

Sunday, January 27, 2012

Larger than the Heavens

When the Lord appeared to Moses in the burning bush and sent him to Pharaoh to deliver the people of Israel from the land of servitude, He said to him *"I have surely seen the oppression of My people and have heard their cry. So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey."* (Exodus 3:7-8). The land of Canaan is geographically small, not as large as the land of Egypt. It is only 30 miles wide, limited by the Dead Sea and the Jordan River from the East and the Mediterranean Sea from the West. Therefore, it is clear that God means something other than the large land because the people of Israel were choked and oppressed in the land of Egypt despite its large size.



In fact any place God chooses for us to live with Him becomes vast and comfortable and we can never feel choked no matter how small its size might be. However, if we isolate ourselves from God, even if we are in large and comfortable places, there will come a time when we feel choked and distressed.

When God dwells in a place, it becomes infinitely vast. God is infinite and not bound by space or buildings made by the hands of men, however, He will gladly accept to live in the heart of man, the work of His hands. God is pleased to take the heart of man as His own temple. It is the temple that He fashioned with His hands. This dwelling makes the heart of man large and fills it with Joy, love, and purity, *"that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith."* (Ephesians 3:17) *"Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?"* (1 Corinthians 3:16).

Anyone who lives in fellowship with God tastes this vastness and glory.

St. Mary is the greatest example for this. She became the second heaven by the dwelling of God in her womb. In that regard, we sing about her in the Kiahk Praises: *"He made your innards His throne, also your virginal womb, He made it larger than the heavens."* (Greek praise on the eighth passage of the Saturday Theotokia)...

Larger than the Heavens, what an amazing phrase!

This is the result when the heart is filled with grace and the fruit of the dwelling of God in the life of man. The heart becomes larger than the heavens and is not bothered by anything as St. Paul said in the epistle to the Corinthians: *"O Corinthians! We have spoken openly to you, our heart is wide open. You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted by your own affections. Now in return for the same (I speak as to children), you also be enlarged."* (2 Corinthians 6:11-13).

It is a biblical commandment to us to have a large heart. Loving God and keeping His commandment is the way to have this large heart. His Holy Spirit works within us through the commandment so that we have a large heart as it is written in the psalm: *"I will run the course of Your commandments, For You shall enlarge my heart."* (Psalm 119,32), *"I called on the LORD in distress; The LORD answered me and set me in a broad place."* (Psalm 118, 5).

Sometimes we hear from people that they are distressed and choked because of some circumstances or because they might be suffering from something. They wish if their circumstances to be changed so they rest from their troubles. The true remedy for this condition lies not in the change of their circumstances nor the relief from the external suffering but rather it is through the inner work of the Holy Spirit within the heart. When our hearts becomes large, all feelings of distress and choking cease to exist even though the external conditions may stay at their worst.

Our early fathers the monks, although they lived in narrow caves and holes in the earth, did indeed enjoy the fellowship of God and His love. They felt as though they own heaven and earth...Their hearts became larger than the heavens by the dwelling of God within them.

Here we understand the value of prayer and praise. Through communicating with God, grace is poured into the heart so it becomes larger and higher than all tribulations and problems and it becomes larger than the heavens. The troubles of this world becomes like small rubbish that is thrown into a vast ocean where it sinks and vanishes.

The humble heart is a place of rest for God and He makes is greater than the heavens. Thus the heart accepts all events around it in thanksgiving just as St. Mary did in her life. She accepted everything in complete submission and without complaining. She kept all things and pondered them in her heart. Now she tirelessly intercedes on behalf of the whole world and asks for the divine mercy for all sinners and the weak. She helps and comforts, encourages and blesses, and present to us a magnificent example on how to have a large heart, Larger than the Heavens

Fr. Yohanna Naseef

fryohanna@hotmail.com

St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church, Palatine, IL