



EL-MANARA

AN INITIATIVE OF THE MEDIA COMMITTEE - DIOCESE OF SYDNEY & AFFILIATED REGIONS

COPTS' NEWS

"Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men." - Luke 2:52



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Thankyou for your kind donation

Happy Father's Day

Find this issue online at www.elmanara.org.au

The Shepherd & Mother of Light Ministry

With the Blessings of HH Pope Shenouda III, Pope of Alexandria & Patriarch of the See of St Mark and all Countries of Immigration and under the auspices of the Bishopric of Public, Ecumenical & Social Services, Counsellor Amir Ramzy and a group representing The Shepherd and Mother of Light Ministry will arrive in Sydney in a mission during the period from 7th to the 11th of September 2011.

The Shepherd and Mother of Light Ministry's purpose is to serve the most needy Copts in Egypt who live under the poverty line. Its vision is a better life for the most needy to become human and productive. Its mission is to lift needy Copts from their state of extreme poverty to a human level of existence focusing on their development to become self sufficient. The Ministry develop them spiritually and economically by insuring their connection to a church, educating their children in education centers and schools, enrolling them in literacy centers, establishing small businesses/projects for them, referring them to our employment centers, and teaching them skills to get jobs,... etc.

The Purpose of the Visit

Present the ministry of the Shepherd and Mother of Light to Copts who live in Sydney to share the responsibly of taking care of their brothers and sisters in Egypt who live under the poverty line (poorest of the poor) through organizing trips to Upper Egypt to visit them in the villages and experiencing serving the poor in person and/or being involved with any of the development programs of the ministry (spirituality, education, economic development, housing, health & special needs).

HH Pope Shenouda III wrote a supporting statement about the ministry in El-Keraza magazine. Also HG Bishop Moussa Bishop of Youth Affairs & HG Bishop Youannes wrote supporting letters for this ministry.

Saint Mark Ski Trip, Perisher Ski Fields



By RAY SEDRAK

On the 21st to 24th of July a group of 55 youth from St Mark's Church undertook a trip to Perisher Ski Fields. The group ranged from keen first timers, to experienced veterans, but everyone from every level of competence had a fantastic time! With a relatively even mix, the girls clearly showed they were able to

keep up with the boys. The group was blessed enough to have the company of Abouna Augustinos for a couple of days of the trip itself.

Gathering at church on the Thursday evening the crowd were very eager to finally get on the bus, which in true Egyptian style, arrived later than the Egyptians themselves! Finally we were packed and ready to embark on

the 6 hour journey to the snow fields – of course factoring in a Macca's stop on the way!

After a restless night full of expectation, excitement and one bumpy bus ride, we finally arrived on the Friday morning to a pleasantly covered ski field! The sleeping tablets had worn off, as did the sore necks and stiff backs, *(continue on page 5...)*

Invitation to attend the Coptic New Year Carnival 1728AM - Feast of Martyrs (El Nayrouz)

Dear beloved congregation of the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Sydney,

'Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come' (Revelation 1:4).

HG Bishop Daniel is congratulating all of you on the occasion of the Coptic New Year of the Martyrs 1728AM praying the LORD to bless you in this New Year so that you may all remain steadfast in witnessing for Christ during these difficult times in which we now live

I write requesting the blessings of all of you attending the official launch of the Coptic New Year – Feast of Martyrs 1728 AM (2011).

The Coptic New Year is one of the biggest feasts celebrated in the life of the Coptic Orthodox Community, which is the beginning of the New

Coptic Year. This Feast has been celebrated since the ancient times of the pharaohs and has been part of the life of the Church since that time.

On this very important occasion, the Coptic Orthodox Church in Sydney will be celebrating the Carnival of the Coptic New Year which will be attended by the congregation of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Sydney, including the Coptic Orthodox Colleges and youth.

I kindly ask you to join us in celebrating the Carnival of Martyrs on Sunday the 11th of September 2011, at St. Mary and St. Mina Coptic Orthodox Cathedral, 339 Forest Road Bexley from 3:00pm to 5:00pm.

The Initial Proposed Programme will be as follows:

- 3:00pm - Thanksgiving praise and procession

- 3:20pm - Talk by Rev. Fr. Fiopateer Gamiel - Diocese of El Geza
- 3:30pm - Power Point Presentation on the Martyrs & Choir
- 4:00pm - Presentation by the Students of the 3 Coptic Colleges in Sydney
- 4:50pm - Final speech by V. Rev. Fr. Tadros Simon- Vicar General
- 5:00pm - Closing prayers

The Carnival will be followed by Vespers in all the Coptic Orthodox Churches at the Diocese of Sydney.

We look forward to having you attend this Great Occasion with us.

May the Lord Jesus Christ bless you.

V. Rev. Fr. Tadros Simon
Vicar General
Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Sydney & Affiliated Regions

MORE NAYROUZ CELEBRATION DETAILS ON PAGE 7

The Feast of the Nayrouz

By HH POPE SHENOUDA III

In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit, One God. Amen.

The Feast of the Nayrouz means the feast of commemorating the martyrs and we do not commemorate the martyrs once a year, but it is as if we commemorate them every day. If those amongst you read the Synaxarium you will find that every day it says, "In this day the Church commemorates..." and inevitably they contain a number of martyrs.

The Feasts for the martyrs is not just a feast unique to the Coptic Orthodox Church only, but all the churches have some form of commemoration for the martyrs. This is because the martyrs have in the church a special position which is greater than all the saints of the church. It is greater than all the patriarchs in the service and all the monks in the contemplative life. The martyrs occupy the number one position but the question is why?

The martyrs in their martyrdom demonstrated the deepest form of love towards God. Our Lord Jesus Christ said, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" Jn15:13. The martyrs loved God more than their personal lives, and they laid down that life for Him. In their martyrdom they not only displayed the depth of their love to God, but it also contains the depth of their courage.

It was with the depth of courage that they witnessed to Christ publicly even though the consequences of that witness may have led to their death. This is why St. John the Baptist for example, whom the Lord described as, "among those born of women there was not risen one greater than John the Baptist" Mt11:11, was a witness and a martyr at the same time. It is very likely that the term 'martyr' came from the term 'to witness', to witness to the faith, even if this ultimately lead to the person's death for the sake of that witness.

We notice that our fathers the apostles who received the faith from Our Lord Jesus Christ and spread it in the world, almost all ended their lives with martyrdom. This is with the exception of St. John the beloved who ended up being severely tortured more than those who were martyred.

The martyrs therefore have the depth of love for God whom they loved more than their lives. They also have the depth of faith. The faith which they held onto until death and this faith was not stopped by any threats or sufferings. They fulfilled the true depth of our Lord Jesus Christ's command, "you shall be witnesses to Me" Act 1:8.

Furthermore they were an incredible example to all the generations in witnessing to the faith and being steadfast despite all the torture and persecutions. They are the ones who preserved the faith for us with their blood until it was given to us intact. This is why we consider the martyrs to be the seeds of faith, and the foundation of faith in the church.

It is possible for any one to witness to the Lord but it is not possible for just

any one to die because of their witness to the Lord. They were therefore an example to all the believers in their love, and in their faith, and in their witness to the Lord, and also for their courage. When you read the stories of each one of these saints you find that they had complete faith in their witness to the Lord, and they had exceptional courage. In their steadfastness and bearing their sufferings they were brave.

Martyrdom began from the beginning of Christianity and has remained with her throughout her journey through time. It started from the beginning of Christianity for as our Lord said, "In the world you will have tribulation" Jn 16:33. Many are those who tried to run away from this tribulation but the martyrs did not run away from tribulation, rather they bore it and persevered through it. He said to them, "the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service" Jn 16:2. He also said to them, "I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves" Mt 10:19. When Our Lord Christ called people to Christianity, He did not call them to a path strewn with rose petals, but He told them you will be taking a path containing tribulation and the threat of death.

Despite this they bore, and were patient, and steadfast all their lives. There even came a time when death was desired by people. It was not just the overcoming of the fear of death but it had become a desire for them to depart this world and be with Christ. As St. Paul says, "having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better" Phi 1:23. To the extent that once 30000 Copts went out of Damanhor towards Alexandria seeking martyrdom and they sang hymns and praised God on the way. Death had become a desire to them.

When the day of St. Fam the Soldier had arrived he wore his finest clothes, and when they asked him about why he had done this he said that today was the day of his wedding feast and that he was going to the wedding feast. St. Antony, the father of all the monks also sought martyrdom, despite monasticism being an escape from the world it was never an escape from martyrdom. He came out of the wilderness to Alexandria seeking martyrdom. He would on many occasions strengthen the believers publicly in front of the people, but God did not permit for him to be martyred for God had preserved him for another purpose.

What is amazing is that someone like St. John the Baptist received his martyrdom whilst Christ was still on the earth. It was possible for Christ to have save him if He so wished. However Our Lord allowed for him to be martyred so that He can add to St. John's crowns the crown of martyrdom.

From those martyrs who loved martyrdom there is also the great St. Ignatius the Bishop of Antioch and who the Antiochian patriarchs are named after to this day. They take the name Mar Ignatius as well as another name. This saint was being taken to Rome to be martyred, and the believers in Rome wanted to save him from death,

and kidnap him from his captors and prevent him from being brought before the emperor. St. Ignatius sent them a remarkable letter which can be found in the writings of the apostolic fathers, as he is considered an apostolic father. In it he tells them quite plainly that he feared that their love for him was going to cause him harm. Having laboured all this way in his life to this point are they going to cause him to begin the journey again? They are going to throw him to the lions and that if the lions did not eat him, he will provoke them into eating him. It is a wonderful letter in the writings of the apostolic fathers. This saint was ultimately thrown to the lions that devoured him, but in that night he appeared in the spirit to the believers and strengthened them.

The people by martyrdom use to feel the approaching joy of meeting Christ, and meeting those in heaven, and this was for them far more important than the joys of this earth. So in addition to their faith in Christ and Christianity they believed in heaven and the angels, etc...

They use to consider death the quickest way to paradise. The strike of the sword took a minute or part of a minute. This was insignificant compared to finding themselves in the arms of Christ all of a sudden. Even the mothers would encourage their children with this understanding as they faced martyrdom. Martyrdom enlisted all types of people from the community: children, youth and elders, women and men. For example, St. Demiana was martyred and the forty other virgins with her. She rebuked her father initially when he fled from martyrdom; he then returned and gained the crown of martyrdom. Her father was a ruler over the area of Zafaran.

The most severe persecution for Christians came during the reign of Emperor Diocletian. This is why from the beginning of the reign of this emperor we started the Coptic calendar. I told you that they looked upon martyrdom as the quickest and most secure way to entering paradise, but that depended on them being martyred straight away. However there were those who were not that fortunate and were tortured for long periods. Often it took someone to intervene and try to influence the officials to martyr the person.

It was bearing this torture which raises their importance as well. There was also during these times of torture a special grace granted to them which allowed them to bear the suffering, and be patient in their pain. When you hear the stories of the martyrs and what kind of tortures they went through, you are amazed and ask how could they have accepted all this? There is no doubt that there was a special grace that protected them. It protected them in bearing the pain, and in being steadfast in the faith despite all their sufferings.

I told you that the severest persecution was during the time of Emperor Diocletian but that does not mean that the persecution has ended. When we talk about St. Peter the seal of the martyrs it does not mean



that martyrdom has ended. When we talk about 'the seal of martyrs' it may mean that he was the last Pope to be martyred by the Roman Empire. It could also be a reference to him being the last Pope in whose papacy the communal martyrdom ended, because martyrdom can take place to individuals or it could take place to entire cities. For example the city of Isna, is called the city of martyrs because the entire city was martyred. Also like the Theban Legion which involved the martyrdom of over 6000 individuals.

It was through these martyrdoms and steadfastness that they embarrassed the state. It was either for the state to win over the Copts and for them to become her support, by stopping the persecution, or it losses them without gain. The state eventually ended the persecution and the Emperor Constantine in the Edict of Milan of 313AD granted the freedom of religion and the Copts were no longer killed because of their Christianity.

We want to know how the Church prepared her children for martyrdom. It prepared them with a deep steadfast faith and it would tell them of what use to happen in the days of the early church and our fathers the apostles including the great miracles that took place. It also prepared them with the books of those who defended the faith or the apologetics. They would also encourage them by telling them that the time is near, and the Lord is coming soon. They would often write in their letters the term 'maran atha' meaning 'The Lord is coming'. The term 'marai' in the Syrian language means 'the lord' and 'atha' means 'coming'. They would also say that the Lord is near.

They also encouraged them in strengthening their spiritual lives, so the life of chastity spread, not just for the sake of a love for the life of chastity, but at the least so as not to bear children to worry over in the time of persecution and death. This is why St. Paul when he talks about his life of chastity says, "But I want you to be without care." 1 Cor 7:31. When he talks about being without care, he means without care in the time of persecution as to what will happen to their children.

Furthermore the Church took care of the families of those martyred and provided for them. The Church also took care of the relics of the martyrs. St. Youlios began to write the stories of the martyrs and preserve the relics of the martyrs.

(continued on page 7...)

The Blessings of the Saints in Our Life

By HG BISHOP DANIEL

Romans 8:35-39...

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation of distress, or persecution or famine, or nakedness or peril, or sword? As it is written: 'For Your sake we are killed all day long. We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.' Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. for I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels or principalities, nor powers nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Next week, we will celebrate the Feast of El Nayrouz, which is the start of the Coptic New Year 1728.

And on this day, we honour those who offered their lives to the Lord as a sweet smelling sacrifice, by witnessing their faith, with great love and commitment.

And so, to remember these saints, and keep their message alive in our hearts every day, our church adopted a calendar called the "Calendar of Martyrs".

And because we love them so much, we number each year as being: "in the year of the martyrs."

But I want to ask... what is martyrdom? Is it something that only happened in the past, to those who shed their blood for the sake of their beloved Lord Jesus?

Or is martyrdom something that can still be alive today?

In Greek, the word 'MARTYR' means 'TO WITNESS', and so this means that martyrdom is not only in the form of bloodshed, but in any way that makes us witness for the Lord.

For example...

We can live the life of martyrdom today, through living a life of righteousness, and being a good example for others. In this way, we can be strong witnesses for the Lord.

For example, we see how the story of St Anthony, had a great affect on the people of Rome, and it became the reason for monasticism to spread there. Also, when St Augustine read the story of St Anthony, he was greatly affected, and this led him to repent.

We can live the life of martyrdom today, through living a life of repentance.

For example, we see how God was merciful to saints like St Moses the Black and St Mary the Egyptian, and many others. We see how God helped them in their struggle not to return to their sin again. Don't you think that this struggle is a form of martyrdom? Their repentant lives were a great witness to others, of their faith and love, and that's why their spiritual fathers (St Isidore and St Zocima), glorified God in them.

We can live the life of martyrdom today, through living a life of love for others.

For example, it was because St Bishoy was full of love, that the Lord gave him the blessing of seeing the Him. Also, it was because St Stephen the Archdeacon was full of love for his enemies, that God gave him the honour of seeing the glory of heaven.

The Lord said in Matthew 5:8, "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God." Don't you think that these people who are full of love, are the best witnesses for the Lord? Even the Lord Himself said, that love will be the sign that will differentiate you from others.

We can live the life of martyrdom today, through living a life of serving others.

And we have many examples... We have the example of Deacon Habib Girgis. He spent all his life serving the church and establishing the Sunday School movement. He became a great witness for others that many wanted to be his disciples. One of them was a young man named Nazeer Gayed, who was the fruit of Habib Girgis's successful ministry.

Also the example of Fr Bishoy Kamel. This priest lived his whole life to serve others. He was a very effective witness to the Lord, and through his example, many people converted to Christianity, and many Christians repented and lived holy lives. Don't you think this life of service is a life of martyrdom?

And the list is long...

So what we can learn here, is that each one of us can make the life of martyrdom and witnessing, relevant in our lives every day, by living a life of purity and righteousness.

+++

So what are some of the benefits we can gain in our life from learning about the saints?

There are 5 main points:

1. they give us a good example of how we should live
2. they strengthen our faith
3. they fill us with humbleness
4. they teach us wisdom
5. they encourage us on our spiritual journey

The 1st benefit is the good example they give...

In our church, we have a very great variety of saints.

For every virtue you want to achieve, you will find a multitude of saints guiding you by their example.

For example, if you want to live the life of repentance, you can read the story of St Moses the Black, or St Mary the Egyptian, or St Augustine, or St Baessa.

If you want to live the life of helping the poor and needy people, you can read the story of Anba Abraam, and St Nicolas.

If you want to live the life of service, you can read the story of St Bakhomious, St Paul the Apostle, and Fr Bishoy Kamel.

If you want to live the life of long-

suffering, you can read the story of St Marina the monk, or St Annasimon, or St Moses the Black.

And the list goes on and on...

But here, we must stop and mention a very important issue...

The point is not to imitate the saint literally in their way of life, but to learn their virtues and apply them in your life.

For example, you don't have to live the life of martyrdom by bloodshed. But you can live the life of the martyrs by following in their steps of: having strong faith, having courage, having long-suffering, and looking forward for eternal life. All of these virtues we can achieve with God's grace.

Maybe we are not able to pray all day and night like St Arsanious, but we can learn from his example, by: loving to pray, loving to be in the presence of God, and trying to grow in our relationship with Christ all the time.

Also, we cannot live like the hermits in the desert, who fast for many days without any food, and spend years alone in solitude, and live in silence. But we can learn from their example by: loving to fast, loving to spend time alone with the Lord each day, speaking only when necessary, and saying words that are of benefit to others.

So the point is not to imitate the Saints way of life, but to learn from their example and virtues.

Then you read, for example, about the repentant saints, try to be like them in their struggle: take them as an example in their life of repentance and how they never returned to the sin again, take them as an example in the way their hearts were very sorry for their sin, take from them their love for God and their return to Him.

The 2nd benefit the saints have in our life is that they strengthen our faith...

When we look at saints like St George, St Demiana, St Samuel the Confessor, etc, we see how they were holding fast to the true faith, even to their last breath!

They were willing to be persecuted and even die for the sake of witnessing to the truth. And they accepted all kinds of persecution with joy, because they considered the gift of eternal life more precious than their earthly life.

And that's why St Paul said to the Romans (8:18): "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

Take for example the life of St Athanasius... he was exiled 4 times, he was insulted and accused, and he was told, "The whole world is against you!" Imagine, how much did this wonderful saint endure for the sake of protecting and preserving our faith!

It is for the sake of this faith, that saints suffered and were martyred in all generations!

And how beautiful is the symbolism of St Paul the hermit wanting to be buried in the robe of St Athanasius, who was the defender of faith!

The 3rd benefit is that the saints make us feel humble...

Whenever we read about the great spirituality of the saints, we feel very humble and we feel that we are nothing in comparison.

For example, when we read the story of Anba Abraam, and how he loved to



serve the poor, doesn't this make us feel humble?

And also when we read the story of St John the Merciful, who sold all his possessions and gave them to the poor. And then in the end when he had nothing left to give the poor, he sold himself as a slave and donated the money to the poor. Don't you think we would feel humbled when we compare our donations with the donations of these saints?

Also, sometimes we may think that we do a lot of service, but when we compare our service to the service of St Paul the Apostle, or Fr Bishoy Kamel, don't you think we would become humble?

The 4th benefit is that the lives of the saints give us a spirit of wisdom...

For example, when we read the Bible stories of Joseph, and Solomon, and Abigail, we learn how they made wise decisions, and were able to win the love and respect of all people.

Also, we can learn many examples of wisdom from the lives, and the sayings of the desert fathers. There are so many saints who can teach us many treasures of wisdom.

The 5th benefit is that we learn the importance of struggling in our spiritual life...

We have the example of 1000's of saints, who lived the life of repentance, and were changed from a sinful life, to grow strong every day in their spiritual life, and reach very high levels of spirituality.

This road is not easy, and it is not quick – it is gradual, and it is a struggle.

But the lives of the saints give us great hope that, in the same way the Lord was with them and helped them, He will also help us too.

And finally, the lives of the saints can also benefit us in many other ways...

For example:

- We can learn how our confessions should be more sincere.
- We can learn how we should pray with a loving heart, with all humility and faith and love.
- We can learn how to deal with other people in love and respect.

I wish you all a blessed Feast of El-Nayrouz through the intercessions of the Virgin St Mary, all the Martyrs and by the blessings and prayers of HH Pope Shenouda III, may the Lord keep his life for many years to come.

COYA SYDNEY

COYA SPORTS

2011 NAYROUZ CUP

"If anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned, unless he competes according to the rules." (2 Timothy 2:5)

Date: 24-25 September 2011

Venue: Granville South High School
Corner of Rowley & Rawson Roads Guildford

Sports on offer:

- + Rugby League 7's (Mens)
- + Indoor Soccer (Mens)
- + Under 18's Indoor Soccer
- + Volleyball
- + Outdoor Soccer (Girls)
- + Basketball

For more information, please see:
your Church Sports rep, contact Steve Marcos, or:

Web: www.coyasports.org.au Email: sports@coyasports.org.au Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/groups/coyasports>

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." (Col3:16)

Weekly Bible Fellowship (WBF) in Sydney CBD


Please Join us for a weekly Bible Fellowship in Sydney CBD.

When: Every Wednesday starting Wed 29 June 2011.
Where: Pitt St Uniting Church 264 Pitt St Sydney
Time: 1:00 - 2:00 p.m.
Contact: Abraham yousef on 0400607044

Come and invite your friends.

"I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one."
1 John 2:14

COYA Annual
NAYROUZ SKIT COMP.
FRIDAY 9th Sept @ 6pm
Hurstville Civic Centre



Support Your Local Community Project...
Call Exodus Youth Worx For A Free Quote On All
Your Lawn Mowing Needs
0414 075 680

Exodus Mowing Services:

Exodus Youth Worx was recently awarded a government grant of \$2900 to start a new local community project. With the help and ideas of our youth we came up with a lawn mowing business "Exodus Mowing Services". This new local business will help employ unemployed youth providing them with opportunities to gain experience and get involved with the community. This is a great prospect for our youth and community to grow together and branch out to the wider community. Our services include lawn mowing, trimming, edging, blowing, hedging and general clean up. Please help support us in a mission to redirect our youth back to God, this is the beginning to building a better future for the youth.

For a free consultation and a quote on the spot please call us on 0414 075 680.

"We mow so youth can grow"

Saint Mark Ski Trip, Perisher Ski Fields



(...continue from cover)

and St Mark's was ready to infiltrate the slopes with a busload of Coptic youth. The group subdivided into several smaller groups, some hit the slopes hard while others were simply happy to take things slowly – many actually undertook lessons and picked up their skills quite rapidly at that!

Having arrived at the slopes quite early in the morning, and spending all day there, the once rowdy group returned back to Sponars Hotel to enjoy some much needed rest and a hearty vegan meal. This was then followed up by a relaxing session of group discussion, trivia and charades by the inviting warmth of the fire place at the hotel. Everyone was then off to an early nights rest due to exhaustion, and more importantly to take the blessings of the mass the following morning.

The following morning, the group was blessed enough to partake in the holy

liturgy, indeed God is with us wherever we go! Although, this was probably the only time the mass was performed next to a swimming pool! But everyone was grateful not to have missed out on the body and blood of Christ. This was followed by another packed and eventful day on the slopes!

Some of the highlights of the trip included the lunchtime gatherings of most, if not all, of the youth on the trip. Quite a spectacle to see a large number of Egyptians taking over a cafe! There were plenty of stacks, trips and falls to showcase throughout the trip. Even some of the more experienced skiers taking a tumble from time to time.

The Saturday was the most exciting of the days spent on the trip, with an early start for the mass, followed by breakfast and then straight to the slopes! After finishing the day at the snow fields, the group headed back to the hotel for a quick dinner, then back

to the slopes again for an eventful evening of night skiing! There was a vibe of excitement through the air as the experience of skiing at night was new to most of the group, there were plenty of thrills and spills as the entire group was on the one slope! All in all, a very entertaining evening to say the least! Returning to the hotel after an exhausting day, there was much needed rest and relaxation which coincided with activities and games.

Celebrity heads was the order of the day, with Om Kalthoum somehow making it into the games that night! There were plenty of snacks to go around as well plenty of jokes and laughs. It wasn't long before the wide eyed youth soon turned into a tired and exhausted lot, it was definitely lights out earlier than expected.

Some other noteworthy mentions included the bus's extremely poor ventilation system, the poor kangaroo who nearly caused the bus to be in

an accident (may God rest its soul!), a certain collision between two youth, one coming off second best and needing to be carried down the mountain in a body bag. There was one casualty with a broken wrist, other than that all involved were fit and healthy by the end of the trip! Our fantastic bus driver Adam was well integrated into the Egyptian culture by the end of the trip also! Amongst several other incredible memories made on the trip, including the bombardment of Macca's on the way back also, which should be commended at trying to feed 55 hungry Egyptians!

Thank you to all who were involved in the trip, from Abouna for taking the time out to accompany the youth, as well as the organisers and the youth for coming and making it such an enjoyable trip. The St Mark's ski trip has been a tradition for many years, and by the grace of God will continue to be for many more to come!

FILM FESTIVAL
2011

a FILM production to raise for the needy in egypt.

premiere night 16 october

Australian Christian Family Association Presents

'PLANT A SEED & JUST ADD WATER?'
PARENTING SEMINAR

Wondering how to get your child on your side? How to encourage them to be successful?
a must for all parents, servants & educators

SPEAKERS *Dr Sara Ghaly + Mrs Samia Mikhail*

TIME Sunday 11th September 2.00 -5.00 PM
LOCATION St Anne's Anglican Church Hall, 42 Church St., Ryde
COST \$10 per person

Refreshments will be served
Child minding available for children above 2yrs
For information & tickets, please call 0434 018398

No More Excuses

By ESTHER YOUSSEF

Everyone has something in their life that they want to change. I don't think anyone would struggle to come up with something about themselves they would like to change. But the minute you want to change something in your life, the devil is waiting to give you a thousand excuses why you should stay the same. More often than not, we listen to these excuses.

"I want to serve more but it's just a busy time at work"

"I want to give more but I need to finish the repayments on my new car"

"I know I should stop this sin but I'm already doing better than so and so"

What this teaches us is that willpower is not enough. A good intention is not enough. Personal resolve is not enough. If it was enough, we wouldn't be in the shape we are in spiritually. There's a difference between good intentions and God intentions. Good intentions centre on me- what do I want to change? What do I want to do?

What do I want to stop? What do I want?

Those fail.

God intentions are not centred on me, but are centred on God. It's not what I want, but what does God want. It's not what change I want to make, but what change God wants to make.

When the initiator of the change is God, the change comes with special power. So we have to ask ourselves two questions:

1. What does God want to change in my life? The majority of us know what God wants to be different in our life. It may coincide with what you want, but it doesn't necessarily need to be the same thing.
2. Why does God want this to change? Often times we know the "what" without knowing the "why". Knowing the "why" gives power to the "what". When I know why God wants me to change something, it gives me power to do that which God wants me to change. For example:

What? Read my bible. Why? Because I need to become more like Christ, and the tools which God gave me is His word, the sacraments and prayer.

When you connect the why with the what, it gives you motivation. Romans 8:31 says "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?" So if God is telling us to change and he is for us, who can be against us?

An example of this in the Old Testament is the story of Moses. God wanted to change something in his life and through this change, change the lives of many others. But when faced with the challenge, Moses started making excuses; "O my Lord I am not eloquent neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue" (Exodus 4:10).

Notice that when God wants to change something in your life, God asks you to do something that we believe is impossible. God rarely calls us for things we are qualified. So no matter what excuses we give ourselves, no excuse can stand before God.

So the Lord said to Moses "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the LORD? Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say." (Exodus 4:11).

Whenever we are called to change, we need to ask ourselves- is there anything too hard for God? Above all things, we need to stop making excuses that stop us from the will of God and more importantly, we need to realise that with God all things are possible.

Saint Mary Mother of God

The entire life and character of St. Mary is one of inner glories and riches, "for the Lord does not see as man sees for man looks at the outward appearance but the Lord looks at the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7). For this reason St. Paul says, "We do not look at the things which are seen but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary but the things which are not seen are eternal". (2 Corinthians 4:18).

i. St. Mary = Possessed Inner Glory

"You are the ark, overlaid with gold on all sides, which is made of undecaying wood, for she was clothed with the glory of the divinity from within and without (Sunday Theotokia)". "The royal daughter is all glorious within the palace; her clothing is woven with gold". (Psalm 45:13). On the exterior, St. Mary had nothing for which others could envy her; she was not famous, nor rich, she kept content and silent in her inner glory. She gloried in her Lord and Saviour, "My soul rejoices in God my Saviour." (Luke 1:46-47).

ii. St. Mary = Possessed Inner Riches

St. Mary was rich in grace; Archangel Gabriel greets her: "Rejoice highly favoured one...do not be afraid Mary, for you have found favour with God. (Luke 1:28-30). "Hail to you full of grace, hail to you who has found grace, hail to you who has given birth to Christ, the Lord is with you". (Saturday Theotokia). "Many daughters have done well but you excel them all." (Proverbs 31:29). St. Mary possessed the inner richness of a submissive and obedient heart, deep prayer and praises, contemplation and meditations, gentle spirit and powerful faith in Christ. Therefore Elizabeth exalts St. Mary saying, "Blessed are you among women, blessed is the fruit of your womb and blessed is she who believed that there shall be a fulfillment of these things". (Luke 1:42-44). The humble St. Mary "kept all these things in her heart and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19).

iii. St. Mary = Possessed Inner Beauty

"The Father looked from above and could not find any one like you. He came and was incarnated from you". (Wednesday Theotokia). In the Morning Prayer we beseech St. Mary, the Father chose you, the Holy Spirit overshadowed you and the Son, in humility, was born from you asking to redeem the world He created. St. Mary's inner beauty radiated great joy to all humanity as we chant saying, "Hail to St. Mary the joy of Generations". St. Mary's inner beauty is reflected in her concern for others. Over the mountains she traveled with haste to assist her frail cousin Elizabeth (Luke 1:39). At the wedding of Cana of Galilee she tells her Son and Lord they have no wine (John 2:3). This inner beauty

Mary a second heaven where God the Logos dwelt. St. Peter stresses inner beauty by saying, "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 precious in the sight of God." (1 Peter 3:3-4).

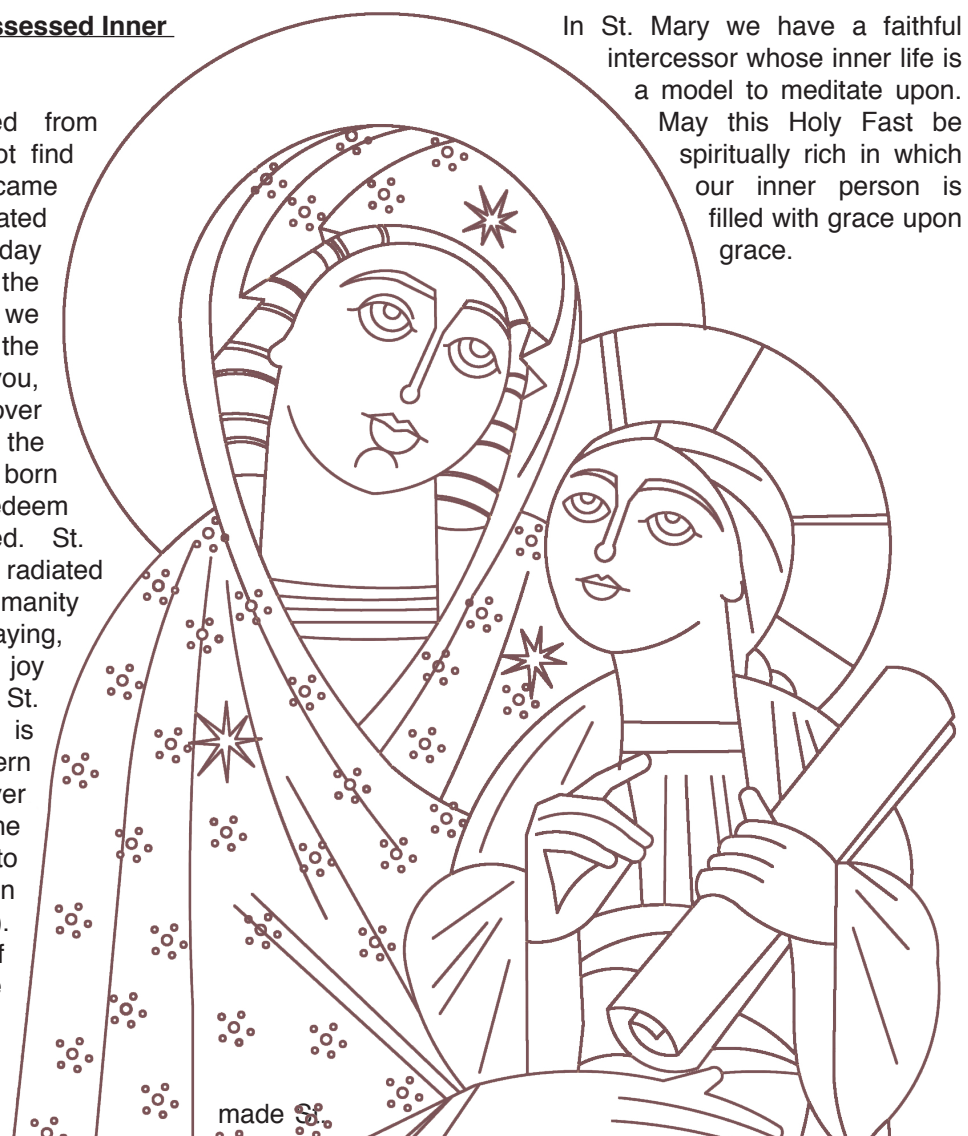
iv. St. Mary = Possessed Inner Purity

St. Mary was most pure in mind, heart and thoughts. Thus, St. Mary became a living sanctuary for the Lord of Hosts to dwell. David the Prophet asks, "How can a young man cleanse his way, by taking heed to your word. (Psalm 119:9). Christ clarified this saying, "You have been made clean already by the words I have spoken to you, abide in Me and I in you". (John 15:3). Indeed, "blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8). St. Paul adds, "To the pure all things are pure but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure but even their minds and conscience are defiled." (Titus 1:15). "You have become the stock of purity and the vessel that carries the true Manna; O pure Mother of God, O honoured Virgin" (Theotokia of Tuesday).

v. St. Mary = Possessed Inner Honour

"You are higher than the Cherubim and found more honourable than the Seraphim (Sunday Theotokia). This honour was because St. Mary was clothed with authentic humility (1 Peter 5:5), "for God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6). Indeed the more we, "humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord and he will lift you up" (James 4:10). St. Mary always perceived herself as the handmaid of the Lord. "Blessed and perfect are you, O who has found all grace, before the King of glory, our True Lord. You deserved all honour, more than any one on Earth, for the Word of the Father, came and was incarnate of you." (Wednesday Theotokia).

In St. Mary we have a faithful intercessor whose inner life is a model to meditate upon. May this Holy Fast be spiritually rich in which our inner person is filled with grace upon grace.





The Annual Celebration of the National Coptic Day "El Nayrouz" and the Commemoration of the Church Martyrs for 1728 AM

Under the apostasy of HH Pope Shenouda III and his partner in the apostolic ministry HG Bishop Daniel

The Diocese of Sydney will hold the annual celebration of the martyrs "Nayrouz" on Monday 12th September 2011 at St Mary and St Marina church in Penrith.

The celebration includes Coptic Art exhibition, Choirs and Skit activities, Scouts activities, and lot of other surprises...

Guests include Government officials and Fr Philopateer Gamil
Time : 4:00 PM

Saint Mary and Saint Marina Church
363 Ninth Ave (cnr Terrybrook Rd), Llandilo, Penrith

The Feast of the Nayrouz

(...continued from page 2)

The time of persecution use to be a time of strengthened faith and not weakness. Spirituality becomes deeper during the time of persecution, the fast becomes deeper, the prayer becomes deeper, and the relationship with God becomes deeper.

The final point I would like to bring to your attention, is what do we benefit from the Feast of the Nayrouz? Its spiritual lessons is not just that we have a fascination for the faith, courage, steadfastness of the martyrs and we become proud that we are the children of the martyrs.

The spiritual lesson is that we must walk in their ways. St. Augustine was once asked by someone, he wished to be martyred but how could he given that the era of martyrdom had passed? St Augustine said to him, if your heart has the same desire as the martyr then you are counted as a martyr. Having the desire of the martyr means you have no desire or care for this world. Notice that the church also use to encourage the believers by telling them the same thing and not to have a care for this world. When ever they attended church it would tell them "Do not love the world or the things in the world... the world is passing away, and all the lust of it, but he who does the will of God abides forever" 1 Jn 2:15,17. A continually repeated lesson for the believers.

There was once a monk who wished to be martyred. He was advised not to leave

the monastery but despite the advice not to go down this route he refused and he stubbornly went out. He entered the wilderness and there he found a group of Bedouin camped who spotted him and brought him to the camp, and these Bedouin were cannibals, and they planned to do horrible things to him before they chopped him up and ate him. The man began to shake, and became very scared. He remembered the advice of his spiritual father and how he told him to stay away from this path. He started praying that God would save him from these people. If it weren't for a large group of armed merchants arriving on the scene he would not have lived. The Bedouin escaped, but by the time the Bedouin escaped his nerves had escaped and he was found by the merchants a nervous wreck. Therefore do not think that martyrdom is an easy thing.

We are also in the beginning of a new Coptic Year, in this new year we pray for a good beginning, and we advice that you should take at least one virtue and train your self in it. Take the virtue of longsuffering for example. Train yourself to accept bad word from others against you or the insult of others and so on.

Glory be to God forever Amen.

(Based upon a lecture given at the Grand Cathedral on 13th September 2006, Translated by George Barbary, <http://www.stmark.org.uk/>)

New Complex Project at St Shenouda Monastery Sydney, Australia

We are all very thankful to God for his many blessings and especially for the wonderful site which He has given us to build our Monastery.

I'm delighted to announce/present to you our new Project that we have been waiting on for a long time. This Project will consist of a large Cathedral that will accommodate nearly five hundred people, a Services Centre which will include; Lounge Areas, Dinning Areas, Bookshop, Offices, Canteen, and Other Facilities.

This project will be a great addition to our blessed Churches in Australia, and will serve the many generations to come.

This Project has been blessed and approved by H.H Pope Shenouda III.

For further information and pictures please visit our site:

www.stshenoudamonastery.org.au

Keep this Project in your prayers as well as your donations

God Bless you.

Bishop Anba Daniel

Bishop & Abbot of St Shenouda Monastery, NSW, Australia
Monday 21/5/2011

Virtual View of the Front Gate & Car park on the left.



Top View of the New Cathedral & The Services Centre.

Contributions to this project are Not Tax Deductable and can be made to:
Coptic Orthodox St. Shenouda Monastery Limited, Westpac Bank. BSB: 032-274 Acc No: 26-4333

True Freedom

By HG BISHOP ANGAELOS

Today we spoke about the reality of freedom, what freedom is, what we think it is, what it should be, how the world interprets it for us, and how it changes around our concept. Because of that change in concept, we actually end up looking for the wrong things and trying to satisfy it by the wrong things.

I think we have to realize in our lives that there is something more. What my role is here is to demonstrate for you how to think about these things. If you did not KNOW that God is in the world, you would not be here, at this lecture, at a Christian convention, at a time when you could be doing so many other things.

So God's presence is something we know and we feel. The question of liberty - how does God give it to us? God gave us freedom twice. The first time God gave us freedom is when He created us. Not only did He give us freedom in the world, when He gave Adam and Eve dominion and told them to subdue, but He also gave us freedom when He created us and allowed us to choose His Kingdom. Otherwise, there would be no point.

Now Adam and Eve made a choice. If they were not free, they could not have chosen... They had a choice, although they had everything around them - the fish, the birds, the sun, the moon, the trees - everything was there and provided for. Yet, Eve initially made a choice that she wanted more than that - she was not satisfied. And Adam made a choice to listen to her above what he knew to be right. Because of that choice, God had to free us a second time. He gave us freedom a second time. He knew we would come back, and that would be unfair. Some people say, "God is unfair and does not allow us to make our own decisions."

That is not true. If God were unfair, He would have said, "They made their mistake once. They are out of the Garden, and they cannot come back." But God did not say that. Instead, He saw that they made a mistake, but thought, "I have My other children - the whole of humanity - who might want to come back to Me. But they cannot. The obstacle is too great and the barrier is too high. So what I will do is I will go to them to break down that barrier, to remove that obstacle, and then give them the choice once and for all to choose Me, to choose life over death, to choose righteousness over sin."

So that is what He did - give us a second chance at liberty. He came in the flesh, and defeated death and sin on the Cross, and gave His blood for us to be free and choose Him over the world. So God gave us freedom twice, and that is not all. He gave us another type of freedom - He knows that though He gave us many brain cells, only a small portion of them work. He knows we will mess up sometimes. Although I see Adam's mistake, and that Christ died for me on the Cross, I will still stumble in sin, repeating old sins or developing new ones.

God knows we are prone to weakness

- it is how He created us. What He will do is give us the ability to replenish ourselves when we fall. Not only that, God says, "I will go down and live among them, and give My blood on the Cross, and I will leave them My sacraments, My body and blood, My church, My ministers. So every time they make a mistake, it can be removed, if they so choose."

So God gave us free will and choice twice, and the second time, gave us a renewable forgiveness that must be through the sacramental life we all live. Read in the epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians 5:1: "Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty in which Christ has made us free, do not be entangled again with the yoke of bondage."

God has given us freedom once, given us renewable freedom through sacraments and salvation... He says to us, "Please, I beg of you, do not fall into the bondage of sin once again." You have seen the results and the outcome. Our Lord wants us to be free. He came and died that we may have life and have it more abundantly. He did not just come and die so that we may have life - He laid down His life for us so that we may live more abundantly.

How does Christ give us freedom? By being our heavenly Father, by being our Savior, by being our God who wants us to be in His heavenly kingdom, and provides those facilities for me. God sees our state and sees our lives. There is a verse in Psalm 46: "Who executes justice for the oppressed? Who gives food to the hungry? The Lord gives freedom to the prisoners, the Lord gives eyes to the blind, the Lord raises those who are bowed down, the Lord loves the righteous." What does He do? He gives freedom to those who are oppressed and in prison. And we are oppressed and in prison. We like to walk around thinking no one has anything on us, and no one can force us to do anything. I'm living a young life; I have my freedom, career, money - who could dare tell me how to live?

Think for a moment about the last time you confessed. Think of the struggle you had about telling Abouna the same thing that you have told him time and time again. It seems that I am bound, in prison. For those of you who have not confessed in a while, it is probably because you have something to confess that you do not want to give up. Is that freedom - are we truly free? The Lord is able to bring us out of that. He is able to give freedom to the prisoner, no matter what or who has imprisoned you. If you call on His name, He will give you freedom.

You and I are weak (please do not be offended). Don't forget that we started as dirt - dust. Dust that only came to life with the breath of God. Without His presence, we are dust. Do you see now why we need Him to be free? Without Him, we are absolutely powerless. It is no wonder St. Paul says to us, "In Christ I can do all things." St. Paul spoke out of experience. St. Paul, who was Saul, who killed, tortured and persecuted Christians, certainly had a complete change. God had done something for him and moved him.

Are you Paul? Are you Saul at the moment? Are you Moses the Black? Mary of Egypt? Augustine? Are you the soldier standing at the foot of the Cross, spearing our Lord? Are you the adulteress, the Samaritan woman? Are you Zacchaeus? Because even if you are, Christ set all of them free. No one else could have, but He did. In Him alone we have freedom.

I like the second part of the Psalm we read: "The Lord raises those who are bowed down." How many of us are bowed down? How many of us feel broken and overcome? How many of us feel we do not even deserve to be sitting among all these people - they think I am good, but I have so many sins and done so many bad things. We don't need to think that way, because the Lord raises those who are bowed down. He extends His hand and lifts us up from servitude. We are bound in chains, and He raises us up, makes us new, with His mighty hand. All I have to do is submit to Him, and it is He who sets me free.

Let's look at a sequence of verses and see what you think: Our Lord says, "I am the way, the truth and the life." Sounds nice, doesn't it? This is not just poetry - it is reality. Just as our Lord said, "I am the truth," He also said "You shall know the Truth and the Truth shall set you free." Does it start to come together now? HE is the truth, and by knowing the truth, HE shall set you free. Then we go to the next verse - John 8:36 - "Therefore, if the Son of Man makes you free, you shall be free indeed." The truth sets you free - indeed. How many of us want to be "free indeed"?

Do you really? Sometimes we like the servitude, the bondage, the chains of sin, the easy life, the fact that I do not have to choose. I do what I want, when I like it, and forget the implications. What are the wages of sin? Death - it's a big price to pay. How does our Lord set us free? By being the truth in whom we believe, and in whom we see, and in the reality of our lives, through whom we can overcome death and weakness and sin.

And, as we read earlier, we stand fast in that liberty and not go back to bondage. Why go and come back and go and come back - such a difficult thing to do, such a waste of time.

What does Christ give us? You think He gave us teachings, potential salvation. What did He give ME? If I live this life, I have to be good and do the right thing, but I don't know if I want to do it. Sometimes I prefer to live conservatively. But God gives us a gift - if you want to knock it back or throw it away, know you are throwing it away. I'm sure if you got a gift voucher or gift of cash, a gift to use as you wish, you would not throw it away or give it back or say no thanks. Doesn't make much sense, does it? But that is what we do, every day.

We get these checks and vouchers and gifts for things that cannot be measured by humankind, and what do we do? We throw them away. One day, we will want them - on that one day, it will make the difference between heaven and hell. We had that ticket to freedom in our hands. The gift



of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 6:23). How many of us throw that gift away?

From Romans 8:1-2: "There is therefore now no condemnation in those who walk in Christ Jesus, who walk, not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit, for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death."

Sometimes we think of this as being law and lack of law, rules and lack of rules. That is how a teenager thinks when they are moving out - their parents' house had rules, and the outside has no rules. That's not right - there are always rules. They are rules to your friends, rules prescribing you have to do particular things, just so you can belong. I love this passage from Romans - the law of the Spirit has made us free from the law of death and sin. I am either under the law of Christ or the law of Satan, of life or death, of righteousness or sin. So either way, I am under a law and bound. But being bound to Christ is freedom, but being bound to Satan is servitude and death.

I hope I have hit a nerve, to make us change our lives once and for all, to make us realize we do not want to be bound by Satan. I do not want to be a slave of this earthly master, who is cruel, harsh, and wants us to die spiritually as he has already died. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free of the law of sin and death. We are free - we have that freedom. It is what we do with it. We stand fast and enjoy the liberty of Christ Jesus, and not to be entangled in the bondage of sin again.

How does Christ make us free? By loving us, dying for us, and providing for us the means of being with Him. Salvation, forgiveness, mercy, and above all, the willingness as our Heavenly Father and Savior to accept us if we want to return to Him, and say, "Father I have sinned against heaven and earth and before you sight, and am no longer worthy to be called you son. Make me your hired servant." (Luke 15) But the father did not let him finish - he brought him to the house, not as a servant, but as a son, who was lost, but was found, who was dead, but is alive again.

Glory be to God forever, Amen.