

Aboard an Airplane

I write these words while I'm in the air between heaven and earth. I am on my way from Chicago to Boston to attend the priests' seminar for North and South America led by the shepherd of shepherds, the beloved holy father, Pope Shenouda III.

This is a meeting that his holiness is keen on keeping every year. He meets with his priests of the Americas, who are now numbered over two hundred, to follow-up on various matters of the ministry. He listens to their ideas and questions, and gives them advice, guidance, and living experience. This is to further the growth of the Coptic Orthodox Church in these countries and to become more organized, more cohesive, more profound, and more fruitful.



In fact, right at this moment, many thoughts come to my mind. Please, allow me to share just one of them, namely, the airplane being above the clouds.

1 – **When the airplane ascends, it penetrates the clouds and rise above them. Then, there is no obstacle between it and the sun, contrary to those who walk on the ground where the clouds may block the sun light for them.** Likewise, when a human transcends with his spirit, and rise above the vanity of this world and its desires, the light of the Sun of Righteousness will shine upon him, and he can enjoy this light without any obstruction. He would also enjoy the fellowship with Christ and His words that satisfy the soul, and His love that captures the hearts. As to he who ties himself to earthly things, desires of the body, and the lusts of the flesh, he will lose the sense of the divine presence, miss the true light, and his life becomes gloomy. Then, the solution is not to wait for clouds to go away, but rather it is to ascend high and soar above them through repentance and severing all ties to sin. After that, the sun appears clearly again and gives an overwhelming feeling of joy and enlightenment.

2 – **Sometimes, the airplane shakes due to turbulences, but it does not affect the journey.** Perhaps it is safer for the passengers to buckle up their safety belts while seated as they do in cars. Likewise, in the journey of our lives, there are some bumps and turbulences as a result of difficult or sudden events. Nonetheless, life goes on and doesn't stop, and as much as we are committed to Christ and to the church, we will be secure, steadfast, and hardly stand any losses. As long as God leads the journey of our lives, lay ourselves in His hands, and submit everything to Him, He is able to cross over with us this land of sojourn, so we reach the harbor of salvation in peace.

3 – **Airplanes have the highest safety standards,** therefore you see many passengers sleeping soundly, while other read, listen to music, or finish their paperwork. The airplane in this situation resembles the church which raises us from earth to heaven. The church takes us on a flight to soar high and hover with the cloud of witnesses and the heroes of faith in untainted skies above the turmoil and deceptive temptations of the world, in the company of our family, the members of the kingdom of God, angels and the saints. We fly with the Church in peace and tranquility, confident in the presence of Christ with us, and His protection for us throughout the stages of our speedy journey to heaven. His promises are certain: *“I will never leave you nor forsake you.”* (Hebrews 13:5), *“And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”* (Matthew 28:20), *“For I am with you,” says the LORD, “to deliver you.”* (Jeremiah 1:19).

4 - **At high altitudes, the temperature is very low up to 50 degrees below zero, and of course no one can live in such deadly atmosphere outside the airplane. However, airplanes are always conditioned to an appropriate temperature and an atmospheric pressure that is accurately adjusted.** This gives us an idea of how successful spiritual life can be under harsh and cold conditions. When we find that the environment in which we live is totally contaminated by sin, we ought to create for ourselves a healthy and conditioned environment, so that we are able to live. It means that living a saintly life is possible in the most difficult environments, only if we don't mix with sin and its coldness, but rather completely isolate ourselves from it. We don't isolate ourselves from the world, but rather from the sin in it. We ought to always take heed in surrounding ourselves with church prayers, readings, spiritual teachings, and praise. This becomes a pure and warm environment in which we can live in peace with God, no matter how cold the climate surrounding us is.

The trip has ended, but the lessons which we learn from life do not end.

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