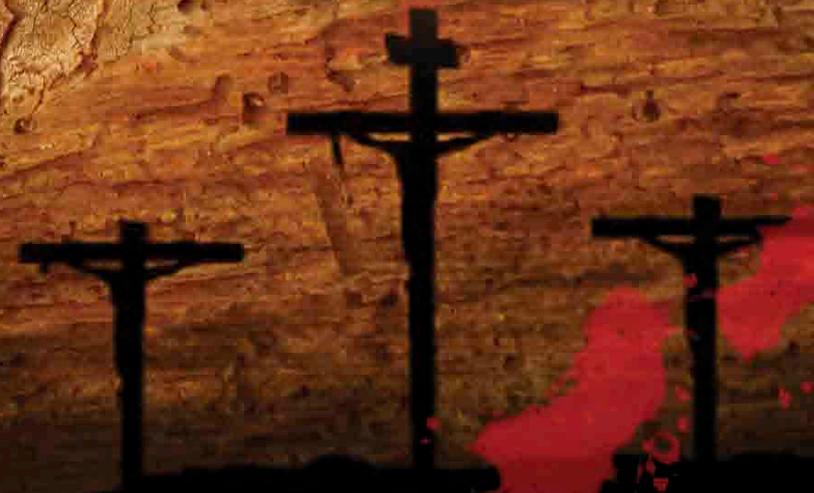
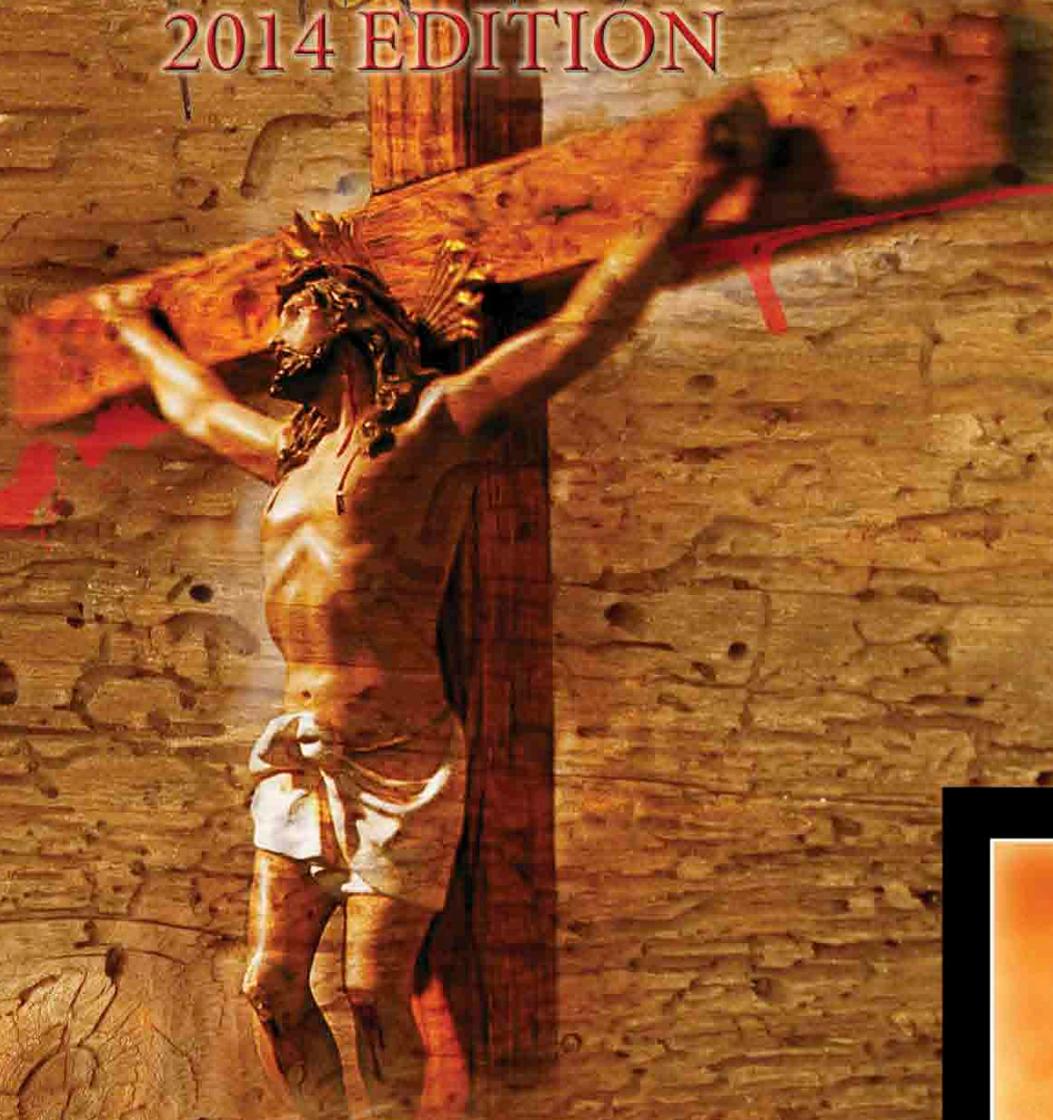


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PASSION WEEK

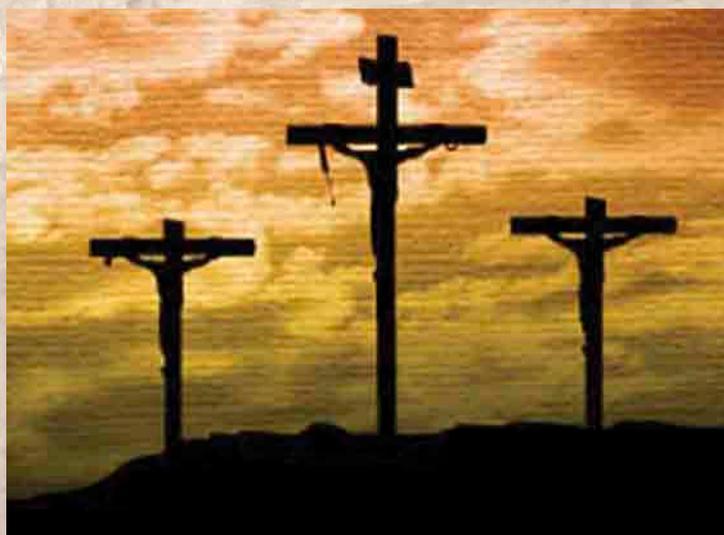
2014 EDITION



THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PASSION WEEK

The Passion Week or the Holy Pascha (Passover) is the most important period in the year and the richest spiritually. It is a week full of Holy memories of the most crucial stage of salvation and the outstanding chapter in the story of redemption. The Church chose for this week certain readings from both the Old and the New Testaments, which reflect, the most passionate feelings that explain God's relation with Man. The Church also chose some deep hymns and spiritual contemplation to suit the occasion. In the early Church, our Saintly Fathers used to receive this week with respect and reverence, and act in great humility. While fasting, they abstained from eating any sweet food like honey or jam, as they considered it not appropriate to taste any sweet thing while commemorating the Lord's suffering for them. Some used not to cook anything during that week, as a matter of devotion, and lest cooking should distract them from worshipping. The majority of Christians used to eat nothing but bread and salt. Those who were physically capable abstained from Friday night till Easter Sunday. As a sign of devotion during this week, women used not to put make up or wear jewellery. People devoted all their time for worshipping; they gathered in Churches for prayer and contemplation. The Great Emperor Theodosius was one of the Christian Kings and Rulers who ordered all Government Houses and Business to cease work, to enable people to concentrate on worshipping. Prisoners were also allowed to go to Church and join in the ceremonies of this Great Week, hoping that it would help them to reform. Christian masters also used to relieve their slaves from work all the Pascha Week to enable them to worship the Lord like their masters, without any discrimination. So both masters and slaves were able to worship God and enjoy the effectiveness and depth of this week.

***Excerpt from Yours is the Power, Glory and Honour,
by HH Pope Shenouda III***



+
*Then Jesus said
to His disciples,
'If anyone
desires to come
after me, let him
deny himself,
and take up his
cross and follow
Me.'*

+
(Matthew 16:24)



THE RITE OF PASSION WEEK

During this week, the Holy Church concentrates on one subject: The Lord Christ's suffering. For this reason, the Psalm readings and the Canonical Hours which cover various subjects relating to the Lord Jesus Christ including His birth, His ministry, His Resurrection, Ascension and sitting on the Father's right hand and His Second Coming in His Glory, are replaced by a special hymn chosen by the Church especially for the Pascha Week in which we address the Lord suffering for us saying:

«Thine is the Power, the Glory, the Blessing and the Honour, forever Amen, Emmanuel our God and King «

«Thine is the Power, the Glory, the Blessing and the Honour, forever Amen, Our Lord Jesus Christ»,

«Thine is the Power, the Glory, the Blessing and the Honour, forever Amen ...» adding to it .. **«Our Good Saviour»** from Wednesday night, as the plot to betray the Lord Christ was the practical step towards salvation. This prayer, is repeated ten times every day.; five during daytime and five at night. In each of these prayers, we turn to our God and Saviour in His passions and say,

«we know who You are, for «Thine is the Power, Glory, Blessing and Honour, forever Amen.»

With this prayer, we follow the Lord Christ step by step along the incidents of this week that preceded the crucifixion. What then are these incidents? And how does the Church act during this week? How did the suffering start?

On Palm Sunday, the Lord Jesus Christ went to Jerusalem where He was gloriously received as a King: The people praised and cheered Him with palms, spreading their robes under His feet, and the whole city was in turmoil ([Matthew 21:10](#)). This annoyed the chief priests and the elders of the people: scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees. They envied Him for the great love people felt for Him, so they started thinking of a way to get rid of Him! They were more upset when He entered the temple and expelled all who were buying and selling. They then asked Him, **«By what authority are You doing these things?»** ([Matthew 21:23](#)). Since then they decided to kill Him, telling one another **«Look, the world has gone after Him,»** ([John 12:19](#)). The chief's desire to kill the Lord Christ was due to their envy, but the puzzling thing is the change in the multitude's attitude; they received Him like a King, then shouted to Pilate, **«Crucify Him, crucify Him! «** ([Luke 23:21](#)).

When the crowds cheered Jesus, they looked at Him as an earthly King, **'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD! Blessed is the kingdom of our father David'** ([Mark 11:9- 10](#)). But the Lord Jesus refused a Kingdom on earth, as His is a Heavenly Spiritual one. The plot to get rid of the Nazarene was then a natural reaction from the Chiefs who lost hope in the long awaited kingdom!!

The church considers the end of Palm Sunday Mass the beginning of the Passion Week, as the plot to kill the Lord Jesus Christ started to develop since then.

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*Who Himself
bore our sins
in His own
body on the
tree, that
we, having
dies to sins,
might live for
righteousness-
by whose
stripes you
were healed.*

+
*(1 Peter
2:24)*

During this week the Church's Icons, Pillars and Lectern and sometimes even the walls are all covered with black cloth, creating an atmosphere of mourning. It makes everyone feel that he is sharing in the Lord's sufferings, as said by St. Paul, *'that I may know Him and the power of His Resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings'.* (Philemon 3:10).

General Prayer For the Departed:

Through the Passion Week, the Church is preoccupied with the Lord's sufferings only, there is no raising of incense even for funerals, but replaced by the Pascha prayers and readings. For this reason, a general prayer for the departed is held after Palm Sunday Mass, for the souls of those who pass away during the Holy Pascha. The priest prays on some water for this purpose, and not for blessing the palms as some may think.

During these prayers we have to confess our sins to the Lord in true repentance, as we never know when our life will end. After this funeral mass and the dismissing of the congregation, prayers are carried forth outside the camp.

Outside the Camp:

Under the Law of the Old Testament, sin offering was to be burnt outside the camp (*Leviticus 4:12,21*), so it would not defile the camp with the congregation's sins. Thus the Lord Christ who took away the sins of the whole world, suffered outside the Holy City. They considered Him a sinner, sent Him outside the Camp and crucified Him. St. Paul explained, and referred to this matter by saying:

«Let us go forth therefore to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach.» (Hebrews 13:13).

The Holy Church follows the Lord's steps during the Pascha Week and goes with Him outside the camp, closing the veil. The Church also leaves the first Chancel, the Chancel of Saints, and moves the Lectern to the second Chancel to pray away from the Altar, outside the Sanctuary and the

camp, bearing His reproach and saying: **«Thine is the Power, the Glory, the Blessing and the Honour, forever Amen.»** With this hymn, we follow the Lord Jesus Christ in His passion, step by step, contemplating on every word we say to Him in His Passion.

Excerpt from Yours is the Power, Glory and Honour, by HH Pope Shenouda III



+
*Looking unto
Jesus, the author
and finisher of
our faith, who
for the joy that
was set before
Him endured the
cross, despising
the shame, and
has sat down at
the right hand
of the throne of
God. (Hebrews
12:2)*

THE PASCHA HYMN



Thine is the Power, the Glory, the Blessing and the Honour, forever Amen.

We sing this hymn for the Lord Christ all through the Passion Week, following all His movements. We sing it instead of the Canonical Hours, the five day prayers and the five night prayers. We repeat the hymn twelve times in each prayer instead of the twelve

psalms that are included in each prayer of the Canonical Hours.

The Lord Christ left Jerusalem to Bethany, where we follow Him saying, 'Thine is the Power, the Glory, the Blessing and the Honour.' The Chief priests were annoyed when the Lord cleared the temple, and said, «By what authority are You doing these things?» But we say, «Thine is the Power, the Glory, the Blessing and the Honour... Emmanuel our God and King». They planned to kill Him while we defend Him saying, 'Thine is the Power, the Glory, the Blessing and the Honour... forever Amen.' The Lord, in humility, bent to wash the disciples' feet, and we praise Him saying 'Thine is the Power, the Glory, the Blessing and the Honour.' The Lord was praying at Gethsemane in such agony that His sweat was like drops of blood and we proclaim, 'Thine is

the Power and the Glory',

We follow Him hour by hour; when arrested, put under trial in the presence of His enemies, crowned with thorns, flogged, falling under the Cross, nailed, till He commanded His Spirit into the hands of the Father and when He took the robber on His right with Him into Paradise, and we sing to Him all the time the hymn, «Thine is the Power, the Glory, the Blessing and the Honour... forever Amen.

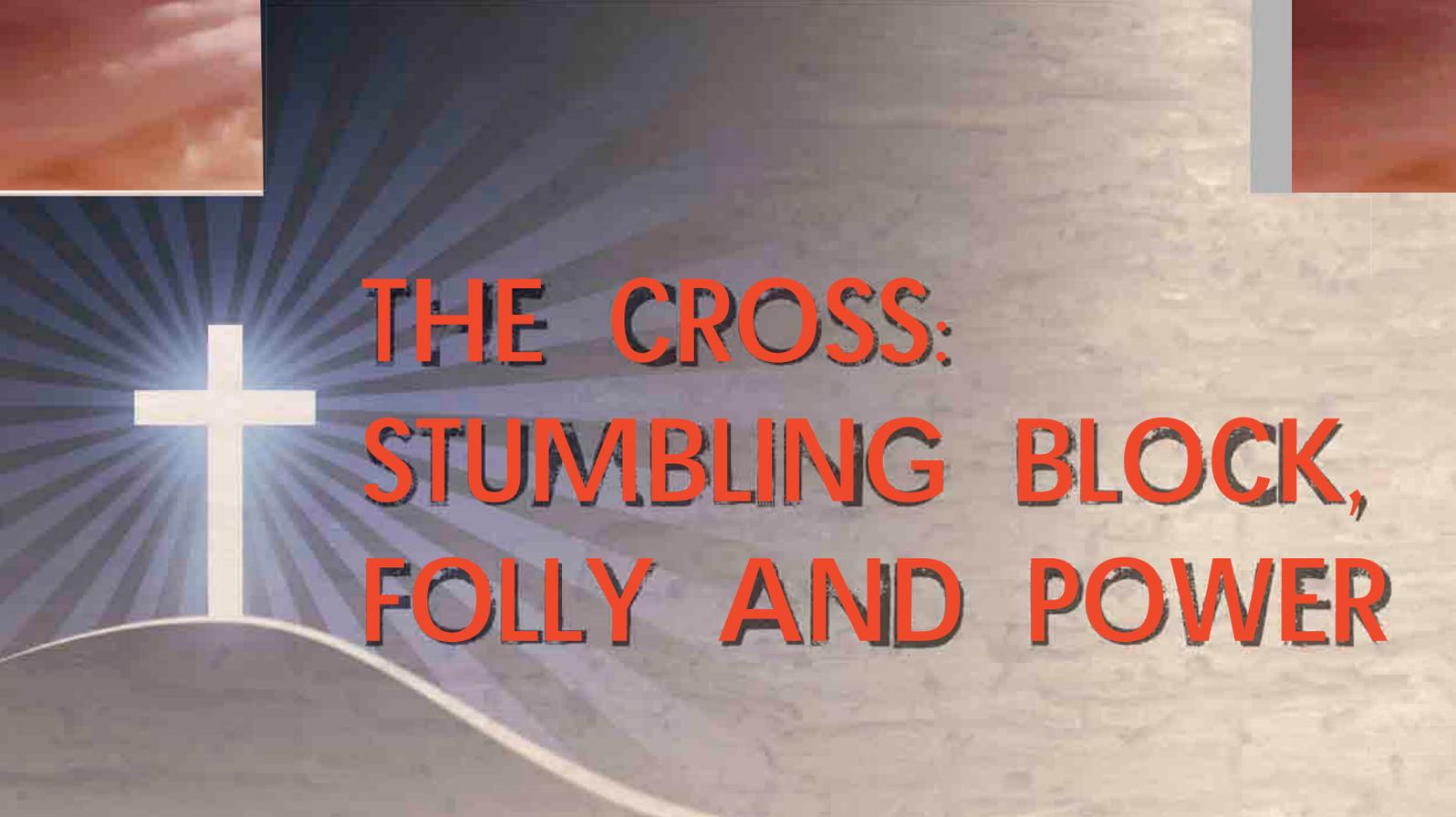
Excerpt from Yours is the Power, Glory and Honour, by HH Pope Shenouda III



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For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

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(1 Corinthians 1:18)





THE CROSS: STUMBLING BLOCK, FOLLY AND POWER

The cross has three aspects in relation to man, which are revealed by St Paul the Apostle in his first letter to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 1:18- 25).

1- THE CROSS- A STUMBLING BLOCK

Lord you have said: *'Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks'* (Matthew 18:7). How can the Cross be a stumbling block? The Cross in itself is not a stumbling block but it is so the Jews. Judaizing is an evil quality in the subconscious of man, to which the Cross is a stumbling

block. Love of Leadership, wealth, self, formalities and public appearances on the street corners- all are Jewish traits to which the Cross always stands as a stumbling block.

My soul, when you look forward to the love of leadership, Jesus tells you, *'I came not to be served but to serve'* (Matthew 20:28). The Cross is a stumbling block to you my selfish soul as you behold the crucified Jesus willingly offering Himself on the Cross. It is a stumbling block to you my soul when you participate with the Jewish money-changers and those who sold pigeons while you behold Jesus on the Cross stripped even of His clothes. It is a stumbling block to you my soul when you cannot bear to have someone hurt your pride, neither at home nor at work or even in the service of the church, while you see Christ despised and rejected on the Cross. A stumbling block to you when you seek the places of honour while the Lord calls you to sit in the lowest place (Luke 14:7- 11).

A stumbling block to you my soul when you give parties to your friends and rich neighbours while you do not invite the lame, the maimed and the poor (Luke 14:12 -14).

My soul, you are daily threatened by a Judaizing relapse, and the Cross of the Lord will always be a stumbling block whenever you stray from the life of love and perseverance and whenever you give in to the life of hatred, tiredness and shunning the narrow gate.

+
*For the sign
of the cross
and faith in
the Lord is for
u a wall that
no assault
of yours (the
devil) can
break down*

+
*(St. Anthony
the Great)*

My Lord Jesus Christ, truly you have commanded me to take up my Cross daily and follow you (*Luke 9:23*), and without a doubt you wished to protect me from the ills of Judaizing that threaten my miserable spirit.

As for the Church, Judaizing has remained a threat, but she avoided the relapse into Judaism through the folly of the Cross. And this is what the Apostle frankly proclaimed when he said that if he submitted to the Judaizing thought and to circumcision, the stumbling block of the Cross would have been removed (*Galatians 5:11*). The church opposed the early millenarianism and the school of Alexandria struggled in this regard confirming that *(here we have no lasting city)* (*Hebrews 13:14*), but we have a Cross to take up and a narrow gate to enter by. The return to an earthly millenium of Christ in the twentieth century is a Western belief that is mixed with the venom of Judaizing. The councils of churches that have come to agreement with the Jewish thought, away from the call of repentance, have in fact put down their weapon, which is their Cross, because (the stumbling block of the Cross has been removed). They emerged from the meetings in agreement but without a Cross.

2- FOLLY OF THE CROSS

My Lord Jesus, you have proclaimed that the Cross is God's wisdom, holiness and salvation, *(We impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God... for if they had (understood it), they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory)* (*1 Corinthians 2:7,8*). When man is unable to comprehend the greatness of a matter, he tried to belittle it. Thus the mystery of incarnation and salvation is a lofty divine mystery which man cannot comprehend unless the Holy Spirit declares it to him. When man can comprehend a topic, a philosophy or an invention, he becomes a master of it. Man thought he can comprehend God and thus become His master, not knowing that (the wisdom of this world is folly with God) (*1 Corinthians 3:19*).

When St. Paul the Apostle spoke about Christ's suffering and resurrection, Festus, the governor, said in a loud voice *(Paul, you are mad; your great learning is turning you mad)* (*Acts 26:23,24*), as for the Greek philosophers in Athens, they said about him, *(What would this babbling say)* (*Acts 17:18*).

In this twentieth century of our the Cross will remain folly. The Cross will remain the difference between Christ and the world with its philosophies and religions. The belief in the Trinity, Incarnation, Crucifixion and Resurrection will always remain a folly to others. You will be unable to convince an apostate who does not believe and who will accuse us of ignorance. Moreover, the Christian who adheres to truth in his life and at work is accused by his colleagues of not being open-minded. The woman who behaves and dresses as a Christian is accused of being old-fashioned. The forgiving Christian is accused of foolishness. The man of faith is accused of being unrealistic, and he who deserts the world to worship God in a monastery is accused of running away. He who spends his time and wealth in the service of Christ is asked *(Why this waste?)* (*Matthew 26:8*).

My Lord Jesus, from the beginning you have taught me that my Christian life should start by carrying the Cross everyday, I shall carry it and witness for you against the Hellenism of the world in spite of their calling me foolish, because the Cross is folly.

As for the Church, the world today imposes on her a social and an ethical Gospel instead of making morals and social activities the fruits of a spiritual life. Many churches have slipped and

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*And being
found in
appearance
as a man,
He humbled
Himself
and became
obedient to the
point of death,
even the death
of the cross.*

+
(Phillipians 2:8)



fallen into the snare of secularism. They established colleges and hospitals, but they do not talk about repentance. Some Christian groups have allowed pre-marital relations while others have permitted dancing even among monks and nuns.

My Lord Jesus, do not ever allow our Church to throw down its Cross, following in the steps of the Western churches, in her attempt to assume progress and to keep in pace with the advancing world. My Lord Jesus, you know that our Church is accused of foolishness and lack of progress because the Cross is folly to many...

3- POWER OF THE CROSS

1- The Cross in its Nature is Strength, Not weakness and defeat

Herod, who is a type of the Church that is mingled with the world, wished to hear a word from Jesus. But Jesus strongly refused because the powerful truth and the cunning and deceiving fox are not compatible. Pilate asked Jesus about truth and Jesus did not answer because truth is always obvious and clear. Pilate then threatened Him with the Cross but Jesus told him (You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above) ([John 19:11](#)).

The priests and Pharisees wished that Jesus would share in their hypocrisy, but He likened them to white-washed tombs which are full of all uncleanness ([Matthew 23:27](#)). The money-changers wished He would accept a bribe and not drive them out, but He was zealous for the holiness of His house and overturned their tables ([Matthew 23:12](#)).

Hence, the world from all walks of life plotted against Him and threatened Him with the Cross. But He carried His Cross with power and did not give up any of His principles. The Cross was a proof of the victory of His principles over them. The Cross was a proof of the weakness of the world. The Cross was a proof of the power of Christ.

The children of Jesus should be strong and the proof of their strength is the Cross. The Cross is not merely a form of spiritual meditation, but it is also perseverance in suffering in order to stand against the world. The Cross in the life of The Lord was not the result of His actions, but rather it was a part of His ministry when He said (that He must.. suffer many things...) ([Matthew 16:21](#)).

Jesus, my God, teach me when I am in distress in this world, not to feel defeated but victorious through the power of Your Cross.

2- The Nature of the Cross is the Highest and Most Profound Form of Love

Love to those who crucified Him... Love of the sinners... Love to give without expecting anything in return... The Cross is the defeat of hatred; there is no trace of hatred in the Cross.

3- The Cross is the Strongest Form of Victory over the Devil, Death, Hell and the World

The Cross has crushed Satan... I have seen this with my own eyes, when the bishop or priest places the Cross over a person possessed by an evil spirit. I have seen and heard the devil cry out and leave, terrified by the Cross.

How great and awesome is the Cross. Sin is the cause of death and, on the Cross, the Lord Jesus condemned sin in the flesh ([Romans 8:3](#)).

When Queen Helena wanted to find out which cross was the

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*For each of us
He laid down
His life... and
He requires in
return that we
should do the
same for each
other.*

+
*(St. Clement
of Alexandria)*

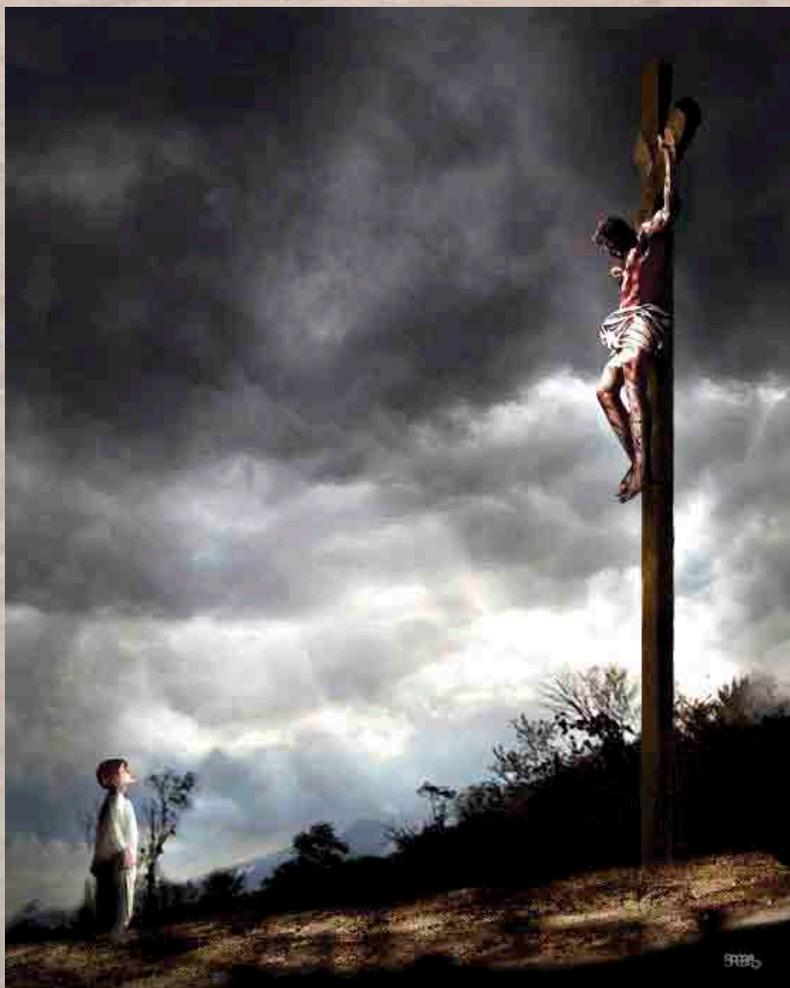
Lord's she placed a dead body on the first and second crosses, and nothing happened. But as soon as the dead body touched the third, the corpse instantly came back to life. Hence she was assured that it was the Cross of the Lord.

The Cross is victory over hell where Christ went through the Cross, *in which He went and preached to the spirits in prison* (1 Peter 3:19), and restored the captives.

The Cross is victory over the world. The Lord conquered through it- He was born in a manger so no one boasts about His place of birth, He fled and lived off the contributions of the generous, He worked as a carpenter, thus He blessed work, and labour, and humiliated the pride of the rich. In His ministry He bore the Cross until He fell under its weights. Through the Cross, He granted us purity, *And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires* (Galatians 5:24).

My Lord Jesus, remove the veil from my eyes so I can discover the power of Your Cross in my life and *deliver my mind from the recklessness of insubstantial works and worldly lusts, to the remembrance of Thine heavenly judgements*. Grant that I do not complain from labouring in Your service but rather make me a Cyrene coming in from the country (Luke 23:26). Let me, my Lord, no longer live but you live in me (Galatians 2:20), and grant that I have a share with the victorious, and that I stand beside the sea of glass, with those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name. Lord Jesus give me your spiritual harp so I can sing the song of the Cross, the song of Moses, the servant of God and the song of the Lamb (Revelations 15:1-4). Through the intercession of Virgin Mary who shared the suffering of the Lord on the Cross (cp Philemon 3:10, 1 Peter 4:13), grant that I carry Your Cross, a stumbling block and folly to others, but God's strength to me. Amen.

Extract from Coptic Church Review, Volume 6, Number 3 by Abouna Bishoy Kamel



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*But God forbid
that I should
boast except
in the cross
of our Lord
Jesus Christ,
by whom the
world has been
crucified to me,
and I to the
world.*

+
(Galatians 6:14)



THE FEAR OF THE LORD: IS OUR CROSS

Renunciation is nothing but the evidence of the Cross and of mortification. And so you must know that today you are dead to the world and its deeds and desires, and that, as the Apostle says, you are crucified to this world and this world to you (*Galatians 4:14*). Consider therefore the demands of the Cross under the sign of which you should henceforward to live in this life; because you no longer live, but He lives in you, Who was crucified for you (*cf Galatians 2:20*).

We must therefore spend our time in this life in that fashion and form in which He was crucified for us on the Cross so that, as David says, piercing our flesh with the fear of the Lord, we may have all our wishes and desires not subservient to our own lusts but fastened to His mortification. For so shall we fulfil the command of the Lord which says: *'He who does not take his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me'* (*Matthew 10:38*).

But perhaps you will say: *'How can a man carry his cross continually? Or how can anyone who is alive be crucified?'*

Hear briefly how this is.

The fear of the Lord is our Cross

As then one who is crucified no longer has the power of moving or turning his limbs in any direction as he pleases, so we also should affix our wishes and desires – not in accordance with what is pleasant and delightful to us now, but in accordance with the law of the Lord, where it constrains us.

He who is fastened to the wood of the Cross no longer considers things present, nor thinks about his likings, nor is perplexed by anxiety and care for tomorrow, nor is disturbed by any desire of possession, nor is inflamed by any pride, strife or rivalry. He does not grieve at present injuries, does not remember past ones. And while he is still breathing in the body he considers that he is dead to all earthly things, sending the thoughts of his heart on before to that place whither he doubts not that he is shortly to come.

So we also, when crucified by the fear of the Lord should be dead indeed to all these things, ie not only to carnal vices but also to all earthly things, having the eye of our minds fixed there we hope at each moment that we are soon to pass. For in this way we can have all our desires and carnal affections mortified.

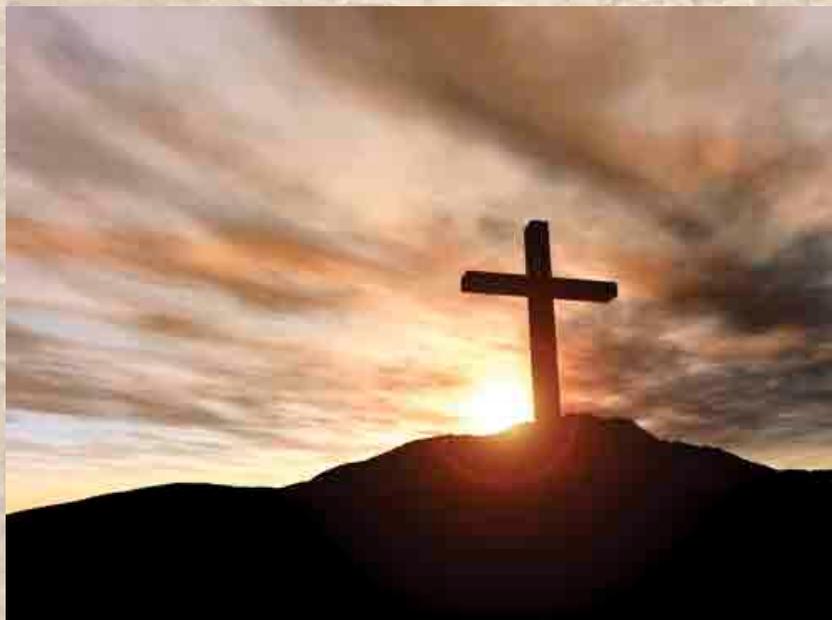
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*The Cross has
been not a
disaster, but
a healing of
Creation*
+
*(St.
Athanasius the
Apostolic)*

Therefore, beware, lest at any time you take again any of those things which you renounced and forsook, and, contrary to the Lord's command, return from the field of evangelical work, and be found to have clothed yourself again in your coat which you had stripped off; neither sink back to the low and earthly lusts and desires of this world, and in defiance of Christ's Word come down from the rod of perfection and dare to take up again any of those things which you have renounced and forsaken. Beware that you remember nothing of your family or of your former affections, and that you are not called back to the cares and anxieties of this world, and as our Lord says, putting your hand on the plough and looking back to be found unfit for the Kingdom of Heaven *(Luke 9:62)*.

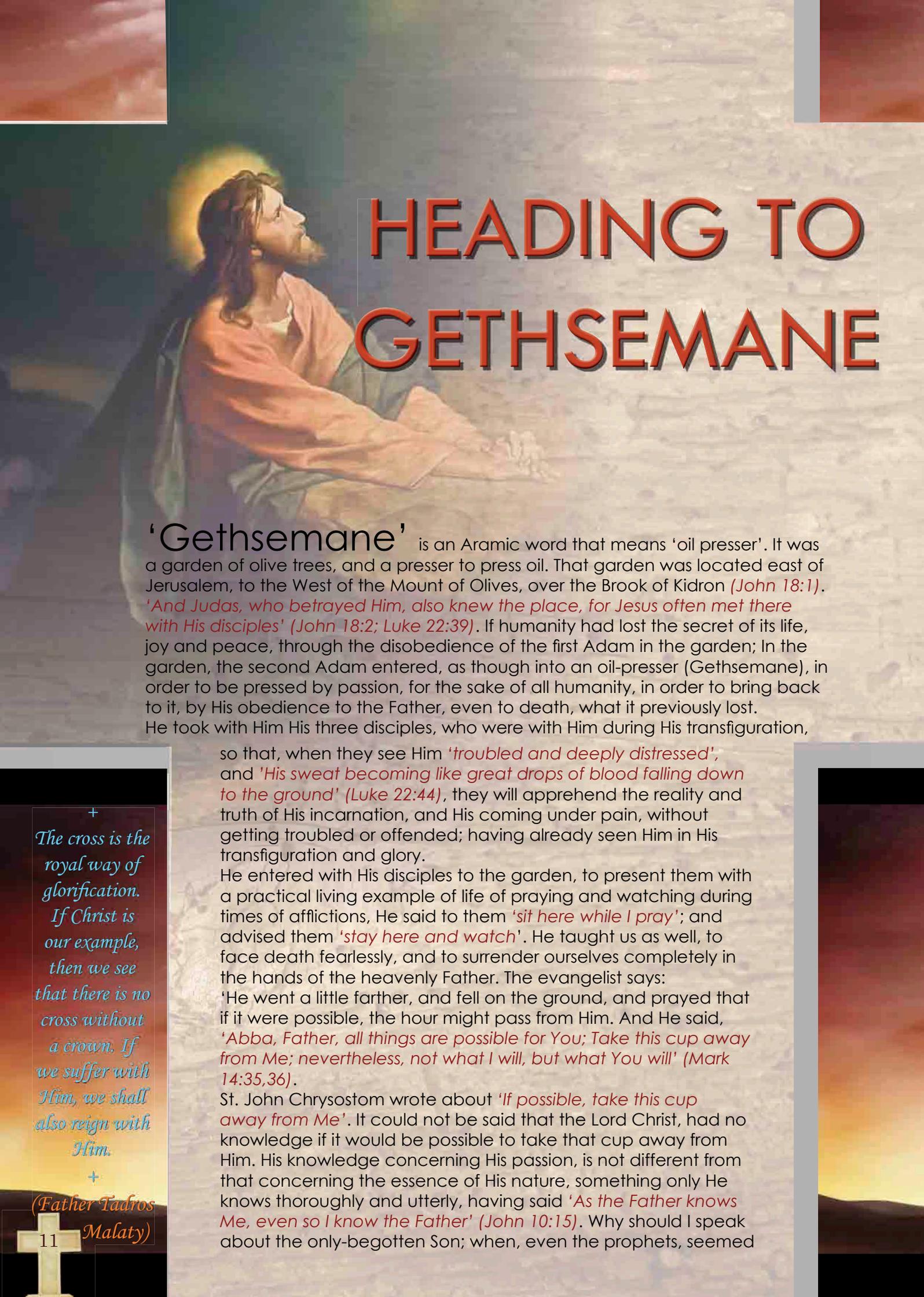
Beware lest at any time, when you have begun to dip into the knowledge of the Psalms and of this life, you be little by little puffed up and think of reviving that pride which now at your beginning you have trampled under foot in the love of faith and in fullest humility; and thus as the Apostle says, building again those things which you had destroyed, you make yourself a backslider *(Galatians 2:18)*.

Rather, take heed to continue even to the end in that state of nakedness of which you made profession in the sight of God and of his angels. In this humility too and patience, with which you persevered for ten days before the doors and entreated with many tears to be admitted into the monastery, you should not only continue but also increase and go forward. For it is too bad that when you should be carried on from the rudiments and beginnings, and go forward to perfection, you should begin to fall back from these to worse things. For not he who begins these things, but he who endures in them to the end, shall be saved *(Matthew 24:13)*.

Extracted from Sunday Gospels of Tute, Babeh and Hatour, Patristic Meditations on the Sunday Gospels of the Coptic Lectionary by John Cassian



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*Having
wiped out the
handwriting of
requirements
that was
against us,
which was
contrary to us.
And He has
taken it out
of the way,
having nailed
it to the cross.
(Colossians 2:14)*



HEADING TO GETHSEMANE

'Gethsemane' is an Aramic word that means 'oil presser'. It was a garden of olive trees, and a presser to press oil. That garden was located east of Jerusalem, to the West of the Mount of Olives, over the Brook of Kidron (*John 18:1*). *'And Judas, who betrayed Him, also knew the place, for Jesus often met there with His disciples'* (*John 18:2; Luke 22:39*). If humanity had lost the secret of its life, joy and peace, through the disobedience of the first Adam in the garden; In the garden, the second Adam entered, as though into an oil-presser (Gethsemane), in order to be pressed by passion, for the sake of all humanity, in order to bring back to it, by His obedience to the Father, even to death, what it previously lost. He took with Him His three disciples, who were with Him during His transfiguration,

so that, when they see Him *'troubled and deeply distressed'*, and *'His sweat becoming like great drops of blood falling down to the ground'* (*Luke 22:44*), they will apprehend the reality and truth of His incarnation, and His coming under pain, without getting troubled or offended; having already seen Him in His transfiguration and glory.

He entered with His disciples to the garden, to present them with a practical living example of life of praying and watching during times of afflictions, He said to them *'sit here while I pray'*; and advised them *'stay here and watch'*. He taught us as well, to face death fearlessly, and to surrender ourselves completely in the hands of the heavenly Father. The evangelist says:

'He went a little farther, and fell on the ground, and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him. And He said, *'Abba, Father, all things are possible for You; Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will'* (*Mark 14:35,36*).

St. John Chrysostom wrote about *'If possible, take this cup away from Me'*. It could not be said that the Lord Christ, had no knowledge if it would be possible to take that cup away from Him. His knowledge concerning His passion, is not different from that concerning the essence of His nature, something only He knows thoroughly and utterly, having said *'As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father'* (*John 10:15*). Why should I speak about the only-begotten Son; when, even the prophets, seemed

+
*The cross is the
royal way of
glorification.
If Christ is
our example,
then we see
that there is no
cross without
a crown. If
we suffer with
Him, we shall
also reign with
Him.*

+
*(Father Tadros
Malaty)*

not to be ignorant of the fact- namely Christ's passion and crucifixion- but knew it clearly, and firmly proclaimed it beforehand.

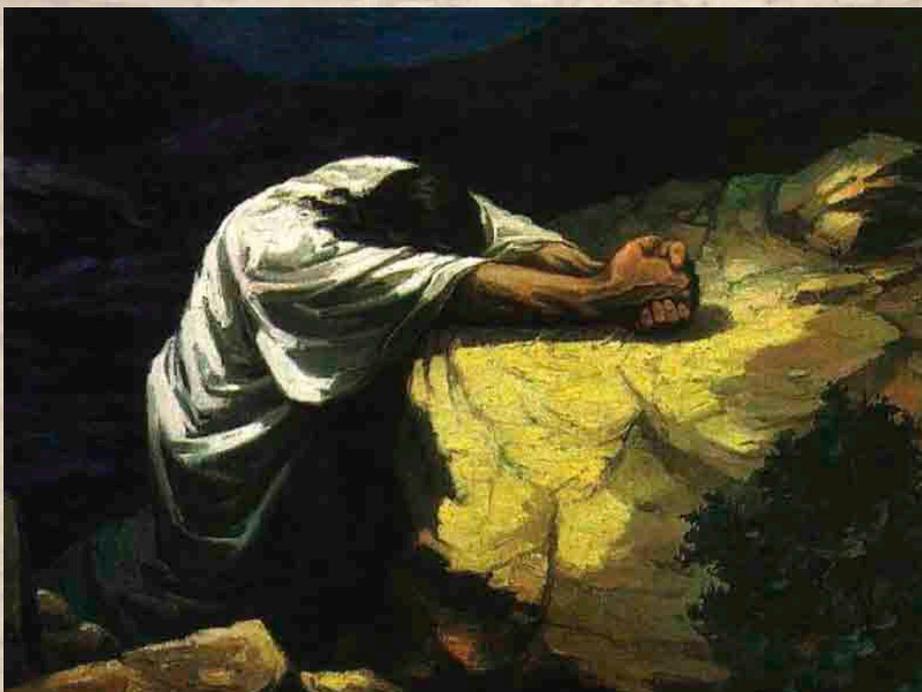
That expression, *'If possible take this cup away from me'*, is not to be taken as a desire to escape crucifixion, He called Peter who was granted the revelation from the Father; and whom He beautified and given the keys of the heavenly Kingdom, He called him 'Satan' and 'offense', and accused him as not mindful of the things of God; All that, because Peter said to Him *'Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You'* (Matthew 15:22, 23), that is, You could not be crucified. How then, would He not desire the Cross, for which He rebuke the disciple and called him 'Satan', just because he asked Him to avoid crucifixion?! How can't He desire the Cross, He, who presented Himself as the Good Shepherd, who gives His life for the sheep, saying *'I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep'* (John 10:11).

Behold, how He is commended by the apostle Paul, because of His proclamation that He would *'give His life'*:

'Who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of man. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross' (Phillipians 2:6- 8). He who spoke of Himself saying *'Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life, that I may take it again'* (John 10:7), and how the apostle Paul also says of Him *'and walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us'* (Ephesians 5:2).

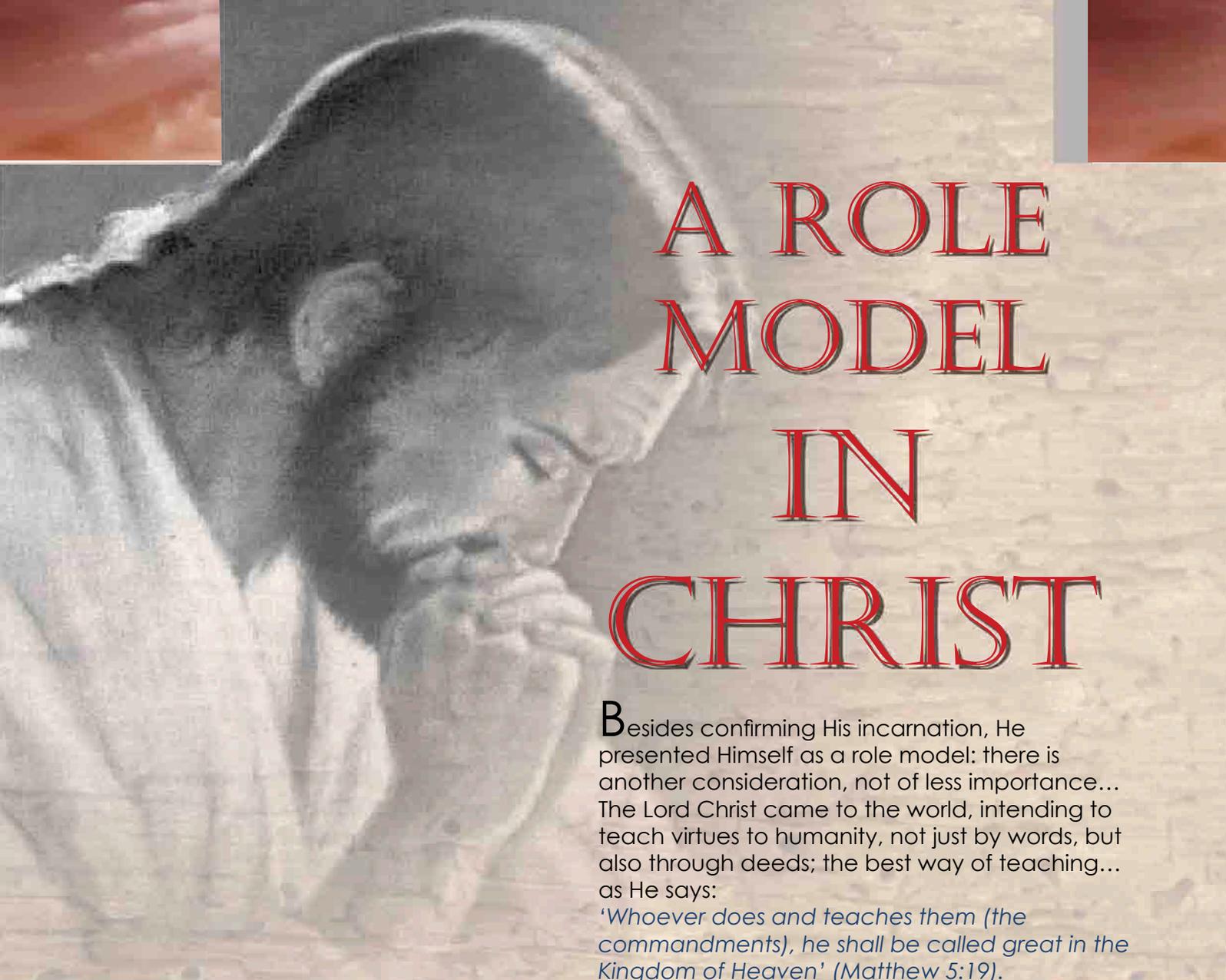
As the Lord Christ approached crucifixion, He lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said *"Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son"* (John 17:1). Behold how He speaks of the cross as a glory! So how could He try to avoid it, when He is actually asking the Father to hasten it.

Extracted from The Gospel According to St. Mark by Father Tadros Malaty



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*If they fall
away, to renew
them again to
repentance,
since they
crucify again
for themselves
the Son of
God, and put
Him to an
open shame.*

+
(Hebrews 6:6)



A ROLE MODEL IN CHRIST

Besides confirming His incarnation, He presented Himself as a role model: there is another consideration, not of less importance... The Lord Christ came to the world, intending to teach virtues to humanity, not just by words, but also through deeds; the best way of teaching... as He says:

'Whoever does and teaches them (the commandments), he shall be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven' (Matthew 5:19).

He commanded His disciples to pray *'Lead us not into temptation'*, then He put that commandment into a practical form, when He said *'Father, if it is possible to take this cup away from me'*. Here, He teaches us all, not to throw ourselves purposely into danger..., to teach us the humility of thought, and to remove from us the love of vain glory. We should entreat Him not to lead us into temptation, yet it is not according to His will, we should ask Him to do, whatever He chooses, saying, *'Now what I will, but what you will'*. He said that, not because the will of the Son is not that of the Father, but to teach men to submit their will to that of God, even if they are troubled, afflicted, and facing danger, and even if they are not yet willing to leave the present world.

Extracted from *The Gospel According to St. Mark* by Father Tadros Malaty



+
*Let the Christ,
the King of
Israel, descend
now from the
cross, they we
may see and
believe.*

+
(Mark 15:32)

THE SECRET OF THE SORROW OF CHRIST

St. Ambrose speaks to us about the secret of the sorrow of Christ, who said, *'My soul is exceedingly sorrowful'*, saying How great is the compassion of the Lord; If He had not my feelings, His goodness would not be as complete!.. He became tired for my weaknesses. He carried my grief to grant me joy. He descended even to the pain of death, to get me back to life; He suffered to conquer sorrow. It was written of Him: *'A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief'*. (Isaiah 53:3)

Joseph taught us not to fear the prison; And in Christ we are taught how to conquer death... You are suffering, O Lord, not because of your wounds, but You are *'wounded for our transgressions'* (Isaiah 53:5). We behold You as a victim of pain, yet, You are suffering for our sake, *'bruised for our iniquities'* (Isaiah 53:5). That weakness is not according to Your nature, yet You acquired it for my sake. Since the fall of Adam, our only chance of getting out of this world is by death, but as God did not create death, and does not desire the death of the sinner, as much as his penitence, He was sorrowful to bear what He did not create.

St. Ambrose completes his comment on the sorrow of the Lord Christ, to confirm that it did not affect His Deity, but only to His human soul; the incarnated Son of God having a human soul that shares our feelings, He says 'Now My soul is troubled'; It is the trouble of the human soul, as

the Deity is not prone to pain. The Lord is not sorrowful (by His Deity), or His Divine nature; but His soul is. He was sorrowful, not because of Passion, but on account of our scattering, as He says *'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered'* (Matthew 26:31). He was also sorrowful on account of His persecutors, knowing that He is redeeming their transgressions by His Passion, He prays for them saying, *'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do'* (Luke 23:24).

Father Theophlactius presents another reason for the Lord's sorrow, saying; it is as though, He was saying 'I am sorrowful, not because I will die, but because the Jews who are My own people, crucify Me, and would therefore be denied the Kingdom of God'

St. Augustine likewise comments on the Lord's sorrow, saying; The Lord probably uttered these words, because of the secret it carries; revealing that He is to suffer according to His body, that is to say according to the Church, to which He became its cornerstone; and that would embrace members both from the Hebrews and from the Gentiles. The saint based his statement upon the Lord's talk to the Father saying 'Abba, Father'. The word 'Abba' symbolises the Jews, and the word 'Father' symbolises the Gentiles, in the relation of each of these two groups with God, as He is the Father of both the Jews and the Gentiles.

Extracted from *The Gospel According to St. Mark* by Father Tadros Malaty

+
And He,
bearing His
cross, went
out to a place
called the Place
of a skull,
which is called
in Hebrew,
Golgotha
+
(John 19:17)

JESUS MOCKED

Then the soldiers led Him away into the hall called Praetorium, and called together the whole garrison. And they clothed Him in purple; and they twisted a crown of thorns, put it on His head, ... and struck Him on the head with a reed and spat on Him; and bowing the knee, they worshiped Him. And when they had mocked Him, they took the purple off Him, put His own clothes on Him, and led Him out to crucify Him' (Mark 15:16- 20).

What happened on the way to the cross was not meaningless; He Himself planned that way from eternity for our salvation. For our sake; *'For the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame'* (Hebrews 12:2).

Some exegetics see that taking off His clothes temporarily, to clothe Him with purple, refers to the casting off of the Jews, who were close to Him according to the flesh. They denied Him; thus casting themselves off Him, so that if they repent and get back to Him with belief, rejecting their material thought, that is to say, became Christians at the end of age, they would again reattach to Him, as they apostle says *'Hardening in parts has happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in'* (Romans 11:25).

St. Ambrose talks to us about the purple garment given to Him by the soldiers, as referring to the victory of the martyrs, as well as to royal authority. It was destined for His body to collect, for our sake, the spilled blood, and to grant us by His passion, His reign in us.

St. Jacob El-Serougi comments on these events saying:

They bared Him of His clothes like shearers, yet He was silent like a lamb in the shearers' hands. He discarded His clothes, so as to clothe those who left the paradise naked.

Clothed them with His clothes, to remain Himself in disgrace; ... He knew that they were suitable

for the disgraced Adam.

They bared Him of His clothes, and clothed Him with a purple robe, the colour of blood, to adorn the murdered bridegroom.

They twisted a crown of thorns for His head; that is fitting for Him, as He came to uproot thorns from earth !

He carried the curse of the earth, through the crown put on His head; and mightily bore the weight of the whole earth.

Sins, transgressions, afflictions, sufferings, and strikes were twisted with the crown of thorns, to be placed on His head to carry.

Through the thorns, the curse of Adam was dissolved.

He became a curse, in order that the returning heirs would be blessed.

Through His crown of thorns, He uprooted the cursed seed of the serpent.

Through the crown of thorns, He destroyed the crown of the devil, who desired to become a god over creation.

Through His crown of thorns, He twisted a crown for the daughter of the Gentiles, the bride He betrothed from among the idols, and gave her His name.

With a reed, they struck the exalted Head, that caused the angels to tremble.

Behold, how much the Lord Christ had endured from the sinners.

That ignorant man, how did he dare to spit on His face ? !

That also happened for the sake of Adam, who was the one worthy of being spat on, because of his iniquity.

+
'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me'.

+
(Luke 9:23)

Extracted from The Gospel According to St. Mark by Father Tadros Malaty

THE WAY TO THE CROSS

They compelled a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus, as he was coming out of the country and passing by, to bear His cross. And they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a skull' (Mark 15:21, 22).

If the word 'Simon' means (to hear, or to obey), and the word 'Cyrenian', referring to a Gentile town in Lybia, means (heir); Simon the Cyrenian refers to the Church of the New Covenant, that became a heir through the obedience of faith; It came of the Gentiles to share with its Christ His cross, and to enjoy with Him that great honour. The Lord Christ bore His cross (John 19: 17) on His shoulder, as a sign of His reign, as told by Isaiah: "The government will be upon His shoulder" (Isaiah 9: 6).

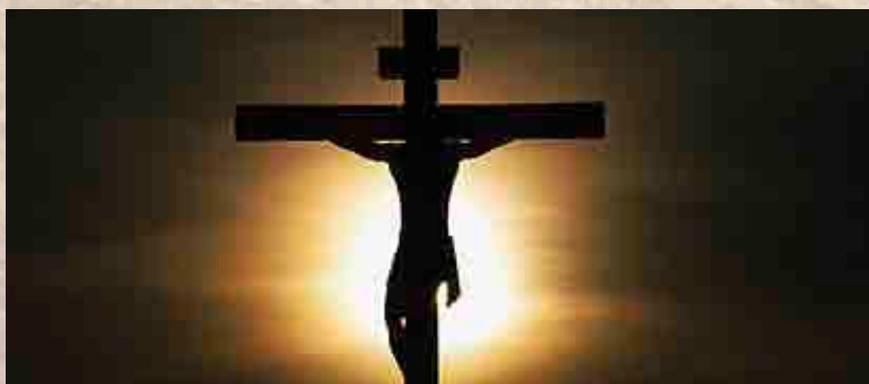
He was symbolized by Isaac who carried the wood of the burnt offering to the place of sacrifice (Genesis 22: 6).

Along the way, when the Lord fell under the weight of the cross, the soldiers compelled

Simon the Cyrenian to carry it; becoming a reference to the Church that shares with its groom, His Passion, to enjoy the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His heavenly glories. They brought Him to the Place Golgotha, that is translated as the place of the skull (Mark 15: 22), claimed to be the burial place of Adam; As though the Lord Christ was raised on a tree, in order to grant life to Adam, who lost his life because of the tree.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem believes that nomenclature reminds us of the fact that the crucified is: 'The head of all principality and power' (Colossians 2: 10). The Head suffered above the place of the skull.

Extracted from The Gospel According to St. Mark by Father Tadros Malaty



+
He saved
others; Himself
He cannot
save. If He
is the King
of Israel, let
Him now come
down from the
cross, and we
will believe
Him.

+
(Matthew
24:42)

CRUCIFIED BETWEEN THE THIEVES

“Now it was the third hour, and they crucified Him. And the inscription of His accusation was written above: ‘THE KING OF THE JEWS’.

With Him they also crucified two robbers, one on His right and the other on His left. So the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘And He was numbered with the transgressors’ ” (Mark 15:25 - 28). St. Mark considers that the crucifixion started from the time the Jews cried out before Pilate, ‘Crucify Him’, and Pilate granted them their request, although raising Him on the cross took place at the sixth hour. That is why, St. Augustine and St. Jerome, see, by saying that, St. Mark putting the responsibility of His crucifixion on the Jewish. The Jews who crucified Him with their tongues, before the Romans executed their verdict. The inscription of His accusation was written on the cross, ‘*The King of the Jews*’, that was not haphazardness, as the Jews got annoyed and asked Pilate to change it to: ‘*Who claimed to be the King of the Jews*’. But they could not, by the cross, deprive Him of His reign; the cross came to establish His kingdom in us.

St. Ambrosius says: The crucified Jesus Christ, and His royal glory were radiating from the cross. St. Cyril of Jerusalem tells us, concerning His crucifixion between two robbers: Referring to the two robbers who were crucified with Him, it was written, “*He was numbered with transgressors*” (Isaiah 53). They were both transgressors, but one of them is no more; the other, who rejected salvation until the end, though his hands were tied, yet his tongue kept blaspheming. For one, it was the end of his life, but the beginning of his repentance and salvation. After rebuking his partner, he said to Jesus: “*Lord, remember Me when you come into your kingdom*” (Luke 23: 42).

Remember Me, O Lord, to you I cry out; the eyes of my mind are closed, but remember me. I do not say remember my deeds, for which I am frightened. Everyone is kind to his fellow traveller; I do not say remember me now, but when you come into your kingdom. What power has illuminated your soul?

Who taught you to worship the despised, who was crucified with you?

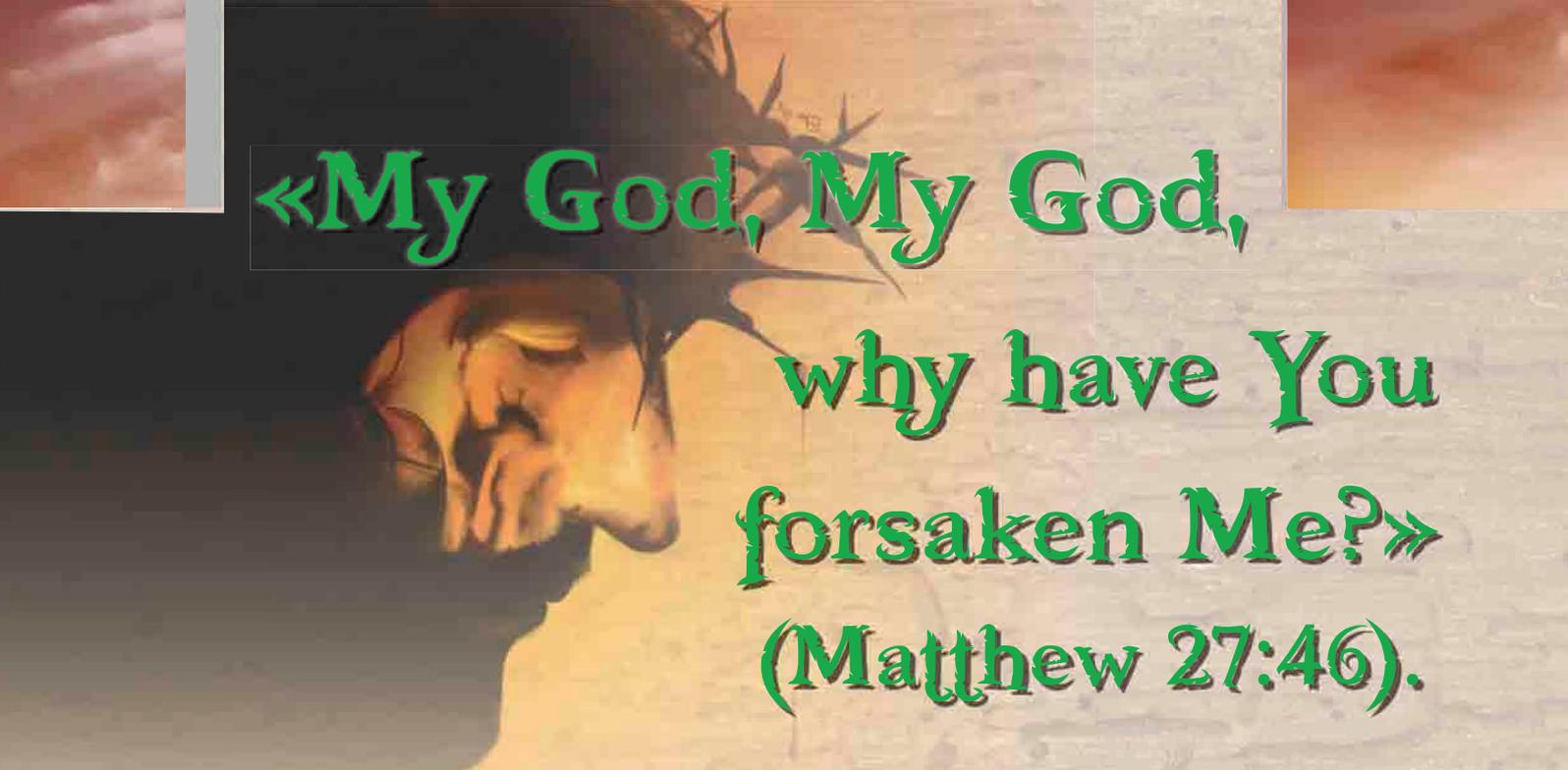
St. Cyril the Great says: Two robbers were crucified with Him, started by mocking Him; one of them likened, in his behaviour the evil Jews, while the other, admirably took a different trend. He believed in Him; and amid his bitter suffering, condemned the vicious attitude of the Jews, and the blaspheming words of his partner crucified with him. Confessing his sins, and admitting that he is justly receiving the due reward of his deeds, he condemned his evil ways, to be forgiven by God, saying with the Psalmist: “*I will confess my transgressions to the Lord. And You forgive the iniquity of my sin*” (Psalm 32: 5). He presented Christ with a blameless testimony, rebuked the Jews for their lack of God's love, and condemned the verdict of Pilate, saying, “*This man has done nothing wrong*” (Luke 23: 41). What a beautiful confession! He gained the inheritance of saints, and his name is now written in heaven; after having been condemned to death, he was numbered among the dwellers of the exalted city.

Some scholars see in the two robbers, a reference to the nations of the Jews and the Gentiles; one of them was condemned to death through the Mosaic law, while the other, through the natural law. The Lord Christ was crucified between them, to bind them together in Him, being a corner stone for the (catholic) Church, offering His blood a price for unity in Him.

+
*He who is
without
sin pray.
How much
more ought
sinners to
pray?*

+
*(St.
Cyprian)*

Extracted from The Gospel According to St. Mark by Father Tadros Malaty



«My God, My God,
why have You
forsaken Me?»
(Matthew 27:46).

This statement does not mean a separation of the divine nature of Jesus Christ from His human nature, nor does it mean that the Father has forsaken the Son. It means rather that the Father has allowed Him to be tormented. His divine nature and His human nature were never separated for a single moment or a twinkling of the eye. That is what we firmly believe in and what we recite in the Holy Mass. If ever His divine nature deserted Him, His redemption could never have been considered as infinite, rendering infinite salvation, capable of atoning for the sins of all humanity throughout the ages.

Thus, there was no rupture between His divine and human nature. As for His relationship with the Father, the Father did not forsake Him. Let us only consider this verse: *«Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me» (John 14:11)*. What is the meaning then of, *«Why have You forsaken Me?»* It does not mean a separation; it indicates only that the Father did

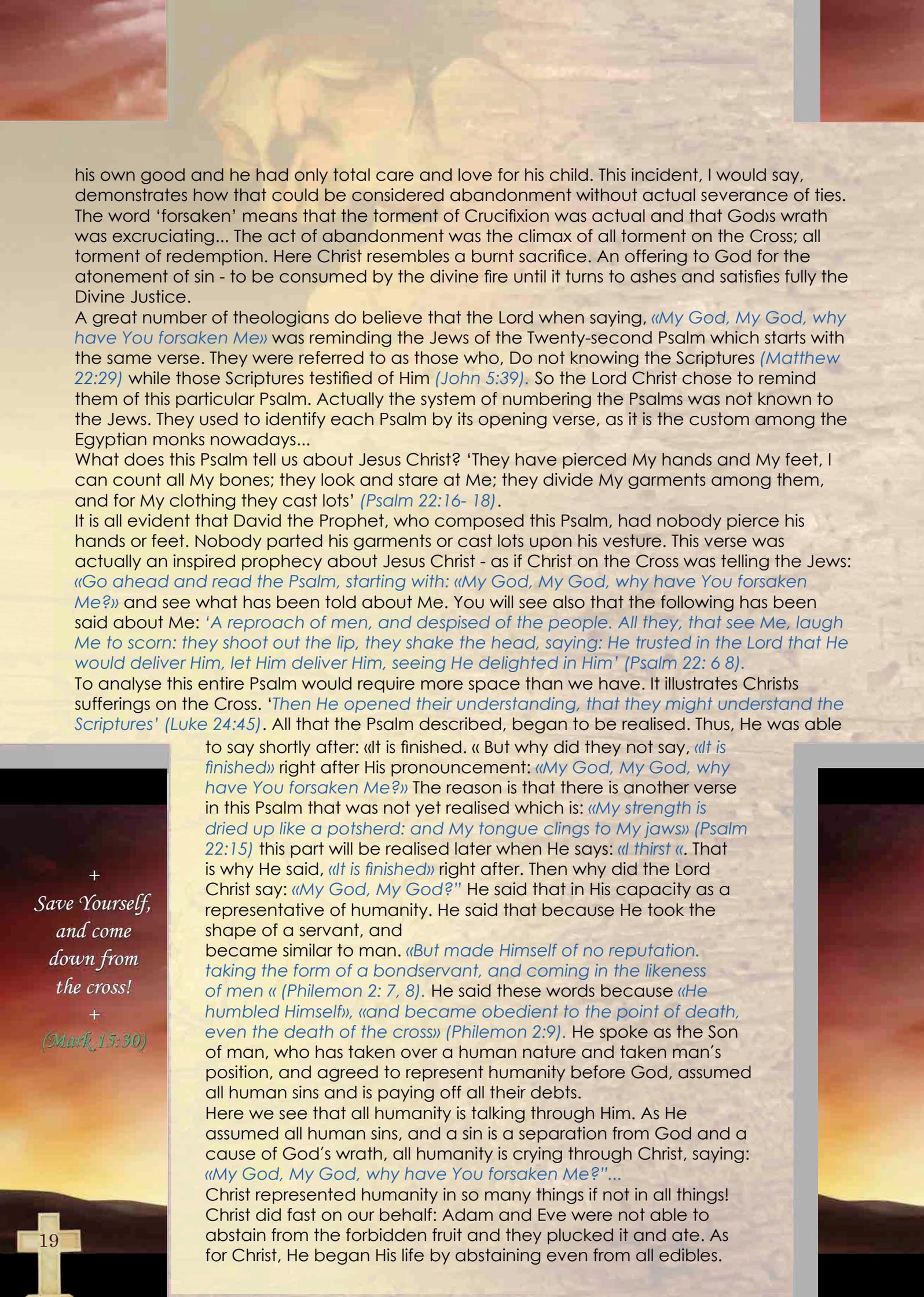
allow that He should suffer; that He should bear the blame and suffer God's wrath over sin. That goes for the emotional torment He underwent. As for the physical pain; God allowed that He should suffer physically though God, in His omnipotence, could have made Him insensitive to pain. But, if that had happened, the Crucifixion would have been null and void - for pain would never have been experienced and consequently, no penalty has been inflicted, no acquittal effected and no redemption accomplished...

Thus, the Father allowed that the Son should suffer, and the Son accepted that ordinance and was also afflicted by it. In fact Christ came to the world for that particular reason. It was a rupture that both parties preconceived and agreed to... for the sake of humanity, and the Divine Justice.

God allowed that Jesus should suffer, sacrifice Himself and be tortured but did not break away from Him. It was not a separation but rather a dispensation. God suffered that His Son should suffer but still loved him fully, *«Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him» (Isaiah 53:10)*. An example that may make the meaning easy to grasp: Suppose a parent accompanied his child to the hospital for an operation, let us say for the removal of an abscess; that the parent was holding the child's hand while the surgeon went on with his incision. The child would then start to cry and plead with his father not to let that happen to him saying to him, 'Why did you forsake me?' In fact, the father did not desert his child, he only allowed him to suffer since the operation was for

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Now Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross. And the writing was: Jesus of Nazareth, The King of the Jews.

+
(John 19:19)



his own good and he had only total care and love for his child. This incident, I would say, demonstrates how that could be considered abandonment without actual severance of ties. The word 'forsaken' means that the torment of Crucifixion was actual and that Gods wrath was excruciating... The act of abandonment was the climax of all torment on the Cross; all torment of redemption. Here Christ resembles a burnt sacrifice. An offering to God for the atonement of sin - to be consumed by the divine fire until it turns to ashes and satisfies fully the Divine Justice.

A great number of theologians do believe that the Lord when saying, *«My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me»* was reminding the Jews of the Twenty-second Psalm which starts with the same verse. They were referred to as those who, Do not knowing the Scriptures (*Matthew 22:29*) while those Scriptures testified of Him (*John 5:39*). So the Lord Christ chose to remind them of this particular Psalm. Actually the system of numbering the Psalms was not known to the Jews. They used to identify each Psalm by its opening verse, as it is the custom among the Egyptian monks nowadays...

What does this Psalm tell us about Jesus Christ? 'They have pierced My hands and My feet, I can count all My bones; they look and stare at Me; they divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots' (*Psalm 22:16- 18*).

It is all evident that David the Prophet, who composed this Psalm, had nobody pierce his hands or feet. Nobody parted his garments or cast lots upon his vesture. This verse was actually an inspired prophecy about Jesus Christ - as if Christ on the Cross was telling the Jews: *«Go ahead and read the Psalm, starting with: «My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?»* and see what has been told about Me. You will see also that the following has been said about Me: *'A reproach of men, and despised of the people. All they, that see Me, laugh Me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying: He trusted in the Lord that He would deliver Him, let Him deliver Him, seeing He delighted in Him'* (*Psalm 22: 6 8*).

To analyse this entire Psalm would require more space than we have. It illustrates Christs sufferings on the Cross. *'Then He opened their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures'* (*Luke 24:45*). All that the Psalm described, began to be realised. Thus, He was able

to say shortly after: *«It is finished.* *« But why did they not say, «It is finished» right after His pronouncement: «My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?»* The reason is that there is another verse in this Psalm that was not yet realised which is: *«My strength is dried up like a potsherd: and My tongue clings to My jaws»* (*Psalm 22:15*) this part will be realised later when He says: *«I thirst* *«. That is why He said, «It is finished» right after. Then why did the Lord Christ say: «My God, My God?»* He said that in His capacity as a representative of humanity. He said that because He took the shape of a servant, and became similar to man. *«But made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men* *«* (*Philemon 2: 7, 8*). He said these words because *«He humbled Himself», «and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross»* (*Philemon 2:9*). He spoke as the Son of man, who has taken over a human nature and taken man's position, and agreed to represent humanity before God, assumed all human sins and is paying off all their debts.

Here we see that all humanity is talking through Him. As He assumed all human sins, and a sin is a separation from God and a cause of God's wrath, all humanity is crying through Christ, saying: *«My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?»*...

Christ represented humanity in so many things if not in all things! Christ did fast on our behalf: Adam and Eve were not able to abstain from the forbidden fruit and they plucked it and ate. As for Christ, He began His life by abstaining even from all edibles.

+
*Save Yourself,
and come
down from
the cross!*

+
(Mark 15:30)

He was in no need to fast, but He fasted forty days and forty nights as mentioned in the church hymns. He represented us in observing God's law:

«The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any who understand, and seek God. They have all gone aside, they have all together become corrupt;» (Psalm 14:2,3).

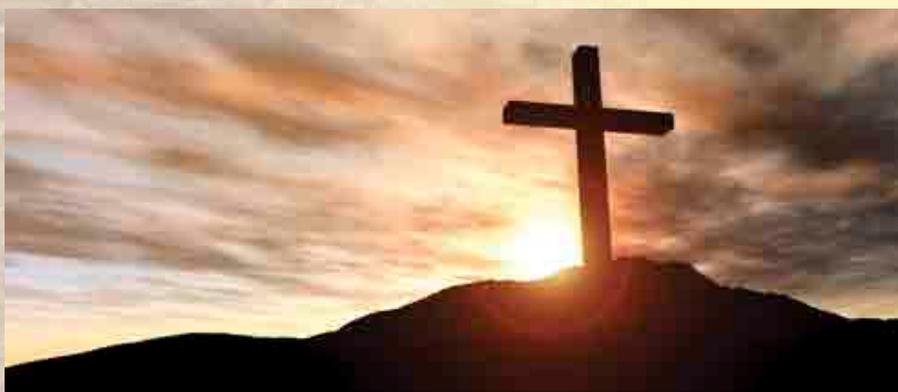
When Christ came, He represented humanity in being obedient to God. He observed the Law, *«To fulfil all righteousness» (Matthew 3:15)* as He mentioned at the time of baptism. Thus, He acted the part of humanity in offering God a chaste and a gracious acceptable life. He represented us in death, torment and the atonement of sin: *«For He has made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin» (2 Corinthians 5:21)*. He suffered all God's wrath for the sinful with all the bitterness therein. And as a representative of humanity said: *«My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?»* And He who helped everybody and has never forsaken any person, was forsaken by all, even by the Father. In that way He paid off our debt and suffered God's wrath and emerged triumphant, having been tried emotionally and physically. He also gave us that a poignant lesson so that we may be more cautious.

If sin would have as a consequence all such abandonment and pain, we should: *«See then that we walk circumspectly» (Ephesians 5:15)*. We should be wary about abandoning God so that God would not abandon us in turn. The Son Himself has been forsaken. The torment of being abandoned is unbearable. We should thank our Lord Jesus Christ for all that love and for all His abnegation.

The words: *«why have You forsaken Me?»* should be a source of consolation for us when we encounter any difficulty. Knowing that if the Lord has not *«spared His Own Son» (Romans 8:32)*, why should we grumble about whatever suffering God allows? God was pleased to put His own beloved Son to grief. And in spite of His saying *«This is My Beloved, Son, in whom I am well pleased» (Matthew 3:17)*, why do we grumble at the moments of trial though we could never suffer as much as Christ suffered and though we deserve to be punished. The Son drank willingly the cup that the Father offered Him. He only said, *«Your will be done»* and was obedient until

death on the Cross. His pronouncement: *«why have You forsaken Me?»* was not a complaint or protest, as we have said before but it was only an expression of the reality of His suffering and a declaration that the act of redemption is being realised...

Excerpt from Ten words of Our Lord on the Cross, by HH Pope Shenouda III



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*'You who
destroy the
temple and
built it in three
days, save
Yourself! If
You are the
Son of God,
come down
from the cross'*

+
*(Matthew
27:40)*

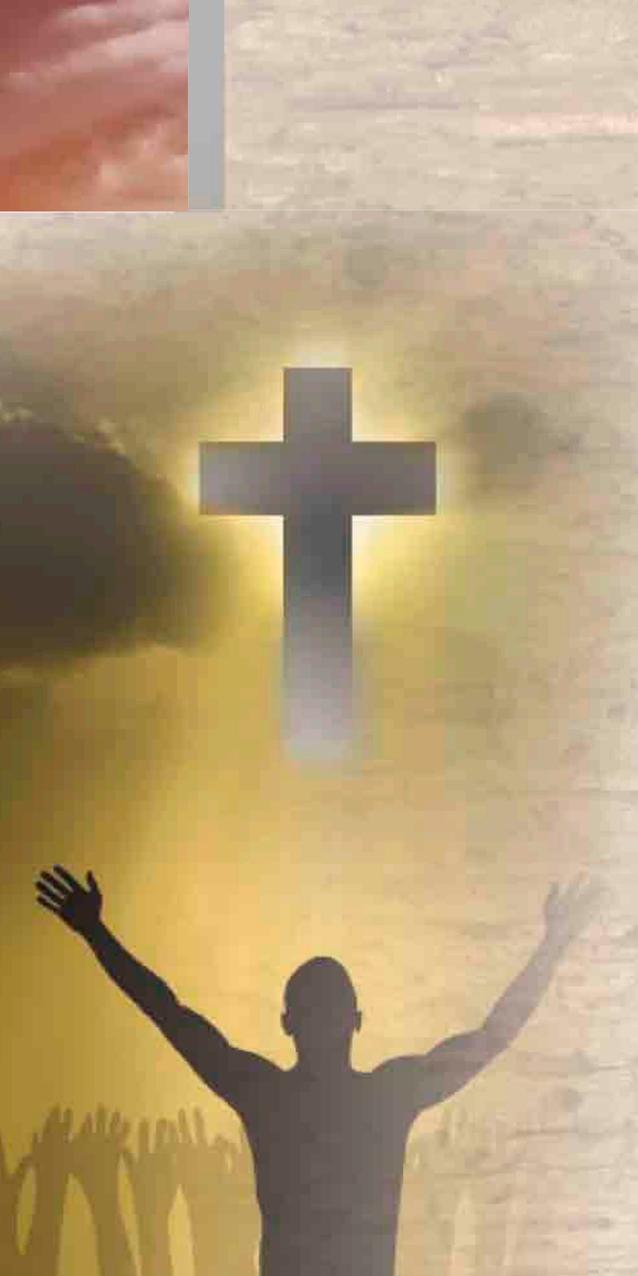
JESUS BREATHING HIS LAST

“**A**nd at the ninth hour, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani’?, which is translated, ‘My God, why have You forsaken Me’? Some of those who stood by, when they heard it, said, ‘Look, He is calling for Elijah’. Then someone ran and filled a sponge full of sour wine, put it on a reed, and offered it to Him to drink, saying, ‘Let Him alone; let us see if Elijah will come to take Him down. And Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and breathed His last” (Mark 15:34 - 37).

According to the flesh, the Lord Christ was totally exhausted, and could not, at that time, cry out with such loud voice; But He did, to proclaim that what was going on their hands, was not out of weakness on His part, but a fulfilment of His Divine work, that He stated beforehand through His prophets. The words, ‘*My God, Why have You forsaken Me*’? do not indicate despair, as some may assume, as the Son is never separated from the Father; But He wanted to demonstrate how horrible was the sin, that He carried in our place, and that made Him, the beloved Son, seem as being fallen under the wrath of God. With that cry, He is also reminding them of the twenty-second psalm, that narrated the events of the crucifixion. With that cry, He offered the Jews a final warning, to reconsider what they were doing, before He breathes His last; hoping that they would apprehend that He is the Messiah, the fulfiller of the prophecies, and would thus retreat. As to their assumption that He was calling for Elijah, The person of the prophet Elijah was connected to Christ, as a forerunner, to prepare the way for Him. Likewise, the Jews saw in Elijah their helper in heaven, who intercedes on behalf of the afflicted and the persecuted; So, as they assume, He was asking for His Intercession.

Extracted from *The Gospel According to St. Mark* by Father Tadros Malaty

+
*And
whoever
does not
bear his
cross and
come after
Me cannot
be My
disciple.*
+
(Luke 14:17)



CHRISTS WORDS ON THE CROSS- IN MY LIFE

These valuable words said by the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross are worthy of being cherished by all of us. Let them have their effect on our lives. Let us weight in our minds every word and react to it. Here are two examples as to how we can react to two pronouncements:

Father, forgive them:

The Lord had taught us to say in the Lord's prayer, *«Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.»* Thus, the words *«Father, forgive them»* have become a prerequisite to forgiveness for yourself.

Let nobody imagine that he is offering

forgiveness to the others when he says: *«Father, forgive them»* He is actually acquiring forgiveness for himself. For, it is the prerequisite of getting forgiveness for yourself, to forgive the others. *«Forgive, and you will be forgiven»* (Luke 6:37).

The Lord Jesus Christ did not comment on any verse except this one when He taught us the Lord's Prayer. He said: *«For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you»* (Matthew 6:14, 1:5). Consequently, if you do not forgive others, you preclude forgiveness for yourself and not for others. If you say: *«Father, forgive them»*, He will, answer you saying: `I will forgive you, too.` Thus, your forgiveness to others is something you are bound to do, if you wish to be forgiven yourself... You are better off then, if your forgiveness - as it is the case with Christ - is based on love, not being an obligation for obtaining forgiveness for yourself. Probably this forgiveness to others would annoy you inwardly and would not be acceptable to your reason and judgment. How can I forgive that person who so much annoyed, aggravated and humiliated me? I should tell you: Just endure and be patient. Actually when you offer forgiveness to this person, you are offering it to yourself. Then forgive, that God might forgive you. And I repeat; let your forgiveness be for love and not as a necessity.

When the Lord Christ came to the Cross asking the Father

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Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the tree and laid Him in a tomb.

+
(Acts 13:29)



forgiveness for all the sins of people, He began by forgiving His persecutors first. It was as if Christ was saying to the Father: *‘I forgive them for all they did, so that you may forgive Me’* - not because He wanted the Father to forgive His sins - for Christ was without sin, *«Which of you convicts Me of sin?»* (John 8:46) but to forgive the sins He carried for others, for He is *«The Lamb of God, that takes away the sin of the world»* (John 1:29), *«And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all»* (Isaiah 53:6). You may say, ‘How can I forgive them for all they did to me? Is it not enough that I am keeping my peace and not returning evil for evil?... No, my dear, this peace is not enough, you have to overcome your inner feelings and forgive willingly. When you have won the battle within yourself, and forgiven for love, you will have ascended the Cross. When you ascend the Cross you will be able to say: *«That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings»* (Philemon 3:10). You have partaken the Lord in His suffering, ascended with Him the Cross and forgiven the offenders for they know not what they are doing.

«Today you will be with Me in Paradise»

Say to yourself, ‘if I wish to have that promise from the Lord Christ, I should say as the thief has said: *«For we receive the due reward of our deeds»* ‘The thief on the right side of the Lord did not rebel against the torment he was subjected to. On the contrary, all he wanted was to be forgiven in eternity. This is an example to follow and not that of the other convict who asked that Christ would come down from the Cross and let him come down also, or as he said, Save Yourself and us. What a wretched fellow he was. For Christ to come down from the Cross would have brought the damnation of the whole world. If that thief was seeking salvation of his spirit, he would have said ‘Would you please, Lord, stay a little on the Cross, for my sake, so that I may not perish. Please, Lord, bear up your pain for my sake, endure until death, so that you may pay the price of all my sins’. Be spiritual, brother, as the thief on the right side who was anxious for his eternal life and not be as carnal as the thief on the left who cared for nothing but to save his body. Also, do not shun or rebel against any crisis in your life, but you should say as the penitent thief has said: *«For we receive the due reward of our deeds.»* If you ask the Lord to remember

you in His kingdom, by the same token you should remember Him on earth and cling to Him with love and adoration. Do not ask the Lord to remember you only on earth but also in His kingdom. No matter what the earth has in store for you-nails, crosses or suffering- the only thing that counts, is your future life in the heavenly kingdom. It does not matter if we spend our life on earth nailed to a cross. The only thing that matters is to be with the Lord in His Paradise. Do not seek to come down from your cross, but persevere and endure.

The Lord has said to the thief: *«Today you will be with Me in Paradise»*; because He accepted His faith, confession and penitence.

As for you, Brother, did you offer God faith, confession and penitence in order to be worthy of His company in Paradise? If you have not done that already, start now! Take part in His suffering so that you may be glorified with Him also. Remember that the words: *«Today you will be with Me in Paradise»* are very reassuring and able to fill you with joy and hope. And if the thief has gotten a promise to be in Paradise, you should be in no way discouraged whatever your sins may be. If the thief’s penitence was accepted in the last moments of his life, you should not give up even if all your past life has been a waste.

The Lord’s pledge to the thief illustrates fully how fast God’s

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For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.

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(Colossians 1:19, 20)





response to our prayers could be. As soon as the thief said: *«Remember me, Lord»*; he received an answer; *«Today you will be with Me in Paradise»*. Thus, persevere in your prayers and supplications, and keep reciting: *«Lord, remember me»* say this over and over, from the bottom of your heart and with faith, and be sure that God will respond to you. Do not succumb to the Devil and let shame or pride preclude you from asking. The tax-collector in his deep shame said: *«Lord, have mercy on me»* the thief in his acknowledgment of his sins, said, however: *«Lord, remember me»*. In the same manner, in spite of all the shame we experience because of our sins, and in spite of the fact that we have no means of defence or excuse, we would still recite the words: *«Lord, remember me»* because we have much more faith in His love and forgiveness until we get a pledge to be with Him in Paradise. The Lord did not promise the thief to be in Paradise only, but He pledged further that the thief will be in His company. Actually the best thing in paradise is to be with the Lord...

Truly, Paradise without the Lord is nothing, and no source of joy because the real bliss is to be with the Lord. When the Lord is among His people they enjoy His love, company, parenthood and kindness. For that reason do not ask for Paradise but ask for the Lord Himself. Wish to be with Him; to enjoy looking at His joyful face. Truly, David said: *'Your face, Lord, will I seek; hide not Your face far from me'*. The most wonderful thing about the story of the thief is that he has been pledged to be with the Lord in Paradise though he was not with the Lord on earth.

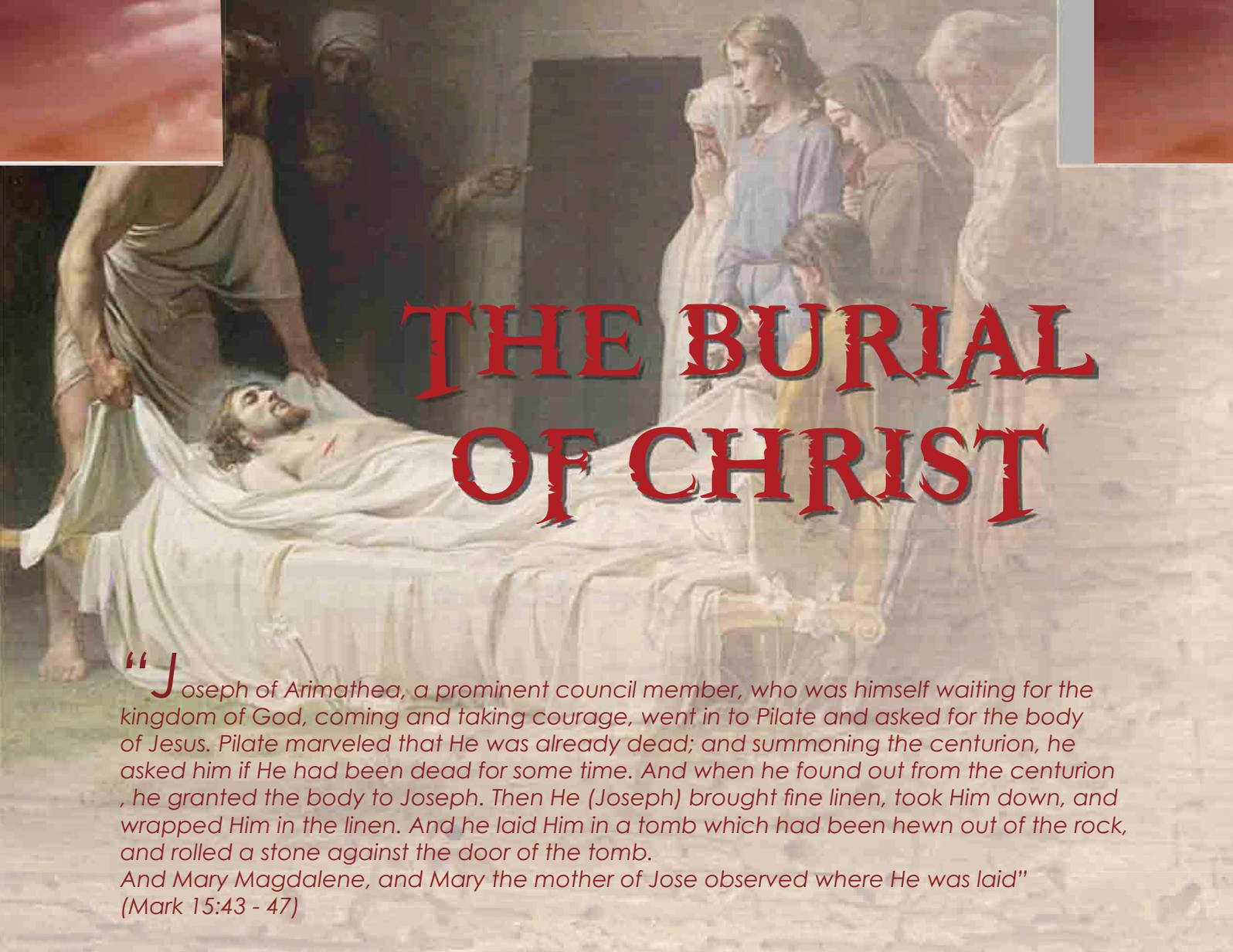
Only a few hours spent with the Lord were adequate to offer him the company of the Lord forever. The fact is that these few hours were spent in depth and touched in depth the heart of the Lord. Thus, it does not really matter how long you pray and supplicate to the Lord. The question is how deep are your feelings. A deeply felt word could be extremely effective. Say it and live in depth with the Lord to touch His deepest thoughts.

Excerpt from Ten words of Our Lord on the Cross, by HH Pope Shenouda III

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*And that He
might reconcile
them both to
God in one
body through
the cross,
thereby putting
to death the
enmity.*

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*(Ephesians
2:16)*





THE BURIAL OF CHRIST

*“Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate marveled that He was already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him if He had been dead for some time. And when he found out from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph. Then He (Joseph) brought fine linen, took Him down, and wrapped Him in the linen. And he laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock, and rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. And Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of Jose observed where He was laid”
(Mark 15:43 - 47)*

The body had to be taken down before sunset, as the crucifixion took place on Friday the 'preparation day', on which the Jews prepare for the Sabbath rest. On that day the Lord was crucified, on the sixth day, thus, as God created all creation in six days, to take rest on the seventh day, so also He was raised on the cross, renewing His creation on the same sixth day, to enter with it into the secret of the true rest. The crucifixion of the Lord on the sixth day, 'the preparation day', may embrace our commitment, to be carried by the cross to Him, as long as we are still in this world, by making of all our life 'a preparation day'; to stay with Him on the cross until we breathe our last. And when our worldly life comes to its end, He would send His angel, as though 'Joseph of Arimathea', to lay our body to rest for a short while, until it is raised again on the great day of the Lord.

The Lord did not wish, His body to be wrapped by His disciples, lest there would be accusation, that they stole the body before burying it; But He was wrapped by an honourable righteous man. St. Ambrose comments on the wrapping of the Lord's body, saying: The righteous man anointed the body of Christ with spices and wrapped it with linen. Righteousness is the clothing of the Church (the body of Christ), and innocence is its beauty. So, you too, clothe yourself with the glorious body of the Lord, to become righteous. If you believe in His death, then wrap Him in full Divinity; anoint Him with myrrh and spices, the

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“Lord,
remember
Me when
you come
into your
kingdom”

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(Luke 23: 42)

sweet fragrance of Christ (2 Corinthians 2: 15).

Joseph of Arimathea wrapped Him in a new linen, probably the new sheet, seen by Peter descending from heaven, and in it were all kinds of four-footed animals, beasts, and birds of the earth (Acts 10: 11). By it, the Church was wrapped, uniting the different peoples in the same faith. He was placed in a new tomb, in Joseph's tomb, as Christ did not have His own burial place; A tomb is set for those under the law of death, but the Conqueror of death has no tomb of His own. The death of Christ has its own nature, different from that of other humans; that is why, He is not to be buried with others, but in a separate tomb by Himself. Through the Lord's incarnation, He is unified with the whole humanity, yet, with some Difference. He likened us in His birth, yet, differed in being conceived by a virgin.

Who would be this Joseph, in whose tomb Christ was buried? He is surely that righteous man who surrendered his tomb to Christ, to give the Son of Man somewhere to lay His head (Luke 9: 58), and there, to find rest. "A throat is an open tomb" (Psalm 5: 9); That is the throat of a man without faith,

who utters dead words; but, in the depths of man, there is a tomb, hewn by the righteous, so that the Word of God would enter into the hearts of nations through faith. A rock is to be placed on the door of the tomb, to keep it closed; As Christ is well wrapped in our souls, He has to be carefully kept, lest we lose Him. The tomb was hewn in a rock; that is established upon the steadfast faith in God. Not every one can wrap Christ; That is why the pious women stayed afar; yet they carefully observed where He was laid, so as to come later to anoint Him with spices. In their love, they were the last to leave the tomb, and the first to return to it.

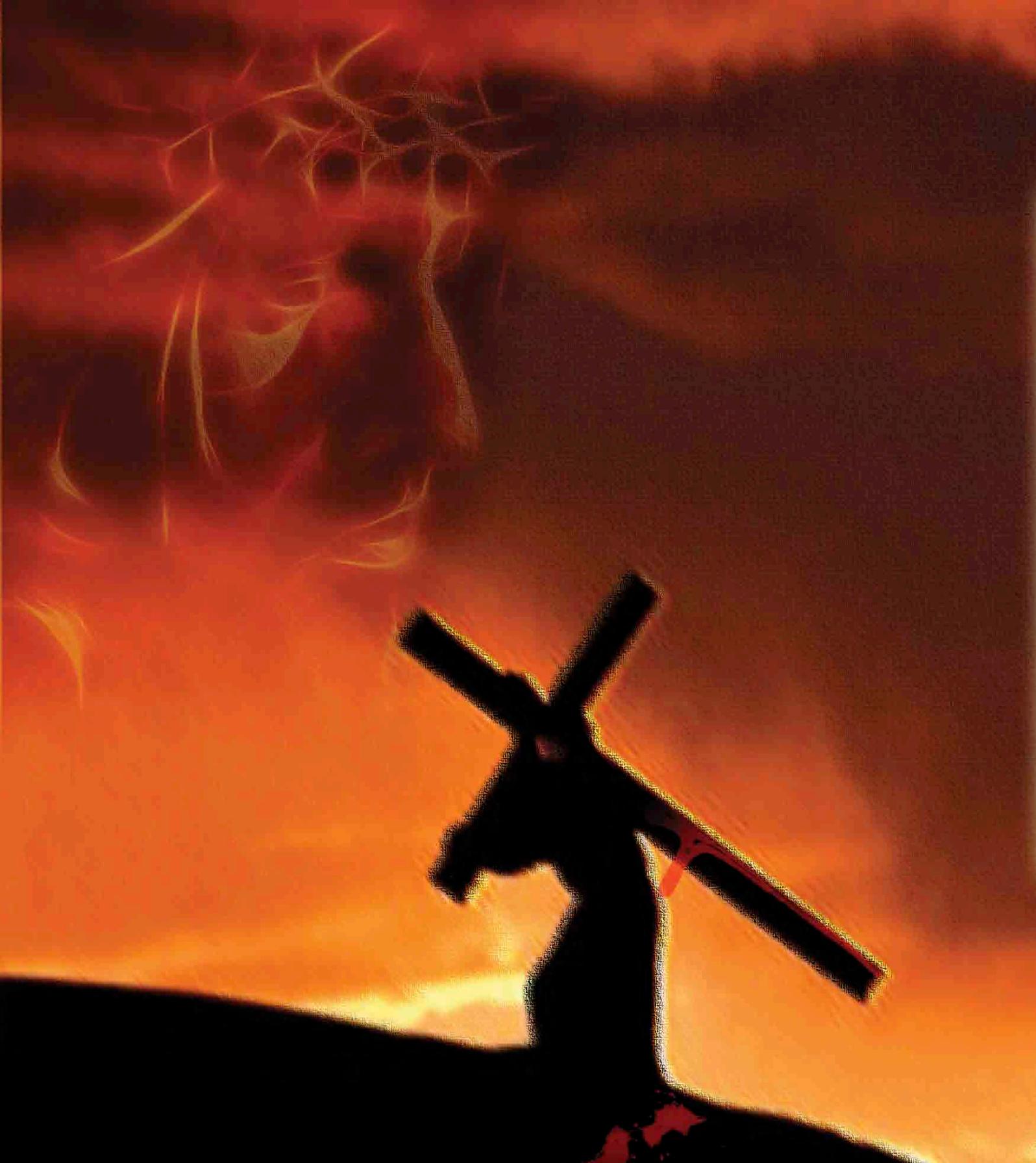
Finally the burial of the Lord Christ by Joseph of Arimathea, represents a pious spiritual experience, that is fitting for us to live by every day. This Joseph came from Rama, said to be 'Ramathaim Zophim' (1 Samuel 1: 1) -- 'Ramallah' nowadays. As the word 'Rama' in Hebrew means a (high place); No one could enjoy that honour, unless he comes from the heavenly high places; that is to say comes from Rama; enjoying heavenly life, as his home and where he is raised. How could he carry the body of the Lord, if he does not have the heavenly spiritual mark? What is that body which we carry, but our life, being ourselves, members of His body, which we wrap in linen, namely in true purity, anoint with the sweet fragrance of Christ, and enter with it into the Lord Christ Himself, as though into the rock. Thus our life would carry the power of His resurrection, and would be in the company of angels, as angels were inside the tomb of the Lord.

Extracted from The Gospel According to St. Mark by Father Tadros Malaty



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*'Whoever
desires to
come after
Me, let him
deny himself,
and take up
his cross, and
follow Me'.*

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(Mark 8:34)



SAINT MARY & ANBA BISHOY
COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH SA

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