



PERFECTION OF LOVE

A B L E S S U S A N E W S L E T T E R Vol. 8 No. 2

Fasting and Prayer

The commandment of fasting can be traced to as far back as the time of Adam and Eve when God commanded them to refrain from eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. All throughout the Holy Bible fasting has been utilized, whether by the prophets in the Old Testament or the apostles in the New Testament. We also know that fasting must be accompanied by prayer as our Lord said, "Watch and Pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Mark 14:34) Without the incorporation of prayer with fasting, it alone becomes a useless burden. The act of prayer itself when accompanied by fasting can be beneficial in that it allows for the person to fully appreciate its spirituality rather than if it was done on a full stomach. In the liturgical prayer of the fraction of Lent, we are reminded time and time again of the blessings and miracles that can occur from fasting and prayer; at the end of which the priest finally prays, "We too, let us fast from all evil, in purity and righteousness...so that with a pure heart, an enlightened soul, an unashamed face, a faith unfeigned, a perfect love and a firm hope we may dare with boldness, without fear to pray to you, O God, the Holy Father." Therefore, as we approach the season of lent, we need to ask ourselves whether we have fully encompassed all the spiritual aspects of fasting and prayer.



Sayings of the Fathers

Fasting was ordained in Paradise. The first injunction was delivered to Adam, 'Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat.' 'You shall not eat' is a law of fasting and abstinence." The general argument is rather against excess than in support of ceremonial abstinence. In Paradise there was no wine, no butchery of beasts, no eating of flesh. Wine came in after the flood. Noah became drunk because wine was new to him. So fasting is older than drunkenness. Esau was defiled, and made his brother's slave, for the sake of a single meal. It was fasting and prayer which gave Samuel to Hannah. Fasting brought forth Samson. Fasting begets prophets, strengthens strong men. Fasting makes lawgivers wise, is the soul's safeguard, the body's trusty comrade, the armor of the champion, the training of the athlete.

Dear Members,

If you have not yet received your contribution summary report or the Annual Report from HG Bishop Youannes and would like one, please contact us. May God bless your service during Lent and fill this season with many spiritual blessings.

Member Services,

Service Updates...

+ Periodically, BLESS USA shares information about the service of BLESS in Egypt through presentations in churches throughout the country. During the upcoming weeks, BLESS USA will present at the following churches. We invite you to come and see how the service has grown.

St. Abanoub & St. Antonious' Church
Bayonne, NJ March 13

St. Mark's Church
Cleveland, OH March 20

We will continue to update you as more churches are scheduled throughout the country. We hope to see you soon.

To raise the standard and quality of living for needy and disadvantaged Copts residing in Egypt, and to aid in alleviating thier suffering.

+ Through God's Grace the Annual Servants' Orientation has just concluded. We are happy to welcome 16 new servants to the BLESS USA family. We ask you to continue to pray for the growth of the service.

St. Basil, in his homilies on the Holy Spirit

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 have shown towards your less fortunate brothers and sisters in Egypt - the brethren of the Lord.

I would also like to congratulate you-my beloved on the beginning of the Great Lent, the deepest and most spiritual time of the year. A time when our souls are enlightened and our spirits are moved toward true repentance, quiet retreat and humble prayers. This is the time when we remember our Lord's call to the church during these days, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning. Blow the trumpet in Zion, declare a holy fast, call a sacred assembly." (Joel 2: 12,15).

My beloved brethren let us continue to contemplate on:

The Blessings of Mercy toward the Merciful

The Divine Inspiration mentions many blessings that are bestowed upon the lives of the merciful. In the last several newsletters, we contemplated on twenty-four of them. This time let us contemplate on to the twenty-fifth blessing:

The Lord preserves the life of the merciful.

Our teacher David the Prophet and King, the sweet chanter of Israel, chanted and said, "Blessed is he who considers the poor; The Lord will protect him and preserve his life." (Ps. 41: 1,2).

This blessing ("the Lord will preserve his life",) which is experienced by those who are merciful, carries two meanings:

The first meaning:

"The Lord will fill his heart with life"... As Archangel Raphael said to Tobias and Tobit, "Those who give alms will enjoy a full life" (Tob. 12:9.) Furthermore, as the Holy Inspiration mentions, "He who pursues righteousness and love finds life" (Prov. 21:21.) The Lord Who said, "I am the life" (John 11: 25) fills the hearts of the merciful with life, so they can chant with David the Prophet saying, "For with you is the fountain of life" (Ps. 36: 9). The Lord Who is a life-giving spirit (1 Cor. 15: 45) and gives life to everything (1 Tim. 6: 13) fills the merciful heart with life. Then we chant with St. Paul saying, "For to me, to live is Christ" (Phi. 1: 21) and sing with St. John saying, "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers" (1 John 3: 14)... the poor and the meek.

The second meaning:

"The Lord will save him from death"... that is what Archangel Raphael said to Tobias and Tobit, "for almsgiv-

ing saves from death" (Tob. 12:9.) Similarly, Tobit said to his son Tobias, "for almsgiving delivers from death" (Tob. 4: 10). The Lord fills the merciful heart with life and saves them from death, and we have examples;

Tobit The Righteous:

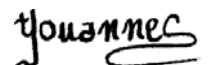
We read in the Book of Tobit that he was of the tribe of Naphtali. And it happened in the year 733 B.C. that king Salmeser of Assyria came and took all the land of Naphtali, and deported the people to Assyria (2 Kings 15: 29). Tobit was deported to the city of Nineveh. When he was 88 years old the Lord allowed blindness to strike him. After eight years the Lord sent him His archangel Raphael and healed him.

Tobit was very merciful all the days of his life. He was merciful before he lost his sight, while he was rich, and after he lost his sight, and when he was in need. He was merciful after he gained his sight again, and when his wealth was restored. We can see that the Lord preserved his life and saved him from death because Tobit showed mercy to those in need. The Divine Inspiration tells us, "I also buried any whom king Sennacherib put to death when he came fleeing from Judea in those days of judgement that the king of heaven executed upon him because of his blasphemies. For in his anger he put to death many Israelites; but I would secretly remove the bodies and bury them. So when Sennacherib looked for them he could not find them. Then one of the Ninevites went and informed the king about me, that I was burying them; so I hid myself. But when I realized that the king knew about me and that I was being searched for to be put to death, I was afraid and ran away. Then all my property was confiscated; nothing was left to me that was not taken into the royal treasury except my wife Anna and my son Tobias. But not forty-five days passed before two of Sennacherib's sons killed him... and I returned home, and my wife Anna and my son Tobias were restored to me." (Tob. 1: 18-22). This, my beloved, is an example of the blessing of mercy toward he who was merciful. Believe me, my beloved, the more we consider the poor and the needy, the more the Lord will preserve our lives. As Archangel Raphael said, "those who give alms will enjoy a full life" (Tob. 12: 9).

My beloved, this was just one example, God willing in the next newsletter, we will explore more examples of how God preserves the life of the merciful.

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