

ARCHANGEL MICHAEL

Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate
Archangel Michael Church
P.O. BOX 256 Howell, NJ 07731

ADDRESS CORRECTION
REQUESTED



MONTHLY
NEWSLETTER



November 2003

Volume 4 Issue 44

Hator 1720

www.archangelmichaelchurch.net



“32 Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

33 Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth.

34 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

35 Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning;

36 And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately.

37 Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.

38 And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants.

39 And this know, that if the goodman of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through.

40 Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not.

41 Then Peter said unto him, Lord, speakest thou this parable unto us, or even to all?

42 And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season?

43 Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.

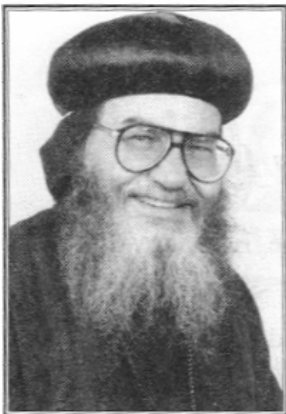
44 Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath.” (Luke 12: 32-44)

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.



PRACTICAL INSTRUCTIONS IN PRAYER FOR THE BEGINNER

His Grace Bishop Moussa

Practical Instructions in Prayer for the Beginner

We are all beginners in prayer; that is why I do not intend to discuss prayer in detail. I will only share with you some of what I have learned, sometimes from personal experience but mostly from the experience of others.

Prayer is a Meeting Between God and the Soul: Prayer is essentially a meeting between the soul and God, and it is necessary to have two real parties in order to have a real meeting; that is, both have to appear as they really are. In truth, we generally do not appear before God as we really are, just as God also does not truly appear in our relationship with him. We imagine that we are talking to God, whereas we are actually standing before Him with a make believe personality talking to what we believe is God. Each of us is a series of personalities at one and the same time. This is either wonderful wealth or a strange and contradictory mixture. We are different according to the circumstances and the events around us, and those who deal with us notice that we have numerous personalities. There is a Russian proverb, which says: "He is a lion when he meets lambs, but a lamb when he meets lions." This applies to us to a great extent, for we are familiar with the woman who seems gentle and pleasant with others, but is most clamorous in her home.

How Can We Discover Who We Really Are? The first difficulty we encounter when we begin to pray is which personality, from this strange mixture within us, is the one that will meet God? The cause of the difficulty is we are not used to discovering our real selves quickly. If we give ourselves five minutes everyday to study our activities and relationships, we will quickly and easily make this general discovery. We will discover which person we were when we met with this one or the other, and what kind of person we were when we did this thing or that one. We can subsequently ask ourselves: When was I really my true self? Maybe this did not happen at all or it happened for the fraction of a second or only under certain circumstances or on meeting a certain person. When we can identify those moments, and we can all do so, we discover that the times when we are alone are the most important and the profound in life! We generally live a reflected life. In the depths of our being, we do not have different personalities in different circumstances, but the life that is in us

frequently belongs to others.

Examine yourself and ask yourself: How many times did I act out of the depth of my self? How many times did I express what I really am? You will discover that this happens rarely. We are in the habit of becoming involved with events around us that are peripheral to life such as those to which we are exposed on the radio, on television or in the papers. What we need is a type of concentration during those moments alone which will eliminate all of these extraneous matters. You will feel the heavy burden that is ourselves, but do not imagine that all that is beautiful in us is gone. In the depths of ourselves we will find the image of God in which we were made. This consolation to the spirit is like the restoration of a beautiful antique painting and the removal of the traces of hands that do not appreciate art and which distort the way it was created by the hand of an inspired artist. The more we strip ourselves, the more many flaws disappear, and so we revert to our first loveliness and discover the real beauty God placed in us. We realize how we have driven ourselves to the misery resulting from the veil that is between God and us. Hence, we discover how much we need God, not to fill emptiness, but to fill us with His presence.

Therefore, let us understand this and repeat this simple prayer every evening during this week: "Help me Lord to remove anything that is not genuine in me, so that I discover what my true self is."

How Can You Discover What God is Truly Like?

If we really want to talk with God, we have to find out what He is truly like. We all know what a "principal" means to students. When they meet with him or interact with him, they think of him in terms of his job, and they remove all human traits from his character, and so it is impossible for them to talk to him on the human level.

Another example is when a young man first gets to know a young woman. He attributes to her all the perfect characteristics although she does not in reality possess any of them. He, therefore, creates qualities that are artificial and imaginary. In this case also, a meeting is impossible since the young man is talking to a person who does not exist in reality. This is what happens between us and God, for we possess many mental and imaginary images of Him which we have gathered from books, from church and from what we have heard from religious men when we became adults. Although these pictures have a lot that is true, they often hinder our meeting with our real God. Although we should derive benefit from the knowledge we have acquired personally, or from our reading or listening, there is something even more important.

Our knowledge of God today is the natural result of our experience of Him yesterday. Therefore, we should not restrict ourselves to what we learned about Him before, but we have to look forward to a new knowledge in the present and future. This makes clear the function of theology, for it gives us a deeper and more comprehensive knowledge of God than that which is peculiar to us. That is why we have to approach God as though we simultaneously know Him and do not know Him.

What Happens Next? It is simple. God is free. He either comes to us and answers our prayers, and draws near to us and makes us feel His presence, or He chooses to do the opposite. God may allow you to feel his absence, and this is as important an experience as feeling His presence. In both cases, you will truly experience the God Who answers and the God Who delays.

Try to discover the truth for yourself and to stand face to face before God as He is after you discard all the imaginings and the idols you have made in your mind of God. In order to reach this result, I suggest that you repeat this prayer: "Help me, Lord, to cast away all the fake images I have of you, no matter how much effort it costs me."

The Sincere Conversation: The first thing we must avoid is lying to God, a thing we do often even though it is apparent to us. Let us talk frankly with God, revealing to Him the kind of people we are, not because He does not know it, but because there is a vast difference between supposing that He Who loves us knows everything about us and the fact that we have the courage and love to be open about the truth about ourselves.

Would that we would declare to Him candidly that we often stand before Him unwillingly, and that we do not meet with Him truly, that we are tired and want to go to bed, but we must not say this in a spirit of pride or negligence, remembering that we are talking to our great God. After this, we will sit with Him, happy in His presence and enjoying the same feeling we have when we sit with people we love and to whom we feel attached. If we cannot sit silently between His hands, let us have an honest and sincere conversation about all the things we encounter. Let us place all our worries in His hands, and let us not become preoccupied with them again, but let us lose ourselves in His wonderful person.

Let us learn how to place our worries one by one in His hands after we really have placed ourselves before Him. And let us repeat this simple prayer from time to time: "Help me, Lord, to forget all my problems and to think of You."

We Have to Be Silent in Order to Hear God:

What next? It looks as though we have emptied ourselves of everything, so what shall we do? We cannot remain empty; otherwise, we will be filled with wrong things: feelings, thoughts, reactions and memo-

ries. We have to remember that a conversation cannot be one-sided, with us speaking and not listening to the other party. That is why we have to learn how to be silent so God can speak. This is very important in spite of its great simplicity.

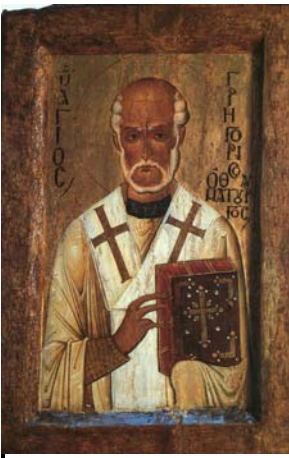
I remember that, at the beginning of my ministry, a lady said to me: "Father, I have been praying without ceasing for 14 years and have never felt the presence of God." I asked her: "Have you given God the chance to speak?" She answered: "No, I was speaking to Him all the time; isn't this prayer?" I said: "I don't think so; I suggest you spend quarter of an hour every day in silence in the presence of God." She followed this advice and came to me saying: "This is amazing. When I was talking to God, I felt nothing; when I became silent before His Blessed Face, I was surrounded by His glorious presence!"

We will not learn how to pray well to God if we do not learn how to be joyfully silent in His presence. Then we shall stand before Him face to face without seeing Him!

The Importance of Written Prayers: After we finish what we want to tell God, we frequently experience a feeling of emptiness. What should we do? It is advisable, in this case, to begin repeating some of the written prayers, which we have learned. Some people consider this a simple, unimportant affair, but we do not mean mechanical repetition, which would make these prayers ineffective and useless. What we mean is to meditate on the words of the prayer with a focused mind. Some believe that these prayers are not useful since their words are not those we wish to say to God; we then resemble a small child who criticizes the paintings of a great artist, or a beginner in music who criticizes the musical compositions of an inspired musician. We need to go to art and music academies to develop an artistic sense and sound understanding and so have the truth revealed to us. In the same way, we say these church prayers to learn what the feelings, thoughts, and ways of expressions are which we must experience in our own prayers as sons of the church. They also help us in the dry periods when we find very little to say.

Therefore, when we strip ourselves of all that is fake and face our real God, we revert to the image of God and we experience repentance and pray sweetly and with sanctity all the prayers of the Church and benefit from them.

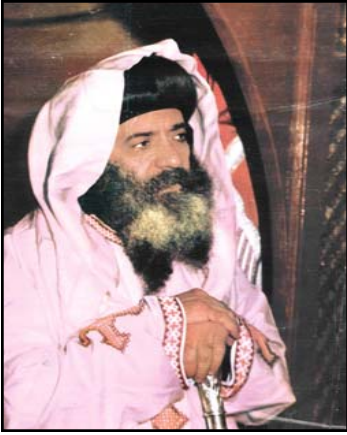
Let us sit in silence and stillness for a few minutes each day, ending with this prayer: "Help me, Lord, to see my sins clearly, so that I do not judge my brothers, and may Your Name be glorified every day."



Departure of St. Gregory the wonder worker

He departed on the 21st day of the blessed month of Hatour , in the year 270 A.D.,. He was the bishop of Neocaesarea, in the province of Pontos, where he was born to rich pagan parents. He learned philosophy and wisdom at an early age and surpassed many of his colleagues. Then he went to Beirut, where he studied the Greek and Latin subjects. From there he went to Caesarea, Palestine, where the erudite Origen was, who taught him Christian philosophy. He also learned theology and the interpretations of the holy books. In

the year 235 A.D., he went to the city of Alexandria, the cultural center of the world at that time, to complete his studies. He returned to his town in the year 237 A.D. In the year 239 A.D., he was baptized in the holy baptism and became a Christian, for he realized the vanity of this world and chose the way of the everlasting kingdom of heaven. He directed all his attention to the salvation of his soul. When he knew that the Bishop of his town was seeking him to assist him in the bishopric duties, he escaped to the wilderness. He devoted himself to prayers and ardent worship, forsaking the world and the futility of its glories. When the Bishop of his town departed, they sought him in order to make him the new bishop but they did not know where to find him. It happened while the people were gathered with St. Gregory, the Theologian, that they heard a voice say, 'Seek Gregory the hermit and set him a Bishop over you.' They sent a party to search for him in the wilderness and in the mountains. When they did not find him, they decided to take a Bible and pray the prayer of ordination over it, as though he were present. They called him Gregory even though his given name was Theodore. St. Gregory, the Theologian, presided over this service. The angel of the Lord appeared to St. Gregory in the wilderness and said to him, 'Rise up and go to your town, for they have made you the bishop over it and refuse not, for it is the Will of God.' He did not hesitate, rose up immediately and descended from the mountain and went to his town. The people went forth to meet him with great honor, and they completed his ordination in the year 244 A.D. The Lord performed many signs and wonders at his hands, so that he was called the wonder worker. For example, two brothers who owned a lake from which they made a good living by catching large amounts of fish had a falling out because of it, for each one of them claimed his ownership of it. When they were unable to reach an agreement, they sought the wisdom of St. Gregory to help them settle their differences. He ordered that they should divide the yield of the lake equally between themselves. When they did not heed his judgment, he entreated God and the waters of the lake dried up and it became a farmland, which they divided between them. Reports of the signs and wonders which he made were heard throughout the land. Finally, when he completed his strife, he departed in peace. May his prayers be with us. Amen.



Coptic People ask His Holiness Pope Shenouda III

Question: What is the meaning of the statement of the Lord "*I am the door of the sheep all who ever come before Me, are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them*" (John 10:7-8). Is it believable to say about all the prophets that came before Him that they were thieves and robbers?!

His Holiness Pope Shenouda III answers: The Lord Christ, absolutely did not mean by this statement the prophets.

Here He talked about those who did not enter from the door by saying "*I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber*" (John 10:1), but the prophets had entered through the door and were sent by the heavenly Father. Who are those thieves then?.

They are those who came shortly before Christ, led people astray and Gamaliel talked about them. When the chief priests brought the Apostles before them in the council, to judge them for their preaching the resurrection of the Lord, said to them "*look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us*" (Acts 5:28); "*they took council to kill them*" (Acts 5:33). Then one in the council stood up, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in respect by all the people and commanded them to put the apostles outside, and he said to the members of the council: "Take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men." For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody. A number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was slain, and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing. After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away many people after him. He also perished, and all who obeyed him were dispersed. And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing, but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it lest you even be found to fight against God" (Acts 5:34-39).

About those as Theudas and Judas of Galilee, the Lord Christ said, they were thieves and robbers. Those that came before Him and claimed to be somebody and drew away many people after them, were dispersed. We can add to them, those false teachers who troubled the people with their teachings and Christ called them "*blind guides*" who had the keys of the kingdom, they did not enter and prevented others from entering. (Matt. 23:13-15).



The rank of A Deacon

By: His Grace Bishop Moussa

"Deacon" is a Syrian word that means servant. In Greek, it is called "Deyakon". The deacon's main job is to help the priest or bishop in his religious service. The first church appointed seven deacons to serve tables, who were filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom, "Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said... therefore brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business." (Acts 6:2-3). "whom they set before the apostles, and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them." (Acts 6:6).

- 1- Our teacher St. Paul mentioned some other qualifications in his first epistle to his disciple Timothy, Chapter 3.
- 2- not greedy for money.
- 3- holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience.
- 4- ruling their children and their own houses well.
- 5- they should be tested first, and then, if they pass the test, they are to serve.

"Being a deacon is the first and lowest rank in the priesthood ranks, St. Peter praises it saying, "For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus." (1Tim 3:13).

There are five ranks of Deacons:

- Epsaltos (hymnist)
- Oghnostos (reader)
- Epidiakon (assistant deacon)
- Deacon
- Archdeacon (head of deacons)

**Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's
good pleasure to give you the kingdom.**
(Luke 12:32)

COPTIC FEASTS

November 1 **Departure of St Rewies**
November 2 **Martyrdom of St Luke the Evangelist**
November 25 **Martyrdom of St Mina the meraculous**
November 26 **Beginning of the advent**

CHURCH SERVICES

FRIDAYS

-7:30 PM-8:00 PM

English Prayer Meeting

-8:00PM-9:30PM

Arabic Bible Study Arabic Prayer Meeting

-8:00PM-9:30PM

Midnight Praises /Midnight Prayers /Hymns

SATURDAYS

-8:00AM-11:30AM:

Divine Liturgy

-12 Noon-1:00PM:

Sunday School & Youth group meeting