

## THE CROSS IN THE CHURCH

### Memory verse:

“Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.”” (Matthew 16:23-25)

"Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, ..... and come, take up the cross, and follow Me" (Mark 10:21).

### Main points:

1. The feasts of the cross
2. The procession of the cross
3. Carrying your cross

### Spiritual preparation for the servants:

Pray that the lesson is guided by the power of the cross, dwell on what the cross means to you personally, and focus on how you might strengthen your relationship with our Lord through the cross.

### Introduction:

The sign of the Cross is a source of tremendous blessing. The great St. Anthony, Father of all Monks, advises us bravely, *“draw the sign of the Cross, let the devils mock at themselves, but you fortify yourself with the Cross.”*

In so doing, we profess our belief in the Holy Trinity. It is deeply saddening to see that the making of the sign of the Cross has disappeared in the lives of many Christians.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem writes, *“Let us then not be ashamed to confess the Crucified. Be the Cross our seal, made with boldness by our fingers on our brow and in everything, over the bread we eat and the cups we drink in our coming in and in our goings out; before we sleep, when we lie down and when we awake when we are traveling and when we are at rest.”*

### The lesson:

#### PART I: The Feasts of the Cross

The Coptic Church celebrates two Feasts of the Cross: One on 27<sup>th</sup> September (17<sup>th</sup> Tout) and the other on 19<sup>th</sup> March (10<sup>th</sup> Baramhat).

#### **First Feast**

As for the first feast, it happened that Empress Helena had a vow to visit Jerusalem, if her son Constantine believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. Constantine at that time was preparing for a war. He saw the sign of the Cross in a dream, and a voice told him, “By this sign you will conquer”. From that moment Constantine was converted to Christianity. To

fulfill her vow, Empress Helena traveled to Jerusalem, accompanied by her soldiers. When she arrived there, she asked about the place of the Cross. Nobody could help her but she was referred to an old Jewish Rabbi named Jude, who knew where that Cross was. At the beginning, he denied knowing anything about it, but when she insisted, he guided her to the place. The Cross was buried under a huge hill of garbage, where the Jews wanted it to remain, for fear of the power of the Cross and the Crucified.

After digging for many days, three Crosses were brought to light. The Empress wanted to know which one was the Lord's Cross. It happened that a funeral was passing by and the people were carrying the coffin. So they put the first and second Crosses on the coffin, but nothing happened. When they put the third Cross, the dead rose again. So it was known that it was the Lord's Cross. In the place where the Cross was found, the Empress built the Church of the Resurrection (the Holy sepulchre). The Church was consecrated by Athanasius, the Pope of Alexandria.

Since then the Church celebrates the feast of the discovery of the Cross on 17<sup>th</sup> Tout (27<sup>th</sup> September) and the feast runs for three consecutive days to 19<sup>th</sup> Tout (29<sup>th</sup> September).

## **Second Feast**

The second Feast, which is on 10<sup>th</sup> Baramhat (19<sup>th</sup> March) celebrates the 'finding' of the Cross once more, by the Emperor Hercules, in the year 628 A.D. When the Persians were defeated by Hercules, they were forced to leave Egypt and return to their own country. On their way back, they passed by the Holy Land. One of their Princes entered the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which was built by Empress Helena. He saw light coming from a piece of timber that was kept in a golden frame. The Prince was about to touch it, when fire came out of it and burnt his fingers. When he investigated the Christians told him that it was the base of the Lord's Holy Cross and nobody could touch it, except a Christian. He tricked and bribed two Deacons who were in charge of guarding this part of the Cross. So they stole it and carried it to the Prince's country.

When the Emperor Hercules heard what happened, he fought the Persians and defeated them. He searched everywhere looking for this piece of the Cross but could not find it. The Persian Prince hid it in the garden of his palace, then killed the two Deacons.

The daughter of a Jewish Rabbi who was taken captive, saw that happened and hurried and told the Emperor. He accompanied her with some Bishops and Priests. After some digging, they found the base of the Cross in the year 629 A.D. They wrapped it in a rich piece of material and it was carried by Emperor Hercules to the city of Constantinople, where it was kept.

## **PART II: The Procession Of The Cross**

Thrice annually, on Palm Sunday and the Feasts of the Cross (19<sup>th</sup> March and 27<sup>th</sup> September), the joyous procession of the Cross takes place, in Matins after the Priest prays: "God have mercy upon us (with the Cross and three candles in his right hand).

It is a great celebration in which the Priests and Deacons go around the altar and the nave of the Church chanting, 'Lord have mercy', followed by the hymns of the Cross.

Through the joyful procession the Clergy and Deacons read 12 selected gospel passages together with 12 Psalms. The number 12 (4 x 3) refers to the Kingdom of God on earth, as maintained by St. Augustine, the Holy Trinity (three hypostasis) reigns over the four directions of the world. The Tribes of Israel, the disciples of the Lord (Matthew 10:1) and the gates of the Heavenly Jerusalem (Revelation 21:12) are twelve in number. Following each reading the Deacons lead the congregation chanting a small hymn in honour of the Angel or Saint followed by the chorus:

**Palm Sunday:** Hosanna in the highest, this is the King of Israel, blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord of Hosts.

**Feasts of the Cross:** Through His Cross and resurrection, restored man again to Paradise. The procession is preceded by the Tarah (explanation) which is read by the head Deacon:

- Hail to the Cross, the sign of triumph that is given to Christians for strength.
- Hail to the Cross, the tree in the Paradise, that its perfumed branches give life to everybody.
- Hail to the Cross, the sign of salvation, that Constantine saw shining in the heaven.
- Hail to you, Cross, that Helena the Empress, searched for unceasingly until she found it with the nails.
- Hail to the Cross that converted the bitter water into drinkable water for the believers.
- Hail to the Cross that God was crucified on it and stretched His hands to attract everybody to Him.
- Adam was dismissed from Paradise because of one tree, and because of the Holy Cross he regained his original rank!

### **The Procession**

- (i) The MAIN DOOR OF THE SANCTUARY opposite to the altar, is the Cross itself, from which we communicate of the Lord's Body broken for us, and drink His Blood shed for us.
- (ii) The Icon of ST. MARY, the first person to Bear the Cross and follow Jesus her Son and God. This is the Cross of Faith submission: Let it be done to me according to your Word. It is the Cross of endurance; A sword will pierce your soul also (Luke 23:35).
- (iii) The icon of ANGEL GABRIEL who preached the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception. He is the servant of the mystery of Incarnation: this represents the path of the Cross.
- (iv) The icon of ARCHANGEL MICHAEL, who preached the Resurrection. He is the servant of the mystery of victory.
- (v) The icon of ST. MARK, represents the cross of Mission and Evangelism.
- (vi) The icon of the APOSTLES, ST. PETER & ST. PAUL represents the cross of service and martyrdom.

- (vii) The icon of ST. GEORGE represents the cross of martyrdom, subjection to persecution and blood-shedding.
- (viii) The icon of ST. ANTHONY, represents the cross of spiritual struggle, monasticism and perfect honesty in seeking the Kingdom of God.
- (ix) The NORTHERN DOOR of the Church, from which entered the catechumen who believed in Christ and wished to join the Church: Christ's body. It represents the Cross of hearty faith and being protected by the Only Redeemer.
- (x) The SOUTHERN DOOR, from which the deacon in the early centuries used to receive the donations of the Christians to their poor brethren. It represents the cross of donation: the donation of love and perfect sacrifice.
- (xi) THE BASIN, represents the cross of humility and washing feet in perfect self-denial.
- (xii) The icon of JOHN THE BAPTIST, represents the cross of bearing witness to the truth and abstaining from the world and its authority. Thus our hearts rejoice very much for we can bear the cross, each according to his mission, potentialities and conditions of life. We rejoice and boast very much of the sign of our Kingdom and the motto of our King!

### **A Heavenly Icon**

The procession commences and concludes in the Sanctuary around the Altar. The Altar is God's place from which He declares His love of the Holy Trinity to all mankind. Thus it is the most joyous meeting between the heavenly Bridegroom and His blessed Bride. This meeting starts from the Sanctuary of the Altar in other words achieved by the Holy Trinity (three rounds) through the sacrifice of the Cross.

Our salvation starts from heaven (the Sanctuary resembles heaven). "While we were still sinners", states St. Paul, "Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him." (Romans 5: 8-9).

Christ willingly entered Jerusalem heading towards the Cross to His Bride's house with emphatic will, determination and incredible love. On the way, He told the disciples, "Behold we go up to Jerusalem and the Son of Man shall be betrayed to the chief priests and the scribes and they will condemn Him to death, and they shall deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him and on the third day He shall rises again." (Matthew 20:18-19).

## **PART III: Carrying the Cross**

Why do we carry the Cross?

### **(i) Carrying the Cross = Condition of Discipleship**

It is a divine commandment from the Lord, "Whoever does not bear his Cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple." (Luke 14:27). Carrying the Cross is a precondition for being a disciple of Christ. "God is love." (1 John 4:8). God manifested His love for us in that He descended to earth to save humanity, "For God so loved the world that He gave

His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16). God’s immeasurable love is demonstrated in that while we were still sinners He died for us. Thus, love became the symbol and motto of Christianity. Christ reinforced this to His disciples saying, “This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” (John 15:12). “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:13). In carrying the Cross we carry love and the visible sign of God’s infinite love for all mankind.

**(ii) Carrying the Cross = Fellowship with Christ**

We carry the Cross because Christ carried the Cross. Thus we have fellowship with the suffering Saviour of whom Isaiah the Prophet prophesied saying, “He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, everyone to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgement, and who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people He was stricken. And they made His grave with the wicked; but with the rich at His death, because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth. Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand. He shall see the travail of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities.

Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.” (Isaiah 53:5-12).

**(iii) Carrying the Cross = Road to our Salvation**

With content we carry the Cross because it is the only way to redemption and salvation. As St. Peter said, “Nor is there salvation in any other for there is no other Name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12).

**(iv) Carrying the Cross = Source of Glory and Honour**

We carry the Holy Cross for it is the source of our power and glory. Regarding the power of the Cross St. Paul says, “For the message of the Cross is foolishness to those who are perishing but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:18). Concerning the glory of the Cross, the Apostle Paul says, “But God forbid that I should glory except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Galatians 6:14).

Thus, the Cross is central to the Christian life. As Father Bishoy Kamel states: “There is no Christianity without the Cross. It is like a bride without a groom. Those who carry the Cross fall into one of three categories:

**(i) Grumbling**

Some carry the Cross grumbling day and night. Consistently complaining and whinging about their life circumstances, precarious financial status, physical appearances etc. An example is the left thief on the cross who blasphemed and said, “If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us.” (Luke 23:39). St. Paul instructs us “Do all things without murmuring and disputing that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault.” (Philippians 2:14-15).

*My Cross is Heavy*

A woman was asked to accompany a friend to an orthopedic shoe specialist so that she could have her orthopedic shoes adjusted. They had to wait for a while in the reception room, during which time she did not stop whinging and whining about her bad fortune and her poor share in life, repeating every now and then, “My cross is heavy. Oh, how heavy is my cross.” Suddenly a door of one of the rooms opened.

All heads turned to the sound of laughter and giggles. Out of that door came a young girl (possibly in her mid-twenties). She was being shown how to walk in her artificial leg. The limb expert was explaining to her the theory of how the stump fitted “better than a glove” in the cavity of the artificial leg through a modern technique of suction.

The girl had an indescribable happiness all over her face and eyes and a smile that revealed the most beautiful teeth. Her joy brought tears to the eyes of all those present. She was taken to an adjacent room to be shown how to sit on a chair, how to stand and how to walk. The woman could not help overhearing the girls conversation with her companion, neither could she suppress her admiration for her sense of humor despite her tragedy. She was saying to her companion, “Now I can literally say, ‘I am back on my feet again’. Oh, I can’t wait to go back to ... (a neighboring Asian country). I will have my children under my wings again, I will be back to my job and back to a new start in life.” The woman was silent for the rest of the afternoon. Possibly out of embarrassment or a reduced sense of self-centeredness.

This incident brings to mind the scene of the crucifixion: three people were crucified, two who had their crosses carried for them, one was cursing, one was contrite and remorseful, begging to be remembered in the Kingdom. The only innocent one of the three had to carry His own cross.

**(ii) Contently**

Others carry the Cross contently like Simon of Cyrene and Demas the thief on the right hand side of the cross who rebuked the other thief and said, “Do you not even fear God seeing you are under the same condemnation. And we indeed justly for we receive the due reward of our deeds, but this Man has done nothing wrong”. (Luke 23:41-42).

With faith and humility, Demas then tilted his head and said to Jesus, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your Kingdom”. And Jesus said to him, “Assuredly I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise.” (Luke 23:42-43).

The blessed Father Bishoy Kamel says the left thief desired physical salvation; hence, he went to Hades, whereas the right thief sought spiritual salvation thus he ascended with the Cross to Paradise.

Between the prayers of the sixth and ninth hours on Good Friday the Church prays the right thief's creed in which we say, "Blessed are you, the blessed thief, and blessed are your well spoken words, by which you truly deserved the Heavenly Kingdom, and the Paradise of Delight. The disciple denied, and the thief cried saying, 'remember me O Lord, when You come in Your Kingdom.' Blessed are you Demas, the thief, more blessed than all others on earth, for you have been granted what no other has ever been granted. All your life, you were a thief, in the hills of Jerusalem. And by one word you uttered to the Lord, He sent you to Paradise.

### **(iii) Joyfully**

The first person to carry the Cross joyfully was the Lord Jesus, "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of faith, who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the Cross, despising the shame and has sat down at the right hand of the Throne of God." (Hebrews 12:2).

From Pilate's Pratorium commenced the long and painful journey of the Cross to Golgotha. In agony and pain Christ fell three times. The Lord endured the blaspheming, "You who destroy the temple and build it in three days save Yourself". "If You are the Son of God come down from the Cross". Likewise the chief priests also mocking with the Scribes said, "He saved others, Himself He could not save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the Cross and we will believe in Him. He trusted in God, let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him for He said I am the Son of God." (Matthew 27:39-43).

How should we carry the Cross?

#### **(i) Crucifying the Lusts of the Flesh**

The children of God are inwardly powerful and strong. They are not defeated by the weight of sin, lusts of the flesh, various temptations or the strikes of the devil. "Those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." (Galatians 5:24). "Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." (Galatians 5:19-21).

#### **(ii) Suffering and Hardships**

Carry the Cross by quietly enduring sufferings and hardships. On the night before His death on the Cross, Christ warned His disciples, if the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. "If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." (John 15:18). Christ added, "Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy." (John 16:20).

However, joy and victory in the Cross of Christ will follow as promised by the Lord: "In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." (John 16:33).

From the Apostolic era it was established that carrying the Cross is integral to the Christian life. “We must”, says St. Paul, “through many tribulations enter the Kingdom of God.” (Acts 14:22). St. Stephen, the first martyr and archdeacon was stoned to death (Acts 7:59). St. John and St. Peter, on the day of Pentecost were imprisoned (Acts 4:1-4). St. James, the brother of St. John was beheaded by Herod (Acts 12: 1-2).

St. Peter was imprisoned (Acts 12:5-19). St. Paul, together with Silas, was imprisoned at Phillipia (Acts 16:25-34). In Jerusalem, St. Paul was imprisoned and the Lord appeared to him and strengthened him (Acts 23:10-22).

### **(iii) Loving Your Enemies**

No religion in the world except for Christianity calls for loving your enemies. On the Sermon on the Mountain, Christ taught us to love our enemies, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ 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, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.” (Matthew 5:43-47).

How can we fulfill this challenging commandment? As we are weak and limited we require the power of the Holy Spirit. As St. Paul puts it, “For the love of God has been poured into our hearts through His Holy Spirit.” (Romans 5:5). Also, by living under the feet of the Cross, like St. Mary and St. John the Beloved. The latter wrote in his first epistle, “In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifested: “Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother. For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.” (1 John 3:10-11). Love is the golden sign and St. John says, “If someone says, ‘I love God’, and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?” (1 John 4:20). In so doing we fulfill the Scripture which says, “let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.” (1 John 3:18).

### **(iv) Life of Submission**

A blessed form of carrying the Cross of Christ is submitting your entire life and surrendering your will at the feet of the Cross. The Holy Mother of God, St. Mary, is the great example who said to the Archangel Gabriel: “I am the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done to me according to your words.” (Luke 1:38). Consequently, she was exalted by her cousin Elizabeth: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord.” (Luke 1:42,45).



Abraham the father of fathers, lived a life of submission, leaving his own country and kindred and fathers house at the old age of 75 (Genesis 12). In tremendous submission Abraham sacrificed Isaac on Mount Moriah (Genesis 22) and subsequently the Lord blessed him saying, “By Myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son, in blessing I will bless you, and in multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.” (Genesis 22:16-18). St. Paul highlights this work of Abraham by stating that it was accounted to righteousness.

**(v) Serving the Brethren**

We carry the Cross of service like St. Paul who declared “For I am determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” (1 Corinthians 2:2). At Ephesus, before returning to Jerusalem, he gathers the elders and says, “You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; and how I kept nothing back that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race and joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.” (Acts 20:18-24).

Empowered by the Spirit of God, and filled with zealousness to spread the kingdom of God, St. Paul wrote 14 epistles and established several churches in Asia Minor, ordained Bishops like Timothy and Titus for Ephesus and Crete. Indeed St. Paul carried the Cross of ministry and focused sharply on his task saying, “My little children for whom I labour in birth again until Christ is formed in you.” (Galatians 4:19).

In his second letter to the Corinthians St. Paul highlights the marks of carrying the Cross of the ministry, “We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed. But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in sleeplessness, in fastings; by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.” (2 Corinthians 6:3-10).

St. Paul then describes the suffering endured by God’s servants in the course of service; “From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was

shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils amongst false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness – besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.” (2 Corinthians 11:22-28).

Today, more than ever, the Church of Christ, which the Lord purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:17), needs dedicated men and women, youth and children who are willing and ready to carry the Cross of Ministry and serve the Lord faithfully and diligently in many and varied fields.

#### **(vi) The Ego**

Our number one enemy is the ego. Pride is the cause of all our sins. It is the cause of the fall of Satan (previously a rank of Angels). Even the righteous and the Saints fell in this sin. The disciples grumbled who was the greatest. The Lord taught us, “But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself, will be abased and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Matthew 23:11-12).

In crucifying our egos we seek to be meek and humble knowing that God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble (Proverbs 3:34, James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5). Elijah the prophet felt he was the only one faithful to God and his covenants and he complained saying, “I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; because the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life.” (1 Kings 19:14).

Then the Lords said to Elijah to return to the wilderness of Damascus, “Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.” (1 Kings 19:18). Full of confidence in his mind and heart, St. Peter disputed the Lord’s words and said, “Even if all are made to stumble yet I will not be.” (Mark 14:29). When Christ confronted Peter and said, “Before the cock crows twice you will deny me three times.” (Mark 14:30). St. Peter replied more vehemently, “If I have to die with You, I will not deny You!” (Mark 14:31).

Even these who excel spiritually are tempted by pride. St. Anthony the father of Monks thought that he alone had risen to such a high spiritual level, then the Lord directed him to the inner desert to visit St. Paula who had dwelt in the desert for 80 years without seeing a human person. St. Macarius the Great was struck by pride and the angel of the Lord appeared to him and directed him to Alexandria to visit two simple women living with each other caring for each other’s babies. St. Macarius was bewildered with their simple love and meekness.

For this reason Christ, the King of Glory washed the feet of his disciples and ascended to the Cross to crucify our egos and arrogance and thereby liberate us from the bondage of the self. In short, unless we accept to crucify our ego, we become enemies of the Cross, we begin to pursue self righteousness instead of looking to the Cross for justification, self

indulgence instead of taking up the Cross to follow Christ, self advertisement instead of preaching Christ crucified (1 Corinthians 1:23), self glorification instead of glory in the Cross (Galatians 6:14).

### **(vii) Family**

We carry the Cross in the family by fulfilling our duties towards each other. It is imperative that the husband carry the Cross of sacrifice and endurance. He must love his wife just as Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for it (Ephesians 5:2) and (Colossians 3:19). This requires self denial searching diligently for the comfort and joy of his wife. The husband does not seek his status and prestige rather the welfare and advancement of the family even at his expense.

Similarly, the wife carries the Cross of submission, “wives submit to your own husbands as to the Lord.” (Ephesians 5:22) and (Colossians 3:18). The wife seeks not her own wishes and rights but her duties and responsibilities. The submissive wife is not weak and passive but wise as Solomon says: “She opens her mouth with wisdom and on her tongue is the law of kindness” (Proverbs 31:26), “Her children rise up and call her blessed, her husband also and he praises her.” (Proverbs 31:28).

Should both the husband and wife carry their respective Cross (sacrificing and submitting) without grumbling and complaining, a beautiful Christian home will be established. It becomes a house of prayer, a house of blessing and a house of purity. It develops into a heavenly Icon. If the family lives under the Cross then King Solomon’s words are fulfilled, “through wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established; by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches.” (Proverbs 24:3-4).

### **(viii) The Narrow Gate**

We carry the Cross by choosing the narrow and not the wide gate. “Enter by the narrow gate”, says Christ, “for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.” (Matthew 7:13-14). St. Peter for example could not comprehend that Christ must suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed (Matthew 16:21). Thus St. Peter took Christ aside and began to rebuke him saying, “far be it from You Lord, this shall not happen to You!” (Matthew 6:22). Immediately thereafter Christ began to enlighten his disciples about the significant role of carrying the Cross, “if anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matthew 16: 24-26).

At the expense of their health and comfort, their status and positions, their opinions and views, the children of God prefer the narrow gate of the Cross for it leads to heavenly joys. In so doing they “are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed – always carrying

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about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.” (2 Corinthians 4:8-10).

When asked what is the narrow gate, Anba Amonius replied: “To control your thoughts and to strip yourself of your own free will for the sake of God.”

### **Conclusion:**

Let us remember the sign of the Son of Man on earth, so long as we expect this sign of His in heaven in His majestic coming.

### **References and recommended reading:**

1. Maged Attia, *The Cross of Christ*
2. His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, *The Feast of the Cross*