



Summer Festival | 2023 / 2024



REJOICE

Youth (19 -29 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

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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“ REJOICE ”

Rejoice Always

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.

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)**

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.

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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 Australian.

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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)

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
- 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.

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)

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.

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)**

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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).**

Rejoice through the Act of Prayer

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 ...

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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!**

“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.

“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)**

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The Epistle of St. James

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.

CHAPTER 1

This chapter is split into 4 main sections:

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.

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. 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.

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)**



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.



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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:

- a. “Even the demons believe”: Knowing or believing that God exists is not enough. For **“faith without works is dead.”**
- b. Abraham's work showed his faith: only when Abraham was about to sacrifice Isaac that he truly showed his faith in God.
- c. 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.

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:

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

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.

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.

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:

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.

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.

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

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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.

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.

CHAPTER 5

The saint ends his Epistle with general advice for everyone:

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.

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,’”**



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.

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.**

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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.

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.

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Is sound doctrine important for spiritual growth?

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:

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 do we 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.
- 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.

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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.**

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).

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)

In the **Sacrament of Eucharist**, we abide in Christ and He 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).

All these sacraments are served through the **Sacrament of the Priesthood**, the father the priest is entrusted by God over His holy mysteries.

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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.

St. Anthony the founder of monasticism, St. Macarius, St. Shenouda, St. Pachom, and St. Bishoy, 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.



Conclusion

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)**

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Personal Well-being

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 physical and 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. 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 understands that **“To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven:” (Ecclesiastes 3:1)** and live by that concept.

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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.

Healthy Relationships

Another sign of sound mental health is having healthy relationships. The balanced person can establish healthy relationships within his/her environments (school, work, church, neighbourhood, etc...). He/she is able - with God’s grace- to communicate well with all people.

Realistic Goals

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.

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Healthy Independence

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.

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, and God's words presented in the Holy Scriptures for our edification, and finally Godly counsel from a spiritual guide or father of confession. Rejecting others’ opinions and discounting their ideas without a conversation or dialogue is often a sign of a close-minded and immature personality.

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Rejoice in Salvation

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.

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? 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.
- 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?!

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

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)

- Humanity was 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.
- 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)**

“ REJOICE ”

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, born with this corrupt nature.
- 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.

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.

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.”**



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; **“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)**

“ REJOICE ”

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.

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.

Memorization

From The Midnight Prayers – First Watch

PSALM 3

LORD, how they have increased who trouble me! Many are they who rise up against me. Many are they who say of me, “There is no help for him in God.” But You, O LORD, are a shield for me, My glory and the One who lifts up my head. I cried to the LORD with my voice, And He heard me from His holy hill. . I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the LORD sustained me. I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people Who have set themselves against me all around. Arise, O LORD; Save me, O my God! For You have struck all my enemies on the cheekbone; You have broken the teeth of the ungodly. Salvation belongs to the LORD. Your blessing is upon Your people. **Alleluia.**

“ REJOICE ”

From The Midnight Prayers – First Watch

THE GOSPEL

(Matthew 25:1-13)

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

Amen.

“Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.

“Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish.

“Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, “but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.

“But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. “And at midnight a cry was heard: ‘Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!’

“Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps.

“And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ “But the wise answered, saying, ‘No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.’

“ REJOICE ”

“And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut. “Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open to us!’ “But he answered and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.’ “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.

Glory be to God forever. Amen.

“ 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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