

Sunday, October 16, 2011

He was working according to his rank

In late 1972 at the beginning of the pontiffacy of Pope Shenouda III, may the Lord protect his precious life, His Holiness sent a church delegation to visit the monks in the monasteries of St. Anthony and St. Paul to make sure they are in good living and spiritual conditions during the war that was taking place at that time. The Red Sea region, under the Israeli occupation of Sinai, was considered a military zone, and it had a restricted access that required a permit from the army. Therefore, the monasteries of St. Anthony and St. Paul were almost in a complete isolation and under very difficult living conditions.

His Holiness, Pope Shenouda III, with his usual fatherhood, wanted to check on the monks under these harsh conditions in that area. He formed a delegation of two bishops accompanied with some priests and monks to visit these two monasteries, to check on the conditions of the monks, pray with them, and to supply them with provisions to ensure that their needs are met. The two bishops were Anba Pakhomious the current metropolitan of Al-Behayra, may the Lord protect him and bless his ministry, and the departed Anba Aghathon, the former metropolitan of Ismailiyah. The delegation included some of the caring priests, among them, the current priest of St George's church of Al-Hadara in Alexandria, Abouna Takla Labib, who personally told me the details of this amazing trip.

The clerical delegation arrived at the monastery of St. Anthony after a long and tiring trip since the roads were unpaved unlike they are today. The monks welcomed the delegation with great joy, they rang the bells, and greeted them with procession with censers and the melodic hymns until they entered the church and prayed the prayer of thanksgiving.

In the evening, the monks set up a dinner table to welcome the two bishops and the rest of the delegation. They all sat around the table in joy, and joined them an ascetic silent monk, Abouna Yustos Al-Antony [of St. Anthony]. Although he used not to eat with the rest of the monks since he had a special diet which was highly austere, he accepted the invitation to honor the papal delegation. As we all know this amazing monk, who departed in December 1976, was very ascetic and silent almost all his life except when he participated in the church liturgical prayers such as midnight praise and the liturgy.

While at the table, they talked about St. Anthony the father of all monks. In the discussion, a question came up: Was St. Anthony a priest or not? The discussion took a long time and the group split into two camps. One camp asserted that St. Anthony was a priest who conducted liturgies and took confessions. The other camp said that there was no reference in his life story about him being a priest, but rather he was a spiritual father and a teacher to many monks in their path of monasticism with its three vows, Chastity, obedience, and poverty, but he didn't necessarily have to be a priest.

Throughout the gathering, Abouna Yustos was completely silent and did not open his mouth with a single word amid all the heated discussions. Finally, and out of humor, Bishop Agathon raised his voice, saying: "Father Yustos, we haven't heard your voice. Tell us what you think, was St. Anthony a priest or not?"

Everyone was silent, waiting for what will happen. Will Abouna Yustos answer or will he remain silent? The person who asked the question is a bishop and it would be inappropriate not to respond to him.

After a moment of silence, Abouna Yustos calmly opened his mouth and his face looking towards the ground, and said in a deep voice: "*He was working according to his rank.*"

His words came as a surprise to everyone. He pointed out to them that St. Anthony was a man of strife, trading with his talents whether or not he was a priest. Instead of us being busy with this unfruitful discussion, let's be watchful such that every one of us works according to his rank.

Everyone was completely silent, and no one dared to open this subject again.

+ It does not matter what kind or number of talents we may have. What is important is that we trade with whatever talents God have given us. Success is not measured by the kind of talents and gifts that a person possesses, but rather is measured by how much we are able to invest these talents for the glory of God who owns them and grants them to us.

+ Additionally, it is not good for us to be preoccupied with arguing matters that are nonessential to our spiritual lives, or doesn't serve our salvation, this is completely unedifying to our spiritual life.

+ Let each one of us be working according to his or her rank: The bishop, the priest, the deacon, the monk, the father, the mother, the servant, etc. We should not be preoccupied with the ranks of others and what talents they may have. Rather, we should pay attention to our own talents and to make every effort to invest with them such that we give them back to God with profit, and to deserve to receive the Lord's words, "Well *done*, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over

Fr. Yohanna Naseef a few things, I will make you ruler over many things

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