

Sunday, August 19, 2012

Are We in Fear?

Words are going around these days regarding many Copts being in fear of the radical Islamic movement reaching power within the Egyptian government. As a result many Christian families are turning to immigration in fear of a severe wave of persecution against them. In this context, I would like to shed some light on few important facts:

1 - We should all know that **Christians do not fear anything** because all challenges facing them are diminished before the power of God that works within them. No matter how insurmountable the waves of evil and hatred are, they are very weak when they crash into the rock of Christian faith and the divine power that resides within Christians.

2 - If some extremist movements, that harbor hatred towards Christians, have reached leadership positions within Egypt, it **saddens us but doesn't invoke fear in our hearts**. We are sad because religious discrimination leaves any society torn up and destroys the future of the country.

3 - If we have any fear or rather concerns, it is for the well-being of the nation, we are also concerned about the purity of our hearts. Christians recognize that without purity of the heart, we cannot see God. Therefore, we are keen on keeping our hearts not to be contaminated with hatred or the desire to take revenge or any short-lived ambitions of the world for which we enter in conflicts. Here, I recall the saying of St. Augustine: **"I sat on the top of this world when I did not fear anything or desired anything."**

4 - **We are not afraid of dealing with any groups**. As Christians we have no enemies except the devil and his hosts. Even those who have enmity towards us or hate us and don't return our peace or greeting, as the type of those who are mislead and corrupted by radical teaching, **we will still continue to offer them our peace, welcome, and love**. In doing so, we will never lose anything, but rather we will stand firm in the commandment of our lord Jesus who taught us: **"Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house.' And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest on it; if not, it will return to you."** (Luke 10:5-6)

5 - **We believe that love can change hearts**. Therefore, our calling is to sow the seeds of love everywhere we go. We take it from God and overflow upon all those who are around us with practical love, trusting that love is the most powerful weapon. We should never be mislead or tricked into returning evil with evil, but rather we should leave matters into the hands of God as the Bible Teaches us: **"Repay no one evil for evil... As much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves... For it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. Therefore, 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."** (Romans 12:17-21)

6 - As to the migration of Christians abroad because of these tribulations and hardships, I would like to clarify some points in this regard:

+ **We have a strong love for Egypt** throughout which we cherish thousands of holy places such as churches and monasteries and the Christian historic sites. We cannot be detached or removed from it no matter how much we are spread abroad.

+ As Christians, we also believe that **"The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness."** This means we can live in any country, and with diligence, honesty, and being talented in our professions, coupled with the blessing of the Lord, we prosper anywhere we live and we would be the cause of prosperity to these countries in which we live.

+ We know that **in this world, we will have some tribulations** as the Lord Jesus told us, and **we will withstand them** without repaying evil with evil. Rather, we trust that God will transform all things and all events to our good.

+ If the doors of immigration to some countries are open, **some Christians among all Egyptians migrate, but they will always remain connected to their beloved homeland**. They care about its affairs, seek for its good and prosperity, and help their fellow citizens in any way possible. **Even when they are far physically, their homeland is living within their hearts**. As the departed, Pope Shenouda said in his famous quote: **"Egypt is not merely a country we live in, but also it is a country that lives within us."**

7 - In summary, as Christians, we are in the protection of powerful God, Lover of mankind. He is also the Almighty. All matters of life are in his hands, and his work with His children and His Church, throughout history, are bright like the Sun. Therefore, we always feel safe and have inner peace no matter how things become tense around us. Through prayer, we place our lives and affairs in the hands of God who always on our side and transforms things to our benefit.

Fr. Yohanna Naseef

fryohanna@hotmail.com

St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church, Palatine, IL