



PERFECTION OF LOVE

A B L E S S U S A N E W S L E T T E R

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Brotherly Love...

"Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like precious oil upon the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, running down on the edge of his garments. It is like the dew of Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion; for there the Lord commanded the blessing-life forever more." (Psalm 133:1-3)

Christian brotherhood brings together the knowledgeable with the less knowledgeable, the young with the old and the rich with poor in one accord. His Holiness Pope Shenouda III has written that "Love is the first of virtues; nay, it is the conglomeration of all virtues."

St. Peter the Apostle preached, "Since you have purified your souls in obedience to the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart. Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing. And above all things have fervent love for one another, for love will cover a multitude of sins." (I Peter 1:22; 3:8,9; 4:8)...

Brotherly love is much more than witnessed service. It is also exhibited in the simplest of service to those who are in need. Do the widows and those less fortunate feel the sincere love of the brethren? When was the last time you asked a widow of the congregation did she have transportation to the church to attend Vespers or the Divine Liturgy? "But whoever has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth" (I John 3:11,14-18). Tertullian (c.197) wrote, "We are the same to emperors as to our ordinary neighbors. For we are equally forbidden to wish ill, to do ill, to speak ill, to think ill of any person. The things which we must not do to an emperor, we must not do to anyone else."...

Further, Tatian (c.160) said, "With us there is no vainglory, nor do we indulge in a variety of opinions. For having renounced the popular and earthly, obeying the commands of God, and following the law of the Father of immortality, we reject everything which rests upon human opinion. Not only do the rich among us pursue our philosophy, but the poor enjoy free instruction. For the things which come from God surpass the rewards of worldly gifts. Thus we accept all who desire to hear-even old women and youths. In short, persons of every age are treated by us with respect."

Truly, love reigns as the first fruit of the spirit. "But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, long suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Galatians 5:22,23).

May we all have the heart of brothers one to another.

Excerpts from lecture titled "Brotherly Love Surpasses Knowledge, Age and Wealth"

by H.G. Bishop Youssef



Sayings of the Fathers

So the active life is to give bread to the hungry, to teach the ignorant with the word of wisdom, to set aright the lost, to recall a proud neighbor to the life of humility, to care for the weak, which services each of us should perform, and provide the wherewithal of subsistence for those entrusted to us. Truly the contemplative life is to hold fast with the whole mind, at least to the charity of God, our neighbor but to abstain from external action; to cleave to the sole desire for the Creator, so that the only recourse for the spirit is, scorning all cares, to burn to see the face of the Creator, so that it now understands how to bear the weight of corruptible flesh with grief; to seek with all its desires to be among those hymn-singing choirs of Angels, to mingle with the citizens of Heaven, to rejoice at the eternal incorruption in the presence of God.

The Homilies of Saint Gregory the Great On the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel

Spiritual Message

Reverend Fathers and beloved brethren, friends of BLESS USA

The peace, love, and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ be with us all. I would like to express my gratitude for the generosity and kindness of heart that you shown towards your less fortunate brothers and sisters in Egypt. Also, I would like to congratulate you, my beloved, on the Coptic New Year. My beloved brethren, let us continue to contemplate on:

The Blessings of Mercy to the Merciful

The Divine Inspiration mentions many blessings that are bestowed upon the lives of the merciful. In the previous newsletters, we contemplated on twenty-one different blessings. In the last four newsletters we contemplated on the twenty-second blessing bestowed on the merciful:

"The Lord answers the merciful prayer, and when they cry, He will say 'Here I am'."

The Divine Inspiration says: "Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh...Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and He will say, 'Here I am'" (Is58: 7,9).

The Lord answers the call of those who are merciful; this is a blessing that the merciful experience in their lives. In the previous newsletters we mentioned eight examples of the Lord answering the prayers of those who showed mercy to others:

1. Our teacher David the prophet.
2. The family of St. Takla Hemanot the Ethiopian.
3. The Apostle St. Paul.
4. H.H. the late Pope Matthaos 1.
5. St. Abraam, the late bishop of Fayoum and Giza.
6. St. Sarabamon Abutarha, the late Bishop of Elbehera and Elmenoufya.
7. A Merciful widow from Upper Egypt.
8. A Widow of one of the Priests from Upper Egypt.

Now let us reflect on:

One of our current merciful Bishops:

His Eminence is one of the Bishops in Egypt who is known for his love and mercy toward the poor and the needy. Several years ago, he was in the process of buying a church city for several millions of Egyptian Pounds from one of the other denominations in his. So, he started to collect money from inside and outside his diocese. By the Grace of God, he was able to collect the down payment and wrote several checks for the remaining amount which was due every 6 months consecutively. Every six month, he was able to write the check and in the same time continue giving to the poor and the needy. He was always saying that the blessing of the brethren of the Lord brings the money to buy the church. When the date of the last check was near, the Bishop did not find money in the account. He felt shy to ask the people again because for several months he was asking from whomever he knew and even whomever he did not know. He did not know what to do and

the deadline was approaching slowly, So he knelt down and prayed fervently, so that God would interfere. God replied the very next day! Our mother, St. Mary appeared in a dream to a lady who was living alone in Cairo, telling her to give a hundred thousand pounds (which she had in her house) to the Bishop.... But the lady ignored the dream...again our mother St. Mary appeared to her in a second dream asking her the same thing. The lady's heart started to move, but she was hesitating somehow. The mother of Light appeared to her for the third time telling her that she must go tomorrow to give the money she had to the Bishop in his diocese' building. Early the next morning, the lady woke up, put the money in a bag and went for the first time in her life toward the city. She asked for the bishopric building and went there. The Bishop greeted her, whom she had never seen before. She told him about the dream and gave him the money; he told her that the dead line is tomorrow. The Bishop immediately knelt down thanking God and praising His Holy Name and remembering the Divine Inspiration saying, "The Lord answers their prayers, and when they cry, He will say ' Here I am'." (Is.58: 9)

The blessed brother W. N. in Lebanon:

He is one of the richest Copts in Lebanon...living in a big house by the seashore in one of Beirut' suburbs. He is a very blessed brother full of love and mercy toward the poor and the needy, helping the Brethren of the Lord always. One night, while he was going out to Church, he opened the door of his car and suddenly four armed men came toward him to rob him.... Give us all that you have. He gave them all the money he had in his pocket. Give us also your watch. He took off his watch and gave it to them. Unexpectedly, one of them said, " let's kill him or else he will tell the police about us." This blessed brother continued his story to me saying, " I don't know how to tell you my feelings at that moment... but one thing I knew for sure that my life was about to end soon. So I cried out from the depth of my heart very strongly saying my God ...my Lord...". " And, amazingly, I found the four men running away from me in a twinkle of an eye how? I don't know. Why? I also don't know.

See, my beloved, how the Lord answers this blessed man whom when he cried out, the Lord answered him ' Here I am', ' The Lord will keep you from all harm' (Ps.121: 7). This blessed brother continued his story saying, "after I took my breath and relaxed, I heard a voice saying, ' Blessed is he who consider the poor; the Lord delivers him in time of troubles. The Lord will protect him and preserve his life.' (Ps.41: 1,2).

May our Lord compensate you with the incorruptible instead of the corruptible, the heavenly instead of the earthly and the eternal instead of the temporal.

Bishop Youannes

General Bishop and Secretary of H.H. Pope Shenouda III