

***THE FIRST EPISTLE
OF
ST. PETER***

1999

FR. TADROS YACOUB MALATY
St. George's Coptic Orthodox Church
Sporting – Alexandria

Translated by:
FERIAL MOAWAD
St. Mark's Coptic Orthodox Church
Chicago - Illinois

Reverend Father Tadros Y. Malaty has kindly permitted that his books be published in the COeRL. He has requested that we convey that any suggestions or amendments regarding their translation are welcome, and should be forwarded to:
sydneywebmaster@coptic.org.au

INTRODUCTION

THE WRITER OF THE EPISTLE

1. The scholars and the Fathers of the Church have unanimously agreed that St. Peter was the writer.

2. **St. Ireneaus** was the first to excerpt some sayings from the epistle mentioning St. Peter's name. However, we find some excerpts in the writings of early and later Fathers following him, like what came in the epistle of **St. Barnabas**¹, the writings of **St. Clement of Rome**², the book of the Shepherd by **Hermas**³, and the writings of **St. Polycarp the Martyr**.

3. **St. Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Eusebius of Caesarea** have mentioned that the epistle of St. Peter is widely accepted by the church, without any doubt.

4. The epistle is in harmony with the style of his sermons mentioned in the book of Acts, for example:

First: He referred to God as Judge who judges with no partiality (Chapter 1:7 with Acts 10:34).

Second: He emphasized the talk about the Father who raised Christ. (Chapter 1:21 with Acts 2:32 & 3:15, 10:40).

Third: His declaration that the Lord Jesus is the Chief Cornerstone. (Chapter 2:7 with Acts 4:11)

5. St. Peter did not know the Greek language; however, St. Mark and St. Selvanus perfected it, and they were close to him.

TO WHOM WAS IT WRITTEN?

1. It was written to the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus,

¹ Compare the epistle of Barnabas 1: 5 with 1 Pet. 1: 9 – 4:12 with 1: 17 – 5: 1 with 1:2 –5: 6 with 1: 11-16: 10 with 2: 5.

² Compare the epistle of Clement, bishop of Rome (1968 ed.) with 7: 4 with 1 Pet. 1:19, 9: 4 with 3: 2-36: 2 with 2: 9-30:2 with 5: 5-49: 50 with 4: 8.

³ Refer to the book of "The Shepherd" by Hermas 3: 5, 4: 3,4 (under print)

Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia in Asia Minor. (ch.1:1)

2. Some believe that St. Peter did not mean the regions according to their official geographical locations, for example, Pontus was in the district of Galatia till the year 63 A.D. Phrygia, which occupies a large area in Asia Minor, was not mentioned between the districts. However, the carrier of the epistle could not have passed from Cappadocia to Asia without passing through Phrygia. Thus, it was impossible for a Christian not to enter the region of Phrygia, from the readers of this epistle, especially that their number was many. (Acts 18:23). Therefore, these names had a broader meaning for they meant all Asia Minor⁴.

3. On the Day of Pentecost, there were some from Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia. (Acts 2:9)

4. Pontus is located by “Bohrof El-Karm, which is the origin of Aquila. Since St. Peter started addressing his epistle to this district. **Tertullian, St. Cyprian the Martyr, and St. Jerome** called this epistle “the epistle to Pontus.”

5. Cappadocia, lies on the west of Pontus.

6. Asia: the district of Asia under Asia Minor. This was the place where Aquila was born. (Acts 18:2)

7. Bithynia: near Pontus, from Constantinople.

TIME AND PLACE OF ITS WRITING:

It was written between the years 63 and 67 A.D, that is, during the persecution of Nero. (54-68 A.D.)

It was written from Babylon (ch. 5:13). There were different opinions regarding the city of Babylon:

1. All agreed that it was not the one on the Euphrates River, for it was destroyed at that time, and tradition did not mention that St. Peter went there. It is very unlikely that St. Mark and Silas went there.

⁴ Studies in First Epistle of St. Peter by Dr. Moris Tawadros.

2. Catholics claim that it refers to Rome, relying on the fact that Babel mentioned in the Revelation refers to Rome. However, there is nothing that either supports or refutes that opinion.

First: Why did not St. Peter mention the name “Rome”?

Second: Historically, St. Peter did not arrive to Rome early enough before his martyrdom to allow him to write two epistles.

Third: Arranging the provinces as mentioned in the epistle from East to West supports the idea that the epistle was written somewhere in the East.

3. The most accurate opinion is that Babel is “Babylon” or Old Cairo, which was earlier a habitation for a Jewish community and a station for Roman soldiers whose influence is still existing until today.

Historical traditions support this opinion, which state that St. Mark came to Egypt in year 61 A.D. or 62 A.D.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE EPISTLE:

1. It is very similar to some of St. Paul’s epistles especially the ones of Ephesians⁵, Romans⁶, Galatians⁷ and Titus⁸. We also find many similar expressions between this epistle and St. Paul’s to the Hebrews⁹.

2. St. Peter took many excerpts from the Old Testament because he is the apostle of circumcision, the apostle to the Jews.

3. His constant and repetitive referrals to the words of the Lord Jesus Himself because he was an eyewitness to what the Lord Jesus has said and done.

⁵ 1 Pet. 1: 1-3 & Eph. 1: 1-3, 1:20 & 1:4, 2:9 & 1:14, 3:22 & 1:21, 2:5 & 2:21,22, 3:1-6 & 5:22-24

⁶ 1 Pet. 1:21 & Rom. 4:24, 4:1 & 6:6,7, 2:24 & 6:11, 5:1&8:18, 3:22&8:34, 2:5 & 12:1, 1:14 & 12:2, 4:10,11 & 12:3-8, 1:21&12:9,10, 3:8-12 & Rom. 12:14-19, 3:13,14 & 13:1-4, 2:6,7&9:33.

⁷ 1Pet.1:4 & Gal. 3:23, 2:16 & 5:13

⁸ Compare 1Pet.1:1&Tit.1:4, 2:9&2:14, 1:3 & 3:5, 1:8 & 2:14

⁹ Studies in First Epistle of St. Peter by Dr. Moris Tawadros.

PURPOSE OF THE EPISTLE:

1. To encourage the believers to accept sufferings. This epistle is considered one of the excellent comforting epistles, and every chapter is filled with a comforting message.

2. To reveal the practical holy and the mutual relationships within the family, society, Church, through faith in the Crucified Lord Jesus.

OUTLINE OF THE EPISTLE:

- 1. Salvation and sufferings Ch. 1**
- 2. Our relation with Christ our Rock Ch. 2**
- 3. Our social relations in the Lord Jesus Ch. 2**
- 4. Our family relations in the Lord Jesus Ch. 3**
- 5. Our relations with those suffering in the Lord Jesus Ch. 3**
- 6. Tribulations and the life of holiness Ch. 4**
- 7. Our church relations in the Lord Jesus Ch. 5**

Chapter 1

SALVATION AND SUFFERINGS

1. Opening salutation	1
2. God's act of salvation:	
First: The love of the Trinity to us.	2
Second: God's new gifts	3-5
3. Our stand toward salvation	
First: Faith, hope, love	6- 12
Second: Strife and work	13-25

1. OPENING SALUTATION:

“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (v. 1).

Peter is the name by which the Lord called him. (John 1:42). In Syrian, he is called *Cephas* which means “a rock,” referring to the faith which he uttered regarding the Lord Jesus.

“The apostle of Jesus Christ,” here he calls himself apostle, that is, one of the twelve and not their chief.

“To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia...”

We have previously mentioned about these countries. Here he addresses them as pilgrims. This corresponds with the spirit of the epistle, which is directed toward suffering people. This pilgrimage is not just based on the shortness of the temporal life, but rather on what is much better which is our belonging to the kingdom of the heavenly Christ, as St. Paul said, *“Our citizenship is in heaven.”* (Phil. 3:20)

The source of this feeling as being pilgrims is not pessimism, but rather a cheerful outlook, which is our clinging toward heavenly matters. This is our foundation of enduring sufferings with patience and rejecting earthly matters. Moreover, it is the foundation of all our spiritual life.

St. John Climacus¹ defined being pilgrims as: [Being pilgrims means forsaking all temporal matters on earth which hinder achieving our goal in the spiritual life. Pilgrimage is a humble behavior, hidden wisdom... knowledge about which most people do not know... hidden life... unseen goal... invisible meditation... longing for humility... desire for suffering... permanent determination on God's love, abundant blessings... rejecting vain glory... deep silence.]

Hence, pilgrimage is carrying the human soul with all its energy to cross over sufferings and tribulations for the love of the Holy trinity.

2. GOD'S WORK IN SALVATION

First: The love of the Holy Trinity to us:

Since the epistle is all centered on the sufferings in the life of the believer, therefore it was necessary for St. Peter to start his talk about "*Salvation*," which the holy Trinity offers to us in an inexpressible love. Discovering God's sacrificing love, is the incentive behind one's enduring sufferings with thanksgiving. Therefore, St. Peter talks about:

1. The **Father's love** declared in man's choice.
2. The **love of the Holy Spirit** declared in our sanctification for obedience.
3. The **love of the Son** declared on the Cross.

The Father choosing us: "elect, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ."

1. **God declared His love to us by choosing us for the kingdom.** The fanatic Jews misunderstood this choice, for they thought that God is prejudiced toward a specific people or race, and forcing them to follow His ways. Therefore, the apostle for circumcision had to talk about the Father choosing us, for he clarified:

- That the choice is based on the "*foreknowledge of God*

¹The Ladder to Heaven and Levels of Virtues 3: 1

the Father.” This foreknowledge is different from the will, for His will is that everyone is saved, but due to His foreknowledge, He knows who are the ones who will accept, believe and abide in Him. As St. Paul said, “*For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son...*” (Rom. 8:29). On the cross, the Son opened His arms declaring the Father’s calling to the entire human race. However, the Father knows who are the ones who follow Him and abide In His commandments, as the Son knows His sheep. (John 10:14)

- St. Peter here calls the believers “*the chosen.*” **St. Augustine** comments that not all the believers abide till the end, but because the chosen are among the believers.
- The choice here is not depriving one from his freedom but is “*sanctification of the Spirit for obedience,*” that is, submission to the work of the Spirit of the Lord in obedience.

St. Augustine tackled this subject by saying²:

[St. Paul said to Philemon, “Whom I wished to keep with me, that on your behalf he might minister to me in my chains for the gospel, but without your consent I wanted to do nothing, that your good deed might not be by compulsion, as it were, but voluntary” (Phil.1:13,14).

“See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil... I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live” (Deut. 30:15,19).

Also in the Book of Sirach, “*It was he who created man in the beginning, and he left him in the power of his own inclination. If you will, you can keep the commandments, and to act faithfully is a matter of your own choice. He has placed before you fire and water; stretch out your hand for whichever you wish. Before a man are life and death, and whichever he chooses will be given to him” (Sirach 15:14-17).*

Also, in the book of Isaiah: “*If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land. But if you refuse and*

² Aug. Man’s perfection in Righteousness 19

rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword” (Is. 1:19, 20).

We cannot reach the end without our will, and we cannot achieve our goal unless we receive Divine help.

2. Sanctification of the Spirit for obedience:

The Father loves us and He chose us for Himself. The Holy Spirit loves us with the same love of the Father, for He is the Spirit of the Father and His work is to sanctify us for obedience.

Man cannot sanctify himself nor can he struggle by himself; that is why God granted us the Holy Spirit to help us. In the sacraments of baptism and confirmation, the Holy Spirit lives inside us and we become His own. And in the sacrament of penance and confession, our sins are forgiven; and we abide in Him in the sacrament of the Eucharist. The Spirit offers us works of righteousness from love, joy, peace, and meekness. The Spirit sanctifies us and helps us for obedience and perseverance³.

3. **“And sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ”**: God’s love in choosing and sanctifying us made Him pay a high price, the blood of the Lord Jesus, as a propitiation for our sins and cure for our ailments and a covenant for His fellowship!

In front of this sacrificing love, we are ashamed to complain from any tribulation nor grumble from any suffering nor fear death!

“Grace to you and peace be multiplied.” Since He granted us the Divine capability as He paid the price and granted us His Spirit the Helper in our struggle, He overflows His grace and peace.

- **Grace:** His free gifts and Divine blessings fill the heart with peace.

Peace: Depends on the grace of God, when one realizes his reconciliation with God, the source of peace and happiness. Thus one is infatuated with the fellowship of God’s love and is elevated above all sufferings. This also reflects our peace with others, even the troubled, because our inside is strong and steadfast so the

³ Refer to the “Divine Love”, chapter of “God my Sanctifier”, p. 801-1044.

outside is not worried⁴.

Second: God's New Gifts

St. Peter writes about the greatness of God's free gifts which we receive through the merit of the Blood: "***Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again...***" (v.3).

Glory is to You O our Father, for You have offered us the most precious gift through Your abundant mercy. You have granted us new birth through baptism! All our worship is built upon this birth, for You have granted us:

1. New Birth: We were removed from the olive tree and were grafted in the new olive. (Rom. 11:22). Our old man is crucified and we are granted a new creation. (2 Cor. 5:17). "*Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit*" (Tit.3:5).

St. Didymus the Blind said. [When we are submerged in the baptismal font because of the goodness of God the Father and the grace of the Holy Spirit, we are washed from our sins. And are renewed from the old man, and are sealed by His power to be His own. When we come out of the baptismal font, we put on Christ our Savior as a new garment worthy of the honor of the Holy Spirit who renewed us and sealed us⁵.]

2. New Hope: "*To a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*" In the Old Testament every one was concentrating on the Promised Land and temporal blessings as a symbol for the Heavenly Jerusalem and the eternal blessings. However, now after the new birth from the Heavenly Father and the heavenly mother (the Church), it is not appropriate for us to have hope in the earthly matters.

This new hope is based on the resurrection of the Lord, for we, as members in His Body, take off all temporary hope and

⁴ Refer to interpretation 2 John 3

⁵ Divine Love p. 852.

look up for a living hope toward an eternal inheritance. It is a living hope for it springs from a living heart continuously overflowing with a life of never ending love!

3. Eternal inheritance: The one born from the flesh expects a material inheritance, however, the one born from the spirit longs for a spiritual inheritance. “*And if children, then heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ...*” (Rom. 8:17). What are the features of this spiritual inheritance?

- “*To an inheritance incorruptible*”: for it is not an earthly inheritance but rather heavenly.
- “*And undefiled*”: for it differs from the earthly inheritance where it can be taken by force or through robbery, as well as evil spending may lose it.
- “*And that does not fade away*”: For its beauty and splendor never fade away.
- “*Reserved in heaven for you*:” for this is the subject of God’s care and protection; therefore, we should never despair for God has prepared heaven for us in spite of all our misconduct.

St. John Chrysostom said: [Look how our nature was demeaned then elevated! For one could never be lowered more than what he had been, nor be risen more than where Christ was and raised us with Him. Today is the day where the Lord has risen and our nature has risen above all creation!⁶]

4. New Power: “*Who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time*” (v. 5). The divine hand, which protects the inheritance, is the same one that protects us, who are expecting the inheritance. For it offers us all possibilities to sanctify us for the heavenly wedding which is declared on the Great Day.

3. OUR STAND TOWARD THE SALVATION

Since God offers us all possible means for our salvation, however we will not enjoy the way of salvation unless we

⁶ Divine Love, p. 737 –740.

participate with our own will. Our participation does not demean God's act of salvation nor deny His free gift nor drive us to self-righteousness. Though our faith, hope, love, works are very essential for our salvation, yet they are not by our own power, but they are gifts that God offers to those who struggle and take them by violence, built on the merit of the Blood of Christ.

There is no justification without faith, hope and love (deeds of love). We cannot benefit from God's mighty deeds for our salvation without faith, hope and love. What is our obligation, then?

1. **Faith:** *"In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire..." (v.6, 7).* St. Peter talks about our duty toward salvation. He asks us for practical faith:
2. **Life full of joy:** Faith in the Lord does not bring joy which any sufferings nor neither temptations nor any outer circumstance can put off. Let us rejoice with our mother the Virgin St. Mary saying, *"My soul rejoices in God my Savior"* And let us sing with David while repenting, *"Restore to me the joy of Your salvation."*
3. **Life full of temptations:** *"You have been grieved by various trials,"* that is trials are obligatory in the life of the believer, for through them, he shares with the Suffering Lord. He is not exposed to one trial or two but to various trials, carrying the cross with the Lord Jesus like Simeon of Cyrene. These trials are few, for no matter how long we live on earth, it is nothing compared to the eternity. This endurance purifies our faith, though we receive it through strife from the divine grace. Our endurance does not nullify that salvation is free and grants the feeling of God's blessing.
4. **Hope:** *"May be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ"* (v. 7). Hope supports the believer

in tribulations for it lifts his eyes to the Great Day of the Lord to see:

- Praise: from God for his patience and endurance till the end. “
 - Honor: in front of his brothers sharing with Him in the Heavenly Jerusalem.
 - Glory: for he deserves to be united with the Heavenly Groom!
5. **Love:** “*Whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory*” (v. 8).

Since we do not see what we are going to be like, yet we believe hoping for the eternal glory, therefore, we love God rejoicing with His work with us. We love the revelation of Jesus Christ where our corruptible body carries incorruptibility, and the soul sees her Heavenly Groom face to face. This is the end of our faith “the salvation of our souls.”

As **St. Augustine** said⁷: [The apostle says here that we are saved through the new birth, yet he declares in another place that “*For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, then we eagerly wait for it with perseverance*” (Rom. 8:24, 25).

St. Peter said a similar statement: “*Though you do not see Him, yet believing you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*”

Since this time is the time of faith, and the reward of faith is the salvation of our souls, this faith which works with love (Gal. 5:16), then one should not doubt that the day will come to an end. And at the end we shall receive the reward, not only the salvation of our bodies, which St. Paul had talked about in Romans 8: 23, but also the salvation of our souls, as St. Peter said.

This present age will end; therefore, we rely on hope, more

⁷ N. & P. N. Frs, p. 323.

than receiving the reward.

But we have to remember that though our inner man, that is the soul, is renewed day by day (2 Cor. 4:16), yet while we await eternity for the body and salvation of our souls, we say we are saved because of the deposit which we have received here. We consider all matters which the Only Begotten Son has heard from the Father as matters which we hope to obtain in the future, although the Lord has declared these things as though we have already received them.

This yearning for the heavens and the longing for the eternal salvation is:

- The subject of the prophecy of the prophets.
- The subject of the preaching of the Gospel.
- The subject of the amazement of the heavenly creatures.

1. **The subject of the prophecy of the prophets:** They desired eternity through love; and the Holy Spirit, “The Spirit of Christ” has granted them to prophecy about the salvation. St. Peter said, “*Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow*” (v.10,11).

They looked and searched for it, and that was the proof of love.

The Spirit of Christ has granted them to testify for the eternity, for the glories are related to the sufferings of Christ, for there is no salvation without the shedding of blood.

The cross, to which the fathers and prophets adhered, was the center of symbols and prophecies, for the Lord said, “*Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day and he saw it and was glad*” (John 8:56). They saw it in a surpassing way; they saw the sufferings. Here, the apostle mentions the sufferings in the plural form to reveal its intensity and abundance. Also, he mentioned the glories in the plural form because as the sufferings abound,

likewise the glories. Here there is an inner longing for the soul to carry the sufferings of Christ without grumbling, in order to participate in the surpassing glories. This is the meaning of true love.

2. **The subject of the preaching of the Gospel:** Since the prophets loved the Lord through the shadows and prophecies and desired to see the cross of the Lord and His glories, how much more should we love Him since He did all that for our sake!

“To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven” (v. 12). In the fullness of time, we preach about the things that the prophets desired to see and see. Here, St. Peter states that the prophets were ministering, that is, it was a matter of ministry and humility and not pride.

3. **The subject of the amazement of the heavenly creatures:** *“which angels desire to look into.”* Love is one of the traits of the angels too, that is why they desire to see the salvation of man. Their desire is not mere curiosity but rather sharing and longing for man’s repentance. (Luke 15:10). God’s great work with us is the subject of the amazement of the angels and their praises to the Creator!

Second: Strife and Work:

Since we look toward God’s salvation to us, believe in Him, hope for the inheritance, love eternity, what do we do now?

1. *“Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober...” (v.13).* St. Peter is waking up the bride to meet her Groom repeating the call three times: *be sober, be watchful, be sober* (ch. 4:7; 5:8), so she may be always ready for her Groom girding up her loins! St. Peter adapted this comparison from what the travelers used to do. They used to gird their loins because their clothes were long so their long clothes do not hamper them.

2. Or he may adapt this comparison because one rolls up his sleeves while deeply thinking in an important matter.

3. Or he may have adapted this comparison because the fishermen used to gird their loins while walking in the water up to their knees.

Then, let us gird our minds with righteousness in the life of holiness resembling our Bridegroom.

St. Athanasius the Apostolic said: [Let us gird our minds resembling our Savior the Lord Jesus Christ about whom Isaiah wrote: “*Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, and faithfulness the belt of His waist*” (Is. 11:5⁸.)]

4. “***Rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ***” (v. 13). Watching without hope faints. Therefore, all our hope should be directed toward the glory (grace), which we shall receive when the Lord Jesus appears.

May the Lord be our hope (1 Thess. 1:3), and His appearance be before our eyes because He is not far from us but He comes to us. In the Greek script, it means He is on the way so we may receive Him.

Let our hope be “***fully***” in the eternity, that is, with perfection and maturity. As **St. John Chrysostom** said: [Certainly, hope resembles a strong rope hanging from heaven to help our spirits. Whoever holds on steadfastly to this rope is elevated above the temptations of this evil world. If one weakens and does not hold on to this hope, he will fall into the pit⁹.]

5. “***As obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance...***” (v. 14). This means that we should look forward to the reality of our great position as children of the Heavenly Father, who is full of goodness. As obedient children, let us not behave as we did when we were ignorant.

⁸ Epistles of the Resurrection, epistle 3, p. 52

⁹ “You will Return with greater Power” by St. John Chrysostom

As **St. Augustine** said¹⁰: [We have earthly parents who beget us on earth for struggle then death. However, we have other parents, for God is our Father and the church is our mother, who begets us for eternal life.

Let us reflect on whose children are we? Let us behave accordingly, fit for such a Father.

We found a Father in heaven; therefore we have to be careful in our behavior on earth. Whoever is related to such a Father that has to behave in a proper way fit to deserve that relation and to obtain that inheritance.] How should we behave?

“But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’ And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your sojourning here in fear” (v.15-17). St. Peter clarified the source, the incentive and the boundaries of our behavior.

- Our behavior: **is holiness**, that is, love for the heavenly matters and hatred of sin.
- **Its incentive**: First: to walk according to the call with which we are called. As obedient children to submit to the will of the Holy Father. As **Tertullian** said¹¹: [God’s will is our sanctification (1 Thess. 4:3) for He wants us to be according to His likeness, to be holy as He is holy. (Lev. 11:44).] St. Peter puts the Day of Judgment before our eyes as an incentive for the life of holiness and righteousness.
- **Its source**: The Holy God is our Father, and this is what Christianity is all about, that is, to realize the fatherhood of God and to enjoy it. This fatherhood is not build on partiality, but rather on God’s mercies and His justice, for He judges every one according to his deeds, without any partiality. Therefore, we should not despair for He is our Father, nor be negligent for He is the Judge. He is the just Father and the compassionate

¹⁰ The Lord’s Prayer , 68 ed. P. 9

¹¹ Tert. : On exhortation to chastity 1.

Judge.

Thus, the apostle for circumcision has abolished the wrong Jewish thought that God is biased to the Jews on the expense of other nations and His justice.

- **Its boundaries:** “*In all your conduct.*” In Greek, it means in all the road of life or in every behavior, whether in silence or talk, whether in inner thoughts or in apparent acts.... Let every thing in us be sanctified for the Lord.

4. MEDITATING IN THE GREATNESS OF THE SALVATION:

Since we are required to be watchful, to live in hope, obedience, holiness, and in God’s fear, then we accept the hard labor and sufferings voluntarily. The motive behind that is our continuous reflection on the greatness of the salvation, for it is:

- Not with silver or gold
- Eternal redemption!
- It makes our faith and hope steadfast in the Father!
- It grants us the capability of being pure.
- It gives us the new birth.

A. Not with silver or gold: “*Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your father, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot*” (v.18, 19).

Silver or gold was paid to free the captives of war. However, the Lord did not pay neither silver nor gold to redeem us from our aimless conduct, but He presented His precious blood, the sufferings which the Son of God has endured and which led to the reproach of the cross!

He presented precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. The lamb is considered the most pure animal (Ex. 12:5, Deut. 28:3). The lamb was a symbol of the holy, harmless Lord Jesus. (Heb. 7:26. John 1:29).

Tertullian said: [You were bought at a price, that is with the blood. You were removed from the tyranny of the flesh to glorify God in your bodies¹².]

Meditating in the Cross of the Lord Jesus makes the soul yearn for sufferings, despise the riches of the world and urges her to seek the eternal glory. **St. Ambrose** said: [Therefore, the Cross of the Lord is my wisdom! The death of the Lord is my salvation! For we are saved with His precious blood as St. Peter said¹³.]

He addresses the rich to reflect on that price saying: [Let no one think that a different price was paid for him because of his richness. Richness in the Church is richness in faith, for a believer has the world of riches. No wander for a believer owns the inheritance of Christ, who is richer than the whole world. It was said to all and not only to the rich that you were redeemed with the precious blood. If you want to be rich, obey the One who said, “*Be holy in all your conduct.*” He said, “*Conduct yourselves throughout the time of your sojourning in fear.*” He said in fear, neither in luxury nor in pride, but in fear. You have a temporary stay here on earth, so use it wisely!¹⁴]

B. Eternal Redemption: “*He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you*” (v. 20). Let us meditate on His eternal love, for this redeeming act is not new. Before He created us, that is before the foundation of the world, He planned to redeem us to pay for our rebellion. This is the subject of the joy of the true believers to realize the sacrificing love of God for them. This drives them to kiss the cross and carry Him joyfully.

C. It makes our faith and hope steadfast: “*Who through Him believe in God. who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God*” (v. 21). St. Peter was afraid lest the heresy of Philo the Alexandrian, who called that

¹² Tert. : On Modesty 16.

¹³ On the Christian Faith 3: 5

¹⁴ Letter 63

there are two gods: one for the Old Testament, who is severe and punishes sinners, and the other of the New Testament who is gentle and compassionate with sinners. Thus, St. Peter emphasizes that what the Son did was in obedience to the Father; therefore our faith and hope in Christ are in God the Father and not separated from Him.

Christ obeyed the Father, *“Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered”* (Heb. 5:8). He submitted to the will of the Father, therefore, He emptied Himself, incarnated, suffered, rose from the dead, and took the glory by the will of the Father, which is the same as the will of the Son¹⁵.

D. It grants us the capability of purification: *“Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart”* (v. 22). Let us meditate on the greatness of this salvation, for He does not rob one’s freedom but He asked one to strive. For it is written, “You have purified your souls...” Therefore, there is no salvation for anyone who does not purify himself.

Obedying the truth, through the Spirit, that is obeying the Lord Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, fulfills this purification.

Obedience is by our will, whereby our will submits to the will of Christ, so that His purpose is fulfilled in us. Obedience requires strife and labor, and the Holy Spirit supports us in that!

This obedience is summarized in our brotherly love, for this is the purpose of the Lord Jesus and His commandment. St. Peter said about the brotherly love is open to all the human race,

- **without partiality** or bias.
- **“Without hypocrisy,”** for it stems from inner love not from outward incentive.
- **“With a pure heart”:** It has been purified with the Holy Spirit and became pure in its purpose.

¹⁵ Refer to the article “His obedience to the Father” in the book of “Divine Love”, p. 225-228.

- “*Fervently*,” for it is according to the love of Christ who died for us.

E. It grants us the new birth: “*Having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever., because ‘ All flesh is as grass, and the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the Lord endures forever’*” (v. 23-25). Here, St. Peter emphasizes on “*the new birth*,” for through it, we enjoy the greatness of the salvation, and through it, we have the right of the inheritance and we joyfully go through the sufferings.

Here, he compares between the spiritual birth and the physical birth, for the spiritual birth is from an incorruptible seed. It is from the living word of God that endures forever. He means by this word:

- Logos¹⁶: that is, the Word Incarnate, for through His cross, burial and resurrection, we were buried with Him in baptism so we may rise putting on Christ. (Gal. 3:27)
- The word of the gospel: by which you were preached. It focuses on the cross, without which the heavenly birth would not have been existed. **St. Ambrose** said: [Water, after being sanctified through the mystery of the cross, becomes fit to be used in the baptismal font and the chalice of salvation. As Moses the prophet threw the rod in the well of water, likewise the priest utters on the baptismal font with the testimony of the cross so the water may become sweet due to the work of the grace¹⁷.]

¹⁶ Refer to Fr. Hepolitus, “The Refutation of all Heresies” 4: 5.

¹⁷ The Sacraments by Fr. Ambrosios, Morcos Magazine.

Chapter 2

OUR RELATION WITH CHRIST OUR ROCK

After St. Peter concluded his talk about the salvation through the second birth, he talks now about our responsibilities as children of God.

1. **The negative aspect:** v.1
2. **The positive aspect:**
 - First: To be joined to the mother v. 2
 - Second: To be joined to God, the true Stone v. 2 -10
 - Third: To be attached to the practical behavior: v. 11,12
3. **Our behavior in the society as children of God.**
 - First: Submission to the rules of the country: v.13-17
 - Second : Faithfulness in the service v.18-25

1. THE NEGATIVE SIDE

“Therefore, laying aside all malice, all guile, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking” (v. 1). Since we received our heavenly birth, it is more appropriate to lay aside all the evil works of the old man and its lust, which hamper the growth of the new man created according on the image of God in righteousness and holiness of truth.

Let us lay aside *all malice*, that is, wickedness (1 Cor. 5:8), for it is one of the traits of Satan and the pagans who resist God and who deliberately follow evil and harm.

Let us lay aside *all guile*, so we may become like our simple Father, who is without deceit or any twisted ways. Thus, we return to the simplicity of childhood in our worship, and our preaching. Thus we become children of the kingdom. (Matt. 18:3).

Let us detest *hypocrisy*, so we do not put on the pretense of the Pharisees, but rather seek the hidden glory as a bride adorned to her groom.

Let us forsake *envy* where one asks for his brother's failure. This was what made Satan attack Adam, and why the Jews betrayed the Lord Jesus¹⁹.

Let us abandon *evil speaking*, by which one insults his brother publicly and demeans him. This is the third level of wrath, for the saints²⁰ divide wrath into inner wrath, wrath accompanied by words like "*Raca*" and wrath accompanied by insult words like "*You fool*."

2. THE POSITIVE SIDE:

First: Attachment to the Blood:

"As new born babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby" (v. 2).

The starting point of the positive side is that the believer continuously realizes that he is a nursing baby "*As new born babes*." Nothing can satisfy him except his compassionate mother's breast, thus he desires it and throws himself on it.

The advantage of the church's milk is that it is pure and grants continuous growth, "*that you may grow thereby*."

Notice that the word "*pure*" in Greek is derived from "Logos, that is Word," meaning the milk which the Lord Jesus, the Word of God, grants in His church.

What does the church nurse us?

St. Clement of Alexandria said: [It is the milk of love! Blessed is he who nurses from it! It is available in winter, as well as in summer. It does not need to be heated or to be cooled, for it is always ready²¹.]

It is the honest spiritual teachings whereby we have received from generation to generation. It does not contain any philosophy nor elaboration, but rather it is spirit and life, which the saints have experienced throughout the ages.

¹⁹ Sayings of the Fathers about envy in the book of "Brotherly Love".

²⁰ Brotherly Love, p. 232.

²¹ Instructor 1: 6.

It is the living rituals, which revives the soul, thus helping the flesh and spirit in worship.

It is the intercessions and prayers of the saints.

Second: Attachment to the Lord, the living stone:

“If indeed you have tasted the Lord is gracious. Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious” (v. 3, 4). The pronoun “If” does not mean doubting, but rather assuring that the Lord is gracious. Whoever tasted that the Lord is gracious comes to Him as a living stone.

Perhaps St. Peter remembered what the Lord had called him “Peter, or Cepha or Rock” when he declared his faith in the Lord Jesus. Here St. Peter reveals that the Lord Jesus is the rock or the living stone on which the church is built.

St. Cyprian said²²: [Christ was called “Stone,” for it was written in Isaiah, *“Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; whoever believes will not act hastily”* (Is. 28:16). Also, in Psalm 117; *“The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.”* (v. 22). Also, in Zechariah, *“For behold, the stone that I have laid before Joshua: upon the stone are seven eyes. Behold I will engrave its inscription,’ says the Lord of hosts, ‘and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day”*” (ch.3:9).

In Deuteronomy, “

Joshua, the son of Nun, took a large stone and set it up there under the oak that was by the sanctuary of the Lord. And Joshua said to all the people, *“Behold, this stone shall be a witness to us, for it has heard all the words of the Lord which He spoke to us It shall therefore be a witness to you, lest you deny your God”* (**Josh. 24:26, 27**).

This is the stone mentioned in the book of Genesis, where Jacob had laid under his head, for Christ is the head of the man. When he slept, he saw a ladder reaching up to heaven where the Lord is and His angels are ascending and descending.

²² Three books of testimonies against the Jews 2: 16.

It is the stone mentioned in the book of Exodus where Moses sat upon on the top of the mountain, when Joshua was fighting Amaleks. Through the holy stone and His sitting upon it, Joshua defeated Amaleks as Christ defeated the devil.

It is the great stone mentioned in the book of First Kings wherein the Ark of the Covenant was placed.

It is the stone mentioned in the book of First Kings, by which David had hit the head of Goliath and slew him. It symbolizes the defeat of Satan and his followers, where the forehead is not sealed with the name of Christ, this seal which continuously grants us hope and life.

It is the stone that Samuel had put when conquering the strangers and called it the stone of help, that is the stone that helps us.

The Lord Jesus is the stone by which we conquer Satan, and it is the living stone to which we go. The apostle addresses the believers saying, coming to Him, not when you come to Him, for we should continuously struggle till the last breath.

It is the living stone that is full of love and not a solid. Let us approach Him not in dry worship but in love, where we flatter Him and hear His flatter, we listen to His rebuke, and to reveal to Him all what is in our hearts, for He is not hard before our weaknesses.

“You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (v. 5)

Since He is the living Stone, we are built on Him as living stones, for as He is living, we live by Him. (John 14:19)

He made us spiritual house and a habitation for God in the spirit. (Eph. 2:18-21). In this verse, we notice that:

1. It is one house undivided against itself, but rather attached by the bond of love, beyond the limits of time and place. All the apostles and martyrs, are as living stones, for St. Mary is

praying for us, we who are struggling; as living stones too; and we also pray and love the future generations.

Hermas²³ saw in one of his visions that the victorious church is like a building. Many stones from the earth were moved and built beside each other and united together that the rows were not noticed and it became like a tower as one stone.

2. **Hermas** also saw that many stones refused to become in the building. These stones are the ones that depended on their own power and thought that they can build their foundation on Christ outside the church, thus, they rejected the spirit of the fathers and refused their doctrines and wanted to become independent, hence they became outside the spiritual house.

“Common priesthood”: for we are to offer spiritual sacrifices from *“Within the heart,”* as **Tertullian** said: [This sacrifice proceeds from the whole heart and is nourished by faith and guards the truth. It is full of innocence, purity, and chastity and is adorned by love. We have to protect it through our good deeds presenting psalms, praises on the altar of God to receive everything from Him²⁴.]

All believers offer these sacrifices, but there are priests who are devoted for the priesthood as mentioned in the epistle of James chapter five, and which St. Paul has clarified their conditions in his first epistle to Timothy²⁵.

What are these acceptable spiritual sacrifices to God?

1. **Slaying the human will or the ego**, which is the best sacrifice, where with one raises his hand by the cross, like a spiritual knife to slay his personal will, his private desires, as Abraham raised his knife to slaughter Isaac. As Isaac, being the son of blessing and the son of promise, returned alive, we, too, should slaughter our will by the cross, so we may have the strong will of Christ, His desires and the mind of Christ. Thus, we sing with the

²³ The Pastor, Book 1 vision 3.

²⁴ Tert. On Prayer 28.

²⁵ Refer to the First Epistle of St. Timothy.

apostle saying, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.” I have crucified the “ego,” so Christ may live in me.

2. **The sacrifice of humility** before God and men: As David, the psalmist said: “*For you do not desire a sacrifice, or else I would give it.; You do not delight in burnt offering. . The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, these O God, You will not despise*” (Ps. 51:16,17).

3. The sacrifice of good deeds: As St. Paul said, “*Do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased*” (Heb.13:16). David the Psalmist said, “*Offer the sacrifices of righteousness*” (Ps.4:5). Doing good and righteous deeds involve sacrifice and carrying the cross, therefore the Lord smells them as acceptable sacrifices, through His cross.

4. The sacrifice of pain and suffering: for the sake of the Lord, as St. Paul said, “*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress, or persecution or famine... as it is written, ‘For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter’*” (Rom. 8:35, 36).

5. **The sacrifice of the flesh:** The believer does not look at his body as an enemy, but rather he nourishes and cherishes it (Eph. 5:29). When the Bible or the holy Fathers speak about the enmity of the flesh, they mean the desires of the flesh.

St. Augustine wrote a book about controlling the soul, emphasizing the importance of the flesh and refuting what the heretics said the flesh being an enemy²⁶.

Let us, then, control the flesh, through the bonds of love and offer it on the altar. Let us hold on to the cross of the Lord, offering the members of the body as a living, holy, and acceptable sacrifice to God. (Rom. 12:1). Let us slay the members of the flesh and not present them as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present them as instruments of righteousness to God. Hence, all the

²⁶ Printed under the name of “Chastity”, 1962

desires, emotions, feelings of the members of the body are sanctified to become energy helping the spirit, instead of fighting the spirit.

6. The sacrifice of thanksgiving: St. Paul commands us saying, “*Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name*” (Heb.13: 15)²⁷. The sacrifice of thanksgiving is the sacrifice of the angels. The heavenly creatures have no physical bodies so they may offer them as living sacrifices, nor material belongings they can offer them as charity, nor anyone to annoy them so they may forgive. They have no contradicting will to their Lord’s, nor do they suffer any physical pains. The only thing they can offer is their continuous praise and thanksgiving.

Therefore, the church trains her children to live a life of praise as in the praises of psalmody, psalms, hymns, so they may be trained to do the work of the angels.

St. Anthony the Great, the father of monks, tells us this exercise: [When you go to sleep on your bed, remember God’s blessings, His care for you and thank Him for that. Then, when you are filled with these memories, you will rejoice in the spirit, offering praises to Him in the highest. When one is not committing evil, the only thing that can satisfy God is the offering of thanksgiving more than anything else is²⁸.]

“Therefore, it is also contained in the Scripture, ‘Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame’ (v. 6). The Father has put His Son a chief cornerstone in Zion that is in the church, whereby the believer becomes a member in the mysterious Body of Christ.

Hermas said: [The Lord Jesus is the old Rock and the new Door. When questioned about that, he said that this rock and the door is the Son of God. I asked, “How can the rock be old and the

²⁷ Refer to Ps. 56:12, 102:22.

²⁸ Filokalia p. 23.

door be new? He answered, “Listen, O you ignorant, the Son of Man is old, for He is the Partner of the Father in the creation, thus He is eternal. I asked, “Why is the door new, my master?” He answered, “For He was manifest in these last times (1 Pet.1:20) , therefore, the door became new, so that whoever is saved through it, enters the kingdom of God. He asked, “The stones which formed the door were used in building the church, but the ones which did not form the door were thrown outside.” He continued, “Likewise, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he accepts the name of Christ. If you desire to enter a city surrounded by fence and has only one door, you cannot enter unless you enter through that door. In the same manner, no one can enter the kingdom of God except through believing in His Beloved Son Jesus Christ²⁹ .]

2. The Lord Christ is the cornerstone who controls all the building and connects each stone to the other. **St. Augustine** said³⁰: [The cornerstone connects two walls; when the wicked Jews rejected the faith, He connected those who believed in Him with those who were previously Gentiles, thus He joined the two without any prejudice toward the Jews as there thought in their blind fanaticism.

3. The Lord Christ is also the mysterious cornerstone who joined the wall of the Old Testament with the wall of the New Testament. On Mount Tabor, Moses, who received the Law, met with Elijah the prophet and three disciples, uniting between the two testaments, declaring that He is the Cornerstone for the Law and the prophecy and the preaching of the Gospel.

“Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, ‘The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone” (v. 7).

When building Solomon’s temple, the builders brought a huge stone, but they could not find useful, therefore they forsook it and neglected it, but when they were searching for a cornerstone,

²⁹ The Book of the Shepherd, 3 rev.12

³⁰ Sermons on certain chapters from the New Testament 1:14,15.

they could not find except that huge stone, so the builders rejoiced with it.

The Jews rejected the Lord Jesus and despised Him, and crucified Him, for they wanted Christ according to their earthly interests whom reigns as an earthly king. However, those who believed in Him, found that Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit (Eph. 2:20-22).

We found Him the spiritual Rock, which is not solid, that followed us and from which we drink the same spiritual drink. (1 Cor. 10:4).

St. Augustine said: [The Jews knew Him and they crucified Him; but the whole world heard about Him and believed in Him³¹.]

St. Peter said that He is a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense to those who reject Him. “***They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed***” (v. 8), Saying, “*To which they also were appointed,*” does not mean that God is the One who rejected them, but they rejected Him, and the Lord had declared earlier of what they would do (Is. 8:13-15). Moreover, He declared it, through His divine mouth when saying, “***Whoever falls on that stone will be broken, but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder***” (Luke 20:18).

He is like a stone, on which they stumbled, and a rock of offense. A rock is usually huge, and normally one would not stumble on it. However, in their disobedience, they stumbled in Him, but He was not affected at all!

They did not obey the Law (The Word carved on stone) because of their stony hearts. Thus they stumbled in the living stone, but we, upon obeying Him, do not stumble in Him.

St. Augustine said: [With your soft heart, you can see in these stony tablets (The New Testament) what fits the stiff-necked

³¹ Reference 30 (12: 4)

people. In the mean time, you can see the Stone, your Bridegroom, whom Peter has denied. For them, He is a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense; but for you, He is the stone, which the builders rejected, and has become the chief cornerstone.

Do not be afraid when you read these tablets for they are sent to you from your Bridegroom. For others, they are like stones because of their insensitivity, however, to you, they refer to power and steadfastness.

The finger of God wrote these tablets, and the finger of God cast out the devils. Also, the teachings of Satan which tortures the conscience, are cast out by the finger of God³².]

“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (v. 9).

Since we are founded on the Cornerstone and are attached to Him, therefore, we are ***“a chosen generation”***: The apostle of circumcision uttered this statement to correct their misconceptions of a chosen generation, and that God has chosen them because they are Jews. However, when the Lord incarnated and many Gentiles were from His ancestors, and when He sent His apostles to the Gentiles, these entire revealed God’s love to humanity and that this choice does not lead to pride and fanaticism, but rather to carrying the responsibility.

“A royal priesthood”: This was excerpted from the book of Exodus (Exodus 19:1). Nevertheless, in the Old Testament, we know that not every one was a priest or a king, but only the chosen. Therefore, the saying ***“royal priesthood”*** means that from our midst, there are priests dedicated to the ministry of the King of kings.

“A holy nation and His own special people.” Its own special function is to minister and to witness to the One who called us from darkness to His marvelous light through practical behavior as children of light.

³² Reply to Faustus the manchaean 15: 5

What we proclaim are the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. This means that we reflect the beauty of the radiant Christ, so people may see His divine light inside our hearts, and get to know Him through our behavior in life. Thus, the saying of the Psalmist David is fulfilled, “*Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God will shine forth*” (Ps. 50:2).

In all that, we do not take credit, but the credit goes to the One who had mercy on us. St. Peter continues, “*Who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy*” (v.10). We were full of darkness, but He called us to His marvelous light... What else do we want? He has chosen us to be His people as Hosea prophesied. (Hos. 1:6, 9, 2:23).

THIRD: PRACTICAL BEHAVIOR

After St. Peter concluded his speech about our foundation on the Lord Jesus and proclaiming about His praises, he started to clarify the importance of proper conduct by saying, “*Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul*” (v.11).

He calls them “*Beloved*” to attract them to listen and apply. This call was very common to the souls of the disciples and apostles for they have heard it from the loving Lord Jesus and heard the voice of the Father for His Son saying, “*My Beloved Son,*” during the baptism and the transfiguration, therefore they became fond of it.

He also calls them *pilgrims*, that is guests, for he previously commanded them to forsake the lust of the flesh because they are God’s children, and also because of their feeling of being strangers and not being attached to the world.

Our fathers the monks used to train the new monks to visit the cemeteries, daily for long hours, to realize the reality of this life here.

When St. Theodore the ascetic fell in lust with the beautiful lady Hermoine, **St. John Chrysostom** wrote to him asking him to

return to his first ascetic life, telling him about God's abundant mercies. In order to overcome the lust of the flesh, He advised him to visit the cemeteries and reflect on the dust, ashes and worms, and in the mean time remember the end of the evil and the happiness of the righteous³³.

Listen, St. Peter did not say abstain from sin, but rather he said to abstain from the root of sin, which is the "carnal lusts." Father Dorotheos said, [Sins are fulfilling practically the lust of the flesh, that is, one practices what the lust stirs in him³⁴.] We have to uproot these lusts, even if they were just thoughts fighting the soul.

This inner war between the lust of the flesh and the desires of the spirit is permanently existing, but it does not have any power over our will, as long as we do not yield to it.

Therefore, let us abstain from the lust of the flesh by not surrendering to it, but using the members of our body as instruments of righteousness. Thus we witness to God before the Gentiles when they see the visible fruits like the reflection of the inner purity and the victory of the desires of the spirit over the flesh, and the subduing of the lust of the flesh³⁵.

Father Mathetes, from the second century³⁶, compared the relation of the soul to the flesh as the relation of the true Christians to the pagans who constantly attack them³⁷.

[The soul is spread throughout all the members of the body, like the Christians who are spread throughout all the cities of the world. The soul abides in the body but it is not from it, like the Christians who live in the world but they are not from the world. (John 17:11& 14:16)]

The soul is invisible and it protects the visible body, likewise the Christians are visible but their righteousness is invisible.

³³ "You will return with greater power" by St. John Chrysostom, p. 22

³⁴ Filokalia p. 152

³⁵ "Chastity" by St. Augustine

³⁶ One of St. Paul's disciples or his companions.

³⁷ The Epistle of Diognetus 6.

The body hates the soul and attacks it, not because the soul harms the body but because it prevents him from enjoying the lust of the flesh. Likewise the world hates the Christians, although the Christians do not harm the world, but because they instruct them not to follow the lust of the flesh.

The soul loves the body who hates it; likewise the Christians like those who hate them.

The soul is imprisoned in the body, yet it protects the body; likewise the Christians are in the world as if in a prison yet they are not defiled in it.

The eternal soul dwells a tabernacle susceptible to death, and the Christians dwell as strangers in a temporary dwelling looking for their unperishable dwelling in heavens.

When the soul neglects food and drink, it becomes in a better condition; likewise when the Christians accept persecution, they multiply.]

“Having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.” (v. 12)

How much the Romans spoke against the Christians as evildoers! Tertullian, the scholar wrote:

[The Tiber River flooded and it harmed the walls of Rome, and the Romans blamed that on the Christians. They used to blame the Christians whenever the River Nile does not produce mud or whenever an earthquake or famine or pestilence occur and they used to scream, “Throw them to the lions.]

But on the Day of the Lord for judgment, or the day when God reveals to their eyes the knowledge of the truth, then the good conduct of the believers will be manifested, thus they will glorify their Father who is in heaven. (Matt. 5:16)

St. Cyprian the martyr wrote to Rogatanus the priest and other confessors who were thrown in prison: [I am delighted to tell you that this is a great responsibility put on your shoulders that through your testimony and your quiet righteous life, they may

glorify God³⁸.]

St. Cyprian the bishop and martyr wrote that the good conduct adorns the confessors and the martyrs.

3. Our Behavior in the Society as Children of God

First: Submission to the governments:

“Therefore, submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as supreme,” (v.13)

The Jews stirred a dissension among the rulers stating that the Christians submit only to Christ the King, thus they do not submit to the emperors nor rulers, rebelling every law and regulation.

To clarify this issue of whether the Christian should submit to the heavenly or earthly kingdom, the Lord declared the necessity of submitting to the governments (Matt. 22:21).

Thus, St. Paul followed the same example (Rom. 13:1-7) and asked from his disciple Titus to remind the people to submit to authorities and to be ready for every good work. (Titus 3:1)

The essence of Christianity is love and submission (humility) and not pride and rebellion. **St. Augustine** is advising his people not to be afraid from the threatening of the rulers when they force them to worship the idols. He said³⁹: [Should we follow the road of pride and ignore the authorities? St. Paul himself said, :Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore, whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God...” (Rom. 13:1,2)

Tertullian said⁴⁰: [Regarding proper honor for kings and emperors, it is very clear that we have to be in complete obedience as the apostle commanded us to be subject to rulers and authorities. (Tit 3:1) However, there are limits to this obedience which is to keep ourselves from worshipping idols.

A good example for that is the three youths. In spite of their

³⁸ Epistle 13 (Oxford edition) to Rogatianus the priest

³⁹ Sermons of certain chapters from the New Testament 12

⁴⁰ On Idolatry 15.

obedience to Nebuchadnezzar, they did not accept to worship his idols. Also, Daniel, who submitted to King Darius, yet he was steadfast in his faith. (Dan. 6)

“Or to governors, as to those are sent by him for the punishment of evil-doers and for the praise of those who do good.” (v.14) This means that we do not fear the governors but we love them and submit to them for they are appointed by God to punish the evil-doers and to praise those who do good. (Rom. 13:3,4)

Let us submit to the rulers and care to do good to every one. This shuts those who unjustly accuse the church. “For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.” (v.15)

Some may ask: Why do we submit to them, aren't we free?

Freedom in Christianity is not chaos nor rebellion against rules and regulations, but rather submission and obedience with joy, doing good and conquering evil under our feet. “As free, yet not using your liberty as a cloak for vice, but as servants of God.” (v.16)

St. Anthony the Great said: [Do not think that the free are those who are free because of their positions, but rather because they are free in their lives and nature. The freedom of the soul and her blessings are a result of the inner purity and rejecting the earthly matters⁴¹.]

[A free person is the one who is not a slave to any lust of the flesh but subdues his body in chastity. He is satisfied with what God gives him, no matter how little, thanking God from all his heart.]

A free person is free from inside, thus he lives not enslaved to any lust. Freedom does not instill in us carelessness but rather teaches us to carry responsibility. St. Irenaeus said: [A slave is accountable for his deeds, however a son is accountable not only for his deeds but for his words too, (Matt. 12:36), and for his thoughts too (Matt. 5:28); hence, obtaining this power of freedom makes him more sensitive to his mistakes⁴².]

⁴¹ Filokalia p. 24,43.

⁴² Irenaeus against heresies 4 : 165

“Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.” (v.17)

St. Peter starts by honoring all people so that they may not think there is partiality or humiliation to the poor or the weak. We have to honor all God’s creation whom the Lord Jesus died for. Whoever despises any human being despises his Creator and Savior.

When we honor all people, we love the brothers, that love about which St. Paul wrote in First Corinthians chapter 13. Without that love, worship loses its essence.

We have to fear God in love, for whoever does not love his brother whom he sees, how can he worship God?

The fear of God instills in us the honor of the rulers and kings sent by Him. The incentive of honoring the rulers is not the person of the rulers but the fear of God.

Second: Honesty in Service:

“Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also the harsh.” (v.18)

Since the basis for submission is the fear of God, therefore, the believer cannot question his masters’ deeds but respects them and loves them, even if they are harsh.

St. Peter means by the word “servants” slaves also, although their number was huge at that time. The historian Benenos said that one of his friends had 4000 slaves who do not have any legal rights.

Because many of the slaves believed in Christianity, therefore, St. Peter had to give them some advises concerning their work, asking them to submit without grumbling even if their masters were harsh. Through dealing with slaves, Christianity was able to win many of the masters. Through the good conduct and the sweet aroma of the slaves, they were able to win their masters.

The importance of honesty in work was manifested in the letter that Pope Theonas, the Alexandrian, wrote to Lucianus, one of the chief guardians of the emperor’s palace.

Some of the excerpts of this letter: [My dear Lucianus, I do

not want you to brag that some of the men from the emperor's palace have attained the knowledge of truth. Moreover, we need to offer gratitude to our Lord who uses us as good vessels for worthy deeds, and He granted you great honor in the eyes of the emperor so that the aroma of Christ may be manifested for the glory of Christ and the salvation of many⁴³.]

The emperor himself was not a Christian, yet he trusts the Christians for they are the most honest people in their service. Therefore, you have to be very cautious lest you fall in any sinful act nor utter an unfruitful word so that the name of Christ may not be blasphemed.

God does not like you to bribe the emperor for your personal interests.

Beware of any covetous man who is an idolater. (Eph. 5:4,5)

Let us do everything in meekness and righteousness so that the name of the Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in everything.

Fulfill the duties entrusted to you in the fear of God and in love to your boss, and with great carefulness.

Consider every matter coming from the emperor as if it is coming from God Himself, as long as it does not contradict with God's commandments; Let us be inflamed with love, fear and joy.

Trample all your vices and lusts of the flesh under your feet.

Abide in patience, courage and be revived with virtues and the hope of Christ.

Endure everything for the sake of your Creator. Endure everything and conquer everything so you may win Christ Himself.

My dear Lucianus, the wise man, endure gently the unwise, maybe they become wise. (2 Cor. 11:19)

Do not harm anyone any time and do not make anyone angry.

If someone tried to harm you, look to the Lord Jesus... Do not let any day pass without reading part from the Holy Bible and meditating in it.]

⁴³ A. N. Fathers V. 6 P. 158/161.

“For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God, one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do well and suffer for it, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. (v.19,20)

Slapping was the normal punishment for slaves when they err. What is our glory if we are slapped because of our sins? However, whoever is slapped for doing good, and then he becomes commendable before God.

The word “commendable” in Greek, has two meanings at the same time which are, “grace and favor” .

Father Piamon⁴⁴ related that an honorable lady at Alexandria asked Pope Athanasius for someone to help her. He told her about a widow who fears God. She came back asking for another one to help her. This time he offered her a wicked widow who beat her . She came back thanking the Pope saying, “ Truly, you have given me a lady who helped me and strengthened me. The first one used to honor me and spoil me with her services.”

The Lord Jesus as our example

“For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps.” (v.21)

The Lord Jesus came by Himself and lived between the servants and was slapped on the face. He did all that so that we may follow His footsteps.

“For to this you were called,” that is, this is Christ calling for us. St. Augustine said: [Let us lift our eyes to our Bridegroom, for He was hanged, unjustly, on the cross as a slave⁴⁵.]

Pope Athanasius the Apostolic said⁴⁶; [Our Lord endured unjustly to teach us how to endure. When He was beaten, He endured patiently, when He was insulted, He did not insult back.

⁴⁴ Kassian p. 464 – 469.

⁴⁵ Spiritual values of Neyrouz Feast, p. 4

⁴⁶ Letters of the Resurrection, p. 120-121.

When He suffered, He did not threaten but rather offered His back to the scourges and His cheeks to those who smite. He did not turn His face from spitting.

His will was to be led to death so that we may see in Him all virtues and immortality, so that we may follow His footsteps so that, through the truth, we may trample on serpents and scorpions and every power of the enemy (sin).

What did Christ offer as an example?

1. Who committed no sin, now was guile found in His mouth,” (v.22)

St. Peter did not mean to talk about the holiness of the Lord Jesus, for He is holy without sin, but he takes us on the way to the cross so that we may follow His footsteps. He did not commit any sin, yet He was accused as an evildoer; He had no guile in His mouth, yet He was accused as a deceiver.

2. “Who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously;” (v.23)

As a Judge, He has the right to take revenge, yet for the sake of the cross, He endured insult as a silent sheep before its shearers. (Is. 53:7), likewise, everyone who wants to walk with the Crucified Christ!

3. “Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness, by whose stripes you were healed.” For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.” (v.24)

St. Peter, as an eyewitness to the sufferings of the Lord Jesus, saw Him as an example for enduring it. He heard Him saying, “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death.” He entered the garden of Gethsemane to carry the sins of all the human race and to crucify them on the cross. St. Paul concentrated his talk about the Lord Jesus as an example for enduring death on the cross.

St. Peter reveals the concept of the sufferings of the cross. They are not mere courage nor ability to endure but rather love and sacrifice. For He wanted through His stripes, that is His wounds, to

heal our wounds. He bent His back willingly to carry our sins in His body, in a mysterious way. “Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many.” (Heb. 9:28) “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.” (v.12)

Through the sufferings of His love, He clarified to us His care, that He is the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls, who seeks every sick soul, opening His arms to every one who goes astray!

He chose death on the cross. This was not coincidence, but as St. Athanasius the Apostolic said⁴⁷:

1. [It was not appropriate for the Lord to be sick and He is the One who heals others.

2. He came as the Savior not to die Himself, but to die instead of others.

3. If His death was in secret, it would not have witnessed the resurrection.

4. He became a curse for us. (Gal. 3:13), and this is the cross.

5. How can He call us (the Gentiles) if He were not crucified stretching His arms to call us?!

6. Since the cross was the worst kind of death and the most brutal punishment, therefore the Lord Jesus endured the cross, willingly, through His humanity, redeeming all human beings from the worst punishment of death.]

7. St. Augustine said: [He chose the cross to taste the bitterest sufferings, for He died slowly, for He became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. (Phil. 2:8)

8. The scholar Tertullian said: [He chose the cross to fulfill the prophecies and the symbols written in the Old Testament⁴⁸.]

How can we imitate the Crucified Christ?

St. Peter said, “Having died to sins, might live for righteousness.”

⁴⁷ Summary of an article about “Was the shame of the cross necessary?” in the book of “Divine Love”.

⁴⁸ A. N. Fathers V, 3 p. 164 –165.

St. Ambrose said⁴⁹: [Have you crucified sin to live for God? Whoever dies to sin, lives for God!]

Do you live for the One who sacrificed His Son to crucify our lusts in His body? Christ died for us so we may live in His life-giving Body; therefore, our rebellious nature has died in Him.

Thus, the cross is the ship of our salvation.

St. Ambrose gave us another lesson saying: [Upon looking at Jesus on the cross when He forgave those who crucified Him, who does not learn to forgive those who trouble him? Those qualities of Christ are your strength!⁵⁰]

⁴⁹ On the Holy Spirit 1 : 9: 109 & 110.

⁵⁰ The Christian Faith 2: 11: 95.

Chapter 3

OUR FAMILY RELATIONS IN THE LORD JESUS

In this chapter, the apostle addresses the issue of our family relations in Christ Jesus:

1. Marital commandments:

First: The woman's submission to man: v. 1-2

Second: Taking heed of our conduct: v. 3-6

Third: The relation of husband and wife: v. 7-8

2. The relation of the Christian to those who trouble him: v. 9-22.

1. MARITAL COMMANDMENTS

FIRST: THE WOMAN'S SUBMISSION TO MAN:

“Likewise, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands, that even, if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear.” (v.1, 2)

The Roman Law allowed a man to have authority over his wife and children as his slaves and animals. Thus, women had no rights at all, which caused some to escape. However, when Christianity came calling for love, some thought that Christianity urges women to rebel against their husbands. Therefore, the church directed these clear commandments to women, which indicate their submission to their husbands.

St. Peter asks the women to submit to their husbands, even if some do not obey the word. for they hear the practical word through the pure conduct of their wives, which is full of righteousness and fear of God. Since it is not appropriate for her to teach her husband, because he is her head, yet she can win him to the Lord by her submission and good behavior.

St. John Chrysostom said, [Through the obedience of the wife to her husband, he becomes meek toward her...

Through love, all attack is abolished; if he is atheist, he will accept the faith, and if he is Christian, he will become a better Christian⁵¹.]

Submission is not due to fear but rather it is submission in the Lord (Col. 3:18), for she submits because the church submits to her Bridegroom the Lord Jesus. (Eph. 5:24)

St. Clement of Alexandria said⁵²: [It is written in the Holy Bible that the Lord gave man the woman to help him. She can help her husband and relieve all his burdens through her service and her good conduct and ability.

If he is not influenced by her good behavior, then she does all what she can to live a pure life, trusting that God is her helper and her Savior in this life and the life to come.

Let her take God to be her Guide in all her undertakings, doing righteousness and looking at God's blessings as her goal.

St. Paul addresses Titus in his epistle saying: "The older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things, that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed." (Tit. 2:3-5)

SECOND: TAKING HEED TO GOOD CONDUCT:

"Do not let your beauty be that outward adorning of arranging the hair, of wearing gold, or of putting on fine apparel; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible ornament of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very special in the sight of God." (v.3,4)

This part is read in the liturgies of the departed virgins, as if the church wants to direct every one to be adorned for her Groom with the inner adorning.

As the soul is adorned for her Bridegroom, so "the adulterous woman was arrayed with purple and scarlet, and

⁵¹ "Brotherly Love": Attributes of loving husbands, p. 258, 260.

⁵² The Stromator of Miscellanies 4 : 20.

adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication.” (Rev. 17:4)

Let the women be adorned for their husbands, but they should know that what appeals to their husbands is not their outer adorning but their inner adorning. This is also what attracts the heart of Christ, for He says, “Behold, you are fair my love! Behold, you are fair! You have dove’s eyes.” (Song of Sol.. 1:15)

St. John Chrysostom said: [Do you want to be beautiful? Be clothed with giving alms, put on compassion, be filled with chastity, avoid being pride. All these are more honorable than gold and make the ugly look beautiful.

O woman, when you exaggerate in adorning yourself, you become worse than a naked woman, for you have taken off the beauty of your countenance.

If you put on a royal robe, would you put on it a robe of slaves? You have put on the Lord of the angels, how can you go back to the earthly matters?

To whom are you adorning yourself? Is it to please your husband? Then, do it at home!⁵³]

St. Clement of Alexandria said: [The true adorning of a woman is not the outer one where others do it for her, but rather the inner adorning for which she struggles. The work of her hands grants her special beauty. Thus she adorns herself with her efforts. She weaves with her hands; for the one who is formed on God’s image cannot adorn herself with improper things from the market⁵⁴.]

“For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him Lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror.” (v.5,6)

St. Peter gives Sarah, Abraham’s wife, as an example for she was adorned with:

⁵³ Summarized from “Brotherly Love” , p. 262.

⁵⁴ Instructor 3 : 11.

1. Her reliance on God, therefore, she heeds to please God, not men.
2. Her submission to her husband, for she calls him “my lord” in love.
3. Her good deeds, that is her diligence in the salvation of her soul and caring for her home.
4. Her feeling of no fear at all, for she submits, not due to fear of slaves, but due to marital love.

THIRD: THE RELATION OF MAN TO HIS WIFE:

“Likewise, you husbands, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.” (v.7)

St. Peter puts more responsibility on men to treat their wives wisely.

St. Clement of Rome said: [Let us direct our wives to what is good, so that they may reveal pure personalities which we admire, showing true humility⁵⁵.]

St. Peter enumerated the causes, which drive the man to honor his wife by the following:

1. They are weaker vessels who need compassion in order not to perish.
2. They are members in the body, and the head is not holy unless the members are holy.
3. They are heirs with us in the eternal inheritance, without any partiality between man and woman.
4. To keep the peace of the heart and home, thus our prayers may be mingled with love and one spirit, without wrath and doubting. (I Tim. 2:8)

After concluding about family relations, St. Peter said:

“Finally, all of you, be of one mind, having compassion for one another, love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous.” (v.8)

Finally, that is, the purpose of all these commandments is to have one mind, not only for the married, but for everyone. (Phil.

⁵⁵ Letters of St. Clement of Rom, p. 6.

1:27), and to have one feeling toward one another, full of brotherly love, compassion, and gentleness. (Phil. 2:3)

The Lord Jesus has requested this unity in His farewell prayer (John 17:21), and commanded us to rejoice with the joyful and to weep with those who weep. (Rom. 12:15)

His saying, “Courteous” in the Greek origin, means that it is derived from humility before God, and the Romans always thought that courtesy is the opposite of courage.

2. The Relation of the Christian with his Persecutor:

It is very hard for someone to love the one who troubles him, but in Christ Jesus, it is easy for the following reasons:

1. As an heir to the blessing, cannot say anything except for blessing:

“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.” (v.9)

This is our call to inherit a blessing. Therefore, it is not appropriate to utter anything except for blessing, and we should not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good. (Rom. 12:21) Hence, it is not hard for us to obey God’s commandment: “Bless those who curse you, and do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.” (Matt. 5:44)

2. To practice here tasting peace:

“For he who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking guile; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it.” (v. 10,11)

This is another incentive that we are heading toward the eternity of peace. Thus, we train ourselves while on earth, as if in school, for the life of peace in which we live with the King of peace. Thus, when we love eternity and to see good days, the deposit of the life to come, we have to:

1. We have to refrain our tongues from evil, as a servant who fears his master.
2. We have to do good as an employee who waits for the reward.
3. We seek peace and pursue it, not due to fear or for the reward,

but as sons of the King of peace, who do not want except to taste peace!

St. Dorotheos said⁵⁶: [David, the psalmist, expressed this sequence by saying: “Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.” (Ps. 34:14)

Depart from evil, that is, avoid evil completely. Escape from any act which leads you to sin.

However, the prophet did not stop at that but continued, “and do good”, for sometimes one does not do evil but in the same time does not do good.

David continued, “Seek peace and pursue it”, that is, you have to struggle to obtain it.

Reflect on this verse, for when one refrains from evil, and when he struggles to do good, he can become an object for the enemy’s attack, therefore he has to labor, and strife, once as a servant who, from fear refrains from evil, and another as an employee who seeks the reward for his doing good.

When he accepts God’s help in doing good, he finds comfort in doing good and tastes peace. He experiences the struggling battle and the meaning of the joyful peace and happiness, thus he seeks peace and struggles with persistence.]

St. Augustine said: [We will reach the true peace when our nature cleaves to its Creator, thus we have no inner conflict⁵⁷.]

Thus, by refraining from evil and doing good, we attain peace, and this is our exercise on earth.

3. To Please God:

“For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and their ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.” (v.12)

The apostle does not mean here that the Lord does not look at the evil nor listen to their prayers, but he means that He does not answer them.

The goal of the believer is to please God; therefore, he overcomes evil by good and loves those who trouble him, as long

⁵⁶ Philokalia p. 166–168.

⁵⁷ Chastity by St. Augustine, p. 38.

as this pleases the Lord.

4. No one can harm him:

When the believer realizes that no one can harm him, not even the worst circumstances can harm him, unless he harms himself by himself by forsaking doing good. Thus, he is not afraid even from the one who wants to kill him, for he is certain that he cannot deprive him from doing good. The more his sufferings abound, the more his crown will be.

“Who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you are blessed.” (v.13,14)

St. John Chrysostom wrote a book called, “No one can harm one’s self unless he harms himself⁵⁸.” He clarified that no devil, nor oppression, nor sickness nor death nor poverty can harm anyone, unless that person harms himself by doing evil. On the contrary, we see that sufferings have blessed Job; poverty has benefited Lazarus; and the rain and the winds have assured the steadfastness of the house on the rock. (Matt. 7:24)

The envious person does not harm the one he envies, but rather harms himself. The oppressor kills himself and does not harm the one whom he oppresses. Thus, sufferings do not produce harm but rather blessing to the one who endures them for the sake of righteousness.

5. To give an opportunity for preaching:

“And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled. But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.” (v.14,15)

St. Peter excerpted this verse from Isaiah the prophet. (Is. 8:12,13)

St. Peter asks the believer not to fear those who trouble him, nor be annoyed from them. The motive behind that is the sanctification of the Lord in the heart; because whoever sanctifies the Lord in his heart, does not fear men but God. And whoever

⁵⁸ This book was translated and printed under the name of “Who can harm you?”

fears God, and not men, sanctifies God in his heart, and this is the best proof of his preaching and a practical testimony to the Lord, and a true answer to whoever asks him about the reason for the hope in him, enduring the hardship in meekness and the fear of God.

Thus, they smell the nice aroma of Christ in the good conduct of the believer when they unjustly accuse him, but he endures with a clear conscience without any desire for revenge but rather in love for the salvation of all

“Having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.” (v.16)

Festos and Agrippa witnessed about St. Paul. “This man is doing nothing worthy of death or chains.” (Acts 26:31)

The more the persecutions on Christians, the more were drawn to Christianity because of the Christians enduring with joy and thanksgiving.

St. Justinus said: [You can see very clearly that when they behead us or crucify us or throw us to the lions or in fire or any other suffering, we do not forsake our faith, but the more we endure, the more Christians are added to the faith in the Lord Jesus⁵⁹.]

6. Following the example of the Lord Jesus:

“For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but made alive by the Spirit.” (v.17,18)

The Christian trains himself on the life of endurance and loving those who trouble him, from the life of the Lord Jesus who suffered and endured. Through the Lord Jesus and from Him, one obtains inner power to accept suffering with thanksgiving.

According to logic, when one suffers for a transgression he committed, he feels that he deserves that suffering.

But the mind of the Lord Jesus, the concept of the divine love requires that we rejoice when we unjustly suffer, for it stems

⁵⁹ Book of “Army of God” , Morcos Magazine.

from love and this works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. (2 Cor. 4:17)

When the Lord suffered once in the flesh, He endured the wages of our sins in His flesh. These are the sufferings of love which drove Him to accept death in the flesh, while He is living in the Spirit, thus His Spirit did not taste death.

The Lord died in the flesh, His soul separated from the flesh but His divinity did not separate from His humanity nor from His soul!

“By whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water.” (v.19,20)

When the Lord died in the flesh, His soul was separated from His flesh, but His divinity was not separated from His flesh nor from His soul. The soul departed to Hades to preach those who died on the hope of the resurrection, for Satan has no power over them.

St. Ambrose said: [It is obvious that the Lord Jesus did not fall under the power of darkness but rather He abolished its dominion, preaching even to the dead in Hades to liberate them⁶⁰.]

But who are the ones to whom He preached? There are many explanations, some of which are the following:

A. The opinion of **St. Athanasius, St. Cyril, St. Jerome**: After the Lord’s death in the flesh, He descended to Hades and preached to those who did not believe Noah when he was warning them about the flood, but when some saw the rain pouring, they repented and asked for mercy.

B. The opinion of **St. Augustine**: The Lord Jesus, with His Holy Spirit, preached the people, through Noah, and warned them of the flood, so they may repent, but they did not believe. Saying, “in the prison”, he means the spirits who were in the flesh. Only eight, Noah, his wife, his three sons and their wives were saved through this preaching.

⁶⁰ The Christian Faith 3 : 4 : 28.

C. The opinion of **Tertullian**⁶¹: The number 8 was to show that the creation started with Adam and Eve, a man with only one wife, also, the new world, after the flood, Noah and his sons, each having one wife.

D. The opinion of **Fr. Hippolytus**⁶²: [He arranged everything on earth; therefore, He became man to restore to us our image through Himself, also He arranged everything under the earth for He was numbered with the dead preaching the Gospel to the souls of the saints who died on the hope of the resurrection. Through death, He conquered death.]

E. The opinion of **St. Irenaeus**⁶³: After mentioning the people who sinned in the Old Testament, he said that the Lord descended to the deep earth proclaiming His ascension, declaring the forgiveness of sins to those who believe in Him.

All those who believed in Him, hoped in Him and declared His coming and submitted to His blessings, that is, all the prophets, the fathers, He forgave them their sins, in as much as He forgave us.

F. The opinion of **St. Clement of Alexandria**⁶⁴: He relied on what Job said in ch.28:24, that He looks to the ends of the earth and sees under the whole heavens. He descended and preached not only to those who hoped in His salvation, but to the Gentiles, who in their ignorance, lived as righteous according to their law.

“There is also an antitype which now saves us, namely baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” (v. 21)

After mentioning Noah’s ark as a symbol for baptism⁶⁵, he started talking about its effect:

St. Augustine said: [The Christians of Cartage give a perfect name to baptism which is “Salvation”, and the mystery of

⁶¹ On monogamy 4.

⁶² A. N. Fra V. 5 P. 209.

⁶³ Irenaeus against heresies 4 : 27 : 2.

⁶⁴ The Stromato 6: 6.

⁶⁵ Sayings of St. Ambrosios p. 17.

the Body of Christ is “Life”. They excerpted this from the first apostolic tradition where the early churches depended on them as foundation, for without baptism and partaking in the Lord’s Supper, one cannot obtain the kingdom of God and the salvation and the eternal life⁶⁶.]

The Holy Bible witnessed to that... Does baptism, and expressing it with salvation, differ from what is written, “... He saved us through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.” (Tit. 3:5)

Hermas⁶⁷ saw in one of his visions the victorious church built as a tower on the water. When asked the reason it was built on water. He said, [The tower is built on water because your lives will be saved through water.]

Baptism does not only wash the dirt of the flesh but rather grants a pure conscience for the power of the resurrection of the Lord, whereby we are buried with Christ and rise again. For this reason, the church was used to baptize the catechumens the Sunday before Easter, called “Baptismal Sunday.”

Therefore, it is appropriate not only to obtain the capability of the life of holiness in the sacrament of baptism and then deny Him by our behavior, but we have to abide with a clear conscience for the resurrection of the Lord Jesus⁶⁸.

St. Basil the Great⁶⁹ talked about the effect of baptism when He answered the question: Why should baptism be through immersion in water? He said: [In baptism, there is purification of the soul from dirty, carnal thoughts, as it is written, “You shall wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.” (Ps. 51:9)

Therefore, we do not wash ourselves after each transgression, as the Jews used to do, but we have one baptism only, (Eph. 4:5) for in baptism death is carried away once, then the resurrection is once from the dead.

For this reason, the Lord granted us the “covenant of

⁶⁶ On Forgiveness of sins and Baptism 1 : 34

⁶⁷ The Shephard: Book 1 Vision 3

⁶⁸ St. Augustine refuting Festus 19

⁶⁹ On the Holy Spirit 35

baptism” carrying in it the nature of life and death.

Water achieves the picture of death, and the Holy Spirit (in the same time) grants life.

This answers the question: Why was the water related to the spirit? (John 3:5)

In baptism, we achieve two goals:

The First: is to mortify the flesh of sin (Rom. 6:6) so it may not carry the fruits of death. (Rom. 7:5)

The Second: is our life in the Spirit (Gal. 5:25) so we may have fruits for holiness.

The water receiving the body is like a tomb carrying death, but the spirit overflows power of reviving , renewing our spirits from the death of sin to our first life.

This is what he means by being born of water and spirit.

Through baptism, we are baptized to the death of Christ and His resurrection. Therefore, we accept sufferings even to the point of death joyfully, abiding in the Crucified Lord, waiting to have an inheritance with Him in the eternal glories.

“Who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.” (v.22)

After the Lord passed through the cross, He ascended to the right hand of the Father. We notice here that the word “right” does not mean the right direction for the Father has no right nor left, but it is an expression, in human terms, so we may understand the greatness of the Son.

The Lord went to His throne in heaven, who was not separate from His divinity even while His Incarnation.

All the angels, authorities, and all the heavenly hosts worship Him and glorify Him. In His ascension carrying the flesh, He declares the victory of the human race, in His Person, and their return to heaven to inherit what sin had deprived them of. Therefore, He says, “To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My father on His throne.” (Rev. 3:21)

Chapter 4

TRIBULATIONS AND THE LIFE OF HOLINESS

In this chapter, St. Peter addresses the issue of sufferings.

1. Sufferings and forsaking lusts: verses: 1-4
2. Sufferings and the judgment: verses: 5-11
3. Sufferings and the glories: verses: 12-19

1. SUFFERINGS AND FORSAKING LUSTS⁷⁰

“Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.” (v. 1)

The beginning of man’s fall is his desire to be independent from God, to be liberated from God’s will and his thought, thus living in the spirit of darkness in the flesh. He started to submit to the lust of the flesh. Therefore, he lowered his head so he may not see the heavenly matters, but to see only the earthly matters as if he will live forever on earth. The Lord Jesus suffered for us in the flesh, offering us His cross to mortify sin living in the flesh and to put to death our inner corruption, to restore health to our bodies, therefore, we can say, “How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Knowing this that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with...” (Rom. 6:2,6)

“That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.” (v. 2)

The lusts of the flesh are mortified, thus, we live the rest of our sojourning according to the will of God, according to His power and not according to the lusts of the world.

“He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.” (2 Cor. 5:15)

St. Clement of Alexandria said: [The cross of our Lord

⁷⁰ Book of “Divine Love”: “Christ was crucified for me.”

became a fort, a refuge against our former sins. Therefore, since we are renewed, let us be steadfast in the cross, in the truth, and restore our sanctification⁷¹.]

“For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in licentiousness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries.” (v. 3)

St. Peter rebukes us, in gentleness, that the days of our sojourning are few. It is enough what we have lost because of our evil conduct according to the will of the Gentiles.

Instead of the human nature with all its thoughts and lusts, we have the Crucified Christ working in us, therefore through Him, we become victorious over the lusts.

“In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you.” (v.4)

Pagans are perplexed how we, the believers took off the old man, whereby we are not attracted to the dissipation. In their confusion, they blaspheme by saying that this is due to the suppression, deprivation and ignorance of the believers, without realizing how much happiness they are in.

A lustful man convinces himself that no one can live in purity, thus, he sees the human race very weak, and if he sees any pure man, he thinks that he is hypocrite.

In the same manner, the struggling believer, who is attached to the Lord’s cross, is astonished how come people do not taste the sweetness of the pure holy life.

After St. Peter talked about the effect of the sufferings of the Lord in the life of the believer, he is encouraging him to endure sufferings by lifting his sight to the Day of Judgment.

2. Sufferings and the Judgment

“For this reason the gospel was preached also to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.” (v. 6)

⁷¹ Instructor 3 : 12.

St. Peter proclaims to those who are suffering that the Lord is ready to judge. Judgment is drawing near, how can we not endure sufferings joyfully and fear those who blaspheme against us?

He judges the living and the dead, that is, He judges the saints living by the Spirit, as well as the dead who died in sin.

He also judges the living who have not yet departed to His Second Coming, for in a moment, they will be transformed. He does not forget those who preceded and slept in the flesh. Everyone, whether young or old, since the creation, receives his reward.

For this reason, the Judge, the Lord Jesus, preached the dead. Who are the dead?

1. Perhaps, he meant those who departed from this world, carrying their sufferings for the sake of the faith, those whom people have judged according to the flesh and condemned them as deserving death, although, in God's eyes, they are alive.

2. The Judge has preached to the dead in the Spirit. (Matt. 8:22& John 5:25), that is, the evil people so they may repent and accept the condemnation of people, heeding to live according to the Spirit.

St. Augustine said: [St. Peter does not mean to describe only what happens in Hades, for the Gospel is now preached to the dead, that is, the evil unbelievers. So whenever they believe, they are judged by many tribulations and mortifying of the flesh itself. Then, they live for God according to the Spirit, where their spirits were dead when they were enslaved in their unbelief and evil doings⁷².]

What are the fruits of our continuous meditation in the Lord's Second Coming?

The early church especially among monks, used to practice three exercises, which were considered basic for the life of a believer, especially those who seek monasticism.

1. Visiting cemeteries.

2. Practicing the prayer, "Lord Jesus, have mercy upon me", or the continuous prayer, as St. Augustine called it the directed prayer,

⁷² Letter 164 ch. 7

because it is directed against the devil who is defeated by the arrows of prayer.

3. Remembering the day of judgment and the Second Coming of the Lord.

The apostle presents the third exercise as an incentive for:

1. Being serious and watchful in prayer:

St. Peter says: “Be serious and watchful in prayer.” (v. 7) Remembering the day of judgment subdues the carnal lusts, thus, one lives alert, that is, submitting to his mind, spiritual mind and not to his carnal lusts.

St. Anthony defines the alert as: [Those whose souls are alert, can discern between good and evil, heed wisely to what is good and for edification, and practice it with great thanksgiving to God⁷³.]

Let us be serious and watchful so we do not end up with those, whom **Hermas**⁷⁴ saw as lazy, old unable to move. When asked about the reason, it was mentioned, [Because your spirits are old, you lost your power because of your weakness and doubts. You became like old people who lost hope in renewing their strength and do not expect except to sleep their last sleep. Thus, you weakened because of the worldly cares and surrendered yourselves to idleness and did not cast your cares upon Him (I Peter 5:7).]

B. Our Love to the Brothers:

“And above all things have fervent love for one another, for ‘love will cover a multitude of sins.’” (v. 8)

Since our goal in worship is to attain continuous prayer and to be continuously in the bosom of God, however, there is no use if this is not supported by loving our brothers fervently, love which stems from the depth of the inner heart. Love covers the sins of others, hence God covers our sins and forgives us and makes us enjoy quiet prayers⁷⁵ acceptable to Him. Thus, our unity to God

⁷³ Filokalia p. 19

⁷⁴ The Pastor Book 1 vision 4.

⁷⁵ Refer to the interpretation of St. James 5:20 & article of Fr. Isaac in Kassian letters p. 210.

abounds.

St. Clement of Rome said: [Love unites us with God, for love covers a multitude of sins⁷⁶.]

This love stems from reflecting on the Day of Judgment, where God never forgets the labor of love, even a cup of cold water. He does not forget its reward.

When we lift our eyes to the Day of Judgment, we desire to see, even those who trouble us, as angels of God, participating in praising and glorifying God. This creates in us a deep spiritual love.

C. Hospitality to Strangers:

“Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.” (v. 9)

Reflecting on the Lord’s Second Coming on the clouds and Him calling us by our names to be in fellowship of His glories, accepting us in His eternal bosom joyfully, drives us to open our hearts and houses to our brothers, the strangers, thus, we invite them to our houses without grumbling but with great joy.

Because our fathers the monks heeded to be hospitable to strangers, sometimes they used to break their fasting hours for the sake of strangers, thus they did not deprive themselves from offering a sacrifice of love to God in the person of strangers.

D. Serving Others:

“As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever, Amen.” (v.10,11)

The more the believer directs his vision toward eternity, the more he stirs the gift, which he has received from God, without laziness. Here, we notice the following:

1. St. Peter said, “As each one”, which means that there is no one in the church who does not have a gift from God, whether a child or an old man, whether male or female, whether a priest or a lay man, whether a celibate, married or widowed, for we are all

⁷⁶ St. Clement bishop of Rome, p. 40.

members in the mysterious Body of Christ, and there cannot be an idle member without a function in that mysterious Body.

2. “Has received a gift”, which means that no member has credit in whatever gifts he has. St. John Chrysostom said: [God distributes His gifts with the measure that is fit for our salvation. God gives one person less gifts than the other, not because He does not love him much, but because He knows he cannot inflame more than that gift. If God offers him more gifts, he will become negligent.

God offers another person more gifts than the other, not because he is better than his brother, but because God knows that that person can work with that many gifts, and without that many gifts, he will fail in his job.

Hence, God, the Beneficent and Pantocrator does everything that is good for our salvation.

3. “As good steward of the manifold grace of God”: meaning that these gifts were given from God’s hand, not for vain glory but for the ministry of the church and all the human race.

St. John Chrysostom said: [There are different members in the church, some are more honorable than others, for example, some celibates, some widows, some married and all compliment one another.

One’s gift may be less than the other’s, but it may be indispensable, so if that member is delayed from his job, many other jobs will be delayed⁷⁷.]

4. “If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

As the preacher hides so that the Word of God may appear clearly, likewise anyone who is granted a gift from God has to know that he cannot do it unless God gives him the power to implement it.

Thus, the Father is glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and dominion.

The word “Amen” does not mean the conclusion of his talk,

⁷⁷ Brotherly Love, p. 423 – 424.

but it means “let it be so!”

3. The Sufferings and the Glories:

“Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.” (v.12,13)

This statement reveals the severe persecution, which the church had to go through in Asia. He calls it “the fiery trial”

This matter is not strange, for he tells them “do not think it strange”. Temptations and sufferings are essential in the believer’s life. Though they are fiery trials, yet they are beneficial for two reasons:

1. To try them: a student during exams stays late at night studying, but he does that joyfully, waiting for the success. Gold and silver are purified in the crucible to burn the impurities, so they may shine more. “You have tried us O Lord as .You purify silver⁷⁸.”

St. Cyprian the Martyr⁷⁹ urges the people of Thibares for martyrdom saying: [The apostle is teaching us the same commandments of the Lord and the heavenly teachings. The Lord is encouraging us saying, “Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come everlasting life.” (Lk. 18:29,30)

He says, “Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you, and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man’s sake. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven, for in like manner their fathers did it to the prophets.” (Lk. 6:22,23)

The Lord wants us to rejoice and leap for joy in tribulations, for where there are persecutions, crowns of faith are granted and the soldiers of Christ are purified and the heaven is opened to the

⁷⁸ Deut. 13:3, Joshua son of Sirach 27: 5, Rom. 5: 2.

⁷⁹ Epistle 55 (Exford ed. Epistle No. 28)

martyrs.]

A believer has to go through these tribulations, whether during persecution or during peaceful times, for the war from the devil against God's children exists at all times. The war does not have to be external, but it may be internal against sin. **St. Cyprian** said in his eleventh epistle: [During persecution, man is crowned with a crown of martyrdom. Also, during peaceful times, man is crowned with the crown of a pure conscious⁸⁰.]

2. “As you partake of the sufferings of Christ, rejoice....”: The secret of our joy is not just being purified to receive the crown, but to partake of the sufferings of Christ... What great glory when we have a share of His suffering!

St. John Chrysostom said: [“For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us so our consolation also abounds through Christ.” (2 Cor. 1:5) He elevates our souls, considering our sufferings dedicated specially for Him. How great is our joy when we are partakers of Christ's sufferings, and for His sake, we suffer!⁸¹]

“If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified.” (v.14)

As long as the sufferings and the reproaches do not stem from personal enmity or from a mistake, which the believer has committed, but in the name of Christ, he is blessed. The secret of this blessing is that the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of glory, dwells on him for the sake of the Lord. He dwells on Him to carry his labor, to support him, and to grant him glory. Thus, the evil person blasphemes against the Holy Spirit in the person of the believer.

“But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, or evildoer, or as a busy-body in other people's matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.” (v.15,16)

One may be ashamed if he is punished because of committing crime, murder, robbery or evil doing, or interfering in others' business.

⁸⁰ Oxford edition letter # 13

⁸¹ Divine Love p. 360 – 361.

However, if he endures sufferings as a Christian, that is, because of his relationship with the Lord Christ, then he should glorify God because he does not deserve that honor.

As the Lord Jesus has told His disciples, “A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you...In the world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” (John 15:20&16:33)⁸²

However, one may complain saying: Till when are we going to endure suffering for the sake of glory?

St. Peter confirms his answer by saying:

1. The time has come for judgment.
2. Salvation requires strife and perseverance.
3. We are in the hands of the Faithful Creator.

1. The time has come for judgment:

“For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?” (v.17)

Perhaps St. Peter meant that the Lord has ordered the destruction of Jerusalem and Solomon’s temple because the Jews have rejected the Lord and persecuted His disciples. This is a proof that the judgment is coming for sure, and there is no need to hurry. Therefore, may the believer endure hardships waiting for the eternal glories.

2. Salvation requires strife:

“If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?” (v.18)

St. Peter is calming those who cannot wait for God’s judgment because of their sufferings. He is telling them that the salvation of one’s soul is not easy, but requires struggle and effort. Since the Lord Jesus said, “...The kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent takes it by force.” (Matt. 11: 12), therefore, we, the sinners, should patiently endure sufferings for our salvation. He is reminding us with the Lord’s saying, “Strive to enter through the narrow gate.” (Lk. 13:24) Hence, every vespers, we pray saying: [If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where shall

⁸² Refer to article of sufferings in the book of “Divine Love”, p. 355 – 366.

I the sinner appear. The burden and the heat of the day I could not endure because of the weakness of my humanity, therefore, O merciful God, consider me as one of the eleventh hour...^{83]}

St. Anthony said: [We cannot say that behaving in righteousness is impossible, but it is not easy. You cannot become wise or good in a moment, but you need to study, practice, and to continuously struggle⁸⁴.]

Therefore, we are required to endure afflictions, voluntary, that is, to crucify our lusts and to offer the sacrifice of voluntary poverty and the labor of piety and sacrifice for the sake of the love of the Lord Jesus.

3. We are in the hands of the Faithful Creator:

“Therefore, let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.”

The Lord Jesus offered us a lesson in that when He Himself cried on the cross saying, “Father, into Your hands I commend my spirit.” (Lk. 23:46)

Why do you fear sufferings, for the Lord has assured us that one of our hairs cannot fall without our Heavenly Father’s permission?

He is the Beneficent, as the church calls Him in all prayers, therefore, we submit to Him our lives. If He allows temptations, it is for our own good, just as the clay surrenders to the hands of the pottery.

Even if we enter the oven, it is sufficient that the eyes of the Pottery are on us all the time. He knows the right temperature, our position inside the oven, and the time enough to prepare us as vessels for honor.

When sickness or troubles surround a child, his father and mother show more love to him and give him more attention; likewise, when tribulations surround a believer, God and the church are more compassionate toward him.

⁸³ Agbeya Prayers.

⁸⁴ Filokalia p.22, 29

Chapter 5

OUR CHURCH RELATIONS IN THE LORD JESUS

In this chapter, St. Peter addresses the issue of pastoral relationships:

1. Advices to the pastors
2. Advices to the flock.
3. Concluding advices.

1. Advices to the Pastors:

“The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed.” (v.1)

We notice that the word “elders” was translated in Acts 20:17 as priests and in Acts 20:28 as overseers. It is obvious that he means, by the word “elders” the bishops and the priests. **St. Jerome** said: [The early church used to call the bishops and priests “elders”, but he addressed the deacons separately⁸⁵.]

St. Peter said “I who am a fellow elder” without specifying that he is their boss as some claim, but he is one of them. This is what the Lord Jesus put as a constitution for His disciples, that there is no one greater than the other, but whoever wants to be first has to be last.

“Witness of the sufferings of Christ and a partaker of the glory that will be revealed”: St. Peter writes here with great wisdom for he is focusing on the sufferings in the life of a believer, and he is connecting that to the sufferings of the Lord Christ. He is assuring them that He has seen the Lord’s sufferings, thus he is not talking theoretically but from experience as a witness.

Since he is relating sufferings to the glories, he reveals that he is a partaker of the hope toward eternal glory.

⁸⁵ Letters of Eronemos.

Advices to the pastors:

First: “Shepherd the flock of God, which is among you,”

Service is shepherding, for the servant offers to those whom he is serving all their needs, not from himself but from the Shepherd of the shepherds, the Lord Jesus who said, “I am the good Shepherd.”

It is a precious flock for it is the flock of God, whoever takes care of it offers a service to the Owner of the flock Himself, and whoever neglects it insults Him.

Father Ephrahat said: [You shepherds, follow the example of the old good shepherds, for Jacob used to shepherd Laban’s flock and he used to struggle and be watchful, hence he received the reward. Jacob said to Laban: “These twenty years I have been with you; your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried their young, and I have not eaten the rams of your flock, that which was torn by beasts I did not bring to you; I bore the loss of it. You required it from my hand, whether stolen by day or stolen by night. There I was! In the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night, and my sleep departed from my eyes.” (Gen. 31:38-40)

As Jacob was a shepherd, also Joseph and his brothers, Moses, David, Amos, all were shepherds and they were good shepherds.

Now, my beloved, why were the shepherds chosen to be shepherds for the human race? Definitely, to learn how the shepherd takes care of his flock, and struggles for their own good. Then, after they attain the attributes of a good shepherd, they are chosen to shepherd human beings⁸⁶.]

Second: “Serving as overseers” : that is to watch over them with open eyes and to be wise in directing them. **St. John Chrysostom** said: [He has to be very alert, fervent in the spirit as if he is breathing fire⁸⁷.]

St. Gregory of Nyssa⁸⁸ said: [How important is wisdom for the shepherds because:

⁸⁶ Pastoral Love, p. 463 –464.

⁸⁷ Pastoral Love, p. 734.

⁸⁸ Article “Be wise” in the book of “Pastoral Love” p. 727 –759.

1. They are shepherding precious souls whom the Lord has died for!

2. The diversity of the traits and the circumstances of each individual.

3. The diversity of ages and races.

Third: “Not by constraint but willingly”: The shepherd does not consider the ministry as a heavy burden but he ministers joyfully for he is a minister in the vine of the Heavenly Father.

Fourth: “Not for dishonest gain but eagerly”: The shepherd does not serve his flock for achieving temporal goals but with alert mind toward the flock, he cares for their salvation and their relationship with the Lord.

St. Augustine said: [Those who shepherd the flock of Christ to win the sheep for themselves and not for Christ, love themselves and not Christ⁸⁹.]

Fifth: “Not as being lords over those entrusted to you,”: The shepherd does not consider the flock as his inheritance to dominate them, but he loves and cares for them.

Sixth: “But being examples to the flock”: The shepherd is an example to his flock; his behavior, conduct and his life is a practical sermon and a fifth gospel to his flock, more than his words.

St. Gregory said: [If the shepherd goes astray, his flock will go astray too.]

Seventh: The shepherd lifts his eyes continuously toward heaven waiting for the Second Coming of the Shepherd of shepherds to grant him the heavenly inheritance.

“And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.” He is the Chief, full of glory, when He appears, He offers the shepherds, who followed his example and cared for his flock, to share with Him His eternal glory.

⁸⁹ Article of “Love distinguishes between the shepherd and the heirling” in “Pastoral Love” p. 493 -526

2. Advices to the Flock:

“likewise, you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.”
(v.5,6,7)

St. Peter directs the attention of the flock to the humility of our Lord Jesus Christ, therefore he asks us to do the following:

A. Submission to the Shepherds:

Humility is the garment, which one has to put on, therefore, St. Peter said, “Be clothed with humility”

Humility is manifested in obedience and submission to one another, how much more should we submit to those whom God has appointed for our spiritual care! (Heb. 13:7)

St. Philokinos said: [I warn you, my brothers, not to argue about the counsel which our spiritual guides give us, lest the earth opens its mouth and swallows us like those who disobeyed Moses and the earth swallowed them⁹⁰.]

St. John Climacus said: [How blessed is the one who mortifies his will and leaves God, his Father and Teacher, to arrange everything in his life; he will be at the right hand of the Crucified Christ⁹¹.]

B. Submission in the Lord:

Submission is not personally, but in the Lord. Therefore, St. Peter said, “Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God.”

The one who grants the help is not the teachers themselves, or their righteousness or their private teachings, but the grace of God, which supports them.

St. Augustine⁹² resembles this grace to a lady who has a secret song praising and saying, “God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

⁹⁰ True Fathers of worship, Syrian Monastery.

⁹¹ Ladder to heaven and levels of virtues.

⁹² City of God 17 : 4.

St. Augustine⁹³ resembles the shepherd to a clerk who utters what the judge tells him, even if it contradicts with his wishes.

Thus, we submit to what God says on their tongues, not responsible for their mistakes for God will judge them accordingly.

C. Looking at God's Care:

We are not distracted by the care and love of the shepherds, but through them, we see God's love and His watchful care. "Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you."

When we call the priest "Our father", we call him that in God the One Father. When we call him "Our shepherd", it is through the Great Shepherd, who only has the flock, and He is the true Bridegroom who has the bride. (John 3:29, 10:11)

St. John Chrysostom said: [The flock is God's fellow workers (1 Cor. 3:9) The flock belongs to its owner; the flock is the building of God who belongs to its owner⁹⁴.]

Therefore, the wise flock is the one who does not get attached to the shepherds personally, but to the Lord as a good Shepherd who cares about all our matters.

3. Concluding Advices:

St. Peter concludes his epistle by talking about the devil, our adversary, who wants us to perish. Thus, one should not hate his brother who annoys him, but the devil.

"Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. But may the God of all peace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen." (v.8-11)

The cause of the battle and the sufferings in this world is not the human beings but it is a battle between God and Satan. The

⁹³ Pastoral Love, p. 57.

⁹⁴ Pastoral Love, p. 14.

devil is the enemy, and God is the Lord of all grace who perfects, establishes, strengthens and settles us for a victorious life.

St. Augustine said: [We should not hate our brothers, but their enmities⁹⁵.]

St. John Chrysostom, the suffering Archbishop said: [Till when are we going to oppose one another? Till when are we going to fight one another, so that the devil may laugh at us?⁹⁶]

2. The devil is a very strong enemy, like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. He is our enemy because of his enmity to God, and we are God's image. He is our enemy because of his pride. He annoys us because he is jealous that we took his position from which he fell.

In spite of all that, he does not have dominion over us unless we surrender to his will. He can deceive people but he cannot oblige anyone. He seeks to devour anyone but he cannot approach anyone, unless one allows him, then he has the right over him.

St. Shenouda the archimandrite⁹⁷ wrote an article about the incapability of the devil to dominate the children of God.

St. John Chrysostom wrote three articles to refute those who say that the devil has dominion over us, by saying⁹⁸:

- a. The devils could not enter the pigs except with permission from the Lord Jesus. (Matt. 8:28-38)
- b. The devils could not tempt Job without God's permission.
- c. Our negligence allows the devil to deceive us, while our alertness and vigil make us conquerors.
- d. We cannot blame the devil but ourselves, for if we stumble because of the devil, there are some who stumble from the beautiful creation, (Rom 1: 21-25), others stumble from the members of his body created to glorify God, others stumble from the cross which is the power of God for salvation (1 Cor. 1:28-32), others stumble from the Lord Jesus Himself, the Conqueror and

⁹⁵ Sermons on certain chapters from the New Testament.

⁹⁶ Spiritual values of Neyrouz Feast, p.45.

⁹⁷ Deacon Joseph Habib translated it and printed it in the year 1968.

⁹⁸ Pamphlet about "Does the devil have dominion over you?" 1967 edition.

Giver of life. (John 9:39), others stumble from the apostles preaching the truth. (2 Cor. 2:16)

3. St. Peter asks us to attack the devil by faith

Let us believe that the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory cannot invite us without offering us the capability to reach our goal. His invitation is accompanied by His divine support to endure sufferings and to attack the devil, so His promises may be fulfilled with us.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem, say⁹⁹: [Is there anything more scary than the devil? Nevertheless, we cannot find a shield against him except the faith, for it is an invisible shield aimed at an invisible enemy who shoots fiery darts at those who are negligent.

Since he is an invisible enemy, yet we have in faith a strong shield, as St. Paul said, “Above all taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.” (Eph. 6:16)

When the devil throws his fiery darts of the lustful evil, then faith reveals the Judgment Day, which puts off this fire.

Conclusion:

“By Silvanus, our faithful brother as I consider him, I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God in which you stand.” (v.12)

Perhaps Silvanus is the same as Silas who is mentioned in the book of Acts, (Acts 15: 22,32,40), and he is the same person mentioned in St. Paul’s epistle to the Thessolonians. (1 Thess.1:1, 2 Thessl 1:1, 2 Cor. 1:19)

“As I consider him”, in the Greek origin, does not mean that he is doubting, but it means that he is certain.

He called Silvanus, “our faithful brother”, because Silvanus, probably, was a minister to the Gentiles.

This concise epistle was for their exhortation, not to study it theoretically, but “in which they stand”, that is they live by the true grace of God.

“She who is in Babylon, elect together with you,

⁹⁹ Catechetical Lect. 5 :4.

greet you; and so does Mark my son.” (v.13)

In the introduction, we mentioned that Babylon was, most probably, Old Cairo.

There is an opinion, which has no proof at all, that Babylon was St. Peter’s wife, who was a chosen wife from the Lord, who used to help him and she was martyred before him.

Our brothers the Catholics interpret “Mark my son”, as being him knowing Christianity through St. Peter after the resurrection of the Lord, and they claimed that St. Mark never heard the Lord Jesus nor followed Him¹⁰⁰.

However, it is well known that the Passover was prepared in the house of St. Mark, (Mark 14:13,14), and that that was the first church in the world.

He was the young man who followed the Lord, and during His arrest, he left his cloak and fled away. (Mark 14:51,52)

The French Encyclopedia¹⁰¹, whose publishers are Catholics, say that the claim that St. Mark was a disciple of St. Peter, was not true.

It is mentioned in the Catholic Theotokias: [O the apostle and evangelist St. Mark, speaking of divine matters, you have received the crown of apostleship. The apostles, your companions, are proud of you, and we too¹⁰².]

Thus, when St. Peter called St. Mark “My son” this was a proof of his love, his old age, and that they were related, for St. Peter’s wife was a cousin of St. Mark’s father. St. Peter used to visit St. Mark a lot¹⁰³.

“Greet one another with a holy kiss of love. Peace to you all who are in Christ Jesus. Amen.” (v.14)

Since the apostolic age, the people in the churches used to kiss one another. That is why during the Divine Liturgy, the deacon says, “Kiss one another with a holy kiss.” This is very evident from

¹⁰⁰ Treasure of valuable worship in the saints’ stories (Nissan 25)

¹⁰¹ Volume 16, p. 871.

¹⁰² Kiahk Month 175 – 177.

¹⁰³ Refer to the book “The Evangelist St. Mark” by Pope Shenouda.

the following¹⁰⁴:

1. The sayings of the saints Paul and Peter at the end of their epistles. (Rom. 16:16, 1 Cor. 16:20. 2 Cor. 13:12)
2. In the commands of the apostles: [Let no one have any hatred or hypocrisy between his brother, then let each one kiss the other with a holy kiss.]
3. **St. John Chrysostom** assured us that the kiss was used in the church since the apostolic age¹⁰⁵.
4. **St. Dionysus** said: [May the divine kiss be given during the uncovering of the prospherine.]
5. **Tertullian** said: [It is the custom now that during fasting, we use the kiss of peace, which is the seal of prayer, to conclude our prayers with the brothers; therefore, our prayers may ascend to heaven with great acceptance. For how can our prayers be perfect without the holy kiss?¹⁰⁶]

He concludes by sending the peace to all of them, the inner peace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

¹⁰⁴ Sayings of the Fathers in explaining "Tasbeha and Liturgy", 1958 edition by St. Mary Church in Moharram Beh, p. 43.

¹⁰⁵ Article 24 in the interpretation of First Corinthians.

¹⁰⁶ Tert. On Prayer 17.