



MAHRAGAN ALKERAZA 2016

# TASTE & SEE

## The Lord Is Good



**English Edition**  
Gr 9-12 & English Adults



**HOLD FAST**  
*what you have*



**H.H. Pope Tawadros II**

Pope of Alexandria &  
Patriarch of the See of St. Mark



**H.G. Bishop Mina**

Bishop of Mississauga,  
Vancouver and Western Canada

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## INTRODUCTION

### Mahragan Alkeraza 2016

As we celebrated the conclusion of last year's Mahragan with the distribution of the trophies for the first, second and third place winners, we were grateful for God's blessings for a successful 2015 Mahragan. His Holiness Pope Tawadros II said during the Awards Ceremony in Egypt, "I am happy to see the activities of the Youth Bishopric, I am glad that our beautiful Church that is 2000 years old is full of young youth and I am proud to see the creative work and achievements of the youth."

Last year, in addition to the usual participation from Egypt and Sudan, we had a great worldwide participation from 192 Churches representing more than 20 countries and 8 languages.

The theme for Mahragan 2016 is **"Taste & See The Lord Is Good"** (Psalm 34:8). This year, God is asking each one of us to grow in Christ by learning from:

1. The Journey of the Holy Fifty Days
2. The Sacrament of the Eucharist
3. Tasbeha (Praises)
4. The Patriarch Severus of Antioch
5. The Shunammite Woman



We hope that all of you will participate in the Mahragan activities this year, and encourage everyone you know to join us in one of the greatest annual events, presented by our mother, the Coptic Orthodox Church.

May God bless Mahragan Alkeraza this year and the efforts of all the participants and coordinators, through the prayers of our beloved father Pope Tawadros II.

✠ My best wishes for a happy  
Festival

✠ Bishop Mousa

# Taste And See The Lord Is Good

In a world that keeps changing, we can trust in the word of God that never changes.

Spiritual life is about tasting and experiencing God. There's a big difference between hearing about what honey tastes like and actually tasting it! Even though Job heard a lot about the Lord, it's only when he saw Him that he said: "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You" Job 42:5.

That's also why David said: "I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; my flesh also will rest in hope" Psalm 16:8-9.

To truly taste and see the goodness of the Lord, we need to first believe in the Lord Jesus who resurrected from the dead, ascended to heaven and will come again to take us with Him. Only then will we rejoice in God: "Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you" John 16:22. When the heart rejoices, the tongue also rejoices in hymns and praises. "Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms" James 5:13.

This year's Mahragan theme will focus on the following:

1. Rejoice
2. Be complete
3. Be of good comfort
4. Be of one mind
5. Live in peace

## 1. REJOICE

The real joy of Christianity was granted through the death and resurrection of Christ and the hope of the eternal kingdom. Though we endure pain and suffering in our lifetime, this pales in comparison to the joy that we will witness in our eternal life with Him. This is why we rejoice. The Lord Himself said to His disciples: "I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you" John 16:22. Also, as His Holy Spirit dwells in us, we have joy, since joy is one of the fruits of the Spirit.

## 2. BE COMPLETE

How can we be complete and grow spiritually without Christ? It's impossible! Our Lord is Perfect, as He Himself said: "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" Matthew 5:48. This means that we should follow Christ's example of perfection. This can be done through:

1. True faith in the Lord Jesus. Faith is the bond that connects our weakness with the strength of God.
2. Baptism in which we die and resurrect with Him.
3. True and persistent repentance, striving against the world with its temptations, the body with its lust and the devil with his pressures.
4. Spiritual discipline: prayer, readings, and partaking in the Holy Communion. If we live without prayer it is as if we say we do not need God.
5. Service: Expressing our love to Him though our love for others.

## 3. BE OF GOOD COMFORT

The Lord was honest with us when He said "in the world you will have tribulation" John 16:33, but He also comforted us when He added "but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" John 16:33. The world tribulation means what the heart cannot endure. This signifies that we will face persecution and pain during our journey on earth but we trust our Lord Jesus as He said to Peter: "What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this" John 13:7. Jesus asks that we follow Him not only to the mountain of Transfiguration but also to the mountain of Golgotha, to persevere during our sorrows to be worthy of eternal glory. "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" 2 Corinthians 4:17. There is a big difference between light temporary affliction and the weight of eternal glory.

## 4. BE OF ONE MIND

As believers, our one goal is to witness for Christ and spread His kingdom in the heart of all people. St. Paul said: "for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel" 1 Corinthians 9:16. Service is our duty not choice. It is our responsibility, not a privilege. Regardless of our weakness, God can use us. "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." When we give God our weak and limited power, He adds to it His unlimited and glorious power.



That's why St. Paul continued his service until the time of his martyrdom with courage and honesty, "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong" 2 Corinthians 12:10.

## 5. LIVE IN PEACE

To truly live in peace, we must have peace with God, peace with others, and inner peace with ourselves.

### Peace with God

"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" Romans 5:1.

St. Paul explained this in details in Romans 8:28-30 when he said:

- "All things work together for good to those who love God"
- "To those who are called according to His purpose."
- "For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son"
- "whom He called, these He also justified"
- "whom He justified, these He also glorified"

Jesus restored peace between humanity and divinity through His Incarnation. He took what is ours and gave us what is His.

### Peace with Others

Christianity calls all people to "live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you" 2 Corinthians 13:11.

Confucius, the Chinese spiritual leader, taught his disciples saying: Don't do to others what you don't want them to do to you. Our Lord Jesus teaches us to be proactive and initiate positive actions. He says, "Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them" Matthew 7:12.

There's a huge difference between someone who does not hurt his brother so that his brother does not hurt him in return, and the one who loves all people and spreads the spirit of love and unity. "But through love serve one another" Galatians 5:13.

Our Lord Jesus says: "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you" Matthew 5:44.

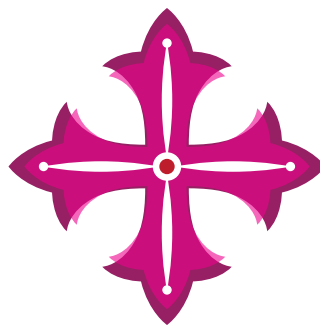
The devil seeks to separate while God seeks to unite. That is why St. Paul said: "But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!" Galatians 5:15.

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" Romans 12:20-21. "Love never fails" 1Corinthians 13:8.

## Inner Peace

There's always a struggle between the spirit and the body. St. Paul said: "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another" Galatians 5:17. As children of God, we must "Walk in the Spirit, and not fulfill the lust of the flesh" Galatians 5:16.

Walking in the spirit is a result of controlling our body! Christianity does not try to oppress the body in negative ways but rather focuses on strengthening the spirit to control the body. That's why as Christians, we fast. We control our senses which are the entrance of sin. We must train ourselves to act quietly and with chastity in all our actions. That's the key to inner peace.



# The Book of Habakkuk

## The Author

The book of Habakkuk is written by Habakkuk the prophet. His name means, “to embrace”. It is assumed that he was from the tribe of Levi as his writings resemble that of the psalms.

## Date Written

The book of Habakkuk was written in the period between the years 612 to 589 BC. This is the period before the Babylonian captivity and the destruction of Jerusalem.

## Purpose of the Book

The book starts with a prayer from the prophet complaining from the corruption that he was seeing among his people. God answers him, by saying that He will discipline them by the way of the Chaldeans. Then after he saw the cruelty of the Chaldeans, he cried to the Lord asking why the Chaldeans are punishing God’s people when they are more evil.

In the second chapter, the prophet is waiting for God’s answer to the complaints that he had in the first chapter. God answered him and said that He is using the Chaldeans only to discipline His people. Then after they accomplish their role and because of their pride, the Chaldeans will be overthrown.

In the third the chapter, the prophet rejoices. Through his prayer he saw the coming salvation and waited for the blessing. He encouraged the Jews to pray a similar prayer and to have hope during the time of tribulation in their captivity. It is a song of encouragement and comfort.

The prophet is in a continuous struggle with God in his prayer. Thus, he is called the questioning prophet; St. Jerome called him “the fighter of God” similar to Jacob. He has many questions so he stands continuously in prayer waiting for God’s answers, does not seek answers away from God.

He finds that those who are innocent are treated unfairly. Often when people are faced with situations that are unjust or that they do not understand, they complain and grumble against God. On the other hand the children of God should trust Him, and pose their questions solely to Him. God will always answer question in due time and give peace and justice to His people.



Children of God should understand that God's wisdom is beyond any human wisdom. This book is a dialogue between God and man, God speaks and man listens, and vice-versa man speaks and God listens with love.

The question that the prophet posed was "Why is God allowing His people to suffer injustice?" This is a question that is asked by all generations including the present. The Book demonstrates that God disciplines His people because He loves them.

### Characteristics of the Book

The Book of Habakkuk is one of the books by the 12 Minor Prophets. The Minor Prophets are those who wrote shorter prophecies, the Major Prophets are those who wrote longer prophecies. The difference between the Minor and Major Prophets are the length of their prophecies and has nothing to do with the importance or prophecy itself.

The Book is a dialogue with God, and thus it has the potential to touch the lives of all who read it. It demonstrates that in time of trouble a person should seek and can find the comfort of the Holy Spirit. The book presents the problem of evil and the victory of truth.

**Chapter 1:** Crying out to God because of pain and injustice. God is using these as tools to discipline His people.

**Chapter 2:** God answers and explains why the Chaldeans are unjust such that it can be a lesson to not imitate them if the circumstances are different.

Chapter 3: Praise and thanksgiving to God because He did great things for them.

### Chapter 1

#### Verses 1 – 4

The prophet cries out and intercedes for his people. He is wondering why there is injustice. His question is clear, "O Lord, how long shall I cry, and You will not hear? Why do You show me iniquity, And cause me to see trouble?"

The law is too strict such that not one can follow it, and the unjust are proud of their lawlessness. There is no justice and the wicked have surrounded the righteous.

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## Verses 5-11

- The Chaldeans are an unjust nation; God allowed His chosen people to be subject to them in order to be disciplined, “For I will work a work in your days” (Habakkuk 1:5). In the Bible, every nation that rose against Israel symbolizes the devil and his kingdom. Thus, the interaction between the Chaldeans the Israelites can be taken as a spiritual lesson.
- “A bitter and hasty nation” The Chaldeans are violent and cause bitterness to the nations that they conquer.
- “Which marches through the breadth of the earth, To possess dwelling places that are not theirs” The Chaldeans are forceful and invade other nations.
- “They are terrible and dreadful” The Chaldeans terrify all other nations
- “Their judgment and their dignity proceed from themselves” The Chaldeans are a very authoritative nation that follows its own laws. They take over everything, following their pleasures and lusts.
- “Their horses are swifter than leopards” Horses at that time were mainly used for war, this shows that the Chaldeans were in constant state of war, they had no mercy and were a deceptive nation.
- “More fierce than evening wolves” Wolves which spent the day hungry and go out at night to hunt, kill and devour.
- “Their chargers charge ahead” The Chaldeans attack from where you don’t expect.
- “Eagle that hastens to eat” Eagles are very fast and have excellent sight. They can see their prey from a far distance choosing to attack at the most opportune moment.
- “They gather captives like sand” The evilness of the Chaldeans outweighs their goodness. They gather up other nations to make captives of them.
- “They scoff at kings, and they scorn princes” All attempts from other nations to attack the Chaldeans generally fails and they end up becoming their prey.
- “They deride every stronghold” This refers to any human stronghold.
- “For they heap up earthen mounds and seize it” The Chaldeans plundered all of Israel’s treasures.
- “Then his mind changes, and he transgresses; he commits offense” The victories of the Chaldeans inflate their egos and pride makes them God’s enemies.
- “Ascribing this power to his god” They attribute their victory to their own power and that is how they drew near their destruction.



## Verses 12 – 17

- The prophet cried out again to God after he learned that the Chaldean punishment was not for death, “Are You not from everlasting, O Lord my God, my Holy One?” as if he wanted to say to God You are Holy how can You tolerate this injustice.
- “We shall not die” Habakkuk realizes that God is everlasting and will give from His infinite goodness to His people.
- “O Lord, You have appointed them for judgment” The Chaldeans will not be able to abolish God’s nation. All what they are doing is just disciplining them.
- “O rock, You have marked them for correction” God appointed the Chaldeans for the purpose of discipline but He is the rock who will protect His people. God allowed Satan to punish His people, but He will not allow him to persist in his torment. The Chaldean sins are greater than the sins of the Israelites and God can use evil people or any means He desires to discipline His people. God allows tribulations from time to time to discipline us, but He will never leave us. So, we should go to Him and find shelter in the time of our tribulations.
- The prophet then goes on to describe the characteristics of the torment of the Chaldeans. “They make men like fish of the sea” referring to the Chaldeans who can catch whomever they want from the Israelites. The verse “like creeping things that have no ruler over them” refers to the Chaldeans who can crush the Israelites like bugs. Finally, the Bible says, “They take up all of them with a hook, They catch them in their net, And gather them in their dragnet. Therefore they rejoice and are glad” verse 15
- The verse 16 states, “Therefore they sacrifice to their net” usually people offer sacrifices to their god, but the Chaldeans are sacrificing to their net, signifying to their army. They considered their army the source of their power and sacrifice to it, making it like a god. People tend to glorify their own power and do not ascribe the glory to God.
- “And burn incense to their dragnet; Because by them their share is sumptuous And their food plentiful” The Chaldeans rejoice over the big catch referring to the army capturing many Israelites, which is symbolism for the devil rejoicing over each of man’s sinful mistakes.
- The verse 17 says, “Shall they therefore empty their net, And continue to slay nations without pity?” The devil is like the Chaldeans, who with every catch get even hungrier for more. Thus the Chaldeans empty their net quickly such that it can be used it again, symbolizing the devil who will quickly come to tempt man time and time again.

## Chapter 2

### Verses 1 – 2

- After Habakkuk finished his prayer to God, he waited for God's answer and His salvation.
- "I will stand my watch And set myself on the rampart" This is Habakkuk waiting for God's answer. He stood on the rampart, which is Jesus Christ, the Rock who protects all. Thus complaints and questions for God will not weaken our faith. The Lord can be questioned, but in the spirit of prayer, trusting in Him, however, not with a lack of faith or grumbling. Jesus Christ is the Rampart that announces the love of God the Father, also the Holy Spirit presents the Son (John 6:13-15). The Holy Spirit is in all Christians, and one has to withdraw from the loud noise of the world to be able to hear Him. Questions are answered in prayer and submission to God not by murmuring or disagreeing with His decisions.
- "What He will say to me, and what I will answer" God answered the prophet and the believers.
- "The Lord answered me and said... make it clear for all the readers" So that they can understand and thus go repent.
- The summary of the vision is that the righteous will live and those who are evil will perish. This may take time and happen eventually even if it is initially delayed. "For the vision is yet for an appointed time"

### Verses 4 – 5

- He started to describe God's sadness regarding the human sinful state of man and how it is like that of the Chaldeans. Man is proud, greedy, envious, unjust, dishonest, violent, and does not know God.
- "His soul is not upright" This means that man is proud, ascribing all achievements to themselves and their own might.
- "But the just shall live by faith" Those who are just should endure and trust in God, that He allows all things to be for good regardless of how they seem at the time.
- The Chaldean people are wicked, they transgress in wine. The effect of wine is deceit. It causes man to do wrong just like in Noah's story. Drunkenness is more dangerous than pride.
- God explains to the prophet that Chaldeans will be destroyed by their own greed and pride. God's people have to holdfast to the faith, trusting in God regardless of what the Chaldeans do to them.

## Verses 6 – 8

- This is a prophecy of the fall of the Chaldean tyranny and that all the people oppressed by them will mock them. The Chaldean sin is pride thus their punishment was shame.
- “Increases what is not his” The Chaldeans took what they did not deserve.
- “Will not your creditors rise up suddenly? Will they not awaken who oppress you? And you will become their booty. In a moment the Chaldeans do not expect, people who seemed asleep will wake up and the Chaldeans will be their captives. As they plundered many nations the people shall plunder them. As they caused bloodshed their blood will be shed.” The Chaldeans will lose all that they had achieved, what they did to other nations will be



done to them. This is symbolic to sin. No matter how tempting and enjoying sin seems, it will never satisfy or fill man's desire. It will only destroy their life.

- "Creditors" All what they capture is like a loan or a debt that they have to return.

## Verses 9 – 11

- "Woe to him who covets evil gain for his house" God is not against materialistic gain as long as it is done in an honest and proper way. The Chaldean people built up their nation by evil means thinking that this will protect them and give them security in the days to come. This is similar to what the people of Babel did, when they tried to build a tower to save them from any future flood.
- "You give shameful counsel to your house" If evil is used in an attempt to build up wealth, security and protect from hard times, evil will come and destroy all that effort. The Chaldean people after they destroyed many nations, had evil eventually come to them. "For the stone will cry out from the wall, and the beam from the timbers will answer it"

## Verses 13 – 14

- "Woe to him who builds a town with bloodshed" Nebuchadnezzar built the cities through injustice toward captives and bloodshed. The end result was fire that consumed Babylon, "Behold, is it not of the Lord of hosts that the peoples labor to feed the fire?" This is a message to all those who put their hope in materialistic things.
- "The nations weary themselves in vain" The whole world is vanity and will perish. However, this does not mean that man should not work. God put Adam in paradise that he might toil in it. Also, God was with Joseph and he was a successful man. This means that we should labor and toil but being careful to not give all our time for vain things, we must leave sufficient time for God.
- "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord" This is what happened with the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and the extension of His kingdom on earth.

## Verses 15 – 17

- This woe is against the devil that tempts the people to get drunk with the pleasure of this world, such that they lose their dignity. "Pressing him to your bottle" refers to whoever pours the wine. When Lot and Noah got drunk they lost their dignity and this is what the devil attempt to do to us. The devil tempts us with the lust of this world and with our

freedom. This can also apply to all pressure others into commit sins or those who teaches others new sins.

- “Be exposed as uncircumcised” Sin or anything that is perceived to earthly glory is a loss. St. Paul considered the whole world as a loss and this is what Satan attempt to trick man into thinking is glory.
- “For the violence done to Lebanon will cover you” Lebanon here represents man, God created man perfect in His own image, and through sin Satan has corrupted this image. Likewise the Chaldeans ruined the beauty of Jerusalem and oppressed its people.
- “The plunder of beasts” The Chaldeans stole livestock. The verse points out that Satan can only influence those who follow their own desires.
- “Made them afraid” The devil prepares tribulations for those who refuse to follow him in order to scare them. He even prepared the cross for Jesus. Those who get scared from the devil’s tribulations and persecutions left God and eventually perished.

### Verses 18 – 20

- This final woe is against all idol worshipers. Idolatry will be of no benefit to them on the last day. The atheistic beliefs of modern philosophy are like gold and silver. They make one think that he can do all things, and cause one to trust in their own power.
- The prophet saw God in the holy temple, so he said, “Let all the earth keep silence before Him”.
- The prophet started questioning God’s judgment only to eventually understand that through God’s wisdom every mouth will be shut. Habakkuk replied with what could be paraphrased with “let Your will be done, Holy is Your name”. Which is the appropriate prayer for anyone who wants to submit to God’s will and who trusts in His wisdom (Revelation 11:33-36).

## Chapter 3

### Verses 1-2

- “A prayer of Habakkuk” Prayers from prophets are considered prophecies.
- “Shigionoth” This a musical instrument or could refer to a distinctive type of music.
- “I heard your speech and I was afraid” When Habakkuk heard what the Chaldeans will do he was afraid. Thus he went to the Lord interceding for his people
- “Revive Your work in the midst of the year” Habakkuk looked at the great work of God in the past, God showed him the future and His plan for salvation. However he understood that



between those two realities there will be a period of discipline.

**Verse 3**

- “Teman” Refers to the mountain in Sinai that Moses climbed to meet God.
- “Paran” Refers to the mountain of Edom.
- Beginning from verse 3 we find a switch in the prophecy as the Lord answers Habakkuk’s prayer. He remembered all of God’s glory in Sinai and God showed him that this glory will



be repeated again when He will save His people (Deuteronomy 33:2, Exodus 19: 20 & 24:17). These verses refer to the presence of God in His glory among the people. When God comes the heaven will be full of His glory and His majesty. Heaven may also refer to the human soul that as it gets attached to God becomes like the heaven.

- “God came from Teman and the Holy one from Mount Paran” This means that God revealed His glory in Teman. In Deuteronomy 33:2 Moses said, “The Lord came from Sinai, and dawned on them from Seir; He shone forth from Mount Paran.” Meaning that the Lord will show His glory first to the people of Israel in Sinai, followed by Seir which refers to the spreading the knowledge of God to the Gentiles.
- Habakkuk uses Seir as a symbol of Gentiles who later came to believe in Jesus Christ. This is in contrast to Mount Paran, where the people of Israel were lost and is a symbol of the Jews accepting Christianity in the last days.
- “And the earth was full of His praise” Is a prophecy for the spread of Christianity to the whole world.

#### Verses 4 – 8

- Verse 4 is a description of the incarnation, light is a symbol of the divinity, the hand is a symbol of the humanity.
- “His power was hidden” Referring to the incarnation, Jesus took the shape of a bondservant.
- “Fever followed at His feet” Our Lord Jesus trampled death by His death, and death fled from His presence.
- In verse 7 it refers to the place of Cushan which is part of the Palestinian land. This land is not Jewish land, rather its inhabitants were in continuous enmity with God’s people.
- In verse 8 the Sea refers to the world and the rivers refer to God’s children. Here Habakkuk asked if God is displeased, and he makes a prophecy of God saving his people.

#### Verses 9 – 13

- When God came to earth, He conquered death and crushed the head of the serpent. He destroyed all of the devil’s power and gave us a New Covenant. He sent His apostles to announce to the whole world the message of salvation. The “arrows” entered our hearts and we became full of the Holy Spirit.
- Warriors used to hang their bow on their backs while riding their horses. The Word of God enters the hearts of people like arrows, filling them with the Holy Spirit which transforms them. The Word of God is like a beautiful river that goes through the land and giving life. “You divided the earth with rivers.”

- In verses 10 through 13 it explains how God's glory filled the whole earth. His wrath will be upon those who are evil and salvation will be for the righteous.

### Verses 14 – 16

- When the devil directs his evil arrows toward the Son of God, these arrows will bounce back towards him. The cross defeated Satan and his authority. Thus the evil nation's oppression of the Israelites would have very little overall effect.
- "You walked through the sea with Your horses" Similar to how God saved His people from the Egyptians when he parted the Red Sea, He will save His people from the Chaldeans.
- "When I heard, my body trembled" When Habakkuk realized the strength of his adversary he was frightened. However, after he asked God he understood that this tribulation was to discipline the Israelites, so he was reassured. Often people might feel like strangers in this world, but through the presence of God in their lives and the promise of eternal life they are reassured. As it is written, "In the world you will have tribulations, but be of good cheer I have overcome the world."

### Verses 17 – 19

In verses 17 through 19, we learn that a sinner who insists on continuing in his/her sins loses all of their potential blessings. However, if there is repentance they must trust that the blessings will return even if they might be delayed. "Though the fig tree may not blossom... Yet I will rejoice in the Lord" this reinforces that when there is trust in God's mercy blessings will come, as long as there is repentance.

The believers rejoice in Christ even if "the fig tree may not blossom". This is because the true believer does not rejoice over materialistic things. The true believer will instead rejoice in their eternal life.

These verses might also refer to the last day and the great tribulation. The fig is a symbol of the Jewish nation that was cursed and the vine is a symbol of the church who as dispersed. "The labor of the olive may fail" is a symbol of the foolish virgins who did not have oil. "And there be no herd in the stalls" refers to a lack of believers in the churches. Despite all this the true believers rejoice. The secret of this joy is, "The Lord God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer's feet, And He will make me walk on my high hills"

# St. Paul's Epistle to The Philippians

## **Writer: St. Paul**

- His Hebrew name means, "wanted" or "asked for".
- His name also means, "little".
- He was born in Tarsus and has a Roman citizenship.
- He was highly educated and spoke Greek, Hebrew and Armenian.
- He went to Jerusalem, and received his education under the feet of Gamaliel, a famous teacher of the Law (Acts 22:31).
- He lived as a Pharisee.
- He consented to St. Steven's death and guarded the clothes of the people who stoned him.
- He travelled to Jerusalem to persecute the Christians there, but on his way, our Lord Jesus Christ appeared to him and guided him as to what he must do. He believed and was baptized by the hand of Ananias, the Bishop of Jerusalem, and was transformed from a persecutor of the Church to a defender of the faith.
- He wrote 14 Epistles.

## **Written to: The City of Philippi**

- The name Philippi means "Horse" or "war lover".
- It was named after King Philip II (the Macedonian), the father of Alexander the Great.
- It was a Macedonian colony, part of the Roman Empire, that worshipped idols.
- Its people had the same duties and rights as the Roman people.

## **Date written:**

- It was written around 63 AD at the end of the first exile of St. Paul in Rome. During this time, St. Paul wrote letters to the Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians and Philemon.
- St. Paul visited the city of Philippi in the year 52 AD where he established the first European Church. He went there after he saw a vision of a Macedonian man asking him







to come over to Macedonia and help them (Acts 16:9). Many of the Philippian people believed, the first of whom was Lydia, the seller of royal clothing.

- St. Paul and Silas were imprisoned there. They used this opportunity to preach to the jailer and his household. Their imprisonment was the result of a revolution against St. Paul, when he commanded the evil spirit to get out of a fortune-telling slave girl. When her owner realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them thinking that they were Jewish. When they realized that they were Romans, they set them free.
- When the Philippians heard that St. Paul was sick and imprisoned, they sent Epaphroditus with gifts and to take care of St. Paul. Epaphroditus became very sick during his stay in Rome. The Philippians were saddened by the news. St. Paul shared their sadness and he sent a message to comfort them and also to thank them for their gifts and love. St. Paul only accepted money from the Philippians because he felt their true love and sincerity, but he taught himself to be satisfied with what he had even if it was little. The Philippians donated to Jerusalem as well (2 Corinthians 8:1-5). The epistle is recognition from St. Paul for the generous offerings of Macedonian Churches.
- The word love was repeated 11 times in this epistle. It does not contain any blame or criticism, rather it is full of love towards children who have a specific place in the apostle's heart. He went to them after he saw a vision and instituted the first Church in Europe. Despite St. Paul's imprisonment, the epistle has a joyful tune as St. Paul learned to rejoice in the Lord always. Epaphroditus carried this letter to the Philippians to comfort them and to reassure them about St. Paul's health.

## Chapter 1: Joy amidst tribulations

### Verses 1-6

- "Grace and peace" - The greeting of "grace" in Greek means, "I wish to have grace according to your need". The Jewish greeting of "peace" means, "the peace will come upon the hearer as a divine gift". Grace in Christianity is the blessing we received through the incarnation and redemption of our Lord Jesus Christ. The greatest blessing we received is the Holy Spirit, and His greatest fruit being peace. St. Paul used this greeting because Jesus Christ came for all and in Him only, we obtain this free gift from the Father for our salvation as a proof for the work of salvation by reconciliation.

## Verses 7-8

- St. Paul carried Jesus' love for the Philippians and His desire for their salvation. St. Paul's heart became the righteous instrument of his love for them, which resembled Christ's love. It is the Holy Spirit Who puts this love in our hearts (Galatians 5:22). We must be careful with our emotions and feelings, because they can provoke negative actions, such as loving some people more than others, hatred due to problems and conflict with God in the presence of tribulations.
- But the love that God puts in our hearts is more than our love for one person, it is the love for everyone, even our enemies, and this love is the reason for our joy

## Verses 9-11

- St. Paul experienced the love that God put in his heart and prayed that the Philippians be filled with this love. St. Paul's love for them was shown in his prayer that their love may increase that they attain salvation. Love is the fulfillment of the Law and the Gospel. It is the sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit in us (Galatians 5:22). Without love, there is no salvation because we lost God's image. There is a strong relationship between love and knowledge. Therefore, we need to have a good relationship with God who will then give us the chance to know His glory (1 Corinthians 2:9-12). As our knowledge of God increases, our love for Him will also increase. As we discover who Christ is, our love for Him will also increase.
- "To be able to discern in different situations" - Whoever is filled with knowledge and love will have discernment in variety of situations to determine what is best.
- "Pure and blameless" - In the Greek translation, this means "Examined in the light and found blameless, so it will not cause anyone to stumble" "Filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ" - The saints cannot be found righteous by the Mosaic law or by nature, but by abiding in Christ united with Him to become a branch in the true vine. The branch cannot give fruit unless it is aiding in the vine. This cannot be obtained except by faith, baptism, and repentance. We will then abide in Christ and bear good fruit. There is no righteousness except by Christ's life in us (Galatians 2:20). Life in Christ has fruits that will appear in our lives, which will lead to God's glory. We should let people see our good works so they may glorify our Father who is in heaven.

## Verse 12-14

- "Furtherance of the Gospel" - Furtherance in Greek is a word, which could be used for

describing a group of soldiers working to cut down trees in a forest to make a path for the army. St. Paul did the same with his service of strengthening and spreading of the Gospel.

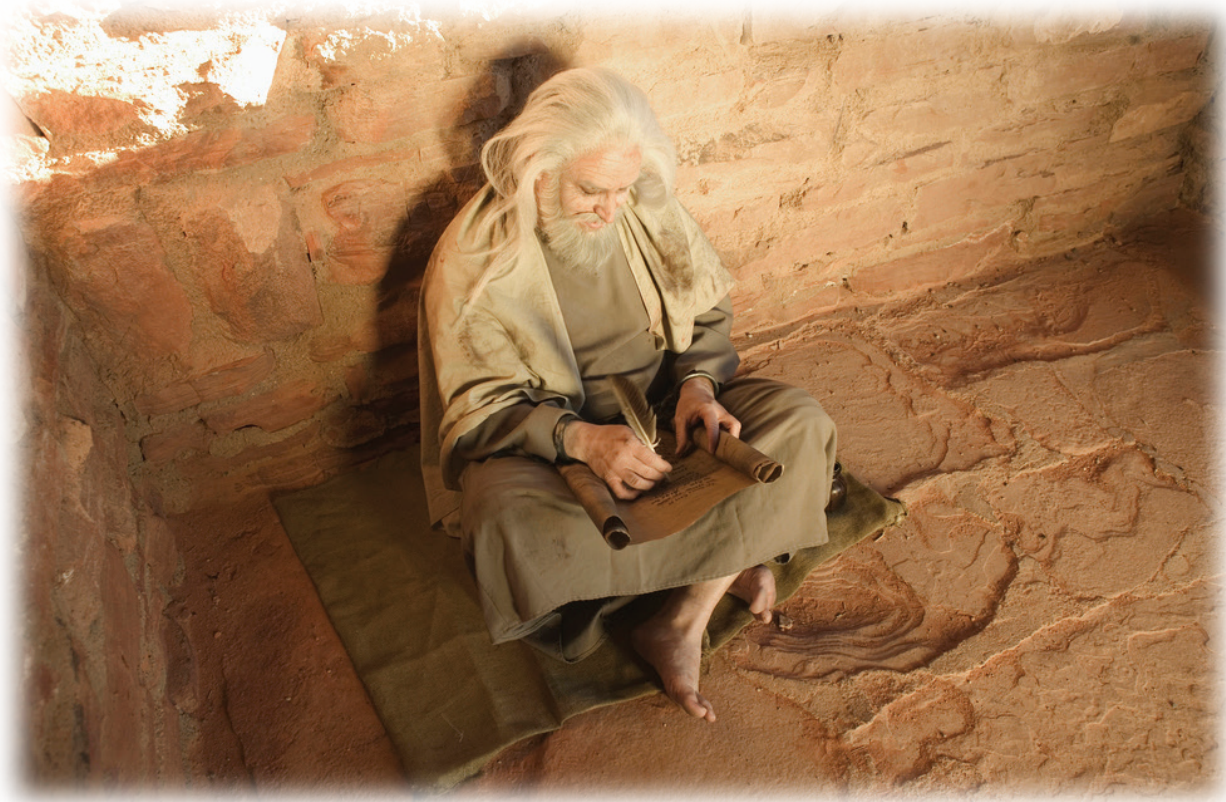
- “What has happened to me” – This refers to St. Paul’s life in prison for about 2 years.
- “Has really served” – Prison was not an obstacle for St. Paul’s mission, but in fact strengthened his mission.
- “My chains are clear to everybody” - It was clear that St. Paul’s chains were not for any crime that he had committed but because of his love to Christ. Thus, he was not considered as an ordinary prisoner.
- “Palace guard” - The palace guards are the guards of the empire. They lived in a residencies connected to the palace. St. Paul comforted the Philippians by telling them that his chains did not prevent his ministry. He preached Christ to every visitor who then knew Christ and spread the gospel not only in the palace but also outside. Most of the brethren when they saw St. Paul’s courage were courageous themselves. They trusted in the Lord, preached without fear and endured the persecution. Christianity spread in Rome through the believers who preached the word.
- St. Paul, in these verses tried to answer the Philippians in case they wondered why God allowed him to be in prison if his teachings were right. He explained that without the prison it would have been impossible for him to reach the palace, so God makes things work for the good.

### Verses 15-17

- “Envy and strife” - Some Jews who became Christians wanted the Gentiles to follow the rules of the Law of Moses before they became Christians. They were angry at St. Paul because he neglected the rites of the Law. St. Paul faced them and tried hard to straighten their teachings. Now that St. Paul was in prison, those people with bad intentions began to attack St. Paul’s teachings for their own glory. They thought that this will weaken St. Paul, adding more trouble to his imprisonment such that this may stop his ministry.
- “Selfish ambitions” – Refers to working for their own benefit.
- “Goodwill” - Refers to those who preached with joy and love for the glory of Christ.

### Verses 18-20

- “Whether in pretense or in truth” – Refers to whether the motive is their own glory or the glory of Christ.
- “In this I rejoice” – St. Paul rejoices because either way the word of the gospel is spreading.



- “My deliverance” - St. Paul’s mission was the spreading of the gospel; God preserved his life until that moment for that reason. St. Paul rejoiced because his goal was fulfilled.
- “Continue to rejoice” - St. Paul rejoiced in prison regardless of his condition.

#### **Verses 21-26**

- “To live is Christ” - When a person lives with honesty in Christ and does not seek to enjoy the worldly pleasures, their life will be filled with Christ and they will grow in a deeper relationship with Christ. As Christ said, “Whoever finds his life will lose it and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matthew 10:39).
- For many, life is focused on enjoying the world and all that is in it; money, lusts, etc... Those people are afraid from death as they consider it as the ultimate sadness because it will separate them from what they enjoy. This is in contrast to the Christian view that death is not the end of life but instead the beginning of a new life.
- “Fruitful labor” - This is a Greek expression meaning, “the labor is considerable”, that is a life that is fruitful for the glory of Christ. St. Paul’s life and labor was for God’s glory. Death

will also be a gain, as he will be freed from his trouble and live the life of glory with Christ.

- “Torn between two” - Both life and death are good and have their benefits. Whatever God chooses for him, he will be content: life to bring more glory to God, or death, which will unite him with his Savior.

### Verses 27-30

- “Not terrified by your adversaries” - These words were said to horses that were troubled when they encounter something that frightens them. There is no reason to be terrified because God’s grace is able to keep His children “Whoever touches you touches the apple of my eye” (Zach 2:8).

## Chapter 2: Joy in serving

### Verses 1-4

- “If there is any consolation in Christ” - the word consolation is translated to encouragement and refers to encouraging others in times of tribulations. St. Paul sees that the best way of encouraging others is by talking about Christ. This changes the attention of the one who is suffering, reminding him/her that they are a partner of Christ’s sufferings and thus will be a partner in His glory. If humans are able to comfort each other, it is obvious how much more Christ will help and support His children and send the Holy Spirit to assist.
- “If any comfort of love” - This comfort is consolation and relief of the saddened hearts. This should be done with love, not as a forced duty. There is no way to comfort people except by showing them love.
- “Fellowship with the Spirit” - Fellowship will be perfect if we all submit to the Holy Spirit, who unites together.
- “If any affection and mercy” - This refers to those who have a compassionate heart. Whatever is taken from Christ must be given to everyone. Just as Christ loves and shows compassion, all must do the same. The Holy Spirit will change our nature to make it like that of Christ’s nature.
- “Being of one accord, of one mind” - This can only be achieved if the person is filled with the Holy Spirit.



- “Do nothing out of selfish ambition as vain conceit”-The reason for division can often be envy or partiality, which will lead to hatred or seeking personal glory. Each person will see themselves as better than others. St. Paul addressed these divisions when he heard of them (Philippians 4:2).
- “Vain conceit”-This is when a person is filled with pride or with the gifts that God has given to them.
- “Let each esteem others better than himself”.
- Finally it is important not to focus on personal needs but rather to take care of others with empathy.

### Verses 5-11

- A Christian mind should be the same as that of Christ’s. St. Paul explains through Christ’s incarnation and salvation that there is no better example of humility for Christians to follow. Through learning from Christ’s example of humility, they can make their mind similar to that of Christ.
- “Being” in Greek means to exist or to be continuous. Christ is God in essence before and after the incarnation. This is similar to humans; humans remain human and do not change.
- “In the form of God”-As mentioned previously, humans will remain human no matter how they look outwardly. Similarly, the nature of Christ does not change with the incarnation. He is God who appeared in the flesh.
- “Robbery”-Our Lord did not consider it robbery to be equal with God because He is God. He humbled himself and took the form of a bondservant (2 Corinthians 8:9).
- “He made Himself nothing”-Through His incarnation, the glory of His divinity was hidden. This was so that the human race can draw near Him, so He can lift them up. He completed in His Body the work of redemption. If He had appeared in His glory, they would have recognized Him and would not have crucified Him (1 Corinthians 2:8).
- The incarnation and crucifixion did not change His nature as God, but added humanity to His divinity. For this reason water and blood came out of His side as a sign of unity of His divinity with His humanity.
- “The form of a bondservant”- Jesus took the human nature and became like us in everything except sin.
- “In the likeness of man”- Jesus Christ became man with full humanity but not like any

ordinary man, as He was without sin and still maintained His full divinity.

- “God exalted Him” This refers to Christ’s humanity because He humbled Himself and He was obedient. God exalted His humanity. Our Lord Jesus Christ has the authority to lay down His life and to take it again (John 10:17-18). This verse is also has a message to all Christians informing them that anyone who humbles themselves like Christ will be exalted and glorified with Him.
- “Giving Him a name that is above every name” God the father revealed who is Christ, that He is God. The name Jesus means “Jehovah saves”. Even just the name of Christ is powerful and torments or terrifies the devil; His name is a powerful and has become a praise. Everybody in heaven and in earth confesses this, giving thanks and worshipping Him.

## Verses 12-13

- “It is God who works in you to will” In verse 12 St Paul talked about the responsibility that each person has toward their own salvation. St. Paul encourages that the work should not be done by ourselves but God who works within us. If St. Paul had said “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” then it would have been very scary for us. It is impossible for us in our weakness to work out our own salvation. Instead, St. Paul talked about the heavenly gifts given to man in order to be saved, so God is working with us, helping us to reach our goal, which is salvation.
- “And to do” God is only One who gives help and support in situations. Without Him nothing is possible see John 15:5.
- Thus salvation is shared work between both the Holy Spirit and man. These verses comfort the Philippians that should St. Paul or any other apostles depart, it is God who works in His people.

## Verse 14-15

- “Complaining” Complaint come out from the bitterness of the heart, when there is no compassion for one another. It stems from a lack of love, from not trusting God and from disbelieving that all things work together for that which is good for us. That is why the church teaches to always give thanks and to avoid complaining.
- “Disputing” This is a generally caused by pride and not being flexible or willing to hear others, eventually leading to disputes.

- “Blameless” To be blameless is to be without fault or defect. To be blameless in front of God we have to be in Christ see Colossians 1:22.
- “Harmless” This refers to the person who always looks toward God and is honest in all that he does.
- “Crooked” Which means dishonest in their dealings.
- “Perverse” A distortion of truth.
- “Shine like stars” The light that resembles the holiness which comes from our Lord Jesus. We are the light of the world, see Matthew 5:14. We receive our light from Christ the sun of righteousness and the true light, see John 8:12. The children of God must strive to be like God, see Ephesians 5:1. We became children of God through our baptism and we must continue in faith to perform good deeds such that people can glorify our Father Who is in heaven.

### Verse 16-26

- “Rejoice with me” The apostle is rejoicing in his suffering, as a way of showing that suffering is a gift from God for the sake of Christ, see Philippians 1:29. This is what makes St Paul rejoice, to suffer for the sake of Christ who loves him. He is imitating Christ and sharing in His cross. It is an invitation to all the Philippians to be like him. St. Paul wanted to send Timothy to Philippi to reassure them and tell them about his news, although he needed Timothy during his imprisonment. This was because there was no one similar to Timothy in Rome who could be matched in reliable and love for them just like how St. Paul loved them.
- “No one like-minded” St. Paul is essentially saying that Timothy thinks like him. Timothy is humble, loving, and dedicated in his service. The Philippians knew Timothy well.
- “For all sake their own” With the increase of persecution the love of many decreased, they became less careful regarding their salvation and their honesty toward the Lord Jesus.
- “As soon as I see how it goes with me” St. Paul was saying that as soon as he knew his situation regarding the imprisonment, martyrdom or release, Timothy would go to tell them the news. This is regardless of the situation be it death or freedom.
- “I trust the Lord” St. Paul felt that he would be set free, and that was what ended up happening as Nero ended up setting him free that time.
- “I considered it necessary” St. Paul knew their feelings when they heard about Epaphroditus’ illness. Epaphroditus was commissioned to go to St. Paul carrying the

Philippians' gifts for him. He was sent to serve St. Paul while in the prison. So, when he got sick St. Paul was moved, he called Epaphroditus "my brother" in baptism, "fellow worker" in the mission and the service and "fellow soldier" against the power of darkness. Through this we can see St. Paul's love and how he prefers to put others before himself. Although he was in need of Epaphroditus who was serving him, he sent him back to the Philippians.

### Verses 27-30

- "Sorrow upon sorrow" St. Paul would have had excessive sorrow over had Epaphroditus died from his sickness. This shows the love of St. Paul to all to the Philippians and to his disciple. This also shows that Christianity does not ignore human feelings.
- "Hold such men in esteem" St. Paul tells the Philippian to welcome Epaphroditus in the Lord with great joy and honor and not to blame Epaphroditus for leaving him while he was still in prison. So St. Paul told the Philippians about Epaphroditus' service and to accept him in the Lord because of his love and how he exposed himself for many dangers.
- "Came to close death" Referring to Epaphroditus risking his life for St. Paul's service in the prison. Possibly this is because there may have been some danger from the prison guards or because of his illness.
- "To supply what was lacking in your service toward me" St. Paul refers to the help that the Philippians could not give to St. Paul because of the distance between Philippi and Rome. Epaphroditus helped St. Paul and he did what the Philippians could not.

## Chapter 3: Joy in the Lord

### Verses 1-4

- "Finally" - In the Greek translation finally refers to "What is left", implying that the previous topic has ended. The final topic is about the Jewish teaching regarding the importance of the circumcision for salvation. The apostle did not want this teaching literally subjected to the Gentiles as it is a heavy burden. He also wanted to help those who were enforcing it strictly from following what is wrong.
- "Beware" - Means to watch out, to be careful or to open your eyes.
- "Dogs, the evil doers" - The Greek and the Jewish people used these words as words of criticism and reproach. St. Paul used these words to blame the false teachers who held fast to the Jewish teaching thus depriving them from grace in the gospel of salvation. They considered Christianity a sect of Judaism and taught that for the Gentiles to enter





Christianity it has to be through Judaism.

- “Mutilation” – This refers to those who cut parts from their bodies. It describes the false teaching that instead of the spiritual circumcision the Gentiles require physical circumcision as a way of salvation.
- “For we are the circumcision” – St. Paul calls the people who enforce circumcision dogs and mutilators. These people had cut themselves from the church of Christ and the spiritual circumcision through the work of the Holy Spirit. St. Paul is essentially asking what is better, to cut off part of the flesh or the Holy Spirit kills the love of sin that is in us?
- “Who worship God in the Spirit” - This worship is shared by all those who believe in Christ either Jew or Gentile, they all became God’s people.
- “Rejoice in Christ” - God’s people rejoice in Christ and not in the works of the flesh like circumcision or being the children of Abraham.
- “No confidence in the flesh” - In the Christian understanding, salvation is beyond our capability and it is the work of God for the human being. The Jews imagine that salvation is a natural work of man toward God; that is why they talk about human deeds like circumcision, the Law and rituals. St. Paul wanted to warn us from the false teachers, so that we worship God in Spirit submitting to the Holy Spirit and we rejoice in Christ.

### Verses 5-6

- These verses explain the meaning of the righteousness that is in the body. St. Paul boasts about his own attributes that he is circumcised, a Jew, from the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew, and a Pharisee. All these were considered gain in the eyes of the Jews however St. Paul considered them as a loss because they did not benefit him in any way with respect to his relation with Jesus.
- “The excellence of the knowledge of Christ” - When we compare the knowledge of Christ with any other knowledge, it becomes obvious that the knowledge of Christ is significantly superior. The knowledge of Christ leads to peace, joy, and heavenly glory.

### Verses 9 – 11

- “Be found in Him” - To be found in Christ means to unite with Him forever. It is through abiding in Christ that one is justified and will have Christ’s righteousness in them. Faith in Christ is the beginning of all blessings.
- “Not having my own righteousness that is from the law” - This is the righteousness that

is acquired when the Law is fulfilled, however no one could fulfill the Law in full. If one could be made righteous by the Law there would be no need for Christ.

- The righteousness that is received from God, through faith in Christ, leads to the heavenly glory but the righteousness that is acquired through the works of the Law leads to earthly success and earthly inheritance.
- “The power of His resurrection” - St. Paul experienced the power of Christ in all the situations of his life. He saw firsthand the power of God that raised Christ from the dead and he experienced firsthand the power that was able to raise him from the death of sin.
- “The fellowship of His sufferings” - When the Apostle experienced the love of Christ and His power toward him and the whole world he longed to suffer with Christ. Whoever experiences the love of Christ finds it easy to accept sufferings for Christ’s sake. “For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake” Philippians 1:29 “That we may also be glorified together.” Romans 8:17

#### Verses 12 – 14

- “I press on” - This reflects struggling in life. St. Paul meant that he did not reach the full knowledge of Christ. It is a continuous process and he must continue to struggle to attain it.
- “Forgetting those things which are behind” - He does look at what he achieved. He did not reach heaven or perfection. The word forgetting in Greek means to completely forget. He is like person in a race running toward a goal; if he turns around he will waste his time and will likely lose the race. Spiritually whoever looks behind will perish like Lot’s wife and whoever put his hands on the plow should not look back.

#### Verses 15-17

- “Mature” – This denotes maturity of the mind, having the same the mind as he does, as mentioned in verses 13, 14. Whoever strives for perfection must rely on God’s grace and not on self-righteousness
- “Otherwise” – Refers to something other than Christ’s mind that is to say whoever is busy with worldly things or finds themselves righteous, thinking that they do not need to strive. The work of the Spirit is to show those people their error.
- “Let us walk by the same rule” – No person should stop striving in their spiritual life no matter what level is attained, rather they must continue in the way of righteousness always.

# TASTE & SEE

The Lord Is Good



- At the time there were no written Gospels so St. Paul put himself in front of them as a living Gospel. He asked them to imitate him as he imitates Christ.

### Verses 18-19

- St. Paul talks about the one who left the way of Christ and went after earthly matters. They assumed that the body is the source of all evil, so their sins will not add to the evil of the body. Based on this wrong assumption they did not see any wrong in their sins and thus they refused to carry the cross.

### Verses 20- 21

- “Our citizenship” - Meaning nationality or social responsibility. It refers to our heavenly citizenship given to us by our heavenly Father.
- “Eagerly wait” - In the Greek translation it means waiting with strong desire and refers to waiting the second coming of Christ. What motivates Christians to behave as heavenly citizens is the second coming of our Lord who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to the glorious body.

## Chapter 4: Rejoice always

### Verses 1 – 2

- “Stand fast” - It means as long as Christians are waiting for the second coming of Christ they must stand fast in their faith.
- “My joy” – St. Paul calls the Philippians my joy because of their love and obedience. They are his crown, just as the one who wins a race receive a crown. In order to win a race the participants have to go through intense training for long periods of time. The apostle strived his whole life for their salvation and is proud of their faith. He will receive a crown because of them.
- The apostle implored Euodia and Syntyche to be of the same mind so they do not deprive themselves from the unity with Christ and the joy in Him. The dispute between them hinders the work of the ministry and the work of the Holy Spirit.

### Verses 4 – 6

- “Rejoice in the Lord” - The true joy is to abide in Christ. Joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit.
- “Let your gentleness be known to all men” – In the Greek translation it implies do not get angry, do not be hard on others, and be patient. It is being willing to sacrifice your own

benefit just like how Abraham sacrificed his benefit for Lot. This characteristic will be only in those who rejoice in the Lord. Joy originates from love which is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. Joy and love produce patience, self-control, forgiveness, kindness and gentleness.

- “Be anxious for nothing” - Do not worry or be concerned or fear when faced with problems.
- “Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life” Matthew 6:25

### Verse 7

- “The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus”. This is God’s gift for His children so that they can have victory over the tribulations of this world. Victory in Christianity is to have joy and peace despite the external troubles. “Your joy no one will take from you”. John 16:22

### Verses 8 – 9

- In these verses St. Paul instructs all to meditate on a number of valuable topics.

### Verses 10 – 12

- “I rejoiced in the Lord” - He rejoiced in the Lord as he taught them, he did not rejoice because of their gifts to him but rather for the love that God put in their hearts
- “Flourished” - Refers to the fruit of their love to him as they looked after his needs while he was in prison.
- “Not in regard to need” - Although he was in need of their gifts, he did not want his service to be the source of materialistic gain.
- “I have learned to be content” – St. Paul had learned to be satisfied with that which he had no matter how little it was.
- “I know how to be abased” – St. Paul knew how to live a modest life, with very little possessions.
- “To abound” – Refers to having left over even with very little, and also giving to the needy. When he had a lot he did not get proud and when he had little he did not complain.
- “All things” – Refers to all the situations that St. Paul faced in his life
- “I have learned both to be full and to be hungry” - Spiritual life requires both training and striving. He accepted everything from the hand of God, trying to learn from it and giving thanks to God. Some people complain when they are troubled and forget God in their joy. St. Paul learned to live with Christ in all circumstances. St. Paul wanted to tell





the Philippians that he rejoiced at their gifts not for the gifts themselves but because he saw their love in them.

- “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” - Christ is in all things and thus the source of his strength. This is similar to what Jesus said, “without Me you can do nothing.” John 15:5

### Verses 14-17

- St. Paul did not want the Philippians to misunderstand that he disdained their gifts, so he told them that they were doing good by sharing in his distress. He told them that he felt that in his distress, they were distressed. Since the beginning of the gospel, when he departed from Macedonia, no other church shared with him in distress like they did.
- “But you only” – St. Paul received assistance only from them because he was confident in their love.
- “Giving and receiving” - St. Paul gave them spiritual things and took from them materialistic things. He did not say this to seek more gifts, but wanted the spiritual fruit to abound in their lives.

### Verses 18 – 20

- St. Paul described the gifts of the Philippians by three amazing descriptions; a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice and well pleasing to God. Thus he prayed “And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” That God give them according to His riches that they may enjoy the heavenly glory in Christ Jesus.
- “According to His riches” – Each person gives according to the riches he has. This implies that the King of kings would give according to His infinite riches.
- “Glory” - This is one of God’s attributes from the beginning and forever.
- “Those who are of Caesar’s household” – St. Paul did not mean Nero and his family, but rather the soldiers to whom he was preaching. Those soldiers believed and were inviting others to hear St. Paul preach and to believe.



# The Divine Liturgy: Presence and Life

## Learn, Understand, Live

The Divine Liturgy is the core of prayer and collective worship in the Coptic Orthodox church. It is when the angels and the heavenly powers arrive and the Holy Spirit descends to transform the bread and wine into the body and blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

The Divine Liturgy therefore is a connection with heaven. The time spent in church during the Divine Liturgy is one of the moments of heaven on earth.

The Divine Liturgies that we pray are:

- The Liturgy of St Basil
- The Liturgy of St Gregory
- The Liturgy of St Cyril

The Divine Liturgy sanctifies the bread, the wine, the congregation and the place.

### Live:

What can I do to benefit from attending the Divine Liturgy?

- Arrive early
- Participate in the responses
- Stand in a quiet place where you can follow the prayers and not get distracted
- Use the book of the divine liturgies, preferably your own book, to follow along
- Concentrate and meditate on the prayers

The Divine Liturgy is composed of ten parts. These are:

1. The Raising of Vespers and Morning Incense
2. The Procession of the Lamb



## Learn:

The raising of incense prayers comprises of:

- The Prayer of Thanksgiving - The church starts every prayer, including vespers and the raising of morning incense, with the Prayer of Thanksgiving. The church thanks God for all His works.
- The Mystery of Incense - The priest places five spoonfuls of incense in the censer while making the sign of the cross three times. These five spoonfuls of incense represent the five righteous men of the Old Testament who offered acceptable sacrifices to the Lord, and the Lord smelled their pleasing aroma. These men are: Abel, Noah, Melchizedek, Aaron and Zacharias.
- The Prayer of Efnouti Nai Nan - Lord Have Mercy on us - The priest asks for God's mercy and the congregation responds three times with: "Lord have mercy".
- The litany of the Gospel - The Psalm and the Gospel are read.
- The Five Minor Litanies - The priest prays the Five Minor Litanies concerning peace, the church fathers, the holy places, the weather and vegetation, and the congregations.
- The Absolution - The priest reads the absolution and says the final blessing.

## Understand:

The priest encircles the altar with incense signifying the preaching of the Holy Trinity in the four corners of the world. The priest encircles the altar counter-clockwise signifying that eternity is not tied to time, and that during prayer we connect with heaven.

## Live:

The incense is an announcement of God's presence and that is why we say: "Glory be to God the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit" while the priest encircles the church with incense. Feel the presence of God, bow your head and offer repentance and a true confession from the heart, saying: "I ask you my Lord Jesus to forgive my sins".

## Second: The Procession of the Lamb

The procession of the lamb is the beginning of the journey. The Church is committed to offer all its life to Christ.

- Psalms are prayed before the procession of the lamb because they prophesize the incarnation of Christ the Lord.
- On Saturdays and Sundays and during non-fasting periods, the church prays the Third and Sixth Hour prayers before beginning the mass. During periods of fasting, the church



also reads the Ninth Hour, and during Holy Lent and Jonah's fast, the Eleventh and Twelfth Hours are also prayed.

- Next the priest examines the bread to choose the most suitable one for offering. He then places his hands over the tray in the shape of a cross and says: "May the Lord choose a lamb without blemish."

### **Learn:**

The number of loaves in the basket of the lamb should always be an odd number, such as 3, 5, 7 and so on. Find out why.

### **Understand:**

The priest selects the loaves with his face towards the people because he announces that no one is worthy to stand in front of God, except the one mediator who stands between us and God the Father, His only Son Jesus Christ who offered His life to redeem the sins of the whole world.

### **Live:**

During confession of our sins and putting all our hope in Jesus Christ, we are not worthy to approach Him except by asking for mercy, and therefore we say, "Kyrie Eleison". That is why we have to offer our whole life to Jesus Christ to sanctify us with His blood. The moments of offering of the lamb are moments of awe, humility and repentance. Lift up your heart confessing your sins and ask for God's mercy.

### **Understand:**

The priest wipes the selected bread "korbana" all around with water. This action symbolizes the baptism of Christ by St. John the Baptist in the River Jordan by immersion.

The priest then holds the lamb, wrapped in linen, in reverence against his head while standing at the door of the sanctuary saying, "Glory and honour, honour and glory". He proceeds around the altar with the deacons to symbolize that salvation is offered for the whole world. Then he puts the selected bread in the paten and puts the wine in the chalice while praying the thanksgiving prayer. He covers them with the prospharin to symbolize the burial of the body of Jesus Christ. Then he folds one linen in the shape of a triangle and puts it on the prospharin to symbolize the seal that was put on the tomb.

Do you know the meaning of the word 'Spadikon'?

3. The Readings
4. The Prayer of Reconciliation
5. The Anaphora (lift up your hearts)
6. The Institution
7. The Litanies
8. The Commemoration of the Saints
9. The Fraction
10. The Prayer of Submission and the Communion

Connect each of the following Biblical references with the related part of the Divine Liturgy:

- |  |                                    |
|--|------------------------------------|
| • The mystery of Godliness                   | • Revelations 4:11                 |
| • The incense                                | • 1Timothy 3:16                    |
| • He gave Himself for us                     | • 1Timothy 2:1-2                   |
| • Proclaim My death                          | • Hebrews 11:40 & Revelations 6:11 |
| • Getting ready by repentance                | • Revelations 5:8                  |
| • The praise of the seraphim                 | • Ephesians 5:2 & Romans 5:8       |
| • The commemoration of the saints            | • 1 Corinthians 11:27              |
| • Meet and right                             | • 1 Corinthians 11:26              |
| • The prayer of reconciliation               | • Matthew 5:23-24                  |
| • Uniting with Christ                        | • Isaiah 6:3                       |
| • Signs for the way                          | • John 6:56                        |
| • Praying for the president and the soldiers | • Matthew 26:26-28                 |
| • Sanctifying the oblations                  | • Psalms 119:105                   |

## First: The Raising of Incense

The Raising of Incense is an introduction to and preparation for the Liturgy, consisting of a collection of prayers, praises and Thanksgiving prayers which request the Lord's blessings upon the sacramental service. The Raising of Incense is mandatory prior to the commencement of the Liturgy. The only exception to this is during the Great Lent. Since liturgies during Lent end late, they do not include vesper prayers.

## Third: The Readings

- The readings are a guide to the journey. They are the map by which we understand our position with respect to God and His position in relation to us. Without this map we lose the way and do not reach our destination.

### Learn:

The readings are called the “Liturgy of Catechumen” because they are the educational part of the Liturgy. The church has prepared five readings for each Liturgy:

- The Pauline Epistle (part of the epistles by St. Paul);
- The Catholic Epistle (part of the other epistles);
- The Praxis (Part of the book of Acts);
- The Synaxarium, which is the story of the saint(s) of the day; and
- The Gospel (a part of the Psalms and a part of one of the four gospels)

### Understand:

During the Pauline Epistle the priest encircles the whole church offering incense, while during the Catholic Epistles the priest does not go out of the sanctuary. During the Praxis he only encircles the first chorus. Do you know why?

What is the meaning of the words: ‘Katamaros’ and ‘Praxis’? Find out.

### Live:

- At the end of the Liturgy, the priest announces: “The holies for the holy.” Where can we get holiness except through the work of God’s Word in us?
- The word of the Gospel requires that we humble ourselves and eagerly receive every word. It is good to surrender my heart to God and to examine myself and my life in light of the Scripture.
- When the priest encircles the church while burning incense, he is really extending an invitation to repentance and acceptance of the Word of God in purity.

### Learn:

- The word ‘Synaxarium’ means news or biography. It is the book containing the daily commemoration of the Saints. The Catholic Epistles are: The Epistle of James, The two Epistles of Peter, the three Epistles of John the Beloved, and the Epistle of Jude.

## Fourth: The Prayer of Reconciliation

What is the meaning of the word 'Aspasmos'?

### Learn:

- Man is made in God's image in his capacity to love. Without repentance and reconciliation with God, it is not possible to offer truthful love.
- Sin deprives us of the capacity to love. That is why the holy kiss is a true work of repentance and a way to revise oneself, to quit hatred and enforce love.
- The Reconciliation Prayer is not prayed on Holy Thursday as an indication that the true reconciliation will not be accomplished until the crucifixion of Christ on Good Friday.

### Understand:

- Why does the priest lift up the prospharin? The Priest is declaring that the resurrection of the Lord has been fulfilled in us through reconciliation with God by repentance and reconciliation with our brothers with the holy kiss and our willingness to sacrifice for them.
- 
- The priest prays the Prayer of Reconciliation and gives thanks to God. The first part of the Prayer of Reconciliation consists of meditations on the creation of man, without corruption, then the fall of man by the envy of Satan. This is why the Liturgy of the faithful starts with the Prayer of Reconciliation signifying our reconciliation with God before the distribution of the Holy sacraments.
- 
- The second part of the Prayer of Reconciliation: The priest asks God to fill his heart and the hearts of the congregation with His heavenly peace. Soon after, the deacon calls on all those assembled in the church to "greet one another with the holy kiss". Thus the whole church becomes one heart and one mind, in preparation for participating in the Divine Liturgy. The priest starts by saying, "The love of the God the Father be with you" (i.e., the love of God will be steadfast in us if we love one another).

### Live:

- Now we can be reconciled with others. We can offer love to others because we are reconciled with God. "Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go

your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift." Matthew 5:23-24

## **Fifth: The Anaphora - Lift Up Your Hearts**

- Now we prepare to be uplifted in heavenly matters. The church declares the reconciliation of God with His people in Jesus Christ. We respond by being reconciled to each other.
- What is the meaning of the word 'Anaphora'? Find out.
- When we start the actual prayer on the bread and wine, the priest prays for the sake of the congregation and the congregation prays for the sake of the priest:
  - "Peace be with you all."
  - "And with your spirit."
  - "Lift up your hearts."
- Here everyone lifts up their hearts and responds:
  - "We have them with the Lord."
- So the priest thanks God for this great blessing.
- The congregation responds: "It is meet and right."
  
- At the beginning of every liturgy, let us ask God to give us this blessing: that our hearts be occupied with Him alone throughout the entire Liturgy.

### **Live:**

- If you have really offered your heart to God, this is a blessing given to you by Him. You should
  
- Thank Him for His work by saying: "Meet and right."

### **Understand:**

- The priest then raises his hand and says: 'Agios', and does the sign of the cross three times. First he makes the sign of the cross on himself, then on the servants and third on the congregation. When the priest says to the congregation, "Lift up your hearts," we feel we are in heaven so we participate with the heavenly hosts in praise saying, "Holy, Holy, Holy." We praise the Lord because for us He became man, was crucified and buried, resurrected, ascended into heaven and will come back to reward us.



## Live:

- Praise the Lord and thank Him for His work with you. Man is reconciled with God through repentance and with his brothers and sisters through love. Man's heart and thoughts are lifted up to focus on heaven. He becomes part of the heavenly choir. We praise the Holy God, who sits on the throne of His Glory, saying, "Holy, Holy, Holy."
- Why does the priest put incense in the censer when he says, "was incarnate and became man"? Find out.
- "As if man is shifted up to heaven, standing beside the throne of the Lord of Glory, flying with the Seraphim and singing the holy praise." - St John the Chrysostom
- "All the heavenly powers come and sing this praise. The altar is filled with angels who congregate to honour the sacrifice. How can you Christian dare to attend this sacrifice without respect? The church is heaven itself." - St John Chrysostom

## Sixth: The Institution

- The Institution is the most important part of the liturgy. The Holy Spirit descends on the sacrifices and transforms them into the body and blood of our Saviour.
- Here we remember how Jesus Christ gave us His body and blood.
- The priest says a silent prayer and then declares the transformation of the bread and wine to the body and blood of Christ.
- The candles are lit around the altar during the institution of the bread and wine, which signifies that the light of life has risen from this sacrifice.
- The priest calls the Holy Spirit while he is kneeling because Jesus Christ is the one who has established this sacrament. He is the one sending His Holy Spirit now onto these oblations.

## Understand:

- Here the priest points with his hands covered with two veils to the bread and says, "He instituted this great sacrament that is for righteousness."
- When the deacon says, "Worship God in fear and trembling", the priest invites the Holy Spirit to transform the bread into the body of Christ and the wine into the blood of Christ. Then he does the sign of the cross on the bread three times and says:

- “And He gave thanks;
- And He blessed it;
- And He sanctified it.”
- He then puts his hand over the rim of the chalice and crosses it three times saying:
- “And He gave thanks;
- And He blessed it;
- And He sanctified it.”
- Each time the congregation responds by saying, “Amen.”
- What does the phrase “Do this in remembrance of Me” mean?

## Seventh: The Litanies

What does the word ‘litany’ mean?

### Learn:

The Litanies constitute the mystery of communion. They are requests for several matters. As we all enjoy being part of the one body, we pray for love and unity of heart.

We pray for those we love; we put all their lives and needs in front of the Lord. We pray for the peace of the church and our father the Pope, our fathers the priests and for the well-being of the servants. We pray for the widows and the orphans, the strangers and the sojourners. We pray for the sacrifices and the sick and travelers, and those in suffering and those in pain, presidents and all the soldiers. (Ephesians 2:1-2)

The priest prays the seven short litanies. These are:

- The Litany of Peace
- The Litany of the Fathers
- The Litany of the Priests
- The Litany of Mercy
- The Litany of the Place
- The Litany of the Waters or the Seeds and Plants or the Airs of Heaven
- The Litany of Oblations

### Live:

By these requests we return to the paradise of love in which we are united in one heart; this heart is filled with giving and caring for everyone. No one can stand in front of God by himself

or ask for himself only, except through our membership in the one body.

Ask to be sanctified with the work of the Holy Spirit so that true love overflows in your heart and sets you free of your ego.

## **Eighth: The Commemoration of the Saints**

Sharing with the Triumphant Church

### **Learn:**

After the litanies are parayed, the priest prays the Commemoration of Saints, which includes the most prominent fathers of the church. We then remember our dearly departed.

The Commemoration of Saints is the presence of the whole church by being one body with the Son of God; it does not only include visible members but also the unseen or invisible members as well. The commemoration of the saints is “communion with the Triumphant Church” where we pray for them and ask for their prayers.

### **Understand:**

- During Holy Thursday’s Liturgy neither the Commemoration of the Saints nor the Diptych are prayed. Find out why.
- “We should pray for the departed faithful and offer on their behalf a secret sacrifice to make God merciful to them.” - St Cyril the Pillar of Faith
- Keep standing during the Commemoration of the Saints prayers and stay focused. Meditate on the virtues of the saints mentioned. Ask for the intercession of each one of them.
- Participate and pray for the departed so that God may grant rest to their souls.

## **Ninth: The Fraction**

### **Learn:**

- The Fraction is a prayer of thanksgiving to God for His inexpressible gift; He freely gave us His Holy Body and Honoured Blood as a way to eternal life for those who worthily partake of them.
- It is also a supplication that He may purify our hearts, souls and bodies so that we dare, in the intimacy of His Divine love, partake of them.
- The prayers of Fraction are numerous. Some Fractions are prayed all year round and some

are for major or minor feasts of our Lord, the Virgin's feasts, the angels' or saints' feasts, for periods of fasting, and so on.

## **Understand:**

- The priest divides the Holy Body into 12 parts around the spadikon. This symbolizes the sufferings that were inflicted on the body of Christ.
- The priest crosses the Holy Body with the Holy Blood. This points out the fact that the Lord endured suffering and also that blood poured out of His side.

## **Live:**

- During the Fraction prayer, meditate on the pain of the Lord Jesus Christ for your sake. Meditate on the slashing and all the painful torture that He endured.
- Look deep into your heart and tell yourself, "All that for my sins! Lord have mercy on me for I am a sinner."

## **Tenth: The Prayers of Submission and Communion**

- The deacon says, "Bow your heads to the Lord." Everybody bows their heads to the Lord saying: "Before you, O Lord." It is a moment of repentance and confession to become worthy to accept the prayer of absolution from the priest. While the priest is reading the absolution, everyone of us should offer repentance.
- The deacon says, "Let us attend in the fear of the Lord." Then the priest says, "Peace be with you." And the congregation responds "And with your spirit." Then the priest says, "The Holies for the holy." The people respond, "One is the Holy Father. One is the Holy Son. One is the Holy Spirit. Amen", as if they are saying we are not holy, we are sinners and unworthy and the only holy one is the Holy Trinity.
- Then the priest says the last confession, and each time the congregation responds with, "Amen". What does the priest say in the last confession? Find out. The deacon then says, "Pray for the worthy partaking of these immaculate, heavenly and holy mysteries."
- The Eucharist is the sanctification of the human creation, so it can return to its original image, announcing the presence of God and testifying to His love to man who was created in His own image. Now we proceed in one line as if we are going up to heaven,

opening our mouths as if they were the manger of Bethlehem. We welcome the Logos Incarnate; yes it is a moment of joy and sanctification.

## Live: Participate

- Praise with the joy of a person who just got sanctified by the blood of Christ.
- "A person should not prevent himself from daily partaking of the body of the Lord for his own healing." - St. Augustine

## Summary

- The Divine Liturgy is a journey to heaven.
- We start with a prayer to raise morning incense, announcing the presence of God in our midst.
- For the lamb of God has offered Himself for our sake: "The Offertory."
- He gave us His words to guide us and sanctify us: "The Readings."
- In order to come to Him, we must first be reconciled with our brothers: "The prayer of reconciliation." As we are reconciled with God and with our brothers, then
- We lift up our hearts and dwell in heaven: "Lift up your hearts."
- Then He offers His Body and Blood to us so that we can become His own body: "The Institution."
- As we become His Body, we are sharing with our brothers on earth: "The Litanies."
- And we also share with our brothers in heaven: "The Commemoration of the Saints"
- We also have a share in his pain that he suffered on our behalf: "The Fraction."
- Finally we eat His Body and drink His Blood to be steadfast in Him and He in us: "The Communion."
- We all become members of His Body. The Eucharist makes us all one body united with Jesus Christ and also with our brothers.



# St. Augustine

## His Early Years

St. Augustine was born on 13 November 354 AD in North Africa in the city of Thagaste near Algeria. He received his education at the hands of Pagan teachers and through reading books of philosophy and literature by Pagan writers. He forgot all the Christian teachings that his mother taught him. Although his mother Monica was from a Christian family, his father had a Roman citizenship and was a pagan with a rude character. All he wanted was to see his son rich and educated regardless of his behaviour. So Augustine grew living a reckless life enjoying all human pleasures and lusts.

He had a brother and a sister whom his mother had taught Christian teachings. She endured the wicked deeds of her husband and her mother-in-law and she won them both and her husband believed and was baptized before his death.

At the age of 16, Augustine went to Carthage to continue his study in rhetoric. There, he joined a group of bad friends who led corrupted lives and became their leader. He had an affair with a woman in Carthage for about 14 years and gave birth to a son from this relationship. He studied law, as he wanted to become a lawyer or a judge. He also learned Latin. He was very successful in his education and excelled over other students in his generation. Throughout his studies, he was not trying to change his life but rather he sought the praise of others. He also learned that only the truth could lead one to happiness.

Augustine was very impressed with Cicero's teachings which led him to seek chastity and look for the truth. He read the Holy Bible but not with the spirit of faith and humility but with pride. He followed the Manichaeism religion (a heresy that spread at that time, that taught that the body of Christ descended from heaven, and was not a materialistic body, but rather an imaginary body that dissolved in His divine nature).

Monica saw how her son was deviating from the truth and was leading many in the wrong direction. Through her love and prayer she was able to bring him back. As Pope Kyrillos VI said: "Prayer is able to move the hand that coordinates the whole universe". She prayed for his salvation with tears. One night she saw in a dream that she was standing on a piece of wood (a

symbol of faith) as if she was embraced by it. She saw a young man asking her about the reason of her sadness, so she told him about her son. He told her “Don’t worry your son is here, he is with you”. She turned and saw her son standing on the same wood. So she trusted that God answered her prayers.

### In Rome

In the year 382, his friends convinced him to go to Rome for richness and fame. His mother tried to prevent him but failed. He tricked her by telling her that he was going to say farewell to one of his friends who was travelling, but he left to Rome leaving her behind.

### In Milan

The governor of Milan sent to the governor of Rome asking for a rhetoric teacher, so he sent him Augustine. In Milan, Augustine met the Bishop of Milan, St. Ambrose, who took care of him. Augustine liked him and was impressed by his sermons. St. Ambrose was one of the greatest speakers and rhetoricians. Augustine was more interested in his speaking skills and the topic of his speeches. He also found out that St. Ambrose was very knowledgeable in bible study and different spiritual meanings. So Augustine had a strong relationship with St. Ambrose. In the meantime, Monica came to Milan to be by her son’s side and to help him to abandon his mistress. Augustine listened to his mother and let his mistress go but he kept his son whom he loved as he was smart and brilliant.

Augustine listened to Old Testament explanations from St. Ambrose (this was neglected by the Manichaeans). He also heard his answer to Manichaean followers and other heresies. This is when he saw the light of truth. He realized that the church is from God, where the prophecies of the Old Testament were fulfilled. He met his mother to tell her that he will abandon the Manichaean religion but he still did not accept the true faith as he thought that it was impossible for him to keep his chastity.

Augustine started to read some of Plotinus’ books that were translated by Victorinus. He learned from them but they still did not lead him to the faith. He started to read the Holy Bible again, especially the letters of St. Paul. He was very impressed by them especially in how they connect the Old Testament to the New Testament. He visited one of his friends and told him about his reading to Plotinus’ work published by Victorinus. His friend told him that Victorinus embraced the Christian faith. Augustine wanted to follow his footsteps but he was still bonded by his bad habits.

## His repentance

A man named Ponticianus (a true believer) visited Augustine. He found him with his friend Allipos reading the Letters of St. Paul. First, he thought they were reading some philosophical books, but Augustine told him that he has been concerned with these letters for a while. So Ponticianus told him about the life of St. Anthony and how his story led one of the nobles to leave everything behind and to follow his path. Augustine's heart was touched. He thought how uneducated people steal the kingdom, but here he was, with all his knowledge, still in sin.

He went to his house's garden. There he saw all his sins in front of him. He cried saying: "A strong storm... defend me... O Lord, how long? How long, Lord? Will you be angry forever? Remember not our former iniquities, for I felt that I was held by them. How long, how long? Why not now? Why not this hour be end to my uncleanness?" As he was speaking and weeping in bitter contrition of his heart, he heard a voice from a neighbouring house, as of child, chanting and repeating, "Take up and read; Take up and read". Instantly, he went to read the letters of St. Paul.

He read the verse, "And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts" (Romans 13:11-14).

Augustine believed in our Lord Jesus and his life changed completely. He was influenced by St. Paul. He isolated himself from his friends and his sinful life and dedicated himself to God's service. This was in the year 387 AD and he was 32 years old at that time. It was through the death of one of his friends, his philosophical studies, reading of the Holy Bible, St. Ambrose sermons and his mother's prayers and teachings, that he finally found Christ.

## His return to Thagaste

Augustine returned to Thagaste. He told his mother about his conversion and how her tears and her prayers for almost 20 years were accepted. It was as St. Ambrose told her "the son of tears could not perish or be lost".

Augustine went back to his city with his mother. After 5 days, she was sick with a high fever. She told him that she had accomplished her role now that he is a servant of the Lord and she departed in peace.

After the departure of St. Monica, Augustine went back to Rome. There he fought the Manichaeian heresy. He then went to Africa and from there to Carthage and back to Thagaste. He donated all his procession and dedicated himself to prayer and meditation in the word of God with his friends for 3 years. He wrote many books while studying the bible. He wrote out his studies and meditations in books and distributed them to those who wanted to learn about God and His word.

### **His ordination as a priest**

As Augustine was visiting one of his friends in Hippo, the Bishop of Hippo ordained him as a priest, although he was declining this ordination with tears. He asked him to give sermons most days of the week. He lived in a place owned by the church and made it a monastery and many monks joined it. He also instituted a convent for nuns which was run by his sister.

### **His ordination as a bishop**

In the year 395 AD, he was made the bishop of Hippo. All the believers were delighted but the heretics rose against him and wanted to kill him. He was known for his love to the poor and helped them in many different ways. He continued fighting against the heresies. He attended an assembly held by the command of Emperor Honorius in year 411 AD against the Donatism; which included 275 bishops and 279 Donatist. He debated with them showing them the right Christian faith. He was bishop of Hippo for 38 years.

### **His departure**

When he was 72 years old, Augustine chose one of the priests to take care of the church. He wanted him to be his successor. He spent 4 years preparing for his departure with tears. He died in the year 438 AD at the age of 76 years.

### **His writings**

He wrote about 232 books, including Historical books e.g. "Confessions" and "Retractions" and philosophical letters e.g. "On the blessed Life", "The Immortality of the soul", "On music". His writings also include apologetic works against the heresies of the Arians, Donatists, Marinchaeans and Pelagians.

He also wrote explanations on Genesis, the Psalms, the 1st letter of St John, the sermon on the mountain, Consensus of the Evangelist and commentaries on St. Paul's letters to the Romans, to the Galatians and the Gospel of St. John. He also wrote about ethics and Christian discipline.

# St Mary the repentant hermit

## (St. Mary of Egypt)

St. Mary was born in a small village in Egypt in the year 345 AD. When she was 12 years old, she secretly left her parents' house and went to Alexandria. At this time, Alexandria was the center of science and knowledge. It was a place where merchants and vendors from the East and West would meet and also where thousands of students from different countries would study. They all lived in excessive luxury and Mary was very impressed by this lifestyle. Many youth tried to seduce her so she gave up to them and lived in sin for 17 years.

"Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again" John 4:13

### In Jerusalem

One day, she saw the crowds of pilgrims preparing to go to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross. It was a big celebration and many people attended to take the blessing of the Holy Cross. She went along, announcing to her fellow travellers, "I have a body that will serve as both fare and food for me". During the trip, Mary explored the outer limits of lust and passion with her companions. When they arrived to Jerusalem, Mary did not go to visit the holy places but went after her lust and sin.

The day of the Exaltation of the Cross dawned while she was still flying about, hunting for youths. At daybreak, she saw that everyone was hurrying to the church so she ran with the rest. When the hour for the holy elevation approached, she tried making her way in with the crowd, but was struggling to get through the church doors. With great difficulty she made it to the entrance of the church from which the life-giving Tree of the Cross was being shown to the people. When she went to the doorstep that everyone passed, she was prevented from entering by a strange force. She struggled in vain having attempted three or four times. Her feet tread on the doorstep over which others were entering without encountering any obstacle.

### Her repentance

She began to understand the reason why she was prevented from being admitted to see the life-giving Cross. The words of salvation touched the eyes of her heart and revealed to her that

it was her unclean life that prevented her entrance. She began to weep and lament and beat on her breast, and to sigh from the depths of her heart. As she stood weeping, she saw above her the icon of the most holy Mother of God. She turned to her, weeping, and said:

“O Lady, Mother of God, who gave birth in the flesh to God the Word, I know, O how well I know, that it is no honour or praise to you when one, so impure and depraved as I, look up to your Icon. O Ever-virgin, who kept her body and soul in purity. Rightly do I inspire hatred and disgust before your virginal purity. But I have heard that God who was born of you became man on purpose to call sinners to repentance. Then help me, for I have no other help. Order the entrance of the church to be opened to me. Allow me to see the venerable Tree on which He who was born of you suffered in the flesh and on which He shed His holy Blood for the redemption of sinners and for me, unworthy as I am. Be my faithful witness before your son that I will never again defile my body by the impurity of fornication, but as soon as I have seen the Tree of the Cross, I will renounce the world and its temptations and will go wherever you would lead me.”

Thus she spoke and as if acquiring some hope in firm faith and feeling some confidence in the mercy of the Mother of God, she left the place where she stood praying. She went again and mingled with the crowd that was pushing its way into the church. And no one seemed to prevent her, no one hindered her entering the church.

She entered without difficulty and saw the life-giving Cross. Throwing herself on the ground, she worshipped with trembling, with tears and with true repentance. She came out of the church and went to the icon of St. Mary and bending her knees before the Virgin Mother of God, she said:

“O loving Lady, who have shown me your great love for all men. Glory to God who receives the repentance of sinners through you. What more can I recollect or say, I who am so sinful? It is time for me, O Lady to fulfil my vow, according to your witness. Now lead me by the hand along the path of repentance!”

And at these words She heard a voice from on high: “If you cross the Jordan you will find glorious rest.”



## **In Wilderness of the Jordan**

Hearing this voice and having faith that it was for her, she cried to the Mother of God: 'O Lady, Lady, do not forsake me!' With these words she left the porch of the church and set off on her journey.

She went to the church of St. John the Baptist that was on the banks of the Jordan. She prayed in the church and took communion. She crossed the Jordan and afterward went in the desert where she spent 47 years in prayer, fasting, meditation, fighting against the temptations of the devil.

## **Her Struggle and Asceticism**

For years in the desert, she fought against her passions and desires. Her previous life and her deeds before her repentance were coming to her. She used to begin to regret the meat and fish of which she had so much in Egypt. The mad desire for profligate songs and thoughts of fornication also entered her and confused her greatly. But when such desires entered her, she reminded herself of the vow which she had made, when going into the desert. In her thoughts, she returned to the icon of the Mother of God who had received her and would cry to her in prayer. She implored her to chase away the thoughts to which her soul was succumbing. She always had St. Mary as her helper.

As for her food, she fed on herbs and all that can be found in the desert. The clothes she had when she crossed the Jordan became torn and worn out. She did not have any clothes and suffered greatly from the cold and the extreme heat of the desert. Her skin became very dark from the heat and cold of the desert.

Do you want to inherit the earth, beware lest the earth inherit you. If you are meek you will inherit the earth if you are harsh it will inherit you. You will truly inherit the earth when you holdfast to the creator of the heaven and earth.

## **True repentance and continuous struggle:**

After years of struggle, God's grace overshadowed her and the Holy Spirit dwelt in her. She cited words from the scriptures. Although she never learned from books, the word of God became alive in her as it is powerful and alive in itself and teaches man knowledge.

### **Abba Zosimas the Monk**

There was a rule in the monastery that at the beginning of the Great Lent, the monks would celebrate the holy Liturgy and partake in the Holy Communion then they would go out in the desert and cross the Jordan River. After crossing the Jordan, they would scatter far and wide in different directions. In this way, they used to spend the whole fast, and then return to the monastery a week before the Resurrection of Christ on Palm Sunday.

Zosimas did the same as all. He went far into the desert with a secret hope of finding some father who might be living there, who he can learn from. As he wandered and prayed in the desert, he suddenly saw the semblance of a human body.

At first, he was confused thinking he beheld a vision of the devil, was afraid. But, having guarded himself with the sign of the Cross, he turned his gaze in that direction and in truth saw some form moving. Zosimas was so overjoyed at beholding a human form that he ran after it in pursuit, but the form fled from him. He followed. At length, when he was near enough to be heard, he shouted: "Why do you run from an old man and a sinner? Slave of the True God, wait for me, whoever you are, in God's name I tell you, for the love of God for whose sake you are living in the desert."

Then the human form answered him: "Abba Zosimas, I am a sinful woman, but if you wish to talk to me, throw me your cloak so that I can cover my body". He took off his cloak and threw it to her. He found himself in front of a woman with a body burnt from the sun and with long white hair. She turned to Zosimas and said: "Why did you wish, Abba Zosimas, to see a sinful woman? What do you wish to hear or learn from me, you who have not shrunk from such great struggles?" Abba Zosimas begged her to tell him her story. So she told him everything about her life until that day.

She asked him not to tell her story to anyone until after her departure. She also asked him to come the following year on Holy Thursday and bring her the Body and Blood of Christ that she may partake in the holy Mysteries. The following year, Zosimas went and gave her communion. She asked him to come again the next year in the same place where they first met. He promised to come back and went back to his monastery. Until then, Zosimas did not know her name.

## Her departure

And when another year had passed, Zosimas went again into the desert. He reached the same spot but could not see a sign of her. So raising his eyes to heaven as before, he prayed: "Show me, O Lord, Your pure treasure, which You have concealed in the desert. Show me, I pray, the angel in the flesh, of which the world is not worthy."

Then on the opposite bank of the river, towards the rising sun, he saw the saint lying dead. Her hands were crossed according to custom and her face was turned to the East. A lion was beside her, guarding her body. Running up, he shed tears over the saint's feet and kissed them, and took her blessing.

For a long time he wept. Then reciting the appointed psalms, he said the burial prayers and thought to himself: "Must I bury the body of a saint? Or will this be contrary to her wishes?" Then he saw words traced on the ground by her head:

"Abba Zosimas, bury on this spot the body of humble Mary. Return to dust that which is dust and pray to the Lord for me, who departed in the month of Baramoda, on the very night of our Lord's Passion, after having partaken of the Divine Mysteries."

While he was thinking how he was going to dig to bury her, the lion came and dug a grave for her. He buried her pure body and returned to his monastery. He told the monks what happened and wrote the story of her life. This was around the year 437 AD.

The Coptic Church considered her life a great example of repentance and asceticism

The Story of St. Mary of Egypt teaches us that true repentance saves and purifies the soul like a second baptism. Whoever defiles his baptism with sin, renews it with repentance. No matter what the sins are, they are forgiven.

Through her repentance, her struggle and her asceticism, St. Mary of Egypt, who was a sinner, inherited the kingdom of heaven. The church celebrates her feast on the 6 of Baramoda.

**Memorization**

## PRAYER OF THE NINTH HOUR

### **Psalm 110**

Praise the Lord! I will praise the Lord with my whole heart, in the assembly of the upright and in the congregation. The works of the Lord are great, studied by all who have pleasure in them. His work is honorable and glorious, and His righteousness endures forever. He has made His wonderful works to be remembered; The Lord is gracious and full of compassion. He has given food to those who fear Him; He will ever be mindful of His covenant. He has declared to His people the power of His works, in giving them the heritage of the nations. The works of His hands are verity and justice; All His precepts are sure. They stand fast forever and ever, and are done in truth and uprightness. He has sent redemption to His people; He has commanded His covenant forever: Holy and awesome is His name. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; A good understanding have all those who do His commandments. His praise endures forever. Alleluia.

### **Luke 9:10-17**

And the apostles, when they had returned, told Him all that they had done. Then He took them and went aside privately into a deserted place belonging to the city called Bethsaida. But when the multitudes knew it, they followed Him; and He received them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who had need of healing. When the day began to wear away, the twelve came and said to Him, "Send the multitude away, that they may go into the surrounding towns and country, and lodge

and get provisions; for we are in a deserted place here." But He said to them, "You give them something to eat." And they said, "We have no more than five

loaves and two fish, unless we go and buy food for all these people.” For there were about five

thousand men. Then He said to His disciples, “Make them sit down in groups of fifty.” And they did so, and made them all sit down. Then He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the multitude. So they all ate and were filled, and twelve baskets of the leftover fragments were taken up by them. Glory be to God forever. Amen.

**We worship You O Christ together with Your Good Father and the Holy Spirit, for You have come and saved us.**

### **The worshipper prays the litanies:**

O You, who tasted death in the flesh in the ninth hour, for the sake of us sinners. O Saviour, put to death our carnal lusts, O Christ, our God, and deliver us. Let my supplication draw close before You, O Lord; according to Your Word give me understanding. Let my petition reach Your presence; according to Your Word give me Life.

**“Zoksapatri ke Eiyou-ke agi-you epnevmaty” (Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.)**

O You, Who commanded Your spirit into the hands of the Father, after being on the wood of the cross at the ninth hour. You guided the thief who was crucified with You to join You in Paradise; do not neglect me, O Good-One, nor reject me, I, the lost one, but sanctify my soul and enlighten my understanding. Allow me to be a partaker of the Grace of Your Life-Giving Mysteries, that when I taste of Your Goodness I may offer praise without lukewarmness, longing for Your Light above all things, O Christ our Lord, and save us.

**“Kenin ke aa-ee ke-ic-touce e-on-ace ton e-onon Amen.” (Both now and forever and unto the age of all ages, Amen.)**



O You, Who for our sake was born of the Virgin, and endured crucifixion, O Good-one, and abolished death by Your death, and revealed the resurrection by Your resurrection; do not turn Your face, O God, from those whom You have created with Your own hands; but show forth Your love for mankind, O Good-One. Accept the intercession of Your Mother on our behalf, and save, O Saviour, Your humble people. Do not abandon us unto the end, and do not forsake us forever. Do not break Your covenant, and take not Your mercy from us, for the sake of Abraham Your beloved, Isaac Your servant, and Israel Your holy one.

**“Kenin ke aa-ee ke-ic-touce e-on-ace ton e-onon Amen.” (Both now and forever and unto the age of all ages, Amen.)**

When the thief saw the Author of Life hanging upon the Cross, He spoke saying: “If He Who is crucified with us were not the Incarnate God, the sun would not have hidden its rays, neither would the earth have quaked in fear. But, O Almighty One, who endures all things, remember me, O Lord, when You come into Your kingdom.”

**“Zoksapatri ke Eiyou-ke agi-you epnevmaty” (Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.)**

O You, Who accepted unto Him the confession of the thief upon the Cross, accept us also unto Yourself, O Good-One, we who deserve the sentence of death because of our sins. We acknowledge our sins with the thief, confessing Your Divinity, crying out and saying: “Remember us, O Lord, when You come into Your Kingdom”.

**“Kenin ke aa-ee ke-ic-touce e-on-ace ton e-onon Amen.” (Both now and forever and unto the age of all ages, Amen.)**

When the Mother saw the Lamb, the Shepherd, the Saviour of the world, hanging upon the cross, she said weeping: “The world rejoices in that it has received salvation, while my heart burns as I look at Your crucifixion, which You are enduring for the sake of all, O my son and my God.”

**TASTE & SEE**  
The Lord Is Good

# ACTIVITIES

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**Arts**

**Creative Writing**

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