



Summer Festival | 2023 / 2024



REJOICE

Adults (30+ yo)
English Edition

“ ... the Lord your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you surely rejoice” (Deut 16:15)



His Holiness Pope Tawadros II



118th Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of The See of Saint Mark

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Appreciation

The summer festival central committee of the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Melbourne and its affiliated regions would like to give thanks and appreciation to the **Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States** (www.smfsus.org) for their blessed and tireless work in the translation, revision and art-work of St. Mark's Festival (Mahragan Al Keraza) books from the original Arabic version under the guidance and prayers of **H.G Bishop Youssef**.

May The Lord bless all their fruitful services and for many years to come.

**In Christ,
SF Melbourne Central Committee.**

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You Shall Surely Rejoice

“**You shall surely rejoice**” is this year’s St. Mark Festival’s theme. This year we celebrate 20 years since St. Mark Festival was founded by HH Pope Shenouda III with his continuing prayers and blessing of our father HH Pope Tawadrous II.



The Holy Bible always encourages us to live a life of joy as we read in Deuteronomy 16:15 “**you shall surely rejoice**”. However, how can we experience the true life of joy when we are happy one day, and sad on other days?! Some days we are not satisfied with our lives even if we accomplish much! We may wonder, how can we rejoice if the world is in turmoil; much trials, pains, sicknesses, wars, and inflation. We do not know where the world is heading.

The Wisdom of Sirach answers this question for us in 2:11 “**My sons, consider the nations of men, and know that not one of them hoped in the Lord and was confounded**” which is why we “**shall surely rejoice**”. Joy is one of the fruit of the Spirit Who works in us.

There are 2 Types of Gladness:

1. Worldly happiness:

Showy, exasperated, and temporary. Worldly happiness passes away once the reason passes. It affects our thoughts and our emotions but does not affect our spirits.

2. True Christian Joy:

It is what is given by our Lord Jesus; “**For He Himself is our peace**” (Ephesians 2:14) and the source of our joy “**Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!**” (Philippians 4:4)

Sources of Joy:

The Joy of Repentance:

What can strip the person from his/her joy other than sin?! Sin gives us a sense of guilt which leads to loss of joy. The Holy Spirit inside us, rebukes us and encourages us to repent and restore our joy.

In the Orthodox understanding, repentance is:

- Regretting our wrongdoings
- Feeling the need for repentance
- Going to our father the priest, confessing and receiving an absolution



The Joy of Fellowship, Service, and Giving

The Joy of Enduring Hardships: just as our Lord endured for our sake, we too rejoice in enduring for His name, “**So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name**” (Acts 5:41)

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With What Shall We Rejoice?

Rejoice in the Lord Jesus My Savior and Redeemer:

- **“Rejoice in the LORD, you righteous” (Psalm 97:12)** Our Lord Jesus is Great! He offered the greatest love ever! He created us in His image and likeness to enjoy His unlimited love and to live with Him in paradise. But we have sinned and fallen with our own will.
- He was incarnate, born in a manger from a poor virgin, and lived poor. Not only poor but suffered and rejected by many. He died on the cross for our sake, He was buried, and He rose on the third day to raise us with Him. He ascended into heaven and sat at the right hand of the Father to take us with Him to His throne. **“And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.” (Isaiah 35:10)**

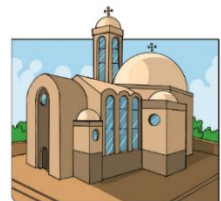


Rejoice in the Holy Bible:

- **“These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. (John 15:11)**
- The Holy Bible is your personal divine message; in it we find love, rebuke, commandments, promises, teaching, and details about the way to eternal life ... Can we reach God without His guidance and life-giving words?!
- Therefore, every Christian ought to study the Bible regularly fulfilling the Lord’s commandment **“You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.” (John 5:39)**
- The Lord described His words as **“The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.” (John 6:63)**
- Jeremiah the prophet said, **“Your words were found, and I ate them, And Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; For I am called by Your name, O LORD God of hosts.” (Jeremiah 15:16)**

Rejoice in the Church - The House of Joy:

Our Coptic Orthodox Church is unique; the Lord redeemed her with His blood. She received the sound faith from our fathers the apostles. Therefore, she is an apostolic Church, straight in her teachings, faithful to the Lord regardless of the circumstances (tribulation, persecution, heresies, etc.). She is the house of joy, and she gives us joy.



Rejoice in Being a Member of the Body of Christ:

We receive this membership through the Holy Sacraments, and we keep this membership through our spiritual struggle. We serve inside the Church then we witness to the Lord outside in our society. Each member of the Body of Christ has a calling and a message for the society. This brings joy to our life, knowing our identity and our calling. I am a Christian, Orthodox, Coptic, and American.

We receive our membership in the Body of Christ through Baptism, and we are consecrated through Myron. We abide in Christ through the Eucharist, and whenever we sin, we have the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession. When we are sick, we call the priest to come and pray for us and anoint us with the unction of the sick oil. In Holy Matrimony, the bride and groom are joined together through

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the Crowning Prayer, one man and one woman, with purity and holiness become one body and one spirit in the Body of Christ **“so then they are no longer two, but one flesh.” (Mark 10:8)**

We keep this membership by spiritual strife. This membership has been given to us as a gift from God, who loved us to the end and redeemed us with His precious blood. When we sin, we must repent, struggle against the sin, and be filled with the Lord, in prayers, Bible readings, sacraments, spiritual reading, spiritual meetings, etc.

We express this membership by serving in the Church. First by joining a Preservant program, in order to be able to serve in the Church according to our talents. Each member has a role.

We also express this membership by witnessing to the Lord in society as the Lord said, **“You are the salt of the earth; ... You are the light of the world.”** and **“A little leaven leavens the whole lump.” (Galatians 5:9)** and also **“we are ambassadors for Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:20)** We witness to Christ in our schools, work, meetings, celebrations, etc.

Joy in Spiritual Fulfillment:

“My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and my mouth shall praise You with joyful lips.” (Psalm 63:5) The true Orthodox believer, as a member of the Body of Christ, has a life of joy and fulfillment through:

- Praying the Psalms daily
- The Arrow Prayers (Jesus Prayer): *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.*
- Daily lectionary readings
- Reading the Synaxarion daily
- The Midnight Praises
- Church Fasts
- Church seasons
- Church Feasts
- The Eucharist
- The Church Fathers sayings



Joy in Asceticism:

- There is a major difference between our moderate Coptic asceticism and other forms of asceticism that are puffed up at times, and could lead to sadness, and not joy.
- The asceticism which we adopt is that of St. Anthony and St. Paul. St. Anthony lived in his cave for 20 years and came out joyful. He was not overweight or raw-boned. This is moderate and spiritual asceticism. The body is a talent from the Lord, and we ought to keep it healthy.
- The sound asceticism is under the direction of the father of confession offering my asceticism to the Lord.
- In our church, we are joyful when we fast. We rejoice in our spiritual asceticism.

Joy in Martyrdom:

“So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.” (Acts 5:41)

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Rejoice in the Eternal Life to Come:

Being confined within time and busy with our lives on earth threatens the health of our spiritual life; As humans, we are spiritual beings, created with the breath of God, He allowed us to live on earth for a short period of time. After that, we go back to our original heavenly and spiritual condition where all the glory and holiness resides, in the heavenly Jerusalem. We can recognize the following glories in our joyful eternity with the Lord:

▪ Joy in the glory of holiness:

- As St. John the Beloved saw a great crowd, dressed in white, with palm branches in their hands **“These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” (Revelation 7: 14)**
- The robes which have been made white in the blood of the Lamb and palm branches in their hands are a sign of victory as **“The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.” (1 Corinthians 15:26)**
- The illuminated body that we will live with in heaven is unable to fall or sin, no illness and no death, no temptation, and no sadness.

• Eternal Joy:

- **“Enter into the joy of your lord.” (Matthew 25:21)** ... this is the call that the honest and believing soul will hear when it reaches paradise, that is why it is referred to as the “paradise of joy.”
- The joy of meeting with the Lord, with the saints and all who went there before us, “the place which grief and sorrow have fled away in the light of the saints.”

• Joy of the Communion with the Lord:

In heaven we will live in continuous communion with God and with the **“members of the household of God” (Ephesians 2:19)** ... with the angels and the saints. Let us imagine our meeting with the Lord ... How joyful How longed for ... How fulfilling! What about our dialogue with the angels, with St. Mary, with the Church fathers, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and saints!



There is no doubt, we will be entering into a never-ending joy in the presence of the Lord, and an indescribable happiness **“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 Corinthians 2:9)**

• Joy in the Glory of Eternal Life:

The Lord promised us saying, **“Because I live, you will live also.” (John 14:19)** ... and as long as the Lord lives forever, so are those who believe in Him will live with Him forever.

“And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” (John 17:3) That is why St. Paul said **“For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain... Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you.” (Philippians 1:21-24).**

Therefore, let us rejoice:

- in the Lord Jesus my Savior and Redeemer
- in the Holy Bible
- in the Church - The House of Joy
- in the Eternal Life to Come

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Rejoice in Prayers

Praying is an integral part of the Orthodox spiritual life; the life of the Orthodox believer is incomplete without prayers. The fathers say that **“Prayers are the door to heaven.”**



Through our communication with God, we are able to build a connection with Him and therefore build companionship. Pope Kyrillos the sixth said that **“prayers moves the hand of He who moves the universe.”**

Let’s read this parable, Luke 18:1-8, **“Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart, saying: “There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, ‘Get justice for me from my adversary.’ And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, ‘Though I do not fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.’ Then the Lord said, “Hear what the unjust judge said. And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?”**

Personal Prayers within the Community- In Orthodoxy, we have different levels of prayers:

Liturgical Prayers (Any prayers we pray as a community of believers inside the church):

- The Holy Church chose for us a set of prayers to teach us the faith and to teach us how to pray!
- That is why we depend mostly on a set of prayers or memorized prayers that we learned from Lord Jesus Himself when His disciples asked Him saying, **“Teach us how to pray”** He said to them, **“When you pray (plural), say Our Father who art in heaven, etc.”** Notice here the emphasis on the plurality of the command and of the prayer too.

Family Prayers (The prayers within the family):

- Which can be a mix between memorized prayers and personalized prayers.
- Although family prayers are very important, it is often forgotten or ignored.
- Praying as a family helps keep the peace of the home, bring joy, and bring an abundance of blessings to it.
- We see a focus on this aspect of prayer in the litany of the assemblies when Abouna says **“Houses of prayers, houses of purity, houses of blessing. Grant them to us, O Lord, and to Your servants who will come after us, forever.”**
- Our houses need to be filled with prayers in order for them to be filled with purity and therefore be filled with blessing.
- As a youth, you can take the initiative to establish or renew a family tradition of praying together as a family.



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Individual or Personal Prayers

(The Church left us to express our feelings to God through our personal prayers): These are my prayers in my room, expressed however I feel comfortable even if they are silent prayers. A very important aspect of the personal prayers is the Jesus Prayer (Also known as the Arrow Prayers) **“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”** We learned this short and very effective prayer from the tax collector who said **“God, be merciful to me a sinner!” (Luke 18:13)** By this simple prayer that justified the tax collector, we learn that it could be a powerful introduction for us in our personal prayers. Even if we ask God saying **“God, be merciful to me and help me pray”** meaning that we can pray by asking for the ability to pray when we are at a loss for words.

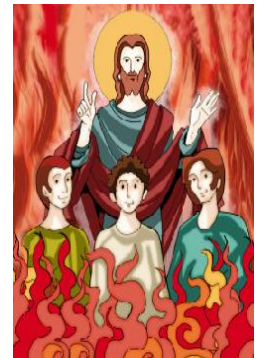


All aspects of prayers are needed and essential in the life of the Orthodox believer; they cannot replace each other. The ultimate goal is to integrate personal prayers to be within the liturgical prayers and bring the liturgical prayers into our individualized prayers.

When I pray in my room, I pray with the Agpeya and also pray personal prayers. I can incorporate parts from the Tasbeha, or even other liturgical prayers. And when I am in the church, my mouth is praying with my fellow brethren and my heart is praying a personal prayer. Even when I am listening to a sermon, the priest can be talking about a certain virtue and I can pray to God to help me attain it.

If I am focused on supporting my liturgical prayers with my personal prayers, I will never get bored in the Liturgy. Talk to God about yourself within the liturgical prayers:

- When I am singing the First Hoos, inside me, I am thinking, *God if You opened the Red Sea to the Israelites, surely You will open this door for me.*
- When I am singing the Psalm of the Third Hoos, I am praying, *Lord You saved the three saintly youth from the fiery furnace, surely You can save me from that problem, etc.*
- When the priest says in the Liturgy: *“Lead us throughout the way to Your kingdom” – I say lead me O Lord, I don’t know the way, show me how to reach Your kingdom, hold my hand and guide me, without You I can do nothing!*



When I pray my personal prayers, I do not necessarily need a closed door, I can close the door to my heart so it is not distracted, I close the door to my senses so I am not looking at every movement that happens during the liturgy, etc.

When I come to the altar, I pour out my needs and longing for God. I see Him there and I eat Him there!



I don’t need to wait until the perfect time comes for me to stand and talk to God; I can make every minute in my life a minute of prayer and praise through the Jesus prayer.

Your personal prayers should be like a heartbeat, it can never be stopped.

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Practice Makes Perfect:

Praying is a skill; we are on a journey to learn this skill throughout our spiritual life; the more we pray, the better we get at it by God’s grace. We get discouraged because we do not pray enough!

In addition to the prayers others offer on our behalf, (i.e. Parents, Spiritual fathers, servants, etc...) our prayers maintain the blessing in our daily life; when we pray during the day, our day is blessed, and when we pray in the middle of the night, the night is blessed and the next day also.



“I have set watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they shall never hold their peace day or night. You who make mention of the Lord, do not keep silent, and give Him no rest till He establishes and till He makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth.” (Isaiah 62:7) Notice in this verse how those who pray are described as ‘watchmen’ who never rest day or night, never cease to mention the Lord, and end with giving God no rest until He listens to us and blesses us.

It is also important that we remember others in our prayers as they remember us. In the parable of the persistent widow, the judge listened to her request just because of her determination. Imagine when God sees our determination and persistence in prayer! He said: **“men always ought to pray and not lose heart” (Luke 18:1)** The Lord loves to hear us pray, He asked us to do so!

“rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer” (Romans 12:12) St. Paul is telling us that prayers bring hope, and require patience. I have hope that **“whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” (Romans 10:13)** and must be patient in my prayers **“praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints” (Ephesians 6:18)**

Prayer calls for being vigilant; Lord Jesus Himself was vigilant and prayed. He didn’t pray just to teach us to pray but also to communicate with the Father. He also prayed because He was a perfect human who needed to pray as He said to St. John the Baptist, **“it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” (Matthew 3:15)**

St. Polycarp of Smyrna said: “Therefore, forsaking the vanity of many, and their false doctrines, let us return to the word which has been handed down to us from the beginning, watching in prayer, persevering in fasting, beseeching in our supplications the all-seeing God not to lead us into temptation.”

He also prayed before big events as we see in Luke 6:12-13, **“Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles”.**



Did He need to pray? What do I do before making big decisions in my life?

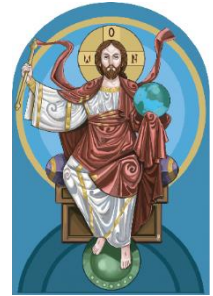
The more I pray the better I get at praying by God’s grace; like speaking a language, if I practice, I will improve until I become fluent and vice versa.

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Fulfillment Through the Act of Prayer:

What challenges us in prayer is that we look for a certain fulfillment; a fulfillment according to our own understanding and limitations. However, effective prayers bring fulfillment within itself.

Prayers bring joy to the believer’s life when he/she is rested while being assured that the Lord is the Pantocrator. He is in control of everything. He is good, loving, and righteous.



Those who were successful in their prayers did not have specific expectations from their prayers in which they lost hope when it wasn’t fulfilled. Instead, they found their fulfillment in the act of communicating with God. That is why they found favor in God’s eyes, and they were able to speak to Him as a close friend ...

- Like Abraham who interceded with God regarding His decision on Sodom and Gomorrah when he said: **“Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Genesis 18:25)**
- Or David when he said to God: **“How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, Having sorrow in my heart daily? How long will my enemy be exalted over me?” (Psalm 13:1-2). Who can talk to God like that if he wasn’t close to Him!**



How did they reach this level of communicating with God as a close friend?! Are they fulfilled only by the result or by being with God and connecting with Him?

- **“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God” (Philippians 4:6)** God will take care of us; our role is to pray, and not be anxious, and He will take care of the rest.
- That is why the correct way to pray is to ask for God’s will to be done, regardless of what our will is.

May God help us fulfill His commandment and pray without ceasing.



The Epistle of St. James

Show Me Your Faith by Your Works

Overview:

This Epistle of our teacher St. James is part of the Catholic Epistles, and it talks about the Christian life of holiness and how we should behave as Christians. St. James points out through the Epistle that we should persevere in the difficult and painful times and to show our true faith by our behavior.

- **The Epistles’ major themes are:**
 - 1) Perseverance through the tough times
 - 2) Work and behavior that show the faith and complete it
- **The writer of the Epistle is St. James the Lesser (also known as the Just), the brother of the Lord**
- **The Epistle was written between the years 60-61 AD**

CHAPTER 1

This chapter is split into 4 main sections:

- 1) **The introduction (1:1):** Here we notice that St. James calls himself a “bondservant of God” even though he is the brother of the Lord. This is mirroring how the Virgin St. Mary called herself “maidservant of the Lord” after the annunciation that she will become the Theotokos. This is the true Orthodox understanding of humbling ourselves before God.
- 2) **Understanding Trials (1:2-12):** St. James points out that the true Christian rejoices in trials because of his faith; he understands that the trials are a test of his faith and that once he passes the pain, by gaining the virtue of patience, he would be getting closer to God and his faith in Him would grow exponentially. It is therefore the understanding of the Church that going through a trial is a participation in the Cross of Christ.



patience.

St. James also points out that being rich or poor are both a form of trials; the poor needs to be proud of God as his treasure and the rich needs to humble himself under the hands of God and lean on Him and not on his richness. In order to understand all this, St. James says that a man needs to feel his weakness and ask wisdom from above.



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- 3) **Sources of trials (1:3-18):** Trials come in different ways. Some are from God in order to allow us to grow in faith or to make us repent and change our way from the wrong to the right path (e.g. some trials might befall us to protect us from falling into the sin of pride). Other trials, however, come from Satan in order to make us fall into sin. These are enticed by temptations which will lead us to fall. St. James points out clearly that these trials originate by temptations from our desires that lead to the conception of sin and when **“it is full grown, brings forth death”**. They do not come from God **“for God cannot be tempted” (1:13)**



- 4) **How to deal with trials (1:19-27):** St. James gives us some tips on how to deal with these trials and they are all summarized in **“being doers of the Word”**. What that means is simple: we need to know the Word of God so well that every action we take is stemming from it. We need to keep our mouth for glorifying God.



CHAPTER 2

This chapter focuses on how faith and works go hand-in-hand and cannot be separated. St. James starts this chapter by talking about how our faith should be manifested actively in our lives. He gives examples on how favoritism (for example between rich and poor) is going against the fulfillment of the law: **“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”** He then continues this chapter and proves how works are the fulfillment of faith:

Works are what prove that faith exists:

- “Even the demons believe”: Knowing or believing that God exists is not enough. For **“faith without works is dead.”**
- Abraham's work showed his faith: only when Abraham was about to sacrifice Isaac that he truly showed his faith in God.
- St. Athanasius said that “faith and works are two sisters that are joined together”. Christianity is living the faith in the light of our Lord Jesus Christ.



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CHAPTER 3

The apostle continues in this chapter his explanation on the true expression of faith through works and explains that bridling the tongue is a major factor in this life:

1) The untamable tongue can manifest itself in different ways that we might not notice.

a. **Love of teaching:** While teaching is very important in the life of the Church, St. James points out that we should not be teaching because we love teaching, as this carries within it pride and self-love.

b. **Unbeneficial talks:** When we talk with no boundaries and in unbeneficial topics, we open ourselves into more chances of starting a fire.



He also points that bridling the tongue needs heavenly wisdom which is different from the earthly one. The heavenly wisdom is characterized by purity, peace, gentleness and mercy. The earthly wisdom, on the other hand, is self-seeking and sensual and results in jealousy and schism.

CHAPTER 4

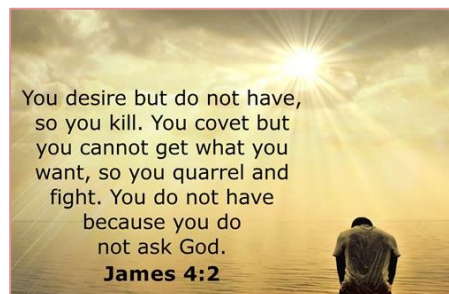
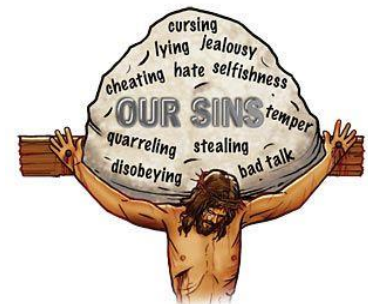
St. James points out in this chapter how earthly desires can deprive us of our inner peace and peace with God. He gives us examples of sins that we are usually tempted with to make us aware of them:

1) **Love of possession (4:2-3):** St. James points out that the secret of unanswered prayers is that they focus on earthly things and are not aligned with God’s will.

2) **Adultery:** The apostle connects between the love of the world and adultery for they both are manifesting the struggle between the spirit longing for the divine and the body longing for the earthly.

3) **Pride:** St. James simply states that we just need to resist the devil, and he will flee from us. He then goes on and defines that all what this resistance takes is drawing near to God. He also points out that by not submitting to God in our plans that we make, we are not trusting in Him but rather in ourselves and our plans.

4) **Judging (4:11-12):** The saint points out that to judge someone is to take the place of God. He points out that since we didn’t give out the law, for **“there is one lawgiver”**, we should be doers of the law and not judges.



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CHAPTER 5

The saint ends his Epistle with general advice for everyone:

- 1) **To the rich (5:1-6)**: He advises them to lean not on their money but to live humbly and always lament their sins. He admonishes them to make sure they are always faithful in their trades and to help others and ease their lives.
- 2) **To the persecuted (5:7-12)**: The apostle tells them to look forward for the coming of the Lord and to be united by love. He also reminds them that they should always be speaking the truth: **“let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No,’”**
- 3) **To those in hardships (5:13)**: To pray as it is the only way to open the gate of mercy. Those who are cheerful also offer prayers and praise.
- 4) **To the sick (5:14)**: To call upon the priest of the Church to confess his sins and be anointed with the oil of prayers. For, as St. James points out, **“The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much”**.



The saint then ends with his last advice to all of us; to bring back the ones who wandered away from the truth. And the only way to bring them back is by us following all the advice he points in the Epistle, people will see the light in us and come back to Christ.

For **“he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.” (James 5:20)**



May we always be ready to show our faith with good works abiding by the word of God, as St. James teaches us in this epistle.

Be Proud of Your Orthodoxy

- ❖ Our Coptic Orthodox Church is unique among churches in offering sound, balanced, and clear faith. Our church is biblical, traditional, apostolic, and priestly, and loves the rituals, and patristic.
- ❖ Our Church is truly a paradise of saints, those who have departed (the victorious Church) and those who are still alive (The struggling Church).
- ❖ Her teachings are biblical, yet our understanding of those biblical teachings is based on the interpretation of the early fathers of the church.
- ❖ As her children, we ought to be proud of our beloved church, and thankful to our faithful fathers and mothers who gave their lives to preserve the faith and deliver it to us.



Let's take a look at some of the aspects that characterize the Coptic Orthodox Church:

Our Church is Apostolic and Patristic

- The teaching of our church and its interpretation of the Holy Bible is based on the sound teachings of our fathers the apostles as they received it from our Lord Jesus Christ.
- Those same teachings were delivered to us at the hands of St. Mark and have been passed down faithfully with each new generation until we received them today.
- As St. Paul says, **“but I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.” (Galatians 1:11)**. He also said that he delivered to us exactly what he received from the Lord. **“For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread” (1 Corinthians 11:23)**
- He also advises us to deliver what we learned exactly as we received it. **“Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.” (2 Thessalonians 2:15)**
- The Church of Alexandria has produced heroes like St. Cyril and St. Athanasius that defended the faith against heretics from the early ages. The faith that St. Cyril and St. Athanasius explained and taught is still accepted by all churches.
- It is important to note that in order to have true biblical teachings we need to have a foundation by which to understand those teachings.
- The way the fathers read and understood the Bible as it was passed down to them by the apostles and by the guidance of the Holy Spirit is our foundation for having a sound understanding of the Bible.
- **Is sound doctrine important for spiritual growth?**
Of course! St. Athanasius said, **“there is no true spiritual growth without a true dogma”**. A good example is when we go to church to pray the liturgy and receive communion, we gain the following:

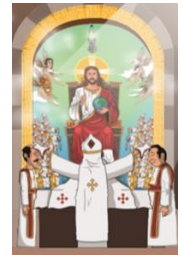


“ REJOICE ”

- **Eternal life** “Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life” (John 6:54)
- **Abiding in Christ** “He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.” (John 6:56)
- **Resurrection** “...and I will raise him up at the last day.” (John 6:54)
- **We gain life in Christ** “he who feeds on Me will live because of Me.” (John 6:57)
- **How to benefit from our dogma in our spiritual growth?**
 - By learning our dogma and overcoming the delusion that says that Christian dogma is hard to understand.
 - Look into every doctrine and how it affects me and helps me grow in my relationship with Christ.
 - Research the biographies of the fathers and how they lived the Orthodox dogma in their daily lives.
 - Look into my conduct and examine whether it reflects my Orthodox identity.
- **How to protect our Orthodox dogma from corruption?**
 - Study the dogma in light of the fathers of the Church.
 - Memorize verses from the scriptures that support our dogma.
 - Learn analogies that further explain and clarifies the dogma.
 - Teach our Orthodox dogma to others as I received it from my fathers and servants.

Our Church Loves the Liturgical Rites

- Our Church offers its unique faith and dogma in the form of very rich and unique rituals, fasts, prayers and hymns.
- The purpose of all these rituals is to explain the faith to all the faithful regardless of their age or education level.
- While some complain nowadays that our rituals are so dry, the truth is by spending a little bit of time trying to understand and live the rituals of the church; you get to truly live and enjoy and taste the Kingdom of Heaven here on earth.
- In fact, an outsider can learn most of our Orthodox dogma just by entering the church during Pascha week and he/she will feel through the hymns and the dark veils, the sadness for our sins which lead to Christ dying on the Cross to save us.
- In contrast, during the Feast of the Resurrection and the Holy Fifty Days, you can live the joy of the Resurrection just by attending any service.

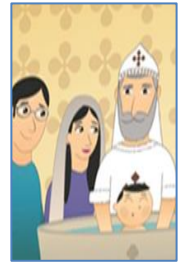


Our Church is a Sacramental Church

- Our Coptic Orthodox Church is a sacramental Church, we believe in the Holy Sacraments and its vital role in our salvation and its efficacy in our daily lives.
- Sacraments are means by which we receive grace from the Holy Spirit. They are referred to as Mysteries, as each has a visible and outward sign (prayer, water, oil, etc.) and an invisible grace.
- These sacraments are **Baptism, Myron (Confirmation), Repentance and Confession, Eucharist, Unction of the sick, Matrimony, and Priesthood.**

“ REJOICE ”

- There is no salvation without **baptism**, “**unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.**” (John 3:5), in it we “put on” Christ as St. Paul says, “**For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.**” (Galatians 3:27). It is also death and resurrection with Christ “**do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.**” (Romans 6:3-5)
- In the **Sacrament of Myron (Confirmation)** the Holy Spirit dwells in us when we are anointed 36 times with the Holy Myron after baptism “**Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.**” (Acts 2:38)
- There is no salvation without a life of **repentance and confession**, “**If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.**” (1 John 1:8) and “**If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**” (1 John 1:9) “**He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.**” (Proverbs 28:13)
- In the **Sacrament of Eucharist**, we abide in Christ and He abides in us “**Then Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.”** (John 6:53-56)
- Our beloved Church, as a caring mother, pray for the sick of her children following the divine command in the epistle of St. James. (**Unction of the sick**) “**Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.**” (James 5:14-15)
- In the **Sacrament of Matrimony**, the Church prays for the bridegroom and his bride with faith that the Holy Spirit will bless their union and make the two into one “**So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.**” (Matthew 19:6) That is why in our Coptic Orthodox Church divorce is not permitted.
- All these sacraments are served through the **Sacrament of the Priesthood**, the father the priest is entrusted by God over His holy mysteries. Our fathers, the priests, and bishops are the only ones who have the authority to administer the sacraments.



Our Church is the Birthplace of Monasticism

- Our beloved Coptic church is the birthplace of monastic tradition in all the world.
- All the churches that have monastic orders are indebted to our Coptic Orthodox Church for establishing this tradition.
- Not only the order of monasticism, but also its rules, canons, spirituality, literature, etc...

“ REJOICE ”

- St. Anthony the founder of monasticism, St. Macarius, St. Shenouda, St. Pachom, and St. Pishoy, and many others are the true lamps of monasticism in the whole world.
- Many pilgrims from the east and the west went to the Egyptian desert to meet with these fathers, learn from them and deliver what they learned to their countries.
- The monasteries and convents are the backbones of our beloved Coptic Church, supporting our Church and the whole world with unceasing prayers day and night.
- And giving a great example of leaving the whole world for the sake of the One.



Conclusion

- Our beloved Church is indeed, Orthodox in faith, patristic in teaching, sacramental in life, loves the liturgical rites and hymns, and enlightened the whole world with monasticism.
- We are proud of our beloved Church which is never shaken by persecution, heresies, schisms, or tribulation. Whose faith never changed and will never change with God's grace and protection. **“The gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” (Matthew 16:18)**

Keys of Spiritual Struggle

- Many of the Biblical narratives explain the importance of spiritual struggle in the life of the believer.
“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, 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,”
(Hebrews 12:1)
- Our struggle also needs to be according to God’s commandments.
“And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.” (2 Timothy 2:5)
- No one is able to succeed in their struggle without God’s grace.
“for without Me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5)
- It is indeed better for us to struggle while here on earth and gain the crown of spiritual struggle rather than rest now and suffer for eternity.
- Knowing that your effort and struggle is never forgotten before the Lord. The Lord sees your struggle and will recognize you for it.



Meaning of Spiritual Struggle

- Spiritual struggle means that the person works hard to overcome sin in his/her life. It is the exercise of self-control in everything, all the time.
- There are two aspects of Spiritual struggle: negative and positive.
 1. **The negative aspect:** means to do every effort to stop or stay away from sin in all of its forms and shapes. Also staying away from roads, relationships, and activities that may cause one to stumble and fall.

However, the negative aspect is not enough, one must also practice the positive aspect.

2. **The positive aspect:** means that the person struggles in order to know the Lord better and grows in his/her love towards the Lord.

It is a beautiful aspect as the individual gets to taste the sweetness of living with the Lord and enjoys the depth of His love.

Therefore, the positive aspect of the spiritual struggle complements and completes the negative aspect.

“ REJOICE ”

Keys of Spiritual Struggle

Like an “Escape Room” game, some challenges in life need a special “key” to unlock and overcome. Here are some “keys” to help us “unlock” these challenges:



🔑 Hope unlocks the challenge of despair

- Do not ever let yourself fall into despair. Remember that hardships will always end.

“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

(2 Timothy 1:7)

“Let us hold fast the confession of *our* hope without wavering,
for He who promised *is* faithful.” (Hebrews 10:23)

“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always *be* ready to *give* a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you;” (1 Peter 3:15)

🔑 “Spiritual joy” unlocks the challenge of sadness

- Whenever you feel overwhelmed with sadness and disappointment remember the divine commandments. “Do not sorrow, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.” (Nehemiah 8:10)
- Leave the darkness of sadness and know that there is nothing on earth worth being depressed. All sadness will go away even after a long time.

“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!” (Philippians 4:4)

🔑 Strength unlocks the challenge of weakness

- You may not be so strong to handle life’s challenges, you could have some weaknesses, but you also have many strengths. You are strong because of the Spirit of God who is inside you and with His grace that surrounds you.
- Look for your points of strengths and grow and develop them and look for your points of weakness and work on overcoming them with God’s grace.

““O man greatly beloved, fear not! Peace *be* to you; be strong, yes, be strong!”
So when he spoke to me I was strengthened” (Daniel 10:19)

“strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power,
for all patience and longsuffering with joy;” (Colossians 1:11)

🔑 Good hobbies unlock the challenge of free time

- You may have some “free time” from time to time. Many do not know what to do in their free time.
- Having excess free time may lead you to do unprofitable activities, do not be overcome by them.
- The Lord gave you many talents, use it for your edification and the edification of those around you. Ask the Lord to help you use the talents He gave you for the glory of His name.

“Do not neglect the gift that is in you” (1 Timothy 4:14)

“that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;” (Colossians 1:10)



“ REJOICE ”

🔑 **Forgiveness unlocks the challenge of envy**

Life is shorter than to be wasted on trivial matters, do not occupy your mind with those who challenge you and give you hard time ... there is no one in the world without weaknesses ... open your heart ... and your mind ... and be accepting and tolerating to others around you.

“And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.” (Ephesians 4:32)

“bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do*.” (Colossians 3:13)

🔑 **Confidence unlocks the challenge of shyness**

- Do not say “this is above my ability” or “I cannot do that”. Let go of negative comments like that and replace them with positive thoughts that spring from trusting the Lord.
- **“With God’s grace I can” ... “God willing I will ...” Do not let shyness weaken you, do not be constantly hesitant ... make decisions according to scriptures.**



“And we have such trust through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as *being* from ourselves, but our sufficiency *is* from God,” (2 Corinthians 3:4-5)

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” (Philippians 4:13)

- Always pray asking for the Lord’s guidance, and He will give you according to His will.

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🔑 Courage unlocks the challenge of “fear”

- It is normal to face many kinds of fears. All people have various levels of fear. Fear is different from one person and another. What is needed is to learn how to overcome this fear and not let it stop your process of growth.
- Do not escape due to fear, but rather face your fears trusting in the Lord’s promises.

“Fear not, for I *am* with you; Be not dismayed, for I *am* your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.” (Isaiah 41:10)



“Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God *is* with you wherever you go.” (Joshua 1:9)

- St. Augustine said, "I sat on top of the world when I came to fear nothing and desire nothing but You."
- The true spiritual person is always strong, and courageous holding on to the Lord and His promises.

“I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20)

“If God *is* for us, who *can be* against us?” (Romans 8:31)

Father Pishoy Kamel once said: “The saints are not people without sin but they are people who struggle against sin”.



Rejoice in Salvation



Introduction

- The topic of original sin is of great debate. While there are some topics that typically are only of debate among those who study such topics, this issue, in particular, is of debate even among many.
 - The Church teaches us that when Adam sinned, the result of his sin was death and corruption: **“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned –” (Romans 5:12)**
 - Adam’s sin did not only affect him personally but affected the entire human race. Because of his sin, corruption, sin and death entered into the world.
- As the children of Adam, we were born with this sin (referred to as the original sin), we also were born carrying the result of that sin which is death and corruption.
 - Therefore, humanity needed a savior, to save it from sin and its consequences.

What happened to humanity with Adam’s sin?

• Spiritual death

- Adam’s sin separated man from God, Who is the source of life.
- The “image” was separated from the “Origin” rather than communion.
- Man started to run away from God rather than running toward Him.
- It became impossible for man to be with God, there is no communion between light and darkness.

• Physical death

- The consequence of sin is death. When Adam broke the commandment there was no escape from death.
- Man became under the sentence of death; man became prone to illness and disease which led to death.
- It is from God’s mercy that Adam did not die immediately after breaking the commandment, but he was left to father children from which his Savior (and the Savior of the world) will come from.

• Shame, fear, and suffering

- Because of the fall, man lost the glorified image of God, he lost his reverence and dignity, and was expelled from the garden of Eden carrying the shame of sin.
- Before the sin, Adam and Eve were living in the garden naked and not ashamed as they were covered with God’s grace. However, after the fall, the shame of sin opened their eyes to their nakedness.

“and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings.” (Genesis 3:7)

- Fear entered Adam’s life for the first time, and pain and suffering found their way to his being.
“I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.” (Genesis 3:10)

“ REJOICE ”

• Corrupt nature

- Sin settled in human nature and affected it from all aspects. Fear, anxiety, turbulence, pain, and disease all became part of the human condition.
- Sin also reached nature, the earth, and the plants. The animal's nature became aggressive toward man. Even climate, wind, tornados, floods, and volcanos all became against man.
- Humans became inclined to sin.
- All were born with this nature along with Adam's sin.

Why did God not simply forgive Adam?

- Knowing the massive consequences of Adam's sin, some may wonder why did Adam not offer repentance, which God would accept sparing humanity from dealing with the consequences.
- This solution was not feasible for the following reasons:
 - God is completely just, as He is completely merciful. If God simply forgave Adam because He is merciful, then His mercy would contradict His justice.
 - God gave Adam a clear warning and gave him all the necessities to help him obey the commandment, like heavenly wisdom, fulfillment in his Creator, spiritual joy, etc.
 - So, if Adam falls and does not bear the consequences of sin, it will contradict God's divine justice.
 - Also, God declared the consequences of sin before the fall. How can God not keep His word?!

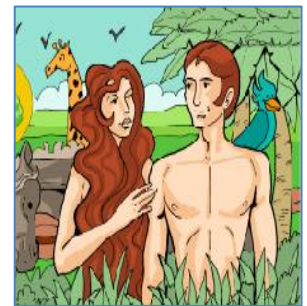
“God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do?” (Numbers 23:19)

- Finally, if a judge acquitted a person who was found guilty, he himself will be guilty towards justice. Will the Judge of the universe be guilty towards the divine justice?!



Wasn't God able to save Adam with one word?

- Another question that is often raised is, if God created the whole universe with a word. With His divine order, every living thing was created. Why did He not save Adam with a word?
- While God created the universe out of nothing with His word, after the fall, the creation already existed in a broken state and needed to be saved and renewed.
- Adam's sin put the entire creation under the sentence of death, and in the hand of Satan.
- Therefore, the work of salvation is needed to renew this creation and return it to its holy state, and to repair all that was ruined by sin; pay the price, and free all from the bondage of sin.



“ REJOICE ”

If Adam is the one who sinned, why do I bear the consequences?

- Many wonder about their relation with Adam’s sin. It seems unfair that we -as individuals- are held accountable for Adam’s transgression.
- To understand this we ought to understand that the entire human race was in Adam when he sinned (As human nature, not as individual persons)
- We (the human race) were in Adam when he was created, when he sinned, and when he died. Therefore, we were counted corrupt, sinful, and dead with Adam.
- We were born with the sin of Adam, and the corrupt nature represented in Adam.
- Like a tree, when it is hit by a disease, every fruit of that tree becomes bad, and the seeds inside its fruit also carry the same disease. If these seeds were planted again, the tree that will come out of them will carry the same disease, and so on.
- Adam became the diseased tree that carried the disease (sin and corrupt nature) to its branches, fruit, and seeds. **“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.” (Psalm 51:5)**

Does that mean that we bear our parents’ sins too?

- No. There is a difference between Adam’s sin, of which sin and the corrupt nature entered into the world, and sins committed afterward, in the state of the fall.
- We see this in Adam’s sin (and Eve before him); their sin was introduced from outside (the serpent) while when we look at Cain’s sin, where did it come from?
- Cain’s sin came from within, and no one pushed him to it, it was initiated from his heart (because of the corrupt nature he was born with).
- This continued throughout all generations. Including the prophets **“They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one.” (Romans 3:12)**
- Each of us is born with the sin of Adam and carries it along with his/her own sins. **“No one is without sin even if his life on earth was a single day.”**

The Divine Liturgy Explains our Faith

- In the Liturgy of St. Basil the priest says **“Holy, Holy, Holy indeed, O Lord our God, who formed us, created us and placed us in the Paradise of Joy...”**
- However, while none of us now say that we saw Paradise, we were there in Adam because we were created through Adam. This highlights the beauty of the Liturgy in that it is an expression of the true faith.
- Then the priest continues saying **“When we disobeyed Your commandment by the deceit of the serpent, we fell from eternal life and were exiled”** – it is important to note the specific language being used here as the use of the word “we” implicates all of us not just Adam.
- In The Gregorian Liturgy, the priest says **“but according to my will, I did eat”** – one might ask the priest “you were not there, how did you eat from the tree” – the response however would simply be that if Adam ate, we all ate too. For through Adam, we shared in this act and **“plucked for ourselves the sentence of death.”**



“ REJOICE ”

The First Adam and the Second Adam

- St. Paul explains this doctrine in detail in his epistle to the Romans. **“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned”. (Romans 5:12)**
- It is important to understand what is meant here by the word “world” - it is not meant as to the physical world i.e. Asia, Europe, Africa – however the word refers to people. When it is said “God so loved the world” it is understood that the world means its people. Therefore, here the scripture is clear that through one man, sin entered the people; Then, because of this sin came death. **“But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man’s offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many.” (Romans 5:15)**
- What St. Paul is saying here is that just like how Adam burdened us, Christ redeemed us. In the same way, one man’s sin was imputed to all, one Man’s gift saved all. **“For if by one man’s offense death reigned through the one, much more those who received abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in the life through the One, Jesus Christ.” (Romans 5:17)**
- This comparison is repeated throughout the epistle. What happened to us because of Adam was remedied because of Christ. **“Therefore, as through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men.” (Romans 5:18)**
- It is further explained to us what exactly the gift is. **“So that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Romans 5:21)** The emphasis here is that the grace of God is greater and that we can take solace in knowing not only did God’s gift redeem us from the original sin but gave to us more than that which we were burdened by through Adam’s error.

Conclusion:

- To summarize our Church’s faith on this issue, we believe that we were in Adam when he was created, when he sinned, when he died, and when he was corrupted by sin.
- That is why we were born of him sinful, corrupt, and dead. **“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.” (Psalm 51:5)**
- The Lord Jesus - the Second Adam- came as a new beginning for a new humanity and its first fruit so that we can be united as a whole with Him. When the Lord Jesus became man He became the representative for all humanity.
- The Holy Bible says that Christ is above all, this means that He is able to be a representative not just for His generation or region where He lived, but for all humanity from the beginning until the end. For Him to do this, He must have witnessed humanity from the start until the last day – no one else can do this but our Lord Jesus Christ.

“ REJOICE ”

- From this summary, we can understand that Christ was incarnate, that He took flesh from St. Mary, that while He was in the flesh, undertook the act of salvation to save us, that while in the flesh He carried our sins, that He died and that He resurrected from the dead.
- From this understanding we can contrast what we took from Adam versus what we received from Christ. From Adam, we received sin and death; from Christ, we received salvation and everlasting life.



“ REJOICE ”

Measures of Sound Mental Health

“Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers”
(3 John 1:2)

There is no doubt that God wants His children to be successful and joyful in every aspect of their lives. This success is not only on a spiritual level, but also with respect to studies, relationships, career, and also physical and mental health.

Here are some measures of sound mental health:

Feeling Joyful

- One of the measures of sound mental health is a general feeling of happiness and satisfaction; when one is not dealing with constant disappointments, sadness, and internal turmoil.
- Of course, one of the big factors which affect one’s mental health is sin and being separated from God due to a lack of a sincere life of repentance and confession.
- This general sense of happiness comes from enjoying life’s blessings and successes. There is no doubt that our life through Christ is what leads us to be successful. **“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” (Philippians 4:13)** meaning that when the Lord is in our lives, hearts, and minds, He gives us the power and the ability to be victorious in our lives **“Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.” (Romans 8:37)**
- He also gives us the grace which takes the effort that we put into any work and crowns it with success. He works through our weaknesses, and we are strong with and through Him, **“The God of heaven Himself will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build” (Nehemiah 2:20)**
- By this all, one can face any hardships (internal and external) and be able to achieve a balanced look on life which leads to always being joyful in the Lord as we are commanded.
“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!” (Philippians 4:4)



Moderation

- We learned from the fathers that **“The middle road (moderate path) saved many”**.
- One has a sound and healthy mental state by living in moderation without exasperation, or extremism. Also free from negativity and the “I don’t care” attitude.
- Moderation is the middle road between two extremes, i.e. the person is not overly confident, nor constantly doubting his abilities. Always trusting in the Lord and that He crowns every effort with success.
- Moderation in ambitions, not setting unrealistic goals which require unbearable effort nor overcome with laziness and lack of motivation.
- He/she takes the talent from the Lord and seeks spiritual guidance and balance between his/her spiritual, social, physical, intellectual, and emotional needs.
- He/she understands that **“To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven:” (Ecclesiastes 3:1)** and live by that concept.

“ REJOICE ”

Self-acceptance

- Self-acceptance does not mean being prideful or tolerating a sinful lifestyle, but rather accepting the talents we received from the Lord, including weaknesses, and maybe even physical limitations, and using them in the best way possible for the glory of God.
- The Lord accepts us when we turn to Him, He takes our weaknesses, sanctifies them, and empowers and equips us to do every good work. **“For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:10)**
- **“Let the weak say, ‘I am strong.’” (Joel 3:10)**
- **“Not I, but the grace of God which was with me.” (1 Corinthians 15:10)**

Accepting Others

- There is an important biblical teaching in Titus 1:15 **“To the pure all things are pure”**.
- In baptism, our senses were baptized, including our vision, we see everything with a good and pure eye.
- Those of sound spirit see God’s work in everything, look at all situations with a positive eye, and have a general, hopeful attitude toward life.
- Others can only focus on the weaknesses of others, forgetting their own shortcomings.
- They always have negative thoughts or assumptions towards other people or situations.
- As Christians, we are called to accept others and understand that every human was created by God, and He seeks their salvation. We ought to tolerate the weaknesses of others when they deal with us as we are also tolerated by many.
- We ought to look past the shortcomings of others and see them with an eye for what they can be with God’s grace.

Healthy Relationships

- Another sign of sound mental health is having healthy relationships.
- The balanced person is able to establish healthy relationships within his/her environments (school, work, church, neighborhood, etc...)
- He/she is able - with God’s grace- to communicate well with all people.
- He/she is “light” and “salt” anywhere they are. A living gospel and a true witness to the Lord within his/her dealings with others.
- Christianity does not support living in a bubble and being enclosed in oneself. She raises her children to be open to the surrounding society, loving and being loved by all, flexible and holding fast to their faith without compromise or extremism.



“ REJOICE ”

Realistic Goals

- Those of sound mental state do not run after unrealistic goals; they are realists with a positive look on life and a hopeful trust in the Lord.
- Scriptures teach us to be content with what we have according to our abilities and calling without losing our healthy aspirations and ambitions, **“For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.” (Romans 12:3)**
- **“Now godliness with contentment is great gain.” (1 Timothy 6:6)**
- It is important to note that contentment does not contradict one’s strive for growth and development, as long as all ambitions are for the glory of God’s name and not for personal gain and pride understanding; that hard work and strive is nothing but investing the talents given to us by the Lord.

Healthy Independence

- Meaning that the person is not emotionally enslaved to a person or an ideology.
- Natural human emotions need to be regulated with a sound mind and spirit otherwise it could lead to exaggerated and unhealthy emotions that could be destructive to one’s life and relationships.
- The balanced emotions which are regulated by a wise mind and a godly spirit are:
 - Not enslaved to a person or a thing
 - Pure and holy according to God’s will
 - Stable and not constantly changing
 - Enlightened and does not lead to sin

Balanced Intellectual Independence

- Meaning that one is not enslaved to a specific school of thought or a single person but be open-minded to read and understand various schools of thought while maintaining spiritual and wise discernment to differentiate between right and wrong.
- This discernment is guided by the Holy Spirit, who dwells in us as God’s children, and God’s words presented in the Holy Scriptures for our edification, and finally Godly counsel from a spiritual guide or father of confession.
- Therefore, a sound mental state is manifested in accepting others’ opinions and schools of thought while discerning what suits us as God’s children.
- Rejecting others’ opinions and discounting their ideas without a conversation or dialogue is often a sign of a close-minded and immature personality.



“ REJOICE ”

Memorization

From The Midnight Prayers

Rise children of light, praise the Lord of hosts, may he bestow upon us the salvation of our souls.

When we stand up bodily before You, take away from us the sleep of carelessness, and give us alertness, so we may learn how to stand before You at the time of prayer and send up to You appropriate glorification to gain forgiveness of our sins.

Glory be to You O lover of mankind.

From The Midnight Prayers – First Watch

PSALM 70 (69)

Make haste, O God, to deliver me! Make haste to help me, O LORD! Let them be ashamed and confounded Who seek my life; Let them be turned back and confused Who desire my hurt.

Let them be turned back because of their shame, Who say, “Aha, aha!” Let all those who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; And let those who love Your salvation say continually, “Let God be magnified!” But I am poor and needy; Make haste to me, O God! You are my help and my deliverer; O LORD, do not delay. **Alleluia.**

“ REJOICE ”

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R

Anthem 2023/2024

E

(By the grace of God we grow
And give fruits a hundredfold
And His Spirit dwells within us
Gives us joy as the Bible told) **x 2**

J

(Rejoice in your faith and church
Handed down to us by God
Be firm in prayers and doctrine
And build your life on His word) **x 2**

O

(Our Lord wants us faithful
Glorified and joyful) **x2**
Always joyful

I

For He has redeemed us on the cross
And gave us eternal life
When you're a temple for His dwelling
Sadness will not be a choice

C

Praise and thank God every day and you...
And you will surely rejoice!

E

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