



A Whisper of Love



POEMS, PRAYERS AND SAYINGS OF
HIS HOLINESS POPE SHENOUDA III

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HIS HOLINESS POPE SHENOUDA III

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INTRODUCTION

"The righteous will be in everlasting remembrance" (Psalm 112:6)

It has been a year since the departure of His Holiness Pope Shenouda III to Paradise, and innumerable are those who miss him dearly, and who seek the valuable spiritual treasures he has left. In your hands, dear reader, is a humble attempt to collate and translate into English some of his poems, prayers and sayings. It is written for those who desire a glimpse into the heart and mind of this beloved, tireless and faithful shepherd.

His Holiness was not only a prolific writer but also an accomplished poet whose poetry reflected his deep spirituality and love for God. All the poetry of His Holiness Pope Shenouda III rhymes beautifully. Unfortunately, we have been unable to mimic this, but have aimed to convey as closely as possible the meaning of the original text.

We leave you with a few couplets from His Holiness' poem 'A Father You Are' which he wrote in 1951 for the fortieth day memorial service for Deacon Habib Girgis, the founder of the Sunday School Movement in Egypt. As you can see from these lines, uncannily, this poem is a perfect description of His Holiness Pope Shenouda III himself:

"You are a heart wide in embrace

Upon which a whole generation or nation lived

You are a fountain of tenderness overflowing-

You are kindness, you are compassion, you are love

And a father you are, and we, my father

Lived in love upon your bosom, crawling"

March 2013

That Garment

*“But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside”
(Genesis 39:12)*

Perhaps these were the thoughts going through Joseph’s mind or passing his lips when his master’s wife caught him by the garment.

*There is the garment- take it-
My heart is not therein
I own not the garment
Neither do I claim it
Your money has purchased it
It is your right to regain it
So then, take the garment
Or if you so wish, discard it
As for my heart, I have sworn-
‘Never shall you enter it!’
See, I own not my heart
Neither, too, shall you either
For to my Lord it belongs
Unto me was it entrusted
In vain then you draw near it
Behold my heart- ask it*

*Absent spouse of yours has
Over money and women charged me
A master has he made me
Over household, length and breadth
A binding contract it is
How could I wish to break it?*

*If betrayer I were then perhaps
This pledge would I have broken
How can I rebel against my Lord and God
And this evil accept
Ignoring my sense and my Faith
Discarding godliness?
Leave me then, depart from me
Your morals are corrupt
What boast have you in my garment
Which you have from me taken?
There is the garment- take it-
My heart is not therein*

*Ah! If you knew what I knew
Of Abraam my forefather
The story of obedience
Of altar, of son's promise
An obedience sung by the world
From one generation to the other
An obedience I inherited-
The slogan of my glory
Obedience to God and not to evil
For evil kills
Obedience to the Spirit and not the flesh
For the flesh my servant is
I shall obey God if even
All alone I obey Him
How can I God disobey
And hateful evil obey?
There is the garment- take it-
My heart is not therein*

A Stranger

*“...for I am a stranger with You, a sojourner, as all my fathers were”
(Psalm 39:12)*

*A stranger have I lived in the world
A sojourner as my fathers were
A stranger in my ways
In my thoughts, in my desires
A stranger have I found no ear
To pour in my views
Of my alpha are men bewildered
Of my beta unaware
The world fluctuates in chaos
In clamour, in commotion
And here alone I remain
My heart bidding farewell, keeping distant
A stranger have I found no home
Nor corner to house me*

*I have left the charms of the world
Heeding not to its calls
And I drew along, going
Far from its amusements
With heart free, desiring not
Any of its aspirations
With ear chaste, listening not
To the clamours of its inhabitants
And here alone I roam
Happy with its ravines
With my harp, with my flute
With the melodies I sing*

*With holy hours in which
Alone with my Creator, I sit
My walk is as a wavy shadow
In beholder's eye
A stranger have I lived in the world
A sojourner as my fathers were*

*My lifetime have I gained, not lost
In fame or in money
Hindered not by house
Nor by friend, nor by kin
Here has the monastery verses
Comforting me, and proverbs
Here the lamp is the Gospel
By bushel hidden not
Here the monks fear not
The railings nor the chains
Where feelings are no more enslaved
By hopes or by aims
Engulfed not by the world
In its comings, in its goings
I say to every demon
Intending now to entice me
'Take heed, for I live
A stranger, as my fathers were'*

The Gates of Hades

“...on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18)

*How harshly were you oppressed!
How pursued were you by death!
How struck were you by persecution
And by torture and by hardships!
How wounded were you like Jesus
With nails and with thorns!
You and your children tortured
They cast you out and exiled you
Lies did they hurl at you
And fables and distortions
A wonder it is how you stood fast
Against pagans and heretics
There was a Voice ever echoing
In your ears and resounding
Power within you igniting
The very words of God about you
That ‘the gates of Hades
Never shall they overcome you’*

*You were born not on earth;
In heaven was your birth
You are of the Holy Spirit;
You are not of clay and water
You are true, you are holy
You are light and luminary
A beginning indeed have you
Yet to you there is no ending*

*Asked to speak of you, we say
 'You are alpha and omega'
Who watered you? Who other
 Than the Fountain of Blood?
Who shielded you? Who other
 Than the Person of Redemption?
Rest assured then and take comfort
 For with you is the Crucified
And the gates of Hades
 Never shall they overcome you*

*Ask the era of El Moez
 For from experience it knows
Ask it how it was by faith
 That you did move Mount Moukattam
A mountain did you shake
 And if you so wished, you could shatter
O forgetful one, you'll see
 If slowly you go through history
Say to the one named 'great', that
 'The Lord of the Copts is the 'Most Great''
Every Copt, meek and gentle
 For the truth, becomes a lion
Death does he not fear
 For by Faith has he Hades trodden
For the flesh does he not care
 For more precious is the spirit
And the spirit does he offer
 Saying without a trace of doubt
That 'the gates of Hades
 Never shall they overcome you'*

Heroes

“To the heroes who realised the secret of true life, and so sang with Saint Paul, ‘For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain... having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better’ ”

(Philippians 1:21,23)

You attained glories on earth and in heaven

Humiliating unbelieving tyrants

You died not, O heroes, but live in heaven

The abode of the immortal

He dies not who unbelievers overcame

And who by Jesus their thrones did shake

He dies not who through martyrdom became

An example throughout the ages

He dies not who valiantly the spirit offered

Upon the altar of truth unwavering

He dies not each stranger here

Who as visitor through the world passes

A wonder how you withstood tyrants

In a steadfastness that stunned the world over

What attracted you to death?

Did you see therein the crown of life?

Or did you see Jesus standing waiting

So to Him you raced?

Or did you hear as inspiration the whisper

Of He who called you, hence responded?

Or did you call to mind the cross of the Nazarene

And thus forgot all but He?

Or did you picture the pillar of Faith about to topple

So as human shields to its defence rushed?

*Whatever was death's cause
Never can we number you among the dead
You died not, O heroes, but live in heaven
The abode of the immortal*

*From where did you receive this endless power
O host of martyrs?
O unarmed ones, by which sword were you armed
In the battlefields of blood?
Did you see that earthly shields
Suit not the sons of heaven?
You armed yourselves with hearts pure
With answered prayers and with hope
And with faith strong, able
To restore the dead and heal the frail
Disclose to us a portion of your godliness
For the world has dimmed and the godly few
For whenever we remember you
Our hearts in tenderness throb and extol you:
'You died not, O heroes, but live in heaven
The abode of the immortal'*

This Vine, My Master

*“O God of hosts... visit this vine and the vineyard which Your right hand
has planted, and the branch that You made strong for Yourself,
revive us” (Psalm 80:14,15,18)*

*This Vine, my Master
Your right hand has planted
From a thorn on the edge of Your forehead
It has sprouted
By Your scarlet Blood and streams of tears
It has been watered
Tended by Your pure love
Of Your tenderness it has tasted
In the Paradise of Faith it grew
Living and in You trusting
And continued to bear to the Copts
The fruits of Your atonement
This Vine, my Master
Your right hand has planted*

*Yet a branch, my Master
Has the wind blown away
Making homeless from corner to corner
The birds in the vine nestling
Without song they fly
Of injustice complaining
O You who said, ‘Who touches you
Does the apple of My eye touch’
Give joy to the birds of the vine
Dispel every sadness*

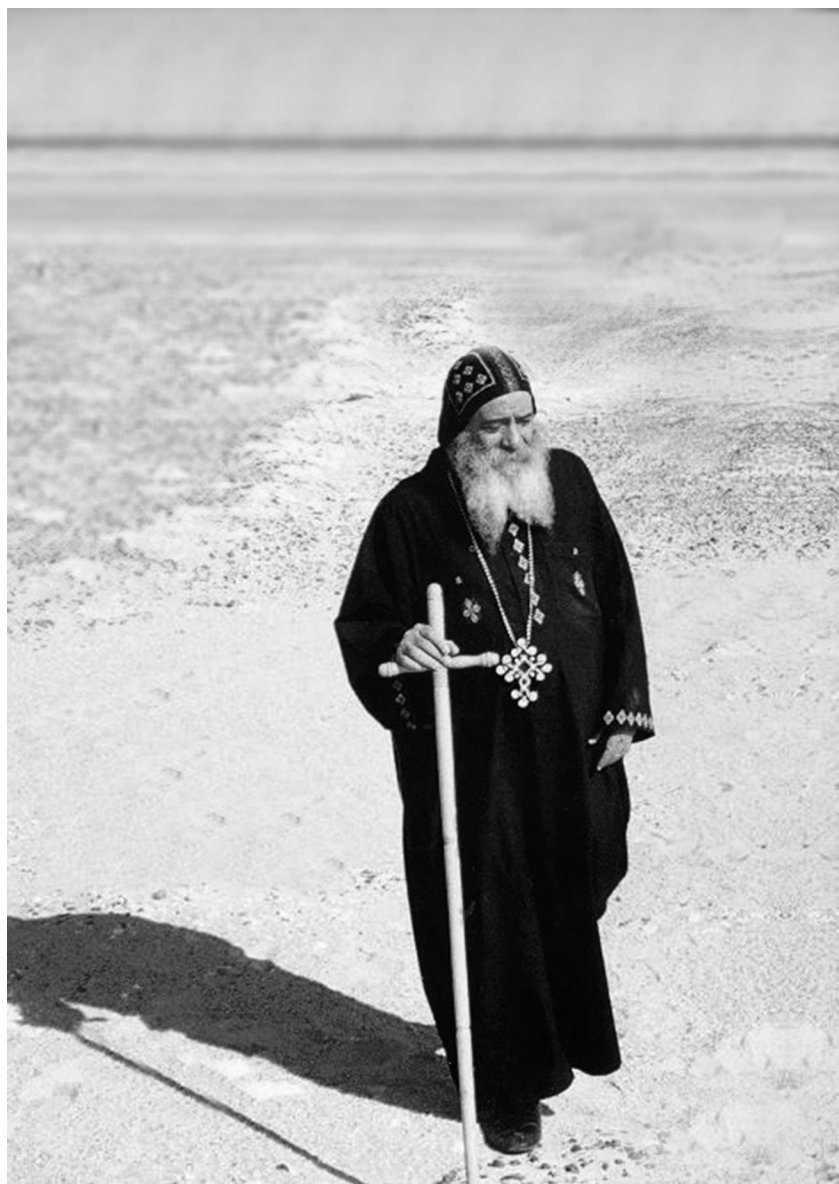
*And restore this branch
For it is of Your strongest
This Vine, my Master
Your right hand has planted*

*It is not for me, my Almighty Creator
To comprehend Your design
For foolish am I, but with You
O Holy One, is wisdom
But we have been left by all, O Lord
Whom have we but You?
None have we but Your promise of old-
Will You remember, Lord, Your promise?
Never shall You forget it
Even if the vinedresser shall forget
How can You forget Abraam Your chosen
Or Jacob Your servant?
How can You forget the love and the compassion
Or Your tenderness of old?
This Vine, my Master
Your right hand has planted*

*We are engraved on Your palm
No trouble shall we fear
We have sinned, yet in punishment
Shall our end not be
Behold, mercy pours down
From the Father abundantly
Whenever we close a door
Mercy does another open
Ah, my Master, O You who knew*

*Vinegar as drink
Your poor people, O Holy One
Have torture suffered
Behold the vine, after maturation
It has become desolation
And have compassion on it this day
For it has no life without You
This Vine, my Master
Your right hand has planted*





Hymn of Barabbas

*“And they all cried out at once, saying,
‘Away with this Man, and release to us Barabbas’ ”*
(Luke 23:18)

*It was not You who listened to the Serpent
But my mother, who sinned and to its call listened
It was not You who plucked from the garden
But my mother, who of its fruit plucked illicit
You are holy and pure, whereas I am
The one who in evil strayed and was lost
You are high in heaven, whereas I am
The son of the earth, whose origin is its dust
You are Lord and God, whereas I am
Your sinful, disobedient slave
So why is it You Who are crucified here
While I, the sinner, am free and boastful?
A wisdom, O Lord, I cannot comprehend
And a tenderness limitless and sublime*

*How strange, O Lord, what happened-
Why did they hate You, why?
You lived, my Master, for a time with them
Casting out hatred and discord from them
You were, O Holy One, a compassionate heart
Filling the world with love and peace
You were feet for the lame and hands
For the maimed, and a Father for the orphan
You raised the dead, the blind could see
And the paralytic took strength and stood up*

*So why did the world rise up against
Your tender-hearted Person and their hurts multiply?
So why is it You Who are crucified here
While I, the sinner, am free and boastful?
A wisdom, O Lord, I cannot comprehend
And a tenderness limitless and sublime*

*It is I, not You, who ought to have been crucified
I, who am full of shame, who has my soul defiled
I am the one, woe is me, who has in sin wasted his today
As I have wasted my yesterday
I am the one who after death runs, and in
Carousing and drunkenness, my own grave digs
I am the thirsty one who hastened
Begging the Serpent to my cup fill
O Crucified, You Whose holiness was seen
By all in the ungrateful world
Whenever the eye tries to look upon You
My ashamed soul covers it with tears
So why is it You Who are crucified here
While I, the sinner, am free and boastful?
A wisdom, O Lord, I cannot comprehend
And a tenderness limitless and sublime*

Arise!

“Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered”

(Psalm 68:1)

Arise, and Satan destroy!

Leave of his kingdom no remnant

Arise, and to the dead preach

‘That sin of yours has been forgiven’

Forgive Peter his weakness

Wipe the Magdalene’s tears

Reveal Your wounds, convincing

Thomas, for his doubts run deep

And send to us Mark

To build our Church pure

And come and accept, my Master, to

Dwell in the houses of his See

Lift up faces downcast

Pity the eyelids weeping

Tyrants have over us rejoiced

So arise, mock their weapons

They assumed You a Man who was no more

For Whom there was no return, no deliverance

Yes, indeed, the Christ You are

You are life’s very Source

Arise in glory splendid, or rather

Appear in authority Divine

Arise amidst the hosts of heaven

For in heaven are You Lord

Arise, and the guards fill with dread

By Your splendid appearing astound them

*Arise, and strengthen shepherds' faith
And gather the flock scattered*

*Time has passed us by
As strangers in this world
Fallen are our consciences here
And not able to arise
For above the tomb vast
Lies a stone and soldiers guarding
O You Who raised the dead
And from the dead did arise
O You Who did death destroy, O Lord
Of resurrection and immortality
Arise and souls deliver
From the tomb of straying and of sin
Arise, and strengthen shepherds' faith
And gather the flock scattered*



Shut the Door and Reason

*“ ‘Come now, and let us reason together,’ says the LORD”
(Isaiah 1:18)*

Shut the door and reason

*In the dimness of the night with Jesus
And fill the night with prayer
With wrestling and with tears*

O bewildered one, you who are

*Lost in thoughts deep
You enquire of men and complain
Crying, ‘Where is the way?’*

Have you found the answer

*O poor one, and a heart to sympathise?
Have people dispelled
Your worries and trials?*

My friend: no friend in the world

*Can help you
People own no sure and decisive
Remedy appropriate
One group’s remedy
Opposes the other’s*

But I have a cure

*Which we have all experienced
Shut the door and reason
In the dimness of the night with Jesus
And fill the night with prayer
With wrestling and with tears*

*O reformer, you who
Set the world ablaze
Flaring up for truth and reform
Angry and furious
How much have you met with torments
With slander and remarks shameful
Carrying a cross today
And tomorrow too?
My friend: if time passes
In fights and in disputes
And things remain the same as yesterday
Difficult and crucial
Go then to your chamber
Kneel and your soul outpour
Tell Him, 'It has worsened and narrowed
So open the wide door'
Tell Him, 'My Lord, I am incompetent
I am unable'*

*And present the matter and reason
In the dimness of the night with Jesus
And fill the night with prayer
With wrestling and with tears*

A Father You Are

“Remember those... who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct”

(Hebrews 13:7)

Faith and love were your godliness

Thorns and crosses, your life

And you, who are you? Are you a messenger here?

Far splendid than a messenger- you are a heart

You are a heart wide in embrace

Upon which a whole generation or nation lived

You are a fountain of tenderness overflowing-

You are kindness, you are compassion, you are love

And a father you are, and we, my father

Lived in love upon your bosom, crawling

Your sons are many, but above all, O saint

You have a Lord

O strong one, in whose nature was no violence

O meek one, in whom was no weakness

O noble one, who whenever was made an enemy

Did the wrongdoer's evil forgive and pardon

O sage one, who educated men;

In whose rebuke was love, in whose voice affection

Your ways were impartial and pure

Your utterance of phrases white and chaste

Defaming no man, recalling no evil in describing

But by love and encouragement

You straightened the crooked, and calmed the disturbed

Thus you were favourite and well-beloved

Your bosom vast in expanse

And a father you were, and we, my father

Lived in love upon your bosom, crawling

O poor one, who through the world passed

Owning the ruins of its possessions

To whom money was offered

But who rejected it despising, heeding it no attention

At a time when it crept into places most sacred

And did them dim so dark

Richer are you than kings of wealth inherited

And shepherds who gathered illicitly

Who snatched it from the hungry mouth but rather

From even nursing babes not weaned

As ascetic you lived in honour and in virtue

For the richest are they who in honour live

No fault is there in such living

But in storing and in amassing

You are richer with children who all

Lived in love upon your bosom, crawling

In peace of heart, sleep in rest

In God's bliss, in forefathers' bosom

And to the songs of David listen

To hymns flowing from the loving heart

And behold Stephen the deacon

In the Sanctuary of the Firstborn, in glory eternal

Tell him, 'In your footsteps have I followed

Like you too, I was in death as a martyr'

Say to my fathers, 'Entreat and pray

For God's Grace for this new generation

*Remember them, for my offspring they are
Bearing the burden in a generation stubborn'
Be then, as you have always been for us
For we are your kin and beloved and comrades
And a father you are, and we all, my father
Lived in love upon your bosom, crawling*



Feelings

*“Keep your heart with all diligence,
for out of it spring the issues of life”
(Proverbs 4:23)*

*But they are feelings
Moving all the time with me
They live within my depths
Within my heart, within my ribs
They show upon my smile
And in my laugh and in my tears
They are feelings that follow me
Throughout my wake and in my sleep
They run always
Throughout my blood
Whether aware of them I am
Or aware of them I'm not
How often have I said to them
'Go and leave me, depart from me'
But they are feelings
Moving all the time with me
Whether aware of them I am
Or aware of them I'm not*

A Whisper of Love

“Whom have I in heaven but You?

And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You”

(Psalm 73:25)

Throbbing heart of mine has Your resting place become

In the inner recesses Your place have I concealed

I have left the world in all of its tumults

And withdrawn from all, that I may with You live

No thought have I, nor opinion

Nor other desire save to follow You

And Jacob my father’s secret I perceive

Now I know how he with You did wrestle

O heart’s Companion, how sweet You are!

High and Awesome, how splendid You are!

O Mighty One, in whose palm a whip

Whilst love does Your tear-ducts bleed

The world cannot contain You, oh, how narrow it is!

How, then, can the heart suffice to hold You in?

I have left the world in all of its tumults

And withdrawn from all, that I may with You live

I have left all, my Lord, but You

None have I in life’s estrangement but You

And the mind have I checked from its wandering

Wherever You are, there shall my thoughts be

Family and friends have I forgotten

Nay, even the self, in the love of You

I have forgotten all in Your love

O heart’s Delight, forget not then Your son

*Not distant are You from my spirit which in
The stillness of silence does Your call await
In heaven You are indeed, yet every heart
Living in love, is for You a heaven
Your holy throne is a heart emptied
Of the love of all, and so loves none but You
Behold, the eye have I shut from beholding
That perhaps You I may behold
And the ear, too, have I emptied
That perhaps to You I may listen
Throbbing heart of mine has Your resting place become
In the inner recesses Your place have I concealed*



How Can I Forget?

"...my sin is always before me" (Psalm 51:3)

*I shall forget yesterday and today
And I may forget tomorrow
A phase of my life I shall forget
Spent to no avail
Yet there is one question
I shall not forget,
When the heart confounded, asked:
'How can I forget?'*

*How can I forget that phase
Of recklessness and iniquity of youth
When lax the heart, whenever it arose
Stumbled and tripped, and fell down again
With the wine of iniquity did I inebriate it
For more did it cry out
Whenever a cup I emptied
Satan would fill it up again*

*How many a time did the Lord call me
And from Him I turned my face away
His tender heart He showed me
I who from Him ran away
'Be a chest for My heart', said He
Yet I did not take Him in!
In my resistance, my heart was hard-
Harder than a rock*

'Will you come, friend, to My wedding feast?'

I did myself excuse

Again He in compassion spoke

And in gentleness- but impatient I was

'Wait for Me', He said

Leaving when wait I did not;

My heart was eager not

To His feast attend

As Hades was that past

As a terrible demon standing

Before me by day

And by night too

How many a night did I

Drench my couch with tears

Oh dim soul of mine

Will ever you see the sun?

Over my head the priest the absolution did read

So I felt relieved

'Come, be reconciled with the Lord, come!' said he

So reconciled I was

'I will forget yesterday', I said

But the mind screamed, so I cried out

'It is good, heart, to forget'

Yet, how can I forget?

How can I forget that phase

Of recklessness and iniquity of youth?

How can I forget the Lord Crucified

And my heart His crucifier?

I Drenched My Couch

*“I am weary with my groaning; all night I make my bed swim; I drench
my couch with my tears” (Psalm 6:6,8)*

*I drenched my couch
With bitter tears
And promised my God
‘That was the last time
In Your love I’ll abide-
Abide as a rock-
From all my heart
I am not to sin returning’*

*But arose against me
The warfare fiercely
And I fell once more
To the depth of sin
From my heart I wept
In repentance pure
‘Twas but for a time
And to sin I returned*

*My will I strengthened
My promises I increased
In my conceit
My promises I multiplied
In my will I trusted
In my striving also
Self-deceived was I
And to sin I returned*

*From the depths I cried out
 'Have mercy upon me!
I acknowledge my weakness
 O Lord, help me!
Power is from You
 From above- not from me-
So long as You are with me
 Never shall I return'*



O Star

"For Your name's sake, lead me and guide me"

(Psalm 31:3)

O star who guided us

Centuries ago to the Babe of the manger

I am, O star, a stranger here

A vagabond with no guide

For an age astray from God, I have found no guide

To take my hand and lead me

So guide the heart to His manger

And leave me there in awe and adoration

Amidst angels beautiful in appearance

Around Jesus in worship kneeling

We are in the world, weak and defenceless

Finding, O star, none to protect us

Save the promise of the delivering Messiah

Who the past forgives and our sins conceals

Whenever lust seeks after us

Or a careless fancy our heart attacks

Whenever a blow its severity increases

And for a day we weary of our fight

Whenever a wind blows and uproots

Our grown plant and our plantation shakes

The heart hastens and complains aloud and says

'O star who guided us

Centuries ago to the Babe of the manger'

*Walk with my heart, O director
And tarry not your pace if the day draws nigh
I am, O star, feeble and frail
Above all men, the most deserving of compassion
A child in the life of the spirit am I
Neither heart nor mind have been enriched
Neither dream nor vision have I
Nor have I heard the clear voice of revelation
A weak shoot in the wilderness am I
Who whenever meets the wind does bend
Alone, bewildered or rather unable am I
I am, O star, a stranger here
A vagabond with no guide*

*Visit me, O star, for from the life of evil
I have not a day relented
How often have I made promise to God and broke it
How I wish, in fear of my weakness, I had not
Slave to iniquity am I, my desires I satisfy
Whether I will to, or whether I do not
Alone amidst the enemy's weapons am I
In my loneliness fearful or shuddering rather
Thrown into my straying am I
No bishop to shepherd me, neither any visitor
So gloomy and dark is my pathway
For an age astray from God, I have found no guide
To take my hand and lead me*

*We have heard this day of the birth
Of He who by His birth the universe astounded
Walk, O star, and guide us
For how needy is the heart of its guide
Pass by all men in compassion
To the worshipper preach in his temple
Awaken from his stupor he who slumbers
Arise from his bed the dormant
And sing the good news with songs of rejoicing
That to the singer the universe rushes
'The Lord is born as a Babe like us'
So guide the heart to His manger
And leave me there in awe and adoration*

*All that is in the world is evil outrageous
All have sinned and drifted afar
Exploited, they in complacency yielded
If only we knew what brought them down
Their hearts for evil became a dwelling
Recklessness lost them all that they had
In vain does the mind guide them
For in sin did their minds also stray
So have compassion then, O star
You know how their condition has turned out to be
Arise, and with heart sincere gather them
Amidst angels beautiful in appearance
Around Jesus in worship kneeling*

At Your Feet

“Be not far from Me, for trouble is near” (Psalm 22:11)

At Your feet I kneel

Seeking help in times of trouble

In Your embrace I slumber

In yearning as did John

A gentle reproach have I

O Lord, listen and Your ear incline

Your chosen land whose beauty

Did all the planets outshine

Is humiliated and desecrated

And fit no more for life

I Love You, Lord

“I will bless the Lord at all times” (Psalm 34:1)

I love You, Lord, in my solitude

You call to my heart by Your words so deep

I love You, Lord, in tribulation

In my time of need, in my time of pain

I love You, Lord, in my repentance

In the time of tears, in the time of regret

I love You, Lord, in times prosperous

And I love You too in the time of scarcity

I love You as the palace is being built for me

And in its collapse, and in its destruction

I love You, the Heart Who my wound binds

And I rejoice when I see it healed

I love You, the Spirit Who hovers around me

Who grants my soul graces most sublime

Wandering in an Estrangement

"Vanity of vanities, all is vanity" (Ecclesiastes 1:1)

My friend, I know not what I am
 And neither you, know what you are, here
You, like me, are wandering in an estrangement
 And all men are like us too
We are two guests, spending a time
 Then leaving whence comes our day
Our fathers lived for a time before us
 After which they then departed

Naked have I entered the world
 No possessions have I in it or riches
And naked shall I leave it
 Of all the mind foolishly gathers and possesses
A wonder then, if after this, we shall desire
 A dwelling place on earth or in homeland?
Disillusioned by this mirage
 Inebriated by its dreams
We have wasted our yesterdays
 If only we would awake, and our hearts clarify
Before departing, and only 'If only' remains

I know not how we depart, or why
 All I do know is that depart we shall
Along the path of death we all run
 Racing one after the other
Our lifetime is as a vanishing vapour
 And as a lightening flash
Be then what you wish, my friend

And towards the horizon run
From its one end to the other
Your aspirations in titles fulfil
Or in money or in glory satisfy
Shut the ear and in your dreams soar
The days wasted and in dreams spent
At the end you drop exhausted
Lying in a few handbreadths of earth
Calmed, the heart in silence remains
None left in it of throbbing or pulse
Where then is the heart's uproar of yesterday?
Where is its volcano of love and hate?

Say to he who builds houses here
‘O visitor, why are you building?’
Say to he who plants thorns, ‘Enough!
Those same thorns will you reap’
Say to he who for pleasure sings
‘Will you, when death comes, also sing?’
Say to he who lifts his head up high
In pride, in confidence, in boasting
‘Lower down your head, walk in fear
As you lift up the head, you will bend it down too’
Say to he who surpasses and runs ahead
‘Stop, my friend, and wait for me
We are twins who walk together
I in your bosom, you come to mine too’
Say to he who titles cherishes
If he cries boasting, ‘Is there one greater than I?’
‘We are in origin dust trivial
Can he who says ‘I...’ his origin forget?’

Our Father Abba Anthony

*“Who is this coming out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke,
perfumed with myrrh and frankincense,
with all the merchant’s fragrant powders?” (Song 3:6)*

*In the Church of the first-fruits
In the assembly of the pure
Standing in all reverence
Our father Abba Anthony
Standing in great glory
With the wearers of the eskim
In the rites of the seraphim
Our father Abba Anthony*

*With prayers spiritual
And a life of faithfulness
Did you consecrate the wilderness
Our father Abba Anthony
With strivings in prayer
Over tens of years
And tears in metanoias
Our father Abba Anthony*

*With asceticism in fasting
For many days lasting
With a soul that slumbered not
Our father Abba Anthony
With abstinence in pleasures
And meditation on the Divine
And contemplations on the spiritual
Our father Abba Anthony*

*You were given the spirit of Elijah
And of the Prophetess Anna
And of John, son of Zacharias
Our father Abba Anthony
The demons trembled
Before your faithful heart
And your unceasing prayers
Our father Abba Anthony*

*They fought you for long
With every means possible
With deception upon deception
Our father Abba Anthony
Of your sister they reminded you
That they might unsettle you
And by this return you
Our father Abba Anthony*

*They scattered gold and coins
On the mountain before you
Glistening on the sand
Our father Abba Anthony
They came to you singing and dancing
In images of women
To make you fall into temptation
Our father Abba Anthony*

*They came in the image of lions
Tigers and leopards
Roaring like thunder
Our father Abba Anthony*

*In evil forms they came to you
That they might terrify you
Your humility put them to shame
Our father Abba Anthony*

*You cried out, "O mighty ones!
Why do you all this trouble take?
Dust I am, and ashes"
Our father Abba Anthony
"I marvel at your gathering
Against my weakness demonstrating
I am weaker than the least of you!"
Our father Abba Anthony*

*O fortress high and strong
O model of the contrite
Humbling yourself before demons
Our father Abba Anthony
O example and role model
For all generations
O dweller of the mountains
Our father Abba Anthony*

*O example of celibacy
And of strength spiritual
And of the stillness of the wilderness
Our father Abba Anthony
O mighty in your strivings
O wise in your counsel
Intercede for your children
Our father Abba Anthony*

*We live not as you lived
We walk not as you walked
Remember us then in your prayers
Our father Abba Anthony
Intercede for our wretchedness
For the weakness of our nature
In the days of our estrangement
Our father Abba Anthony*



Prayers



No One But You

"Lord, who is like You...?" (Psalm 35:10)

O Lord, I can find no Being but You
 Who deals with me with kindness
 and accepts me.

You are the One with Whom I feel secure,
 to Whom I open my heart
 and tell all my secrets
 and explain to Him my weaknesses
 knowing that He will not despise them,
 but will have compassion on them.

You are the One before Whom
 I pour out my tears
 and declare my longings.

With You I feel that I am not alone
 but I have a Power supporting me.

Without You, Lord, I feel that I am in emptiness
 and can see no real existence for myself.

But with You, Lord, I yearn
 for what is more sublime than matter,
 the world and all that is therein.

Prayer for the New Year

"You crown the year with Your goodness"

(Psalm 65:11)

Grant that it be, O Lord, a blessed year;
a pure year in which we please You,
a year in which You dwell by Your Spirit
and share in the work with us.

Take our hands and lead our thoughts
from the year's beginning till its end,
that the year may be Yours,
and that You find rest in it.

It is a new, pure year-
permit us not to stain it by any sin or defilement
that we may rejoice in all that You do
and say with John the Evangelist,
*'All things were made through Him,
and without Him nothing was made that was made'.*

Let it be, O Lord, a happy year:
put a smile on every face and rejoice every heart.

Intervene by Your Grace in afflictions:
give help to the afflicted,
grant all peace and comfort,
grant good things to the needy,
healing to the sick,
and comfort to the grieving.

We ask not for ourselves alone
but we ask for all, for they are Yours.

We pray for the Church,
for the preaching of Your Gospel
and for Your word,
that they may reach every heart.

We pray for our Country,
and for the peace of the world,
that Your Kingdom may come in every place.

Let it be, O Lord, a fruitful year, full of goodness:
let each hour in it have its achievement.
Permit not a single moment of it to be wasted,
but fill it with activeness,
work and productivity.
Grant us the blessing of the fruitful and holy toil.
Grant us the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
in all we do.

We thank You, Lord, for giving us life
until this moment
and for granting us this year,
that we may bless You in it.
Amen.



A Prayer for Repentance

*“O God, You have cast us off; You have broken us down;
You have been displeased; Oh, restore us again!”*

(Psalm 60:1)

O Lord, I love You from my depths,
but I commit sin out of weakness,
habit or due to offence-
And not out of lack of love for You.

I want to reach You-
but obstacles beyond my power hinder me.
You know, O Lord, all things; You know that I love You.
It is true that I sin,
but I do love You;
It is true that my deeds are not befitting this love,
but the love is there.

I will not wait, Lord, till I am pure and then seek You
but I want to seek You now,
that You may help me to be pure.

I will not wait till I am diligent in worship
and strong in spirit, and then seek You;
but I want to seek You now when I am slothful,
that You may deliver me from my slothfulness
and give me fervour in spirit and strength in spirit.

I seek You when I am lying down on my couch, sleeping
that You may wake me up from my slumber
And rise me up from this couch.

I seek You whilst I am in my sin
that You may deliver me from sin.
I seek You whilst I am estranged from You
that You may bring me closer to You.

O Lord, if You are angry with me,
I will apologise to You.
If You are displeased with me,
I will reconcile with You.

Lord, I have the intention,
but I have yet to walk in the way.
I want, Lord, to be with You always:
to be with You when I am in sin
and to be with You
when I am in righteousness.
If only the righteous sought You, Lord,
then we would all have perished-
but we have hope that sinners also seek You.

Sin may destroy practical things in my life,
but it does not destroy the feelings of love
within my innermost parts towards You.

I call You and You do not answer...
there is a huge barrier between You and me.
There is Your fearful saying,
*"When you spread out your hands,
I will hide My eyes from you;
even though you make many prayers,*

*I will not hear.
your hands are full of blood”*

There are barriers between You and me:

I have lost the first love

that was between You and me;

I have lost the intimacy that bound us...

That is why I do not feel that intimacy.

I do not speak as in former times:

before, I used to speak to You with love,

before, I used to speak to You with intimacy,

before, I used to speak to You

feeling the affection that was between You and me.

Before, I used to speak to You with fervour,

but now I speak and I feel

that my words do not rise up to heaven,

and do not enter into Your presence.

I feel that there are huge barriers;

I feel that there are many, many miles

between You and me.

I seek You and do not find You;

I call You and You do not hear;

I ask You and You do not answer;

as though I were not Your son and You were not my God.

Why this abandonment?

If You abandon me, there is no loss on Your part-

who am I among the millions of millions?

But if I am far from You,

I am completely perished.

What binds me with life is but my communion with You.

If I leave You,
 it means I have perished.
Without You, I can do nothing.
You are everything to me.
I have to seek You,
 to run after You,
 to search for You.

O Lord, if You are angry with me,
 I will apologise to You.
If You are displeased with me,
 I will reconcile with You.

I do not flee from You at all.
It is, O Lord, a transient period;
 a temporary phase,
 in which the heart has not changed,
 but a mere stumbling;
 a small illness from which I will be healed,
 a mere darkness
after which the light will shine again.
Do not count it for me for my whole lifetime.

I have, O Lord, walked with the world, it is true.
I have desired what is in the world, it is true.
But all these had to do with lust and not love.
Lust is temporary;
 it is transient and superficial,
 but love is deep,
 in the inner depths of the heart.

The things in the world were a lust-
but they were not love;
love is for You alone.

Do not think, Lord, that my lust was love;
it was all rashness and carelessness-
but not love;
love is for You alone.

You are everything to me.
You are the life,
You are the very existence,
You are the eternity,
You are my destiny,
You are the Alpha and the Omega,
You are All in All.
Amen.



You Alone

"There is none upon earth that I desire besides You" (Psalm 73:25)

There is none upon earth that I desire besides You...

After I have known God,
 how can I desire anything?
 Impossible!
After this great light has shone in my life,
 how can I desire anything upon earth?
How can I combine the Lord with the world
 and the spirit with matter?
 Impossible!

There is none upon earth that I desire besides You...
These things I have left a long time ago
 and all of me became Yours,
 and all of You became mine:
 My beloved is mine, and I am His
 He feeds His flock among the lilies.

I have left everything
 and You became everything to me,
 then You became the Power,
 You became the Help,
 You became the Blessing,
 You became All in All for me,
And there is none besides You.

There is none upon earth that I desire besides You...

You are All in All and there is none besides You.
 You are the One Who fills the heart,
 the One Who fills the eyes,
 You are the One Who fills the thought,
 and the One Who fills life,
 You are the One Who fills all eternity,
And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You.

My own self even I do not desire;
 I desire not even my own self.
I detach myself from all
 because there is none upon earth
 that I desire besides You.
And I attach myself to the One
 because this is all that I desire- This One.

It is enough for me to taste You,
 and to enjoy You,
 and to suffice with You,
 to be found in You,
 and You in me
And to abide in You, and You in me.
Amen.

Contemplation on God's Greatness

"Bless the LORD, O my soul..." (Psalm 103:1)

O Lord Who is exalted above all,
Whose throne is heaven, whose footstool is earth;
the Incomprehensible and the Insearchable,
the Omnipotent and the Omniscient,
the Examiner of hearts and minds
Who knows the hidden and the manifest.

You, Lord, are the Omnipresent Who fills all.
You, Lord, are from everlasting to everlasting,
before Whom stand all the heavenly powers,
the angels and the archangels,
the thrones, the cherubim and the seraphim.

You, Lord, permit the dust and ashes to speak to You.
You, Lord, Who are above all in greatness,
in Your humility,
You permit the dust and ashes to speak with You.
But even Lord, in Your great humility,
You created this dust and ashes
after Your own image,
and in Your own likeness,
and gave him authority.

You not only permit the dust to speak with You,
but even to gently reproach You
as did Jeremiah, when he said to You,
*"Righteous are You, O Lord, when I plead with You;
Yet let me talk with You about Your judgments."*

*Why does the way of the wicked prosper?
Why are those happy who deal so treacherously?"*

Thank You, Lord, for Your humility
which You revealed in Your incarnation;
You emptied Yourself and took the form of a Servant
and was manifest in the form of Man,
and all this for the sake of our salvation.

Your humility also appeared in the Crucifixion
and Redemption
and when You permitted some to treat
You in a manner not befitting Your Divinity;
You did not destroy them
nor did You send fire from heaven
to consume them,
but You gave Your back to scourging
and Your cheeks to slapping.

You, Lord, are humble;
if it were not for Your humility,
we would not have been able to speak with You.
You, Lord, are a loving God, always giving-
giving without our asking,
giving more than we ask, giving bountifully.

You, Lord, are He who cares for all, even the animals.
You give them their food in due season,
and give food to the young ravens.
You make Your sun rise on the evil and on the good,
and send Your rain on the just and the unjust.

You, Lord, give us life and give us Your providential care,
O Good Shepherd, O Saviour, O Deliverer;
You Who seek the lost sheep,
Who rejoices over the lost coin when found,
and over the return of one sinner
more than the ninety-nine
who are not in need of repentance.

We thank You and praise You, O Lord
Who forgives our sins and blots out our iniquities,
O You who said, *"I, even I, am He Who blots out
your transgressions for My own sake;
and I will not remember your sins"* (Isaiah 43:25),
as though You have forgotten them,
You Who are All Mind,
Who does not forget any thing.

You alone are the wonderworker:
You are the miracle performer,
O You Who sits upon the cherubim,
Who walks upon the wings of the wind,
O You who does good, who casts out demons,
Who heals every illness and weakness in man.
O Lord, we will never forget Your benefits towards us,
but each one of us prays and says,
*"Bless the Lord, O my soul;
and all that is within me, bless His holy name!
Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and forget not all His benefits:
Who forgives all your iniquities,
Who heals all your diseases."* Amen.

Sayings



+ *God is present*

+ *All things work for good*

+ *It is bound to end*

+ *Keep the Psalms in your heart,
and the Psalms will keep you*

Remember



- + Remember people's love for you and their good past with you, whenever you are fought by doubts of their sincerity and whenever you see them erring against you, for then their past love will intercede for them and your anger will subside.
- + Remember that you are a temple of the Holy Spirit. Do not grieve the Spirit of God Who is in you, but be always a holy temple.
- + Remember your vows, which you took before God in your baptism and which your parents took on your behalf: to denounce Satan and all his evil works, all his thoughts and wiles, and all his hosts and power.
- + Remember death, so that the attractions of the world flee from before you, and that you feel that all is *'vanity and grasping for the wind'*.
- + Remember always that you are a stranger on earth, and that you will return to your heavenly homeland.

On Prayer

- + There is a prayer without phrases, without words... the throbbing of the heart is a prayer, the tear of the eye is a prayer, the feeling of God's presence is a prayer.
- + Do not measure your prayer by its length, but by its depth and purity. The prayer of the Pharisee was much longer than that of the tax collector, but God did not accept it because of his lack of purity of heart.
- + You are in prayer, not giving God time, but you are taking from Him a blessing. You need this blessing which you take; you need to speak with a Heart Who loves you, to Whom you can open your heart and speak openly. You need God to work in you and to work with you, and in prayer, you aim for this.
- + Prayer is a yearning for God... man's spirit yearns for a life other than the life of the material... Within each one of us is a yearning for the infinite and also a yearning for high ideals which are not found in this world... and from here man turns to God to satisfy his spiritual yearnings.
- + Prayer is the opening of the heart to God, that He may enter it and cleanse it.
- + Prayer is the soul's yearning for being with God. It is the yearning of the finite for the Infinite, the yearning of the created for the Creator and the yearning of the spirit for her Source and Satisfaction... In prayer, man rises above the level of matter to meet with God.

On God

- + God gives you what is of benefit to you and not what you ask for, unless that which you ask for is of benefit to you, and this is because oftentimes you ask for that which will not benefit you.
- + God says to you, 'My returning to you is a certainty. What matters is your returning to Me. At any time you seek Me, you will find Me with you, or rather, I am standing knocking at the door of your hearts that you might open for Me' (Revelation 4:20).
- + When God says, 'My son, give Me your heart', He means, 'Give Me your heart that I may fill it with blessing, with love and with purity. Give Me this heart that I may sanctify it, cleanse it and wash it from all its defilement, and lift it up from the earthly level and make it sit in the heavenly, and show it My glory'.
- + How beautiful it is to be with God; it is the spirit's enjoyment here on earth, and it is also her eternal delight in heaven.
- + God looks to your heart and says, *'This is My resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it'* (Psalm 132:14).
- + He who is accustomed to leaving all things in God's hand, is accustomed to seeing God's hand in all things.

On Others

- + There is a difference between a man who gives to the poor, and a man who loves the poor and so gives them. He who loves is better, even if he has nothing to give, because God looks to the heart before the hand.
- + By gentleness you can win even an enemy; by violence you can lose even a beloved.
- + When someone hurts you, do not answer back, but meet the hurt with silence.
- + Understand others, and help them, calmly and in a kindly spirit, to understand you. And in this way live with them in mutual understanding, in love and in calmness.
- + Train yourself to honour and love others, whether in their presence or in their absence.
- + Praise others and make them feel that you esteem them, and that all the good that they do is the subject of your admiration and is not hidden from you.
- + Respect the opinion of the person with whom you speak, however much you disagree with it.
- + If you have nothing to give others, give them a cheerful smile and a kind word, give them love, give them tenderness, give them a word of encouragement; give them your heart.

On Self

+ Your glory is in your personality, not in your position or authority or outer appearance. Your glory is in your essence, in your spirituality, in your nature, in your sense, in your wisdom, in all that is found within your heart of virtues and good qualities.

+ Strength of character is not an outward appearance but it proceeds from the depths of man: from his heart, his mind and his will.

+ The strong man is not the one who can overcome others, but the one who is victorious over himself.

+ Make the goodness that is within you stronger than the wickedness that comes upon you.

+ Simplicity is not the opposite of wisdom but simplicity is the opposite of complexity. Christian simplicity is a wise simplicity, and Christian wisdom is a simple wisdom, that is, there is no complexity in it. A man can be extremely intelligent, yet at the same time, simple; that is, he does not complicate matters.

+ God loved you, for this reason He brought you into being. God loved you, for this reason He created you in the best image; He created you in His image. He gave you understanding, wisdom, spirit, immortality, beauty in all things.



*"I thank you all, my beloved brethren...
I am now no longer with you, but you-
you are in my heart always.
I have lived all my days in your hearts
and continue to live there...
I have taken you in my heart,
and in my thoughts you are...
Your pains and your problems I commit to God...
It is for your sakes that I am here,
and for your sakes that I go there."*

His Holiness Pope Shenouda III
(on going to the monastery for prayer)