

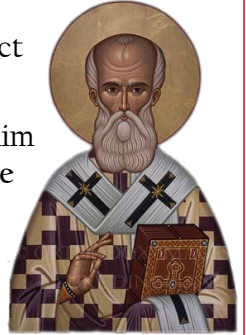
Sunday, May 20, 2012

St. Athanasius the Apostolic

St. Athanasius, the great Pope among the Patriarchs of Alexandria, who fought the good fight against the dangerous Arian heresy and was able to expose it and repudiate it with the grace of God, preserved the pure faith for us until today. This man was steadfast like a mountain, meek like a child, powerful like a gushing river, ascetic and prayerful, full of grace, bearing the cross of suffering and exile without grumbling, until he became a reflection of the image of the Lord Jesus.

There are many factors that lead to fashioned his personality in such manner. We will reflect on some of them:

1- It is likely that his father was a priest in Upper Egypt, and specifically in the area of Akhmim [a city in the Sohag Governorate]. This lead him to be immersed in church life in a young age by growing up embracing church prayers and rites. They filled his mind and soul to the extent that even when he played with other children, he would act out the church rites that he continuously watches such as baptism and the liturgical worship.



His father took a great interest in his education so he hired for him a personal teacher in his childhood. Thus, he grew up loving reading in an abundant way. He wrote his first book in explaining the church dogma “The incarnation of the Logos” at approximately twenty years of age.

2- He lived through the era of persecution; this was during his childhood and early youth. During that time, Pope Peter the seal of the martyrs was martyred with some other bishops, priests, and many of the members of the congregation. This certainly influenced him and instilled in his heart the utmost importance of faith, which is consecrated with blood, and the love Christ the savior who deserves that we offer Him our lives as a living sacrifice on the altar of martyrdom.

3- He was a disciple to Pope Alexander, who was a loving father, and a great teacher and leader of the church when it had more than a hundred Bishops. Pope Alexander lead the church with insight and competence amid the raging Arian storms. St Athanasius learned from him to be steadfast in faith, wise in words and actions, and faithful in teaching.

4- He followed St. Anthony and served him for a period of time in his early youth. This was an excellent opportunity for St. Athanasius to see a living image of Christ, and to experience grace when it ignites the heart of man with love and how it changes him!

St. Athanasius was profoundly influenced by St Anthony, by his asceticism, his spirituality, steadfastness, level headedness, meekness, and calmness. Thus, he graduated at his hands a well-rounded theologian. A true theologian is one who knows how to pray, and after he tastes the love and fellowship of God, he reads and learns by the guidance of the Holy Spirit so he becomes taught by God.

5- While in the school of Alexandria, he learned at the hand of great teachers who bore the cross during the time of persecution and some of them are counted among the confessors.

6- He studied philosophy, literature, poetry, and Roman law, that is to say he was a well-cultured person so he was able to witness to Christ in a simple and well-understood language.

7- He was a disciple to the writings of the fathers of the school of Alexandria and its scholars who preceded him. He often mentioned and honored them in his writings.

8- He has a great passion for the scriptures, which he read day and night. It is difficult to find one line in his writings that is void of a biblical reference either quoted or inspired. In his writings, he always repudiated the heretical thoughts with an overwhelming outpour of biblical verses that proclaims the truth, exposes falsehood, and completely obliterates it.

May the blessings of this great saint be with us and supports our faith, Amen.

Fr. Yohanna Naseef

fryohanna@hotmail.com

St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church, Palatine, IL