

Summer Festival | 2026

But you must continue in the things which you have learned - II Timothy 3:14



**“BUT YOU MUST CONTINUE IN THE THINGS
WHICH YOU HAVE LEARNED” (II TIMOTHY 3:14)**

**His Holiness Pope
Tawadros II**



**His Grace Bishop
Rewis**



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

**General Bishop of
the Diocese of
Melbourne and its
affiliated regions**

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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Continue in What You Have Learned

2 Timothy 3:14

St. Paul wrote to his disciple, St. Timothy, saying, “Continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them” (2 Timothy 3:14)

St. Paul advised St. Timothy about the importance of striving with a spirit of strength, not one of hopelessness, to preserve the sound faith. He encouraged him to refute heresies with firmness, but also with meekness and love.

This is the theme of St. Mark Festival this year: there will always be resistance to the work of God. The devil will always resist the truth, but our reassurance is in the promise of our Lord Jesus Christ:



“The gates of Hades shall not prevail against the Church.” (Matthew 16:18)

I. One Faith, Sound Teaching

a. Why preserve the faith?

- This is the faith that our Lord Jesus Christ established, and the apostles preached. It was preserved by the Church living it and handing it down pure and sound from generation to generation.
- Our Church has kept the faith unchanged, as it was handed down to us through the Holy Bible, the writings of the Church Fathers, and the Canons of the Ecumenical Councils. It is recorded in Church Tradition.

b. Characteristics of an Orthodox Believer:

• Filled with Christ:

Knows Him intellectually, understanding that He is one of the Holy Trinity; abides in Him through the Eucharist; and has a relationship with Him through prayers.

• Filled with the Holy Bible:

Faithfully knows God’s message to stand against all the wrong teachings that we come across every day.

• Filled with the Holy Orthodox Church:

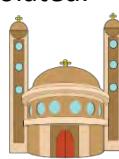
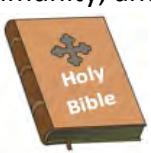
The congregation of *believers (one doctrine)*, gathered in the *sanctified* house of God (*rite*), led by the *clergy (Sacrament)*, in the presence of *angels and saints (tradition and role models)*.

• Filled with the Church Fathers:

Knows their lives and righteousness, follows their example and teachings.

• Integrated:

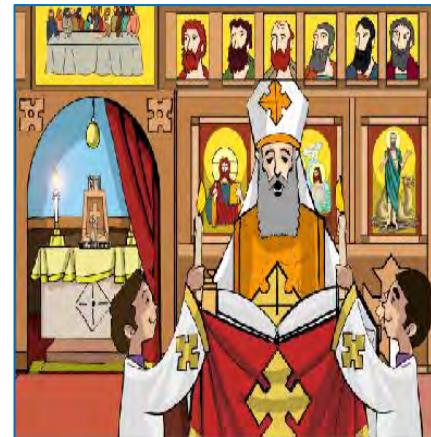
In the community, and not isolated.



“BUT YOU MUST CONTINUE IN THE THINGS WHICH YOU HAVE LEARNED” (II TIMOTHY 3:14)

II. Resources of the Coptic Orthodox Teaching

- a. **The Holy Bible:** The Holy Bible is the foundation of all Church teachings. No teaching may contradict it; every teaching must align with the Scriptures.
- b. **Church Tradition:** The rites of the Church and teachings of the Fathers have been handed down from generation to generation, as they received it from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. It is through Tradition that we received the Holy Bible.
- c. **Liturgy:** The Liturgy is a trusted resource like the canons of the Ecumenical Councils. We pray what we believe and do not teach anything different.



In the Divine Liturgy, we declare our faith in the Trinity, the incarnation of the Only Begotten Son of God, His redemption of humanity, His death on the Cross and His resurrection, His ascension into Heaven, and sending us the Holy Spirit, the Second Coming, and eternal life.

We also proclaim our belief in the Sacraments and the work of the Holy Spirit in us, that St. Mary is the Theotokos, and our belief in the intercession of the saints.

- d. **Biography and Teachings of Church Fathers:** The Church Fathers explained and taught the sound faith as agreed upon by the Church. Their lives and writings continue to guide us today.
- e. **Canons of the Ecumenical Councils:** These are decisions unanimously agreed upon in the council.

III. Abiding in the Sound Faith and Handing It Down to Generations

- a. **Our Lord Jesus Christ established the Church on the rock of the Orthodox faith:**

- “On this rock I will build My church” (Matthew 16:18)
- He instructed His apostles to care for His people: “Tend My sheep” (John 21:16)
- And to preserve the faith and teach it to everyone: “Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:20)

- b. **Our Coptic Orthodox Church firmly rejects any teaching that differs from the true faith:**

“But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let them be accursed.” (Galatians 1:8)



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IV. Why and How to Reject Heresies and Wrong Teachings

a. Why Reject Heresies:

Our Lord Jesus Christ warned us of the false prophets who are “ravenous wolves” (Matthew 7:15).

Throughout the ages, the Church convened councils to refute heresies and to separate heretics when they insisted on their wrong teachings.

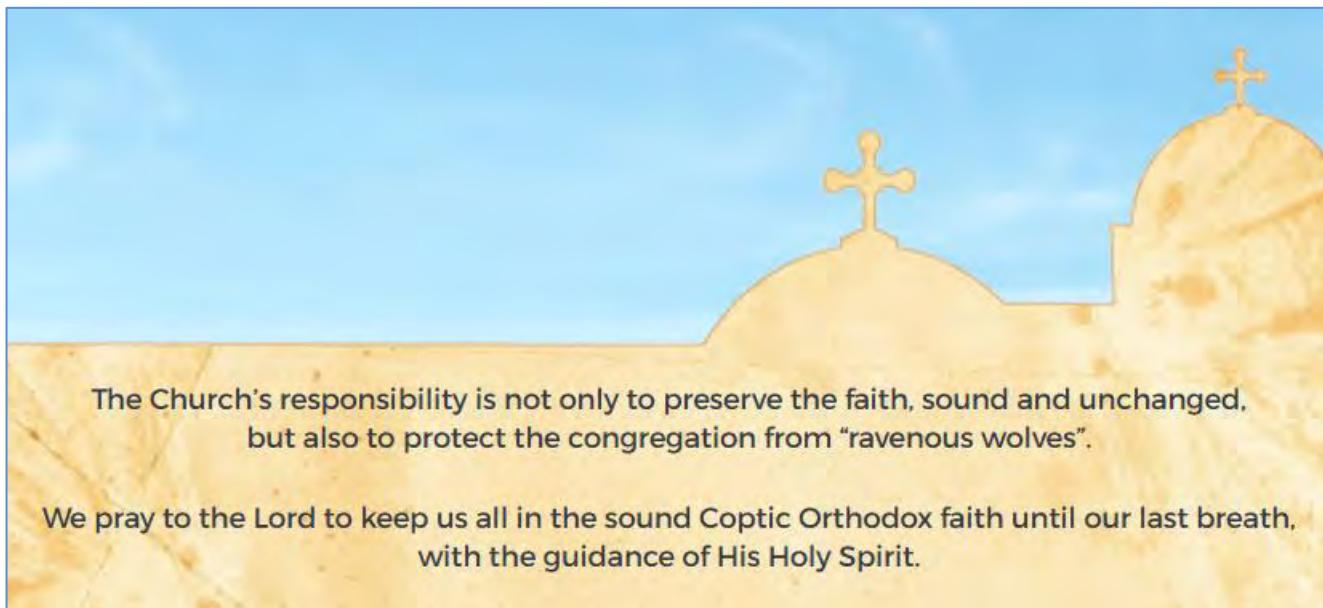
We honor the heroes of the faith who participated in keeping the true faith sound, such as St. Athanasius, St. Cyril, St. Dioscorus, St. Samuel the Confessor, and others.

We, too, should follow in their footsteps, remaining faithful in keeping the true faith, pure and unchanged, just as we received it.



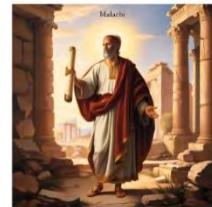
b. How the Church Handles Heresies:

- **Warning:** “warn those who are unruly.” (1 Thessalonians 5:14)
- **Avoidance:** “Note those who cause divisions... and avoid them.” (Romans 16:17)
“From such withdraw yourself.” (1 Timothy 6:5)
- **Rebuke:** “Rebuke them sharply.” (Titus 1:13-14)
- **Separation:** “Put away from yourselves the evil person.” (1 Corinthians 5:13)



The Book of Malachi

Malachi the prophet is the author of the last book of the Old Testament. It is believed that he wrote his book after the people of God returned from exile. The name “Malachi” means “My angel” or “My messenger.”



Summary of the Book of Malachi

The Book of Malachi was written to awaken the people of Judah and warn them of the coming judgment if they did not repent. However, the people doubted the love of God and did not keep His commandments.

Malachi repeatedly urges the people to respect and honor the Lord with sincere reverence, for He is their Father and Creator. But the people continued to dishonor God.

To prepare the way for the Lord, God promised to send His messenger before Him. St. John the Baptist fulfilled this by calling the people to repentance in preparation for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our Lord Jesus Christ came to the temple and cleansed it, but purification and judgement will be fulfilled at His Second Coming, when He will purify His people and judge the wicked.

Malachi is the last book of the Old Testament, in which prophecy ends. The message of prophecy in the Old Testament ends by urging us to await the coming of the Sun of Righteousness. After Malachi, St. John the Baptist will come to prepare the way, followed by the Lord Jesus Christ.



Theme of the Book

Malachi the prophet uses a distinctive style in his writing. His words are structured in the form of questions and answers. He provides a question to the people, then presents their anticipated response, and then presents God’s answer or correction.

For example:

- **“I have loved you,” says the Lord. Yet you say, ‘In what way have You loved us?’ (Malachi 1:2)**
- **“You offer defiled food on My altar, but you say, ‘In what way have we defiled You?’” (Malachi 1:7)**

The prophet presents a dialogue between God and the people, and between God and the priests. God revealed their weaknesses and filled their hearts with hope that the Messiah is coming.

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Chapter One

The book is divided into:

1. God's Love for Jacob and His Rejection of Esau
2. Rebuking the Priests and the People
 - Offering impure sacrifices
 - Not following the Law or judging fairly

1. God's Love for His People and His Rejection of Esau (Malachi 1:1–5):

Malachi starts his book by highlighting God's love for His people and His rejection of Edom (Esau). However, the people respond, **“In what way have You loved us?”**

God reminds them of His covenant with them on the Mount of Sinai after freeing them from slavery in Egypt. God chose them to be His people and rejected Esau. Both nations were exiled, but only the children of Israel returned to their lands and regained their strength.

This distinction shows that being part of God's chosen people is not due to their deeds but to God's grace and will. God declares His love to His people, **“I have loved you,”** while the people doubted His love, saying, **“In what way?”**

In Verse 3: God's love for Israel is proven by destroying the mountains and heritage of Esau, while allowing Israel to rebuild their land.

Verse 4: **“We will return and build the desolate places.”** Edom tried to defy God's decision and rebuild Edom, **“They may build, but I will throw down.”**

Edom was called the *Territory of Wickedness*. Everyone who witnessed what happened to Edom would acknowledge their wickedness. While in Israel, they received God's blessings and mercy.

2. Rebuking the Priests and the People (Malachi 1:6-9)

Although God is worthy of all honor and respect from the people of Israel, both the people and the priests didn't follow the laws and commandments of God. They dishonored Him through careless worship and disobedience.

The priests, instead of leading the people to God, led the people to disobey God. The animals they offered as a sacrifice, meant to atone for sin, defiled the altar (1:7).

They offered defective sacrifices, which was against the law of God: **“You offer defiled food on My altar”**- bringing animals that were lame, blind, or sick. The Lord asked them to close the doors of the temple for He would not accept their vain offering (Malachi 1:7–10).

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3. Unacceptable Offerings from the Priests (Malachi 1:10-14):

God called the priests to hold them accountable for despising His name. **“Says the Lord of hosts to you priests who despise My name” (1:6).**

God rebuked them in two ways: if they are sons of God, they must honor their Father; if they were servants, they must honor their Master and fear Him. The priests are both sons and slaves of God, but they neither honored nor feared Him.

In **verse 7**, the priests offered **“defiled food”**. They despised the Lord’s table, saying, **“The table of the Lord is contemptible”**. According to the law, fine flour mixed with oil was required with every sacrifice, but the priests offered rotten bread or the cheapest grains. The priests despised the rituals which means they despised the Lord.

In **verse 8**, the law requires them to offer sacrifices without blemish, symbolizing the Lord Jesus Christ, who is without sin.

“Is it not evil?”, is a rhetorical question indicating that the priests didn’t see anything wrong with the people offering defective sacrifices, and the priests thought that if they are burned, then nothing is wrong.

The priests didn’t object to these offerings or teach the people to offer their best offerings, because they didn’t want the people to be angry with them and stop giving them gifts.

Then God challenged them: **“Offer it then to your governor! Would he be pleased with you?”** The implication is that they would never offer such offerings to a human ruler. How then could they offer them to God?

Verse 9 is a call for repentance, so God would accept them and their prayers. **“Will He accept you favorably?”** If these defective gifts are offered by your hands, would God accept them?

In **verse 10**, the priests refused to do any work, even a simple task like closing the doors of the temple unless they were paid. They offered sacrifices on the altar because they benefitted in eating them. This showed they were concerned with materialistic things. God said, **“Who is there even among you who would shut the doors, so that you would not kindle fire on My altar in vain? I have no pleasure in you,” says the Lord of hosts. “Nor will I accept an offering from your hands.”**

God is not pleased with the offering itself, but with the heart of the person offering it. It is not enough to give an offering to God; our offering must be with a pure heart filled with love.

Verse 11 is a prophecy about Christianity: **“For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles.”** Because the Jews despised God’s name in Jerusalem, God would make the nations everywhere enter the faith and magnify His name.

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“In every place incense shall be offered to My name, and a pure offering; For My name shall be great among the nations.” This pure offering is the Eucharist.

Verse 12: “But you profane it” The priests despised their service and compared themselves to the rich people. They despised the rituals, and they thought that the return they were given was not worth their effort and they didn’t honor serving the Lord.

Verse 13: “Oh, what a weariness! And you sneer at it” This humiliates God that a servant considers serving the Lord a burden instead of being proud of it.

Verse 14: “Who has in his flock a male, and takes a vow. But sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished.” They were supposed to offer the best they have but instead offered defiled sacrifices.

“Cursed is the deceiver”, who thinks that God can be deceived with a defiled offering. Whoever does this will be cursed, not blessed.

Chapter Two

Summary of the Chapter:

There were two great rituals established by God:

1. **Priesthood:** It is necessary for the Church to continue. However, the priests of the Old Testament corrupted it and caused people to stumble.
2. **Marriage:** It was defiled through divorce and marriage to foreign women.

Condemnation of the Priests: (Malachi 2:1-9):

“O priests, this commandment is for you. If you will not hear, and if you will not take it to heart, to give glory to My name”: It is a message directed to the priests because of their desecration of the service.

“If you will not hear”: God warns to offer repentance and give glory to the name of God.

“I will send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings”: God will not bless them if they don’t hear Him.

Verse 3: God gives examples of these curses **“I will rebuke your descendants”**, this has two interpretations:

- They will not have descendants, or that drought and poor harvests will reduce tithes, therefore the priests’ share will decrease.
- God will **“spread refuse on your faces, the refuse of your solemn feasts.”** This refers to the unclean parts of the sacrifices, symbolizing disgrace and making the feasts impure and joyless.

Application for us today: God is not pleased when we conduct ourselves like those of the world. He wants us to be the salt of the earth.

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Verse 4: “**Then you shall know that I have sent this commandment to you...**” When these warning come true, they will know that God has sent this commandment. His covenant with Levi continues, and God still sends His Word.

Verse 5: God’s covenant with their fathers was a covenant of “**life and peace.**” God chose them to be His servants. They should be committed to the service so that they may have peace in this life and eternal life to come.

Verse 6: “**The law of truth was in his mouth**” refers to the tribe of Levi, who was righteous and followed the commandment of God. “**And turned many away from iniquity**” means God blessed Levi’s efforts with success. Many souls were saved because he taught them and lived a righteous life.

Verse 7: “**For he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.**” A priest must be knowledgeable, aware of religious matters, and able to teach others. The word “messenger” here means angel, highlighting the priest’s sacred role.

Verse 8: “**You have caused many to stumble at the law.**” The priests caused many to stumble because they corrupted the covenant of Levi, that is the covenant of the priesthood, and they didn’t keep the commandments.

Verse 9: “**But have shown partiality in the law.**” They were interpreting the law to favor those who gave them more, ignoring their sins.

“Therefore I also have made you contemptible and base before all the people.” God honors and gives glory to the faithful servants, but those who abuse their role lose their honor.

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The People's Unfaithfulness: (Malachi 2:10-16)

God addresses the people's unfaithfulness, especially in marriage, because they had defiled this sacred covenant.

Verse 10: The prophet started with **“Have we not all one Father?”** This means it is not right for one to betray his brother, we should all be in unity before God. Then the prophet transitions from brotherly relationships to marriage, which should also reflect faithfulness.

Verse 11: The people disobeyed God's law by marrying foreign, pagan women. This marriage **“profaned the Lord's holy institution”** which is the temple of the Lord and God's people. This sin is considered a betrayal of the Lord because there is a covenant between God and His children. Note that in verse 10, although the prophet didn't sin, he places himself with the sinners. **“We deal treacherously with one another.”**

Verse 12: **“May the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob the man who does this...”** By disobeying the covenant of marriage, he will be separated from God's people and the heavenly inheritance. Even priests are not exempt.

“Tents of Jacob”: refers to the people of God.

“Yet who brings an offering”: even the priest will be cut off.

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Warning Against Divorce (Malachi 2:13-17)

These verses address the issue of divorce and unfaithfulness in marriage.

Verse 13: “And this is the second thing you do...” They had once expelled foreign wives in repentance, then they forgot the covenant and married foreign women again.

“You cover the altar of the Lord with tears...” They mistreated their wives and divorced them without a reason, then they married foreign women. The men wept at the altar of the Lord because God no longer accepted their offerings. The abandoned wives also wept because they were unjustly divorced. God sees their tears that have covered the altar and rejected the sacrifices and offerings of their husbands. **“So He does not regard the offering anymore.”**

Verse 14: “Because the Lord has been witness between you and the wife of your youth.” God is the witness to the marriage. Marriage is not a social agreement, but a divine covenant made before God. He sees the heart and He is the only one who will judge with justice.

Verse 15: “But did He not make them one?” From the beginning, God made marriage to be a union. He created Adam then formed Eve from him, making them one.

Verse 16: “For the Lord God of Israel says that He hates divorce.” God created marriage as a sacred covenant, and divorce violates that covenant. **“For it covers one’s garment with violence”** God sees divorce as an act of betrayal. **“Take heed to your spirit”** God will punish every unjust person.

Verse 17: “Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord” They accused God of rewarding evil with good things. **“Where is the God of justice?”** They questioned God’s justice.

They could no longer see the difference between good and evil. Their sense of right and wrong was so distorted that they thought God favored the wicked. Malachi warns that this thinking is dangerous. The God of justice will come and judge with righteousness.

Chapter Three

The first words of Chapter 3 directly answer the question previously asked: **“Where is the God of justice?”** The answer here is that He is coming soon. He is coming to correct all situations, and His coming will be preceded by St. John the Baptist.

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Preparation for the Coming of the Savior (Malachi 3:1-6)

The word **angel** means “prophet” or “messenger”. That’s why everyone agrees that St. John the Baptist was the prophet referred to in this verse. He prepared the way for the Lord Jesus Christ by calling people to repentance. St. John the Baptist prepared the way before Christ, and then Lord Jesus Christ came directly after him.



Verse 1: “And the Lord, whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple.” This is a clear prophecy about the coming of Christ to the Jewish people, that He will suddenly appear in His temple. Indeed, this prophecy was fulfilled when our Lord Jesus Christ entered the temple: as a baby at 40 days old, at age 12, and later when He cleansed the temple by expelling the money changers and sellers.

“Messenger of the covenant”: The Son is called a ‘messenger’ because He was sent by God, the Father, to establish a new covenant.

“Will suddenly come to His temple” refers to the incarnation. The true temple that our Lord Jesus Christ established is the temple of His Body.

Verse 2: “But who can endure the day of His coming?” The glory of our Lord Jesus Christ appeared multiple times: at His Transfiguration, when those sent to arrest Him fell to the ground, in His miracles, and when demons trembled before Him.

“And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire”: The Jewish nation didn’t last because they rejected and crucified the Savior. But God tolerated all the mistakes of the Roman Empire, knowing they would eventually come to believe, while the emperors who persecuted Christianity await a fearful judgment. Even the devils have not been able to withstand Him, from His incarnation to this day, they are tormented by the power of the Cross.

Verse 3: “He will purify the sons of Levi”: The sons of Levi represent the priests. Christ will purify them, making them worthy to offer righteous sacrifices and serve faithfully.

Verse 4: “As in the days of old”: The Lord was pleased with Noah, Abraham, and Fathers of the Old Testament who lived by faith and righteousness.

Verse 5: “And I will come near you for judgment”: The Lord will come on the Day of Judgment. It will be a day of joy and gladness for those who accepted Him. And the contrary to those who rejected Him, followed their lusts, or oppressed others, such as strangers and the vulnerable.

“I will be a swift witness”: The Day of Judgment will come suddenly and unexpectedly. Though our Lord declared His love on the Cross, He still hates evil and sin and will judge and punish the wicked.

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Returning to the Lord of Hosts (Malachi 3:7-12)

Verse 7: God is rebuking them for turning away from His service “**from the days of your fathers**” as they are repeating the same sins of their fathers. “**Return to Me and I will return to you**” God is calling them to repent their sins.

Verse 8: “Will a man rob God?” Who dares to do this and steal from God? When we don’t pay the tithes, we are stealing from God, because this is not mine, but God’s.

“Yet you have robbed Me!” God accused them of stealing from the holy things which is considered the worst type of theft.

Application for us: *Tithes are not just from our money, but also our time. There are times we should offer to God and spend them in prayers, Bible study, and attending church meetings and services.*

Verse 9: “You are cursed with a curse” When a person robs God, he should expect the blessings to cease. He should expect famine, bad weather, and insects to eat the crops.

“Even this whole nation” and since the sin was collective, the punishment will be collective.

Verse 10: “Bring all the tithes” for some of them brought only some of their tithes, like Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5).

“That there may be food in My house” for those who serve at the altar can find their food.

“And try Me now in this” this is the only time that God has allowed us to test Him. The believer pays his tithes and waits for the blessings from God.

Verse 11: “And I will rebuke the devourer for your sake” God will stop the growth of the insects that eat the crops such as the locusts. For all the creation is under the Lord’s command. “**Nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you**” it will not go bad.

Verse 12: “And all nations will call you blessed” everyone will talk about you with respect and bless your God.

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Corruption of Concepts (Malachi 3:13-15)

Some people listened to the prophet and others mocked him.

Verse 13: “Your words have been harsh against Me” They rejected the Lord’s judgments, and they said bad words without feeling ashamed.

“What have we spoken against You?” Asking the prophet to provide evidence for what was said.

Verse 14: “You have said, it is useless to serve God.” They said worshiping God, fasting and praying would bring pain and sorrow.

“And that we have walked as mourners before the Lord of hosts” They said it is difficult to worship God, and made it appear as a burdensome duty. They didn’t understand that it fills the heart with joy and peace.

Verse 15: “So now we call the proud blessed” In their short sightedness, they said that the wicked are successful and wealthy. They thought that this success was forever and called the wicked blessed.

God is Treating them as Sons (Malachi 3:16–18)

Verse 16: “Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another” They talked about God with love.

“And the Lord listened and heard them.” God notices the good deeds and doesn’t forget the love of His people. **“So a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the Lord”** God does not forget someone’s love no matter how small. Even offering a cup of water in His name will not be forgotten. **“And who meditate on His name.”** They meditate on the name of the Lord and His love to them which deepens their relationship with God.

Verse 17: How is God rewarding the righteous? **“On the day that I make them My jewels.”** This means that in eternity, the righteous will be God’s beloved people and a special possession of God.

“And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him.” On the Day of Judgement, God will rescue His people. God will deal with us not according to what we deserve, but according to His mercy.

Verse 18: “Then you shall again discern between the righteous and the wicked.” The difference between the righteous and the wicked will appear in eternity. The righteous will be in glory while the wicked will suffer. The righteous will receive the reward for their righteousness and rejoice and praise the Lord.

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Chapter Four

In this chapter, we are told about the Day of Judgment and the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ:

The Rising of the Sun of Righteousness (Malachi 4:1–3)

Verse 1: “For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven” It is a day of wrath and fire. The arrogant and the wicked will be like stubble or fuel for the fire. But those who fear the Lord will become like gold that becomes purer when tested.

“That will leave them neither root nor branch.” This means that on this day, God will eradicate those whose hearts were attached to wickedness.

Verse 2: “But to you who fear My name” For those who fear His name, the Lord will shine, for Christ is the light of the world. It will be a joyful and beautiful day for those who fear the Lord.

“The Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings” He shines with the light of healing and salvation. **“And you shall go out”** The righteous will come out of the dark and narrow prison; their bodies will come out of their graves. **“And grow fat like stall-fed calves”** Then you shall leap in joy just like those calves who freely leap without any stress, worry or grief.

Verse 3: “You shall trample the wicked” The righteous will have victory over their enemies.

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The Promise to the Righteous (Malachi 4:4-6)

Verse 4: “Remember the Law of Moses” There is no doubt that this verse was intended to be the conclusion not only of this prophecy but of all the books of the Old Testament. They should not expect any other prophecies until our Lord Jesus Christ comes. **“The statutes and the judgments”** mean not only the Ten Commandments but all the ordinances, laws and rituals.

Verse 5: “I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.”

The Church Fathers have interpreted the two witnesses mentioned in Revelation as **Elijah and Enoch**. Neither of them experienced death, having been taken up by God. They will return before the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, to call the world to repentance.

Verse 6: “And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers,” The coming of St. John the Baptist was to call people to repentance and prepare them to receive our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the same way, Elijah will come before the Second Coming to call people back to God and restore broken relationships.

Family relationships have been corrupted because of divorce and the corruption of marriages. Elijah will come to restore love within families and confront the sins that have caused this corruption.

“Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.” The last word in the Old Testament is **“curse”**; for curse will be upon those who rejected the Lord Jesus Christ. While the last verse of the New Testament is about **grace** for Christ came to remove the curse.

“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen. (Revelation 22:21)

The Council of Nicaea and the Orthodox Creed

Our Coptic Church is a strong church with a rich and glorious history. Despite facing many hardships and tribulations over the centuries—persecution, heresies, and more—nothing could defeat her. Her holy saints remained faithful and strong; they opposed the false teachings with all their might and endured pain and persecution to protect the Christian faith and deliver it to us unchanged.

The Heresy of Arius

The heresy of Arius began during the papacy of Pope Peter I. Arius was a priest in Alexandria who deviated from the true Orthodox faith. At first, he taught his false teachings in secret, but later he began teaching them openly.

1. Arius wrongly claimed (false teaching):

- That the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son is of less divinity than God the Father, which makes Him not One in essence with the Father.

In the Trinity, the three Persons—or three hypostases—exist within the one, undivided essence of God. The three hypostases have the same attributes of the divine essence. (i.e. As human beings, we have the same attributes of humanity). However, each hypostasis (person) has a distinct (unique) attribute. They have the same attribute of divinity, the essence. But each one is distinguished in the hypostatical or personal attribute.

- But St. Athanasius defended the true Orthodox faith and proved Arius wrong by using verses from the Holy Bible:
 - [“I and My Father are one.” \(John 10:30\)](#)
 - [“He who has seen Me has seen the Father.” \(John 14:9\)](#)
 - [“All things that the Father has are Mine.” \(John 16:15\)](#)

2. Arius also falsely claimed (false teaching):

- That the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son is not equal with God the Father and only fulfilled what the Father commanded.
- He used this verse to support his claim:
 - [“I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.” \(John 5:30\)](#)
- St. Athanasius explained that our Lord Jesus Christ spoke as the incarnate God; sometimes He spoke from the perspective of His humanity (being a man on earth).
 - [“Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done.” \(Luke 22:42\)](#)
 - [“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” \(Matthew 27:46\)](#)

“BUT YOU MUST CONTINUE IN THE THINGS WHICH YOU HAVE LEARNED” (II TIMOTHY 3:14)

- At other times, the Lord Jesus Christ spoke about being equal to the Father and being of the same essence as the Father.
 - **“I am in the Father, and the Father in Me” (John 14:10)**

3. Arius also falsely claimed (false teachings):

- That the Lord Jesus Christ received His authority from the Father.
- He used this verse to support his claim:
 - **“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.” (Matthew 28:18)**
- St. Athanasius explained that the Lord Jesus Christ, being of one essence with the Father, has all the authority that the Father has.
 - **“For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will.” (John 5:21)**

The Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God

- We believe that our Lord Jesus Christ is the incarnate Word of God (Logos). He existed from the beginning:
 - **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (John 1:1)**
- Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself declared His divinity when He was asked by the chief priests and scribes:
 - **“Then they all said, ‘Are You then the Son of God?’ So He said to them, ‘You rightly say that I am.’” (Luke 22:70)**

Pope Athanasius defended the true faith. He is known as **“the Defender of the Faith”**.

The Ecclesiastical Upbringing of St. Athanasius:

- He was born around the year 296 AD to pagan parents.
- As a child, He befriended and played with Christian children his age.
- One day, Pope Alexandros, his predecessor, watched the children play and St. Athanasius acting as the bishop baptizing the others.
- Pope Alexandros took him as a youth, baptized him, and ordained him a deacon.
- He later became Pope Alexandros's secretary who sent St. Athanasius to the School of Alexandria, where he learned theology, philosophy, and the Holy Bible. He became a great theologian in our Church.
- He wrote many works explaining the Orthodox faith like **‘On the Incarnation of the Word’**.
- He spent his life teaching the Orthodox Christian faith and refuting the Arian heresy.
- He spent 3 years in the desert with St. Anthony the Great, who taught him **spirituality, asceticism, and living the faith**.



“BUT YOU MUST CONTINUE IN THE THINGS WHICH YOU HAVE LEARNED” (II TIMOTHY 3:14)

St. Athanasius at the Council of Nicea:

- In 325 A.D., The Church held the Council of Nicea to address the heresy of Arius.
- 318 bishops attended, along with Emperor Constantine.
- St. Athanasius, as a deacon, accompanied Pope Alexandros.
- He contended earnestly for the apostolic doctrines against the arguments of Arius.
- He had a prominent role in the formulation of the Creed, which was approved by the Council and is known as the Nicene Creed.

During the Council of Nicea, The Creed was formulated until: "...whose kingdom shall have no end". Arius and his followers were excommunicated.



The Nicene Creed

The Nicene Creed was finalized at the first Ecumenical Council in Nicea (325) and at the second Ecumenical Council in Constantinople (381). It was the definitions of these councils that were ultimately accepted by the Orthodox Church as the correct Symbol of Faith.

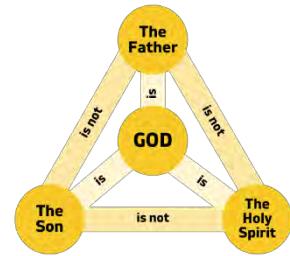
To be an Orthodox Christian is to affirm the Orthodox Christian faith presented in the dogmatic treasure that is explained in the Creed and all that have been expressly developed from it in the Orthodox Church over the centuries down to the present day.

Faith is the foundation of the Christian life, as is evident in our liturgical prayers. In the Divine Liturgy, we begin the Liturgy of Faithful by declaring our faith through the recitation of the Creed.

The Three Basic Beliefs of the Orthodox Faith in the Creed:

1. The Holy Trinity:

One cannot read the Holy Bible nor the history of the Church without being struck by the numerous references to God the Father, the Son (Word), and the Holy Spirit. It is the Church's teaching and its deepest experience that there is only one God because there is only one Father.



In the Holy Bible the term “God”, with very few exceptions, is primarily used to refer to God the Father. Thus, the Son is the “Son of God,” and the Spirit is the “Spirit of God.” The Son is begotten of the Father, and the Spirit proceeds from the Father—both in the same timeless and eternal action of the Father's own being. In this view, the Son and the Spirit are both one with God the Father and in no way separated from Him.

Thus, the Divine Unity consists of the Father, with His Son and His Spirit distinct from Himself and yet perfectly united together in Him.

“BUT YOU MUST CONTINUE IN THE THINGS WHICH YOU HAVE LEARNED” (II TIMOTHY 3:14)

2. Salvation:



Only God can save the world. However, it had to be a man who paid the price for transgression, since it was man who sinned. But man, alone, could not do it because man himself needed to be saved. Therefore, the divine Son of God was born as a man of the Holy Spirit from the Virgin Mary.

“And the angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.” (Luke 1:35).

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He is the Lamb of God who was slain, that through Him all sins might be forgiven. He is also the great High Priest who offered the perfect Sacrifice by which humanity is cleansed from sin and purified from iniquities. As High Priest, our Lord Jesus Christ offers the perfect sacrifice, His very own life, and His own body, as the Lamb of God, upon the tree of the Cross.

Although our Lord Jesus Christ did not sin and did not need to suffer and die, He willingly took upon Himself the sins of the world and voluntarily gave Himself up to suffering and death for the sake of man's salvation. This was His mission as the Messiah and Savior.

3. The Church:

In the Church, all become one in Christ; all put on the renewed and glorified humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Nicene Creed affirms belief in **one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church**. This means:

- **One Church:** There is only one true Church established by the Lord Jesus Christ, united in faith and sacraments.
- **Holy:** The Church is holy because it is the Body of Christ, made holy by the presence of the Holy Spirit.
- **Catholic:** The Church is universal, for all people, in all places and times.
- **Apostolic:** The Church is founded on the teachings and traditions handed down from the apostles.



The Coptic Orthodox Church faithfully continues to preserve the apostolic faith and sacraments given to us by the Lord Jesus Christ and His apostles.

“For as many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” (Galatians 3:27)

Within the unity of the Church, humanity becomes what it was created to be, to live in full communion with God.

“through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.” (2 Peter 1:3-4)

Without the Church, through its sacraments and spirituality, we cannot fully experience communion with God in this sinful world.

Spiritual Canon

Why and How?

A law is a system that regulates something or makes it legal in accordance with an established and recognized order.

All creation follows a fixed system: the weather, astronomy, and nature all operate according to laws. There are also traffic laws, commercial laws for banks, military laws, the penal code, and regulations for universities. All of creation teaches us that there must be laws to govern the course of life. If all of creation follows laws, then surely the human being—the crown of creation—must also live his life according to a clear and defined system.



If all of creation has a fixed law, then our spiritual life must also have a spiritual law – a spiritual canon. The spiritual canon is the system of spiritual life between a person and God, agreed upon with the priest you confess to. The canon is what organizes and regulates our spiritual life, our spiritual commitments, and our spiritual conduct. It governs the entire course of our spiritual journey.

Who established these rules?

It is a system derived from the experience of the saints who strived to live by the commandments. These rules came as a result of their long experience and through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. All of them are based on the commandments of the Holy Bible—they are a practical interpretation or application of those biblical commandments.

The Importance of the Spiritual Canon

It facilitates our spiritual journey and struggle and brings joy to our spiritual life.



Spiritual rules are not merely a set of practices like fasting and prayers—they are also rules that regulate our thoughts, goals, principles, and behaviors

The Goals of Spiritual Canon

- A Spiritual canon is like nourishment—it satisfies and quenches the soul. Its primary goal is to delight in the love of God and to enjoy constant fellowship in His presence. It is meant to help us spend more time with God, deepen our relationship with Him, and grow in His love.
- It makes it easier to return to God in times of spiritual laziness.
- It reveals the right path and helps me discern.
- It serves as a measure of one's spiritual life and a tool for self-examination to evaluate one's spiritual journey.
- It supports me on my spiritual journey, brings me joy, and gives me a foretaste of eternal life.
- It is a strong fortress against the attacks of the devil. It is a powerful weapon against the enemy and a remedy for spiritual ailments. Neglecting my spiritual canon exposes me to danger.

“BUT YOU MUST CONTINUE IN THE THINGS WHICH YOU HAVE LEARNED” (II TIMOTHY 3:14)

The Consequences of Not Adhering to a Spiritual Law

The one who does not abide by the spiritual canon is a slave to desires and lusts.

The harm that results from not following the spiritual canon is not a punishment or vengeance from God for not listening to Him. Rather, it is a natural consequence of not adhering to what is beneficial to me. It is like a student who does not study—the natural result is that he fails the exam.

In daily life, a person forces himself to do many things like eating or taking medicine, and many other necessities of life. So why shouldn't I also compel myself to do what is spiritual and essential for my salvation and eternity? It is better to commit with conviction, awareness, and joy, and to make that commitment in freedom.

1 Corinthians 9:24–27

In these verses, our teacher St. Paul the Apostle uses examples from athletic competitions. The word "run" refers to struggle, sweat, toil, and bitter conflict. This is a reference to St. Paul's ministry and his efforts in preaching—he runs to obtain the crown of glory, which is the reward of victory. This message is directed to each one of us. Spiritual life is not a life of laziness, sluggishness, or complacency.

There is, however, a difference between striving in a sports arena and in the spiritual field. In the former, only one person wins the prize—perhaps two. But in the spiritual realm, everyone who strives can receive the reward. We are all called to obtain the crown, but the more one strives, the more one receives, **“for one star differs from another in glory,”** as is written in 1 Corinthians 15:41.



St. Paul Presents Three Examples of Spiritual Struggle

1. The Good Soldier (2 Timothy 2:3–4):

This soldier fights faithfully on behalf of his king or leader and endures hardships. Likewise, the Christian fights against Satan and sin by the Holy Spirit under the leadership of the Lord of Glory Himself and is willing to sacrifice himself for Christ.



“BUT YOU MUST CONTINUE IN THE THINGS WHICH YOU HAVE LEARNED” (II TIMOTHY 3:14)



2. The Athlete in Competition (2 Timothy 2:5):

They strive to obtain a crown and endure daily training to attain victory. They voluntarily abstain from certain foods and pleasures to prepare for the race, how much more should the believer, for the sake of the heavenly crown, willingly refrain from things that hinder his salvation with complete freedom and choice.

3. The Hardworking Farmer (2 Timothy 2:6):

This one toils for the sake of the fruit. And the one who labors and plows certainly partakes in the harvest, deserves his share. Those who labor in His service will receive eternal glory.



Features of the Spiritual Canon

A spiritual canon is not against free will, it's something I choose freely. Satan tries to deceive us in believing that it is an obligation. Truth is, we practice with spiritual awareness and personal freedom.

The priest **offers** the canon but does not enforce it or compel his children to follow it. Rather, he advises, guides, encourages, and persuades. He simply points out its benefits.

Spiritual canon is not a burden. It is a beneficial, necessary, and vital system for human salvation. That's why it must be practiced **freely, joyfully, and with conviction**.

The idea of self-denial is when I **willfully** constrain my will to submit to God's will—because His will is always good. Free will is exercised in spiritual life. However, since my will is not always fully aligned with God's will due to human weakness, I must exert some self-denial to conform to God's good and perfect will. Just like I might force myself to study or exercise because of the benefits I see in it.



There is a big difference between **self-denial** and **obligation**. **Self-denial** is voluntary, but **obligation** is forced. Freedom comes with responsibility and accountability. This sense of responsibility for my own salvation and eternity makes practicing the spiritual canon easier.

Spiritual canon is **flexible**. While it requires commitment and self-discipline, it is not rigid. Spiritual canon is like medication prescribed by a good doctor—given according to the unique needs of the patient. This flexibility supports **consistency** in practicing. The canon, or its "dosage," may change, but the goal never changes: **the salvation of the person and their journey toward the love of God**.

“BUT YOU MUST CONTINUE IN THE THINGS WHICH YOU HAVE LEARNED” (II TIMOTHY 3:14)

Canon Requires Consistency

What frightens the devils most is our **consistency** in keeping our spiritual rules. Being committed to a spiritual canon is like a soldier who faithfully trains every day, even during times of peace, so he will be **ready for battle** when the time comes.

Because spiritual canon nourishes the soul, it must support **growth and gradual progress**, varying from person to person. This growth is not only in **quantity**, but more importantly in **quality**—in the way we practice the canon: in depth, in experience, and in the sense of God's presence.

A spiritual canon is like a **ladder** that we climb gradually toward a higher spiritual stature. Growth here means continuous progress toward the ultimate goal: **a deeper knowledge of God** and a constant enjoyment of **His presence**.



The Wars That Hinder the Practice of a Spiritual Law

Discussion Questions:

- What prevents you from practicing a spiritual law daily?
- What are the challenges we may face in our commitment to the spiritual law?

All obstacles generally fall under three main categories:

- 1. Postponing the canon**
- 2. Obstruction of the canon**
- 3. Deviance of the goal of the canon**

We can sort all the following struggles under these headings:

1. Lukewarmness and Boredom:

This is a common spiritual war. A person may feel drained, cold-hearted, and unwilling to continue. They might rush through their spiritual rule just to finish it. In such cases, the **fathers recommend persistence**—doing something is better than doing nothing.



In such times, effort becomes a **sacrificial offering** pleasing to God. This leads to **humility** and **teach perseverance and persistence** in prayer. The key is **not to give up**.

2. Wasting Time:

Satan pushes us to spend time on anything—just to leave us with no time for our spiritual law. This is the war of **procrastination**: "I'll do it—but not now."



For example, a student might waste hours on social media and at the end of the day find no time for studying. They end up giving their leftover time to prayer or Scripture.

“BUT YOU MUST CONTINUE IN THE THINGS WHICH YOU HAVE LEARNED” (II TIMOTHY 3:14)

3. Pride:

Like the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18:9–14. The Pharisee was faithful in keeping certain spiritual rules but became **self-righteous** and **looked down on others**.



But Scripture tells us: "**When you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants'**" (Luke 17:10).

So, why pride? What credit do I deserve for simply doing what is required of me? Practicing my spiritual canon is the **least** I owe.

4. Wandering Thoughts and Distractions:

This is one of the most difficult battles people face. The human mind **never stops thinking**. So, either we offer it **spiritual thoughts**, or we leave it to **drift into worldly and vain ones**.

Distraction often comes from **scattered senses, lack of a peaceful environment**, or the **burden of many worries**. The devil uses these to distract us and consume our time and energy with trivial matters.

5. Physical Exhaustion:

Sometimes, one keeps their canon for the end of the day and end up not doing it because of feeling tired.



Other times, it is due to illnesses and this needs to be discussed with the father of confession.

6. Losing or Changing the Goal:

The devil might deceive us in believing that the canon, itself, is the goal. This can lead to frustration if it's not completed, or pride if it is, like the Pharisees and hypocrites.

Even more dangerously, the enemy may lead us to **compare ourselves with worldly people** who seem to do whatever they want and still look happy and fulfilled. Then we might ask: "Why should I deny myself and deprive myself of so many pleasures?"

7. Hiding Your Spiritual Law:

Some people hide their spiritual practices under the excuse of being discreet. For example, they might say: "I don't like to pray in front of others at home."

But if this **discretion leads to neglecting the rule**, then it is a mistake. We must **continue practicing our spiritual rule** without focusing too much on hiding it, because this can be a trick from the devil to **stop us from praying or committing altogether**.

“BUT YOU MUST CONTINUE IN THE THINGS WHICH YOU HAVE LEARNED” (II TIMOTHY 3:14)

Elements of a Spiritual Canon

1. Prayer:

- Do you pray regularly?
- Do you pray with focus and depth?
- Are your requests spiritual, or only materialistic?
- Do you feel God's presence in your prayers and connect with Him?

Or do you consider prayer simply a task to complete?



2. The Holy Bible:

- Do you read the Bible regularly with understanding and focus?
- Do you apply the commandments in your life?
- Does the Bible shape your thoughts and behaviors?
- Do you reflect on what you read?
- Do you memorize a verse each day?



3. Repentance and Confession:

- Every time you confess, do you come with a genuine repentance and strong resolution not to return to sin?
- Are you striving for change, or has confession become a routine?
- Do you rejoice in the grace of forgiveness?



4. Attending the Liturgy and Receiving the Eucharist:

- Do you attend the Divine Liturgy early?
- Do you thank God for the gift of union with Him through Communion every time?
- Do you ask to enjoy His presence in your life and feel it?
- Do you pray for the needs of others or just your own?



5. Spiritual Meetings:

- Do you regularly attend your weekly spiritual gatherings?
- Do you actively participate?
- Do you strive to live out what you hear?
- Does attending the meeting impact your life?
- Do your family members notice a change in your behavior?

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WHICH YOU HAVE LEARNED” (II TIMOTHY 3:14)**

6. Personal Retreat (Quiet Time):

- Are you committed to spending half an hour daily alone with Christ?
- Do you have weekly times for study, meditation, or memorization?
- Do you dedicate personal, quiet time for your growth and joy?



7. Reading Spiritual Books:

- Does spiritual reading have a daily place in your schedule?
- Do you practice what you read?
- Do you seek deeper understanding and growth in spiritual knowledge?

8. Almsgiving and Service:

- What is your attitude towards giving?
- Do you strive to give?
- Do you see giving as only financial, or as also giving your time, effort, and care in service?
- Do you regularly offer your tithes?



9. Fasting:

- What does fasting mean to you? Is it just avoiding certain foods for a period of time?
- Do you give God more time during the fast?
- Do you aim to grow in a particular virtue during each fast?

In Conclusion: Focus on the **depth and spirit** of the practice within your spiritual canon, not just on doing it as a habit or routine.

The Eucharist

“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 6:53-55)

The Mysteries of the Church

The Mysteries (or Sacraments) of the Church are the channels by which we receive the graces and blessings of the Holy Spirit. God the Holy Spirit works in the Church through the Mysteries giving us His gifts, blessings, and comfort; teaching and guiding us in the way of Truth.

The Church has Seven Mysteries: **Baptism, Confirmation, Repentance & Confession, Eucharist, Unction of the Sick, Matrimony, and Priesthood.**

Of these Mysteries, the first four are redemptive, they are necessary for salvation. Every believer should practice them in order to gain eternal life. The Mysteries of the Church are all **instituted by the Lord Jesus Christ** and are **administered by the father the priest**. They have an **invisible grace** which we receive by practicing a **visible rite**.



In the Eucharist, the visible rite is the Divine Liturgy with the bread and wine, by which we eat the Holy Body and the Precious Blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, abiding in Him and He in us.

The Eucharist

The Mystery of the Eucharist is often called the **“Mystery of Mysteries”** or the **“Crown of the Sacraments,”** and it carries the greatest importance among the Seven Mysteries. One must receive the Eucharist immediately after receiving Baptism, Confirmation, Confession, Priesthood, and even Matrimony (according to the original order of the Church). Also, after the General Unction of the Sick on the last Friday of the Great Fast.

The word **Eucharist** comes from the Greek word **εὐχαριστία (ev-kharistia)**, meaning “thanksgiving.” The Lord gave thanks at the institution of the Eucharist during the Last Supper.

“He took bread, gave thanks, and broke it...” (Luke 22:19)

“BUT YOU MUST CONTINUE IN THE THINGS WHICH YOU HAVE LEARNED” (II TIMOTHY 3:14)

The term “Eucharist” was the preferred term among the 1st and 2nd-century Christians, as it reflects the Church’s response of thanksgiving for God’s saving work.

“And when I call it ‘thanksgiving’ (Eucharist), I unfold all the treasure of God’s goodness and call to mind those mighty gifts.” (St. John Chrysostom (4th Century))

Holy Communion

Meaning “fellowship” or “sharing”, this term for the Eucharist is used by St. Paul when he writes:

“The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.” (1 Corinthians 10:16-17).

The term “Holy Communion” emphasizes the union of the faithful with Christ and with one another, as members of the One Body of Christ.

The Institution of the Eucharist

“He instituted for us this great Mystery of godliness.” (Liturgy of St. Basil: The Institution Narrative)

The Institution of the Eucharist by the Lord Jesus Christ is recorded in:

- **Matthew 26**
- **Mark 14**
- **Luke 22**
- **1 Corinthians 11**



Additionally, in **John 6** the Lord Jesus Christ reveals the meaning of the Eucharistic Mystery, proclaiming Himself “the Bread of Life.”

After eating the Jewish Passover with His disciples, the Lord Jesus Christ washed their feet. The washing of the feet was a sign of repentance and was their preparation for the Eucharist they were about to receive.

“Jesus rose up from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.” (John 13:4-5)

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Following this, the Lord instituted the Eucharist with His disciples. St Paul writes:

“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; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes.” (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

“For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.”

(Matthew 26:28)

The Lord Jesus Christ administered the Eucharist to His disciples, giving them to eat of His Body and drink of His Blood for the remission of sins, and instructing them to, **“Do this in remembrance of Me.”** The Apostles, following the instruction of the Lord, celebrated the Eucharist throughout the Book of Acts, continuing into the early Church, and is faithfully preserved to this day.

The Old Testament Points to the Eucharist

The Tree of Life:

When God created the heavens and the earth, He planted a garden eastward in Eden, and placed Adam and Eve there. **“The Tree of Life was also in the midst of the garden.”** **(Genesis 2:9)**

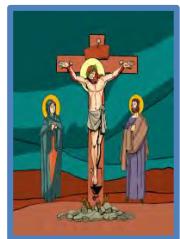


At the Fall of Man, when Adam and Eve sinned, **“the Lord God said, ‘Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever’ – therefore the Lord God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken.”** **(Genesis 3:22-23)**



Because of sin, Adam and Eve, and all of humanity was cast out of the garden and were not permitted to eat from the Tree of Life. But through the Cross, the Lord restored our nature and enabled us to partake of the Tree of Life—His Holy Body and His Precious Blood.

**“We have become worthy to have • the Tree of Life to eat from,
• which is the Body of God, • and His True Blood.”** (Thursday Theotokia Part 2)



“BUT YOU MUST CONTINUE IN THE THINGS WHICH YOU HAVE LEARNED” (II TIMOTHY 3:14)

The Passover:

Before the Lord delivered Israel out of the land of Egypt during the Exodus, in the tenth plague, the Israelites were instructed to prepare a perfect, year-old male lamb to slaughter at twilight and to apply its blood to the wood of the doorposts and lintel of each home. Inside, they were to roast the whole animal – without breaking any bones – eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs, and do so in haste, letting none of it remain. By doing this, they would be “passed over” in the tenth plague – the first born of every house would be saved from death.

“For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.” (1 Corinthians 5:7)

St. Paul teaches us that the Lord Jesus Christ is our true Passover. He is the **“Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29)**. His Blood was shed on the wood of the Cross, with none of His bones being broken. His Body and Blood are received in the Eucharist. Through this, we are granted salvation from the death of sin and granted eternal life.

“He made His own Body food and His own Blood drink for His disciples;
for this much is clear enough to anyone,
that a sheep cannot be eaten by a man unless,
its being eaten, be preceded by its being slaughtered.

This giving of His own Body to His disciples for eating clearly indicates
that the sacrifice of the Lamb has now been completed.”

(St. Gregory of Nyssa (4th Century))



“BUT YOU MUST CONTINUE IN THE THINGS WHICH YOU HAVE LEARNED” (II TIMOTHY 3:14)

The Manna in the Desert:

When Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt and through the desert, the Lord provided sustenance in the form of manna: **“Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day” (Exodus 16:4)**

The Lord Jesus Christ reminded the Jews of this manna, the **“bread from heaven”**. While it temporarily sustained those who ate it in the wilderness, they still died. But He is the true Bread of Life, giving eternal life to those who partake of Him.

“I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.” (John 6:48-51)

“The Bread of Life • who came down for us • from heaven • gave life unto the world.”

(Sunday Theotokia Part 4)

The Presence of Christ in the Eucharist

How does the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ? It's a **Mystery!** The Apostles, the Early Church Fathers, and our Orthodox Church do not attempt to describe or explain *how* the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ. What we know is what we have received: after the Liturgical Prayers, the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ.

“I believe, I believe, I believe, and confess to the last breath that this is the life giving Flesh that You took, O Christ my God, from the Lady of us all, the holy Theotokos, Saint Mary. You made It one with Your divinity without mingling, without confusion, and without alteration... You gave it up for us upon the holy wood of the Cross, of Your own will, for us all.” (Liturgy of St. Gregory (Confession))



At the end of the Divine Liturgy, the priest prays the Confession and says that “this” (the Holy Mysteries in his hand) is the same Flesh taken from Saint Mary, united with His Divinity, and given up on the wood of the Cross for us all.

The Protestant Reformers of the 16th Century introduced new ideas about the Eucharist that are contrary to the Orthodox understanding handed down from the Lord Jesus Christ. These ideas persist until today in various Protestant Denominations.

- Ulrich Zwingli believed that the Eucharist is “a symbol” of Christ’s Body and Blood.
- John Calvin claimed that Christ is “spiritually present” in the bread.

These views arose 1,500 years after Christ and the Church and are not supported by the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ, the preaching of the Apostles, or the writings of the Church Fathers.

“BUT YOU MUST CONTINUE IN THE THINGS WHICH YOU HAVE LEARNED” (II TIMOTHY 3:14)

In John 6, the Lord Jesus Christ declared: **“Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life... for My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed.”**

Many of His disciples responded, **“This is a hard saying,”** and **“walked with Him no more.”** Yet the Lord Jesus Christ offered **no correction**—His teaching remained clear and literal, not symbolic.

The Church Fathers on the Eucharist

- “When the Master, Himself, has explicitly said of the bread, ‘This is My Body,’ will anyone still dare to doubt? When He is, Himself, our warranty, saying, ‘This is My Blood,’ who will ever waver and say it is not His Blood?” (St. Cyril of Jerusalem (4th Century))
- “That you know that it is through the might of God the Pantocrator which surpasses all description, the oblations were changed in truth into Christ’s Body and Blood.” (St. Cyril of Alexandria (4th Century))
- “The bread, which is produced from the earth, when it receives the invocation of God, is no longer common bread, but the Eucharist.” (St. Irenaeus of Lyons (2nd Century))
- “So long as the prayers of supplication and entreaties have not been made, there is only bread and wine. But after the great and wonderful prayers have been completed, then the bread is become the Body, and the wine the Blood, of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (St. Athanasius (4th Century))



The Eucharist and Me

The Eucharist is Life

“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.” (John 6:53-54)

“Given for salvation, remission of sins, and eternal life to those who shall partake of It”
(Liturgy of St. Basil (Confession))

St. Augustine (4th Century) contrasts ordinary food with the Eucharist. With ordinary food, if you don’t eat it, you will die; if you do eat it, and you will still eventually die – by age, disease, or some other casualty.

But with Christ’s Body and Blood, there is a guarantee on both sides:

- Don’t eat, it leads to death.
- Eat, and you will live eternally.



“BUT YOU MUST CONTINUE IN THE THINGS WHICH YOU HAVE LEARNED” (II TIMOTHY 3:14)

The Eucharist is Abiding in Christ

“He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.” (John 6:56)

“We become one Body, and ‘members of His flesh and of His bones.’” (Ephesians 5:30)

“In order, then, that we may become this—not by love only, but in very deed—let us be blended into that flesh... On this account He has mixed up Himself with us; He has kneaded up His Body with ours, that we might be a certain One Thing, like a body joined to a head.” (St. John Chrysostom (4th Century))

When we abide in Him and He in us, His will, word, teachings, mannerisms, and goals become our own. This union enables a life of obedience to His commandments, purity, and sanctification. The natural result of abiding in Christ is the bearing of the fruit of the Spirit:

“love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control”.
(Galatians 5:23)

Preparing for the Eucharist

True Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ

- Only Orthodox Christians, baptized and confirmed in the Orthodox Church by an Orthodox priest, can receive the Eucharist.
- Having proclaimed the sound doctrine and belief in the Orthodox Creed
- Having faith in what is said during the Confession – this is the Body and Blood of Christ.

Reconciliation with Others

- **“Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.” (Matthew 5:23-24)**
- The Reconciliation Prayer and the Greeting with the Holy Kiss at the beginning of the Liturgy demonstrate the love of the believers in preparation for receiving the Mysteries.

Repentance & Confession

- **“Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body.” (1 Corinthians 11:28-29)**
- Living a life of repentance and regular confession with an Orthodox priest.
- A true feeling of unworthiness – approach the Mysteries with a contrite heart.



**“BUT YOU MUST CONTINUE IN THE THINGS
WHICH YOU HAVE LEARNED” (II TIMOTHY 3:14)**

Physical & Spiritual Preparation

**Consult your Father of Confession. Adjustments are made for the sick, the elderly, infants, and other pastoral circumstances.*

- Fasting from midnight (or for 9 hours – whichever is longer).
- Participating in the fasts of the Church (e.g. Advent, Great Fast, Apostles Fast, Wednesdays and Fridays, etc.)
- Attending Vespers, Midnight Praises; being on time to the Divine Liturgy.
- Refraining from the Mysteries during times of ritual impurity (e.g. bodily discharge, menstruation, nocturnal emission, bleeding, etc.).

**The Eucharist is the true Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ,
given for the remission of sins. Let us therefore approach the Holy Mysteries
with reverence and humility. In the Eucharist we receive Life.**

“Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who trusts in Him.” (Psalm 34:8)

Memorization

Psalm 67 (66) in the Sixth Hour in the Agpia

God be merciful to us and bless us, And cause His face to shine upon us. That Your way may be Known on earth, Your salvation among all nations. Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You. Oh, let the nations be glad and sing for joy! For You shall judge the people righteously, And govern the nations on earth. Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You. Then the earth shall yield her increase; God, our own God, shall bless us. God shall bless us, And all the ends of the earth shall fear Him. **Alleluia.**

The Gospel of the Sixth Hour in the Agpia

(Matthew 5:1-16)

A chapter from the Holy Gospel
according to St. Matthew
may his blessings be with us all. Amen.

And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are you When they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.

“Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavour, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men.

“You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.

“Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

Glory be to God forever. Amen.

Litanies of the Sixth Hour in the Agpia

Lord, who on the sixth day, at the sixth hour You were nailed to the Cross for the sin that Adam dared to commit in paradise. Break the bonds of our sins, Lord Christ and save us. I cried to the Lord and He heard me. Lord accept my prayer and answer my supplication, hear me in the evening and in the morning and at noon. Hear my words and spare my soul. **Thok-sa-patri Ke ey-you Ke agiyou epnevmaty.**

O' Jesus Christ, our Lord, who was nailed to the Cross at the sixth hour. You mortified sin by the cross, by your death You raised the dead; Man, whom You created with Your hands, who died to sin. O' Lord, may all our pains be ended through Your life giving and healing sufferings. May our minds be saved from foolishness and worldly desires to the remembrance of Your heavenly laws. **Ke-neen Ke-pee Ke-is-touse E-onas ton E-onon. Amen.**

Because of our many sins, we are without liberty, pretext or excuse, we can only plead to You, O' Virgin Mary, Mother of God, to pray to whom you gave birth, because your supplications are acceptable to our Saviour, O' Pure Mother, do not turn the sinners back, plead for them, because He to whom you gave birth is the merciful redeemer. He suffered to rescue us. O' Lord, we are helpless, we badly need Your compassion, help us for the sake of Your glory, God save us and forgive our sins for the sake of Your Holy Name. **Ke-neen Ke-pee Ke-is-touse E-onas ton E-onon. Amen.**

Sayings of the Church Fathers

1. “Read the divine Scriptures constantly. Never, indeed, let the sacred volume be out of your hand.” (St. Jerome)
2. “A tree is known by its fruit; a man by his deeds. A good deed is never lost; he who sows courtesy reaps friendship, and he who plants kindness gathers love.” (St. Basil the Great)

“BUT YOU MUST CONTINUE IN THE THINGS WHICH YOU HAVE LEARNED” (II TIMOTHY 3:14)

Anthem 2026

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(Our doctrine, from the start,
established by God himself,
preached by the apostles,
and our fathers kept it safe.) **2x**

a strong tree of faith,
its roots trace back to history,
pure and watered by God's words
(Rites and also liturgy) **2x**

firm,
firm in my faith and doctrine
Our church is fatherly
Orthodox as my forefathers
Heroes of the Coptic church.

Mark, Athanasious, Dioscoros,
heroes and pillars of faith,
though heresies arise,
still we're steadfast in our faith.

Rooted in your church,
be firm in what you've learned.

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