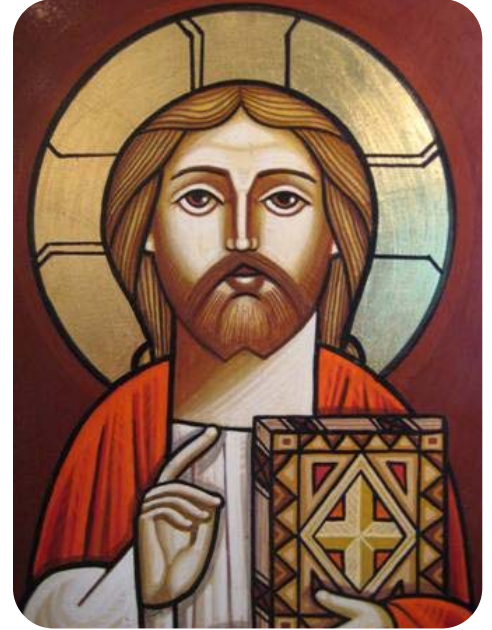


Sunday, March 17, 2013

Coptic Missionary Churches (1)

- + The Church is the embassy of heaven on earth. It radiates the love of God and His salvation to all mankind.
- + Before the Lord's ascension, He commanded His disciples saying: *"You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."* (Acts 1:8). Indeed, after the Pentecost, the disciples started to gradually preach the message of salvation to the whole world.
- + Thus, we can see that Church as a Christian institution is fundamentally evangelical in its roots. It preaches the love of Christ, invites people of all races to enjoy His salvation, and shares His abundant grace through the fellowship of the household of the Lord (Ephesians 2:19).
- + Our Coptic Orthodox Church has always had this evangelical spirit throughout ages. Historically, the Coptic Orthodox Church has evangelized in Africa, Europe all the way to Ireland. Our Church also evangelized through the life of her saints and their valuable spiritual experience such as St. Anthony. His life story alone moved the hearts of thousands of young men in Europe and the Levant to dedicate their lives to Christ their redeemer.
- + In modern times, the Church started to regain her role in mission work throughout the world once more. This started with the immigration movement [out of Egypt] in the middle of the 20th century where hundreds of Coptic churches filled the Diaspora.



- + Initially, the mother church main effort was to minister to the Egyptian immigrants and establish churches to care for them and their children. Afterwards, the second and third generation Egyptians grew up in the church cherishing its prayers, praise, and faith and tasted its patristic and liturgical traditions. They wanted to share this precious Orthodox tradition with their friends and neighbors. Hence came the initiative to establish evangelical (missionary) churches which embrace the youth of the second and third generations and transform them into evangelical ministers and missionaries.

+ These churches are bona fide Coptic Orthodox Churches. Nonetheless, they have a special evangelistic approach that caters to those who are not Christians. This is typically done by launching missionary groups to the community to reach all factions of society from the homeless to the professionals and every faction in between. These ministries offer the love of Christ in the form of meals to the homeless or printed materials accompanied with a soft spoken word. They always invite everyone to celebrate the holy liturgy which is the core of worship in our Orthodox faith. With pleasant follow up, some join catechumenal classes as a preparatory step to be fully integrated in the fellowship of the church through Baptism.

+ Some may ask: Shouldn't all Coptic Churches be called evangelistic (Missionary) churches? [If so] then why some churches have that name and not all of them? Are there other benefits of these missionary churches? Are there any guidelines or reservations that must be taken into consideration in establishing these churches? This is what we will discuss in the next two articles with the grace of Christ.

Fr. Yohanna Naseef
fryohanna@hotmail.com

St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church, Palatine, IL

