

Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate

St. Mary Coptic
Church
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بطريركية الأقباط الأرثوذكس
كنيسة السيدة العذراء
القبطية الارثوذكسية - شيكاغو

March 1986

+ On March 21st we shall have several spiritual and happy occasions to celebrate. Locally this day coincides with the first anniversary of **St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church** of Chicago. On the same day last year, when the new church was officially initiated, with the blessing of **His Holiness Pope Shenouda III**, our hearts were full of joy and peace when it came to our minds the anniversary of the departure of the blessed **Father Bishoi Kamel**, who has been known to many of us. Although we can no more see him, yet we feel him working and praying for the new Church.

We dedicate this church bulletin to the life and some sayings of this blessed spiritual leader

A SPIRITUAL LEADER: FATHER BISHOI KAMEL

(December 6, 1931 - March 21, 1979)

Father Tadros Y. Malaty

Reverend Father Bishoi Kamel Ishak is considered one of the greatest spiritual leaders in this century, not only in Egypt but among Copts all over the world.

It is difficult to depict his heart towards God's Kingdom, but I will briefly try to give an account of his life and his ministry. I was very close to him, as I had the honor to serve with him when he was a teacher in Sunday schools, and afterwards when he was a priest.

Message from Above

Rev. Fr. Bishoi believed that he received a message from God. He studied in the Faculty of Science and worked as a teacher; then he studied Sociology and Philosophy in the Faculty of Arts believing that these subjects would help him in teaching the children in Sunday schools. He devoted his life to serve our Lord Jesus Christ.

He had a strong personality; he was decent, logical and effective especially towards the Christian youth. He was ordained as a priest on the second of December, 1959, at St. George Coptic Orthodox Church in Sporting, Alexandria, Egypt. He became a famous priest not only in Alexandria, but also throughout Egypt. By his spirituality and his good treatment he came to be loved by the Moslems as well.

Herewith, are some attitudes in his ministry: He was not interested in the church's financial status. He believed that his time was precious and must be used in preaching the Gospel, in which he was instructed. He built St. George

Church, and established five churches in Alexandria, one in Los Angeles and one in New Jersey.

He asked that some priests might be ordained to serve with him in the church. Some leaders in the Coptic and Protestant churches refused his idea, but his faith was strong, and he had confidence in his mission and love for everyone. Before he died, there were five priests in his church.

He established many churches near St. George Church, believing that the concentrated ministry is more successful. He encouraged many members to worship God in the newly established churches. He never paid attention on being praised, honored or admired by others; he was a humble person.

In spite of his fame among all the Copts and Moslems, he was very modest, humble and broad-minded. He spoke cheerfully to all people, especially the poor. He knew how to deal with children, as if he was a child; and he was respected by the elders.

He was very attractive as a preacher because of his humility and modesty, and because he spoke the colloquial language.

He was very kind towards everybody, especially with his spiritual sons. He always gave hope to the sinners, and never despaired of the salvation of anyone believing that God Himself seeks our salvation.

His Fatherhood

It is too difficult to explain his father-hood. He opened his heart to everyone he met. He felt his responsibility not only towards the people in the church, but also to everyone who asked for his help. He had the pleasure to share in their suffering and their joy. Every man, woman, young man and child felt that he was his own father, who granted him all his attention and love.

In dealing with family problems he used to comfort everyone. He saved many persons who were about to leave Christianity due to sexual or financial pressures. He was a father to orphans, widows and strangers. Many families secretly received a monthly support from him. He never went home with his wife to celebrate any feast alone. After the Divine Liturgy they used to visit the distressed families and sometimes came home with someone in need.

Father Bishoi and the Cross

The crucifixion was the centre of his mission. He wrote two books about the Cross. (**Under The Feet Of The Cross, and I was Crucified with Christ**)

He used to ask those who came for confession to contemplate on "Jesus Wounds". On his visits to some patients, he used to strengthen them by saying that they were participating in Jesus' sufferings.

He also used to say that our participation in Christ is deepened through the meditation on the Cross. Without having a holy meditation on the crucified Christ, you cannot say that you know Him. This shows that we have to spend some minutes daily to practice this meditation.

He used to encourage the patients who were been suffering from cancer, saying that this disease is the way to Paradise, because the sick person participates in the Lord's suffering. Fr. Bishoi also suffered from this sickness; he was always thanking God for this gift. The feast of the Holy Cross occurred three days before his departure. Although the doctors had forbidden him from speaking, he preached warmly about the Cross. His favorite icon was that of St. Mary Magdalene kneeling before our crucified Lord. He used to keep this icon in front of him, and set his eyes on it before he died

A Churchman

He was a true churchman. He loved the church because he considered it as Christ's bride, and mother of Christians. He loved her Holy Scriptures, her Sacraments, her hymns, her rituals, her saints and even her buildings. He loved the Holy Scripture, because he considered it as the book of the Church, and spent most of his time in reading, meditating and studying it. He also encouraged his spiritual sons to read it without ceasing.

He never separated any passage of the Holy Scripture from the Tradition of the Church, its liturgies and hymns.

He was interested in the Coptic language and taught it to the children. He used to pray the liturgies in Arabic to make people understand it. He spoke about Baptism and Chrism as the hidden fountain of gifts of the Holy Spirit. He

uttered the words clearly in his prayers so that all people in the church might participate in worshipping God.

His love to the Church appeared most during his last few years when he started to stress on its lectionary in his sermons and writing. He tried to discover what the Holy Spirit wanted to teach in every occasion.

Father Bishoi was eager to enjoy the blessing of the saints in his life and his ministry. He had many friends among the saints and the heavenly powers, especially the Holy Virgin St. Mary, the Archangel Michael, St. George, St. Mina and St. Abraam of Fayoum.

He wrote many books and articles; he encouraged many writers to publish their work at the church bookstore.

Last Days

Although he spent his last two years fighting cancer, the smile never left his face. His house and his heart were always open for his congregation. Many admitted that they found comfort in their illness or trouble just by looking at their Father or hearing about his patience. When I heard these stories, I always remembered the words of St. Augustine, that a priest lying on his sick bed for thirty years may be more effective in his service than with all his preaching.

On the eve of the feast of the Holy Cross, he was visited by His Holiness Pope Shenouda III. In the same night, his doctor advised him not to over-burden himself by speaking, but his answer was, " **I long to speak much about the Cross. Do not hinder me from speaking about it. Our message is to make the power of the cross apparent to all.**"

In his last hours, he advised us about the service of the Lord. He blessed all those present one by one; then he asked in amazement, " **What is this opening above us?** " When he was asked, " Father, where is this? " He answered in a faint voice, " **Heaven** ". The doors of heaven have finally been opened to accept the servant of the Lord.

May his blessings be with us . Amen.



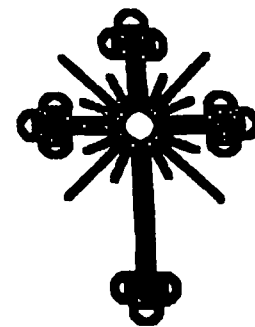
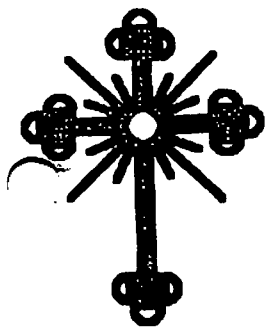
Church News

+ **Liturgy Services:** Saturdays; March 8 & 22 , April 12 & 26 from 9:00 A.M. till 12:00 noon , followed by sunday school for our children.

+ **Place:** Still we have the service at 107th and Kean. We pray to God to bless our efforts in finding a place in the North Suburbs for sunday services.



The Coptic Church has two days in the calendar when she celebrates the feast of the Cross: Tut 17 (Sept. 27) and Bar matiat 10 (March 19). The following article is written by late blessed Father Bishoi Kamal ..



THE CROSS

Stumbling Block, Foolishness and Power

Blessed Father Bishoi Kamel

The Cross has three aspects in relation to man, which are revealed by St. Paul the Apostle in his First Letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:18-25).

1) The Cross—A Stumbling Block

Lord you have said, "Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks" (Matt. 18:7; NAS version). How can the Cross be a stumbling block? The Cross in itself is not a stumbling block but it is so to the Jews. Judaizing is an evil quality in the subconscious of man, to which the Cross is a stumbling block. Love of leadership, traits to which the Cross always stands as a stumbling block.

My soul, when you look forward to the love of leadership, Jesus tells, "I came not to be served but to serve" (Matt. 20-28).

The Cross is a stumbling block to you my selfish soul as you behold the crucified Jesus willingly offering himself in the Cross.

It is a stumbling block to my soul when you participate with Jewish money-changers and those who sold pigeons while you behold Jesus on the Cross stripped even of his clothes.

It is a stumbling block to my soul that loves to be conspicuous, while seeing Jesus, rejected and crucified, warning you against praying in the lanes and on the street corners.

It is a stumbling block to my soul when you cannot bear to have someone hurt your pride, neither at home nor at work nor even in the service of the church, while you see Christ despised and rejected on the Cross.

A stumbling block to you when you seek the places of honor while the Lord calls you to sit in the lowest place (Luke 14:7-11).

A stumbling block to you my soul when you give parties to your friends and rich neighbors while you do not invite the lame, the maimed and the poor (Luke 14:12-14).

My soul, you are daily threatened by a Judaizing relapse, and the Cross of the Lord will always be a stumbling block whenever you stray from the life of love and perseverance and whenever you give in to the life of hatred, tiredness and shunning the narrow gate.

My Lord Jesus, truly you have commanded me to take up my Cross daily and follow you (Luke 9:23), and without doubt you wished to protect me from the ills of Judaizing that threaten my miserable spirit.

2) Foolishness (Folly) of the Cross

My Lord Jesus, you have proclaimed that the Cross is God's wisdom, holiness and salvation, "But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom,.....for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory," (1 Cor. 2:7&8). When man is unable to comprehend the greatness of a matter he tries to belittle it. Thus the mystery of incarnation and salvation is a lofty divine mystery which man cannot comprehend unless the Holy Spirit declares it to him. When man comprehend a topic, a philosophy or an invention, he becomes master of it. Man thought he can comprehend God and thus become his master, not knowing that 'the wisdom of this world is folly with God'. (1 Cor. 3:19)

When St. Paul the Apostle spoke about Christ's suffering and resurrection, Festus, the governor, said in a loud voice, "Paul, you are mad, your great learning is turning you mad". (Acts 26:23,24). As for the Greek philosophers in Athens, they said about him, "What would this babbler say?" (Acts 17:18)

In this twentieth century of ours the Cross will remain foolishness (folly). The Cross will remain the difference between Christ and the world with its philosophies and religions. The belief in the Trinity, Incarnation, Crucifixion and Resurrection will always remain a folly to others. You will be unable to convince an apostate who does not believe and who will accuse us of ignorance. Moreover, the Christian who adheres to truth in his life and at work is accused by his colleagues of not being open-minded. The woman who behaves and dresses as a Christian is accused of being old-fashioned. The forgiving Christian is accused of foolishness. The man of faith is accused of being unrealistic, and he who deserts the world to worship God in a monastery is accused of running away. He who spends his time and wealth in the service of Christ is asked, "why this waste?" (Matt. 26:8)

My Lord Jesus, from the beginning you have taught me that my Christian life should start by carrying the Cross every day. I shall carry it and witness for you against the Hellenism of the world in spite of their calling me foolish, because the Cross is folly.

As for the Church, the world today imposes on her a social and an ethical Gospel instead of making morals and social activities the fruits of a spiritual life. Many churches have slipped and fallen into the snare of secularism. They establish colleges and hospitals but they

do not talk about repentance. Some Christian groups have allowed pre-marital sex while others have permitted dancing even among monks and nuns.

My Lord Jesus, do not ever allow our Church to throw down its Cross, following in the steps of Western churches, in her attempt to assume progress and to keep in pace with the advancing world. My Lord Jesus, you know that our Church is accused of foolishness and lack of progress because the Cross is folly to many.....

3) Power of the Cross

I- The Cross in its Nature is strength, Not Weakness and Defeat:

Herod, who is a type of the Church that is mingled with the world, wished to hear a word from Jesus. But Jesus strongly refused because the powerful truth and the cunning and deceiving fox are not compatible. Pilate asked Jesus about truth and Jesus did not answer because truth is always obvious and clear. Pilate then threatened Him with the Cross but Jesus told him, "You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above." (John 19:11)

The priests and Pharises wished that Jesus would share in their hypocrisy but He likened them to the white-washed tombs which are full of all uncleanness. (Matt. 23:27)

The money-changers wished He would accept a bribe and not drive them out but He was zealous for the holiness of His house and overturned their tables. (Matt. 23:12).

Hence, the world from all walks of life plotted against Him with the Cross. **But He carried His Cross with power and did not give up any of His principles.** The Cross was a proof of the victory of His principles over them. The Cross was a proof of the weakness of the world. The Cross was a proof of the power of Christ.

The Children of Jesus should be strong and the proof of their strength is the Cross. The Cross is not merely a form of spiritual meditation but it is also perseverance in suffering in order to stand against the world. The Cross in the life of the Lord was not the result of His actions but rather it was a part of His ministry when he said "that he must suffer many things" (Matt. 16:21)

Jesus, my God, teach me, when I am in distress in this world, not to feel defeated but victorious through the power of Your Cross.

II- The Nature of the Cross is the Highest and Most Profound Form of Love.

Love to those who crucified Him.... Love of the sinners.... Love to give without expecting anything in return.... The Cross is the defeat of hatred, there is no trace of hatred in the Cross.

III- The Cross is the strongest Form of Victory Over the Devil, Death, Hell and the world.

The Cross has crushed Satan.... I have seen this with my own eyes when the bishop or the priest places the Cross over a person possessed by an evil spirit. I have seen and heard the devil cry out and leave, terrified by the Cross.

How great and awesome is the Cross. Sin is the cause of death and, on the Cross, the Lord Jesus condemned sin in the flesh. (Rom. 8:3)

When Queen Helena wanted to find out which cross was the Lord's she placed a dead body on the first and the second crosses and nothing happened. But as soon as the coffin touched the third, the corpse instantly came to life. Hence she was assured that it was the Cross of the Lord.

The Cross is victory over hell where Christ went through the Cross, "in which he went and preached to the spirits in prison," (1 Peter 3:19) and restored the captives.

The Cross is victory over the world. The Lord conquered through it - He was born in a manger so no one boasts about his place of birth, He fled and lived off the contributions of the generous, He worked as a carpenter, thus He blessed work and labor, and humiliated the pride of the rich. He granted us purity, "And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." (Gal. 5:24)

My Lord Jesus, remove the veil from my eyes so I can discover the power of Your Cross in my life and "deliver my mind from the recklessness of insubstantial works and worldly lusts, to the remembrance of Thine heavenly judgments." Grant that I do not complain from laboring in Your service but rather make me a Cyrene coming in from the country (Luke 23:26). Let me, Lord, no longer live but you live in me (Gal. 2:20), and grant that I have a share with the victorious, and that I stand beside the sea of glass, with those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name. Lord Jesus give me your spiritual harp so I can sing the song of the Cross, the song of Moses, the servant of God and the song of the Lamb (Rev. 15:1-4). Through the intercession of Virgin Mary who shared the suffering of the Lord on the Cross, (cp. Phil. 3:10, 1 Peter 4:13), grant that I carry Your Cross, a stumbling block and foolishness to others, but God's strength to me Amen.

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