

STORIES FOR THE YOUTH

SERIES I
Stories 1 -15

Edited By
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FORWARD

Once again, I have had the blessing and the pleasure of reading one of **Fr. Tadros Malaty's** wonderful contributions to the spiritual life of the Coptic Church. While the books are no real substitution for meeting our beloved Fr. Tadros in person, I was glad to have another taste of the love, wisdom and experience that emanates from this loving father. The results of years spent with the beloved Father Pishoy Kamel are clearly evident in his work.

I am glad that this book was translated from Arabic into English. But I am even happier that I was given the opportunity to edit the English translation before it went to press. I hope this trend of editing continues. This editing step is absolutely necessary for the books translated from Arabic for publication and distribution in our Coptic churches in the lands of immigration.

A few years back, John Watson of Oxford University did a review of Abouna¹ Tadros' book *Councils and Conciliatory* for *The Coptic Church Review*. *The Coptic Church Review* is the premier scholarly journal put out for the educational and spiritual benefit of English speaking Copts around the world. It is no surprise, then, that Fr. Tadros is on the publication's editorial board.

Watson gave a favorable review of the book's content, but he also had this to say: "My appeals for careful English-language editing of Fr. Malaty's books have fallen on deaf ears. This is a sad mistake. There are no less than 63 elementary errors of spelling or syntax in the volume under review. Abouna Tadros deserves better. It is a fundamental law of translation that the translator translates into his first language. An English-Language editor, at the very least, is needed for Fr. Malaty. I am sure the Arabic is excellent. The practice of using Arabic speakers for English 'translations' should be abandoned. It is inexcusable. It is no service to the Church. The same problem arises in many poor translations of books by Pope Shenouda.

Once again, a booklet by Fr. Tadros has no index. I continue to hope for better days!"

John Watson

I am a member of the "Second Generation" of Copts in the lands of immigration. I cannot possibly agree more with John Watson's sentiments. Our Church in U.S.A and other lands of immigration is in serious need for books written by their fathers to be translated and edited properly. Unfortunately, many of the people translating the books don't have English as a first language; for this reason, many translations have grammar, syntax (sentence structure), and spelling mistakes.

I fear that many youth that may have benefited from their extensive vocabulary, were inhibited because they were unable to follow the translations.

I urge any English speaking youth who shares my sentiments to *respectfully* speak up and express him or herself through whatever media in their Church community. We urgently need people who speak English as a first language to volunteer their time and effort to serve the Church as translators. Even if they don't read or write Arabic, they can serve as editors of writings that have already been translated. Finally, I hope that my request is not ignored or swept under the carpet.

Again, I thank God for the blessings he gives us through the pen of Fr. Tadros and pray that God will keep him with us for many years so that we may benefit from his words and enjoy his contemporary contributions to the spiritual and intellectual heritage of the Coptic Orthodox Church.

*A Youth of the Coptic Church
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¹ Abouna" is a term used by the Coptic people to address their fathers the priests. It is equivalent to the English "Fr."

1: KEEP ONE PICTURE, DROP THE OTHER

On the Sunday following the feast of the departure of Fr. Pishoy Kamel (March 26, 1995), a woman who wanted to give her confession came to the church of St. Mark (Jersey City, N.J). She was extremely penitent. She said to me, "I was in love with a person years ago and I desperately wanted to put an end to this sinful relationship, but I couldn't get over my feelings towards him, so I kept his picture in my pocketbook".

A few days ago, on the feast of the departure of our Fr. Pishoy (Mar.21), his picture was given to me. So, as many people do to receive the blessing of his prayers, I put his picture in the same pocketbook with the other one.

That night, in a dream, Fr. Pishoy appeared to me and began to accuse me saying, "How could you put Fr. Pishoy's picture with that other person's picture. You have to make a choice. Keep one and drop the other".

Immediately, I woke up in the middle of the night, took the picture of this person out and tore it to pieces, deciding to live in repentance. Three years after, the sinful relationship, I had come for the first time to confess with sincere repentance. I decided to live as our father Pishoy lived, in the spirit of purity, having no communion with sin.

Truly, our beloved father was known for his great love for repentance. He longed to give his whole life to see every soul getting closer to our Holy Savior and experience the joy of communion with God. The World, with its events, joys, and sorrows could not affect. His devoted spirit which we were blessed to be touched with

Even after his rest and departure from this world, the spirit of preaching did not leave him. He longs for the repentance of all people and prays for the purity of all, in the Holy Christ.

Often our father preached with the evangelistic principle "For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness, and what communion has light with darkness?" (2 Cor. 6:14). He used to say, "Christianity does not agree with half solutions."



Soliloquy

O my Savior, grant me to keep Your picture within me,
This which you engraved with Your own blood on my heart,
This which Your Holy Spirit formed inside me.
Let my soul be an icon of You, and become ready for the eternal wedding.
My soul, which will be Your bride, carries your icon,
O my heavenly groom.
O God, please take from my heart every picture of corruption
and every earthly thought so that I may fly into Your Heaven.
You wouldn't allow your son's image to be kept with corrupted pictures.
You didn't allow communion between Your righteous light and abominable darkness!
Then , how would I have the audacity to carry both pictures together
The picture of the holy heavenly with the picture of the mortal earthly?
Please break every earthly picture and statue inside me,
let Your Holy Spirit carry my spirit to You to become
a living icon of Your holiness.

2: GIVE ME A PIECE OF SMOKED FISH

One day, an intense battle ended with the victory of Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte. So he wanted to reward those valiant soldiers of different nationalities who performed outstanding acts of bravery. "My brave soldiers," shouted Napoleon, "tell me what you desire and I will be obliged to perform it."

The Polish hero said, "Give Poland its independence". The emperor agreed and said, "I will."

The poor Czechoslovakian said, "I am a farmer, give me a piece of property to plant."

The emperor said, "It's yours, my friend".

The German said, "Give me a bar in which to drink beer."

The emperor said, "Grant him a bar". Then it was the Jewish soldier's turn, so the emperor looked at him and, smiling, said, "How about you, my friend"?

The Jewish person looked at him timidly and with hesitation said, "My lord, if you don't mind, give me a piece of smoked fish".

The emperor, surprised shrugged his shoulders with disapproval and said, "Give this man a piece of smoked fish".

After the emperor left, the other soldiers surrounded the Jewish man and said to him, "You fool, how dare you ask the emperor for a fish? Is that any way to treat the emperor."

The Jewish soldier immediately answered, "You'll see who the fool is! You asked for Polish independence, a field, and a bar. The emperor won't give you these things! But I am realistic. I asked for a piece of fish, maybe he will give it to me!".

God, Grant Me To Be Realistic

From the earthly, I can ask for dust,
But from the heavenly, I can ask for heaven,
I am asking each according to his abilities.

Maybe the human will give something,
but often it is given without humility.
But the heavenly, with love, longs to give even himself with joy.

Cursed is he who depends on human help.
The human souls come out and they turn to dust.
But whoever depends on You gets very close to You
and are elevated by Your Holy Spirit to live with You forever.

What can I ask of you?
You gave me Yourself!

You are the bread of life, who satisfies me.
You are the spring of life that waters me
You are the king who leads me

You are the eternal light and by knowing you, you light my darkness.
You took away every feeling of loneliness.
You became my older brother, heavenly groom, divine friend, and my companion who carried me in my fatigue.
You are all my satisfaction.

O Beneficent! What more can I ask? You gave me Yourself.
O Lord, just grant me to be realistic.

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3: Transparent Glass

A rich man once wondered, "What good would all this wealth do to me when I feel this awful emptiness deep down? What does my soul long for in order to have rest?" He then went to a wise man, explaining his problem and seeking his advice.

The wise man took him to the window and the two of them looked through the glass towards the heavens. The wise man then asked the rich one, "What do you see?"

"I see the beautiful blue sky," answered the rich man.

"Look at the street. What do you see?"

"I see many people."

Then the wise man gave him a valuable mirror and asked him, "What do you see in it?," I see my image."

Then the wise man said, "through the cheap window you were able to see clearly both the beautiful blue sky and the people outside. But, through the image of the mirror you were only able to see yourself. The silver frame around this mirror is like the prison of the ego, which is the killer of the soul. This is what the love of silver does!"

Give Me Your Simplicity and Take Away From Me the Love of the Bright Silver

O my Savior, give me your simple eyes,
They are like the transparent glass, which looks inexpensive.

Let me have your eyes,
Through them, I can see the beauty of the sky within me!
I can see You with Your good Father and The Holy Spirit

And long for communion with You,
And the work of Your Spirit inside me,
To find a place in Your Father's embrace!

Yes God, take away from me the love of bright silver
Which looks valuable in the eyes of many!
Many of whom try to work hard for it.

But the truth is: That it controls them, possesses them
and they become its slaves!
It prevents them from the vision of the sky,
So the eternity becomes a shadow in their eyes,
And the heavenly glory a mirage!
And the communion with the angels becomes a psychiatric problem
and an abnormality!

Yes, it prevents them from seeing their brothers!
They ask for themselves and not for others!
They become prisoners in the prison of the "ego,"
And they lose the glory of the freedom of the sons of God.
My Savior, give me the simplicity of Your eyes,
and take away from me the love of the bright silver.

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4: Your Father Is Sick in the Hospital...

“Come After the Exam!”

Once, as I was going through the college dormitories, I found a student in a state of great perplexity.

"Why are you so upset?" I asked. "Our fellow student", answered one of the students, "is disturbed by an idea that might destroy his future."

"What is this idea?"

"He is insisting on leaving during his exams and going to upper Egypt, because he has the idea that his father died today even though it is not true. He is a pre-med student and his absence may result in his failing. I would lose his chance to enter college.

He said to me, "I am sure that my father died today. I can't finish my exams, I have to leave today". Then one of his fellow students intervened saying, "We all suffered from homesickness in our first year away from home and imagined that we had relatives that died, got sick, or even got involved in accidents".

But the student said, "I'm sure my father died today."

I tried to calm him by saying that we could send a telegram to his father, asking how he is doing and then wait for an answer. He liked the idea and therefore wrote a telegram to his father. Afterwards, he began studying for the exam. The next day, the answer to his telegram came: "Your father is sick in the hospital. Come after the exam."

The student completed his exam and got there to find that his father had indeed died. He had actually passed away at the same hour that the student had shouted, "My father has died!"

This is what psychiatrists call the sixth sense, where a person feels things, which are invisible, as if they were visible and definite. This is a true event, which I experienced.

If you can, through the sixth sense, join your loved ones and experience their feelings while they are here in the flesh, how much more can you experience this with those whose spirits have departed to paradise where they have joined God. In all their love, they feel your presence and ask that you participate in their glory. Their heart is enlarged and filled with love towards you. You should have friends in paradise who share your feelings and who work for you so that you don't live in total isolation.

Father Pishoy lived among us as a friend to the Archangel Michael and many others. This gave him power and filled his life with hope. This friendship gave him his characteristic smile.

A lot of those who lived among us had the spirit of friendship. The first among them was the late St. Pope Kyrillos VI who was famous for his deep friendship with St. Mena. It has been said that he has been seen in his company, how he is with him in supporting others?

I Am Not Alone

I suffer a lot from loneliness.

It's as if my parents have left me,

even my closest friends don't understand my feelings.

O God, You fill my heart. You fill my life and grant me power and victory.

Talk to me and let me talk to You because You are my heart's desire.

Through You, God, I am close to Your angels.

I can befriend Your Saints and love them deeply and suffer no more from loneliness.



5: They Are All Unclean, They are All Pure..

At the end of a Youth meeting at St. George's Church (Sporting, Alexandria), a young man who came to the meeting for the first time came and said to me seriously, "This is the first time in my life that I long for a confession." As I welcomed him, he said to me, I want to lead a pure life, but I am unable to.

"Why?". I replied. "Because it is impossible to find a young man without a sinful relationship with the other sex!", the young man said.

"How come? Many are pure."

"If you weren't wearing that black robe, you would find out that all of these young people are at night clubs doing evil. All of them are unclean."

"All of them?"

"I say all of them because there is no man who can live without a sexual relationship."

Then I started talking to him about the possibility of God in a man's life. Concerning pure living, I gave him practical examples from the Holy Bible, the history of the church, and examples of contemporary youths.

"Do you think that I can lead a pure life?" he asked.

"This is the work of Jesus Christ within you by His Holy Spirit.

"What can I do? I love sin."

"Every morning and every night I ask to Jesus Christ, "Is life with You better than sin? I want to live in purity with You."

A few weeks later the young man came back with the same seriousness saying, "Do you remember me?"

"Yes," I said, "I remember you."

"I want to tell you, " he said," that all these young people are pure, I don't think that there is one among them who is not."

"How come? Didn't you say a few weeks ago that all of them are unclean?"

"When my heart was unclean, I thought that it was impossible that a young man could live clean. But, now after my experience of purity in Jesus Christ, I don't think that any person can live in the mud of impurity. I see all of them enjoying purity and chastity and how they hate corruption."

This is a real story that I present to each believer, so that he may experience for himself the richness of our Christ's grace who gives us His righteousness and who fills our heart with love.

O You Who Saves Me From This Body of Death

My depth is complaining to You about myself.
My body suffers, and all of my senses and feelings are shouting.
The corruption gets to me. Can I be pure again?
The sin is sweet, but with its deadly sweetness,
it carries the poison of death.
O God, make it taste bitter in my mouth.
Here is my body in Your hands, make it holy.
Make my eyes, ears, and all my senses and feelings holy.
In You I can see everything around me holy,
So I may live in the promise of Heaven,
Even during the battle against sin.

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6: A Friend For Eternity..

This is the story of a famous leader named Joshua who had 80 disciples. All of them became good leaders.

One day, Joshua lifted up his heart and asked God what He had prepared for him in eternity. In a dream, Joshua heard a voice telling him, "You and Neres will be with me in Paradise and both of you will receive the same reward."

Joshua woke up upset, wondering how he could dedicate his whole life to the ministry of God and still get the same reward as a butcher who had not fully dedicated his life to God. He called his 80 disciples to him and said to them, "Until I find this Neres, we will not gather neither for me to teach nor for us to discuss anything."

They began to search everywhere for this Neres until they discovered that there was a very poor man named Neres living in an extremely poor village. Joshua went to the nearest city in the village. All the multitude gathered with him and he asked them about Neres the butcher. "Why do you ask about this rustic and unknown man? He is nothing," they replied.

When they went to bring Neres, he said to them, "I think you misunderstood the message from Joshua. I am not the man. Who am I to be called for by the enlightened teacher and rabbi Joshua who filled Israel with his teachings." In the end, he refused to go with them.

Joshua was determined to meet him and when he heard that Neres refused to come with them, Joshua decided to go to him. As Joshua drew near the house, Neres saw him and hastily said to him, "Why do you want to see me, O crown of Israel?"

"I just want to know one thing, what kind of goodness do you do in your life?" Joshua asked.

"I don't do anything extraordinary," Neres replied. But Joshua insisted to find out the details of his life.

"I lead a normal life," said Neres. "I have my old, sick parents living here with me. I wash their feet and hands, dressing them. I find that I do this work joyfully and that I have the desire to serve them and give them all that they need."

When Joshua heard this, he bowed down before him. He kissed his forehead and said to him, "O blessed son Neres, blessed are your deeds and your life. How happy I am to be your company in paradise!"

This simple story may reflect how heaven weighs the deeds of people. The calculation of heaven is different from the calculation of this world. God wants us to be engaged in practical love. It is not the rank, the position, or the religious order that counts. None of them are nearly as important for our salvation as are honesty and love to Him.



7: He Alone Remained With Me.

As Fr. Pishoy sat beside the man he said to him, "I hope all your problems have been solved. You seem happy."

"No, " he responded, "everything is the same, but I realize that Jesus is dwelling in me when I go through some tribulation and struggle. I will tell you of a dream, or perhaps a vision, that filled me with joy."

"I went to sleep very broken hearted, so broken hearted that I was at the point of committing suicide. I decided that I was going to throw myself from a very high mountain. On my way to the mountain, I encountered many of my friends. They all gave me comforting words of consolation, but I didn't feel that I could share my agony with any of them.

As I continued on my way towards the mountain, I met a priest who gave me good words, but the agony in my heart increased as he spoke of the promises of God. I was not even able to accept his words.

Further along on my way, I met an angel who told me about the joys of heaven and how the faithful are waiting for their brothers and sisters to join them in the life of praise and joy in heaven. He also talked to me about life on earth, with all its agony, but in my stupidity I insisted to continue on my way-to suicide.

As I continued on, I reached the top of the mountain. From there I could here the voices of my friends, the priest and the angels weeping for me. But I was to distressed to give them any attention. I realized that all of them loved me, but none of them were able to solve my problems.

Finally, I threw myself from the mountain. My body slammed into a rock and I started to bleed. Before I knew what was going on, I heard a sound, as of a man who had fallen beside me.

It was Jesus. He threw Himself after me to save me from certain death. Everyone tried to save me, but it was Jesus alone who was able to come to me, even to the point of death, to give me life. By His wounds, he healed my wounds. He is the only one who can go to my tomb to offer me the resurrection. He has the power to convert my darkness into light and my agony into joy."

Always With Me

I will never fear

I will never lose hope.

He is with me.

Allow me, O Lord,

to see Your hands open to embrace me.

Yes Lord, I see You in the depth of my heart
Where your holy spirit lifts my heart to You.
I hear your voice through the world around me,
through my family, through my father of confession, through my brothers in Christ.
I see You transfigured before me
and enter into a deep conversation with you
through your Bible that is full of joy and Your holy Church.



8: I Carried His Cross With Him.

A youth used to come to Abouna Pishoy Kamel looking for work. Finally, an owner of a factory hired him and made him carry a tremendous amount of paper on a bicycle to deliver to various places. One day, this youth came to Abouna and said, "Today I carried Jesus' cross with him."

"How?" asked Abouna⁽¹⁾

The youth answered, "I was carrying a heavy load of papers on my bicycle and I came to a steep hill at the end of *Port Said* St.. I tried hard to pedal up the hill, but my strength failed and suddenly I found myself fallen under a huge pile of papers. I wasn't even able to move."

"No one approached me or offered any kind of help. I found Jesus fallen down beside me beneath the weight of His cross, and sweat was dripping from him. I realized that at that moment I was sharing in His suffering and was exceedingly glad. I felt as if I were not worthy of this great honor. With joy, I started to pray to Him thankfully, "O my Lord is it for me to carry Your cross. I am exceedingly glad for the suffering of Jesus in me.

"I carried His cross with him."

"No, His cross carried me."

Soliloquy

O Jesus, when every hand seemed cold to me,
I found Your hand stretched out with great love to me
When I found Your way narrow,
I found that You were my companion in the way of the cross.
 You converted the bitterness of the road
To the sweetness of Your life.
I hear your loving voice whispering,
"My yoke is easy and My burden is light."
I kneel before the Cross
And My earthly life is converted into a heavenly one
Your cross is wonderful, lifting me up to you.



9: I Am Upset With God

Fr. Pishoy Kamel¹ visited a sick person who was complaining from pain in his back. Abouna Pishoy started to give him words of solace, but the man answered, "I'm not asking God to take away my illness. I only ask Him to give me the strength to stand up for prayer and take from me the severe headache that hinders me from praying 'Our Father.' As long as the headache was there, I couldn't concentrate on one word."

Abouna Pishoy replied, "Don't be upset if you are not able to attend church or stand up for prayer, or even say 'Our Father,' because you participate in Jesus' suffering. Give thanks for this participation. For Jesus also suffered back pain under the heavy burden of the cross."

Some days later, when this sick man came to the church, Abouna Pishoy greeted him with his usual smile. The sick man said, "I am upset with God because whenever I got used to the pain and felt the sweetness of the suffering and counted myself unworthy of that suffering, He cured me."

Abouna Pishoy Kamel considered suffering with Jesus to be the greatest kind of worship.¹ In our case, the man fell short of being in the church, as far as attendance and prayer are concerned. But, through suffering, our bodies become a temple for the crucified and our life becomes a ceaseless prayer.

I remember that I had a friend who was serving with me in the church. He was looking forward to being a monk. He loved the monastic life. But his father of confession was also a monk and he told him not to be hasty: "Be patient, there is no rush."

One day this friend came to his father of confession and said, "I don't have enough time for labor and service. I feel that I'm wasting time. I want to devote myself to worship, however, and I have had so many troubles in work."

The father replied with great wisdom, "The time will come for you to devote yourself to worship. However, wait and be patient. Train yourself now to exercise the patience since it is a very good opportunity to share in Jesus' suffering and crucifixion. It is very easy to pray, to meditate, and to praise God which are important and necessary in Christianity. But without suffering, how will you share in Jesus' great love?"

Suffering !

O Long-suffering,

Give me Your long-suffering.

Give me joy on Your Cross.

Mix my worship with Your suffering

My depth rejoices with You forever.



¹ Fr. Pishoy suffered from cancer at the end of his life. "The Coptic Church, when celebrating the Feast of the Cross chants its tunes according to those of the Palm Sunday hymns, i.e. the tunes of joyous exultation. In conformity and identification with his beloved Church, Fr. Pishoy overcame the pain by rejoicing, for even before being attacked by cancer, he called it 'the disease unto the Kingdom.' While he lay in bed with pain with patience, silence and a fixed gaze on the Cross. As for the interval between the brutal attacks of pain, they were spent in chanting hymns of praise and glorification.

Another means by which this ardent disciple of Christ soothed his agony was listening to a recorded tape of the five chapters of The Book of Lamentations. This joyous endurance of Abouna filled all the hearts with comfort and joy. They too, saw in him the Apostle Paul who offered his pain as his credential (2 Cor. 11:21-33), for he transformed pain into a life with God, and disease into evangelism." (*The Story of Father Pishoy Kamel: Magnetic Radiation*; by Iris Habib El Masry, pp. 25,26; Pub. St. George Church Bookstore, Sporting, Alexandria, Egypt).

Other books by or about Fr. Pishoy Kamel include, *The Cross: As Lived by Rev. Fr. Pishoy Kamel* (two short booklets- St. George Church Library, Sporting Alexandria, Egypt and The Holy Apostles & St. Apanoub Church, Black Town, N.S.W., Australia),

Pastoral Work in the Life of Father Pishoy Kamel, by Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty (St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church-St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church, Jersey City, New Jersey and St. Peter & St. Paul Coptic Orthodox Church, Santa Monica California)

From the Fruits of Paradise: Sayings by Fr. Pishoy Kamel (St. George & St. Joseph Coptic Orthodox Church, Roseboro, Quebec, Canada).

10: Atomic Bomb

In Lebanon, after the civil war had ended, an art teacher asked the students to draw whatever came to mind. The teacher walked around the classroom to see what the little children had drawn. The first one she saw was of a tank, the second was of canons, the third was of a dead person, the fourth was a child crying after losing his father, and the fifth was of homes that had been destroyed. The teacher felt sad for what she saw, because the bad memories that the children had of the war emotionally traumatized them. It was as if society had destroyed these little kids and spoiled their hope and their joyful outlook.

Finally she came to a girl who had drawn a picture of an apple. She was cheered by this and wondered to herself about what made this child different from the other children. Why did you draw an apple," she asked.

"It's not an apple," the girl answered. "It's an atomic bomb."

It is very difficult for me to express the feelings of this teacher and how negatively the society affected the lives of the children.

My beloved reader! Don't be surprised that this child drew an atomic bomb and not an apple. The war destroyed her psychological state as well as that of so many youth and people in the entire country.

I'm worried about you that the world may, with its great weight, enter your heart, creating in you an atomic bomb. This may destroy your energy, talents, and feelings instead of offering an internal apple, to taste it and take a benefit from it.

You may ask me, "Do you want me to escape from my surroundings? Don't you want me to live in the world?"

"Yes, God created the world for us to live in and enjoy it as a joyful gift. But, beware of misconceptions or defilement. Don't convert the world into a corrupt valley and a hidden battlefield. Use the world to thank the creator. Open your heart with love to all and Jesus will be your companion. Your life will be an everlasting wedding.

Through You, My Depth Rejoices, O Victorious Giver

I cry in love to You, O Wonderful.

The world around me becomes a center of corruption.

My body and its lusts fights my soul and thoughts.

My friends around me push me to sin.

Who can save me from my surroundings?

You are the only Holy filled with love.

Attach me to You and deliver me from every sin.

The corrupted world becomes a joyful bridge, taking me to you.

Instead of lust, the body kneels down with all its ability to support my soul.

I will no longer condemn my brothers and sisters.

I will commit myself to lead them to His heavenly Kingdom.

With You, there is no spirit of despair, but the spirit of love,

Counseling and power.

Through You, my depth rejoices, O victorious Giver.

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11: A Friend From Heaven

The young monk knocked gently on the door of the cell of the solitary monk saying, "Agapy¹." But the solitary monk didn't answer. He repeated himself a second and third time, but there was still no response. The monk had no choice but to enter as he knew that the solitary was very sick. The monk was surprised when he found, sitting next to the solitary, a very distinguished man.

The solitary asked the monk, "Why did you enter without permission?" But the visitor interfered saying, "Let him in, for God wants him to take the blessing!"

The visitor then asked permission to leave and saluted the two monks. The monk then asked the solitary, "Who was that foreign visitor?"

"The customs of monasticism," said the hermit, "provide that you don't ask questions about matters that do not concern you!"

The young monk, however, insisted on knowing who the distinguished visitor was because when the man saluted him he felt strength filling him.

At last the solitary said to him, "I'll tell you under the condition that you don't tell anyone until the day of my departure. . . I suffered from severe pain and felt unable to rise up to open the door of the cell. That's why I left the door opened to allow you to enter.

"As the pain became very severe, I held the Holy Bible, the source of my consolation which I thought of not as a book for reading but for meeting God the Logos, His angels, and Saints in both the Old and New Testaments. I became accustomed to combining the reading with prayers, entering into gratifying conversation with my Lord, for he is the source of my happiness, joy, and consolation.

"I held the Holy Bible and, as the pain became so severe, I felt that I needed a friend to comfort me. I needed to talk with Jeremiah², the "Weeping Prophet." I opened the Book of Lamentations then I raised my eyes to God and cried, 'Send me Jeremiah the prophet to comfort me!' And as I started to read in the book of Lamentations, Jeremiah the prophet appeared to me and we entered into comfortable conversation. You came to the cell and found him talking with me and had the chance to meet him!"

My beloved, there is no doubt that you are like me and are in need of friends to accompany you and support you. There isn't a friend greater than God the Logos. You meet Him when you read the Holy Bible or the written theological declarations. Through the Bible, you enter into a conversation with your Friend as He is the Logos, who grants life, and who is the Giver of pleasure and gratification to the soul. Then you say with the Psalmist,

"With Your words I am delighted."

"With Your words I live."

"I found Your word sweet, so I ate it." (Psalm 119)

Through the written heavenly declaration, the Holy Spirit lifts up your heart, your thoughts, and all your depths to Heaven so that you hear the heavenly voice that says, "You are heavenly and to heaven you will return!" And you won't hear again the voice that says, "You are dust and to dust you shall return!"

Don't let the reading of the Holy Bible be a routine job that you are obliged to do, nor simply a quieting of your conscience. But rather, through it, you meet the heavenly people and the Saints who all love you and support you.

¹ "Agapy" is the Greek word for "Love."

² Jeremiah is known as the "Weeping Prophet" because of the mourning nature of his prophesy and his sadness over the sinfulness and rebellion of his people and the subsequent calamity that befell them. This is even more evident in the book of Lamentations which Jeremiah authored and which follows the Book of Jeremiah in the Holy Bible.



12: Man in Paradise.

One of the godly teachers lifted his eyes to Heaven and asked God to reveal to him his position in the afterlife. It was to his surprise that he heard a voice telling him that he'd be in paradise with one of the rich people.

After his long spiritual strife since childhood, his dedication to learning and teaching, and his love and care for his people, this godly teacher was surprised to hear that he would attain what the rich man living a luxurious life attained. The teacher met the rich man and started to ask him about his spiritual life and his behavior.

The rich man told him that he lived a normal daily life just like any of his other rich friends. As the teacher tried to find out more about him, he answered that he always used to give some of his money to the poor. The teacher told the rich man that it's impossible to attain the same inheritance in Paradise as he had attained by simply giving to the poor. So, he asked the rich man about some of his acts of love.

The rich man told him that he used to meet one of the ship owners, who used to bring and sell to him some jewelry or precious articles from time to time. One day, he met the ship owner and asked him if had brought anything precious with him. The ship owner told him that he didn't bring anything but 200 slaves that he wanted to sell for 10,000 pieces of gold. The rich man felt that the price was not important, but that setting free 200 slaves of his own race was more precious than gold. So without hesitation, he gave the gold to the ship owner and took the slaves. He offered them all they wanted from houses of food and drinks and also got some of their boys married to the girls. The whole city was transformed as if into a great feast.

The rich man saw that one of the girls among those he set free was characterized as being very gentle and beautiful, so he asked his son to marry her. He agreed and when he asked the girl, she agreed as well. A great ceremony was held for the engagement of the son of the rich man. All the city was happy, especially the slaves that had been set free.

The next day, the rich man noticed that one of the slaves who had been set free was sad. The rich man asked him why he was sad, but he didn't answer. He told him that he was thankful that he set him and his fellow slaves free and provided for their needs, but that something distressed him a bit. This was the marriage between his son and the beautiful girl. The youth was upset because he and the girl had made arrangements to get married before they were set free. The man was quiet for a few moments and then asked, "Why didn't you tell me this before the engagement of my son?"

The youth answered, "I was shy because of your immeasurable kindness to me and my fellow slaves."

"What can I offer you," asked the rich man, "to compensate for your loss?"

"I don't think that gold or silver could compensate for the girl."

The man was quiet again and then went to his son and explained the situation to him. The son then declared his desire to leave the girl, because he couldn't be happy at the expense of someone else's happiness and the ceremony of the engagement was held up. The rich man, his son, and all those around them rejoiced over the happiness of the youth and the young girl who were once slaves but were now engaged to be married.

When the teacher listened to the story he kissed the rich man and realized that by his largeness of heart and his love, he attained this great position in the eyes of God.



13: A Kid With a Strong Personality.

A lady came to me complaining from her son who entered the day care center. "For the last few days," she told me, "I have been patiently scolding him for doing something wrong, saying, "Don't do that." But he kept answering me, "No, I will do it."

"I would tell him gently, 'Honey, that's wrong.'

"But he insisted, "I will do this. I will do it."

I was surprised to hear this because I know this kid to be a very gentle boy. He loves me and we get along well together. I ignored the situation (so that he would not get used to having violent arguments with me or with others) and left the place pretending to be smiling.

The next day, as I was joking around with him, I asked him, "What's your opinion about what you were doing yesterday?" He answered, "Hmm. . .I know that what I did was wrong."

I asked him, "Then why did you insist on doing it even though you knew that it was wrong?" He answered immediately, "I had to do this, otherwise my personality would be weak! Whatever I want to do, I'll do, even if it's wrong!"

I was surprised at his answer because this was a kid who wasn't even six years old. "How could he consider listening to my advice-and I am his beloved mother- to be a sign of weakness of personality?" asked his mother. "What can I do," she asked, "to correct his misconception without losing him?"

Since I found that the lady was confused, I said to her, "I advise you to do something wrong in front of him, on purpose. If it happens that he says to you, 'This is wrong,' say to him, 'You are right,' and correct the fault. Then after one or two days, ask him, 'What do you think about my listening to you? Do you think that I have a weak personality?"

Dear youths, many times we have the same attitude as this kid. So, we think that to have a strong personality is to insist on our own opinion without listening to the opinions of others, especially those who love us like our parents. The strong personality is that which doesn't take the stubbornness of the children without getting the benefit of the experience of the fully grown. It was said about our Lord Jesus Christ that he was "subject to them" (Luke 2:51). That is, to St. Mary and St. Joseph. And he is not only their Creator, but is the Wisdom of God Himself!

Adhere to the Lord so that you may carry the spirit of humbleness which will support your will power in Him and grant you a right personality, allowing you to learn how to deal with everybody, and how to benefit from the experience of many!

Obedience

How hard is it for me to be obedient;

I want to have authority, not to be ordered!

I think that by this I have a strong and right personality.

You came to our world

You were obedient to your mother as well as to St. Joseph.

You are the Creator and you obey the created by the obedience which is combined with love!

You who Heaven and earth are obey!

Your obedience doesn't diminish Your authority.

Sanctify obedience in me!

Yes, bind me to you so that I won't shy away from obedience!

I'll obey so that I'll feel that I am a partner with you in obedience

How bitter is obedience, for in my sight it is being beaten,

But with You I find it so sweet.

Teach me, train me, grant me the experience of your obedience,

So that I may see you working in me, you who are truly obedient!

You who became obedient (Philippians 2:8), representing us, practicing righteousness.



14: A Metropolitan On My Shoulder

In one of the meetings of the East Coast Churches Assembly, I heard a story from one of the metropolitans⁽⁷⁾ from Coptic reclusive literature which really moved me and still occupies my thoughts:

A youth entered a monastery and the head of the monastery handed him over to a godly and sober solitary so that he would be his disciple. The solitary started to care for the youth in regards to his spiritual life, directing his thoughts to the adherence to God as a Savior and Friend who enkindles the heart with love.

It seems that the youth was lazy to a great extent and the solitary kept encouraging him to enter into the spiritual strife, pushing him in the way of deep love and not simple dependence on formalities and exercises without spirit.

Suddenly the youth died and the solitary was very sad for him because he knew his laziness in his strife. As he was crying and wailing for him one day, he saw him in a dream. He was standing with the hellfire reaching his feet.

As the solitary saw this vision, he cried sorrowfully for his son. As for the son, he looked at the solitary and said, "Don't cry for me, for a metropolitan is standing on my shoulder."

The solitary woke up shaken from the vision and sat alone for days, contemplating the depth and meaning of the vision. He asked himself, "If this was the case of a careless metropolitan, what then will be my condition? The clothing of monasticism does not intercede for the lazy ones!"

Maybe this was a symbolic story narrated by the Coptic reclusive literature to urge believers to concentrate on the inner depth and of the soul and to stop practicing spiritual exercises without spirit.

The Anonymous Words of a Youth

I claim You as my Saviour

I read the Bible regularly,

But in stupidity I can't see you behind the letters!

I pray each morning and night,

But I don't know how to talk with you on a personal level.

I practice a lot of worship but my depth is like a stone!

Teach me how to enter into the depth

To meet You through Your written word.

And interact with you in my prayers,

To see your Cross shining upon me in my repentance

To enjoy becoming firm in You as I take communion.

I enter as if into heaven when I am in your church!

Let Your right hand catch my soul,

And take it into your happy chamber,

To rejoice with You who are the desire of my heart.

To be filled with the hope that death can't destroy,

And to comfort in your Kingdom that the doors of Hades can't overcome.

Yes, I don't rely on self-righteousness or on a position in the Church, but on the abundance of Your grace¹!



15: Worried About Myself..

After about 20 years, I met one of my beloved sons while I was in California and he asked me to visit him in his magnificent house. When we sat down together, he said, "Do you remember when I started my life here in California 20 years ago. I was struggling with all my effort and now God has given above and beyond what I asked for. "

"It's the gift of God, " I said, "and we thank Him for it. He cares for us."

"Do you now how abundantly He poured His great riches on me?," he asked me. "For the last few years I have asked myself," `What shall I benefit if I succeed here and don't enjoy the inheritance of Heaven?'

"I knelt down and prayed before my Lord and made an oath not to touch the tithes, no matter what my circumstances were, because that's the money of the Lord!" I said to him, `I'll also give to the poor-either in Egypt or in America-from the nine tithes². For I don't possess anything; it's your gift to me, my Lord!"

"I started to give generously, and thus the doors of heaven were opened before me. He gave me more than I needed. I would kneel and cry, 'Enough, enough! I am worried that the abundance of riches will captivate my soul and destroy it.' And when I would cry, he would open his doors more and give me more."

That is how this brother expressed the way that God deals with us. When we open not only our depositories, but our hearts and our souls first to our weaker brothers, He opens the doors of His heaven before us and generously gives us more than we can imagine.

When our Lord Jesus Christ spoke of his little flock, the object of the Father's pleasure, he said, "Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell what you have and give alms" (Luke 12:32, 33).

The believer says this in the third office of midnight praises. It is as if, in the last seconds of midnight, we are expecting the coming of Christ. We desire to be from the little flock that the father is happy with. He opens to the flock His godly, fatherly bosom for them to rest in it. The way of free membership into this flock is to open the doors of our hearts for the weak. We sell our possessions and give alms. When the door is opened with love and joy to the hungry, thirsty, naked, exiled, jailed, and all of the weak and needy people, we find the heart of God opened for us to be a holy flock of God.

I whisper in your ear: "Do you want to be a member of this small holy flock? Give love to the weak. Open your heart to everybody, especially your parents. You'll see how the grace of God will grant you the spirit of holiness as a sign of your joining the flock of Christ who is the Beloved of the Father.

¹ In the early days of the Christian era, the apostles chose metropolitan cities as centers for the dissemination of their evangelistic teaching. There they established churches, which they put in the charge of bishops. With the gradual spread of Christianity and the increase in the number of churches, the older church came to enjoy a mother-daughter relationship with the more recently established ones. Its bishop was designated metropolitan, a term first used in 325 by the Council of Nicea. A Metropolitan has seniority over other bishops in the province. He has the right to convoke provincial synods and preside over their sessions and has the right to confirm the elections of bishops in his province. In recognition of the preeminent position of the metropolitan, his formal approval was required by members of the priesthood who requested interviews with the head of state. (*The Coptic Encyclopedia*, Ed. Aziz S. Atiya; Vol. 5 pp.1611,1612).

² The word "tithe" comes from the Old English word for "tenth." The tithe is literally the "tenth part" of something. Here it refers to donations or gifts (usually, but not always, of money) for the poor or needy and for the support of the church. It usually amounts to the tenth part or 10% of a person's income. The "nine tithes" refers to the other nine parts (or 90%) of what the person has after they have given the traditional tithe of 10% from their income. It should be noted that although the part we give is called the "tenth part," it should really be called the "first part" because we give back to God the "firstfruits" of what he gives us.

Consider me from your small flock.

I'm wailing from my sins and the lusts of the body.

Why don't I live in the holiness of your small flock?

Grant me your Holy Spirit to open my heart with love to the small, the poor, the needy, the weak, the disturbed.

Let my heart be also opened to my parents with the obedience that is full of joy so that You may open the doors of Your heaven before me.

Join me with Your small flock so that I may be sanctified to you and live in the bosom of Your heavenly Father.

A youth who repented