

St. Anba Abraam the Bishop - 'Friend of the needy' 9SA2

Aim

At the end of this lesson, the class will be able to:

1. Acknowledge the spiritual qualities of the young 'Boulos'.
2. Live in the environment, which characterised this great personality.
3. Touch the spiritual virtues and gift of this blessed saint and struggle to have one of these virtues.

Remember, the aim of this lesson is to give the class an insight to the life of Anba Abraam such as the factors that lead him in the spiritual path and what were his spiritual characteristics and virtues. Stories about the miracles and wonders that came from his hands will be used as examples and not as the core of this lesson.

Biography of his life

- ❖ Born on 1829AD (15458M) in a village in Upper Egypt called 'Delga'.
- ❖ His mother died when he was 8 years old (1838). The Church compensated the loss of his mother by more care and love.
- ❖ His father remarried after 3 years (1841)
- ❖ He joined the school of the Church to learn hymns, the Bible, Coptic language, arithmetic, Tasbeha, etc (as the customs of this time). He was rewarded for his prayers and obedience and he was ordained as a deacon at the age of 15 years old (1844).
- ❖ He was attracted at this time by monastic life and was full by the desire to spend all his life with the Lord praying, absorbing the word of the Lord, understanding the books of the Church, focusing his attention to obey the Commandments of the Lord. He left the world and went to the monastery of 'El Meharak'. He spent one year there for a test, and then all the monks agreed that he was suitable to the monastic life. He was ordained as a monk on 1848 and given his old name 'Boulos'.
- ❖ His spiritual progress in prayers, Bible, obedience and silence attracted the attention of all the monks of the monastery. Accordingly, the Bishops of 'Minia' – a big city in Upper Egypt – asked him to work as a deputy to the Bishop. He accepted as a sign of obedience. In the 4 years he spent at Minia (1859-1863), the Bishop relocated to a place full of the poor, needy and sick where they helped and served them. It was very clear that Father Boulos' heart and feelings were towards the 'brothers of Jesus'. The grace of the Lord helped him more in this direction. At that period he was ordained as a priest.
- ❖ By the end of the 4 years, he asked for permission to return back to his monastery because he felt he was badly in need of a spiritual revival. He wanted to return to the life of solitude, more prayers, more contemplation, more ascetic life.
- ❖ He returned to his cell, although no one knew exactly what happened in the next 3 years. There was a lot of evidence that the grace of the Lord filled his heart with a lot of virtues and lead him to a higher stage of spiritual maturity. Examples of these virtues are self-denial, love and care for any needy person, spiritual wisdom, life of continuous prayer, and contemplation of the Bible.
- ❖ Due to all the sweet aroma that surrounded him, he was chosen as the Abbot of El Meharak monastery on 1866.

- ❖ In the period of his leadership of the monastery which lasted 4 years (1866-1870), he concentrated his efforts in:
 - ◆ the spiritual prayers in the lives of the monks.
 - ◆ the library of the monastery, a lot of manuscripts were written at this time.
 - ◆ utilising the facilities of the monastery as reclamation of the land.
 - ◆ share in the needs of the 'brothers of Jesus' until some of the monks complained that he spend all the resources of the monastery to feet the needy.

As a result, the monastery started to attract a lot of young people to monasticism. In one week about 40 monks were ordained.

- ❖ Due to the complaints of some monks, he was dismissed and ordered to leave the monastery. He left with 4 of his disciples and went to the monastery of 'El Baramos'.
- ❖ He stayed at El Baramos from 1870 to 1881. For 11 years he lived in the monastery growing in his spiritual life. In this period the Lord was preparing him for another mission, to be a live example to the world of all the apostolic and Christian behaviours, virtues and power.
- ❖ The Pope Yoanis the fifth chose him in 1881, through the advice of his 4 disciples, as the Bishop of Fayom and Giza – 2 provinces in Upper Egypt. He had the name of 'Anba Abraam'. For 33 years he served the diocese with all honesty.
- ❖ On 9th June 1914, he departed to Heaven. About 30,000 people from all over Egypt came to farewell him. In 1964, the Holy Synod of the Church counted him as one of the Saints of the Church.

The features of the personality of Anba Abraam

- ❖ Since he was young, he learned in the Church, he drank the spirit of the Church through continuous prayers, memorizing the Bible and applying it practically in his life, singing and practicing the Sacraments of the Church. He found all the care and love from the Church which helped him in overcoming the tragic event of losing his mother at the age of 8, and the remarriage of his father after 3 years.
- ❖ He was very strict in his spiritual life, regardless of all the troubles he faced. He struggled and asked eagerly to "love and give the needy without limits" and he was given this gift. He suffered a lot for this gift, he was dismissed from the Abbot position in his monastery, was ordered to depart to another monastery, while he was a Bishop some people went to the Pope to complain about the Bishop spending the money of the diocese unwisely. But as he accepted all the persecutions and sufferings, he was crowned and beautified by the gifts and wonders of the Spirit.
- ❖ He practiced prayer everywhere and anytime in any occasion. His power and liberty in prayers and his strong faith in asking from the Lord were noticed and documented by all the people who dealt with him. Also, this was recorded and published by an English writer called Leader in his book "The Sons of Pheros".
- ❖ His love and contemplation of the Bible is known to everyone. He read the Bible every forty days (33 chapters everyday). Also he held a daily meeting for his people at night to pray the Psalms and read the Bible and he explained it.

- ❖ He was ascetic in all the desires of the world. He never had more than one old dress, and he had nothing in his room. All the money that came into his hand he gave it away to the poor and needy. Many times the wealthy personalities in the diocese collected money and gave it to him to build or renew the bishopric, but instead he gave all the money to the poor. One time they went to the Pope to complain, and the Pope asked Anba Abraam to come to meet him. When he entered the Patriarcate, he saw a rope in the room, and he took off his old dress and hung it on the rope. This rope was a ray of light coming into the room through a hole in the ceiling. To the astonishment of the Pope and the attendance, the ray of light carried the dress of Anba Abraam.
- ❖ His food was very simple.
- ❖ He was too strong in declaring the truth. He was very humble and very strong at the same time. One time he went to the house of the Psalter (the leader of the choir of the church, blind person), to apologise for him because the Psalter felt that Anba Abraam rebuked him. On the other hand, he was asked to attend an official meeting to excommunicate a priest, and as he found out that the penalty was not just, he refused to sign it and left the meeting and threatened that he would not attend anymore of the meetings. Accordingly, the penalty was dropped.

The gifts of the Holy Spirit

- ❖ Casting out demons - from Christians or Muslims, with authority. The power of his hand Cross was terrifying for the demons.
- ❖ Knowledge of the future ('prophecy') - as if he was reading an open book of the events. One time on his dismissal from his first monastery, one of the monks slapped him on his cheek, so Anba Abraam turned the other cheek and the monk slapped him again on the left cheek. Anba Abraam angrily said, "this hand will be cut from this body". After many years the hand of this monk was cut in an accident.
Once three people tried to cheat him; two went to him pretending that they were strangers, saying their friend died and they were in need to bury him. So he looked at them and asked, "did your friend die?" and they answered yes. He gave them money but they returned to him, weeping and asking for forgiveness as their friend nearly died but he told them it was too late.
- ❖ Fervent and able prayer - Whenever he asked for any sick people, or people that were in need, his prayer had an acceptable response from our Lord. The English writer Leader testified that "this man can open Heaven very easy and let you feel the presence of the Lord when he repeated his simple strong word in prayer". The sick were accustomed to get his handkerchiefs which were blessed by him and used it as a blessed substance for healing. His prayer also was very powerful in the cases of barren women.
- ❖ Performing wonders and miracles – once two merchants attended to the bishopric to spend the night as strangers. At midnight one of them killed the other and left the place. In the morning they discovered the crime, and the police were notified. Anba Abraam gave them his stick and asked them to go to the station and the stick would lead them to the murderer. They did this, and the police captured the killer with the head in his luggage.

Introduction

1. Get some pictures (A4 size) of Saints (Anba Abraam, St. Dimiana, Pope Athanasios, St. Bshoy, St. Sidhom Bishay, etc) and ask the class, which of these Saints are from our century. Also, you can ask the class to put the pictures in order of date.
2. Ask about what they know about Anba Abraam. It is important to skip the stories they know about him and introduce the new material.

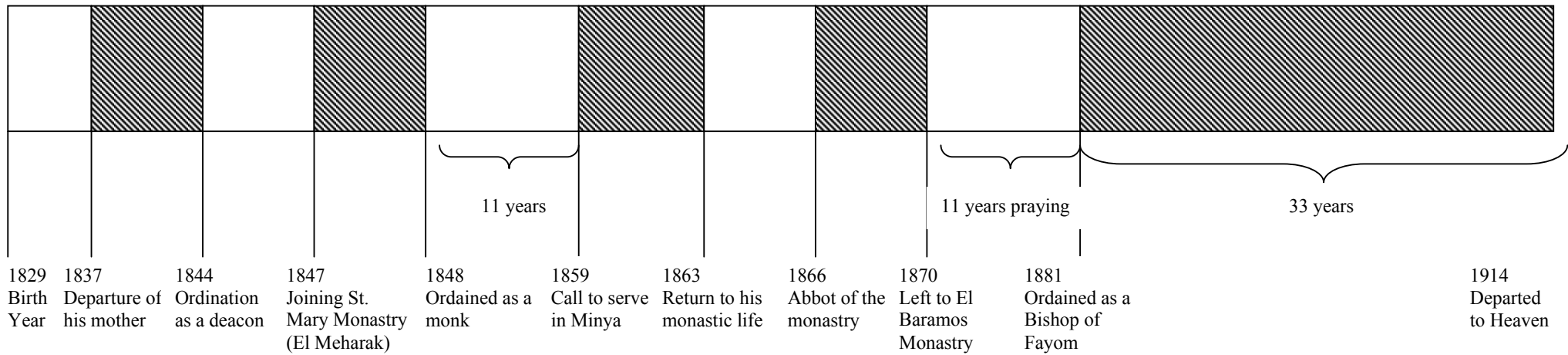
The lesson

1. Chose some verses and write each verse on a separate A4 sheet:
 - ◆ Matthew 5:7,8,10,11,12; Matthew 6:3-4; Matthew 6:19-21; Matthew 6:34; Matthew 25:34-40. Let the class choose the most suitable to Anba Abraam.
 - ◆ Ask the class how would they feel if they faced the events of the life of Anba Abraam, e.g. the death of his mother at the age of eight; his dismissal from the monastery because he applied the commandment of the Lord.
2. Show some clips of the video of Anba Abraam (about five minutes) and allow the class to comment on the clips the watched. Abraam. Let each person express what he/she likes about the saint and why.
3. Let each one in the class choose one of the gifts of Anba Abraam that they like to be in them, and then ask each person how this gift will be given to them.

Final exercise

- ❖ Let each one in the class to make a goal to pray, read the Bible, or giving or helping the poor and ask the Lord to help them gain a gift.

Timeline



Anba Abraam Bishop of Fayom

1. Choose one answer from each of the columns:

a) Anba Abraam was from (column 1) and was contemporay with (column 2)?

Column 1	Column 2
- 4 th century	- Pope Cyril IV, Anba Sarabamon Bishop of Monofia
- 11 th century	- Pope Athanasios & Anba Antonios the Great
- 19 th & beginning of 20 th century	- Pope Abraam Ebn Zaria, Simon the shoe repairer

b) Anba abraam was born at (column 1) and ordained a monk at (column 2) on year (column 3) at the age of (column 4)?

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4
Alexandria	St. Mina	1847	45
Village in Upper Egypt “Delga” (near Malawy)	El Maharak (near Assyot)	1820	32
Cairo	El Baramos at Wadi El Natron	1895	18

2. What were the factors that lead the young ‘Bolous’ to leave the world and consecrate his life to the Lord? Are these factors applicable now? Why?

3. Anba Abraam served St. Minia Dioces for about four years. In your opinion why did he insist to return to his cell in the monastery?

Are there any contradictions between the life of serving God and the life in the monastery? Why?

4. As an Abbot of the monastery of St. Mary El Moharak (1866-1870), Anba Abraam had a major plan to serve the monastery. What were the major items of the plan?

- a) _____
- b) _____
- c) _____

5. If you were a monk of this monastery at that time, what would you do if you saw the revolt against the Abbot? (group discussion)

6. If you were Anba Abraam, suddenly you find yourself fired from your post and ordered to leave your monastery. What would your feelings be, should you reproach the Lord, the Church, the monks, etc? (group discussion)

7. If we questioned Anba Abraam in his cell in El Baramos monastery after 11 years, what would his comments be, and what were the major virtues that were built in his spiritual life? (compare with the life of Moses the Prophet – 40 years in the desert).

8. Review quickly the life of Anba Abraam as the Bishop of Fayom for 33 years (1881-1914AD). What is the major single issue that attracts you and why?

9. What was the effect of all the hard times and suffering in the life of Anba Abraam on his new role as a bishop and spiritual leader and a hero of Christian values in his time?

10. If you would like to identify Anba Abraam, he was “a man of...” (choose one answer only)

- prayer
- miracles
- Bible
- Heaven
- great love to the Lord and to the people
- very humble heart
- great will to apply the Commandments without limits

11. If the Lord comes to you in a dream as he came to Solomon the King, and offers to grant you one thing from the virtues of Anba Abraam, what would you ask for?

If you ask in faith and follow the same life of Anba Abraam, you will be granted whatever you ask for. Remember, the Lord in His last speech to His disciples said “Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full” (John 16:24).