

Sunday, November 18, 2012

## Pope Tawadors, the Gift of God

The Lord Jesus pointed out to the Samaritan woman in His conversation with her that the gift of God surpasses the materialistic matters that she aspired to. He encouraged her to seek this gift and promised to give her abundantly (John 4). Therefore, the church always seeks this gift, and when she [The church] seeks something specific from God, she dedicates deep prayers and fasting. The result is that God always gives the church His blessed gift in its due time. Through these gifts, God affirms His love and faithfulness towards His people from generation to generation.

Tawadros, or Theodoros in Greek, means the Gift of God. Pope Tawadros II is the Gift of God to the Church after she went through difficult time. Nonetheless, through prayers and fasting, the divine Gift of God came to bring joy to every heart. Thus we are assured that *“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights.”* (James 1:17)

I have known Pope Tawadros II for over 37 years as he was my Sunday school teacher for about two years in the mid Seventies.

He was the head of Sunday school at the church of Archangel Michael of Damanhour. During that time I lived in the town of El-Mahmoudiya, about 18 Km North East of Damanhour [Western Delta]. Our church didn't have any Sunday school servants, so Dr. Wagih [Now Pope Tawadros II] used to come with another servant every Friday to pray the liturgy with us. Afterwards, he would serve Sunday school for 15 boys and girls in Elementary and Junior High age. I do recall that he was kind, pleasant and patient. He was also talented in telling biblical stories and saints' biographies in an attention-grabbing way.

After he was ordained a bishop in 1997, we met several times either at St. Mark's in Alexandria or in the Karma building in King Mariout among other places. He used to encourage me, discuss and debate topics in humility being clear and simple in all matter. In spite of the difference in age, experience, and stature between us, he always liked to exchange experience and knowledge. I have always admired his creativity, his vision for the future of the church and being deeply rooted in the patristic traditions and generally interested in the human heritage.

Indeed he holds sincere love in his heart towards everyone. I cannot forget that he came to lead the funeral prayer of my father in July of 2004, he gave a deep spiritual sermon that comforted all the audiences.

I invited him once to participate in an anti Female Genital Mutilation conference; he came and contributed with a valuable lecture about the subject. He accepted invitations to celebrate the opening of service centers in many churches in Alexandria. He got to know these churches closely, as though God was preparing him that some day he will be their bishop.

I remember a conversation that took place between me and him 13 years ago. It was after he led the grand opening of a service center under the name of Mother Teresa in one of the churches in Alexandria. It was noticeable that the center carries the name of Mother Teresa although she doesn't belong to the Coptic Orthodox Church. During that event he amazed me when he said “I wish/anticipate the day when we open a service center honoring the name of Dr. Ahmad Zewail.” [Ahmad Zewail is a Muslim Egyptian American Nobel prize Laureate in Chemistry for his work on Femtochemistry.] Thus, Pope Tawadros II, the gift of God to us, has an open mind that celebrates and honors human achievements and is willing to learn from everyone.

I informed him once that one of the servants in his parish mishandled funds that belonged to an elderly widow at St. Mark's Church in Alexandria. The issue ended peacefully but the widow was hurt from what had happened. He immediately suggested that we visit her as soon as we can. Indeed, he came from King Mariout especially for this visit on a Thursday morning. He left his car at St. Mark's church and we went together in my car to visit the widow, his words were like a balm that healed her heart, and we were deeply touched and consoled by these words.

When I moved to serve in the United States, he was the only bishop that called to check on me and supported me with his love and words of encouragement. When he lost my phone number, he obtained it from my mother in Alexandria and called me again to ask about me and the ministry and whether I needed anything. This is how I experienced his love in a practical manner and saw in him the embodiment of fatherhood.

I truly believe that God has given the Church a good shepherd according to His heart, so “Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!” (2 Corinthians 9:15).

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