



Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate
Archangel Michael Church
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**ADDRESS CORRECTION
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ARCHANGEL MICHAEL



**MONTHLY
NEWSLETTER**



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“**35** And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all. **36** And he took a child, and set him in the midst of them: and when he had taken him in his arms, he said unto them, **37** Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me. **38** And John answered him, saying, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us: and we forbad him, because he followeth not us. **39** But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me. **40** For he that is not against us is on our part. **41** For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward. **42** And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea. **43** And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: **44** Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. **45** And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: **46** Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. **47** And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire: **48** Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. **49** For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt. **50** Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his saltiness, wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another.” (Mark 9: 35-50)

This Newsletter is a free monthly publication of the Archangel Michael Coptic Orthodox Church, PO Box 256 Howell, NJ 07731, under the supervision of the priests of St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church, East Brunswick, N.J.

The committee welcomes your participation in the form of articles, reviews, news or comments. Please mail your articles, comments...etc. to the church or e-mail them to newsletter@archangelmichaelchurch.net

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



Great Lent

His Grace

Bishop Sarapion

Great Lent is considered the holiest fast since our Lord Jesus Christ Himself had fasted it. Therefore, during Great Lent we follow the example set by our Lord Jesus Christ, Who fasted on our behalf forty days and forty nights (Matt. 4: 2). Also during Holy Week, which comes after the 40 days, we live the Passion of Christ day by day and hour by hour. Because of the significance and holiness of Great Lent, the church designated a week of preparation to precede the 40 days. The church is teaching us to prepare for Great Lent in a spiritual manner. We fast to prepare ourselves for the 40 holy days. In fact, the preparatory week is not the only fast which the church designated to get us ready for Great Lent and Holy Week. Two weeks prior to Great Lent there is Jonah's Fast, also known as Nineveh's Fast. It is a short fast, only three days, and it is a fast of repentance. During this fast, we live with Jonah his fasting and repentance in the whale's belly. We also live with the Ninevites their fasting and repentance. Just as the fasting accompanied by repentance saved Jonah and the Ninevites from perdition, our fasting also accompanied by repentance will save us from eternal destruction and death due to sin.

Great Lent is an Apostolic Fast:

It is mentioned in the Didaskalia (chapter 18) the following: "Great Lent should be honored before Holy Week. It starts on the Monday following the Saturday and is completed on the Friday preceding Holy Week. After it, you must pay great attention to Holy Week and fast it with fear and piety." In Canon 69 from the Canons of our Fathers the Apostles, the following is mentioned: "Any bishop, priest, deacon, reader, or chanter who does not fast Great Lent or Wednesdays and Fridays shall be excommunicated, unless he has a physical ailment. As for a lay person, he shall be excluded."

Great Lent is an Ascetical Fast:

The church teaches us to fast until sunset. Fish is not allowed during this period. Also married couples should refrain from physical relations to give themselves time for fasting and prayer (1 Cor. 7: 5). We would like to emphasize the importance of the period of strict abstinence during fasting. It is refraining from eating and drinking for a period of time, followed by eating vegetarian food. Some people practice fasting by abstaining from meat and they eat vegetarian food, disregarding the period of strict abstinence. These people should actually be regarded as vegetarians and not as fasting. A vegetarian eats only vegetarian food but is not considered a fasting person. True fasting must be accompanied by abstinence from food and drink until sunset as designated by the church. However, due to variations in people's physical and spiritual abilities, the church gave the father of confession the authority to designate to his children the length of their strict abstinence. He determines what is suitable for their spiritual benefit according to the nature of their work as well as their physical ability to endure fasting.

Great Lent is a Period of Prayer:

The period of Great Lent is distinctive for its many Liturgies. They become the spiritual treasure for the fasting person to help him throughout the rest of the year. In addition to the Divine Liturgy on Sundays which has specific readings, hymns and tunes, the church also arranged special readings for the daily Liturgies during Great Lent. Also, there are special hymns during the weekdays. The church celebrates the Divine Liturgy almost daily during

Great Lent. It is preferred that these Liturgies start late in the day to offer those fasting the opportunity to practice strict abstinence. It is not permitted to have the Divine Liturgy early in the morning on weekdays since we pray the hours until the Compline Prayer. How can we pray the psalms of the Compline Prayer at 5:00 A.M.? Also, having an early morning Liturgy means there will not be abstention from food since we can not abstain from food following the Divine Liturgy. The proper time to end the Divine Liturgy during the weekdays of Great Lent is at sunset. Due to the inability of the elderly and the sick, it is permitted to have it end earlier but not before noon. That way everyone may receive the blessing of Holy Communion while benefiting from abstention. We hope that the fathers of confession will take great care in guiding their children as to the importance of strict abstinence and how to struggle to keep it for as long as they can.

Great Lent is a Period of Repentance:

Fasting without repentance and changing one's life becomes useless. Unless the fasting person changes his life during fasting he will only be hungry and exhausted without gaining anything else. Therefore, the church constantly reminds us of the importance of repentance during fasting. Before Great Lent, we fast Jonah's Fast and we live the story of Jonah's and the Ninevites' repentance. During the third Sunday of Lent, the Holy Church offers us the Gospel reading of the Prodigal Son as a model of repentance. It requires an awakening, confession of sins, leaving the place of sin and returning to the Heavenly Father with confidence in His mercies and acceptance. This parable reveals to us the depth of God's love for sinners and how He accepts them no matter how horrendous their sin is. Our Lord Jesus Christ said, "the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out." (John 6: 37) Christ "has come to save that which was lost." (Matt. 18:11) God desires that all men be saved and come to the knowledge of truth (1Tim. 2:4). Christ is the True Physician who is needed by those who are ill by sin. He did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance (Mark 2: 17). Repentance is a result of divine action; it is the Spirit of God, Who moves the hearts of sinners to repent. It is written in the Holy Bible, "For it is God who works in you both to will and do for His good pleasure." Phil. 2: 13) God's pleasure is in the return of a sinner so that he will not die in his sin. When God sees his sinful child returning to Him, He has compassion and goes to him, kissing him and welcomes his return by saying, "It is right that we should make merry and be glad." (Luke 15: 32) The return of a sinner and his repentance results in joy to God as well as all those in heaven, because "there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance." (Luke 15: 7) During Great Lent we praise God for His many mercies. The Doxology of Great Lent presents to us a magnificent hymn in praising God on His mercies as well as asking for His mercies. The first Doxology of the Sundays of Great Lent starts with the following:

I will praise you, O Lord, for your mercies are forever.

From generation to generation, my mouth shall declare your truth.

In this beautiful doxology we praise God for His mercies. Then the chanter remembers his many sins and transgressions by saying, " My sins are heavy over my head." As his sins are revealed in front of him, he then remembers the stories of those who repented and were accepted by God so he won't lose hope. Therefore, he remembers the publican, the adulteress and the thief and asks God to make him like any one of them. Again, he recalls God's attributes by saying, "I know You are good, kind and merciful. Remember me in Your mercy forever." God does not wish the death of a sinner but that he should return and live. Then the chanter remembers his sins once again and says:

I have sinned, O Jesus, my Lord, I have sinned, O Jesus, my God, O my King, do not count the sins I have committed.

He asks for God's mercies and not to be punished like Sodom and Gomorrah, but to have mercy on him like the Ninevites. The chanter ends his praise by saying:

**But absolve and forgive, My many transgressions, As good and lover of mankind
Have mercy on us according to Your great mercy.**

This doxology is beautiful poetry through which the human soul expresses her feelings resulting from the heaviness of her sins. At the same time, she shows her great hope in our kind and merciful Lord, Who is happy with the return and repentance of the sinner. Yet He punishes the unrepentant sinners. Therefore, repentance is the means by which we enjoy God's great mercies.

Great Lent is a Period for Doing Mercy:

The church reminds us of the importance of doing merciful acts during fasting. Therefore, during Great Lent we chant together praising those who have mercy on the poor. The Holy Bible teaches us that the fasting which is accepted by God is the one in which we do acts of mercy to others. "Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from you own flesh?"

Fasting is a beautiful period to do good deeds by helping the poor, feeding the hungry, visiting the sick and taking care of the needs of others. The person who fasts by not yielding to the needs of the flesh will feel the needs of others and his heart will be moved to serve them. Also, the asceticism of fasting teaches us to care for the heavenly and not be concerned with the earthly. Thus it becomes easy to forsake our material possessions and offer them to the needy.

Great Lent is a Period of Reconciliation with Others:

Fasting is an act of worship presented to God and God does not accept the offering and worship of a person who quarrels with others. Instead He asks him to go and make peace with his brother before coming to worship and present offerings in front of God's altar. Fasting is an appropriate time to evaluate our relationship with others. As we ask God to forgive us our sins, we must also forgive those who have sinned against us.

May God grant us a blessed fast by which we can grow in a life of prayer, asceticism and repentance. May we always increase in doing acts of mercy and living in peace with one another.

Short Story

Positive Attitude

Michael is the kind of guy you love to hate. He is always in a good mood and always has something positive to say. When someone would ask him how he was doing, he would reply, "If I were any better, I would be twins!"

He was a natural motivator. If an employee was having a bad day, Michael was there telling the employee how to look on the positive side of the situation. Seeing this style really made me curious, so one day I went up to Michael and asked him, "I don't get it! You can't be a positive person all of the time. How do you do it?"

Michael replied, "Each morning I wake up and say to myself, you have two choices today. You can choose to be in a good mood or you can choose to be in a bad mood. I choose to be in a good mood. Each time something bad happens, I can choose to be a victim or I can choose to learn from it. I choose to learn from it. Every time someone comes to me complaining, I can choose to accept their complaining or I can point out the positive side of life. I choose the positive side of life. *"Yeah, right, it's not that easy," I protested.* "Yes, it is," Michael said. "Life is all about choices. When you cut away all the junk, every situation is a choice. You choose how you react to situations. You choose how people affect your mood. You choose to be in a good mood or bad mood. The bottom line: It's your choice how you live your life." I reflected on what Michael said.

Soon hereafter, I left the Tower Industry to start my own business. We lost touch but I often thought about him when I made a choice about life instead of reacting to it. Several years later I heard that Michael was involved in a serious accident, falling some 60 feet from a communications tower. After 18 hours of surgery and weeks of intensive care, Michael was released from the hospital with rods placed in his back. I saw Michael about six months after the accident. When I asked him how he was, he replied. "If I were any better, I'd be twins. Want to see my scars?" I declined to see his wounds, but I did ask him what had gone through his mind as the accident took place. "The first thing that went through my mind was the well-being of my soon-to-be-born daughter," Michael replied. "Then, as I lay on the ground, I remembered that I had two choices: I could choose to live or I could choose to die. I chose to live."

"Weren't you scared? Did you lose consciousness?" I asked. Michael continued, "...the paramedics were great. They kept telling me I was going to be fine. But when they wheeled me into the ER and I saw the expressions on the faces of the doctors and nurses, I got really scared. In their eyes, I read 'he's a dead man.' I knew I needed to take action. "What did you do?" I asked. "Well, there was a big burly nurse shouting questions at me," said Michael. "She asked if I was allergic to anything. "Yes, I replied." The doctors and nurses stopped working as they waited for my reply. I took a deep breath and yelled, "Gravity." Over their laughter, I told them, "I am choosing to live. Operate on me as if I am alive, not dead." Michael lived, thanks not only to the skill of his doctors, but also because of his amazing attitude. I learned from him that every day we have the choice to live fully.

Attitude, after all, is everything. ***"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."*** Matthew 6:34

After all today is the tomorrow you worried about yesterday.

The Martyrdom of Saint Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna.



On the Twenty-Ninth Day of The Blessed Month of Amshir St. Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna⁽¹⁾, was martyred. His life began at the end of the first Christian century and he became the disciple of St. John the Evangelist. He was the one about whom the Lord said, "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, 'These things says the First and the Last, Who was dead, and came to life: I know your works, tribulations and poverty, but you are rich; and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of

Satan. Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:8-10) .

St. Polycarp went to Rome in the year 157 A.D. to settle a dispute with Arikestus, Bishop of Rome, in regard to the Easter feast. He shepherded his flock well and remained on his chair for a long time until a good old age. He wrote many articles and discourses about the Holy Advent, death, hell, torments of hell, the Virgin St. Mary and many others. He attracted many souls to the Lord with his life-giving teaching.

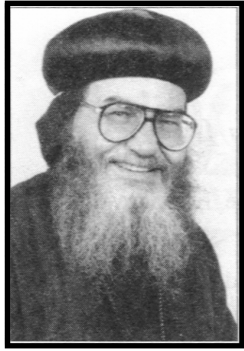
When Emperor Marcus Aurelius incited persecutions against Christians they strongly pressured him saying, "Swear and we will set you free; curse Christ and we will spare your life." Polycarp replied, "I have served my Lord Christ for 86 years and He never harmed me so how can I blaspheme against my King Who saved me?"

The Governor said, "If you do not fear the wild beasts, I will make the fire consume you if you do not repent." St. Polycarp said, "You threatened me with fire that burns for a while, then burns out, for you do not know the everlasting fire of judgement and the eternal punishment that are awaiting the evil ones. Now why are you lingering? Do whatever you want."

After severe tortures and many threats, the saint wished to shed his blood for Christ's name. He commanded and taught his people to be steadfast in faith and told them that they would not see his face after that day. They wept and tried to hold him down to prevent him from leaving but they failed to stop him.

He went and confessed the Lord Christ before the Governor who ordered to cut off his head after much torture; thus he received the crown of life. Some of the believers took his body, shrouded it and buried it with great honor.

His prayers be with us and Glory be to our God forever. Amen.



Coptic youth ask **His Grace Bishop Moussa**

“ From the youth Bishopric web site”

Question: What happens when a girl is raped, but she is not ready to have the child?

Bishop Moussa Answer: She can let someone adopt the child, for we as Christians do not accept abortion. Abortion means depriving the child of life and it is not in our capacity to do this; it is the embryo's right to live. And as for our precious Christian girls, surely they would not put themselves in a situation to have this bitter experience. You must be cautious because it is very strange that in a world where there is complete sexual freedom, some still resort to rape. However, there is a saying, "whoever drinks of the salty water is always thirsty". So take care, be cautious and do not give the green light to anyone. This does not mean that you must be always suspicious but you must be as simple as the dove and as wise as the serpent.

Question: What is the importance of confession?

Bishop Moussa Answer: In confession we receive two very important things: absolution for our sins and a solution to our problems through the direction and guidance of our spiritual father. Confession is not only spiritually beneficial but also psychologically. Sometimes we just need someone to listen to us. Your spiritual father will listen to you in the spirit of fatherhood. While being guided by the Holy Spirit he will give you comfort, because the Holy Spirit is the comforter, "the Paraclete". Confession is better known through experience and not through description. Confess regularly not because of dogmatic teaching, but because of the experience.



BIBLE STUDY

The Epistle to the Hebrews

For the first Jewish believers, believing in Christ raised many questions. What about the temple and animal sacrifices? What about the Law of Moses? Did believing in Christ negate so that they had grown up believing? Was it really enough to trust in Christ? The Old Testament offered no answer for these questions.

Answers were needed right away for those who lived in the time of this book's writing. Tolerance would soon give way to torture and executions. Nero would not leave this odd group alone for ever. Believing in Christ would be a life-or-death proposition.

Author and Date : No one knows for sure who wrote Hebrews. No one in the early church could say with certainty that they knew, though the church at Alexandria (Egypt) strongly believed it to be the apostle Paul's work. Yet Hebrews has been accorded one of the most respected places in the Bible. This book won its place in the New Testament by its merit, not by the esteem of its author.

Recipients: The original audience of Hebrews is not named. Some scholars have said that the book was written to Gentile Christians, arguing from the author's use of the Septuagint and from the absence of any mention of Gentile-Jewish controversy. Others have suggested that the letter was addressed to a mixed group of Jews and Gentiles. But most scholars suppose that the addressees were Jewish Christians because of the book's heavy emphasis on Jewish topics and themes, especially the detailed discussion of the superiority of Jesus Christ over angels, Moses, Joshua, and Old Testament believers. Quotes of Old Testament passages appear throughout the book.

Purpose: The Book of Hebrews was written to address the doubts of those who were second guessing their conversion to Christianity. "You began with God's plan of salvation," it says in effect. "You believed in His word and followed His plan of salvation through the temple sacrifices. And then when His once-for-all final sacrifice was made in Jesus Christ, you believed. That was as it should be. That was God's plan. Do not go back on the steps you have taken!"

The author of Hebrews set out to show that Christianity is the true successor to Judaism. He centers his attention on three topics: (1) priesthood, or divine mediation (7:1-28; 10: 19-22); (2) sacrifice, or divine redemption (9:11-10:18); (3) covenant, or divine promises (8:8-13; 9:15-22). He uses three Old Testament passages to prove his point: (1) Ps. 110:4, which announces a new priesthood providing the necessary divine mediation; (2) Ps. 40:6-8, which speaks of the new and final sacrifice providing divine redemption,- (3) Jer. 31:31-34, which announces a new covenant that provides full and final forgiveness.

"From The Nelson study Bible: Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville

For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink
in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily
I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward.

(Mark 9:41)

With the grace of God
and your generous
contributions, the Church
now has \$440,000 of the
\$500,000 total amount for
the purchase of the land.
The remaining \$60, 000
is due by October 2002.

Progress Chart

Goal \$500,000

Loans \$75,000

Donated \$365,000



Church Services

Fridays

- 7:30 PM-8:30 PM
Hymms Lesson
- 8:30PM-10:00PM
Arabic Bible Study
Arabic Prayer Meeting
- 8:30PM-11:00PM
Midnight Praises
Midnight Prayers

SATURDAYS

- 8:30AM-11:30AM:
Divine Liturgy
- 11:30AM-1:00PM:
Sunday School &
Youth group meeting

COPTIC FEASTS

- March 8 ----- Martyrdom of St. Polycarp Bishop of Smyrna
- March 9 ----- Departure of Pope Cyril VI
- March 11 ----- Beginning of the Great Lent
- March 19 ----- The Cross' Feast
- March 26 ----- Martyrdom of St. Sedhom Bishay of Dimiat
- April 2 ----- St's Mary Apparition in Ziton, Cairo
- April 7 ----- Annunciation Feast
- April 26 ----- Last Friday of Lent
- April 28 ----- Palm Sunday