on an elderly bishop who was known for his holiness and strong arguments. They were afraid he would go to the Nicene council and argue against Arius. The Arians knew that the bishop and his disciple would take two donkeys; therefore, they followed them. At the end of the day, the bishop along with his disciple decided to spend the night in a hotel and then resume their trip the next day. They checked in and left the two donkeys in the stable adjacent to the hotel. At midnight, the Arians came and slaughtered the two donkeys to make sure that the bishop and his disciple would not be able to travel to Nicaea.

. Early in the morning, the disciple went to the stable. To his surprise, he found out that the two donkeys were completely slaughtered. He returned to the bishop panicking. The bishop asked him, "Why are you panicking my son?"

"They slaughtered the two donkeys and we don't have money to buy other ones."

"Don't worry son. God always has solutions for our problems."

"What do you mean father?"

"God, who wants us to attend the council, will provide means for our travel."

They both went to the stable using a lantern since it was still dark. The bishop asked his disciple to bring one of the heads nearer to the body. The bishop prayed to God saying, "You know that we don't have money to buy two donkeys. If You want us to go to the council, bring back the donkey to life."

Soon, the first donkey began moving and the other as well. The bishop and his disciple resumed their trip to Nicaea when the Arians had already arrived there. When the bishop and his disciple reached Nicaea, every body was looking at them bewildered.

The Bishop asked, "What's wrong. Why are you looking at us like that?"

They pointed out that the black donkey has a white head and vice versa. At that point the bishop realized that his disciple made a mistake in putting the right head on the right donkey. Therefore, the bishop had to tell them what happened.

Short Story No. 119

The moving Cell

After sunset when every monk went back to his cell, reciting his psalms, praising God or reading his bible. The illiterate monk sat alone at the cemetery crying bitterly asking God why he could not memorize the psalms and not even the Lord's Prayer. He kept on repeating the part that says, "**Our Father who art in heaven**", thinking about the fatherhood of God and thanking Him for salvation.

A monk named Bachom went to the Abbot of the monastery. He knocked at the door and said Agape. The Abbot opened.

"I came to talk to you with love", father Bachom said.

"Yes, what do you want?"

"I'm sure you know the illiterate new monk."

"I know him. He's very simple and loving to all."

"Yes, but how can he put on the garb of the monks when he can not read the bible or Memorize the psalms or even the Lord's Prayer."

"How did you know?"

"Forgive me father. I was attracted to his look while praying. He looked as if he was standing in heaven and when I got closer to him I found him saying nothing but the phrase, "**Our Father who art in heaven.**"

The Abbot paused for a moment and said to father Bachom, "Leave this matter to me, I'll deal with it."

The Abbot was not happy, as he liked the simple monk and he did not wish to dismiss him. In the mean time, he did not want to be against the regulations of the monastery. Next day the Abbot met with the new simple monk and asked him, "How many psalms do you memorize?"

"Forgive me father, I only pray with what I already know."

"I've to know because the rules of the monastery requires you to memorize parts of the bible and the psalms."

"I try to memorize as much as I can."

"If you don't memorize I'll have to ask you to leave the monastery"

"But can I have my cell with me?"

"Are you joking?"

"No father but I don't want to part and leave my cell."

"Take it if you can", answered the Abbot to finish the dialogue.

The simple monk bowed gently and left the place. He went to the storage area, got a rope, tied the cell and started saying, "Move you blessed one."

To the surprise of the fathers of the monastery, the cell moved with him until it settled miles away from the monastery. This poor monk, who was not able to memorize any bible verses, lived there in his simple cell alone worshipping God.

Short Story No. 120

A DARK PATH

In a dark path, the two brothers Stephan and Marc started their walk talking with each other when suddenly a speeding car passed beside them and splashed them with mud. With a nice smile Stephan said to his brother, "It's just a sprinkle, we've to take care if another car passed."

When they got closer to light, Marc said, "It isn't a sprinkle as you thought Stephan."

"We'll wash our clothes when we get home Marc."

But when Marc saw his clothes closely he said, "We can't go to visit our friend George with these dirty clothes. We've to get home and get clean clothes before we visit our friend."



As long as we are in this world, the dirt of the world is going to soil our bodies. If we stay in the darkness we think it is just a sprinkle but when we get closer to our Christ (The Light) we realize that an action should be taken.

We have to get back to our repentance and confession, to put on the new man's work which is offered to us by the Holy Spirit. Then, we can reach our heavenly home.



Many a time, I drink sin like water.

Many a time my life was soiled by sin.

Let Your light shine upon me, my Savior.

Lighten my inner man in order to be ashamed of myself.

I go back to Your church to find You the holy one purifying my inner being.

I confess to You my sin and unholy life.

I enjoy Your fiery Spirit's work in me, which pours Your glory upon me.

Short Story No. 121

GETTING READY FOR THE WEDDING

In one of the American cities, a young lady asked me if she could come during the week to the church to have a rehearsal for her wedding. She wanted to rehearse with the children who would accompany her during the wedding march. The bride was shocked when I told her that there was plenty of time and that her wedding was after six months and that she should not hurry.

She replied, "Six months aren't enough for preparation."

I reproached myself since this young lady considered these six months not enough time for getting prepared for her wedding. While the groom of my soul declares that He is coming soon (rev. 21.7) and I am lazy about preparing for the unique eternal wedding.

Heaven has been ready for this wedding several thousands of years ago. Jesus paid the price by shedding his blood. He also gave us His Holy Spirit so that our spirit would unite with Him eternally.

The twenty-four priests who are not incarnate together with the heavenly hosts are longing for this happy day.

Yet, my soul, the bride, is busy with things other than its wedding day.



Angels are crying, "Send Your sickle for the time of harvest is at hand."

The heavenly hosts see the bride that You collected from all nations

And different ethnic groups,

They come together from different ethnic groups, white, black, yellow,

All reflect Your wonderful glory.

All are Your holy body.

Let Your Holy Spirit form me so that my soul would be a heavenly bride.

Let my heart long for that happy day.

Open my heart in order to see You coming in Your wedding procession,

Carry me on Your cloud, O the groom of my soul.

Take me to the bosom of Your father to the heavenly feast.

Short Story No. 122

Belonging to the Cannibals

One of the servants of God was moved when he saw a shepherd crying. He asked him, “Why are you crying?”

“The dog ate part of my bible while I was resting amongst my sheep.”

“Don’t cry. I’ll give you another copy.”

“The problem is not in getting another copy. The problem is that I used to be a cannibal and when and when I knew the Word of god it changed me. I become loving to people and calm.

“What has this to do with your dog?”

“I’m afraid that my dog would be calm and wouldn’t be able to protect my sheep from the wolves.”

The servant of God smiled and told him that the Word of God is not letters and pages but a living relationship with God. He said to him, “your live was changed because of the Word of God but your dog won’t get what you were blessed with. The Word of God became Man to renew the human life.”

Then the shepherd was relieved and was assured that his dog would not change by eating part of the bible and would continue to guard the cheep.



You changed the life of a cannibal, O the right Word.

Yes You are alive and effective.

When will we see all nations enjoying your love?

When will You convert them to heavenly angels?

Short Story No. 123

Bless the Lord O my Soul

On his way to church, the preacher met one of the church workers and the following conversation took place.

“I’d like to ask you about the meaning of a biblical verse”, said the worker.

“What is it?”

“It is written in the Psalms,

“Bless the Lord O my soul.”

I understand that the older bless the younger; God blesses my soul not vice versa. What do you think?”

“Do you have children?”

“Yes, three.”

“How old are they?”

“Marc is seven, Mary is six and Mathew is five.”

“At Christmas do they bring you gifts?”

“Yes.”

“Do you know what kind of presents they bring you?”

“No.”

“Who buys it for them?”

“They arrange this with their mother without my knowledge to surprise me.”

“Who pays?”

“I do.”

“Are you pleased with the gifts?”

“Sure, they show me how much they love me.”

“What do you do when they offer you the presents?”

“I hug them, kiss them and I offer them much more valuable presents.”

“This exactly what happens With God, we cry to Him saying “we bless You and glorify You, we give You of what You blessed us with.”



+ Lord, You ask me,

“Give me to drink.”

Let me give You with the Samaritan woman from my pail.

I give You from the well that You gave me.

Then You give me everlasting water from which whoever drinks will never thirst.

+Lord, You are the source of every heavenly or earthly blessing.

We will give of whatever You gave us.

Accept our gift, O the Giver of all gifts.

Bless my soul, for without You I shall be deprived of all blessings.

Short Story No. 124

The Happiest Man On Earth

Peter asked his father, who was known for his permanent happiness, “How would I know that I’m following the lord’s path?”

“The sign that you’re following the lord’s pass is to feel that you’re the happiest man on earth. You should feel that the moment you’re living now is the happiest moment because you’re carried on the eternal arms. You feel the touch of God’s hand which helped you in the past, is still helping you and will help you till it takes you to the bosom of the Father.”

Peter asked, “How would I feel that I’m the happiest man on earth when I feel uptight, knowing that my friends are richer and more talented than me?”

His father said, “I’ll tell you a well-known story.

A stone cutter returned home after dinner. He sat on an old chair lifting his eyes to heaven saying, “My Lord, why did You create me in a poor family which could not send me to school, or provide me with enough money to start a business? There are many people who don’t work as hard as I do yet they’re richer. Can’t You make me rich so I would be happy and glad?”

The stonecutter dreamt that while he was working in the mine he found a treasure. He became glad, hid the treasure and left the mine to start a new life.

He said, “God accepted my prayers and made me rich. I wish I asked for more.”

He lived with the rich and famous. One day he was invited to a royal party. Seeing what the king enjoyed of greatness, he wished to be king. He asked God to make him a king. God made him king and every body was paying respects to him. One day while he was walking in a royal parade, he felt the heat of the sun. He felt he was weak compared to the sun. He wished to be the sun so God granted him his wish. Then, a cloud came and masked the rays of the sun. The sun felt its weakness and wished to be a cloud. The sun became a cloud and turned to rain. Animals tried to escape from the rain. Birds left their nests looking for shelter. However, there was a strong rock that the rain could not harm. The cloud felt so small compared to the rock. The cloud turned to a strong rock. Suddenly, the stone cutter hit the rock with his axe. The rock felt so weak compared to the stonecutter and asked God to be a stonecutter. It was so and the stonecutter returned to his first condition.

The stonecutter got up from his sleep and gave thanks to God for making him a stonecutter, neither a rock, a cloud, the Sun, nor even a king or a rich man. His life was changed to a life of praise and thanksgiving. He worked hard and encouraged his children to study joyfully.



*I praise You Lord,
Because You did not leave me in need of any thing.
Today is the best moment of my life.
I am the happiest man on earth.
You raised me from dust and opened gates of heaven for me.
You made me member in Your holy body and You gave me Your Holy Spirit.
What more can I ask for?*

*My soul glorifies You always.
I shall be glad in You,
You are my happiness.*

Short Story No. 125

The Emperor and the Artist

The emperor of Japan asked one of the artists to draw a picture of a bird. He expected to see the picture after few weeks or months. Several months even years passed but the artist did not bring the picture. The emperor decided to surprise the artist in his gallery to see if he started the painting or not. When the emperor met the artist, he asked him if he started drawing the picture. The artist replied, "Wait for fifteen minutes and you'll receive it."

The artist grabbed a brush and in few minutes offered the emperor a unique picture of a bird.

The emperor was amazed that the artist was able to draw the picture of a bird, which he requested some years ago, in few minutes.

The emperor asked, "If you're capable of drawing such a beautiful picture in few minutes, why did you wait so long to draw it?"

"I'll answer you practically", the artist answered.

He showed him eyes of birds, in another area of the gallery wings of birds, then legs, heads etc.

The artist said to the emperor, "I spent all these years to collect all these pictures and studied them all to give your majesty the best possible picture of a bird."

The emperor then realized that what the artist offered in minutes was a result of years of hard work.



It took a great artist several years to produce a fifteen-minute invaluable picture. Would it not concern you that the greatest artist, the Holy Spirit, draws the icon of Christ in you, to present you to the Father? That cost God a lot. He sent His only begotten son, so you can become a living immortal icon with which the Father will be pleased. When evil thoughts leap into your mind to spoil your life which is an icon, search your bible so you can see what God has done for you throughout the ages. Go to the cross, so the Holy Spirit can open the eyes of your heart. Then you will see the giving love of God who drew the icon with His precious blood.

Short Story No. 126

The Beauty of Sincere Love

Father Pishoy Kamel was known for his smile that attracted many people. He used to meet with burdened sinners, who saw in his kindness the grace of God. People used to be filled with hope, because he used to share with them their burdens. They throw with him all their sins at the feet of the cross and preach with the Marys the pleasure of resurrection.

I met someone from West Covina, California, who said, "I'll never forget, asking Father Pishoy to set aside three hours for my confession as a first session.

So I asked him, "When could I start?"

He answered, "Right now." I was surprised that he agreed and I knew how busy he was. Few minutes after starting confession, I felt peace and hope filling my heart. I felt that both of us were under the feet of the Savior. I thought he'd deprive me of communion for a long period of time. I felt a strong desire to have communion and to live in gladness with the Lord Jesus the Lover of sinners. He gave me a simple exercise, which I practiced gladly."

Father Pishoy had a principle, that any body who never made confession before or it had been too long since he confessed, he would not delay this kind of confession. He used to say, "May be the Holy Spirit is leading someone to repentance and if it was delayed it might be too late and I'd loose this soul."

If father Pishoy did not want to postpone confession, you should not postpone your repentance, confession and communion.

Lord grant me a heart filled with gladness,

I offer it to every soul wounded with sin so that it will be attracted to You.

Short Story No. 127

He's my Son I'm Willing to Kiss his Feet

Father Pishoy Kamel was known for his practical love that was shown in dealing with people. In the early sixties, as I entered the courtyard of the church, I saw a newly married young man who was calling father Pishoy names. This was before the Saturday vespers; I led him to a room and calmed him down. I asked him to go home till things calm down.

I expected that the news would reach father Pishoy. After the vespers and confessions, I said to father Pishoy, "The young man was upset. He was mad and I asked him to go home and cool down. He'd like to apologize for his behavior."

Instead of going home, Father Pishoy asked me to go to the house of the angry man saying, "He's my son and I'm willing to kiss his feet."

I was glad to see his love to his children. The young man was surprised by our visit and bent down to kiss father's feet but father Pishoy pulled him, hugged him and said, "I owe you an apology."

This made the young man cry. This is a true Christian love shown by father Pishoy.

One of the things that father Pishoy did not like is "The honor of the clergy". He considered that the honor of the priest is in being willing to wash the feet of sinners with great love. He felt he was not worthy of serving the Lord Jesus in His children.



Let me see You in the life of each sinner.

Let me see You longing for washing his/her feet,

Offering Your precious blood to clean his inner being.

Let me offer my life for every soul.

Let me have the dignity of serving You, washing the sinners' feet.

Short Story No. 128

Switch off the Recorder

When father Pishoy Kamel was ordained, many were attracted to Jesus since they saw in him a man of great love. One of the servants in Los Angeles told me the following story.

“When father Pishoy came to Los Angeles, he visited me in my house. I asked if he’d like to hear a nice preacher, he said, “Yes.”

As soon as he heard the preacher glorifying an important personality, he asked me to stop the recorder. I asked, “Why?”

He answered, “The preacher that brags about talking with a great man about Christ, isn’t fit for the kingdom of heaven. Did Jesus die for great men only? Is the soul of this great man more precious than that of a slave?”



Perhaps the most valuable thing in father Pishoy’s life is his desire for the salvation of every soul whether rich or poor, young or old, literate or illiterate.



I wish to see every soul saved.

My desire is to see the whole world enjoying You.

Let me die so my brother would live.

Let me be poor so others would get rich.

Let me have the honor of reaching the last row where I shall find You,

Stretching Your arms to hug those who are in front of You.

Short Story No. 129

A Man of Great Spirit

The secret of father Pishoy's strong personality is not his numerous talents but his great love. When His Holiness Pope Shenouda was talking about Father Pishoy, he said,

“He had a great soul always willing to accept all people.

Young man young lady if you want to enjoy a strong personality; you have to know the true practical love.

I have known father Pishoy since he was the Sunday school supervisor in St Mary church, in Moharam Bek, Alexandria. When we used to meet for congratulating a young man on his success or return from abroad, he used to turn the conversation into a spiritual one with love and gaiety. His wise love makes you desire to tell him what worries you; he never interfered with the affairs of others. He was, as Christ said, like salt that adds taste to the food without making it inedible.

In 1957, in a retreat period in one of the monasteries, one of the monks asked me if I knew Samy Kamel (Fr. Pishoy). I said, “Yes, I do.”

“That man is like a nice breathe that passes and leaves you with peace of mind. He makes you feel that you want to chat with him but he doesn't interfere in the lives of others.””

Short Story No. 130

Strict Love

Father Pishoy was known for his serious love. He did not like hypocrisy. Like his Master, he loved sinners but he never accepted any impurity in the church.

During my service in Los Angeles, father Pishoy wrote me that Pope Shenouda is not happy about one priest in the city who tried to change the dogmas in our church. Father Pishoy with other priests and servants in the church defended the opinion of the pope.

In his last days when father Pishoy was in bed, he asked me to see Pope Shenouda concerning corruption in the church because he felt this matter had to be dealt with.

When I left to Los Angeles to serve in the church which was founded by father Pishoy, he said to me, "I had to excommunicate two persons for their behavior. I have to absolve them before returning to Egypt."

He excommunicated them because after buying the church, they asked him to be only concerned with the liturgy and prayers and leave to them the courtyard for social gatherings during which they would dance and drink wine. Despite of this, we visited them. As they declared their respect for the church, he absolved them in front of the congregation. Before I met them he used to tell me that these two persons had good talents and intention. He said that their attitude was because they did not think spiritually. He opposed them but he did not want the church to lose them.



**"For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged
(As though I were present) him who has so done this deed. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,
When you are gathered together, along with my spirit with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ,
Deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the
Day of the Lord Jesus. Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the
Whole Lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven that you may be a new lump,
Since you truly are unleavened"**
(1 Cor. 5.3-7).

It is not a virtue (to be negligent to unrepentant sinners) but weakness.
It is not love but unkindness to the souls that are neglected;
They will perish without alertness to their destruction.
(St. Augustine)

Whoever shepherds the flock should neither be a lion or a goat.
(St. John of the ladder)

Chasten with the fear of God and do not be kind.
Do not fear anybody but judge with truth and straightforwardness.
(St. Anthony)

Reprimanding should be preceded by kindness and mercy not anger.
(St. Augustine)

Doctors should not despise patients but rather cure the disease.
(St. Basil the Great)

If the person that opposes the dogma is not excommunicated,
The church will be a den of thieves.
Shepherd the flock, with no grumbling or disrespect as one with authority
But like a shepherd that looks after the sheep.
(Didascalia, unit 4)



*O Love, teach me how to love.
O True Love, grant me your fiery Holy Spirit,
For my heart to be kindled with the fire of your love.
My spirit, with You, will shine on every one,
So I can see in them Your beloved creation.
You were kind to sinners and tax collectors; You forgave the adulterous her sins.
You entered the house of the tax collector,
And opened Your paradise to the thief on the cross.
With Your love, You did not hurt the feelings of a wounded sinner,
But You were always healing and supporting.
With Your love, You drove the sellers of pigeons, and the treasurers out,
Not to stay outside the temple forever
But to be ready with repentance to enjoy Your Holiness.
In Your kindness You warned the scribes and the Pharisees,
Yearning to accept them if they humble themselves and come to Your bosom.
Lord You are wonderful in Your love, Pontius Pilate said,
“You desire to look at Him, but it is difficult to gaze at Him.”
You attract the little children to You and sinners come to You repenting,
Evil Pharisees respect You.
Abide in my heart so I can practice true love without hypocrisy,
And become firm but humble.*

Stories for consolation

**Short Stories
Along with the story
“To whom is this chair?”**

131-143

**Prepared By
Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty**

*Translated by
LUCY FARAG
HANY GIRGIS
SHAWKY YOUAKIEM*

Dear blessed one

I present to you this booklet of short stories which helps our understanding of the passing from this world, and the enjoyment of life in paradise till the great day of the Lord when we are crowned with the eternal heavenly glory.

The stories are a collection, which are selected from actual daily experiences. Some of the stories are extracted from the following books, with additional commentary provided:

Green, Michael P. *illustrations for biblical preaching*. Michigan: Baker Book House, 1992.

Naismith, Archibald. *2400 outlines. Notes quotes, and anecdotes for sermons*. Michigan: Baker Book House. 1967.

Barnhouse, Donald G. *Let Me Illustrate*. Fleming H. Revell, 1967.

“What scares me? Death?

No, because it is not dreadful to me,

Through death we reach to a safe harbor”

(St. John Chrysostom).

Short story 131

The Shadow of Death

A father along with his two children stood in front of his house waiting for one of his friends to drive them to the church to attend the funeral services of his wife. The father was at a loss as to what to say to his children, who lost their young mother, in order to console them.

As he was perplexed, a huge bulldozer passed by them. The house shook by the movement of this huge bulldozer. It was a clear day and the sun was shining. As the bulldozer passed by them, the shadow of the bulldozer came on the man and his two children.

The man said to his two children, "Did you see the bulldozer?"

The elder son replied, "Yes its shadow came upon us, it had a disturbing sound. I felt the whole ground is shaking under me due to its movement."

The father said, "Yes indeed it has a dreadful noise. I wonder what happens if it crosses over a person!"

The younger child replied, "It'll destroy him completely."

The father said, "What happened when its shadow came upon us?"

The elder son said, "Nothing at all Dad."

The father then said, "Such is death. Its sound is scary and dreadful. All mankind fell under its sting, and it destroyed homes and generations. But thanks God, Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lover of mankind, drove away the bulldozer of death. He died like all mankind. Death however couldn't destroy Him. By His death, He made death to have no sting on us. He drives the bulldozer Himself so that the bulldozer just passes the shadow of death over us and doesn't roll over us. Consequently, we don't fear the bulldozer. As the Psalmist says,

"Yes, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for you are with me" (Ps. 23.4).

He says 'the valley of the shadow of death', not 'the valley of death'."

The younger child said, "But mom died dad, didn't death destroy her?"

The father said, "Death can't destroy her. She passed through its shadow to our living Christ to live with Him in paradise! There she will meet all the believers who went through the same thing (death). Everyone is joyful with the new life."



*+I thank you my good Savior,
Because You did not entrust neither an angel, or archangel,
Cherubim or Seraphim,
Nor a prophet, nor a righteous one to drive the bulldozer of death.
Instead You descended into our world, drove the bulldozer of death Yourself.
It did not pass over me but only its shadow,
For there is no death to Your servants but a departure.
+ Yes where is your sting O' death!*

*Here the Beloved of my soul is commanding you,
You will not touch my soul,
And even my body you will get nothing from it.
In your shadow, my body finds temper relief,
Till it has its complete rest when it is glorified,
Becoming participant with Christ in His glorified body.
Welcome O shadow of death, through you I cross over to the Beloved of my soul.*

Short story 132

I Kiss Her Clothes

During my service at the church of St. Mary, Cleopatra Alexandria, in 1981, I visited a family. We talked together about the joyful gospel of Christ. A 70-year-old man asked me if he could confess.

We entered alone in a room, his eyes started to tear as he said I am from Cairo and came to Alexandria in the summer and have not been able to confess. My wife passed away 27 years ago. I can not remember during all this time that she ever said a word to hurt my feelings or that I ever said a word to hurt her feelings.

We lived in a lovely joyful atmosphere full of true love.

Each time I left home to my work, she'd make the sign of the cross over me and say; "May our good Lord protect you and let you return safe filled with joy."

When she would leave to go to the market, I used to do with her the same. We lived as if we were in a joyful paradise. God filled our life with inner peace. She has passed away.

Her clothes are still hanging in the closet. Whenever I leave home I would first go inside the closet to kiss her hanging clothes. She is the secret behind the blessing in my life. I feel that she did not depart from me, but that she now prays for me.

I am waiting for my departure from this world so that I can live with her and with the Groom of our souls, Jesus Christ."

This man felt that the tens of years he lived with his wife were a down payment for a grander life.

We dread death because we have not yet experienced life in paradise; but he who experiences it in his inner self, in his family life, and with his beloved colleagues, sees in death a crossing over to the life in paradise in its fullness.



*Grant me O Lord the experience of life in paradise,
To test this kind of life in a world overcome by unjustness,
So I may not fear death.
Let me love the salvation of my soul,
To love my family, neighbors, and colleagues
And also those who wish to resist me and wish to frustrate me.
Pass over with me O Lord from the death of hate to the paradise of love.
I desire to cross over to Your paradise.
See You face to face O the desire of my soul.*



“If (your, young husband,) had altogether perished, and utterly ceased to be, it would be right to be distressed, and sorrowful; but if he has only sailed into the tranquil haven, and taken his journey to Him who is really his king, one ought not to mourn but to rejoice on these accounts. For this death is not death, but only a kind of emigration and translation from the worse to the better, from earth to heaven, from men to angels, and archangels, and Him who is the Lord of angels and archangels ... But perhaps you long to hear your husband's words, and enjoy the affection which you bestowed upon him, ... Well! The affection which you bestowed on him you can keep now just as you formerly did”

(St. John Chrysostom to a young widow).

Short story 133

Where are the bones of the emperor Philip?

Alexander the great had a great friendship with the famous philosopher Diogenes. One day as they were walking together, Diogenes asked to be excused from the emperor so that he may go through the cemetery. The emperor then asked him if he could go with him. Both of them entered the cemetery and suddenly Diogenes sat among the heap of bones staring at them with great interest as if he was looking for something. As Diogenes stayed a while staring at the bones, the emperor asked him, "What are you searching for?"

The philosopher responded, "I'm searching among the bones to distinguish the bones of your late father, the emperor Philip, from the bones of the slaves; it seems that I am unable to differentiate."

The emperor shook his head and said, "Truly we're all equal in death."



*Lord grant me not to be concerned about the burial of my body,
Or what becomes of my bones.
Grant me Lord to be concerned with sanctifying my body and my soul,
So that my body may share with my soul in the eternal glorification,
So both may live together in heaven.
When can I take off corruption to put on incorruption?
When can I depart from disgrace to enjoy the glory?
When will my death be crushed so I may live forever?*



"If we want not to fear death, then let us stand where Christ is,
So that he may say regarding us,
"I tell you truly, there are some standing here who shall not taste death" (Luke 9.27).
Those who have truly reached unity in Christ will not taste death.
They undoubtedly just experience death of the body and are exposed to it,
But the life of the soul remains.
We ought not to close our ears, but open it so that we may hear Jesus' voice.
Whoever hears His voice will not fear death"
(Saint Ambrose).

Short story 134

Empty handed

When Alexander the great had reached 34 years in age, he had conquered almost all the world in his time. When he felt that his days were coming close to an end, he raised his eyes to those around him and said, “My days are close to ending, but I have one wish that I request of you to make it happen. Let my hand be stretched out of the coffin when I die so that the world may know that Alexander the great left the world empty handed.”



*Naked, I came out of the womb of my mother, and naked I shall leave the world.
One day I shall leave and I will have nothing to carry with me.
Lord! Grant me that You become my only treasure.
You are my account in heaven,
My only account O my Savior, let me be with You in heaven.
Let my inner self be Yours, O Lord, here on earth that You become my eternal share.*

Short story 135

The missing father

Young Teresa asked her mother, "Where did my father go?"

The mother answered, "He's with Father Jesus."

"Is he coming back?"

"No, but we will go to him when our Lord Jesus asks for us."

Two days later, the mother was speaking to a friend and saying, "I'm very sad because I lost my husband."

The little girl heard her mother and as she remembered what her mother told her about her late father, the girl asked her mother, "If something was lost and then you found where it was; do you still consider it lost?"

The mother responded, "No Teresa!"

The child then said, "You told me that my father went to be with Father Jesus, why do you now say that he was missing as if he was lost?"

This story reminds me of what St. John Chrysostom said when he went to church for a funeral prayer. As he saw that many were weeping, he said to the congregation,

"I am astonished from what I see. Is our faith just a talk?

We desire heaven, but when someone near to our heart goes to heaven, we cry and mourn!"



Grant me O Lord to recognize Your existence.

See Your hand stretched waiting for me,

Unto You I run joyful and with jubilation.

With every soul, which passes on to You, my heart burns with tenderness for You.

I say to the passing soul, "May God who helped You, help me also!"



Speaking to the congregation because of a fatal plague that befell them, saint Cyprian said,

"Thus the heavenly had been prepared to take the place of the earthly!

The great matters in place of nonsense! The eternal instead of the temporal! Therefore what is the reason for worry and fear?

If you are righteous by faith, you live. You rejoice once you get rid of Satan and come close to be with Jesus Christ in paradise!

Through death we reach the harbor, our heavenly home, eternal rest and everlasting life.”

Short story 136

Because God took him

A mother sat with her little girl, Nancy, to read to her from the Holy Bible. She read to her the following verse,

“So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty five years, and Enoch walked with God; And was not, for God took him” (Gen. 5.23-24).

The mother gave her daughter, as she used to do, a chance to express what she heard in her own simple expressions.

The child said, “Mum, Enoch lived with God, and God walked and talked with him. They were close friends. Each of them revealed his secrets to the other. For days, weeks, months, for a full year they talked. A year after year and for 365 years they remained friends.

One day as Enoch was walking and talking with God, Enoch said to God, “My dear God, It is late in the day; let us go to my house and sit together.”

God said to Enoch, “Why Enoch, we have walked together and chatted for 365 years and now we are closer to my home than yours. Why don’t you come today in my place?

Come with me to my home for My Angels, and my heavenly servants are anxious to see you, My dear friend.”

Enoch agreed and he went with God. Enoch was no longer to be found here on earth, for God took him.



*My estrangement has been for too long my beloved friend.
When will You invite me to Your heavenly home?
I long to rest in Your bosom,
To meet Your heavenly servants,
To be with You in Your heavens, and not in this world.
Yes Lord, grant me to walk with You, to converse with You the words of true love,
To talk with You in Your heavens forever.*



Surely those who dread death are the ones who are not born from water and spirit, for they shall be delivered to the fire of hell. Those who dread death are the ones who have not experienced the cross and sufferings of Christ. Those who dread death are the ones who expect after death yet another death.

Why do we pray asking “Thy kingdom come” if the bondage of this world fascinates us?

Whoever has come in touch with the throne of Christ, and the glory of the kingdom of heaven, ought not to mourn and cry; but rejoice for his departure from the world according to the promises of Jesus Christ, and his faith in the truth.

(St. Cyprian).

Short story 137

Turn the pages of the Holy Bible

In the sixties, cancer cases were very rare, perhaps because they were not easily diagnosed. I visited a patient who suffered from blood cancer at the institute of medical research. He was in his seventies and his cancer was in a late development stage. I asked him, "What do you think of the seventy years you spent in this world?"

The patient replied, "Please turn the page of the bible that is open in front of you."

As I turned the page, he asked me, "How long did it take you to turn the page?"

I replied, "just a few seconds."

Then the patient said, "The seventy years have passed and ended as quickly as it took to turn the page of that opened Bible. Many sorrows passed by me and also many joys, many opportunities for success, and also many for disappointments. I hoped for many things and received, and many times I hoped for things that I did not receive. I loved and served. Thoughts of condemnations and hatred passed through my mind. Many things passed as if in a twinkle of an eye. This is my life. It is ending as if it was a passing moment."



Like a shadow, man walks.

My life is passing but it does not end.

I shall live here for just few moments,

But I shall stay with You forever Lord, O the mystery of my eternity.



We ought not fear this death, but fear the destruction of the soul, which is the lack of knowledge of God. This indeed is what should horrify us.

(St. Anthony
).



This is my hope and desire of God: to be at that hour without help from a human, with no one to close my eyes except for God. Then I'll be lying on my face contemplating on God.

This is dear to my heart more than anything else is.
(St. John Saba).

Short story 138

The Electric Blanket

The mother noticed that the room of her only daughter Maggie was very cold in the winter; so she bought her an electric blanket. Maggie loved to be warm, so she used to set the electric blanket to its maximum power. The mother noticed that Maggie woke up late every day since Maggie could not resist sleeping in the warmth of the blanket.

The mother did not wish to deprive her daughter from being warm, but she did not want her to become accustomed to laziness and extended sleeping periods.

Therefore, the mother used to wake up early to turn off the blanket half an hour before waking up her daughter.

As Maggie felt the cold, she could not feel comfortable on her bed.

This is what The Lover of mankind does with us. When He finds us submitting to the comfort of the world and its warmth, He allows tribulations and suffering so that we may be filled with anxiety to leave the bed of this world to be with Him in heaven.



Wake me, my Divine coach.

Take all the warmth from my bed to wake up.

I slept for a long time; wake me even by pain and suffering.

Prepare my soul for heaven; make it ready to rise.

Short story 139

A perplexing question

In Los Angeles in 1971, a young simple Coptic man took a car ride with an American man. It was late after midnight. On their way, they had this conversation:

“Where are you going?” Asked the American.

“To the Coptic Church at Robertson Ave.”

“Are you crazy? Is there a prayer held at this hour of the night?”

“It’s the bright Saturday eve which precedes Easter.”

“Come on, say the truth. Are you going to a bar?”

“No, I’m going to church.”

After a long period of silence, the Coptic young man asked the American, “What’s your religion?”

The American mocked at him and looked at him as if he was retarded. Then there was a moment of silence after which the Coptic young man asked, “If, after your death, you found yourself face to face with God, what are you going to do?”

The American man kept silent until they reached the church. The American then asked if he could enter with him the church. Indeed, they both entered. The American was astonished to find a large congregation worshipping God at this hour. He started to cry asking the young Coptic man to start visiting him to tell him more about God.

A person who is honest with himself, even if he was agnostic whenever faced with the certainty of death will say to himself, “What will I do if I come face to face with God?”

This is the reason the communists in their writings avoided, to a great extent, to mention death. It is said that Lenin wrote a letter to a friend, twenty years, after the death of his son. He revealed to him that he had lost his peace and that his son had just died recently. Time was not able to give him consolation for the death of his son.

I found a poem written by an agnostic soldier who turned into a believer in God the night of his death on the battlefield. Costi Bendeli documented the poem in his book *The Ways to God*.

Hear me O my God.

I never spoke to You before.

I was told that You do not exist.

As a fool I believed this.

Last night from within the bomb hole that I was in, I saw Your heaven.

Hence I was sure that they tricked me.

I love You dearly; I want You to know that.

Look, a big battle is about to take place.

Who knows? I might meet You this night.

It is a strange matter, but since I got acquainted with You, I no longer fear death.



Those who live in pleasure fear death, but those who live in sorrow seek death to quickly depart from this world.
(Father Aphrahat).

Short story 140

A speeding car

Peter rode with his friend John in John's car. As Peter loves praying, he lifted up his heart to the Lord his Savior beseeching God to lead his life on earth as a trip towards heaven. On the way, John sped to 45 mph. Peter started to pray for John while looking at his beloved friend, reciting in his heart "May God shepherd you and take care of you."

After a few minutes, the car speed reached 65 mph, so Peter asked God to protect him from the dangers of the road saying, "Protect me O lord for I have depended on You."

The speed increased to 75 mph. Peter's prayers became whispers, "To You I come nearer O my God."

The speed increased even more to 85 mph and Peter raised his voice saying, "Unto You O God I come near. Indeed I have come very near to You."

As the speed reached 95 mph Peter screamed with his prayer saying, "Yes this world is no longer my dwelling place."

When the speed reached 100 mph he screamed even louder, "My God unto You I come!" The speed reached over 100 mph, so Peter's screaming increased, "Yes Lord grant to my life holy memories."



So whenever my soul walks in God's path, the inner heart screams are lifted to God asking Him not only protection in this world, but to be closer to Him. I also feel my alienation from this present world and wish to meet my Savior face to face. I wish that my life be transformed into holy memories or a living testimony of God's work in me.



*My savior may You drive the car of my life.
Yes, hasten so I can come closer to You.
To realize my alienation from this world and to cry,
"I am coming to You. I desire to see You, for You are my glory."*

Short story 141

She is your daughter, not mine

Since Estakhum was suffering from a severe illness, her pious mother, Paula, knelt before God and in complete submission she cried saying,

“My God You’ve granted me Estakhum. She’s Your daughter and not mine. You know if she had finished her mission on earth or not. If You wish to take her, then Thy will be done.

If she hadn’t finished her mission, allow her to stay; not for me but to serve Your holy name.”

Indeed God granted the daughter recovery.

As death became closer to St. Paula herself, saint Gerom described those moments saying, "God showed her that her time was close. Her body and her limbs became very cold and only her holy bosom carried the warm continuous beats of the soul. She started saying with the Psalmist:

“Lord, I have loved the habitation of Your house, and the place where Your glory dwells” (Ps. 26.8).

“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” (Ps. 84.1-2).

“For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the House of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness” (Ps. 84.10).

When I asked her why she remained silent, she refused to respond to my question. I asked her if she was in pain. She answered in Greek, that she was ok and that all matters as she sees them were calm and comforting. She lifted her finger toward her lips and made the sign of the cross over them; her breath then stopped.

Short Story 142

More Powerful than Death

A Contemporary Story

This is a real story. It is not a story of a martyr living during the era of martyrdom who tolerated the suffering for the sake of the faith in Christ. On the contrary, this is what I myself came in touch with in the land of immigration. It is about a young man who faced death in the most critical circumstances.

I tell this story not from a confession of the young man or as a family secret, but through the elaborated details that the young man told. The facts of this story had touched the hearts of many Copts who lived in the same city where this young man lived.

Flowing Tears

The young man opened his eyes to find himself surrounded by a team of doctors and nurses who were binding his wounds. They were trying to save his life. He lied motionless aching all over.

“What happened?” the young man asked himself, but he could not find an answer in his memory. After deep thinking he remembered those fearful moments when his life was about to end. As he was driving his car, an accident was about to happen, and he realized that there was no way for him to escape death. He did not have time to think. Before he knew it, he lost his conscious in that accident, and there he was in the hospital. He had no idea how long he has been unconscious, is it hours, days or weeks? He had no clue.

When the young man opened his eyes, the doctors sighed of relief. The nurses tried to start a conversation with him about anything other than the car accident, trying to fill his heart with tranquility and comfort. They wanted to direct his thoughts away from the pain. As for him, his attention was directed to something else other than what they were talking about, though they were nice and compassionate, and showed great concern.

He was completely silent and did not utter a word. He did not even show any expression on his face. The strange thing was that he did not even ask them about the accident, or the extent of his injuries. He did not show any concern or worry about his life. He did not ask about his wife, and two children, his family who left their homeland and relatives to immigrate and live thousands of miles away. This small family was neglected by this young man, who just wanted to have fun and was only seeking his own pleasure what ever the price was.

His eyes were not looking at anyone or anything around him, but rather staring far away where what no one else can see. He gathered all his energy and closed his eyes again; but tears were flowing out of it in a noticeable way. He could not lift his hands to wipe the tears, so one of the nurses reached and wiped his tears gently. Everyone around him thought that since he gained his conscious he started to feel the severity of pain from his serious injuries. “Could it be that he was unable to express his pain by words, and that is why his eyes were filled with tears?” Everyone thought they did not realize what was on his mind.

As the young man gained his conscious, he did not feel the pain. On the contrary his thoughts and attention were far away from the accident, his injuries and the pain. He felt that

the unseen God has transfigured before him visiting him with his love as if He was taking him into His bosom. He was able to feel the tender and merciful hand of God patting his shoulder.

This young man's eyes were opened to see things he was unable to see before and his heart felt things he was unable to feel before. He felt the concern of his Savior towards him and he started calling upon Him, "My life could have ended by this dreadful accident as it usually happens with many, but Your love for me let You save me. You have given me a new chance to return back to You, and I will repent that You may be my share."

The world has become small in the eyes of the injured young man. He realized that all the efforts he has done for his own pleasure evaporated in few moments. He felt that he was deceived by the lust of his body and fooled by the pleasures of the world. But now the gates of heaven are opened specially for him. He saw God's plan for his salvation unfold clearly before his eyes. It was as if God had left everything to be concerned only with his salvation. He **"who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."**

His tribulation turned to a great opportunity for repentance and he reaped the fruit of repentance: peace and joy. His heart and his feelings surpassed the pain of his body. He did not think about the seriousness of his injuries or become worried about the fate of his family if he died and left them in a strange country.

Any way the young man's heart and thoughts were as if separated from the body and its pain. He ascended with his thoughts and feelings to heaven declaring his repentance, thanking God for giving him another chance.

The critical moment passed. His inner peace helped in healing his wounds faster. The doctors told him he could leave the hospital and go home.

His family received him with great joy, for they felt as if they have lost him for a while because of the weakness of the human nature and the temptations of the world. Then, he put in his heart to live for God and to take good care of his family. It was a new beginning of a new life for all the family.

The young man was not healed completely from his wounds and he revisited the hospital from time to time for medical supervision. This did not disturb the peace of the family or let them lose their peace and joy.

One day the young man felt severe pain in his stomach, and was taken to the hospital. He was investigated immediately by the doctor who took care of him after the accident. The doctor thought that the pain was a result of, or somehow related to, the accident.

After performing the necessary tests and examining him, the doctor told him an urgent surgery was needed with no delay to remove tumors that appeared in his stomach.

I do not know what the reaction of his wife was when she heard this news from the doctor. I know this would be very disturbing news in Egypt. How much more would it be in this situation in a strange land away from the family and the loved ones! There was no family atmosphere that may comfort him, no friends to surround him in the time of his calamity and his sickness.

As for the young man, he agreed upon having the surgery without even asking about the amount of risk involved. He did not show any sign of disturbance. On the day of the surgery and after the young man regained his conscious, the doctor who was standing next to his bed started talking to him frankly. "We thought that we would remove the tumors from your stomach. But we were surprised when we found out that the tumors spread all over your abdomen

to a degree that made us unable to remove anything. There is no cure for you here or at any other place in the world. Cancer had spread all over your intestine. All that we can offer is some injections and medication to relieve your pain. It would be few weeks, after which you'll suffer unbearable pains. Then you would go into a coma and your life will end shortly after. I advise you to leave the hospital so that you can arrange with an attorney to prepare your will and arrange for the needs of your family."

The doctor talked to his wife about the painful news and asked her to deal with this rationally and objectively, and not emotionally. This was very hard on the wife, because of the circumstances around her. She needed to become tougher for a while to be able to manage her situation. The young husband left the hospital before his wounds were healed from the surgery. His poor wife accompanied him, and the shadow of death was in front of her face, attacking her young husband to destroy the family completely.

More Powerful than Death

One afternoon, a deacon came to me very disturbed. I asked him, "Why are you disturbed?"

He answered bitterly, "I've a Coptic colleague at work, whom you don't know. He hasn't been to church for years even before he came to this country. His address isn't in your church records. He's a very special case and he lives far from the church. He's a good friend of mine and he's a very nice and loving young man. It's known about him that he's extremely open and frank that he didn't leave any colleague whatever his race is, till he told him the details of his tragedy."

The deacon told me this story with a lot of concern, as if the injured one was his brother or one of his family members.

As soon as I heard this story I was very sad. I felt the responsibility of the church toward that person even if he did not leave his address in the church. The church should search for every soul that is troubled by sin, withdrawn to the world, or deceived by its pleasures. Imagine what would have happened if this young man died before he repented. Who would have been responsible for that? I put in my heart to go immediately to visit this family, and try to save this young man before he gives up his last breath. I felt I needed to take care of the family spiritually and psychologically.

Within minutes I was on my way with the deacon to visit this family. I did not think what to say to a strange young man who was facing death, or to the family members who were about to lose the only source of support they had, represented in this young man. One thing I was sure of, that God the Lover of mankind is the only one who can help His children, and strengthen them in time of tribulation.

After less than an hour I was knocking on the door, a kindhearted young lady opened the door. She was calm and simply said to me, "Father, pray for my husband, that God would heal him."

I comforted her with simple words and went to the room where her husband lied. He was delighted when we entered his room as if heaven was opened before him. He was lying in bed motionless, but he was in a strange lively state. He lifted his head and I hugged him. His face was cheerful and his heart was full of joy.

I asked myself, "Is this is a state of a person who faces certain death and know that his death is so close and no one will carry the responsibility of his family after him?"

I did not expect to see him in such a state of cheerfulness. Many are disturbed and fear sickness and death. Many feel guilty and disturbed in this kind of situation. They feel guilty towards their children because they took them from among their family and brought them unto this far and strange land.

Any way the young man welcomed me with his heart more than his words. I asked everyone to leave the room, so that he can confess. I can not speak about what went on during these great moments, but I can say that I felt the effect of the Spirit of God as if heaven had been opened, and the heavenly hosts are rejoicing for his repentance.

The young man offered a sincere and true repentance after many years away from the Lord. His tears of repentance were mixed with the tears of spiritual joy and peace. As for his confession it is not my right to reveal it, even after his departure. All I can say I was shaken with each word he spoke; I was crushed with his broken and contrite heart. I rejoiced for his joy and peace. After confession the deacon and the wife returned to the room. We talked about the word of God, we praised God and offered thanks, and Eternity was the center of our contemplation.

The young man asked for some tapes of the Divine Liturgy, and the Psalmody (praises) that he may hear it and keep his mind on his Savior at all times. He also asked to have communion and I brought communion to him several times. Many of his friends, the Copts, visited him to see how the young man was facing death with joy had learned a lesson for their lives.

To tell the truth, during all my visits to him, I did not see him once gloomy or depressed though he was suffering from severe cancer pains. I did not see him once grumbling; but so many who were in pain visited him and came out of his home with their hearts full of peace. His talk with his visitors was about the providence of God, His love and about eternity which he sought and his anxiety to see it.

Many times he said these words, "Pray for me father not to be healed, I'm not afraid of death, but I thank God who enables me to have the eternal life. Ask God and pray for me not to go through the severe pain which the doctor said I'd go through, so that I wouldn't be weakened and sin even with my thoughts or my heart towards God. I don't ask God to let me live longer because of my two young daughters, for they are His children and He can take better care of them."

Three weeks went by and the young man did not enter the stage of severe pain. The wife called for me in the church and left a message that her husband went into a coma and he was in critical condition. She called the ambulance to take him to the hospital. I heard the message at a late hour at night and I went immediately to the hospital. The nurses told me that his wife had left and he was alone.

Since he was in a coma he spoke to no one and here he was spending the last moments of his life. I entered the room where he was alone except for one nurse who was watching him. I stood before that angel who suffered pain with joy. After I prayed, I called his name whispering. He opened his eyes, but could not speak and he smiled for a little while, closed his eyes and gave his last breath.

Short Story 143

*Whose Chair is this?
Glories are waiting for me!*

In the bedroom

The young lady heard knocking on her door. When she opened the door, she was stunned to see a monk standing at the doorstep. She did not know what to do. The monk realized her disturbance; he smiled and said, "May I come in?"

The lady said, "Welcome my father."

The monk entered the living room. Quiet moments passed. The lady was thinking, "What does this monk want from me? Doesn't he know that my house is a bordello? Maybe he is burned with passion. Is that why he came? Or was he attracted to my beauty? But I see him pure and chaste. Maybe he came to scold me! How dares he? I won't allow it. Let him teach people in his monastery or in his church, but he won't invade my privacy to scold or rebuke me in my house."

As the young lady was wondering in her mind, the monk asked her nicely, "How are you doing?"

She answered, "Fine!"

Before she asked his name or about his monastery, he put his hand in his pocket and gave her some money. The young lady realized what he came for. She held his hand and led him to her bedroom. As they sat, the monk asked her, "Is there any other inner room in here so nobody may see us?"

Indeed she entered with him into an inner room. For the second time the monk asked, "Is there any other inner room so nobody can see us?"

"Why do you ask monk? Nobody is in the room and nobody will enter here with us." she answered.

"I desire that no one sees us. I want a safer room so no one ever see us."

"What do you mean that no one will ever see us?"

"I want a room where God can't see us."

"What are you saying father? A place where God can't see us! God sees us wherever we are."

Hence the monk started crying and said, "I can't my daughter commit this sin before the eyes of God, The one who loved me, and gave His Son for my salvation. I can not distress His heart. I don't fear people; let them say whatever they want to say. But I fear God, only Him I fear. I fear God who created me in His image and likeness. When I fell, He could not tolerate to let me perish. He died on the cross that I may live."

Then he went on and on about the endless love of God and redemption. The girl started crying bitterly and said to him, "What's the solution, my father? Can God accept me after all what I have done?"

"Yes, my daughter, God accepts everyone, He

"Who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

"I'm an adulteress. I defiled the lives of a lot of men, and broke up many homes."

"Don't be afraid my daughter. Heaven rejoices with your repentance."

“Maybe my father, you do not know how evil I’m? I am not just a person that needs repentance; I’m a very evil person. My blood is mixed with lust, and my body with sin.”

The young lady fell crying at the feet of the monk. As he could not tolerate her tears he cried also and held her hand to lift her up, saying, “Don’t be afraid my daughter. Have hope in the Lord. He loves you. He’d sent me for your salvation.”

Then she controlled herself a little and said to the monk, “Don’t leave me my father till you get me out of this place. I can no longer stand to stay at the place of sin.”

He answered, “I won’t leave you till my soul rests concerning you.”

The young lady asked, “Is there a place out of the city to spend the rest of my days there to repent?”

The monk said to her, “I’ll prepare a place for you.”

In the market place

She stood up saying, “Tolerate my weakness father. Please wait several hours. I want to get rid of everything I gathered from this sinful life.”

The monk went to the hall of the house. The young lady put all her belongings in suitcases. She called carriers and went out with them, leaving the monk alone.

She went towards the market of the city. The people of the city were amazed asking themselves to where beautiful Taees is leaving.

Many were watching her; some even followed her to know where she was going. As she reached the middle of the city she asked the carrier to stop and put down her bags, then she paid him. Everyone was surprised. Many gathered around her amazed, no one asked here anything.

Taees looked to the people with tears and said, “Come on, all of you, who traded with me; look, I’ll burn all that I have gathered from the filthy life I lived.”

Then Taees set fire at all her suitcases before hearing any comment.

When Taees came back to her home she opened the door quietly to find the monk praying towards the east. She did not wait for him to finish his prayers. She fell at his feet saying, “Here I’m at your hand. Don’t leave me till the grace of God works in me. Tell me what I should do.”

The monk stopped his prayers and lifted Taees from the floor. She insisted not to sit on a chair. Then he asked, “What’s your plan my daughter?”

“I’ve no plan, father. God led you to me, and worked through you to release me from this sinful life.”

The monk said, “I don’t know a place except the convent.”

“Will they accept me, father?” she asked.

“If God accepts you how can anyone reject you?”

“But I’m a defiled person, how can I live among the virgins?”

“I know that God, who saved us by His blood, loves all sinners who repent from all their hearts.”

After a short conversation, they both left, and the people of the city who watched from afar were amazed. Who is that great man who changed the life of such a wicked person? Taees was walking calmly with a broken contrite heart, her head down and her tears falling on her cheeks. She accompanied the monk and did not look left or right till they reached one of the nunneries.

The monk met the Abbess of the monastery, introduced Taees to her and asked for Taees to be taken care of. Taees looked at the Abbess and said, “Mother, I’m defiled in heart, thoughts

and body. I've one request. I need a small room to live by myself alone to weep the rest of my life for the sins I have committed."

The Abbess patted her shoulder saying, "You're my daughter, my young sister. The Lord forgives us all our sins."

Nevertheless, Taees said, "Please don't treat me kindly like that; don't be gentle with me and don't let your heart be compassionate on me. I need severe discipline. My heart aches; my thoughts were evil and my body is full of sin and corruption. I can't live among saints. Let me live by myself. I'm less than all humans."

Taees insisted on her request. Therefore, the Abbess offered a small cell to her with a small window, from which she was offered dry bread and water.

When the monk asked to leave to go back to his monastery, Taees said, "Father, you didn't tell me how to pray."

The monk did not speak for a while. He was thinking. He wanted her to live a real repentance. He said, "You don't deserve to pray to God or stretch your hands towards Him, nor even mention His Holy name by your lips, because your lips are defiled and your hands are unclean. You ought to sit looking towards the east and say, "Oh You who created me have mercy on me."

Taees cheered and rejoiced with the words of the monk, kissed his hand and said, "I know I'm a sinner, pray for me my father so that God may have mercy on me."

He bid her farewell and left with the Abbess.

Whose chair is this?

The monk returned to his cell with his heart full of peace glorifying God who grants repentance to all sinners. The story of Taees occupied the monk's thoughts. He could not forget her tears. So he concentrated his prayers on her day and night. He prayed and supplicated to God and asked, "Give comfort to my heart Lord concerning Taees."

Days passed and the story of Taees still occupied his mind. He left his cell and went to the desert to meet the father of the monks Father Anthony. The monk reached the cave of St. Anthony and as they met they greeted one another, knelt to the ground and kissed each other.

As the monk Serapion told St. Anthony the story of Taees, St. Anthony thanked God.

He comforted father Serapion and said, "Taees is now in the hands of God, the Lover of all mankind, who desires our salvation and forgives our sins and does not want to remind us of them." He continued, "To be more comforted let us pray with some of the monks so that God may reveal to us the destiny of this daughter."

St. Anthony called some of his sons, the monks. He told them the deeds of God with Taees and asked them to dedicate their prayers this night so that God may comfort their hearts concerning Taees. At night they all prayed concerning this matter. About midnight one of the monks saw a vision.

He saw as if heaven was opened and an extremely beautiful chair was carried by the angels. The monk looked to the chair surprised. One of the angels asked the monk, "Why are you amazed? Do you know whose chair this is?"

The monk answered, "Sure, it's for our father Anthony."

But the angel said, "This chair is for Taees."

The monk rejoiced because of this vision. In the morning he told the vision to St. Anthony and father Serapion and to the other monks. They all gave glory and thanks to God.

Father Serapion left the western desert and went to the convent to tell the Abbess and comfort her concerning Taees.

Father Serapion met the Abbess who informed him that Taees had departed from the world. He told her what happened and they glorified God. The Abbess gathered all the nuns and father Serapion told them the story of Taees, this great Saint who, by her true repentance, won a glorious place in heaven.

Stories for consolation

Short Stories Along with the story “LOVE AND TEARS” 144-156

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Short Story No. 144

The New John

In a small village lived John the fisherman. He was a heavy drunkard who spent all his money on drinking while his wife and children lived miserably. His wife used to work as a housemaid to earn daily living. The wife along with the relatives tried to prevent John from drinking but in vain. He could not stop it, careless of his health and the needs of his family. He met a believer who talked to him about God's great love for him and the price which Christ has paid to save him. He attracted John's heart to Heavens to find in it his fullness, joy and inner peace. He no longer suffered from emptiness, isolation and such feelings which led him to drunkenness.

John stopped drinking and began to work seriously as a fisherman giving all his earnings to his family and the needy. His family no longer lived in need; therefore, they opened their hearts as well as their house to the needy and the broken hearted.

Once his wife asked him if it was possible to change their house for, it was inconvenient for bringing up their children. He agreed. As he met a house owner he asked him to rent his house. The house owner said, "Honestly, I can't let you rent my house."

"Why?"

"I don't guarantee that you would pay the monthly rent."

"Why do you judge me so? Do you know me?"

"Yes."

"Did you deal with me before?"

"No, but I know that you spend all your money on wine."

At the moment, John took out some golden coins from his pocket saying, "I'm not a drunkard. God's blessing fills my life and my home and I no more buy wine by the grace of God."

The owner of the house was surprised on seeing the golden coins.

"This John you are speaking about is dead." John said. "The new John has risen with Christ the giver of resurrection. You were astonished when you saw the golden coins but if you saw my inner heart you will find wonders. In it there is the invaluable kingdom of God. I'm a new creation in Jesus Christ my Savior. His Holy Spirit works within me. He let me rest in His Father's bosom. Behold, all my life is renewed"

The house owner rejoiced and gave John the keys under no condition saying, "I'm pleased that you'll dwell in my house, New John."



*May Your light shine in me,
So that I kindle with the love of heavens.
May I not be drunkard with the world,
So that I can realize Your love.
Grant me a new heart, a new thought,
A new name and a new mansion.*

Short Story No. 145

The Affection of a Chicken

An American farmer smelt smoke so he listened to the local news. He knew that fire caught the cornfields two weeks before its final growth. He knew that fire during such time is uncontrollable. He knew also that fire would reach his field with the winds and started to think, "What shall I do as fire should burn my field, my house and the barn? I'll lose everything."

He started to burn the field in a way so as his house and the barn should not be surrounded by fields of dry corn. He burnt his field but saved his house and the barn. While walking by his field depressed for what he lost, he saw a burnt chicken spreading its wings. He looked at it with tears in his eyes and as he moved it, he found its small chicks running. He looked at the affectionate chicken which had covered its chicks under its body allowing itself to be burnt for their sake. It was burnt without escaping or moving its wings to protect its chicks, while he grieved on material losses. He lifted up his eyes saying, "My beloved Savior! I understand now what You said,

**"How often I wanted to gather your children together,
As a hen gathers her brood under her wings."**

I thank You for, though You did not sin, You put Your body to death joyfully to bear the fire of my sins. I thought that fire could destroy You but in Your love, You brought me with Your death to life."

Short Story No. 146

“And by His Stripes we are Healed”

As Raymond crept to the prayer’s room calmly, he found his father looking at the resurrection icon with tears running down his cheeks. An hour later, Raymond and his father talked to each other.

“Father, I see you contemplating on the resurrection icon, why?”

“I’m contemplating on the stripes of my Lord. Though He had risen from the dead, stripes still exist on His hands, feet and sides.”

“Will the stripes of our bodies remain after resurrection?”

“No, as they’re deformities and we won’t have deformed bodies in heaven.”

“So why do the stripes of our Savior still exist?”

“Because these are the stripes of His love for mankind, He was wounded for our transgressions. As Isaiah says,

“By His stripes we are healed.”

“Can you explain to me this verse?”

“The following story may reveal to you its meaning.

A fire caught a small house. On the upper floor there was a ten-year old boy. The widowed mother was in the garden. She screamed and ran to the staircase to rescue her only son. However, she suffocated and died. As Mark saw what had happened and perceived that the child was in danger, he climbed the back sewage pipes in spite of being hot because of the fire. He entered from the window, carried the child and returned the say way.

The fire engine came and put down the fire.

All people grieved over the widowed mother who suffocated when she wanted to rescue her only son. All sights were directed towards the poor child who lost his parents and was rescued from actual death. All people asked who would be guardian for this poor child. The council of the village was held and the richest man said, “I’m ready to bring him up.”

One of the child’s relatives replied, “Thank you for your feeling but I’m his kinsman. He may easily get used to my children and be a brother to them.”

The pastor of the church said, “I’m a father and he’s my child, I’ll be happy to have him with us.”

One of the laymen of the church said, “we’re all fathers to him As for me, I’ll be blessed to have him as one of my family members.”

Suddenly a man came with his hands in his pockets; he went to the child and showed him his palms. The child soon embraced the man and insisted on going out with him.

The attendants were astonished and asked the man about what had happened. He showed them his hands which were burnt when he climbed the hot pipes to rescue the child.

They all cried, “He’s the only one who deserves to adopt the child. The burns remained to declare his sacrificing practical love.”

The father commented on the story, “Likewise, Christ came to our home and bore the fire of our sins. He was nailed to the cross to save us. He was pierced to protect us. His stripes are the secret behind our eternal healing.”



*O who had risen from the dead, grant me
To meditate on Your stripes of love.
Carry me to Your pierced side.*

*May I see Your fiery love instead of my sins.
I see You giving me life O resurrection.
Who can possess me but You!*

Short Story No. 147

Escape

St. Serapion the great was known for purity and chastity and was respected by all monks and nuns. Once he met a nun and asked her about her personal affairs. Finally he asked her for an apophthegm. She said, "Escape."

"From what?"

"Escape from what you're doing."

"What am I doing?"

"Forgetting your sins and not minding your own business."

The great father was silent for he benefited from what she said. Our fathers and mothers were concerned with their salvation and that of others kindly, bravely and without hypocrisy. Though he was a great Saint he needed the advice of a nun to be only concerned with his spiritual growth.



*Open my eyes to see You coming on the clouds,
Taking Your believers to an unspeakable glory.
May I be concerned with my eternity and that of my brethren.
May I not be concerned with nonsense.
May I be always obsessed with You.
You are my love, my joy and my glory.
You are my fullness.*

Short Story No. 148

Who Supports Me?

A monk told me the following story:

I joined the monastery after having a prestigious job after graduation. I lived all my life spoiled by my family, friends and colleagues. While I was a novice I was asked to be responsible for baking. I poured water over the flower and this was my first time to bake. Few minutes later I felt tired as I had no experience in such a work. I asked myself, “Who will support me? I’m ashamed of asking God to help me do this earthly work. Is it fit to ask Virgin Mary the queen to help me? There’s no doubt that St. Demiana is experienced in baking as she was a mother to forty virgins.” I asked for her help and I really felt happy while baking. I finished baking and the monks were amazed how I finished so quickly. St. Demiana became my intercessor in this work which, with God’s blessing, was transferred from a manual work to a great joy.



*Thank You O the Lover of mankind,
For giving me a cloud of witnesses surrounding me.
It supports me for the salvation of my soul,
It helps me reach a partnership with You.
With it my life is transferred to a heaven.*

Short Story No. 149

Can You Wait for Me?

One of the monks used to enter the church of the monastery before doing any work. He used to walk to the Altar in awe worshiping and glorifying the Lord. His job was to prepare food for the monks. He entered the church and worshiped God as usual. As he looked to the Altar he saw Jesus Christ appearing to him with His glory. He looked at Jesus for few seconds and said,

“I don’t deserve to see You.

I really desire not to leave You.

Now I’ve to prepare food for my brethren.

They’re Your sons and I serve them for Your sake.

Do You allow me to leave and serve them?

Can You wait for me?

I long to look at You O The Lover of mankind.”

The monk left the church and went to serve his brethren praising God. After finishing his work he went to the church to find Christ waiting for Him joyfully.



Let me see You in my brethren.

I serve You in them, You who serve all.

I rejoice with serving them thus I rejoice on seeing You.

May I love You in them practically not with words.

Short Story No. 150

A Poisoned Watermelon

As Sam returned from school, he found his father writing a sign, "Warning! There's only one poisoned watermelon which no one knows but the farmer."

Sam said wondering, "What is that father?"

"As watermelons grow, thieves come to steal them by night."

"Why do you poison a watermelon, Dad? It may kill a family or two."

"I didn't poison any watermelon."

"I'm sorry, you're lying."

"I don't want to lie but I found no other means to prevent the thieves from stealing."

"Do you want to lose eternity for the sake of watermelons? Didn't the Bible say,

"But the cowardly, unbelieving ...and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with Fire and brimstone, which is the second death"

(Rev. 21.8)?"

"What shall I do son?"

"Don't lie under any condition, father."

The farmer insisted on hanging the sign at the entrance of the field of the watermelons so that the thieves would not steal them. The thieves came by night and when they found the sign they wondered, "Did he truly poison a watermelon?"

They started arguing but reached no conclusion. Finally, they decided to leave lest anyone of them should get poisoned.

As Sam reproached his father, his father said, "Now for three days no thief approached the field, didn't my plane succeed?"

Sam answered, "You may think it to be successful but you made God angry with us which would deprive us of His blessings."

Father commented, "God knows my heart. There was no way out but lying."

A week later, Sam found his father very sad. As he asked him about the reason behind his sadness, father said, "The thieves replaced my sign with another large one that says, "There are two poisoned watermelons." I'm at a loss. Did they really poison one of the watermelons or did they lie like me? I don't know what to do. I can neither sell the watermelons nor eat them. I've lost the whole field."

Sam commented, "Dad, you've lost the timely and the eternal. As you measured lies to people, they measured you more of the same measure."



May I possess You, O the Eternal truth,

So that I may never lie.

Grant me to say the truth no matter how much it costs.

And not to lie no matter how much it profits me.

Let me say the truth to possess You O the Truth.

Short Story No. 151

A Bee with No Sucker

Isaac was allergy because of a bee's sucker. Doctors recommended that he should not go to any place where bees can be found. As Isaac was on a journey with his father, a bee came into the car. Isaac and his father panicked. As the father had to protect his son, he caught the bee in his hands. With his nails he cut the bee's sucker and released it. As the bee flew again in the car, Isaac panicked. However, his father embraced him saying, "Don't be afraid Isaac, I cut its sucker, it won't harm you. Let her fly."



Christ lived among us.

Death, that kills us, tried to kill Him but it could not kill the Giver of life.

Christ caught death and cut its sting (the bee's sucker).

Now with all confidence we praise,

"O Death, where is your sting?

O Hades, where is your victory?"

Thanks to Christ who, in His Fatherhood, made us conquer our last enemy: Death.

Short Story No. 152

Thy Will Be Done

After dinner, Stephan went to his office to study and read as usual. His son Mark came in asking, "Can I switch on the TV to watch the serial, Dad?"

"We specified the programs which you should watch in order to give everything its time." Stephen answered. "I want you always successful, informed and cultured. You should give time to your spiritual life, study, etc."

Mark was silent for a while, and then said, "I kept what we have agreed on but do you mind watching the serial?"

Stephen talked to him gently but Mark repeated the question several times. Suddenly Mark raised his voice asking, "Do you mind?"

The mother heard her son's loud voice thus she came to know the reason as she knew that her husband was gentle dealing with his son as a friend.

Mark said to his mother, "I'm asking Dad to know his will." Stephen replied, "You don't want to know neither my will nor your mother's yet you need us to follow your will. You want my consent by urging me. Do what ever you like."



Many a time we pray "**Thy will be done**", while we urge God to complete our will not His. Many a time He guides us, at last, He allows us to fulfil our will in order to experience our faults.



*May my depth say with my tongue,
"Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven."
May my prayers be manifested in my life and behavior.
Grant me to submit to You.
Shine on me with Your light so that I would fulfil Your will.
I will then rejoice with it, O Divine Wisdom.*

Short Story No. 153

A wrong Address

An evil thought occurred to Lucy's mind. She kept silent for a while thinking how such a thought occurred to her. It was Satan knocking the door of her heart so that she might open to him. He would then enter and reign over her. Lucy knelt down and said to Lord Jesus Christ, "Lord Jesus Christ, I fear to open the door lest the enemy should break through it and sit on your throne inside me. Please Lord, open the door yourself."

Lord Jesus Christ opened the door to find the evil one escaping and saying, "It's a wrong address."

Lord Jesus closed the door of Lucy's heart Himself and declared the establishment of His joyful kingdom in her.



*Lord, put a guard over the doors of my heart; guard them Yourself.
The enemy will then escape never to return.
You are the Key of David, who opens the doors of my heart,
So that the righteous would enter.
You close the doors of my heart.
Thus, the enemy would never dare to knock them.
You are my victory and joy.*

Short Story No. 154

Who Taught My Daughter Lying?

Paul entered his house to find his wife very upset. As he asked her about the reason, she answered, "I don't know who taught my daughter to tell lies. I tried by all means but in vain. She's been accustomed to telling lies."

Two days later, as Paul was talking gently to his wife, he said, "I just want to ask you who taught your daughter lying."

"Maybe her friends or for fear of being punished, isn't it so?" The wife said.

Paul smiled and said gently, "Do you remember what you said to Sally when she phoned you two weeks ago?"

"I welcomed her."

"Yes, but after the call, didn't you say that you didn't want her to enter our home?"

"I said so."

"When she came, didn't you meet her cheerfully saying to her that we missed her and that she blessed our home?"

"Did you expect me to dismiss her?"

"No, but your daughter learnt hypocrisy and telling lies. She knew that you didn't want her visit while, you welcomed her as if you missed her much."

His wife kept silent for a while. Then, she whispered, "Truly, it's I who taught my daughter telling lies."



*You want me to be an icon of Heaven,
To bear witness for the truth.
Notwithstanding, I foolishly flatter people and tell them lies,
Making many excuses.
Woe unto me, because of whom many people stumble.
Dwell in me O Truth,
So that lies and hypocrisy may find no place in me.*

Short Story No. 155

A Conference for the Tools of Carpentry

The tools of carpentry met together on a conference. As the hammer wanted to head the conference, the tools protested, "How can the hammer head the conference while he's very noisy. He should leave the conference."

"If I have to leave for my noise, then, the anvil should also leave since he works on the surface. His work has no depth." The hammer said.

When the anvil heard this, he protested, "If you want me to leave, then, the ruler should also leave. He's only used in measuring. He proudly claims that he's the only one who works accurately."

The ruler complained, "If I have to leave because of my pride, then, the sandpaper doesn't deserve to participate in the conference for he's rough and his sound is disgusting." Thus, each tool thought no one but him deserved to participate in the conference. When the carpenter of Nazareth came in, he took the wood and worked silently with the hammer, the anvil, the ruler, the sandpaper and the nails. He made a magnificent cross which all the tools united to praise for they all participated in the work. They all felt that they needed each other in the hands of the Wonderful Savior.



*My soul suffers from pride.
I despise the works and thoughts of others.
Sometimes, I suffer from frustration.
Thus, I see myself without talents
Doing nothing valuable.
Take me with Your right hand and work in me as in my brethren.
Make from us ambassadors for You.
You are wonderful in Your work O Lord.
You raise us out of the dust
And bring us to Your Father's bosom.
We're proud of all Your tools.*

Short Story No. 156

Love And Tears

**Presented by
St. Ephraim Syrus**

A Sinful Woman

Jesus was invited to a banquet. As a sinful woman heard of this invitation she rejoiced. She realized that she bound herself to pain with her sins. She lamented herself,

“What did I profit of my fornication? I disgraced the innocent. I ruined the orphans. I robbed the merchants’ money rudely. However I was not satisfied. Like a sea storm, I made many ships sink. Why don’t I gain a Man who’s able to reform me? For God, who reform sinners, is one while the devils are many.” She had shower, erased the make-up which blinded her eyes and wept. She put off her impure clothes and jewelry intending to put on goodness. She took her jewelry and looked to heaven crying silently to Him who hears her carefully, “This is the profit of my sin; with it I will buy my salvation.”

With The Ointment Salesman

She took her jewelry and went sorrowful to the ointment salesman. When the seller saw her asked her wondering, “Isn’t it enough for you to contaminate the whole city. Why did you put off your impure clothes and pretend of being modest? You used to come to me in fine clothes bringing with you some jewels to buy expensive perfumes. However, today you’re coming with ordinary clothes bringing much gold. What happened? You should either put on fine clothes for you are rich or buy perfumes that suit these ordinary clothes. Are you going to meet a merchant who doesn’t like fornication thus you want to deceive him by these modest clothes? If he’s pure, I pity him. He’ll be destroyed. I advice you to desert all your lovers and choose for yourself a groom who will reform you.”

What the seller said was wise. She answered, “Don’t hinder me. I won’t take the ointments for free; I’ll pay for it. Take the gold which will not last and give me the ointment that will last for the Immortal One. I’ll meet a rich merchant as you said. He’ll rob me of my sins and I’ll rob him of his richness. As for marriage, I’ve a heavenly groom. His kingdom is forever.”

She took the ointment and left.

A Conversation with the Devil

When the devil saw her, he grieved much. However, he was glad as he saw her taking the ointment yet, he was afraid because of her modest dress. He followed her closely. He listened to her murmur. He examined her eyes to see where she was going. The cunning devil knows our purpose by means of our words.

Being unable to change her thought, he appeared to her as a man and a group of young men looking like her old lovers. He said to her, “Where are you going, lady? Why are you in a hurry? Why are you so meek like a slave? You’re wearing a simple dress instead of the luxurious ones. Instead of the jewelry, you don’t even wear a ring. What do you intend to do?

Did one of your lovers die and you are going to shroud him? Let me go with you to the tomb and share with you your grief.”

She answered, “I’m really going to bury a dead. My sinful thought is the one who died.”

He said to her, “Enough of that nonsense, I’m your lover. I’ll give gold more than before.”

The woman answered, “You’re not a lover of mine. My groom is in heaven, God, whose kingdom is forever. I say frankly and never lie; I’ve been a slave to Satan since my childhood. He treaded me under his feat and I in turn ruined many. I was blind not knowing that He’s the one who gives sight to the blind. I’m going to Him to gain sight, to be myself light for many.”

Satan grieved and cried loudly, “You conquered me O woman, I don’t know what to do.”

Satan at a Loss

Being unable to change her thought, Satan lamented himself, “From now on I will lose my greatness and pride. How can I trap her who chose to be high? I’ll go to where Jesus is as she is about to be there. I will tell Him that this woman is an adulteress so that He may despise her. I’ll say to Him, “This woman has corrupted many men while You’re righteous and many people gather to see You. If they saw You talking to an adulteress, no one will accept You.” But how can I go to Jesus who knows all hidden things and who I’m? He knows my bad intention; He’ll probably rebuke me and all my tricks would then fail.

I’ll go to Simon who doesn’t know what’s hidden and say to him, “Tell me about the Man you’re entertaining in your house. Is He righteous or a friend of sinners? I’m a rich man and I want to entertain Him like you to be blessed by Him.”

Simon said, “Since I saw Him I found no impurity in Him but serenity and peace. He healed the weak and the sick for free. In the wilderness, He saw the multitudes hungry so He seated them on the grass and filled them with His mercy. The lonely widow followed her son’s funeral to the grave but He consoled her and restored his life to him. He healed the dumb, the blind and the leper with a word. I heard about Him, so I invited Him to bless my possessions and my sheep.”

Satan said to him, “Don’t honor someone so rashly. He seems to be respectable and not liking wine. If He left your house without talking to an adulteress, He should be righteous then.” Satan said this cunningly and stood at a distance to see what would happen.

The Adulteress at the Door

The woman stood at the door praying, “Lord, don’t reject me as You’ve called me. As You don’t despise me, open to me the doors of Your mercy to refuge to You. Protect me from Satan and all his army.”

As Simon saw her, he said to her, “Go out O adulteress for, He who’s here is righteous together with all His followers. Aren’t you ashamed of your sins? You won’t be able to trap this man for, He’s righteous.”

The woman replied, “You’re really the host but you don’t know what’s hidden. I’ll present my case at the banquet and nobody will blame you if you let me in.”

He dismissed her. Jesus called for Simon and said, "If there's anybody at the door let him in. If he's hungry, thirsty or sick he'll take what he needs and go. Let sinners come to Me for, I came to carry them to heaven."

A Meeting with Jesus

Simon let her in. she came in and stood at Jesus' feet praying, "My tears are like springs washing the feet of Him who seeks the sinners. Would You allow me to wipe Your pure body with my heavy hair? Would You allow my impure lips to kiss Your feet?"

As Simon saw that, a thought leapt into his mind, "What's that? An adulteress enters my pure house! If I'd known this, I wouldn't have invited You Jesus. You deceived me. He isn't righteous as I thought. If He'd been a prophet, He'd have known that this woman is an adulteress; He wouldn't have let her wash His feet with her tears and kiss them with her lips."

Knowing his thoughts, Jesus said to him, "**Simon, I have something to say to you.**" Simon was ashamed of himself as he was blaspheming Jesus; yet, Jesus talked to him gently as a man talks with his friend. He replied, "**Teacher, say it.**"

"There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, And the other fifty. And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?"

Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more."

And He said to him, "You have rightly judged." Then He returned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, (you aren't hospitable as you should be)

But she washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head, (see what she deserves).

You gave Me no kiss, (see your enmity).

But this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in, (see her love).

You did not anoint My head with oil, (see your negligence).

But this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil, (see her zeal).

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."

Then He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

Then Simon thought, "Your sins are forgiven! Who forgives sins but God?

Who is this person who knew that the woman is a sinner but her love is great. He knew even my thoughts. He must be more than a prophet.

I judged Him rashly yet He talked to me gently.

I blasphemed Him secretly and He is now revealing Himself to me.

He is the Lover.

He forgives sins.

He knows my thoughts and secrets.

He is the God of the prophets."

SHORT STORIES

157-170 With the Story “The Worshipping Slave”

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Short Story No. 157

The Blessed Tailor

Stephan told his son about the life of St. Anthony and how he sold all his belongings and gave the proceedings to the poor. St. Anthony started his ascetic life in a hut by the river shore. Then, he moved to the Eastern Desert where he lived in a cave. He was living the life of prayers. To support himself, he wove baskets from palm-tree branches and gave what was left of money to the needy.

The son followed the story of St. Anthony and how the devils used to wage wars against him but he always overcame them. The son asked, "Was St. Anthony avoiding the people?"

Father replied, "Sometimes he avoided the people but he loved them and prayed for everyone."

"Why didn't he serve in a church?"

"He never served as a deacon or as a priest but he supported Pope Athanasius by going to Alexandria where many heretics used to come to him for advice. Also many people who read his biography came back to Christ such as St. Augustine who repented after hearing about St. Anthony. Many atheist philosophers believed at his hands or after knowing about him."

"Do I have to be a monk to reach his level of holiness?"

"No, I'll tell you how a simple tailor from Alexandria reached a level higher than that of St. Anthony."

One day while St. Anthony was praying in his cave; he had a thought if there was any one who reached his level of holiness. Suddenly, he heard a voice telling him, "Anthony! You didn't reach the level of a tailor in Alexandria."

The saint was astonished. On the next day, he took his staff and left to Alexandria in order to search for that tailor.

When the simple tailor saw the elderly saint his heart rejoiced and he welcomed St. Anthony greatly. He tried to offer him food, but St. Anthony asked him, "What's your work? Tell me about your spiritual life."

The tailor replied, "I don't think that I do any goodness."

St Anthony asked, "How do you spend your day?"

"I wake up early in the morning and pray. Before I start, I thank God and praise Him. I look at my sins and I tell myself, "Every one in town is going to heaven because of their good deeds, but for me I'll not see heaven because of my sins." I repeat the same words before going to bed."

When St. Anthony heard these words he said, "You're like a person who works with gold and makes tiny beautiful items quietly and peacefully. Because of your simple pure life, you'll inherit the everlasting life, while me even after leaving the world and living in the desert far from people, I didn't reach your level of holiness."

"Father, Can I become a saint?" asked the son

"Yes, Jesus called us to be saints."

"What should I do?"

"Remember your weaknesses like that simple tailor. Be filled with hope and gladness with your Savior. Thank God and praise Him, all the day before doing anything."

Short Story No. 158

The Fleeing Hermit

An unmarried girl became pregnant. She falsely accused the hermit Macarius of raping her. The whole village became furious with the hermit. The mob came to him insulting him, beating him and mocking at him. An elderly man who tried to calm the people was also insulted by the mob. Finally, the father of the girl asked that they would not release the hermit until the hermit assured them that he would be responsible for the expenses of her labor and that he would support her and the child.

The hermit returned to his cave half-dead. He used to speak to himself saying, "Work hard Macarius, because you now have a wife and a child. You've to work day and night for your needs and theirs." He actually worked hard making woven baskets, which his disciple sold to pay for all the needs of the pregnant girl.

When her time came to give birth to the baby, she stayed several days in labor. They told her that if this state continued she might die before giving birth to the child.

The girl was obliged to confess saying, "I'm suffering because I falsely accused the hermit of raping me. The hermit is innocent, but such a person tempted me and I sinned with him."

The relatives of the girl felt very sad that they accused an innocent man. The girl's family together with the villagers went to ask forgiveness from the saint. When his disciple heard that; he was very happy and he rushed to tell him the news.

As soon as the saint heard the news he ran away to the Natroon valley. He fled from false praises. St. Macarius did not flee from his false accusers but he fled from their praises. Nothing destroys the life of a person more than him waiting to listen to the praises of others.



You might ask how could I tolerate being unjustly accused? St John Chrysostom answers, "If someone accused you of adultery, tell yourself, 'I did not commit adultery, but in my youth I had a lot of thoughts of desire. I should consider his accusation as a chastisement for me.'"



*Lord help me to withstand the words of praise,
Many have fallen because of them.
Make me happy when people denounce me,
Then I will share You in bearing them.*

Short Story No. 159

Accept This Little Money

One of the noble men of Alexandria went to the El-Calali Desert (the cells desert) asking for the blessings of the desert fathers. He brought with him some money to offer to the monks.

He went on visiting the cells of the monks, one after the other presenting them some money and asking them to pray for him. Each monk responded by saying that he would pray for him but totally refused to accept the money, because he had enough for his needs. The prince tried with all the monks but in vain.

At last he went to St. Macarius and begged him saying, "Please accept from me this small amount of money for the service of the fathers."

St. Macarius said, "By the grace of God we all have what we need. The brothers work hard for their needs."

The prince felt very sad, thinking that God had refused his offering. He said to St. Macarius, "Father, for the sake of God don't disappoint me and accept this small amount of money which I brought with me."

St. Macarius replied, "Go my son and give the money to the brothers."

The prince said, "I've tried and no one would accept it and some of them wouldn't even look at it."

The saint asked the prince gently to take the money with him and give it to the needy in the world. The saint continued by saying, "Those who live the monastic life are dead to the world, they need nothing from the world."

The prince was still not comfortable thinking that God had refused his offering. The saint was gracious to the prince and asked him to wait a little while. He took the money from him and poured it into a pit in the desert in front of the gate of the monastery. He then rang the bell and all the monks came to the gate. They were about 2400 monks.

The saint asked them saying, "Brothers, for the sake of Christ, if any of you is in need, let him gladly take from this money." They all went around the pit and no one took any thing from it.

No one of the 2400 monks accepted any money offered with love to them. Each one considered that he had died with Christ and he was not in need of anything. For the sake of the Lord, he worked very hard for his needs and what was left he offered to the needy in the world.

The prince was overwhelmed and threw himself at the saint's feet asking him to accept him as a monk in his monastery. The saint explained to the prince how hard it is to be a monk. Notwithstanding, the prince insisted. As for the money, they used it to construct a building in the monastery.

This is not the case for the monks only, but also for every true Christian in whose heart enters the Lord Jesus Who rose from the dead. He is not in any need. His pleasure is to give and give generously, not in taking and collecting. He lives all his life overflowing over others giving generously.



*Let me die with You and rise with You,
So I can enjoy Your glorious resurrection.
I do not need any thing from this world.
In You I find my needs and my glory.
I have You, so I desire nothing else.
I enjoy You, so my life overflows with constant giving.
I find my pleasure in giving not in receiving.*

Short Story No. 160

The Kind Word

St. Macarius was walking from the Scetis Desert to the mountain of Nitria. He asked his disciple to go before him. On his way, the disciple saw a pagan priest carrying a load of wood on his back. It was noon and very hot and the priest was in a hurry.

The disciple felt sad about that priest who was wasting his life. He said to him, "You, servant of the devil, where are you running to?"

The priest was very angry, threw the wood on the ground and kept beating the monk with all his might and left him half-dead. He carried the wood again and went his way.

Later, the priest met St. Macarius who felt sorry for the priest who was carrying a heavy load and walking fast in the hot desert. St. Macarius said to him, "You industrious man, may God help you."

The priest was affected by the words of the saint that came out from a kind heart and a smiling face. The priest approached St. Macarius and said to him, "What good you found in me that you greeted me in such a way?"

The saint replied, "I saw you work hard, though you don't know for what reason."

As the priest felt at ease looking at the features of the saint, full of kindness and gentleness, he threw the wood on the ground and said to the saint, "I was affected by your greeting and realized that you belong to the great God, not like the evil monk who cursed me, so I had to beat him very hard."

St. Macarius realized that the priest was talking about his disciple.

Kind words affected a pagan priest who asked St. Macarius to accept him as a monk.

They went where the disciple was lying. They carried him to the church in Nitria mount. The monks looked after the injured brother marveled to how the pagan priest accepted the faith and desired to become a monk after meeting their spiritual father only once.

St. Macarius used to tell his disciples, "Bad words have damaging effect on people while kind humble words can convert sinners to holy ones."



*Dwell in me O Humble Holy One,
So I can become humble.
Let no harsh word come out from my lips.
Let me be a witness for Your Gospel,
And Your dwelling in me,
You Who do not shout, and no one hears Your voice,
You Who love sinners and are kind to everyone.
Grant me to be gentle to my brethren,
But from where do I get such gentleness
Unless I unite with You Who are the True Love?*

Short Story No. 161

With A Broken Arm

A Symbolic Story

As Michael was returning home late at night, he fell down and broke his left arm. The ambulance came and carried him to the hospital. On the next morning, he was hardly able to shave after he suffered some minor injuries at his face. At night, he was in pain and unable to sleep. He imagined that he heard the following dialogue:

His right arm told his left arm, "We don't miss you left arm, all the members of the body are glad that it was you and not me which was broken, since without me. the whole body will not be able to function."

The left arm answered in humility saying, "I know that you're more important than me."

The right arm answered, "Yes, I'm more important than you. Without me, the body can't write a letter."

The left arm asked, "But who holds the paper when the letter is being written?"

The right arm said, "I hammer nails."

The left arm commented, "And who holds the nails which you hammer?"

The right arm said, "Who holds the sander when the carpenter needs a smooth piece of wood?"

The left arm responded, "And who holds the piece of wood?"

The right arm said, "When my owner walks in the road, who holds his hat by which he greets his neighbors?"

The left arm asked, "And who carries his briefcase while you're holding his hat?"

Finally, the left arm said to the right one, "When I was broken today, didn't my owner find it difficult to shave, in spite of you holding his shaving items and me not able to hold his skin while shaving it? Without me, he's unable to do many jobs. He's in need of you as well as me. Let's work together even if we have different roles."



*Lord let me not despise my brother's work,
Rather, let me toil with him for Your glory.
Let me be proud of him and his gifts.
Without him, I have little value,
Without him, I do not experience my union with You.
Gather all of us in You, Who are the Head of all.*

Short Story No. 162

Niagara Falls And An Orange Peel

David went to his father confessor, being very depressed and said to him, "For many years, I didn't commit a sin; but suddenly as I surrendered to my thoughts, I soon sinned."

The priest tried to calm David quoting from the words of St Paul,

"Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10.12).

Our victory over a specific sin, even for many years, does not guarantee absolute victory. Therefore, we ought to be always careful, trusting in the overwhelming grace of God.

The priest told David the following well-known story:

Some years ago, the English champion Bobby Leach, in a daring act, was able to safely cross the Niagara Falls in Canada, in a barrel, without being harmed.

A short time later, while walking in the street, he slipped on an orange peel, and he was carried to the hospital with a serious broken foot. He who was not harmed from the Niagara Falls, even with a scratch, a small orange peel seriously broke his foot.



*By You my Savior I can face the challenges that face me.
You have given me authority to trample on serpents,
Scorpions and all the powers of the enemy.
By You I challenge the devil and all his forces,
The world with all its evil and the flesh with its desires.
Without You, I am careless and I fall into the most trivial sin.
A bare idea might defeat me,
And a small fox might destroy me,
And spoil the vineyards of my heart.
Without You, I cannot stand against the simplest temptation.
Be my support and grant me the spirit of wakefulness and awareness.*

Short Story no. 163

The Servant of Humanity

When I went to Los Angeles in 1970 to serve the church there, the late father Pishoy Kamel asked me to go with him to visit one of the Ethiopian brothers as a kind of reconciliation and when I asked about the reason of his anger, Fr. Pishoy said to me, “He was upset when I said that the Blessed Virgin Mary wanted to become the servant of humanity.”

Fr. Pishoy and I went to visit him and we did not leave him until we became friends with him again. Fr. Pishoy told him that he loved the Virgin Mary, mother of all believers and the heavenly Queen who is above the Cherubim and the Seraphim. She is his beloved intercessor.

I remembered this story on the eve of Maundi Thursday this year when I was talking about Judas who agreed on delivering Jesus to the Jewish authorities, asking for 30 silver coins, the price of a slave. That behavior was not strange for a person whose heart loved money. What upset me terribly was that the Master of all and the Creator of all humanity accepted by His own will to be treated as a slave.

Every slave sits down to wash the feet of the members of the family, his masters. He experiences humility and shame as an insult to his humanity. But the Lord Jesus bowed down by His own will asking every sinner to allow him to offer his dirty feet for Him to wash. He asks every person to accept that. This is how the Master of all finds His pleasure and as He washes the feet with water, He washes the hearts with His precious blood. He took the form of a slave and obeyed till death, the death on the Cross. He accepted slavery, which redeems others with its life.



+ *You accepted to be a slave, You to whom the heavenly creatures bow.
You ask me to give You my dirty feet to wash with Your hands, You the Holy One!*
+ *Permit me to share with You Your love.
I desire to enslave myself with You to everyone, so I may win everyone.
Grant me to race and run towards You, that I might become a slave with You.*

Short Story no. 164

The Door is Narrow

The doorbell rang. John opened the door. A big parcel arrived from a furniture store. It was a bed that he bought for his son. John was happy, since his son outgrew his only bed. He opened the parcel and started right away to fix the bed. It was cold, so his wife asked him to fix it in the kitchen. He did that and the parts of the bed were glued together and the bed was ready to be taken to his son's bedroom.

The son was happy with his new bed. He wanted to sleep in it. His parents asked him to wait for few minutes until the glue was set. John and his wife then tried to get the bed to their son's bedroom but what a surprise, the kitchen door was too small. The kitchen room should have been one inch wider for the bed to go through it.

There was no solution except to destroy the bed, parts of which were glued together. It was necessary to buy another bed.

Do not be surprised by what these parents did, because you often do the same thing. Your soul is like this child waiting for a comfortable bed. You do your best using human measures that differ from the Divine Measures. As you try to take the bed out, you find your Christ, the narrow door, Who alone is able to take you to the bosom of His Heavenly Father.

If you desire purity for yourself, chastity and real comfort you need to do your calculation correctly, which is to accept the Crucified Lord Jesus working in you.



+ *How do I console my soul? I offered it every worldly comfort, but it got lost! You are the narrow door; You take my soul to Your Father's Bosom. With You I enjoy sharing with You Your Glories.*

+ *What I thought cheerful for my soul destroyed it. You alone, the Crucified One, are the secret of my comfort and my peace.*

Short Story no. 165

A Lump of Mud

The great Italian artist, Benvenuto Cellini, announced the arrival of a huge piece of marble that had a defect in it. He placed it in Florence square. Many artists came to see it but they all looked at it and passed by; it was good for nothing. Passers by used to look at this piece of marble and feel unhappy. Some requested that it be removed from the square. Suddenly someone came and put a fence around it, which hid the marble completely.

After hard work, two years later, the fence was removed and what a surprise! Michael Angelo made a statue for King David from this piece of marble. He was the only person who was able to make a statue of a unique artistic value from that piece of marble.



You often look at yourself and see it as a lump of mud like that useless piece of marble. You say with St. Paul "There is nothing good in me, meaning my flesh".

If you are a lump of mud, God puts around you the fence of the body, a temporary umbrella over you. Then, certainly, the hand of the Creator will make from this lump not a statue of King David, but an icon for the Son of King David, the Lord Jesus Himself, at Whom the angels love to look. They see the glory of the King's daughter inside you.



+ You, the Greatest Artist, let Your hands change the lump of mud to a heavenly artistic piece. Out of nothing, You make a sky and from my grave You bring out joyous kingdom.

Short Story no. 166

Touches of A Creative Hand

In a school trip to a factory of pottery in Qena, in Upper Egypt, the students of a primary school and their teachers watched in amazement how the potter took a piece of mud, put it on a rotating wheel and formed from it a beautiful vessel. One of the boys asked the potter for a piece of clay and took permission from him to put it on the rotating wheel. As the potter gave him permission, the piece of clay became a beautiful vessel. The boy held it and as he tried to straighten a part of it, the neck of the vessel broke.

The student was embarrassed and the other students were laughing at him. The potter smiled and with his creative touch was able to put the broken part back and the final product was a vessel more beautiful than it was before its neck was broken. The student was happy and so were the other boys.



+ If our lives resemble a piece of clay, as we try by our own hands to shape it, it breaks and we lose our lives. It needs the touches of God's hand, the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, Who by His amazing power creates from it a living icon for Him, fit to be placed in heaven.

+ My Creator, look at me, a handful of dust. Who can shape me in Your image except You? I tried hard but to no avail. Whenever I try to do good, I find evil near by.

+ My own hands destroy me, but Your Kind Hands bless me. Your mercy leads me to heaven. Many people mock at me for my helplessness in making myself holy, But You lord, with Your great love gives me hope. You hold my life in Your hand to form it in Your great glory.

Short Story No. 167

The Invisible String

Blessed Baptism of Steve Mark On 10 October 1994

The family celebrated the birthday of Steve. Steve was happy as he entered the hall that the family rented for this reason. Steve saw a big balloon on which his name and the date of his baptism were written. The balloon was tied with several colored strings. The child got hold of a pair of scissors and cut one of the colored strings, but the balloon did not move. He cut one colored string after the other but the balloon never moved. He went and asked his father for the reason.

His father got the pair of scissors and went towards the balloon and he found a transparent string. As he cut it, in seconds the balloon started to rise to the ceiling. Everyone saw the name of Steve and the date of his baptism. Steve was happy to see the balloon touching the ceiling of the hall.



You also often get hold of a pair of scissors of your will to free yourself from the ties of sin, from which your soul is resting in the dust, as if to you heaven is impossible to reach. You need to present yourself to the Lord Jesus as a Father Who gets hold of the scissors of His Cross by which He cuts your invisible ties which keep you in the dust; then, you will rise by the wings of the Spirit towards heaven.



+ *My soul longs to rise to You, but the flesh with its desires pulls me down. May Your hands reach the Cross in order to cut away every rotten part in me.*

+ *Yes, I promise You to flee away from any temptation, as much as I can. I can not promise You to lead a holy life, because who can sanctify my innermost but You?*

+ *I flee from the ungodly places, the improper books, and the evil company, but who will sanctify my eyes? Shall I keep them shut? Who would sanctify my ears? Who would direct my thoughts? Who would satisfy my feelings? Let Your hands, which are full of kindness, extend and circumcise my innermost by Your Holy Cross.*

Short Story no. 168

Among The Chastised

At the beginning of the Holy Week, as I entered the nave of the church, where the icon of the suffering Lord was placed, I felt as if I was in a court room where we were all standing in front of a Unique Judge. He judges all the humanity and at the same time he intercedes on behalf of the repentant believers.

We, the chastised, come and each one of us confesses, "I am guilty and worthy not only of reproach but of death. I can only promise to carry You inside me for Your Holy Spirit to work in me. He will convert me from a criminal to a saint, from someone deserving death to someone worthy of glory. Truly You are an Amazing Judge. You do not see our sins but You desire that all be saved and know the truth."

This scene reminds me of what was said about Mr. Neff the Governor of the State of Texas:

The Governor met with the inmates who committed crimes. He gave them a long speech to inspire them and fill them with the spirit of law and order. He expressed his desire to meet any one of them alone and promised not to use anything he says against him. Many inmates spoke with him in private. Most of them blamed their family circumstances, work or health conditions. Many of them told him that they were not guilty, that there is no justice in the society and they were unjustly punished.

One inmate said to the Governor, "I am guilty and deserve all the punishment. Thus I've served my sentence willingly and faithfully. I repent and I promise you that after being released; I shall live as a good citizen in order to be worthy of your trust and your mercy."

The Governor was moved and ordered his immediate release.

+ Lord, I see that You are imprisoned inside me, to carry me on Your shoulders and open my eyes to see that the gates of heaven are open.

+ Free me as if from the prison to the real freedom. I desire to rest with You in my eternal home.

+ Lord, raise my heart as if from the grave, free my soul from the prison of death, so that it lives with You freely and enjoy the glory of Your Resurrection and the down payment of Your Heavenly Glory.

Short Story no. 169

Small GROVES

In Castle Carlisle at the borders of Scotland, one can notice small groves dug by fingers in the stones on the hills looking at Scotland. Some people from Scotland were arrested in this castle as a result of rioting. The inmates used to look from the windows behind the iron bars, see the hills of their country and long to be released.

Many of them used to spend long hours each day looking to the hills of their country and feeling as if they had escaped from the prison and were walking on the hills. Unwillingly, their fingers were forcefully scratching the stones on which they made groves, unveiling the desires of their hearts.

If our sins have imprisoned us in the worldly jail, yet through the Divine promises of the Holy Bible, our hearts are pulled towards the hills for our inner man to rise to the heavenly country. Our hands unconsciously work by the rich grace of God, to build corridors by which we flee to heaven.



+ I see You my Savior trying to carry me to see the open heavenly gates. You deliver me from bondage to complete liberty. I would like to be in my everlasting home. Make my heart rise as from the grave.

+ Deliver my soul from the slavery of death for it to live with You in liberty, always enjoying the glory of Your Resurrection and the down payment of Your heavenly glory.

Short Story No. 170

The Worshipping Servant

A Real Short Story

A rich man from Rome visited Alexandria, bought a slave there and took him home. The slave was particular in his behavior. He worked hard, never complained, used to work silently helping his fellow slaves. He was always smiling; he never cracked a joke, was always gentle and looked serious and respectable.

When he was by himself, he used to praise the Lord and sing the Psalms. His master loved him dearly and made him the head of all his slaves. He even loved to be in his company, listening to his words though he did not talk much. His fellow slaves loved him as a kind father. The old slaves used to complain to him of their troubles and find in him a father with a big heart. The young ones also found in him amazing love and compassion.

They were all fond of him. He always talked about the Lord Jesus. He used to open the Holy Bible and talk to them about the Lord Jesus the Servant, the Master Who presented Himself to be slain for His slaves. He used to gather them to pray with one spirit. The features of their faces changed from those of miserable slaves to joyous faces, from the life of complaints to the life of thanksgiving and from the life of laziness to the life of hard work.

The blessings of the Lord came unto the palace and the master loved his slaves. He used to see them as his brothers, sit with them and listen to what they said. He was proud of them as friends more than as slaves and servants, specially that Alexandrian slave. He presented him to his visitors to see by their own eyes what they did not hear from the other slaves. They saw him as a blessing to the owner of the palace and to all those who worked there.

One day a man from Alexandria came to visit that master. The master started to speak to his guest about that Alexandrian slave and all what he did in the palace. He described how that slave changed the lives of all the people in the palace to a happy life and how he attracted many to the Person of our Lord Jesus.

The guest longed to see that Alexandrian slave. As soon as the guest saw that slave he gazed at him and started asking himself saying, "I wonder if he is...? But who brought him here?" The guest was as if in a dream. He remembered what happened a long time ago in one of the poor districts in Alexandria when he met on one cold evening with some of his poor relatives. He said to himself, "We were sitting around the fire to warm ourselves when one of my poor relatives said that he made a mistake by going to Peter the miserly to ask him for alms. Peter kicked him out and swore at him. One of those present commented by saying, "All the district knew that Peter was very mean and no one should go to him to ask for alms."

A third person said that no one could compete with Peter in his meanness. I said, "My brethren, why do we talk about Peter? And why do we condemn him because of his meanness? Who knows? One day he might change and become a man with a generous heart. After all, the Lord changed the hearts of Zacchaeus the Tax Collector and of Levi and of others."

All those present laughed at me. One of them said that I was naïve. If I'd any dealings with Peter, I wouldn't have said what I had said about him. No one in the world had a cruel heart and the love of money as Peter's."

Then I felt embarrassed of what they said but I replied that I can't promise to be able to

take some alms from Peter, but I know one thing, which is that my Lord Jesus is able to change our characters and our natures. Jesus can take away our weaknesses and offer us life. Let's all pray for Peter. He's our brother; he's miserable. May the Lord have mercy upon him and upon us.

After that evening, I went home to my wife and children and as usual we prayed together. I asked them to pray especially for our brother Peter and for our souls. We all prayed for Peter whose soul was humiliated by his love to the world and its vain riches. In the morning, as I was walking near the tax collecting office, I saw Peter there. I went to ask him for alms. He became angry and started to curse and swear at me. I didn't know what to do. I raised my heart to my Lord Jesus Christ saying, "Lord Jesus, help that man and help my weakness."

As I was in that state, Peter's servant came to bring him his breakfast. Peter took a loaf of bread, broke a piece and threw it over my head. I took the piece of bread from the ground, kissed it, thanked him while he continued to call me names and left.

On my way, I went to the churchyard. I stood there and lifted up my heart and prayed. I don't remember what I said more than "Lord Jesus, help Peter as You're his Father. You alone love him."

The next day, I didn't know what had happened. We (my fellow beggars and I) were passing by Peter; he was kind to us without limits. Since then he used to gather us in his house and be generous to us. All of a sudden he disappeared and we didn't know where he went.

It's him, Peter, how did he become a slave? I don't believe my eyes, how did he come here? The man got hold of himself, stood up from his chair, went towards the slave and whispered in his ear, "Aren't you my master Peter from Alexandria?"

The slave said words, which the host could not hear. The man hugged the slave and started to kiss him. The owner of the house looked very surprised, not knowing what was happening. The slave excused himself, realizing that the owner of the palace would know his story and tell everyone; he escaped right away. He took a boat back to Alexandria and from there he went to the wilderness.

The Slave In The Wilderness

In the wilderness, the slave met one of the fathers the monks, kissed his hands saying, "Peace be with you father."

"Peace be with you son. Who brought you here?"

"Father, I heard about the life in the wilderness and my soul longed to leave the world and come here to worship Him Who loved me. I want to be among you, learn from you and be a servant to you."

"Son, it isn't an easy life here. We live in a desolate land, work for our living and eat dry bread, few beans and some vegetables. The battle in the wilderness is hard; the gate is narrow and the cross is heavy. Many came here and after a short while they found how harsh the life was and left back to the world."

"Father, I've great hopes in the love of Jesus. He'll help me. Don't discourage me. Test me and I'm sure that the grace of my Master and your prayer will support me. Please don't send me back."

As the father realized the determination of the slave he started asking him about his life.

The slave agreed to tell his story after the father had promised not to reveal it before his death. The slave said:

I was a tax collector in Alexandria. I was miserly and loved money greatly. Yes, I worshipped it, had an unmerciful heart and never responded to the tears of an old man, pleading of a woman or the cries of a child.

Many a home I destroyed and many an elder I insulted, I can't remember. Many men and women sold their children in order to pay me the taxes. I worked day and night to record the taxes and write down the names of those who didn't pay them. People used to escape from me and feel bad when they looked at me.

I was always anxious and thinking about the money I should collect. I was a miserable man who tortured others and tortured myself even more than I did to them. One night, which I'll never forget, I put off the light and tried to sleep, but figures filled my thoughts and I couldn't sleep at all. Finally, with great agony, I sighed and cried, "Lord, don't deny me sleep which all the animals enjoy."

After a short while, I don't know whether I slept or was still awake; I found myself very hungry. I saw a very large table full of food and as I hurried to eat from it, someone who guarded the table prevented me. As I pleaded, he allowed me to eat from one dish, which he gave me. As I held the plate gladly, I found in it the piece of bread, which I threw over the head of a beggar on that day.

I woke up terrified and started to cry. Then I started to pray. It was the first time in my life to pray and without anyone teaching me how to pray. I was repeating the phrase, "Lord teach me how to love You. Lord grant me a kind heart."

In the morning, as I decided to make an act of mercy, I hurried to the church where I met one of the priests who was surprised to see me with tears in my eyes. He asked me about what had happened. I kissed his hands and said to him, "I'd sinned against God. I destroyed the lives of many people. I loved the world from all my heart and now I ask you to pray for me. I only want my Lord Jesus."

The priest encouraged me, raised his hand with the cross in it and prayed over my head as I was crying bitterly. I left the church to do as my father the priest instructed me. I went to the prison house and paid money for all those I imprisoned and for all the children who were sold by their parents to pay me the taxes. I looked for the poor and tried to help them as much as I could. I went to my work to do my job honestly. I didn't ask anyone for more than what should be paid. I decided not to keep any money from which I collected unjustly. To say the truth, I felt extremely happy. Here, the eyes of the slave were filled with the tears of joy and were unable to speak to the father the monk. He crossed himself with the sign of the cross and said, "Glory be to the Merciful Shepherd of our souls Who looks after every son of His."

The slave continued his story saying, "One day as I was walking in the market place, I saw someone shivering, so I took off my coat and covered him. That night, in a dream, I saw my Lord Jesus walking in the cold putting on my coat. I hurried to Him saying, "Lord, how do You accept to put on the coat of a sinner like me, and who gave it to You?" The Lord replied, "Son, whatever you do to anyone of those poor people, you do it to Me."

I got up with great joy with praises in my mouth and I was repeating, "Jesus put on my coat. Let me give Him everything." As I gave away to the poor all the money which I collected unjustly and cruelly, I didn't know what else to give them. After a while, I went to one of my slaves whom I had set free, gave him money and asked him, "Sir, I'm your servant, would you promise me to do as I ask you?"

He promised. I told him about what I saw in my dream the night before. I told him that I

wanted to offer the Lord myself as I had offered Him my coat. I asked him for the sake of his promise to take me to the market place and sell me as a slave and give the money to my brethren the poor. The man cried a lot and tried not to fulfil his promise and as I insisted, I changed my clothes and he sold me as a slave.

I went away to Rome with my master who bought me. The Lord gave me grace in his eyes until he treated me as a friend. One day, one of my old friends came to visit my master and as he saw me he embraced me and asked me why I came to Rome. I didn't tell him anything but escaped from the vainglory.

"Father, here I am between your hands, accept me as your servant."

SHORT STORIES FOR THE YOUTH

171-185
Together with the story
“In The Grip of Love”

Prepared by
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Short Story No. 171

One of the Participants Left

In the early sixties, father Pishoy Kamel went to a Youth conference in Switzerland. When he returned, I asked him, “What do you think of these meetings?”

He answered, “I learned a lot about the personal relationship among the members of the conference. I learned from each participant what’s useful for my spiritual life and for serving God.”

During our conversation, he said, “During the breaks in the meeting, while we were busy talking about the Church, one of the participants left. When he came back, I asked him, “Why did you leave the discussion?” He said, “It was my prayer time, that’s why I’d to leave although I was eager to continue the discussion.”

Father Pishoy concluded that he learned from this member the commitment to prayer. Many times we are ashamed to pray when there are relatives in the house and neglect our private prayers. Father Pishoy and I had a commitment, that during our visitation in the church area, we excuse ourselves and go to church for prayer for quarter an hour as we knew that when we return back home in the night we are exhausted and we would not be able to concentrate on our prayers.



*Lord, give me commitment, so You would be the first priority in my life.
Take me away from even serving others to talk to You.
Let me keep the prayers in its due time, also by sharing in studying Your word.
Take away my embarrassment from the people, so I can enjoy You most.
Give me spiritual fire deep within.*

Story No. 172

Do This and you will Be Happy

Young Anthony sold every thing he owned and gave the money to the poor. He was eager to serve God. He was very happy with his new choice, hoping to live in heaven, with angels. To his surprise, he started to feel bored and many thoughts attacked him. He shouted to God, "I like to be saved, but the thoughts never leave me alone, what should I do?"

Anthony moved from one place to another. He was in a great dilemma, not knowing what to do. Suddenly he saw a man weaving palm leaves, making mats and baskets, praising the Lord while doing his work and then stopped for the time of prayer. This man was repeating the process of working and praying. Anthony realized that this was an angel, that work is part of worshiping and that the mind of a slugger is a factory for the devil.

This was the beginning of the Monastic life in Egypt; work is a must not only for the monks. The poor need to work also for their salvation and eternal life. A true believer does not have a dull moment. Every second of his life is valuable. He would not stop till the last breath. Young people sometimes escape from their studies by exaggerating in their spiritual life, not knowing that making a balance is a safe royal approach. The spiritual student is keen on his studies, knowing that this could be the talent that God gave him to utilize.

The main concern of Satan is to create the feeling of complaint. Young people may feel guilty of concentrating on studies and neglecting the time for worship. On the other hand, during worship, they feel guilty of neglecting their studies. A happy balance will be the best thing to do,
"Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's"
(Luke 20.25).

Here are some practical ideas:

- Keep your Bible wide open at your desk, to remind you that you are in the presence of God.
 - Between subjects, read a psalm or part of a psalm.
 - If you feel bored, pray in a low voice (e.g. give me honesty in doing what I am doing, support me so I can be saved.)
- If it is difficult to concentrate, cry to God for help.



- *Lord let me be honest in all things.*
 - *Who will give me honesty except You? You are truthful and just.*
 - *Let me be honest in my work as well as in my worship,*
 - *Honest with people as well as with You.*
 - *Let me feel Your Presence during my work so my soul may be comforted,*
 - *And I draw power from You during my work.*
 - *Let me hear Your sweet voice,*
- "You were faithful in that which is least I will trust you also in much."**

Story No. 173

The Crisis of Trusting

One of the ministers met Maurice, a university student, who looked upset and bitter. The minister began by telling him that God is love; He cares about our lives.

Maurice asked, "How can I trust Jesus when I have lost my trust in every body?"

The minister asked Maurice, "When are you going back to Alexandria?"

"Friday night." answered Maurice.

"Did you book your seat on the train?"

"Yes."

"Do you know the clerk who booked the seat for you?"

"No."

"How can you guarantee a seat then?"

"Every time I call for reservation, I find my seat there."

"Do you know the name of the train driver?"

"No."

"How can you trust a driver with your life then?"

Finally the minister said, "If you can trust the driver (whom you do not know) to take you to your destination. Isn't it logical to trust the Creator of the universe to look after you?"



You Lord are my guarantee I surrender my life to You.

You are the Truth and the Way.

You are the reason behind my happiness and success.

You are my glory and my spiritual Guide.

Story No. 174

The Shield of Baron Veritas

The baron built a shield; he fixed it on the way to his castle. He used to watch, from a window, travelers coming from the north and the south stopping and admiring the beauty of the shield. A traveler from the south was admiring the shield and saying, "The Baron is really rich he made his shield of gold."

"No it is made of silver," said the traveler coming from the north.

While they were arguing the baron came along and asked why they were arguing. The baron showed them the two sides of the shield; the one facing south was made of gold while the side facing the north was made of silver.

"Each one of you saw the shield from his side. I wish instead of fighting, we stop and look at the subject from all its sides."



*My soul, why do you quarrel with others?
Why do you insist on your own opinion
As if no body else has command of matters but you?
Lord let me be like You drawn by Your Power to heaven.
Let me have the proper understanding,
Since You have the power to see all angles of a situation.
In love, I shall be able to see the others' point of view.*

Story No. 175

The Debt was Paid

Lord Congleton announced that he was going to exempt the tenants from the rent if they met with him in his office and he set a date for this occasion. The tenants did not believe him, saying, "It's one of his tricks to take us to court."

No one went to the office at the set time. At the end of the day, one of the tenants went to the office and saw the Lord waiting as announced. The lord asked, "do you expect me to forget about your debt?"

"I do."

"Why do you expect it to be true?"

"Because you're a lord, and you promised."

"Do you trust my promises?"

"Absolutely."

"Why?"

"Because you're a lord and will not deceive a poor man like me."

The Lord signed a receipt for this tenant. The tenant was very happy waving the receipt and saying, "God bless you Sir."

The tenant left the office, to find the rest of the tenants waiting to ask him what happened. He was waving the receipt, saying, "He exempted me from all my debts."

The rest of the tenants rushed to the Lord's office. To their surprise, the time was over and the office was closed.

That Lord gave a lesson in faith and belief and only one benefited from this chance.



*Let me come to Your Presence, trusting Your Promises.
Your Blood washed me from inequity. You paid my debt.
How sweet and kind You are, O the Savior of my soul!
Why do I wait for long to meet You?
Let me enter while the gates are open.*

Story No. 176

Mother Indebted to John

John's mom asked him to buy a few things on his way back from school. He bought the items but he did not wish to ask her for the money. So he left her a note saying:

Mom owes John:

Bread	25
Salt	60
Matches	15
Total	100

John left the note on the table. His mom saw the note and she ignored it. At dinnertime he found a dollar with a note, saying:

John owes mom

Cloths	free
Food	free
Care and kindness	Free
Total	none

John read mom's note, was touched and tears came down from his eyes and he went to the kitchen. He hugged and kissed his mom and returned the dollar to her. In the evening mom offered John \$5 and said to him, "Our love is above all.

✝ ✝ ✝

Thank You Lord for the family love.

You are our Father.

The Church is our Mother.

How can we pay You back for Your Divine Love!

Story No. 177

More Blows

Two university students were arrested for stealing from a general service office. One of them came from a rich family; the other was the son of a poor man. They were both tried for their theft. Four big lawyers defended the rich boy while only one lawyer defended the poor guy. At the end of the trial, the poor kid got three years in jail, while the rich Kid got 10 years sentence. Every body was surprised by the judge's discussion.

To stop everyone's surprise, the judge made a statement:
The poor man's son was guilty to his university only while the rich man's son was guilty of hurting the university as well as hurting his family's reputation. He deserves a bigger punishment.



Lord You taught me

That someone who knows better and makes mistakes deserves greater punishment.

Lord You manifested Your Great Love for me.

You offered me the means of salvation.

You let me lack nothing.

What excuse do I have if I neglected Your Salvation and despised Your Precious Blood?

Support me so I can be saved or else my punishment will be greater than that of unbelievers.

Story No. 178

The Dirty Fingers

Salome returned from school, started doing her homework and her fingers got dirty from the ink. Her Dad asked her to clean her hands but she told him, “Dad, I’ll have a shower before going to bed.”

Her father said to her, “Taking a shower is general hygiene but when our hands get dirty we should wash them. Don’t you see Mom washing her hands every time they get dirty while she’s working in the kitchen?”

We need daily repentance with our prayer, as we pray,

“Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

Daily repentance saves us when our souls are soiled by certain sins.

Daily repentance does not interfere with a special repentance and vice versa.



*A daily shower is good hygiene.
Nevertheless, when my hands get dirty I hurry to clean them.
Let me wash my soul in Your Blood.
Let me have the blessing of Your daily forgiveness.
Let Your Holy Spirit remind me of my sins.
Carry me to Your Cross to enjoy Your forgiveness,
Because You are the Most Holy, Forgiver of our sins.*

Story No. 179

Wellington was Defeated

A tour guide at Winchester cathedral used to tell the following story:

Every body in England was waiting for the news about “waterloo.” At that time there were no telegrams or telephones. A man would use sign language from a ship, which could be seen by a person standing on the top of the Winchester cathedral, who would signal to some one on top of the hill in London, then to the rest of the country.

The first sign was Wellington; the second word was defeat. At that time, there was a thick fog that made visibility impossible. Every body thought that Wellington was defeated. Two hours later, when the fog was lifted the third word came “the enemy.” So the complete statement was that Wellington defeated the enemy. The whole country was happy.

This is similar to what happened when Jesus died on the cross. Every one thought that it was over but on the third day when He rose from the dead the disciples rejoiced.



At the feet of the Cross, I cry with the three Marys but only for a while,

On His Resurrection I rejoice with them too.

At the feet of the Cross, I realize the power of God for my eternal salvation.

I see an open gate for my fellowship with the heavenly host of saints.

Story No. 180

A Period of Grace

A widower had two children. He hired a nanny to look after them. The man interviewed the nanny and gave her instructions regarding the food of the two children, cleaning the house and the children's homework. Every now and then, the man used to call to make sure that the kids lacked nothing. A year after his wife's death, the man married the nanny. She was then the wife. He never asked her what to cook rather she asked him what he would like to eat. She was no longer a nanny but a loving wife.

This is exactly the feeling of a true believer in his relation with God. He will not wait for an order to obey for he is a loving son who finds his delight in fulfilling the will of the Heavenly Father.



*Lord what do You want me to do?
My heart and all my feelings are in Your hands.
I will no longer find Your commandments a burden.
Rather, it is a delight to carry Your cross.
I will live for You the rest of my life.*

Story No. 181

An Atheist And An Answer for a Prayer

In a trip across the Atlantic, one of the ministers was preaching about answered prayers. An atheist said he did not believe a word of what the minister was saying. He returned to his room and he was thinking if there was a God. Does He listen to us and answer our prayers? Is what the Minister saying mere imagination? While he was struggling with these ideas, his soul was screaming, "I want to know the truth." He continued to struggle till the time for the evening service. He rushed to listen to the minister. On his way to the meeting, he noticed a lady who looked tired and weak. Not knowing what to do, he found two oranges in his pocket. He put the oranges in the lady's stretched hands and rushed to the meeting. Coming back from the meeting, he saw the lady eating one of the oranges. He said to her "It seems that you're enjoying your orange."

She answered, "Yes, my Heavenly Father is kind and generous."

The man said, "He isn't alive."

The lady said, "Don't say that. I've been suffering from seasickness for the past 5 days and I saw the passengers in the first class were getting oranges and I was too shy to ask for an orange. Today my master gave me two oranges while I was sleeping, not one but two. He gave me more than I need. I believe in His promises."

"For you father knows our needs before we even ask" (Matt. 6.8).

The atheist asked her, "Do you mean what you say?"

She answered, "Why should I lie?"

The atheist paused for a moment then he said to himself, "May be the living God took care of her through me while I thought I could oppose Him."



Open the eyes of all people so they can see You as a Father

Who stretches His hand and satisfies every one from His kindness.

You are the true Giver.

Let me cry from my depth to You.

"“You are my share,” said my soul.”

Story No. 182

Alone but Not Alone

In 1754, there was a war between the French and the English in Canada and the Indians sided with the French. One night the Indians attacked a poor family coming from Germany while the mother and the eldest son were not home. The Indians took two girls captive. Barbara, ten years old and Regina, nine. They took Barbara and disappeared while Regina was given to an old widow who treated her very harshly.

Regina was always singing a beautiful song that she had learned from her mother:

Alone but not alone.

You are near to me in my solitude.

My Savior is always by my side.

In my sadness He gives me gladness.

I am with Him and He is with me.

Even here I cannot be without Him.

Regina was praying day and night. She found peace in reciting biblical verses. She was always hopeful and believing in God's promises.

In 1764, Regina was nineteen. One of the British troops discovered the Indian camp, attacked the camp and liberated 400 captives. The captives were taken to Carlisle. Mothers rushed to that city but it was not easy for mothers to recognize their children. Regina's mother was looking for her two daughters but she could not find them. She was crying bitterly. One of the guards asked her, "Do you remember any thing you used to do together with your children?"

She said, "Yes, we used to sing I am alone but not alone."

She started singing this song in a loud voice. Suddenly, she saw a young lady rushing to her and singing the same song. They hugged each other and said, "We've been joined by love and the true promises of God and the living faith that abides in the hearts."

The mother returned home with her daughter who had been lost for ten years. The mother was saying with Saint Paul,

"And that from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures,

Which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus"

(2 Tim. 3.15).

Story No. 183

I'm Indebted to you Mom

In the state of Georgia, the only son of a widow was the top of his class in college. He was waiting for the day of receiving his diploma from the Dean of the college. The celebration day was drawing nearer. On the celebration day, he noticed that his mother was not ready. He said to her, "Mom why aren't you ready for the party? Today is the celebration of my graduation."

The mother answered in a low voice, "You know son that I'm a poor woman, I make my living from cleaning homes and rich people will be coming to the party with their fine clothes. I don't want to embarrass you since I don't have a good dress to put on for the occasion."

He looked at his mother with tears in his eyes and said to her, "What do you mean? Shall I be ashamed of you? I owe you every thing Mom. Every thing achieved is because of your love and hard work. I'm not going to the party without you."

The mother was convinced to go to the party because of her son's insistence. Mother and son went to the party holding hands. The mother sat among the rich and famous. She was wearing an inexpensive dress. The son was the first to receive his award and a golden medal being the top of his class. While everybody was clapping he went down the stage to put the gold medal on his mother's dress telling everybody that she was the one who deserves the medal, "I'm indebted to you Mom."

And so the young man was not ashamed of his poor mother who worked hard to make him a successful person.

Are you ashamed of your Jesus who became poor to make you rich and was crucified to pay your debt? Let us say with St Paul,

"As for me I only boast of the Cross of the Lord Jesus Christ."

Truly He promised us saying,

"Whoever acknowledges me before men I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven"

(Matt. 10.32).



You became a slave You the Holy one,

To lift me up to the rank of a child of God.

You became last of all so I can have part in Your glory.

How can I be ashamed of You while You are the reason behind my existence!

Story No. 184

The Night of Preparation

A Minister was invited to a banquet on Saturday night but he said he would not be able to attend. When he was asked to give a reason for not going, he said, “When a surgeon is responsible for an operation he’s usually busy by sterilization; he doesn’t touch anything. I dedicate the Saturdays for sitting with my Master in order to be ready to serve His people on Sundays.”



*Lord let me be the physician of souls.
You are the Great Physician.
I serve so that they would be holy in You.
I shall carry You to the souls of my injured friends
And not carry them the poison of my hidden sins.
Draw me away! We will run after You.*

Story No. 185

In the Grip of Love

Andrew went to the bedroom. Instead of sleeping in bed, he lied on the floor resting his head on a chair. He was thinking about his past. He was talking to himself, "You Andrew, all your life were deprived of love, you don't remember that you were hugged once by your mother or father. Your brothers didn't care about you. You never experienced the family warmth. You started your school year as a troublemaker; you never respected others. All you wanted was to take revenge from everyone. You were a loser. You were kicked out of school and life was hard on you so you were hard on others. Now you are in a beautiful villa that belongs to rich people. Perhaps this is the first time in your life to see people that care about you."

And so time passed by Andrew while thinking about the kindness of the elderly lady that cared for him and the new clothes that her two sons offered him. He fell asleep on the floor. Suddenly, he heard knocking at the door. Then, he realized that he was a guest of a loving family who had took him in after spending some time in prison. It was one of the two sons,

"Sorry Andrew I did not know that you were sleeping. I thought you are shy to join us."

"Not at all, I was just in need for a good night sleep."

"Come join us for dinner then you can go back to your sleep."

He washed his hands and went to have dinner with the elderly lady and her two sons. After saying a blessing, they started eating,

"I hope you had a good rest."

"Thank God I feel well in your presence."

"We'll be happy if you stayed with us. The house is big and God's blessings are immense."

"I'm not worthy of your love, I don't deserve to live with saints like you 'cause I'm an evil man."

"Don't say that. We're all sinners but God in His mercy forgives us."

"You don't know my evil nature."

"Don't worry for, the Lord Who created us loves us and offered His life for our salvation."

"Maybe He'll save some one else but not me."

"No, He wants you. He wants every body saved."

After dinner, they went to the garden to continue their talk about the everlasting love of God. Andrew's tears came rolling down and they all joined in prayer. Later on, the family asked Andrew if he would like a tour of the villa and as he agreed they started going from room to room. Then, they stood in front of a beautiful piece of art on top of the piano.

"It's a beautiful piece."

"And ancient too", said the elderly lady.

"How much does it cost?"

"Five thousand pounds but it is worth more because it belongs to my grand parents."

After the house tour everybody went to the prayer room and facing an icon for Jesus they prayed and everyone went to bed.

Andrew went to bed and tried to sleep but he could not. He was thinking, "How am I going to let this valuable piece pass by me. But how can I betray those who love me? Am I going to live

depending on them the rest of my life? I'm going to steal it, sell it and make a business from the money to be independent."

Andrew went on his toes reaching for the statue. He hesitated several times then he grabbed it and went to the garden but he found the gate locked. He acted very fast and jumped over the fence. Immediately, two policemen arrested him, searched him and found the stolen statue. They took him to the police station.

At the Police station

The elderly lady wakened her son when she heard a knock on the door after midnight. The son opened the door to find two policemen who informed him that they had arrested a man jumping over the fence of his home. He had stolen goods. "We want someone to come to the station to identify the stolen objects." The policeman said.

"I'll come with you," said the son.

The mother heard the story and immediately went to Andrew's room to find it empty. She wanted to join her son to the police station. The son tried to discourage her from going but she insisted. When the elderly lady reached the room where Andrew was, she greeted him in a friendly manner but Andrew could not look at her. The officer was surprised and asked her, "Do you know him?"

"Yes, sure, I do. He's a friend of the family."

"We found him jumping over the fence."

"He's a friend and he lives in this house."

"We found a valuable piece with him."

"I gave it to him to fix it."

"You don't accuse him of theft?"

"Impossible."

"We'll let him go on your guarantee."

"No, we'll take him home to spend the night with us."

Andrew could not bear this dialogue; he felt he had escaped the police arrest to be captive at a love he never experienced before. Andrew was speechless; one of the sons took him by the hand to the car to go back to the villa. Andrew with tears rolling kissed the old woman's hand asking for her forgiveness for biting the hand that helped him. The elderly lady said to him, "Don't say that Andrew. God forgives us daily."

He accepted to go with them to the villa. As they arrived there, he got down the car and his eyes were fixed towards the place where he had jumped down. He spent the night weeping. Early next morning after praying with the family and having breakfast, he left and never returned.

With Daniel the Monk

Years went by and the Mother got sick. She had a stroke and she got paralyzed. She stayed at home with her two sons who were serving the Lord. The two sons used to join their mother in family prayer and Bible study. The sons used to take their mother to a terrace where they would chat about the former Saints and also about a famous monk, whose name is Daniel, who has lots of visitors

from all over the country who go to be blessed by him. Monk Daniel had to leave the monastery and live in a cave far away from the monastery.

One evening, the mother said to her two sons, "Go to father Daniel and ask him to pray for me and to bless you too."

"Why don't you come with us mother?"

"You know I'm sick and I don't want to be a burden on you."

"No, if you come he'll pray for your healing."

"I don't want to be healed. I'm longing to be with the Lord."

"No mother, don't say that. We need your blessing."

"I've finished my mission in this life. I'd like to be with Jesus, that's much better."

Early next morning, every body was ready for the trip. It was hard for the mother to go on the sand with her wheel chair so she asked her sons to go ahead to the cave and she would wait for them in the monastery. For the mother's good luck, Father Daniel was present at the monastery that day. One of the monks pointed to the son where Father Daniel was. The moment they faced father Daniel, he told the first son, "You're Paul, aren't you?"

The son answered, "Yes, how did you know me?"

He pointed to the other son, "And you're Peter."

"Yes do you know me?"

"Is this your mother?"

"Yes."

Father Daniel hugged the two sons and kissed the mother's hand telling her I am your son Andrew "the thief". Through you I found my Savior. Father Daniel knelt near the wheel chair, prayed and anointed the mother with oil. Soon the legs started moving and the mother was healed and she praised the Lord.



Father Athanasius Botros told me this story to write it narratively. I just changed some events of the story.

SHORT STORIES FOR THE YOUTH

186-199

**Together with the story
“The Strange Godparent”**

**Prepared by
Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty**

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Short Story no. 186

Hospitality of a Donkey and a Mule

The two brothers Moses and Paul arrived at the city of Belbais. They were walking together in the streets of the city amidst the dark talking about a friend of the family named Claudius and his three children. They were really excited to see his family members who were bound with love, grace and the life of prayer.

The two brothers did not feel the lapse of time as they reminisced about this family. They arrived at Claudius' house and knocked on the door. The man opened the door and could not believe himself when he saw the two young men in front of him. He had not seen them since their father's death. He hugged them with tears in his eyes.

His wife hurried to welcome them with great excitement as if they were her own sons. She started inquiring about their mother after their father passed away. Claudius' three sons welcomed the visitors heartily and sat chatting with them happily. Claudius' wife went outside the guestroom to prepare a goose for dinner.

After an hour, Claudius accompanied Moses to a separate room to inquire about his spiritual life and the conduct of his deceased father's business. Moses answered saying, "I thank God the business is doing well. God's blessings are countless. But what worries me most is that my brother Paul, who is not flexible, doesn't know how to run the business. He is a donkey and is a burden on me in the business."

Claudius sighed bitterly and tears ran from his eyes. He asked him, "How can you call your brother a donkey, my son? He's your brother whom you should love not condemn. You should consider his credits, virtues and talents not his errors and weaknesses."

However, Moses did not listen to him.

Claudius sat down with Paul and talked with him alone. When he asked Paul about his father's business, he answered that everything was fine except that his brother was like a mule, getting furious without any cause and that he does not act with love or wisdom. Claudius then advised him to bear his brother and not to condemn him. Notwithstanding, Paul did not listen to his advice.

After an hour, Claudius went into the kitchen and returned carrying a tray with two covered plates. After his sons left him alone with the two visitors, he served the tray for dinner.

Paul and Moses washed their hands and sat around the table. When they uncovered the two plates, they were surprised to find some uncooked lentils and beans. The two brothers looked at each other in surprise as if asking what Claudius has done. Was it a mistake in the tray or was it on purpose because of a grudge between him and their father?

The room was all quiet when the old respectable man interrupted the silence by saying, "Why are you surprised my sons? Isn't this the food of the donkey and the mule? Moses, you have called your brother a donkey. And you Paul! You have called your brother a mule. Eat then, this is the right food for you both."



*Give me eyes You the Lover of human beings
That I could see every person as You see him.
And cover his weaknesses as You cover mine.
Help me that no bad word comes out of my mouth,
But speak with Your sweet tongue.
Help me with Your thoughts so I would not condemn any person.*

Short Story no. 187

The Miraculous Merchant of Candies

Uncle Bishay, the merchant of candies, was an extremely simple and honest man. He used to wander with his cart carrying candies in the streets of Shoubra, downtown Cairo, selling candies to the children near one of the schools there. Uncle Bishay loved the Bible and used to give his Bible to his friends and asked them to read him some of its chapters and verses, as he was illiterate.

One day, Uncle Bishay saw one of his neighbors heading to him, looking confused. He said to Uncle Bishay, "Peace be with you, brother!"

"Peace be with you Uncle Bishay!"

"I hope all is ok."

"Everything is ok. But your wife feels some pain and asks you to leave your cart to one of your friends and go back home to her."

Uncle Bishay was a little confused, as he left his wife in the morning feeling not quite well but he did not take it seriously. She concealed most of her pains behind her sweet smile and her nice words with him and with her eight kids.

Uncle Bishay made the sign of the cross and looked at heaven praying for his wife. Then he walked towards his house where he found the door of his room in the ground floor open. He saw all the needy women surrounding his poor wife in the one room in which all the family was living. These women used to visit the house and take small assistance from this loving wife.

When Uncle Bishay saw this scene; especially when the women started to console him for his wife's death, he tried to collect himself and he asked them quietly to leave the room with his sons for some time. Then he went into the room and approached his wife who was dead on the bed. He knelt down in great faith and he prayed humbly saying, "God, You've given me eight sons and You gave me this wife as a pillar for the house to raise her kids. How could You take her from us? Who could raise those kids?"

Tears poured down on his face while he was blaming God with inaudible words. While he was crying he heard these words, "I gave your wife fifteen more years, as I did before with Hezekiah the King."

Bishay relaxed and thanked God for his gift and support. Then he asked the women to come into the room and fetch some food for his wife. Bishay said to his wife with great faith, "Raise up and eat."

Then she opened her eyes and started eating after some minutes.

Bishay left his house, thanking God for his great care. He asked one of his friends to write the date of that day on a small paper which he put in his wallet. Time went by, and Uncle Bishay became old and he raised his eight kids while he was working as a merchant of candies. One day, a man came and told him that his wife was very sick. Bishay took out the paper from his wallet and asked him to read the date written on it. He found out that fifteen years had passed and realized that the time for her death has drew near. He hurried to his house.

He entered the room and knelt down beside the bed saying to his wife, "Farewell my wife. Thank you God for leaving her all these years to raise her kids and support me.

Now rest my wife in the name of God. Remember me in Jesus Christ's presence."



How sweet You are my Creator!

You endow me with grace and glory in my life.

*You give me peace and joy in my departure.
If I live, I live for You.
If I die, I die for You.
You are my life and eternal glory.*

Short Story no. 188

I Heard Nothing

At the door of the parish of Fayoum, the priest asked about his grace Bishop Abram. They told him that he was sitting, as usual, on his couch. So he went in.

When the father bishop saw the priest, he welcomed and hugged him, asking about him. The priest sighed bitterly saying, "I couldn't sleep all night, father."

"Why?"

"Because of my colleague the other priest."

Anba Abram stayed silent without any response. But the priest continued complaining of his colleague. Then Anba Abram asked one of the people working in the parish called Rizk to get him a cup of coffee.

The priest drank it and continued in his complaints. Anba Abram asked for another cup of coffee for the priest.

The priest continued talking bitterly and the bishop did not utter a word or show any response. Finally the priest ended his conversation saying, "I've burdened you with my complaints but you didn't answer with a word or guide me."

Anba Abram looked at him and said, "I'll ask for another cup of coffee for you. Relax your mind. Believe me I didn't hear anything of what you said."

The priest was greatly embarrassed and he apologized because of his complaints against his colleague and asked the bishop to pray for him so he could control his tongue and not to condemn anyone. Then he bent his head pleading for the prayers of Anba Abram to ask God's forgiveness for his sins.

When the priest finished, he left Anba Abram to find his colleague priest in front of him so he embraced and kissed him forgetting everything he did.

The priest went back to Anba Abram after some time. The bishop inquired about his colleague. The priest answered that all things were fine and that his colleague whom he thought was a troublemaker beforehand has become extremely nice to him and that he even has felt that he was not worthy of his fellowship and his blessings. The priest was even praising his colleague. The bishop rejoiced and looked happily at him saying, "Hurry to the church and take part in the holy mass."

The priest left Anba Abram and hurried to the church where he took part in the mass with the other priests feeling great spiritual and heavenly happiness. The mass ended quickly and the priest headed to the front door carrying a Korban (The Holy Bread) but he found it closed. The priest knocked at the door until the janitor opened and was surprised and asked the priest, "How did you go into the church?"

"The door was open."

"I didn't open it."

"How did this happen. I already took part with the other priests in the service of the Holy Mass."

"Which Mass?"

"The Holy Mass."

"There was no Holy Mass today."

"I tell you, I took part in the prayers myself and this is the Korban of offering."

Then the priest realized that he was praying in a Holy Mass with a group of hermit priests as a reward for his repentance from his colleague's condemnation and the great love his heart carries.



+ *Let my tongue stop condemning others.*
Let my heart and mind look at You in heavens.
+ *Let me not be occupied by the weaknesses of others,*
So I could enjoy my partnership with the holy saints.
+ *Let me not condemn anyone, to avoid the eternal condemnation.*

Short Story no. 189

Shift from Death to Life

Young Mark noticed a big smile on his mother's face. So he asked her, "Why do I see you happy, Mom?"

She said, "I've heard a sermon on the promise of Jesus Christ for us."

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has Everlasting life, and shall not come into judgement, but has passed from death into life"

(John 5.24).

The mother started explaining to her son this Divine promise and how she realized the certainty of the work of Jesus Christ for eternity through whose blood we are transformed from the death of sin to the new life.

Both mother and son opened the Bible and the son underlined the heavenly promise and knew it by heart. He even started memorizing it all day and he was extremely happy.

Ten days passed and the kid went home one day to find his mother losing her inner happiness and looking depressed. Mark looked at his mother with great surprise, saying, "What happened Mon? Did the verse change? I'll go and see."

Then he rushed to her room and brought the Holy Bible and opened it saying, "It's the same verse which we used to read. The heavenly promise has not changed."



+ *Let me preserve Your heavenly true promises so that You preserve me always happy.*
+ *Inscribe Your heavenly promises in my heart.*
Set them in front of my eyes so that I shall not forget them.
+ *This is Your lively promise: to endow me with Your eternity.*
With You I live and I glorify God, the happiness of my soul.

Short Story no. 190

An Atheist And A PEASANT

Some years ago, one of the educated people volunteered to wander from one city to another to spread his atheist thoughts amongst people. With his eloquence he could make the people question their faith in God. Considering this as retardation, the study of the Bible an ignorance, and the redemption through Jesus' blood as backwardness.

He saw a lot of people in a large hall at a certain city and he started talking to them with great eloquence. When he felt that he dominated the emotions and minds of the attendants, he announced proudly in front of all the crowds, "If God the almighty is present, let Him declare Himself by striking me dead quickly."

Then he satirically commented, "Look there is no God."

Suddenly, a young peasant approached him and politely said, "Sir I can't stand against your logic. You're educated but I'm a humble uneducated peasant. But I ask you to answer a question which is confusing me, as you're so wise and knowledgeable."

With great pride, he said, "Ask."

She said, "I'm a humble person who believes in Jesus Christ who loves me and died for me. My faith fills my heart with joy waiting for death in hope that I'll live again to be with Him. Sir, I ask you, "What shall I lose if I was surprised to find that there is no God or redemption or eternal life after I die?"

A great silence took place in the hall and the atheist lecturer said ironically, "You won't lose anything as after death, you won't stand in front of anyone and you won't ever exist!"

The peasant said, "Thank you sir, as you answered my question, will you allow me to ask another question only?"

She said, "When your turn in death comes, what would be your condition, if you discover that you're standing in front of God whom you are despising, and that the Bible is true and the redemption which you denied is a true fact?"

The atheist lecturer was silent while all the crowds were confused and suspicious regarding the false teachings of this atheist.



- + *You have given me a perception and discernment to recognize You.*
- + *Sanctify my soul to see You.*
- + *Let all see and rejoice in You.*
- + *Let all wait for the moment of meeting you.*

Short Story no. 191

The Banner of Heaven

Copenhagen Christian, King of Denmark, noticed during his wanderings, that the sign of the converted cross was waving on a public building and this would be a breach of the agreement between Hitler and the city. The King issued an order, "Drop this banner from the building."

The German soldier refused to follow the order saying, "The banner has been raised recently according to the orders issued from Berlin."

The King said, "I said drop this banner before twelve o'clock, or else, I shall send a soldier to the building to get it down."

The soldier said, "We'll shoot any soldier who will do this."

The king said, "I'm the soldier who will take down the banner."

The king went up and took the banner down and the Nazi soldier could not kill the King of Denmark.



Likewise, King of Kings Jesus Christ came down from heaven to tear down the banner of Satan the power of this world and to replace it with the banner of heaven.

St. Paul the apostle, says,

"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"
(Heb. 2.14).



My King, remove from my heart the banner of the devil and replace it with Your love.

"And His banner over me was love" (Song. 2.4).

Who could expel the devil from my heart?

Who could liberate my soul except You?

Raise the banner of Your love on me so that my soul would be Your dwelling.

Short Story no. 192

The Extreme Beauty

Andrew saw Peter the servant of the church and frankly said to him with bitterness, "I don't know why God created me.

Nothing in me is good.

I'm a furious person.

A lot of times, I do grieve my father and my friends.

I did my best to live with humility and grace.

I promised God a lot of times not to get furious but I couldn't.

What should I do?"

Peter answered, "Don't get frustrated. Yesterday my wife and I stood in the garden, in front of an apple tree which was full of fruits. We picked up a delicious apple and as we were eating it, I said to the tree, 'How beautiful and delicious you are! Your branches are full of fruits.'

My wife smiled and said, 'Don't you remember how the fruits of this tree weren't good for eating? But you mixed it with the seeds of another better tree. Your hands are those which made this tree beautiful and fruitful. If you didn't feed it with the good seeds, it'd have been useless and fruitless and it should have been cut and burnt. Thank you my dear husband.'

What I did with the fruitless tree, my Lord Jesus Christ is doing with me. He gave me His life and fed me with it. He created of me a beautiful tree full of spiritual fruits. Without him, I don't deserve except to be cut and thrown out in an eternal fire. Jesus is fulfilling His promise to me."

"I am the vine, and you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit, For without Me you can do nothing"

(John 15.5).

Andrew stayed silent for a few moments then he said to Peter, "But I'm very furious, will God rid me of this fury?"

Peter said, "Jesus will switch your anger to useful and holy anger."

Andrew said, "How? Is there a holy and useful anger?"

Peter said, "Definitely yes. Without anger, I can't offer a true repentance. Let me be angry, not with others, but with myself. Let me rebel, not against people but against sin which intrudes on my life. This is the work of the Holy Spirit to remove our weaknesses and reshape them with His graceful and beautiful touches.

Andrew! I'll narrate to you a realistic story:

John Ruskin the artist found that one of his relatives was weeping bitterly and he asked about the reason behind that. She said, "I've a very precious handkerchief which has special memories for me. Some ink was spilt on it and stained it. I checked with more than one dry-cleaner companies but they all said that the ink couldn't be cleaned. I felt very upset.""

The artist smiled and took her handkerchief and asked her to relax, as he would handle this problem. The artist headed to his workshop and drew a beautiful rose on the spot. He returned to his relative and gave her the handkerchief. She said in surprise, "This is not mine."

He said, "No this is your handkerchief but I turned the ugly spot into a beautiful picture."

The lady was very happy and thanked the artist who turned ugliness into a beauty.

This is what God, the Artist, does when His Holy Spirit absorbs us so as to transform us into a lively icon of Jesus Christ. Therefore, we find ourselves completely changed and renovated. We are reborn in the waters of baptism. God's spirit works in it without stopping."



*God, my soul is in Your hands, You the Great Artist.
My soul is within Your hands oh God.
You are the Miraculous Artist who transforms my ugliness into great beauty.
It is You who turn my soul into a lovely icon.
Thank You God for all what I have is contributed to You.*

Short Story no. 193

A Pin or a Scorpion's Sting

It was said that a person went one day into his library. He took a book to read and felt like a pin pinching his finger. The man thought that this was caused by a pin stuck to one of the pages, which was left by a negligent person who borrowed the book from him. The following day, his finger started to swell and then all his arm then his body. Within a few days, the man died.

His injury was not caused by a pin but by a fatal sting of a scorpion which was hidden behind the books and the man ignored the treatment.

Truly, a lot of books carry fatal poisons even more dangerous than those of a scorpion which sting the person's thoughts and cause hidden sickness that could damage the life of the person and even his eternity. Amongst these books, those mentioned in Acts 19 and 20.

"Also, many of those who have practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord grew mighty and prevailed."



God! Let me not stop reading, You the Miraculous Instructor.

God! Endow me with true understanding to read without tedium,

To stay awake without laziness.

God! Endow me with discernment

So that I would not be tempted by misleading philosophies

And my mind would not be stung by scorpions and snakes.

Help me to enjoy Your word and live till eternity.

God! Enlighten my mind so as to have the true knowledge

And the old snake would not sting me, with false knowledge, as it did with Eve.

Live in me so that I can find in You all truth.

You are the open book of my heart.

In You I enjoy knowledge and truth.

Short Story no. 194

The Discarded Obelisk

Ted stood amongst the youth looking at an obelisk-shaped stone which looked very beautiful in its three sides while the fourth one was not touched by the artist. This obelisk stayed on the floor for thousands of years in a stone quarry at Aswan, in Upper Egypt and no one accomplished it or even placed it in the entrance of the city or in front of the altar.

The youth heard the words of the tourist guide saying, "One of the pharaohs, mostly Tohotmas the third, wanted to build the largest obelisk in the world so he chose a piece of granite, the base of which is 14 X 14 square feet, and its weight was estimated 1170 tons. The Egyptian artists carved the designs on its three sides. Then, they discovered that there was a fault so they stopped their work after all the efforts exerted. Here is the stone lying in front of you not suitable to be placed in front of any Egyptian city or to be put in front of any altar. Truly, it is a unique piece of granite which cost a lot of money and effort but could not be accomplished because of its defect."

Ted returned to the hotel with his colleagues but could not eat. He left them to walk alone outside the hotel and the picture and the story of the obelisk stayed in front of his eyes.

He looked towards heaven saying, "Now I understand.

No unclean animal could enter heaven.

Pharaoh refused to enter a city in Egypt or an altar with a defective obelisk.

How God could allow the unsanctified to approach His Heavens?"

"They have all turned aside. They have together become unprofitable. There is none who does good, No, not one" (Rom. 3.12).



+But thanks, God for Your great love,

You sacrificed Yourself so as to wash us with Your blood

That we can approach the bosom of God.

+ The stone obelisk has been thrown on the ground thousands of years

Because of a minor defect.

God, let me not be thrown away because of a folly in my life.

God, help me to be protected from sin and any sinful thoughts

Lest I should be thrown outside with the stone obelisk.

Short Story no. 195

A Sudden Meeting

While George and Mark were walking together, criticizing their friends, suddenly George interrupted the conversation, and said, "Mark, didn't we agree that whenever one of us says a bad useless word or condemns others, the other would say, 'I don't want to listen'?"

"George, don't be so strict."

"No, We should be ready. What should we say if Jesus Christ would come now or if He would summon us to His paradise?"

Both of them remained silent for some time. Then, George interrupted this silence saying, "Whenever, I remember the visit of the U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower (1890-1969) to Paul Donald Haley, I feel guilty longing for the visit of the King of Kings according to God's promise."

Mark then asked, "What's the story of this visit?"

George said, "When General Eisenhower became the U.S. president (1953-1961), he made a visit to Denver.

Paul Donald Haley, a six-year-old kid, learned of this visit. Paul had cancer and was seriously ill. He asked his father saying,

"I love the president so much and I am eager to see him. How could I see him even from a distance?"

Paul's father embraced his kid and kissed him with tears in his eyes, as he knew that his son was dying. Then he said to his son as a kind of a joke, "Write to the president that you're looking forward to see him."

Paul wrote to the president explaining his illness and circumstances and that he was eager to see him. Eisenhower was greatly impressed by the letter and on Sunday morning, he asked for his limousine chauffeur to drive him to the child's home.

The president knocked at the door and Donald Haley was surprised to find the president in front of him asking to see his son who was following him.

Donald was confused as he did not expect to see the U.S. president in front of him but the president said to him with a sweet smile, "Sorry, I didn't call to set an appointment for the visit. But I came to see Paul, your dear son."

The president welcomed the child saying, "I knew that you wanted to see me. I'm also eager to see you, that is why I came."

The president held the child's hand and accompanied him to his limousine to show it to him. Then the president returned the child home after he had a friendly conversation with him.

The child returned to find his father confused.

Paul asked his father, "Why are you disturbed Dad?"

His father said, "How could I receive the president with these clothes: jeans and sleeveless shirt? Is this the way to receive a president?"

With a big smile revealing the child's pride for the president's visit, he said, "He came for my sake and not for your sake Dad. He loves me and is eager to see me."

Donald said, "I'm happy that he's your personal friend and that he took you to his car to showed it to you and that he spoke to you personally but I should not have received him with these clothes."

Paul said, "But you didn't know that he was coming."

Donald answered, "As long as we sent him a letter, we should have expected his coming. I feel pain as I wasn't ready for his coming."

George ended his story commenting,

Every day of my life, I say to my Lord, "Yes come my dear Lord."

How could I not stay awake waiting for His arrival?

I am His sick child who is anxious to see Him. Jesus Christ loved me and promised to come to hold my hand, to accompany me to His Father's bosom. Yet He does not have a temporary friendly conversation but I stay with Him and inherit His glories. He accompanies me to His heaven and reveals His eternity.



I am yearning for You Jesus Christ.

No one can qualify me for Your coming except Your Holy Spirit.

Kindle my soul with Your love so I might be more eager to meet You in eternity.

Come to me or take me to You. I am eager to see You and to live with You forever.

Come my Lord. I will not stop to testify for Your coming.

I wish I could see all the people with me on the clouds.

I wish to rejoice and let all rejoice in You.

I wish to be crowned by Your glory and let the others do likewise.

I will not stop calling You. Jesus Christ is coming. Let us wait awake for Him with joy.

Short Story no. 196

Poor Horse

Stephan, a horseman, was greatly admired by the citizens, as he was clever in guiding his trained horse. He won a lot of medals in horse races. Stephan loved his horse greatly and treated him like a friend. He decided to let his horse guard his garden from the birds that were eating the fruits from the trees.

The horse was really alert and did not let any bird approach the fruits. It was very fast, running everywhere in the big garden so as to protect the fruits of the trees. When darkness fell, the horseman, the owner of the orchard came back and found out that his horse has damaged all the beautiful flowers and the vegetables during his continuous jumping through the garden to kick out the birds. He started hitting his horse vigorously with whips.

One of the neighbors noticed Stephan and rushed to him saying, "What are you doing?"

"I'm punishing the horse, as it spoiled the beauty of the garden and destroyed all the basins of the roses and vegetables on which I invested a lot."

"Do you think that the horse did this on purpose to hurt you?"

"No, but it didn't care about the basins of roses and vegetables."

"Who is to be blamed for that? Is it the horse or its owner who didn't know how to put everything in its right place? It isn't the job of the horse to guard the gardens from birds."

Stephan realized that he was the one who deserved to be lashed by whips and not his horse, as he was not wise.



+ *Let me be proud, O Lord, of Your offerings to me*

And not to envy any other person for his talents.

Let me not despise others for not having what I have.

Help everyone to be honest with the blessings You have given.

+ *Offer me Your Wisdom to realize the job I should do which is suitable for my talents.*

+ *Endow me with Your Wisdom so I can put everything in its right place.*

Short Story no. 197

An Open Tap

M.P. Green narrated a story saying that one of the mental hospitals was conducting an irregular test before permitting the patient to go out of the hospital. The doctors used to accompany the patient to a room with a basin full of water. The doctor let the tap open slightly and asked the patient to wipe the wet floor of the room.

The doctor noticed that the patient wiped the floor without turning off the tap. Accordingly the water dropped from the basin to the floor. Likewise the patient continued to wipe without result and the floor was still wet. Then the doctor asks the hospital not to let him out, as he is not cured.

A lot of times, we do what this patient has done. We leave the tap of our senses open and the bottom of our hearts continues to be open for follies which sneak from eyes, ears, tongue, nose or touch. We try to wipe our hearts of these blemishes, to no avail. But we need our Savior Jesus Christ, the physician of our souls who has the Key of David; He is the one who can open and nobody can close, and who can close and nobody opens. It is He alone who can sanctify our senses so that no dirty water can come through them.



*My God! Put a guard over my mouth and a strong door for my heart.
Oh God, be the guard over my senses so that no sin could destroy them.
Oh God, You are the only One who could cure my thoughts,
Sanctify my soul and wipe the traces of my sins.
You are My Savior and the secret of my sanctity.*

Short Story no. 198

I'm the Captain

A youth was raised in one of the neighborhoods of New York and was working in the theatres. He was famous for his dramatic script. He bought a yacht and hired a person to steer it. He used to call himself "the captain". He bought a certain uniform designed for the skipper with copper buttons and golden medals.

He accompanied his mother on a cruise. When his mother boarded the yacht he went into his room and put on the skipper's uniform. Then he came to his mother and said, "Mom, I'm the skipper of the boat."

His mother looked at her spoiled son and said, "Yes, you're the captain according to your own opinion." Then she remained silent for sometime and continued,

"You're the captain of the boat according to your opinion and your mother's but not according to the captain's point of view."



*Many a time I regard myself as virtuous according to myself
And according to other people's opinions. But am I virtuous in Your opinion, God?
Let me be virtuous, Oh Lord.
According to You and not to other people's thoughts.*

Short Story no. 199

Strange Godfathers

(The original copy of the story is taken from transcript 92 available at the Monastery of Great Saint Anthony)

Father patriarch met with a group of his sons whom he knew in person. After welcoming them, one of them said, "Forgive us father Patriarch. We came to your holiness to reveal a problem which was worrying us."

"God will solve it my sons."

"There is a lady who is living beside us and is known to all the city for her bad reputation. She opens her home for men and spoils the morals of the youth."

What is strange is that some weeks ago she came to my wife knocking at the door. She was really sick and weak. It seemed that she was really ill. She revealed all her disgraceful past to my wife and asked her to accompany her to the church and be her sponsor and God Mother in front of the priest. My wife refused, as she knew that till recent times this lady was committing a lot of sins and was trapping others in them. My wife was concerned that her repentance might be temporary because of her illness and that she'd go back to her past. In short, my wife didn't accept to be her godmother and was worried about her kids for fear of her bad conduct. So she spoke harshly to her so as to discourage her from coming again to her house.

However, I heard from some of our brothers, that she approached them within these days and they did what we did. All people were worried that she might mislead their sons into folly. According to my point of view, as long as she was serious in her repentance, we should support her wisely for her redemption even if the whole city hears about her disgraceful reputation.

"Forgive me my father! Could she be baptized soon?"

"No, we should give her some time to test the truth of her repentance."

"What's strange, my father, is that my wife saw her yesterday wearing a white dress which made my wife suspicious. So my wife asked her, "Why are you wearing this dress?"

The lady said that she was baptized and that she would stay for a week in white.

"Are you sure of this?"

"Here is my wife. You can ask her."

"What did the lady say?"

"My Father, she said that she has been baptized and that she would wear white for a whole week. Truly, my father, she was rejoicing. But I couldn't sleep all night as I was worried about her return to her past, especially, she did not quit her wicked life, as I believe, except after her illness. As before her illness, her house was the source of our worries because of those men coming in and out of our street."

"Did she tell you who baptized her?"

"She said father so-and-so."

"Don't worry my children. I know that the said priest is a wise and a prudent person. I think that he wouldn't baptize a person unless he was sure that she had a reliable godmother responsible for her life. I've never heard that he rushed into baptizing any one. I'll summon him and check this issue with him."

All the people left the patriarch trusting that he would personally take care of this.

The said priest was welcomed decently by the patriarch and then was asked,

"I've heard that so-and-so was baptized."

"Yes my father patriarch. I'm the one who baptized her two days ago."

"Do you know her beforehand?"

“Absolutely not, but I have heard about her as her disgraceful reputation was known all over the city.”

“How could you baptize her so fast?”

“Two days ago, she came to me with three distinguished persons from the city whom your holiness know and trust. They confirmed her repentance and pledged in front of God and me - and in the room of the deacon - that she repented and required urgent baptism.”

“Why didn’t you ask for postponement?”

“I did try a lot but my confidence in them urged me to baptize her at their responsibility in front of God as they became her entrusted God Fathers.”

“I’ll check with them. Would you object to that?”

“No, I’m ready to confront them.”

The holy patriarch summoned urgently the three men. Then he asked one of them,

“Do you know that lady?”

“I heard about her but I’ve never met her.”

The priest was surprised and embarrassed and his face blushed and asked him again,

“How come you didn’t meet her?”

“I’ve never met her my father.”

“Didn’t you bring her for baptism with the other two men two days ago?”

“I for myself, I’ve never seen her or brought her to you.”

The other two men answered with the same words.

The father patriarch was surprised because of these denials and was confused. Yet he fully trusted his respectable priest as well as the three men.

The priest tried to control his emotions and quickly said to them,

“Did you not come to me two days ago with the lady and asked me to baptize her and you were her God Fathers?”

One of them answered,

“This is strange, my father, I’ve never seen you before this day and this is the first time, I know that this lady was baptized. We all know her bad reputation, how could we introduce her to baptism? How could we be her godfathers? Are you sure of what you are saying?”

The priest answered, “Yes, The deacon was present. He’s there. Let’s ask him.”

The holy patriarch felt the seriousness of the situation. He summoned the deacon who greeted the three people. When the patriarch inquired, “What do you know of this lady?”

The deacon said, “I hear about her bad name. But two days ago, I attended part of the rites of her baptism and I was totally surprised how this lady was baptized and how such honorable people like these would sponsor her.”

At this moment, the three men were surprised and asked, “Did you see us with your eyes?”

He said, “Yes and you were her God Fathers.”

The priest was relieved and sighed. The three men were greatly terrified and insisted to summon the said lady.

The lady came into the patriarchate in her white clothes with a big smile. She met all the people there. The patriarch asked her quietly, “I wish to know how were you baptized.”

She answered, “My father, I felt greatly bitter and was eager to enjoy the secret of baptism but my evil past closed their hearts and I don’t blame them for that.

Two days ago, I was weeping bitterly for long hours till God opened the hearts of these three men. They knocked at my door and asked me to rise with them and go to my father the priest. This deacon was present and I was baptized and this was my heart's wish.

God has fulfilled my heart's request and lightened my mind and my life has changed from darkness to light. I’ve enjoyed resurrection after I was dead with sin.

Truly I say, my father Patriarch, I owe my whole life to these beloved men and to my father the priest. It's God who blessed them with the virtue of concealing my sins. God compensate them and their children."

Tears of joy came down from her eyes and all were silent. One of the men tried to check with the lady again. However, the holy patriarch asked him to be silent and asked the lady to go out for a while. Then he said to the men, "I thank you all for your love. But I would like to tell you a secret, all of you are saying the truth and there is a miraculous secret in the story of this lady, which we should know. I'll sit with her to know the truth of her baptism."

The patriarch excused and then he asked the lady, "Were these three men your God Fathers?"

The lady answered in surprise, "Ask them my father. I didn't ask them but they themselves came and requested me to do that."

"Do you know them beforehand?"

"Never."

"Why did they come?"

"I don't know."

Then the father patriarch closed his eyes and pleaded to God to reveal the secret of these men. God declared to him that three angels came to support her when all people refused to help her.

Then the patriarch asked her, "Did you perform any act of love?"

"Could an adulterous woman like me do good things?"

"Before your sinful life, did you do one good thing in your youth?"

She remained quiet for some time then said, "In my youth, I was walking beside a field. I found a person tying a rope on a tree and he stood on a chair to hang himself. I felt great pain so I went to him and asked what he was doing. He answered saying that he borrowed a lot of money and he could not pay his debts so he thought of suicide.

I cried in front of him bitterly and said to him, "Would you lose all your life because of money?"

He answered, "What should I do as I could not pay my debts?"

"I'll give you all what I have but don't harm yourself."

He responded to my pleading and left the tree and came with me home. I gave him all what I had of money and jewelry. I became poor and underwent a hard crisis so I was forced to sell my body for sin several times.

As I lost my purity, my life turned into adultery until God declared His love and allowed me to undergo a chronic illness and I was about to die. I implored God to give me another chance for repentance. I've already done so but I couldn't find a person who could sponsor me for baptism. Then God sent me these blessed men."

Then the father patriarch sighed and said, "God is not unfair to forget any deed of love. You saved a person from the death of the body so God sent His angels to make you enjoy the redemption from the death of the soul. God loves you even if all the people closed their hearts in front of you."

The father patriarch went out to the priest and his deacon and the three men and told them about God's miraculous deeds and His eternal love. All felt elated and went out thanking God who does not forget our humble deeds of love, even if we forget them ourselves.

SHORT STORIES FOR THE YOUTH

200-214

**Together with
“The Angel of Mercy”**

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Short Story No. 200

Christ Is the Joy of the Family

In bitterness, Sarah walked from one room to another saying, “Hell can’t be worse than my life now. I’ll kill myself. It’s the only way to find rest. I hate my life, my husband and even my kids. I don’t want to be a wife or a mother. I feel like a slave spending all morning preparing food, washing dishes and cleaning. I’ve no choice but suicide.”

Sarah got hold of a razor so as to cut the veins of her left wrist. No one would stop her.

Suddenly the phone rang but Sarah ignored it. “There’s no one who loves me,” she thought “No one can sympathize with me.”

The phone kept ringing and Sarah started wondering who it might be, “Is it my parents who brought me to this life of fatigue and bitterness? Is it my friends? I’ve no friends. Is it my husband who took away all of my happiness? I can’t stand the touch of his hand. I don’t want to hear his voice.”

Sarah was very confused. Finally she decided to answer. She picked up the phone and thought, “This will be the last phone call in my life. ‘Hello’”

“Hello Sarah!”

“Yes, who are you?”

“Someone who loves you.”

“No one loves me.”

“I love you. There is also another one who loves you even more than me.”

“Who are you?”

“You don’t know my name. I’m your neighbor. I saw you looking very desperate in the balcony this morning. I felt the bitterness of your soul. I found out your telephone number. I can’t rest while you are in distress, That is why I want to talk to you.”

“What do you want?”

“I want to assure you that you have a true Bridegroom who loves you dearly.”

“Who is that bridegroom?”

“He’s the great Lord Jesus Christ who died for your sake and rose from the dead. He’s preparing a place for you.”

“I don’t think that He loves me. I decided to commit suicide. Hell is more convenient for me than this life.”

“Remember the love of Jesus Christ for you and His true promises for you.”

The neighbor started to talk to her about the joyful promises of God and the deeds of Jesus Christ who fills the heart and the family with joy. Sarah lifted her heart towards her Savior and asked Him to fill her heart with comfort and stand with her family. The razor fell from her hand after she hung up. She had promised her friend to call her back. She knelt down to pray for the first time in tears.

“Lord Jesus, declare Yourself to my heart and my household. I’ll never leave You no matter what happens. Hold my hand and guide my family so that we might be happy amidst our pains.”

Sarah felt that everything in her life had changed: her concept of God who arranges for her a place in heaven, her attitudes towards life as well as her thoughts towards her parents, her husband and her kids.

When the kids came back from school, she welcomed them with great joy as if she was seeing them for the first time. Happiness filled the house. Tears poured down on her face

when she thought what would have happened if the kids had come home and found her dead. They would have been shocked and left without a mother.

She heard the door opening. It was her husband. She hastened to open the door welcoming him with great excitement, which was unusual.

Sarah told her husband what had happened.

They prayed together and then he said to her, “Tomorrow you’ll receive a letter from me. Today I decided to commit suicide and I came to bid you and the kids farewell. But thanks to God, my peace and happiness are restored. I don’t know what to say. I feel guilty towards God, you and the kids. Now let Jesus Christ take the leadership of our family. Yes, come Lord Jesus Christ. Glorify Yourself in our small church.”

The first thing Jesus did in His service was attending the wedding at Cana of Galilee and His transformation of the water into wine. This reveals Jesus Christ's concern for the family. He wanted to establish it Himself and support it with His love. He wanted to present a new conception of marriage and fill the family with love and happiness by His permanent presence amidst it.

The family is not a mere bond between a man and a woman to produce kids. It is a lively icon of heavenly life. The law of the family is the sacrificing love. The language of the family is limitless sacrifices without expecting rewards. Its place is beside Jesus Christ where it is born, washed with the precious Blood and protected by Him. It is the second kingdom of love in which Jesus dwells.

“How could we express the happiness of marriage, established in the Church, confirmed by offerings and stamped with blessing?”

(Tertullian the Scholar)

Short Story No. 201

THE CONQUERED DEMON

Everyone in the monastery did his share of work. St. Makarius was cutting grass to fix baskets with his disciples. After he finished with the baskets, he headed for his cell glorifying his Savior. He never considered himself over his disciples but he participated with them meekly in every job.

Suddenly, the devil appeared to him in the picture of an extremely mad person. He wanted to hit the saint and kill him but St. Makarius stood unshaken and full of peace.

The devil felt his great weakness in front of the faithful saint and said to him, “Makarius! You have conquered me, with your great power.

I cannot overcome you.

Look, everything you do, I can do also.

You fast while I never eat.

You stay awake while I never sleep.

There is only one thing through which you overcome me.”

“And what is it?” asked St. Makarius.

“Your humility,” answered the devil “that is why I cannot overcome you.”

Saint Makarius stretched his arms to pray humbly. Therefore, the devil vanished.



*God, You came down by Your humility to my world.
What humility could I show being worthless dust?*

*God, reveal to me my inner soul, so that I may realize that I am the chief of all sinners.
Who can save me from my sins except You?
I confess to You my sins trusting in Your great compassion.*

How could I build anything towards heaven without a base of humbleness and humility?

*Let me be united with You.
You who sacrificed Yourself for me.
Let me be endowed with humility in my life,
Finding joy in every weakness You allow for me.*

Short Story No. 202

A Cluster of Grapes

When a vinedresser saw that his vine had produced a cluster earlier than its regular season, he offered it to the great St. Makarius as a present. The saint received it with great joy and sent it to a sick monk in the monastery saying, "Perhaps this monk needs it most."

The sick monk was very happy to feel the saint's concern but before eating the grapes he said to the messenger, "There is another monk who needs this bunch more than me."

Every time the bunch was brought to one monk, he would think of the others and send it off another way. Finally the bunch came back to St. Makarius. The saint raised his eyes towards God and thanked him for the love, asceticism and sacrifice of the monks. What really pleased the saint's heart was that all the monks had one attitude towards each other. St. Makarius praised the Lord who turned the monks into an orchard carrying the fruits of true love.



Let Your Holy Spirit work in us.

Endow us with the fruits of the soul so that we carry Your love.

Short Story No. 203

In the Right Moment

A former soldier went into the Chase Bank of Manhattan to apply for a loan of \$600 since the bank had a special section for small loans for workers and employees.

The soldier started filling the loan applications and took them with him because some signatures were required from governmental sources to prove his former career. He returned to the bank, the next day and submitted the papers. The bank manager asked him to stand in front of the camera and a picture was taken of him to be attached with the forms.

When his picture, name and the amount of money were registered, the estimate of the small loans paid by the bank reached exactly one billion dollars.

The bank manager stood with the other employees to congratulate the former soldier and the camera of the local newspaper took his picture. He was lucky, as by his loan, the total amount of small loans of the bank became exactly one billion dollars. Because of this soldier's luck, the bank decided to give him the loan free without letting him pay a dime.



*Yes my Lord, You watch my coming to You at the right decisive moment.
I owe You a loan. Who could pay it? But Your Divine promise exempts me from it.
Your Son descended to redeem me from every debt.
Here are all the cameras directed towards me, even all the saints are surrounding me.
All Your heavenly blessings cover me.
What credit do I have?
You are the giver of all these free offerings.*

Short Story No. 204

An Agreement to Disagreement

The hunter targeted his gun towards the bear to kill it. The bear raised his fore legs and said, "Why do you want to kill me? What did I do?"

"I want to sell your fur", answered the hunter.

"I also need a good breakfast. Should I attack you then?" argued the bear.

"Then I should kill you."

"No, let's discuss this as two mature creatures to reach an agreement."

Then the hunter directed the gun away from the bear. The bear bent his head in front of the hunter. The two sat together as if in a peace conference so as to reach an agreement. The discussion continued for a long time. Finally the hunter said, "I won't leave without the fur. I need its price."

The bear answered, "And I won't leave without breakfast. I'm hungry."
As they could not agree, each one escaped the other.



Many a time,

I desire to establish an agreement between the desires of the body and my soul.

This is impossible.

They sit together but they never agree.

Let Your Holy Spirit work in me so that my body and my mind be sanctified.

As for the carnal desires, they never agree with the desires of the soul.

Short Story No. 205

The Brave Soldier

Joseph asked his father, “Why does God allow painful trials? Does he want us to suffer? Doesn’t he want us to rejoice and be cheerful?”

His father answered, “God has created us to be happy, offering us everything. But as we misuse the easy life full of blessings and void of distress, he permits us to have some pain at times so that he can raise our hearts to an eternal life glorious and full of joy.

“How?” asked Joseph.

The father said, “I’ll tell you a famous Greek story:

Antigonus noticed that a soldier full of zeal and courage chose in every battle the most dangerous locations to fight. His behavior used to enkindle his colleagues and superiors with serious strength. Antigonus admired the soldier whom he summoned, thanked and revealed to him his gratitude for his loyalty to his country. The soldier said, “I love my country and desire to die for its sake.”

Antigonus asked if the soldier desired something. The soldier thanked him without asking for anything. At the end, the soldier said that he was seriously ill and was expecting his death between one day and another since he had severe pains. His pains pushed him to get involved in the battles without any fear of death, which he expected fast.

Antigonus introduced the soldier to one of the clever physicians. After a few months, a battle started but Antigonus noticed the disappearance of the soldier from it. After they achieved victory, Antigonus inquired about the soldier thinking he might have died. He was told that the soldier did not die but was completely healed by the physician. After his treatment, he became very concerned about his health, family and his comfort. He avoided taking part in battles.

Antigonus was sad for the soldier whose pains used to fill him with courage but when he was healed, he lost his courage.



I welcome all pains that You allow me O God.

I am happy with pains.

It is my treasury of love to You.

It is my support in my strange life.

My pains are my glory as long as You bear them with me.

It is through them that I like to talk with You.

I welcome the pains, which open the doors of heaven for me.

It is through them that I enjoy the partnership of Your agony,

Share the power of Your crucifixion and enjoy the power of Your resurrection.

Short Story No. 206

I Didn't See Anyone

The Abbot summoned a monk and asked him to travel to Alexandria to meet Pope Athanasius the Apostolic and transfer a certain message to him. On his way back, he met another monk in the wilderness, who asked him,

“Did you see Pope Athanasius?”

“I saw him and gave him the message.”

“What did you see in Alexandria?”

“I didn't see anyone or anything.”

“Were the streets so vacant of people?”

“No, but all my thoughts and looks were directed towards my Christ. Nothing drew my attention except for my dialogue with Him.”

This story reminds me of what happened once with one of the princes, although the motive was completely different.

The prince was upset because of a furious young man who was always mutinous. The prince gave him a lot of chances to stop his fury and aggression but it was useless, so he decided to cut off his head.

The prince called this youth and gave him a pot full of oil, which he asked to carry, and ordered him to walk between two executioners, one on the left and the other on the right. He asked him to walk in the city roads and come back. He ordered to cut off the youth's head instantly if any oil was dropped on the road.

The prince was expecting the death of the youth but after some hours, he came back with the two executioners.

The prince asked the youth, “What did you see on the road?”

“I didn't see anyone or anything”, answered the man.

“What did you hear?”

“I didn't hear anything.”

“How come? This is the market day of the city”, exclaimed the prince
“Because I concentrated all my senses on the pot of oil lest one drop of it fall.”



God, allow me not to see or hear anything.

Not because of my fear of perishing but because of my love for You.

God, allow me to see and hear Your voice so as to fill my soul with Your peace.

Short Story No. 207

From the Clinic TO the Zoo

One day, a High school student in New York City injured his nose. He headed from school to the medical clinic where the doctor had treated him. As he was meditating on the reason God allowed his nose to be hurt, he found himself in front of the Bronx zoo. He thought of going into the Zoo for sometime because nobody would be at home in the morning. The student paid for the ticket but before entering, the senior employees of the zoo surprised him by presenting him a gift. The photographers were taking pictures of him as well. When he asked about the reason, he was told that he was the person number billion to enter the zoo since the date it had been opened.

It is a very simple incident, but happens daily in the life of the faithful who say with St. Paul the apostle,

**“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” (Rom. 8.28).**

*God, Your Fatherhood is profound and miraculous, transforming all my life to good.
Your plans transform the utmost bitterness into sweetness.
It is in You, the Guide of my life, that my soul finds rest.*

Short Story No. 208

Don't Throw Stones At my Boat!

While Sam was playing with his small boat in a pond, it went out of his reach. As Sam was scared to go down in the pond, he called his older brother to fetch it for him. Sam expected his brother to go down into the pond and fetch the boat for him. To his surprise, his brother threw stones in the pond beside the boat. He started shouting, "Don't throw stones at my boat!"

The elder brother ignored Sam's shouts and continued throwing rocks, which caused waves that carried the boat to Sam's reach.



*God! How far is Your wisdom from my understanding!
You act as if You are throwing stones at my life,
But You satisfy my needs through Your wisdom and love.
God, throw Your stones as You wish.
Cause waves in my life.
I feel peaceful and relaxed as long as You are the One Who throws them.*

Short Story No. 209

From the Door Not from the Window

Monica talked with her daughter about Jesus Christ as being the Door through which we can enter heaven. Her daughter asked, “What do you mean by these words?”

Monica answered, “If we go to visit Sandy, your friend, and find on the door a note saying, 'Don't ring the bell, come in through the side door,' what should we do?”

Her daughter answered that they should follow the instructions and go through the side door. Monica said, “Jesus Christ declared to us that He is the Door and that anyone who wants to go to heaven should go through Him.”

Monica continued, “If in the middle of the night, we find a person using a ladder to reach the window of the upper floor. When we ask him what he is doing he would say, 'I'd like to visit you.' What should we do then?”

The daughter replied, “We should call the police to save us because the reason of his visit is clear, since a visitor comes through the door not the window.”

If we would like to go into heaven we should go through the Door which is Jesus Christ and not through the window.



My Lord Jesus Christ,

You are the Door who can take me to the bosom of Your Father.

You are the Only One who can take us there to find happiness in Heaven.

And without You, we have no share in it.

Short Story No. 210

Two Letters in One Week

Maggie, the university student, was always honest with her mother hiding nothing from her. She was decent, kind and cheerful. She sent her mother two letters in one week asking her to send thirty dollars. The first letter was a long one, in which she talked about her desire to attend the birthday of one of her friends who lived 50 miles away from the college. She mentioned that she would spend the weekend with her, if her mother would approve it. She wrote about her friends who would attend the party and stay with her after the party. She kept on praising them and their behavior. She repeated many times in the letter the words, "If you would like me, mom, to go with them."

The mother sent a letter of refusal, not because of the amount of money she required, but because she was going to a distant place and was staying overnight with a family whom the mother did not know anything about.

After the mother had put the letter in the mailbox, she received another letter from her daughter. It was a very short letter, about 5 lines. It said that her colleague became ill so she gave her all the money she had and that she needed thirty dollars. Her mother sent her fifty dollars by telegram.

The first letter included an expression of yielding to the mother's will but the short letter did not, yet the girl knew that she was implementing her mother's desires.

Many times we lengthen our prayers and declare with our tongues, but not with our hearts, the yielding of our will into the hands of God but God does not respond. While other times we pray for seconds from our hearts without saying "Thy will be done", yet God is happy with every simple true word.



God, teach me how to pray.

Let my prayer be according to Your will, not by words but by heart

*Let Your Holy Spirit shape me so that my will be transformed according to Your will,
And my happiness be in Your satisfaction.*

*Let me carry Your mind in me and rejoice in Your union with me
So that I can accomplish Your joy in me.*

Short Story No. 211

Have you Ever Been Arrested?

A person applying for a job started filling out an application form which included the following question, "Were you imprisoned before?"

He answered, "No."

The following question asked, "Why were you not imprisoned?"

He answered, "Because nobody arrested me."

He deserved to be imprisoned but the policemen did not see him when he was committing the crime, That is why he was not arrested.



*I confess O my Lord Jesus Christ that I am a sinner and deserve death,
But Your blood saved me, so I was not arrested.
My sin is ever before me,
But You carried it for me, as You are the Carrier of all the sins of the world.
I was trapped in sin, but I did not succumb to it.
You forgave all my sins.*

Short Story No. 212

I'm Thirsty

While the French critical artist J. F. Raffaeli was walking beside the village Barbizon, he saw Y. B. Corot drawing a picture of fields with forests in the background. Raffaeli noticed that Corot drew a small pond amidst the fields. Therefore, he was astonished at this and asked Corot, "Why did you draw a pond of drinkable water while there is none?" Corot answered, "Young man, it's now eleven o'clock. I came to this field at six o'clock in the morning and I'm very thirsty. I drew this pond to refresh myself."



*My journey has been long.
I draw a picture of heaven in my heart,
So that it may spring abundantly with water from You O God,
That I would not require the water of this world which does not quench my thirst.*

Short Story No. 213

Where did the Drawing Go?

A mother noticed that her daughter Nadine, who returned home on her first day of school, was quiet and uneasy. The mother asked her daughter, “Nadine, what are you thinking about?”

“I drew a picture of an apple on the blackboard”, answered Nadine. “Then I erased it with a brush. Where did it go?”

“It disappeared.”

“Where did it disappear?”

“It just vanished.”

“Yes, but where did it vanish?”

The conversation continued this way and the mother did not know how to explain the erasing of the drawing.

Likewise, our sins are listed in our life-record in heaven, but when Jesus Christ interferes and erases them with his precious blood they disappear. But how? That is what we cannot understand.



My God, my sins have spoiled my life-record.

I have become unclean.

Wash me with Your blood to purify me.

Erase my sins with Your superior love.

But how?

I cannot understand.

What I know is that my life-record has become as white as snow!

Short Story No. 214

The Angel of Mercy

A Real Story

Sarah used to go to church every day with her husband Sgaz Abb (meaning “Blessing of God”). He was a priest. She used to take part with the congregation in the vespers prayers and the liturgy of the Eucharist. One day she came into the church alone while nobody was there. The doors and windows were closed and there was no light but that of the candles. Sarah walked quietly towards the Altar and she bowed down respectfully praying.

Then she rose and looked at the icon of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ at the door of the Altar and started praying quietly to God who loved her and sacrificed Himself for her. The devil tried to distract her because of her infertility but she resisted and wisely put the issue within the hands of Her Creator. She started crying from the depth of her heart, “Jesus Christ, You are the King of Kings.

You are the Help of those who are in trouble and pain, the Hope of all people.

You are the Joy of the sad and troubled.

You control everything.

Hear my prayers and give me a son to be Your servant.

But if it is not Your will then keep my womb shut.

You are glorified now and forever, Amen.”

The lady wiped her eyes and went out of the church. Her heart was full of joy and peace. When she went home she started thinking about her eternal life as she used to do every day. But that day her longing for Jesus Christ had increased and she looked forward to rid herself of her body and go to heaven to live with God, waiting for the glorious day of resurrection.

As she was meditating over these things, she started to consider giving all her money to Jesus Christ through the poor. Sarah was very rich and had inherited a lot of money from her father. She used to donate generously. The people called her “Ekzyharya” (meaning “God's chosen one”) because of her love for the poor, her generosity and her many virtues. Every month on the Twelfth Day, she used to celebrate the feast of Michael the Archangel by setting great banquets for the poor after the liturgy of the Eucharist. Her husband the priest was likewise very generous.

As she was thinking, her husband came into the house and saw his wife looking like an angel. She was always beautiful, but on that day she was exceptional. He saluted her and she said to him, “Dear father, I’d like to ask you about something. If you like it do it. If not reject it.”

“Go on.”

“God has granted us a lot of money. We don’t have a son who can inherit this money. Don’t you think it a good idea to donate our fortune to the poor and needy and give the rest to the church? Don’t you think that we should free the slaves and maids so God may free us from the slavery of sin and help us?”

“Dear sister, your suggestion pleases me but don’t rush it. It may be that God doesn’t want us to make a vow and then regret it afterwards.”

“How could we regret an offering? Let us donate it because donation is the best way.”

When the priest heard his wife's answer, he rejoiced and realized that this idea was not a sudden emotion but a true sign of inner love. Therefore, he knelt with his wife imploring the Lord to accept their offering. Then, they started distributing a lot of their possessions to the poor and dedicated a share for the church without telling anyone of the congregation or the deacons.

In the evening the priest and his wife sat together talking quietly, then summoned the slaves and maids as usual to read the Holy Bible. They all prayed and were about to go back to work when the priest stopped them. He asked them to sit down again and started talking to them, "Dear sons, by the grace of God, my wife and I have decided to free you so that you may live a blessed free life."

The slaves were stunned and did not know what to say because the priest and his wife treated them as if they were their children. Everything was quiet for some moment, then the head servant said, "Dear father and kind mother, did we do anything that you would send us away? If so, punish us as you wish but please don't let us go."

The priest smiled and said, "No my son, we don't want to punish you. You've done nothing wrong. We love you and want you to be free so that God will liberate us from our sins and redeem us. We'll give you all what you need and help you in finding jobs."

"Father, we'd like to stay with you because we love you."

"God bless you my sons, you're free. Whoever wants to stay with us may stay as a free person and not as slave."

With the Archangel Michael

Years passed and the priest and his wife enjoyed great inner happiness but something worried the priest. Therefore, after he finished his midnight prayers, he started to implore the Lord saying, "Lord, our kind Father.

Look to the church.

Look to the people of the church.

Our spirits are bitter because of what we hear of the new king who denied his faith publicly, condemned Your Holy Name and worshiped dumb stones. He demolished Your Altar and built altars for statues. He killed Your priests and virtuous people and surrounded himself with magicians and other worshippers of Satan. He defiled a lot of women and raped many girls and his evil spread throughout the city. We heard that his soldiers have come closer to our city. What should we do?

God, You're our help and protection; You're our hope and refuge.

God of Michael the Archangel, preserve the purity of our people."

After some hours, the priest and his wife were awakened because of much noise. The priest went out to see what was happening to his people. The soldiers saw him and followed him with their spears but he escaped. He threw himself in a pond and cried saying, "God, the Leader of Michael the Archangel, help me and all Your people.

Archangel Michael, where are your miracles?

Why did you leave me at my time of death?

This is a day of great trouble."

The priest did not realize that Michael the Archangel was protecting him from drowning. He went out of the water after a few hours to find that the soldiers had left him since they thought that he had drowned. He walked to the city where he saw his people in pain. The only person that the soldier had captured was his wife. He realized that the soldiers took her to the king since she was very beautiful. The priest became extremely sad. He went

into the church and cried bitterly saying, "O God, I wish You would have allowed my death so that I may not have seen the pains of my people and the rape of my wife.

Do You allow a pure holy creature to be raped by a wicked atheist?

Couldn't You save and redeem her?

God, remember her and all Your people through the intercession of all Your saints and angels."

As the priest wept, a ray of hope crossed his heart and he felt very peaceful. He realized that all things work together for good to those who love God. Therefore he dedicated all his time to serve and guide his people towards their salvation. One day as he was raising incense amidst the people and putting the cross on the head of each one, he saw a queen wearing beautiful rich clothes and jewelry so he blessed her and went back to his service. After the service, he went and asked her, "Who are you, Queen?"

"Truly, I'm a queen but God's angel saved me from the wicked king who wanted to rape me."

"Why did you come here?"

"I heard that your wife had been abducted by the king so I came here to be your wife."

The priest made the sign of the cross and furiously rebuked her saying,

"How could you have such evil thinking my daughter? Do priests marry twice? I believe that God is the protector of my wife and that He'll restore her to me."

"If this is what you believe in, then God will restore her to you."

"Tell me, who are you?"

She unveiled her face saying, "Look my lord. I'm your wife."

The priest then rose up and kissed her head and cried saying, "Where have you been?"

She answered with a sweet smile, "God's will has preserved me and I came here through your prayers."

The news of the arrival of the priest's wife's spread quickly. All the people of the city got together, thanked and glorified God for the safety of her arrival. In the evening, the church was full with all the people who participated along with the priest in the prayers and glorified Michael the Archangel as her request and then he went back home.

The priest said to his wife, "On that sad night, I threw myself at the pool. When I went out the Archangel Michael appeared to me and said, 'I came here to save and protect you for the sake of the offspring that will come out of you, a boy whom I'll preserve.'"

His wife started narrating what had happened to her and said, "I tried to escape but after a few hours, the soldiers came back to the city, perhaps after they were sure that you were dead. They abducted me although they treated me decently as if I was a queen. They wanted to please me through any way but I was praying to my Savior to save me through the intercession of Michael the Archangel. They led me to the city of the king. The king wanted to see me. He brought me to the palace where they offered me precious jewelry and clothes. He welcomed me but never touched me. He ordered the soldiers to take me to the city of his god where he'll come on the third day to marry me in a great official ceremony. During the night of the king's coming, everyone slept exhausted but I didn't sleep. I took off the precious clothes they had given me and put on my old garments. I lifted my heart to God and said, "Lord, Jesus Christ, why have You looked for my sins and overlooked the virtues of my husband who served You with a pure heart?

Why have You delivered me to these atheists who do not know Your name?

I implore You to give me a boy from my husband the priest.

How do You allow me to bear a son from an atheist who does not even know Your name?

God, Almighty who saved Daniel from the lion's den and delivered the three youth from the furnace, show Your power and salvation and do not abandon Your poor servant.

And you, Michael the Archangel, why have you deserted me in my distress?

What happened to the covenant between us which says that you don't desert me as long as I celebrate your feast on the Twelfth Day of every month?

O angel of mercy and compassion don't leave your poor servant but help me and save me."

I wept more and more as time passed but I kept on praying. As I prayed I noticed a strong light emerging from behind so I rejoiced greatly. I saw my beloved Michael the Archangel saying to me, "These troublesome trials are not there for your destruction but rather for God to test your patience and to reveal His wonders through you.

This salvation isn't for you alone but for the son that you'll bare." Then, Michael the Archangel disappeared and I rejoiced.

In the morning, the king summoned all his magicians and court men to offer sacrifices for his wedding. When the temple was overcrowded, I was seated beside the king. After the celebration started with loud songs and dances, something extraordinary happened; great thunder and lightning struck the earth. Everyone was afraid and the king was shocked. The Archangel Michael appeared to me and brought me to our church.

A Blessed Son

The second day after Sarah's ('God's chosen one') arrival, the Archangel Michael appeared to her and said, "Peace be with you, O chosen one.

Today I announce to you the conception of the blessed boy.

He'll be loved by God and by men and also by us, angels.

His virtues will be countless as the stars of heaven."

Sarah ('God's chosen one') slept and saw a pillar of light in the midst of her residence with its top in heaven. All the kings and peoples of the earth looked at her astonished; a multitude of birds flew around it.

While she admired this great scene she heard her husband scream. She woke up and woke him up and inquired about his scream. He answered, "I saw a very bright sun under our bed and a lot of countless stars. I saw also a light shining on all the earth."

After nine months, she gave birth to her son Takla-haymanot, who after three days of his birth, stretched his arms, looked towards heaven and said, "One is the Holy Father. One is the Holy Son. One is the Holy Spirit."

Forty days after his birth, he was baptized.

The priest and his wife underwent financial difficulties after some days and they could not arrange a banquet for the poor on the feast of Michael the Archangel. The mother implored the Lord to help her to offer anything on this blessed feast. She was crying while she was pleading with the Lord. Then she was surprised to find her son whom she was carrying, wiping her tears with his hands and pointing to a plate containing some flour.

She fetched the plate and when the baby put his hand in the flour, it started pouring flour till it filled a lot of bags. He did the same thing with butter, oil and honey. Thus she set a great banquet for the poor at the feast of Michael the Archangel.

SHORT STORIES FOR THE YOUTH

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**Together with
“The Flying Man”**

**Prepared by
Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty**

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Short Story No. 215

God Is Always Present

(This story was told by H.H. Pope Shenouda III concerning his brother, the late Fr. Botros Gayed)

After finishing his studies in the clerical college, Mr. Shawky Gayed joined the faculty of Arts and Philosophy. One day an atheist professor was lecturing against the existence of God. Shawky stood up and argued against the professor's points. The other students listened as Shawky proved the professor wrong. After the discussion was over the professor asked Shawky for his name and asked him to meet him in his office.

The student went to the office where the following dialogue took place:

"I advise you to find another college."

"Why should I?"

"Because I'll never let you graduate as long as I live."

"God exists."

"Whether He does or not; it doesn't matter now. He won't save you from my hands. You must transfer to another college."

"I'm not leaving."

"Then, you won't graduate from this college."

On the exam day, the registrar informed Shawky that he could not attend the exam because he did not comply with the attendance requirements. The student accepted, counting this a small price to pay for his faith in God his Savior.

The following year the professor went to Iraq to teach for three years. Shawky then took the exam, completed his studies and received his diploma signed by the dean of the college and the president of the university.

After obtaining his Bachelor degree, the professor had returned from Iraq. The student went to the professor's office and asked him, "Do you remember me?"

When the professor responded affirmatively, Shawky said, "I've just received my Bachelor degree, Thanks God, Who is always present."

The professor congratulated Shawky admiring him for his strong faith. The professor could not make Shawky leave the faculty but he himself had to leave for 3 years until the student had finished his studies.



I am carried by Your eternal arms.

So why should I be afraid?

What can confuse my soul?

You are my Helper and the Source of my success.

You know all of the deepest mysteries.

You are the God of impossibilities.

I trust in You and in Your Divine promises.

Short Story No. 216

In a Farmer's Uniform

The Arians (those who deny the divinity of Jesus Christ) falsely accused Pope Athanasius of Alexandria before the great emperor Constantine. The Pope became very upset and wanted to meet the emperor. He knew that the emperor was coming through a certain road so he put on a farmer's attire and pretended to work in a nearby farm. At the proper time, the Pope jumped in front of the emperor's chariot. The emperor was surprised and asked to know the identity of this man who risked his life by jumping in front of a moving chariot. The Pope answered and said, "I'm Athanasius and I want you to know the truth."

The emperor admired his bravery. He asked Athanasius to sit beside him in the chariot and listened to what he wanted to say.

Short Story NO. 217

The Marvelous Staff

Pope Cyril the Great wanted to inform the emperor about decisions of the Ecumenical Council of Ephesus but the Nestorians prevented this from happening by searching every person that came near the emperor's palace. At last, the Pope thought of sending an elderly monk to visit the emperor holding a staff. Inside this staff would be a copy of the decisions of the council. He was searched but it never occurred to them that the staff contained what they were looking for. As soon as he was in the presence of the emperor, he pulled out the papers from the staff and handed them to the emperor.

Likewise, God gives wisdom to His believers to overcome difficulties.

Short Story NO. 218

A Cup of Coffee

Jack sat down with his father confessor complaining of his dad who did not let him talk to his chemistry teacher, Michael.

“I don’t know how to deal with my father, for he doesn’t want me even to speak to Mr. Michael.”

“What do you like about Michael?”

“He’s kind and honest in everything he does.”

“Do you think that your father likes these qualities?”

“Sure he does but he doesn’t like Mr. Michael.”

“How do you justify that?”

“Maybe my father is jealous ‘cause I talk a lot about Mr. Michael.”

“I don’t think so since your Dad is a kind loving man. He wants you to have Michael's qualities but not to be a spitting copy of him or of any other person. He wants you to have your own personality. Learn from the others and imitate them in the serious matters and apply what you gained in the way, which matches your personality and your circumstances. Thus, you wouldn’t be like a monkey imitating without thinking.”

This is what the Bible teaches us, St. Paul desires that we will be like him since he is like Jesus. The Church's tradition is to deliver from one generation to the other the living faith practically and not as an imitation, not just the imitation of apparent, arid and meaningless actions. By means of this tradition, we meet with our God through the work of His Fiery Spirit in our belief as well as in our communal and private worship and through the canons of the Church. We see Him transfigured in the history of our Church. That's the true tradition.”

The Priest remained silent for a while then he told Jack a story that illustrated the danger of imitation without understanding and without clear wisdom.

“One of the presidents of the United States of America invited a group of farmers to the White House. Since these farmers were not familiar with the protocol, they all agreed to do exactly what the president did.

Coffee was offered to them just like the rest of the people attending. The president held his coffee dish, so all the farmers picked up their own. The president poured some coffee into the dish and the farmers all did accordingly. The president bent down and offered the dish to his cat. The farmers became embarrassed and didn’t know what to do.”



*Let me live with You and follow the example of Your apostles.
They received Your Bible, Your promises and the faith in You.
They even received their lives from You.
Grant me to learn from their lives,
Enjoying Your heavenly fatherhood,
Carrying Your Holy Spirit always to renew my soul.
Grant me to follow my fathers' footsteps
So I can carry the love that abides in them, by the work of Your Holy Spirit.
Through the living tradition, I see You transfigured in all worships.
I interact with You through the history of Your Church.
I hear Your voice through every Church law,
So I can turn into a lively icon for Your heaven.*

Short Story NO. 219

I Feel Lost

In June 1996, as several theologians from the Middle East were meeting, the bishop of Limasol, Cyprus, said, "I am lost."

One of those present asked, "Why do you say that?"

He said, "I speak English, Greek and German, but I cannot understand Arabic. All of you speak Arabic."

He added, "This reminds me of the story of a ship captain, who was listening to the people on board. The first one was bragging about his knowledge in mathematics, the second about his knowledge in philosophy, etc. The captain of the ship was embarrassed because of his lack of education. An hour later, there was a violent storm. Everybody was screaming and the ship began to sink. The captain asked them if they knew how to swim but they did not. He told them that they would all sink."

You might think that knowledge and degrees in science is all what you need in life, but always remember that your talents, which might not please others, may save your life. Do not underestimate your talents.



*Lord, help me to discover my hidden talents,
So that I may be faithful in the little,
And thus, I shall receive what is much more.
I am not asking for more talents,
But I need Your help to be faithful in using mine.
May Your Holy Spirit work through my talents.
May He work in me, I am the weak.
For Your power is manifested through weakness.*

Story NO. 220

This Is my House

Tim and his sister were discussing the Biblical verse,

“You have been bought with a price” (1 Cor. 6.20).

Tim asked his sister, “What’s the meaning of this verse?”

She answered by telling him the following story:

John was passing by a beautiful house; he told his friends that it was his own. Two days later Sam was with the same friends. He pointed to the same great house and said, "This is my house."

The friends did not want to embarrass Sam, knowing that John claimed the same house to be his own. The next day the same friends were passing by the same house, when Philip got a key from his pocket, opened the house and invited them in. They asked him if it was his house and he said, “Yes, it’s my house. Why are you surprised?”

One of the friends said, “John said that this is his house and Sam said the same thing. Now which one of you is telling the truth?”

Philip answered and said, “We’re all telling the truth. John designed the house so he’s proud of his design and says that it’s his house. Sam owns the house and I’m just the tenant who lives in it.”

Tim's sister remained silent for a while then stated, “I’m God's building. He created me. He bought me with His blood on the Cross and He dwells in me.”



You formed me, O great Architect.

You made me in Your image and saved me.

You shed Your blood for me.

You came down to our earth; You made me Your sacred Temple.

You are my Creator and Savior; You dwell in me.

You own me, O Great Builder.

Let Your light shine in me,

And please do not leave me, because You are the Source of my Life.

Short Story NO. 221

The True Offering

In London, England, a Christian met a very rich orthodox Jew. It is known that orthodox Jews are very strict with the Law. The Christian was wondering if the rich Jew pays his tithes so he asked him, "Do you pay your tithes to God in full?"

The Jew answered, "If I pay my tithes in full that means I don't offer any thing to God because the tithes are not mine. What I offer over and above the tithes is the true offering."

The Christian became very embarrassed because he realized that this Jew surpassed the Jewish Law and fulfilled the Gospel's Law.



*If I offer the tithes from my time and my income,
I shall be offering nothing because these are Yours.
May I offer my heart and all my life to You.
By Your Divine love You possessed me.
May I possess You through love.
"You are my portion," my soul says.*

Short Story NO. 222

A Dialogue between a Cow and a Pig

One day, a father came to me. He was very excited and said, "I give my children good presents since they will eventually inherit all my wealth. I'm giving them most of it now so that they feel my paternal love. They'll always remember my love. It is better this way rather than waiting until I die that they might think that I was a miser."

St. Augustine said, "Why are you burdened with too much riches that might hinder you from going on? If you give some to the needy, they will be glad to walk with you through the journey of life."

This reminds me of a dialogue between a spiritual man and a rich man. The rich man said, "I wonder why people blame me and accuse me of being a miser while I wrote a will that all my money should go to the poor after my death?"

The spiritual man said, "I'll tell you a story about a cow and a pig."

The pig said to the cow, "How come people like you, while you only offer them milk and butter? I offer them meat, bacon, ham and soup!"

The cow answered, "The answer may be because I offer my gifts while I'm still alive.""



*Lord, grant me the blessing of giving,
So that I may offer all my life to You and to my brethren.
I shall leave everything when I get to heaven to be with You.
Let me send some riches there before my departure.*

Short Story NO. 223

The Password

During the American civil war, one of the guards directed his gun at a soldier and asked him for the password. The soldier was confused and told him that he was a friend and not an enemy. The guard insisted for the password and finally advised the soldier to go back to the camp and get it. The soldier went back to the camp and got the password, which was Massachusetts. When he reached the border he said the password and the guard saluted him and told him that he could then cross the border.

Our password as the good soldiers of Christ is the name of Jesus and through Him, we can go to heaven and be in the bosom of the Father.



Your name is the sweetest name in the mouth of all Your saints.

Your name is a fortress. In it I enter and take refuge.

Your name terrifies the devils.

Through Your name, I win,

And all of heaven's gates are opened for me.

Short Story NO. 224

The Eggs were Broken

Maggie ran to her mother shouting, "Mom, somebody broke the eggs."

"What eggs?" asked her mom.

Maggie explained, "Last week, I saw a nest with eggs. This morning there were only pieces of the shells."

Mother, knowing what had happened, took hold of her daughter's hand and they both went to the nest. "Nobody broke the eggs dear. What happened is that there were baby sparrows inside these eggs. When these babies grew bigger, the eggs split open and baby sparrows came out and flew away", mother said.

Maggie was very happy as she watched little sparrows jump from branch to branch.

As we remember our loved ones who died we say to them, "You have departed from your bodies, which wore away in the tombs, as you flew away into Paradise to rejoice with all the heavenly hosts."

Short Story NO. 225

Let him Fly with the Young Eagle

Jack visited his friend the farmer. As they passed by the chicken house, they saw an eagle eating with the chickens. Jack asked, "Isn't the eagle supposed to fly?"

The farmer answered, "This eagle forgot his first nature as an eagle. Now it lives and eats with the chickens."

Jack then asked if he could try to get the eagle fly. The farmer agreed spontaneously saying, "Do whatever you want with it."

Jack took the young eagle to a hill and let it go but the eagle glided for a few moments and returned to the ground. It went down to the farm and then walked as if it was a chicken towards the chicken hall. The very same thing happened when Jack tried a second time. On the third attempt, the eagle majestically spread its wings, gave a very loud cry and flew away into the sky. It never went back to the chicken hall to eat with them again.



O Lord, remind me that I am an eagle.

I can lift up my heart to heaven.

Because I am Your son and the temple of Your Holy Spirit.

May my soul be lifted up and soar in the heavens.

Short Story NO. 226

Let me not Stay in This Nest

Sandy came home after visiting her sick friend, who was suffering from great pain. She asked her sister, "Why does God allow such pain and suffering?"

Her sister told her that God is preparing the soul for departure from this world.

"But how does this happen?" asked Sandy.

"God deals with us as the eagle deals with its youngsters. The eagle prepares his nest by putting straw over thorns. As the eggs hatch the straws are blown away and the nest becomes uncomfortable. Thus the young eagles fly away."



The world with all its beauty may seem uncomfortable to me.

Its thorny routes may hurt me.

Make me fly away from this world's nest.

In You only, O God, I find refuge and comfort.

Short Story NO. 227

Do We Know Each Other on Earth?

One of the ministers was talking about the beauty of heaven. As he rendered the audience eager about our heavenly home, one of them asked, "Will we be able to recognize each other in heaven?"

"Yes," answered the minister, "we'll be able to recognize our family, our friends and all of God's saints." Then he confirmed his answer from the Bible, the biographies of the Saints and from contemporary life.

Many were involved in this discussion, which seemed too long for they were extremely eager to see their friends and relatives who had departed.

All of a sudden one of the audience asked, "Do you think that we recognize each other now?"

There was a moment of complete silence in the room. The same person said, "I've been coming to this meeting for the past three years and nobody asked me for my name. Is it wise to be preoccupied with our dead friends and family members while ignoring the living ones among us?"

Short Story NO. 228

Evil Company

Roseanne noticed that her dad was very upset. "Why are you upset Dad?" she asked him.

Her dad explained, "I've planted wheat, which cost me a lot of time and hard work but the sparrows came and ate it. There is nothing that you or I could do about it. I'll get my gun and shoot those birds."

"But Dad, won't you be sorry afterwards about the dead sparrows?" asked Roseanne.

"I might kill a sparrow or two but I'll save my crop."

The father got his gun and started to shoot. He noticed that all the sparrows flew away except one bird that was unable to fly. After getting a closer view, he realized that it was his beautiful canary, which he loved very much. It had fled from the cage and joined the sparrows that came to eat the crops. The canary alone was hurt. All the sparrows had managed to escape.

The father was very sad for his beloved canary. He carried it kindly, covered it with his coat and returned to his house to take care of its wound.

As Roseanne beheld her father entering his house sad, she asked him, "Dad, why are you sad?"

He replied, "Our dear canary is hurt."

As Roseanne was in grief, her dad showed her the canary, which was covered by his coat. He said, "The poor canary was hurt because he was in evil company."

The sparrows that destroyed the crops escaped and the poor canary was hurt, although it wasn't in need of food."

"Evil company corrupts good habits" (1 Cor. 15.33).



Lord, open my eyes to see heaven.

Let me find good friends to love and be loved by them.

You are my dearest Friend.

Let me always be in Your Company.

Short Story NO. 229

He's my Father

Some botanists went to the Alps to look for rare flowers. One day, they found a rare valuable flower but they could not reach it because it was located far away and close to a steep and dangerous slope. The only way to reach it would be to tie a man and lower him to the flower.

A boy, who was following them, heard them discussing the matter of this rare flower. He asked them, "What are you looking for?"

They said that they were looking for a rare flower that grows only on rocks and that they were willing to pay \$100 to whoever would bring it to them. They told him that they had a very strong rope by which the person who would go down the rock would be tied. All of them would hold it tightly so that the person would be safe.

The boy looked down at the dangerous slope and told them to wait. The botanists were puzzled because of the boy's behavior. A few minutes later, he came back with an elderly man. The boy said, "I'm willing to go down the mountain and get you the flower if this man holds the rope he's my father."

Truly our journey of life could be filled with dangerous situations but if our Heavenly Father is holding the rope we are in safe hands. Our life will not be thrust down the cliff. The Psalmist says,

"Marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well" (Ps. 139.14).



Lord, be the Leader of my life.

I will only leave my life in Your hands.

A successful man was asked about the secret of his success.

He said, "I was raised on the knees of a righteous mother,

And I spent my life through the knees of a straight and firm father."

Short Story NO. 230

I Give Him the Leadership over my Life

In the past century, a minister sat beside the driver of a wagon that was driven by two horses. The driver was a drunken man and he was talking to the minister about horses and wagons. The wagon came to a big slope. The minister asked, "What would happen if you lost control over the horses?"

"We'll surely die But I've experience with horses and shan't lose control", replied the driver.

The minister sat quietly for a moment and asked, "What if I had more experience than you and told you that you're losing control over the horses?"

The man answered, "In that case, I'd surely give you the leadership."
The minister then said smiling, "Well, I assure you that our Lord, Jesus Christ, has the best leadership over our lives. Why do you not give Him the leadership over your life?"



You are my Guide in my trip

*What can frighten me in this life?
My trip is too long and full of troubles but You are my Guide.
I'm very weak and my enemy is very strong.
But I'll be hidden in You, the Conqueror.
All forsook me but You call me by my name.
You carry me on Your shoulders.
You guide me by day and enlighten me by night.
The grave awaits me but You raise me through Your Cross.
You grant me the delight of Your Resurrection.
You know all my past life and You prepare my future.
How can I be afraid while You carry my soul
And bring it from its agony to share with You Your glory!*

Short Story NO. 231

The Greatest Computer in the World

Jessie noticed that her daughter spent a lot of time on the computer. At the beginning, Jessie was encouraging her to use it but equitably without ignoring other activities of her life. One day, Jessie was drawing her daughter's attention to the great work of God. She mentioned what David had said in Psalm 139.14,

"Marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well."

She added that Mrs. McNamara, the wife of the Secretary of the U.S.A. ministry of defense, was asked if computers will take over and replace the human brain. She replied, "The human brain is the greatest computer in the world. It weighs approximately 3 pounds; it contains 10 billion cells and 2500 internal connections with other nerve cells. In order to build a computer with this power, it requires a space equivalent to the face of the earth."

Short Story NO. 232

What If you Started By Sweeping This Room?

Ma Ferguson was energetically campaigning in the state of Texas. After taking a tour allover Texas and talking to its citizens with enthusiasm, she came home. Proudly she reported to her husband saying, "I'll sweep the entire state."

Her husband looked around him and suggested, "What about starting by sweeping this room?"

This was the advice of Jesus to his disciples, to start preaching in Jerusalem (Luke 24.47; Acts 1.8) and then move on to the rest of the world.



*I want You Lord to abide in my inner Jerusalem,
And there, establish Your kingdom through Your Holy Spirit.
Thus I shall be Your witness wherever I go.
I shall become a true ambassador of Your love,
And a living icon that reveals Your glory.*

Short Story NO. 233

The Flying Man

A TRUE CONTEMPORARY STORY

In one of the small streets of Old Cairo, stands the convent of St. Marcorios or Abu Sefein (The Saint with the two Swords). Many simple nuns, who have left their homes and their families for the sole purpose of praying and praising God, live there. They all wear veils as a sign of their abandonment of life and all its worries. They are dressed in black garments, not as a sign of mourning or distress but as a sign that they left everything and are no longer preoccupied with anything but what is essential for living. In this simple nunnery, the nuns devote all their lives for prayers and praises. They do some manual work and some simple crafts in order to cover the expenses of the nunnery.

Several years ago in the midst of these holy nuns, lived an Abbess called Tamav (Mother) Kereya. She served and nurtured her children, the nuns. She would stay awake to guide and strengthen them spiritually and physically. Tamav Kereya was known for her great love to reading the Bible and to singing praises. It was said that she memorized the Old and the New Testaments by heart. Whenever she talked, it would be about the teachings of the Bible or about the lives of the Saints. Bishops would often come and listen to her talking about God.

In this spiritual atmosphere, one of the rich people of Upper Egypt from Abu Korkas used to go to the nunnery carrying gifts. In the morning, he would stay in Cairo for his personal business and in the evening, he would go to the convent to enjoy Tamav Kereya's stories about the saints and listen to her talking about God's great love and care. While staying at the convent, he used to feel as if he is abandoning his worldly life and laying it at Tamav Kereya's feet. He felt that he had laid his life in the hands of God to obtain renewed strength so that he would return to Upper Egypt with a peaceful mind and a contented soul. Tamav Kereya used to tell the man how God sends St. Abu Sefein to help and guard the convent.

The Renovation of the Mills

The rich man decided to renovate his mills so he put some of them for sale. He went from village to village to receive the price of the mills. He put the money he received in a small bag under his arm. One of the taxi drivers noticed the bag full of money and decided to steal it no matter what it would cost him. He started talking to the rich man and ended the conversation by asking if the man would like a ride to Abu Korkas. The man answered affirmatively and they decided on the driver's fees.

On their way, the taxi driver talked to the man kindly to create a friendly atmosphere. When the cab approached the village of Kafr Ammar (the driver's village), the greedy driver pretended that there was something wrong with the taxi. Therefore, the driver excused himself and told the man that they would pass by the village for a few minutes to fix the taxi. The rich man agreed and the taxi driver drove to a small cabin and stopped the car. He went into the cabin and came out carrying a toolbox and pretended to fix the engine. The rich man was tranquilized that it will take a few minutes.

What the rich man did not know was that when the driver had entered the cabin, he met two of his friends. One of the friends asked, "Why are you here so early?"

The driver asked him to be quiet and not to make any noise. He signaled to his two friends to enter an inner room of the cabin. With a low voice he told them, "Both of you exit from the back door and wait for me on the road outside of the village. Pretend that you need a ride to somewhere along the road of Abu Korkas because the man in my taxi is a simple man and he has a bag full of money"

One of the driver's friends asked, "How will we get rid of him?"

The taxi driver thought for a few moments and answered, "I know a perfect spot along the way. We'll stop there and get rid of him."

The taxi driver apologized to the rich man for his delay and they went on their way.

The Three Evil Men

The driver started talking to the man as if everything was casual. They finally arrived at the spot at which the two bandits waited. The taxi driver pulled over and asked them, "What do you want?"

They answered saying, "Could you please take us on your way? We'll pay you whatever you want."

"I'm sorry but this man is late. He's to get to Abu Korkas," the driver said.

"That's the way we want to go."

"I'm sorry gentlemen but you'll have to ask this man first."

The bandits asked the man if he would mind them but he, being a kind man, did not refuse. The two bandits rode the car realizing that their plan was working wonderfully. With incredible speed, the driver drove away until no sign of life could be seen and then the driver pulled over. The rich man then realized that something was wrong. The bandits' faces turned into evil figures as they cornered him. Full of fear, the man asked, "What do you want from me?"

"The bag." answered one of the bandits

"Then take it and leave me alone."

"If we do that you'll surely notify the police."

The man tried to assure them that he would not tell the police but to no avail. The bandits prepared themselves to strike the man. The rich man lifted up his heart asking for the help of the God of St. Abu Sefein.

Suddenly the three men backed away with fear as they saw the man starting to fly into the air. A police officer was holding his hand and flying with him over a nearby pond.

The bandits could not believe what they were seeing. None of them could open their mouths as they stared at the marvelous sight. Even the rich man was overwhelmed with amazement. The bandits, fearing that the police officer would arrest them, fled away terrified.

The rich man had forgotten about his bag of money and about the bandits. He looked to the police officer who was comforting him and patting his shoulder. He looked back trying to spot the taxi but it was nowhere to be seen. The man kept on looking around him astounded.

Minutes passed like hours. The police officer sat beside him comforting and reassuring him that he would not leave until the man was safe. He started telling him how unwise it was to collect money in front of other people. The two kept on talking until the man felt at ease again. The police officer then flew with him over the pond and returned him to the road saying, "Don't be afraid for I'll send you one of my friends."

A Meeting between Friends

A few minutes later a Mercedes drove by and the officer stopped it. Knowing that the driver was going to Abu Korkas, the officer asked him to drive the man to his house saying, "He's a close friend of mine."

The man got into the car and when the officer made sure that he was safe, he disappeared.

The driver froze and asked the man, "Where's the officer who was just here?"

"He left." answered the man

"Where did he go?"

"He went back to where he belongs."

"He didn't go anywhere. Where is he?"

"He's St. Abu Sefein," replied the rich man.

The driver did not believe until the rich man told him the whole story.

The man replied with regret, "Why didn't you tell me before he left so that I can take his blessings?"

The driver of the car was taking care of the church of St. Abu Sefein and he knew a lot about his great miracles. The following day, the rich man left Abu Korkas. He went to visit the convent instantly to offer thanks to God who glorifies Himself in His saints. He then told Tamav Kereya and all the nuns the wonderful things that had happened to him.

SHORT STORIES FOR THE YOUTH

234-255
Together with
“Talking Bottles”

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Story No. 234

A Feast of Love Changing the Course of History

Upon their arrival at Esnah, Upper Egypt, the exhausted captain and his troops were surprised by what the residents of the town offered of food and drink joyfully. The pagan soldier Pachomius approached one of the youth carrying the food and asked him, "Who sent this food?"

The youth responded to him saying that the food was offered by the Christians.

Surprised by that fact, Pachomius asked the youth if he knew who the soldiers were.

The youth answered, "No."

"Why is this food and drink given so generously then?" asked Pachomius.

"For the sake of God who loves all mankind", said the youth.

"But why is it offered joyfully?"

"We offer it in the name of God, a feast of love and an offering from sincere hearts."

When Pachomius heard this, he decided to convert to Christianity upon his safe return from Ethiopia after quelling the revolution there. By the time he and his troops had reached the city of Aswan, they learned that the revolution had been subdued and that the soldiers had been released. Instead of returning to his house after he heard that, Pachomius was baptised and became a disciple of the Ascetic Hermit Palemon. He finally founded the Communal (cenobitic) system of Monasticism in the East, which was later (in the sixth century AD) used as the basis for the Benedictine Order in the West.

A feast of love has thus changed the course of history of the Church. It attracted millions for the enjoyment of the Divine love and brotherly charity.



O Divine Love

Grant me to offer a cup of cold water in Your name.

Grant me a loving heart that seeks doing good.

Grant me to love my brothers in return for Your love for me.

Story No. 235

He Sets the Example

One day, St. Pachomius (the founder of Communal Monasticism) set out on a trip with some of the monks. Each monk carried with himself his share of bread for the journey. When the Saint went to pick up his share, one of the young monks said, "Father, God forbid that you carry anything. I've carried my share as well as yours."

The Saint however replied, "No, I'll carry my own."

The monk persisted, "But you're our father and you watch over us day and night. Please let me carry your bread."

Notwithstanding, the Saint insisted that no one carries his bread, since the leader should not only make himself equal to his brothers, but he should also serve them and bear their burdens.

St. Pachomius furthermore said, "Since it was written of the Lord that it was fit for Him to be like His brothers in all respects, how can a humble person like me distinguish himself from his brothers and not carry like them?"

Finally, the Saint quoted from Christ's teachings,
"Whoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant" (Matt. 20.27).



*What shall I give You in return, O Bearer of the sins of the world?
You have borne my burdens, those which no one but You can bear.
Teach me to be like You,
And to bear my brethren's burdens.
Grant me not to distinguish myself from my brothers,
But to yearn to minister unto them,
And to be a servant to them with You.*

Story No. 236

Outstanding Miracles

St. Pachomius was well-known for his heavenly visions. The Lord had also endowed him with the gift of working miracles and wonders. Once, some monks approached him asking, “Tell us father, what can we do to acquire the ability of working miracles and wonders?”

He answered with a smile, “This ability will be muddled with pride, therefore do not seek it if you’re in pursuit of a pure and spiritual quest. Rather, it’s better for you to seek the power which would enable you to perform such miracles and wonders.

If you see an idolater, and light for him the way that leads him to God. Thus, you will have revived a dead person.

If you return a heretic back to the faith, you will have opened the eyes of a blind person.

If you convert a miser into a generous person, you will have healed a withered hand.

If you convert a lazy person into a motivated one, you will have healed an invalid.

If you change a person’s anger to kindness, you will have exorcised the devil.

Can anyone possibly hope for anything greater than this?”

Thus, St. Pachomius’ heart was not tied to working miracles but to the salvation of people and to their enjoyment of the eternal glory.



Grant me the power and proof of the Spirit,

That I may work through You for the salvation of my brethren.

I have no request but this: to see all enjoying You, O the Source of my life.

What shall I offer You?

The salvation of one soul, in Your eyes, is better than all that the world has to offer.

Story No. 237

My Great Achievements
In One Line

Father Pishoy Kamel's favourite saying used to be:

"I + Christ = a life that defies death."

Truly enough, even after Father Pishoy's departure from this world, his good memories remain and his deeds shine year after year maybe more than during his lifetime. This contrasts sharply with many others, whose memories, and even whose very names, are forgotten shortly after they pass away.

This brings to mind an anecdote that is said of Napoleon Bonaparte, who having dazzled the world with his military skills as well as with civilian achievements, had numerous admirers and flatterers who wrote about him countless works of praise. He had so little time to read what was written about him that once he turned to his entourage and remarked, "What I do now may fill thousands of volumes in this generation. In the next generation, maybe one volume will suffice to record my works. In the third generation, one paragraph will probably be enough for that. By the fourth generation, only one line will be needed."



*All external earthly glory will wither away and fall with time,
But the internal or heavenly glory will defy death.
It will shine and flourish with the passage of time,
And increase with each generation,
Until it blends with the everlasting glory.*

Story No. 238

My Boss Is Always Present

In the local grocery store, after Jimmy, the cashier, had weighed the oranges that a customer had brought, the customer leaned over and whispered in his ear, "Put two more oranges; the other cashier used to do that for me in return for a tip."

But Jimmy answered, "I can't do that 'cause my boss forbids it."

The surprised customer then remarked, "But your boss isn't here now."

Jimmy then said, "No that's not true, my boss is always present. I'm Christian."

These were the same feelings that young Joseph had, when his master's wife locked herself in her bedroom with him, believing that no one could see them. Joseph, on the other hand, feeling the Lord's presence despite the locked door, said,

"How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God" (Gen. 39.9).



*Open my eyes to see You always beside me,
Looking at me, not for dwelling on my faults,
Rather, for supporting me and for defeating all the enemy's tricks.
When You look at me You exalt me to Your height. Then, I would not sin.
Look at me and let me would look at You,
For my eyes to always enjoy Your vision.*

Story No. 239

Who Will Wash her Hands?

A large meeting was once held in 1893 in Chicago, between the leaders of the religions in the world including Buddhism, Confucianism, etc. As they discussed their various philosophies, Edward Everett (a Christian) said, "Gentlemen, I'd like to introduce to you the subject of a lady in deep distress; she has blood stains on her hands. She tried every possible means to remove them, including the application of different kinds of scents and perfumes, but to no avail. She could only temporarily give her small hands a pleasant odour. She's devastated, crying all night for someone to remove those bloodstains from her hands. Those stains, however, remained since those are the bloodstains of the people against whom she committed wrongdoings. Can any of your philosophies help this lady rid herself of those sins?" He asked them.

Since all the meeting participants waited for an answer, he continued saying, "I'll direct this question to someone else. I'll direct it to St. John, who will tell this lady how to get rid of her sins."

The speaker paused for a moment then said, "Listen to what St. John has to say."

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us

From all unrighteousness" The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleans us from all sin."

(1 John 1.7-9).



My inner feelings cry to You:

Who can wash my hands from my crime?

Who can purify me from my sins?

Your blood purifies from all iniquities.

Your blood washes away the blood- stains from my hands.

Your blood sanctifies me, O most Holy One.

Story No. 240

Don't Suppress his Courage

The "Indian Christian" magazine once reported that a violent army officer hit a young soldier since he misinterpreted his courage as an expression of rudeness. Although the soldier felt significantly demeaned, military regulations were such that he could not defend himself and all he said to the officer was, "I will make you regret this."

In a subsequent fierce battle with the enemy, the officer was wounded and taken captive. The same soldier was brave enough to penetrate the enemy lines, meet and identify the wounded officer and rescue him. The officer then felt the soldier's love and appreciated his bravery. He was grateful to him and thanked him for his courage since he was the only soldier who had insisted on such a venture. While thanking the soldier, the officer shook his hand and said, "How can I take back the insult that I inadvertently caused you?"

The soldier replied with a smile, "I told you I'd make you regret it."

Since that day, the two became friends.

Let us neither suppress our brothers' courage nor hurt their feelings since this could have a devastating effect on them. Rather, let us support and encourage them, thus helping them use this courage, of which they are so proud.

This call is directed to parents as well as to leaders whether in church or in secular life. Let us support those who work with us, not suppress their talents and let us listen to them and respect their rights and liberties.

Story No. 241

A Musical Note

One day after dinner, a rich merchant called his wife and children, opened his safe and said, “Today I’ve lost everything I own but as you have seen, I ate happily as though nothing wrong had happened. The Lord who has given me has taken; blessed be His name.”

Thus the merchant’s hardship was transformed to praise and thanksgiving to God, which will last to his credit in this world as well as in the world to come.

This merchant’s actions remind me of a dispute that took place between two brothers, when one of them saw the other tracing black ink spots on a sheet of paper. “What are you doing? Why are you smudging the paper with black spots?” asked the brother.

“It’s true that these are black spots but they have their meaning,” the other replied.

“What do they mean?”

“Wait a while.”

The brother then drew lines across the page, connected the black spots with short lines and thus transformed the seemingly meaningless spots into a musical note.

This is how God transforms our lives which are full of hardships. He creates from the black spots a hymn of praise to glorify Him and to bear witness to Him.



*Even if my life is full of hardships that appear as black spots,
Your Divine Hand will change them into a hymn of thanksgiving.
Your Fiery Spirit will comfort my feelings of sadness,
And will transform the bitterness within me into heavenly sweetness.*

Story No. 242

The Broken Heart

When King Henry II found out that his son had rebelled against him, he became so angry that he ordered his execution. The son fled from one city to another until he was arrested finally in a city in France. Just before being put to death, he asked to be taken to his father to apologise for his rebellion. When his request was denied, he begged to be attired in sackcloth and to be taken from his bed and cast in ashes until his death, thus expressing his deep regret for his rebellion against his father.

When the father heard of his son's death, he wept bitterly, saying, "I wish I had died in his stead."



"Let us sigh and pray now.

Lamentations belong to the wretched and prayers to the needy.

Prayers will pass and be replaced with praise,

And tears will end and be replaced with gladness"

(St. Augustine).

Story No. 243

Who will Buy my Seat in Heaven?

The famous atheist Voltaire was once a guest at one of the banquets given by Frederick the Great. In an attempt to mock at the believers in God and eternal life, he said to the Christians present at the banquet, "I'm ready to sell my seat in heaven for one Prussian Dollar."

Then, one of the believers commented saying, "Sir, since you're in Prussia, you must know that you aren't allowed to sell anything without prior proof of ownership. Are you prepared to prove that you have a seat in heaven?"

Voltaire marvelled at that comment and was so ashamed that he only said a few words during the rest of the evening.



*Lord, You promised me not to worry about what to say.
Our Heavenly Father's Spirit grants us the words to speak.
Grant me that my life be adorned with holiness,
That it be filled with Your heavenly wisdom,
And empowered with the power of the Spirit.*

Story No. 244

Discovering How The Hebrew verbs are Arranged

The teacher said to his young students, “In all the modern languages, such as English, French and Italian, the verbs are conjugated so that “I” comes first, hence, I do, you do, he does. In ancient Hebrew, though, it is the opposite: hence, he does, you do, and I do.”

When one of the students asked for the reason, the teacher replied, “This is the ideal approach in the spiritual as well as the secular way of thinking. We should start first with “he” followed by “you” and finally “I.” Therefore, we should say, God does, you do, and I do. Thinking of God should come first, followed by your brother and, last of all, yourself.”



*May You be the First in my life, O Lord.
You are the Source of my existence and my salvation.
Grant me to care for what is for my brethren,
Since love means asking for the well being of others.
As for me, make me the last of all,
O You who, in Your humbleness, have occupied the last ranks.*

Story No. 245

The Flames of Hell

Two men were assigned a job in a coal mine. One was a righteous Christian and the other was evil. The deeper they went into the mine, the hotter it became. Then it became so hot, that the evil one said, "If this is the temperature in the mine, how hot will it be in Hell with the burning fire?"

The Christian replied, "I don't think I can comment on the difference but I do know one thing. If a single link of the chain attaching us breaks, we'll be separated for ever in the twinkle of an eye."



We all labour in life together.

Perhaps the believer's share of suffering is larger.

But when will the wheat be separated from the chaff?

When will I leave the flames of hardship to enjoy the pleasure of the Paradise?

I long to see the whole world glorified,

And Your Holy Spirit working in everyone.

O You, who will salvation and the knowledge of truth for all.

Story No. 246

Everything Concealed Shall Be Revealed

One of the servants of the church, upon his return to his office, found a visitor waiting for him, who was known for his dishonesty. The servant looked quickly around the office and discovered that his alarm clock was missing. He realised that his visitor had stolen it. The servant nevertheless conversed amiably with the visitor. At one point during their conversation, the alarm on the clock went off loudly. The visitor was so embarrassed because the sound came from his pocket that he couldn't even take the clock out to silence the alarm. The servant remained emotionless and continued the conversation. He finally said, "Don't worry, turn off the alarm. We must always remember that everything concealed shall be revealed. The day will come when the Lord will proclaim all our deeds. Let us hope that the blood that He shed for us will overshadow our iniquities."



*I fear that someone be offended by my calamities.
I wish to expose myself before others,
So You would shelter me at Your coming.
Expose me here, and not in heaven.*

Story No. 247

The Secret of Meekness

A certain elderly man was known to have been particularly violent and aggressive in his youth. He was asked about the reason behind becoming so meek in his old age. He replied, "By praying and by speaking in a low and quiet voice."

It was said about Jesus Christ,
"He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street" (Isa. 42.2).



"Crying to God is not through the tongue, rather, through the heart.
There are many whose lips are silent but whose hearts cry out loud.
There are also many who are noisy with their lips,
But whose hearts are unable to offer much.
Therefore, if you cry to God, make sure that you cry to Him from within,
Since only then, will He listen to you"
(St. Augustine).

Story No. 248

The Plant of Life

John always made excuses about his coolness towards spirituality, such coolness made him lose his vitality. His father confessor, constantly assured him that “life” touches the innermost depths, and that external influences, however severe, will not quench a person’s inner fire. It is therefore fit for a believer to repeat with St. Paul,

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God” (Rom. 8.28).

The father said, “It is fit for a believer to be like the plant of life.”

John then asked, “What is the plant of life?”

The father replied, “It is a strange plant that grows in Jamaica; it is called the plant of life because, unlike other plants when a leaf is plucked and tied with a thread, instead of withering and dying, it absorbs moisture from the air and grows white thread, like roots and other leaves start growing. This is like a believer who is isolated against his will from all spiritual surroundings. God’s Holy Spirit who lives in him will grant him life and enable him to overcome death and to escape being choked by any circumstances.”



You are the life in which death is transformed into resurrection.

Instead of darkness, You bring me to Your miraculous Light.

Instead of the grave, You make me a glorifying heaven.

Story No. 249

An Encounter with Queen Victoria

About two years before her death, Queen Victoria visited an elderly God-fearing lady who was in her one hundred and fifth year and preoccupied with her salvation and the life thereafter. The lady greeted the queen very warmly and said, “Your Majesty, may I ask you one question?”

The Queen replied, “Sure, you may ask anything you want.”

The lady then said in a calm voice, “Will we meet in heaven?”
The Queen bowed her head and answered tearfully, “Yes, we’ll meet in heaven with God’s grace in the name of the blood of Jesus Christ who is my Saviour.”



*Grant me the real longing to instil in every soul the desire to enjoy everlasting life.
Grant me not to be preoccupied with transient occurrences,
Rather with the salvation of all,
Till we all meet in the heavenly home that You prepared for us.*

The Magnificent Horizon

One day, during a sea voyage that Jacqueline was taking with her younger sister Caroline, both sisters were standing on deck admiring the view of the sky and the seemingly endless sea. Jacqueline exclaimed, "What a view! Look Caroline at the magnificent horizon!"

Caroline then asked, "How long will it take us to reach that point?"

Jacqueline replied, "The more we move forward, the more will that point seem to recede. It's impossible to reach the point where the sea and the sky seem to meet."

This is the horizon of God's infinite love. When we travel in the ocean of life, we see in Jesus Christ our meeting with the Divine heavenly love. We see it and we try to reach it but whenever we enjoy it, we discover its endlessness. This is the Divine love, in which we repeat with St. Paul the apostle,

**"That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love,
May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height;
And to know the love of Christ, which passes knowledge,
That you might be filled with all the fullness of God"**

(Eph. 3.17-19).



*Let me praise Your love, O my God.
Lift up my heart to see Your love overshadowing me,
To see the doors of Your heaven opened for me.
I look down and see Your love bearing me,
As though on Your eternal arms.
I look to my right and see Your love,
In all the moments of my happiness.
I look to my left and see Your love,
Manifested even in times of hardship.
How rich is Your love that surrounds me!*

Story No. 251

The Prince of Norway

A young Norwegian, travelling in a train in Norway, noticed an unhappy-looking American tourist sitting beside him. When he asked him what the problem was, the tourist replied that the seat was uncomfortable, especially because the trip was a lengthy, overnight one. Upon the young Norwegian's insistence, the two exchanged seats. They then started a conversation that lasted all night long. The Norwegian spoke mostly of Jesus Christ his redemption and the place in Heaven that he prepared for us.

The following morning, before the young Norwegian left to change trains, he bid the American farewell and said that he had enjoyed their conversation about our Saviour Jesus Christ. The American then said, "I'd like to know who you are and if you need anything from the States."

The Norwegian replied, "I've one request. Remember Bernadotte, the prince of Norway, in your prayers." Then, he shook the American's hand affectionately.

The American was astonished to learn that that was the son of the king of Norway and asked where he was going.

The prince replied, "To bear witness for my Christ and His grace.
"That, though He was our rich, yet for your sakes He became poor" (2 Cor. 8.9).



*For my sake, O King of kings, You have become a slave.
You have impoverished Yourself to enrich me with Your poverty,
O granter of riches.
What can I give You in return,
O love of my soul?
Oh that I would be poor for Your sake!
Acquiring You enriches me,
And no one can deprive me of You.*

Story No. 252

I Lost Everything

After having lost all his wealth in a stock market transaction, Mark returned home too upset to talk to anyone. Seeing him sitting miserably in his chair, and unable to speak with his family, his wife told their children that they should support their father in his feelings since they always enjoyed the fruit of his labour. One by one they went and sat around him.

His wife then said to him, "Don't be upset Mark. God who has given you abundantly has permitted that some be taken back from you. Let's thank Him for taking care of us."

After a moment of silence, Mark said angrily, "I've lost everything; I don't have a dime left to my name."

His wife smiled saying, "But you still have me; how can you say that you lost everything? Am I not better than any wealth?"

His son and daughter then said, "You also have us and you have your health. Aren't these blessings better than all the riches of the world?"

Then the wife and children added, "You still have two strong hands to work with, two feet to carry you wherever you go and two eyes to see."

The youngest child finally said, "God has left you His true promises; He's our righteous Father who is with us and who satisfies all our needs. Let us sing with the Psalmist,

"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits" (Ps. 103.2).

Mark felt ashamed and said, "Now I know that I haven't lost everything, but what I lost is nothing compared to what my God has bestowed upon me."



*Glorify the Lord O my soul,
And forget not all His blessings.
I am indebted to my Creator for my soul,
And to my Saviour for every inner glory.
My soul will praise You for the rest of my years in this life,
Until I see You, then I shall join the heavenly hosts in their praise of You.
As long as I have You, I lose nothing,
Even if I lose the whole world, even death makes me see You face to face.*

Story No. 253

A Sacrifice of Love

An Indian widow undertook a long trip with her two sons to the shores of the Ganges, in the province of Varanasi. After the three had knelt down to pray to the holy river, the widow hugged her beloved firstborn, kissed him lovingly and threw him in a turbulent area, as a way of sacrifice. A short time later, some Indians asked her, “How come you didn’t offer your sick, younger son?”

She replied, “My god requires the best I have; isn’t that true?” Truly this pagan widow puts us to shame when we offer to our God our leftovers, rather than our best. Believing that she was offering a service to her god, this atheist widow sacrificed her beloved firstborn by throwing him in the river. Is it too hard for us to offer our best time for prayer to our God and to offer Him our best feelings?



*You, the only Son of God, have descended to my world,
While I was still an enemy.
You carried the cross of my shame,
While I was still an ingrate sinner.
For my sake You conquered the darkness of the grave and death,
And descended into the flames of Hades to carry me in Your arms.
What then can I do for You, You who are full of love?*

Story No. 254

Born Blind

One of the servants was talking at a gathering about the great love of God and how His Only-begotten Son descended to offer His life to redeem us and to carry us to His heaven. Suddenly, a man from the audience ran to the pulpit from where the servant was talking and said, “Ladies and gentlemen, don’t believe a single word from what you have just heard. Have you seen God? Have you seen Jesus Christ? Have any of you been to heaven? Have you seen Satan? I hope you don’t believe anything that you haven’t seen with your own eyes. It’s stupid to believe in something that you can neither see nor touch.”

After that man had finished talking, another one took the stand and stated, “Dear friends, I’ve heard that a river runs near by but I don’t believe it. Many have spoken about a public park, a few miles from here, with green grass and beautiful flowers but I don’t believe it. It is said that beautiful trees line the streets of our city but I don’t believe it. I’m sure that many of you will say that I’m stupid but I’m not. I’ve never seen in my life any grass, flowers or rivers, as I was born blind. I need eyesight to perceive the surroundings. Now do you think that I really need eyes to believe that all those things exist around me?”

Having said that, the blind man addressed himself to the previous speaker saying, “You, sir, in your remarks to the audience, have not discredited the servant. Rather you’ve proved the fact that you are blind spiritually. It’s for this reason that you didn’t understand what the others perceive and believe in, the realities that they live in and enjoy.”



*Let Your hands touch my eyes that I may see,
That I may see You and get to know You through the eyes of my heart,
To know You and to get close to You, the desire of my heart.
With Your light, O Lord, I see light.
Let Your light rise over the world,
And may You grant the grace of perception to all,
So they would revel in the magnificence of Your glory,
And enjoy communion with You.*

Story No. 255

Talking Bottles

A True Contemporary Story

During one of his regular encounters with his father-confessor, when they would normally talk about God's caring for our bodies and souls, a young man mentioned to the priest the sad state of a friend of his, who had strayed in the path of sin and who had become an alcoholic. The young man also recalled his own past and perceived how the grace of God had saved him through the repeated spiritual sessions that he had had with his father confessor. He remembered how he used to think that nothing could stop him from the ecstasies of sin and no happiness could be compared with the life of freedom. Thus doing what he willed with no feelings of guilt or remorse. He also remembered how he came to the realisation that no freedom beats that of being a son of God; no ecstasy is greater than the feeling of being with God and no power is compared to that of conquering evil and experiencing chastity.

The priest asked the young man to visit his sinful friend and to talk to him about the love of Christ and the fruit of repentance. The young man felt that he was unworthy of such an undertaking, having repented only recently. He apologised to the priest saying, "How can I speak to my brother of repentance, knowing my weaknesses and sins?"

But the priest reassured him of God's support and encouraged him saying, "How can we stand idle while Satan is causing a soul to perish under the yoke of sin? If we have experienced God's love for us, shouldn't we help others to experience the same?"

The young man finally agreed, asked the priest to pray for him and made his way to his friend's house, not knowing what to tell him or how to approach the subject. When he knocked on his door, a lady opened it and told him that his friend was not available. He walked away breathing a sigh of relief and saying, "I thank You Lord because You know that I'm not worthy of talking to others about You. You know my sins. I don't know what to say. I didn't find him but You know how to find him, how to enter his heart and how to talk to him."

Upon his return home, his mother told him that the friend he had been seeking had in fact come looking for him. Since no message was left, the young man was worried because that friend never exchanged visits with him before. He went back quickly to his friend's house and the two finally met.

The young man then started talking to his friend about how God's love for us was manifested on the cross; how he himself had led a life of sin; how he thought that he was happier than most; and how his soul now cringes at a sinful life; that he then discovered communion with God.

The friend started weeping bitterly and upon our young man's invitation, the priest went over and listened to the friend's tearful confession. The priest comforted the friend and filled him with hope in Jesus Christ who forgives all sins and who saves all souls from corruption. After the friend had calmed down, the priest explained to him the tricks that Satan would play and told him that although the battle against evil would be strong, particularly in the first stage, victory would

bring significant peace of mind. The friend also promised the priest that he would refrain from any alcohol, since it leads to many sins.

The friend's tears of happiness with this new beginning were mixed with tears of repentance and feelings of remorse. At night, his longing for alcohol started increasing almost beyond control but he insisted in honouring the promise he had made to the priest and finally went to bed after a significant moral struggle. Suddenly the door to his room opened and he saw giant bottles of wine moving quickly towards him; a voice came from the bottle nearest his head saying, "Get up and drink!"

When he hesitated, the command was repeated. He then said that he had promised his father confessor not to drink. The bottle though repeated several times, "Get up and drink!"

When he insisted on not drinking, the bottle burst and a violently angry ghost emerged and again commanded him to drink. He was steadfast in his refusal and made the sign of the Cross saying, "With God's grace, I won't drink!"

Immediately, the ghost screamed and disappeared.

The friend then rose, and savoured the sweetness of triumph in Jesus Christ. He appreciated the power of God, which supports those who repent. He also could not resist contacting his father confessor right away to tell him what had happened. His father confessor encouraged him with God's words of comfort and hope.

SHORT STORIES FOR THE YOUTH

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Story No. 256

Wash your Mouth

While attending a young lady's funeral, I sat with her father who said to me, "My mother died when I was six. Seventy years have passed; yet, I can never forget her. I live with what she had taught me. I'll tell you a story. When I was a young boy, I was walking home with my elder brother when I heard a boy saying a very bad word to his friend. I didn't understand the word and I decided to ask my mother what it meant. She asked if my brother was the one who said that word but I explained the situation. She then took me to the bathroom and gave me a bar of soap. She poured water in my hands saying, "Wash your mouth so that the bad word would not stick to it." She made me repeat washing my hands five times to make sure that my mouth was cleaned and that I would not say that word again. Until today I never utter a bad word lest it should stick to my mouth and make me impure."



*Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth.
Keep watch over the door of my lips.
Wash my inner mouth with hyssop and I shall be clean.
Put Your words in my mouth.
So that there would be no place except for sacred words.*

Story No. 257

She Shut off the Gas

In Glasgow, Scotland, a woman went into a hotel. She was totally broken, in despair and she desired to die. In her room, she closed the door and opened the gas connected to the heater so that it would fill the room and cause her to suffocate and die.

She sat on a chair in a state of despair, when she noticed a book on a table. She picked it up, opened it and started reading. It says,

“You are not your own. For you were bought at a price” (1 Cor. 6.19-20).

The lady realized that her life was not hers but it belonged to God. She got up, ran to shut off the gas and opened the room door to let the gas out. She then kneeled to God and asked fervently for His heavenly condolence.



*Why are you cast down, O my soul?
And why are you disquieted within me?
You are not mine,
But the Lord bought you at a price.
He died for you to give you glory.
Wait on the Lord.*

Story No. 258

It Is Jesus Who Carries Burdens

A young man asked his spiritual father, “How can you carry all the peoples’ sufferings and problems?”

The priest answered, “I carry all of them to the Altar and God carries the burdens along with me to His glory.”

The young man asked, “Do you find happiness in this?”

The priest answered, “With every burden I carry, Jesus rushes to carry me. What more happiness can I ask for? Let me tell you a story:

Henry brought home a package to his wife. When he opened the door, he found his paralyzed daughter, sitting on her wheelchair. After kissing her, he asked about her mother. She told him that her mother was upstairs and asked if the package was for her mother. She then asked her father if she could take the package to her mother. He was surprised that she wanted to do this when she could not get up and go upstairs. She told him not to worry because she knew that he could carry her along with the package and go upstairs. The father felt humbled by his daughter’s faith in his love and that she did not doubt that he would carry her. My soul is like that little girl, wanting to carry everybody’s burden and knows that Jesus’ love will carry all to His heaven.”



*Help me God to carry other peoples’ burdens,
You who happily carry all the burdens.
Let me carry their burdens so that You carry me to Your heaven.
Open my heart to love all,
In order to find Your heart opened to my weaknesses.*

Story No. 259

*My Father Knows
How Much I can Tolerate*

When Peter was shopping in a store, he noticed the owner of the store piling a lot of boxes on a boy's arms. The pile looked so high and so heavy. Peter looked at the boy saying, "The pile is becoming so heavy on you, poor son."

The boy looked at Peter and smiled at him replying, "Thank you sir for your concern but I'm sure that my father knows how much I can carry."

Peter was humbled by the answer. He realized that no matter how much concern he showed, he could not equal the concern of a father for his son.



*My Savior, here I am extending my hands to You.
You can put all the burdens on them,
You, who love my soul,
And know my capability more than anybody else.
You will not let me carry more than I can tolerate.
You are my Father, my Savior and The Healer of my soul.*

Story No. 260

*Do me a Favor,
Don't Talk to me*

Abba Agathen was known for being very meticulous. He was always fighting for the salvation of his soul and enjoying the pious life with the Lord. When his departure from this world drew near, he spent three days in complete silence and he was not moving. He was staring and thinking about something that occupied all his thoughts and his feelings.

When the monks woke him up, they asked him, "Where are you, father Abba Agathon?"

"I'm standing in front of God's judgment."

"Are you also afraid of this moment?"

"Even though I kept God's commandments, I'm a human. How can I know if my deeds were acceptable to God?"

"Don't you have faith that your deeds were acceptable to God?"

"I won't be sure until I meet God whose judgments are totally different from those of men."

"Give us an apophthegm."

"Do me a favor and do not talk to me now."

He died at that moment and they saw his face lighting up as one meeting His beloved.



Help me my Savior to be ready for death.

Let me await meeting You.

Let me be warned and afraid.

For the sake of this moment, St. Arsani was weeping all his life

And for it, every believer carried his cross with You.

Who can be excused in Your presence?

Your blood saves me.

Your Holy Spirit carries me to the Fatherly bosoms.

Story No. 261

You'd Be beneath Me

Abba Isithoros, priest of Eskeet, was known for his spiritual wisdom. Many great leaders were his disciples. Whenever he was attacked by thoughts of pride about who he was and how many people were his disciples, he used to repeat the following phrase, "Am I like Abba Anthony or did I become like Abba Bemwa?" And the thoughts of pride would disappear. Sometimes the devil would fill him with despair, telling him, "You'll go to Hades in spite of your efforts."

Then, Abba Isithoros used to tell the devil, "If I went to Hades, you'd be beneath me. A thief inherited the kingdom of heaven with one word."

Thus his soul would be comforted.



*O my soul, why are you so proud?
Have you become like St Paul the Apostle,
Who called himself the chief of sinners?
Or have you become like one of the martyrs,
Who even gave up their souls for the Lord?
And why do I feel despair,
When with one word the thief inherited heaven?
The Lord's arms are extended to me
And the Father is waiting for my return.*

Story No. 262

A Happy War

Before accepting faith, Abba Moussa lived in sin, practicing evil in its worst forms. After accepting faith and his baptism, he struggled from time to time with evil desires. One day he went to Abba Isithoros complaining. Abba Isithoros started encouraging him, giving him hope and finally asked him to go back to his cell but Abba Moussa replied that he would not be able. Therefore, Abba Isithoros took him to the roof of the church. He asked him to look to the west where they saw many devils ready for war, then to the east where they saw many angels glorifying God. Abba Isithoros explained, “Those we saw in the west are fighting us and those we saw in the east are helping us. Shouldn’t we then feel encouraged and strong since God’s angels are fighting for us?”

Abba Moussa was so happy to hear this and went to his cell praising God.



*The devil will not stop fighting me,
Until I meet You face to face.
Your angels will not stop to sustain me.
You are the Conqueror and Victory Giver.
Let my soul rejoice in the middle of war,
Since heavenly victories await the winners.*

Story No. 263

The Room of Memories

Andrew asked his elder brother, “Prophet David had faith in God’s forgiving love, but why did he repeat the phrase, ‘My sin is ever before me’?”

The latter answered, “He had faith that God forgave his sins yet he feared that he might sin again. That is why he always remembered his sins as well as the wealth of God’s infinite grace to him.”

Andrew asked, “Isn’t it enough to remember God’s gifts to us?”

His brother replied, “There is a Persian story about a shepherd who was very poor then he became a high-ranking official in the king’s court. He kept a room that he called “the room of memories”, in which he put his shepherd’s stick, his sling and his clothes. He used to start his day by spending an hour in that room remembering who he was and what he has become. That hour gave him a lot of happiness, glee and wisdom. It also made him humble and compassionate towards the poor.

So if we remember our sins and how God gave us His generosity and sanctity, made us His children in the water of baptism and made His Holy spirit work in us, we should thank God for His gifts. Also we should remember our brethren the sinners so that we may be compassionate to them and desire their salvation.”



My sin is ever before me.

Your infinite grace is ever present with me.

My whole life becomes an eternal sacrifice of thanking,

For Thine is the glory, O Savior of all.

Story No. 264

At the Head of the Table

One of the kings of Ireland went to a royal banquet. He was given a special place at the head of the table. The king walked with his distinguished guests and everybody saluted him. Suddenly, the king walked to the last rows. People thought that he wanted to talk to somebody but he just sat down. One of the guests asked him to go back to his given place at the head of the table but he replied, "I'm sitting at the head of the table for, Jesus, our head, sat in the last row. And wherever Jesus sits, there is the head of the table. So now I'm sitting at the head of the table enjoying the presence of Jesus."



*God help me seek the last row,
So I can meet You,
You who became a Slave for my sake.
Grant me to be bounded with You,
Jesus, the teacher of meekness and humility.*

Story No. 265

The Dead Leaves of the Trees

As the World War I ended and peace was back to Europe, Michael and his family went on a visit to Belgium at the beginning of the spring. After two days, Michael, his wife and their son Mark went for a walk out of town, several miles away from the hotel. The roads were full of guns, tanks, military cars and other equipment left over by the Germans after they had left the area. The sun was shining and the weather wonderful.

Mark asked his father about the equipment and why the Germans had left it all behind.

Father explained, "The Germans didn't bother about the equipment that much as it's nothing compared to the millions of people killed and the countries that were destroyed. Human life is more precious than anything in the world."

Mark then asked wondering, "Why do people go to war and kill each other?"

While they were walking the dead leaves of the trees started falling on his head and his clothes. He asked, "Why are there dead leaves when the weather is so beautiful and the trees are supposed to bloom in the spring?"

His dad answered, "These leaves died because of the cold winter and they lost their connection with the branches. In the beginning of spring, there are no new branches or flowers yet, but there are very small invisible buds. When those buds start growing the dead leaves fall, not because of the sun or the winds but because of the hidden life starting in these growing buds."

Mark replied,

"Then even if life is hidden in a small bud, it is still stronger than death."

Michael said, "That is true and this is our daily experience with Jesus who was resurrected from death. Every morning, when we remember our resurrection with Jesus, the dead leaves in our old man fall, while the buds of good work in our new man grow continuously. Our sins are destroyed no matter how deep they are because they are alien to our nature. Instead of worrying about the dead leaves, we should care about the lives of the new buds, since as they appear the dead leaves will fall. If we looked at the new life given to us by Jesus, we would never fight each other again."



*O my living God, the conqueror of death and abyss.
If I have You then I have the resurrected life.
Death with its dead leaves cannot affect me,
Since You are the Resurrection in me.
Every morning, I live joyously in Your glorious resurrection,
And the spirit of victory.
So I do not fear death,*

*Or this earthly life with its worries and temptations.
I fear nothing.
But I hold the fear of a loving son to his Father.*

Story No. 266.

The Confession of an Atheist

Lew Wallace told the following story to a friend:

I always believed in agnosticism and I hated the Christian faith. R.C.Ingersoll was one of my best friends. After being the governor of Arizona, I was coming back east with my friend Ingersoll. As we were talking, we approached the city of St Louis and we noticed a lot of church steeples.

Ingersoll said, "Isn't it terrible that a lot of the so-called intellectual people continue to believe in stupid notions that they learn under the steeples of these churches! When will the time come when people will throw the teachings of their so-called Holy Bible away and consider them stupid?"

Suddenly, he looked at me and said, "Wallace, you're an educated man and a thinker. Why don't you collect enough material for a book that proves that Jesus' teachings aren't real and that Jesus himself didn't exist? Such a book will make you famous. It will be a wonderful work and it will end this stupidity about that so-called Jesus the Savior of the world."

I was deeply affected by this conversation. We discussed the subject of this book together and I told him that I would try to gather the information and publish it as a wonderful piece of my life and a crowning glory of my work.

I went home to Indianapolis and talked to my wife about my goal. Since my wife was a member of the church, she was not happy with the idea but I decided to go ahead with it anyway. I started my research in all the libraries here and in those in the Old World and gathered all the information about the time when Jesus was said to have lived. After getting a pile of possible proofs, I started writing the book. I wrote about four chapters, when I clearly realized that Jesus Christ was a real person like Socrates, Plato, Caesar and other men who lived in ancient times. I became convinced that Jesus Christ lived on earth, based on the truths related to the time he lived in.

I found myself in an awkward position. I started writing to prove that Jesus Christ did not exist and did not live on earth, but now I was faced with the fact that He was a historical figure just like Julius Caesar, Marc Anthony, Vigil, Dante and a multitude of other men who lived in ancient times. I asked myself, "If He is a real person (there was no doubt) then could he not be also the Son of God and our Savior?"

Gradually, I began feeling that since Jesus Christ is a real person, then He might be the one I heard about. My conviction kept getting stronger until one night I was completely sure. I knelt on my knees and prayed for the first time in my life. I asked God to reveal the truth to me; to forgive my sins and help me for I'd become a follower of Jesus Christ.

As morning drew near, I felt a light shining in me so I went into my bedroom and woke my wife up and told her, "I've accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and my Savior."

She answered, "Lew, I've been praying for you since you decided to write that book, that you'd find Him while you're writing."

Story No. 267

A Blank Check

Dr. Wilbur Chapman had a hard time and he had to travel to the west. One of his old kinsmen came to say good-bye and handed him a small piece of paper. Dr. Chapman looked at the paper; it was a signed check with his name on it but no money amount.

He asked his kinsman, "Do you mean to give me a blank check to write any amount I want?"

"Yes," said his wealthy kinsman, "I don't know your situation or your needs. Fill it up with any amount you need."

Dr. Chapman went on his trip and came back without using the check but he felt comfortable knowing that he had access to millions if he needed.

This is what Jesus gave us for our trip in this world, a blank check, as it is said,
"But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus"
(Phil. 4.19).



*You fulfill all my needs,
You the Divine Treasure.
For You only I open my hands,
And for You only I open my mouth,
So that You fill my depth,
O the essence of my satisfaction.
Why should I beg a human for love,
Or ask for praise or a sweet word,
When You reside in me!
You are the entire glory, You grant sweetness.*

Story No. 268:

Love Dispute

A bishop was told that an old couple was in a deep fight together. He could not believe it since he had known them to live in peace and that they were truly in love since their marriage. After making sure that what he heard was true, he went to visit them.

He noticed that they were upset at each other. Asking about the reason, the husband answered, "I'm sad father for, my wife doesn't want to obey me."

The bishop was surprised, as she was known to be humble.

The husband explained, "A sum of money was sent to us as a blessing and I asked her to buy a dress for herself but she on the other hand, wanted to buy me a coat, which I don't need."

At this point, the wife asked the bishop to judge between them, "I don't need a dress while he is in need for a coat."

The bishop looked at them with feelings of happiness and surprise. The reason behind the fight between them was not selfishness, greed or personal interests but it was for love. Each one wanted to put the other before oneself. He rejoiced at that.

It is said that when St. Pachomius noticed that the people of the town of Esna are loving and generous to foreign soldiers, he entered the town. He saw fights of that nature, where people compete to give and to give oneself.



It is time for struggle

I shall not enter the racecourse without You.

I shall carry You in my heart,

To run, to give and sacrifice myself for others.

My soul rejoices when I give up myself for all my brethren.

Let me die with You and let all others live.

Let me carry the cross with You and let all others rest.

Let me go with You back, to the last row,

And open my hands along with Yours to embrace all with love.

Story No. 269

Judge Yourself Before Others Judge you

It was hard to believe that a monk let a woman visit him in his cell. One of his fellow monks noticed this fact and along with other monks, they watched him to make sure. Then they went to St. Makarius to complain and to ask for the dismissal of the monk. St. Makarios told them not to believe that of their fellow monk because a monk would not behave this way. Since they saw the woman themselves, they told St. Makarios to come with them to see by himself.

They waited from a distance until they saw the woman go in the cell, then one of them stood by the cell door while the others went to get the Saint so he could see the woman. The Saint asked them to go away from the cell and let him get in first in case what they saw was a mirage. When he knocked the door, the monk was embarrassed and told the woman to hide under a big couch.

St. Makarius went in, sat on the couch and spoke to the monk as if he knew nothing. Meanwhile, the monks came in, looking all around in the cell but they couldn't find the woman; they were ashamed and left the area. As the Saint was leaving the cell, he took the monk's hand and said to him, "My brother, judge yourself before others would judge you." Then he bade him farewell and left.

As he was going out, he heard a voice saying, "Blessed you are Makarios, who emulated your Creator and like Him, covered the flaws of others."

The monk cried in repentance and spent the rest of his days struggling to live a pure life.

In all our private and public prayers we thank God because He covered us. Let us cover our brethren as God covers us every day so that He would cover us on the Day of Judgment.



*Thank You God for, You always cover me.
May Your Spirit Work in me,
So that with love, I cover my brethren and not defame them.
You covered me with love inside You,
Let my heart forgive everybody's weaknesses.*

Story No. 270

Go up the Tree

Some people noticed that St. John the Short, often fled to his cell to get away from everybody. A monk asked him about the reason. He answered, "I'm like a person sitting under a big tree watching out for vultures and wolves coming towards him. If he couldn't meet them he would flee and go up the tree to escape. So here I am sitting in my cell seeing all the bad thoughts coming at me. If I can't ward them off, I flee to God with praying and I'm saved." So he used to flee, not to escape his work with his brothers, but to keep his inner peace with God.

Another time, he came to church and he heard some brothers having a very loud discussion. He went back to his cell, went around it three times, and then went inside. Being asked why he did so, he answered, "The sound of the discussion was still in my head and I wanted to get it out before entering my cell so that in my cell my brain would be pure."



*God, help me go deep inside myself,
And close the door of my senses so that I can be with You only.
I get to know myself and to see You incarnated in me.
Let me flee to You and go up with You on the tree of the cross,
So that the vultures would not come near me,
And the serpent would not swallow me.*

Story No. 271

Taking Love by Force

From the Syrus History

The Mourning Knell

The bells of the monastery of St. Barsoum in Antioch (present day Turkey) started to toll in a mourning hymn the whole day. With tears in their eyes and feeling like orphans, the Antiochian people walked fast to the church of the monastery. They all left work and the entrance to the city was crowded with all members of the clergy and people from all countries. They were mourning the passing away of the Holy Father Abba Dinysius the Talhari, Patriarch of Antioch and the east.

Because of such crowds, the deacons had to organize the entrance to the church. The holy body of the Patriarch, wearing his full patriarchal vestments, was placed on the apostolic chair facing the holy Altar. A cross was placed in his right hand and the parochial staff in his left hand. Every believer went in, knelt humbly thrice in front of the Altar with complete acceptance of God's will and kissed the Holy Bible then the Patriarch's cross and his right hand, asking for his prayers and that God would repose his soul. Hours or maybe days passed until it was time for the funeral ceremony.

On the appointed day, the Archbishop started the funeral ceremony with the Lord's Prayer, then the prayers of thanksgiving to the beneficent God, the One who takes care of every body. Those were mixed with psalms of praise and readings from the Holy bible, giving heavenly condolences to the people of God and revealing the power of resurrection and eternal life. There were also supplications to God to bless the Patriarch's soul and to ask for his prayers for them. Then the Patriarch was anointed with holy oil three times: on his forehead, his chest and his knees.

The Archbishop delivered a touching speech. He expressed the feelings of loss felt by the clergy and the people due to the passing away of the Patriarch. He praised him and talked much about his holiness and his caring for the parish. He added that the Patriarch's love would not die and his caring would not stop. He said also that although the Patriarch put of his body, it is to serve at an angelic and heavenly level, a service of prayer and supplication in front of the holy throne. Finally, he ended his speech with thanks to the churches' representatives who came from all districts to participate in the sorrows of the Antiochian church.

At the end of the prayers, the Patriarch was placed on a chair and carried by the clergy. They went around the church in a great march and many of the people of the congregation wanted to kiss the Patriarch. Finally, the Patriarch was taken to "The house of the saints", which is the cemetery of the Patriarchs of Antioch situated next to the altar. According to the rituals of the church of Antioch, the Patriarch stayed on his chair holding his cross and his staff. He is not put in a casket, as if he was still alive to continue his work in the church along with previous Patriarchs, participating with them in the caring of his flock and all humanity by praying.

The Sad Patriarch

Everybody was waiting to see how would the bishops elect a new Patriarch and who he would be. There was a meeting of the Holy Synod that was attended by all the elders of the clergy. There was only one missing, the Catholicos of Takreet (in Iraq). His name was Abba Thomas and his bishops. They were not told of the meeting because of some problems that took place between them and the Holy Synod in the days of the previous Patriarch.

In a closed session, the names of the candidates were presented. When the name of Father John was mentioned, everybody agreed and each face looked cheerful. In a few moments, the Archbishop went out to announce to the priests, deacons and people the news of the unanimous decision of the Synod to enthrone Father John as Patriarch. This affected the believers for, their sorrow over the Patriarch who passed was transformed into a deep inner joy for the new Father and everybody knew the day of the ordination.

On that day, the bells of St. Barsoum's monastery were ringing to announce the joy of the people for the ordination of the new Patriarch. The bishops and the representatives of the churches of the east and west walked into the church, along with priests, deacons and some of the congregation.

The elected Patriarch was wearing his full priestly vestments and he was standing at one of the Altar's corners, waiting for the Holy Mass and the ordination rituals. It was as if he was ready to start his parochial work through the sacrifice and the Altar, to present himself with Jesus to be crucified and to die daily for his beloved children.

He stood with his head down, his eyes were full of tears and many images were passing before him. In one instance, he was facing God, The Supreme Shepherd on Judgment Day. God was asking him to give a report on his service, on the blood of each person he did not take care of in all of Antioch, whether a priest, a deacon or from the people. In another instance, he saw himself kneeling before the Altar, taking all the responsibilities of his work, his service and caring to God to carry them and transfer them into eternal glory. In another thought, he was going back to the life he had before entering the monastery, and the vow he made in his heart not to go back to the world, but to dedicate every breath to prayer and to continuous praise with the angels. In the middle of all these thoughts that filled his head and his soul, Father John was forced to lift his heart along with the bishops and priests in the prayers of the Holy Mass. When they finished the prayers of the Pentecost, the Archbishop approached him, took his hand and started the prayers of the ordination.

All the people attending forgot what was needed at these terrifying moments, that the Catholicos is the one to precede the bishops. But he was not there, since he was not included in the Synod meeting and he was not notified of the day of the ordination. Nevertheless, the happiness of everybody with Father John swallowed the problem completely. Therefore, the ceremony was completed without any question about the Catholicos.

The Archbishop asked Father John, "You were chosen by the Holy Spirit to be the Patriarch of Antioch and the east, in other words you will be father of us all, do you accept?"

The Father was silent for a moment, and then in a soft voice and with tears in his eyes he answered, "Yes."

At that moment the Archbishop kissed Father John the fifth and then everyone started singing a beautiful and long Syrus hymn, "Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find doing his will." At the end of the hymn, the Fathers brought the parochial staff

and moved with it to the table of life. Then, the congregation sang a short hymn: “May God give you the staff of strength from Zion to conquer your enemies and to take care of your people.”

It was a terrifying scene when the Archbishop took the parochial staff and gave it to the youngest of the bishops who held it from its bottom, then the next bishop came and held the staff above the first hand. The third then the fourth bishop followed them and at the end the Archbishop held the staff from its top. Then, all of them walked to Father John the fifth to top all of their hands with his. It was as if the Holy Synod were all together in the responsibility given to them by Jesus Christ, the Highest Shepherd, to care for all, and the Patriarch is the head in Jesus Christ.

After long prayers, four men carried the Patriarch on a chair. Meanwhile, he was reading the following from the Bible,

**“Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep ... I am the good shepherd.
The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep....”**

The father was uttering those words pertaining to the good shepherd as if the Holy Spirit was assuring him that he was caring for Jesus’ people. Also he was accepting this duty from Jesus and by Jesus.

It is hard to describe what went on in the father’s mind while he was reading those words in the Bible but soon the ceremony and the mass ended and all the fathers carried the Patriarch in a huge procession inside the church amid happy hymns.

Father John the fifth stayed for hours amid the clergy and the people to accept their congratulations and to pray for them. Then, he was asked by some of the fathers to go to his cell to rest after all this effort. He agreed and went to his cell and closed the door. There, he felt bewildered and fell on the floor near one of the chairs. Very slowly, he lifted his head to rest it on the chair and started to mumble silent words. His heart was kindled, praying for everybody but suddenly he started thinking, “What shall I do about The Catholicos? He was ignored by the Holy Synod concerning choosing and ordaining me as a Patriarch. Shall I rest while he’s suffering? What shall I do when he’s known to be harsh? A split in the church is inevitable and I’m the cause. No, my heart will not rest until the heart of my father The Catholicos rests. I’m a father and it’s my duty to solve the situation. The soul of the Catholicos, his bishops and their people demand this from me.”

Father John prayed with deep tears and in few days he met with the Holy Synod where he talked about the Catholicos. He heard that the Catholicos is splitting from the church because of his ordination as Patriarch without the Catholicos’ presence. He asked for their advice in a Christian spirit. However, noticing that some of the members were quite upset with the Catholicos, he asked them softly and humbly to pray for him. He also asked them to let him solve the problem with the help of God’s guidance. In complete love and trust, they accepted and he assured them that he would find a solution. Finally, every member went back to their parishes and the Patriarch went back to his cell to pray.

The Foreign Monk

Before the beginning of the Holy Mass in Takreet, a Syrian monk walked into the church. He was wearing a cheap costume. He seemed to have come from a distant place since he looked tired and his clothes were dusty from the road. His head was down and he walked decidedly and slowly to the Altar where he knelt three times while praying then he made the sign of the cross. At that moment, he kissed the Bible, the holy icons and finally he stood before the Catholicos. He

knelt all the way to the ground, kissed the cross in his hand while saying, “Pray for me Father for I’m a sinner.”

Then, he joined the other monks in praise and song.

Since many monks came to that church for one reason or another, nobody noticed the previous scene. Notwithstanding, the way the monk was standing in fear and rightness, his looks were humble; his voice was sweet and so spiritual that the hearts of the Catholicos and the people were attracted to him. The Catholicos called him, asked about his name and which monastery he came from and if he would stay with him in the church. The monk replied that he was not worthy to find such grace in the eyes of the Catholicos.

At dinner, the Catholicos met with all the priests and the monks and he introduced the new monk to them. Everybody was happy to see him. When the meal was finished they started asking him about the new Patriarch, when they found out that he came from Antioch. He answered that he knew him and that he was a very simple person. Next, they asked about the position of the Holy Synod about the situation with the Catholicos. He replied that he did not really get involved with these matters but he heard that all the members felt sorry and they would like to find a way to apologize to the Catholicos and his bishops. Then, he was able to change the subject in a nice and wise way, and the rest of the time was spent in a wonderful spiritual way.

The Catholicos, the priests and the people were pleased with the monk to the extent that the cell given to him to stay in was transformed into a place of perpetual spiritual meetings. The Catholicos, who enjoyed his company, also visited him. They spent the time talking about God’s words, the life of saints and they sang church hymns of praise. In many instances, the Catholicos used to discuss some of the church’s problems with the monk who replied in soothing words.

Few days later, news came of the passing away of Abba George, the bishop of one of the Arab countries that belonged to the Catholicos. The Catholicos was very saddened and he was forced to leave Takreet so he could preside over the funeral mass. The people were wondering about whom would replace the bishop who had passed away. The Catholicos replied that he would choose the Antiochian monk for that position. By the time the Catholicos came back to Takreet, the news about the newly appointed bishop was spread all over. The priests and some of the people went to congratulate the monk for being chosen as a bishop.

The monk ran to the Catholicos to make condolences for the passing of the bishop. The Catholicos patted him on the shoulder saying that his only condolence is for God to help him in his new position. Tears started running down from the monk’s eyes and he begged the father to excuse him from occupying this position since he was not good for it and it was beyond his capability. The father replied that he knew that the monk was meek and that God would help him because of this. He added that he was sure that God, who bestowed on him a lot of grace in the eyes of the church, would do the same after his ordination and that he would be a source of blessings to so many.

Finally, the monk asked if he could make confession, since the Catholicos did not know him so well. He also asked what a person should do if he had committed a sin. The Catholicos thought for a while and realized that the monk wanted to confess of a specific sin that prevented him from becoming a bishop. He replied that God loves all humans and that He forgives all sins.

Then, the monk made a prostration (Metanyia) saying, “I am your servant, Patriarch John, who accepted the ordination without your advice or blessing. Do you forgive me father?”

The Catholicos was so moved that he embraced the Patriarch crying and asking forgiveness for anything or any word said against the Patriarch.

SHORT STORIES FOR THE YOUTH

272-283

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Story No. 272

Every Drop of Water Has its Value

We were invited by the President of the Sacred Heart Catholic University of Lebanon to sit together on top of one of the beautiful Lebanese mountains. We were amazed at the view of the water falling through the green-covered mountains. With the beauty of nature, the soul finds inner peace, self-discovery and the realization of God's gifts to it. Then, the president of the University told us the following story:

"Few months ago, I invited a foreign university professor to this same place. He was very absorbed by this same view and after a while asked, 'Where does the water go after it flows through the mountains?'

I answered saying that the water keeps going all the way to the Mediterranean Sea.

He was very shocked and said, 'How can that be? Every drop of water has its value. If this water were in my country, we would keep every drop and use it to transform the deserts and the plains into a paradise.'"

The professor was bitterly sad because of the wasted natural resources and the ill use of God's gifts to society. That is how people in heaven feel when they see rivers of the living waters flowing through our hearts, but they do not flow to the dry hearts of others. Jesus Christ stood on the last big day of the feast and said,

"If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said,

'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water'" (John 7.37-38).

The great gift of God is His Holy Spirit given to us like a river of living water. It makes God's dwelling inside us and inside others a happy one.



God, You gave me Your Holy Spirit like rivers of living water.

It flows in me to transform it into a happy place.

It transforms my desert into a paradise for You.

I invite You, Lover of my soul, to come, eat and drink.

I invite Your heavenly friends so they can find happiness in me.

Your Holy Spirit is the spirit of love that does not know selfishness.

He flows in me so that I love all humans,

Even people who fight and torment me.

Story No. 273

The Millionaire Beggar

A young man complained to our beloved Father Pishoy Kamel about his many weaknesses. Fr. Pishoy, as usual, pointed out to the young man to all his new capabilities in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, as a member in Jesus' body and as the Altar of the Holy Spirit. He diverted his view from the spiritual poverty that swallowed all his thoughts to the wealth that he had in his hands. That was the way of Fr. Pishoy in his dealings with all people. He used to encourage and support, so one can recognize God's true and faithful promises. The story of that young man resembles the following story of the millionaire beggar:

After the death of a very wealthy man in Texas, his lawyer contacted another lawyer in New York to locate a relative of that man. He told him that it was discovered that it was a rich man hot-tempered but having strong personality. After the Civil War, he settled in Texas and bought vast lands for very little money. Oil was discovered on the land and that made the man very rich. When he died, he did not leave a will and he did not have any relatives in Texas. After searching various states, a grandson of his was found in New York. That grandson would inherit \$30 million, of which the lawyer deposited \$1 million in the grandson's name in a bank but the grandson lived as a beggar and did not look like a millionaire or behave like one. That is why the lawyer was trying to locate him and ask him to come forward to accept inheritance.



*God, grant me to discover Your capabilities in me.
You are my treasure and my wealth.
Why do I behave like a poor person,
When deep inside me exists The Source of Heavenly Wealth?
Open my eyes to see Your gifts to me,
And enjoy Your true Divine promises.*

Story No. 274

A Train Falling into a River

Thomas came complaining to his father confessor about the evil thoughts he was suffering from. He struggled so hard to fight them but failed. The priest noticed that Thomas concentrated on his own abilities and efforts and his faith was weakening. He was not seeing the cross as God's power to salvation. That is why the priest spoke to him about the power of Jesus' precious blood in making all life holy, including thoughts, words, and behavior. Then he narrated the following story to him:

A train, coming from Kingstown, North Carolina, U.S.A., derailed and fell into a river while crossing a bridge. An investigation of the train conductor and the signalman found a surprising result. While they both insisted that they did nothing wrong, their testimonies were confirmed by witnesses. So what caused the train to derail and fall into the river? According to the conductor, the flag raised from the signal box was white, meaning the track was clear and he could proceed but suddenly, he realized that part of the bridge was opened. As he tried to brake, there was not enough room and the front of the train along with two cars fell into the river. Farmers from the vicinity did their best to save people but could only save 35.

So why was the signal given for the train to proceed? Again, the signalman and his witnesses insisted that the red flag was raised for the train to stop. The conductor, who was hurt badly in the accident, insisted that he saw a white flag. Finally, the investigator asked to see the flag box himself. He discovered that the red flag was so old, that the color had faded so much and it looked almost white from afar and that was the cause behind the accident.

After finishing the story, the priest commented on it saying, "When the cross fades in the eyes of a Christian he cannot say,

"And his banner over me was love" (Song 1.4).

When we look toward the cross all the time, we are capable of making our thoughts, and even our whole lives holy. We would be able then to say,

"Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified" (Gal. 3.1).



*God, Your cross is the secret behind my life.
Let me portray it and contemplate on it all the time,
So that my thoughts, my heart and my life would be holy.
Instill Your cross in me and let me be carried by the Holy Spirit,
So that I can live with You at Golgotha,
And enjoy Your resurrection, You, the Savior of my soul.*

Story No. 275

A Person's Opinion of his Father

Many children complain of their parents in their confessions. An eleven-year-old girl who had bitter feelings toward her mother, came to make confession. She said, "Many times I feel that my mother doesn't treat me like a mother. For example, whenever I want to wear a certain dress, inside I don't feel like wearing it if my mother tells me to wear it. Unconsciously, I behave differently from what she expects me to do. I feel that she's from a past generation which has thoughts that are backward in thinking."

That reminded me of what a person usually says about his father at different ages,

4 years old, "You're my father who can do anything."

5 years old, "You're my father who is very knowledgeable."

6 years old, "Father, the sweetest dad in the world."

8 years old, "Father, you doesn't know everything as it should be."

10 years old, "Father, when you were my age, things were completely different from today. Your experience doesn't fit into our era."

12 year's old, "Father, you don't remember everything. You must have forgot your childhood, you forgot that you were once a boy facing all the issues that I face."

14 years old, "Father, you're from a backward thinking era."

21 years old, "Who is my father? Oh my God, I don't see anything good in my father."

25 years old, "My father knows very little."

30 years old, "I need to consult with my father because I benefit from his experience and how he dealt with the issues that I'm facing. He's so wise and he carries a whole world of experience."

50 years old, "I don't deserve to be the son to my wise father. I'm sad because I didn't appreciate the fact that my father was intelligent. I could have benefited more from him."

Story No. 276

A Woman beneath the Stones

Before Moses traveled on a long business trip, he asked his brother Saul to care for his wife. This was a chance for Saul to talk to his brother's wife about his feelings towards her. He started being friendly with her but then went beyond being friendly. She firmly reminded him that she was like a sister to him and she would not cheat on her husband and sin against God. But he ignored her words and did not fear God's wrath. His lust for her was great that he promised her many material things. She did not relent so finally he threatened her but she ignored his threats.

One day, he sent away her slave to the market. While the slave was away, he assaulted her and tried to rape her but she screamed. When he could not get his way with her, he left the house and got two men to testify wrongly to the Sanhedrin about her. They said that they saw her commit sin with her slave and she was sentenced to be stoned. She was dragged outside Jerusalem with a rope around her neck while people mocked at her along the way. There, she was thrown into a pit and stones were thrown at her until she was completely covered with them.

The next day, a man and his son were coming to Jerusalem so that the son could learn the Torah. When it became dark, they sat next to the hill of stones where the woman was and decided to sleep there. As they slept, they heard the woman crying, "O God, I was wrongly stoned. How does evil conquer good? Does God allow the hands of sinners to hurt good people?"

When the man and his son heard the voice, they lifted the stones until they saw the woman between life and death.

"Who are you, daughter?"

"I'm the wife of a man from Jerusalem."

"Why are you here?"

"I was wrongly stoned."

The man and his son took care of her and told her why they came to Jerusalem.

"If you take me to your home, I'll serve you and teach your son the Torah (the Mosaic Law), the prophets and the rest of the books."

"Are you specialized in that?"

"Yes, for in the Torah I meditate day and night."

The man and his son took the lady back to their house. One day, the slave who served the man lusted for the lady. He tried to seduce her to no avail so he threatened her but she was not afraid. He then killed the man's son and escaped. When the father came home, he found the lady in a state of shock. Because he lost his son, he told her that even though he did not blame her. Her presence reminded him of his dead son and asked her to leave the house.

She arrived at the seashore searching for a ship to go back to Jerusalem but there was a group of pirates who had just looted a ship. They kidnapped her and sailed. Suddenly, there were hit by a violent storm with very high winds that put their lives to danger. First, they cried out to their gods, then they decided to cast lots to find out who caused the storm to occur. They decided

that it was the lady and they wondered who she was. She told them that she worshiped God of heaven and earth whom she loved and feared. She also told them of everything that had happened to her until then and she put her faith in God Who is the Only One who knows the purity of her life. The pirates were very touched by her story and left her on a shore.

The lady, who was very happy for God's help, walked until she found a small cave where she stayed and did some handiwork to earn a living. Because of her piety, people loved her and felt God's grace in her life. As a result, God gave her healing powers for the sick. One day, a man came to her with three lepers who were very unhappy and bitter and begged her to pray for their healing. She said that she would pray for them but they first had to confess their sins. They started to confess but she told them that there was one sin they did not confess yet. Two of them confessed that they falsely accused a woman of wrongdoing and she was stoned because of it. The third man confessed that he tried to rape his brother's wife and when she fought him, he used the two men to falsely accuse her of committing sin, which led to her stoning. The fourth man, who brought the three lepers, looked bitterly at the men because he was the lady's husband. The lady told them that she was the person they were talking about. Her husband embraced her and begged for forgiveness and the other three men wept bitterly. As for her, she said, "God forgives our sins."



*God, when the entire world is against me,
It is enough that You care for me.
You are the Only Judge and the Only Redeemer.
You are the God of all the wrongly accused.
You are the Hope of the hopeless.*

Short Story No. 277

Satan and his Friends

In December 1970, I was given an American magazine that had a cover featuring a man dressed like the devil performing a satanic wedding ceremony. Seeing that magazine saddened me a lot. After a few years, one of the believers said to me, "I asked a coworker about the reason behind his faith in the devil. The coworker replied that whenever he asked God for something, He would not give it to him. But when he asks the devil for things, they are given to him right away. So why not follow Satan?"

Also, in Los Angeles, there was a television program about devil worship. There was an American lady who was asked what she did with her baby. She said that she gave it as a human sacrifice to the devil and she skinned it and ate it with her friends. This is what happens to a person in the most advanced country in the world, when they surrender themselves to the devil.

All of these examples remind me of the following story:

While on a desert trip, a man found a skull with the following phrase written on it:
"Keep me and you will live in peace."

The man, wanting money not peace, mockingly kicked the skull. A piece of candy fell from it, which he put in his pocket. At the end of the trip, he gave his clothes to his eldest daughter to wash. She found the piece of candy, ate it and became pregnant. When she told her father the truth, he thought that she was lying and that she had the baby in sin. He wanted to kill her but she gave birth to a beautiful child who stood up and started talking to them. They realized that he was the devil and they feared him. However, instead of praying to God to get rid of the child, the father sold him to his brother. His reasoning was that to be the devil, it had great powers and would work in his brother's fields without being known.

The child worked hard and the crops increased. The brother knew the child to be the devil and he feared he might kill him and his family. He wanted to get rid of him but at a high price. While the child and the man were working in the fields, a minister passed by and the child said to the minister,

"Minister, don't fear for the gold in your right pocket and the pearls in your left pocket."

"Who told you I had gold and pearls?"

"I can tell you where you're going and what you're doing."

"Tell me, then."

The devil answered, "You're on your way to the royal palace to decorate its doors with gold and pearls but your work will be ruined because of the envy of the king's men."

"What can I do to decorate the palace doors and please the king?"

"It's very simple: kill two birds; put each in a golden urn; then, put each urn in seven silver urns; and bury each of them on the right and on the left of the palace entrance."

The minister told the landowner (the brother) about how wise the young child was and that he never saw anybody like him. Then he said he would acquire him for any price so he can help at the palace. The minister bought the child, followed his advice and, as a result, the king

was very pleased and gave the minister power over all the palaces. The minister consulted the child about everything. The minister met his daughter and said to her,

“We became very wealthy because of that child but I know that if the king found out the truth about the child, he would want to have him for himself and I’d be turned away. Can you kill the child, give it to me to eat and also bring his bones?”

The daughter agreed, hid a knife and went to kill the child but the child said to her, “Why would you want to kill an innocent child? What did I ever do to you?”

The daughter got very disturbed and said, “What shall I do to please my father?”

The child replied, “I’ll kill a child, give it to you to cook for your father and I’ll disappear.”

The girl agreed and cooked the child for her father who was happy to being wealthy and getting rid of the child devil.

In the morning, the king called upon the minister to tell him about three dreams he had the prior night. In those dreams, 40 crows are flying and picking at him. He asked the minister to call all the wise men to explain the dreams within three days, or else all their heads would be cut off. The minister went home troubled and was telling himself that if the child was alive, he could explain those dreams. Suddenly, the child devil appeared and told him the truth about not being killed. The scared minister asked the child to explain the dreams and the child said that he would explain the dreams to the king in person.

The child was taken to the surprised king and the child told the king, “Those dreams concern you, your father and your grandfather. Your grandfather loved to hunt and had an eagle that was very dear to him, which was also a very good hunter. On one of his hunting trips, your grandfather became very thirsty. He noticed water drops coming out from a rock so he brought a cup to collect the drops but every time the cup was almost full, the eagle would jump on it and let all the waterfall out. This was repeated three times and finally the cup fell into a hole. Your grandfather was so upset to the extent that he killed the eagle and then went to get more water. He was surprised to see a venomous viper spouting venom into the water. He realized that the eagle was trying to save him. Then, he took the eagle’s body, put it in a golden urn, which he put in seven silver urns and buried it at the right side of the palace entrance. If you dig there, you’ll find the eagle’s bones.”

The king dug there and found the bones as the child said.

“The second dream is about your father who was at a huge banquet with other kings. Every king was bragging about the amazing things he possessed. Your father said that he had an amazing bird, which was with him all the time. Then, he asked the bird to fetch something of value but the bird brought back just a straw. Everybody laughed so your father got upset and killed the bird. Then, the straw fell and became an apple tree that everybody ate from. Your father, saddened about the bird’s death, took it, put it in a golden urn, which he put in seven silver urns and buried it at the left side of the palace entrance.”

The king dug up the urns and was surprised that the child knew all these things.

Then the child said, “The third dream is about you, for the forty crows are thirty-nine men who sinned with your wife, the queen, and the fortieth crow is the one who knows the secret.” The king believed the child and ordered the thirty-nine men killed at once. The child brought the men to the king and they included people who had owned the child in order to get wealthy. Then, the

child asked for mercy for the fortieth person who knew about what the men did with the queen but the king insisted on killing that man and that is when the child said, “I’m that fortieth man.”



*God, there is no friend to the enemy of good.
He is a fighter and killer, even of his friends.
His nature is destruction even when he gives many gifts.
He is a liar and a cheater, even when he tells the future.*

Short Story No. 278

The Tenth Man

Mr. Sadek was a man who dwelled among us at St. George's Church in Sporting, Alexandria, Egypt. He was pure in nature and dedicated his life just to worship devoutly and be a witness to the joy of Jesus' living words. In spite of his constant smile, tears ran down from his eyes when a soul was lost or another soul found its way back to God. I used to see him always standing in a corner of the Altar area in such a way, which he could only see the Altar. At the end of the liturgy, he would always go to the back of the church first so that he could leave without talking to anybody. After going home, he would go into his room, close the door and spend time with Jesus after partaking in the Eucharist. It was said about him that he saw saints gathered around the Altar, especially during the reading of the Synaxarion (The Synaxarion is a Church history book that contains daily readings for events that occurred on that day in Church history and an account of the lives of the saints).

This reminds me of a popular story that was told about the village of Hebron in old times. That village was almost empty and during the Feast of Repentance, the people gathered to say special prayers but there were nine people who needed a tenth person in order to follow the rituals of the feast. The men waited for a guest to come to town to complete the group. This was difficult because everybody preferred to go to Jerusalem. The men were distressed and prayed fervently for a person to join them. After sunset, they saw a very old man coming very slowly toward them. They ran to him with great happiness and offered him food but he said he was not hungry. When the prayer was done, they were all very happy and felt a tremendous strength since this was a holy day and they had been fasting. Afterwards, they all wanted to invite the guest to their houses so they cast lots. The winner was a very devout man with whom the guest went home. To his surprise, at the door, the guest suddenly disappeared and the man called upon the village to search for him. They could not find him so the people thought that they were not important enough for the man to accept their hospitality. In the evening, the devout man cried to God asking him to reveal the identity of the guest. The guest appeared to him and said that he was Abraham, the father of the patriarchs. He saw their yearn for worship so he came to be the tenth man and help them.



*God, You let us share with the saints and the heavenly beings their worship,
And they share with us love and prayer.
As we meet in Your church, Your angels join us.
In my bed at night, I see the church around me and do not feel alone.*

Short Story No. 279

The Album of Memories

Count Enzenberg asked Prince Bismark to write something in his album of memories. Prince Bismark noticed that somebody wrote, "Throughout my life, I learned two essential rules for wisdom: the first is to forgive a lot; and the second is to never forget." Another person wrote, "A little forgetfulness does not prevent honest forgiveness." Bismark wrote, "I learned to forget a lot and to ask for a lot of forgiveness."



*God, You asked me to forgive my brother,
"Up to seventy-seven times" (Matt. 18.22).
Let me forget all that I think is bad.
Let me acknowledge my own sins,
To ask forgiveness from my brethren.*

Short Story No. 280

The King who Forgives

One day, King George III was visiting the royal stable when he noticed a nice boy who looked sweet but serious. The king treated him in a very nice manner and the workers and the king's entourage noticed this. Later, the supervisor of the stable saw him stealing some grain from the storerooms. Even worse, after the supervisor chided the boy, he repeated the offense so the supervisor lost confidence in him. He had to ask the general manager of the stables to dismiss the boy.

When the king came back to visit the stables, he inquired about the boy after he could not find him but the supervisor did not tell the king the truth and said that he was away. Not convinced, the king asked that the general manager investigate the matter. The manager told the truth about the boy's dismissal and the king was very saddened because it marred the boy's image. He lost his job and the trust of his coworkers. The boy was brought to the king but could not lift his eyes to look at the king because of his feeling of guilt. The boy did not know why the king wanted to see him. When the king asked the boy why he stole the grain, the boy's face became pale and he was very afraid. Then, the boy knelt to the ground and his answer was an outpouring of tears. He stopped crying and said to the king, "I'm guilty my lord and I've no excuse for what I did. I deserve the worst punishment."

When the king noticed the true repentance shown by the boy and his sadness for what he did, he said, "Fine my son, I forgive you."

Then, he put his hand on the boy's head in a fatherly manner. He looked at the supervisor and told him to reinstate the boy to his position and take care of him. The boy was so happy and could not express the joy that filled his heart. He was guilty but the king forgave him and did not punish him.



*God, let my soul be humbled so that I confess my guilt,
And to say that I deserve to die because of my sins.
Let me hear You say, "Your sins are forgiven."
Let my soul rejoice and be filled with your rich love.
You turned my punishment into salvation,
And instead of humiliation, you bestowed on me a share of glory.
Instead of judgment, You gave me Your goodness.
How great is Your love for You created me in Your image,
Even though I am a guilty slave.
You also opened heaven's doors in front of my eyes.*

Short Story No. 281

King Khan and his Beloved Hawk

Irene noticed that her daughter, Theresa, was very upset. Asking why she was upset, Theresa explained that few hours before, she was very angry. Because of her anger, she spoke to her very close and dear friend in an unbecoming manner. She was worried that her friend might be angry with her and she felt guilty and wanted to apologize to her. Her mother advised her that a person should think ten times before saying anything or behaving hastily. When we are angry, we should think a hundred times before saying or doing anything. As an example, she narrated the following story about Jankis Khan.

He was a magnificent king and a great leader who led the armies of China and Persia. He won many battles and his kingdom ranged from Eastern Europe to the Sea of Japan (circa 1162-1226 AD). Despite all his power, he was conquered by his anger and mourned for the rest of his life. What happened was, after winning several battles, one day he decided to go hunting, which he enjoyed a lot. He went riding on horses with his friends, carrying their bows and arrows, while their slaves followed with the hunting dogs. They all went through the forests, talking, singing and laughing. On the king's elbow was his beloved hawk, which was trained to hunt. The king would order it to fly high and when it saw a deer or a wild rabbit, it would attack it like a fast arrow. However, the hunt was not as successful as they expected and at one point, the king was alone on a road between two mountains. It was very hot and he became very thirsty. The hawk was flying high, when the king noticed drops of water falling very slowly from a source at the top of a big rock. The king put his cup out to gather the drops of water until it was full. As the king started to drink, he heard a loud noise and the cup fell from his hand. It was the hawk knocking the cup from his hand and then it flew away again. The king gathered more water in the cup but the hawk repeatedly knocked the cup from his hand whenever he tried to drink from it. Finally, the king threatened to kill the hawk if it repeated its action but the hawk continued so the king hit the hawk with his sword and killed it. The king was very sad that he killed the hawk but in his mind he had no choice. He tried to drink but his cup fell in a deep hole so he tried to drink with his hands. Then, he noticed that there was a venomous viper putting its venom into the water. Realizing that the hawk was trying to save his life, he felt deep sadness and remorse. Because of his anger, he killed his faithful hawk. He learned a valuable lesson not to behave hastily when he was angry.

Short Story No. 282

The Horseshoe

During the American War of Independence, a weak young man was talking to himself saying, “What are you good for Luke Farnum? All your friends and acquaintances went to war to defend their country while you are useless. You work as an iron smith helper and so what is the value of your life?”

Suddenly, a cavalier came to him asking, “Can you make a horseshoe for one of our horses?”

He replied, “Yes I can. I helped the iron smith many times and I’m very good at it.”

He worked very fast and efficiently and made a perfect horseshoe. When he was done, Colonel Warner who was riding the horse said to the boy, “My son, what you just did for your country equals the work of ten soldiers.”

It turned out that the same Colonel won a battle later that day. The Colonel would not have done it without the help of the soldier behind the scenes, Luke Farnum.



*God, let me be like a little boy who makes good use of what little he has.
Let me not belittle my small gifts and envy people with abundant gifts.
It is not according to the number of gifts or how big they are, that You notice me,
But with the spirit of caring and faith You embrace me.
Take away from me those feelings of despair.
You are the Savior in all instances.
Let me hear Your sweet voice telling me,
“You were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things.”*

Short Story No. 283

The Three Brides

As Christmas drew near, all the bishop's thoughts were on the advent of our Lord on Earth. Near midnight, the bishop went into the church, as usual, which was left open all day and night. He walked in softly so nobody would see him. He used the light coming from the lanterns in front of the icons of the Virgin Mary, St. John the Baptist and the rest of the angels, martyrs and saints to guide his way.

He knelt three times in front of the Altar while singing joyfully in secret, "We kneel in front of You Jesus, along with Your Good Father and the Holy Spirit for, You came and saved us." He entered into the Altar and kissed it then knelt down and started thinking about the manger saying, "Treat me like You did the magi. You sent them an angel in the shape of a star to attract them to Your love. Let me present the gifts of my life: gold, frankincense and myrrh. Accept them as gifts of love: royal life like gold, a life of prayer like frankincense and a life of glorious pain when I share with You Your bitter cross. Count me with the shepherds so that I can present to You all my flock. Let me be there for their salvation. Let my soul be hurt when they are hurt and let my heart ache if any of them leave the flock. Let me die with You for their sake so that they live for You, with You and in You. You are the true life."

The bishop was quiet for a moment in order to feel and hear the baby of the manger inside his heart. Suddenly his thoughts were interrupted by somebody's sighs coming from the stall adjoining the Altar. Not wanting to interrupt the man's prayers, the bishop listened to him saying, "O Child, the Wonderful Baby of the manger, You are all the love. You are my treasure and my wealth. Behold me for I never complained. I'll never forget Your love and care for me. Truly, nobody knows my needs except You. I don't want to beg anybody when You're the good shepherd. Remember my Lord Your daughter Margo who wants to deny her faith in order to marry an idol worshiper. I'm not a good father since I don't have the money to get her a bedroom or wedding clothes to marry a Christian man. Because the idol worshiper is tempting her with his wealth, she's willing to lose her eternal salvation to marry him. Your stores are vast O Lord, send us some of them so that Margo and her two sisters wouldn't perish."

The man was devastated and weeping as he was saying, "Take my soul O Lord but don't let my daughters perish. They're Yours and You gave them to me as gifts. Let me rejoice in their salvation and not in their marriages. I'd like them to be holly brides to You, the Eternal Bridegroom."

The bishop recognized the man's voice especially when he mentioned the name of his eldest daughter Margo and that he had three daughters. Tears ran down from the bishop's eyes and he made prostrations saying, "It's your sin, O miserable Nicolas. If you were a real father, you would know the needs of this man and his daughters. I've sinned O my Good Savior. Don't permit that one of Your children perishes. Guide me to do what's right."

The bishop prayed silently so that the man would not hear him and would be embarrassed. He said to himself, "The least thing to do is to be responsible for the expenses of the marriage of his daughters. But how can I do this when their father is a respectable modest man who won't accept any financial help, especially from the church. He'll surely say that there are people who need money more than he does."

Few minutes after the man went out, the bishop went to the bishopric next to the church.

The Bishopric Safe

The bishop could not sleep being concerned of the affairs of the man and his three daughters. He went to the safe to take all the money from it and put it in a pocket attached to an envelope enclosing a Christmas card. The bishop dedicated the card to Margo, writing,

Blessed daughter Margo,
This is a gift from the One who loves you, who became man for your sake to make you a partner in His eternal glory. He became poor to enrich you forever.
He is the Groom of your soul; He seeks the beauty of your inner man who will not grow old.
Accept this small gift from Him who sacrificed His life to redeem you.
It is a gift for your marriage in Jesus Christ who sanctifies you.

After the bishop wrote the card, he thought how to send it to Margo. At dawn, the bishop was disguised in the uniform of a worker, took a ladder and went to Margo's house. He went up the ladder and threw it from the window then he went back rejoicing.

The Repentant Bride

Mary found the pocket and as she found that the card was dedicated to Margo, she gave it to her. "Margo, why did you throw the pocket on the floor?"

"Which pocket?"

"This pocket."

"It's not mine."

"Your name is written on the envelope attached to it."

Margo took the pocket and went to her father wondering, "Mary found this pocket and the envelope in the floor under the window."

He gave the envelope to his daughter to open it and read the card. Tears ran down from her eyes in deep sorrow yet with joy for what God has done. She read them the card and they praised the Lord not thinking of who sent this pocket. Margo wept bitterly asking God to forgive her for she intended to deny her faith to get married to the rich atheist. She said to her father, "Let me go to Fr. Nicolas to make confession."

They all went to the bishop to ask him to pray a special mass to thank God who hears His children in their troubles. Margo made confession and showed him the card. The bishop comforted her and appointed the time of the thanksgiving mass. Few days later, a believer proposed to Margo and the bishop blessed the engagement and the wedding ceremony.

The Three Brides

The bishop rejoiced as he saw Margo standing in awe and piety during the wedding ceremony praying from all her heart. After the wedding the bishop was busy thinking of her two sisters. A week later, he sent a second gift addressed to her sister Mary that made the whole family rejoice and Mary got married.

The man decided to know who this generous giver was. He kept watching to see who would throw the third pocket. As it was thrown the man hurried to the street to see a poor worker going down a ladder. The man held his hand saying, "Tell me who you are and who sent you to give us all this money."

The man looked at the worker to discover that he was Bishop Nicolas. He fell to the ground before him yet the bishop bowed down and embraced him saying, "Why do you thank me? You're all my children. Our Savior Jesus Christ is the one who sent me."

Tears ran down from the man's eyes while kissing the bishop's hands. On the other hand, the bishop asked him to tell nobody until the day of his departure.

<p>This is the story of St. Nicolas, Bishop of Mora. The church celebrates the commemoration of his departure before Christmas (On the tenth day of Kiahk). In the west he is called Santa Claus or Papa Noël who comes disguised presenting gifts to the children on Christmas Eve.</p>
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Short Stories For consolation

**284-300
Together With
“Ruth and the Thieves”**

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Short Story No. 284

The Kindness of A Heathen Captain

The ruler named Akela asked one of the captains in the army named Basselidis to take St. Potamina to be executed. St. Potamina was one of the most famous martyrs, at the time of Emperor Sepestinous Severous. Basselidis led Potamina to the arena of martyrdom. On their way to the arena, some heathens tried to insult her but she was defended by Basselidis who showed kindness towards her. She was touched by his kindness and asked him to be brave. She told him that she would intercede to God for him after her departure from earth so that he may receive a quick recompense for his kindness towards her.

The ruler ordered that the beautiful Potamina be raped of her clothing when she would be thrown in boiling tar but Basselidis pretended that he did not understand the command and asked her to descend into the pot with her clothes on. She considered this, a great generosity from him, for her love to the life of purity and for his desire not to disgrace her in front of the crowd.

Short time after her martyrdom, Basselidis was asked by his friends to swear for a reason. He cried that it is not lawful to swear at all confessing that he was a Christian openly. His friends thought he was joking, as heathens used to imitate Christian words and mock at them but the way he said it gave no doubt to his friends that he is truly a faithful Christian. They told Akela, who called him down to ask if it was true after being sure that he was a Christian. He released him from his duty and put him to jail.

The Christians, including Origen, asked him about the secret behind his changes. He said that St. Potamina appeared to him three consecutive nights to assure him that what she asked for him was going to happen. He ended his life by getting the crown of martyrdom. He was martyred by beheading on the following day.



*O Lord, what You seek is love and kindness.
When it comes from a pure heart You reveal Yourself to it.
You give it truth, and offer it Your sacraments.*

Short Story No. 285

British Surgeon Became Christian

Dr. Stewart Holden, a British surgeon was asked how he became Christian. He told the following story:

“Before I came to Egypt I lived in the island of Malta with a group of doctors. There was a young Christian man who served us; he used to bear witness for Christ. My friends and I didn’t appreciate him. We always bothered him but he did not seem to be annoyed as he used to tolerate things happily. One night I entered the apartment. I found him kneeling down praying completely taken in prayer. I got mad so I took off my boots, which were very heavy because of all the mud on it and threw it at his cheek. I took my other boot and also threw it at the other cheek for no reason. He didn’t move and his concentration was not distracted; he continued in his prayer as if nothing had happened. I went into my room and slept. In the morning, when I woke up, I found that he took the boots that I threw at his face, cleaned them up, polished them and put them in their place. I felt guilty because of my inconsiderate behavior. I loved his Jesus and I believed in Him.



*God, give me a heart full of love
To bear witness for the greatness of love in Your heart.
I carry within me the icon of Your love.
The world is thirsty for love
Not for the logical discussion to prove Your presence in me and to prove eternity.
Let Your Holy Spirit lead me in Your royal path of love.
When You give me this,
I would rush to You bringing others to the bosom of the father with me.*



After labor, some women give up their children to others to raise them.

But Jesus gives Himself to His children so that they could be united with Him.
(St. John Chrysostom)

Whom can I Learn From?

Mark used to follow well-known people so he can sit with them for a while. After accomplishing this, he would brag to his family and friends on how he got to do something they never did. One day, Mark met a wise man. He asked the wise man, "Give me an apophthegm."

The wise man answered, "Don't seek the acquaintance of famous people but try to learn from the people around you, even a small child or a thief."

"How can I learn from a child?"

"You learn from a child 3 things:

- First, a child doesn't need anything to make him happy because he's always happy.
- Next, a child doesn't know laziness, as he/she is always active and busy.
- Last of all, learn praying earnestly for, when a child wants anything he/she never stops asking until he/she gets it."

"How can I learn from a thief?"

"You can learn from a thief five things:

- First, a thief makes plans in the morning and works at night so he doesn't give himself any rest.
- Second, he never gives up. If he doesn't succeed in one plan, he makes another to get what he wants.
- Third, he always loves his partners and cooperates with them.
- Fourth, He's always ready to die for whatever he wants to get.
- Last of all, He doesn't mind any obstacles or problems."



*Lord, help me learn from all things.
I learn working hard from the ants (Prov. 6.6),
Peace from doves (Matt. 10.16),
Wisdom from the serpent (Matt. 10. 16),
Discipline from the bees.
May I learn from the evil to stop doing evil.
I learn from the wise so I love wisdom.
May Your Holy Spirit work in me.
And let Your Holy Wisdom help me, O Lord!*

Short Story No. 287

I'm Moses

Frank heard about his friend Alfred who was harassing others. Frank tried to attract him to love and kindness and stop him from hurting others for, when one makes a trap for a friend to fall in one will fall in it. Frank told him the following story:

A king had a Jewish Prime Minister but this Prime Minister had left his religion. The Prime Minister grew against Jews and was thinking of an idea to get rid of all the Jews. He said that Moses was still alive and Jews hid him amongst them and was still making miracles. The Prime Minister asked the king to tell the Jews to bring Moses or they would all be killed. As the king told the Jews, they were very upset and asked for 3 days to get him. The Jews fasted. On the third day, the Jewish leaders were on their way to the council, they saw a Jewish man eating not caring for his people. One of them asked him, "Didn't you hear of what happened to us?"

The man answered, "What? The king wants to see Moses? I am Moses! Take me to the king."

They said, "He's going to kill you."

The man answered, "Don't worry, take me to the king and I'll save you all."

They took the man to the king. He said to the king "I'm Moses."

The King looked at the Prime Minister and asked, "is this Moses?"

The Prime Minister said, "He should make a miracle then we'll know the truth."

The man said, "I'm going to make you a great miracle my master. Bring me a barrel full of oil and have the Prime Minister stay under it for one hour. I won't only bring him out alive but also I'll make him a young man."

The Prime Minister got scared and his legs started to shake. Then he said, "Master, now I'm sure this is truly Moses."

The Prime Minister realized that he fell in his own trap.



O' god with Your fairness You judge.

With the measurement You use, it will be measured back to you.

Grant me to give love to my brethren, so I can find Your love welcoming me.

Let me never trap someone so I can never fall in the trap myself.

Make me desire with love that everyone repent so that everybody would be glorified

And it will be glory to me.

Short Story No. 288

The Woodsman's Dream

John went to the jungle with his axe. He cut some wood to sell to get money for his expenses and for his family. It was a very hot and sunny day and John was sweating a lot. After a few hours of cutting wood he grew weak and very exhausted. He threw his axe, sat on the ground and started complaining on how he had to do all the work to get money for his family and how his back was aching and his arms and legs really sore. He said to himself, "My food is dry bread and some beans. I've never tasted meat yet and I live like a slave that owns nothing. Gold has no place in my cottage." When he got upset and was exhausted he fell asleep. He dreamt of a very handsome man whose face was shining like a star and he had a gold bar in his hand. The man said, "God heard your complaints and cries and He sent me to ask what you want."

John said, "My desire is that whatever I touch becomes gold."

The young man smiled and said, "Whatever you asked, God will give you."

The man touched John with his gold bar. John was surprised and thought it was a joke and then the man disappeared. John woke up from this dream and grabbed his axe to start working but the axe turned into gold. John was shocked but at the same time he was very happy. He kept touching the pieces of wood which kept on turning to golden pieces. He couldn't believe that he would become the richest man in the world. John screamed to the people around him to help him carry all this gold he had. Suddenly he felt thirsty. He took his clay pot to drink but the pot turned into gold. When he tried to drink the water, the water also turned into gold. He soon became very thirsty and felt dying so he cried to God to help him overcome this nightmare. Suddenly John woke up and found the clay pot next to him. He thanked God for what he saw was just a dream. He drank the water in his cup while thanking God for what he had. He went home happy and grateful and never complained about anything anymore.



Thank You God for everything.

Nobody cares for me like You do.

You are the wise heavenly Father who controls everything.

Even my hairs are numbered for You.

My soul is grateful all my life for all the blessings I have,

And all the gifts I got without knowing.

Wherever you go, He sees you.

If you light your lamp, He sees you.

If you switch it off, He sees you.

Fear Him who always sees you.

If you want to commit sin, go to a place where He can't see you,

Then do whatever you like.

(St. Augustine).

Short Story No. 289

In the Mud

It was said that a brother in Saint Anthony's monastery in "Pispir" was accused of a certain sin so he went to St. Anthony. After a while, some of the brothers followed to complain about him and started throwing charges against him; whereas, he was defending himself.

St. Pephnotius then interfered, "I've seen a man fall into the water and sink into the mud to his knees. Some people came to help and pick him up but they drown him to the neck instead."

When St. Anthony the great heard that, he said, referring to St. Pephnotius, "Look at this man! He can really win souls and save them."



*Teach me to be kind to the weak,
For I am also weak.
Grant me to cover my brothers' sins,
So that You would cover me.
When shall I see the world enjoying the fellowship of Your glory?*

Short Story No. 290

The Thieves' Wine

St. Pephnotius never drank wine but he passed in front of a gang of thieves who were drinking. The chief of the gang knew that St. Pephnotius is a monk and doesn't drink wine so he filled him a cup and grabbed his sword out threatening, "I'll kill you, if you don't drink."

St. Pephnotius was neither afraid of death nor thirst for wine. He rather thought that the murder that the chief of the gang would commit would only harm the latter's soul so he preferred to suppress his personal will and drink the cup for the sake of the man's salvation, being sure that the Grace of God would work within him.

The chief of the gang was so ashamed in front of this man's obedience and meekness and did not know what else to do but apologize, saying, "Oh father! Forgive me for, I've saddened you."

The Saint then replied, "I'm sure that God will forgive you your sins for the sake of this cup."

In repentance, the gangster said, "And I'm confident that with God's Grace, I won't sadden anyone else ever."

It was then told that the whole gang repented on his hands.



*Lord, Grant me the spirit of love with wisdom.
Grant me the spirit of seriousness without being literal,
To care for my salvation, without neglecting the salvation of others,
Theirs and mine are in Your hands, Savior of the world.*



We avoid people's eyes, and sin in the presence of God.

- ❖ We know that God is the judge of the world,
- ❖ Yet we sin in front of His eyes.
- ❖ (St. Ambrose).

❖ Short Story No. 291

The Box of Problems

One of the believers noticed that he had a lot of anxieties and that his confusion didn't solve the problems but complicated them more. Therefore, he decided to dedicate the Thursdays of each week for solving his problems and called it "The Thursday club for Problems."

Whenever a thought chased him and he felt anxious, he wrote his thoughts on a piece of paper and threw it in the box of problems and put the box in front of him to pray so that God would fill his heart with joy.

On every Thursday, the man would open the box of problems and read what he had written to find that most of the issues were solved. This way, he learnt to pray instead of worrying.



Two things we shouldn't worry about:

- Things that we cannot solve for, all we have to do is put them in front of God in prayer.

- Things that we can solve for, we start working depending on God's Grace working within us.

Short Story No. 292

In World War II

A young man was called for military service in World War II. He got very worried. He went to his father confessor who directed him to put his life in God's hand.

After confession, he asked himself, "Why am I so worried?"

One of two matters will certainly happen:

I'll either be in the front of the troop or in the back.

If I were in the front, for sure I would be in a safe spot or a dangerous one.

If I were in a dangerous spot, I would get either hurt or not.

If I got hurt, I would either recover or die

If I recovered, why should I worry? And if I died I could never get worried after death. So why should I worry now?"



St. Augustine says,

"If you are led into temptation, remember that if the problem is not solved, you yourself will be taken from the world, so why should you worry? Certainly there is a solution."



Give sleep to my eyes and peace to my heart,

For, my life is at Your hands.

Why should I worry for tomorrow?

You are able to manage it.

It is You who clothe the lily.

It is You who lead the birds.

It is You who care for wild beasts.

Then, why should my soul be worried?

Short Story No. 293

Thanks ... Thanks

During my visit to Melbourne, Australia, in August 1996, a colorful fish in a glass pot drew my attention. The fish never stopped moving. From time to time, it went up to the water surface.

When I saw this I remembered the story of the word 'Thanks' that lived sadly in the little boy Mark's mouth. It always desired to move in his mouth to his lips and be said. Then, it can breathe and get alive and strengthen but Mark used not to be thankful to anyone. In harshness he put the word thanks on the shelf in his mouth and never let it move on his lips. Because the word stayed with no use, it got weaker and weaker until it was about to die.

Mark had an elder brother called Sam. He was very gentle and thankful to everybody. The word 'Thanks' was on his lips all the time; it breathed air so it grew bigger day by day.

One day the two brothers sat on the table for breakfast. The word 'Thanks' in Sam's mouth noticed how weak her sister in Mark's mouth was so it offered her invitation to come to visit and get the chance to breathe the air. In a twinkle, the word 'Thanks' jumped from Mark's mouth to the table and then to Sam's mouth. The two words jumped happily in Sam's mouth.

Whenever Mom offered food or drink, Mark would take and eat madly. But Sam would say, "Thanks...Thanks" to his mom.

Everybody noticed that Sam said 'Thanks' twice while Mark never said it. The word 'Thanks' that was in Mark's mouth asked her sister to stay longer with her and her sister welcomed her kindly.

Mark started to notice how rude he was with his family and friends. He also noticed that his brother Sam always repeated the word 'Thanks' twice gently. Mark tried to imitate his brother and thank people but he could not because the word left his mouth and his behavior was very rough.

Mark sat in his room checking back on his behavior and realized that when he lost the word 'Thanks', actually he lost too much. He looked to God and cried, "God, give me a thankful life instead of ingratitude,

So that the word 'Thanks' would come back to my mouth and my heart.

I thank You for every condition,

And thank those who are around me.

God give me through Your Holy Spirit, love with gentleness.

And with the broad heart, soft words,

That I would become a living witness to the Bible, O Perfect Love."

The words 'Thanks' in Sam's mouth rejoiced. The 'Thanks' which was before in Mark's mouth asked her sister to go back to her original place, not to be paralyzed on a shelf but to be all the time on Mark's mouth, doing her sweet job.

Short Story no. 294

I Came to you Thrice

The cobbler Victor used to love God. He was honest in his work, very cheerful and kind to people. He used to cry to God with a humble heart, "My loving God Jesus,
My soul desires to see You
I wish I could see You, my lord."

One night Victor had a dream, that God is promising to visit him the next day. He woke up happily. Then, he went to the nearest forest to cut some flowers and roses to decorate his small room where he used to work, cook, eat and sleep.

He was praying while working waiting for God's visit. Suddenly he saw an old man coming looking very tired. In welcoming voice he talked to him, and respectfully asked him to sit and rest.

The old man sat down. Victor noticed that the man's shoes were very old and ripped. He brought new ones and gave them to him but the man refused to take them saying that he did not have money to buy them but Victor insisted saying that it was enough if he could remember him in his prayers.

After the old man left, Victor started to wait again for his Holy Guest. Then, he saw an old lady walking slowly because of the heavy load she was carrying. Victor asked her to come inside to rest. He brought her some food so she ate and thanked him for his kindness and generosity.

By evening, Victor found a little boy crying in the street. He forgot what he was doing and went and asked the boy why he cried; the boy told him that he lost his way home. Kindly he comforted the boy saying that he knew his parents and he would take him home. Surely he did and he was in a hurry, worrying that God might come and find him absent.

By night, Victor closed his small shop and sat down thinking if God was going to come at night, and what he was going to do when he would come because God would never break His promise.

He thought, "I'm going to wash His wounded hands and feet,
And sit at His feet, like Mary listening to His sweet voice,
And offer Him with Martha food that I cooked."

Hours passed and Jesus did not appear. Then, he started to reproach Him saying,
"Why didn't You come my Master?
Why didn't You make my heart happy with Your presence?
Didn't You promise to come?"

While he was complaining, he heard a voice saying,
"I never broke my promise to You Victor.
I came to you thrice today.

I came to you as an old tired man and you gave me new shoes with kindness and generosity.

I came to you as an old lady and you offered me food that you cooked.
And I came as a lost child and you walked with me."

At that point, Victor knelt down worshiping God, thanking Him for meeting him in these needy and lost people and accepting through them all his offerings.



*God, my soul always desires to see You.
You are the God of the forsaken.
Let me open my heart to the forsaken and the despised.*

*You are the orphan's Father and the widows' Judge.
Make me helpful to the orphans and caring to the widows.*

*You are the Savior of all mankind.
Give me a heart that can love everybody,
To see You through Your poor sisters and brothers.*



*You are the good Shepherd who leads the sheep.
You lead me in the coming days.
You walk before me on the morrow, which I worry about.
Now why should I worry while You are there seeing all my future?*

Short Story No. 295

Who Deserves This Diamond?

George met his sons and said, “My sons, I’m getting older and I won’t live long that’s why I’m thinking of distributing my money among you.”

George gave each son his share. Everyone appreciated what their father did out of wisdom and love. Finally he said, “Now only one diamond is left and this is the most valuable thing to me, I would give it to him whoever did something good among you.”

The first one said, “I think I deserve it because I traveled to far countries. I know nobody there. Yet a rich man made me an overseer over his money and his possessions without making me sign a document. After he came back from his trip, I gave him everything honestly.”

The father said, “You did well my son but you only did what you had to do and if you didn’t, you would be stealer and sinner.”

The second son came to his father and said, “I did better than that dad. While I was walking on my way on the shore, I saw a boy sinking in the lake, asking for help but no body cared about him as if they had stone hearts. I couldn’t stand it any more so I jumped in the lake with my clothes on and rescued him. When the people wanted to thank me I ran away because I did that to satisfy my conscious.”

The old father said, “Well done son but what you did was a duty for any good person who loves others.”

The third son said, “Dad, one day I was walking around, I saw a Shepherd who hated me and used to bother me for no reason. I saw him sleeping on the edge of a big hole and if he moved a little he would fall and die. I thought of taking revenge only for seconds. I looked to my loving Lord and asked for help; then, I ran to the Shepherd and I pulled him away from this deadly edge so he was saved. I tell you the truth dad I really enjoyed what I did and I tasted the sweetness of my Jesus’ commandment:

**“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.”**

Since that day the Shepherd became my best friend; his hard heart became like an angel’s heart full of love.

George gave the diamond to his son and said, “You really deserve this because you did something that a normal person can’t do, you saved your enemy’s life. But your true diamond is your enjoyment with Jesus Christ the lover of man kind.”



*God, give me the spirit of love,
And a heart full of love.
Give me Your self,
So that my heart would be full of love to everybody.
When I was an enemy, You reconciled between the Father and me,
And opened the doors of heaven before me,
And offered me a place with Your angels.
Can I give back this love even to my enemies?*

Short Story No. 296

Mom's Light

At night, John panicked when a violent sea storm blew. He was looking bitterly in tears at the sea, as his father and his sister Janet took a fishing boat and was thus in danger. The fisherman's wife lit a lamp and put it at the window of the upper room. John, who was standing at the shore, asked her, "What are you doing, Mum?"

"I put a lamp to lead your father to the shore."

"The light is very dim; it's useless. If the weather didn't get better, my father and my sister would be in actual danger."

"I won't rest till they come safely."

The mother fixed the lamp and knelt praying to God to preserve them and all those who are at sea.

In the middle of the storm, as the fisherman could not control the boat, Janet looked around asking God to rescue them. She saw a faint light and said to her father joyfully, "Direct the boat towards the light. It's undoubtedly mum's. She won't rest till we arrive safely guided by her light."

The fisherman did so till they arrived safely to the shore. As the mother saw them, she thanked God and said to them, "How were you saved?"

Janet replied, "Your light has directed us. If it weren't for it, we would perish."

John was affected by Janet's words. As he was always mutinous, especially with his mother, he said to himself, "How far am I from my mother's light!"

He did not sleep that night but knelt down offering repentance to his Savior, surrendering to God and asking Him to guide him in life with His Heavenly love.

Years later, John fell very sick. As he was dying, he said to his sister Janet, who sat beside him weeping, "Don't be afraid, sister, as I don't fear death. I am on my way to the shore of peace for I directed the boat of my life towards mum's light."



*I see in my mother the motherhood of Your church,
Which lights with knowledge before me,
So that I would not perish in the middle of the destructive storms.
Grant me the heart of the heavenly mother,
So that I would not rest until all people direct the boat of their life towards You.
They would see You, O the True Light; darkness would then fade;
We all would live with You in the eternal light.*

Short Story No. 297

The Fences of Ancient Sparta

The king of ancient Sparta boasted of the fences of his city, which did not exist anywhere else in the world. A visitor who came to him observed that there were no fences around Sparta; thus, he asked the king, “Where are the fences of Sparta of which you’re proud?”

Then, the king pointed at some soldiers saying, “These are its fences. Each one of them is like a stone in a fence.”



Let me hear Your voice O God.

He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God.

Let me be a living stone,

To lean on my brethren and let them lean on me.

May we all have the foundation of Christian faith.

Give us love to make us all a fence with You.

Short Story No. 298

Orange Juice?

If you press orange, what would come out? Orange juice.

Years ago, an author wrote this question in his book. However, his answer was not “Orange juice” yet, “What’s in comes out.”

Jesus Christ has trodden the winepress alone (Isa. 63.3), so what was the outcome? **“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.”**

Likewise, when we are pressed, what is inside us comes out. If the heart is full of the Holy Spirit then troubles will reveal His fruits: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal. 5.22-23). However, if the Spirit of God is not working in us then hatred, complaining, wrath and harshness will come out of us.



Dwell in me O the spirit of God and lead my life.

Then I would not fear temptations or troubles.

On the contrary, I shall be filled with Your excellent Divine fruits.

Short Story No. 299

The Word of the King

As Mike committed many crimes, he was taken to the king who was enraged, as he knew much about Mike. Mike trembled in the presence of the king unable to look at his face. He expected to be sentenced to death. When the king saw him panicking, he said to him, “Mike, you committed many crimes. What do you want before death?”

Mike tried to collect himself and said, “A cup of water.”

The cup of water was brought to Mike who could not hold it as his hands were trembling. The king said, “Drink it for, you won’t be killed before you drink it.”

Mike tried to lift it up to his lips but it fell down from his hands and was broken. The men of the court were enraged and asked the king to let them behead Mike. However, the king looked at Mike and said smiling, “The word of the king should be executed. As you didn’t drink the water, I won’t kill you. Go, I excuse you this time. Go and repent.”

Mike went out joyfully considering it a chance for repentance.



*If the word of the king should be executed,
What about Your Divine words and promises then!
Indeed he who believes in You will not be judged.
Let me find Your love and enjoy Your kindness.
May I cling to Your promises O the King of Kings.*



“Where the word of a king is, there is power;
And who may say to him, “What are you doing”
(Eccl. 8.4)?

Short Story No. 300

Ruth and the Thieves

An Easter Story

A Den of Thieves

Some thieves lived in a den beside the tombs outside Jerusalem. They were thinking of their chief Barabbas who left them to walk slowly on the mountains. One of them called Nabal said, "Barabbas has changed since Pontius Pilate released him and the people saved him from crucifixion replacing him with Jesus. He isn't with us now to encourage us to steal and kill. Many a time he leaves us and walks alone on the mountains. Sometimes, he looks up to the sky; other times, he looks down to earth for hours and he does not talk to us. Did he get depressed because of being imprisoned? Many a time he was imprisoned and did not change that much. Is he afraid of being sentenced to crucifixion again? He's known to be a brave man. What is he thinking of?"

They decided to talk to him to make him get rid of depression.

A Conversation among the Thieves

The thieves went to Barabbas asking him to talk with them. One of them called Saul said, "Are you afraid of being sentenced to crucifixion again? What are you thinking of?"

Barabbas shook his head and said, "I neither fear death nor mind what people say about me. When I was sentenced to crucifixion, I didn't panic. What occupies my mind is Jesus who was crucified in spite of being innocent. He's so tender. I loved Him when I saw Him judged as He was kind and generous even during His suffering. I heard that He healed the sick, the blind, the deaf and the paralyzed and even raised the dead. He changed adulterers and sinners into saints. It was I who should have been crucified."

Nabal said mockingly, "What happened Barabbas. Do you want to be a saint?"

Saul also said mockingly, "Do you want to repent after committing all these crimes?"

A third one said, "Are you mad Barabbas? Didn't you kill children, women and old men paying no attention to their cries and tears?"

A fourth one said, "Do you want to be a disciple to Jesus the crucified?"

Barabbas said calmly, "I don't deserve to be a disciple to this Righteous Man. I knew that the veil of the temple was torn in two when He died. Nature itself was enraged for His crucifixion; the sun was darkened and the earth quaked. I heard the roman centurion crying, 'Truly this Man was the Son of God. Demas the thief heard Jesus' words, 'Today you will be with Me in Paradise.' I won't ever forget these wonderful events."

They all were silent in amazement.

Young Ruth and the Gang of the Thieves

One of the thieves cried, "Leave Barabbas to these destructive thoughts and come on. There are some people coming towards the tombs, let's steal what they have."

Saul said, "Wait they look strange, they're neither riding nor having food. They aren't coming to bury a dead person for, they are singing not mourning. Why do they accompany children to the tombs?"

David said, "Let's go and see what we steal from them. Let's go quietly for, they don't seem to have weapons."

The thieves went to them and Barabbas followed them admiring their songs and cheerfulness. As they approached them, a young girl called Ruth was walking in front of the group; she greeted Barabbas saying, "Hello, Barabbas."

"Do you know me?"

"You're Barabbas for whose sake as well as mine my Savior Jesus was crucified."

"Were you then among the people who cried release Barabbas and crucify Jesus?"

"No."

"Who told you about me then?"

"Lord Jesus Christ himself."

"Where have you met Him?"

"He came to us in hell, as I departed from this world about a thousand years ago. He came rejoicing carrying Demas the thief. He took us all from hell to Paradise. Not only had He let us go to Paradise but also He allowed our souls to go back to our bodies and be risen to preach his resurrection. Now we're going back to the tombs. Jesus is risen, truly risen. This has been our hymn since we were risen. Be ready Barabbas to share with us seeing Jesus resurrected."



Lord Jesus Christ would not have come and knocked the door if He hadn't wished to enter. If He does not always dwell in us, let's blame ourselves

(St. Ambrose).

Story No. 301

The savage Tribes Ruler

The emperor of China had great confidence in his representative Wu Feng, who was wise and adamant yet, kind and gentle. Therefore, he made him ruler over the tribes resident on Formosa Mounts. He had to be very rigid since these tribes were extremely barbarous and ferocious. However, he was also fair.

The tribes loved him much for his gentleness. Consequently, they stopped many bad habits except for a fierce one. On the feast of their god, some of them used to go down the mountains to the road leading to the villages and kill the first person they would meet to offer him as a sacrifice for their god.

Feng tried all means to stop this act, to no avail. One day, Feng received a message from the emperor of China to the effect that if these tribes did not give up that habit, he should return shamefully to China. At last, he called them and said, "Honorable chiefs, I was gentle to you but you insist on disobeying. Tomorrow will be the next time for you to practise such a custom. Tomorrow when you go down the mounts you'll find a man in white. Kill him if you wish but it'll be the last time."

They agreed reluctantly. On the following day, when they went down the mountains they actually found a man in white. One of them beheaded him and they took the head to their chief while they were singing and dancing. When he saw the head he cried bitterly and all people around were silent.

When the other chiefs saw it they were amazed to find that it was their beloved friend Feng's. It appeared gentle and peacefully, as he accepted death willingly without fear. They all looked at each other bewildered. Feng preferred to accept physical death instead of putting criminals to death. He taught them a practical lesson to know how ferocious their crime was. They killed their dearest friend and it was the last crime they committed.

This is what our Good Lord has done for,
"While we were still sinners, Christ died for us"
(Rom. 5.8).

+ + +

*You came down to us O Wonderful Judge,
Not to judge but to save.
You accepted the penalty of physical death,
And granted me Your resurrected life.
Your Cross revealed my great sins.
Your Cross proclaimed Your rich love.
Yes, You loved me and gave up Yourself for my sake.*

Story No. 302

A Preacher Giving up his Seat

A preacher got on the bus and was seated. The bus driver was talking with a passenger who insisted on riding the bus and standing since there was no seat for him.

“Please get off ‘cause there isn’t a seat for you and the law forbids that a passenger would stand up in the bus.”

“I can’t as my wife and children are on the second floor of the bus and they don’t have the fare.”

“The law doesn’t allow me to drive unless all passengers are seated.”

Both of them insisted on what they said. Therefore, the bus was late. Then, the preacher stood and said, “Ladies and gentlemen, You see: the driver is subject to the law and the passenger to an old law, that of the family. In order not to violate any of them, I decided to leave my seat to this passenger. I just want to say that I’m now repaying my Savior Jesus what He did for me. As He saw the human carriage had stopped being not able to move and reach the Father’s bosom, He gave me His seat and took mine. He took me as if in a heavenly carriage to the Father’s bosom. Moreover, he descended to the Cross and went down to hell after accepting to die physically in my stead.”

+ + +

*You took what is mine and gave me what is Yours.
What did I have save death!
You took our body and died,
Not because You sinned,
But for Your love to me.*

*On the other hand, what is Yours?
The extreme everlasting glory.
You gave it to me.
Great is Your love O Wonderful Lord.*

God’s desire for granting us His blessings
Is even more than our desire for taking them.
(St. Makarius the great).

Story No. 303

Six Months For Memorizing a Psalm

Abba Pampo was illiterate. When he desired to be a monk one of the monks took the responsibility of teaching him the psalms to memorize them. He began with psalm 39,

“I said, “I will guard my ways, lest I sin with my tongue””

When St. Pampo heard that he said, “Before hearing more, I’d better be secluded for a while to exercise myself to carry out this commandment.” Six months passed while Pampo did not show up. The other monk went to him to know why he did not go to him to learn the psalms.

Pampo said, “I haven’t learnt yet to carry out what I’ve heard.”

Abba Pemen said about him that he cared for handwork. At the time of his departure, Abba Pampo said, “Since I came to the wilderness, built the cell and dwelt in it, no day passed without work. I never ate bread except that Which I worked for. Until now, I wasn’t sorry for a word I uttered. Now, I’m leaving to God as if I’ve never done anything to satisfy Him.”

Story No. 304

Elijah the Prophet
Comforting me

St. Pesentaous was born in Shemeer, Armant, Egypt in 568 AD to devout Christian parents who brought him up on Biblical principles. He memorized many Divine books and learnt the church sciences during his childhood. He yearned for the monastic life. Therefore, he left to St. Elijah the great the abbot of St. Pafam monastery on Shama Mount.

He loved reading the Bible. A brother once looked from the window and saw him reading the prophets. He saw that when he read a Book and finished it the prophet who wrote it would come and kiss him.

Once a brother went to visit him, as he was very sick. He found the door of his cell open. As it was the habit of the monks, he said, "Bless me my father."

As the Abba did not answer, he thought that he was unable to move. He entered the cell to find him talking to someone. The saint blamed him lovingly, "Is that the law of monasticism to enter the cell without taking permission?"

"Forgive me my father. I've sinned but I thought you're sick and unable to stand up."

The saint sitting with St. Pesentaous said to him, "Let him in for, God allows him to take this blessing for his good deeds."

Then, the brother kissed the saint's hand. As the saint left, the brother said to St. Pesentaous, "I beg you father tell me who's this saint. When I took his hand, kissed it and put it over my face I felt a strange force and joy filling me."

"God had compassion on me for my weakness and loneliness and sent me my friend Prophet Elijah the Tishbite of Mount Carmel to comfort me with the Divine Words. In the name of spiritual love, don't reveal this before my death."

+ + +

*+ Reveal to my eyes Your care.
You surround me with a cloud of witnesses.
Your angels and saints support the fighters in the spirit,
And You are the Lord of all dwelling in us.
+ What shall I ask for?
May Your grace accompany me till the last breath,
Until I go to You in Your paradise.*

Story No. 305

A Magic Lamp

When I was in Raliegh in North Carolina, a book containing messages from American kids to God drew my attention. I read it not for fun but I discovered the reality of my soul through these simple messages.

The following is one of them,

Dear God,
If You presented me a magic lamp like Aladen's I'll give You all what You want except my money and toys.
Raphael

Do not be upset. Many a time, we present such messages to our Lord but not that frankly. Do we not often desire that God would give us a magic lamp in order to have money as we wish? We also are ready to present Him everything save our souls, money, etc.

+ + +

What to ask for and what to offer?

+ *What to ask for?*

I do not want a magic lamp to fulfill my dreams.

I desire Your Holy Spirit,

To lift my soul up to Your heaven,

And carry me to the heavenly Father's bosom.

Give me Yourself O the Desire of my heart.

+ *What to offer You?*

May I offer You my heart before my tongue makes a vow.

You are my life, money and fun.

I offer You what is Yours O the Heavenly Treasure.

Any fun, without You, is meaningless.

You are my richness and delight.

Story No. 306

She saw the King

As Victor Immanuel III King of Italy went to Raconegy to spend some time of fun, the Italians went out to receive him. They left their houses, fields and sheep to see the king. Only one woman decided to stay at home to guard the house and care for the sheep while her husband and kids went to see the king.

While she was milking the cows she heard knocks at the door. She opened to find a tired man. He asked her for a cup of milk. She served him some milk and a cake. The man asked her, "Why are you alone at home?"

"My husband and kids went to see the king while I stayed here to guard the house and care for the animals."

"Don't you desire to see the king?"

"Yes, but I gave them the priority to see him. When they see him I feel as if I did."
"They won't see him today."

"Why?"

"The king isn't there. He's here."

"Are you joking?"

"No." He presented her a golden coin. Then, she knew that he was not a beggar. He took his hat in his hand and greeted her thanking her. She saw his face and realized that he was the king.

+ + +

+ While many people searched for You among the great
You descended to us as a poor man,
Asking for a fresh cup of milk,
While You lead humanity at large.
You come to us searching where to lay Your head.
Accept my heart as a dwelling for You.
Be transfigured in me for, I yearn for seeing You.
+ May I see You through the practical living faith.
May I offer to Your young brethren of what You gave me.
Proclaim Yourself to me O the True Light.

Story No. 307

“Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord!”

Ariana governor of Ansana, Malawy, Upper Egypt, heard about Abba Amonius bishop of Esna. He heard how he transferred the city into a church kindled with the spirit and the love of God. Ariana grew very wrathful, as he hated the name of Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, he dedicated all his efforts to destroy Christianity. As he entered the city from its northern gate with his soldiers ready to kill any Christian they would meet they found no one in the city. They walked till they reached the southern gate. There, they found an old woman.

The governor asked her about the people and the priests. She answered, “they went to St. Isaac’s monastery to pray with Bishop Amonius.”

“Did they know of my coming so they feared and fled?”

“Yes, they heard of your arrival so they rejoiced, as they’re longing for passing to the Lord.”

“Don’t they fear death or torture?”

“Through torture, they share with Lord Jesus His pains and proclaim their love to him. And through death, they pass to Him.”

He got furious of her bravery, asked her to guide him to the monastery and then ordered her to be beheaded. She rejoiced as if presented a great reward. The soldiers went to St. Isaac’s monastery. As the people saw the soldiers advancing, they went out to receive them joyfully. Then, they saw Lord Jesus Christ coming among His angels. Therefore, they cried, **“Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest.”**

Ariana was astounded. He ordered all to be beheaded save the bishop. He chained him and took him to Ansana to torture him there.

+ + +

+ *You filled Your people’s life with joy.
Then, they saw You coming with Your angels,
Even through their persecutors.
They welcomed Ariana and his soldiers with praises.
+ How did they receive Ariana when he was martyred?
The doors of paradise opened.
Martyrs went out to see their persecutor a martyr.
The one whose heart was filled with hatred,
His heart now is filled with love.
They saw him, who was threatening and killing,
Now praising and loving.*

Story No. 308

A Quarrel Between the Fingers

A quarrel took place between the fingers. Each of them wanted to be master. The thumb said, "The matter doesn't need taking. I'm nearly separated from you. You all are on one scale while I'm on another. You're slaves unable to approach me. I'm your master, the most huge and greatest of all."

The forefinger said mockingly, "If presidency had been by size the elephant would have been master over human beings. I'm the finger that orders and forbids. The president uses me to point to anything or proclaim anything."

The middle finger said laughingly, "I'm the tallest while you're dwarfs beside me. I don't need to ask you to be subject to me."

Then, the ring finger said, "Look brethren! The gold ring is glittering around me. Is the wedding ring put around any one else?"

Finally, they all were silence to hear what the little finger would say, "Brethren, I'm the thinnest and the shortest. I never give orders. Moreover, the wedding ring is never put around me. Whenever you gather together for a certain service, you lean on me. I'm your servant."

Then, all bowed down to him saying, "The Word of God has said, **"For he who is least among you all will be great."**"

+ + +

*+ Let me be the last among all and a servant for all.
May I never boast of my huge body or fine air,
Or being tall,
Or of what I have of gold or riches.
May I bow down to carry my brethren with love.
Let me O Lord be a servant for all.*

Story No. 309

God's Computer More Accurate

An intimate friendship grew between Dr. Milad Hana and me when we were detained in the cells of El-Marg prison. We talked to each other for thirty minutes daily during our daily compulsory walk. Dr. Hana is known for his sharpness and political experience especially because Dr. Hana and his wife had a strong relation with President Sadat and his wife.

Once he said to me, "According to the computer of my mind which will never fail me, President Sadat will surely order executing three Moslem and three Christian clergymen, as a kind of balance. As for you, if they're kind to you, you'll go out of prison after fifteen or eighteen years."

I said, "My soul longs for Lord Jesus Christ. I'm prepared with joy to accept anything."

God's providence let me meet Dr. Hana outside the prison. Then, I asked him, "What do you think now of the computer of your mind?"

He answered smilingly, "God's computer is more accurate."

+ + +

+ *How unsearchable are Your judgments. And Your ways passed finding out.
Grant me to understand the secret of Your plan,
And count on Your Divine computer.
Thank You for, You gave me Yourself O Wise.
Let me know how to work on the Divine Computer.*

Story No. 310

The Happiest Man on Earth

As some philosophers knew of Abba Anthony as a monk they decided to visit him to know his philosophy. They went to the eastern desert in Egypt and climbed the mountain till they reached his cell. The cell was without furniture except for a small mat. There were neither a library nor books. They saw St. Anthony very vital and always rejoicing. They said to him, “We expected to see a very harsh and gloomy man like all philosophers especially those who choose seclusion.”

“I’m serious with myself, which fills my heart with joy, as I lack nothing.”

“How is that? You live in an empty cell without possessions, medicines or books. Don’t you feel isolated?”

“No.”

“How?”

“I don’t live alone for, my Lord Jesus Christ Who loves me, lives with me and inside me. His presence fills me with joy and satisfies me. I’m the happiest man on earth.”

+ + +

+ You descended to me O my Savior.

Lift me up to You with Your Holy Spirit.

Fill my depth with Yourself.

May You be pleased with me.

+ Open my eyes to see You inside me.

I always cry, “Now, it is the happiest time in my life.”

I am the happiest man on earth.

You are the secret behind my happiness and joy.

Story No. 311

At the Cancer Hospital

The young man entered the cancer hospital, where he found pleasure in serving the e sick, seeking the salvation of their souls that they may enjoy fellowship in the eternal glory. He raised the patients' heart to heaven, soaring with them above the cruel pain of cancer and unveiling to them the doors of heaven waiting to receive the souls of those who go with gladness and rejoicing.

This time, he stood before an old lady whose heart was totally attached to the world. She had not benefited from the pain of her illness or from any words. The young man felt that she had only a few moments to pass away so he urged her to seek joy in Christ the Savior but she passed away with a hardened heart.

Tears rushed to his eyes, not because she had died but because of her hardness and the cruelty of her heart. He raised his eyes to heaven saying, "I would have liked to go home rejoicing in the salvation of this soul. My soul is bitter. You died for her. How many times did I speak to her of You but she did not respond!"

Suddenly he noticed that a lady was calling him from her bed. When he went to her she asked him about death and the other life. She was a Christian in name not in her life. She had not practiced the new life in Jesus Christ and had not tasted the satisfying fruits of the spirit.

He spoke to her for a long time and her spirit rejoiced. She cried, "I'm truly happy that my Savior has opened the door of hope before me in my final instants. I long to see my sweet Christ and to go to be with Him."

As she proclaimed her wish to be released she gave up her soul. The young man's heart was very joyful and he realized the boundless grace of God Who used him even in the final instants.

+ + +

+ *May I cry with Saul of Tarsus:*
Lord, what do you want me to do?
Use me not as I wish but as you wish.
+ *I am in Your hands.*
+ *Light up the depth of my soul that it may carry You*
And bear witness to You through Your Holy Spirit.
Accept my whole life that I may cry,
"If I live, I live for the Lord.
If I die, I die for the Lord.
If I live, or die, I belong to the Lord."

Story No. 312

The First Fruits for the Lord

While a pious lady was talking to some ladies about Lord Jesus Christ, a man threw a potato on her face and disappeared. All the ladies were perplexed but she gently took it and put it in her bag.

Few months later, the lady came to the church with a bag of potatoes which he offered to the church. A lady asked her, "Where did you get it?"

She answered, "I offer to the Lord the first fruits of the potato which was thrown over my face while I was talking to you. I planted it in my garden and these are the fruits.

+ + +

What should I offer You my Lord?

You bore our shame.

Let me bear the fruits of good which conquers evil,

In order to see good even in pain.

Story No. 313

False Pearls

Sandy went to her father confessor complaining of what some believers did with her. She was blocked by some church attendants because they were hypocrites, “Why does God allow such thing?”

“Don’t be afraid for, On the Great Day of the Lord, all true believers will be glorified and all hypocrites will be defamed. Let me narrate to you the story of the false pearls.”

A minister was serving in a meeting for ladies. They were putting on unique jewelry and pearls. The minister said, “The effect of X ray is amazing. It reveals dear jewelry and pearls.”

He switched off most of the lights and he directed the rays to some jewelry which was glittering when all lights were switched on. Soon, the true jewels glittered while the beautiful false pearls lost their magnificence.

+ + +

+ *Your Holy Spirit burns what is false inside me
And renews what is true.*

+ *May Your Spirit work in me,
For, in Your Great Day, the goats shall be distinguished from the sheep,
And the tares from the wheat.
Then, Your saints will be glorified,
While the evil shall be judged.*

Story No. 314

Taking Revenge

In the state of Illinois, an atheist farmer sent a letter to a local newspaper to this effect:
“I’ve a farm. I prepared it on a Sunday, planted it on a Sunday, harvested it on a Sunday and stored on a Sunday. I then found my crops much more that that of my neighbors who consecrate Sundays doing nothing on them. I’ve harvested the crops on October.”

Though the newspaper editor was not experienced in religion when he read the letter he published it commenting,

“God does not always take revenge on October.”

+ + +

*With David the psalmist, I cry,
“Why do you prosper the way of the wicked?”
You wait for, You want them all to be saved.
Otherwise, let their cups be filled with evil.
You reward everyone according to his/her deeds,
In the appointed time.*

Story 315

Waiting for Thanks

A man came to me in great bitterness. He makes much good but no one even thanks him. He felt down; therefore, he thought of doing no more good. I then remembered what St. John Chrysestom said, “When we deal with others we should see Lord Jesus Christ. What we present is to Him Who gave us all His life put to death for our sake. We thank Him for His love through loving His beloved, the human beings.”

I remember what A. Naismith narrated about E. P. Hammond who visited Detroit in Michigan. He noticed a man on whose face there were traces of a big wound. That man used to look from the window for long hours during the day. He asked him about the reason. The man replied, “Nine years ago, I saw a car running fast. In it, there was a girl screaming for help for, there wasn’t a driver in the car. I tried exerting much effort to stop the car. I succeeded but I’d a big wound. After I regained conscience I asked if the girl was safe. I knew that she was ok. I asked if she or any one of her family members came to thank me. Yet, I was told that no one came. Since that day, I’m looking from the window waiting for any one of them to thank me.”

+ + +

+ *Let me O Lord do good for Your sake,
Not waiting for a single word of praise.
You alone examine the heart.
You do not forget a fresh cup of water.
+ You gave me much.
How can I repay You Your many gifts?
Through my brethren.
Grant me a thankful heart,
To thank You with the tongue as with deeds.*

Story No. 316

An Atheist on Deck

On deck of the ship, there was an atheist who used to gather people around him to make them doubt their faith and hope in the eternal life. He was proud of his eloquence and persuasion. While he was talking there was a great storm in the sea. The ship lost balance and was about to sink. He looked at his Christian intimate friend and said, "We're dying. We depart from the world very quickly."

He was panicking more than anyone else on deck. His friend said to him calmly, "We're all departing but not to the same place. Through My Lord's grace, I'll go to everlasting joy to find many people welcoming me in my eternal home."

The atheist then realized the value of faith during such crucial moments. He cried to God to give him faith and hope in His eternal love.

+ + +

*+ Let me through faith challenge all circumstances.
Let me find even in death the way of my glory.
Believing in You is the secret behind my life.
It is the way of sharing Your glory O the Savior of all.*

Story No. 317

Saving Twenty-Three Persons

In Los Angeles, Dr. R. A. Torrey narrated, in a meeting, about a young man who saved twenty-three persons when a ship was sinking in Michigan Lake. He told the attendants that that hero was a student in Northwestern University. He said also that he never forgot how he looked especially because after he had rescued them all he broke down of fatigue.

To his surprise, an old man attending the meeting commented, "I'm this young man."

Then, Dr. Torrey asked him, "What's your memory about that incident?"

The old man answered, "I was suffering bitterly for a while since no one of them or of their relatives thanked me. But when I heard your words, I realized that doing good has its effect on many people whom we may not know. I now thank God for, there was no one to thank me but there're people who interact with good deeds."

Truly, Lord Jesus Christ cleansed ten men from leprosy at a time but no one returned to thank Him save the Samaritan (Luke 17.15-18).

+ + +

Uproot from me O Lord the spirit of ungratefulness,
To always remember Your generosity,
And offer You a sacrifice of continuous thanking.
+ Let me not wait for a human being to thank me
But offer every act of love for Your sake.
Let me always watch for meeting You.
Let me repay You love for love.

SHORT STORIES

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Story No. 318

The Angel Left me

A Real Story

Fr. Yohanna, the priest of St. Mark's Church in Shobra, Cairo, Egypt, was shocked to see what Fr. Mikhail Ibrahim did. After dismissing the angel of the offering at the end of the Liturgy of the Eucharist, he returned quietly to the sanctuary and bowed to a child. He repeated that three times. As he was bowing he said to the child, "Forgive me, son. My voice was very loud. Forgive me."

Fr. Yohanna asked Fr. Mikhail, "How could you bow to a child who is considered as your grandson?"

With his usual quietness, he said, "I'll tell you what happened but don't reveal this to anyone until my departure from this world. As I was remembering in front of the offering the names of those who asked me, I saw an angel near the altar. Every time I mentioned a name, he would appear and disappear again. I saw this deacon moving and he distracted me. I screamed at him to quiet down. Immediately the angel left me and didn't return."



*Lord, grant me the spirit of tranquility mixed with love,
In order to have communion with angels.
Give me to resist fighting for the truth with anger,
For the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.
May truth be mixed with love and not anger,
To be able to see You my true Love,
And enjoy the communion with the heavenly hosts.*

Story No. 319

Are There no Fathers?

I was moved after reading a letter which an American child wrote to God. He said:

Dear God, Is there any of the Patriarchs around us today? Patrick

I felt that this message reveals the thirst of the world to enjoy the presence of one of the early fathers like Abraham or Isaac or Jacob; one that carries the spirit of faith, with a tender fatherhood and leadership in the way of truth.

The American culture offers all what is humanly conceivable to satiate our hunger. This is especially true for children in terms of freedom, educational and recreational games, etc. Nevertheless, we always hear this phrase, "It's boring." They are longing for a true fatherhood that satisfies the soul in Christ Jesus.



I usually recite:

"Our Father who art in heaven."

*But can I ever find someone carrying the shadow of Your fatherhood,
Someone like Abraham, the father of all believers?*

His heart was wide with love,

His inner being was burning with tenderness,

And carries with faith each soul to enjoy Your bosom.

Many carried the title of "father" through body or spirit,

But they did not offer a living icon of the Lord's abundant Fatherhood.

Give the world true examples,

So that all may enjoy Your Fatherhood.

Story No. 320

Let him Hit me

In a small village in Upper Egypt, a number of people gathered around a young man hitting his father with a large stick. Everyone was upset at the ungrateful son and tried to hold him back. The beaten father screamed, "Let him hit me. I beat my father at the same spot. My deeds have come back to me."

Twenty years may have passed and the son may have thought that his acts were erased by time. However, in due time, he drank from the same cup which he filled.



*Your blood sanctifies all my life.
It washes all my iniquities and falls,
But in Your love, You allow me to drink from the cup I poured,
So that I would not belittle my sins.
Awesome are you O Lord in Your love.
You long to not remember my sins.
Because of Your love, You allow my deeds to return to me,
Not as a punishment, but for chastising and edification.
Your hands work always for my salvation.*

Story No. 321

In a Psychiatric Hospital

A young man told me this funny story:

John was visiting a friend in a psychiatric hospital. On his way to his friend, one of the patients ran to him and proudly asked him, “Do you know who I am?”

“No.”

“I’m Napoleon Bonaparte.”

“Who told you that?”

“God, of course.”

Before John could respond, another patient said, “Why are you surprised? He says the truth. I’m the one who called him Napoleon Bonaparte.”

This story is told of patients in a psychiatric hospital but its events occur everyday in our lives. Many think that they are God. When they say a word, they consider it faultless. They do not accept discussion or another opinion in their lives.



*Lord, destroy all pride inside me,
So that I would not be the one to order and prohibit.
Help me not to hold to my opinion in pride and haughtiness.
Let me not live, but You live in me,
So that I desire to be crucified with You,
And May I find a place for every person in my heart.*

Story No. 322

I Killed my Son

A Russian man opened his door to find a well-dressed man that appeared quite wealthy.

The visitor stood examining the man. Finally, he could hold himself no longer and embarrassed him saying, “Don’t you recognize me? I’m your childhood friend, Alex.”

The man could not believe it. He asked, “Where were you all these years?”

The visitor answered, “I immigrated to a far land. God blessed my way and I became wealthy. I came so that you may prepare a way for me to meet my parents.”

The two sat together and invited old friends. They all agreed that he would go to his father’s house in disguise to surprise him. The next morning they would all arrive there with a musical group and introduce them to one another.

Alex knocked at his parents’ door and they accepted him in as a visitor. He paid generously for food and lodging. The two elderly parents could not recognize him but thought him to be a rich tourist, especially after seeing his pockets bulging with money. The man and his wife agreed to kill the visitor so as to take hold of his money. At midnight, the old woman carried a dim torch, followed by her husband. They entered his room while he was sleeping. He had a beautiful smile on his face, most probably dreaming of his encounter the next day with his parents. The elderly man became compassionate but his wife asked that he must hurry. He stabbed his son one big stab that took his life. They then both spent the rest of the night covering their crime.

The next morning, all the friends came and inquired where the visitor was. The elderly woman denied ever seeing him. Finally, one of them said, “Wait, woman. That visitor is your only son. He returned from his traveling and agreed with us to present him to you.”

When they heard this, they fell down to the floor screaming, “We killed our son.”

✠ ✠ ✠

*How many times do You come to me O Giver of Life,
And in my ignorance and cruelty I kill You (Acts 3:11)!
Each hurtful word that proceeds from me kills You O Tenderhearted.*

✠ ✠ ✠

C.F. “El-Bostan” magazine, St. Mark church, Washington, June 1988

Story No. 323

Let All Enjoy the Gods

A massive Indian temple stood by the shore of a deep river. George was looking upon a stone. On it was engraved a huge calf ridden by a god and his companion. George asked about the meaning of this drawing and was told:

An ancient Indian myth tells that a good man lived in this place. He loved people and the gods. The gods loved him and used to descend from heaven to visit him.

One day the gods visited him, and talked with him. His heart was rejoicing exceedingly, and he desired that all farmers would see the gods and speak with them. As he thought on these matters he asked the gods to permit him to go and call his brethren the farmers that they might enjoy them. They assured him that they would wait for him. He hurried to call his friends, but he thought thus: "It will be very joyful that gods remain on earth forever. Instead of bringing my friends to see them for a while, I will jump in the river and die. The gods promised they would stay until I return. If I fail to return, they will wait for me forever! I will die, but all humanity will enjoy the gods."

And indeed, he jumped in the river and did not return. The story continues that when the gods waited and he did not return, they decided to return to heaven. Before leaving, they etched on that stone a picture of a god and his companion on a calf.



This story reveals the inner longing for every soul that God come to her and embraces her and others in an atmosphere of practical love. The Word of God came down to us and lived among us like one of us and died to take us with Him to heaven.



*With love You came down,
You made Your home with me, O the Word of God.
You died for me and prepared me for Your dwelling.
You rose and ascended.
With Your Holy Spirit You raise me to Your Father's bosom.
With Your descent You turned my world into heaven.
With Your ascension You turned Your heaven into my homeland.
What can I give in return for Your abundant giving?*



C.F. "El-Bostan" magazine, St. Mark church, Washington, December 1986.

Story No. 324

A Priest Learns

The monk Demonilos entered the church and bowed down in front of the sanctuary. As he entered the sanctuary, he became very upset. He saw the priest together with an evil man. The man had thrown himself at the feet of the priest crying. The monk spoke harshly to the priest saying, "How could you allow this evil man to enter the sanctuary to defile it?"

The priest left the sanctuary with tears running down his face.

The monk wrote to Deonysius the Areopagite to inform him of the incident, proud that he had saved the sanctuary from this evil man and this reckless priest. The response that he received was:

"No, you did not save the sanctuary from being defiled.

You yourself sinned for you did not show mercy.

Christ showed mercy towards the lowest of His creatures,

Will you make yourself above Christ?"

He also told him the following story:

"While I was in Crete, I was welcomed by a pious priest called Carbos. That priest spent long hours in quiet meditation and was given grace to see visions during the holy sacraments. This priest told me that he felt very hopeless when a non-believer entered the church and attracted a Christian man to participate in an idol worshipping feast immediately after he had enjoyed baptism. The priest continued praying for both the Christian and the non-Christian. He consecrated many days and months to pray for them but they continued more in their ways so he asked God to take vengeance on them, especially that they were striving to tempt other believers.

His hatred to them increased so he asked God for fire to consume them. When he asked this of the Lord, the house shook, the roof split and fire came down from heaven to his feet, and then he saw Christ surrounded by His angels in heaven. Carbos looked up with great fear to see the Lord Christ in His glory, then he looked down under his feet and the earth split up and a great abyss opened. He saw the two sinners standing on the edge of the abyss. Two great serpents came out and moved towards them and wrapped themselves around their legs. The serpents were using all their energy to push them. They bit them and played with them to attempt to push them in. Suddenly, a group of people appeared and they almost fell from the push of the people and the serpents.

The priest became so involved in the events that he forgot the open doors of heaven. He did not raise his eyes to see Christ with His angels. He stood quietly for a long time wondering why the Lord had left them on the edge. Finally, he ran towards them and started pushing them with all his might but could not. He became very angry. He looked up to heaven to complain to God for His patience and mercy.

When he looked, he saw all kindness and mercy. The Lord left His throne and went to the sinners. He stretched out His arms to pull them and the angels came down to minister to them.

Christ looked at the priest and said, "I'm willing to die for the salvation of men although I committed no sin. Do you prefer to throw sinners in hell or live with God and His angels that are also good and lovers of mankind?"



Teach Me To Love Sinners.

You suffered death on behalf of the sinners.

Grant me to love them as You do and not to ask for revenge.

By Your longsuffering, You converted the persecutor Saul into an apostle.

Grant me the hope of the salvation even for those who oppose the truth.

Story No. 325

The Most Precious Gift

A young man was getting ready to graduate from college. For many months he had admired a beautiful sports car in a dealer's showroom. Knowing that his father could well afford it, he told him that this was all he wanted. As Graduation Day approached, the young man awaited signs that his father had purchased the car. Finally, on the morning of his graduation, his father called him into his private study-room. His father told him how proud he was to have such a fine son and told him how much he loved him. He handed his son a beautifully wrapped gift box.

Curious and somewhat disappointed, the young man opened the box and found a lovely, leather-bound Bible, with the young man's name embossed in gold. Angry, he raised his voice as he spoke to his father and said, "With all your money, you give me a Bible?"

He then stormed out of the house.

Many years passed and the young man was very successful in business. He had a beautiful home and a wonderful family but realized that his father was very old and thought perhaps he should go to him. He had not seen him since that graduation day. Before he could make arrangements, he received a telegram telling him that his father had passed away and willed all of his possessions to his son. He needed to come home immediately and take care of things.

When he arrived at his father's house, sudden sadness and regret filled his heart. He began to search through his father's important papers and saw the still gift-wrapped Bible, just as he had left years ago. With tears, he opened the Bible and began to turn pages. His father had carefully underlined a verse, Matt. 7:11,

**"And if you, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children,
How much more shall your Heavenly Father give to those who ask Him?"**

As he read those words, a car key dropped from the back of the Bible. It had a tag with the dealer's name, the same dealer who had the sports car he had desired. On the tag was the date of his graduation and the words "Paid in Full."

It would have been beneficial for this son if he had read the Bible from cover to cover for it contains many precious lessons, such as:

"A foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her who has borne him" (**Prov. 17.25**).



*Your Book is a wonderful heavenly trip,
Faster than any car or rocket.
It lead us to the source of sanctity and wisdom.
Teach me, train me and support me.
Your word is my life and strength.*

Story No. 326

A Bouquet of Dead Flowers

Christine held some flowers in her hands, arranging them in a vase for her sick mother. Lisa, the nurse, was observing intently from a distance. She asked, "What are you doing, Christine?"

"I am preparing a beautiful bouquet for my mom."

"You're right. It's beautiful. Your mom is a wonderful woman filled with love to you and to many others but wait, don't put them in the vase yet."

"Why?"

Lisa went to the other room where Christine sleeps and got her vase and said, "Christine, put those flowers in your vase. The flowers are beautiful. Keep them in your room. When they wither you can put them in the other vase for your mom."

Christine could not believe what she was hearing. She thought that Lisa loved her mom. She always takes care of her and tries to make her feel comfortable.

Christine said, "What are you saying? Are you kidding?"

- "No, I'm very serious."

"You want me to offer my mother dead flowers?"

Lisa smiled and hugged Christine and kissed her saying, "You're a faithful daughter. You want to offer the best to your mom. You want to offer the flowers while they are still beautiful. You don't want to wait till they wither and become dry. You would consider that an insult and a lack of love but let me ask you, "Why are you waiting for the beautiful flowers to die before you offer them to the Lord that loves you? Don't you consider that an insult to Him?"

Christine asked in wonder, "How do I do that?"

"The Lord asks for your heart and life while you're young, full of life but you delay till you become old and offer it then when you lose your vibrancy. At the same time you repeat that you love Him."



Abel offered the best of his herd.

Give me Lord that I may offer you the best of my life.

I hear you pleading:

"My son, give me your heart.

And let your eyes observe my ways."

Lord, I give You my heart and thought,

And all my life in Your hands.

Accept my most inner being.

As an acceptable sacrifice.

Story No. 327

The Disguised

Mark noticed that his friend Peter was acting unlike himself. He seemed to be putting on a mask that did not really express what he was like. He wanted to talk to him about his hypocrisy so he told him this story:

A lazy, sneaky raven tried to cover himself in dust. That way, he thought, he could deceive the pigeons into thinking that he was one of them and not have to find his own food.

He approached a group of pigeons feeding in the yard. The older pigeons soon knew that he was not one of them. He walked differently. They chased him away.

The second day, after having practiced the walk, he returned. It was not easy to reveal his true identity but as soon as he ate a piece of meat, it was clear that he was not a pigeon. Again, they chased him away.

The third day, he returned but he had learned to eat only what the pigeons eat. He approached the pigeons, walked like them, only ate what they ate and things were going well until an old friend of his passed by and called him. He immediately answered and so was again exposed.

The first time his walk revealed him, the second time, his taste in food and the third, his voice. Likewise, no matter how much a person tries to pretend to cover his or her true identity, their behavior, desires or language will reveal them.



*Remove from me the mask of hypocrisy to hide in You only.
With Your Holy Spirit renew my nature.
Change my behavior, my desires and my language,
To become truly Your son and daughter,
And live likened to the heavenly hosts.*

Story No. 328

Noah Comforts me

A Sunday-School teacher met a fellow servant. That friend was extremely depressed.

“Why are you looking so down?”

“I’ve been witnessing for a while with no response. I feel like I’m wasting my time. I often wonder if I cause this by my sins or if I’m just an awful preacher.”

“Personally, I’ve been so joyful.”

“Why?”

“I was meditating on Noah.”

“How was that?”

“He spent 120 years witnessing and calling people to repentance while building the arch. Nobody responded except his family. Noah did not get depressed. Now, after his departure many people repented and returned to the Lord. He witnessed but the fruits came after he had gone. This comforts my soul.”

From this moment, that servant served with joy and the depression left him and he won many to Christ through his joy.



Lord, give me confidence in You.

Through You I serve and witness to Your joyful Gospel,

And I rejoice with Your work in me.

Story No. 329

Is 'God' a Noun or Verb?

Peter was sitting with his father confessor. He was the kind of guy that cared a lot about appearance. For example, He boasted of being a deacon but his behavior was not appropriate. His father confessor told him the following story:

Mr. Avrill Harriman, a great organizer of European conventions, was asked, "Do you speak French well?"

He answered, "My French is excellent. I've a huge collection of nouns and adjectives but I don't know any verbs."

The father confessor commented, "Harriman was deceiving himself. He cannot speak French without verbs."

The nouns of our Christian faith are many: Lord, Teacher, Savior, Light of Light, true God of true God

The Adjectives are also many: wonderful, beautiful, etc, words that we could use to describe the beauty of anything.

Nevertheless, a sentence can never be a sentence if it does not contain verbs so we are in need of active verbs to be complete and fulfill our calling.

Our Christianity is not made up of nouns only but also of verbs.

True believers realize that God is a verb as well as a name. He loves, creates, saves, blesses and glorifies. The first sentence that was written in the Holy Bible was,

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1.1).

Jesus came both as a Man and a Verb, for He is the Savior and the Verb that He offers is, **"Follow Me."**



I have carried the noun "Christian" without the verbs.

Tell me: 'Follow Me,'

And I shall be drawn to you.

Let my life be full of verbs,

That glorify Your Holy Name.



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* Coniaris, Anthony. *Daily vitamins for Spiritual Growth.*

Be persecuted and not persecutor.

Be crucified and not a crucifier.

Be misjudged not a judge.

Be sensitive and do not desire what is not yours.

Carry goodness and mercy and do not demand justice (in your judgement on others)

St. Isaac the Syrian

The way to heaven is measured by the working well not by miles.

Story No. 330

“If”

King Philip sent a message to the people of Lycaonia saying, “If I enter Lycaonia, the city will go down to dust.”

Their answer was very short. It consisted of only one word "If."

The king then realized that they are capable of resisting his attempt to invade their cities.

This is the conditional “if,” but our teacher Paul offers us a certain “if,” he says,

“If God is for us, who can be against us” (Rom. 8.31)?

Here he means since the Lord is with us, certainly who will dare to be against us?

He also says,

“If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above” (Col.3: 1).

This means “Since you are certainly raised with Christ, ask what is from above.”



In the certainty of love we are resurrected with You.

Why should we ask for perishable matters?

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* Naismith, Archibald. *2400 Outlines, Quotes and Anecdotes for Sermons*.

Story No. 331

A Pope Takes Care of a Child

I was on my way to a church with a young priest. He asked me, “What were you thinking of, this morning?”

I answered, “I was thinking of Pope Alexandros. He was looking out of the window towards the beach. He saw a young boy playing with his friends. The boy was acting as a bishop baptizing a child. He acted his role with great care and seriousness. The Pope felt as if he had found a treasure and called him and his friends. The children were surprised by the presence of a father full of love.

After an intense conversation, the Pope asked to meet the child's mother. Consequently, the mother gave the child to the Pope as a student. This child grew to be St. Athanasius the Apostolic who has drawn the attention of 318 bishops assembled at the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea and the whole Christian world.”

The priest became silent and quietly he said, “I confess: when I started my service as a priest, the older priest asked me to take care of the service of Sunday-School and the youths so that he can take care of the adults. I was a little bothered but I know now how much the priest loves me. He actually gave me the most important work in the church, which is serving the young. The Pope took care of one child and it was a blessing to many.”



*My Lord the Logos, You became a Child.
With Your love You entered the world of childhood,
And directed our eyes to the children.
Every soul is precious in Your eyes.
It is more precious than the whole world.
You offered your blood a ransom for each child.
Grant me Your Holy Spirit that I may love each child,
And tend to every soul,
You who loved me and sacrificed Your life for me.*

Story No. 332

A Question to the Scientists

The New York Academy for Science mailed out a question to a number of scientists. It said, “If there was one thing you could change in the human body that can benefit human kind in this critical time, what would it be?”

The scientists sent back their responses. Dr. Albert Szent-Gyorgy, the winner of the Nobel Prize in medicine, gave the answer that the result of his research for over fifty years indicated to his great amazement of the harmony of nature, especially of the human body, especially what it possesses in protection and resilience. My helplessness in correcting nature makes me stand silent in awe.



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* Naismith, Archibald. Ibid.

Story No. 333

Wonders in the Planets

Peter was going through a rough time and was very sad. John spoke to Peter of God's providence that takes care of counting even our hair. He said, "God in His love moves the world for us. For us He created the world. For us He put the laws of nature. For us He also breaks these laws if it's to our benefit."

"How is that?"

"Did you not hear what the Lord did in the days of Joshua when He stopped the sun until victory was completed?"

"Do you think this is a real story or a fictional story to teach us?"

"In the book 'The Evening Star,' which was published in Spencer, Indiana, U.S.A. in the year 1970, Dr. Harold Hill, a specialist in space program wrote¹:

"Astronauts and scientists met in Green Belt, Maryland, to conduct some studies to establish the position of the sun, moon and some of the planets in the next hundred years. They explained that this was needed so that they may not launch a spaceship in the wrong zone and cause damage. They entered all the data in computers. They went back centuries. The computer indicated that there was an error in the information compiled.

When they reviewed their data, everything seemed right. They continued questioning what could be wrong until they found that was a day missing at some point.

They spent all their energies trying to solve their mystery of the missing day until someone said, "When I was in Sunday school they told me something about the sun stopping."

Scientists searched the Bible until they found in the book of Joshua when the sun stopped one day.

When they went back to the computer, they went back in time to the time of Joshua, they found that the sun was delayed 23 hours and 20 minutes, not a full day, as mentioned in the Bible. There were forty minutes missing for a full day to be missing.

It was also found that the sun was reversed 10 degrees in the days of Hezekiah the king of Judah. These ten degrees are equivalent to 40 minutes. Thus an explanation was found for the missing day.



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¹ Retranslated from Arabic.

* Naismith, Archibald *ibid*.

Story No. 334

The Problem Is Deep in me

Steve noticed that the clock of the church was 15 minutes ahead of time. He fixed it but the next day it returned back. He then noticed that at times it was ahead, at times behind and every time he would fix it.

One day he brought in a big sign and put it above the clock and he wrote,
“Don't blame my hands, the problem is deep within me.”

He tried to fix the clock through its hands but it needed someone that understands the mechanism of clocks, to fix it from the inside.

Often our hands, legs or thoughts lead us to do wrong and we try to cure them from the outside. We need God's abundant grace to enter our insides to cure us from within.

Truly, sin hides deep down in our soul but our Christ can enter into our deepest depths to cleanse us.



He Turns My Lamentation into Joy

I confess to You my Lord:

How often I praise You with my tongue?

Yet my heart is heavy.

Open my mouth to confess Your Love.

And turn my life into a song of praise.

Be my strength and my song,

So that I may enter into heaven.

How often I gave offerings?

But neglected to give myself a sacrifice and burnt offering of love.

I defiled my inner Jerusalem.

I defiled Your altar within me.

Help me repent, so that I would neither be as Shiloh that was ruined,

Nor like the Temple that was destroyed and burnt.

I offer lamentations for my broken soul,

But with Your Holy Spirit You turn my lamentations into joy.



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* Naismith, Archibald ibid.

SHORT STORIES

335-350

**Prepared by
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*Translated by
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*Youth Meeting
St. Georges and St. Anthony's
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Short Story No. 335

A Child Driving a Bulldozer

Jim used to take his 5-year-old son with him to work. The son usually sat beside his father while he was driving the bulldozer. One day, the little boy sneaked out of the house and sat in the driver's seat, pushed the button and the bulldozer moved. As the bulldozer moved, the boy could not stop it; it destroyed 3 cars, entered the neighbor's fence and crashed into a big tree. The boy was screaming. The father rushed to the bulldozer and stopped it. The boy, leaving the bulldozer, said, "I knew how to start the bulldozer but I didn't know how to stop it."

Many of us think that liberty is to do what we want, just as this boy did. He who tries drugs once or twice, discovers that he is enslaved by addiction and knows not how to stop. It is wiser not to start. For those who started, they should cry to God their Father saying,

"Bring my soul out of prison" (Ps. 142.7).



*I entertained an evil idea; I opened for it my door and now I am its slave.
Who can get into the depth of my soul and deliver it but You! Free my soul from jail!
Many times I behaved carelessly, believing that I have the right to do so.
I thought that I'm a free person,
To do as I wish,
But now I am a slave to my lust and have become a prisoner of my pleasures.
You are the True Deliverer of my poor soul.*

* Coniaris, Anthony. *Daily Vitamins for Spiritual Growth*.

Short Story No. 336

Take off the Black Clothes

In the city of Perth, Australia, I met a lady who lost her 25-year-old son. She was bitter about losing her son, a young man. As she was very sad, she used to light a candle in front of the icon of St. Mary and used to cry asking St. Mary to pray to God to give her condolence.

Suddenly, while she was sitting and extremely sad, she fell asleep. She saw in a dream a beautiful lady holding her son. He was happy but quiet. The mother was ashamed to ask her, "How did you get to my house?"

In the dream the mother was wearing her black garment, though there was a white spot on the black garment.

The beautiful lady said, "Your son is always joyful. He's with me happy because of your morning and evening prayers and that you pray for him. He's also happy that there is a white spot on your garment and wishes that you get rid of this black garment."

The poor mother was ashamed to say to her, "How can I take off this black garment since I lost my son?"

Because she saw her son happy the mother was silent for a while then she shouted, "Who are you? Are you St. Mary?"

The lady answered "Yes."

The mother responded, "Please take good care of my son."

St. Mary answered, "Don't worry. He's with me always and he's joyous."

The mother woke up in a peaceful spirit and full of comfort. She realized that her son did not die but was with God and among the Saints.



Lord, open the eyes of our hearts.

As we see you, we rejoice O the Source of our joy.

We see our beloved ones in Your glorious presence,

Sharing with the heavenly hosts in their prayers,

And with the Saints their never ending praises.

In the spirit of piety and love, St. Mary qualified for an amazing motherhood.

You became the Mother of God the Word, the Unlimited.

Your heart is big enough for the love of every human being.

Pray for us, you who are full of love.

Short Story No. 337

At the Ticket Booth

On September 1996, while I was chatting with Fr. Peter the Syrian Orthodox priest in Australia, he told me the following story:

H.G. Philoxinus, Metropolitan of Mardin in Turkey, before his ordination while on his way from Homs to Aleppo, met a poor man who asked him for alms. His Grace gave him all he had in his pocket, which was the price of the ticket.

As the father reached the ticket booth he asked the employee to give him a ticket and he promised to mail him the money as soon as he got home.

"I can't do that," answered the employee.

While the father was leaving the booth, a man rushed in and asked the employee not to take money from the father, saying, "Sell me two tickets one for me and the other for the father."

The father had never met this man before but he felt that God who told us to be kind to the poor takes care of us one way or another and He will never leave us in need.

That father was ordained a Bishop, he was kind and he cared for the poor, knowing that they are the treasure that no one could take away from him.



Lord, give me a loving heart for the poor and the needy

Since You opened Your heart for me.

You promised, "As much as you do, it will be done unto you.

Your deeds will come back to you."

Let me practice love in order to possess love.

I see You in all my brethren, especially the needy and rejected.

I love You in them, O the Source of love.

I meet You through them, O my heart's desire.

Short Story No. 338

You Got a Blessing, Wear it

One Christmas eve, as the church was full, Fr. Mikhail Ibrahim saw a young man coming out of the Deacons room with tears in his eyes. He went to him and with a smile asked him, "Why are you sad?"

The young man did not want to talk but the father insisted on finding out.

The young man answered, "I came late. I wished to serve on this special night but I didn't find my uniform 'Tonia'. It seems that one of the Deacons from another church took mine by mistake and put it on."

Fr. Mikhail took him by his hand to the priests' room and offered him his own Tonia. The young man refused but Fr. Mikhail insisted that he should wear it and said to him, "You've a blessing to wear it. Don't be upset. Be joyous. No one should be sad on this special evening."

Short Story No. 339

The Goose with the Golden Eggs

Nona and her husband Sam were looking at an enormous palace, which belonged to one of the great people of the town.

“Look Sam at this huge palace; it must have cost its owner more than 5 million dollars. When do you think we shall have one like it?”

Sam replied, “Don’t forget Nona that we used to live in a hut and that we found the mysterious goose. It lays every day one golden egg and we were able to buy our new home with its furniture. We’re now living in luxury.”

“But I want a palace much better than that of our neighbor. I’ve an idea; no doubt the goose stores inside itself a large amount of gold. Let’s kill it and get all the eggs and we will be rich fast this way.”

The couple decided to kill the goose but to their surprise there was no storage of golden eggs. The couple cried and in their greed they even lost the daily golden egg.



Your hands Lord offer me what is more valuable than gold.

Your love is great riches, grant me inner satisfaction,

And take away from me the spirit of greed.

You are my treasure, satisfaction and riches.



THE RICH AND THE POOR

- The poorest man in the world is he who treasures his money.
- To be rich is to be satisfied with what you have.
- “Who can find a virtuous wife for her worth is far above rubies” (Prov. 31.10).
- Many people spend all there time making money.
- He who has a godly mother will never be poor.

- **Short Story 340**

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- ***What about you?***

-

- I read a letter written to God by an American boy. He wrote:

“Dear God:

I am an American, what about You?”

Robert

That letter reminded me of an incident, which happened in Ottawa, Canada, around 1987. There was an argument between a little girl and her father about tradition. He told her that he is Egyptian.

The girl answered harshly, “But I’m a Canadian.”

It seems that every one is proud of his nationality. **The writer of the message is proud of being an American and he asked God about His nationality.**

In every prayer we cry, “Our Father Who art in heaven.” He is our heavenly Father who grants us the citizenship of heaven by being his children.

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Grant me Your citizenship, O the heavenly!

I am proud of my nationality as an Egyptian and of my church, as an Orthodox in beliefs.

When You carry me to You I shall have Your citizenship, O the heavenly.

Through Your church I get my heavenly passport.

Your Bible trains me for the language of heaven which is Love.

Your fiery Holy Spirit carries my heart to my heavenly home.

When are You coming to me?

Or when shall I go to You to dwell with You forever.

Short Story No. 341

The Feelings of the President

A young boy was begging. He was ashamed of begging but he left at home a sick mother who was suffering not only from disease but also from severe hunger. The boy was ashamed of stretching his hand to beg; however, in the mean time, he felt he had an obligation toward his sick mother.

In the crowd, one of the nobility noticed that the little boy was not at ease. He went to the child and spoke nicely to him, "Why are you not at ease?"

The boy answered, "Sir, you look like a noble man; you wear expensive clothes and a top hat. I never complained before to any one about our condition but I am in a bitter struggle. My father died and left us nothing. My mother works so we can eat but now she is sick in bed. I've neither food nor medicine to give her."

The man hid his tears with an artificial smile and said to the boy, "Take me to your home."

Before getting to the house, the noble man ordered some food to be sent to the house of the child.

The two entered the house and while the noble man was talking to the sick mother he took pity on her and said to her, "I'm not a doctor but I'll write down a recipe that benefit you."

He handed her the written paper and left.

The mother looked at the paper and found it to be a cheque for a large sum of money and she was very surprised when she read the signature of the cheque. It was George Washington, the president of the United States of America.



*Lord, grant me a kind heart that understands the pain of orphans,
And cares about the needy.*

Let me offer my heart and my feelings before offering my money and my belongings.

Short Story No. 342

Don't Believe your Ears

Young Pachomius was attracted to the Christian faith by the power of love and he practiced love. He established more than 10 monasteries that harbored thousands of monks. Their motto was the life of sharing and brotherly love. They were together in prayers and in their meals. Some chose to dwell in separate caves outside the monastery but still praying for the whole world.

One day some hermits came to visit father Pachomius. After a long spiritual conversation, the father asked his disciple Tadros to prepare a meal for the guests.

As Tadros was late, the father asked another monk to prepare a meal for the guests. That monk was late also so father Pachomius asked a third monk to prepare the table. At last, the father himself got up and prepared the table himself.

Father Pachomius was surprised, especially since he knew that his disciple Tadros was very obedient. Father Pachomius in a kind word said to his disciple, "If your own father asked you to do something would you not do it?"

Tears came rolling from Tadros' eyes saying, "Did I refuse to do any service for you?" Father Pachomius replied, "I asked you to prepare the table for the guests but you never did."

"Father, I heard you saying leave us alone because we'll discuss private matters," said Tadros. The father was astonished and he asked the other two monks and they replied with the same words.

Father Pachomius rang the bell, collected all the 1500 monks and he told the story to all of them. He also mentioned seeing a ghost that was in the window. He realized that it was the devil that changes the words so that the brothers mistrust each other and lose their brotherly love.

In the name of love, do not believe even your ears. You could hear what your brother never uttered or you could comprehend what he never meant.



Lord, grant me the spirit of brotherly love,

So my heart would be big enough for every one.

Let me not trust my feelings.

Let me see every one through You so I can rejoice with them and love You through them.

Short Story No. 343

With the Bus Driver

A lady in Australia told me the following story:

I took the bus; there was no one except the driver. I prayed to God to give me word for his salvation but I was silent for a while not knowing what to say. I was reading the Bible on the bus.

The driver asked me, "What kind of book are you reading?"

"The Bible," I answered. As the Lord opened a chance for me to speak to the driver, I handed him a tract about the life in Christ but he told me that he does not believe in Christ or in the Bible or in the everlasting life.

I asked the driver, "Do you have friends?"

He said, "Yes, many."

"If you became ill, how many friends will come and visit you in the hospital?"

He answered, "May be 3 or 4 friends."

I replied, "I don't think any one will come. But the Lord Jesus, the only One that came from heaven, Lover of mankind, is there for both your body and spirit. He is the Only One concerned with our needs."

Then I started to speak to him about the Savior but he did not pay attention. As we approached my stop, I asked him to wish for the love of Jesus.

A few days later, I saw the same driver rushing behind me. He was saying, "you," since he did not know my name. He said to me, "I was looking for you to share with me my happiness. The same day you were talking with me in the bus, I'd a heart attack and was rushed to hospital. Not a single friend came to see me. I remembered your words. I asked my wife to get me a Bible to look for my friend and savior Jesus Christ.

Now I know Him and have experienced his love. I've come to tell you and make you happy about his love for me."



My father and mother left me, but You embraced me.

You are the Physician of my soul and body.

When every one deserts me, You show me Your self deep within me.

You seek my love, O the Whole Love.

You look for me, asking for my friendship,

You Who satisfies every one with Your love and care.

Let me be satisfied with you and let every soul be satisfied with You.

Send me, powered by Your Holy Spirit, to attract many to Your love.

You came to me without being ashamed of me.

Let me introduce You to others without being ashamed of Your Cross.

Short Story No. 344

The Golden Touch

In the seventies, I was visiting the Copts in one of the cities in the lands of immigration. In that city the Copts were less than forty families. I was asked to visit three families whose breadwinners had heart problems. The three came to the New World and each had three jobs to secure the future of their families. They did not get more than 4 or 5 hours of sleep. They did not spend enough time with their families. They were in their thirties. That reminded me of the famous Greek story about king Midas of Feregia (Turkey), who lived around 800 B. C.

Midas was the richest man in the world. He loved collecting gold and never had any rest just working and collecting gold. For his great love for gold, he named his only daughter Mary of Gold, the one he loved dearly.

The little princess did not care about gold, which her father collected. She cared about her golden hair. She used to enjoy the golden rays of the sun at sunrise and sunset. She used to go to the garden to enjoy the beautiful flowers and go fruit picking. She had a love for nature that God created for her.

One day Midas went to his stores, closed the doors carefully and started to examine the boxes of gold, touching the gold with great joy. Suddenly, he broke his silence and started talking to himself in a loud voice, "Truly Midas you're the richest man in the world. Who has this amount of gold except you! I'm rich but I won't be satisfied until I collect all the gold in the world. If there is one gram of gold with someone else I won't be happy."

He felt then that a cloud came by and an angel appeared to him and said to him, "You have lots of gold, are you satisfied? This gold you have is so little compared to the gold in the whole world. Do you feel that you aren't satisfied with what you have?"

Midas replied, "Satisfied no way, I spend my nights thinking how I can collect more gold; I wish that every thing I touch turns into gold."

The angel responded, "Do you really want to have this wish?"

"Yes I do and nothing would make me any happier," said Midas.

"Tomorrow when the golden sunrays come through your window, you'll have your wish come true," said the angel.

The angel disappeared. Midas opened his eyes and realized that what he saw was a desire of his heart. The king said, "What I saw is just a dream, but who knows it might come true?"

The king woke up and touched the bed cover and waited but nothing happened. He became upset and he tried to remember the details about the dream. Sunrays started to enter his window; the bed cover turned into gold. The king was very pleased. He started to touch the bed; the rug and every thing turned to gold.

He looked from the window; he saw the garden in which his beloved daughter spent most of her day. He said to himself, "I'll offer my daughter a nice surprise."

He went to the garden and touched the trees; they all turned to gold. He returned to his palace, touched the bread and it turned to gold; the cup of water also turned to gold.

Midas was happy with all the gold that surrounded him but he could not eat nor drink. He shouted, "What can I do? I'm hungry and thirsty, I can't eat or drink gold."

Suddenly the young princess came home crying.

"What happened my little one?" he asked.

She replied, “O my father, every flower became dead with no smell no life; they all turned to gold.”

He said, “Don’t you think that they’re now more beautiful and more precious than before?”

“No father, they’re without smell and they don’t grow. I prefer living flowers.”

“I see you didn’t eat father. Tell me I see you look sad. What happened?” She ran to her father with tears in her eyes. He tried to hug her but she turned into a golden statue. She was no longer the happy princess. Her beautiful blue eyes turned to gold. All her body and even her clothes.

The father fell down to the ground, not knowing what to do. He felt that someone was shaking him, telling him, “Is this not that what your heart desired? Are you not the happiest man on earth?”

“How can I be happy? I’m the most miserable person in the whole world. I hate gold, do you think I’ll eat gold. And where is my beloved daughter?”

“Which do you prefer, O king? The golden priceless statue, or the little princess that is full of life and love?”

“Get me back my daughter and take all my gold.”

“Go to the river that runs at the end of your garden, get some water from it and pour it on every thing that became gold. It’ll return to its original form.”

The king rushed to the river and did as the angel told him. He was very glad when his daughter came back to life and every thing returned to its original form.



The love of money changes every thing to rigidity.

It makes me loose my food and drink, my love and rest.

Let me have You. You are the Secret behind life. You are my Treasure and my Riches.

You are the Satisfaction of my soul. Give me Your wisdom to only seek Your will.

May I live to be content and glad with You.

Short Story No. 345

Broken Pieces of Glass

In the city of Rally, North Carolina, Fr. Mesail Abu-Elkher told the following story:

The glass windows of the Cathedral of St. Peter of Rome were imported from Spain. Everything was ready for the opening of the Cathedral but the night before the opening they realized that the eastern window of the altar was missing. However, it was difficult to postpone the opening ceremonies.

Everyone was panicking. The famous artist Michael Angelo said to them, “Why are you upset? Show me where you threw the broken pieces of glass.”

They asked one another what he was going to do with broken pieces of glass but he insisted.

He started to choose some pieces and to put the broken pieces together, producing a beautiful picture of the Holy Spirit, which won the admiration of all.

No one could imagine that this beautiful window was made of the broken pieces of glass that were in the trash.

This is the work of the Holy Spirit, the Greatest Artist; He carries me from the trash to the chief's place.



*Who carries me from the trash to the holy altar, except You the Fiery Holy Spirit!
Transforming my corruption to immortality and from death to life.*

*Work in me, to sanctify my body and spirit, my thoughts and my feelings,
all my possibilities to be transformed to a living Icon of my Lord Jesus Christ.
Then, the Spirit of God would be glorified in me.*

Short Story No. 346

On the Cigarette Pack

In Brisbane, Australia, while I was talking to the beloved father Mosa Soliman, he told me the following story about how Pope Cyril the Sixth had a miraculous role in the life of smokers.

One beloved person was suffering from smoking for several years. The smoker got one of the books about the miracles of Pope Cyril and placed it on top of the cigarette pack. He then said, "Pope Cyril, you can pray for me to stop smoking."

Two hours went by without the urge to smoke. He thought it was just a psychological condition. He tried to get a cigarette and light it but he felt sick because of the nasty smell of burning. He again said, "It might be a psychological condition." He got another cigarette and the same thing happened.

A guest came to his house and found him in a state of surprise. He asked the guest to get him a cigarette from his pack. The same thing happened and since that time he never smoked again.

I narrated this story to another person who was also suffering from smoking and he used the same idea with successful results. That was due to the prayers of Pope Cyril.



*I thank you my Lord because death can not ruin my life.
I abide in You so that my mission would not stop even after my death.
I shall work for Your kingdom as long as I live.
Death will not be able to destroy my love for my brothers.*

*Lord I am no longer afraid of death.
Through it I pass to You, O the Desire of my spirit.
Truly, my love increases to all mankind.
Generations of believers that have left are now supporting us with their prayers.
Let the existing generations, clergy and people support everyone with practical love.*

Short Story No. 347

Wrong Information

A lady took the train in the North East Coast of the USA, a Snow Belt of the region. There was a snowstorm, and the snow covered the rails of the road. The train driver drove the train very slowly behind the snowplow truck.

The lady panicked. She was carrying a baby together with a bag that had her clothes and the baby's needs. She was concerned with her friends who were waiting for her on the other end due to the train delay.

She asked the conductor to let her know ahead of time about her stop. The conductor told her nicely, "I'll let you know."

The lady asked the conductor once more not to forget to let her know. "I'll let you know," he replied.

One of the passengers said to the lady, "I'm familiar with this road. I'll inform you about your stop."

When the stop that was before her stop came the passenger told her, "Your stop is next." He carried her baby and her bag, getting ready to leave the train.

When the train stopped, the passenger helped her to leave the train saying, "What a careless conductor! Wow could he forget about you?"

A few minutes later when the train resumed traveling, the conductor came looking for the lady. He was saying, "Where is the lady with the baby? She's supposed to get off at the next stop."

The passenger told him that he forgot about her and she got off when the train stopped. Sadly, the conductor said, "How come she left? that was an emergency stop. It wasn't a regular stop. She got off in a place where there is no shelter in the middle of a snowstorm."

The conductor rushed to see the driver of the train telling him what had happened, "I think that there is no other way except to take the risk of going back."

The driver went back to find the lady trying to keep herself warm but her baby had already died between her hands because of the bad weather.

This was the result of the wrong information which she got from people who appeared to care about her.



*Your Holy Gospel is the royal road.
Your Holy Spirit is the honest guard,
Your Church is the true mother.*

*Let us not be deceived by the wrong information
Even if it came from people who seem to care about us.*

Be my Guide O my Savior.



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Naismith, Archibald. *2400 Outlines, Quotes and Anecdotes for Sermons*.

Story No. 348

An Old Man Sets his House on Fire

In June 1896, while a Japanese grand father was sitting on the porch of his house with his 10-year-old grandson, suddenly an earthquake shook the mountain. However, his house and neighbors houses were not hurt since they were built to be quake proof.

The old man noticed that the seawater was rising, stretching for miles. From his experience, he realized that the seawater will overcome the village and will cover it entirely. He looked at the people of the village who were looking at the sea, not knowing what was going to happen.

The grandfather asked his grandson to get him a torch. With the torch, the old man set fire in the wood on top of his house. The child shouted for help thinking that his grandfather had lost his mind.

When the villagers saw the fire they got up where the fire was and the fire alarm was ringing which was heard from a distance.

The young people came and tried to put off the fire but the old man prevented them and said, "I want every one in the village to come here."

They were all astonished, wondering what was wrong with the old man. They asked the grandson, "What went wrong with your grandfather?" He said, "Maybe he became crazy, I saw him starting the fire."

The grandfather said, "Yes, I started the fire because I want to see every body here."

As all the people of the village arrived, the tide was so strong that it wiped out the village.

At that time the villagers knew that this old man did not think about himself but he cared about the safety of the people of his village.



Lord, you see what I can not see.

You did not burn down a physical house, but You gave Your body to death.

You drew me towards You, so the water of the pit can not overcome me.

You, my Savior, are miraculous in Your love.

People thought that Your cross is foolishness and a stumbling block.

You were accused of failure and weakness.

While, You with Your love offered me Your Cross which is the power of salvation.



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C.F. "El-Bostan" magazine, St. Mark Church, Washington, August 1988

Short Story No. 349

Transmitters of the Plague

A Latin writer told the story of the spread of the plague in Sicily. What was really strange was when someone became sick with this illness, instead of caring for him his family sat around awaiting his death.

They also carried his contaminated cloths on a mule to a neighboring town to spread the disease there. They said, “Why should we alone get the curse of the plague?”

This was the human logic of many people. If someone is a slave to smoking, drinking, drugs or Satan worshipping, they never rest until they make others do the same perhaps among their own friends too.



*Whoever accepts Satan as his father invites others to join him.
He falls and pulls down others with him.
What benefit he has in doing such destructive action?*

*Whoever accepts Your Fatherhood O my Lord,
Will never rest until everyone else accepts You, to enjoy the blessings of your love.
Why are you ashamed my soul of witnessing for your Heavenly Father?
Why are you not witnessing for Him as His agent?
Why are you ignoring the fact of being an ambassador for your Savior,
The Lover of all mankind?*

Short Story No. 350

Work as a Kind of Worship

Father Gawargios Kolta told me the following true story:

“A wife of a rich merchant came complaining that her husband was very busy with his work, in a way that he did not leave any time for worship. He was kind to the poor, honest in his job but he ignored his spiritual life.

I visited him several times and he always had excuses for not coming to the church or taking communion. He used to tell me, “My conscious is comforted. I don’t hurt anyone. I fear God and work is a kind of worship. Not everyone who goes to church will go to heaven.”

I talked with him several times for several years of the importance of worshipping in the church. His pious wife never stopped praying for him and also asked me to pray for him at the altar.

Suddenly, when he was in his fifties he became sick with cancer of the blood. He lost his smile and he started asking everyone who visited him to pray for him. He came to the church and tasted the beauty of church life, feeling sorry about lost years. He felt as though his days were numbered. He asked St. Mary to be with him when his soul leaves his body. As I promised, I took communion home for him regularly.

One day, his wife came to me to tell me that her husband would be in church for communion. When I asked her what happened, she said that he had seen the Virgin St. Mary in a vision. He was not sure whether he was awake or asleep.

She informed him that the Lord Jesus had mercifully looked upon him and removed his sickness. Then, he was actively moving around in the house. He was completely cured; he was practicing his personal worship at home as well as his regular worship at the church. He assigned the business to his children. His talk with them was concentrated on their salvation and the enjoyment of everlasting life.

Two years later when one morning his wife went to wake him up, she found him smiling but he had gone to his God and Savior.



Grant me Lord to enjoy You in my work.

So I give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what belongs to God.

Your worship gives me pleasure even in my troubles.

Meeting You is satisfying to me and You are the Guide on my journey.

STORIES FOR THE YOUTH

351-366

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Story No. 351

Reading the Bible with his Tongue

In one of the quarters of Kansas City, a man was injured in an explosion and lost his hands. Moreover, his face was gravely wounded. He lost his eyes; therefore, he was not able to read. Feeling much bitterness, he craved for reading the bible. He asked, "How can I read the Bible having neither hands nor eyes?"

He was told that there was a lady in England who enjoyed reading the Bible with her lips. She used her lips instead of her fingers to read the Bible in Braille. He contacted an organization to send him the Bible in Braille in order to learn reading the Bible with his lips. Nevertheless, before receiving the Bible, he realized that his lips lost sensation. As he received the Bible, he started to learn reading by touching the letters by his tongue. He enjoyed reading it. He said once, "I read the whole Bible four times and some of its books many times."

Thus his suffering was changed into an enjoyment of the Word of God that grants the soul sweetness and consolation.

This man brings judgment upon us for he learned to read the Bible with his tongue after losing his eyes, his hands and the nerves of his lips. What excuse do we have?



*Let me experience the sweetness of Your Word,
To read it with all my senses,
To experience the strength of Your Word,
To live with it and enjoy Your promises.
With it, I hurry to the eternal bosom.
With it, I enjoy the eternal glory.*

Story No. 352

The Golden Coin

John talked with the Sunday school children in St. Mark church about the importance of taking care of our poor brethren. After discussing the matter, they decided to dedicate part of the alms for the poor families. Each one of them promised to save twenty-five cents of their pocket money for the poor. On the following week, during their meeting, Stephen threw twenty-five cents in the alms box but with indifference. John saw an angel, standing beside the alms box, who commented on Stephen's behavior, "This coin, Indifference, is of tin; it has no value on the scales of God."

Mark threw twenty-five cents saying to himself in bitterness, "It's a duty to deprive myself of something and present it to God."

The angel commented, "This coin, compulsion without love, is of iron. It also has no value on the scales of God."

Sam threw twenty-five cents with his eyes wondering here and there to make sure that all people saw him.

The angel commented, "This coin, vainglory, is of brass that glitters like gold. It also has no value on the scales of God."

George did the same but his heart was groaning for the poor and the needy, saying to himself, "Poor are those who don't have convenient food or shelter. They live miserably while we live in luxury."

The angel's comment was, "This coin, pity, is of silver. It's acceptable and valuable in the sight of God."

Then Luke put twenty-five cents into the box while saying, "Lord, I don't deserve to present you a little of what You gave me. You gave me Your soul. Accept my heart before accepting my money. You're mine and I'm Yours, O my Beloved."

The angel rejoiced and said, "This coin, extreme love, is of gold. It's invaluable for God, the source of love."



*I see You, the Creator, putting forth Your hands.
With Your love, You desire me to present to You of what You gave me.
I do not deserve to present something to the Creator of the universe.
Uproot laziness and indifference from me,
Take away from me the feelings of compulsion.
Grant me not to be deceived by the praise of people,
But with my love to my brethren, I love You O the lover of all.
Beside You I see no one; then I will meet You while dealing with the needy.*

Story No. 353

Fulfilling the Will of God

A minister's heart kindled with love to Christ. He devoted all his life for the salvation of those who met him. The minister fell sick and was compelled to stay in bed. One of his friends visited him and said, "You were very active in serving God, so why God permitted that you fall sick?"

He answered with inner peace, "I was serving God, the thing which I didn't deserve; now, I'm fulfilling the will of God, which is greater. Therefore, I praise and thank him all the days of my life."

Ministry is indeed the great work of God but fulfilling the will of God is considered greater by His honest servants. This was apparent in the life of our beloved father Pishoy Kamel. He served by bearing his sickness thankfully more than the service he offered all the days of his life. His thanks to God still consoles many people especially those who are sick with cancer.



*With Your Holy Spirit, I will work till the last breath.
With Your Holy Spirit, I thank You fulfilling Your Holy Will.
Teach me: What do You want me to do?
Lead my life.*

Story No. 354

The Martyr Perpetua

In 203 AD during the persecution in the days of emperor Sawiros, Minosious Timinianous, the proconsul of Africa, arrested five catechumens. Among them was Vivia Perpetua who was twenty-two years old. She was the wife of a rich man having a baby and she was the daughter of a noble man. A man called Saturus accompanied them. He seemed to be their teacher and spiritual father. He chose to be imprisoned with them to encourage them and share with them their pains. Perpetua's husband was a Christian. He accepted the faith secretly. When persecution took place he escaped. The five were imprisoned in a house. Perpetua's father came doing his best to convince his daughter to return to worshipping the idols. However, she told him that she would not renounce Christ under any condition. Therefore, he started beating her and insulting her then he left. At that time, the arrested catechumens were baptized. Few days later, Perpetua, along with her companions, were taken to the prison. Its darkness and bad smell terrified her. Besides, the soldiers were cruel and she was deprived of her baby. On the first day, as she suffered much pain, two blessed deacons called Tertius and Pomponius gave money to the soldiers to allow them to have some rest. She was also allowed to breastfeed her baby who became weak because of hunger. Perpetua asked her brother to take care of the baby and not to worry about her. Afterwards, she was allowed to have her baby with her; thus, she rejoiced. God changed the prison into a palace to the extent that she felt that she never had rest but in prison. Her brother visited her and told her that she was living in glory and that she was dear to God for bearing pains for His sake. He asked her to pray to God to reveal to her whether this will end by martyr them or not. With trust she asked him to come the following day to tell him what the Lord would reveal to her.

As she prayed, she saw in a vision a golden narrow ladder on which only one person could go up. On the sides of the ladder all kinds of knives and swords were fixed. He whoever goes up carelessly without looking upwards will be injured and perish. At the foot of the ladder, there was a huge dragon willing to devour anyone who would go up. Saturus went up first till he reached the top of the ladder. Then he looked to her saying, "Perpetua, I'm waiting for you, but be careful of the dragon lest it should kill you."

"In the name of Jesus Christ it won't harm me," the Saint replied.

She advanced towards the ladder to find the dragon lifting up its head but in fear. She put one of her legs on the golden ladder and with the other she treaded on the dragon's head. She went up to find herself in a large garden. In the middle of the garden sat a very great man. His hair was white. He put on a shepherd's clothes milking the flock and surrounded with thousands of people in white.

This man lifted up His head and looked to her saying, "Welcome Daughter."

He called her and gave her cheese made of the milk. She took it and ate it; and all those who surrounded Him said, "Amen."

Perpetua woke up to find herself as if eating delicious food. She told her brother what she saw. Thus they knew that this would end by martyrdom.

Story No. 355

Ready is my Heart

With the captain of the American Navy Admiral Porter, there was a young officer who never yawned. Whenever the captain called on him, he found him ready, put on his clothes and showing up soon cheerfully. The captain said to him once, "I will promote you if you tell me why are you always ready?" The officer replied, "Whether sleeping or waking up my heart is ready whatever the case is. I'm always ready to respond even if I'm asleep, so I never complain."



*Ready is my heart, O Lord, ready is my heart.
Call on me by day or by night.
I am waiting for Your coming.
Your voice is sweet.
Come to me and let me come to You.*



The Power of Love

*A rock is strong but iron can split it.
Iron is strong but fire can melt it.
Fire is strong but water can quench it.
Water is strong but the clouds can carry it far away.
Clouds are strong but the winds can move them.
Winds are strong but man can resist them.
Man is strong but fear can destroy him.
Fear is strong but love can cast it out.*

Story No. 356

Your Advent Made my Life a Heaven

Sam visited his friend Mark who was sick to the extent that there was no hope of healing.

“I see you rejoicing, Mark.”

“Yes of course, I asked God not to heal me.”

“How?”

“I’m longing to see my beloved Jesus.”

Sam asked him jokingly, “What would you do if you went to heaven and didn’t find Jesus?”

“I’ll follow Him for, heaven is wherever He is”

“If you went to hell, what would you do?”

“Wherever Jesus stays there will be no hell but heaven.”

This was the answer of a young simple child who tasted the sweetness of meeting Jesus. The Savior came to the world to change the value of tears into a pleasant heaven. With His love, He penetrated our depth to establish His kingdom within us. The heavenly hosts desire the holy altar, namely, our souls.



Your birth, O my Savior, changed my life into an everlasting feast.

Your transfiguration in me made me always rejoicing.

Your advent in me made springs of living water to erupt in me.

You change the desert into a spiritual fruitful paradise.

There are rivers inside me listening to the psalmist,

“The floods have lifted up their voices.”

The floods of my eyes, my ears, my thoughts, my hands and my emotions cry out,

Composing a symphony of love played by the Holy Spirit.

May I hear the psalmist,

“Let the rivers clap their hands.”

Glory is to You, O the Divine Spring,

Who created of me heavenly rivers working harmoniously.

Shepherds praise You,

For You reconciled between the wolves and the lambs inside the barn.

You are the Newly Born, however You are older than Noah is and also younger than he is.

You saved all those who were in the arc.

Your father David killed a lion for the sake of a lamb (1 Sam. 17. 34-37)

You the son of David kill the hidden wolf that killed Adam,

The meek lamb who lived and bleated in Paradise.

Hearing these praises, the brides woke up suddenly,

And kept virginity,

Even the young maidens with purity came in-groups to worship the Son.

(St. Ephraim the Syrian)

Story No. 357

Your Birth Filled me

Michael gave his friend Andrew a piece of mud saying, "Look, the worm that lives in the mud has its color."

"Don't be surprised. The colors of many insects change according to the colors of the leaves which they live among and eat. Moreover, many birds, especially geese, have the smell of what they eat, especially when they eat fish," Andrew replied.

Michael commented, "It is said that man is a hungry being whose nature changes according to what he eats. Therefore, Christ was born in a manger so that when man is hungry he can be filled with Him. He will then stop seeking the world with its lasts which are dissatisfying to find in his Savior an eternal satisfaction."



*I am a hungry being, who can satisfy me?
You are the true bread coming down from heaven.
Your promise is true: "I am the bread of life.
He who comes to Me shall never hunger,
And he who believes in Me shall never thirst" (John 6.35).
You are the bread of angels.
He whoever eats You, resembles angels.
His nature changes so he becomes a partner in the Divine Nature.
Why should I roam in the world to be satisfied with it,
When You descended to me?
You gave me Yourself to eat and to drink.
May Your blood flow in my veins.
May Your thought be in me,
So that I will be a living icon of You.
May I be full with You.
It is only You who fill my emptiness.
It is You only who penetrate my depth,
And with Your Spirit You renew my nature.*

Story No. 358

A STRAWBERRY CAN

The pastor of the church knocked the door of one of the houses in his parish. A lady in an apron opened to him holding a can of Strawberries. She said to him harshly, "I don't want you to talk to me, I'm indifferent with religion."

As she wanted to shut the door, the pastor said, "Can I know what you're carrying?"

"A can of strawberries", she replied.

"From where did you get it?"

"From the supermarket."

"What are you doing with it?"

"A pie."

"You know what you are carrying, from where you got it and what you are doing of it. However, you don't care to know your soul, its origin and its work and purpose."



Elders with the spirit of youths

The Christian does not know senility.

He is always growing.

Remember that:

Goethe completed his literary work Faust when he was eighty-two.

Titian drew his best painting when he was ninety-eight.

Kourad Adenauer was the leader of West Germany when he was eighty-six.

Always live with the heart of a youth,

So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

Story No. 359

An Extra Feast Please?

A child once wrote a message to the Lord saying:

“Dear God,
Can you please put an extra feast between Christmas and Easter because there is nothing good that happens between them?”

Jennie

This is a child’s heart crying in need of more spiritual joy in addition to that of Christmas and Easter.

The early church, as well as the modern Orthodox Church, managed to have a celebration every day of the year, be it a Lordly feast or in memory of a saints who have joyfully gone to Paradise.

Every Sunday we celebrate Jesus’ Resurrection. Every Friday we fast and remember his salvation-giving pains. There isn’t a month that passes by without us remembering His birth and resurrection.



My Lord:
You are my everlasting Feast!
Your bible is my joyful gospel,
Your Birth’s gospel fills my heart with peace.
Your birth offers me a new birth.
Your resurrection grants me a blessed life.
With you, my sufferings are turned to joy.
And my pilgrimage turned into a never-ending feast.
You are my feast and endless joy.
In the angels’ feasts I see you transfigured, O’ God of heavens.
In the feasts of prophets and apostles I see you the core of every prophecy and mission.
In martyrs’ feasts your glorious cross shines within me.
In the saints feasts I see you O’ Holiest of Holies the Saint of Saints.

Story No. 360

Liable for their Sins

In the tenth century, during his early patriarchal visits, Pope Makar ElShabrawy the 59th pope announced that he would pass by his native village Shobra Kebala in Kwessna. The news was also delivered to his mother that he would visit her as well.

When the Pope entered the village with the bishops and priests and headed to his mother's home, he found her weaving with tears in her eyes. Expecting a warm welcome, the Pope stood watching his mother who only kept crying as she continued weaving. Ashamed of her attitude and thinking that she didn't recognize him, he asked, "Don't you recognize me Mother? I'm your son."

She replied, "I do son, but you don't know what you've become. You're happy because of your position but my grief over you is great. I would have preferred to see you in a coffin instead of being happy with the vainglory. Don't look to what you have achieved but cry and be sad for you're now liable for all the sins of those who praise you."

The Pope and his crowd paused and tears filled their eyes. These words were forever present in the Pope's mind.



O'Lord, make sour vainglory for me.

O'Lord teach me not to be overwhelmed with people's praise or criticism,

But only to be occupied by each person's salvation.

When Your Spirit works in me, I would willingly die for anyone.

O' Lord, may I die that all would live.

Grand me to carry Your Cross so that all be blessed by Your Resurrection.

Prepare my soul to meet You.

Grant me faithfulness in the earthly little

So that I enjoy the eternal greatness.

Story No. 361

A Photo of El-Natron Valley Prison

During a time of great tribulations for the church, when a great number of priests, bishops and other civilians were arrested and detained in El-Natroon Valley prison, the late Fr. Youssef Assaad was among those who were incarcerated. Due to lack of space, the bishops, priests and all others were grouped together in one floor with triple bunker beds. It was during one night when everyone was praying together with the only light coming from oil lanterns fueled by oil gathered from breakfast beans, that Fr. Assaad was so moved by the heavenly sight of that congregation that he asked for a small camera to be sent to him.

The prison warden was furious when he found out about it and summoned one of the bishops at once to his office. When the bishop returned, he broke the news that because of Fr. Assaad's actions, the warden has issued new stricter rules, even affecting food sent from other churches and rest periods outside the confinement areas.

The Bishop then turned to Fr. Assaad and scolded him saying, "You're making yourself liable for some very charges because of this camera. You'll not leave prison."

In the calmest of voices, Fr. Assaad replied: "Do not worry about me, for I will be the first out of prison."

Afterwards, Fr. Assaad kept on with his prayers and was among the First group to be released from prison.



*O'Lord, grant me the spirit of faith with prayers,
So that I trust in the richness of your wisdom and your power.
When tribulations are many,
When the sea and its waves are at their highest,
You come to me, to reassure and rest my soul.*

Story No. 362

Cow Thief

It was around midnight on a cold December night, when Sergeant Peter -who was energetically walking his beat- noticed a man suspiciously walking while leading a cow behind him.

Sergeant Peter didn't hesitate and approached that man and asked him for the reason of his late walk. The man panicked and showed all sorts of signs of anxiety and fear and then got out a \$ 10 note and tried to get Peter to take it. Immediately sure that the man is a thief, he refused to accept his bribe and firmly ordered to walk in front of him to the police station. Sweating furiously, the man got out another note and begged Peter to leave him. Peter stood back and pulled his pistol threatening to shoot if the thief didn't comply with his orders. Peter walked gun-in-hand behind the thief who saw Peter ready to shoot every time he looked behind him all the way to the police station.

Peter pushed the man fiercely into the police station and reported the whole event in all honesty to the officer in charge. The thief simply smiled as the officer grabbed a chair and asked him to rest and turned to Peter saying, "Congratulations, you've just arrested the new deputy Captain."

Peter was caught completely off-guard and was trying his best to apologize in the middle of all his confusion when the deputy sheriff got up and congratulated him on performing his duty well.

"I usually disguise myself and tour the different patrol areas to check on the performance of those on duty. I even had to borrow the cow from a friend to be your suspect tonight."

The deputy then asked Peter to come the following morning to his office where the other officers gathered and said, "You're a faithful and honest man, and you should expect a promotion soon."

Offering him the money that he did the previous night as a bribe, he said, "Please accept this as a reward. It's the same amount you refused to take yesterday out of honesty."



*Grant me O'Lord to live honest in the few as well as the many.
Let me be faithful neither for other people's sake nor for reward,
But for your sake O' Most Faithful.*

Story No. 363

A Piece of Bread

Growing more and more in Christ, a young man dedicated long hours for prayer and spared no effort in his service for others and his care for their salvation. Loving a hermit's way of life he restricted himself to one meal a day. He never hungered really and never wished a certain food, but was occupied by the glory arranged for him in Heaven. He used to frequently visit the monastery of St. Pachomius in Upper Egypt, where he always wondered at the monks' commitment to eat twice a day together. He believed that only one meal was enough for a man to live and carry on with his vital activities. He later joined the monastery and abided to monks' daily two meals norm. Surprisingly enough, after a while he found himself feeling severe hunger. He even started sneaking a piece of bread during lunch to take it to his room where he later ate it when he felt hungry. However, there wasn't a time when he ate his hidden piece of bread without crying bitterly and his heart crying out, "O'Lord, how has my life turned to sin?

When I was in the world, one meal sufficed.

Now in the monastery, not even two meals are enough!

How can I steal bread?

How can I hide my transgression?

I am falling from one sin to another!

Who will save me from this weakening except You my Savior?

I promise You that I won't steal bread even if I'll starve."

On the following day, the young monk went to the dinning hall with all the rest of the monks firmly thinking that he wouldn't take bread again. However, he couldn't stand the hunger once he finished eating and took bread again. He kept doing this day after day and was getting desperate thinking that there was no solution to his problem.

When the monk met his father confessor, he confessed with a deep sense of guilt and embarrassment. He was feeling really ashamed during confession while the father hearing his confession smiled a wide smile full of hope and answered the young monk, "The devil knew how to come through to you. He trapped you with a seemingly simple sin. It was because you were embarrassed to confess it that you weren't able to get rid of it. But now you repented to the all mercifully and forgiving God. You revealed your weaknesses in front of your father confessor. The power of this sin is now gone. It won't control you anymore. Your Lord will grant you the spirit of triumph and victory for He works in the honest and frank soul that doesn't hide anything."

The monk came out from his father confessor's room praising God who grants victory to His faithful and honest children.

When the following lunch time came, the young monk didn't feel hungry as he used to but actually went back to his state before becoming a monk: eating a little with thankfulness and a joyful heart, stopping his old sins and being full of the Lord's peace.



I confess my sins in my sanctuary

Specially those silly ones

Which a young man does not commit.

*Grant me, as a son of the Lord, to be frank,
To confess all my sins,
To rest assured of the richness of Your love and mercy.*

*Grant me also to confess in the presence of my father confessor,
That I should be embarrassed now of my silly acts,
So I will not be uncovered on the Day of the Lord.
Let me uncover myself before You, and be covered by Your Grace.*

Story No. 364

Tears Overseas

“How can I maintain a pure mind and pure thoughts away from judging people while listening to all the parties involved in a problem at church?” This question simply haunted me. I was assigned to serve abroad in a church that had quite a few problems and I didn’t really know how to handle them.

On the first Saturday evening, I met a number of people but I wasn’t really listening. The following Sunday morning, I was holding Mass service. I was surprised when a young deacon -who joined the church recently - stood to read the bible, but barely finished the psalm as tears filled his eyes. It was when he started to read the gospel that his sighs and sobs became simply too much that he couldn’t finish reading the Gospel and had another deacon replace him to read the gospel.

The whole congregation wondered, “why is this young man crying?” while I felt sorry for myself and wished that God grant me similar pure tears.

On that same week, as we were praying the 12thth hour prayer in one of the houses of the congregation, and during reciting the psalms, the hostess’ eyes were full of tears. Her tears went running down her face and she was actually crying more than she could speak. This kept happening more than once, and I couldn’t help but be moved by her tears.

On the following Sunday, the young deacon came to me in all humbleness saying, “After the Mass last week, many people asked me about the reason of my crying. I’m a sinner father. I feel that I’m not worthy of reading the gospel because of my sins.”

And so, in a foreign country and in the midst of church problems, I met pure souls offering their tears to their Savior as an acceptable sacrificial offering of love. They are souls that know how to sustain the work of the spirit within their lives, and so live concerned with the salvation of their souls regardless of the surrounding circumstances.

This deacon and that lady managed to exercise the purity of thoughts and be concerned only with the salvation of their souls. That is how God answered my question.



O’Lord grant me pure thoughts wherever I am and under all circumstances.

May Your Holy Spirit lift me up above all happenings,

So that my heart would not be occupied with troubles but with Your Salvation.

May it overcome all problems as if lifted by the wings of a dove.

May my soul rise to live for You and by You.

May it fly to settle in Your Embrace.

May I indulge myself in your mysteries.

I ask neither to have a certain stature nor to live in a certain ambiance,

But to be in Your Arms wherever I am.

It is not where I am that sanctifies my thoughts,

Nor my surroundings which shape my soul.

It is Your Spirit who sanctifies to the end.

May my soul rise as with a dove’s wings

For me to cry over my grave sins

So that my tears mix with your wondrous works.

I cry over sins that bear heavily upon my soul.

I offer them to you as an offering of pure love.

*Grant me also tears of joy
For my soul to rise to the heavens in hope
And praises your unbroken work in it.*

Story No. 365

The Broken Handed

The Sad Mother

Father Gawargios Kolta narrated the following real story:

A mother came grieving over her only pious son who was deceived by a divorced woman. He was concerned with her out of pity. As they used to meet each other for a long time, their passions kindled and their thoughts became sinful. In the summer vacation, the son asked his wife to take her children and spend the holiday with her family. He did not accompany them pretending to have no vacations. On a certain day the mother opened her son's flat, to tidy it and prepare food for him, to find it unorganized. The son came out of his bedroom asking his mother to leave for he did not want to talk to her then. Mother realized what was going on and as she begged him to let her in, he kicked her out. When she went out weeping, she met the doorkeeper who said to her, "I'm really sad, your son spends the nights with a divorced woman who's not as fair as his wife."

She told Fr. Gawargios, weeping, that her son sinned and became a son of Satan. She asked him to accompany her to her son's house but he did not let them in. They had no other choice save to fast and pray.

The Mother's Fight

The mother went with the priest to her son for a second time. This time she asked the doorkeeper to knock the door. When the son opened, the mother rushed inside the flat while the priest kept standing outside. He asked the priest to have a seat. The mother screamed unconsciously, "This woman should leave. My son is married and has children, why do you want to ruin the family?" The son slapped his mother. The priest was hurt and took her hands to get her out. However, she fell down unconsciously crying, "Do you slap your mother for an adulteress!" The priest said to him, "You increase your sins by slapping your mother. Fear the anger of God."

The priest went out with the mother consoling her, "Fasting and prayers will release him from the trap of sin. The things that are impossible with men are possible with God."

He asked her to tell nobody even her husband and just cry to God. The priest kept asking God bitterly to save this man. Few days later, he met the man by chance and reproached him seriously. The man listened to him silently and then said, "Pray for me so that God may save me from her. After a while, I'll ask her to leave but not now."

Mother asked her daughter in law to return soon saying that her husband was sick and needed care. Her son complained of his mother for the priest saying that she was not wise for, his wife's coming would complicate the matter.

The wife came to find her husband not welcoming her. She realized the disappearance of many of her perfumes and make-up; she felt that he betrayed her.

Strict Fasting

The wife wisely told the priest what she saw and felt and asked for his counsel. She handed him some of the belongings of this adulteress that she found. The man came to

the priest asking for these belongings. The priest reminded him quietly of his first love to God and the purity of his holy garment, his body, which he profaned. He asked him to think of his wife and children. However, he felt that the man had fallen with the harlot into a deep pit. (Prov. 23. 27). The priest told the wife that fasting and prayers would save her husband. She decided to fast everyday till sunset until he repents. A month later, the husband begged the priest to make his wife stop fasting for her body had weakened exceedingly and he was on his way to break his sinful relationship. The priest asked him, “Are you concerned with your wife’s health and unconcerned with the destruction of your soul and your family! Ask God to grant you His fear before He punishes you.”

Fr. Gawargios Concluded with the verse, “**Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand**” (Rev. 2.5).

A True Repentance

Few days later, the man attended the vespers prayers. He sat at the last seat bending down his head. He made confession with tears and asked the priest to pray for him and allow him to partake in Holy Communion which would support him.

He saw God’s love manifested in his wife’s strict fasting and his mother’s tears and sufferings for his salvation. He wanted to be chastened to feel the bitterness of the sin. Though the divorced women tried to drag him to sin by all means, his concern for his salvation and his hope in his Savior along with fasting and prayers supported him. Later on, he partook of Holy Communion with his hand broken. When the priest asked him about the reason behind breaking his hand, he said, “Two days ago on my way to work, I was driving fast. Approaching a square, I tried to put on the breaks yet the car collided with a tree and my right arm was broken. It’s the punishment of God that the hand which slapped my mother was broken.”

Peace was restored to the family and the man traveled abroad with his family. On the other hand, his mother praised God who accepted her prayers. Some weeks later, the mother fell sick for two weeks. Then, the second Monica reposed rejoicing for the salvation of her son. The son always remembered his mother’s love and sacrifice for him.



*He, whose mother is rich in piety, is not poor.
The son of tears will never perish.
Grant me motherhood to desire the salvation of all.
May my tears not stop, till all people are saved.
May my body weaken with fasting,
Hoping Your Grace, so that my soul will not perish by sin.*

Story No. 366

Why has the Dead Sea Died?

As the young boy was skimming through the Atlas, he was attracted by what is called the Dead Sea. He asked his father, "Why has the Dead Sea died? Who killed it?"

The father smiled saying, "The Dead Sea lies at a depression where rains and rivers gathered and this water couldn't be drained. Thus salts increased in it and its mineral water was concentrated so there was no life in it. Selfishness killed it as it takes without giving." Therefore, Lord Jesus Christ has said, "**It is more blessed to give than to receive**" (Acts. 20.35).

**"There is one who scatters, yet increases more;
And there is one who withholds more than is right,
But it leads to poverty" (Prov. 11. 24).**

*Let me be more pleased with giving than receiving.
May You dwell in me, so that I desire to give up myself for everyone.
I will be full when You dwell in me, I will not desire to take anything.
I will then seek to give generously like my Lord.*

SHORT STORIES

367-376
Together with
“No One Like God”

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Short Story No. 367

Friendship amongst Contemporary Saints

Our beloved Fr. Georgios Quolta recounted the astonishing friendship that bonds three contemporary saints:

❖ Pope Kiryllos (Cyril) VI, a man of prayers and praise, well known for performing wonders and miracles.

❖ Fr. Mikhail Ibrahim, father of confession of bishops, priests and many Sunday school teachers.

❖ Fr. Pishoy Kamel, the pillar and founder of the spiritual school designed and intended for the salvation of the souls through a living evangelical and ecclesiastical attitude.

It is rather surprising that all three of them departed from this world in March but in four years apart. Pope Kiryllos VI passed away on March 9, 1971. Fr. Mikhail departed on March 26, 1975 and Fr. Pishoy on March 21, 1979.

All three have in common a pragmatic, effective and active love that was associated with real and genuine modesty. Likewise, active ecclesiastical thinking, strong passion for salvation, struggle in praying, unlimited giving characterized all three and self sacrifice for the Lord Jesus.

All three were commonly known for their commitment to non-stop struggle in time of sickness, especially during the last hours of their life (at the brink of death). The following reveals their friendship and extraordinary modesty.

A priest from Upper Egypt once came to visit Pope Kiryllos and to receive his blessing. Fr. Mikhail was also present. Surprisingly enough, the Pope modestly reiterated, “How do you ask me for blessings while Fr. Mikhail is present? Ask him for the blessing.”

What an astonishing friendship and extraordinarily modesty. The Pope refuses to bequest his blessings in the presence of a saintly priest. The Pope used to comment when coming across some of those who used to serve with Fr. Mikhail by saying, “How fortunate you are, serving with the all-blessed priest.”

Fr. Georgeios also conveyed what happened to him prior to his ordination in priesthood:

On March 9, 1971, while at work I found out about the departure of our Pope Kiryllos. It was shocking news, which grieved me a lot, so I left for St. Mark Cathedral to pay my last respects. From there I went to St. Mark Church in Shobra to serve the needy brothers of Christ. I was there alone, reflecting over what happened and also unhappy because Fr. Mikhail had had a recent heart attack. The doctors had given strict instructions of “no visitors” allowed but I was summoned to see Fr. Mikhail (for an immediate meeting) via a message delivered to me by his grandson. His daughter, upon seeing me at the front door before ushering me in, asked me not to mention any news about the Pope passing away as it could worsen his health condition since a strong love bonded them.

With his known meek nature, Fr. Mikhail was inquiring about the needy, especially the students and asked me to get an envelope containing alms and donations from the wardrobe given to him by some of his beloved ones for the students. After finishing the paper work, as I was about to leave he asked me to stay for a while. We were talking about the various church services. Abruptly he stopped and said, “Did you know that Pope Kiryllos has arrived into heaven?”

I was truly overwhelmed by his remark. He avoided answering me when I asked him how he found out. Nobody had seen him or told him and it was only after four hours. I was sure that it was manifested to him through a divine revelation. I was even bewildered, as he went on joyously with a bright shining face saying, “How happy and blessed he is! I fervently look forward to reach there.”

I stumbled for a moment and went on asking God to keep and give him an enjoyable long life to serve his church.

His response was rather unearthly, full of faith and hope, “As long as there is remaining oil we keep on shining but when that comes to an end we leave to go to Him. Do you understand?”

After a while before leaving he asked me, a layman, to pray. He insisted and I had to obey asking for his blessings and left comforted praying for his speedy recovery and long life.

Once more, Fr. Georgios recounted the friendship that existed between Fr.

Pishoy Kamel and Fr. Mikhail. Upon Fr. Mikhail’s departure from this world, his body remained in the church for two days. Fr. Pishoy stayed by his side throughout those days reciting psalms intoning midnight praise and celebrating the liturgy. I appreciated the enormity and extent of their love by looking at Fr. Pishoy eyes as if whispering, “We’ll soon meet in the presence of God.”

Only four years separated their meeting again with the multitudes of saints.

It is worth mentioning that Fr. Mikhail used to regularly spend the month of May in Mandara, Alexandria at “Beit El Asdiquaa” (The House of Friends), which is next door to St. Mina’s Church. Fr. Pishoy diligently used to go there and I was in his company, for confession seeking Fr. Mikhail’s advice in pastoral matters. Before leaving for Australia in 1975, we went to see him for confession for the last time. Yet, he asked us to say the “Absolution.” Upon refusal, he took Fr. Pishoy’s hand placing it on the top of his head and ordered him to say the Absolution.



O Gracious God, give me that spirit of friendship for all living creatures,
To bond me with Your saints and to receive their blessings.
Teach me modesty and meekness and grant me a heart that is full of love,
To be able to meet with You, right at the end of all waiting.

Short Story No. 368

Even the Great Are in Need of God

General Grant was once approached by one of his officers expressing the fullness of life, the victory and the inner joy and peace that are in Jesus Christ. The General reacted positively accepting the beloved Lord.

The officer went on saying, “The kingdom of Heaven earned a lot by your receiving and accepting the faith in God.”

The General responded, “God is not in need of great ones but even great ones are indeed in need of God.”



*God in His love looks for and seeks all.
No prejudice for rich or against poor, great or meek.
As He shed His precious blood a propitiation for all.
O Master, I need You.
Who can fill my heart but You!
Who can let me enter into glory except You!
Only with You alone is my satisfaction.*

Short Story No. 369

A Bar of Chocolate Sweet Yet Soiled

Jim, a very rich man, was well known as being a miser. On his way back home he bought a piece of chocolate. It accidentally fell on the ground in the dust, which saddened him. A beggar happened to be passing by, so Jim begrudgingly gave it to him with great sorrow.

At night, in a dream, he saw himself as being very hungry. He came across a five-star hotel full of people. The restaurant inside was also packed with people and those serving them. He asked one of the waiters for food and waited but in vain. He asked a second, a third and a fourth times, at last a waiter came carrying that piece of soiled chocolate. In a fit of rage, Jim furiously burst out saying, "Don't you know who I am? How dare you treat me this way, giving me a piece of filthy chocolate? I'm not begging."

The waiter reminded Jim, "Probably you came to the wrong place. Though we have an extensive menu of delicious food as you can see for yourself, we don't offer food in exchange for money.

We only give back what every person sends us in advance while he was living on earth.
This is the Restaurant of Eternity."



*O Lord let me be prepared for the day of my departure.
May I offer You what You have given me.
There I shall find a home and abide.
There I shall attain Your Love, You who satisfies the souls.*

Short Story No. 370

The Burnt Cake

Susanna observed her little selfish child, unwilling to share anything that belongs to him with his elder brother. The elder brother's attitude was different, always sharing what was his. She started by telling the greedy child a fairy tale about selfishness, the tale of the "burnt cake."

Once upon a time, a prince was known for his great selfishness as well as being a miser. He would always accuse any one who asked him for help of being inactive and lazy.

Upon death, the angels received him unpleasantly. When he asked for the reason, the following was conveyed to him:

"You're treated as you treated others. You were never kind to orphans, widows, the needy or those in pain, serving and caring about no one but yourself, ignoring all around you."

After a while, the devils got hold of him and led him to hell. A lot of food was around. Being hungry, he ran towards the food but the devils were faster and started whipping him with whips of fire and torturing him, giving him no chance of getting near the food. He begged and begged asking for mercy, but alas, the devils knew not the meaning of the word.

Finally, one of the devils asked his associates to listen to what he had to say. The prince asked for another chance to go back and do mercy to his fellow men. They granted him one hour. He quickly left in his chariot and started filling it with various kinds of food. On his way back as the time drew near, a fellow hungry man asked him for something. The prince without delay murmured, "No time for stopping. No time for giving. All I have is just for my sustenance in hell."

The hungry man persistently kept on asking and the prince searched for something to give. The prince found a burnt cake and threw it at him. As his hour was up, he was taken back to hell. He was tormented and felt hungry but no one gave him anything to eat. At last, he found that 'burnt cake'.

This tale figuratively shows how misers enslave themselves to their own selfishness, even when given the chance of doing good, they won't make use of it.



*O Holy Spirit, I beseech You to renew my nature.
Take away my selfishness and make me fruitful through love.
Free me O Master from being enslaved to my ego.
Grant me an open heart that knows how to love and how to give.
O Lover of mankind, allow me to bear You within me,
And carry Your love to all mankind.*

Short Story No. 371

Let me Joyfully Carry my Cross

A fair widow noticed that her young children would always run away from her upon her returning home from work fully exhausted. She wondered, “Why should I bear this heavy cross? My husband died leaving me with three children. I’m still young. Why should I work hard, day in and day out and suffer with no one to comfort me? I’m left on my own and hated by all, even by my children. What wrong have I done? My cross is intolerable.”

One day she knelt before God asking Him to take away her soul, as she could no longer bear it. She went to bed and in a dream she saw a room full of crosses, some big, some small, some white and some black, and the Lord Jesus were there in His tender loving care looking at her and asking, “What are you complaining about? Give Me your cross, which seems unbearable to you and choose for yourself another one to carry to protect you throughout your life.”

She felt relieved upon hearing that and quickly put her cross in the Lord’s hands. She reached for a small cross that looked light. As she tried to lift it, she found that it was too heavy. She asked the Lord about that cross. The Lord in turn explained that it was a cross of a young lady suffering from paralysis at a very early age, incapable of moving and hence not enjoying her life. Nobody and no friends to cheer and comfort her. The lady was astonished and inquired about the shape and size of that cross, “By the look of things, it doesn’t appear that way.” The Lord explained, “The bearer thankfully accepted it from Me with no complaints, that’s why it looks small and light.”

The lady moved on towards another cross that also looked small and light. As she started to lift it, she again felt not only its heavy weight but also as if it was a piece of iron in flames. Instantaneously she dropped it, crying from pain. “Whose cross is this? She asked.”

The Lord replied, “That is the cross of a lady whose husband was indeed an evil one, mistreating and abusing her and her children but she bears her cross in patience and prays for the salvation of her spouse’s soul.”

As she moved towards a third small and light one it felt as cold as ice. She cried, “Whose cross is that?”

The Lord answered, “That Is the cross of a lady who lost her six children. When loosing them one by one she used to ask for comfort till they all meet in Paradise.”

The Lady threw herself before the Lord and cried, “I’ll carry the cross You gave me,
Asking You O Master to carry it with me.
My sufferings are but delight with You.
My grief no distress if from You.
You transform my bitterness to honey.
Let me bear my cross in thanksgiving,
And kindly carry it with me O Savior of my soul.”

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* C.F. “El-Bostan” magazine, St. Mark Church, Washington, October 1989

Short Story No. 372

The Mirror and the Windows

A selfish, egotistical Prince called Henry displeased his parents for his extra self regard and exaggerated needs to be the center of attention. His parents tried in vain to make him share his possessions with others. At last, an angel appeared before them and assured them of rectifying the problem provided they allow him to take care of the prince for one month, to which they agreed.

The angel took the prince to a superb palace amidst a lovely garden full of captivating flowers, delightful fruits and fascinating fresh water fountains. Overlooking the garden were grand windows and between those windows mirrors. The angel told the prince that the palace and everything therein was his to enjoy, as well as the beautiful garden through the exalted, majestic windows. Yet, let it be known that whenever you look into a mirror, windows get smaller while the mirror gets larger.

Prince Henry stopped before a mirror admiring himself for hours moving from one to the other. Mirrors started getting larger and larger stretching out. On the Other hand, windows became smaller and narrower. There came a day when all windows vanished. An immense mirror replaced all the walls, doors and windows. As the prince felt hungry, he moved from one place to another hoping to find a way out for himself. He then realized that the palace had become a cell in which he was imprisoned without even being able to look out. This distressed, tormented and angered him to the extent of ripping his clothes to no avail. Suddenly, he heard a humming sparrow. It just occurred to him that there was a caged sparrow in the palace. He rushed towards the cage and freed the bird bitterly saying to himself,

“O little one, you were left imprisoned with me in this place.

No fault of yours but because of me, admiring only myself and forgetting all about you. I’ve neither food nor drink to offer you.”

As prince Henry was pondering, he heard the sound of dropping water. He managed to gather almost half a glass of water offering it to the bird while blaming himself for its captivity. As Henry was looking around in the rooms of the palace, he spotted a small piece of old dry apple, which he took to feed the bird.

The prince was totally absorbed in what he was doing and forgot about himself for a while. Slowly, a window started to open until there was enough space for the bird to get out. Henry gently took the bird, kissed it and set it free. Indeed liberating the bird satisfied him, even though he was staying behind. He realized that what became of him was nothing but his own doing and selfishness. Since Henry’s heart had opened for the freedom of that small bird, doors and windows were opened before him. The prince was at last freely moving and enjoying the palace and all that was therein.

Henry was cheerfully rejoicing and saying,

From my selfishness I’m free.

From the prison of my ego I am liberated.

Free to love others that I may love myself, as it should be.

Taking care of my brothers so God would take good care of me.

Short Story No. 373

No Way off in God's Company

A member from the church of St. Peter, St. Paul in St. Monica, California, recounts this story:

A young fellow approached me fervently offering his services, any kind of service just to kill the time. This dialogue came to pass between us.

"I'm eager to serve my Lord Jesus."

"Come and join us in the preparation of the holy bread "Qorban"."

"Good, I've nothing to do since I just got laid off."

"Come and join us; in God's company there is no "lay off."

"I'm looking forward to work for Him. Recently, I was in the hospital where I saw a young fellow having a heart attack. It dawned on me that it could have been me. I must be prepared."

He started working passionately with us as if his soul was prepared to go to heaven. In a week's time he was ordained a deacon and received communion. He went back home and passed away, commanding his spirit in God's hands.

God works in mysterious ways for the salvation of our souls, even unto the brink of one's life. This chap's knowledge of God and his eagerness to be saved granted him his will.



O Lord lead me in Your service so that I maybe in Your vineyard all the way.

You reject no one.

You reward all, even for offering a sip of water.

Open my heart that I may see You coming.

O my Lord, call me to ascend to Your Paradise,

To meet with You O God the Source of my life.

Qualify me O Lord with Your Spirit of fire.

May Your fountains of love burst within me.

Let all the doors of Your Paradise be opened before me.

Short Story No. 374

The Strange Fellow

Eight individuals who were part of a performance group were on the deck of a ship, vigilantly waiting for their fellow companion. The ship started to sail and they were worried about their companion who was a key figure in the play they were about to perform. They had spent so many nights rehearsing and getting ready for the show. They realized then that all their efforts and money spent on costumes were in vain. What will become of their show? It seemed impossible to be on stage, as their missing friend was not only the key figure, but also the most active and vibrant among them. After a while, a member of the group came up with a solution. He had just met somebody on the ship that seemed capable of taking the role of their missing fellow and assured them of his ability. He then asked that man to replace their missing companion. The next evening, all nine of them were on the stage, successfully performing to their great satisfaction and that of the applauding audience. As the curtain went down by the end of the show, those present and the rest of the group were astonished to find out that the masked man performing on behalf of the missing companion was an old man in his seventies. He said to them all, "Being young is a state of mind.

Youth is within one's inner self.

No one can deprive you of it, even death has no power over it."

That reminds me of the well-known remark frequently stated by our beloved Fr. Pishoy Kamel to the effect that, "A Christian never gets old. The Holy Spirit always rejuvenates, revives and works through him."



*Let Your fiery Holy Spirit dwell within me and fill me.
Non temporal heavenly wisdom over time inspires me.
Always live my youth without cease.
And enrich me with eternal youth.
Despair knows no way to my heart but peace.
Longing and enjoying hope in You at ease.
Age ruined many in youth.
Still many old-aged live their joyful youth.
Grant me O Lord that heartfelt joy in You.
My Life and my Joy is only in You.*

C.F. "El-Bostan" magazine, St. Mark Church, Washington, April 1986

Short Story No. 375

St. Demiana's Church

Caliph Abd-El-Aziz (the ruler of Egypt) delegated his ruling powers over Egypt to his son El-Asbagh. The young ruler was noted for his enmity and hatred towards Christians. He used to persecute the Christians and destroy their churches.

The church of St. Demiana that was built in the fourth century by Queen Helena, the mother of Emperor Constantine and consecrated by Pope Alexandros (the 19th Pope) was among those demolished. He built himself a palace on its site. The salty waters of the Mediterranean flooded and reached the boundaries of a church at Samenoud on the western side of the old citadel. The flood submerged the palace and ruined part of the embankment. King Hassan Ben Attahyia was saddened to hear the news. That part of the country, El Zaafran in the Eastern Delta next to El Borollos Lake, an herb growing area, was a revenue-generating area. It was brought to the king's attention that he could call in Pope Khaeel the First, the 46th Pope (743 - 767 A. D.) to pray for the uplifting of the adversity.

Through the divine providence the Pope, assisted by St. El Toufahy and some priests, prayed inside the church at Samenoud. As the Pope went out of the church holding the cross up and chanting, "Kyriyalaissou: Lord have mercy," the water receded before the multitudes, and the Pope followed by El Toufahy, the priests, the king, his court and the congregation. They proceeded and the waters went on receding until they reached El Zaafran, where they lodged their tents close to the palace, part of which was ruined by the floodwaters. Pope Khaeel and all those present continued on praying and kneeling to the ground. A strong wind started to blow and an abundance of sand accumulated giving rise to an embankment stronger than the old one.

In gratefulness the king received the Pope. The king agreed to assist in building a church on the site of those forty virgins who were martyred in the company of St. Demiana, as a sign of gratitude. The king also decreed that nobody should bother the Christians and peace reigned over Egypt all the days of the king's life.



*Amidst torment and suffering O benevolent God,
Your miracles are visibly manifested.
Your love for Your people is always evidently declared.
Joy in times of agony reigns,
And utmost peace is bestowed.*

Short Story No. 376

No One Like God

A True Story
Prepared by
Nabil Khalil

The monk was standing by the door of his cell trying to take in a deep breath of the northern blowing gentle breeze. He was heavyhearted with the recent unhappy events. He used to admire the limitless horizon before him but today he was no longer in that cheerful mood. He felt as if he was in solitary confinement, imprisoned by his sorrows and misery. He felt surrounded by demons pressuring on his chest, squeezing his heart until he could no longer breathe.

He tried his best to get over that frightening nightmare but in vain. What is wrong? He used to enjoy and ponder over God's beautiful creation, **"The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows His handiwork."** But that day he could only see the red color of fire and blood.

He said to himself, "Why does the world seem to be on fire? Is that to vex me My Lord, or is it to blind me from seeing just a little bit of the good and beauty around?"

He lifted up his eyes as usual for help and comfort. Nevertheless, the sky was dark that day and so the stars were not bright before him.

It came to his mind what was written, "Heavens are like copper and the ground like iron." He started to associate his feelings with his unparalleled sin. Indeed, he thought that he should not have peace because of his sins. **"No peace for sinners, said the Lord,"** as voiced by the prophet Isaiah. Indeed there should not be peace if one angers God. A loud voice echoed in his ears penetrating through the silence of ages and shouted in every ear, **"Say to the ungodly ... Evil and woe to those that drink iniquity like water."**

Taking a deep sigh the monk thought, "Is there no mercy, O Master? Where are Your fountains of love? Are they dried up? Why do You put all Your powers against a worm such as myself?"

He lifted up his sight towards God in resentment, crying, "Why have You left me to grow up and come to know the sins and lusts of the body? Why have You, with Your all-encompassing prior knowledge, left me to advance and get dirty and spoil myself with evil thoughts? Is that the freedom of choice You bestowed upon me? I'm badly in need for someone to push me hard towards perfection."

But he went on, "Stop blaming the Lord for your faults. Do not affiliate God with iniquity. God is by far beyond reprimand or reproach. Job may have been right in reasoning with Him but God has been very kind to me, not getting me into difficulties as He firmly did with Job. That could be the reason behind Job's bitterness and complaints. Even then Job thought it was not right, and he regretted and repented. Who am I? The imperfect monk to brag and blaspheme?"

He then came to his senses and uttered, "I'm not in blasphemy. I'm just putting my case before Him, speaking my mind, asking for interference and comfort." Even then God would not like to respond. "Heavens are like copper and the ground like iron," which came to his mind.

Yet he stopped for prayer with the psalm he loved and cherished, **"Why do You stand far, O Lord? Why hide Yourself in times of trouble? By day I pray and You do not hear."**

That was a psalm he knew by heart. It was a cry from within a distressed soul. In such a manner, God hears, listens and has compassion but why not this time? No mercy! No response!

His abbot's fierce voice and sharp tone rang out, cutting all the hope in him,

"You are not meant to be a monk. Why do you trouble yourself? Leave the monastery for the world. Find yourself a religious lady and get married. Have some kids, hug and raise them in the fear of God. Then, you will be rewarded, probably more than those in celibacy."

The monk could not bear hearing anymore; he bowed and said,

"Father, Please give me just one more chance. With the Grace of God I can truly repent. Where to go if I had to quit? How can I survive?"

With a kind but firm look the abbot went on to say,

"Listen my son and be obedient."

"I was not disobedient at all, but I can't leave."

"Then go and find someone else, not me if you don't want to obey."

"I know how much you love and care for me Father. Why do you cast me out?"

"Listen my son. The matter is beyond reasoning. You were born with flaring instincts and wild imaginations. You were mistaken in your love for the destitute life of the desert. You're better off in marriage; there's nothing wrong with that. Go and live, as God wants you to live and not as you desire. Tomorrow, before sunrise leave the monastery and get married as soon as possible."

The monk left in great despair, "Is that the way O God? You leave me. Can't You guard and keep a desolate monk looking for help? Do You want to leave me to the lustful temptations? Are You not capable of helping a needy monk like myself? Or am I not among those chosen?"

He walked towards his cell and went in with tears filling his eyes, not knowing what to do. The lazy hours of the night passed as if years of darkness. Just before dawn, he could not think of anything but to go back to his abbot begging for a fresh chance to stay in, in the company of the saints thinking of his need for another opportunity, though it was not the first time.

Still, he was talking to himself,

"How many times have I vowed to be upright? How many times did I fast, staying up and meditating in the Holy books? But things keep going back quickly to evil, back to square one in weakness and infirmity, no stamina. It is very unbecoming for a monk to be tempted this way. Oh no, not in the church, the house of God."

"Indeed I cried for help and the Lord did respond, but in a matter of a few days I went back flirting with my impure thoughts. I went on dreaming of having a nice home with nice kids and a pretty wife. Indeed I wasn't meant to be a monk, not even a Christian layman. I've to quit from amongst the saintly monks and leave the monastery for the world."

"Farewell my beloved and humble cell. Here my cries were heard. Here joys were enjoyed. Here I felt glory and feebleness. Who is going to dwell here from the saints? Farewell O Land of Saints. Farewell O Land of Angels, O Paradise of the Lord. Farewell all my fathers. I don't deserve your love, your kindness and your prayers. I don't even deserve to serve you. Farewell. Farewell."

He couldn't endure it anymore. He set off unnoticed, not able to take leave of neither his father nor his brothers, not bearing the look of his garment that reminded him of his vows. He took off to nowhere, like a ghost in the haunted darkness lest someone notice him or hear his heavy sighs. On his way, he came across the front door of the church. Without delay, he threw himself before it and he was about to burst out crying. Only his fear of being heard or discovered

let him manage to control himself. He started to kiss the doorway and walked with difficulty towards the front entrance as his tears overshadowed his sight.

It never crossed his mind what the monks would say about him in the morning or what would be the reaction of his abbot Father. He was really in gulping despair; nothing was in his mind, just being a failing monk and a lustful Christian layman. He stumbled down, sometimes falling in a pitfall or heavily sighing, talking to himself as he was walking along the sands of the desert. Suddenly, he heard the voice of one of the hermits living in solitude outside the monastery approaching and calling him,

“Who is that walking in the dark of the night?”

“It’s the voice of that anchorite, the saint, the very experienced with revelations Fr. Marcos.”

“Who are you, son? Why are you out of your monastery at this hour of the night?”

The monk then realized that Fr. Marcos was aware of his case. Stopping, he replied bashfully, “O Father!”

“Where are you going, my son?”

“Forgive me Father and pray for me. I’m nothing but an impure evil man.”

“Talk to me my son. What is wrong? What is worrying you and has made you leave your cell and stopped you from praying?”

The monk could no longer keep on thinking but hurriedly, boldly and heartily opened himself to the hermit Father.

“O Father, I was taken in, eaten up and beaten by evil thoughts day in and day out, though I kept and upheld all the advice given to me by my Father but things continued to be worse.”

“You said that you followed his directions but that things went from bad to worse. How come?”

“Yes Father that was indeed the truth. I couldn’t bear it anymore. Darkness was all around me and nobody else to lead me.”

“How can you say this? Don’t you know that your God, your Savior, loves you and cares for you?”

“He left me for those lustful temptations, befalling only the wicked and you say He loves and cares for me!”

“Be sure my son of your Savior and of His caring love”

“No, no my Father. He forgot about me. He defeated me. Where is He?”

“Who told you so? He never forgets.”

“I believed in His powers. I had all the faith in Him to save me from my sins but that was sometime ago.”

The hermit then hugged him and put his arms around him and said, “Who said so? Who said that He doesn’t love you and takes care of you? Don’t you know my son that temptation is not falling down? Being tempted is altogether different from giving in.”

“How is it Father?”

“Our inner self serves God’s commandments whereas our old man stages war against us. That war is for us, not against us, in the name of Christ and for His sake. That kind of war is a good sign of vitality. You’re living in God. By God you’re striving, conquering and will be crowned.”

“But I haven’t conquered, Father.”

“Your detest and hatred for your lustful thoughts, your efforts against evil in praying, fasting, vigilance and not giving in are signs of victory.”

“But I’m still tempted.”

“Do you think, even for a moment, that you won’t be tempted while you’re a soldier for Christ?”

“My Father pointed to me that he has never been tempted this way all through his life. That sounded very unusual to me. O Father, I feel that I’m no good for Christianity, let alone monasticism. My elder Father recommended my going back to the world and getting married.”

“Tell me son, if you as a young man have to go back to get married because you’ve been tempted, what can I do while in this advanced age and being tempted more than you?”

“Tempted like me! How come, Father?”

“Yes, my son.”

“How did you go about it?”

“Let’s go back to the monastery asking for the blessing of the Fathers, hold fast to the faith, keep on struggling unto death and leave not our battle against evil.”

The monk took command of himself after a while and he peacefully followed the hermit Father who assured him of their togetherness in struggle for eternity.

The monk went in his cell, feeling reborn as though God had given him another opportunity. He started to think positively, “I’m good for nothing, but O God, fight my enemies. Take a shield and defend me.”

Instantly, he knelt for prayers with a heart full of hope.

“This is the day the God has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.”

Suddenly, he heard someone knocking on his door, though lightly but recognizable in the quietness of the night. He didn’t want to stop praying to open the door but continued to pray the 5th Psalm. **“O Lord, save us ... O Lord lead us along.”** Again, he could hear the knocking on his door and his elder Father’s voice asking, “Open Father. This is I: Toma.”

“This is my Father’s voice. Probably he came to request my speedy departure. Maybe the abbot Father who convinced me to come back wasn’t able to talk to him as promised. Have they missed each other? O Father, What can I say?”

While in bewilderment, his elder Father begged in a feeble tone, “Open my son and do me an act of love.”

The monk hurriedly opened the door, bowing in lowliness, but was overwhelmed by the elder Father’s gesture of kneeling before him in humility and saying, “Forgive me my son. I’ve erred and gone wrong.”

“Please Father, don’t say this. Please pardon and absolve me. I’m your son.”

The monk took his Father’s hands and kissed them.

“Botros my son, thank God you’re still here. I know now that you’re by far better than me.”

The monk couldn’t take it anymore, went on bowing in humility before his Father, to which the elder Father quickly responded in bowing to the ground, taking the hands of his disciple in his own and gently patting his back.

“Son, forgive me. I was too harsh on you. I couldn’t imagine what you went through, until God revealed it to me. Indeed, I asked you to leave but that was my own rationale. Yet God made it known to me to follow His footsteps, be kind like Him and merciful to others. Woe to the world, where people judge others. Thank God! Judgment is only for the Son of God who loved His people to the end. We’re in God’s merciful hands. When I told you to leave before sunrise I thought I was giving you the best of counseling. In God’s eyes that was our rationale as humans, not His as I came to know of it. I suffered and cried for you. I was up all night for you though I didn’t give in when you pleaded, but asked you to be obedient and leave. I knew you are deep in trouble in your life. I was indeed in trouble for your sake lest you should be eaten up in despair

and I was determined to stay up all night praying for your troubled soul to Jesus who died for you. Truly my son I felt that all the doors were closed before you, let alone those of heavens. But I kept on praying for your sake, though in the back of my mind you seemed to be hopeless. And the way you were tempted ... a monk going through such unclean, filthy temptations that long. It came to my mind that you were not that open in your confessions. Sometimes I entertained the idea that you were either deceiving me or yourself or lying to me, or being reckless and careless and that you're better off in the world. But all through I had a feeling inside me that all my reasoning had nothing to do with God."

The elder Father went on recalling the events of that night, "Do you know what happened to me tonight my son? I feel ashamed of myself, yet I have to tell you everything. Forgive me son, I, in my seventies, started having those lustful unclean thoughts. I haven't been tempted this way in a long time. I laid down on the ground kneeling, crying and praying for hours. Those thoughts never departed. On the contrary, things kept getting worse. Nevertheless, I went on crying for help, crying for the crucified Christ and crossing my face asking for forgiveness. I was in agony. I've never experienced anything like that before, even in my youth. I was like an adolescent. I was rolling around on the ground in pain. I decided to run away and leave the monastery, so my son, as a drunkard knowing not what is around, I left away only for few steps to find the hermit Fr. Marcos before me. I was frightened and scared to let him know what became of me but he gently said, "What led you out this time of the night, Father?"

"Nothing, Father."

"What is wrong with you? What worries you?"

The elder Father lost control of himself as he came to know that everything is in the open before the hermit Father.

"I confessed, and told him everything. I mean everything. Surprisingly enough, he comforted me and retold me what went on between you two."

He mentioned of his deliberate coming to my cell to pray to God that I'll be tempted likewise to taste the bitterness of the war and the agony you have been through. He reiterated,

"You did judge the young monk as being no good. Examine yourself and see whether you are good. God has tempted you instead of that young monk. See for yourself, a man in his late seventies going through the same ordeal as a youth, thinking that you realized your purity through personal stamina. You have to know that God saved you the trouble of going through such temptations, yet measurably allowing you others according to your endurance. Why then judge your brother so harshly?"

"I confessed my sins stating my ignorance in struggling. We prayed together and God lifted that burden from upon me. Then and there I came to realize that chastity is a gift from God. I was mistaken my son, quickly I had to come in lowliness, praying to find you still here. What would I have done if I didn't find you in here? Thank God you're still around. Forgive me my son and carry on struggling and fighting. Don't give up and believe me, God surely will come to your help. Now I know why St. Paul stated,

"Not that I have achieved perfection, but I keep on trying, hoping to achieve what Christ has achieved for me."

As long as we're here in this world we have to fight steadfastly, knowing that our Leader Jesus Christ will not leave us to stumble or fall. But if we think that we've attained perfection, despising others in their battle against evil, the divine grace will depart from us and we'll be left on our own in weakness and submission."

By sunrise, both the elder Father and his disciple were praying and chanting the psalm, **"This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. O Lord Save us and lead us."**

Meanwhile, Fr. Marcos was wandering around meditating over that Biblical verse,
“Accomplish your salvation in awe and fear.”

Story No. 377

Success without failure

Mark met Peter the youth servant. Mark was depressed as the time of the exams approach.

“I didn’t neglect my study but I used to stay all the night studying.”

“Why are you worried?”

“I feel I’d forgot all what I have studied throughout the whole year.”

”It’s a mere fancy, as when you read the exam paper you’ll remember the answer and regain your self-confidence.”

“I don’t think so; I don’t remember even the main titles of every subject.”

“Don’t be afraid, as fear confuses man and it is reflected on the answer sheet.”

“How not to fear?”

“Through trusting God Who gave you studying as a talent. Since you had been honestly watching, you deserve to hear the Divine Voice,

“You were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things.”

“I fear failure.”

“God has given us the spirit of success not that of failure. Remember that success is a Divine gift to the faithful even the unbelievers. However, He gives a great success to those who fear Him:

“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly ... And whatever he does shall prosper”

(Ps. 1).

“The God of heaven Himself will prosper us” (Neh. 2.20).

Then Peter told Mark the following story to show him how God is able to turn what can be considered failure into success.

A believer traveled to the African tribes to preach the Gospel there. He accompanied his preaching with deep prayers. After a short time, he gave up his soul while praying. The only outcome of his ministry was that an old lady accepted the faith. Many considered him unsuccessful in his ministry. However, a believer wrote a booklet about that minister and dedicated it to,

“An atheist woman who believed”.

Such booklet led thirteen thousand souls to the faith in Christ. He seemed to be an unsuccessful minister who only led one soul to the faith. Nevertheless, God has used his biography to attract thousands of people. God prospers us in His time.

✝ ✝ ✝

*I am pleased with success for, it is a gift from You.
As I am in Your hands, failure will never reach me.
Even if people saw me unsuccessful,
Even if I entertained doubts,
You are the Secret behind my prosperity.*

With You, I am always victorious,
Until I hear Your pleasant voice,

**“You were faithful over a few things,
I will make you ruler over many things.”**
*Your Love erased the word ‘failure’ from my memory.
It no longer has a meaning in my daily experience.
You are the Secret behind my success.*

Story No. 378

A Photo Or A Force

In March 1997, In Brother A. She's in South Orange County, The house owner told me the following story:

An American Jewish man told me that he intended to start a certain project but he faced many obstacles. Therefore, he lost hope in continuing. One of the employees working with him, who happened to be a Coptic lady, saw him, much distressed. Knowing the reason, she said to him, "Take this photo, put it in your pocket and cry to God. He'll surely support you."

He was not a religious man at all. However, feeling such bitterness, he took it and put it in his pocket without even asking whose photo it was. He returned home and cried to God. Then, he noticed that a certain force has filled his soul. He started the project to find everything going on easily.

As I asked him to show me the photo, I discovered that it is the photo of St. Pope Cyril VI."

My beloved Father Pope Cyril reposed in the Lord more than twenty-seven years ago. However, he is still working through prayers even with more strength in many countries. He did not master English; yet, he talked to an American Jewish in the language of the spirit which excels any human language.

✙ ✙ ✙

*Grant me the spirit of prayers and praises, as You granted my father.
Then, neither weakness nor death will conquer me.
The world is in need of saints,
To preach with the spirit of strength.
Neither place nor time can imprison them,
Since Your Fiery Holy Spirit works in them.*

Story No. 379

He left And Neglected me

Several weeks ago, a university graduate came to me to make confession. He told me that he has not made confession since he was a primary-school pupil. When I asked for the reason, he answered, "I was making confession but my father confessor excused and left me maybe because of a certain problem or ... What I remember is that he left and forgot about me. I left the church with bitter feelings not towards him only but towards all priests. Thus, my relation with the church and with My Lord Jesus has been very cold for all these years."

I then remembered what Lord Jesus Christ said,
"And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple,
Assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward"
(Matt. 10.42).

I felt that many people are suffering from being deprived of love and emotions, waiting for the sons of God, priests and laymen, to offer a cup of water to quench their inner fire. They need care, a smile or a phone call provided that it is coming from the heart. The world is thirsty for a cup of water while we do not offer it.



I Am Thirsty

*Many a time, I yearn for a word of love.
My Savior, You quenched the fire of my soul,
With the fountain of blood AND WATER WHICH sprang out from Your side.
You loved me with Your love sacrifice.
You never wounded me with one word of blame.
On the contrary, You covered me with the spring of Your love.
Grant me to give You a cup of water,
Through my brethren,
Not from the ending water of this world,
But from the water of Your love which runs in my heart.
May I love all even those who persecute me.
May I quench You, through them, with fresh water,
Which is the gift of Your Holy Spirit.*

Story No. 380

Wednesday or Tuesday!

On the eve of Sunday proceeding the Great Lent, I was listening to the psalm chanted in the church, "And whose belly You fill with Your hidden treasures" (Ps. 17.14).

I asked myself why the psalmist has talked about filling the belly with the hidden treasures of the Lord and why the church has chosen this verse to be chanted few hours before fasting. I remembered what happened more than forty years ago when I was a university student.

A friend of mine was knocking at the door. As I opened, he asked me if I had lunch. It was the midyear holiday. My mother traveled and I was in Alexandria alone. I answered, "I don't remember but I don't feel hungry." As we were talking, I mentioned that it was Tuesday but he said that it was Wednesday.

I remembered then that I began to draw the picture of Lord Jesus Christ on cloth and coloring it on Tuesday morning. It was the first time for me to draw on cloth and color. I was taken in that and spent Tuesday staying till Wednesday evening without sleeping or eating. I thought then that it was still Tuesday.

I then cried to my Savior,

*+ My love to a new hobby made me forget the need of the body for a while,
And forget about time completely.*

What will happen then when You reveal to me Your hidden treasures?

I shall then be lifted up to You,

Forget all about time and my belly will be filled with Your hidden treasures.

*+ Truly, my continuous hunger is the proof of my weakness,
And my urgent need for inner satisfaction.*

+ Grant me during this fasting,

Not to seek the time of eating,

Yet, let Your Holy Spirit kindle my depth,

For my soul to yearn for being filling with Your righteousness,

And my belly be filled with Your hidden treasures.

Your giving-life sacraments fill all human beings.

Story 381

A Dialogue Between Two Mice

A mouse left Alexandria to a nearby village for a friend of his there. As the Alexandrian mouse hungered, his villager friend took him to a store and said to him, "I've made a hole in a bag of wheat and another in a bag of barley."

The other one asked resentfully, "Don't you have anything other than wheat and barley?"

"No, life here isn't like the city."

"Why don't you then come with me to the city?"

"Is there a place in your house?"

"Yes, and there's much delicious food."

They both went to the city and crept to the house. The villager said, "I'm hungry. What would you offer me?"

"Follow me."

They crept to the kitchen. As the villager smelt the food, he lamented his past life full of deprivation. They made two holes in the sugar bag and ate. The villager then said, "It's delicious. I never tasted it before."

Suddenly, the kitchen door opened and the lady stretched her hand to take the flour bag. The city mouse said to his friend, "Hurry up with me."

They both entered a hole. The villager was frightened. After the lady left, both of them returned to the sugar bag. On their way, the host took his friend to eat from the dried dates and figs. As the guest was eating and lamenting the past, he heard a cat. He asked, "What's that?"

"Hush, don't talk. It's the most dangerous cat in the city. He skillfully hunts mice."

"Oh, let's return to the hole."

They returned to the hole where the cat could not reach them. After the cat left, they both went to the store. The guest moved here and there very amazed. He ate a little of every sort of food so that he would be able to taste everything. At once, the host cried, "Don't taste this delicious piece of cheese. If you stretched your head to eat it, the trap will smash your head."

"What?"

"A large strong piece of iron will fall on your head and kill you before you taste the cheese."

The guest was frightened and said, "Thank you for your loving advice but let me return to my village. There's very delicious food here but you live frightened. It's better to live on wheat and barley having peace and safety."

**"Better is a dry morsel with quietness, than a house full of feasting with strife
(Prov. 17.1).**

✠ ✠ ✠

*Grant me thanksgiving so that I would never complain,
Or desire what is not mine.*

*You are Wonderful in Your love O Lord.
Many a time, I thought that I am deprived,
Yet, Your inner peace fills my soul,*

And transfers even bitterness into sweetness.

Story No. 382

Gold or Stones

Sally noticed that her son was very miserly. He used to save all his money without buying even the essentials. Whenever Marian bought food he would ask her to let him taste so as not to buy for himself. Therefore, Sally told him the following story:

One of the rich men of Memphis (An ancient city of Egypt south of Cairo.) was very miserly. He had a large amount of gold which he hid in a hole lest any one steal it. Every morning, he used to check on it. However, once a thief saw him and stole the gold after he left. The following day, the rich man noticed that his gold was stolen. He almost broke down. A friend of his said to him, "Don't be upset. You can put some small stones and imagine that they're gold and come to see them everyday. What's the difference between the gold and the stones when you aren't using the gold for your interest or that of your brethren?

+ + +

*Lord, grant me to possess You,
For, You are my Treasure and my Riches.
When I possess You, my heart would desire nothing.
Let me use all my possessions for my brethren's edification and mine.
Let me not bury my talents in the dust of laziness,
But kindle them with Your Holy Spirit.
Neither gold nor talents has value,
Except in being used.
When I hide them they become dust,
But when You use them, they become a real treasure for me.*

Story No. 383

The Dog in the Manger

Some people use the expression "The dog in the manger". The story behind it is that a dog found a manger full of hay so he slept in it. Every now and then, any other animal would come to eat from the hay. Then, the dog would shout and let no one eat from it. Of course he did not eat it because it is not his food and in the same time he would not allow any one else to eat from it. Therefore, he became a model of human egoism.

+ + +

*To You only, I complain of my egoistic heart.
To You I cry because of my narrow-mindedness.
Many a time, my egoism deprives me of my human nature,
Then, my weak soul falls since it does not seek good for others.
Nevertheless, Your Fiery Holy Spirit kindles my depth with love.
May I die and all live.*

Story No. 384

Gather the Feathers

A peasant was angry against his friend and called him names. However, when he went home he calmed and was sorry for what he said, How did I utter such a word? I'll go to my friend and apologize to him."

He actually apologized to his friend. His friend accepted his apology; yet, he was not at rest. He met the priest and made confession. Seeing him not at ease, the priest said to him, "If you want to be comforted fill your pockets with feathers and put a feather in front of each house in the village."

In obedience, he did what he was ordered to do and returned joyfully to his father confessor. The father said to him, "Gather the feathers again."

As he went gathering the feathers, he found but few, as the wind lifted them away. He returned in great sadness. Then, his father confessor said to him, Each word you utter is like a feather which you put in front of your brother's house. It's easy to do that; yet, it's very difficult to take it back to your mouth as if you didn't utter it."

Therefore, every morning, we lift up our hearts to God crying with the psalmist,
**"Set a guard over my mouth, O LORD;
Keep watch over the door of my lips."**

+ + +

+ *Your Holy Spirit sanctifies the soul.
He only is able to protect my mouth,
And sanctifies my depth and my words.
+ I thought that words could not hurt me.
However, I realized that they destroy me.
Their wounds are graver than those of a sword.
Who can save me from my wrong words?
+ Grant me an inner mouth to speak in my depth,
To share the heavenly their talks and praises.
May it be a tool used by Your Holy Spirit.*

Story No. 385

The Young Man And His Girl Friend

In May 1997, a young man from North Orange, California, asked me, "Why doesn't God make wonders with the unbelievers to believe and be saved?"

I told him about practical examples of God's works with all people all over the world in order to let them believe. God makes many wonders; however, man often insists not to hear the Divine voice. Few days later, I read the following story: (1)

In Dallas, a preacher was on his way to a meeting for Biblical studies, On his way, he saw an awful accident. He saw a young lad and a girl, in a car, killed in that accident. He went bitterly to the meeting. Later, a young lady joined the meeting. Knowing that the minister was affected by the accident, she narrated the following story:

This young man, with his girl friend, asked me to accompany them to have fun. However, I refused, as I find my enjoyment in the word of God. I asked them to accompany me to this meeting. As for them, they mocked at me and laughed as if I was insane. I tried to talk with them about the sweetness of living with God, to no avail. They left me thinking that I'm depriving myself of the lusts of the world which they enjoy. Only five minutes later, their life ended in that tragic manner.

The young lady wept saying,
**"He who is often rebuked, and hardens his neck,
Will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy"**
(Prov. 29.1).

+ + +

+ *Your voice is always heard.
You talk to me everyday,
Once kindly and another time adamantly.
May I hear Your voice and not harden my neck.*
•

• McGee, Vernon. *Proverbs*. 1991. 238.

Story No. 386

Crime in the heart And The mind

Commenting on the wise Solomon's words,

**“A man burdened with bloodshed will flee into a pit;
Let no one help him”**

(Prov. 28.17).

An author wrote that a man who commits an awful crime lives always in fear. A policeman told him that the clues of some crimes could not be found for years. Suddenly, the one who committed a crime would confess it.

Then, I remembered the following incident:

In 1971, a man, who was almost breaking down, called me while I was in Los Angeles. He asked me to go to him immediately. Actually, I hurried to him. He met me alone in the airport and said to me secretly, “I noticed that my wife whom I love much was so depressed. She didn't sleep for days and I couldn't know the reason. Once during the night, she woke me up saying, ‘Wake up. I want to confess about something. I tried for years to hide my crime; yet, my conscience tormented me. However, I couldn't sleep that week. I confess ... My son isn't yours. Divorce me or kill me. No one would blame you.’”

He lived for days struggling with himself, as he could not live with a wife who betrayed him while he was always faithful with God and her. During that period, he used to call me everyday until he was comforted by her repentance and tears not fearing him but for fearing God. Therefore, their marital peaceful life was restored through her true repentance.

+ + +

Cover me with Your Honorable Blood

+ *Lord, grant me to confess my sins before You,
And cover me with Your Honorable Blood.*

+ *If I hid my sins from people,
They would remain in my heart and mind.*

*May I confess them before You,
And with humility, I confess them before my father confessor in Your presence.
Your Holy Spirit will then work in me.
Wash me of my sins.*

Story No. 387

The Wasp And The sparrow

An officer sat in a field. As he was looking at the wheat store, he saw a wasp taking a seed of wheat and going away. The wasp repeated what he did several times. Being curious, the officer followed the wasp to see where he went. He saw the wasp crossing a certain wall; thus, he crossed it to find the wasp going down to the ground to throw the seed to a sick sparrow and flying to bring him another one.

The Divine Scriptures tells us to learn from the ant (Prov. 6.6). This story invites us to learn from a wasp which made an act of love for a sick sparrow without waiting for a reward.

+ + +

*+ I belittle myself,
When I see a wasp teaching me love.
It loves not asking its own but what for others.
You want me to be lifted up to the level of angels.
While, in my foolishness, I went down the level of flies.
+ Grant me Your Holy Spirit O the Divine Love,
Then, my heart will be kindled with love,
And I become not like an angel,
But a living icon of You.
+ My Lord, You send a wasp to care for a sick sparrow.
Would You not then change nature which You created for my sake!
May I trust in Your love and care O my Creator.*

•

Story No. 388

Adam's Rib

People narrate the following imaginary story to reveal a bitter fact:

It was said that Adam left Eve for few hours and returned. Then, Eve asked him, "Why are you late? Where have you been?"

He answered calmly, "I was working in the field."

She entertained doubts and said, "I'm sure that you were with another woman."

Adam was surprised how Eve could doubt his love for her and his purity. He said, "Don't you know that there isn't any woman but you? God didn't create any woman except you."

She thought for a while and said, "Truly, God didn't take anyone but me from your ribs."

Nevertheless, as Adam slept, Eve uncovered Adam's chest to count his ribs. As he felt what she was doing, he woke up disturbed and asked, "What are you doing?"

She answered, "I'm making sure that God didn't create from your ribs any woman save me."

It's an imaginary tale which reveals that when man entertains doubt he/she loses confidence even in his/her Creator Who shepherds him/her and cares for his/her salvation and eternal life.

+ + +

Lord, heal my soul from skepticism,
For, it makes me lose my inner peace,
And lose my closest friends.
Other people's behavior is not the reason behind my doubt.
It is the voidness of my heart and mind.
Fill my soul with Yourself,
For me to know that love thinks no evil.

Story No. 389

Following her Steps

Arsany looked at his sister Susan in humility and said, “You always climb the hill while I can’t. I want to climb but it seems that I’ll remain at its foot all my life. What can I do?”

Susan answered, “Don’t be afraid Arsany. I’ll climb slowly. Walk on my footprints. I’ll support you till you reach the top.”

Susan actually climbed slowly and Arsany followed her footsteps. After a while, a wind blew and erased Susan footprints. Arsany got a little perplexed and said to his sister, “What can I do? Your footprints disappeared.”

She answered, “Don’t be afraid Arsany. You’re on the top now.”

He cried, “I never thought that reaching the top is that easy. Thank you for, you supported me with your footprints for a while. Now, I can reach the top easily.”

+ + +

+ *Thank You O Lord,
For, You gave us many saints,
To follow their steps.
Grant me their way,
To possess You as they did.
“I urge you, imitate me” (1 Cor. 4.16).
The winds of time may blow,
And erase their footsteps.
I have already reached the mount with them.*

Story No. 390

The Fish And The Cat

While Mark and Michael were playing, Michael dragged the tablecloth. Therefore, the vas fell down and was broken. Then, Mark said to his brother, "Mom will punish you, as she likes this vas so much."

"I'm obliged to lie and say that the cat broke it. Will you witness for this?"

"No, we aren't used to lying."

"But I don't want to sadden Mom or be punished."

"She'll be more sad when she discovers that you lied."

"How?"

*"Lying will never save you and everything concealed shall be revealed. If we lie we become Satan's sons for, **He is a liar and the father of it**" (John 8.44). Do you know the story of the fish and the cat?" (1)*

"No, tell me about it."

A fisherman took a fish weighing seven pounds to a rich man to sell it to him. The rich man paid its price and asked him to send it to his house. When the man's wife saw it, she phoned her brother and invited him to dinner, as she knew that he liked fish. In the evening, the rich man went home. When his wife served him supper, he was surprised not to find the fish served. Therefore, he asked, "Why didn't you cook the fish?"

"I prepared it to be cooked. As I was busy talking on the phone, the cat ate it all."

"Did the cat ate it all?"

"Don't you believe me?"

The man took the cat and weighed it. It weighed seven pounds. Then, he said to his wife, "The fish weighs seven pounds. Then, what's this, the cat or the fish which she ate?"

Then, the wife was ashamed of herself since lying did not save her the trouble.

+ + +

+ *Grant me the spirit of truth.*

Then, I could not tell a lie.

+ *Uproot from me lying,*

So that I would not be a son to Satan the father of it,

But a son to You O the Truth.

•

• Bennett, J. William. The Moral Compass. •

Story No. 391

The Traces of the Nails

Matthew's soul was bitter because of his son Philip. He tried all means but in vain. Philip neglected his studies and wasted his time. He was irresponsible and harsh in his talks. On Maundi Thursday, in the evening, Matthew entered his son's room and presented him a large picture of Lord Jesus Christ Crucified, which Philip admired. He also gave him some thin nails saying, "Each time you sin, fix a nail in Jesus Christ's crucified body and each time you truly repent, uproot a nail. Thus, you discover your weaknesses together with God's mercies to you."

On the end of the month, Philip noticed that the features of the picture had totally disappeared because of the nails. Philip wept bitterly offering a true repentance. He cried to God to support him and kindle his heart with the Holy Spirit. The father noticed a great change in his son's life. When he entered his son's room, he found only one nail fixed in the picture. He rejoiced, embraced his son and uprooted the last nail.

The son burst into tears. The father asked in great surprise, "Why do you weep that bitterly? Our Christ the Savior and Forgiver rejoices with the repentant."

"I know but ... All the nails were erased but their traces still exist on the picture. He forgives my sins yet, the traces of the wounds remains in his body even after the Resurrection. I've crucified my Savior with my negligence for a long time."

+ + +

+ *Draw Your Cross before my eyes,
So that I would not forget Your extreme love.*
+ *Every time I commit sin, I fix a nail into your body.
While You, in Your love, are waiting for my salvation and glory.*
+ *Thank You O Forgiver.
I glorify You O Giver of glory.*
Grant my insight to see Your wounds all the time.
"You ... before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified"
(Gal 3.1).

Story No. 392

The Frog and the Pig

A little pig went down in the mud. The frogs were afraid that they might be hurt or crushed by the moving little pig. One of the frogs said, "Why do you not warn us that you're coming to the mud so we leave it for you and wouldn't be hurt or killed."

The pig said, "I don't care. If you were as big as I'm you wouldn't die."

The little frog started eating like crazy in order to get bigger and bigger. Her mother told her not to do that but she continued to eat and get bigger until she exploded and died.

+ + +

I wish to listen to my mother, the church, not to a pig,
For my enemy appears in a form of a friend,
Encouraging me with greed and pride,
That will lead to the destruction of my body and soul.
Teach me to learn from You Lord,
You are my real food and my glory.

Story No. 393

A Mattress That Killed its Owner

Problems started between Peter and his bride during the first week of their marriage. Relatives as well as priests tried to make peace but soon hostility was resumed. Peter accused his wife of being extravagant, not caring about their financial state. On the other hand, the wife was suffering from his miserliness since he deprived the family from the bare essentials, claiming that he was poor.

Several years later, the wife left the house, went to her brother and asked not to return to her house since there was an argument over buying a new mattress. The brother tried to calm his sister but she gave him several examples of his miser behavior.

The brother asked, “where do you think he keeps his money? Does he put it in a bank?”

“He doesn’t trust banks with his money”, answered the sister.

“Does he help his parents?”

“No, he’s very miser with his parents. He doesn’t give them even gifts in the feasts or other occasions.”

“Does he spend his money over his friends?”

“He has no friends.”

“Then, where does he put his money?”

“I don’t know if he puts his money somewhere or that the blessings of God departed from him.”

The sister continued with her complaints. She said that her husband did not buy a single suit since the wedding. The mattress they sleep on was so bad that if thrown in the garbage nobody would pick it up. The brother continued to calm his sister, telling her to carry her cross.

She answered, “At least, he should buy us a new mattress. I can’t stand it.”

Her brother promised to buy her a mattress as a gift in the near future.

Two days later, Peter went away on a business trip. The brother brought a new mattress and his sister reluctantly accepted the gift. She tried to tidy up the house to make the new mattress visible so Peter would be happy for getting a free mattress.

She was wandering what to do with the old mattress. She heard the junk man calling and she asked him if he wanted to take the old mattress for nothing. He agreed to take it unwillingly since the mattress was not fit for human use.

The next day Peter came back to find his wife with a big smile on her face. He looked at the bed and asked, “Where is the old mattress?”

“I had great difficulty to convince the junk man to take it”, Said the wife.

As soon as Peter heard that, he screamed, “All my money has gone with that old mattress. I used to put all my money in this mattress.”

He dropped dead; he had a heart attack and his misery has killed him.



*Lord, whoever keeps your commandment,
The Divine commandment will keep him.
But who keeps money, the money will kill him.*



Father Botros Gayed's diaries, *ElKeraza*. 1997

Story No. 394

Gold Mines

The ship was sailing carrying hundreds of people looking for work across one of the oceans. Suddenly, the alarm sound indicated state of emergency. Boats were lowered to carry the people with their belongings and as much food as they could and then went to a nearby island. They realized that they were alone on this island while the ship was full of water and sank.

The people decided to prepare the land for sowing. Two days later, one of these people came shouting, "Don't be upset. I've good news: we're on an island which has gold mines, we all going to be rich."

Everybody was happy. They quitted sowing the land and all worked in the mines and became rich. Food ran short. Winter came and they could not find food. What is good of all this gold if they can not find food? They were in trouble they could not find a solution especially because the time of sowing and reaping is over. One after the other started dying until all perished and all the gold did not help them.

This is the story of many of us, who refuse to trust in God who satisfies our souls with the Divine knowledge. They find excuses. They are busy with temporary matters but the time will come when they will discover that what they collected will not satisfy their souls; that the opportunity has gone forever and they lost their everlasting life.



*Knowledge is more valuable than the purified gold.
My soul was occupied with many things but You are its heavenly food.
Your wisdom satisfies my soul and knowing you quench my thirst.
Let me have You in order to live, be satisfied and not perish.
You are my satisfaction, gladness and my riches.
You are my life and my glory.
You are my fate and my heart's desire.*



Arnot, William. *Studies in Proverbs*. Michigan: 1978. 145-146.

Story No. 395

Abraham, his Son and his Donkey

After supper, the little boy Tony said to his father, "I want to go to bed. Come with me and read for me from the bible."

The father went to Tony's room, explained to him in a simple manner the meaning of the read part of the bible. Then, they prayed.

Father said to his son, "I see that you aren't happy, why? I always enjoy seeing you smiling."

"I'm upset Dad."

"Why?"

"I'm puzzled; I don't know how to please my friends at school. Whenever I do something, one of them criticizes me."

"Tony, don't be upset. Before doing something ask God's guidance. You can also ask someone with more experience like one of your parents, your father confessor or your teacher."

"And what should I do with those who criticize me with no obvious reason?"

"Remember the verse by St Paul,

"If I were still trying to please men, I would not be servant of Christ" (Gal. 1.10)."

"But I live among people, how can I not please them?"

"Have you heard the story of Abraham, his son and his donkey?"

"No dad."

"I'll tell you the story:

Abraham wanted to sell his donkey. He was an old man (75 years) he had only one son who was 15 years old. The son asked Abraham, "What should we do dad?"

"Let's carry the donkey."

On the way, some young people saw them so they mocked at them. One of them said "Do you ride the donkey or the donkey rides you people. Do you teach your son stupidity?"

Abraham said to himself, "I think it's stupid. Let's ride the donkey, the two of us."

A friend saw them and said to Abraham, "You've no mercy; you and your son ride this poor donkey. Stop this cruelty."

So Abraham let his son ride the donkey while Abraham walked. Passing by Abraham's brother, he was mad and said to his nephew, "You ride the donkey and poor old dad walks! Get off and let your father ride the donkey."

Few minutes later, a group of young ladies saw what happened. They said, "How come you ride and the poor little boy walks?"

At last after examining the situation they decided to both walk and drag the donkey along. Shortly after that, Sam, Tony's friend saw them and said to them cruelly, "What are you doing? Why not riding the donkey? Did the donkey complain? Wasn't it created for us to ride on?"

Abraham did not know what to do. They decided not to please people, but what was acceptable to God they did.



*+Teach me lord not to pay attention to please people,
But to please You.
You are the Wisdom, Giver of understanding.
You are the Leader, the Way and the Truth.
I shall have You in my heart,
Guided by Your Holy Spirit.*

Story No. 396

It's Worth Taking a Photo

In a Coptic gathering in Jersey City, they were telling stories. Said Wadi who had an experience in serving among students' hostels at Alexandria:

I was visiting the late Nazmi barsoom, deacon of St. George church in sporting, then came father Pishoy Kamel accompanied by Father Luke Sidaros who was laughing. The deacon asked, "Why are you laughing father Luke?"

He replied, "Ask father Pishoy. It's worth taking a photo and sending it to Pope Shenouda."

At last, father Luke told the following story:

Father Pishoy took me to visit a lady that recently gave birth. She was living in the 5th floor. As we reached there, Father Pishoy congratulated her for the newborn baby.

The lady said, "It's suppertime and I won't let you go without food. I'll prepare a goose." Father Pishoy said to her in a fatherly way, "I'd get my share uncooked."

"You take the whole goose with you" said the lady.

Father Pishoy accepted the goose. He hid it in his wide sleeve holding its beak so that it wouldn't make noise. Father Pishoy walked few blocks, in a totally different direction to where we have to go; he went up the stairs till the 6th floor, where he found kids crying.

"Why are you crying?"

"We're hungry. We asked our mother to give us some food but she told us to pray. How can we pray while being hungry?"

"Don't be afraid, Jesus sent you the food you need."

Father Pishoy said to me, "Stay with the kids and tell them stories while I help the mother prepare the food."

Father Pishoy slaughtered the goose to help the mother to prepare the food for her hungry children. I wish we had a camera to take a photo of Father Pishoy while slaughtering the goose. We would have then sent a copy to the pope and kept the other in the church."



Truly several of Father Pishoy's behavior needed a picture,

Just to photograph his fatherly heart.

I shall not hesitate to say,

"The heavenly hosts were rejoicing for his kindness and his love for all.

It is a scene that pleases both angels and people."

Story No. 397

Be Kind to Unbelievers

In 1997, at Los Angeles, Pope Shenouda told this story to the servants of Sunday school.

In my youth and while serving in Sunday school, I met a young man who did not have any thing to do with God; He never liked talking about God, church or everlasting life. I developed a strong relationship with him to make him benefit from God's salvation and worshiping in a church. The young man became happy and got good spiritual friends.

Suddenly, he stopped coming to church. I called him but he said, "I can't come to church. One of the servants had a chat with me that made me feel that what I am doing is all wrong. I can't be with you anymore. You have your way and I have mine."

I spoke to him explaining how simple our faith is and the beauty of the spiritual life. I started with him from scratch after that servant who wanted to make him bear responsibilities beyond his capacity, which discouraged him. Pope Shenoda commented on that story that we should be kind to those who are new to the faith.



*Your path is a happy one my Lord.
You invite me to go through the narrow path,
But I can see You carrying the cross with me,
So I forget the narrow path and I become occupied with you.
Let me not burden my brothers,
But through kindness and mercy, I bring them to You,
Who through Your love carry the whole world.*

Story No. 398

Are my Eyes those of a Dog?

Pachomious was a teenager worshipping idols. He asked his father to carry food for the farmers working in his father's farm. At sunset, the farmers and the shepherd were worried about the return of the boy in the dark. Therefore, they prepared a tent for him to spend the night. One of the shepherds had two beautiful daughters who waited until everyone went to bed. Slowly one of them went to the young man's tent. As soon as Pachomious saw her, he knew that she was trying to instigate him. He said to her, "Are my eyes those of a dog to sleep with my sister?" Seeing that he was such a pure-hearted person, she left.



*The idol worshipping boy refused to sleep with his sister,
Lest he be like a dog that joins more than one female.
He, in a subtle way, behaved in purity,
For that the heaven chose him to be the angel of God.
He believed and was baptized and he enjoyed the work of the Holy Spirit.
His spirit was elevated to heaven,
Others were lifted up with him to the true purity.
We need Your grace to have the eyes of angels not the eyes of dogs.*

Story No. 399

A Gift from Australia

While being busy preparing for a theological conference between the Chalcedonian Orthodox Church and the Non-Chalcedonian, I had difficulty finding references to prepare a theological paper about “The Nature and the Person in the early church”.

One evening while I was praying the vesper at St Mary church in Alexandria, I had a thought. I asked myself, “I spend many long hours preparing for theological papers about churches while I’m not a scholar. I don’t even have experience in theology. There are many people who are more experienced than me in this field. I’ll go to the Pope and apologize to him for not doing this job as there are many others that can do a better job in this.”

After I prayed, I delivered the sermon. Then, after the vespers, I saw Dr.Ibrahim (one of the immigrants to Australia), he informed me that his father (the late father Isaac) has sent him to me for an urgent issue. As he asked me to meet tonight at his uncle's home, I agreed.

After I finished accepting confessions, and in my way to meet Dr.Ibrahim, The thought of running away from my assignment of theological dialogues was insisting for I can devote more time to my church and serving my people.

I met Dr. Abraham and he offered me a gift while saying, “Father Isaac has sent you this gift.”

I took it from him and put it aside but he insisted that I should open the rap. I thought it must be a box of chocolate but to my surprise I found a volume of theological expressions in Greek with their meaning and its use by the early church fathers. I was surprised for I know that Father Isaac is not that interested in these theological studies.

Then, Dr. Ibrahim said to me, “My father knew that this book is a new release and it will be useful for you.”

I felt that God’s hand is guiding me. I felt ashamed of myself and started to do the research that was requested of me in a spirit of thanksgiving. I felt that God is showing me His guidance to all my life.



*I am amazed from those who deny Your existence.
They want to see you to believe in You.
I see you daily, manifesting Yourself to me,
And I see you O the Director of my life.
My life does not go haphazardly,
But it is in Your hands,
Guided by Your Fiery Holy Spirit.*

Story No. 400

He Is Better Than you Are

On May 1997 in Los Angeles, Pope Shenouda told the following story:

One of the monks has fasted without food for three weeks. He was very happy spiritually being in the company of the Lord Jesus. One day he saw another monk that became very weak after only one day of fasting. Thoughts of condemnation attacked the monk who fasted for three weeks because that poor monk could not do it for one day. An angel appeared to that monk and said to him, “He is better than you are. You fasted three weeks because God’s grace helped you through but this poor monk struggles with all his heart to fast that day.”



*It is true that the excellence of the power is from Your grace,
To support my brothers and me.
I thank You for caring about us all.
I should not underestimate him, who can do less,
And those who do more than me should not discourage me.
Thank You Pantocrator who works in all of us.*

Story No. 401

I Decided to Leave the Monastery

Departure without saying good by

At sunset by the delta, the monastery's bells rang and hundreds of monks were flocking towards the church. In minutes the church was full and every body was waiting for Father Pinophius to start the prayers but for the first time he did not show up. They waited for a long time but at last one of the elders led the prayers. After the prayer, the elder rushed to father Pinophious' cell. The door was opened but he was not there and a note was posted on the door that says:

"My dear brothers, monks of the monastery,
May the peace of our God fill your hearts.

I write you with tears for I feel that I dwelt with great saints whom I am not worthy even to speak with. I used to see the face of our Lord Jesus Christ in each one of you. Your smiling faces and your rejoicing hearts, your concern for the salvation of every body and your prayers for each, especially the needy and rejected souls.

I won't ever forget these things. I confess my carelessness and my shortcomings. Your continuous praise for me and your generous love disturbed my poor soul. I don't deserve all that love from you and I was afraid of losing my eternity. Forgive me, I decided to leave the monastery but believe me I hold each one of you deep in my heart till the last minute of my life and even when I meet my savior.

Pray for me so that God leads me and prepares me to meet with you.
Forgive me all, God be with you."

Your servant in Christ
Pinophious

Several monks came over to find out what happened to their beloved Father Pinophious. The elder was in tears and the note was falling from his hand while saying, "Truly, we don't deserve your presence with us father Pinophious. You're great in your love and great in your humbleness. But where are you planning to go? The whole country knows you and loves you. Why didn't you say good bye?"

The monks felt like orphans lost their loving spiritual father. The monastery sent some monks to search for father Pinophious but in vein.

The old Farmer

At the garden of a monastery in Tibia, a group of youth was working when an old monk stopped by them and said to them, "I know that you're in need of a farmer, to help you with the work. We got a good experienced farmer; let's give him a chance."

The youth did not like the idea but they accepted the old farmer. They gave him a lot of hard work so he might get discouraged and leave on his own. The old farmer was working hard and he was nice to all of them with a permanent smile on his face. One evening they were all resting in small huts when the old farmer spoke to them words of kindness. They all loved him and considered him a father. They trusted him with their secrets as he used to lift them up with the Holy Spirit so they can experience the heavenly life.

Every body was attracted to his kindness not only the workers but also the visitors to the monastery. The old farmer used to leave his hut late in the night so he could do others' work before anybody could see him.

Several years went by, one day one of the visitors drew nearer to the old farmer and suddenly he fell to the ground trying to kiss the farmer's feet. The visitor started to cry out, "I won't let you go father Pinophious."

Father Pinophious tried to escape but people were all around asking the visitor about his mystery. He told them that this man was father Pinophious who left his monastery in the delta escaping the great honor he got.

Under a lot of pressure, he accepted to return to his monastery where he was received with great honor. As for him, he was crying bitterly because he ran away from pride but it came back several folds.

The personnel at the monastery were keeping an eye on him so that he would not escape again but he managed to run away to the monastery in Palestine. Nevertheless, he was returned to his monastery.

*St. John Cassian told us this true story, as he met father Pinophious in his monastery in Palestine.



*In love Pinophious left the monastery to escape from pride.
In love he carried his brethren in his heart every where he went.
He ran away from pride but he did not run away from work.
He ran away not to look for comfort but to labor more.
Wherever he existed, he lifted every person to You.*

Story No. 402

Lead us not into Temptation

In a friendly atmosphere, Mark the teacher wanted to find out who is the most reliable student. He asked his students, "If you found a purse that contains a valuable, rare piece of diamond what would you do with it?"

One of them replied at once, saying, "I'll look for the owner of the diamond to return it to him."

The teacher said "He's fast to answer but I doubt his intention."

The second student said, "I'll wait if the owner claimed his diamond I'd give it to him. If not, I'd keep it."

The teacher said, "He's honest in his words but he's a cunning heart."

The third said, "I'll pray to God not to lead me into temptation so I wouldn't be tempted to keep what isn't mine."

Then the teacher realized that the third student was honest in his words as well as in his heart.



Lord, lead me not into temptation.

Protect me, You know my weakness.

Do not allow any opportunity that might lead me to my weakness.

And if did, protect me.

Preserve my heart, my thoughts and all my senses.

Story No. 403

A Friendship between a Frog And A Snake

A girl came to me asking for an advice, “I’m in love with my cousin but my father doesn’t like his brother. He requested that I don’t see or talk to his nephew. Should I listen to my father’s advice? What did my cousin do to me so that I do not talk to him?”

The girl was torn between her and her cousin.

I remembered the old African story about “Why the small frog does not play with the small snake?” it is a symbolic story.

One day, while the young frog was jumping amongst the grass, enjoying the worm beautiful sun rays, he noticed a long animal whom he never saw before. He continued to jump towards the snake, and said to him, “Hello!”

“Hello!”

“What are you doing here?”

“I’m enjoying the sun.”

“What’s your name?”

“I’m a newborn snake.”

“Do you want to play with me?”

“Thank you I feel lonely. I need a friend to play with.”

The young frog started leaping and the small snake started following here with his eyes. The little frog asked the snake, “Can you jump like me?”

The snake answered, “No, can you teach me how?”

They both began to teach each other how each one walk. They both spent wonderful time. Feeling hungry, they went home. The little frog went to his mother, trying to creep on her belly.

“What are you doing, my baby?”

“I learned how to creep from my good friend the little snake.”

“Did you say snake?”

“Yes mother my dear friend, mother.”

The mother was mad and said to her, “You fool, didn’t you know that there is an old animosity between me and his mother? Never again play with him. He will suddenly open his mouth and swallow you.”

The little snake tried to jump so his mother said to him, “What are you doing?”

“I learned from my friend the frog how to jump. We spent the whole day very happy together. He is a beautiful friend.”

The mother was surprised and said to her son, “how stupid you are! Frogs are food for us.”

The little snake became very upset; tears came from his eyes and said, “Is it possible that one day I swallow my friend!”

Next day, the snake refused to play with the frog and the frog was afraid to come near the snake each one dreaming of that wonderful day they spent together.



We think that the young are the cause of trouble but practically speaking, the adults are the cause of the trouble for the young. They inherit our mistakes.

Story No. 404

The Frog Prince

In the old days, a king had many daughters. All of them had serious problems except the youngest. She was beautiful. She used to go to the garden and enjoy the sun and she used to play with her golden ball.

One day, while she was playing with her ball it fell in the pond, She kept crying for an hour. She started crying aloud. Suddenly, she heard a voice saying, “Why are you crying my dear princess?”

She looked to the right and the left but could not see anyone. She thought that it was just her imagination but the voice came back again. She looked in the pond to find a frog talking to her.

“Why are you crying?”

“I lost my golden ball in this pond.”

“What would you give for getting back your ball?”

“I’m willing to offer any thing even my crown.”

“Do you promise to keep your word?”

“I’ll keep my promise.”

In a flash, the frog dived in the water and brought the ball. As soon as she saw her golden ball, the princess grabbed the ball and ran towards the palace.

“Where are you going? You promised to give me what I asked for.” Said the frog.

At night while dinning, there was knocking at the door. The princess opened to see the frog at the door. “What do you want? This is not time for visiting. Why didn’t have an appointment?” She slammed the door and sat beside her father.

Her father asked her, “Who was at the door?”

“A frog wants to visit us.”

“How did you know him?”

“My ball fell in the water and I promised to give him what he asked if he brought me my ball.”

“Did he bring the ball?”

“Yes.”

“What did he ask? Since you promised you have to do. It was better if you didn’t promise. Open for him.”

As soon as the door was opened, the frog rushed to the table.

“What do you want?”

“Carry me to sit beside you at the table.”

She looked at her father saying, “What should I do?”

“You promised; you have to do it.”

“Carry me to the table to eat from your plate.”

An hour later, the frog asked the princess to carry him to her bedroom. The princess put the frog in one of the corners of her bedroom but the frog said to her one last thing, “Carry me to your bed and let me rest my head on your pillow.”

Suddenly, the frog grew in size and turned to a handsome prince.

“What is happening?”

“I’m Prince Henry. One of the witches converted me to a frog. I realized that I’d never go back to become a prince unless I sleep in a royal bed.

The princess became so glad that she was able to save the prince through her keeping of a promise.



It is a symbolic story. Let us not rush to promises but if we promise we have to keep the promise.

Story No. 405

A Revolution Against a Water Path

Tony noticed that the mirror in the bathroom was missing so he asked, “Mother, where is the mirror, which used to be here?”

“It was broken son. Your father felt it does not suit the bathroom so he broke it.”

Tony decided to surprise his father by buying a modern mirror that suits the bathroom on his father's birthday. The father opened it and put it in one of the corners of the room. While his father was at work Tony mounted the mirror on the bathroom's wall. When his mother came back from work she thanked him for his help and she said, “Your father will like that.”

The next day Tony noticed that the mirror was not there. He asked his mother but she was not able to answer him. Her husband got hold of the mirror and broke it and when she asked him why he did that, he was mad and said to her, “You and your son do not know how to buy a good mirror.”

“Don't you like its shape?” the mother asked.

“No, I don't like the mirror itself.”

“But it's of a good quality and expensive.”

“No, when I looked at it, it showed my face ugly and miserable.”

The wife was silent and she realized that her husband is miserable and he always blamed the mirror not himself.

The husband became madder and decided to leave the house but he said to himself, “Where shall I go? My colleagues treat me badly and my family criticizes me. I will leave the city and go to a far-away village for two weeks.”

He left the house and went to a village. Two days later, Tony, after consulting with his mother, decided to bring his father back. As Tony approached the village he saw his father throwing stones to the water. Tony greeted his father saying, “Peace unto you dad.”

“Where will peace come from?”

“What happened dad?”

“I ran away from the mirror that showed my miserable face. I came here to enjoy nature but this morning I came to this water path and I saw my miserable face, so I brought some stones to throw in this water path that showed my face ugly and miserable.”



*I see in the world numerous mirrors,
That manifest my soul's revolution,
And declare my inner weakness.
Your Holy Spirit renews my inner most.
I blame no body.
I am afraid from no body, or any thing.
Rather, I carry Your peace within me.*

STORIES FOR THE YOUTH

406-421

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Story No. 406*

A Child Challenging the Public

Paul was putting on his cap in an unusual manner. When Paul met Mark, Mark asked, "Why are you wearing your cap in this manner?"

"Why not? Every one is doing it."

"I understand that the peak is supposed to be in front to protect the eyes from the sun why do you have it backward?"

"I don't know, but I've to be like everyone else otherwise I'll be considered odd."

“But you should use your brain and not follow others blindly. Do you know the story of the new cloth of the Emperor?”

“No, tell me about it.”

“In the past, there was an Emperor who was fond of clothes, and he had a whole wing for clothes in his palace. He used to leave his throne and put on a suit every hour; he didn’t care about his peoples’ needs, or about the economy. The country’s economy declined. Many of the rich people came from different parts of the globe to see the latest fashion of the king’s clothes.

Two brothers who owned a weaving machine requested to see the king to offer him a unique robe. The king was glad and asked what kind of robe they had in mind. One of the two brothers said, “Your majesty, we’re going to make a fine robe of beautiful colors for you. The material is thin and so strong. It requires special big scissors. Moreover, this suit can not be seen by any one who is stupid or incompetent.”

“How is that?”

“You’ll see your majesty.”

“When can I get it?”

“It will take a lot of effort, several weeks to prepare, in addition to the high cost of its making.”

“Can you tell me when can I receive it?”

“That will be difficult, but we promise that it will be ready in a few weeks.”

The king was glad and gave them gold so they can start preparing the robe.

Three weeks went by and the king wished to see the robe but was shy to show his feelings so he sent his Prime Minister. The Prime Minister went to see the robe. The two brothers took him to the room of the loom, and they were working hard. One of the two brothers asked him, “Can you see the beautiful robe?”

The Prime Minister paused for a moment, since he did not see except an empty loom. He was afraid to be called stupid and lose his job; he started to say how pretty the robe was. The Prime Minister returned to the king and informed him about the beautiful robe. The king was pleased, since his Prime Minister was trustworthy, and could see the robe.

The king wanted to know more about the beautiful robe so he sent his Speaker of the Parliament to report about the progress in the preparation of the robe. The Speaker met with the two brothers and told them how much the Prime Minister appreciated the beautiful robe. The Speaker entered the room to see an empty loom. He was afraid to say that he saw nothing, for the king would kick him out. Instead he raved about the beautiful robe.

The king was so pleased that he went himself to inquire about the robe. The king saw an empty machine. He was terrified as he realized that he had fooled himself and others, and he was not worthy to be king. He pretended that he saw the most beautiful robe ever made. The two brothers acted as if they were cutting the material with big scissors and that they were sewing the invisible robe and the king was admiring their wonderful work.

The day of Coronation came, and the two brothers came to put on the robe on his majesty. The king took off his suit to put on the imaginary robe. Every person was admiring the beautiful robe. They were worried that if they said they could not see the robe they would be called stupid.

A little boy asked his father to lift him up so he could see how beautiful the robe was. The little boy said, “What happened to the king? He is in his underwear.”

The father tried to muffle his son’s mouth but the boy shouted louder, “Put some clothes on our king!”

Then the crowd realized that there was something unusual and so the little boy was able to be brave enough to tell the truth.



*Let Your fiery Holy Spirit enlighten my eyes,
So I can see the truth and witness for it.
May no one drag me to lie.
Do not let me be like a dead fish carried by the waves.
May I abide in You so that I would abide in the truth.
May I please You, not the world.*

Story No. 407

You're Going Home

A family led a difficult life because of the harshness of Hitler. Members of the family used to hear stories about life in America; every member used to tell the others what he heard about America. These stories gave temporary comfort to the family at that time.

One day while the son was getting ready to immigrate to America; his mother said to him, "I feel the pain of being separated from you but you're always in my heart. Your image will never depart from my mind till we meet again." The mother continued, "I've never seen America, but I feel that I love it for what I heard about it from those who live there, and for what I've read about it. Son! You're going home while I'm a stranger here in my own Land!"

That was how the mother who lived in her own country gave farewell to her son who was immigrating to America.

In the same manner, with a great difference, the believer, though living in this world, feels that he/she is a stranger as a result of the mistreatment of his boss. He finds comfort with his pious family talking about the everlasting life with its glory. Everyone feels being a stranger in the land in which he was born.

This might be a reason why God allowed Satan to be the chief of this world, so because of his wickedness the heart of the believers will be drawn to eternity. They live here as strangers waiting for a better place.



*+ Thank You Lord for creating this beautiful world for me.
You do not let me lack anything.*

*But because I was attracted to the world not to its Creator,
I became enslaved to the world and to the Enemy of good.
He humiliates me with his violence and oppression.*

*+ Thank You because You used injustice for my salvation.
I realize that I am a stranger in a land ruled by a tyrant.
I long for leaving it to abide in You.*

*Your Divine Bosom is my eternal land.
When am I going to settle there?*

Story No. 408

Death Behind Me

An old lady said to one of the believers, "I'm not expecting death."

The believer asked, "Do you mean that God has taken the fear of death away from you?"

She said, "No, I'm not going to die."

As she emphasized that, the believer thought that the lady had lost her mind, or that she suffered from emotional stress.

He asked her kindly, "Why do you think that God is sparing you from death?"

She said, "Since I've actually died, I'm not going to die again."

As she noticed that he took her lightly, she said to him, "It seems that you didn't understand me: Jesus has died and I died with him! He's suffered and I suffer with him! He's risen and I've risen with him. I'm the daughter of the resurrection. Death is behind me. I'll only sleep in the Lord Jesus Who is my Resurrection."

Short Story No. 409

Even If I Were Given the Whole Wealth of Europe

A nurse was asked to look after a very sick English man. When the nurse encountered the man she entered into the following dialogue with him:

“Do you believe in Jesus Christ?”

“Yes, I’m a Christian, and committed to Him. Do you serve the Christians only?”

“I wish I could serve everyone sharing the suffering of every patient, but I’d a bitter experience.”

“What was that?”

“I was taking care of the French atheist Voltaire till he gave up his soul.”

“What does that mean?”

“Even if I were given the whole wealth of Europe, I decided not to be with another atheist at his deathbed.”

“Why?”

“You can’t imagine how bitter Voltaire was as he faced death. That had a very bad effect on those who surrounded him.”



May my soul experience the death of the righteous.

I see You Lord coming to carry me to Your glory.

I see angels rejoicing for my departure.

I see an endless banquet awaiting me.

Welcome to death, it is a living encounter with You.

Story No. 410

Death Terminates Everything

An atheist met a believer who was preaching the Gospel and had the following encounter with him:

“I don’t believe a word of what you are saying.”

“Don’t tell me why you aren’t a believer, rather tell me in what do you believe.”

“I personally believe that death is the end of every thing.”

“I believe the same thing.”

“Do you believe that death is the end of every thing?”

“Sure, death will end every chance for you to resist God; it will end your fun, friendship and ambition, because you leave this world to go to eternal darkness. Death will terminate every thing for me too. It will terminate my troubles, my tears and my struggle; I will be with my Lord in His glory.”

“I never thought that way before.”

So death finishes every thing, for sinners the result will be eternal darkness; but for the holy children of God, Jesus Christ will be their everlasting reward.

Short Story No. 411

A Piper in Germany

After spending two weeks in Hamelin, Germany, Isaac had the following dialogue with his son:

“What did you like most in Hamelin?”

“The honesty of the people: if someone promised something he/she would gladly fulfill his/her promise.”

“Do you know why?”

“No Dad.”

“There’s a famous story about a broken promise in Hamelin, it might have been fiction, but it has some truth in it. People of Hamelin tell the story to their children to teach them the virtue of honesty and of fulfilling promises.”

“Do you know the story Dad?”

“I heard it from one of the hotel employees. It goes like that:

There was an inscription on an old wall that said, “On July 1284 AD, a piper lead 130 children to a place near Koppen Hill and they were all lost.”

“What has this to do with fulfilling of a promise Dad?”

“Several years ago an army of rats attacked the city of Hamelin. The streets were full of so big rats that attacked dogs, and cats ran away from them. The rats made nests in the hats.

The Governor of the City had a meeting with the police and the leaders of the people. In that meeting, no reasonable solution was found to combat the attacks of the rats. While they were in the City Hall, a soldier came running to see the Governor. He told him that a strange looking man was in the city. He carried a pipe and was looking for the Governor. He had a solution for the problem.

“Let him come in.” the governor said.

The piper said to the governor, “How much would you pay me to save the city from all the rats?”

- “I’ll pay \$50.” The piper was pleased since this \$50 was a big amount of money at that time.

The piper started to play an unusual melody and rats started to follow him. He slowly reached the river. Very gently he took a boat and very slowly the boat moved away from the shore. The rats followed the boat and they all drowned.

The piper came back to the city and the people greeted him with applause. He went to the City Hall to see the Governor. The Governor said to the piper, “This is a small town and we can’t pay you \$50 especially after the damage that the rats caused. You should be satisfied with \$20.”

“But you promised me \$50.”

“You can see the losses that the rats caused. I can not pay you \$50.”

The piper refused the \$20. He left the Governors office to play a wonderful piece of music, which made the children of the city leave their homes and follow him. The piper went along followed by 130 kids till they reached Koppen Hills and every body was happy. The legend says that the earth was split open and engulfed the children. The whole city went to the piper,

who was laughing. They offered him all the gold that the city had so they could get their children back.

He answered, “This is the result of not keeping a promise.”



Lord grant me honesty in my life,

So I would be truly honest in my feelings and in my words.

Let me be honest with You as well as with myself,

Honest with each child and with every one.

May I hear your Divine voice:

“You have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things.”

Who else can grant me honesty?

You are the Honest One.

Story No. 412

A General Going Back to Prison

The Roman history records the courage and honesty of a Roman General. If he promised something he would fulfill his promise, even if it cost him his life. Also he never lied to any one.

There were several battles between Rome and Granada. Sometimes, Rome won and sometimes, Granada won. During one of these battles, General Marcus Atilius Regulus was taken captive to Granada. That was in the third century BC.

He was imprisoned in a cell and after a while he became ill and lost all hope that he would ever see his wife and children again.

Though Rome had lost the battle, he realized as an experienced General that at the end, Rome would win.

Also the leaders at Granada realized that they are losing, so they brought the captive General and told him, "If you can convince your government to make peace with us we shall set you free."

The General agreed. He was taken to Rome where he was greeted very well. His wife and children were glad that he came back. The General said to the authorities, "If we make peace with Granada we'll be able to have a truce; our army will get stronger and we'll be able to defeat the enemy."

The leaders in Rome asked him to stay, but he said, "I came to say goodbye to my family and to my country. Then, I will go back to prison in Granada."

They said to him, "Stay with us and don't worry."

He said, "But I promised, and I've to fulfill my promise."

They suggested sending someone in his place but he said, "Is it right for a Roman citizen not to fulfill his promise? I'm ill and won't live for long. I can't break my promise and now I wish you good luck."

The General bravely returned to jail in Granada in very bad circumstances that led to his death.



*A Roman citizen is proud of his citizenship, if he promises he fulfills.
Lord let me as a son of Yours to be honest,
That I can carry You in my heart O the Truth
So I can fulfill my promises.*

Story No. 413

A Joined Venture between Honesty and Dishonesty

One day, Peter went home very sad. His wife asked him what was wrong. He said, "My colleague accepts bribes. He is getting richer. He is liked by his boss and very popular among his peers because he's dishonest. Look at me: I'm honest, but nobody likes me and my boss treats me badly. What should I do? I can't accept bribes."

The wife paused for a moment, and then told him a story from the Greek folklore.

"Dishonesty had an encounter with Honesty. Honesty was wearing torn cloths, and looked tired. It went like this:

"Why are you not happy?"

"I had nothing to eat the whole day."

"Why?"

"I've no money."

"You're really strange. You're poor, tired and hungry. You live poor and will die hungry because you're careful and honest. Try to learn how to trick people, and forget about your way of thinking. You don't know how to deal with people. I know how to attract them and deceive them, get what is in their pockets and they feel glad. Learn from me."

Honesty paused for a while and then refused the advice of Dishonesty. As Honesty became very hungry, he said, "What shall I do now?"

Dishonesty suggested that they two go and have dinner in a restaurant.

The two of them went to a fancy restaurant. Dishonesty ordered food for himself and for his friend (Honesty). After they had eaten, the waiter brought the bill. Dishonesty shouted at the waiter, "Give me the change of the \$hundred bill I gave you just now."

The waiter replied, "But you didn't give me a \$100 bill."

"I did so."

The manager of the restaurant came, and caring about his restaurant's reputation gave Dishonesty what he asked for. Honesty was upset and said to Dishonesty, "You caused trouble to the poor waiter, and he might even lose his job because of you."

Dishonesty said, "I don't care about him. We ate without paying. Not only that but I left the restaurant with some money in my pocket."

"How do you accept that?" asked Honesty.

"You don't know what is the best for you" answered Dishonesty.

At last Honesty decided to leave Dishonesty even if that meant he would die of hunger.



May I befriend You because You are the Truth.

For my sake You became naked and hungry.

How can I then not endure every thing for Your sake?

May I be poor and may You make me rich.

May I hunger to be filled with You.

In You is my satisfaction.

Story No. 414

How Can I Rebuild the Temple?

It was said that Darius, king of Persia, woke up one day to find his three bodyguards, arguing among themselves about what is the strongest thing in the world. They agreed that each bodyguard would write his opinion in a sheet of paper; all the three papers should be put under the king's pillow. He would read them all and would reward the best answer.

The first wrote that wine is the strongest thing in the world. The second wrote that the king is the strongest person in the world. However, the third wrote that "Truth" is the strongest thing in the world.

The king found the three papers. He gathered the wise men in his kingdom to find out from them the best answer. The king asked each one of his guards to explain his point of view.

The first said, "You people know how powerful drinking is, as it makes great people act in a silly way. Wine can make you lose your mind, and the ability to think soundly. If wine can do all that would it not be considered the strongest thing in the world?"

The second guard said, "The king is the strongest person in the country. He orders troops and no one can stop him. They go to war. They might die and if they win the war they come back with lots of things to the king."

At last the third guard had the opportunity to explain his point of view. He said, "Great is the 'Truth'. It is stronger than any thing. Wine is evil, kings could also be evil, but 'Truth' will always be there. 'Truth' is powerful. It will never die. Truth will do what is just."

When the audience heard that; they shouted. "Great is Truth, it is more powerful than any thing else."

The king asked the guard whose name was Zerubbabel, "You are the wisest among all my guards. What would you like as a reward?"

Answered Zerubbabel, "Remember your majesty you promised to build Jerusalem when you become king. You promised to build the temple. Now, it is time to fulfill your promise. You promised that in front of the King of Heaven."

The king was pleased and sent him off to Jerusalem. At that moment, the guard lifted up his eyes to heaven, and prayed to God saying, "Lord, You are the source of wisdom, glory be to you. I am Your servant."

And so through his wisdom Zerubbabel convinced the king of Persia to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem.



*Dwell in me O, Divine Wisdom.
When I possess You I will possess the Truth.
With You I become strong O the Power of God.
You are the source of Wisdom, Truth and Power.
You are my Praise, my Power O my Good Savior.*

Story No. 415

A Wolf! A Wolf! Save My Sheep

One quite evening, before bedtime, Daniel was talking to his Dad, asking about his opinion of white lies, “Is there a white as well as a black lie? I mean when someone lies to someone else as a joke; no one is hurt.”

The father answered, “We don’t like lying, not because it’s harmful to others but it’s harmful to the liar himself. It makes his mouth unholy, which means that the Holy Spirit can’t dwell in this mouth.”

“But Dad we need to have some fun, like white lies.”

“Son, when someone lies; he loses peoples’ respect. Do you know the story of the boy and the wolf?”

“No, can you tell me this story?”

“In one of the villages, one of the children wanted to draw attention to himself. He left his farm and was crying, “A wolf! A wolf! Save my sheep!”

Every one in the village rushed to help him, but they discovered that he was joking. Two days later, he repeated the same thing. Men of the village rushed to help him. However, he was lying again.

A few weeks later, a wolf really came to his farm. He cried, “a wolf! A wolf! ...” No one came to help him and the boy lost his sheep.”



*Lord how beautiful are Your Divine promises!
May You say to me as You said to Moses,
“I will be with Your mouth,”
So nothing comes out of my mouth but the truth.*

Short Story No. 416

The Young Liar

Hilaire Belloc, the English writer (1870-1953) tells us the story of a young girl named Matilda.

Matilda had been playing alone for a while. No one was in the house except her old aunt who could not play with her. Matilda went upstairs, phoned the fire department and told them that she was alone in the higher level of the house, and there was a fire.

A few minutes later the fire engines rushed to the house, firemen climbed the stairs to find the girl laughing. The poor aunt heard the sound of the fire engines, went upstairs to face an angry firemen. The aunt trying to rectify the situation, paid some money towards the cost of their coming.

A few weeks later, the aunt went out for entertainment leaving behind the young liar as a punishment for her lies.

Soon, a real fire started in Matilda's room, she opened the window and was shouting, "Fire! Fire! I'm going to die."

The neighbors kept saying to her, "Shut up you young liar."
The fire spread through out the house and before the fire engines arrived; the aunt came to find that the house was totally burned down with Matilda in it.



Lord, take away from me the spirit of lying

Since Satan is the father of all liars.

Let me be a son of Yours O the "Truth".

And not belong to Satan any more.

Story No. 417

George Washington and the Cherry Tree

Mr. Washington used to take his younger son George to his farm, so the child could learn how to ride horses and to look after the fields and the sheep. Mr. Washington planted fruit trees, which included apples, pears and peaches.

A friend of Mr. Washington presented him with a cherry tree. It was imported from overseas and it was a good tree. The tree grew and was full of flowers and Mr. Washington was waiting for fruits from the only cherry tree he had.

A few days later, the young George was fooling around with his new saw. He was cutting some tree branches. While he was playing with his saw; he accidentally killed the cherry tree.

At sunset, as Mr. Washington was passing by, he saw the dead cherry tree. He was upset and asked, "Who killed that tree?"

The farmers did not want to tell him that his son did it.

As the son passed by his dad, his father asked him harshly, "Do you know that you killed the cherry tree?"

The son looked sad and told his father, "I can't lie, I killed the tree while I was playing with my new saw."

His father told him to go home.

The son went home sad; he waited in the library for his upset dad, realizing how sad his father was for losing the cherry tree. A few minutes later, his father came home, asked his son again why he had cut the tree.

"I was fooling around with my new saw not knowing what I was doing."

"Now the tree is gone. It was dear to me. It was a gift and the only cherry tree I had."

"Dad, I'm sorry."

In a kind manner the father put his arm on his son's shoulder and said, "I lost the cherry tree but I gained a lot."

"What did you gain dad?"

"I realized that you're brave, and you say the truth. I'd rather have a truthful son than have a whole garden full of cherry trees."

The son never forgot those words and he behaved bravely and was honest all his life.



Lord, grant me the spirit of truth.

Give me the courage to speak the truth always.

This is the work of your Holy Spirit.

O the Truth who is never dishonest.

Story No. 418

Dad! There is One Who sees you

One dark night, a man wanted to steal corn from the neighboring fields. He took along with him his young daughter. At the first field, he asked her to keep watch. If anyone appeared, she should shout, "There is someone who can see you."

The father carried some corn; then, he went to the second field. "Dad, there's someone who can see you," Shouted the daughter.

He left in a hurry to go to the third field. The same thing was repeated.

The father was mad and said to his daughter, "Why did you lie to me? I looked all around and I didn't see any one."

"But dad you did not look upwards where there is One Who sees you," said the daughter. The father was ashamed of himself since he was afraid that people might see him, yet he was not afraid of God who sees even when it is dark.



*Grant me with Joseph the righteous
Not to care for closed doors.
Knowing that You see me,
I shout, "How then can I do this great wickedness
And sin against God?"*

Story No. 419

The Slave Liberator And The Small Bird

On the first of January 1863, President Lincoln of the United States of America issued a decree to liberate 4 million slaves. That angered the capitalists in his country who used to abuse the slaves.

One day the president bent down and picked up something from the ground. His secretary, who was walking along with him, in astonishment, asked the president, "What did you pick up from the ground?"

The President replied, "I picked up a newly hatched bird that has fallen from the nest. I want to take it back to its nest so it can grow and fly when it is ready."

The secretary realized that Mr. Lincoln not only cared about 4 million slaves in his country, but also for a helpless little bird.



*Lord, let me imitate You,
And become a living icon of You.
You are the Creator of the whole world.
You give the lily a beauty which surpasses all King Solomon's glory.
You count the hair of my head.
Which I do not care about.
You care about the sparrows for which no one cares.
Grant me this love towards Your creation.*

Short Story No. 420

A White Silk Cloth

Mark went to Springfield, Illinois, where President Abraham Lincoln was born. Mark went with a friend to the National Museum and noticed that there was a cabin that housed a white silk cloth, the cloth was about 18 inches long. Mark asked his friend John about that piece of cloth.

John answered that this piece of cloth had a story. When Mr. Lincoln was in the grand opera; a man shot him. A lady who was sitting near him got her white dress and put it under the President's head so he might rest waiting for the doctors to come and look after him. The lady went home feeling happy and thanking God who saved the president who liberated the slaves and took care of the weak.

The lady was thinking of taking the dress to the cleaners, but she felt that the drops of blood from the President's wound were priceless. She got a pair of scissors and cut about 18 inches around the drops of blood. She kept that piece of cloth and when it was time to build a museum in Springfield; she took the piece of cloth to the city authorities and it was included in the museum with the title "To the man who freed the slaves".



+ *Your precious Blood,*
As from a lamb without blemish,
Is my treasure, and my fullness.
+ *I see You carried on the Cross,*
You are the bearer of the sins of the whole world,
Carrying me to the bosom of the Father.
+ *Your Blood purifies me from every sin,*
Fills my soul and my emotions.
There is no one who loves me like You, O Savior of the world.

Story No. 421

Fog in the Airport

As the pilot Andrew approached the airport; he found it covered with thick fog. He requested from the controller to direct him for landing since visibility was nil and the airport had obstacles. He was worried, and he called the tower again and told the controller that the flight was carrying a lot of people and they were in trouble, “what should I do?” The controller realized that the pilot was in a state of panic. He ordered the pilot to obey the orders and not to worry about the obstacles. Finally, the plane landed safely.



Truly many times we hesitate to obey the word of God, finding excuses, thinking that these excuses stand in our way to heaven, Let us obey His word and leave the guidance to God, He is capable of carrying us over to the kingdom of heaven.

**“Trust in the Lord with all you heart, and lean not on your own understanding.
In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.
Do not be wise in your own eyes, fear the Lord and depart from evil.
It will be health to your flesh, and strength to your bones”
(Prov. 3.5-8).**

STORIES FOR THE YOUTH

422-438

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Short Story No. 422

The Lazy Donkey

The donkey was always sad and grumbling. His owner was a farmer who woke up before cockcrow, took the donkey to the field, loaded him with a lot of vegetables and fruits and went to the wholesale market to sell his crops to merchants.

The donkey came back from the market while it was still dark. On his way he passed by many other donkeys still asleep. He was constantly grumbling. He thought that his fate was very sad that the farmer bought him to humiliate him with hard labor and deprive him of sleeping at dawn while his fellow donkeys enjoyed that sleep.

The donkey turned to a trick: he pretended to be ill and unable to work. The farmer had to sell him and a tanner bought him. The donkey was happy to get rid of the farmer who woke him up before cockcrow. It was true that the tanner started work after sunrise, but he loaded the donkey with animal skins that smelled terrible. The donkey lost his zest for life because of the terrible smell. He realized then that the reason for his sadness was not lack of sleep or the kinds of loads put on him but it was his heart that did not know thankfulness and acceptance.



“A good gift that does not increase is one without thankfulness”
(Saint Isaac the Syrian).

Short Story No. 423

Nonna Shepherding Her Husband

On my way to the Church of St George the martyr in Sporting, Alexandria, Egypt, I was reading about the life of Saint Nonna. It truly captured all my thoughts and made me feel embarrassed and I did not know how to answer God on judgement day.

Her son, St Gregory the theologian, narrates how she pulled her husband away from idol worship to become, not only a Christian, but also a bishop from whom the devils used to run away.

He was amazed that his mother converted his father to Christianity and he became a successful Bishop. It was as if they both carried two holy bodies, perhaps because they lived as virgins afterward.

St Gregory said his wonderful phrase about his father the Bishop, “Here is the good shepherd, the fruit of his wife’s prayers and guidance. He learned from her the perfect life of service.”

She bore St Gregory who was called the theologian, and Caesarius who was a talented and pious physician. She also bore Gorgonia who followed her mother’s example by attracting her husband Alypius to a holy life and had two sons who became bishops.

I was busy thinking of the woman who can change her family’s character. She becomes a source of blessing for her husband, children and grandchildren. She turns all to a holy family at a high level.

Then, as I entered the sanctuary, a man came complaining of his wife who is a Sunday school teacher. Her heart was not open to her family but away from them. That made me feel very sad.



Lord, give me a heart burning with love.

Through You, Nonna was able to change the life of her family.

Teach me to witness to You.

Let my heart open up to love You and love all who are around me.

When will I behave like this lady!

She was a successful wife, mother and grandmother.

Your Holy Spirit is the secret behind her success.

Short Story No. 424

President Schimel And His Mother (1)

Schimel, a Caucasian leader, was resisting the Russian advance to his region for a long time. However, what saddened this leader's heart was the spread of corruption among his people, especially bribery. He tried by all means to change his people's way but to no avail.

Finally, he set a deadline to execute a cruel punishment: if anybody was caught accepting bribes, he/she would be whipped a hundred times on his/her back, after being stripped, in public with no exceptions. The punishment was for everybody whether men or women, even the elders and the sick.

Surprisingly, the first person arrested was the president's mother. When he was informed; he thought, "Can my mother be exempted from being lashed? How will the people respect the law then? Where is justice? Will my mother tolerate a hundred lashes on her back?"

He then announced, "justice is above all. Let my mother be punished."

Many people begged him to let her go, giving her another chance. Nevertheless, he firmly ordered that his mother be lashed.

The president himself attended the lashing and it was not easy for him to see his mother's back naked and the whip falling on it causing her to bitterly scream. As the first five lashes ended; Schimel could not bare it anymore. He rushed down to where his mother was and asked to receive the rest of the lashes himself.

His mother could not see him being punished for her sin and almost died sorrowing over what she did.



*You took off the garment of glory,
And hid Your Divinity.
You were undressed like a slave,
And like a lamb, You were slain for my sins.
Your love is wonderful O Savior of the world.
How can I repay You for redeeming me with Your blood?*



(1) Naismith, Archibald. *2400 Outlines, Notes, Quotes and Anecdotes*. Vol. 2, article 558

Short Story No. 425

The Birds Preacher

Mark was on his way to Church to meet his friends to celebrate Christmas in Assisi, Italy. While walking, he saw a pious man with a beautiful smile on his face. He was throwing pieces of bread next to a tree trunk. Surprised, the boy stood observing the simple man's behavior. Then, he asked, "What are you doing sir?"

"I'm giving the birds and the little insects food to eat."

"Today is a feast and everybody is getting ready to celebrate. Why don't you postpone that work till tomorrow?"

"I'm very happy for the birth of my Lord Jesus Christ. I want to see every creature, even animals, birds and insects, happy with us. How can I celebrate and be happy and full when the creation doesn't share in my joy?"

Mark went to Church and told his friends about what he saw. They were amazed and wished that the creation would praise its Creator.

Mark went home to find that the net he put in his garden caught two doves. He looked at them and tears fell down from his eyes. He thought, "On this blessed feast this man gives food to the birds and insects to share his joy whereas, I catch two doves and deprive them of their freedom. Let me give the doves to the man as gifts and see what he will do with them."

Mark rushed to give the doves to the man. The man made a nest for them on a tree. After hugging them and touching them lovingly, he put them in the nest and gave them food to eat.

The man looked at the doves saying, "On this day my Lord came to release my soul to His Heavens to enjoy freedom. I love freedom so how can I keep you in a cage? I can walk freely, not only in the city, but also toward heaven. You can move freely as you wish."

Mark was very touched and every now and then he would come and visit the friend of the birds.

Some days passed and Mark came to visit his friend. He was surprised to see him standing and talking to the birds that gathered around the branches listening to his sweet voice as he preached them saying, "I love you little birds for you're my brothers and sisters in the air. Let me talk to you.

Love God, praise Him and look at what He gave you. He gave you wings to fly in the air. You don't sow or reap and He supports you. You don't weave or make clothes and He covers you with beautiful feathers. You don't build homes and nature is there for you to fly in freely. You see the huge mountains, the rivers and the fields. You play and sing joyfully. Don't be ungrateful but praise God for the greatness of His love and beneficence."

When the man finished his sermon the birds soared in a wonderful arrangement, flying around him while singing to their God the Creator in a sweet and beautiful song.

Short Story No. 426

Different From Us

A preacher was among tribes getting his car ready to go to the forests. He was going to meet the members of the tribes to preach the Bible to them. Meantime, his wife was inside their tent holding her baby.

The wife heard a strange sound so she looked out the tent. She saw the leader of the tribe standing in front of her husband pointing a spear at his chest, while the other men removed his shirt. The leader and twelve men were standing there and getting ready to throw their spears at her husband.

Calmly and without fear, the preacher said to the leader of the tribe, "Throw your spear if you wish but before you kill me, let me tell you something."

The leader was surprised at the preacher's courage and lack of worry but was determined to kill him. He said to himself, "Let me hear him before he dies."

So he spoke violently to the preacher asking, "What do you want to say?"

The preacher answered, "I came in the name of God and I'm his servant. I desire that you enjoy His love and salvation and experience the sweetness of life with Him. All that you and your men can do is to kill me. If I die, somebody else will come and tell you God's happy news. The spears will enter my chest but we won't rest until we all are happy with God our Savior."

The spear fell from the leader's hand and he turned to his men saying, "They're different from us for, we fear death and they possess eternal life. Let us hear them and become like them." They all threw their spears and sat down to listen to the preacher. They happily accepted the Bible of Jesus Christ. That was the beginning of preaching among these tribes. (2)



*Your Bible makes my heart happy.
Let me make other people's hearts happy through You.
Your Bible carries me as if to heaven,
So I do not fear death or the abyss.
Let me preach to see all living by You.
Your Bible is sweet, let me enjoy it,
And let others enjoy Your sweet Salvation.*



(2) Naismith, Archibald. *2400 Outlines, Notes, Quotes and Anecdotes*. Vol. 2, article 666.

Short Story No. 427

A Letter Opening Heavens Doors

In one of the evening church meetings, a young lady came to talk to the priest. Her face was very troubled.

"It's been four years now that I'm full of terrible anxiety. My heart has no peace and I haven't been happy.

"What is the reason?"

"If I knew the reason I wouldn't have come to you."

"You definitely know the reason, for you determined the time to be four years."

"I don't know the reason."

"Go back to the beginning of the four years and try to remember the reason."

The young lady did not talk for a while and then said: "I remember something that occurred at that time. I had a fight with an old friend even though we loved each other dearly. I felt that it was my fault and I wanted to apologize but I hesitated. Finally, she left town."

The priest commented saying, "If you know the reason, the solution is easy."

She asked, "How? She left town!"

He said, "Write a letter of apology to her."

"After four years?"

"Why not? For your peace and hers so that God returns the joy of salvation to you."

"I can't do that."

"If you can't write a letter of apology, happiness shall not come back to your heart."

The lady was quiet for a while then went home struggling with her feelings. Everyday she postponed writing the letter to the following day.

A year passed and the priest was surprised to see the lady coming to see him at one of the meetings. She looked joyful all over.

"Do you remember me?"

"Yes, you are the lady I met a year ago."

"I came to thank you. God gave me back the joy of salvation for I followed your advice."

"Thank God, for He wants to fill us with His peace and heavenly joy. Did you write the letter?"

"I wrote it yesterday after struggling with it for a whole year. Finally I felt very bitter and knelt to pray. I implored God's grace to move me, to hold my hand and push me to write the letter. I felt a strange yearning for my friend so I wrote her a tearful letter apologizing. Then I went to put the letter in the mailbox at midnight. I couldn't wait till morning. To tell you the truth, the moment the letter went in the mailbox, the gates of heaven opened before my eyes. Heaven was back in my heart. I realized the meaning of David's words:

"Restore to me the joy of your salvation"

(Ps. 51.12).



May Your Grace fill me.

I fulfill Your commandment with humility.

*I am happy to obey Your Will.
Your commandment is a joy to my heart.
You restore heaven to my heart and open my eyes to see Your Glory.*

Short Story No. 428

A WOLF'S GIFT

In the beginning of the New Year, Michael noticed that his brother John was quiet for a long time. He asked him for the reason and John said, "I heard the story, 'A Wolf's Gift', and I was very moved. I'm thinking about what to give my Lord Jesus Christ on His blessed birthday."

Michael asked him, "What do you mean?"

John said, "I'll tell you the story. In the middle of a dark night and nature's silence, a group of birds woke to a bright light shining in heaven. A gathering of angels came down announcing the birth of Jesus Christ to the shepherds. They were singing beautiful hymns.

The shepherds hurried to the manger to see the Amazing Baby, but the birds gathered right away wondering, "What to do? How can we share the joy of the angels? Shall we go to the Baby? What can we offer Him?"

The birds started to compose a beautiful symphony. They flew to the manger and went in a beautiful arrangement. They waited for the shepherds to come and knelt in front of the Baby and kissed Him joyfully. The sweet voices of the birds soared in an amazing arrangement. The Baby was smiling to show how happy He was with their singing. Saint Mary and Saint Joseph along with the shepherds watched the birds in amazement.

The cow, standing outside, came to the Baby and stood there to hear the birds. Happily she said, "What can I present to You O Amazing Child? I'll let Your Mother milk me so that You can drink my milk."

Soon after, a small lamb came in, went to the Baby saying, "I've nothing to give You, Small Baby. But I can huddle closer and closer to You in this very cold weather. Your blessed body will be warm by the touch of my fur. The lamb moved all around Jesus to warm Him while Jesus patted the lamb with his hands.

After a few minutes, a small donkey came in and walked over toward the Baby. He said, "I'll wait around for I'm sure that Your Mother will need to carry You and go somewhere. I can carry You and Your Mother and take You to anyplace. Not only here in Palestine but even to Egypt if You wish.

What a beautiful ambience that was. The birds presented their sweet gift of harmonious song and the cow gave her gift of daily milk. The little lamb provided the Baby with the warmth of its fur and the donkey kept himself at the disposal of the Baby.

Suddenly, a wolf walked in an unusually calm manner so not to disturb everybody with his howling. He went over to the Baby, with lowered head and sat at His Feet. In the beginning, the wolf scared everybody, but when they noticed the Baby's face they became calm and quiet.

The cow asked the wolf, "Why did you come here?" "I came here as you all came for this Wonderful Baby."

"What would you like to do?"

"I'd like to see the Baby and give Him a gift as you did."

"What do you have to offer? The birds gave their sweet singing, the donkey gave himself as a carrier, and I gave my milk to be drunk and you, what can you give? Aren't you the ferocious animal without mercy for man or animal?"

"Yes, I'm full of ferocity and brutality. Here's my ferocious heart I give as a gift at the feet of that Amazing Baby. I know that He accepts hearts as gifts to change and transform them."

Then the wolf turned to the Baby Jesus and said, “Accept o Lord my evil heart. I’m brutal, ferocious and cunning. But only You can tolerate it. Accept it for it’s my gift to You on your birthday.”

The Baby looked at the wolf and with a smile said, “I accepted your heart and I won’t blame you. Accept instead my heart so you’ll possess my simplicity, my love, my sweetness and my kindness.”

At that moment, they all realized that the wolf presented the most beautiful gift to His Lord.



*My wolfish heart is in Your Hands.
Accept it, o my Creator, for I corrupted it.
Give me Your Big Heart that is full of love.
So I can live with Your Heart, Your Thought and Your Spirit.
Let me live for You O Lover of Mankind.*

Short Story No. 429

I Won't Travel Without Having a Dwelling There

A few months ago, a young woman came to see me and she was in a violent rage. Her husband, who works in the United States, sent her a ticket to travel to him. She insisted on not going and when I asked why, she said that she would go only if her husband rented her an apartment.

I explained to her that renting an apartment in the State where her husband worked could be done in half an hour. It was different from what happened in large cities like Cairo and Alexandria.

The wife insisted on not going unless she gets her wish. After a lot of effort on behalf of the beloved Father Matthew Basil, she finally agreed to go. When she arrived there, she phoned her parents and told them that everything was better than she expected.

The same situation was repeated with a girl, engaged to a man in the United States. Her fiancé came to see me while I was there complaining of his fiancée. She wants him to rent a place and completely furnish it before she gets her entry visa to the United States. Doing that, he added, will cost him thousands of dollars with no benefit.

This is how, every fiancée and wife, cares that her fiancé or husband prepares for them a place to live. In some countries it takes months or maybe a year for that to happen and in some others it takes only a few days.

And I, as my soul is lifted to meet its Bridegroom, see that He is preparing a place for me, the bride. He has been saying for close to two thousand years:

**"I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you,
I will come again and receive you to myself; that where I am, there you may be also"**
(John 14.2-3).

He is assuring us that He is preparing glory for us since the beginning of the world. It is a house for a wedding prepared by the word of the Almighty God since the beginning of the world till now.



*You promised me a house of matrimony,
So that I live with You an eternal wedding.
You have started to prepare it since the beginning of the world.
I wonder what You have prepared for me O the Desire of my heart!
Carry me to Your Father's Bosom
Where I shall settle forever.*

Short Story No. 430 (3)

The Dilemma of the Worms of the Pool

On a night, the moon shined its light on a pool. A group of worms, living in the mud of the pool, gathered to discuss the life they lead in that pool.

“Do you think that there exists something else in the world other than this pool? It is so huge that no one can reach its end even if one crawls in it all one’s life.”

“Yes, can’t you see, wise worm, moonlight at night and sunshine during the day?”

“I can’t deny the presence of the sun and the moon. I think that there’s nothing but them and the pool on earth.”

A big worm laughed and said, “you’re a worm with such a limited mind. Isn’t there a frog that comes down to us in the mud then leaves us at night? There must be another world beside this pool.”

“Let’s ask the frog for he might offer us his experience.”

The worms walked toward the frog and said to him, “Hello big frog!”

“Hello!”

“Every night we see you leave our world. Is there another world outside the Pool?”

The frog laughed haughtily and said, “There’s a very big world outside the pool.”

“Can you describe it to us?”

“I go nearby to a field full of fruit trees. There’s also a very big house close to the garden wall where the farmer lives. In the garden, there’re red apples, yellow apples, yellow oranges and red and violet flowers. In the morning, I see birds with wings flying in the air.”

The poor worms could not understand the meaning of dry land, garden, fruits and colors. Some believed what the frog said and asked him to explain in more detail what he sees. The other worms mocked at the frog saying that he was mocking at them.

In the morning, one of the worms wanted so much to see the strange world that existed outside the mud they lived in. He found the branch of a small plant and climbed it to see what was outside the mud. Nevertheless, He was hit hard by the Sun heat and was almost completely dried up. He started shivering very hard and had no choice but to jump from the top of the branch and fall in the mud in order to live.

That story reminds us of what the psalmist said:

“I am a worm.”

I live in this material world like being in the mud of a Pool. When will my nature change so I can rush from the mud to heaven? There I shall see what eye has not seen, hear what ear has not heard, and realize what have not entered into the heart of man.



You created me, my Lord, of Your breath.

You do not dwell in the mud of this world.

Notwithstanding, You are the Life of that world.

Renew my nature so that I can soar to Your heavens.

I would like to leave the dust of this world and the mud of this pool

To live with You forever.

*Give my body incorruption instead of its corruption,
And immortality instead of mortality.
Let me don Your likeness O the New Adam.
My body shall then become spiritual,
Able to practice the heavenly life.*



(3) Coniaris, Anthony. *Talks for Orthodox Funerals*. No.21

Short Story No. 431

Young Pephnoti's Tears

The little boy came home. His mother noticed that he was not happy and joyous as usual but sad and very troubled. He did not run to kiss her, as usual, but hurried to his room. The mother was very shaken and looked inside her son's room from the window to see him standing toward the east in front of the icon of the Cross. Tears fell from his eyes then he knelt down and started to cry. He was trying to cover the sound of his sobs so no one can hear him.

His mother waited for him to finish his prayer and wipe his eyes to get ready to leave his room. She went in and took her son in her arms and said, "Dear Pephnoti, what is wrong? Tell me why are you sad? Don't hide anything from me."

He only answered by saying, "Mom, pray for our neighbors and me."

"What has happened?"

"Nothing."

"Why do you hide the matter from me when you aren't used to this?"

"Forgive me but I don't want to judge our neighbors. Just pray for them and for me."

"Tell me what happened and I promise not to mention it before anybody."

"The neighbors' children climbed another neighbor's wall and picked his figs and ate them. They stole the figs and offered me some but I refused to take them. I was saddened because they were stealing. I tried to talk to them about honesty but they mocked at me and made fun of me."

"Are you crying because they mocked at you? We don't worry about people's praise or mockery."

"No Mom, I'm crying because they steal. I love them and I don't want them to sadden Jesus' heart."

His mother was deeply touched and tears filled her eyes as she hugged her son saying, "God won't forget your tears and prayers."

Years passed and Pephnoti (Pafnotius) became a disciple of Saint Makarius the great. His tears never stopped falling from his eyes. Once, one of the fathers insisted on finding out the reason behind his tears and Saint Pephnotius had to reveal it. He said, "I'm grieving over myself. My neighbors' children were climbing another neighbor's wall to steal his figs and I tried to stop them. One day, one of the figs fell while they were walking. I picked it up, cleaned it and ate it. Since then, every time I remember the incident, my tears flow for I saddened my Savior's heart."



Let me be honest over the few as over the many.
Let me possess You O the Heavenly Bread,
So I would not ask for the temporary food.
Let me possess Your honesty
So that sin could not creep into my depth.
Wash me, purify me and make me holy.

Short Story No. 432 (4)

A Farmer Becoming a Minister

In the eighteenth century, an English farmer wanted to experiment in his field to produce better crops. He was a serious person and he exerted a lot of effort in his first experiment but he completely failed to achieve his goal. Undeclared, the farmer tried a new experiment, which also failed. The same thing was repeated and again he failed. However, every time he did not give up.

He finally sat down to think about what to do. He failed in all his agricultural experiments but he never felt weak or defeated. He began to examine the reasons behind his failure and recorded his thoughts about the matter so that others can benefit from his bitter and costly experiences.

For the love he had for his country and his fellowmen, he published these notes in a book titled, "How to Farm. The book was very popular and many people benefited from it. Moreover, the farmer amassed a fortune from it. He was later elected a minister in the government.

That is how a person with a strong heart transforms all the bitter experiences into power for him and for all those who are around him. Therefore, Saint Paul says,

"For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind"
(2 Tim. 1.7).



*When my soul feels down deep inside of me,
Your Fiery Spirit, that of strength and not of failure, acts in me.
He transforms my failure into a spectacular success.
Out of the darkness of my heart comes the glory of the resurrection.
You open heaven's doors for me.
Defeat would not be able to capture my soul.
Instead, it soars while praising to the open heaven.*



(4) *Watany Newspaper*. 1 Mar. 1998.

Short Story No. 433

A Royal Funeral

In December 1962, the BBC radio station was broadcasting the funeral of former queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands. The announcer called it the white funeral for, all the members of the royal family wore white. Even the horse, pulling the carriage that had the queen's hearth, had white flags on it. That was the queen's request. The announcer was also astonished at the hymn that was played at the funeral:

“Today, the sun is shining in my soul.

More glorious and more brilliant than any earthly sky for, Jesus is the Light.

Radiance is truly realized, the blessed radiance.

For the moments full of peace and happiness are here.

Jesus shines on my soul with His joyous face.”

The queen heard that hymn a long time ago and was moved by it. She requested that it would be sung at her funeral.

That is how we await the time of our departure from this world as a holy gift. On that day we shall meet Jesus, who lit our way as we lived all the days of our life with him, face to face. His amazing Holy Light will shine on us.

SHORT STORY#434

A LADY WHO LOVES DEATH

In a grave in Hanover, Germany, lies a woman who was an atheist. She did not believe in God or the resurrection. She had a grave made of granite and marble. She made sure it was sealed and surrounded by iron bars and had the following phrase engraved on it:

“This tomb should never be opened”

The lady died and was buried. She expected that, even if the resurrection occurred, no power could open her grave and take out her body.

As rain fell on the grave, a plant seed grew between the rocks. It became a huge tree with its roots deep into the grave.

That is what happened with Caiaphas and the religious leaders. They thought that the seal of Pilate would make the grave of the Lord Jesus closed forever. They did not realize that inside that grave was the Giver of resurrection and the Conqueror of darkness.

SHORT STORY#435

The Decision of the Mice Conference

The cat was going all around the house and the garden looking for mice to eat. Actually he ate a lot of them so that the rest had to hide in their holes for a long time. The mice became hungry and did not dare to go out to eat. The cat celebrated his wedding and went with his bride for a honeymoon in the fields. This was a chance for the mice to go out of their holes to eat and to collect food for storage. Toward the end of the month, the mice organized a conference to discuss the situation from all sides.

After long discussions, one of the mice said, "I found a solution to the problem. The matter is very simple."

"Good, so what should we do?"

"We hang a bell on the neck of each cat. Every time one of them moves, we hear the bell and escape from them."

"That's a very good idea. You're an intelligent and wise mouse."

The conference ended with the decision to hang the bells at the cats' necks. Furthermore, a committee was selected to implement the decision. The committee met and they all wondered about whom would put those bells around the cats' necks. They realized that practically no one could do the job.



*Lord, let me be practical in my decisions.
Who, in all humanity, could hang a bell on the devil's neck?
Who else could save me from perishing except You, Savior of all?
The enemy is happy to kill me and thinks that I could not escape his grip.
But You are the Lion from the tribe of Judas.
You destroy Satan and his kingdom.
You carry me in Your hands.
You give wings to my soul.
Then I fly and live with You in heaven.*

SHORT STORY#436

A Lion in an Artist's Gallery

The lions found out that an artist is having a show of his animals and birds paintings at a gallery. One of them said, "For sure, the artist will have several pieces with lions on them. We're the kings of the jungle and we possess strength and capability. I'm going to the gallery to look at the artist's work."

The lion arrived at the gallery and began to look at the paintings. He came to one that a lot of people were gathered to look at. With difficulty, he walked through the crowds and stood before the painting. He was so surprised at the painting that had a huge lion with a man defeating it. The lion turned to the spectators and said, "I realize that you're happy to see the painting of a sole man defeating a huge lion. You feel that it means victory for all of you. The artist deceived you for he recorded what is in his imagination. He's free to paint whatever he wishes. The problem is that we don't have among us a lion to paint a lion defeating a group of men. I advice you not to be taken in by imagination but be real and practical."



Lord, give me the spirit of hard work.

Do not let me spend my time daydreaming.

With Your help I become victorious and defeat Satan.

He is the lion that walks about seeking whom he may devour.

With You I live, not in dreams, but in strength and victory.

SHORT STORY#437

A Donkey Mimicking Another Donkey

A donkey, carrying a sack full of salt, was walking by a river. Next to him was another donkey carrying a load of sponges. The first donkey could hardly walk for the sack of salt was very heavy. Even though the second donkey carried a big and seemingly heavy load of sponges, it was a light load.

The sponge carrier mocked the salt carrier for the latter was tired. The sponge carrier did not realize the weight of the salt and thought that the donkey was weak and sensitive. While he was busy thinking all that, the donkey carrying the salt fell in the river. The salt melted and the donkey came out strong and had nothing on his back.

The donkey with the sponges on his back was mad that his fellow donkey with the salt sack had nothing to carry. He pretended that he was coming near the edge of the river. He did fall in it and the sponges were filled with water and became heavy. He tried to remove the heavy load from his back and could not so he drowned.

Sadly the other donkey stood there crying for his friend who wanted to mimic him unthinkably and drowned.



*Lord, give me wisdom not to mimic somebody just as he looks like.
With wisdom I learn what is good from everybody.
First let me learn from You for, You are the Only One to renew my nature.
You give me success and carry me to Your heaven.*

SHORT STORY#438

A Mosquito Teaching the King of the Animals

In a conference of animals, a lion stood haughtily announcing that he was the king of the animals. He also said that he was the conqueror of all creatures: animals, birds, insects and even man. A mosquito passing by got mad at these statements and said to the lion, "The whole world knows that your body is strong and that you can defeat many. But I know that every creature has a unique capability that makes it different from others."

The lion replied, "Who are you, mosquito, to give me advice? You're too small to talk to me."

The mosquito said, "King of the beasts, be afraid and not arrogant."

The lion asked mockingly, "Whom should I fear?"

The mosquito replied, "Fear your arrogant heart lest you fall."

The lion said, "I'm not afraid for I'm a strong king."

The mosquito flew toward the lion and stung him on the nose then quickly flew away. The lion roared and began to rub his nose with his two front paws. Now and then the mosquito stung the lion in different places on his body. He became like a toy among the animals and his strength could not save him from the mosquito's stings.

As the mosquito taught the lion a lesson, she stood apart and mocked him in front of the animals. As she was moving left and right, up and down, doing nothing but mocking she was stuck to the light web of a spider. She began screaming to no avail until she lost all her energy and died of hunger and thirst. She became a meal for the spider.

That is how a lion belittled a mosquito and she made him lose his equilibrium, dignity and capability. The mosquito lost its life to a weak spider. That is why Solomon, who was very wise, warns us of the little foxes that destroy the vineyard.



Lord, with You I am strong.

"I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me."

You are my strength, my victory, my joy and my glory.

I do not fear sin, the world or the devil.

I fear the arrogance of my heart that makes me think that I am strong on my own.

Then I fall in the web of small sins and, by my ignorance, lose my eternity.

Lord, protect me from the little foxes.

STORIES FOR THE YOUTH

439-455

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*Youth Meeting
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*Edited By
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Dear,

Here is a collection of short stories: some of which are real; some are taken from the universal popular folklore; some are from the Jewish folklore while others are taken from famous books of allegorical stories like:

Cathy Books. *Animal Fairy Stories*.

La Fontaine. *Les Fables*.

Uncle Arthur's Bedtime Stories.

I have tried to give these symbolic stories a Christian spiritual touch.

Story No. 439

The Sick Lion And The Wise Fox

One day the Lion got sick and he couldn't get out of his den. He was dying of hunger. The king sent a messenger to the animals of the forest to meet together. The messenger told them that his majesty felt sorry for eating a lot of animals during his life. He told them also that the Lion decided, in his sickness, to hold a peace agreement with all of the animals, and that he did not need anything in return but to let one of them visits him every day and serves him.

All the animals went away happy because of this peace agreement; and some of the animals paid a visit to the king every one in his turn. When the turn of the Fox came, he carried some gifts to the king and went straight to the den. At the door, he stared at the sand and then he ran away.

So the animals asked him, "Where are you going?"
The wise Fox answered, "I looked at the sand and I found the trace of the animals' feet then I discovered that this den has become a tomb. I'm really grateful to the sand, which was a one-way passport; it indicated that animals went inside and never left."



*You have imprisoned the evil enemy as if in a den.
With Your Cross, You destroyed his ability.
May I benefit from the traces of other people's feet.
The enemy has devoured many and deprived them of life.
May I run and return to You.
You are my Shelter, the Victorious over all the powers of darkness.*

Story No. 440

A Bear Whistling in a Human Ear

While Michael and George were walking together on a long exhausting trip, a bear appeared to them suddenly. Michael climbed a tree and left his friend George alone with the bear. George couldn't do anything but lie down on the ground and pretend to be dead because bears don't eat dead bodies.

The Bear came and approached George's ear while he held his breath completely. When the bear thought that George was dead he left him.

Michael got down from the tree and said to his friend, "What was the bear saying to you?"

George said, "The bear advised me not to travel with somebody who can't help me and face danger with me."

Michael felt very embarrassed.



*In the hard times, everybody leaves me.
But You are the only one who stands with me.
You are my shield and refuge.
Though I walk through the den of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil; for You are with me.*

Story No. 441

Discourse between the Gout And The Spider

Nancy returned home to find her daughter Monica very angry for, she had learned that the results for being admitted to join university had been issued and she had not been accepted into the faculty of Pharmacy that she has been dreaming of. Nancy tried to calm her daughter down. After a lot of effort, she said to her, "We often desire what's not for our benefit, Let's pray and accept with joy what God has allowed for us."

"I've been dreaming of the faculty of Pharmacy since my childhood, and have worked enormously especially this year to attain my dream," Monica said.

"I know that you were faithful in your studies, for this reason we must accept with joy your admission into the faculty of dentistry."

"But I'm not comforted Mom."

"Why Monica, haven't you heard the dialogue between the Gout (disease of the kings) and the Spider?"

"No Mom, please tell me the story."

The Mother said, "the Gout met with the spider and they began to tell each other where they were heading. The Spider said, "I am going to the castles of the rich where the ceilings are so high that I can set my web of fine threads to catch insects and feed on them. No one will be able to reach me. Thus, I'll be like he who wrote a rent or ownership contract forever."

The gout said, "You go to the golden castles of the rich and famous for their high ceilings and you can weave your web and set a safe home. As for me, I'll go to the feet of a poor man who doesn't have any money for a doctor or cannot seek care. That way, I'll remain in his feet till the day he dies with no medicine to destroy me and take me away from my place."

The spider went to one of the castles of the rich and began to weave the web in a very high ceiling and thought that he inherited the place and that no one could approach him except the insects, which fall into the trap, die, and become his food.

After a few days, the whole ceiling was cleaned and the Spider lost all his hard work. However, he didn't give up but began to weave a new web thinking that this would only be repeated yearly. To his surprise, it was repeated every month. The Spider decided to leave the castle and relocate in the hut of a poor person who is not bothered by the webs of a spider and doesn't care for cleaning the ceiling.

As for the gout, he went to settle in the feet of a very poor farmer thinking that he would have no means to go to a Doctor and buy medicine for treatment. He soon noticed that the farmer didn't care about the disease but remained constantly moving, walking for many hours on his feet. Therefore, he decided to leave the feet of the farmer and to go to the feet of a king or any rich spoiled man who would not move once he felt the disease and the gout would find rest. The spider chose the castles of the rich and he didn't find rest but in the hut of a poor person; while, the gout chose the poor farmer's feet and he didn't find rest but in the feet of the rich, as they call it the disease of the kings.



My Lord, lead my life.

*May your Holy Spirit guide me,
And always lead me,
For I don't really know what is for my benefit.
But you are the loving capable Father and wise.
In You, I am comforted and my soul finds rest.
With You, I pass through this life according to Your will.
May Your will be done and not mine.*

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding" (Prov. 3.5).

Story No. 442

A Crow Desiring to Be an Eagle

While two crows were standing on the branch of a tree conversing, one of them stood gazing at a big eagle who fell on a lamb, held it between his claws, and flew with it up. The old sheep were terrified and the shepherds were gazing up towards the flying eagle motionless not knowing what to do.

The crow said in a loud voice, "What a heroic eagle! He shook the hearts of all the sheep and the shepherds! I'll also be a hero like him. I'll fall on a lamb and carry it up between my claws and fly with it up in the sky. I'll go now and fulfill the desire of my heart."

His friend commented, "What are you thinking of my friend? You're a crow not an eagle. Let the eagle be proud of being an eagle and let us be proud of our race as crows. The eagle doesn't imitate a crow and it isn't fit for a crow to imitate an eagle. Listen to my advice my dear friend. Don't do anything that's over your capabilities and don't imitate him who's stronger than you so as not to fail. Know your potentials before taking any action.

The crow didn't hearken to his friend but flew and circled around the sheep and chose for himself a lamb with thick, beautiful wool. The crow fell on the lamb with his claws trying to hold it and carry it up in the sky. Nevertheless, his claws stuck in the thick wool and he wasn't able to carry the lamb or to save his claws from the wool of the lamb.

The shepherd ran towards the sheep, caught the crow with ease and released his claws from the fur.

The shepherd put the crow in a small cage and offered it as a gift to his young son who started to play with him. The crow desired to escape but he failed and was mocked by all.



Grant me oh Lord not to think of myself more highly than I ought to think,
But to act soberly.
That I may acknowledge my capabilities,
And be proud of what my God has granted me.
Thus, I may live to be successful and thankful forever.

Story No. 443

Two Birds Lamenting Humanity

Two birds heard a loud cry from a third bird under the tree. The two birds looked down and found their friend captured in a trap so they wept bitterly. One said to the other, "I wonder why humans set traps for us!"

"They find satisfaction in eating us."

"What have we done to them, what violent creatures!"

"Yesterday I saw a young man pulling the feathers of a friend bird of ours. He tied a string around him and was playing with it all day. How cruel is the human being. Does man enjoy the misery of others? Does he desire their suffering?"

"Truly, what a poor creature he is. His heart has become crueler than any other creature."

"How come? I heard that man is a loving creature."

"Well, I've never seen a lion eating a lion or a group of wolves fighting with each other. But rarely do we see any two human beings living under the same roof and not fighting."

"You may think that because of our weakness they set traps for us. But what do you say about the millions of dollars spent by humans to make arms and fight one another?"
 "I'm truly saddened for half the humanity is providing arms for the other half."



My lord You have made me a king over all earthly creatures.
 You have asked me to have my brethren living in my depth with love,
 And live together as free kings.
 Violence has entered the depth of my soul.
 I have become in need to learn even from wild animals,
 For, they do not fight each other.
 Grant me the royal love.
 You came down to our earth to raise us up and to renew our cruel nature.
 May You enter my heart of stone,
 And transform my harsh life to a heaven full of love.

Story No. 444

The Deceitful Cat and the Mice

Proud of his experience, the black cat said to himself, “ Alexander the great overcame almost the whole world in ten years. The whole world fears his name, so what should I do? I’ll consecrate my whole time, effort and talents to kill mice and rid the whole world of them.”

The mice heard of it; they were terrified and remained in their burrows for a long time. One day a mouse peaked with his head from his burrow and saw something very strange. He saw the black cat lying down with his back against the wall, and his head hanging down and a ribbon around his head. The mouse called the rest of the troop and said, “Look the cruel black cat has died. He didn’t find any of us to eat. May be because of his violence, he hurt someone so the owner of the house punished him and hanged him. Let’s attend his funeral and make fun of that beast.

The mice came out of their burrows and headed towards the killed black cat. When they came very close, he fell on them caught one of them and played with it then ate it.

Days passed by and the mice remained hiding, so the cat thought of another trick to attack the mice. He wrapped himself in flour and became all white. He went and hid beside the trunk of a tree.

A mouse looked out of a small opening and when he saw the cat, he told him, “What a deceitful cat, You’re that black cat and even if you become a sack of flour we won’t trust you for, you are deceitful.”



The master of the kingdom of darkness often holds the image of an angel of light.

I will never trust a devil even if he appeared all-luminous.

His deception is fatal.

Let me my Savior to find my shelter in You.

You alone protect me from his violence and deceptions.

Story No. 445

The Rooster and the Fox

The rooster stood on the branch of a tree crowing with a sweet voice. A fox standing under the tree looked up and said, "How beautiful and wonderful a rooster you are!"

"Thank you."

"I admire your beautiful voice, do you mind crowing once more."

As the rooster crowed for the second time the fox asked him to repeat the act for the third and fourth time. Finally the fox said with a low and kind voice, "Why do we remain living in enmity? I admire your beauty and sweet voice. Why don't we live in friendship? Let us establish a covenant of reconciliation and you come down that I may kiss you the kiss of friendship and love."

The rooster said, "Why don't you come up since you want to reconcile?"

The fox said, "I'm not able to ascend. Come down for I desire to kiss you. Come down quickly for I've an important errand and I wish to declare my reconciliation with you before leaving the place."

The rooster said, "I don't mind. Just wait for a couple of minutes for, I see a dog approaching from far running towards us. I wish him to be present not only as a witness for our friendship but that he may rejoice with us. Perhaps he would also kiss you."

As the fox heard that a dog was quickly approaching, he left the place and fled saying, "Let's postpone our meeting to another day for, I'm very busy." Thus, the rooster was rescued from the fatal intentions of the Fox.



The devil appears as an Angel of light to deceive me.

He wants to kiss me with a spirit of deception.

He tempts me with the desires of the flesh and the world as if it were for my comfort.

He pushes me to laziness and sleep as if caring about my health.

With his deceitful love, he opens his mouth to devour me.

He leads me to hell where he dwells.

But the Lord, with all His angels, is fortress to me.

May I trust in the Lord that through His Light, He will destroy the darkness of the enemy.

May He grant me heavenly wisdom that will destroy the deceits of the enemy.

Story No. 446

A Donkey Wearing the Skin of a Lion

A donkey felt very depressed, as the animals had chosen the Lion as their king. At his roar, all the animals fled to their holes and the monkeys climbed the trees quickly in fear. The donkey said to himself, “Why should I remain a donkey forever and why don’t I become a Lion? I’ll live the life of kings and be feared by all the animals in the forest.”

The donkey wore the skin of a lion; he looked just like a lion. In great pride, he began to walk in the forest. All the animals fled from him thinking him a lion. He looked up to a tree and saw monkeys standing on the branches terrified from him. He started talking with the monkeys. The monkeys discovered his nature when he was talking to them and they began to mock at him. The lion heard the donkey’s voice. He came out of his den towards the donkey thinking him a fellow Lion.

The Lion looked right and left hoping to find the donkey but couldn’t find him. In pride the donkey desired to assure his greatness and started to talk with the Lion. As soon as the Lion discovered the truth, he devoured him.



*May I never have to wear a robe which isn't mine,
Or hide in deceitful appearances.
May you change my inner nature, that I may truly be a Lion
Not through wearing a skin but through a sincere heart.*

Story No. 447

The Lion and the Proud Donkey

A lion noticed that many of the animals like deer and wild pigs hide in caves and holes for fear of him. He thought of something that would make these animals come out so that he could devour them. The lion walked with a donkey that had a strong voice. The Lion hid between the branches of the trees and ordered the donkey to shout suddenly. As the animals feared the donkey's voice, they came out of their hidden places. The lion attacked some of them and devoured them.

This was repeated as the lion went around from place to place with the donkey. Proudly, the donkey said to the lion, "amn't I successful in my service to you?"

The lion answered sarcastically, "Absolutely, you're a successful donkey. Without you, I wouldn't be able to catch these animals. If I didn't know your qualities and those of your race, I also would be scared of your voice."

The donkey felt the mockery of the lion and his sarcasm. He was angry yet he couldn't retire from the lion's service lest he devour him.

So also every one who praises himself can deceive whoever doesn't know him. However, he will surely be mocked at by him who knows his nature.



Grant me my Lord a humble spirit.

Let me feel every success is due to the blessing of your grace.

You alone know my weakness.

You alone encourage me and never mock me,

For, I am your son.

Short Story No. 448

The Fox and the Gluttonous Wolf

Sophia noticed that her young son was eating gluttonously, and that his entire mind was absorbed by the thought of food whether indoors or outdoors. In a quiet meeting, Sophia told her son the story of the fox and the wolf, a story taken from the Jewish folklore.

A fox noticed that a fat wolf was only concerned with his tummy, so he decided to teach him a lesson about gluttony. He met with him one day and found him busy eating. He saluted him once and twice but the wolf paid him no attention for he was eating heartily and with great speed. Finally, the fox said, "I see you my friend eating only few times, and with great effort you find your food. Nevertheless, the food doesn't even look delicious. While you can find delicious food with no effort at all."

The wolf looked up to the fox and said, "Tell me what to do."

The fox answered, "It's quite simple and easy. Listen to my advice and go to the backyard of a Jewish house on a Friday and help the owner to prepare for the Sabbath. If he sees you helping him he'll invite you to the Saturday feast and you'll eat what you wouldn't dream of."

The wolf was impressed by the fox's wise advice and headed on Friday morning towards a Jewish home. As he appeared in the backyard, the Jewish man and all his family came out with sticks. They started hitting him and with great effort he escaped from them.

Being furious, he went to tear the fox to pieces. As the fox saw him coming in anger, he said seriously, "Why do you blame me dear wolf?"

The wolf answered, "you've exposed me to violent beating and I'd have died if I hadn't escaped from their hands!"

The fox said, "You're unwise and you shouldn't blame me but blame your father."

The wolf questioned, "My father! Why?"

The fox answered, "You went to the house of the same Jewish whom your late father went to and pretended to be helping him on a Friday morning but ate all that was in the house the same evening. Your father didn't even leave a single bone or a small piece of cheese for the owner. The man took his revenge from you because of your father's unwise actions."

The wolf was silent for a little while as one considering the matter. However, the fox broke the silence and said, "Come with me. I'll reward you. We'll go to a great feast."

The wolf forgot all his pain and went with the fox to eat the delicious promised meal. He walked with him until they reached a well. There were two buckets held by string to act like a seesaw. When one drops inside the well the other comes up.

The fox said to the wolf, "I'll go down first so that you can be reassured, and if you wish, follow me."

The fox jumped in the bucket and dropped in the well.

The wolf cried to the fox saying, "What are you doing in the bottom of the well?"

The fox answered, "I am busy with all the delicious food. Please don't disturb my meal with your words."

The wolf looked down the well and saw the moon reflected on the water of the well as a piece of cheese big and delicious. He did not think twice but threw himself in the other bucket. Immediately, the other bucket carrying the fox came up for he weighed much less and the wolf fell in the water.

The wolf was terrified for being trapped inside the well. He started crying to the fox standing at the side of the well, "Tell me what to do. People will surely come and kill me."

The fox answered mockingly, "this is the fruit of being concerned with your stomach. You've lost your mind and stability for your heart and mind have become slaves to your stomach."

The fox left the wolf in the well and fled.



"For if a man is unable to check the unnecessary desires of the appetite how will he be able to extinguish the fire of carnal lust? And if a man is not able to control passions, which are openly manifest and are but small, how will he be able with temperate discretion to fight against those which are secret, and excite him, when none are there to see? And therefore strength of mind is tested in separate impulses and in any sort of passion: and if it is overcome in the case of very small and manifest desires, how it will endure in those that are really great and powerful and hidden, each man's conscience must witness for himself" (St. John Cassian).

Story No. 449

The Wise Monkey

Sam noticed that his son is nosy and interferes in many people's lives. He told him carefully, "Love everyone but don't interfere in his or her business unless they ask of you and to a limit. This way you'll be loved, respected and you'll save yourself from many afflictions."

Sam told his son the story of the wise monkey:

A lion caught a certain disease, which rendered him very weak, and a nasty smell came out of his mouth. He could hardly walk in the desert to find a prey. When he saw a donkey, he asked him, "Dear donkey, I feel very tired and wish to ask you, does my breath smell bad?"

The stupid donkey answered, "Yes it is unbearable," thinking he ought to say the truth no matter what the price is. At this moment, the lion roared and attacked the donkey while saying, "How do you dare ignorant animal to disrespect the king of lions?" Then, he devoured him.

Two days later, the lion passed by a bear that had heard what had happened with the donkey. As soon as the lion asked him, he feared the lion and said, "My lord king of the forest, and master of all the animals, I am smelling from your mouth a sweet aroma I have never smelled before," Thinking that he answered wisely. The lion roared and said, "O deceitful bear, you're a hypocrite. How do you say this when I can smell the terrible smell coming out of my mouth? How do you dare to deceive the king of the forest?" He attacked and ate him also.

A few days later, the lion passed by a monkey. As he saw him the monkey fled and climbed a tree. Since the lion was hungry, he begged him to come down and smell his breath. The monkey having heard what the lion had done with the donkey and the bear said to the lion, "My master the king of beasts, I wish I could serve you and fulfill your request, but I apologize for I am suffering from a flu and cannot smell anything at all because of my illness." The monkey was saved from the teeth of the lion only because he did not wish to venture into what does not concern him.



May I serve all people.

May I be a slave to all.

But grant me not to interfere in their lives,

Or be obsessed with what is of no concern to me.

Story No. 450

A Battle between a Cat and a Dog

A Fox passed by a cat and a dog who were ever fighting. Next to them was a big piece of cheese. The fox desired to eat the cheese. Calmly he asked them the reason for which they were fighting.

The cat said, "You be the judge between us dear fox. I stole a piece of cheese from my mistress the owner of the house, and came out to the wayside to enjoy it myself. When this greedy dog saw me he wanted to snatch it from me saying that it wasn't mine because I stole it and he has the right to take it from me!"

The dog interjected saying, "Do you not see, O just fox that this cat does not deserve this piece of cheese for he stole it and that I have the right to take it from him?"

The fox said, "Don't fight. You're brothers. I suggest to divide it between you evenly so that each one of you can have a piece."

The cat and the dog agreed with the fox's verdict and so he held the piece of cheese, cut it into two halves and gave a piece to the cat and the other to the dog. The dog looked at the piece of cheese in the paws of the cat and said to the fox, "Do you not see that the cat, although smaller than me in size, has received a bigger piece than me? This is not fair!"

The fox shook his head and said to the dog, "You're right."

The fox took the piece of cheese from the cat, ate part of it and returned it to the cat.

The Cat looked at the piece of cheese the dog was holding and said to the fox, "I am the one who brought it to begin with. My mistress could have hit me and yet his piece is bigger than mine!"

The fox again shook his head agreeing and ate a piece from the dog's cheese.

The dog again complained ... and so the fox started eating from this piece and that piece until he finished both of them completely and the cat and dog didn't even taste it and left disappointed.

"For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1 Tim. 6.8-10).

When covetousness creeps to the heart;

It destroys many virtues like humility, love, obedience and thanks giving.

Then, man becomes displeased with everything murmurs and groans over every work;

Man becomes harsh and selfish and loses his inner stability.

(St. John Cassian).

Story No. 451

The Young Mouse and his Grandfather's Advice

Grandpa was talking with his grandson John. He spoke about sin, especially the evil thoughts which offer a particular sweetness and sense of satisfaction but in fact there hides within them poison to those who accept them. The lips of sin are soft as butter; its mouth drips with honey but it raptures the soul.

John argued with his grandfather and was not convinced by the danger of sin and its animosity to the soul. His grandfather told him the story of a small mouse and his grandfather's advice.

A small mouse felt hungry, so he asked his grandfather permission to go out to find food. His grandfather said to him, "May safety accompany you my blessed grandson. Be careful of the enemy. If you see him leave everything and run to your burrow, that you may be saved from him."

The little mouse bowed his head announcing his obedience to his experienced grandfather. The mouse went to a room for rearing chicken, when he saw a big rooster opening his wings and crying in a loud voice he was terrified and returned quickly to his burrow.

"What have you seen my dear grandson?" His grandpa asked.

"I saw a great big creature with a red comb on its head. When it saw me it took a few steps backward and looked at me in bitterness and screamed."

The grandfather smiled and said, "Don't fear darling. This is a crowing cock. He can't harm you. He isn't our enemy."

The little mouse calmed down and his soul was comforted and went out again to look for food. Again, he returned in a state of hysteria. "What happened?" Grandpa asked.

"I saw a huge creature three times the size of the cock, black in color, with long yellow legs, a sharp beak and red eyes. It's for sure a dangerous enemy."

The grandfather said, "Don't fear my dear grandson. That was a black turkey who can't harm you. He isn't our enemy."

The mouse was surprised and asked, "Who's our enemy then?"

The old mouse answered seriously, "Our enemy is often a creature who appears to be quiet. He bows his head until it reaches the ground and closes his eyes as if asleep. His skin is soft fur, appears very beautiful. This is our dangerous enemy. If you see him from far flee immediately lest you fall into his hands, and then he will play with you and destroy you."

**"For the lips of an immoral woman drip honey,
And her mouth is smoother than oil;
But in the end she is bitter as wormwood sharp as a two-edged sword.
Her feet go down to death,
Her steps lay hold of hell.
Lest you ponder her path of life
Her ways are unsuitable;
You don't know them"
(Prov. 5.3-6).**

Story No. 452

The Foolish Man and the Wise Bird

A strange bird fell in the hands of a hunter. The bird spoke to the hunter, who in shock asked the bird, “do you speak our language?”

“I know many languages,” the bird answered, “and God has granted me wisdom, so do you want me to offer you three wise sayings which will help you throughout your life?”

“Yes, I’d appreciate your wisdom very much.”

“I’ll offer you these after you promise to let me free.”

“I promise and will fulfill my promise.”

“Here are the three sayings, if you keep them you will succeed and will be saved from every disaster in your life.

The first is, never regret a good deed you have done.

The second is, don’t believe he who is not trustworthy.

The third is, don’t ask to receive what is impossible.

The man let the bird free as he had promised. The bird opened its wings joyfully and flew away. He stood on top of a tree and called the hunter saying, “O foolish hunter how did you let me go? You’ve just lost the greatest treasure in the world. I carry inside me a precious priceless stone. It carries a magical power through which I obtained the wisdom I possess.”

The hunter was furious for losing that precious gem and determined to catch the bird and kill it to possess that precious stone. The hunter started to climb the tree with great difficulty until he reached about halfway. Then, he fell and broke his bone and began to scream in pain.

At that time, the bird looked at him and in derision said to him, “What a foolish hunter you are! I offered you wisdom but you didn’t wish to learn anything at all.

First, I asked you never to regret a good deed you had done; and here you have regretted letting me free.

Second, I asked you not to believe him who is not trustworthy. However, you believed a bird mocking at you and pretending to carry a magical stone, the matter that no mind can accept.

Not even the third saying of wisdom have you fulfilled, that is never to ask to receive what is impossible. You climbed a tree to catch a free flying bird standing on top of a tree! You haven’t benefited from the words of wisdom. I’m sad because of your foolishness. Many human beings are truly foolish!”

“Don’t correct a scoffer, lest he hate you. Rebuke a wise man, and he will love you” (Prov. 9.8).

Story No. 453

The Head and the Tail

The tail of a serpent revolted furiously against its head saying, “Why do you, the head, hold the center for leadership and I always have to follow you? I know that for a horse a tail’s place is always in the back because of the size difference between its head and tail. On the contrary, I’m a very long tail while you’re a very small head. I’ll take over the leadership and you’ll follow me.”

The head was silent for a while then said, “You may take over the position of leadership for, what do I benefit from this position? It’ll lift away from me the burdens of responsibility, and I’ll be at rest.”

Indeed the head left for the tail its leadership role. The tail started moving in pride, as it became the leader. Since it carried no eyes it fell in a pond full of thorny herbs, and the tail as well as the head felt the deep wounds.

The poor serpent asked, “I wonder if the tail or the head is responsible for this disaster!”

They were both mistaken for they both complained and refused to remain in their positions. The head ought to remain a leader and the tail a follower. This way they can work harmoniously.

“For in fact the body is not one member but many. If the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,’ is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say ‘Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,’ is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing where would be the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased” (1 Cor. 12.14-18).

Story No. 454

The Pig, the Colt and the Ass

The ass noticed that the colt was sad and brokenhearted so she asked him about the reason behind his sadness. “How could I be happy when the owner of the house is unjust?” He asked.

“Why do you say this, son?”

“You and I work hard all day: we carry loads and the owner rides on our backs. Sometimes his wife, children or the workers do that too. He offers us very little food while the pig doesn’t work at all, and the owner offers him a lot of food.”

“Don’t be quick my son in your judgment. Wait until tomorrow.”

The next day, while the master of the house was celebrating the feast of the god Jupiter, he made a great dinner. The butcher went into the barn, held the pig and in a few minutes, the pig was sacrificed and the blood was dripping from his neck.

The colt cried, “How brutal mother?”

The ass answered, “For this hour the master of the house was offering the pig much food, that it may be fattened and so that he may slaughter it and eat it with his family and friends.”

The colt was terrified and stopped eating, but the mother said, “No my son, we shouldn’t eat a lot but we also shouldn’t stop eating lest we fall ill and die. We need to eat to survive and work without laziness.”

The colt started to eat and work joyfully.



*Thank You my God,
For You did not create us to eat,
But offered us food to live and work.
Blessed are You who created us in this life.
We praise you for giving us our daily bread,
And thank you for allowing us to work.*

Story No. 455

A Young Girl Confessing

In New Jersey, I visited a small family. After having a nice and joyful bible study, the couple asked to make confession. Followed by them was their elder son and to the surprise, they asked their young daughter who was about 5 years old to confess. The girl refused and started to cry bitterly. I hugged her and started to ask her, "Do you know what confession is?"

"No."

"Do you love Jesus?"

"Yes, I do so much."

"So, that is confession; that we say we love our Father Jesus."

The girl ran to her mother full of joy and happiness telling her, "Mom, I confessed. Do you know Mom what is confession?"

"What is confession?"

"It's to say that we love our Father Jesus."

We sat all together and I started to explain to the American mother the meaning of confession, "Confession starts with God's great love to us, so we comprehend Christ's salvation to us. And as we understand His great love, we discover that He's the sin Forgiver and the righteousness Giver. His Holy Spirit then lightens our weaknesses and sins, so we do not become dispirited or pessimistic. Rather we take refuge in the cross and we enjoy God's love to us." Confession is as St. Augustine says: "We confess thankfully to God, our sin forgiver and our Glory Giver and we confess our sins and weaknesses."



God I confess that You are a Wonderworker in my life.

I thank You for a blessing you offered me.

I confess that I am a sinner and weak.

But with You, I get righteous, stronger and I grow.

In confession, I offer You only a true repentance.

I fear neither sin nor Satan with all his power,

For, You are the One who gives Victory and righteousness.

In confession, I don't get embarrassed before the Priest,

Since I don't see his hands on my head,

Rather, I see Your Holy Spirit who forgives me my sins and sanctifies my life.

STORIES FOR THE YOUTH

Together with
“The Fox Marring the Image of Marriage”

456-466

Prepared By
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Dear,

Here is a collection of short stories: some of which are real; some are taken from the universal popular folklore; some are from the Jewish folklore while others are taken from famous books of allegorical stories like:

Cathy Books. *Animal Fairy Stories*.

La Fontaine. *Les Fables*.

Uncle Arthur's Bedtime Stories.

I have tried to give these symbolic stories a Christian spiritual touch.

Story No. 456

The Happy Ant

Joy was a happy ant. Every day he would return home in a joyful mood. He would tell his friends, the other ants, about the Wonderful Creator who made this beautiful world. An atmosphere of joy would fill the place as they listened to him. One day, when he returned singing and praising the Lord, his friends asked him, “Joy, what makes you so happy today? Tell us what is making you even happier than usual?”

Joy said, “After I finished the work I was doing with you, I went for a walk on the rocks. As I stood to admire the beautiful blue sky, a dove flew by. She had lovely wings that looked like two great fans.

I said to her, “You’re so beautiful. The Creator has excelled and given you two lovely wings, and a sweet voice. By looking at you, I can clearly see the touches of the great Creator.”

While I spoke to her, a strong current swept me away into the water. The dove came to my help at once. She carried a small branch in her beak. I climbed up on it. Then she flew and carried me away from the water. She really saved me from death. I thanked her for her love, sweetness and gentleness.

After a while, I saw the dove asleep on a treetop. A young boy had spotted her, and was preparing a sling and stone to shoot at her. As soon as I realized what he was about to do, I hurried and stung his foot. This made him cry out and jump. So the dove was awakened and flew away. The boy could no longer catch her. I had saved her from the cruel boy. I thank God that He had allowed me to save the dove. Actually, I need her and she needs me.

I wish people would realize that, so that they would not despise one another.

The strong need the weak, just as much as the weak need the strong.

The old need the young, just as much as the young need the old.”



I need you, O Savior of the world.

I need every young child.

Grant me not to despise anyone.

Help me to overcome feelings of worthlessness.

May I realize that I am a member united with all my fellow men.

“And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it” (1 Cor. 12.26).

Story No. 457

The Frogs and the Fighting Bulls

The young frogs asked their mother, “Why are you sad, mother?”

“How can I not be sad? Don’t you see how these two bulls are fighting fiercely?”

“But what do we have to do with them, they belong to the community of bulls; while we have our own community. We are frogs and they are differently made: they have different bodies, different food and a different way of life. So why should we be concerned with them?”

“It’s wrong to say that for we’re part of one whole and integrated creation. It’s impossible to draw lines between creatures, for whatever happens in the world of the bulls affects even our world of frogs.”

“I can’t understand what you’re saying, mother. What is it that can happen even if all the bulls were to fight each other? We live in the mud of the brook far away from them.”

While the young frog argued with his mother, the stronger bull had charged into the other bull, pushing him away so he could draw over the young cow to his side and marry her. The bull that was hit felt exhausted, and to flee from the power of his stronger opponent, he unwittingly escaped into the mud of the brook. He kept running backwards and forwards and as he did so he stamped tens of frogs that died instantly. The mother and her young frogs had to escape and the young one was shouting out, “Now I understand what you meant, mother.”

Many think with the same narrow-minded logic of that young frog. They care for themselves only. They might open up their hearts but only for their fellow men. However, a wise person should not separate his world from the world of the heavens, or that of animals, or birds, or insects. He needs to have love and concern for all that surrounds him.



O Lord, you have created me to live in the world of mankind.

May my heart be obsessed with the heavenly world where they rejoice with me.

May I be kind to those in the world of animals, of birds, and even of plants.

Grant me a heart that is big enough to encompass tenderly the whole creation.



“Without love, you possess nothing of worth
Whereas if you have love, you lack nothing.
One who loves a brother or sister fulfills the law”
(St. Augustine).

Llewelyn, Robert. *The Joy of the Saints: Spiritual Readings throughout the Year*. Springfield: Illinois, 1998. 114.

Story No. 458

The Poor Crow and Words of Praise

A hungry fox suddenly smelt the odor of cheese. This sharpened his appetite and he wished to taste it. He looked around searching for the source of the smell. Then he spied a crow perched on a treetop and holding in his beak a piece of cheese. The crow had just picked it up from a farmer's basket. The farmer had been carrying the basket on his head and he was on his way to the market to sell his cheese.

Having stolen the cheese from the farmer's basket, the crow had perched himself on one of the branches but he hadn't started to eat the cheese yet. The fox ran to the foot of the tree while he thought of a way to get part of that delicious cheese. He realized that the crow stood on a branch high above him.

The sly fox said to the crow, "I'm so glad to see you, dear brother Crow. You've such a brilliant black color, who else has such a marvelous shining black plumage? Your yellow beak is like pure gold. Your claws shine as purified silver. I just heard one thing that saddens me, and that is that you've an awful voice, and that you fail to sing or chant. Is it possible that in spite of this beauty, you can't produce a beautiful song? I just can't believe what I've heard!"

Upon hearing these words, the crow opened his mouth and the piece of cheese fell out. The fox ran to pick it up

The crow then said, "O brother Fox, I will sing a song to show you that when I want I can sing. Listen to me and enjoy my song."

The fox could not wait and hastily said, "What a dumb Crow are you! You believe in words of praise! You really have an awful voice, and you look ugly. The best thing you have is the piece of cheese that you just dropped out of your beak. It's no longer yours for it's become mine."

The Crow learned a lesson he would never forget; and that is never to believe words of praise from anyone.



O Creator of the whole world, You do not ask for glory from your creatures.

O You who are glorified by the heavenly and earthly ones.

Grant me never to seek words of praise from any person

Nor to beg for sweetness from anyone.

You alone can grant me fellowship in heavenly glory.

You alone can quench my depths with Your sincere tenderness.

You are my glory and my honor.

You are my eternal crown.

Story No. 459

Two Frogs in a Fatty Milk Pot

Mark noticed that his daughter, Nancy, no longer studied or did any school homework. He asked for the reason of such behavior.

She said, "It's now ten days before the examinations, and I feel I can't succeed in any subject. So I have decided not to sit for them this year."

Mark commented on her words, "A Christian person never despairs. We should try our best and be honest in our efforts regardless of the results."

Nancy asked, "What's the use of making an effort when I know that I won't succeed?"

Mark answered, "My child, when we work, it's with a spirit of hope. Have you not heard the saying: 'The best thing to do when you fail is to beat fatty milk until it turns to butter?'"

His daughter asked, "And what does that mean, father?"

He answered, "Two frogs crept into a barn in one of the fields. They discovered a clay pot full of fatty milk. The two frogs began to sip out of the milk and they liked it so much that they lost their balance and fell into the pot. They kept trying to jump out but failed, as the sides were very high and slippery. They swam in the milk for a long time and still they couldn't find their way out.

The first frog felt disappointed and a sense of despair invaded him. He just sat in the milk and was completely frustrated.

The second frog didn't despair at any point. He began to beat the milk with his feet and with all his power. This made the milk turn into a lump of butter. Then, he stepped on top of it and easily jumped out of the pot. In this way, he escaped death."



You are the One Who extracted life from the grave.

You have not given us a spirit of failure.

On the contrary, You have blessed us with the spirit of power, victory, and success.

Through You we enjoy the spirit of hope.

Through You all weakness is transformed into strength.

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me

1.7). "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, and of love and of sound mind" (2 Tim.

Story No. 460

The Sly Fox and the Ram

A wise fox met his friend, the ram, and they walked together in a garden.

The fox noticed that the ram paid no attention when he spoke to him. He also found him solely interested in eating, drinking, and joking. So the fox decided to give the ram a severe lesson.

They both felt thirsty for they had walked for quite a while. So they looked for a stream. They eventually found nothing but a well. Both went in to drink and quench their thirst.

At that point, the ram tried to climb out but was unable to do so. He therefore asked the fox, "What shall we do? It looks like we will have to stay imprisoned in this place until the owner of the garden arrives."

The cunning fox smiled and answered, "Don't be anxious; there's a very simple solution."

The ram asked, "What shall we do?"

The fox answered, "Stand on your hind feet and lean on your front feet on the wall of the well. Stretch yourself up as high as you can. In this way I will be able to climb on your back, and up on your horns to get out. Then I will pull you out of that hole."

The ram was astonished at this idea, and said to the fox, "What a great thinker are you! Such ideas could never have crossed my mind. All that preoccupies me is food, drink, and the good time I can have."

The ram then put up his front feet against the walls of the well and lifted his long horns as high as he could. The fox quietly jumped onto the ram's back, and climbed out, leaving his friend behind in the well.

The ram shouted out, "You promised to pull me out of this hole. Save me."

The fox looked at him and said sarcastically, "What an ignorant ram are you! How can I pull you when I don't have any rope or the strength to pull you out? You are so dumb that you don't think before you act. You should have thought about the way you'd get out even before going into the well. Now I'll leave you at the mercy of your stupidity. Maybe you could depend on yourself and find a way out. I believe the well is the best place for you where you can have a good time, and eat and drink as much as you please."

The fox then abandoned the ram in this situation and ran away out of the garden. The ram was left to face his own stupidity.



*Grant me, O Lord, the spirit of wisdom,
So that I may not live to seek pleasure or satiation.
Grant me to study matters deeply before taking any action.*

*Who would save me from the den of my stupidity?
Save me, O Wisdom of the Lord.*

Grant me Yourself so that I can ascend through You and with You into Your heavens.

Story No. 461

The Game of the Indian and the White Man

One day Monica noticed that her two boys had been quarrelling and yelling at each other for quite a long while. This was an unusual thing so she hurried over to them. She could see how angry they were, so she asked, "What happened?"

Michael said, "Ask Mina, for he's wrong."

Mina said, "No, It's Michael who is in the wrong."

Each one insisted that his brother was the wrongdoer. Therefore Monica said, "I want to know what happened?"

Michael said, "We agreed on playing the game of 'The Indian and the White Man'. Mina gathered some feathers and made a headdress like that of the Indians. He held a bow and a plastic arrow. As for me, I held a gun. He was to play the role of the Indian who wants to kill the white man. I was to play the role of the white man who wants to kill the Indian man. We were each going around the house looking for each other to do the killing. When we saw one another from a distance, he shot his arrow and I shot a charge from my gun. I threw myself on the floor like one dead.

Mina came up to me and cheerfully said, "I have killed you, you are dead."

I lifted my head and said, "No, I'm not dead."

He replied, "Yes, you're dead."

The argument became hot as we differed as to whether I was dead or alive. Each one of us insists on his opinion."

Monica was silent for a moment, then tried to establish peace but failed. She then told Mina somewhat firmly to sit on the chair in the corner of the room and not say a single word. She ordered Michael to sit in a chair in the opposite corner and remain silent.

She left them for ten minutes. They were about to rebel for they were not used to remaining quiet for ten minutes.

Then Monica beckoned them to draw their chairs closer to her. She said she would tell them a short story, "Do you know why Pennsylvania was called by that name?"

They answered, "No."

"Well, it was named after a famous man called William Penn. He was a pious Christian. Every day he would hear stories about how the white men were killing the Indians who were the original natives of America. The Indians had also killed few white men. The Indians saw that America was their country, and they felt entitled to preserve their sovereignty. So they killed the white men in self-defense. In return, many white men treated the Indians violently. This made matters even worse.

Penn held a meeting with a group of friends and said, "We're wrong because we don't know how to win the Indians over. We should become their friends."

Some replied, "You speak from a distance having no experience. The Indians know nothing about coming to terms. All they know is bows and arrows. They hate all that is white."

Penn said, "I'll try on my own."

One of his friends asked, "Will you carry a gun with you?"

Penn answered, "Definitely not."

Many commented, "You're unwise, they'll surely kill you."

Penn replied, "I'll win them over with love."

Penn then went alone towards the region most populated with Indians. When they saw him, they pointed their bows in his direction. However, they noticed that he neither reacted nor got agitated. He wanted to talk with them. So they gathered around him, yet they acted with great caution. They held onto their bows and arrows and watched him carefully. They suspected him of having a cunning plan to get rid of them.

Penn said, "I've come to ask you if we could live together in peace. We can be like brothers filled with love towards one another. We could carry love rather than weapons. God has created us to be brothers and sisters. Let's have an honest intention and goodwill. Let's open up our hearts to one another, for we're one body and blood."

When he had spoken these words, he pulled a paper out of his pocket and read it to them. It asked them to establish a treaty of love and peace. Under that treaty, anyone who attacks his fellow man would be punished, whether Indian or white.

They all agreed to sign the treaty. They began to open up their doors to each other. Some of the white men came and settled peacefully in the region of the Indians. For forty years, no one got killed; while in other countries, many were being killed from both sides.

Now, this region that used to be known as Penn changed to be Pennsylvania.

Michael looked at his mother and said, "Then let me live in peace with that Indian."

Mina smiled and said, "I'll live in peace with that white man."

The two brothers kissed each other and shook hands. They then went on to play in a spirit of love. They went out into the garden after each had left his weapon in the garage.



*Grant me the weapon of love and not the weapons of this world.
May my heart open up and the doors of heaven open up before me.
May I love even those who oppose me
And yearn that peace may fill each one through You.
May I stretch out my arms to embrace every person with love
May I desire to die in order to give life to my brother.*

<p>"If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men" (Rom. 12.18).</p>

Story No. 462

The Narrow Canal

George watched his sister, Isis, for a while. He noticed that she was suffering from some kind of bitterness and depression. He asked her what the matter was. Right away, she complained of her cousin who unfairly spoke badly of her, and ruined her reputation.

Isis expected her brother to sympathize, understand her bitterness, and condemn their cousin. She expected that he would be ready to take her side and defend her.

However, he surprised her as he gently tried to calm her. He said, "I understand how bitter you feel, and I disapprove of anyone humiliating you. Nevertheless, let's be positive and show love to our cousin. Rather than reprimanding her, let's win her over to our side by showing our love for her. In this way, we'll save our time and hers."

Isis could not agree on George's proposal.

George then asked, "Have you heard the folkloric story of 'The Narrow Canal'?"

He then began to tell his sister this story:

A farmer kept walking through his scorched field. The earth had become so barren. He felt very bitter as the canal had dried up and there was no way of irrigating his field. All the plants he had sown were dead. He began to reproach the canal sadly, "You cruel canal, don't you know that my wife, children, and myself all live from the yield of our field? See how the fruit trees are about to die. I can't plant anything else. Refrain from your cruelty and bring me some water."

The canal answered, "You thoughtless farmer, I'm but a small canal, and there's nothing I can do to solve the problem. You should blame the river who is so frugal in the water he gives me."

The canal then turned to the river and started to reproach him strongly. He accused him of creating this problem between him and the farmer.

The river gently turned to God, and said, "O God, look at the canal and hear his moaning due to his dryness. Here I am unable to offer him any water since I've been deprived of the rain for quite some time. See how the fields are dry, and the trees are dying. See the poor farmer moaning as he and his family may die of hunger.

O God, You can grant us water from the clouds of Your love. You can fill me to overflow so that I could offer to the canal his needs."

Suddenly, the winds became stronger and clouds moved to cover the region. The rain poured down. The river did not find time to reproach the canal for his cruel words to him. He just filled him with water. The canal too had no time to reproach the farmer for his stern accusation, and just offered him water. As for the farmer, he began to work in his field.

It is clear that using reproach and cruel words is a sign of emptiness. When the gracious Lord fills our depth with the waters of love, we do not find the time to reproach our accusers. On the contrary, we are able to cover them with the love that enriches our inner man.



O Lord, I confess the emptiness of my heart.

I have come to realize this when I have been hard on others.

I hurt their feelings when I reproach them.

Time seems to have no value and I just waste it in reproach.

*Enrich me with the clouds of Your love.
May you fill my heart with the waters of your mercies.
Then, my heart will be filled with your blessings
And overflow onto others as I draw on Your riches.*

Story No. 463

A Wolf Slandering a Fox before the Lion

On one of the anniversary celebrations of the ordination of H.H. Pope Kyrillos [Cyril] VI, a newly ordained priest from Alexandria decided to travel to Cairo one day before the celebration. He met with His Holiness, as he wanted to congratulate him before any of his other fellow clergy. However, the wise Pope did not want anyone to seek to raise himself above his brethren. He met him cheerfully, and eventually the conversation took this turn:

“Have you come especially to congratulate me?”

“Yes, your holiness.”

“Why didn’t you bring your fellow brothers with you?”

“I’ll also come along with them.”

“Why do you distinguish yourself from them? Next time you should attend with them.”

The father Patriarch thus gave the priest a lesson. He wanted him to love his brothers and not to seek to be better than them. In this way there would be no chance of one person slandering his brother.

This incident reminds me of the story of the wolf who sought to slander his friend, the fox, before the lion.

The wolf heard that his friend the lion, king of the forest, was very sick. He also learned that all the animals had gone to look after him.

As the wolf wanted to show the lion how much he loved and cared for him, he went to the fox and said, “Haven’t you heard that the lion is sick? Let’s go together and care for him.”

The fox, however, knew that the wolf was not a sincere friend of the lion. He also knew that he was a hypocrite and just needed to win his favor. So he said to the wolf, “I don’t want to go.”

The wolf said, “How won’t you go when the lion is very sick?”

The fox answered angrily, “May you both die. I don’t care for any of you.”

The wolf went on his way to the lion. He entered into the den, and seeing how sick the lion was, he tenderly inquired about his health. Then, in the presence of all the other animals, the wolf said, “How is your highness today?”

The lion answered, “Bad! Everyday I seem to be getting worse.”

The wolf appeared greatly moved, and said, “We’re all at your service, O great king. Today, I passed by the fox and invited him to come with me to inquire about your health and offer our services. But the fox showed indifference and even said to me, “May the lion king die, for this matter is of no interest to me.”

The lion king was greatly angered by these words. His whole family was very upset too.

Now, all the lions decided to kill the fox.

Two days went by before the fox learned about this incident. He rushed to the king’s den. He ran so quickly that by the time he reached the place he was breathing heavily. In a voice that revealed great stress, he said, “Good morning to your Highness. How are you today? I’ve heard from the wolf that you were sick. Since then I’ve been running around trying to find doctors and asking them for a medicine that would cure you. I’ve not rested for two days and I’ve neither eaten nor slept. I couldn’t close my eyes until I could find a way to ensure your safety.”

The lion forgot all his anger. He warmly asked the fox, “Have you found a medicine?”

The fox answered, “Yes, I couldn’t come until I found a medicine that would definitely heal you. Your medicine is to wear a living wolf’s skin.”

The wolf got agitated and said, “My skin isn’t good for I’m eight years old and that is really old!”

The fox immediately said, “That is exactly what is required. The best hides are those that are eight years old.”

Before the wolf could say another word, the lions attacked him and skinned him. They then offered the skin to the sick king.

As the animals left, they said, “Truly, he who digs a pit for his brother ends up falling into it.”

The wolf had slandered the fox in order to have him devoured by the lions. Now, he had fallen and become a prey to them.



Grant me to love everyone that I may slander no one whatever the reason may be.

May I not dig a hole for others that I may not fall in it.

You are love itself.

Grant me Yourself, O Source of Love.



“Just as a flame cannot be prevented from rising towards the sky

So a loving man’s prayers cannot be stopped from rising towards heavens”

(St Isaac, the Syrian).

Liewelyn, Robert. *The Joy of the Saints, Spiritual Readings throughout the Year.*
Springfield: Illinois, 1989 (128).

Story No. 464

The Sparrow and the King of the Birds

A young man came to me complaining of being overcome by thoughts of lust.

He said, "I fast, pray, and read the Holy Bible. I repent and confess my sins. I've no evil friends. I don't read cheap or tempting magazines. I don't watch stumbling films. What else can I do?"

I answered, "You lack one thing. You need to discover the power that your Savior has granted you. Hold on to His promise that He will give you the power to tread on serpents and scorpions. Don't take lightly the potentials that the Savior offers to you. Don't fear Satan or any of his forces."

At that point I remembered the following story:

The eagle, who is considered the great king of the birds, gathered his parliament, which consisted of all kinds of birds. He proudly inquired, "Which one of you can display a stronger voice than mine?"

All the birds were silent, and no one could say a word.

He continued arrogantly, "Which one of you can fly above the clouds like me?"

All were silent. However, a sparrow took the eagle's words lightly, and said, "I can fly higher than you."

The eagle puffed his feathers and said sarcastically, "You!"

On the next day, all the birds came to watch the race between the eagle and the little sparrow. As soon as the eagle spread his wings, the sparrow jumped onto his back and disappeared among his feathers.

The eagle flew proudly and rose over the mountains. In the meanwhile, the sparrow kept holding onto the eagle's feathers and remained hiding on the eagle's back.

The eagle shouted out, "Where are you, you little sparrow?"

The sparrow answered, "I'm on top of you. I am higher than you!"

The eagle could not feel the little bird's presence, so he kept flying above the clouds and in vain searched all around for the sparrow. He proudly said, "Where are you, you bird?"

The sparrow answered confidently, "I am on top of you, O proud eagle!"

The eagle became angry. He flew ever so much harder that he became exhausted. Eventually, his strength failed, and he hit a rock and died. The sparrow was able to save himself as he flew away before the eagle hit the floor. In this way, the proud eagle was destroyed whereas the little sparrow had conquered and had stepped with his feet over the eagle who claimed to soar in the skies.



It is You who save the sparrow from the trap of the hunter.

The snare is broken, and we have escaped.

You raise up the humble;

You oppose the proud

I can do nothing, nothing at all.

Your grace grants me the spirit of victory.

The enemy cannot overcome Your grace that works in me.

You grant me the authority to stamp over Satan and all his forces.



“The haughty person is like a tree that is high yet bears no fruit. The envious is like fruit that has a beautiful appearance yet it is corrupt inwards”
(St Ephraim the Syrian).

Story No. 465

Two Kids Pleasing their Mother

On the 25th of November, the beginning of the fast of the Nativity, young Therese said to her sister Caroline, "After forty days we will celebrate Christmas."

"Do you mean the feast of the glorious Birth?"

"Yes, the word Christmas is a Coptic word formed of two parts: 'Chris' or 'Christo' meaning Christ, and 'Mas' meaning birth. This is similar to the word 'Raamses' meaning 'birth of Raa'."

"What are your projects for that feast?"

"I know that mother is having financial difficulties. So we could each save a little every day from our pocket money and put it in a piggy bank. When the feast day comes, we will not have to ask mother for presents. Each of us will buy a present for the other. This will allow us to get presents without burdening mother."

"That's a good idea."

"Before the end of December, Therese brought her piggy bank to Caroline at night. She closed the door of their room and opened her bank. She had fifteen dollars Caroline was very happy and told Therese that this would be enough to buy the Christmas present. She then opened her own piggy bank and counted out what she had saved. That came to seventeen dollars and a half. Caroline said, "Let us go shopping tomorrow and buy the gifts. What would you like to have, Therese?"

Therese was silent for a moment, then said, "I would like to make a suggestion."

"What?"

"I know that mother wishes to see her mother, our grandmother, at Christmas time. However, she doesn't have the money to buy the ticket. It would be great if we bought the ticket and sent it to grandma, and asked her to come over at Christmas time but without telling mother. This would be the happy surprise for her and for us."

"That's a wonderful idea."

The two children hurried to the train station and bought the ticket. They then wrote a tender letter in which they said the following:

"Dear Grandma, We send you the peace of the Lord

We long to see you. Your coming and spending the feast with us would give us great joy. Our Christmas gift to you is a train ticket from your grandchildren

We are waiting for you. Pray for us."

Therese and Caroline were very happy. Their mother noticed some kind of mysterious expression on their faces, so she asked, "I can see that you are not in your normal state. What is on your minds?"

They answered, "Nothing, mother. We're just glad to be with you and rejoice that Christmas is close at hand."

Every time there was a knock at the door, the girls would look out of the window to see if it was their grandmother. Finally, the grandmother did knock at the door, and the mother called out, "Therese, open the door".

Therese said, "Mother, I beg you to open the door yourself as I am very busy."

So the mother ran to open the door, expecting to find a neighbor in need for some help. But to her great surprise, she found her mother who had just come in from the train station. The mother was evidently overjoyed and greatly surprised. The grandmother then realized that her

daughter knew nothing about what her grandchildren had done. She went over to them and hugged them while they felt ever so delighted.

The grandmother said to them, "Thank you for this Christmas present. You've sent me the ticket so I could come over and spend Christmas time with you."

The mother said to the children in amazement, "Indeed, it's I who should thank you for you've given me my Christmas present which is bringing my mother over to celebrate with us."

As for the children, they chimed together, "We have to thank grandma for accepting the invitation and coming over. Her presence is the Christmas present for you, mother, as well as for us."

In this happy atmosphere the grandmother opened her luggage and gave each child a beautiful and expensive frock that she had knitted herself. It had taken six months to get them finished. Therese and Caroline looked at each other and said, "We've offered a simple idea of travel and the Lord has given us a gift which we never dreamed of. Truly, the giver is more blessed than the receiver."



*Grant me, O Lord the ability not to ask for things for myself,
But to ask for things that others need.
Grant me to give joy to others, and then to rejoice for their happiness.
Let me give without seeking to take.*

"It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20.35).

Story No. 466

The Fox Marring the Image of Marriage

I hesitated a great deal before writing this symbolic story that is drawn from the Jewish folklore. However, it was urgent to write it in order to reveal the role of evil friendships in damaging the sacredness of marriage.

It is not a comic story for it expresses the role of the world in distorting or marring the active and practical role of the wife.

The Plan of the Fox to Get Rid of the Tiger

In a conversation between a fox and his wife, the wife said, "I wonder how you can sleep feeling that we're all completely safe: the children, you and myself, when a tiger lives close by, and he has a wife and little ones. They will definitely devour us if they got hungry!"

"Don't be afraid, dear wife. I'm a personal friend of the tiger. Yet I don't trust him at all. I'm thinking of a way to get rid of him as well as of his wife and children."

"It seems you won't act until something happens to me and you lose me, or one of the children, or even get hurt yourself."

"I'll leave now to carry out my plan."

The fox then left the den and headed to meet the tiger, as was his habit. Having greeted him, the fox asked the tiger to join him for a walk. As they went along, the following conversation took place:

The fox said, "I notice that the place in which you and your family are living is a deserted place. In contrast, there is a place next to our place that is covered with beautiful flowers and grass. You could be happy there, and you'll also find a lot of animals that you could prey upon."

The tiger answered, "That's a good idea."

The fox said, "Go now and bring your wife and children and I'll show you that place."

The tiger replied, "I've to consult my wife for she's my life partner and the bride of my youth."

The fox, pretending to be very sad, said, "I'm surprised to see that a great and gifted tiger like you should consult your wife. You're so much feared by most of the animals as well as all mankind, yet you've to consult her! I believe that a wife's advice is always wicked and stupid. A wife's heart is like marble: it is soft and rigid. A wife's like a pest invading the house. If you wish, you could consult her, then do just the contrary to what she tells you."

The tiger returned to his den, and began talking about moving out of their place. His wife sensed that this was a decision her husband had taken as a result of the advice of the sly fox.

She therefore rejected and said, "There are two small animals that we need to fear due to their slyness. These are the fox and the snake."

The tiger was astonished at his wife's words. She then went on saying, "Haven't you heard how a fox once killed a lion?"

The tiger laughed and said, "Are you joking?"

The tiger's wife said, in a serious tone, "No, my dear husband, you don't know how sly foxes are. I'm serious."

The tiger asked, "Does a fox dare to appear before a lion in order to kill him?"

The wife answered, "Yes! I'll tell you the story of the fox who killed a lion:

The Fox who killed a lion

The lion had a dear friend whose company he enjoyed greatly. That friend was a sly fox. Once, the fox came to the lion moaning bitterly. Every now and then, he would hold his head between his two front paws and scream out, "What a terrible headache! Who can save me from this headache?"

The lion asked him, "What can I do to relieve your pain?"

The fox said, "Take this rope and tie all my four feet together!"

The lion asked, "Is this a medicine?"

"Yes, this is a unique medicine."

The lion took the rope and tied the fox. Immediately, the fox smiled and said, "The headache has gone. Thank you, dear lion."

A few days passed by. Then, once, the lion suffered from a headache. He went to his dear friend, the fox, and asked to be tied with a rope so that he would be cured of his headache. The fox actually tied him tightly. He then took hold of a huge rock and hit his head and smashed it.

The tiger's wife ended her story by saying, "Don't trust a fox, dear husband, for his kisses spell enmity, and his heart cannot hold sincere love."

The tiger listened to his wife but did not believe her. From time to time, however, the story of the fox who killed a lion would resound in his depths.

A few days later, the tiger met his friend the fox as usual. The fox said sarcastically, "You've surely listened to your wife. I know all about the advice women can give, especially that of wives. They're so stupid. I fear lest your fate be like that of the maker of silver."

The tiger asked, "What do you mean?"

The fox answered, "Haven't you heard about the maker of silver who was destroyed by his wife?"

"No."

The fox then told him this story:

The Silver Maker Destroyed by his Wife

A skilled silver maker lived in the city of Babylon. He made beautiful silver statues. Many Babylonians, however, stopped buying these statues in obedience to the king's order. One night, the silver maker's wife advised him to make a beautiful statue of the king's only daughter to earn a great reward.

The man obeyed his wife and made a truly beautiful statue. The wife then took it and presented it as a gift to the king's only child, the princess. The princess was so pleased that she gave the silver maker's wife some golden jewelry.

The wife returned home, full of joy. The husband, however, said, "What the princess has given you is not worth even half what the statue has cost me."

The wife answered, "Don't be rash. You'll definitely receive a great reward from the palace as everyone loves the princess."

That evening, when the king returned to his quarters, his only child, the princess, ran to him and said, "Dad, come and see!"

The father looked at the statue and asked angrily, who had made it. When she told him, the king ordered that the hands of the silver maker be cut off as he had disobeyed the king's orders and had made a statue.

As his hands were being amputated, the silver maker kept shouting out, “Husbands, listen to me, never obey your wives. This is the reward of those who follow their advice.”

As the tiger listened to this story he was all shaking with anger at his wife, as well at all wives in general. The fox, on the other hand, calmly said, “It seems that you’ve no real experience, O happy husband. Let me tell you the story of the woodcutter of Damascus.

The Woodcutter of Damascus and His Wife

A woodcutter had a wife who always sat and watched him as he cut wood. She noticed that he held the axe in his right hand while he was cutting. She expressed her amazement as she said to him, “I’m amazed that you cut wood by holding the axe in your right hand, and this is so unlike my late father. Even when you get tired, you don’t use your left hand. My father used to cut with the axe in his right hand; then, when he got tired, he would use his left hand. He used to produce twice as much as you do, even though he was not as healthy as you are.”

The husband commented and said, “This is the first time I hear about a woodcutter who holds the axe in his left hand to cut wood.”

The wife said, “I’m your loving wife. Listen to my advice, dear husband. Try and work in the same way as my father did.”

The man held the axe in his left hand and struck with all his strength, and the blow landed on the fingers of his right hand and cut them off. As he was angry, he lost control over himself and raised the axe and hit his wife’s head and so killed her. The woodcutter was arrested and sentenced to death by stoning and so the two of them died as a consequence of the wife’s advice.”

The tiger was greatly moved by this tale, but the fox had one more story to tell him, “I’ll tell you the story of the king and the honest wife.”

The King and the Honest Wife

A king met with his counselors to discuss some state matters. At the end of the meeting the king said, “I don’t trust any wife in the world.”

His counselors were surprised and said, “How can you say that, your majesty? Surely there are chaste, wise, pure, and honest wives.”

The king said, “Here is my kingdom stretched out before you. Search and find me a wife who has good and sincere advice.”

His counselors dispersed to look for that wife. They finally found a merchant’s wife. The man and his wife both loved each other deeply, and she had great beauty, purity, and wisdom.

The king’s counselors met with their king and informed him of what they found. So the king secretly summoned the husband and said to him, “I’ve heard about your honesty, I’ve also learned that you’re chaste, wise, and have a good reputation. I haven’t seen your equal anywhere in my kingdom. I’ve only one daughter, and I wish to give her to you in marriage so that you would inherit my kingdom with her.”

The man replied, “I’m married, and I love my wife.”

The king said angrily, “Kill her, then you’ll become king.”

The man retorted, “How can I kill someone who never wronged me? We’ve lived together for fifteen years, and we’ve eaten out of the same plate, and drunk out of the same glass. She has filled my heart and home with joy. My love for her increases everyday.”

The king said, “Kill her, and become king.”

The man left, deeply saddened. As soon as he reached home and saw his wife and their child, he said within himself, "My wife is more precious than the whole kingdom. Cursed be every king who conspires with a husband to kill his wife. This would lead a husband to grief and depression, while others may think this would bring joy."

Days went by, but the man never returned to the king. Then the king summoned him, and when he spoke with him and saw his insistence to continue loving his wife, he said, "I thought you were a man; but now I find you have a woman's heart!"

The king then secretly summoned the man's wife, and said to her, "I've heard about your wisdom and talents. I've also learned that there's no other woman like you in the whole world. I desire that you become my wife. Kill your husband and come and I will make you my queen."

The wife was so flattered with that proposal, and said to the king, "I don't know how to kill him."

The king handed her a sword and said to her, "Hide this sword. In the evening, offer your husband alcoholic drinks until he gets drunk and eventually falls asleep. Then strike his neck with this sword."

The wife took the sword and went home. She prepared a banquet for her husband and offered him drinks until he became drunk, then fell asleep. The wife seized the sword and struck his throat. But the sword got bent in her hand, for it was a mere toy and not made of metal.

At once, the husband woke up and asked, "What are you doing?"

She replied, "I got this toy, and when I found you sleeping I wanted to wake you up and talk with you. Why do you ignore me when I've spent all day preparing this banquet for you?"

The man apologized to his wife for falling asleep, and began talking with her while she playfully responded to him.

On the next day, she went to the king's palace and told him that the sword was nothing but a child's toy. She thought he had just mistakenly given her the wrong sword. She then asked him to give her a real one.

The king called all his counselors and asked the husband and wife to relate what had happened. When each had recounted the incident, the king commented, "Haven't I warned you never to trust a wife?"

The fox then said to the tiger, "Beware of your wife, For through her stupid advice, she will harm both you and your children."

The tiger was convinced by the idea. Yet he asked the fox, "How can I be harmed by my wife?"

The fox answered impatiently, "Have you heard the story of the roman wife who desecrated her husband's corpse?"

The fox then began to tell the tiger this story too:

The Roman Wife who Desecrated her Husband's Corpse

Furiously, a Roman king ordered the execution of a traitor. He also ordered that his body be left hung on a tree and not be buried. To make sure that friends or relatives would not steal the body, the king ordered one of his military captains to guard the body day and night.

At midnight, the captain heard some noise that seemed to come from a source close by. Out of curiosity, and to make sure no one was coming towards him, he left his post and went to find out. He came upon a woman standing in front of an open grave. There were many friends

and relatives around her. They were consoling her as she had lost her husband a couple of hours ago. The captain went forward and offered a few words of consolation and sympathy.

The same thing happened on the following night, and the captain spoke with the woman and then returned to his post. The same thing happened again on the third night.

The widow began to develop a sort of emotion towards the captain. So she returned at midnight to talk with him while he stood on watch over the hanging corpse. Suddenly they realized that the corpse had been stolen.

The captain was greatly agitated and did not know what to do. As for the widow, she calmly said, "Don't worry, let's carry the corpse of my husband and hang it on the tree."

The captain said, "How can I steal the corpse of a dead person? I fear the angel of death."

The widow retorted, "Don't fear, I'll pull the body out, and if the angel of death obstructs my way, I'll tell him that it belongs to my husband and that I'm entitled to do whatever pleases me."

She then went and brought the corpse. The captain however noted that the executed man was bald whereas the corpse was not. He was at a loss for that would expose the matter and the king would execute him too. The widow was not moved as she hastily pulled out all the hair from her late husband's head until it was completely bald.

A few days later, these two got married.

The Plan of the Fox Succeeding

As a result of all these stories, the tiger was greatly convinced by the fox's theory. He ran home and gruffly told his wife, "Get up, gather the children, and follow me to the valley that the fox told me about. There we'll be able to lead a good life. If you don't obey me, I'll kill you."

So the wife was obliged to gather her children and follow her husband. They entered the valley that was covered with flowers and the tiger praised the fox for bringing them to this comfortable place.

Seven days passed by, and then heavy rains began to fall. The rainfall swept down from the mountaintops and the valley turned into a deep lake. The tiger, his wife and children tried to climb out but in vain.

Seeing that he and his family were on the brink of death, the tiger wailed, "Woe unto me. I didn't listen to my wife's advice!"



*O Lord, when You dwell in the family,
Everyone behold You living in the other members,
The family would be transformed into a heaven.
With love and humbleness, each member listens to the others.*

*Transform our homes into holy churches,
And make our hearts springs of sincere love.
May You be transfigured in every home, Amen.*

STORIES FOR THE YOUTH

Together with
“Behind The Mountain”

467-480

Prepared By
FR. TADROS Y. MALATY

*Translated by
Salwa Tadros*

*Edited By
Irene S. Abd-El-Massih*

Dear,

Here is a collection of short stories: some of which are real; some are taken from the universal popular folklore; some are from the Jewish folklore while others are taken from famous books of allegorical stories like:

Cathy Books. *Animal Fairy Stories*.

La Fontaine. *Les Fables*.

Uncle Arthur's Bedtime Stories.

I have tried to give these symbolic stories a Christian spiritual touch.

Story No. 467

Tears of Love Capturing a Soul

Charles used to attend prayer meetings. He used to stand in a corner of the church. Without being noticed, he recorded words of prayer and the name of the person saying them. He used to compare the person's words with his behavior during the week. His life was spent in harsh criticism of every praying person.

Charles lacked inner peace; he didn't feel rest or joy. One day, he became very ill. Therefore, he called over the priest, asking for his prayers. The priest was administering the sacrament of unction of the sick with all his heart. Charles was wondering, even during his illness, if the priest was performing a routine act or praying for him with sincere love. He looked at the priest's eyes and saw a tear falling.

Charles could not resist that tear of love. He realized that there was somebody who truly loved him and desired not only to heal his body but also to save his soul. That hidden tear changed his life. No sooner had he been healed from his illness than he went looking for lost souls, bringing them back to Christ the Lord, the source of all love. His life was changed from caustic criticism to positive work of love.



*Lord, give me tears of love to capture souls in the nets of your love
And to lift a lot of hearts to Your Height.
Lord, give me tears of love to open hard hearts
And prepare the depths to meet You.*

Story No. 468

Daniel and the Parakeet

Daniel celebrated his twelfth birthday and his father gave him a beautiful parakeet. Daniel was very happy with the parakeet. He took care of it, fed it, played with it and was kind with it. Few days later, Daniel was arguing with his mother in a loud voice, and was screaming for no reason. He heard his friend the parakeet saying, "Danny, why are you screaming? Be calm and nice."

Daniel was quiet for a while to hear the parakeet repeating what it often said. He said to himself, "The parakeet is mimicking my father who often tells me to talk calmly and nicely and not to scream for no reason."

Daniel went to his room, and sat down to think quietly about the parakeet's words. Seeing him quiet, his mother asked him, "what are you thinking of?"

Daniel answered, "I'm thinking about what the parakeet keeps saying. How can I stop it from saying these words?"

His mother said, "Be calm and nice in your conversations, then your father will stop saying these words."

Daniel shook his head and apologized to his mother saying, "I didn't listen to you or to my fathers instructions but that parakeet taught me an unforgettable lesson."

His mother hugged him, kissed him and said, "We all learn lessons from everything even the little ant. Listen to what Solomon the wise says,

**"Go to the ant, you sluggard!
Consider her ways and be wise,
Which, having no captain,
Overseer or ruler,
Provides her supplies in the summer,
And gathers her food in the harvest.
How long will you slumber, O sluggard"
(Prov. 6.6-9)?**

Story No. 469

A Lady Getting the Permit to Build a Church

In May, 1999, I met a lady who came from the Valley area in California. She told me the following:

Our church in the Valley was involved in a big problem. The time for the hearing came, where neighbors get to approve the building of a Coptic Church on the land that was bought. Some Jews living in the area opposed the project. They argued that an Egyptian church would lower the value of the neighboring buildings, due to the crowds of people and cars that cause noise. Since they insisted on their opposition, the Copts went to court to discuss the matter. In court, the judge listened to both sides. After a long debate, she asked if a certain lady belonged to that Church and she was told that she did. The judge then said that she knew the lady well and that she was a university professor. She did a lot of social work in a building occupied by a Jewish majority. She took care of the aged in the building, devoting a lot of energy to their happiness. The judge then said, "A congregation that includes a lady like this one, who serves without discrimination between sects and religions, is a civilized congregation, broad hearted and open minded. It deserves to have a Church in this location."



*Lord, give me a heart that loves all mankind
Without expecting anything in return,
A heart that loves because it shares with You Your Nature O Lover of mankind.
With love, I meet You O the True Love.
With love, my soul is edified in You.
With love, my Church is edified.
With love, I lift the entire world to You.*

Story No. 470

Two Elderly Monks and a Brick

Two elderly monks were discussing God's amazing work as usual. When they finished talking one of them said to his brother, "We have been together for so many years, since we were young, and we were never angry with each other even for one minute."

"What do you mean? How can a person be angry with his brother? What would be the cause?"

"The first cause for anger is the attachment of a person to an earthly matter, even if it is a very trivial one."

"Do you think that this is the first cause?"

"Do you want to test that?"

"Let's try to fight each other."

One of them suggested that they would bring a brick and put it between them. One of them would say, "This is mine."

The other would reply, "No, it's mine."

This would cause them to fight. The brick was brought and the first monk said that it was his. The other monk replied that it was his. So the first monk agreed with the second one and told him that it was his and he should take it and go. The two monks could not fight after all.



*Lord, if You dwell in my heart, I will not be angry.
I do not need to own anything, for You are everything to me.
You will not make me want for anything.*

Story No. 471

The Blue Bird

Edward and William were two young boys from a very rich family and they were away from home. When mother's day drew near, they competed to get a valuable and attractive gift to their mother. They were in a dilemma as to what to get their mother who was rich and had everything. They looked for two gifts for their mother. Finally, Edward heard of a blue bird that was very beautiful and able to speak five languages.

Edward bought the bird, which cost him a few thousand dollars, and sent it to his mother with a card and some nice words to express his love and appreciation to his mother. He waited for his mother to call to tell him what she thought of his valuable and beautiful gift. He waited until noon on mother's day, then he called his mother who did not mention the gift. He was surprised so he asked if she received it, and she thanked him for the card and the nice words but not the bird. He then asked if she received the bird and she replied that she received it and it was very tasty.

Edward was shocked that his mother killed the bird that cost him several thousand dollars, when he expected her to teach him some of the bird's languages. He wanted her to have fun in talking to him. Nevertheless, she did not appreciate the value of the gift. That is what happens to us when God gives us invaluable gifts and talents. We use them not as God intended but to satisfy our lusts and bodily pleasures.



*God, You gave me love to emulate You, as You are Love itself.
In my stupidity I turned it into cheap lust.
You gave me anger to use against my evil,
Instead, I used it against my brethren, so I killed my inner peace.
You gave me fear to be scared of all corruption,
Instead, I used it for the destruction and the death of my soul.
Give me the spirit of wisdom and discrimination,
To know, with Your Holy Spirit, how to direct all Your gifts to me.*

Story No. 472

A Dialogue between Two Fetuses

Yvette was pregnant and expecting twins. After few months, the two fetuses engaged in a pleasant dialogue. The older fetus said, “Brother, don’t you feel that we are two happy creatures?

We live in a beautiful world carried by a loving and kind mother. She only cares about our health, safety and growth. We don’t work, make any effort or face any problems. Our mother presents us with her blood as a ready-made food for our nutrition. We don’t worry if we get hurt for, our mother goes to the doctor and pays for the check up and medicine while we rest. We don’t suffer from the heat of the sun or the cold at night. We’ve no need for a bed to sleep in for we’re comfortable in our mother’s womb. We don’t walk here or there. Instead, we play together wherever our mother goes.”

The younger fetus replied, “Brother, you’re right, but definitely we’ve to grow and be born to live in another world.”

The older one said, “Do you believe that? We’ll stay for some months in this world and we’ll stay here till the end.”

The younger one replied, “Let’s stay here so when the time of birth comes we won’t go into a strange world.”

When the moment of birth came, the two babies came out screaming for they did not want to leave the fetuses’ world. After a while, they opened their eyes and saw what they could not imagine. They realized that the cord had to be cut to allow them to live a new and better life.



*How long shall I want to live in the world of fetuses?
How long shall I live far from the new life?
May I struggle and enjoy the sweetness of continuous growth.
May I give up all that is childish,
And live in maturity.
Lord, give me the spirit of wisdom and knowledge,
To live happily in my struggle,
Waiting for a New World, a new heaven and a new earth.
May I enjoy what You promised me,*

**“ Eye has not seen,
Nor ear heard,
Nor have entered into the heart of man
The things which God has prepared for those who love Him”
(1 Cor. 2.9).**

Story No. 473

The Curious Monk

His Holiness Pope Shenouda III was meeting with the priests of North America in Boston in September 8, 1998. One of the priests asked him about his opinion about a priest who, because of curiosity, presses people who make confession to tell him their secrets and those of the ministry and Sunday school in his church. He behaves like a prosecutor, not realizing that being curious is a sin that he has to confess.

In answer His Holiness related the following true story:

There was a very simple monk who departed from this world. Once, he was praying for a person possessed by an evil spirit that was behaving as if it was powerless. The monk began to ask the spirit a lot of questions. For example, "How do you enter a person's body? Why do you do it? What is your power over humans?"

The spirit answered the questions then suddenly asked the monk, "Why do you use prayer to find out our secrets? I'm not answering you again."

The simple monk realized that he turned away from caring for the salvation of others and the spirit of service and prayers. Instead, he became curious even about the world of evil spirits. He has deviated from his duty and also realized that Satan might be deceiving in his answers. Instantly, he turned away from his wrong behavior and repented to God for his deviation.



*Help me God not to be curious about others.
What good is it to know all the secrets of others,
And not to know my own deep secrets?
Attract me to the secrets of Your love,
To see the open heavens with my heart,
So I do not desire to interfere in the life of others.*

Story No. 474

A Quarrel between an Eagle and a Sow

An eagle built her nest atop a large tree where she tended her young ones well. A sow had her home at the foot of the tree where she kept her young ones around it. A cat sat on one of the branches of the tree between them. The cat feared that, when she had her kittens, the eagle would take them and eat them. At the same time the sow might trample the kittens with her feet and kill them. In order to save her kittens, the cat decided to make enmity between them.

The cat climbed the tree to see the eagle hugging her young ones. The cat said:

“Hello dear eagle!”

“Hello beautiful cat!”

“I heard the voice of your babies and loved it. I came to tell you some secret information but promise not to tell anyone. It concerns the life of your young ones that I love dearly, and affects mine too.”

“I promise not to tell anybody about it.”

“Yesterday, I heard the sow talking to a friend. She was saying that, in your absence, she would dig around the roots of the tree. The tree will fall and your babies will die along with me. So what shall we do?”

The eagle was quiet for a while. Then she said to the cat, “Don’t worry, loyal cat, I won’t leave the tree. Thus, the sow won’t dig around the roots of the tree.”

The cat thanked the eagle and when night fell she crept to the sow and talked to her saying, “Hello dear pig!”

“Hello beautiful cat!”

“Every day I look down from the tree and admire your beautiful and wonderful little ones, but my soul is hurting inside.”

“Why?”

“Promise to tell nobody. It’s a special secret affecting your little ones and mine.”

“I promise.”

“I found out that the eagle is planning to take away your babies and eat them when you leave them in the morning. She is also going to do the same with mine when they are born.”

“Don’t fear, dear cat, I won’t leave this place to prevent the eagle from taking my babies. Thank you for your advice and caring.”

In the morning, the eagle never left the nest for fear of the sow. The sow also stayed to prevent the eagle from taking the babies. The cat sat between them watching them both. Since the eagle stayed in the nest, the sow believed the cat. Also the eagle, seeing that the sow remained the whole day, believed what the cat said. So many days passed and the eagle’s babies died from hunger and thirst. The same happened to the sow’s babies as well as the eagle, the sow and the cat. They all died because of their behavior that gives us a true lesson in the principle separate to dominate.



Give me the spirit of love not separation.

With love, my soul and the souls of many are satisfied,

*With separation I perish along with the others.
Let me love, for love is the heaven and life of my soul.*

Story No. 475

(True Story from the Synaxarium on 18 Babah)

The Three Thetas

Pope Theophilus, who was pope at the end of the fourth century, was looking now and then at the big piles of dirt outside his cell. He always wished to remove them and build a Church in the name of St John the Baptist. That was a dream of his teacher and predecessor Pope Athanasius the apostolic. That dream appeared to be impossible for lack of money, but the pope believed that nothing is impossible with faith in God's work. He prayed to God to give him wisdom, direction and good arrangement.

A widow coming from Rome with her two sons heard about the Pope's wish. She was wealthy so she gave of her money to the Pope to remove the piles of dirt and build the Church. The Pope started the work with great joy, realizing the amazing support of God's hand. He did not stop and think about how to build the Church, since the money was enough to remove the dirt.

The surprise was that the workers found a very big treasure dating from the time of Alexander the Great buried under the piles of dirt. They also found a stone on which thetas were engraved.

The workers ran to the Pope with news of their discovery. He looked at the stone and lifted his heart to God who is wonderful in his management of all the Church's needs even the financial one.

One of the priests from Alexandria inquired, "How do you explain the three thetas on the stone?"

"God's amazing hand confirms that all that happens is not by chance, as some people believe. God previously sets all our affairs for our benefit."

"Our father the Pope, what do you mean by that?"

"God wanted to confirm that this treasure was preserved for the country's service and for building its Churches."

"How was that done?"

"The letter theta is repeated thrice to confirm that the treasure is from god's providence to be announced in the time of the emperor Theodosius. The first letter theta is God: Theos; the second theta is for the emperor Theodosius; and the third is for my humble self Theophilus."

All the priests and believers were rejoiced in the work of God who plans all for the benefit of the people, even financially. Refusing to handle the treasure, the Pope sent to the emperor to inform him of the news. As he presented the treasure to the emperor, the latter gave of it generously to build a Church in the name of John the Baptist and seven more Churches and for caring for the needy and the poor.



*Oh God in heaven, You care about all the little things that affect my life.
You promised me to hold me in Your Hands,*

*To shelter me with Your Wings,
And to plan all my life.
I have no one but You to trust for You are the Leader of my life.
You are omnipotent, wise and full of compassion.*

Story No. 476

A Catholic Priest Seeing St. Mary in Egypt

When Virgin Mary appeared on the dome of her Church in Zeituun, Cairo, Egypt, on April 4, 1968, our beloved Father Pishoy Kamel was abroad. He told us that many people said that this event was a Russian trick since Egypt was pro Russian at that time. Others commented that it was an oriental sorcery.

Our Father Pishoy met with an Old Catholic millionaire who was busy trying to set the date of the arrival of the anti Christ. That millionaire heard of a lady who predicted the killing of Kennedy that did happen. She also predicted the appearance of the anti Christ in 1962. When he heard of the Virgin's apparition in Zeitun, he said to himself, "The anti Christ must have been born in 1962 and he is six years old in 1968."

The millionaire offered a Catholic priest a large sum of money to travel to Egypt and confirm the appearance of the anti Christ. The Catholic priest came to Egypt and followed in person the apparitions of Saint Mary. Instead of writing a book about the anti Christ, the priest wrote a book in English titled:

Our Lady the Virgin Mary Comes back to Egypt.

That is how God used that priest to be a living witness for Saint Mary's apparition in Egypt.



*God, You alone are good.
My Savior, Your goodness is unique and absolute.
With Your salvation You give us goodness
To share with You Your wonderful qualities.
With Your goodness You turn all matters to good
Even what appears to be painful or evil.*

Story No. 477

A Conference about Money in the Church

In the sixties, our beloved Father Pishoy Kamel took part in a conference about the attitude of the Church towards money. When the question was raised, the minister of a Swedish Church replied, “we’ve no problem for the Church instituted a bank in its name, which finances the Church.”

When it was Father Pishoy’s turn to answer, he said, “Our Church in Egypt exists on people’s donations collected in Church. It takes care of all the financial needs of the church, the Fathers and the Church employees.”

Many were surprised and one commented, “There’s an important point: what if there were fewer people in the congregation, it means that there will be less money. How can the Church fulfill its duties?”

Father Pishoy was sad because that comment goes against the teachings of Our Lord Jesus Christ. He sent his poor disciples and apostles to work without moneybag or knapsack and the Church added the newly saved daily. The believers threw their money at the disciples’ feet but the disciples refused to leave the word of God and serve tables.

Unfortunately, many Churches are preoccupied with gaining money more than gaining souls.



God let me serve You.

Put Your word in my mouth so I can testify to it instead of serving tables.

When will I see every soul attracted to You?

When will all enjoy Your salvation?

Story No. 478

A Sin that Hurts my Christ

A young man met with Father Pishoy Kamel in the beginning of his service as a priest. The young man was quiet, gentle, sweet and he seemed very pious. He sat down to confess bitter sins with tears flowing from his eyes. Father Pishoy was surprised wondering how this seemingly pious man fell victim to all these sins. Before the end of the meeting, the young man asked for a punishment for his sins and some spiritual exercises to help him stop sinning.

Father Pishoy was confused, "Was this young man hypocritical, being pious in Church and committing horrible sins outside the Church?"

One day he met with this young man so he inquired, "I see that you behave piously in Church while you confess painful sins. Is your behavior in Church different from your behavior outside the Church?"

The young man replied, "I share my apartment with a Christian colleague so we're members in the same body. All the sins committed by my colleague I confess. My sins as well as his sins hurt my Christ."



*Lord, give us collective repentance.
If one commits a sin we all commit it.
Give us the spirit of love and true unity.
Nothing is greater than these in Your eyes are.*

WHAT IS OUR BALANCE?

A hotel's bellboy brought a suitcase into the room of a clergyman. The clergyman was telling the bellboy about God's true and honest promises.

He asked the bellboy nicely, "How many pounds do you have?"

The bellboy replied, "Five Dollars."

The clergyman realized that the bellboy survived on tips for the rest of the month. He gave him two Dollars, then asked, "How many pounds do you have?"

The bellboy answered, "Seven."

The clergyman took away two pounds from the bellboy, then asked, "How many Dollars do you have?"

The bellboy said, "Five."

The clergyman reproached him, "How can you say that you have five Dollars when I gave you two for a tip? Do you think that I lie and take away two Dollars from you?"

The bellboy answered, "I've seven Dollars: five with me and two in your hand."

The clergyman then commented that this is the way with God's promises. He gives us a deposit and the remainder of his promises is in His hands. Our balance is not only what we received but also what God prepared for us.



*My balance is not only what You gave me,
But also what You have prepared for me.
You keep my balance honestly
So when shall I enjoy it?*



Wherefore was (Lord Jesus) called the Way?
That thou mightest understand that by Him we have access to the Father.
Wherefore was He called the Rock?
That thou mightest understand the secure and unshaken character of the faith.
Wherefore was He called the Foundation?
That thou mightest understand that He upholdeth all things.
Wherefore was He called the Root?
That thou mightest understand that in Him we have our power of growth.
Wherefore was He called the Shepherd?
Because He feeds us.
Wherefore was He called a sheep?
Because He was sacrificed for us and became a propitiatory offering.
Wherefore was He called the Life? Because He raised us up when we were dead.
Wherefore was He called the Light? Because He delivered us from darkness.

Why was He called an Arm? Because He is of one substance with the Father.
Why was He called the Word? Because He was begotten of the Father.
For as my word is the offspring of my spirit, even so was the Son begotten of the Father.
Wherefore is He called our raiment?
Because I was clothed with Him when I was baptized.
Why is He called a table? Because I feed upon Him when I partake of the mysteries.
Why is He called a house? Because I dwell in Him.
Why is He called an inmate of the house? Because we become His Temple.
Wherefore is He called the Head? Because I have been made a member of His.
Why is He called a Bridegroom? Because He hath taken me as His bride.
Wherefore is He called undefiled? Because He took me as a virgin.
Wherefore is He called Master? Because I am His bondmaid.

...

Therefore having heard these things, think not I pray you that they are corporeal;
But stretch thy thought further: for such things cannot be corporeal.
(Second Letter to Eutropius. St. John Chrysostom).

Story No. 480

Behind the Mountain

PREPARED BY
GEORGE TADROS KOREISA

At sunset

As the sun was setting, the monks came out, each from his cell wearing his black wear with the Kolonswa [head cover] and walking stick. All were hurrying to get away to enjoy a quiet moment in contemplation on God's wonders of nature and His love for them. In few minutes, almost all of them disappeared but for an old monk leaning on his walking stick and hardly able to move his feet. He lifted up his eyes to admire the sun in its most beautiful moment when it is near setting and sending its crimson rays that reflect on the sand and turn it into gold, and the quietness of the desert is everywhere.

The old monk talked to God, "What fatherly love that our Creator has. You gave us this sun to serve all humanity by illuminating the darkness of the world and giving life to earth."

He knelt with humility and reverence then stood up lifting his eyes and praying, "O Lord my Creator, the heavens declare Your glory; And the firmament shows Your handiwork.

Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth and their words to the end of the world. In them You have set a tabernacle for the sun, which is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoices like a strong man to run its race. Its rising is from one end of heaven, and its circuit is to the other end; and there is nothing hidden from its heat."

At this point the old monk became quiet. He was lost in his thoughts not knowing how to express himself. He scanned the desert and saw the monks spread like the stars that light up the sky. He heard entrancing hymns and joyful praises. He was moved for he saw all his children, who were more than a thousand monks, praying to their Creator. Then he thought, "Am I in the midst of earthly angels or heavenly humans? God, kindle all the hearts with your love."



While he was walking and moving little by little away from the monastery, he noticed strange ghosts hurrying to hide behind the mountain. He knew them well; they were members of a tribe that dwelled near the convent situated near the mountain of shehit [Scetis]. He wondered, "What were they thinking of and whom are they plotting against? I know them well and I know their leader. He's a hot-tempered and hard-hearted man. He's a professional criminal, a gang leader and a dangerous highwayman.

Disperse their counsel, O God, Who dispersed the counsel of Ahithophel. Remember o Lord his salvation and reveal Yourself to him and to those who haven't known You yet. And you, mountain of the Holy Lord, are you still sheltering highwaymen and thieves? Isn't what our holy father Saint Abu Makar [St. Makarius] did to you enough? He changed you with the grace of God into a holy circle of prayers, supplications and liturgies. He made you a second heaven and you're now called the mountain of Shehit, which means the measure of hearts."



The silence was interrupted by a beautiful voice coming from far away. It was the church bell of the convent followed by the bells of the monasteries coming to him through the air calling all to the prayer of the eleventh hour. To the beat of the bells the monk walked back to the monastery and closed the door.



Behind the high walls surrounding the convent, the nuns were trickling silently but fast into the church. First, kneeling before the altar, then getting the blessing of the compartment containing the saints' relics, then saluting the mother and the other nuns and finally each going to her place in the church.

The prayers of the eleventh hour were lifted up to heaven and the voice of the mother was gentle saying,

"The Lord is your shade at your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day or the moon by night. The Lord shall preserve you from all evil; he shall preserve your soul. The Lord shall preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth, and even forevermore. Alleluia."

Then each nun sang her Psalm, was blessed with heavenly grace and went back to her cell for private worship.

After making sure all the nuns were safe, the mother looked up to the castle church atop the convent and said, "Archangel Michael, protector of this convent, begin your work now."

Then she went to her cell and closed the door. By the soft light of a candle set before the icon of the Virgin Mary, the mother was pondering the matters of the convent, reviewing each nun's situation and spirituality and asking that each nun would grow more in grace. Once in a while she looked with love and compassion at the icon of the Virgin Mary asking for her intercession. Then she thanked God for his mercies and love in spite of the hardships they endured those days. She smiled recalling that some of the nuns distributed some of their earnings to the poor and needy. She said, "Thank You Beloved Jesus for You're the Only One Who takes care of our convent. We cede ourselves to You to do Your Will."



A miracle at the convent

As the night fell on the desert, a man was making his way to the convent. He was tall, wearing a monk's clothes, holding a long walking stick, leaning on it and dragging his feet across the sand and walking in a solemn and dignified manner. In a few moments, he used the stick to knock on the door of the convent. A soft voice asked, "Who are you sir?"

The man answered in a calm voice, "Inform the mother that the poor priest Daniel from Shehit is at the door."

The sister replied from inside, "A few moments please."

Then, he said, "But tell her to let me in to rest till tomorrow."

Joyfully, the sister ran to tell the mother that Abba Daniel, father of Shehit, was at the door requesting entrance to the convent.

The mother's joy was even greater and she ordered the bell of the convent to toll. All the nuns assembled and hurried to meet the man of God, namely, Abba Daniel.

The hymns were heard in the silence of the night giving an air of feast to the convent. Then the mother knelt solemnly before the saintly visitor while the nuns kissed his feet. Many of them longed to see Abba Daniel and the grace flowing from his eyes, giving a wonderful peace to the soul that eliminates worries and turn them into continuous joy.

As it was the habit of the convent to wash the visitors' feet, the nuns ran and brought water in a vessel and washed the priest's feet. Meanwhile, the mother was repeating her welcome to the visitor, asking for his prayers and blessings for her and for all the sisters for God to give them peace and calmness until the day on which they would meet Him. The mother also asked if it was possible for Abba Daniel to see one of the sisters and pray for her. Her name was Helena, she was blind since birth, and she came to the convent a few years back. Her life was peaceful and she spent it in the practice of the sacraments and in constant activities. She was loved by all and missed only the grace of eyesight to be able to read the scriptures. When Helena was brought to the priest, the mother asked if he could pray for her to be cured from her blindness. The priest replied, "Give her what is left of the water in the vessel."

Helena took the water, made the sign of the Cross in the name of Jesus and then prayed, "Through the prayer of Saint Abba Daniel, let it be your will God."

When she washed her eyes, she ran and fell at the man's feet kissing them and saying, "Father, father, I can see, truly I can see you. You are a man of God and a saint of the desert. How can I repay your prayers and love?"

In the middle of Helena's joy, the other nuns were singing and praising the Gracious and Merciful God. The mother shouted, "Blessed is the hour when you, Father Daniel, arrived and set foot in the convent. Blessed he who comes in the name of the Lord. Thank God who sent you to us tonight."

The man was not aware of what he was doing and the tears were pouring from his eyes. He tried to prevent the nuns from kissing his feet but they all vied to hold on to him and get his blessing. He fell into a coma and his life passed before his eyes. His tears poured like a fountain and when he was asked to give the prayer of thanksgiving and praise in the church he cried, "My daughters pray for me, I'm truly a sinner, go and praise the Lord. Leave me alone to weep over my sins."

As much as he was repeating these pleas, as much as the nuns were holding onto him not wanting to leave him. He insisted on remaining where he was and finally they left him. They went in the church and remained all night praying and praising the Lord. He remained at the door in a profusion of tears and a violent struggle.



Behind the mountain

At sunrise, all the sisters came out to say goodbye to the important guest. They waited until he disappeared behind the mountain. When he was there, he through himself on the sand in a frenzy of weeping and wailing. He trembled, he was very afraid and his weeping increased till his eyes were swollen.

Few hours later, he got up crying, "O miserable. If the blind see in the name of Abba Daniel, then how is the greatness of one who practices the work of God? Misery on me, how did I waist my life in sins and bad deeds? Who am I to wear Abba Daniel's clothes? And how did my sinful lips dare utter his name? "

He took off the clothes and said, “Blessed are you clothes, I’m not worthy to hold you in my hands. I’m a sinner, a thief and even a leader of criminals. O miserable, how did I make the Creator of heaven and earth angry? O sun that sees my sadness, tell your Creator that I’m not worthy to look at you.”

He took a handful of sand, kissed it, wetted it with his tears then he said, “Who am I to walk on this blessed sands that kissed the feet of the great Saint Abu Makar, the leader of this holy desert? Moses the black treaded these sands as a violent criminal then walked on them as the devout Saint Abba Moses the black. Creator of these sands, forgive me for I’m a sinner. How many times I have stolen, vandalized and even taken holy things while You’re Patient my Lord and my God? You could have destroyed and eliminated me, but You’re Long suffering and Your dearest wish is the salvation of sinners.”

He lifted his hands eastwards and prayed, “O Lord, You didn’t come to call the righteous, but sinners, so accept me in the name of all who labored for you and satisfied you from the beginning. Through the prayers of Abba Daniel, from now on I shan’t continue walking in the same way.”

He enveloped his body in Abba Daniel’s clothes, threw himself on the sand and went into a peaceful sleep after the long hours that passed since he went to the convent.



The partners

When that thief left his tribe to enter the convent as Abba Daniel, he was preparing the way for his partners to rob the convent at their leisure. They watched him from afar until he entered the convent and the door was closed behind him. They were all holding their swords and ready for the moment when they could go in the convent. They could not do that before because high castle walls that were impossible to climb surrounded the convent.

They waited as they watched the door to the convent. When nothing happened for hours, they started to worry then they became suspicious. After a while the suspicion turned into fear and terror. As daylight came, they lost hope in him and went back to their place. They were sad as they waited until noon for his return, but he didn’t come back.

They went to look for him in the desert till they came behind the mountain. They saw an incredible sight: their mighty leader thrown on the sand in a pitiful state. They ran to him then in wonder and amazement went into a discussion about what might have happened to put him in this state. One of them said mockingly, “Those virgins must have overpowered him.”

Another one said, “He must have wanted to become a monk and live there so they turned him away.”

A third one said, “Maybe one of the nuns made him a Christian.”

The man’s sad face smiled and said in a soft voice, “Truly the Spirit of God uttered in your mouth that I’ll become a monk and that because of a nun I’ll become a Christian.”

One of the partners said, “What happened to you? Maybe you found precious stones and you want to cheat us and keep them to yourself. Show us what you have.”

They searched him thoroughly and found him very sorry. His face was yellow, his eyes faded. His cruel nature was replaced by a calmness they were not familiar with.



He narrated the story of his entrance to the convent, the matter of the blind nun and what happened until the moment when they came to find him. Hearing the story, they were filled with fear and a terrible silence, and each of them began to think about himself and his life. Finally they decided to see this Saint in whose name the eyes of the nun were opened. So they immediately left to go to the place where Abba Daniel lived.



Abba Daniel

Before sunset, the men and their repentant leader met with Abba Daniel. He welcomed them and greeted them as if he knew them, then he turned to our weeping friend and said to him, “My son, why are you weeping? The Lord chose you as a vessel for his name.”

Then Abba Daniel smiled and inquired calmly, “How is the convent? And how is Helena?”

The weeping man was very afraid and fell at the Saint’s feet crying, “Father, forgive me for I’ve sinned.”

Then he proceeded to tell the story of what happened till the moment when he jokingly suggested that the blind nun wash her eyes in the vessel water. He said, “Through her faith and your prayers, Father, the miracle happened and God cured her.”

Then, Abba Daniel smiled and said, “I knew everything, since your entrance to the convent I was present in the spirit among you. And you, beloved, with faith you can move mountains. With faith you can capture the kingdom of heaven, and the door is open for you. The Lord Jesus invites you in with your beloved friends. All you have to do is repent with a strong will and true remorse.”

The repentant thief replied, “My Father, I promised God that I shan’t go back to my previous life; also I would like to become a monk.”

Therefore, Abba Daniel encouraged him and talked to him about God's love. They were interrupted by the beautiful sound of the bells of the monasteries calling all to the prayer of the eleventh hour. They all stood up and following the rhythm of the bells tolling, they walked toward the monastery where the door was open to let the Saintly Father in with the men who repented, eleventh hour and the bells tolled.

STORIES FOR THE YOUTH

Together with
“The Millions Destroyed”

481-493

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Dear,

Here is a collection of short stories: some of which are real; some are taken from the universal popular folklore; some are from the Jewish folklore while others are taken from famous books of allegorical stories like:

Cathy Books. *Animal Fairy Stories*.

La Fontaine. *Les Fables*.

Uncle Arthur's Bedtime Stories.

I have tried to give these symbolic stories a Christian spiritual touch.

Story No. 481

The lazy Hedgehog

As all mothers, mother Hedgehog was happy with all her children and because she loved them so much she took them on many picnics and also taught them how to protect themselves by shaping themselves into a ball of spines. However, one of the baby Hedgehogs was very lazy and he would usually slow down the path of the whole family when they were walking in the woods.

One day, while the whole family was strolling through the woods the mother saw a great wolf coming their way. She screamed at all her children to shape themselves into a ball to protect themselves. The lazy Hedgehog who was behind the group heard his mother but thought that the wolf was still far away, and out of laziness thought that he had more time to shape himself into a ball.

By that time the rest of the family had turned themselves into balls already, and the wolf could not approach them. Only the lazy Hedgehog had not yet turned himself into a ball even though he heard his mother's cries to him to hurry up. At that time, the wolf had sprinted to where he was and attacked him. When the mother came to check upon her children after the wolf had gone, she found out that only her lazy child was eaten. The grieving mother wept bitterly for her lost child.



*Lord, help me listen to your life giving voice,
Help me overcome the spirit of laziness and abstinence,
So that I would set forthwith in obedience in Your Divine way,
For away from it I have no safety or peace.*

Story No. 482

A visit from Outer space

On an encounter with outer space aliens, the aliens asked, "Is there anything outstanding that you have done?"

A man answered, "We built a space shuttle that we use to go to the moon."

The aliens answered, "So what, we have done that a long time before you have. What else have you done?"

Another man answered, "We invented the computer; a machine that is very small but has great capabilities upon which we depend greatly for development."

The aliens sarcastically replied, "We have beaten you to that too; you people are really far behind, what else?"

A man who was silent all along said, "The Word of God came between us as a man and made wonders beyond belief."

The aliens replied, "O man, you are definitely the dearest and most beloved of all God's creatures for it is a great deed that our God becomes human. What did you do when that happened?"

The man replied, "We crucified Him."



*O Lord You came down to lift me up,
You approach me, for I am Your pre-occupation,
And I crucify You every day with my sins.
Who else could change my spirit from ingratitude to appreciation?*

Story No. 483

In the Midst of Fire

It was suffocating stench smoke that awake Henry in the middle of the night. He grabbed his baby from his bed and woke up Danny, his elder son, and led him by the hand out of the house.

In the middle of the commotion the elder boy screamed, “my teddy bear is burning” and ran back into the house. The flames rose while Danny was getting his teddy bear and trapped him inside.

With smoke blinding his vision, all Danny could do was scream near the window, “Dad, Help me Please Dad Help.”

The father cried back, “Jump out of the window, do not worry, I will catch you.” Danny yelled back, “But I can’t see you Dad.”

The father cried very loudly, “But I can see you. Trust me, Jump!” Danny finally closed his eyes and jumped into his waiting father’s arms.



*Many a time You called to me;
Jump, for My arms are waiting for you.
Your eyes are upon me O Lord,
And Your hands are gentle with me.
Let me leap into your arms,
For You to carry me into Your fatherly bosom.*

Story No. 484

The Drums Language

George burst into his father's room complaining that his brother Mark was doing too much noise with the drum. The father apologized to George and called Mark and started talking to both of them about the language of the drums. He said, "The drum I bought you is not to make noise, rather if we learned how to use it professionally and in the right time it produces nice melodies and sounds. Do you know that the drum has a language that humans can understand?"

The boys were amazed and asked their father to explain it, he said, "Around a thousand years ago, the African troops used to use huge drums. They used to beat it in a certain way that it produces a sound which could be heard 20 miles far away and the beats on the drum are translated into words like the telegram. The one who hears it beats on his drum the same beats giving the same meaning and by that the news are spread all over the miles. When queen Victoria died and England informed West Africa, the news was announced by the drum beats and it was spread all over Africa before the governors of the world knew."



*The savage troops understand the drums language,
And respond to it.
While You Lord talk to us with the love language,
And for our stupidity we do not recognize Your calls.
You speak to us with the afflictions You bore in Your body.
You declared Your love with Your lashes.
You proclaimed Your care with Your wounds.
You call me with Your cross to have You,
And share with You the glory of Your resurrection.
Let my ears hear You,
My mind know you,
And my heart respond with love to Your love.*

Story No. 485

Undesirable Visit

Maggie saw the postman throwing a letter into the mailbox. She took it soon and gave it to her mother. Her mother read it and said, "It's from your aunt. She's coming next week with your cousin Anne-Marie."

"Why?"

"'Cause they love us and want to visit us."

"I don't want Anne-Marie's visit."

"Why?"

"Where will she sleep?"

"With you, in your room."

"No, no. I want no one to sleep with me. I don't want anyone to enter my room, touch my toys and sleep in my bed."

Mother was silent for a while then said, "You didn't experience love. I'm sure you'll love her when you meet her."

"No, I won't."

"Don't say so. You'll not be always happy without loving others. Don't judge what you didn't experience."

Then, mother was silent and left her daughter to think of what she heard.

Few days later, Aunt and Ann-Marie arrived. Mother received them cheerfully. She opened the door of her daughter's room and said, "Anne-Marie, this is your sister Maggie's room. She loves you and will enjoy being with you these days. You'll sleep by her in this large bed."

Maggie neither uttered a word nor showed any sign of welcoming her cousin.

"I'll allow you to lie in my bed but don't touch me." Maggie said at bedtime.

"I'm not fat and the bed is large."

"Don't touch any toy in the morning unless I allow you."

"Ok."

While Anne-Marie was smiling Maggie was frowning. Anne-Marie touched Maggie's shoulder saying, "How do you sleep without playing?"

"Didn't I say to you don't touch me?" Maggie screamed frowningly.

"Sorry, but I can't sleep without playing with my brother with pillows." Said Anne-Marie smilingly.

"How do you play with pillows?"

"Each one carries a pillow and hits the other with it. It's entertaining, let's try it."

Each one took her pillow and hit the other's face. Anne-Marie pretended to be defeated and threw herself on the ground. Maggie laughed loudly. The mothers heard them surprised and hurried to the room to see what was happening. The girls felt their mothers approaching so they pretended to be sleeping. They embraced each other and closed their eyes.

The mothers opened the door of the room and realized what happened yet, they pretended that they didn't and left. The girls rose and played for a long time. In the morning, Maggie asked Anne-Marie to do whatever she liked in the room. They loved each other and were inseparable. The

week passed and Anne-Marie had to travel. Thus, Maggie wept asking her to revisit saying, “I never felt so happy but during this week.”

Few days later, Maggie said to her mother, “I’ve known true happiness. I’d like to share all my possessions with others. Giving and love are the secret behind happiness.”



*Uproot the spirit of egoism from me in order to regard all people as brethren,
And share with them all what you gave me.
Thus, like your heart, mine would be kind.
O Lord, Bestow upon me true love,
To live happily all the days of my pilgrimage.*

Story No. 486

Seven Messengers

“I wish you to live blessed fifteen years in this world.” I said to an old man I met.

Surprisingly he answered, “fifteen years only! I believe I’ll live until Lord Jesus Christ comes above the clouds.”

It seems difficult for man to accept the idea of leaving the world though many believers are joyfully looking forward to leaving to Paradise.

A popular story tells about a young man whom the angel of death visited suddenly.

“Who are you?”

“I’m the angel of death.”

“What do you want?”

“To take your soul now.”

“How can this be? I’m a young man having two young kids. Moreover, I’m poor and didn’t save money for them. How can they live after my death? Give me a chance to guarantee them a secure life.”

“I accept your excuse this time but I’ll return again and won’t accept any then.”

“Please, send a messenger before you come.”

“I promise.”

The young man was disturbed yet, he realized soon that it was just a dream.

Many years later, he became very rich and his sons got married. When he grew very old, the angel of death came to take his soul.

“How do you want to take my soul without sending a messenger as you promised?” The man asked.

“I sent you not only one messenger but seven.” The angel answered, “The first messenger is your eyes which were once piercing and are now blind. The second is your ears for you’re almost deaf. You can hardly hear the sound of a trumpet. The third messenger is your teeth which were able to crush stones and where are they now! Moreover, the fourth one is your hair which was black and became white as snow. Then, the fifth is your body which was like a palm tree and has become like a bow. The sixth messenger is your legs which tremble being unable to carry you. Finally, the seventh one is your appetite: you were able to eat everything but you now hardly eat a little. These are the seven messengers. Didn’t you recognize them?”

When the man heard this, he delivered himself into the hands of the angel of death.



*Everyday, You send me a messenger,
I say now: Ready is my heart, O God, ready is my heart.
I neither fear death nor ask for postponing it.
I am yearning for You O, the desire of my heart.*

Story No. 487

The Motley Ball

On his fourteenth birthday, Mark's father gave him a beautiful motley football which Mark admired. On the following day, Mark was playing with his friends with the ball. He kicked it forcibly. Thus, it ran to the opposite bank of the pool. Some of the boys ran to cross the bridge leading to the other bank while others put off their clothes and swam in the pool to reach the other bank faster. Nevertheless, before any one reached the other bank, the ball had jumped inside a rapid car. Mark got very sad for he longed to have such a ball. Besides, it was very expensive. He went home. When his mother saw him so sad she was sorry for him but unable to buy him another one. She held his hand saying, "The Lord is very rich. He's a kind generous father with his children. Certainly, he'll send you a new ball."

Mark and his mother knelt and prayed. The following day, Mark saw an old man wandering in the village.

He asked him, "Can I help you?"

"I want to visit someone called so-and-so living in this village."

Mark showed him the way to this person's house and asked, "Do you want me to accompany you to show you the way?"

"Thanks, my boy." The old man answered. He noticed that Mark was a kind, generous boy so he loved him and wanted to give him a present. He gave him a motley ball. Mark was much surprised. He thanked God who sent him what he asked for and thanked the old man. "Why do you thank me?" The old man said, "I didn't pay for it. The Lord sent it to you. Yesterday, while I was driving in the village, it jumped into my car and I couldn't stop and look for its owner."

Tears of joy ran over Mark's cheek. He went with the old man to show him the way and told him the story of the ball. Therefore, they both lifted their hearts to God thanking him for he even cares for sending the ball back to a young lad.



O, Lord, you care even for numbering my hair.

You even care for the toys of a child.

You are wonderful in Your love and care.

May I be obsessed with You as You are with me,

Since you always seek my friendship.

Story No. 488

The Signal-Man

The man raised the signal indicating the approaching of the train. He noticed a car coming rapidly. Thus, he began to wave it so that the driver may slow down and stop before reaching the way of the train. The car driver did not pay attention. He was advancing hurriedly. The man continued screaming and waving the signal yet, the driver did not respond. Soon, the car and the train collided. The car crashed completely. The driver and all the passengers but one died. The only survivor had grave wounds. The signal-man was presented to trial. During the hearing, he assured that he waved the signal and was screaming but the driver did not respond.

“But you forgot to light the lamp of the signal” The injured survivor said, “So we saw nothing. You exerted a great effort but in vain.”

Many people do their best.

They care for social and educational activities.

They also long for the salvation of many.

Notwithstanding, they lack the fire of the Holy Spirit which makes them the light of the world.



May your Fiery Spirit work in me.

May my heart be kindled with the fire of Your love,

So that I may be filled with Your light,

Become light for the world

And attract many people to You, O the True Light.

Story No. 489

A friend's Reproach

At the beginning of the seventies, in Los Angeles, a lady came telling me what her young son had done. He did something wrong. As a punishment, she kept silent and did not talk to him. He tried to talk with her however, she ignored him completely. While she was frying meat with Chresco Butter, he held her dress saying, "Mum! Mr. Chresco sends you his regards."

Mother laughed and peace was restored.

There is no punishment harder than being ignored especially by some one dear to us. Notwithstanding, we always ignore our Great Friend's yearning for our love and His desire to create a continuous dialogue with us.

A believer tried to express Lord Jesus Christ's feelings, when ignored even by those who believe in Him, in a letter written by Lord Jesus Christ himself:

Beloved son, I wish to express my everlasting love and care for you.
Yesterday, I saw you walking with your friends laughing.
I wanted to accompany you, walk and talk with you but you ignored me completely.
I walked beside you and greeted you yet, you didn't return my greeting.
I made Sunset and sent a gentle breeze for you.
I expected you to utter a word. Again, you paid no attention and throw yourself on the bed to sleep.
Nevertheless, I still love you.
I ordered the Moon to send its beautiful light over your face and you didn't think of me.
However, I sent an angel to guard you.
Today, I sent the delightful sunlight for you to wake up and thank me for the new day I bestowed upon you.
Instead, you got up quickly and got ready to go out without uttering a single word for me.
I filled the sky with clouds and made rain fall over you to make you remember the tears I shed
because of your ingratitude and you're still indifferent.
I sent you friends to go with you to a beautiful garden to show you what I've created.
Winds blew to murmur in your ears telling you of my love while you're distracted from me.
I made thunder to warn you and showed you lightening to seek my glory and light.
Still, you insist on turning away from me.
Birds praise me and nature glorifies me while, you're silent.
You don't utter a word of thanks.
Dear friend, my love is wider than oceans, deeper than your soul.
My Father sent me from Heaven to lift you up to His bosom.
Call upon me since I wait for a single word or movement in your heart. I love you.
Your unique friend, Jesus Christ.



*Open my mouth, O LORD, to offer thanks to You.
Open my heart to announce my love for You.
Your Holy Spirit kindles my depth.
It makes me always cry,
“You’re inside me deeper than my depth and higher than my height.
You are the unique friend.”*

A Real Story No. 490

Heavens raining food

On our way to London Ontario, Canada, to attend the consecration of the church of Anba Paula the first hermit on January 1999, Fr. Antonius narrated two real stories about our beloved Father Mikhael Ibrahim which I want to record narratively.

Fr. Mikhael Ibrahim got up at 5 A.M. to pray the prayer of the first hour before going out for the Divine Liturgy. While praying, he heard someone knocking at the door. When he opened the door, he found someone asking him for a financial help for an emergency. Father Looked around and found on the buffet some banknotes wrapped together. He gave them to him without looking at them and went back to pray. On his way out, his wife said to him, "There were 6 pounds here."

"God sent someone to take them."

"They were all we have for the rest of the month."

"God will send food for us."

"Have you ever heard that God sends food?"

"Yes, he sent food from Heaven for his people."

His wife got a bit angry and said, "Father! Go to church to pray the Liturgy."

After the Divine Liturgy, someone met him and said, "I've been searching for you since yesterday."

"Why son?"

"So-and-so gave me a sum of money before his death and told me to give it to you 'cause he borrowed it from you. It's worth 20 pounds."

"Would you accompany me home?"

"I'll take your blessing, father."

They both went home. There, father asked loudly, "What do you want, son?"

"So-and-so asked me to give you 20 pounds."

"How many pounds, son?"

"20, father."

"Raise your voice."

"20 pounds, father."

"Yes son, God sends us food from Heaven."



You sent Manna to Your people in the wilderness.

Let me open my mouth and You fill it with the Heavenly Bread.

You grant me all my needs so how cannot I depend on you!

A Story from Australia No. 491

The Young Kangaroo Catching Cold

Jim, the young kangaroo, looked at his mother trembling and said, “Mammy! I feel very cold. I caught cold. Would you please carry me in your pouch to get warm?”

Mother soothed and carried him. Jim rejoiced for, his mother carried him and gave him all what he needed without exerting any effort.

This was repeated day after day. Therefore, mother took Jim to the doctor. After diagnosing Jim, the doctor realized that Jim was not sick yet, he was lazy. He did not want to work.

The doctor looked at Jim saying, “Your medicine is to move, work and expose your body to the Sun heat.”

He asked mother not to carry Jim again lest he should get sicker.



Many a time, I like sickness, I am lazy and idle.

Help me work and fight.

Your grace helps me to work.

I can thus say with You, O, the Only Begotten Son,

“I am working and my Father is working still.”

Story No. 492

Need for a Smile

On a visit to a certain family, the lady told me, reproaching her daughter, “I thank God for my daughter. She’s tender and pure. Her friends are excellent. However, I just have a reproof against her. She shuts the door of her room and talks to her friends sometimes for three hours. I need her to talk to me. When I call her up from work. She answers for seconds and ends the call. I need her smile and tenderness.”

In fact, just as the daughter needs her mother’s smile, the mother also needs her daughter’s. Such a smile is invaluable.

I then remembered the story of a girl who lived in a poor quarter in New York. She used to go to church to enjoy a program made for needy girls. She was characterized by her tender smile. She never complained yet she was always rejoicing in the LORD as if living in Heaven with angels. While she took small material needs, she was pouring peace over the children and ministers through her wonderful cheerfulness.

In a small celebration attended by a big crowd, she sang a small hymn. She attracted the hearts of all the audience not by the words of the hymn but by her inner peace reflected on her smiling face. Among the attendants, there was a physician who suffered many troubles. In spite of being rich, he did not have inner peace. Seeing the child, his heart rejoiced. The smile of this poor child became a practical lesson for him and changed all his life.

Few months later, the physician died. All his relatives came, each of them expecting to take a portion of his huge inheritance for, he was not married. However, when his will was read, they discovered that he left 75000 dollars of his wealth to the young girl who presented him a joyful life through the work of God’s Spirit in her.



*You give joy free as a fruit of your Holy Spirit!
You accept it from us as an invaluable sacrifice of love.
Who can give us real joy but You,
O who alone penetrate my depth,
Renew me,
And grant me the tribute of your rejoicing Kingdom.*

Story No. 493

The Millions destroyed **A Christian Story from the Russian Christian Heritage**

Under the title “The Lawyer and the Millionaire”, Rev. Augustinos Hanna wrote a story which Mr. Mohammed H. Heikal, the Senate former chairman previously translated and published in El-Helal Magazine in 1927

From the universal masterpieces by the Russian novelist A. Chekhov under the title “The Charm of the Bible”. I rewrote it in a style suitable for our youth.

A dialogue in the palace

In the large hall of the palace, sat some of the lawyers, businessmen and politicians to discuss the subject of justice and capital punishment. One of the lawyers who supported abolishing capital punishment, a youth, stood and said, “If evildoers don’t mind their brethren and kill them is it good that the society do likewise and commit a similar crime killing them! Isn’t it enough to make them serve a lifetime sentence so that we can protect society from them without committing a crime? No matter how perfect justice on earth can be sometimes it errs and is affected by false witness, forgery and personal interests. It is better for justice to treat a thousand criminals gently than to kill one innocent person. If a person was killed then, he/she was proved to be innocent, how can it be corrected?”

The debate got hot. The old millionaire, the host, headed the supporters of capital punishment presenting his pretexts as follows, “I feel pain for every suffering person. I don’t bear to see someone sentenced to death. However, I have one question: if the criminals, who don’t have mercy upon their brethren, are not sentenced to death, society will lose control and humanity will be a mob. The aggressive will then kill their brethren unmercifully without being punished. Will the law stand thus bound and disabled? Divine justice has given the law an authority to kill criminals as a punishment (Gen. 9:6; Exod. 18:13-16). Capital punishment guarantees safety among people while, lifetime sentence costs a country large sums of money for feeding and treating murderers. Don’t you agree with me that lifetime sentence is crueller than capital punishment for it is a life-in-death? While, executing death penalty only takes few seconds or maximumly one minute.”

The young lawyer was agitated and asked for abolishing capital punishment even if this costs society money or effort in order not to kill an innocent person indeliberately.”

They challenged each other. When they made a vote the majority supported the lawyer. The millionaire was disappointed and said to the lawyer, “You didn’t taste to be imprisoned a night. Therefore, you think that lifetime sentence is more merciful than capital punishment. I’d give up all my wealth if you accepted to be imprisoned not for a lifetime but only for fifteen years.”

“I accept the challenge.” The lawyer answered.

The attendants tried to lessen the tension but in vain. The millionaire fetched a sheet of paper and gave it to the lawyer to write the conditions of their contract.

A strange contract

The lawyer wrote the contract as follows:

Contract

Items:

1. I certify upon my signature below ... resident in the city of ... that I shall give up all my wealth which is worth ... [about 10000000 dollars] together with the palace in which I dwell for Mr. ... on condition that he accepts to be imprisoned in a solitary cell for fifteen years in the room which is in the garden of the palace.
2. The first party shall pay the expenses for the second party during the period of his imprisonment and getting him what he needs of food, drink, books, treatment and guarding.
3. The second party may not leave the prison for any reason or else, the contract shall be considered null and void.
4. The duration of which contract shall begin from ...to ...

The contract was read in front of the attendants who were sad and bewildered. The two parties and the witnesses signed the contract.

“I’ll be a millionaire. I’ll be rejoicing in prison for the sake of this dear price.” The lawyer said smiling. His eyes were roaming left and right in the palace considering it his own together with the millions waiting for him. On the other hand, the millionaire looked at the audience and said mockingly, “You’ll see how in a year or two, he’ll lose his health and become disappointed for, he who lives free knows not the bitterness of imprisonment.”

The strange cell

The young bachelor returned home and recommended one of his relatives to sell all what he had and keep its price in the bank that it may become a valuable sum of money after 15 years though it may be of no value then compared to the millions he was waiting for. He did not think how he was going to spend those years in his cell since he was sure that expecting to possess the palace and the millions would make these years pass in few moments. The lawyer entered the cell while, the guard stood outside the door. The lawyer looked from the window to see the palace. After few minutes, he left the window and threw himself on a chair beside the bed. He caught a book to read yet, some thoughts wandered in his mind, “Am I right or is it madness? Is this decision a form of youthful rashness that will cost me all my happiness? Is it worth millions? Can I recoil before it is too late? What will people then think of me? After 15 years, shall I find a suitable wife who will accept me for my person not for the sake of my millions? Will I live till my children grow up?”

Hard years

Minutes passed as if they were years. Thoughts sieged him. After a year, he said to himself, "I'll not retreat. I'll make use of my solitude to read and learn languages as if in an institute. I'll learn perseverance also. The lawyer asked the millionaire for books and means of learning which he brought him. After the third year, he got restless and know not what to do. He thus asked the millionaire to get him musical instruments and he sent them to him with the guard. However, he asked him for a tutor to teach him and the millionaire did as was asked. He started to play music joyfully. However, after a time, he tried to talk to the music teacher on another subjects but he refused saying that he was ordered not to talk about a subject other than music. The lawyer submitted to this order and continued playing for a year but got very weary of the instruments considering them a burden which he wanted to get rid of. They neither talked to him nor shared with him his feelings.

At the beginning of the sixth year, he asked for books about other religions. They were brought to him and he read them for a whole year. He was hungry for the Bible. He began reading it during the seventh year not as during his infancy when his parents obliged him to read it. On the contrary, he was crying to God to reveal Himself to him through His Word. After a whole year, the millionaire expected him to ask for something in the beginning of the eighth year but he did not.

"My master asks if you want anything." The guard asked him.

"I thank him for his care and love. Tell him I haven't finished reading the Bible yet and I need nothing." He replied.

The lawyer went on reading and felt God's presence in his cell which had become a pleasant heaven. After a year, the millionaire sent to ask him if he wanted anything. Nevertheless, his reply was the same as the previous year. The same happened the following year. Therefore, the millionaire was perplexed and felt that he would lose all what he had. He asked the guard about the lawyer. He replied, "he scarcely asks for anything even food. He no longer looks from the window to see the palace. He doesn't seem restless. Conversely, his face is cheerful and his countenance full of peace. He spends long hours kneeling in front of the Bible and mixing reading with prayers and praises by day and by night. Verily, I regard him as an angel of the LORD. I am glad to listen to his voice which expresses his joyful heart. I envy him for he's as if in Heaven. Honestly, I don't talk to him as you ordered. However, I hear the voice of his depth which attracts me to a strange power within him. I think he is the happiest man on earth. He surpassed many monks and recluses."

Crucial moments

Only a month remained after which the lawyer was to take all the possessions of the millionaire. The latter was sleepless and said, "What a fool am I. I shall lose all what I inherited and won all my life because of a rash decision. What am I to do then?"

He wandered restlessly in his bedroom as if in a cell having no one to feel his suffering. He looked from the window. It was stormy, snowy and extremely dark. A thought leapt in his mind which he began to execute at once. He went to the kitchen, took a big knife and hid it in his clothes. He took the key of the cell and went to kill the man. Not finding the guard, who left because of the snowy storm, he calmly opened the door and went on his tip-toes. He found the lawyer throwing his head on the table in deep sleep, in front of him, there was a dim lamp. He lifted up the knife to strike the lawyer's neck but stopped suddenly on seeing a sheet of paper on which it was written, "Assignment Declaration"

The millionaire took the paper and shook all over.

The millions destroyed

The old millionaire's hand shook while gazing at the paper which reads,

Assignment declaration

I, the resident in the cell in my dear friend's palace, certify in my full senses that I assign my right in the possessions of my friend the palace owner. I thank him for his love for he has been hospitable to me for about 15 years giving me all what I need. At first, I was bored. I learnt languages and music and read about other religions still, I was not satisfied. Finally, I read the Bible which is a living message from God to me. I fed on His Word and now I need nothing. He opened for me a door in Heaven. Thus, all the earth has become worthless. He changed my cell to a joyful heaven and united me with whom the angels desire to see. How I am glad to give up my right for my friend and escape lest my relatives accuse me of madness, after the end of the term of the contract, and take his money unjustly. Only one Divine statement changed my attitude, "In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread" (Gen. 3.19). How can I then take what is not mine. I ask my dear friend to enjoy God's Word which I enjoyed in his cell and give a portion of his money for buying the Bible and distributing it for all people to taste what I have been tasting.

On reading this paper, the knife fell from the millionaire's hand and threw himself on the lawyer bursting in tears. The lawyer woke up to find the millionaire kissing him. The millionaire wanted to give him half his possessions but he did not accept one cent. He went out and lived with his friend in his palace enjoying the living Bible and the unlimited heavenly love.

STORIES FOR THE YOUTH

Together with
“The Thief of the Gods”

494-508

Prepared By
FR. TADROS Y. MALATY

Translated by
Irene S. Abd-El-Massih

Edited Bhy
Mary H. Mikhail

Dear,

Here is a collection of short stories: some of which are real; some are taken from the universal popular folklore; some are from the Jewish folklore while others are taken from famous books of allegorical stories like:

Cathy Books. *Animal Fairy Stories*.

La Fontaine. *Les Fables*.

Uncle Arthur's Bedtime Stories.

I have tried to give these symbolic stories a Christian spiritual touch.

A real story No. 494

I'm the Mayor

In June 1998, on our way from the church to Calgary Airport, we were talking together about God's treatment with us. Merrily, the daughter said to her old mother, "Tell father the story of your boy friend."

The mother told me the following story smilingly.

Early in the morning, I was on my way home in Calgary. I crossed the way. I didn't see the threshold of the pavement. Since I was walking fast, I fell on the ground. I looked around but found no one to help me rise. Suddenly, a splendid car stopped and a rich lady came out of it but unable to help. After few minutes, another car stopped and a man came out of it and helped me. He was very kind and asked me, "Are you ok?"

I thanked him saying, "You look familiar."

"I'm the Mayor" He said simply.

After making sure that I am ok being near my house, he took his car and went. I then sent him a card thanking him.

The lady did not forget what the mayor of Calgary made for her. The story was engraved in her thoughts.



You descended to me, o King of Kings.

Leaving the fiery cherubic chariot.

You bowed down to my earth and carried me on your shoulders,

You healed my wounds with the wounds of your love.

You led me, with your Holy Spirit, to the open gates of Heaven

And took me to my eternal home.

May my heart kindle with thanks for you.

Story No. 495

Millions of Frogs

In a rage, Alan said to his wife, “What shall I do with those millions of frogs which disturb me? The neighboring pool makes me lose serenity and peace for it is full of millions of frogs which find no time to croak so foolishly but at night. I can’t sleep.”

“Who said they’re millions?”

“These voices should be of millions of frogs.”

“Don’t exaggerate. Let’s go and see how to get rid of them.”

“How?”

“By selling them to the neighboring restaurant. It serves delicious dishes made of the limbs of frogs.”

Alan went to the owner of the restaurant and told him that he was going to sell to him millions of the limbs of frogs. In the evening, he went with his wife taking lamps with them to find only two frogs.

“all these voices are of two frogs only!” He said to his wife.

“Didn’t I tell you we should examine the matter calmly?”

Don’t fear those who slander you and don’t mind those who praise you for, the voice of two frogs only seems to be of millions of frogs.



*Help me o LORD neither to exaggerate, fear dispraise nor seek praise.
Let me hear Your Voice for it is better than any other voice.*

Story No. 496

An Eagle Hunting a Fish

A young man came to me to make confession. He seemed pure and chaste. A family visited him to stay with him for a week in Alexandria. He told me that he was obliged to go to stumbling places but he was not attracted by the sights that corrupt the lives of many young people. After a long time, he came crying for what he saw years ago was dancing in his thought and contaminating his purity. I then realized the danger of belittling sin and not recognizing its real harm for the soul.

I remembered the following story.

Very proudly, the eagle flies far above the sea surface. With his sharp eyes, he notices a fish coming up to the surface of the sea. In an eye twinkling, he goes down to the surface and takes it with his beak, flies up and eats it.

An eagle saw a fish. Soon, he took it with his bill. Making use of his full strength, he flew. However, this time he could not withstand since the fish was very big and heavy. He implanted his beak deep in its flesh. At last, he failed. Thus, he went down to the surface of the sea to let it go that he may be able to cut a piece of its flesh. The fish swam fast towards the depth. The eagle could not but take out his bill of its flesh but this also he could not do. The fish went down very deep and the eagle sank.

<p>“Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us” (Heb. 12.1).</p>
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Story No. 497

The spider

“Why does the spider weave its web in the corners of the houses?” Peter asked his grandfather “And why does it eat dead insects?”

Grandpa told him the well-known allegorical story of the spider.

The spider had to pay the taxes. Having no money, he said to himself, “I’ll borrow money from the animals and not pay it back. On his way, he found a mouse. Thus, he asked him to lend him 1 dollar till the morning. The mouse gave him the dollar and went. Then, he found a cat and asked her to lend him a dollar promising to pay it back in the morning. He behaved thus with the dog, the tiger and the lion.

He payed the taxes and went home thinking what to do. He took the axe and dug a hole in the garden behind his house and covered it. In the morning, the mouse came asking for his money. He talked to him gaily until some one knocked at the door. The mouse got terrified when he knew that it was the cat. Thus, the spider asked him to hide in a room till he departed. The spider opened the door and welcomed the cat telling him that he would pay the debt soon after eating the delicious meal he prepared for him. He showed him the room wherein the mouse hid. He entered the room and ate him. He returned to the spider who conversed with him until some one knocked at the door. Knowing that it was the dog, the cat hid in a room. The dog entered. The spider showed him the way and the dog killed the cat. He did thus with the tiger and the lion.

After the lion had eaten, The spider asked him to follow him to the garden to give him the dollar. The lion walked above the covered hole and thus fell in it and began to roar. All the animals came to see what the spider had done to the king of the beasts and how he had given each animal as a prey to the other in order not to fulfill his promise. All the animals gathered against him. Therefore, he ran to a corner in the house, wove his web near the ceiling and lived isolated having no food but the dead insects.

Finally, grandpa said to Peter, “He who does not fulfill his promise will be respected by no one. He will live as if in a corner not finding suitable food.



*Help me be honest and keep my promise!
You are the Honest who keeps His promises.
May I resemble You so that I may not feel isolated,*

May I fulfill my promises to live in Heaven and enjoy the angelic table.

Story No. 498

An ant amid the snow

The ant, Vigor, went on storing food in a hole all day long in order to find enough food in the winter. On the other hand, the grasshopper, Amusement, went on singing all the summer doing nothing else since it produces a sound while flying. Suddenly, there was a snowy storm. The ant, Vigor, went to its hole which is full of food. She closed the door and stayed with her family to rest and eat. She heard knocks at the door. She opened to find Amusement in front of her trembling.

“What do you want?”

“To dwell and eat with you.”

“Why didn’t you store food during the summer?”

“I was busy singing all the summer.”

Vigor looked at Amusement saying, “You were singing during the summer. Then, dance during the winter.” She shut the door saying, “If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat” (2 Thess. 3.10).

“Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise which, having no captain, Overseer or ruler, Provides her supplies in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest. How long will you slumber, O sluggard? When will you rise from your sleep” (Prov. 6.6-9)?

Story No. 499

I'm Concerned with you

On our way to the monastery of St. Ephram the Syrian in Sednaya, Syria, one of our beloved sons told me a story about his late father who lived in Sanabo, Dairot.

At the beginning of the sixties, my father went as usual to pay respects to H.G Bishop Agapius on the feast who in turn met him cheerfully. My father left him an envelope containing a sum of money for the church and the needy. He returned home to find my mother very disturbed. When he asked her about the reason behind her perplexity, she asked, "What happened?"

"Nothing," He replied "Why?"

"H.G. Bishop Agapius called and he wants you to call him soon. He was talking in a strange manner that I thought He may be angry with you."

"I left him rejoicing."

"Call him soon."

Father called his grace who said to him, "I noticed that the envelope you left is big. It seems to contain a sum of money."

"I left -, a blessing I present to God of what He gave me."

"I fear, my son, you may earned dirty money."

"No my father, God blessed my work this year. This is but a little of what He gave me."

"You're my son. I'm concerned with you and your children."

"Don't fear, my lord. I'll not do what's wrong. God's blessing is better than money."

"May God bless you and your children. I just wanted to make sure you're ok."

This is the true love of a bishop for his children. It is a Christian love through which a believer longs for the salvation of all people. He does not seek his own; he seeks the salvation of his brethren.



*God, open my heart,
So that with love all people may enter it,
So that I may long for their salvation and eternal glory.
I may then regard their crowns as mine and their glory as mine.
When shall I see every soul enjoying Your Salvation?*

Story No. 500

Tom and the Little Frog

Young Tom noticed that his friend Matthew takes the little frogs, plays with them and tortures them. Tom invited his friends with Matthew for entertainment in the garden of his house. After two hours, Tom said to them, “Let’s swim in the adults’ swimming pool.”

“We fear drowning.” They all said reluctantly.

“Don’t you swim in the big swimming pool?”

“No, we swim in the children’s.” said Matthew.

Tom threw himself in the pool pushing the water with his hands and legs while, they all looked wondering.

“How did you learn swimming?” Matthew asked.

“The little frog taught me.” Tom answered. “I used to take little frogs to play with them. Dad told me to learn something from them. When I asked him what to learn, he told me to observe them while swimming. I began actually to imitate them and I learnt swimming.”

Matthew wondered and since then, he no longer played with the little frogs and realized that he could learn something useful from every living creature.



May I be kind with all-living creatures!

And not play with them.

May I learn activeness from the ant,

And from the bee how to extract honey from every flower,

And swimming from the little frog!

Story No. 501

Gorilla between the Lion's Jaws

Tony lived jobless for a long time and was distressed. He heard of a job in the zoo. He went to apply for it. The director of the zoo said, "The gorilla died and we've no one else. It attracts many people especially children. Can you put on the skin of a gorilla, jump among the branches of the trees and imitate its voice for a large sum of money until we export another gorilla from abroad?"

Tony accepted unwillingly. When he started to imitate the gorilla, children threw nuts at him which he ate gluttonously and went on jumping more and more among the branches.

Once he climbed a high tree which could not bear him. It bowed and was broken throwing him in the den of the lion. He did not know what to do. He put off the skin of the gorilla but no one rescued him. Thus, the lion devoured him.

† † †

Help me not to put on a garment which is not mine.
May my inner man be like my outer appearance,
Since there will come a day on which I shall put off my garments.
Who will rescue me then?

A Real Story No. 502

The First Christmas with Jesus

Ben, a thirteen-year-old boy, suffered from brain cancer for about four years which ended with reposing on 14 December, 1997. A short time before his reposal, he wrote a short poem and presented it to his mother:

So have a merry Christmas
And wipe away that tear.
Remember I am spending Christmas
With Jesus Christ this year.

Ben

Story No. 503

The First Christmas in Heaven

A young man felt that his departure drew near. Since it was Christmas season, he wrote a message to his family to comfort them:

All over the country I see trees of Christmas.
Their faint lights shining each like a star
Reflected on the snow they bring forth splendor
With Jesus this year in Heaven I happily enjoy Christmas
My Lord Jesus Christ in paradise has put me.
His glory is reflected on all the saints and me
A shining star he made of each one of us.
I hear Christmas carols that all tongues sing
Much joy and happiness in all hearts bring.
Yet, the hymn of Heaven is sweeter than any praise
I learnt it and now I sing it with delight.
Its language is love,
Its tune eternal joy.
No language can ever tell
About the Heavenly praises' spell.
We're a unique chorus,
With joy Heavens we fill.
All people are busy buying Christmas presents,
Wishing to make for others wonderful surprises.
I now sent you my unique gift
My invaluable prayers for you I offer.
My love for you is greater than any treasure.
Accept my gift better than any surprise.
I hear you telling kids Christmas stories.
Ah! if you keep love for one another
Heaven will praise you forever.
I know how you long for me,
I feel how it is like to miss me,
But sure I'm not far away.
Wipe away your tears and never sigh again
I'm spending Christmas with Jesus Christ in Heaven

Story No. 504

I feared a mouse, didn't fear God

Fr. Mikhail Ibrahim delivered a sermon which was an open confession of his weakness.

He said,

One Day, I woke up at four A.M. I said to myself, "It's too early. I'll sleep for a while." Before sleeping, I felt a strange movement. I saw a mouse running in the room so I got afraid. Yes my children, I was afraid of the mouse which ran beside me not of God who dwells inside me. I preferred sleeping to praying early.

✝ ✝ ✝

May Your Fear fill my heart. May I fear God thus, I will fear no one.

"The fear of the lord is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" (Prov. 9.10).

"By humility and the fear of the lord Are riches and honor and life" (Prov. 22.4).

"The fear of the Lord is honor, and glory, and gladness, and a crown of rejoicing" (Sira. 1.11).

"The fear of the Lord maketh a merry heart, and giveth joy, and gladness, and a long life" (Sira. 1.12).

"To fear the Lord is fullness of wisdom, and filleth men with her fruits" (Sira. 1.16).

"The fear of the Lord is a crown of wisdom, making peace and perfect health to flourish" (Sira. 1.18).

"The root of wisdom is to fear the Lord, and the branches thereof are long life"

(Sira. 1.20).

"The fear of the Lord driveth away sins" (Sira. 1.21).

"And let just men eat and drink with thee; and let thy glorying be in the fear of the Lord" (Sira. 9.16).

"Whether he be rich, noble, or poor, their glory is the fear of the Lord" (Sira. 10.22).

"The perfection of the fear of the Lord is wisdom" (Sira. 21.11).

"And they that remain shall know that there is nothing better than the fear of the Lord, and that there is nothing sweeter than to take heed unto the commandments of the Lord" (Sira. 23.27).

"Much experience is the crown of old men, and the fear of God is their glory" (Sira. 25.6).

"Yet is there none above him that feareth the Lord" (Sira. 25.10).

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of his love: and faith is the beginning of cleaving unto him" (Sira. 25.12).

"Unless a man hold himself diligently in the fear of the Lord, his house shall soon be overthrown" (Sira. 27.3).

"Riches and strength lift up the heart: but the fear of the Lord is above them both: there is no want in the fear of the Lord, and it needeth not to seek help" (Sira. 40.26).

"The fear of the Lord is a fruitful garden, and covereth him above all glory" (Sira. 40.27).

"His delight is in the fear of the lord, And He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, Nor decide by the hearing of His ears" (Isa. 11.3).

"Wisdom and knowledge will be the stability of your times, And the strength of salvation; The fear of the lord is His treasure" (Isa. 33.6).

Story No. 505

A Story from the Space

A Child in the Spaceship

The child Joseph loved reading. After praying and reading the Bible, he used to read one of the children's scientific or literary books. He was obstinate with his mother thinking that obeying her would weaken his character. "No," was always on his tongue to be said even before listening and thinking of what she was saying. Joseph knelt down asking God to grant him the spirit of true love and obedience to his mother.

Joseph held a volume of the children's encyclopaedia, concerning the space. He could not stop reading since he knew much about the space, the planets especially the Moon and the spaceships which went to the Moon. He knew also that, in the near future, he would spend the summer holidays on the surface of the moon.

He went on reading until he fell asleep and the book fell down. Mother entered the room silently and switched off the light. Joseph had a long dream in which he was driving a spaceship going to the Moon. He was looking down to the earth as it became smaller and smaller beneath him until it became like a small drop. He approached the Moon and felt the light of the Moon reflected on his face. On the moon, he saw two beautiful eyes looking and a mouth smiling at him. He looked at the Moon with his heart dancing with happiness. He suddenly opened his eyes to find his mother looking at him with kind eyes and a cheerful face. He embraced her joyfully realizing that she was the Moon which shone with joy and delight.

"Why were you looking at me thus Mum?" He asked after some minutes. "If I am not concerned with you, with whom shall I be concerned!" She answered, "I saw a big smile on your face so I stood to look at your happy face for a time until you opened your eyes and embraced me."



*If you give man a mother to care for him,
To fill his life with joy and to shine before him as the Moon,
How much do You care for me then O the Sun of righteousness?
In You, I find all love and delight.
You are the perfect beauty.
In you is my satisfaction.
You are my love and the joy of my heart.*

Story No. 506

Three Wolves in Alaska

A young lad came to me groaning bitterly of his bodily lusts and defiled thoughts and emotions crying, “Why did God create me an emotional human being? Who can save me from my evil thoughts and control my senses?”

I talked with him about the authority Lord Jesus Christ gave us to change our destructive emotions into constructive ones. When our eyes concentrate on our beloved the Savior of the world we realize that our feelings and emotions are Divine gifts which support us in our daily life and in worshipping God. However, when we ill-use them, they become destructive.

I then remembered an exciting short story written in a book for the children.

In Alaska, the Eskimo live amid the snow. They build their houses of snow. One of them observed that three huge wolves are wandering in search for a prey. His friends and neighbors were frightened. This man threw some meat containing an anesthetic beside his snowy hut during a snowy storm. In the midst of the storm, the wolves found a chance to go out to prey since the dogs were hiding in the huts. The wolves came to where the meat containing the anesthetic was and ate it after some hesitation. Thus, they lost conscience. The man went out and found them unconscious. He dragged them near the hut. His wife thought that he would kill them. However, he put bridles in their mouths and bound them to his vehicle. When the wolves came to conscience they found themselves reined and bound. At first, they resisted and refused to drag the vehicle. However, under the lashes of the whip, even children were able to drive the vehicle dragged by the wolves. The man gave them not the meat they desired but whatever was left. They resisted no more but served the man and his family. All people wondered how he turned these wild beasts into tamed ones.



Who can turn my thoughts, senses and emotions to construction but Your Holy Spirit!

May Your Spirit drive my vehicle and consecrate all my abilities.

May my body together with my soul become a holy vehicle always going forth towards Your Heaven.

Thanks for what You gave me.

My emotions and senses are Your holy Gifts.

You sanctify all my abilities for the edification of many people.

Let me not give my body what it desires but the spiritual food which is prayers and the Word of God that sanctifies everything.

Thus, I would become subject to the work of Your Holy Spirit and my depth would be a heavenly delightful vehicle.

Story No. 507

Build me a Palace like Yours

H.G. Bishop Reweis related the following story

A believer was employed by a rich woman. The man was pious and loving. When his wife asked him about his salary he would not tell her saying, “Had you asked for something and I didn’t bring it to you?”

“I don’t deny your generosity.” She replied, “But I want to know where do you save the rest of the salary.”

“I’m responsible for getting you all what you want with pleasure.” He lovingly answered, “Yet, please don’t ask me where I save the rest.”

Though she loved and completely trusted her husband, she went to the rich lady, out of curiosity, to ask her about her husband’s salary.

“I trust him much.” The rich lady said, “and I pay him a very big salary. Didn’t he tell you?”

“He didn’t.” The wife replied. “He’s loving and generous with me as with others. I really want nothing. Yet, why doesn’t he tell me his secrets when I’m his wife?”

The rich lady talked to the man and asked him why he hid his secrets from his wife.

“I’m always frank with my wife.” He answered. “I love her and I’m ready to give up anything for her. I just don’t want her to worry about money.”

Finding him so insistent not to tell her where he saved his money, she sacked him. However, he never lost his peace. At night, the lady saw in a dream that she rose up to Heaven and saw a great palace. When she asked an angel, “To whom does this palace belong?”

“It’s your former employee’s.” He replied.

“Where’s mine then?” She asked thinking, “If this palace is my employee’s how beautiful and great will mine be?”

The angel summoned her to go with him. She went to a distant place where he showed her a very small hut and said, “This is your mansion.”

“Can it be that my employee lives in a very great palace and I dwell in that very small hut?” She said in agitation.

“This is what the employee’s built and that is what you built.” The angel replied.

The lady woke up very perplexed. She called the employee and said to him, "Today, I leave you all my money to build me a palace like yours."

He opened the doors of her palace for the poor. On the other hand, the lady and the man's wife, who then knew what the lady had seen in her dream, were very happy with this wise man's deeds and helped him serve the poor.

"Blessed is he who considers the poor; the lord will deliver him in time of trouble" (Ps. 41.1).

"He who oppresses the poor reproaches his Maker, But he who honors Him has mercy on the needy" (Prov. 14.31).

"Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor Will also cry himself and not be heard" (Prov. 21.13).

"Because that alms do deliver from death, and suffereth not to come into darkness" (Tob. 4.10).

"For alms is a good gift unto all that give it in the sight of the most High" (Tob. 4.11).

"Prayer is good with fasting and alms and righteousness. A little with righteousness is better than much with unrighteousness. It is better to give alms than to lay up gold" (Tob. 12.8).

"For alms doth deliver from death, and shall purge away all sin. Those that exercise alms and righteousness shall be filled with life" (Tob 12.9).

"Water will quench a flaming fire; and alms maketh an atonement for sins" (Sira. 3.30).

"The alms of a man is as a signet with him, and he will keep the good deeds of man as the apple of the eye" (Sira. 17.22).

"Yet have thou patience with a man in poor estate, and delay not to shew him mercy" (Sira . 29.8).

"Shut up alms in thy storehouses: and it shall deliver thee from all affliction" (Sira. 29.12).

Story No. 508/A

Thief of the Gods

Prepared by Samir B. El-Bahgori

Thousands of people from all countries gathered in Alexandria to attend the yearly celebrations held for Apollo, the god of the heathens responsible for wandering among the planets and stars. The great idol was put in a large courtyard in King Decius' palace. During these celebrations, which lasted for a month each year, people used to dance and sing all night long.

All people admired the greatness and beauty of the idol Apollo. It was made of alabaster, meticulously shaped; its hands were of pure gold. One of the spectators, unusual to attend, was a Christian jeweler called Matra. He looked at the idol in amazement wandering among the people to hear their comments on the greatness of the celebrations and the excellence of Apollo.

While wandering, he heard the voice of the herald announcing the actual start of the festival and commanding all people to worship and raise incense for the idol otherwise they would be killed. Matra returned home that night very gloomy. When his wife asked him about the reason behind his sadness, he told her what had happened. She tried to lighten the matter showing indifference in order to hide her disturbance but in vain. Matra spent the whole night praying and asking the Lord to have mercy on His poor people.

Thousands of heathens came to worship the idol to satisfy it and ask for mercy. In the evening, reports were presented to the king to the effect that all people attended and worshipped the idol but for one sect, namely, the Christians. Thus, the governor commanded that any one who might be Christian should be arrested and ordered to worship the idol otherwise, he should be killed.

Matra observed what was happening carefully. He saw the soldiers breaking into the houses of those who might be Christians. Another night passed during which Matra was sleepless. His prayers during that night were deeper and more fervent. He felt that Heaven received his prayers joyfully. Two hours after midnight, he left his house to the hall in which stood Apollo so great and challenging. No one was there but the guards of the god who were asleep.

He looked at the idol as if for the first time. "Eh! O, the idol thus standing in hollow pride, looking at nothing and smiling so devilishly! What power have you o, made by men?" Matra looked around gnashing his teeth and said, "What would happen if I crushed your head O, fool?" He lifted his stick up and was about to crush the head of the idol but he retreated silently thinking that this would certainly produce a noise enough to wake those foolish guards. How do they think that this is a god, or the gods? Does it need guards? Ridiculous! Matra looked carefully to the hand of the idol made of pure gold. He held it with his experienced hand as a jeweler. He easily cut it and hid it among his clothes and went back.

Meanwhile, his wife was standing at the door of the house bursting into tears. As soon as she saw him, she cried unconsciously, "Dear husband, where have you been? I thought that the soldiers had taken you away. Pray tell me where you have been."

However, Matra did not pay attention to his wife. He went upstairs to his room. His wife desired to hear a word from him. Before uttering a word, he took out the golden hand and put it on the ground. His wife was gazing at that treasure with bewildered eyes while thousands of questions wandered in her mind.

“What is this? Where have you found this treasure? Is it ours? We’re rich then. We’ll leave this beggarly house and buy a beautiful palace. Farewell O poverty. We used only to look at gold but now ...”

“O, woman aren’t you tired of talking? Enough of that please.”

“How can I stop talking while you didn’t tell me to whom this treasure belongs?”

“Sister, it’s the poor’s.”

“How can it be? Who gave it to you?”

He ignored her questions and went on working all the night and the following day. Finally, he melted the hand of the idol, changed it to thousands of small golden pieces and put them into a large cloth bag. On Sunday, at noon, dozens of the poor and the needy came to Matra’s house. They sat in the courtyard of his house as usual. He served them splendid food not as they used to since Matra was a poor man. However, he used to give the poor what remained, after getting his essential needs, which was but a little. Thus, they were bewildered. At that time, Matra stood and said to them that it was time then not to beg for, this was degrading and he told them that they would live honorably. They looked at each other astounded seeing in front of them a big amount of fine clothes which he distributed among them. Before they went out of his house, he had given everyone of them a hundred golden pieces advising them to use what they took honestly either in trade or any profitable business.

However, Matra was still busy thinking of his poor brethren who did not come to his house. He soon took a large sack of clothes in which he put the bag containing the golden pieces and went to each one of them. After carrying out this task, he slept calmly and satisfied that night. Meantime, the king knew that the golden hand of the god Apollo had been stolen and neither it nor the thief could be found.

The king got fiercely enraged. The guards and their captain stood trembling before him while listening to the king’s threats. The captain asked him for an extra period of time during which he would bring the stolen hand. The king appointed a period of three days. The soldiers doubled their efforts to find any path that would lead to even part of the truth but in vain.

The government was compelled then to offer a big financial reward: a thousand Roman golden coins to any one who would inform about the thief or bring the stolen hand. Two days passed while they found nothing. On the third day, the captain was extremely sad thinking of his miserable fate for, remained but few hours and nothing could be found.

Suddenly, a poor man came and said to the captain, “I know the thief.”

The captain stood very attentively, held the man’s shoulders and asked, “Where is he?”

“I can’t tell you now.”

“How can it be?” The captain tried not to be nervous and said, “When then will you tell me?”

“Give me the reward first.”

“Impossible, tell me first.”

“These are my conditions. You can accept or refuse them.”

The captain tried to be kind with him, “You puzzle me O man. By god tell me who’s the thief. We arrested thousands of Christians as they’re the only enemies to our gods. Come and see them.”

The captain held the man’s hand and took him to a wide place, used sometimes as a theatre for showing the Roman plays. It was used then for torturing the Christians in order that thousands of spectators could attend. The man followed the captain and saw the Christian rich being tortured and

in a very bad condition. The man closed his eyes unable to bear what he saw. He shouted loudly at the soldiers, "These are all innocent. Let them go. I know the thief."

The soldiers responsible for these collective torture operations were astounded, stopped working and looked towards the strange man who in turn looked at the captain and said, "Give me the reward and you'll know everything then."

The captain took him out and fetched a bag containing a thousand golden coins, gave it to him and said, "Now tell me where the thief is."

The man looked at the bag rejoicingly and said, "Give me only one hour and let whoever you like to accompany me and I'll return soon with the thief."

"Then, leave the money here."

"Never, the only condition is that I take it. It's mine." He arrested the bag with his hand.

Because of his insistence, the captain accepted this condition and commanded one of the trusted faithful soldiers and brave to accompany him.

The soldier went with the man wherever he liked. After some minutes, he reached a very poor hut. He knocked the door. Some one looked like a beggar came out. The man gave him a handful of the golden coins wishing him a happy future. Some minutes later, the man knocked at the door of another hut. A poor widow came out of it. He greeted her respectfully and gave her a handful of the golden coins and left accompanied with her good wishes. The same episode was repeated. Before the hour passed, the man had finished distributing the golden coins. The soldier, who treated him gently all the way according to the captain's orders, looked at him saying, "Where's the thief?"

"Let's return to the captain quickly. You'll see him there." The man said.

"Is he one of the arrested Christians?"

"No."

The soldier had no choice but to return with him to the captain. As soon as the captain saw them, he hurried towards them. To his surprise, he saw no one else with them. "Where's the thief? Why are you coming alone? Do you want to deceive us?"

"No, no, I'm the thief."

The captain was bewildered as if in a dream, "You! How?"

"I took the golden hand to return it to its owners."

"O, lunatic! Who're its owners?"

"The poor of course."

"I understand nothing." The captain cried.

"But I began to understand." The soldier said. He told the captain what he saw and how the man gave the big reward to the poor and the needy regardless of their sect or religion.

The captain looked at Matra furiously and said, "I want to know the story from the very beginning. Tell me how and when you stole the hand? Where's it now?"

Matra told him the whole story and said, "When I saw the golden hands I said to myself, 'It's the money which the Roman Empire gathers from us, the citizens, oppressingly. The Roman Empire steals our children's living. The least to do is to return some of what the invaders stole.' Alas! I took one hand."

The captain looked at the soldiers and said harshly, "All this happened while you were asleep."

"It's the god who should guard men while you guard your gods!" Matra answered instead mockingly, "What gods are these? I took his right hand thus, he couldn't wave towards me. It seems that his left hand doesn't work. I think that your god felt that his right hand was stolen only when he

tried to lift it to drink a cup of wine and didn't find it. But why didn't Apollo use his tongue to lead you to me? The gods should be eloquent whereas, your god seems to be dumb."

They were all bewildered. The captain shouted, "Hold his hand which stole great Apollo's and put it in the fire to be burnt. Matra bore the fire as if a hand other than his was being burnt. They cut his hands. Before getting healed, they cut his legs also. Though he was handless and legless he never stopped praying or thanking God.

One of the soldiers asked him, "For what do you thank your God?"

"Cause He gave me a chance to do good and share with Him His pains."

At the moment, King Decius ordered that Matra be crucified like his Lord. The captain advanced and said to the king, "Pardon, the man has neither hands nor legs. How can he be crucified?"

Nevertheless, the king's orders should be executed. The captain went out to execute the king's orders. They brought the cross and put Matra over it. They nailed his shoulders thus, his flesh was torn. Meanwhile, Matra was praying. Before giving up his soul, a soldier beheaded him with the sword.

Matra was thus the first to be a martyr after this manner. Such a scene Inspired them with a new type of torture.



"Do not fear the devil even if he was a soul without a body.
Nothing is weaker than him" (St. John Chrysostom).

Story No. 508/B

Why did God send Manna every Morning?

Someone asked a rabbi, “Why didn’t God send Manna to his people once a year not daily?”

The rabbi thus answered narrating the story of a king who used to give his son a yearly pocket money on a certain day. The king noticed that he did not see his son but on that day. Therefore, he decided to give him money every morning to enjoy meeting his son.

Likewise, God wants to meet his people and to meet each one of his children every morning.

STORIES FOR THE YOUTH

Together with
“No, You’ll never Steal my Crown”

509-523

Prepared By
FR. TADROS Y. MALATY

Translated by
Irene S. Abd-El-Massih

Dear,

Here is a collection of short stories: some of which are real; some are taken from the universal popular folklore; some are from the Jewish folklore while others are taken from famous books of allegorical stories like:

Cathy Books. *Animal Fairy Stories*.

La Fontaine. *Les Fables*.

Uncle Arthur's Bedtime Stories.

I have tried to give these symbolic stories a Christian spiritual touch.

Story No. 509

Jackal the Recreant

The jackal saw some chickens on the other bank of the river. Thus, his mouth watered for, he desired to eat one of them. He thought how to go to the other bank. He looked around and saw a camel eating dry grass.

“Why do you eat dry grass?”

“This is what I have.”

“Do you want to eat ears of grain?”

“How can it be?”

“Look at the other bank. There is a field of grain.”

“If I go to it the peasants will prevent me from approaching it.”

“Don’t be afraid. It’s mine. Let’s cross the river together and I’ll give you what you want of grain.”

“Ok. I’ll carry you on my back and cross the river.”

The jackal rode the camel and they crossed the river. As soon as the jackal saw the chickens, he snatched a fat one and ate it. On the other hand, the camel stood looking at the field perceiving that the jackal deceived him. The jackal wanted to return. When he asked the camel to take him back, he said, “I’ve been tired carrying you and crossing the river while, you ate a fat chicken and didn’t give me a single ear of grain.”

“Wait a minute.” Said the jackal.

While the camel was waiting, the jackal went to the owners of the field saying, “Look. The camel has come from the other bank to eat the ears of your field. He’s looking at it and thinking earnestly of attacking it.”

The farmers went taking their sticks and beat the camel who hardly escaped from them. The jackal asked him, “Why are you sad?”

“You lied saying that the farm is yours and the farmers beat me. I was about to die.”

“Do you have severe pain?”

“Why not? They beat me severely.”

The jackal laughed and said, “Don’t you know that I went and told them that you want to attack their farm?”

“Is this my reward?” The camel reproached him bitterly.

“It’s my will.” He answered mockingly. “I do whatever pleases me. Take me back. Otherwise, I’ll stir up the farmers to kill you.”

The camel had no choice but to carry the jackal on his back and swim. When he reached the middle of the river, he began to dive. The jackal cried, “What are you doing? I’ll sink.”

“It’s my will. I do whatever pleases me.” The camel said laughing.

Thus, the jackal drank the same cup. He sank and died and the waves threw him on the shore.

Be persecuted but not a persecutor.

*Be crucified but not a crucifier.
Be oppressed but not an oppressor.
Suffer tribulations but afflict no one.
Be tender but not an envier
Hold on to the truth not to justice.
(St. Isaac the Syrian).*

CF. Liewelyn, Robert. *The Joy of the Saints, Spiritual Readings throughout the Year.* Springfield: Illinois, 1989. (171).

Story No. 510

I Saw Lord Jesus

Margaret went to the priest telling him that she saw Lord Jesus, that he blessed her and gave her peace. The priest did not comment on the vision. As it was repeated for a second and a third time, the priest kept silent. Thus, she said, "I didn't hear a comment on the visions I enjoyed."

"If He's Christ ask Him to tell you a sin I committed last week." The priest commented.

The following week, the lady told the priest, "Lord Jesus appeared to me and filled my life with joy. I said to Him, "Father wants You to tell me a sin he committed a week before." My Lord said that He forgave you. Thus, He forgot it since when He forgives He forgets." The priest was silent for a while then said, "Your vision is true daughter. He's a forgiving God not like men. When He forgives He forgets."



Thank You Lord, You are wonderful in Your love.

You are wonderful O God in treating me.

You wish to forgive me my sins. Thus, You reproach me no more for my sins or transgressions.

You are a True Heavenly Father.

Story No. 511

Dad, Let's Play together

After dinner, Tony took the daily newspaper and began reading it as usual. His only son Matthew said, "Dad, let's play together."

"I'm busy reading the paper as you see."

"I want to play with you. You read it everyday. Let's play now."

"After half an hour."

Before the thirty minutes passed, Matthew had come saying, "Let's play together."

Tony realized that he should either leave the paper and play with his only son or occupy him with something till he finished reading. Therefore, he fetched the scissors and page of an old paper on which the earth was drawn. He cut it into pieces and told Matthew to gather the pieces together to form the picture of the earth. Tony thought that it would take his kid an hour to form the picture. However, after few minutes, Matthew came saying, "Dad, I finished. Let's play together."

"How did you do it so quickly?" Tony said wondering.

"It's so easy. On its back, there's a picture of a child. I formed the picture of the kid thus, the picture of the earth was formed."

Tony kept silent for a moment. Then, he embraced his son and kissed him saying, "Let's play together son." Tony realized that the formation of a child's character could be a blessing for the reformation of humanity at large. Tony remembered that Lord Jesus commanded us not to despise one of these little ones.



Let me care for every child and realize that You love him and died for him.

May I see every child as a living leader

Who can edify the congregation or destroy them.

You never despise one of the little ones.

May Your Holy Spirit make me respect every child.

"Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18.3).

"Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me" (Matt. 25.40).

Story No. 512

Who is the Saint?

Young Mark entered St. Anthony the Great's Cathedral. He walked with his mother looking at the windows of the church on which there are icons of the saints made of the beautiful grained glass. The child was asking his mother, "Who's this saint?"

Mother answered, "St. Matthew the Evangelist, St. Mark, St. Anthony, St. Demiana etc."

Mark went home and told his elder sister about the beautiful icons of the saints which he saw. Sister asked Mark, "Who's the saint?"

"When someone stands at the courtyard of the church and looks at the window one'll see the saints radiating the lights of the church."

Thus, the saint is the person radiating the light of the church. These are the saints in whom Christ's light is transfigured. When we glorify and praise Virgin Mary, a prophet, a disciple or a martyr, we see our Christ glorified through the work of His Grace in them. As for you, it is necessary to follow their example. Ask that God's Grace may work in you thus, what Lord Jesus Christ said would be fulfilled in you: "**You are the light of the world**" (Matt. 5.14), and "**Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven**" (Matt. 5.16).



May Your Light shine in me. May You make me light before men.

I will then proclaim Your Glory reflected in my depths so that Your Holy Name will be glorified in my weakness.

An Allegorical story No. 513

The Stork and the Wolf

A young man came to me to make confession. He fell in love with a girl. He said that he did not commit any sin with her. However, his heart, feelings and thoughts were busy thinking of her. His excuse was that the girl was thirsty for emotions and he feared that evil friends might ill-use her strong passions. He said that he pretended to love her in order to attract her but he soon fell in the trap of lust. He asked what to do.

For the like of this youth, I narrate the story of the stork who put his head in the mouth of a wolf.

Once a wolf hunted a fat quail. Being hungry, he ate it very quickly. Thus, a bone remained in his throat. He tried hard to get rid of it but he could not. He ran towards a stork. When the stork tried to fly for fear of the wolf the wolf cried, "Don't fear O merciful stork. I came to you asking for a favor which I'll never forget."

"What do you want O wolf while you're an unmerciful animal of prey?"

"Pray. It's no time for reproach. Save me for I'm dying."

"What happened?"

"There's a bone in my throat."

"What do you want me to do?"

"You can pick it with your long bill and save me from death."

"How can I do this O ravenous beast?"

"I promise to give you a great reward."

Out of mercy, the stork put his head in the mouth of the wolf, picked the bone with his bill and got it out. As soon as the stork felt that the wolf is no longer in danger he asked him for the reward.

"I fulfilled my promise. Your head was in my mouth and I didn't eat you as I ate the quail. Isn't it enough? If I had closed my mouth while your head was in it, it would have been the end of your life."

As soon as the stork heard this, he flew. The wolf was looking at him sorry for not devouring him.



Let me be kind

Give me wisdom beside kindness

So that I may not put my head in the mouth of a certain sin.

Let me not trust my thoughts save in Your Hands.

"Catch us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines, For our vines have tender grapes" (Song 2.15). "Catch us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines, For our vines have tender grapes" (Song 2.15).

Story No. 514

The Belly and Lust of the Dog

A youth asked a friend of his, "I know that the males of some animals and birds remain single until their death after the death of their females and wouldn't accept any other female. On the contrary, the male of the dog may have any female even if it's his sister, daughter or mother. Why?"

"Cause he doesn't put limits to his stomach." His friend answered. "He who does not restrain eating can't restrain his instinct. If you want to live pure you should put limits to your stomach and go on a diet."

The friend said this not from a scientific view but from the ethical symbolic one.

The young man asked, "Why does the dog eat much without going on a diet?"

His friend told him the following allegorical story:

It was said in the past that the dog and the crocodile were intimate friends. Since the dog loved eating, he took a knife and went to the crocodile saying, "Please, Open my mouth with the knife to be wider for I can't eat a large piece of meat at a time."

The crocodile held the knife and opened the mouth of the dog. Thus, the dog was able to eat very quickly. The crocodile asked the dog to do the same with him. Hence, the dog took the knife and opened his mouth to the extent that he was about to cut the crocodile's head into two pieces. The crocodile's mouth got very wide yet, he felt that he had become ugly and frightening. Thus, he got furious with him and insisted on taking revenge. As soon as the dog felt this, he fled away and they were no more friends. As for the crocodile, he was ashamed of his mien. Therefore, he dived in the water so that no one could see him.



Let me O Lord eat in order to live

Not live in order to eat.

You control my stomach

And put a guard over my lips.

With you, my body,

Stomach, thoughts and senses become chaste.

You are He who bestows purity.

Story No. 515

Anchorites Entertained by Pope Theophilus

The Manichaean thought tried to sneak into Wadi El-Natron (The Natron Valley) among the monks. This thought prohibits marriage and eating meat considering them impurity. Therefore, the monks obliged themselves with eating even a very small amount of meat at least once a year so that no one of those who held that belief would find a place among them.

Pope Theophilus celebrated the feast with some of the recluses since the pope was known for his great love for monasticism, his frequent visits to the monasteries and meeting the hermits to ask for their counsel. The pope served the hermits meat. Each one of them took his share to eat of it with no hesitation. The pope was talking to them with love. He took a slice of meat and said, "I got you the best kind of meat ever found here. May you be satisfied with it."

Suddenly, the anchorites stopped eating and left what is left of the meat without conversing with each other. The pope felt that there was a secret behind that strange behavior. Thus, he asked, "What happened? Why did you all stop eating at the same time?"

"Father, you know that we, the recluses, don't eat meat." One of them replied, "We only taste a very small piece of it once a year according to the custom of the monks of Wadi El-Natron so that the Manichaean thought would not creep to anyone of us. We don't eat meat, not because it's impure but because we seek a better heavenly food. It's just out of obedience for your fatherhood that we ate. However, we don't lust for it. As for saying that you had chosen the best kind of meat so that we might eat and be satisfied, it's not our nature to eat for the sake of lust. Thus, we all stopped eating."

The pope realized that he had not understood the philosophy of their spiritual life yet. He apologized. He learnt from them a spiritual lesson to support him in his fight; that is, to seek the sweetness of the celestial not the terrestrial food.



*My Lord, give me from your table
The heavenly food which satisfies my soul
Light my insight and give me understanding
So that I may hear your voice and realize your secrets.*

*Thus, my soul will be satisfied with your knowledge.
My body will not then seek fullness and lust.
You are my fullness O the desire of my soul.*

An Allegorical Story No. 516

“The lord is my portion,” says my soul,” (Lam. 3.24).

After many years, Peter met his friend John who has become very rich. Peter entered his friend's palace. John was showing him the expensive curios he bought from different countries. He went with him upstairs until they reached the roof. John looked at the neighboring village and said, “Look, the entire village is mine.”

Peter kept silent for a moment. When John moved to another direction of the roof his friend did not follow him but stood looking at the village.

“What are you thinking of, Peter?”

“I'm looking at that red house.”

“What do you admire in it?”

“The lady therein is very rich.”

“What! She's a poor worker. She hardly lives on the wages I pay her.”

“I know that her daily wages are very small but her possessions are many.”

“What does she possess?”

“She possesses Lord Jesus Christ thus, she's the right of the promise, **“all things are yours”**” (1 Cor. 3.22).

The rich man got perplexed and did not utter a word.



*May the rich boast for his riches,
The wise for human wisdom
And the strong for his strength and authority.
You are my richness, wisdom and strength.
You are my praise and salvation.*

<p>“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us” (2 Cor. 4.7).</p>
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Story No. 517

The little Train's Journey to the Moon

The little train used to go fast from a village to another. The peasants thus rejoiced and greeted him together with the birds and the trees. Wherever he went, all greeted him and he greeted them. After years of enjoyment, two peasants caught the little train. They were talking about the space and the planets. He heard them talking about the spaceships which went to the space, that some of the spacemen landed on the Moon and that all mass media cared much for their news. Almost all people even children desired to land on the Moon.

The train decided to leave Earth and go for a journey to the Moon. He actually left the trees, the peasants and the birds. Instead of walking among the villages, he left for the Moon. He tried to go as fast as he could to go out of the Earth to the Moon. He was looking at the Moon where he saw a shining face with two eyes looking at him and a smiling mouth. This sight was pushing him more and more towards the Moon. He was dreaming of the moments during which he would reach his new place.

He actually approached the Moon for, the gravity, which kept his balance, no longer controlled him. There, he found no one to greet him, no beautiful trees to bow to him and no birds to fly around him. He found himself alone. Life was flavorless. Grief filled his heart for he left the Earth over which he used to walk joyfully. He decided to return quickly. There, he found the peasants waiting for him. Being glad, they applauded asking him not to leave them. Tears went down his cheeks and he said, "I'll not leave the Earth again."



*For my sake, You created the Moon and the planets.
You created the Earth so that I may enjoy its blessings
And enjoy the beautiful world.
You created the Moon to light by night.*

*I will not complain again.
With joy, I will live on my earth
And with pleasure, I will pass to the Heavens which You prepare for me.*

Story No. 518

Young Men Serving

Thirty-five secondary-school students in California decided to serve Lord Jesus Christ in one of the countries. They sent a message to one of the pastors of the church in Mexico asking him to allow them to minister there for a week. They did not know what to do. However, they met together to pray to the Lord to guide them to the ministry which suited them for attaining the heavenly kingdom. In the Easter holiday, they went on their journey after collecting a large sum of money and taking presents.

They went to Mexico, to the church. To their astonishment, they found the pastor amid very poor people praying among the remains of a burnt church where nothing remained but four walls. The pastor served as usual without pointing out to the students. They realized that he did not receive their letter and did not appoint a service for them. After the prayers, the pastor welcomed them and the people gathered around them asking about the reason behind their coming. They said that they had come to serve them. All people were astonished since few days ago, the church building was burnt. They were not able to rebuild it yet, God sent them this group of young men to work and pay for it. Beside building the church, the young men built many souls with the spirit of love, and sacrifice with great joy.



*Teach me O Lord to cry,
"What do You want me to do?"
I yearn to put forth my hands and work.*

*May You open for me a way to bear witness for Your Gospel
With practical love and sacrifice with joy
Beside preaching to everyone as possible as I can.*

Story No. 519

A Bee Rescuing a King

The queen of Sheba heard about Solomon's wisdom and great fame. Since she loved wisdom, **"She came to Jerusalem with a very great retinue, with camels that bore spices, very much gold, and precious stones"** (1 Kings 10.2). She met the king and the high officials of his state. She tested him with questions and riddles. The king replied with extreme quickness which revealed the wisdom and intelligence that God granted him.

Finally, she presented him a very beautiful artificial bunch of flowers and a beautiful natural one. No man could ever distinguish between them. She asked him to choose the natural bunch. For the first time, the king seemed perplexed and silence prevailed at the king's court. All were waiting to see how Solomon would get out of this dilemma. Quickly, the king brought some of the bees that were flying around the flowers of his garden. When he set them free, they flew towards the natural flowers. Thus, he held the natural bunch. Soon, all the attendants applauded. The queen also was astounded because of what Solomon had done. Therefore, she glorified God who gave him this wisdom.



May I attain wisdom O Lord!

In meekness, Solomon asked You for wisdom.

You gave him Intelligence and sharpness of mind.

You also gave him a holy pious life.

In meekness, Solomon perceived that a small bee could realize what he could not.

What the bee realized instinctively,

Neither Solomon nor his men could realize.

Grant me O Lord the spirit of wisdom mixed with meekness.

Story No. 520

Berry and the Kitten

Norma had bought a kitten for her young daughter Berry. However, Berry found enjoyment in playing with her friends and going out with her mother. It got very cold. Thus, Norma asked her young daughter to stay at home till she returned from the market. Berry felt isolated since she found no one of her friends for they all feared to go out because of the cold. She tried to find any toy to amuse her but found none.

The kitten which suffered from the same feelings looked at her and said, “Beloved Berry, I feel your bitter pains since I live isolated in this house. I’ve no family. Many a time I tried to play with you but you were busy going out with your mother or playing with your friends. Do you allow me to play with you now?”

Before Berry uttered a word the kitten had run towards her. It licked her legs and kindly wiped them with its beautiful soft skin. Berry held the kitten and played with it. They became intimate friends. She found joy in playing with this small animal which no longer left her room. Her heart opened wide not only for the kitten that suffered from loneliness. She also searched among her friends for any child who suffered from the same feelings to be a friend for her and to care for her.



My Lord, You are the God of every despised person.

You search for those whom no one searches for.

You are the friend of all who seek Your friendship.

May You be my intimate friend.

May You let me be a friend to those for whom no one cares.

Story No. 521

The Bowing Christmas Tree

I was thinking of the true Christian who has love as a nature. He bears love and is full of love because he is the Son of God who is Himself Love. He who clings to Him bears the partnership of His characteristics especially love.

In Halifax, our beloved father, Mikhail Fam narrated a touching short story which he read with his young daughter.

A dove came to a field in which Christmas trees were planted. She asked each tree if they would allow her to build her nest, to lay eggs and to lie over them among his branches. Some of the trees apologized saying that they have been recently planted and they wanted to grow quickly. They did not want a nest to be built among their branches which would hinder their growth. Others apologized saying that the nest would make them look ugly thus, no one would take them and decorate them in Christmas.

Among all the trees, there was a small tree who welcomed the dove. The dove was delighted with the tree who loved entertaining strangers and did not seek his own.

“What can I do for you in return for your hospitality?” The dove asked.

“Living among my branches is my reward.” The tree replied, “It gives me much pleasure to give you warmth to lie over your eggs and that the eggs would produce young ones. Please accept my invitation.”

The dove accepted the invitation with much joy. She began to collect the straw and build her nest among the branches of the young Christmas tree. In winter, it was very cold. Therefore, the tree bowed his upper part to protect the dove and her eggs. He continued to bow as possible as he could until the eggs hatched and the young ones flew. The tree tried then to lift his upper part to be straight but could not.

Christmas drew near. Thus, merchants came to cut the Christmas trees to sell them to be decorated for Christmas. Each of them passed by the bowing tree and refused to buy him until he almost became alone in the whole field. It was very painful for the tree for he would not be decorated for Christmas like the others.

“Was I mistaken when I bowed to protect the dove and her young ones.” He asked himself.

“The decoration which pleases the Born in the manger is the love I gave.” He answered. “I’ll never regret doing an act of love.”

Few days later, a believer who had bought a new house came. He wanted to plant a tree in his front garden. He crossed the field with his wife to find that the upper part of all the trees had been cut. None remained but that bowing tree. He admired him and bought him. The tree was uprooted and was planted in the garden of the new house. The man decorated the tree two days before Christmas. Thus, he rejoiced. After Christmas, all the cut trees withered and all people got rid of them.

However, the roots of the bowing tree went deep in the new soil. He was continuously growing to be decorated every Christmas and In all celebrations. Everyday, he used to sing the hymn of love of the first epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians, chapter 13 and end it with “**Love never fails.**”



*Your Soul bowed with love
Towards all mankind O the Savior of the world.
You became ugly on the cross O the source of all beauty.
However, Your Glory was soon reflected on many souls.
Your cross has become the secret behind the beauty of many.*

*May my soul bow with love with You
And carry Your cross with You.
May all despise my love for a while.
Time will pass and I shall shine with love.
I shall then become Your partner in the everlasting glory.*

Story No. 522

A Telegraph Morse-Code System Operator

The manager of the telephone and telegram department advertized in the official paper that a telegram operator for Morse Code system was needed to work. Seven persons went to apply for the job. They all were seated while the manager was using his device without paying attention to anyone of them. They felt that he was busy working and that he ought to interview them to choose the best. After two minutes, an eighth person entered. He opened the glass door and talked to the manager for a minute. Then, the manager went out and said, "Thank you for your interest to work here but the vacancy has been occupied. You can leave."

"How can it be?" One of the seven asked. "We've been waiting for you to talk to us for hours. When this young man came. He stayed only two minutes. Then, he entered and talked to you for a minute and you chose him without interviewing us!"

"I was talking to you but you didn't hear me." The manager said smiling. "I was talking in the telegraph language but you didn't understand it. I said, "Whoever understands me, let him come in. He'll work soon with me."



*May I hear Your voice O Lord with Samuel the prophet.
May I understand what You say through Your Spirit which dwells in me.
May I answer and run to You
And receive my work with You and through You O Lover of mankind.*

Story No. 523

“No, you’ll never Steal my Crown”

A severe love

Life had become detestable for the man for, he loved Theodora the beautiful virgin very much. He loved her for her gentleness, tenderness, beauty and perfection. He wanted to have her as a wife for all his possessions. She had no reason to refuse him as a husband for, he was a wealthy honorable and handsome young nobleman of Alexandria. He tried with all means to attract her however, she insisted on refusing him. He was sad. He despised life until he fell sick.

Realizing his case, each of his friends suggested a trick but in vain. Her steadiness was not affected by his wealth, his passion, his sickness or the entreaties of many people for his sake. The man then tried to assure her that he would not ask her to deny her Christian faith and that he would protect her from the law. However, she refused to get married to an unchristian man whatever the consequences might be.

Finally, he decided to resort to violence. At that time, the Christians in Alexandria were suffering from great tribulations because of Diocletian’s edict to the effect that all churches ought to be destroyed; Bibles ought to be burnt; all Christian officials ought to be sacked, deprived of their civil rights and regarded as slaves. The man sent Theodora a message telling her to accept marrying him or else, several pains and tribulations would befall her.

Memories and thoughts

No sooner had the fair virgin received the threats than she entered her chamber, looked eastwards to the icon of the cross and bowed down in serenity and peace. She remembered much of the events which she herself had seen and heard of. She thought of the church which had been persecuted Throughout the generations. The Alexandrian school of philosophy dedicated all its efforts for attacking Christianity. It produced volumes containing many falsehoods against the Christians and their faith. Moreover, the rulers support it or at least were pleased with it.

However, with serenity, many Christians defended their faith and refuted what had been written against the church and the faith and showed the fallacies of the heathens and the philosophers. They discussed bravely the violated rights of the Christians. They addressed their writings to the philosophers, the people and the emperor himself. The Christian school of Alexandria was actually closed. However, its work was being done in the houses and education never stopped. It is worth mentioning that Origen, one of its scholars, during the persecution, was preparing, from the unchristians, believers ready for martyrdom. Some of the catechumens have been already martyred.

Churches were closed sometimes but no one could ever prevent the pastoral work. All homes and hearts were opened for the pastors who went from home to home to support their children and encourage them. Theodora remembered the Christians rejoicing while being led to death. She remembered how the persecuted Christians forgave those who persecuted them. They loved, served and prayed for them not out of hypocrisy or fear but out of mercy seeking their salvation. Theodora

felt that she did not deserve to be a martyr for Christ who loved her. She realized that she should pray for the nobleman. She desired his salvation.

Tears ran down her cheeks. Are they tears of rejoicing for the sacrifice of love she was going to offer? Are they tears of humbleness asking for the salvation of this man? Or were they to express unspeakable thanks for He Who opened His arms for her, cared for her that no hair of her head would fall without His permission? She prayed but not as usual. She was leaping in joy as if Heavens descended to her or let's say that she ascended to Heavens and saw what no eye ever saw. She prayed for the salvation of the nobleman and all the unbelievers.

In the court

Theodora was brought to the court according to the orders of the nobleman.

"Are you free or a bondmaid?"

"I'm Christian."

"Are you then free or a bondwoman?"

"I said I'm Christian. Lord Jesus Christ came to free me. As for the worldly concept of freedom, I'm also free."

The judge called the guard of the city and asked him, "What do you know about this Theodora?"

"Theodora is from a noble family. She vowed herself for virginity."

The judge heard about virginity in contempt. Then, he asked Theodora, "If you are from a noble family, why do you refuse marriage then?"

"For Lord Jesus Christ. His incarnation saved us from corruption and gave us everlasting life. I'll never deny my faith. I insist on living as a virgin."

The judge ignored her adherence to Christianity. He did not ask her to deny it for he knew how the Christians would not deny their faith even unto death. He knew the nobleman's desire to marry her thus, he threatened her that he would make someone rape her if she did not get married.

"I think that you know that the Lord looks to the intention of people." She replied with inner peace. "He knows my desire to live in virginity. If you order someone to do what you said, it'll be his sin not mine as long as it's out of my hand."

"Don't disgrace your family."

"Christ can protect his innocent dove."

"You're deceived as you trust a crucified man. Don't think that you'll be saved from disgrace when you go to where I'll send you."

She was not shaken or disturbed by his threats. After many discussions, the judge said to her, "I was much patient with you and didn't resort to violence. However, if you insisted on resisting I'll treat you as a bondwoman according to the orders of our lords the emperors." He was infuriated because of her serenity. He said to one of his men, "Slap this damsel with full strength and tell her to offer sacrifice to the gods and not to be a fool."

"By God, I'll never offer sacrifice to the devil." She replied serenely. "I'll worship no one but God who is my helper."

The judge collected himself and decided to leave her three days to think, swearing that if she did not refrain he would send her to a bordello.

In the bordello

Theodora was taken to a brothel after being ill-treated by the soldiers. She was put in one of its rooms. The bordello was guarded so that the maid would not escape. She lifted her eyes up to her Heavenly Bridegroom giving up her life into His Hands for, with the temptation He makes the way of escape. She was sure that He was able to deliver her. In spite of her tenderness, her feelings had become unaffected with what happened around her for being totally attached to God who loved her. She felt that only God and she were there.

However, the entrance of a soldier into the room interrupted her inner serenity. He called, "Theodora, Theodora!"

She got a little perplexed for she knew that someone would certainly try to rape her.

"Theodora, don't be afraid. I'm your brother Didymus. I'm disguised in a soldier's clothes to rescue your virginity and chastity. I'm a Christian whom the Lord had sent to you."

While putting off the soldier's clothes, Didymus said to her, "hurry up. Put on these clothes and bow your head down so that no one would see you. Flee without talking to anyone."

Few hours later, all Alexandria got confused, a Christian had rescued the fair Theodora from disgrace. Didymus was taken to the governor and was questioned, "Who made this plan for you?"

"God had sent me to do this."

"Tell me where Theodora is or else, you'll be tortured."

"I don't know where she is. I only know that as long as she is a believer, The Lord takes care of her."

After long discussions, he was sentenced to death.

"No, you'll never steal my crown"

Many people had gathered around Didymus as the soldiers insulted him much while driving him to where the sentence was to be executed. During this fuss, there came a girl rushing into the crowd. She held Didymus' hand and said, "I'll never allow you to steal my crown. It's your right to rescue my chastity but not to steal my crown of martyrdom."

They were all astounded for they knew that she was Theodora who did not allow Didymus to steal her glory and crown of martyrdom in the name of Christ. The governor knew soon of that and sentenced her to death. She received the news as if receiving an invitation to a heavenly wedding ceremony thus, she rejoiced. She looked eastwards and lifted her hands up in the form of the cross. She lifted her heart up to heaven and her face began to light. All the attendants felt that she saw something they could not see. She began to talk to her heavenly bridegroom as if there were no one but them. Few moments later, she gave up her head to the executioner ordering him to execute the command of his master.

STORIES FOR THE YOUTH

**Together with
“*The Conqueror of Men*”**

524-537

**Prepared By
FR. TADROS Y. MALATY**

Translated by
Irene S. Abd-El-Massih

Dear,

Here is a collection of short stories: some of which are real; some are taken from the universal popular folklore; some are from the Jewish folklore while others are taken from famous books of allegorical stories like:

Cathy Books. *Animal Fairy Stories*.

La Fontaine. *Les Fables*.

Uncle Arthur's Bedtime Stories.

I have tried to give these symbolic stories a Christian spiritual touch.

Story No. 524.

The Christmas Present

As Christmas drew near, Jane entered one of the supermarkets in Los Angeles to buy Christmas presents for her rich parents. She knew not what to buy them for, they lacked nothing. Finally, she decided to buy two presents. Each of them cost one thousand dollars. She stood at the queue to pay. It was the day before Christmas when the prices beat the record. She got bored expecting to wait for thirty minutes at least.

She saw a boy in ragged clothes strictly holding few dollars in his hands as if they were an invaluable treasure. His young sister was carrying a large pair of shoes made of cheap artificial polished leather. After about twenty minutes, the girl put the shoes in front of the sales woman who said kindly, "Six dollars"

The boy had but three dollars. "Can we leave it to you now and return to take it later?" He asked.

"I want to buy it now." His sister said weeping.

"Don't be afraid." Her brother replied. "I'll work in our neighbors' garden and we'll buy the shoes."

"No, tomorrow the supermarket will be shut. I want the shoes."

Tears went down Jane's cheeks. She gave three dollars to the sales woman and gave the children the shoes.

"Thanks for your love." The boy looked to Jane and said.

"For whom are these shoes?" Jane asked.

"For Mammy." The boy replied.

"Who chose them for her?" Jane asked.

"My sister and I."

"Why did you chose her polished shoes?"

"Mammy is very ill." The girl answered, "And daddy said that she may celebrate Christmas with Father Jesus. Our Sunday school teacher said that in Heaven everything Is very shining. All roads in the heavenly Jerusalem are of bright gold. Thus, we chose these bright shoes to suit her in her journey."

Jane was very touched. Tears ran down her cheeks while driving home to give her parents the presents. She entered their chamber and knelt to pray.



Two children cared for presenting polished shoes to their mother who is coming to You.

On the contrary, I don't care for presenting You a pure heart to dwell in.

Prepare my heart to cross to You.

Story No. 525

Lies graver than Wounds

The monkey made a discussion with the turtle about which is more dangerous: lies or wounds. The monkey insisted that bodily wounds are more dangerous than lies. However, the turtle assured the contrary. The monkey got furious of him. He held a knife and said to him, "Let me wound you and you tell me a lie. We'll see then which is graver."

The turtle agreed on this. Therefore, the monkey wounded the turtle's leg. The turtle put medicines on the wound and treated it. On the following day, he went to the monkey healed. Before going to him, the turtle had bought a huge piece of meat and cut it into small pieces. He grilled them and tied them to a tree as if they were fruits.

"Have you seen the unique tree which bears grilled meat?" The turtle Asked the monkey.

"You don't know even how to tell a lie." The monkey said mockingly. "Is that logical? Does it bring fire and grill it?"

"Come and see." He replied.

He walked with him. When he approached the tree, the monkey smelt the meat. He jumped over the branches of the tree to see the grilled meat. The turtle soon told a dog about that wonderful tree. Thus, he went to it. Being hungry, the dog was barking loudly. The monkey was afraid. He began to throw the pieces of meat one after another.

The dogs were attracted by the smell of the grilled meat and came to eat the grilled meat. They finished it all. However, they continued barking, expecting the monkey to throw more of the grilled meat of that wonderful tree. The monkey could neither go down the tree nor eat even one piece of the meat for fear of the dogs. The monkey did not eat, drink or sleep for three days.

On the fourth day, a big wolf was passing by the tree. Thus, the dogs escaped. The wolf then stayed beside the tree waiting for the poor monkey. The turtle came and said to the wolf, "Why do you lie here? It's a poor monkey dying of hunger and sleeplessness. He's no flesh to be eaten."

The monkey was about to die of fear on the branch of the tree while listening to the conversation between the turtle and the wolf. Finally, the wolf left. The monkey then went down the tree completely tired. When the turtle wanted to talk to him, he said, "I'm not able to talk. I've known that you are right. Lies are much more dangerous than bodily wounds."

"Bread gained by deceit is sweet to a man, but afterward his mouth will be filled with gravel" (Prov. 20.17).

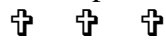
"A thief is better than a man that is accustomed to lie: but they both shall have destruction to heritage" (Sira. 20.25).

Story No. 526

The Stolen Car

In California, many cars are stolen every year. It is rare to find the car in the same day. In 1981, a private car was stolen. Its owner informed the police of the theft. He told the police that he left on the seat biscuits mixed with poison which he prepared to be put in the garage for killing mice. He feared that the thief would eat it and get poisoned. The police warned the thief of eating the biscuits in all mass media. They did their best in searching for the thief not to punish him but to save him and those who were with him.

Likewise, when God asks us to return to him and turns us from doing evil, He does not do this to punish us but to save us from perdition.



*You seek my repentance,
Not my punishment.
With Your love, You save me from the death of sin.*

Story No. 527

Moving the Fence

During the Second World War, a soldier was killed. His colleagues carried him to a neighboring church in Europe. They asked the priest to bury him in the cemetery of the church. The priest welcomed them. Then, he asked, "Is he Catholic?"

"No." They replied.

"I hope to bury him in the graveyard of the church." The priest said. "Yet, since he's not Catholic, I'll only allow you to bury him outside the fence of the cemetery."

He referred to a place outside the fence where they dug and buried the soldier. After the war, they took a bunch of flowers and went to the church searching for the grave of their colleague. However, they did not find it. They went to the priest asking him for the place of the grave. He said, "After you had buried him, I reproached myself for not allowing you to bury him inside the fence of our cemetery."

"What have you done then? Did you bury him in the graveyard?"

"No, I moved the fence to enclose his grave."

The soldiers rejoiced for his pure heart. They entered the graveyard and put the bunch over the tomb of their colleague.

Human love compelled the priest to move the fence so that the tomb of a dead body would be enclosed in the graveyard of the church. However, the Divine Love made Heavens widen and move its fences to enclose the believers.



The Divine descended to move the fence and enclose us in His Heavens.

Thank You O Divine Lover of mankind.

You descended to us to change our earth into heavens.

You descended to move the fences to take us to You O the Fiery Fence.

You moved us from the earth to Your Father's bosom.

Story No. 528

Why Frogs Live in the Mud?

Timothy asked his grandma, “Why do frogs live in the mud?”

“In the past,” She said, “A deer wanted to make a banquet for all the animals and birds. He invited them all save the tiger ‘cause the tiger was his mortal enemy and many animals and birds feared him. All came to the deer’s house. He got perplexed and asked, “Who will head the banquet?”

“I’m the oldest one.” The raven said. “So I deserve to sit at the table-head.”

“No, I’m older than you.” The frog said, “It’s I who should sit at the table-head.”

The frog sat at the table-head and all the others were seated. Before eating, they heard a loud roar. It was the tiger swearing that he would devour all the guests because they went to the banquet and ignored him. They were all afraid. Then, the deer looked to the fox saying, “We all know that you can make the tiger calm down. Hurry and go to him before he comes and devour us.”

The fox met the tiger who was angry. Thus, he said calmly, “Hello, my lord the tiger. Why are you sad today?”

“The deer invited all the animals but me.” The tiger said angrily. “I’ll go to avenge my dignity.”

“I wonder why you’re sad.” Said the fox smilingly. “It’s because they honor you that they didn’t invite you. The deer prepared some herbs and plants. How can he then invite the ruler of the mountains to eat of it? We’re all your servants. How can the servants invite their master to such a poor banquet?”

“You’re right.” The tiger calmed down and said. He then went searching for a prey.

The fox returned to the banquet to find no one save the deer. When he asked him about the guests, the deer said, “They all escaped fearing the tiger.”

The fox went searching for them to invite them to return since he did his task successfully. However, he found the frog who headed the banquet diving into the mud and insisting on remaining there and not returning to the banquet.

She said that she did not trust the tiger. He might think again of taking revenge.

Thus, the frog, who wanted to be the leader proudly, descended into the mud by the spirit of fear.



*Give me the spirit of meekness O Gentle and Lowly in Heart
So that I may flee from timely dignity and not seek worldly glory.
He who seeks the glory of the world, descends into its mud
And is filled by the fear of people not of God.
You are my dignity and glory.*

Story No. 529

The turtle and the Wild Rabbit

A turtle was talking to a wild rabbit. The rabbit mocked at him because of the shell which surrounded his body and made him move very slowly. The turtle asked the rabbit to make a race between them. The rabbit said, "All know that you're the slowest animal in the world. How dare you ask me to make a race between us?"

"Let's try and make a reward for him who wins the race." The turtle answered.

"Ok." The rabbit said mockingly. "But you'll surely fail."

The turtle insisted on making the race. As the rabbit talked much, the turtle said, "You're talkative Mr. Rabbit. Let's begin and define the distance."

The race began. The turtle walked very slowly but continuously. On the other hand, the rabbit lied down saying, "I'll sleep and rest for, whatever the turtle does, he'll not win the race."

He got up and began to play. Suddenly, he realized that there was no time left. He stood on his hind legs and jumped but the turtle approached the goal. He tried to run. However, he failed and the turtle won the prize.

Story No. 530

The Nobel Prize

The Swedish chemist Alfred Nobel devoted himself for scientific researches. He was busy researching about the atom and the explosions. He found enjoyment in these discoveries. His brother died. The papers falsely stated his name in the obituary instead of his brother's. He thus found a chance to see what people say about him and his researches and discoveries. Therefore, he did not correct the mistake made by the paper.

Many articles were written. The title of most of these articles was "Nobel the Inventor of Destruction". Nobel was affected by the articles. He moved from using the atom in wars to using it for peace and the edification of society in many fields. He decided to give a universal prize to him who does the best work for the edification of mankind. The Nobel Prize was thus made.



*Let me O Lord use my talents for the edification of society.
Let me O Lord love every man
And always work for achieving peace.
O Prince of Peace, may I be an icon of You.*

Story no. 531

What does Lord Jesus Do in Paradise?

Meesho used to read the Bible to his son since his infancy and relate to him some stories. Son liked to listen to his daddy narrating stories especially of Lord Jesus Christ. He asked many questions which Meesho answered except one: “Dad, I know that angels and archangels and all who are in heaven praise God continuously. All the saints in paradise glorify Him. But what does Lord Jesus Christ do in paradise?”

Meesho did not know how to answer his son’s question. However, with faith he said to his son, “Let’s pray to Lord Jesus Christ to reveal to you what He does in paradise.”

They both prayed. The son asked, “What do You do O Lord Jesus Christ in Paradise?”

They both slept. Son saw in a dream Lord Jesus Christ sitting on His throne surrounded by thousands praising Him with great joy. He saw Him in unspeakable glory. He saw all approaching Him while, He was wiping the tears of the believers’ eyes. Therefore, His glory was reflected on them. The son approached Lord Jesus Christ. He saw Him groaning. Thus, he asked him wondering, “How do You groan O Lord, You who wipe the tears of the sufferers and bestow upon them Your Glory?”

“I’m sad ‘cause I love you and you still commit sins.” Lord Jesus answered.

“You don’t allow me to penetrate your depth. On the contrary, you dismiss me. I want to make my throne in you. I call you while, you don’t call me. You don’t accept me to carry your burdens. I knock the door of your heart but you don’t open. You forget me being busy with dust. However, I never forget you. I don’t occupy myself even with the Heavenly hosts. I died for you while you’re indifferent. I’m sad ‘cause you don’t know how much I do love you.”

Tears went down the son’s cheeks. He bowed his head ashamed and approached his Lord. The Lord embraced him with His Hands. The son looked and saw them bleeding. He cried, “What’s this my Lord?”

“I still love you. My blood purifies you of every sin and makes you worthy of sharing with me my glory.”

Story No. 532

Jacqueline and the Parrot

On her way home, Jacqueline used to visit her grandma Lucy daily after school. Grandma who lived alone rejoiced with this visit. When Jacqueline left, Lucy used to open the window and bless her. Lucy got sick and stayed in bed. Therefore, Jacqueline visited and served her. Finally, Jacqueline kissed her grandma and left. She closed the door. On her way home, she heard a voice saying, "May God be with you Jacqueline. May God bless you and preserve you."

She looked backwards but did not find her grandma at the window as usual uttering these words. She said to herself, "Grandma is ill in bed. She couldn't have stood at the window to look and bless me. The voice may be of my imagination since I used to hear her blessing and praying for me." No sooner had she given her back to her grandma's house that the voice repeated. She opened the door and told her grandma about what she heard.

"It's the parrot which is beside the window." Grandma said. "It repeated what I had been saying to you everyday." Jacqueline was much pleased with the parrot and ran towards it and kissed it. She then cared for it and they became intimate friends. Jacqueline learnt from the parrot that friendship is made with the words of love and blessing.



*May You bless my mouth O Lord to bless all.
Let it be a fountain that blesses and does not curse
So that it may reveal a heart in which You only dwell.*

"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" (Matt. 5.44).

"Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse" (Rom. 12.14).

Story No. 533

The Effect of Anger

Alan was always angry and always making excuses for this. His father encouraged him to live like his Lord who did not cry out or caused anyone to hear his voice. He was repeating St. John Chrysostom's words, "What is wrong should not be made right by a greater wrong. Wrath is a dangerous sin. We should not defend righteousness by wrath."

Once the father gave his son some nails and said, "Whenever you get angry put a nail into the fence of the garden. Fix it strongly."

On the first day, he counted the nails and found that they were about fifty. He wondered how he got furious fifty times a day. He cried to God to help him be calm and patient. Actually, the number lessened gradually until on a certain day, he did not get angry even once. The father was pleased with his son and gave him a lovely present. He then asked him to go and uproot all the nails. Alan removed them joyfully. He went to his father saying, "I thank God who uprooted from me the sin of anger which corrupted the sight for a long time."

They both went to the fence. Alan said proudly to his father, "Look, there isn't a single nail in the fence."

Father rejoiced but said, "The nails are no longer there but their effect is still apparent in the fence. Man may get rid of anger but its old effect cannot be easily removed."



*Uproot from me the spirit of anger
So that I may behave as a son of yours who has the spirit of gentleness and long-suffering.*

*He who is angry with his brother cannot have Your righteousness.
May You give me Your righteousness so that I do not commit sin.*

"So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath" (Jam. 1.19).

Story No. 534

A Chorus of Three Trees

On a hill, three trees met and went on praising the Creator. An angel appeared to them and asked them, "What do you want?"

"I want to grow and be beautiful," The first one said, "so that a carpenter would take my stem to make of it a beautiful box in which a precious treasure may be put."

"I want to grow and my stem be strong so that a great king's ship would be made of it." The second tree said.

"I want to grow and my stem be very high so that all who see me would glorify God the Creator who dwells in Heaven." The third said.

"I'll tell God your wishes for, He gives everyone the desire of one's heart." The angel said.

Time passed. The first became very beautiful. The second became very strong, while the third became very high. Some woodsmen passed by. One of them cut the first tree and gave its wood to a carpenter who made of it a food box for animals to be put in a barn. The tree wondered why its beauty would be thus spared being a food box for animals. Another woodsman cut the strong tree and gave its wood to the ships makers who made of it a fishing boat to be filled with the bad smell of fish instead of being a royal ship. A third woodsman cut the very high tree and made of it large pieces of wood and left them in a deserted place not knowing their destiny.

The three trees were sad for what befell them. Once the Virgin St. Mary came with St. Joseph the carpenter. She bore a baby. She found no place but the wooden manger for her baby Jesus Christ, the source of the treasures of Heaven and Earth. Thus, the greatest treasure was put in the manger.

After thirty years, Lord Jesus Christ wanted to talk to the multitudes. He sat in the ship which rejoiced being used by the King of kings and Lord of lords. Few years later, the soldiers wanted to crucify Christ. Therefore, they took the wooden pieces and made a cross for the Savior of the whole world who is, alone, able to carry the believers to God's bosom. Thus, the wishes of the three trees were fulfilled in the appointed time in a way they could never imagine.



Let me praise You permanently.

I am a small weak tree.

Use me as it pleases Your Divine Will.

I am at Your Hands O the Savior of the whole world.

Story No. 535

Great Success

Realizing the difficulty of the subject he taught, the professor allowed the students to have a sheet of paper having a specific size during the exam and to write on it whatever they liked. Each student searched for thin-pointed pens to write as much as they could of the laws and summary of some chapter of the subject. On the day of the exam, one of the students went having a white sheet of paper. As long as he was seated, he put it on the ground beside him. All people were observing him in astonishment. When it was time to receive the exam sheet, a young man specialized in the subject entered and stood above the white sheet. The student read the questions and the young man answered. One of the exam supervisors came and asked them about what they were doing.

“The professor allowed us to write the data on a paper to take it during the exam.” The student said. “ This young man who knows the data came with me. He does not stand outside the edges of the paper. He knows all the required information.” In this world, we do not need to write information on a sheet of paper to carry during the exam. What we need is to carry the person of Lord Jesus Christ. Through him, we achieve great success. He alone can answer all questions. He is the One who will justify us on the great day of the Lord.



*I have nothing to carry to You on the great day of the Lord but You.
You are my lawyer and defender.
You alone justify me and hide all my weaknesses.*

Story No. 536

The Enraged Goat

Daniel observed that his son returned everyday from school enraged of his colleagues. He was always grumbling. Therefore, he told him the story of the enraged goat.

Once a farmer had a beautiful goat. He put a golden rattler around her neck. Conceitedly, she was jumping right and left that all people would hear the voice of the rattler and come and see her beauty. While jumping, the rattler leapt into a small thorny tree on a hill. The goat looked to the tree and asked him to throw to her the rattler.

“If you want it, climb the hill and take it.” The tree said. “I’ll not throw it to you.”

The goat was enraged and threatened the tree of taking revenge. She went to the saw, told him what had happened and asked him to cut the tree to avenge her.

“The tree is not mistaken. How can I cut him?” The saw replied. “Besides, I’m very old and I’m no longer sharp.”

The goat was again enraged and threatened the saw of taking revenge. She went to the fire, told her what had happened and asked him to burn the saw.

“How can I burn the saw?” The fire said. “He’s right. He grew old and isn’t able to cut the tree.”

The goat was infuriated and threatened the fire of taking revenge. She then went to the water and asked him to quench the fire for revenge.

“Why do you easily get infuriated?” The water refused saying, “What sin had the fire committed?”

The goat was enraged and thought that all were against her. She went to the oxen and asked them to drink the water who refused to quench the fire. As the oxen heard the story, they said, “We’re not thirsty. Besides, the water didn’t wrong you so we’ll not drink the water.”

She threatened them. Then, she went to a wolf, told him the story and asked him to eat the oxen.

“O enraged goat, why do you stir me against the innocent oxen? If you don’t go away from me now, I’ll devour you.”

The goat fled very furious. She went to the gun asking him to avenge her and kill the wolf. The gun said that he did not have bullets and that he did not want to kill a wolf for refusing to eat the oxen. She hurried to the mouse asking him to gnaw the gun for, he refused to kill the wolf.

“The gun is made of metal and I can’t bite metals.” The mouse said.

The goat went furiously to the cat asking him to devour the mouse who refused to gnaw the gun. The cat looked to the goat and said,

“You’re always enraged. Many a time you wanted to kill me with your horns. I’ll not obey you.”

Finding no way-out, she went to the shepherd and told him what had happened. The shepherd said, “O angry goat, why didn’t you come to me to bring you the rattler? You made great enmity between you and all the creatures and also the inanimates. It’s my fault to leave you all daylong move here and there. Go to the barn.”

The shepherd locked the door and the goat was inside. He brought the rattler. Instead of putting around her neck, he hung it on the door so that if she tried to go out he would hear her and would not let her out for a long time. Thus, rage changed her freedom to a prison.



*Let me O Lord blame myself on everything.
May I be enraged against myself and my sins and ignorance
Instead of being enraged against others.
Anger makes my life a dark prison.
It makes me lose my inner freedom and peace.*

“A wrathful man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger allays contention” (Prov. 15.18).

“He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city” (Prov. 16.32).

“But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth” (Col. 3.8).

Story No. 537

The Conqueror of Men

Samuel did not believe that he was about to see his beloved town which he left for about a whole year. Hours passed as if they were unmoved great mountains. He was on his way home with his camels carrying countless presents for his fair young bride whom he missed much. He was compelled to leave her under the care of his family till he returned from his trade journey. The procession approached his town. Thus, his heart leapt joyfully. He looked left and right so as to see his house and surprise his bride with his return bringing her unexpected gifts. Few hours later, Samuel reached his house. To his astonishment, signs of sadness appeared on its entrance. Moreover, the small trees which he had planted got totally dry and withered as if mourning that desolate house. All corners were covered with dust.

“What happened? Did my wife desert the house and neglect it for a long time? Did she return to her family? Or is there something wrong with her?”

Samuel knocked the door but no one answered. Finally, he opened the door to find himself not in his joyful home but as if in a tomb. He did not want to judge rashly. However, he left his camels with his men and rushed to his brother's house who saw him, ran towards him, embraced and kissed him with his eyes full of tears.

“Where's my wife?”

“Be patient. Don't be afraid. Everything's ok.”

“Did she return to her family?”

“I'll tell you. Just relax.”

“Is she sick?”

“No. Just sit down. Let me wash your feet and serve you and your men food. I'll then tell you everything.”

“As the name of the Lord whom I worship lives, I'll neither eat nor drink till I know where my wife is.”

The younger brother patted his brother Samuel's shoulder and with his eyes full of tears said, “Few days after you had traveled, your wife came telling me that she received an oral message to the effect that you died. She pretended to be bitterly sad. However, she soon began to flatter me. I felt that she was a coquette. I said to her, “Who told you that it's a true message?” I rebuked her and told her that I'd make sure if my brother was alive or dead. I wept by day and by night knowing not how to make sure. Moreover, she didn't mention the place to which she went. Few days later, God revealed to me the evil of that woman. I was told that men visited her by night. Not wanting to judge rashly, I asked her but she denied. However, many people witnessed that she was an adulteress.”

“An adulteress?”

“Yes, a betrayer not deserving to live with you.”

“Don't say so. I know her well. Where's she now?”

“She was an adulteress and the law judged that she should be stoned.”

“Stoned?”

“Don't weep. She was an adulteress and a betrayer. She disgraced us all. Thus, she deserved to be stoned and to be dragged by robes outside the town so that she wouldn't be buried in a tomb but to be left to the dogs and the predatory birds to eat her. This is but a little punishment of God for her fornication.”

Samuel could not hear more. He broke down. However, his brother said to him, "Rise. Don't grief over an adulteress. There're many girls. You can marry a fairer and richer and of course purer one. Rise for, all people know her story. They're waiting your return to rejoice. So don't change their joy into sadness because of an adulteress. Don't let people belittle you."

The brother insisted on washing his brother's feet and head and accompanied him to his house with some of the servants to prepare it for him. However, Samuel lost his inner peace. He tried to smile but in vain.

The brother thought that Samuel would restore his gaiety and inner piece by time. However, he got worse. He sometimes found it difficult to accept what had been said about his beloved bride. Sometimes, he entertained much doubt that he could not bear to see a woman or trust a wife.

However, another event could obsess his mind: his only brother fell on the ground crying of pain without stopping like children. Samuel took him to his doctor who cared for him and treated him for months but in vain. He took him to other doctors in different towns bearing all hardships to no avail. People used to visit them to serve and console them. Samuel refuged to God. He went every morning to the synagogue to pray early before sunrise. He sang the psalms and listened to the law, being read, with unceasing tears asking God to have mercy upon them. Samuel was about to break down because of his suffering brother. Once he met a rabbi after the prayer of the first hour. He said to him, "Rabboni, what can I do so that the Lord may have mercy upon us?"

"Why do you say so Samuel?"

"You know how I feel because what had happened to my wife whom I thought an angel."

"What's your fault then Samuel?"
"I lost confidence in every woman."

"Don't say so. There're many girls in the town who love God and serve Him with pure hearts."

"I don't want to get married. I don't think that I can please or be pleased by any girl especially after my brother had fallen sick."

"Don't say so; you're a believer."

"Then, what to do, Rabbi?"

"Go to the neighboring village for, a minister there has told me that a wonderful woman came to the village few days ago. She's poor yet, meek, modest, loving and righteous; she always reads the Bible and memorizes the psalms. She came to the village in ragged clothes and sat on the threshold of a house. When the housewife saw her weeping bitterly, she opened the door and tried to console her. She loved her for her modesty and her love to God. Few days later, the housewife fell sick with a high fever, thus, the poor woman knelt down by the lady's bed and prayed with tears so God heard her supplications. Since then, the villagers asked her to pray for them yet, she remained meek asking everyone to pray for her."

"What have I to do with her, Rabbi?"

"Take your brother to her so that God may hear her concerning you."

"I don't want to meet any woman whoever she is."

"She's a loving modest servant with a contrite heart; she doesn't consider herself a miracle worker. She always sheds tears for the sake of the afflicted and the sick."

"I'll obey you and go, just pray for us."



2

Samuel took his brother to the woman. In the house, he found some people gathering in the courtyard. She did not go out but sat behind the closed door and talked to them in a very low voice. One of them advanced to the door and asked her to pray for him.

“I’m a weak, poor woman in need for prayers.” She answered. “Pray brother for, God hears the prayers of the repentant.”

No sooner had the man heard the word ‘repentant’ than he wept saying:

I’m a repentant madam. I confess that I was an evildoer, yet, I trust that God is able to take away my sins as well as my physical pains. I committed many sins. Once I stole forty dollars from a man. When my crime was discovered, I was sentenced to be crucified. Then, a lady was passing by; as she saw me arrested and surrounded by people rejoicing over my calamity, she said calmly and boldly to the man arresting me, “Why do you arrest your brother thus?”

“He’s stolen from me forty dollars.”

“Do you want to kill him for few dollars?” The lady asked, and at once gave him forty dollars saying, “Freedom is priceless.”

I loved the lady much and walked with her. On the way, I asked her to marry me but she refused. I soon met a rich man and deceived him claiming that the lady was a bondwoman of mine. I sold her for two hundred Dollars and escaped. I don’t know what became of her afterwards. Undoubtedly, she’s a slave in the man’s house now. She freed me with her money while I delivered her to slavery for no price.

One of the attendants interrupted him saying, “Do you know me?”

“No.”

“I’m the man from whom you stole two hundred Dollars.”

The other could not but weep kissing the man’s feet saying, “Forgive me my brother. I promise to pay you your money back. Tell me please what became of the poor woman I sold you.”

The man replied:

After you took the money, I took hold of her hand but she pulled her hand back saying, “What do you want?”

I said to her, “Why are you angry against me? Your master sold you to me.”

“I’m a free woman.” She replied telling me how she rescued this thief from death. Therefore, I gave her ten Dollars and let her go, but I feel that God has blessed my house because of her.



3

Amidst the amazement that prevailed, a man said, “I met that woman few months ago on the way moaning bitterly of her wounds. She was bleeding. I took her home where my wife cared for her till she recovered. However, she was jealous of the woman as she felt that I loved the woman. Yet, the woman was extremely pure as she refused to marry me chastely. Thus, I rent a room for her; and the slave who’s with

me now bares witness that I cared for her as a sister. But one night, as my wife woke up to feed her baby, she found him slain. As we followed the blood traces, it led us to her dwelling. As she opened the door, we found the knife therein. Thus, my wife insisted on killing her but I hardly convinced her that if she had killed the boy, she wouldn't have left the knife in her dwelling. Anyway, my wife beat her severely. Two days later, I gave her forty Dollars and asked her to leave not expecting her to pay them to rescue a thief.

The people then began to ask about the knife found in her dwelling. Unable to bear the murmurs of the people and his master's words, the slave cried of pain, "I'm the one who killed the baby and put the knife in the woman's dwelling."

Observing what was happening, Samuel forgot his brother's moans and burst into tears for the poor woman while his brother broke down. Suddenly, the poor woman opened the door and rushed towards Samuel and his brother saying, "Do you know who this woman is?" and looked to Samuel saying, "She's your wife whom your brother accused of fornication."

They were all perplexed as they saw Samuel holding the woman saying, "Are you my bride Jolly?"

"I'm Jolly. Your brother tried to rape me claiming that you died and caused me to be stoned unjustly. Now, the Lord made me return back to you conquering not only evil men but evil itself with the power of my God and your prayers, Samuel."

STORIES FOR THE YOUTH

Together with
“The Son of Tears”

538-549

Prepared By
FR. TADROS Y. MALATY

Translated by
Mary H. Mikhail
Irene S. Abd-El-Massih

Dear,

Here is a collection of short stories: some of which are real; some are taken from the universal popular folklore; some are from the Jewish folklore while others are taken from famous books of allegorical stories like:

Cathy Books. *Animal Fairy Stories*.

La Fontaine. *Les Fables*.

Uncle Arthur's Bedtime Stories.

I have tried to give these symbolic stories a Christian spiritual touch.

Story No. 538

Who will Rescue the Ship?

Alexander noticed that his son was always depressed. He embraced him. As he talked to him, he realized that he was depressed because of his feelings of failure. The son said, "I don't know why God created me? I am the youngest of my brothers, weak, untalented and all people mock at my words. I am of no use."

In the morning Alexander took his son to the field and asked him to water the plants. At noon as it was very hot, he took him under the shadow of a big tree where there was a vat of fresh water. They drank then Alexander said, "Look at this huge vat full of water, put on a stand. The vat is supported on the stand by a date seed, without which it would fall. Sometimes we're like a date seed of no use, but without which the vat would be broken and we wouldn't find this fresh water when it is hot. Don't belittle yourself even if you're like this date seed. Did you hear about the man who was talented in making the wireless?"

"No."

"Many years ago, the Television hasn't been invented yet and it was rare to have a radio as it was expensive. Communication was through the telegraph which gives signals translated into words by operators miles away. There was a man living in a country on the Mediterranean Sea. He was fond of receiving signals sent by the ships to the lighthouse for rescue and translating them. He used to spend many hours doing this specially by night. During a stormy night he found that his apparatus stopped completely. He went out to the garden and climbed a high tree to fix the wire of the apparatus. As it started working, he heard a message sent repeatedly. He realized that a ship was calling for help as it was about to drown because of the storm. He phoned the lighthouse soon. When he told the man responsible about the message he said, "I was busy receiving other messages." Then he sent a rescue team which rescued the ship few minutes before drowning. Thus, with his simple apparatus, this man did what the lighthouse didn't do. God is able to save by many as by few."



*I know that I am very small,
I hand You my life and my talents.
You use me, as You do not despise the little ones.
You save by many and by few.*

Story No. 539

A Burning Hut

There was a violent storm that destroyed Matthew's ship. He had to swim on one of the pieces of the ship till he reached a desert island. Matthew knelt down to thank God for saving his life. Then, he searched for water or some plants to eat but found none. He began to collect the remaining pieces of the ship to make a hut for himself. Each time, a thought of complaining leapt into his mind he lifted up his eyes to heaven crying,

““And we know that all things work together for good for those who love God” (Rom. 8.28).

I know that You make everything good.

You change every adversity into good.

You are a loving, wise, heavenly father.

I thankfully accept everything of You.”

Suddenly he saw his hut burning. He looked to heaven not knowing what to say. He was asking God in silence, “Why did You permit such a thing O God?”

Few hours later, a ship came to him. Matthew asked the captain why he came. He answered, “We saw the fire, so we realized that you want rescue.”



You are the Beneficent God.

You change bitterness into sweetness.

You are a kind Father to me as Your son.

Story No. 540

A Kind Word to a Cab Driver

In the rush hour while it was extremely crowded in Cairo, John and George took a cab. As they reached the place they were going to, John gave the cab driver the fees with a smile saying, "You are a unique cab driver."

"Are you joking?"

"No, I admire your ability to drive calmly and cheerfully. You're unique."

"Thank you, no one praised me so before."

"I am not praising you; I am just expressing my feelings towards you."

The driver rejoiced and left. George asked his friend, "Why did you tell him so?"

"This is my way. This society will never be reformed unless you boost everyone's morale as much as you can. This driver deals with dozens of people everyday. If he felt that all people admired him, he would work seriously. Love and peace will then fill him, his family and all the people around him."

"Do you think that a cab driver could reform millions of people in Cairo?"

"I believe that when a good seed is watered, it will become a good tree which shelters many birds and gives shadow to many people and animals. The whole world needs a true kind word from a faithful heart which loves all mankind."



Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth,

Grant it the grace of Your Holy Spirit.

Grant me that my lips utter Your constructive words.

Grant me that my words, my thoughts and my behavior be full of love.

Give me hope to serve all mankind with a loving word.

Water me with Your love so that I may water others with it.

<p>"Comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all" (1Thess. 5.14).</p>
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Story No. 541

The Proud Lion

The animals held a serious conference for fear of a proud lion who claimed to be the king of the animals and devoured an animal every day. All animals got very perplexed. They all lost their peace and waited for their inescapable fate. The jackal told them, "Why should we always be frightened? Let's make a treaty with the lion. Instead of letting him eat whoever he likes, let's cast lot and see who should be eaten everyday."

They all agreed and when they asked the lion, he agreed. On the first day, they cast lots and the jackal was chosen. Some animals took the jackal to present him to the lion but the jackal said, "Let me go alone for I know how to deal with this proud lion." The animals agreed and the jackal did not show up till noon. When he went to the lion, he saw him very furious and hungry.

"Why are you late? Don't you know that I am the king of the animals? Why do you leave me so hungry?"

"No master, the matter is much graver than this."

"What do you mean?"

"On my way to you in the morning, I saw a fat wolf which would have been a delicious meal for you."

"Did he refuse to come with you?"

"No your majesty, he came with me but on our way, Another lion met us and asked us where we were going. I told him that I was going to present that delicious meal to my master the lion. He said furiously, "Is there another lion other than me here!" I said, "come and see." He refused and devoured the wolf saying, "There'll never be a king but me.""

"What?"

"He doesn't recognize you a king thinking himself to be the only king."

"Where is he?"

"Come and see for we won't accept a king but you."

The lion forgot his hunger and got very furious asking the jackal to show him where he was. The jackal took him to an old well with little water. At the well he said to the lion, "Look. He is at his den thinking himself the only king ever found."

The lion lifted up his forelegs and looked at the well to see his image reflected on the water. Being furious he thought that it was another lion. He roared and threatened to find another lion doing the same. The lion jumped into the well to kill the other one but found himself imprisoned in the well unable to get out. Then the jackal called the animals, "Come and see what happened to the lion, the king, because of his pride and anger."



Pride made Satan descend to hell.

While meekness lifted up Virgin Mary to become the mother of God the Word.

Grant me O Lord the partnership of Your meekness.

To enjoy the partnership of Your eternal glory.

"When pride comes, then comes shame; but with the humble is wisdom" (Prov. 11.2).

"By pride comes nothing but strife, but with the well-advised is wisdom" (Prov. 13.10).

"Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16.18).

Story No. 542

The Young Camel and His Evil Friends

John noticed that his son had evil friends. Though he was once excellent, gentle with his parents, hard working and not wasting his time, he was totally changed. He felt that home was a prison, he was always out and whenever he was in he spent long hours talking on the phone with his friends. He neglected his studies and became aggressive with his family. John talked to his son about evil friendship that corrupts life. The son started to defend himself saying that life is not only studying and imprisonment in the house.

John told him the story of the young camel and his evil friends:

As the young camel was tired, he laid down on the ground silently. A raven asked him, "Why are you sitting alone, poor camel? I see you tired of what you carry. Come with me to the neighboring wood where we live freely, playing and talking all day long, unworried about anything. We eat and sleep as we want, ruled by no one."

The raven flew and the camel followed him till they reached the forest, at last he found himself before the den of a lion. The animals, among whom there was a fox and a wolf, welcomed him. They all entered the lion's den.

"You look unfamiliar; who are you?"

"I'm a weak young camel seeking your friendship and protection."

"Don't be afraid, you are a friend of mine from now on."

The camel was pleased with such a friendship and played much with his friends the raven, the fox, the wolf and the lion. The camel thought himself safe and free being protected by the king himself. Once the raven, the fox and the wolf came to him very sad saying, "The lion fought the elephant, was defeated by him and was dangerously wounded. He is at his den incapable of moving, let's visit him together."

The camel was pleased with his faithful friends for, they did not want to go without him. They visited the lion who was hungry and unable to search for a pray. The raven, the fox and the wolf came before to the lion. Finding him very hungry, they asked him to devour the camel but he said, "I promised to protect him so how can I devour him?"

They said, "Don't mind, we'll bring him to you to ask you to devour him."

When they visited him he said, "I am very sick and hungry and unable to search for pray."

The raven said, "I'm at your hands dear king, you're a faithful friend who used to give us food everyday. Eat me instead of dying of hunger."

The fox said at once, "Your majesty, the raven is very small having no flesh to be eaten. Eat me so that I can return to you some of your daily love and care."

Then the wolf said, "Don't eat the fox for, his flesh is impure and unfit for the king. I'll be a delicious meal for you. Let me show you my love for you."

However the raven and the fox said, "O great king, don't eat the flesh of the wolf for it'll harm you."

The camel observed what had happened. Then he went to the lion repeating what his evil friends had said, "O great dear king, I ask you in the name of friendship to eat me instead of the raven, the fox and the wolf."

Before finishing what he said the three evil friends said, "Yes O king, give heed to him for, he'll be a suitable meal for you."

Unmercifully the lion and his friends devoured the camel. Thus, the poor camel was the victim of evil friendship.

"I have not sat with idolatrous mortals, nor will I go in with hypocrites" (Ps. 26.4).

Story No. 543

Alfred and the Poisonous Serpent

As it was very cold, Alfred saw a serpent trying to warm herself. She looked very tired. Alfred asked her, "Why are you groaning?"

"It's very cold and I've no place where I can warm myself."

"I want to help you but I'm afraid of your poison."

"How can I poison the person who saves me? Take me to a warm place."

"I know that serpents are cunning and unfaithful."

"This is untrue. Try yourself and you'll see that I'll return your help with love."

Alfred pitied her and took her to his house. When his mother saw him, she cried, "Take her out soon."

However Alfred insisted on taking her to his room. The poisonous serpent got warm and rose to poison Alfred.

Alfred cried, "Where is your promise?"

The serpent answered, "Where is your mind and wisdom? Don't you know me?"

The serpent stung Alfred and poisoned him.



Give me wisdom together with love.

Teach me not to be kind in an improper time.

Preserve me from the deception of the old serpent,

So that I may not embrace it,

Or give it a chance to poison me.

"But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Cor 11.3)

Story No. 544

Children Receiving the King

In one of the Japanese towns, the school head master announced, "Surprise, the king will visit us tomorrow. What do you think we have to do?" A child said, "Let each one of us give him a small gift for, he loves children. Tomorrow will be a historical unforgettable day." They all agreed and left joyfully except Christine. She left the school with her eyes full of tears. On her way she met an old woman, a friend to her family, who asked her, "What's wrong with you darling?" Christine burst into tears saying, "I love the king so much and long to see him. He'll visit our school tomorrow. All the children will present him precious gifts and I'm poor; I can't buy him a present. I don't know what to do. I can neither be absent from school nor go to school without a present." The lady wiped out her tears saying, "Take this pot and fill it with snow. Wait till all your colleagues present their gifts to the king then give him the pot. He'll accept your gift joyfully." The child did what the lady had said. The next day, the school received the king joyfully and the children presented their gifts. As the king got tired, Christine bowed to the king and said, "Your majesty, I'm of a very poor family. Yet my heart loves you so much. I'm very rich being a subject of a king like who loves children. I present to you this melted snow in a simple pot." The king took the pot and drank of it saying, "You are a wise and loving child. You gave me the most precious gift. Do you like to join my palace? I'll be pleased to have you as a daughter, a little princess full of love and wisdom." All the attendants clapped their hands as the king adopted a girl from this school.



*You are the true king who loves all children.
Accept me as a young child.
What can I present to You?
Accept my heart and my love.
You will never forget a cup of cold water.
Accept it from my poor hands.
You are Love.*

<p>"And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward" (Matt. 10.42)</p>
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Story No. 545

The Wonderful Bird

At the beginning of winter, there was a snowstorm. Mark looked out of the window tracing the birds as they searched for a shelter to protect them from the snow. Mark opened his window waiting for the birds to find the way to his room where they can find food and shelter but they did not. Mark stretched out his hands with food, however, the birds did not mind eating but stayed where they were suffering from the cold.

Mark tried with all means to attract them but in vain. Finally he said to himself, "I can do nothing to save these birds from death but to become a bird myself, to fly and attract them to come into my room and get warm."

This is practical love which makes a person hurry with meekness to the suffering and the perishing to lead them with love to salvation and glory. This is what the Word of God had done; He became man and dwelt among us. He came down from Heaven and met us on earth to lift us up with Him and through Him to Heaven.



*You have become man for my sake O the Word of God.
You descended to my world to take me up to Your Heaven.
You have become human to give me a new nature,
And to make me a partner in Your Divine Nature.
You took what is mine and gave me what is Yours.
May I fly with You and go to where You are.*

Story No. 546

A Shunter Sacrificing His Only Son

While standing by a sign at a bridge, the shunter was surprised to find the train coming. He tried to give a sign to the train driver to stop as the bridge was opened but he found the hand of the signal not working. He had nothing to do but to hurry and close the bridge so that the train would not drown into the pond and all its passengers would not perish. While closing the bridge he saw his only son playing on the railway. He had no time to go and warn him. He had to choose between closing the bridge and warning his son. There was no time for both.

The man closed the bridge to save the train and the passengers. The train passed very quickly. The shunter did not think of looking to his son for definitely he was dead.

The shunter returned home not knowing what to tell his wife. It was bitter for him to permit his son's death. However, bitterness mixed with joy in his heart for, he was honest in his work and faithful in his love to those for whom he was responsible even if this cost him the life of his only son.

He entered his chamber, kneeled down with tears running down his cheeks without uttering a word. The image of his dead son was in front of his eyes together with the image of the passengers of the train. Suddenly he found his son in white clothes embracing him and saying, "What you did was good, father, for God raised me from the dead for your love to your brethren."

The honesty of this shunter made him sacrifice his only son for the sake of his brethren without discussing the matter even with himself. It was necessary then for the Father, the Lover of Mankind, to sacrifice His only Son to save all Mankind.



My soul praises You O Lord.

You presented Your only Son as a sacrifice of love for my sake.

He paid the whole price joyfully to redeem me.

To You is the Glory for Your wonderful love to me.

Story No. 547

I Knelt Down Before God

In Cairo, reposed Fr. Ibrahim Attia narrated the following story:

The only son of a widow reposed. Knowing how much she was attached to him, I didn't know what to do. I went to her house and the maid servant opened the door. When I asked about the lady, she said, "She's in her chamber. She shut the door telling me not to knock whatever the case is. Sorry father I can't tell her that you're here."

After a long time she opened the door. Her countenance revealed a heart full of peace and she said, "I'm sorry father for keeping you waiting so long. Don't be worried about me for, what you wanted to do for me, the Lord has done generously. I have knelt down before God for two hours insisting not to leave him before consoling me. I have peace now. Ask God to continue working in me."



*Teach me how to pour myself at Your feet.
During my suffering Your comforts delight my soul.
You are my refuge.
You permitted temptation to give me a way out.
You are the source of every comfort,
You hear prayers and give blessings.*

Story No. 548

A Conversation with a Wolf

A young man asked me, “Why should I escape from sinful thoughts? Isn’t it weakness?”

I replied, “Many a time, escaping is a point of strength. He whoever escapes from an attractive thought is strong. Since a conversation with evil is by no means logical as the conversation between Eve and the serpent. Let’s escape from the conversation with evil for it is like a conversation between a gentle lamb and a wild wolf.

Once a hungry wolf stood at a waterfall on the top of a hill as he was looking for a pray. Down the hill he saw a lamb drinking of the water. As he looked around he did not see the shepherd or the guarding dog. The wolf lifted up his head thinking as he knew his notoriety for eating the innocent lambs. The wolf tried to justify himself, he looked down to the lamb saying, “You are a small lamb behaving improperly.”

The lamb asked him, “Why do you accuse me of this?”

The wolf said, “Because you drink of the waterfall and you make it dirty. Don’t you know that I drink of it?”

The lamb commented, “O wolf. You drink from the top of the waterfall while I drink from the bottom. How can I then render the water, coming down, unclean for you?”

The lamb was right. Therefore, the wolf was silent for a while then said,

“I heard from a trusted person that you said something evil about me.”

“How can I say evil or good about you when I didn’t see you before?”

“Then it must be your brother.”

“O wolf, I’ve neither a brother nor a sister.”

“Then it must be your father and I’ll take revenge from you.”

Before the lamb could utter a word, the wolf had devoured him. What the lamb had said justified him truly however, how can he be justified before a wild wolf. A conversation with a wolf is useless.



*Lord, You talk to me not to justify Yourself, ... You talk to me not to justify Yourself,
But to give me a chance to enjoy Your love.*

Talking to You is useful and entertaining.

Let me talk to You,

Not to talk to the enemy for he is a devouring wolf.

Teach me with Your Holy Spirit how to escape every useless conversation.

Story No. 549

The Son of Tears

A relieving vision

The woman slept with tearful eyes. She saw, in a vision, herself standing on a piece of wood crying bitterly. She saw a Glorious young man rejoicing who asked her gently, “Why do you grieve thus?”

Crying so bitterly she could not reply, however when she looked at Him she was encouraged and comforted. Then she answered, “My son... O Lord has perished. He became a great philosopher accompanying the great, envied by the rich and desired by all young ladies. Since his childhood he didn’t taste the sweetness of living with You or the richness of the Bible. He contaminates himself with his mistress every night. Now how can I then not grieve over him all my life when he is not following Your law?”

She could not utter other word but burst into tears. The Glorious young man, in a father’s kindness, relieved her saying, “Be comforted for, your son is here with you.”

She looked around to find her son beside her on the same piece of wood thus, she realized that he would accept the faith.



As the lady woke up, she rejoiced being sure that the Lord had accepted her supplication. She knelt down thanking God. Then she hurried to tell her son what she saw. He mocked at her saying, “Don’t you understand that this means that you’ll be like me?”

She did not argue with him but hurried to the church with tearful eyes.



On her way, the devil saw her and was enraged because of her persistence and great hope. He sent her one of her relatives, who met her on the way and asked her, “Why do you weep? Is any one of your children sick and needs a doctor?”

“Yes, my son is sick and I know the doctor who can heal him. I’ll go to church to pray for him and ask the bishop to pray for him to be healed.” The lady replied.

The man then said, “Wait and tell me why are you always depressed? Did you neglect your duties towards him? You taught him the living dogmas; you gave him spiritual guidance and a good education. You gave him love and care. Now he’s become an adult, active, smart, ingenious and globally famous. Enough of that, you’re no longer responsible for him.”

The lady answered strictly, “How can I stop crying over him while Mary and Martha sobbed over their brother till the Lord raised him from the dead? The widow grieved over her son’s physical death, how can I then not grieve over my son who is ruined by lust?”



The man left while she hurried to the church and said to the bishop as usual, “Father, please don’t forget to pray for my perishing son.”

Seeing her grief, the bishop relieved her saying, “Leave him do whatever he likes. Only pray for him as you can’t convince him that his way is evil. I was once a Manichaeon. I not only read the Manichaeon books but I also transcribed them. Finally I discovered their folly and left them.”

However she wept bitterly saying, “Pray for him father.”

Then the bishop replied, **“Be sure that the son of tears will never perish.”**

She left insisting not to stop weeping until her son repented.



An Intimate Friend

The philosopher had a new friend. As the friend was not deep in faith, the philosopher was able to make him follow the Manichaeian belief. Thus they became inseparable for a whole year till his friend fell sick and was about to die. His friend's family baptized him for they feared he would die. Nevertheless, the philosopher mocked at baptism considering it a mere wash of the body however, he did not express his opinion so as not to hurt his feelings. As he was about to be healed, the philosopher started mocking at baptism. His friend rebuked him saying, "If you are keen on our friendship, stop mocking at baptism." The philosopher waited for him to be completely healed to discuss the matter with him, but he died.



The philosopher grieved much over his friend. He wandered as if searching for him. He was expecting every second to see him. Life became dull for him. He found no enjoyment but in grieving and weeping. He hated everything.



Years later, he again admired being praised by people. His evil friends advised him to go to Rome to seek glory. His mother tried to prevent him from going however he told her that he was going to see one of his friends off on board of the ship. By night he left her, in her tears, in St. Cyprian's church and sailed to Rome.



With St. Ambrose

The governor of Milan asked for a teacher of rhetoric. Thus, the governor of Rome sent him this philosopher. There he met St. Ambrose, the bishop of the city, who was kind to him. Therefore, the philosopher loved him, admired his sermons and began to study the Bible only for its rhetoric and not to enjoy living with God. He was interested in the Epistles of St. Paul and started to study them. His mother sailed to Milan to see him. There, she encouraged him to go to St. Ambrose.



Once while he was chatting with Alypius, a true believer, one of the great officials, called Pontitian entered. As he sat down he saw a book on the table. He took it thinking that it was a book of rhetoric but it was the Pauline Epistles. He looked at the philosopher and said surprisingly, "How strange! Do you have a Bible?"

The philosopher replied, "Don't be astonished for I have done nothing for a long time but studying these Holy books."

Pontitian started to talk to them about St. Anthony the Copt. They wondered about what he said. Then he concluded,

"I was in Traveri City with three of my friends. We went out for a walk till we reached the fence of the city. Two of my friends walked until they reached a tent in which there were some ascetics. In the tent they found a book about the life of St. Anthony. One of them took it and read it wondering. His heart kindled and he decided to follow his example. As his heart kindled with the love of God and contempt for what is timely, he said to his friend, "Tell me what's our purpose in life?" He went on reading then he said, "It's over. I no more hope in this world. I'll live for God here from now on."

His friend answered, "I will join your will."

Then Pontitian said, "I searched for them with my friend then we found them in the tent praying fervently. On seeing them we lamented ourselves asking them to pray for us. We went back to the palace with broken hearts. When their fiancés knew this, they decided to stay virgins for the Lord."

As Pontitian said this, the philosopher grieved for he saw before him his previous life saying to himself, "O eloquent man. You're universally famous and all people desire to listen to you. However, the illiterate Anthony surpassed you in purity and chastity. God, all what I did was evil and impure. I grieved over a mistress who died of her love to her lover while I didn't lament my soul which I ruined because I didn't love You O the groom of my soul. I satisfied my teachers but never satisfied You. Many times, I lied in order not to be defeated. I never put limits for love and lust. I was blinded by the smoke of lust. I was proud of my impurity. I committed many sins in order to seem great. My mother was always talking to me in Your voice. She tried hard to prevent me but I never gave heed to her as she's a woman. In Carthage, love imprisoned me. I found no entertainment but in being a lover and beloved. O God, I committed many sins even in the churches. I read Cicero's books so I loved wisdom and desired to have wings to fly to You. However, these writings contained some lies which quenched the fire of my desire for You. I hurried to the Bible but I criticized it harshly. I searched for You with pride while You don't reveal Yourself but to the meek."

Augustine cried at Alypius, "What are we doing to let the unlearned seize Heaven by force, whilst we with all our knowledge remain behind, cowardly and heartless, wallowing in our sins? Because they have outstripped us and gone before, are we ashamed to follow them? Is it not more shameful not even to follow them?"

Rage in the Garden

He rushed unconsciously to a neighboring garden. Alypius followed him to find him leaning on the trunk of a tree crying,

"Protect me from this violent storm. Don't remember my sins for they enslaved me. And Thou, O Lord, how long? How long? Is it to be tomorrow and tomorrow? Why not now? Why not this very hour put an end to shame? I asked You before, "God, grant me meekness and chastity, but not now." I feared that You would accept my prayers so I wouldn't be able then to enjoy my lusts. I liked the company of sinners and not of You. I loved the books of philosophy but never liked Your Bible. Let me repent now, O Lord."

While crying he heard a child saying, "Take up and read."

He took Alypius with him and opened the Pauline Epistles to find it written, "**The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light**" (Rom. 13.12).

He kept on repeating the verse and went with Alypius to tell the good news to the mother who kept on weeping for nearly twenty years waiting that hour.



The mother embraced her son and unconsciously repeated the words said by the young man in the vision, "Be comforted for, your son is here with you."

Although it has been so long, God fulfill His promises in the appointed time. It was time for heaven to rejoice with him who was lost and found, was dead and is alive again.

The lady took her son, his illegal son Adeodatus and Alypius to St. Ambrose to give thanks to God and to make confession to be ready for baptism.



Augustine Died

As the repentant philosopher was contemplating on God's love to sinners, kindness with the weak, and His longsuffering with every person, someone knocked at the door. He

asked who was at the door. As he knew that it was his mistress, he asked, “Whom do you want?”

She answered, “Augustine.”

He then replied, “Augustine died.”

The woman was surprised, and said, “This voice is Augustine’s. How can he be dead then?”

Augustine answered, **“Sister, Augustine whom you want has died. He who speaks to you now is Jesus who dwells in Augustine’s heart.”**

She did not believe what has been said. “What’s that? He is abnormal. Isn’t that Augustine who was once longing to hear my voice, unable to miss me for even a day! Now he refuses to see me! He died indeed, for this isn’t Augustine whom I knew before. The speaker is Jesus Christ who works in him. Jesus, are You thus able to kill sin, impurity and lusts and kindle the heart with chastity to the extent that this sinner refuses to meet me? Why don’t You kill my sins so that I may enjoy You now, to live with You in chastity as Augustine?”

The woman through herself at the door and cried sorrowfully, “I also want Jesus, Jesus, Jesus...!”



St. Monica’s Reposing

Augustine stayed six months with some of his friends in Cassisiacum, near Milan, preparing for being baptized. His mother, his son Adeodatus, his brother and Alypius were with him under the supervision of St. Ambrose. In 387 AD they returned to Milan where St. Ambrose baptized him together with his son and his friend. Then they went to Ostia waiting for a ship to take them back to their country. In Ostia, they had been talking about the kingdom of God and His Second Coming. The mother concluded, “Augustine, nothing makes me happy in this life anymore. I hate what’s temporary. I think that God lengthened my life for one reason: to see you saved as a true Christian. Then why should I stay anymore?”

Five days later she became sick with fever. Finding her two sons in great sorrow, she said, “Wherever I die, bury me there.”

She said so as she no longer desired to be buried with her husband.

Her son Tafikhos answered, “Don’t say that, Mother.”

She looked at him addressing Augustine reproachfully, “Augustine did you hear what your brother said. Sons, don’t be concerned with my body, bury it anywhere. Just pray for me before the Altar.”

Then she closed her eyes, lifted up her heart to God and gave up her pure soul.

Augustine tried not to cry for the physical separation yet, he burst into tears unwillingly and said, **“Shouldn’t I mourn, even for an hour, her who used to make her bed swim with her tears for hours for my sake?”**

STORIES FOR THE YOUTH

Together with
“I’ve Sinned, Forgive mee”

550-561

Prepared By
FR. TADROS Y. MALATY

Translated by
Irene S. Abd-El-Massih

Dear,

Here is a collection of short stories: some of which are real; some are taken from the universal popular folklore; some are from the Jewish folklore while others are taken from famous books of allegorical stories like:

Cathy Books. *Animal Fairy Stories*.

La Fontaine. *Les Fables*.

Uncle Arthur's Bedtime Stories.

I have tried to give these symbolic stories a Christian spiritual touch.

Two Deceived Frogs

One of the two frogs lived in a pool in X City and the other lived in a pool in Y City. The one who lived in X City wished to see Y City and the other wanted to see X City. Each one of them went to see the other city. After covering a long distance, each of them saw a hill in the middle of the way. Thus, they climbed the hill and met each other.

"Where are you going?"

"And you?"

"I want to see your city."

"I also wish to see your city."

"Yet, I'm very exhausted. How can I continue on this long way and then return to my city again?"

"Me too."

"If only we were tall like many animals, we would see the two cities while still on the hill not needing to complete the journey."

"I've an idea."

"What's it?"

"Each one stands on his hind legs and stands with his forelegs on the other's forelegs. Thus, we can both stand with our heads up supported by each other."

"Fantastic, let's do it."

The frog of X City stood with his face to Y City and the other with his face to X City. They did not realize that their eyes are at the top of their heads. Thus, when each of them stands, he sees what is behind not what is before him.

The first one looked to see in front of him X City thinking that it was Y City. He cried, "It's exactly like my city. Why did I then exhausted myself?"

The other frog also saw his city thinking that it was the other city. He repeated what the other one said.

Therefore, they shook hands and each returned to his city foolishly thinking that he saw the other city.



Give me eyes that see what is before them not what is behind.

May I see the gates of Heavens open.

May I enjoy its glory.

May I look back to see earth as Heavens.

May my heart rush to You to see the secrets of Your Glory.

May it not look to dust thinking it glory.

The Electric Current Off

In November, 1965, the electric current was off in New York and its outskirts: an area of 800000 miles square, covering seven American states and great part of Ontario, Canada. The electric current was off for about thirteen hours in some regions. The losses were worth a hundred million Dollars. About 300000 loaves of bread got rotten in the bakery; the industrial machines stopped; two hundred airplanes could not land etc. Because of all these losses, the officials did their best to avoid facing such a disaster again. God has granted us the current of His Holy Spirit who enlightens and edifies us. Notwithstanding, we are indifferent to Him. We do not mind interacting with Him, not realizing that we thus lose much.



*Let me, O Lord, interact with Your Fiery Spirit.
May Your Spirit enlighten my depth.
Without Him, I lose much
And my eternal life is destroyed.*

The Emperor's Driver

The emperor's driver died and the emperor had to choose a driver for his royal chariot. He made an announcement to his people that he whoever found himself fit for this vacancy should apply. On the appointed day, the people went to see who would be chosen. A driver drove the chariot from the courtyard to the emperor's palace which was on the top of a high mountain. He was able to drive it in the hard roads of the mountain and return very skillfully and quickly. The people cried, "This should be the man chosen!"

Another driver did the same but more skillfully and quickly. Then, the people cried for the second time, "This should be the man chosen."

A third driver drove the chariot but very quietly avoiding the slopes; it took him a long time to climb the mountaintop and return. Therefore, all people mocked at him, "He's very slow and inexperienced."

Nevertheless, the emperor announced, "This is the man whom I can trust." The people wondered of the emperor who taught them a lesson: man should be rational and wise not rash.



*God, You descended to us not crying out, no one hearing Your voice in the streets.
With Your love, You gave peace to many people.
Grant me the spirit of meekness and reasoning.*

"Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matt. 11.29).

"Rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God" (1 Pet. 3.4).

A Fox with Seventy-Seven Minds

A hedgehog met a fox who was wandering proudly. The hedgehog greeted him but the fox responded mockingly. The hedgehog looked to the proud fox saying, "I see you very rejoicing; what happened?"

"Just tell me how many minds do you have?"

"Of course, one. What about you?"

"Of course, I've seventy-seven minds; thus, all people respect and love me."

"I'll never believe till you swear in a sacred place that you've seventy-seven minds."

The fox agreed, "I'll accompany you to any place and swear that I've seventy-seven minds."

They went together to a place where the hedgehog said to the fox, "Stand here and swear that you've seventy-seven minds."

As he walked, the fox fell in a hunter's trap; he kept on crying, "Pray, rescue me for, the hunter will certainly kill me."

"I can't rescue you O the one with seventy-seven minds. Think how to rescue yourself. I've but one mind."

"It's 'cause I swore falsely that I fell in the trap. If you can't rescue me, just give me a piece of advice."

Realizing that the fox was no longer proud claiming to have seventy-seven minds, the hedgehog said, "When you hear the hunter's voice, pretend to be dead, lie on your back, lift up your legs, don't move, swell your belly and produce a bad smell. If he beat you with the stick, don't move, he'll then throw you on the way; then, you can escape."

When the fox heard the hunter's voice, he did as advised. The hunter opened the trap and beat the fox who said to himself, "You deserve to be beaten O proud liar with seventy-seven minds." As he did not move, the hunter threw him on the way. Therefore, he escaped saying to himself, "This is my punishment for being proud. I'll not consider myself more intelligent than others again."

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"The proud has no understanding. He who lacks meekness is deprived of understanding" (St. Isaac the Syrian).

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Llewelyn, Robert. *The Joy of the Saints: Spiritual Readings throughout the Year*. Springfield: Illinois, 1998. 131.

In Christ's Bosom

In Beba, Upper Egypt, an only son to his widowed mother departed from this world. Therefore, the mother grieved bitterly and no one could console her. Fr. Abd-El-Massih El-Manahri heard about her. He visited her and began to talk to her, simply as he used to, about our sojourning in this world and waiting for living forever in Heaven. Nevertheless, her heart was kindled with unquenched fire. Finally, he said to her, "Can you promise me not to weep after you see your son in glory?"

"I promise." She replied.

He lifted his heart to Heaven entreating God to reveal to her her son's eternal fate. Therefore, she actually saw her son in Christ's bosom surrounded by the angels in wonderful glory. She rejoiced exceedingly; peace filled her heart and she wished to have a share with her son in Heaven. A person who knows that woman said to me, "Till now, this woman is filled with wonderful peace."



Lord, open my eyes to see You embracing Your believers.

Let me run with love towards Your Divine Bosom.

My soul desires to meet You.

I'm crying, "When will my soul be released?

When shall I see You, O giver of glory?"

The Travelling Seeds

Sam noticed that his young son Mike was somehow lazy, not minding studying and spending most of his time in front of the television watching serials. Sam sat with his son before the TV Every now and then, the announcer would interrupt the serial to announce the last news of the fire catching the woods in California.

Sam said to his son, "Do you know Mike how do forests and fields cover more than a third of the area of the earth?"

"Maybe people planted them."

"No, people couldn't plant all this area. On the contrary, man often destroys woods out of negligence causing about 90% of the fire accidents that take place. He also cuts the trees to use their wood in making furniture and building houses, etc."

"Then, how did they cover all this area of the earth?"

"Cause plants aren't lazy. On the contrary, many seeds travel. Without travelling, many plants would have died away."

"What do you mean? Do seeds travel?"

"God granted them the ability to travel to teach us vigor and activeness. Look at the ground behind our neighbor's house; it's filled with grass. Therefore, its seeds look as if having a parachute. They've silky, soft threads that fly with the wind, even if it was quiet, to distant places to grow there. An example of these plants is called Dandelion; it's an herb with yellow fruits like soft cotton. Another example is the Cattail which has very soft flowers like brown fur. There's also the Milkweed which is an herb having a juice like milk. There's also the Thistle which is a long herb having very thin thorns. All the fruits of these plants are like a parachute."

"Are there other travelling seeds?"

"There're many. Some of which have seeds that fly as if having two wings like the Silver Maple which resembles a strange fly having a brown wing in the form of a leaf. Another example is the Propelle, the wing of which helps the small seed bow and fly with the wind. There's also the seed of the Fringepod which has a small circular wing around the seed. It flies to near places like a kite. Moreover, the plants which grow by the rivers and oceans have something like the ring which saves it from drowning. For example, the seed of the coconut swims for a long distance; it's coated with rough fibers and a hard peel that saves it. Inside it, there's a ring full of air to help it not sink. Such a seed can swim for thousands of miles. It leaves its original place in Middle America and go to the Pacific Islands. Seeds can fly also via the birds and the animals. Some animals like the squirrels and the chipmunks gather some seeds and store them to eat them; sometimes, they play with them hiding them in the ground as if playing the hide-and-seek. As these animals forget those seeds, they grow and become big trees; moreover, they form large woods of the hazelnuts acorns and the hickory.

Some seeds are very light and strong. Birds take them to distant places to make nests of them.

When the nests are destroyed, the seeds fall to grow and become trees. Some seeds travel with the animals as these seeds have light thorns like small needles which stick to the skin of dogs, donkeys and sheep, and sometimes, they stick to men's shoes, especially those with small holes like the Tennis shoes. They then fall in different places and grow to become trees and herbs. Some small seeds as the mustard seeds stick to the feathers or the legs of the birds; they thus move for some miles to find a place to grow.

Animals sometimes eat some fruits with their seeds like the cherry and the raspberry Mistletoe. Some of these seeds come out with the wastes of these animals and grow in different places. Some seeds travel with small insects like ants. These are the seeds of the trillium on the sides of which, there's something like candies; the ants carry them, eat the candies and leave the seed in a different place to grow there.

Finally, some seeds travel through explosion as the seeds are coated with a cover that becomes dry and explodes suddenly so the seeds rush to distant places."

In a sudden, Mike rushed to his room. His father asked him, "Where are you going to?"
"I'm ashamed of myself, Dad. The seeds of the plants know how to move in order to survive while, I live in laziness. I'll rise and work continuously for edifying myself and my fellow humans."



*Lord, You always work for my sake.
You granted even the plants to move and work.
What excuse can I make to justify my laziness and negligence?*

*The seeds travel to grow.
Let my life be a continuous journey
To rush to Heaven and live in Your bosom forever.*

*The spider
And
The Box of Wisdom*

A spider wanted to be the wisest animate. Therefore, he carried a box and traveled to all the countries. He put all the wise sayings he heard in the box. He thus thought himself the wisest being.

When he returned to his country, he saw a small pond, so he said, "I'll drink of it for I'm thirsty."

As he looked to the water, he saw a large amount of yellow ripe bananas thus, he rejoiced and said, "I'll eat also."

He went to the water but found nothing. Therefore, he decided to leave the box, which made his head bowing, on the ground. When he threw it, he was able to see the banana tree on the other bank of the pool. On the tree, there was a monkey laughing. The spider asked the monkey, "Why are you laughing?"

"'Cause the box of wisdom made your back bowing thus, you can't see what's above. You can only see what's down; therefore, you see the reflection of the banana tree on the water. Now, if you want to eat, climb the tree."

The spider shook his head saying, "Truly, a man can't be wise through collecting the wise sayings of the others which becomes a burden over one's back making one unable to see what's above. One should experience wisdom for wisdom is a life to be led not mere words."

If you don't live as a Christian, it is worthless to be Christian.

I found her

A beloved son, in Ottawa, the capital of Canada, told me about a Canadian lady married to an Egyptian man. He tried to convince her to leave Canada and settle in Egypt. As she refused, he alas pretended to agree with her. Some days later, as she returned home, she did not find her husband, her son, their clothes and some other things. When she asked the police, they told her that he went to America and she did not know if he was in one of the states or returned to Egypt.

This event reminded me of a real story that took place in Virginia:

Tausmy Harris from Roanoke, Virginia, suffered bitterly for being deprived of her biological mother. Her mother delivered her to a family to adopt her when still a baby. She felt thirsty for her mother though it was her mother who left her to that family. Miss Harris had been working for years in one of the big markets. One day, a lady responsible for the affairs of the employees asked her, "Do you allow me to ask you a personal question?"

"Yes."

"I knew that you're suffering for being unable to recognize your biological mother."

"Yes, I'm always unhappy because of these feelings."

"Don't you know where she is?"

"No."

"Do you remember how she looks like?"

"No."

"What would you present to the person who would tell you where she is?"

"A valuable present."

"You've been meeting her for years here while, you don't know each other."

"What?"

"As I was revising the files of the employees, I discovered that your colleague Schultz Joyce is your biological mother. These are the papers."

Pens fail here to express how the daughter met her mother with tears running down their cheeks.



You descended to our earth and became near to us.

You dwelt in us.

Nevertheless, we, fools, do not see You or meet You.

Let our eyes see You.

You are the Father and the Brother.

You are the Greatest Friend.

You are all to me.

The Eldest Sister

Young Mary felt lonely and isolated since her elder sister was ten years older than her; she was always busy studying. She would not allow Mary to play with her for the sake of studying. At the same time, her parents were busy working. Once Mary bought a beautiful present for her mother. Mary wanted to draw something on the present box. She brought the colored pens and began to draw with the brush a flower to express her love to her mother. However, the brush moved and the features of the flower were lost. As the elder sister noticed this, she kindly took the brush and made the features of the flower very clear. Mary admired the flower; thus, she kissed her sister saying, "I'm very pleased for having an elder sister to help me thus."

Since then, Mary began to learn from her sister's experience no longer grieving for being much younger than her.



*Let me always rejoice with what You give me.
Let me be happy with my family's circumstances.
You, Lord, give me what edifies me.
Grant me somebody to share with me my life,
And somebody to learn from.*

The Chain of Love

On the highway leading to the city, a snowy storm blew and made the road dark. Caroline's car almost stopped. Old Caroline did not know whether to remain in the car when no one would pass and rescue her or get out of the car and suffer from the severe cold and snow. With his old car, Joy passed by. He stopped and asked the old lady if she needed help. She said to him, "I need to have the tire changed."

"Why did you get off the car in that cold weather? Get into the car please."

Joy changed the tire and asked the lady to drive to see if everything was ok. She wanted to offer him money but he said to her, "Thanks, I've done nothing. Many people rendered me many services lovingly for free while I don't even know their names. I pay them what they did for me in your person."

"God gave me much, how can I then not give you a reward? Please tell me what to do for you."

"Just help anyone in need and remember me in your prayers; my name's Joy."

The lady drove joyfully feeling true love which does not seek its own. On the other hand, Joy drove his old car joyfully feeling warm for this act of love. As Caroline reached a small village in which there was a small restaurant in front of which there was a dim light, she entered the restaurant. The waitress, who was pregnant, served her food.

"When will you deliver your baby?" Caroline asked her.

"Maybe tomorrow."

"How do you work then?"

"For need."

Caroline gave her a one-hundred-Dollar note. As the waitress went to bring her the changes, Caroline left. As she did not find her, she went to the table to find that she wrote her a note:

<p>Blessed daughter, Please accept the money I left you for your baby. I give you what someone else called Joy has given me. Pay me back this debt by helping someone in need.</p>
--

The waitress rejoiced. On the following day, she delivered her baby. Two days later, the waitress' husband asked her, "Why didn't you ask me for money?"

She kissed him saying, "You sent me the money Joy, with Caroline the car's owner whom you helped."

Joy was astonished as the lady paid love to his wife unknowingly.



*Lord, You are wonderful in Your love.
You are not indebted to anyone.
Let me love people without expecting a reward,
As You give doubles and doubles.*

I Saw Three Angels

Timothy and Pishoy were talking about the angels as they appeared to some Biblical characters and some contemporary ones. Pishoy said, "I saw three angels."

"Where? How do they look like?"

"On my way to school a week ago, I saw a friend of mine hurrying to an old man in ragged clothes, tired and walking very slowly. My friend took the old man's hand and said to him, "Please sir, let me help you cross the road."

He helped the man cross the road. The man then said to him, "Thank you son. My eyes are weak and the road is very crowded. I prayed to God to send me an angel to take my hand and preserve me in the way. The Lord heard me and sent you to me as an angel."

My friend then rejoiced."

"Who's the second angel?"

"In an evening, my sister was walking in a dark corridor at home. She took Mum's hand and said to her, "Mum, take my hand for, I'm afraid."

Mum took her hand then carried her on her arms and sang hymns with a sweet voice. My sister looked to Mum as if saying, "You're an angel from Heaven, Mum. If it weren't for you, I wouldn't live." Since then, I see Mum as an angel and a gift from Heaven."

"Who's the third angel, Pishoy?"

"You Timothy, God has sent you to me to encourage me to pray and talk to me about Heaven. I see you as a pleasing icon of God."

"Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5.20).

*I've Sinned,
Forgive me*

Marina the Deceptive

The abbot went out to see some men who came to meet him. He saw them angry against all the monks. When he asked them about the reason, they said, "We want to see Marina. Where's he?"

The abbot wanted to calm them but to no avail. One of them said, "I want to see Marina, that adulterer who came to stay the night in my hotel some months ago, he raped my daughter. Is that our reward for accepting monks in our hotels? Are these the teachings of your Christianity or the rules of your monasticism?"

The abbot was greatly touched and confused not knowing what to do. He could never believe that young Marina the holy, gentle and ascetic could do this. He asked in a calm manner that hid behind great anger and perplexity, "Are you sure of what you're saying?"

The man angrily replied, "I'm not lying. My daughter is pregnant and she told me everything. He's a fox in the garment of a lamb. I know how to reveal his reality. I'll avenge my dignity and chastise him as you don't know how to do it."

The abbot knew how this man suffered especially because Marina went to the hotel with three other monks few months before to buy some needs for the monastery. He calmed the man saying, "Don't be afraid brother for, we won't allow such a person to stay among us. We'll let him know how to preserve himself and respect others. We'll expel him until he repents."

After many discussions, the man calmed down and said, "Then, we'll bring him the baby to bring it up. Just call him for I want to rebuke him."

Marina came and as he heard what had happened, he cried with his eyes flowing with tears, "Forgive me my brothers. I've sinned, forgive me. I'll be responsible for the child. I'll work and fight, just forgive me."

After reproaching him bitterly, the men went out leaving him in his tears as the abbot was apologizing to them.



Marina Expelled

The bell rang and the monks gathered to find the abbot very angry, in front of him, Marina stood crying bitterly. The abbot said, "Beloved fathers and brethren, I don't know what to say as it's very shameful. A monk whom I thought to be righteous and chaste does such a shameful evil! He ruined himself, blemished our reputation and corrupted the image of Jesus Christ in front of people. He raped the daughter of the owner of the hotel. Though we love him as a brother, we should punish him. But how can we chastise him? We'll oblige him to some laws and expel him from the monastery with the baby which the girl's relatives will bring. He'll stay out till he repents truly."

Then, Marina bowed to the ground making a prostration and saying in tears, "Forgive me, my fathers, I've sinned. I've sinned against God, you and myself. Forgive me for I'm young and the devil deceived me but I know that I've no excuse. You're saints and I don't deserve to live among you. Dismiss me for I'm a bad leaven. Pray for me for I'm weak."

Marina could not utter another word but wandered with his thoughts in the sins that he committed while still young and said, "Marina, Marina!

My soul, look how many sins you committed when you were young.
See how much evil you did, you're now defamed.

May I be defamed here not there.

Don't be angry for what had happened but for your sins.

Lord, here I am at Your Hands, chastise me, try me and purify my kidneys."

As he was thus thinking, the monks were amazed.

One of them said, "If he didn't confess I wouldn't believe." Another one said, "If a gentle monk like this did so what will the others do then?"

A third one said, "How deceiving is the devil of hypocrisy. He deceived us with his hypocrisy." Others began to insult him whereas he did not utter a word. He only said, "Forgive me, my brethren. I don't deserve to live among you."



Amid that stormy atmosphere, many elderly monks sighed saying, "Lord, Keep his soul from being ruined by the devil of despair.";

"Lord, keep Your children for, the enemy keeps vigilant to devour us all.";

"God, forgive me and him for, we're all sinners."

An elderly monk then said to the abbot, "Father let's not be rash for, Marina's our son. Who's without sin among us? Brethren, war is waged against us all. He whoever is not fought by the devil of lust is fought by that of pride, laziness or gluttony. Brethren, your brother needs your prayers. Pray for him and me."

The abbot then dismissed the monks after they had prayed the Lord lead them not into temptation.

The abbot imposed upon Marina a strict law, dismissed him and left him on the gate of the monastery weeping. He stayed thus for several months until the men came and gave him the child. Marina was dismissed from the monastery along with his son and many people desired not to see him. Marina carried his child, some necessary objects and the reproaches of many. He went out with tears falling down from his eyes saying, "Work hard Marina, for, now you've a son. This is for your spiritual benefit and edification.

Work hard, you were responsible only for yourself but now you're responsible for your son also.

Work hard for, there're saintly monks praying for you.

He left the monastery to find himself unable to walk. He knelt before the closed door of the monastery and raised his hands praying, "Father God,

Who was crucified for my sake,

You bore the reproaches of those who reproached You without complaining in spite of being Righteous and Holy and able to render them mute.

What can I say, my Lord, about my many sins?

I deserve to be reproached.

Lord, let me accept reproach for the sake of loving You.

You were expelled and You died for me thus, I long to share with You in being dismissed not having where to put my head.

Father, I don't deserve to live among the saints for I've sinned.

Forgive me for the sake of Your Holy Blood and don't deprive me of having a share in Heaven like them. "

Marina stood to kiss the door of the monastery saying, "Can I return to the monastery to serve these saintly monks?"

He carried his child and little dry bread and milk for the baby.



Hours passed as if they were long years. Marina did not know what to do. He was at a loss because of the baby as to from where to get him milk and where to stay with in the desert. He only knew that God Almighty did this for his edification and the baby's. He walked till he met a shepherd who greeted him. The shepherd wondered, as to Who this man was and how he came there with this baby.

When he asked him, Marina answered, "I'm a stranger, having a baby but no work to do. I just want to work to get daily food for the baby and me, to find somewhere to stay in."

The shepherd felt attracted to the man and loved him. He said to him, "Brother, I see that you're gentle. My sheep is yours, my tent is yours and all that's mine is yours."

Marina thanked him and shepherded the flock with him. Marina never got weary of work. He went out in the early morning carrying his baby and citing his psalms, bearing the severe cold and the hot weather without complaint.



A Baby in the Desert

Though he was at a loss, Marina was joyful and having peace. He saw the desert as a beautiful paradise created for his sake. In it, he walked carrying his baby talking to God, cited the psalms, singing and contemplating on his Creator's love to him. As he had no experience in bringing up children, many a time, he carried his baby on his hands and stood looking upward to Heaven and praying, "Father who

loved me and whom I love

Accept my son as a blessed offering to You.

Prepare him for baptism and keep him in Your Love.

Let him know You and love You.

Be his joy.

May You be his Food and Drink.

May You be his Shepherd, Leader and the Keeper of his heart.

O You who carry all mankind, let him carry You in his heart and let him be drunk with Your love.

O You, who engraved his name with wounds on Your Palms, let him call You from his heart and be obsessed with You forever.

O the True Light, enlighten his heart.

May You be his Sun and Day, with Your Light, we see light.

Mix his sleep with Your love so that the devil of laziness may escape from him.

May You be his home so that in You, he may find shelter.

Grant him to be baptized and be a temple for the Holy Spirit.

O the True Shepherd and Lover, embrace him."

Marina thus always prayed for his son whom he soon baptized and was his godfather.



Returning to the Monastery

Three years after being dismissed, Marina returned to the monastery where the abbot accepted him. No sooner had the monks heard about his return than many of them went out furious because of the adulterer monk who defamed them in the whole city to the extent that no monk could ever spent the night in any public place.

Marina listened patiently to these bitter blames. Marina lived among the monks with his son who loved God and worshipped Him as he learnt from his father. Then, the abbot accepted him as a monk in the monastery. The son led a sacred life for he used to talk with his father about God's wonders and love. Marina told his son the whole truth in order to prepare him to bear being blamed without complaint raising his heart to the heavenly matters. He also taught him how to love all people without favoritism, without being concerned with people's praises or blames. Whenever they met with the monks, they would talk about the work of the Holy Trinity and God's love.



The young man died and Marina remained alone with his intimate friend Jesus. He prayed for his son with tears and asked for his son's prayers. Forty years after returning to the monastery, he fell very sick and departed from this world. The knell rang and the monks gathered to hear of his death. However, some of them did not stop blaming him even after his death. Many of them said, "That adulterer has died. What did his lusts profit him? He tortured himself and defamed us all." Others said, "Let's forget his deed for, he wronged us greatly." While others lifted up their hearts to heaven praying God to accept his repentance and repose his soul in the bosom of the saints.



Some monks entered his cell with the abbot to wash his body. When an elderly monk died all would hurry to take blessing from his pure virgin body. Nevertheless, as for Marina, no one cared for this. No sooner had one of the monks undressed him to wash his body than he threw the garment on the corpse crying, "I've sinned, forgive me."

All the attendants were astonished and asked him why he wept. He said while weeping, "It's a woman! It's a woman! We've wronged her."

The abbot knelt to the ground and kissed her feet asking for forgiveness saying, "I've sinned, forgive me. She's a nun, a saint."

All who wronged her wept bitterly asking for forgiveness and those who felt how she had been patient and long-suffering shouted joyfully. All people in the city knew the matter and all went to be blessed by her whom they wronged.

SHORT STORIES FOR THE YOUTH

562-573

**Prepared by
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Story No. 562

Help! Help!

While walking among the mountains, John suddenly lost his balance and fell down a slope but he could catch a small tree that appeared in his way. Then, he looked around and around but found no way to walk in; at top, there was a hill which he could not climb and under it, there was a very deep slope.

Thus, he began shouting, "Help! Help!"

However, no one could hear his voice to help and save him. Therefore, he continued shouting very loudly asking for help.

Finally, he heard a very kind voice asking him, "John, John, can you see me?"

"No, who are you?"

"I'm the one who saved your whole life."

"I need help please."

"Don't be afraid. I see you."

"Where are you?"

"Everywhere."

"Are you God?"

"Yes I'm. I want to save you. Just leave this small tree that I have sent you and throw yourself in My hands, as I'll carry you."

"But I can't see Your hands. I need a rope or human hands, anything that I can see to carry me."

John stopped talking with God for a while and he shouted again, "Help! Help!"

That time, he found no response.

+ + +

How stupid I am!

Even when I hear Your voice,

I do not respond.

I trust the human hands not the heavenly ones.

Oh God, please help me to come back to Your bosom.

Story No. 563

Remember my Gifts

Adam used to complain, as he could not feel happy. On Sunday morning, Adam knelt and shouted, “My God, I want to thank you but my heart is very hard. I feel that I have no gifts to enjoy. Please send me those who can teach me the life of thanksgiving.”

One day, while he was on the bus, Adam saw a very beautiful cheerful girl who was smiling all the time. He said to himself, “She’s a very beautiful girl and certainly, she feels the love of all people and their care for her. She must need nothing more. I hope I were in her place so that I always smile.”

When the bus stopped at the next stop, he saw the girl stooping to hold a stick which was under her seat to lean on it in order to get off the bus... She had a leg amputated. Then, he heard her saying joyfully, “Thank You God for giving me a leg to be able to walk where You like.”

On the next stop, Adam got off the bus and went to a small shop to buy a pen. He gave the money to the seller who seemed to be a cheerful happy boy. The boy brought him the pen and said smilingly, “I hope I’m not late.”

Adam replied, “You’re a very kind boy. I’m happy to talk to you. Don’t you see so?”

The boy said smilingly, “Thank you, but I can’t see so for I’m blind.”

Adam continued walking and noticed a very handsome boy who was standing away from his friends and not playing with them. Nevertheless, he seemed to be happy. Adam went near him and asked him, “Why don’t you play with your friends?”

The boy replied, “Excuse me, I can’t hear what you say. I’m deaf.”

+ + +

Thank you God for:

Giving me two legs to walk in Your way.

Giving me two eyes to see Your beauty in this beautiful nature.

Giving me two ears to hear Your voice and respond to You.

Story No. 564

A Father's feelings

The early American history mentions that a zealous preacher used to ride his horse and go on trips many miles far away for preaching. As he returned home once after being absent for a long time, he noticed his son Jack not keen on his duties. Being fatigued, he talked to him harshly. Lisa noticed that her brother Jack was much hurt by his father's harshness. He thus decided to leave home. She tried with bitter tears to persuade him not to do that, "Dad leaves home for months. I've no one but you and Mom. To whom will you leave me?"

Nevertheless, he insisted. During the night, while all the family members were asleep, Jack rushed to the door amid the darkness. However, his sister saw him. She followed him with tears to prevent him from leaving but in vain. She returned to her room at night to lament her loneliness.

In the morning, the parents knew of what took place. They noticed that Lisa had completely changed. She no longer bore talking to her father. She stopped praying and reading the Bible. She even counted herself as unchristian. After several weeks, her mother asked her to fetch her onions to cook.

"Where are the onions?"

"Upstairs. Be careful while going up the stairs."

Lisa did not utter a word or even smiled for she had forgotten smiling since Jack left. She was only thinking of the time when she would quit that prison not to see her father or mother. She went upstairs to the storeroom searching for the onions which she could not see for the bitterness she felt. She heard steps on the stairs. She said to herself, "It should be Dad whom I don't even bear to see. She hid in the room to avoid meeting him.

The father entered the room without knowing that his daughter was hiding there. He knelt down and prayed bitterly crying, "My God and Savior, I confess that I wronged You, Lisa, my wife and myself. I spoke foolishly and harshly so I destroyed Jack's soul. Forgive me. What can I do? I won't rest till Your son Jack returns and I apologize to him. May Your Holy Spirit touch his heart and restore him back to You and to us."

Lisa could not bear his prayers, true repentance and tears. She never thought that her father loved Jack so dearly and wished his return. Tears ran down her cheeks and she said to herself, "I misunderstood my father's love. His love for me did not get cold in spite of my cruelty and harshness."

She ran to her father's bosom with tears filling her eyes and said, "Sorry Dad, I wronged you."

He embraced her saying, "I'm the one who sinned. Your brother should return. Nothing is impossible with God."

They both went downstairs. As the mother saw her daughter in her father's arms, she forgot all about the onions and cooking and realized how God's hands has made wonders in her home. To their surprise, Jack returned home and became a preacher afterwards. As for Lisa, she married a preacher.

+ + +

*Grant me a heart bearing unlimited love,
So as not to block any one with my wrath.
Grant me the spirit of love and prayers,
To enjoy the impossible.*

Story No. 565

I Hear Grandpa's Voice:

The family got sad and confused for the death of the late priest Shenouda El Shayeb in Esna on October 5th, 1995. On entering the room where young David, the priest's grandson, was sleeping, the family members heard him saying loudly, "I can hear grandpa's voice." At that time, David was only three years old. A few days later, the child, being asked about what he saw in his dream, he said that he saw heaven very beautiful but he could not remember what had been said by his grandpa. The only thing he could remember was that his grandpa's face was very shining and beautiful.

+ + +

*Oh God! Grant me a heart of a child
To see Your face and glory,
To hear the voice of reposed believers,
To enjoy their praises for You
And to be eager to go and partake in their angelic praising.*

Story No. 566

A Sea of Glass

In May 1996, one of my beloved sons narrated this story to me:

My friend saw in a dream the reposed priest Shenouda El-Shayeb (who reposed in the Lord in Esna on October 5th, 1995) was sitting with glory in front of a sea of glass. Having the Bible, I opened it to search for the verse speaking about the sea of glass. I have known that it is in the book of Revelation but I did not know in what chapter exactly it is. Yet, once I opened the book, I found it and read it for him. My friend got surprised saying, "This is the first time to hear about such a sea of glass like crystal in heaven. This is exactly what I had seen in my dream." He continued, "Fr. Shenouda walked on the sea and came to me while Mrs. Salwa, who was suffering thankfully from brain cancer which made her blind, was sitting beside me. Fr. Shenouda hold her hand to walk with him on the crystal sea and when I tried to go with them, he said to me, "Do not come now. Stay at your place."

He felt that it was not easy to tell me such a dream, as she is my sister. After almost a month, Salwa passed away to go with our beloved priest and be with the reposed believers in paradise.

This dream ascertains that some dead believers know - with the divine guidance - the time of the death of some people and pray for them to feel the love of our Christ.

+ + +

*You can cross the sea of glass.
Please, hold my hand to walk with you
To see my Christ with you and say,
The Lord is my portion.
With You, I need nothing more.*

Story No. 567

The Cracked Pot

Mike used to carry two large pots; each hung from the end of a pole which he carried across his neck, to get water from the well to his lord's palace. The pot on his left had a crack in it. Therefore, it always arrived half full. One day, the perfect pot mocked at the cracked one saying proudly, "You're a cracked pot and you always lose most of your water. You're just a burden over Mike's shoulder. It will be better for him to throw you away and ask his master to buy a new one."

The cracked pot cried bitterly for hearing such words. Mike noticed it crying so he asked it, "Why are you crying?"

It replied, "Don't you hear such words of mocking? I'm really ashamed of myself, as you don't get full benefit for your efforts because of the crack in me."

Mike smiled and said kindly, "Why are you sad? I'm happy with you. Look at the road from the well to the palace, you'll find that there are wonderful flowers only on the left side of the path. This view cheers me up every time I pass by it."

The pot asked him, "What am I to do with such beautiful flowers?"

He answered, "When I learned of your flaw, I planted flower seeds on your side of the road and every day while we were walking to the palace, you were watering them. I'm a clever man who can make good use of every thing."

The cracked pot rejoiced and thanked God for letting Mike think this way and benefit from its imperfection.

+ + +

Oh God! You are really a very clever Artist.

Please, have a look at me. I'm just a cracked pot.

But You know well how to make good use of my imperfections.

You are really perfect; You turn all matters to my benefit.

Story No. 568

Preaching the Unconditioned Love

On July 27th, 1998, Hob Harbery wrote in The Ottawa Citizen newspaper an article about the preacher of the unconditioned love. He said, "More than 400 persons pay more than US \$ 200000.00 to spend the next week with the Indian Sri Sri Ravis Shanker in Al Ashram – where he used to stay alone - behind Shawinigan, Canada".

Shanker's preaching states that man may pay any price to gain peace of mind that makes him smiling all the time, never being angry nor nervous and loving to all people with no conditions. Shanker established 80 centers around the world. Every year, he spends eight months traveling to teach people how to get rid of their negative emotions. He sees that inner peace and happiness can be easily acquired when man loves and is loved.

Once, Shanker remained silent for ten days. He occupied himself with nothing around him. Then, he felt that his life and feelings were changed and that all people liked to speak with him for being so attractive. Therefore, he was invited in many countries all over the world to speak about his experience. His speech shows that the human soul is always eager to enjoy its inner peace.

Thus, the Word of God came Himself to announce, "**God's kingdom is inside you.**" It means that we do not need to keep silent for ten days. We need to sit always at our God's feet to have His great peace inside us. His Holy Spirit takes us over every temporal tension and turns our hearts into happy heavens so that we would be filled with love, happiness, peace and righteousness which affect our relation with others.

+ + +

*Oh God! Let me enter my Chamber
And forget every thing around me.
Let me enjoy being near You, as You establish Your kingdom inside me.
Fill me with the fruits of Your Holy Spirit:
Love, happiness, peace and righteousness.
Let me be an ambassador for You
To transfer Your love for every one.*

Story No. 569

A Football Player

Once there was a boy who loved football very much but he was so short. He was living with his father who recognized his son's love for football so he was always encouraging him. Although the boy was always playing football, he was not allowed to play with a team for his shortness. He did not get upset; rather, he used to attend all matches. His father was so happy to attend all matches with him.

When he joined the secondary school, he again played football but did not join the school team for the same reason. His father was so happy for his son's strong will. At the last year, immediately before the final match, the boy received a letter about his father's death. At the date of the match, the boy came sadly after his father's funeral, as he insisted to attend the match. His team lost the first half of the match. The boy wore his football suit and asked the leader's permission to join them in the second half and he gave him permission. To their surprise, his team won the second half.

The team leader congratulated him asking him about the reason of his great success. The boy replied with tears in his eyes, "You know that my father died but do you know that he was blind?"

The leader got surprised especially when he heard the boy continuing, "Since I was a child my father has been so kind to me. He used to encourage me to study and practice my hobby. He attended every match I played. Although he never saw me he was always happy seeing my success. Today is the first time for him to see me. Thus, I liked to make him proud of my success."

+ + +

Your great fatherhood supports me.

You see me struggling against evil

So You become happy presenting me every chance to succeed.

You are happy for Your sons' victory, as You consider it Yours.

Story No. 570

Long Live Emperor Ling

When the emperor was about to depart from this world he called his people and said, “You know my love and care for you. I want to give up my imperial position to one of my sons who can manage your affairs honestly.”

The emperor called all young men and said to them, “I’ll give everyone of you a seed to plant and on the next year, present to me the growing tree. Then, I’ll choose the best for the kingdom.”

Every young man took a seed and planted it in a clay pot. Everyone took care of the seeds to be the emperor. Ling cared for the seed but he noticed that the seed did not grow; it was spoilt. He lamented his luck sadly and did not know what to say to the emperor. His mother was encouraging him continuously and assured him the importance of working honestly regardless of the result.

A year later, the seed was about to decay completely. Ling wanted to excuse himself from meeting the emperor. Nevertheless, his mother encouraged him to go. He noticed that every young man had a small beautiful tree that differed from the other. He was the only one who had nothing. The emperor ordered each one to put his tree in a large hall. Everyone was waiting the emperor’s decision and to be the chosen crown prince. When Ling took his place everyone mocked at him.

The emperor walked examining each plant. Finally, he came to Ling’s pot and said, “For whom is that?”

All young men laughed while Ling was very confused. The emperor ordered Ling to come so Ling was very afraid. The emperor looked wondering while saying, “This is your next emperor.”

All people wondered and whispered to each other while the emperor revealed to them the secret, “I gave you all seeds after putting them in boiling water till they died. The honest man is Ling, as he did not replace the seed while all other young men replaced the seed by another one.”

+ + +

Grant me the spirit of honesty and faithfulness.

Grant me to fight with the spirit of hope.

May I be faithful over a few things,

So that You make me ruler over many things.

**“Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things,
I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord”
(Matt. 25.21).**

Story No. 571

The Proud Lion And The Little Horse

When the lion was hungry he saw a little horse eating in the field. He went to devour him but when he saw him little, he refused proudly to eat him without amusing himself. He rushed towards the little horse. As he saw him running, he said to him, "Why are you running dear son? Don't be afraid. I heard that you're sick. I'm a doctor who came to treat you."

As the little horse heard that, he realized that he would not escape from the lion's jaws. He stopped and said to him calmly, "Thank you kind doctor, as you came especially to treat me."

The lion asked about his complaints. He answered that he suffered from severe pains in the hoofs of his hind legs. Then, the horse raised his leg before the lion and the lion caught it. The lion bowed down his head to examine it. He was standing on his hind legs. As the lion's head was near the horse, the horse kicked him strongly in the face and wounded him.

The lion lied on his back while the horse ran rapidly escaping.

+ + +

*Pride caused a great heavenly being to fall.
He fell down together with his angels,
From the high heaven to the deep hell.
Grant me O Lord the spirit of wisdom and meekness,
So that I would not trust in the proud enemy of good.
Grant me not to be deceived with sweet words.
May I work strongly,
As You grant me the spirit of victory.*

+ + +

Whenever a person is meek,
Mercy embraces him.
As mercy comes near to him,
The heart knows that God supports it,
As it discovers a strong assurance in it.
(St. Isaac Syrus).

Story No. 572

The Stone Cutter

By
Maurice Kh. Zakhari

The young monk walked for a while with the elder monk until they reached a nice place where they used to go and enjoy the sunset. At this place, the elder used to speak with his disciple about God and the young monk used to tell the elder about his hopes and about what saddened his heart. The elder was always trying to make it easy for him supporting him to walk in the narrow path of the saints. Once the disciple wanted to tell his teacher about a confusing matter but he heard him saying,

“How great are You God!
For everything in the world witnesses for Your greatness
And everyone glorifies You.”
How nice are the ending moments
For they are the moments of release!
Oh God, when shall You release me from this world?”

When the elder noticed that his disciple was confused, he asked him about the reason. The young monk felt embarrassed for knowing that the elder discovered his inside and said, “Actually, I’m busy thinking of many things.”

The elder kept silent for a while then said, “It’s good for man to be busy with Jesus Christ not to be busy with matters that divert him from God. May your mind be busy only with God Who is inside you.”

The young monk kept silent for a while thinking of the elder’s speech who looked at him kindly as if he was praying for him saying “Please God, protect this young plant to grow and have good fruits. Keep him away from young foxes and from every evil.”

The disciple looked at his elder teacher saying sadly, “There are serious matters in the world that make one amazed thinking about their reasons.”

Then he started to narrate the following story to him, “Once I went to the near village to buy some needs for the monks. There, I noticed a poor man who has two tents. He lives with his two goats in one of them leaving the other tent which is better than the first for the strangers. Although he is very poor and earns only 10 cents per day from selling the milk of the goat he can fulfill his needs and help other people. For example, he always searches for any stranger in the village to invite him to his tent, wash his legs and present him food and drink. This man makes me ask amazingly, “Why doesn’t God grant this man more money to help more people? I think if he was a rich man, he’d help more poor people and strangers.” So I always pray and fast asking God to grant this person more money.”

At this moment, the elder looked at his disciple and said harshly, “No son, don’t do that. May be it’s better for this man to be poor.”

The disciple replied astonishingly, “Why don’t you want me to ask for his good? How could it be bad for him?”

The elder looked at the sunset and touched his white beard as if he was trying to remember something. Then, he narrated the following story:

There was a pious man called Ologius. He was a stonecutter and was full of God’s grace. He worked hard daily to gain very little money. At night, he used to take a small lamp and go through his village searching for strangers to take them to his home, wash their legs, kiss their hands and present them food. Then, he used to present the remaining food to the dogs. One day, while returning home, he saw a monk who was selling his handwork in the village. Ologius got so happy to invite him with others home. In the morning, Ologius went to his work and the monk returned to his monastery in the Eskeit.

On his way, the monk thought, as you do now, about this stonecutter comparing him to many rich people and asked himself amazingly, “Why doesn’t God give this man more money to help more people?” Thus, he prayed and fasted to God to answer his request concerning Ologius. He had eaten nothing for about three weeks that he became very weak insisting not to eat until God makes Ologius rich.”

One night, the monk saw – while sleeping - a glorious man looking like a priest asking him, “How are you?”

The monk replied, “Please Lord, answer my request concerning Ologius’ sake and grant him more money.”

The Lord replied, “Now, he’s better.”

The monk said, “Give him more money for, more people will glorify you through him.”

The Lord said, “I assure you that he’s better now. Yet, if you want Me to grant him more money, I can do so, provided that you be responsible for him. You should guarantee that he won’t leave my way when being rich, I’ll ask you for his soul.”

The monk agreed saying, “I will, Lord.”

Finally, the monk woke up happily, thanked God and had some food and drink, as God answered his request.

+ + +

In the morning, Ologius went out to cut the stones as usual. He was walking among the high mountains lifting up his face to heavens and reciting his favorite comforting psalm

**I will lift up my eyes to the hills –whence comes my help.
My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.
He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber.
Behold, He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.
The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand.
The Sun shall not strike you by day, not the Moon by night.
The Lord shall preserve you from all evil; He shall preserve your soul.
The Lord shall preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth,
And even for evermore.**

He felt that the mountains and all creatures were reciting with him his psalm.

+ + +

As he reached the place in which he was to cut the stones, he got his axe, called the name of the Lord and struck the mountain harshly with his axe. He heard a strange sound when he struck the mountain which proved that there was a hole downwards. He struck again and was surprised to find a small hole appearing. He continued to strike until the hole widened and he saw downwards a large cell. He could not see inside because it was dark.

Making sure that no one would see him, he tied his rope to a stone and to his waist. He descended into the cell and was hardly able to see inside.

He found many large boxes. He asked himself what would be inside. His question was answered when he struck one of them with his axe. To his surprise, he saw something extremely glittering. He cried, “Gold, Pearls, jewels, diamond, coins!” In a while, he broke all the boxes to find many treasures. He said to himself, “If I took this treasure to my village people will ask about it and the ruler may take it by force.” He decided to take the treasure to a far land where no one knew him.

He went out of the cell and moved a large stone on its opening. He rent some donkeys claiming that he would use them transporting the stones. He put his treasure on them and went secretly to the shore. He took a ship and put in it his treasure without telling the captains the

truth. He told them that he was a merchant travelling to sell his merchandise and earn his living. The ship moved to Byzantium as Ologius ordered. On the way, Ologius' thoughts were occupied with his treasure and his future. As he remembered the strangers, he said to himself, "I'll build a large guesthouse and I'll give much money to the poor."

+ + +

As he reached Byzantium, he collected his treasures and went out of the ship. There, he was informed that a new king has been crowned over the city. He became one of the great people of the city because of his wealth. The king invited him to his banquet and rejoiced much when Ologius presented him a diamond more precious than the one on his crown. The king gave him vast lands and built him a wonderful palace. Leading such life, Ologius forgot all about the poor and the strangers.

Once he got up late after a night spent in amusement and drinking. He remembered that he had an appointment with the king. Therefore, he ordered his servants to prepare his best garments. He then went out and proudly rode his handsome carriage. As soon as he rode he heard someone crying, "Have mercy upon me. I want to tell you a secret."

As he asked about that voice he was told that an ascetic monk was calling him. He smiled and ordered the carriage to move.

+ + +

Meanwhile, one of the servants beat the monk and hurt him. Then, he dismissed him. The monk moved on his legs and hands being unable to walk. Then, he sat beside a beggar. The beggar blamed him, "Why did you come here? Don't you belong to a monastery? You'd have stayed in your monastery to fulfill your vows instead of begging."

The monk looked at him kindly and said, "I didn't come to beg but to save this man's soul."

The beggar looked at him mockingly and said, "Ologius! O fool!"

The monk stayed sorry for guaranteeing Ologius. He remembered seeing him in a dream in a very ugly form among frightening creatures dragging him. Then, he knew how that dream showed his horrible destiny. Therefore, he left his monastery and went searching for Ologius in the place where he saw him for the first time. As he knew what became of him, he said to himself, "Woe unto me. I'm the one who sinned." Then, he took a ship to Byzantium.

Sitting on the floor, he thought, "What shall I do after trying so hard to talk to him but in vain. Every time I try to approach him his servants beat me till death." He decided to return to the Eskait leaving Ologius to God to save him. As he got on the ship he prayed to God asking St. Mary to intercede on his behalf before her Son to absolve him of guaranteeing Ologius. While praying he fell asleep. He saw in a dream Lord Jesus Christ saying to him, "Don't guarantee what's behind your ability and don't resist your Lord's Will."

He could not utter a word. He went to St. Mary crying, "O mother of the world have mercy upon me!"

She went to Lord Jesus and worshipped Him. Then, the Lord said to the monk, "Don't guarantee any one."

"I'll never Lord. I've sinned."

At the moment, the Lord said, "Return to your cell and you'll know how I'll restore Ologius to his first righteousness."

As the monk woke up, he rejoiced and thanked God and also St. Mary for her intercession.

+ + +

The king of Byzantium died and another king succeeded him. Later, three of his officials together with Ologius the Coptic minister disobeyed him. The king executed the three officials. As for Ologius, he confiscated all his possessions but Ologius was able to escape from Byzantium and return to his Upper-Egyptian village where he worked as a stone cutter as before reciting his psalm and served the strangers and the poor washing their feet, kissing their hands and presenting them food.

+ + +

The elderly teacher concluded his story looking kindly to the young monk. Then, he say tears in his eyes. The young monk stood up, made a prostration and said, "Forgive me my father for, I'm still young. May God save my soul."

SHORT STORIES FOR THE YOUTH

573-583

**Prepared by
Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty**

*Translated by
Nermeen S. Daniel*

Story No. 573

Saint Mary's Dream

On the beginning of December, Maggie noticed that her little daughter was sitting all the day in her room on her chair thinking as if there was a serious matter going on worrying her. In the evening, Maggie went to her daughter's room and played with her. Then, they prayed together. Afterwards, the daughter waited to listen to the evening story from her mother.

Maggie smilingly asked her little daughter, "What was disturbing you all the day?"

"Christmas is so near and I need to present a gift to my young brother. I don't know what to buy him for Christmas."

The mother discussed the matter with her daughter and decided to buy a toy for her brother. Hence, the mother began to narrate the following story:

One day Saint Mary woke up and after praying, she stood before her amazing Baby to praise Him while looking to Joseph and saying, "Yesterday, I was thinking about the astonishing incidents that we're living in. we aren't worthy to have such a Baby among us. Not only heaven but also the Lord of Heaven promised us of Him by His angel Gabriel; a troop of angels brought good news to the shepherds and the wise men came from the Far-east to kneel and worship Him. I'm really confused before this amazing Baby who was born extraordinarily.

Yesterday, I saw a dream and didn't understand it well. I saw people from many countries getting ready to celebrate the Baby's birthday throughout six weeks. They had already decorated their houses, streets and warehouses with exaggerated decorations. Moreover, the markets were crowded with people who want to buy gifts for each other. They wrapped their gifts with wonderful and colored covers. All people had put a tree whether natural or artificial in their houses. Every person offers his gifts to his relatives to put under the tree until the birthday party of the Baby.

The people decorated the trees with lights, beautiful colored ribbons and statues of angels. All people are busy and worrying about the presents but forgot the Baby Himself. They did not present Him anything nor even mention His name. I think they know nothing about Him; however, some of them laugh at those who utter His name. Isn't this an amazing thing? All those people from all countries have come to celebrate a birthday for a person they do not want even to hear anything about, is it ordinary? I felt that if my Son visited one of these houses, no one would open to Him and would consider this an intervention into his own affairs.

Although everything seems beautiful and attractive, there are many people reject the Baby's presence in His birthday. I thank God that it was just a dream; I wish it wouldn't come true.

While the little daughter was listening to such a story, she said to her mother, "Oh mum, I saddened my Jesus' heart. What should I do for Him to let my Dad Jesus Christ attend His Birthday party? Which present should I give?"

Mum kept silent for a moment then told her to present the gift to Dad Jesus first, then to present her gift for her young brother.

"How come?"

“What you are doing to a poor person, a patient or a prisoner you do this for Him, as He said before, “The King will answer and say to them, “Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.” (Matt. 25.40).

+ + +

*Lord! May You enter in my heart,
And implant the cross in the bottom of my heart.
Accept my gift which I offer to you to the needy hands
To meet You and celebrate your birthday.
Grant me to delight the suffering and the needy
And to delight you oh Lord. You are amazing in your love.*

Story No. 574

The Poor Rabbit **And** **An evil friend**

In the ancient times, a poor rabbit met a sly fox. An intimate friendship grew between them. At that time, the rabbit was famous for his long tail and small ears. Many animals try to warn him against his friendship with the fox. However, the rabbit insisted on keeping such friendship, as he considered the fox to be the true friend who would fill his life with joy and entertainment.

One day, the fox came to the rabbit saying, "Let's spend one day fishing."

"But we don't have a hook nor a bait to fish."

"Let's sit on the sea shore and you put your long tail in the water so when a fish come to bite you, you should catch it with your tail and drag it to the shore."

"Why don't you put your tail in the water?"

"For your tail is longer than mine and very soft so it will attract the fish."

The poor rabbit obeyed the evil friend and went with him to the seashore for fishing. The former began to put his long tail in the water and the later started entertaining him and suddenly the rabbit screamed, "I caught a fish with my tail, what shall I do then?"

"Lift your tail quickly towards the shore and throw the fish."

"The fish is dragging me down. It's so huge."

The fox looked forward to the water and screamed, "It isn't a fish. It's a big tortoise."

"What shall I do then, Help me! It pulls me down and down into the water. I'll sink indeed."

"Sorry I have nothing to do for you."

"Pull me fox up to the shore."

The fox held the rabbit from its ears and began to pull him until his ears became long. Moreover, as the tortoise caught the rabbit from his tail, it was cut in his mouth. As a result, the rabbit became almost without a tail. This was the result of accompanying the evil friend.

+ + +

Lord! Keep me away from any evil friend.

Keep me away from every evil consultation.

Be my best friend.

Let Your angels surround me, so that I would stick to You all the time,

To join them and behave under the guidance of the heavenly wisdom.

Story No. 575

A Bar of Chocolate

In May 1996, while I was talking to some darlings in the occasion of a young lady's departure. She was suffering from bitter pains of cancer. Her young sister said to me, "I see you talk about death as if it were a bar of chocolate."

I said to her, "our Christ turns death into a gift which is sweeter than a bar of chocolate."

Then, I remembered a story about one of the preachers who was sitting among his darlings studying the Holy Bible. The preacher said to them, "Some people see me mistaken and consider me a conservative for using expressions from the Holy Bible and not talking so much about the recent scientific theories.

Well! Among us there is a widow who lost her only son and he was a Christian guy burning with the Holy Spirit. This Lady needs to be consoled. She is asking whether she will see her son or not. Let's go to science and ask it, "Will she see him or not? Where is he now? Will death end everything?" The widow is very worried. Will scientists be able to comfort her heart? Who will answer her questions and turn her pains and sighs into heavenly consolations?

Saint Luke the evangelist had presented a wonderful description of the first church which was kindled with the consolations of the Holy Spirit.

"Then the churches throughout all Judaea, Galilee, and Samria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied"
(Acts 9.31).

Story No. 576

The Dishonest Tiger

A deer heard someone asking for help. As he went to see who he was he found that it was the tiger. He was lying on the ground, as a large tree fell on his back.

“What happened tiger?”

“As I was walking in the forest a tree fell on me.”

“When?”

“In the morning.”

“What do you want then?”

“Rescue me. I’m dying.”

“How can I rescue you when you’re wild?”

“I promise to reward you not to devour you.”

“Your promise is false.”

“No, I’ll fulfill my promise.”

The tiger begged him to save him promising to reward him. Therefore, the deer dragged the tree and saved the tiger. Then, the tiger prepared to jump over the deer and devour him. At that moment, the deer asked, “Did you forget your promise?”

“How can I fulfill it when I haven’t eaten anything since the morning?”

“But you promised!”

“But I’ve to answer the call of my stomach.”

“Then, let’s go to a wise judge.”

“Ok.”

They went to the serpent. As they narrated their story he said to them, “I’m at a loss. Deer is honest and he rescued you Tiger. You promised and you should fulfill your promise. On the other hand, I’ve to listen to the cries of Tiger’s stomach O Deer. Let’s go to the place where you met in order to be able to judge justly.”

They went to the forest. There, the tiger lied down on the ground. The deer dragged the tree over him and the tiger began to cry asking for help. The serpent asked the deer to perform what he did before.

However, the deer said to himself, “Now I know that the tiger doesn’t fulfill his promises.” He left the serpent talking with the tiger and ran away. Then, the serpent looked at the tiger saying, “I can’t drag the tree. Stay under the tree, as you don’t fulfill your promises.”

+ + +

May I imitate You O Faithful in Your promises.

Let me be honest with You

And frank with myself and with my brethren

In order to hear Your Divine voice,

**“You were faithful over a few things,
I will make you ruler over many things.”**

Story No. 577

The Weak Tiger

A farmer took his cat with him to the field to catch the mice which eat his young birds and corrupt his crops. The cat did his work skillfully. Then, he felt that the farmer had wronged him since he did not present him food till he searched for the mice to eat them.

Therefore, he fled from the farm to the neighboring wilderness.

There, he found a tiger so he trembled. The tiger looked at him and said in amazement, "Who are you? You seem to be a cousin of mine, as you resemble me. However, you're small and weak. What's wrong with you?"

"I wish I were like you cousin. I'm suffering from man who is strong and weak in the same time. He destroyed my might and humiliated me till I became small and weak. You're huge 'cause you're free not enslaved by man."

The tiger answered mockingly, "Is there a creature stronger than me? How does he look like and what are his abilities?"

"Come and see."

They went to the farm. As the tiger saw man he mocked at him, "The cat told me that you're stronger than me while I don't see so. Would you fight me?"

"I left my strength in my hut. Would you wait till I get it?"

"Sure."

"To guarantee that you'll wait me, let me bind you with a rope to the tree."

The farmer bound the tiger to the tree, went to his hut and came with a strong stick. The tiger saw that he would loose him and fight with him but the farmer went on beating the tiger not paying attention to the tiger's cries till the tiger died.

+ + +

*Grant me wisdom and dominion O Lord
To bind the enemy with Your might
To strike him with the tree of the cross.
The enemy has no dominion over me,
As You give me authority over the serpents and scorpions
And every power of the enemy.*

Story No. 578

Man Corrupting Nature

Monica noticed her son Michael calm thinking contemplatively. She asked him, “What are you thinking of?”

“Mom, we went yesterday to the open zoo. I noticed that lions live peacefully with each other. Likewise, the tigers and the foxes. An animal doesn’t eat another one of the same race. Why then does Man wage war against his brethren in other countries?”

Monica answered, “I’ll tell you a symbolic story which reveals how Man corrupted nature itself:

It was said that all animals and birds lived together peacefully on a beautiful island enjoying nature. There was a duck living joyfully. She spent much time swimming with the other aquatic creatures. Once in a dream, she saw a far land much more beautiful than the land she lived on. In the morning, she left her companions and swam to the other land until she got fatigued. At last, she reached the shore of that land.

She slept there and saw a wonderful dream. She saw herself on an extremely beautiful land and heard a voice saying, “You’ve reached the fair land. Here, you’ll see wonders but be careful, here, Man lives. He’s the greatest creature and the king of the earth. He’s intelligent, creative yet, evil. He’d corrupted his life and is now corrupting that of others.”

The duck got up frightened. She walked to find a lion coming out of his den. He asked her, “Who are you and what’s your name? I never saw your like before.”

She said that she was a duck coming from a beautiful island inhabited by animals and birds living peacefully together. She also told him about her dream. He was amazed since he had a similar dream. He said, “Anyway, don’t be afraid. I don’t think that Man’s stronger than me. Follow me and I’ll protect you. I’ll devour him.”

The duck rejoiced and followed. Suddenly, they saw a donkey running. The lion asked him, “Why are you running?”

“I escaped from Man. Though I serve him he’s very cruel.”

“Don’t be afraid. I’ll devour him.”

After a while, they saw a camel fleeing from Man. The lion assured them that he would protect them. The lion saw a strange creature carrying wood and a bag. The lion asked him, “Who are you?”

“I’m a carpenter going to make a den for the tiger, the king of the animals.”

“I’m the king. Make me a den first then go.”

“I can’t give up my promise.”

The lion beat him thus he fell on the ground. He apologized calmly, “I’ll make you a den. You’re really the king.”

In a while, the carpenter made a large box and said to the lion, “Please get in to see if it suits you.”

As the lion got in it, the carpenter covered him with wood. The lion roared asking to get out. Then, the carpenter said, “I’ll make you

An iron cage to live in all your life.”

“Are you Man?”

“Yes, I’m Man whom you want to devour.”

When the animals saw this, they served Man fearing him.

+ + +

The first Adam lived peacefully with all creatures.
Through sin, Man was corrupted,
And the earth was cursed because of him.
War then began among all creatures.
May Your righteousness fill my heart and Your peace return to me.
Then, all the earth would be filled with peace and joy.

“For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one,
And has broken down the middle wall of separation,
Having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is,
The law of commandments contained in ordinances,
So as to create in Himself one new man from the two,
Thus making peace”
(Eph. 2.14-15).

Story No. 579

The Peasant's Gift To the King

While the peasants were planting the fields they heard loud music. As they looked up they found the king together with a great number of the officials and a musical band singing for the king. The peasants left their fields and rushed joyfully to the king who came especially to visit their village. They did not know how to welcome the king and express their joy for receiving him.

One of them rushed to a spring and filled his palms with water.

He advanced joyfully towards the king saying, "My lord, please accept this simple gift."

The king got surprised and asked, "What's that?"

The peasant answered calmly, "My heart rejoiced for receiving your majesty for the first time in our village near my meadow. What can I, a poor farmer, present you then when you are rich and generous? I wanted to express my love for you so I took some water in my palms. I present it not because you need but because this is only what I can offer. Accept it as a gift and symbol of love."

The king rejoiced, embraced the farmer and said to the treasury secretary, "Give this peasant a large sum of money. What he gave excelled the gifts of many people."

+ + +

Lord, You presented me springs of living water.

What to present You when I am poor and needy?

Accept my love as the widow's two small copper coins.

Accept my life as a sacrifice of praise and love.

"Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams"
(1 Sam. 15.22).

Story No. 580

The Beautiful Pearl

A small fly left his hole in the early morning. He saw a glittering transparent pearl on a leaf. He said to himself, "It's a valuable treasure. I'll possess it and become rich. He climbed the tree to take it before anyone would see him. While climbing, the Sun rose. As he reached the leaf he did not find the pearl. He found a small mouse following him with his eyes. The fly was sad when he did not find the pearl. The mouse asked him, "What saddens you?"

He answered, "I came to take the pearl but I'm sure you took it. Let's divide it between us."

The mouse laughed and said, "O fool, you stick to the day dream which fades away with the sunrise."

"What do you mean?"

"What you saw wasn't a pearl. It was a drop of dew, which was dried up with the Sunrise. Don't stick to fancies."

+ + +

My Lord, You are the Truth.

You are the True pearl of great price.

May I possess You so that I would not count on false daydreams.

**"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels,
That the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us"
(2 Cor. 4.7).**

**"A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things,
And an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things"
(Matt 12.35).**

**"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden a field, which a man found and hid;
And for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field"
(Matt. 13.44).**

**"Every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder
Who brings out of his treasures things new and old"
(Matt. 13.52).**

Story No. 581

An Atheist Professor

Several years ago, in USC University, there was an atheist philosopher professor Who exerted much effort to make his students skeptic of God's existence. The students were afraid of debating with him, as he was very eloquent. He continued on practicing such a hobby for twenty years while the students were not brave enough to confront him.

At the end of every academic year, he would stand among his students and say, "If there is still anyone believing in Jesus Christ let him stand up." No one would have the bravery to stand up, knowing that he/she who would confess his faith would be called "Fool".

He used to say, "If God exists let Him prevent this piece of chalk from falling down and breaking into pieces when I throw it."

Once a Christian student felt bitter because of what that professor did. He felt responsible for witnessing for his God whatever the result would be. He prayed to God with tears to give him a chance to witness for Him. He asked God to reveal Himself before the professor in order to enjoy repentance and faith.

When the professor asked if there was still anyone believing in Jesus the young man stood bravely saying, "I believe in my Lord Jesus Christ."

The professor was shocked. The attendants who were about three hundred persons were astounded.

The professor said, "Fool, if God exists let Him prevent this piece of chalk from falling from my hand and breaking into pieces." Then, he threw the piece of chalk as he used to do. However, this time, he got astounded when the piece of chalk leapt from his hand to his shirt, trousers, and shoes and then it ran on the ground without being broken.

He was ashamed. Therefore, he ran away. As for the student, he stood amid his colleagues talking to them about the person of Lord Jesus Christ, his great love and care for us.

+ + +

*You are the True Rock. Who can ever resist You!
Who can not refuge with humility to Your protection?
The one who does not possess You will certainly lose his/her life.
You are my Wonderful Savior.*

**"Keep me as the apple of Your eyes; hide me under the shadow of Your wings"
(Ps. 17.8).**

**"How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God!
Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of your wings"
(Ps. 36.7).**

**"Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me! For my soul trusts in You;
And in the shadow of Your wings I will make my refuge, until the calamity has passed by"**

(Ps. 57.1).

Story No. 582

The Flying Duck

A group of wild ducks went to the south in winter. On their way, one of them noticed some ducks in a field eating from the food before them. She thought of landing to eat a little with them and then return to her colleagues. She had already landed. The more she ate the more she desire to eat more. When she finished she found that the other ducks had already left the area. She said to herself, “Why should I deprive myself of food? I’ll eat and be filled and when my colleagues return in the spring I’ll accompany them.”

In the spring, she noticed them coming. She tried to catch them but being fat, she could not. She decided to wait till the following winter to immigrate with them to the south. However, on the following winter, she was fatter. She went on postponing until she got very fat unable to fly.

**“So I said, “That, I have wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest”
(Ps. 55.6).**

Lord, give me two wings of a dove

To fly and live in Heaven.

May I not look downwards.

May my thoughts be unoccupied with the food of the corruptible body

Lest I fall, yield and be unable to fly.

My brethren fly to Heaven with Your Wonderful Holy Spirit

While I, in humility, stick to earth and become disabled from soaring.

Story No. 583/A

An Illiterate Teaching me

By Samir El-Bahgoury

This story took place in summer 1952 after the Egyptian Revolution on the twenty-third of July. It took place in Upper Egypt where there were sugar cane fields because of which people lived in terror since many people were kidnapped and hid among these fields where no one could find them. In such atmosphere, we used to go to these villages to serve and preach. We used to walk amid the fields.

What encouraged us then to adventure is that the Christians in those villages do not know anything about the principles of their religion. They had not heard the name 'Jesus' before. Once a child thought it a minister's name. He claimed that he saw him going to the neighboring village in trousers and a shirt. What also encouraged us was that the kidnapping decreased in the summer for, the sugar cane does not grow in this season. Moreover, we had more time in the summer.

My family members got frightened when I went to such far villages on foot since there were no ways for cars. The group often consisted of three or four young men. One of them carried a bag of first aid supplies for the villagers and the others cared for visiting and preaching to them.

On our way, we used to pray and sing some hymns which filled us with peace. We seemed before others courageous but inwardly, we were frightened even when we thought of thieves and kidnapping. What filled us with peace is that our Guard never rests or sleeps. I can never forget the men, women and children sitting on the floor in the courtyard of a house owned by one of them. They were amazed to hear for the first time the Biblical wonderful stories.

As the sugar cane began to grow, allowing the thieves and kidnappers to hide among it, we stopped serving during that season also because the summer holiday was over. Few months later while I was walking in the street in my city, Uncle Shenouda, a resident in the village which we used to go to, saw me. I took him home where we talked much. I expected what he wanted to ask about but I had then a persuasive answer. Of course, he wanted to ask me why we stopped serving in their village. When he asked I told him that the accidents which took place there filled us with horror mentioning many of them. To my surprise, he was surprised as if he never expected to hear such a reply.

He then said bitterly in great surprise, "Didn't you say once, **"The very hairs of your head are all numbered."**?"

At that point, I was ashamed of my weak faith. He continued to repeat all the verses, which I once said, proving God's care for us. We then began to visit and serve these villages again. We walked in a way full of dangers but we felt God's arms embracing us.

That illiterate man taught me a lesson which I will never forget.

Story No. 583/B

The Fruits of Love

It was silent in the village, as it was still dark. Samuel the young deacon went to the church early to participate in the Holy praises. He stopped at the door to listen to Cantor Mikhail singing a very sweet hymn, which filled his soul with spiritual joy. As he paid attention, he heard a well-known voice, that of Monk Agathen participating in the Sunday praises.

Monk Agathen Lived in a small cell on the roof of St. Mary's church. He was responsible for the endowments of his monastery and the children's classes joining the church. He used to teach Samuel reading, writing and memorizing the psalms.

Young Samuel entered the church, knelt before the altar and kissed Father Agathen's hand. They all participated in praying the Holy praises under the light of the candles. How awesome is our church and how perfect are its rites!

+ + +

All the children of the village, especially Samuel, loved their father and teacher Father Agathen. Monk Agathen had the gift of healing the sick. Samuel watched many of the miracles that God performed on Father Agathen's hands.

Once a man rushed to Father Agathen's cell. He forced the door of the cell open, which showed how much he was sad and worried. Father Agathen went with him home where his only son was lying sick with great fever. Because of his prayers, the son was healed at the moment. As he was going out, the man tried to present him a gift but he refused seriously. How can he take a price for what God has given him freely?

What attracted Samuel's attention was the time which Father Agathen spent in his cell. He thought, "What does he do in his cell? Does he pray all that time? How does he pray?" He asked Uncle Stephen who bakes the Korban (The Holy Bread made for the Eucharist) but he gave no answer to satisfy Samuel's curiosity.

At last, Samuel decided to discover himself. He went upstairs to the cell but Uncle Stephen saw him. He ran after Samuel and held his garment asking him, "what are you doing here?"

Of course Samuel did not tell him. He threatened to tell the cantor yet, Samuel did not fear for, he did not threaten to tell the monk.

What also attracted his attention was that the monk used to hide his face behind his cloak so that no one could see his tears during the Holy Mass. He thought, "Why does he weep and why that intensely?" His little mind could not answer all these questions. Moreover, He asked himself, why he felt awe when this father prayed the liturgy. Even the babes did not cry as usual and all people prayed with humility with tears filling the eyes of most of them. Why, when the monk's voice was not lovely? He did not even tune the hymns correctly. Nevertheless, he seemed to be talking to God directly with no obstacles.

+ + +

After some years, Samuel became a youth and his relation with Monk Agathen grew more intimate. They talked to each other much in the deep language of the spirit. They read

the Bible and discovered its commandments and sweetness. With no reason, Samuel was worried. He felt that he was going to lose something significant.

As usual, he told his teacher and father about what worried him. Fr. Agathen comforted him saying that we do not possess anything in the world to worry about. The only thing that we should care for is our relation with heaven. Samuel's heart was comforted; thus, he was able to bear what happened later courageously.

One day, while Fr. Agathen was praying the Liturgy during the Holy Lent, a black car stopped before the church. The passengers, an old man and an old monk with a white thick beard, entered the church. Fr. Agathen welcomed them very warmly after the Liturgy. As for Samuel, he did not feel at ease though he could not hate even an enemy. After dinner, the visitors left the village taking with them Fr. Agathen.

The fact was that his holiness the pope wanted to see the monk. He then ordained him a bishop over a city for the people there heard about his virtues and chose him. Samuel accepted to go with his teacher but his parents prevented him. Therefore, he bade his teacher farewell with warm tears. He stayed bearing many of his teacher's characteristics.

On the appointed time, the people of the village felt a great need to have a good shepherd. They found no one but Samuel to bare the responsibilities of serving faithfully. The holy monk left the village but he left behind a fruit of love still walking in the village doing good.

Story No. 583/C

In the Way of Life

By Samir El-Bahgori

Sunday, 24/February

My friend George is wonderful. He was extremely smart. Now, he is ready to hear everything and say nothing. His eyes have contemplating looks. "What happened George? Did you forget your past so soon? Did you forget the projects which we planned together?" Yesterday, it was time for carrying out one of our ever-successful projects.

I waited for a long time but he did not come. Unconsciously, I found myself walking to his house. There, I was told that he excused himself for he was busy. "Are you ungrateful to that extent? I'm really sorry for keeping such friendship. Our friendship was based on mutual understanding. We'd the same aims, thoughts and principles.

+ + +

Sunday 3/March

How enjoyable the last Sundays were! George and I used to get up early and return home after midnight. It is the first Sunday to be alone. I found no one of my friends. I walked in the streets like a mother bereft of her only child. I was consoled a little bit, as I saw George on his way to church.

"I think this is the first time for you to go to this holy place O pious one. Did you forget what you used to say? You've now new friends. I saw you today walking with them after the Mass in that way leading to the village, the way which is dear to our souls. You seemed to be joyful, at least because you got rid of me. But, what's my crime?"

+ + +

Thursday 14/March

I thought of visiting again. This time, he may be gentler with me. Maybe I can know why he did give up our friendship in such a painful manner. As I got ready to go out, my younger sister gave me a blue letter. It was from George.

+ + +

Dear Jack,

I'm sorry for causing you such pain. I'll tell you what happened. Please read it and if we agree this time we'll more intimate and loving. On the eve of Wednesday the twentieth of February, I saw myself in a dream walking as if to hell. I was frightened especially of the serpents, the offspring of the old one, embracing the branches of the trees.

Suddenly, I saw a lion walking roaring. He came to me and ordered me to follow. I followed in amazement like a goat following the slaughterer. He took me captive but he was very generous with me. Therefore, I respected and awed him. Once I pretended to be asleep. I heard him saying, "Few days later, this man will be fit as a food for the prince of this world."

I woke up very disturbed after that dream and asked myself, "What does this mean? It's the way of sin in which I walk according to my own will. This would surely be the result." Being at a loss, I lifted my heart to God asking Him to rescue me. I felt hearing a voice coming from far away, "Come with me to the church. Don't be late." I thought, "What if I go?"

Few minutes later, I was at the door of the church. It was a youth meeting. The preacher talked about the significance of purity in the life of the youth, as if it was a personal message to me. I saw the difference between my impure life and that pure life which every Christian youth should lead. I then realized why I was miserable. I discovered that I'm the lost lamb whom the Shepherd's hand saved. The light filled my depth. I felt free and spiritual awareness.

I went to church many times. I've now pure friends. I serve with them in the Sunday school. I'm praying for you 'cause I want to live with you as intimate friends leading a new life. I'll wait for you tomorrow in St. George's church to have a friendship blessed by heaven and shadowed by the vine of Sunday school.

**Yours faithfully,
George**

+ + +

Friday 22/March

How great is Your love and care for humans O God. You are the Good Shepherd. In Your love, You did not deprive me of Your everlasting inheritance. You took me to Your barn. You embrace me in Your arms.

"Behold, you are handsome, my beloved! Yes, pleasant" (Song 1.16).

Now, I am back to my friend George with our Great Friend Jesus. We need You O savior since the world with its evils is against us. Thank You for, You honored us by serving in Your field while we were sinners but the blood of Jesus Christ purifies us from sins.

Story No. 584

The Bowing Tree

George noticed that his only young son Luke was absent-minded since he came back from school. In the evening, George entered his son's room, played with him, prayed with him and talked to him to know what worried him.

Luke said frankly, "Dad, I'm at a loss. We've a colleague who has haunch-back. All our colleagues make fun of him. He's very gentle and loving. I love him but I fear to lose my friends if I cling to him. He's lonely. What can I do?"

The father told him the story of the bowing tree.

Some painters walked among the trees to draw beautiful pictures of the trees. They saw a bowing tree, the branches of which bowed over an old small building. The travelers used to rest at that building which seemed as if to be embraced by that tree. Some of the artists said that it was not straight and not as beautiful as other trees. Others said that it was a symbol of love, as it bowed to embrace others and save them from the Sunheat.

Moreover, the villagers feared to let their kids play under it lest it fall over them. Once a wind blew. Many of the trees fell; while, the bowing tree was not affected. On the contrary, it supported two other trees that bent over it. In the spring, the three bowing trees had flowers and spread a very beautiful odor. They had seeds which were spread everywhere and grew to be many little trees.

Many people grieved saying that the place would be filled with bowing trees and it would lose its beauty. However, they grew to be straight beautiful ones. All people then realized the value of that bowing mother tree which showed love to many.

+ + +

*Uproot from me O Lord the spirit of destructive criticism.
Grant me eyes to see in the bowing tree motherhood and love.
May I see in every person what is good,
And realize that even the weakness of others may be fit for edification.
O Good Wonderful Lord, You transfer weakness to strength,
Ugliness to beauty
And sadness to joy.
Let me learn from You O Perfect Lord.*

**"He who is devoid of wisdom despises his neighbor,
But a man of understanding holds his peace"
(Prov. 11.12).**

**"Take heed that you do not despise of these little ones,
For I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven"
(Matt. 18.10).**

+ + +

He who loses money loses much.
He who loses a friend loses more.
He who loses his faith loses everything.

Story No. 585

The Ancient Splendid Pot

The engaged couple was fond of buying the expensive ancient pots. On a trip to Europe, they visited a shop of memorials. The bride was attracted to an expensive large pot put in a corner and surrounded by attractive decorations. As she held it and told her groom that she liked it much admiring its beauty, she heard it say,

Fare bride, you don't know who I am. I wasn't that beautiful. I was a handful of dust. My master held me, put water on me and started to knead me. I cried, "Leave me on the ground. Why do you knead me so harshly?"

My master looked at me smiling and said, "Not yet."

He put me in the machine and let it rotate. I felt dizzy and cried, "Enough! Enough!"

My master smiled saying, "Not yet."

He then put me in the furnace where the heat was very high. I said, "Why do you burn me? What did I do O hard-hearted?"

After a while, he opened the furnace smiling and saying, "Not yet." He took me out where I breathed in and it was not hot. However, he took the brush to paint on me beautiful pictures. The smell of the dyes was very awful. I felt vomiting. I said to him, "Enough enough! I can't bear the smell of the dyes."

However, he shook his head saying, "Not yet."

I was about to die when he took me again to the furnace to fix the colors over me. The heat was doubled. I entreated him not to put me in it but in vain. Then, he opened the furnace, took me out and put me over a shelf to get cold. After a while, he fetched me a mirror and said, "O hurt handful of dust, look!"

I was surprised to find myself that beautiful. I said, "This is not I, the handful of dust trodden by feet."

He answered, "This is what I made. This is what the school of pain has done for you."

Dear bride, do not fear pain,

As your Lord walks with you in the path of pain.

If He leaves you without kneading you remain worthless dust.

If He does not put you in His machine you become formless clay.

If He does not put you in the furnace you become dry and cracked.

If He does not paint you with dyes that have bad smell you have no beautiful icons.

If you do not go into the furnace again you do not deserve glory.

Cry with me,

"Welcome school of pain! Welcome school of eternal glory."

"If indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together" (Rom. 8.17).

Story No. 586

The Golden Cage And The Crazy Man

On her way, Jacky's attention was drawn to a man holding a stick and beating some birds which he put in a golden cage.

Jacky asked him, "Where did you get these various birds?"

"From everywhere I go."

"How?"

"I present them food so they come near. Then, I take them and put them in the cage. I put traps everywhere to collect different sorts of birds."

"What do you do then?"

"I beat them till they get nervous and kill each other. Then, I kill those who do not get hurt. This is my pleasure."

Jacky tried to hide her tears and said calmly, "Would you sell me this cage and the birds wherein?"

Being a lover of money, the crazy man said, "The cage cost me much and I exerted much effort in gathering the birds. How much money do you have?"

She said, "Fifty Dollars."

The crazy man answered, "That's little. I'll take them together with your coat."

Jacky did not hesitate. She gave him what he asked for and took the cage. She immediately opened the cage and let the birds out to enjoy freedom. Jacky rushed joyfully to her mother. As her mother asked her about the expensive coat which she valued much, Jacky told her the story of the crazy man. Her mother embraced and kissed her saying, "Nothing is greater or dearer than freedom."

+ + +

Lord, You know how Satan is insane and killer.

He gathers us from everywhere.

He gives us lusts and comfort to deceive and arrest us.

He imprisons us as if in a golden prison.

He stirs us to kill each other.

He finds his pleasure in cruelty.

You presented Your precious blood as a price for us.

You opened the doors of hell and let us out free.

What to present You O Giver of freedom?

Story No. 587

A Private Chamber

Michael said to his father confessor, "Father, I don't know what to confess. I'm a sinner but I don't feel the heaviness of my sins. I don't repent or feel God's work in me."

His father confessor talked with him about God the Forgiver of sins. He told him to keep crying to Him to work in him with His Holy Spirit.

In the evening, Michael knelt down to pray and cried to God, "Lord, reveal to me my sins and make them bitter in my mouth in order to cling to You and enjoy the joy of Your salvation."

Michael did not know if it was a dream or reality when he found someone leading him to the door of a room on which his name was written. He tried to enter but he could not. He asked the one who led him, "What is there in that room?"

He opened the door to him. As he entered he found it full of shelves.

He said to himself, "What's that? I never entered that room. Why is my name written over it?"

On each shelf, there were many files on which it was written, "Private and secret." He took the first file. It was titled, "The friends I love and share with them their life". In the file, there were many sheets of paper. On each, the name of an evil friend of his was written.

He was shocked, "Who knows my secrets and my friends?" He took another file titled, "The friends whom I betrayed". It contained the evils he did towards others. There were many files with the titles: mockery, lies, anger, disobedience, negligence, lustful thoughts, etc. They mentioned details which he himself could not remember. He found his signature on each paper.

In another corner, he found empty files titled: Praying for the salvation of others, talking with others about God's mercies, giving, etc. Tears ran down his cheeks and he collapsed crying, "Who can save me from my sins?"

Suddenly, he found a hand patting and embracing him. He saw the traces of the wounds on it. "Why are you weeping? I'm your Savior."

"What to do Lord?"

"Believe in Me and hold my hand. Proclaim with practical love your faith in Me. Walk with Me in the path of My cross to enjoy My righteousness."

He clung to Christ and asked Him not to leave him. His Savior returned with him to his room where He made the sign of the cross everywhere. Then, all the files were washed as if by blood. Michael took some files to find that Lord Jesus Christ's blood covered his name. His name did not disappear but Christ's name was written over it. The dark files became white and the dark closed room became a temple full of glory.

+ + +

*Your Holy Spirit leads me to the depth of my soul,
Where I discover the heaviness of my bitter sins.
Nevertheless, He does not let me be frustrated.
He reveals to me the person of my Savior.
Your blood purifies me of every sin.
You are the Savior of my soul.
Make me holy and righteous O my Lover.*

*Let me believe.
With practical love I proclaim my love to You
And enjoy living with You.*

+ + +

Great minds search in principles.
Average mind search in incidents.
Little minds search in persons.

Story No. 588

Precious Pearls

Mary went to a shop of cheap accessories and pearls. She saw a necklace having five false glass pearls. Her mother asked her to walk with her to buy food; however, Mary said to her, "Mom, please buy me this necklace. I like it very much."

Her mother said sadly, "It costs twenty Dollars and I don't have but twenty Dollars to buy food for us all."

"It's beautiful Mom. Buy it for me and I won't eat today or tomorrow."

"Believe me, I don't have but twenty Dollars. Your birthday is after three days. Dad will give you money. Then, buy it."

Mary went sadly home. She then opened her pocket to find thirteen Dollars. Three days passed as if they were years. Mary was waiting for the money to buy the false necklace. On her birthday, she actually took the money. Early on the Morning, she asked her mother to go with her to the shop to buy it. As soon as she got it, she put it on and did not put it off except when she had shower lest it rust. Few months later, as Dad narrated the evening story, he asked her, "Mary, do you love me?"

"Yes."

"Then, give me this necklace."

"Take the doll."

"Thanks, good night."

Weeks later, after Dad had narrated the story the same event took place. This time, Mary's eyes were full of tears. She said, "It doesn't suit you Dad. Take anything else."

Few weeks later, he narrated the story and before he kissed her, Mary had put off her necklace and presented it to him joyfully saying, "Dad, please accept this little gift. I love you."

Tears filled his eyes. He stretched his left hand to take the gift while presenting with his right hand an invaluable necklace with true pearls. As she was surprised, he said to her, "I bought you this necklace months ago. I was waiting for you to give me this false necklace to give you then this precious one."

+ + +

You ask for a little of what You gave me.

You long for taking to open for me Your treasures.

As You receive from me what is Yours,

You bestow upon me what my mind can not perceive.

Your love is wonderful O True Father.

Story No. 589

Surrounded with Twenty-Six Guards

A believer whose heart was kindle by the love of God consecrated his life for preaching in a hospital. He traveled to an African country where he exerted much effort preaching for a tribe. Once he was obliged to travel for two days to get money from the bank. He actually took the money and bought some medicines. On his way back, he found two persons quarreling with each other and one of them was gravely wounded. He treated his wounds and talked to him about believing in Lord Jesus Christ and returned to his work.

Two weeks later, he went on the same journey, On his way to the bank, he met the young man whom he treated. The young man said to him, "I want to confess about something. My friends and I knew that you got money from the bank and bought some medicines. We planned to kill you and take all what you had. As we approached your tent, we found twenty-six guards surrounding you."

When he returned to his country, he narrated this story. Then, a believer asked him, "When did this happen?"

On the eve of..."

"On that time, I was playing golf with my friends. I then asked them to go together to the church to pray for our friend who is serving among the African tribes. We actually prayed for you. We were exactly twenty-six."

+ + +

*Lord, grant me a preaching heart.
I desire to see the whole world clinging to You.
May all people enjoy the new life.
Here am I! Send me.
I kindle with prayers for the ministers.
Use O Lord my love, fighting and prayers.
It is Your pleasure to use all people and all ways.*

Story No. 590

Two Priests Attracting my Heart to Heaven

Long years ago, a lady came to me to make confession. With a meek heart she said, “I come to confess with a heart longing for Heaven.”

“What stirred you up to confess?”

“Two priests took my heart to Heaven. As I entered the church I saw a priest sitting by a child making confession. The father was about to embrace the child caring for every word he said. I felt in his fatherhood a shadow of the fatherhood of God who cares for every person whoever he/she is. As I walked in, I saw a wonderful view that dragged my heart to heart. I saw another priest praying reverently before the baptismal font. His face shined with the fear of God. I felt as if he was praying before the Divine throne in Heaven. The first priest reveal to me God’s love and the second revealed the fear of God which cannot be separated from love. Thus, I desired to repent and confess to cross to my heavenly Father and live In His bosom.

+ + +

*Grant me O Lord while practicing any church sacrament,
To be deep not literal.
Let me see You and know Your secrets.
I desire to rush to Your bosom,
Taking with me all mankind to enjoy You.
Then, Your glory would be reflected in our depth,
And Your kingdom would be established in us.
Let Your love and fear meet in me,
In order to accompany the angels who are full of love and fear.*

Story No. 591

God Caring Even for Ear Blugs

On the sixteenth of August 1999, as we were receiving HH Pope Shenouda III in New Jersey Airport, his holiness seemed fatigued. He said to me, "I felt as if my ears are closed after getting off the airplane."

I said, "The British air companies usually give to the passengers ear blugs during the long journeys."

On the nineteenth of August, as I was praying in Rochester, one of our beloved sons gave me before the Holy Mass four pairs of ear blugs. I was astonished since I did not mention what his holiness told me before anyone. Then, I felt the Divine voice inside me saying to me, "I care even for the little things. I care for the ear blugs."

I lifted my heart thanking my Lord who reveals to me everyday his wonderful care. In a few moments, I saw Fr. Shenouda Maher who was about to meet his holiness in Boston. Therefore, I sent the ear blugs with him.

+ + +

*I wonder how can anyone deny Your existence!
I grieve over those who ignore Your care.
Wonderful are You in Your love,
And excellent in Your care.
You care even for numbering my hair.
You are busy with all my affairs.
You control heaven and earth.
You care for the little things for my sake.
To You is the glory and thanking O the Beloved Shepherd of my soul.*

<p>"As I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you" (Josh. 1.5).</p>

Story No. 592

A Real Story

Cassie Challenging Death

All mass media was highly concerned, especially in the States when the young men Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris rushed to Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. They hid bombs in the school and fired twelve people: students and teachers. Finally, they shot themselves. These are but few of the victims of the Devil worship, about which I mentioned a lot of matters in the book *The Devil Worship in the Modern Age*. What astounds me is the heroic hearts of some American young people who challenged death for the sake of their faith in Jesus Christ.

Charles W. Colson tells us about one of the heroines called Bernall Cassie. She was seventeen years old. Her heart was attracted to the living faith and she loved God's word. She always read the Bible even at school. She used to root joy in the hearts of her colleagues. Her colleague Craig Moon calls her, "Light for the sake of Christ". Two days before the accident, she wrote the following verses:

Now I have given up on everything else.
I have found it to be the only way,
To really know Christ and to experience,
The might that brought Him back to life again,
And to find out what it means to suffer and to die with Him.
So, whatever it takes I will be one who lives in the fresh Newness
Of life of those who are alive from the dead.

It was mentioned that she desired to cut her beautiful long hair and make from it a wig to give it to the women sick with cancer whose hair fell down because of the chemotherapy. What obsessed her mind was to give joyfully for Christ and His beloved ones. Marty McCornack said about that loving young lady, "She used to talk to the fallen girls to push them to a pure life. She served the gang members and talked to the released from prisons about God's work and love."

As usual, she was reading the Bible in the school library when the accident took place. An eyewitness said that one of the killers pointed his gun at Cassie, while she was reading the Bible, saying, "Do you believe in God?"

She knew well that her life would be a price for her faith. However, courageously and strongly she said, "Yes, I believe in God."

He asked her, "Why?" Before letting her utter a word, he fired her.

+ + +

*Lord, teach me to practice martyrdom daily.
With practical love I give up my life for Your sake.
With love, I desire salvation and peace for my brethren and enjoy serving them.
I go with You to the last row,
For all to be before me.*

Story No. 593

A Real Story

Rachel Scott Searching for Pain

One of those who were killed in the massacre of the twenty-first of April 1999 in Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado was a young lady seventeen years old. Her heart was only obsessed by finishing her studies and going to Africa to preach there. When any of her colleagues asked her about the reason behind choosing Africa she would say that there are many hardships and pains there and that she wished to suffer from pain in order to give rest to others. Rachel loved writing poetry. Among her papers was found a speech written recently:

What If you died today?
What would happen to you?
Where are you going?
Tomorrow is not promised.
It is a chance that may or may not be.
Tomorrow may no come.
What after death?
Where will you stay in eternity?
Will you have an eternal life with the Loving Father?
Or will you be deprived of Your Savior's hands?
Eternity is in your hands, change it.

Thus, Rachel expressed her care for her eternity as well as her brethren's. She witnessed for her God and was fired by a youth who enslaved himself to Satan. Great is the difference between a negligent young man who willingly enslaved himself to Satan and thus lost everything, and a faithful young lady searching for pain and walking in the narrow path to enjoy the eternal life.

+ + +

*Grant me to choose the narrow path.
In it, I find You suffering,
And share with You Your pains.
There, I meet Your little brethren and carry their burdens.
There, You are transfigured before me and I enjoy You.
There, You carry me to Your eternity to enjoy Your Father's bosom.**

* CF. Rocky, Danver. *Mountain News*.

Story No. 594

Who is the True Son?

After burying the king of Cimmerians, came three young men to the monarchal palace. Each of them claimed that he was the true crown prince. No one could recognize the true prince. Therefore, they went to Ariopharnes King of Thrace who was known for his wisdom.

The king went with the young men to the late king's tomb. He gave each of them an arrow. He asked them to point their arrows and hurt the king's body. The first and the second did as ordered. As for the third young man, his hand trembled and he said in tears, "I can't hurt my father's body. Let any of them be the king but I won't humiliate my father's body." Then, the king proclaimed that this was the true crown prince.

+ + +

*Many people bear Your name.
Yet, they hurt You with their arrows.
They crucify You and defame You again.
Grant me not to desire temporal glory
And not to bear my Christ's name as an outer appearance.
On the contrary, let me enjoy being Your true son,
And honor Your body
In order to be fit for Your eternal glories.*

"For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened,
And have tasted the heavenly gift,
And have become partakers of the Holy Spirit,
And have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away,
To renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God,
And put Him to an open shame"
(Heb. 6.4-6).

Story No. 595

Two Barley Containers

Timothy saw that his mother took a large sum of money from her neighbor to keep it until her return from her journey. He asked her, "Why did you take the money? Don't you fear that a thief would steal it?"

"No Timo. I'll save it in the bank so that my neighbor would get the profit."

"She didn't ask you to do that!"

"Yes, but being honest requires that I do my best to let her benefit."

"What do you mean by Honesty?"

"The true person imitates Jesus Christ the Honest. His honesty is not only in fulfilling His promises but also in love presenting everything to His beloved ones. I'll tell you a story from the Jewish tradition. It's about a Jewish pious man who tried to imitate God in His honesty:

It was said that some Jewish men asked a rabbi to keep for them two containers of barley till their return. They went on their journey and had not returned for seven years. When they returned one of them asked, "Do you remember that we left two containers of barley to the rabbi to keep?"

"Yes, but we had been absent for seven years. Even if he'd put them in his stores, they should have been spoilt."

"Let's see."

As they went to the rabbi he welcomed them and led them to his stores to take their barley. They were surprised to find him pointing at a large amount of barley saying, "This is what you left."

"We only left two containers."

"Yes but I sowed them and planted them for your sake for the past seven years."

+ + +

Lord, grant me the spirit of honesty.

Let me imitate You O Wonderful in Your honesty.

You are Honest in Your love and promises.

You are Honest in what You always do for me.

Let me be an icon of You.

I am not asking for a reward for my honesty.

It is enough for me to imitate You O Honest Lord.

**"Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it Is sin"
(Jam. 4.17).**

Story No. 596

I Didn't Buy the Pearl

Susan saw a toy in his room which she did not buy for him. As she asked him about it, he said, "I found it under our neighbor's tree."

"Is it yours?"

"No. But it had been there for a month. Surely no one want it."

"Then, you should ask them first."

"It's cheap."

"To be honest return it to its place and I'll buy you a toy like it. Or, ask its owner if he doesn't want it."

"What do you mean by honesty?"

"I'll tell you the story of an honest rabbi:

It was said in the past that a rabbi bought a donkey as a means of transportation. Months later, some of his disciples, who used to spend a lot of time in his house, came to him joyfully. They said, "Rabbi, you've become very rich."

"What?"

"Look! It's a precious pearl."

"Where did you find it?"

"It was on the chain around the neck of the donkey."

"It isn't mine."

"Didn't you buy the donkey months ago?"

"Yes but I didn't buy the pearl. I've to return it to the seller."

The rabbi took the pearl and returned to the seller informing him of its value.

+ + +

*Lord, Grant me the spirit of honesty,
So that I would not desire what is not mine.
My honesty is dearer to You than all pearls.*

Story No. 597

The Efficient Generator of the Church

On my visit to an old man in Los Angeles, I found him suffering from loneliness. His wife died and his children live in distant places. He is an old man unable to drive. No one visits him save his friend who drives him sometimes to the church.

I asked him, "How do you spend your time?"

"I do nothing. I hardly go to the shop to buy food and prepare it."

"Don't you serve in the church?"

"How when I can't drive to the church?"

"You can transfer this house to a monastery or a generator to move the church."

"How?"

"Consider yourself as if in a monastery. Take time to pray for our father the patriarch, our fathers the bishops, our fathers the priests, the ministers and the whole congregation. Prayers move heaven for the benefit of the church and the salvation of the whole world. Many people serve and this is a holy work but the church is in need of men of prayers. Don't belittle your role, as you're a vital effective member through your prayers and sighs for the salvation of the world."

His heart rejoiced and he realized his vital role in the edification of the church of God.

+ + +

No one of Your sons is barren or paralyzed.

They are strong as an army with banners.

They fight and work with Your Fiery Spirit.

Neither sickness, senility nor death can destroy Your sons.

Grant us to work without stopping in this world

So that we become even after death like angels praying for our brethren.

Story No. 598

The Naughty Boy And The Encouraging Words

David was a very naughty boy. He used to go to school with ragged clothes. The teacher was not able to control the class because of him. She tried by all means but in vain. He was a failure in his studies. The teacher wrote in the first year report, "David promised to be better. His family circumstances are hard."

The next year she wrote, "David is better because his family circumstances got better." The third year she wrote, "David is an excellent pupil. However, his mother's death affected his personality." Then, the fourth year, she wrote, "David is improving slowly for, his father does not care for him."

David noticed that in spite of his bad behavior the teacher was trying to encourage him justifying his behavior without hurting him. She was not merely a teacher but a mother feeling his pains.

On Christmas, all the pupils brought gifts to the teacher. All of them tried to wrap the present elegantly. As for David, he presented his gift wrapped in cheap paper undecorated. After opening the gifts and thanking each pupil for his gift. She took David's present and opened it smilingly. She found a cheap necklace and a cheap bottle of perfume. Before any pupil commented, she put on the necklace and said, "Thank you David for this beautiful gift."

The academic year was over and David joined the secondary school where he could not meet the teacher. He wrote her a letter to that effect,

Thank you for caring for me. In spite of my bad behavior, you were always supporting me with encouragement. I did not find your care in my father or my mother who was sick for a long time and was always quarreling with my father. Allow me to regard you my mother. I gave you all what I had: my mother's necklace and her perfume. Your encouragement supports me amid the hard circumstances.

Tears filled the teacher's eye as she remembered what St. Paul the apostle said,
"Comfort the fainthearted, Uphold the weak, be patient with all"
(1 Thess. 5.14).

Years later, David sent her a letter to that effect,

Thank you for your encouraging words helped me succeed. I Passed the final exam of the secondary school. I'm the second top student.

Years later, he sent her a letter telling her that he was graduated from the faculty of medicine and that he was the first top student. After four years, she received a wedding invitation with a letter to that effect,

I've been deprived of my mother at a young age but your encouraging words supported me. Do you accept to attend my wedding ceremony as my mother? I will be very glad and I won't ever forget that you are the secret behind my success and peace.

She knelt down to thank God who used her for the edification of many people. Very joyfully, she attended his wedding not as a guest but as a mother.

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Lord, teach me how to support others wisely.

Teach me to be kind to the weak.

Let me uphold others not destroy them.

You are my Supporter, Let me support my brethren.

Story No. 599

The Chosen Pot

Andrew noticed that his son Moses suffered from frustration.

Moses said, "Dad, I feel unequal to my colleagues. I hardly have very few talents. I'm weak. Why did God created me thus?"

Andrew narrated to his son this symbolic story:

Lord Jesus Christ wanted to choose a pot to use. He found several pots on the shelf.

The golden pot said proudly, "I'm made of gold. I'm expensive and glittering. I'm the best." Lord Jesus answered, "I don't work in the proud heart. I don't want an expensive pot."

Then, the tall thin silver pot said, "I think that I'm suitable. The rich put me on the table and drank wine from me." The Lord answered, "I don't want a pot which the rich only can possess."

The glittering huge brass pot, which had a wide mouth, said, "I'm strong and can bear much." Lord Jesus said, "I don't want an empty pot with a wide mouth boasting of his strength."

Then, the glass pot said, "I'm made of transparent glass. When You put me on the table all people can see what's inside me. Though I can be easily broken no one can behave well like me." The Lord answered, "You aren't fit, as I don't want him who thinks himself better than others or him who reveals his hidden secrets and his relation with Me."

The wooden pot said, "I'm made of wood and decorated by carvings. You can put fruits in me." Lord Jesus Christ said, "I don't want him who boast of his outer appearance."

Finally, the clay pot said in humility, "Lord, I desire that You use me. I'm made of worthless dust. I'm fit for nothing, despised by many. I can only be filled with water for the poor to drink. I can be easily broken. You only can make me valuable when You fill me with Your strength."

+ + +

I know that You do not despise anyone.

You want to work in all.

You know that I am not a pot made of gold or silver.

I am not made of invaluable brass or crystal.

I am not made of expensive wood.

I am a clay pot.

Yet, as I possess You

I carry You as a Treasure inside me.

**"But we have treasure in earthen vessels,
That the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us"
(2 Cor. 4.7).**

Story No. 600

Isaac on a Journey to the Moon

Mark noticed that his son Isaac had decorated his room with pictures of spaceships and some planets especially the Moon. Once he asked him about his wish. Isaac said, "I desire to go to the Moon even for few hours."

His father commented, "May God grant you your wish."

Isaac was very happy for his father's feelings, which revealed his love to his son. He opened his heart to his father and asked him for an apophthegm.

His father said, "I see you desiring to go to the Moon. It's a great wish. But, care for passing with God's Spirit to the space in your heart. May you, before reaching the Moon, reach with love to your sister in the neighboring room. My son, care for your depth."

+ + +

*Many people care for air or water pollution,
Not minding the soul pollution.
They build skyscrapers while their souls are very fainting,
Not accepting others.
They establish free ways to connect the continents,
While they are not in contact with their neighbors in the same street.*

Story No. 601

Who is the Christian?

A preacher used to draw the listeners' attention with asking in a loud voice, "Who is the Christian?" As he repeated the question several times, a child whispered in his mother's ears, "Do you know who the Christian is?"

She answered calmly, "Yes dear, keep calm."

As the preacher asked the same question, the child leapt screaming first to his mother, "Tell him Mom." Then, he said to the preacher, "Mom knows who is the Christian. Keep calm dear."

Story No. 602

Don't read this Letter

Simon's eyes were filled with tears for his fallen friend. He knelt down to pray for him. Then, he wanted to write him a letter of love. He knew that his friend was obstinate; he would not listen to anyone. He thought of sending him a letter in the name of God but he knew he would tear it. Finally, he decided to write him a letter signed by Satan.

Dear Son,

I write you a letter which I want you to hide. Yesterday, you woke up late very lazy. You had no time for praying or thanking God before or after eating. You were all day grumbling not knowing how to give thanks. Thank you for, you've become like me. I'm your father. O fool, remember that you're mine. I've been planning to possess you all these years. I attracted you to deny being a son to God and confess my fatherhood. I do my best to make your life a hell in order to taste the life I'm preparing for you.

I know that you grieve God's heart. Thanks. He expelled me for my pride. This time, I repay Him what He did through you. Thanks for clinging to me. I hate you but I can't dispense with you. I'm obsessed with your perishing. I offer you evil sights on the internet and attract you to attend evil parties, to have evil friends, to listen to cheap music and to dance. I assure you that this is necessary. I justify to you every sin. Son, come with me to be burnt in the eternal fire.

But, why should we be alone? Teach your children, friends and neighbors to be like us. Foolish son, you must pay the price of sin. You seem to be twenty years older because of sin. If you love me don't read this letter and hide it. If you try to escape I won't despair. I'll plant despair in you in order not to touch God's extreme love.

Finally, I warn you of getting near Lord Jesus lest He attract you with His love, purifies you with His blood or open heaven with His Holy Spirit before you. Don't allow Him to take you from my hand for, He's alone my Conqueror.