

Sunday, December 16, 2012

Distinct Characteristics of the Christian Faith (2)

The work of the Holy Spirit within Christians

In the previous article we discussed the value of man from two different angles: Creating man after the image of God and His likeness, and God the logos uniting with mankind through incarnation. In this article, we will talk about the work of the Holy Spirit within man and leading him to know God through the inward divine manifestation.

Knowing God:

After God created Adam and Eve, they didn't know Him through a written book, heavenly mediators or prophets. Rather they knew Him by being created after His image and likeness. God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life so man became a living being, and from Adam God created Eve. Man was created after the image of God and His likeness through the divine breath. Thus, he obtained the knowledge of God from His image that he carries within him. Saint Athanasius comments on this in his famous book "The incarnation of the Logos": "When God the Almighty was making mankind through His own Word, He perceived that they, owing to the limitation of their nature, could not of themselves have any knowledge of their Artificer, the Incorporeal and Uncreated. He took pity on them, therefore, and did not leave them destitute of the knowledge of Himself, lest their very existence should prove purposeless. For of what use is existence to the creature if it cannot know its Maker? How could men be reasonable beings if they had no knowledge of the Word and Reason of the Father, through whom they had received their being? They would be no better than the beasts, had they no knowledge save of earthly things; and why should God have made them at all, if He had not intended them to know Him? But, in fact, the good God has given them a share in His own Image, that is, in our Lord Jesus Christ, and has made even themselves after the same Image and Likeness. Why? Simply in order that through this gift of Godlikeness in themselves they may be able to perceive the Image Absolute, that is the Word Himself, and through Him to apprehend the Father; which knowledge of their Maker is for men the only really happy and blessed life." [Chapter 3 (11)].

Since man sinned, his nature became corrupted and the image of God within him became distorted. He lost the knowledge of his creator and sin dominated man and spread out, as God said: "*And the Lord said, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh."*" (Genesis 6:3).

A Prophecy and its fulfillment

Among the prophecies of the Old Testament is a prophecy about the coming of the Holy Spirit upon mankind again: "*And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.*" (Joel 2:28). Jesus then spoke about the fulfillment of this prophecy on more than one occasion in the gospel of John: "*But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.*" (John 14:26). He also said "*But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you.*" (John 16:13-14)

The Work of the Holy Spirit:

Through these verses, we realize that one of the most important characteristics of the Christian faith is the work of the Holy Spirit within those who believe in the Trinity and salvation. Christianity is not merely a set of laws to be followed by those who believe in the Christian religion, neither is it code of conduct which governs individuals and societies. Rather, it is a **fellowship with the Holy Trinity** which is lived by the believers through the Holy Spirit to become children to the heavenly father and members of the body of the Son, the incarnated logos. The Holy Spirit works in the church sacraments and inspires the word of God in the Holy Scriptures. He also leads spiritual people in every sanctified thought and every good deed. Thus, the believers would live Christianity as a practical life attached to God and not a mere practice of some conducts that differentiate a group of people who believe in some religion.

God willing, we will continue this topic in the next article.

Fr. Morcos Daoud

frmorcosdaoud@yahoo.com

St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church, Palatine, IL