

Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate Archangel Michael Church Howell, NJ



December, 2000

Volume1

Issue 12

Hatour/Kiahk 1717

Gradual Progress

From God and Nothing Else



Let God be your goal and proceed toward Him step by step. You definitely cannot start your spiritual life being perfect and you cannot start it by having God become everything to you. However, start by knowing and loving God and grow in this knowledge and love. Give to God from your heart and grow in this giving. Open your heart so God may dwell in it and widen the place of His dwelling.

Train yourself to forsake continuously some of what you like for the sake of God until the time comes when you can forsake everything for Him. For example, let us take fasting: Is it just forsaking some delicious food for God? No, it is a preparation for you to forsake, for God's sake, everything that you desire. It is a spiritual period in which you strengthen the spirit over the body to get closer to God day after day. The less you love the worldly matters, the more you love God. The most important thing is that you do

“ For this reason I bow my knees to the father of our lord Jesus Christ from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God “.
(Ephes. 3:14-19)

not stop at a certain step, but rather progress continuously.

Be like the seed that becomes a tree, then grows and grows. The Lord Jesus said, "The Kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head" (Mark 4:26-28).

This is the nature of growth: the seed, the blade, the head, then the fruit. Any seed thrown in the earth does not stop from growing. If it becomes a tree, the tree continues to grow everyday, even every hour and every moment. Growth is its nature whether you notice it or not. Definitely, if you are away from it for a period of time, you will notice the growth distinctly, and the tree does not get weary of extending upwards and does not stop growing. Be like this tree which grows upwards all the time and stretches to the right and to the left. It grows from a seed under the earth to a plant above the earth.

Likewise, take a lesson from the tree which grows. Devote time to God and let this time grow gradually. Give God from your emotions and love. Struggle that this love grows day after day and that this growth appears in your life and relationship with God. However, be cautious, if you cannot grow, at least do not regress. Then the Lord will tell you, "I have this against you, that you have left your first love" (Revelations 2:4).

Truly, it is a tragedy if God's love stops growing, or cools down and regresses, and you seek one of the good old days when the spirit was inflamed and cannot find it. Then one will cry saying, "I wish I was in

the earlier months in which God kept me, where He shone His light on my head. Oh that I were in the months past, as in the days when God watched over me; when His lamp shone upon my head, and where by His light I walked through darkness" (Job 29:2-3). If you regress, when then are you going to reach the goal that is far ahead? You have known God, this is good, but please grow in this knowledge. You may ask: what are the limits of that growth? Frankly, there are no limits.

You have reconciled with God by repentance, have formed a relationship with Him by purity, and have had fellowship with Him and loved Him. What comes next? The apostle says, "That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, that you being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:17-19).

"That you may be filled with all the fullness of God." What a marvelous expression! Thinking of that expression, I stand perplexed. Whenever I ponder its depth, I find it deeper than my understanding! Indeed, who is able to comprehend the fullness of God? Who can come closer to that fullness, or at least to the fullness of love which attaches man to God?

"Be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18). You should not only have a relationship with the Spirit, or be in submission and obedience to the Spirit, or have the Spirit dwell in you, but you should also be filled with the Spirit. No part of you, neither your heart, nor your thought, nor your senses should be free from the Spirit. The Spirit fills every part of

you! What a high degree! Have you reached the fullness of the Spirit? Have you emptied yourself of everything so that the Spirit fills everything in you and you may live by the Spirit and by the Spirit, you mortify the deeds of the flesh? (Romans 8:13).

Look at St. John in Revelation saying, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day" (Rev. 1:10). Because he was in the Spirit, he saw the heavens opened the throne of God, Jesus Christ and His face shining as the sun in its brightness. All this was because he was in the Spirit. Then, what is the meaning of "Be filled with the Spirit?" How do we reach that level?

If you have not reached that level, at least do not stop, but rather proceed toward it. You have to realize that if you are walking toward a certain goal and you have reached half way through or three-fourths, you still have not reached your goal yet. You should continue your struggle toward your goal very faithfully. This saying of the psalmist will comfort you, "Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord!" (Psalm 119:1). You should progress continually on the way to your goal, moving step by step. You must come closer to it day by day, each day more than the previous one.

"Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things that are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead. I press toward the goal" (Phil. 3:12-14). You must come closer to it day by day, each day more than the previous one. In your spiritual growth and in your relationship with God, let your knowledge of God, your love for Him, your abiding

in Him, your service and spreading His Kingdom, increase day by day. While you are getting closer to Him, beware of the hindrances which you may encounter on the road. Beware of the distracting goals which hinder you from God. God is your only goal and you have no other goals besides Him. However, the enemy, who wants to hinder your progress, offers you other goals that may appear to be all right, but his purpose may be to hinder your concentration on God's love. So be careful.

Believe me that the angels of heaven "which are sent to minister for those who will inherit salvation" (Heb. 1:14), become very surprised when they see us preoccupied with trivial matters, considering them our goals and hindering our journey toward God!. Any desire not pertaining to that of God is a trivial desire which cannot truly satisfy the heart. As St. Augustine said, "Our hearts will remain restless, till they find their rest in You."

On our way towards God, if instead of progressing, we have stopped at some side goal(s) which preoccupied our time, effort, health, emotions, and attention, thus distracting us from the true goal, we shall hear what the Lord had said to His people who had wandered in the wilderness, "You have dwelt long enough at this mountain" (Deut. 1:6).

Therefore, progress and reach forward to those things which are ahead. Do not allow anything to hinder you on the way and try to cast away any desire, which causes you to be lukewarm in your spirituality, or which replaces God's love. Keep God only in your heart and do not let anything compete with Him. May the Lord be with you, strengthen you, make you grow and

Saint Marcorious, Abu-Saifain



On the twenty-fifth day of the blessed month of Hatur, we commemorate the martyrdom of St. Mar-

corious, known as the saint with the two swords (Abu-Saifain). He was born in the City of Rome from Christian parents and they called him Philopater (Lover of the Father) and reared him in a Christian manner.

When he grew up, he enlisted in the army in the days of Emperor Decius the pagan. The Lord gave Philopater the strength and the courage by which he earned the satisfaction of his superiors and they called him Marcorious. He also grew very close to the Emperor.

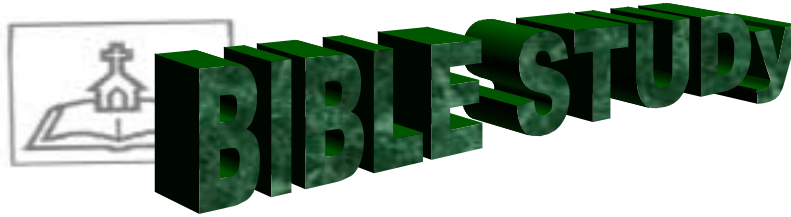
It happened that the Barbarians rose up against Rome and when Decius went out to fight them, he was terrified because they were in huge numbers. Marcorious assured him saying "do not be afraid, because God will destroy our enemies and will bring us victory". When Marcorious left the Emperor, an angel appeared to him in the shape of a human being dressed in white apparel. The angel gave him a sword saying "When you overcome your enemies, remember the Lord

your God". That is why he is called "of the two swords," Abu-Saifain, one is the military sword and the other is the sword of the divine power.

When Emperor Decius conquered his enemies and Marcorious came back victorious; the angel appeared to him and reminded him of what he previously told him, which was to remember the Lord his God.

Decius and his soldiers wanted to offer incense to the idols and St. Marcorious stayed behind. When they informed the Emperor, he called Marcorious and expressed his surprise at abandoning his loyalty to the Emperor. The Emperor reprimanded him for refusing to come and offer incense to the idols. The saint cast his military attire down before the Emperor and said to him: "I do not worship anyone except my Lord and my God Jesus Christ." The Emperor was angry and ordered him to be beaten with whips and stalks.

When the Emperor saw how the people of the city and the soldiers were fond of Marcorious, he feared that they might revolt against him. So instead, he bound him in iron and sent him to Caesarea where they cut off his head. He thus completed his holy fight and received the crown of martyrdom. May his intercession be with us and glory be to God forever. Amen.



THE FIRST EPISTLE OF ST. PAUL THE APOSTLE
TO THE CORINTHIANS

By: Mark Michael

The city of Corinth was notorious during its time for being a very corrupt city. The church there was made up of “true believers” but their pagan neighbors influenced them to follow in their immoral, selfish, and contentious ways. St. Paul was very disappointed in the city yet he was able to aim his concern at the problem at hand: pride and a lack of true love in the church.

The author of this book was stated twice as St. Paul and his authorship of this book is commonly accepted today among the biblical scholars. It is believed that St. Paul wrote this letter while in Ephesus during his third missionary journey. This is evidenced in chapter 16: verse 8, when he states that he will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, thereby dating this book in the spring of 56 AD. By this time, the Corinthian church would have been about four years old.

The city of Corinth was very important during the time of ancient Greece due to its geographical location. It was an ideal city for commerce and many merchants came there because of its well known immorality. After leaving Athens, St. Paul went to Corinth in the fall of 52 AD. The Jews of Corinth rejected his message causing St. Paul to begin to reach out to the Gentiles. He ministered in Corinth for 18 months eventually establishing a church that was mostly congregated by Gentiles as opposed to Jews.

The first Epistle to the Corinthians was St. Paul’s response to two letters. He wrote this letter to remind the Corinthians about their gifts given to them by God that were intended to unify and edify the church. He told them that they were very gifted individuals, but their immaturity and pride caused them to abuse these gifts. St. Paul was also able to provide the most detailed explanation of the resurrection of Christ that the New Testament has to offer. He concluded the letter with a note of hope. The Corinthians could have victory over sin and death because Jesus in His death and resurrection had already decisively it (15:57).

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"The voice of The Lord shakes the wilderness;..

And in His temple everyone says, "Glory!" "

(Ps. 29:8,9)

On behalf of the Tanious family, we wish to thank everyone for their prayers, support, gifts, kindness and service they have shown us.

We were consoled during this difficult time by this support.

We pray that God reward you and your family with blessings and peace and fill your lives with happiness and prosperity.

Fr. Antonious Tanious

This Newsletter is a free publication of the church, under the supervision of Fr. Antonious Tanious.

The committee welcomes your participation in the form of articles, reviews, news, or comments.

Please mail your articles, comments, ...etc. to the church at:

PO Box 256
Howell, NJ 07731

If you would like this newsletter mailed to a friend or wish your name to be deleted from our mailing list please fax your request to 732-821-1512.



*Please do not forget to pray to the Lord that He
may heal the sick
and
repose the souls of those who have passed away in
the paradise of joy.*

Church Services

December, 2000

Fridays, December 8, 15, 22, and 29

-7:30 PM- 11 PM Kiahk's Praises (7&4)

Saturday, December 2, 9, 16, 23, and 30

-8:30AM-11:30AM Divine Liturgy

-11:30AM-1:00PM Sunday School & Youth group meeting

Sunday, December 31, 2000

- 8:30 PM – 1 AM New Year Celebration

-1AM- 5:30 AM Midnight Praises

-5:30 AM- 7:30 Divine Liturgy (Fr. Antonious)

COPTIC FEASTS

December 4 Martydom of St. Philopater Marcorious
(Abu Sefien)

December 12 St. Mary's Entery into the Jerusalem Sanc-
tuary

For the first time this year the church will hold Kiahk's Praises (7&4) every Friday from 7:30 PM to 11 PM. Fr. Antonious Tani-ous will be with us every Friday.