



COPTIC ORTHODOX
PATRIARCHATE



**.. and everything he does
he prospers**

H.H. Pope Tawadros II

**The cover of the book expresses the first psalm
“He shall be like the tree which is planted by the
streams of water....” (ps 1:4).**

Title of the book:

.. and everything he does he prospers

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HIS HOLINESS POPE TAWADROS II

Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of The See of St. Mark
One Hundred and Eighteenth

INTRODUCTION

“The Successful Life” is a series of three lectures given in public meetings. There are three virtues or graces which we consider to be the key to a successful life:

An Open Mind ... A Big Heart ... A Humble Spirit

We need these three qualities together to tackle life’s challenging situations and make a success of them.

In his third epistle, St John said ‘Dearly beloved, concerning all things I make it my prayer that you may proceed prosperously and fare well, as your soul does prosperously.’ (3 John 1:2)

Success in life is to succeed in every way and not just spiritually or socially or academically.

In his prayer, Saint Ephrem the Syrian said ‘Guide the vessel of my life with your commandments, and grant me the understanding to trade my talents successfully as long as I still have the time, before I hear those words: show me the results of trading your talents.’

A successful life is what we all hope for, on our journey to the Kingdom of Heaven.

May the words in this book be a blessing to many, for the Glory of God's name through the intercessions of our Mother the Virgin Mary and St Mark the Evangelist.

The Feast of St Mary
August 2016

Pope Tawadros II



PREFACE

“The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults. Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me! Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.” (Psalms 19:7-14)

We all come across various situations and problems in our life. The world around us is changing fast, with faster means of transport, faster public media, which transmits information all over the world in seconds. Even food is faster to prepare with the increase in fast food and take aways. Man’s lifestyle is changing rapidly.

In the middle of this mad race, the question arises ‘how can man resolve his problems in the middle of such a fast evolving world?’ Man’s success in solving his problems depends on his

attitude: a bad attitude results in bad results and vice versa. When faced with new things, man has the choice either to accept or reject them fully or partially.

When it comes to our children's education for example, we can be faced with certain situations which are difficult to resolve. It is a big mistake to tell your children "When I was your age, I did this or that". To adopt such an attitude is certainly a huge error. Today, in a fast changing world, and with an age gap of 20 or 30 years between you and your children, these words are not suitable at all.

In its mission, the church today requires solutions to a lot of difficult situations in society in general. We repeatedly find ourselves faced with the question "What are the keys to resolve these problems in the best possible way?"

There are three virtues which we can consider as the essential keys to succeed in life:

- **An open mind**
- **A big heart**
- **A humble spirit**

He who is endowed with an open mind will endeavour to have a big heart and this is not possible without a humble spirit.

Equipped with these three qualities together, one can address difficult situations and problems and reach the right decisions.

An Open Mind



“Let the words of my mouth and the thoughts of my mind be acceptable before you, O Lord My Rock and my Master” (Ps 19:14).

God blessed man with the gift of ‘the Mind’ to make him superior to all other creation. As a beacon, ‘the mind’ was intended to light man’s way through life. So, let it be your endeavour always to broaden and expand your mind through knowledge.

The Mind also adds distinction and charm to mankind. To describe someone as sensible and level-headed is to pay him or her a compliment. Most of us know the parable of the ten virgins - and what a difference between the wise and the foolish ones.

Our minds are similar to scales with which we weigh every situation in life. To assist us, God also gave us ‘reasoning’ as a toolkit and surrounded our brain by the eyes, ears, nose, throat and tongue so that the sensory signals they send are carefully and closely weighed .

The ‘Open Mind’ does not just acquire knowledge through mixing with others, but from nature and objects around us as well. The Bible, for example, urges us to learn from the ant and the bee. In the same way, we must learn from everything we see or hear or experience in our lives.

Open minds do not pay attention to the rippling of the waters behind the ship, or to those meaningless people who appear in their way.



Beloved, be wary of sins; they defile the mind and cause it to be unsound. One of the most dangerous effects of sin is that it narrows the mind, and this would have serious consequences. Sometimes we compare someone's head to a rock. Stubbornness is even more difficult to deal with. One example of how sin causes narrow mindedness, is with the story of the 'Born Blind'. Everyone knew that he was blind; they always saw him begging in the streets, but when he was healed by our Lord J.C., who gave him new eyes, the Pharisees began to doubt that he had ever been blind. They called his parents and asked them "Is this your son whom you say was born blind? How is it that he can see now?" (John 9:19). Again, they visited the 'Born Blind' and questioned him. Despite the fact that the truth was so clear; their minds were narrowed and they were unable to realise and accept that this was a Healing Miracle. But the 'Born Blind' stood there and courageously said to them "I know only one fact: that I was blind and now I can see" (John 9:25)

Sin, which defiles and narrows the mind, can lead to worse consequences. It can make man lose his mind, and seem to be mindless. Sometimes when someone commits a serious mistake, he wonders to himself "Where was my mind?"

Sin leaves the mind powerless and unable to think, or makes it reason in a distorted manner. Sin narrows man's mind, however educated and civilised he might be. Terribly hard is the sin of narrow-mindedness!



1. Daniel and the three youths: ‘To these four men, God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning’ (Daniel 1:17). The four youths were blessed with a wide and open mind because God granted them the knowledge, the understanding and the wisdom in Chaldean learning and conduct, but Daniel excelled above the others by the spirit of prophecy. God gave him the gift of understanding visions and dreams which announced His will and intentions.

Daniel and the three youths had the knowledge and wisdom, and this is why we praise and glorify them until today. We narrate their life story and heroic deeds in the third Canticle of the Tasbeha (Midnight Praises), when we sing (Aripsalin) “O Sing unto Him who was crucified, buried and resurrected for us”

2. Abigail, wife of Nabal the foolish: This woman proved to be very wise when she came to meet David the prophet, who said to her “May you be blessed for your good judgement” (1 Samuel 25:33). She had a wise and broad mind.

The Book of Proverbs says ‘Now then my children, listen to me; blessed are those who keep my ways. Listen to my instruction and be wise. Do not disregard it.’ (Proverbs 8: 32-33)

And in the Book of Revelations, God said “Look, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this book.” (Revelations 22:7)

3. **The Canaanite woman:** When Jesus said to her “It is not right to take the children’s bread and to toss it to dogs” (Matthew 15:26), she answered full of faith and wisdom and humility; her composed and discerning answer surprised everyone present. She said “Yet the dogs do eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table” (Matthew 15:27). So Jesus said to her “O woman, great is your faith. Your request is granted.” (Matthew 15:28)

4. **Zacchaeus, the wise decision maker:** We know that he was a tax collector and lived in sin. But the moment he met Jesus, his mind was opened and he broke away from the insensibility of his sins. As soon as his eyes fell on Jesus, his whole existence was renewed. His mind was transformed and exhilarated, and he said “Here I am O Lord! Now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.” (Luke 19:8). This was a wise decision.

5. **Paul the Apostle (Saul of Tarsus):** When he met the Lord on the Damascus road, confused and frightened, he said: “O Lord, what do you wish me to do?” (Acts 9:6). He projected himself as a wise man, as if he was saying to the Lord: I surrender my life to you, do as You may wish with it and reform it. Hence Saul became St Paul, a disciple, an

evangelist and a great preacher, who ended his life as a martyr.

6. **Peter the Apostle:** By going to the house of Cornelius the Centurion (a Gentile), he proved to be an open-minded person. He did not care for people's opinions, and endured their disapproval for the sake of God's approval. The Spirit of God was paving the way for the gentiles to enter the gates of Faith. Prior to those events, the calling was confined to the circumcised. But now, the directives were clear: let Peter the apostle of the circumcised open the gates of faith to the gentiles.

7. **The Myron Sacrament:** Any newly baptised person receives his first sign of the cross on his head to anoint the mind, to sanctify that mind with the grace of the Holy Spirit. A priest normally puts his cross on the head of the person he is blessing or praying for. In other words, he is blessing his mind and thoughts.

THE OPEN MINDEDNESS OF THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS



At the start of the First Church a dispute occurred, which was known in history as ‘The problem of Judaism’. There were two different opinions:

- The first opinion was that pagans had to convert to Judaism first before becoming Christians.
- The second maintained that any pagan could convert to Christianity straightaway.

The Council of the Apostles met and listened to Peter and Paul who defended their view that pagans can convert to Christianity, and to some other believers who maintained that they had to convert to Judaism first. After prayers, debates and discussions, the open-minded opinion won and it was decided that pagans could convert directly to Christianity.

This was mentioned in the Book of Acts: ‘It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immoralities. You will do well to avoid these things.’ (Acts 15:28-29). The decision was ratified and the problem was resolved.

A radical and extreme mind would not contemplate any progress or compromise. Can you imagine what would have happened if the radical view won that debate? Would it have

been acceptable to tell a Buddhist that he had to become a Jew first before becoming a Christian?

The first church was also faced with another problem: that the Hellenistic widows were overlooked in the daily distribution of food compared with the Hebraic widows. So the disciples stood together and said clearly “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them.” (Acts 6:2-3).

They chose seven men full of the Spirit and put them in charge as deacons. St Stephen was the first to be chosen and the problem was resolved.

The Spirit of God dwells and works in His Church. He never forsakes it, but is manifest through the Church Fathers and Saints. Jesus Christ sent us the “Parakleton” the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, to abide within us and guide the Church, and even though every era and epoch is identified by its unique changes we cannot say the same about the Spirit of God, for His Spirit is unchanging and everlasting. In the prayers of the third hour, we repeat “The spirit of truth, who is present in all places and fills all”. A Christian person should always be graced with an open mind.

EVOLUTION IN THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH



The world is changing and our minds should be evolving to keep up with those changes. For example:

❖ ***The Tabernacle*** In olden times it was carried from one place to another, then put up where Moses [I have inserted Moses, because I presume that is who was meant by ‘he’] people wished to worship the Lord. But it is neither possible nor suitable to do the same nowadays. The church has to be a fixed building. However, someone might object and insist that in the old times people used to worship the Lord in a tent.

❖ ***The Holy Bible*** This used to be handwritten on sheets of parchment or papyrus. The size and weight of one single book was huge, but in modern times we have printing and in colour too. Should we take advantage of the printed bible or must we insist on reading from parchment? And when the Bible was printed and became available in every household, some considered this to be a heresy, claiming that the Bible should only be read in the church.

In the early days of the Church in Egypt, people used to pray in the Coptic language and its different dialects. In the tenth century, in the time of St. Severus Ibn al-muqaffa, the Arabic language was introduced in Egypt, and prayers in churches were raised in Coptic, Arabic and Greek.

Our churches in the Diaspora pray in the local language, whether it's English, German, Swedish or French, etc. Evolution is imperative! Insisting to pray in only one language may lead to the loss of many souls. We cannot affirm that there is only one language in heaven. Yes, there is the language of praises but we do not know if that is Arabic or English. Why do some researchers waste time trying to discover the language Adam or his descendants spoke when we can pray in many languages? This is called Evolution.

❖ **Pope Cyril (Kyrillos) IV, the Father of Reform** (1853-1862) This blessed Patriarch was ahead of his time; he established a great printing house and ordered that the machines were received with songs of praise and church hymns. Some objected, claiming that such a reception is worthy of a bishop or a newly ordained priest, and not of a machine made of metal. In those days, printing machines were inconceivable to most people.

In his time, he also endeavoured to teach and educate girls. The school he founded was the first girls' school in Egypt. In that time, a lot of people could not accept the idea of educating girls, and he was faced with a huge challenge. However, today this is absolutely normal.

The human mind must evolve even when it comes to the theological teachings. **Archdeacon Habib Girgis** found that just teaching and preaching to adults was not enough for the advancement of the Coptic Church. He turned his attention to young children and established Sunday Schools in 1900, despite opposition and criticism from religious leaders, who were old-

fashioned and rejected modernisation. Bishop Gabriel, Head of St. Antony's monastery, was one of those who opposed the idea; he wrote

'This is a group of people unknown to the church, who took advantage of the naivety of some members of the congregation, and took the image of the torch bearers, and were able, through cunning and deception, to attract attention and win admiration. This is what they call Sunday Schools. It is an idea which they based on their own principles and supported with a great deal of money. What sort of education is that which allows young boys and girls to mix?'

Bishop Gabriel accused Sunday Schools of ignoring church leaders and hiring Coptic scribes to call for their support. He claimed that the Sunday School magazine was littered with their attempts to attack priests and Metropolitans.

Sunday School has nevertheless endured countless attacks and encountered bitter opposition until the credibility of its mission and the nobility of its objectives became universally accepted, to the extent that Pope Cyril (Kyrillos V) wrote an article in November 1907 which said

'Those whom you see as young children today are the men of the future. Teach them and take good care of them. Bring them up in truth and virtue, sow the seeds of righteousness and grace in them. Draw them close to the church, and teach them to remember the Creator in the days of their youth'.

The idea of Sunday School became the main pillar on which the revival of the Coptic Church was built in the 20th and 21st century.

❖ In the old days, churches were lit with candles, just as in some monasteries nowadays, but the last century saw the installation of electricity and in this century air conditioning systems were introduced due to the expansion in size of the Coptic community and the increasingly hot climate. Can anyone argue that air conditioning units and electric fans should not be used in churches because they were not mentioned in the Bible?

❖ We can also find open-mindedness in the monasteries, which were first built in Egypt and then spread all over the world. In the Middle Ages, these monasteries were centres of civilization where manuscripts of old philosophies and sciences were preserved. The early universities of the western world were founded by churches, and Christian institutions sponsored the majority of early scientific research. Several monks and men of faith took up scientific research, and were prominent scholars in western educational institutions. Some were even founders of particular branches of science:

- Gregor Mendel, the Austrian monk is recognised as the founder of the modern science of genetics, and was the first to discover the initial principles of heredity;
- Georges Lemâitre was the first to propose the theory of the expansion of the universe, and also what became known as the Big Bang Theory;
- Copernicus formulated the theory that placed the sun, rather than the earth, as the centre of the universe.

Some of the greatest universities in the world, such as Oxford or Cambridge Universities, were originally monasteries.

If you take a tour of one of the colleges of Oxford University, you will be shown a small room which they say was used to mend shoes. Apparently, one of the monks used to sit in there and mend the shoes of those visitors who travelled from afar.

So, if a monk wishes to take a step forward and enlighten his mind with knowledge from within the monastery, how can we brand his efforts as misguided when they benefit the whole world?

The world is steadily evolving day after day, and is invariably in need of refreshed and open minds.

THE QUALITIES OF AN OPEN MIND



1. An ever practical mind: always aware of the changing times. So for example if you give your son one pound as pocket money and you tell him “when I was your age, I used to get two shillings”, he will wonder what this strange currency is!

2. A deliberating mind: open to discussions. It is not acceptable nowadays, for example, to end discussions with our children by giving them orders; it would be better to have an open discussion and try to negotiate. Exchanging ideas and experiences broadens and enhances the mind. This is how new ideas are born and misguided ones are gradually abandoned and replaced by proven facts.



3. A mind concerned with the reform of its own society. A father is concerned with the wellbeing of his family members, and a servant in church is keen on improving the services offered in his church, and an individual wishes the best for his community and his country. JC said “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).

4. A realistic mind: a mind that does not just refer to and quote theories. Addiction is a current compelling example. It is

evident that drug addiction is becoming a widespread damaging phenomenon which has deeply affected many families and societies, whereas fifty years ago, the problem was not as bad. A comprehensive and detailed reading into all the factors ought to be considered when it comes to putting new family laws.

A realistic person does not deal with issues in an abstract manner. If there is a housing crisis in Egypt, for example, someone might say “No problem! Let’s build houses!” But is this really the answer to the problem? To build houses, we need to find sites, engineers, builders, building materials, etc. and most importantly to secure funding. That is why a realistic mind is needed to put forward feasible and practical solutions to any problem.

5. A creative mind. Creativity is an enormous mental activity which is basically instinctive, sociably developed and serves human society as a whole. The mind is the centre of creativity. It is like a factory which picks up raw materials and passes them through the multiple processes of testing, analysing, selecting and then distributing them to be deposited in its storage cells.



A creative mind is always innovative; it searches for what is better. Human innovations are endless in every walk of life. Among the characteristics of a creative mind are:

- a. It endures mysteries and ambiguity, and commands an extreme capability to be patient in solving problems.

- b. It is curious, inquisitive and is inclined to search for more knowledge.
- c. It is witty and joyful, and exhibits a good sense of humour.
- d. It is an open mind, which takes on board others' opinions.
- e. It tends to challenge difficult situations and mysterious issues.
- f. It is practical and can deal with different situations.
- g. It is capable of generating ideas.

Anyone who has not received this graceful blessing is rigid and narrow-minded, but an open-minded person thinks and plans well for a successful future.

Another example: We all know that much of Europe is now using the same currency, the Euro. The idea of using a single currency in Europe started in 1960, and was brought to life in the year 2000. In other words, it took 40 years of researching and planning before the decision was taken.

In conclusion, the Open Mind is guided by God:

‘The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes’ (Psalms 19:8)

‘Your word is a lamp for my feet, and a light on my path’ (Psalms 119:105)

One of the dear fathers' stories is about a hermit who lived in the wilderness and never accepted gifts from visitors. He also

could not give anything to his visitors who asked him for any keepsake as a blessing. One day, he stood before the Lord and prayed with tears asking for guidance on what to do since those who offered him gifts were saddened because he refused to take their gifts and those who asked him for a blessing were also saddened as he could not offer them anything to take away as a blessing. He heard a voice saying “Accept the gifts and bless those who offered them, and offer the others the chance to choose from what you have received”.

Another story from the Buddhist tradition of the monastic life in East Asia, and this is totally different from Christian monasticism. They wear yellow coloured clothes, shave their heads and are not allowed to touch women or even to greet them. It is said that an elderly Buddhist monk was once walking with his young disciple. On the way, they saw a 12 year old girl trying to cross a swamp (swamps are common in that part of the world). The girl was scared, so the old man carried her in his arms and crossed the waters, while his young disciple looked on in amazement, wondering how such an experienced elder could break the monastic rules, but he said nothing. He kept thinking about what happened until the end of the day, when he decided to put the question to his teacher. The old man said “I carried that little girl for five minutes only and then left her, but you have carried her in your mind until now!”.

Beloved, please ask the Lord for His Grace that He may bless you with an enlightened and broad mind anointed with His Spirit.



1. Reading & Knowledge

Let us not forget the divine words of the Book of Revelation ‘Blessed is he who reads’ (Revelation 1:3).

Reading affects minds, lives and personalities. It can change one’s principles and ethics in life and definitely broadens the scope of our knowledge. By adopting the habit of reading we gain a deeper insight and understanding of matters and issues. Reading refreshes and exercises the brain. Without reading, the brain becomes stale, idle and limited. It remains stuck in single-mindedness and erroneous information.

St John Chrysostom (the Golden-Mouthed) wrote ‘When you immerse your heart and mind into spiritual readings you will feel fulfilled and will continually experience the presence of the Lord in your life’.

St Isaac the Syrian said ‘When you read about the Divine Providence and have had your pick of the books of the church teachers, your mind is then given to grow in strength and to distinguish the order of God’s creation and deeds.’

Spiritual readings brilliantly prepare the mind to be enlightened and draw it towards chastity to understand God’s creation.

Read the books of the New Testament given by God for the whole world. Find within its pages the provisions for your

journey in life. Allow your mind to better understand the world and to delve deeply into the divine existence.

Reading calmly without interruptions enlightens the spirit and helps it to remain in a state of prayer, ready to face any temptations. No one can enjoy the wisdom of the Holy Spirit without regular reading and watching his thoughts.

When you find yourself immersed in darkness, lacking in grace and spiritual counsel, plodding under a heavy cloud of temptations and despondency, do not be troubled or lose courage, but be patient. Start reading the books of the Holy Fathers and submit yourself to prayer, expecting to receive help. Reading chases away the frivolities of the mind. He who leads a life of parties, clubs and cafes is a superficial character; his conversations are pointless and sometimes even harmful. But he who reads and educates himself will apply his knowledge and skills to benefit others.

I advise you especially to read the books which feed the soul and fill the spirit and the mind. Choose your books carefully and wisely. Read with deep and thorough understanding, and do not accept everything you read without meticulous analysis, remembering those conflicting reports which are sometimes published in the daily papers, for example.

The purpose of reading:

One has to be focussed and always remember one's purpose in reading. There are two purposes:

1. To acquire literary experience.
2. To deduce information and apply it.

A good quality read is perpetual and constantly improving of the mind.

2. *Mental Awareness*

The responsibility of rearing and educating minds falls on all of us: bishops, priests, servants and society as a whole. This is achievable through: **education, guidance and advice.**

Guidance: Coaching an individual to discover his potential and the best possible means of applying his skills, knowledge and education to benefit his society. The bible says ‘Remember your leaders who spoke the word of God to you’ (Hebrews 13:7), and St Augustine said: “God will grant his salvation through your prayers to those who love you”. This confirms that spiritual mentors should infuse love and positive energy to win the trust of those they serve and to attract the souls of the suffering and the fallen.

It is obvious that poor thinking is behind most of man’s problems, and this can be overcome by knowledge and awareness. ‘Whosoever loves discipline, loves knowledge’ (Proverbs 12:1).

St John the Baptist’s message was educational in its essence. He was paving the way for the Lord, preparing the nation to be ready to accept the new faith.

Educating or bringing up children is mentioned in the Bible: ‘Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord’ (Ephesians 6:4).

The expression ‘Christian upbringing’ means acquiring an in-depth knowledge which reaches far beyond the scientific, mental or emotional knowledge. It is experimental, in the sense that it seeks the Truth. It involves self-training and ethical living according to the Christian commandments and rules.

Early Christianity was faced by the fact that most of those who wished to accept the Faith were pagans. They did not have any basic Christian education. To deal with this issue, the early church leaders took it upon themselves to educate these pagans before their baptism in the form of a systematic education called ‘preaching’. Through such lessons, they learnt the simple basics of the Faith and Christian morals and ethics.

Later, in the fourth century, those same people explained the profound Christian sacraments to others, as in the fourth sermon of St. Cyril (Kyrillos) of Jerusalem. Those who wished to be baptised had to be recommended by one of the believers, called the ‘Ishbin’. They were also questioned by the appointed leaders to establish the true motives behind their wish to be baptised and become Christians. The Ishbin then had a very important role towards those pagans, both before and after they were baptised. There were also educational establishments which taught advanced Christian theology and other classical subjects such as sciences, maths, and sociology.

Pope Shenouda III said, concerning the seeking of guidance, “Those who seek guidance are our masters, and their satisfaction outweighs our tiredness. We work hard so that they are satisfied, otherwise, if we are relaxed, they will have to work hard.” To consult is to seek guidance and advice. A spiritual mentor assists him who asks for his guidance to uncover his thoughts and feelings and motives and also his relationship mistakes, to come to the best means or strategy to control and manage his own life.

The subject of Christian Consultancy is part of the Pastoral Theology. It addresses the physical, psychological and spiritual state of human beings who suffer from despair, depression or guilt. It operates alongside the Holy Book and the science of applied behavioural psychology.

Through seeking advice and knowledge, the mind is straightened, and by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, man can become an advisor and a spiritual mentor.

In the same way, the church can present Jesus Christ to her children as the True Healer.

1. Adjusting the mind:

This is the third tool to build your mind by Wisdom and Discipleship. Solomon said, concerning wisdom “The wise have eyes in their heads, but the fool walks in the darkness” (Ecclesiastes 2:14).

The word ‘wisdom’ was mentioned over 300 times in the Old Testament. More than half of those references are in the books of Job, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Wisdom is an inner

light which brightens the mind and the heart, an outer light to guide others on their way.

We can also learn from older people, from the School of Life, and from history. The Sinaxarium is not just a history book. It is said that History is Life!

On 14th of the month of Mesra, for example, the Sinaxarium tells us about the Christian who was poor and unhappy. He often complained to his friend about how poor the Christians were, whereas Jews of the city were rich. One day, he decided to ask for financial help from a Jew, who initially declined to help him on the pretext that he was not a Jew. But after a long discussion, the Jew agreed to give the Christian money on the condition that he curses and stabs the cross. The Christian thought it was a joke and agreed, so the Jew had a wooden cross made. But as soon as the Christian stabbed the wood, blood poured out and later he died. This incident took place in the time of Pope Theophilus 23rd, and to this day we are still learning from what happened.

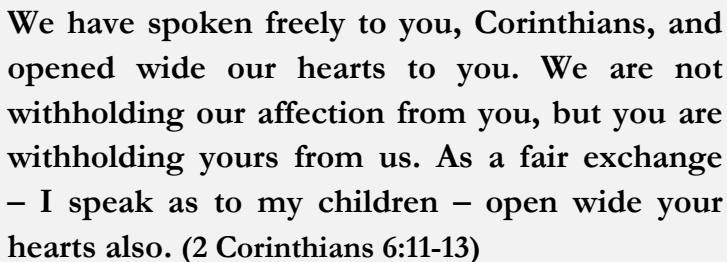
The conclusion, my beloved, is found in the parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins. The Wise had an open mind. They also were gifted with the spirit of readiness as well as a good estimation of time. As for the Foolish, they were narrow-minded. Therefore, they knocked at the door saying “Lord, Lord, open to us!” But Christ answered them and said “Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you” (Matthew 25). It was a painful and tragic ending; because of their limitations and narrow mindedness, they lost their heavenly heritage.

A few years after his marriage, a man asked his wife to prepare a fish meal. He noticed that she cut off the fish tail and head and cooked only the middle part. He asked her why she did so, she answered that her mother did the same. When he asked his mother-in-law, she said that her mother used to do the same. He asked the grandmother and she said that she did so only because her husband bought her a small tray which did not fit the whole fish. This is an example of what we might call the narrow mind.

May the Lord JC enable us to repeat with David the prophet “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer” (Psalms 19:14).

A Big Heart





We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. As a fair exchange – I speak as to my children – open wide your hearts also. (2 Corinthians 6:11-13)

We might wonder at the Bible verse which says ‘Be holy, because I am holy’ (1 Peter 1:16) and also ‘Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful’ (Luke 6:36).

There is another passage about the big heart: ‘We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. As a fair exchange – I speak as to my children – open wide your hearts also’. (2 Corinthians 6:11-13). This is the sign of a heart filled with genuine love.

In this chapter, we will address this graceful blessing of ‘The big Heart’. St John Chrysostom (the Golden-Mouthed) beautifully said ‘Just as the heat of the sun makes everything expand, thus does the heat of Love. It broadens the human heart and expands it’. This is the virtue of a big heart that embraces everyone.



From the Old Testament:

1. The Story of Abram and his nephew Lot

Abram, the older man, was like a father to his nephew Lot. One day a dispute over land broke out between the shepherds of both men and the situation became worse. How will our father Abram handle this? He decided that the best way is to contain the situation. So Abram said to Lot “Let’s not have any quarrelling between you and me, or between your herders and mine, for we are close relatives. Is not the whole land before you? Let’s part company. If you go to the left, I’ll go to the right; if you go to the right, I’ll go to the left.” (Genesis 13:8-9)

This is a clear example of wisdom and a big heart. Abram could have said to Lot “You have to do whatever I say because I am older and like a father to you”. However, Abram had a big heart and so ended the dispute peacefully.

2. The Story of Jonah and the People of Nineveh

In this story we can draw a nice analogy between the big heart of the powerful Creator and Jonah’s narrow heart which can just care for his own people. We all know the story and how God taught Jonah a serious lesson in the hope that he could then understand His intentions. We also know how the people of Nineveh felt remorse and repented and the Lord accepted them.

Do you know if you have a big or small heart? If you find that your heart is narrow, be sure that you will have quite a

tough life, but if you think you have a big heart, you will find plenty of blessings in your life.

From the New Testament:

3. The Samaritan Woman

We all know this woman's story mentioned in John 4. Her world was limited to drawing the water from the well and returning to her home town. Her private life and her sins were a separate matter. However, Jesus waited for her in the middle of the day (the hour of the crucifixion) to talk to her.

When the woman arrived, there was an air of hostility and she spoke to him in an unfriendly tone. However, long-suffering Jesus with His big heart seized on one of her answers, took it as an admission of wrongdoing and then paid her a compliment.

He said to her "Go, call your husband and come back".

"I have no husband." the woman replied (John 4:16).

He could have said that she was lying or deceitful, or that she will always be a sinner. But out of His wonderful heart, Christ said "You are right to say that you have no husband." (John 4:17). This is what led her to start confessing. He then carried on with the conversation without getting angry, even though she tried to change the subject and ask about other things. Again Christ, with His long-suffering nature and big heart, gradually transformed the woman to become a preacher and a missionary in His name for the people in her town. Thus, Christ's big heart has converted that woman to a believer and a preacher.

4. The Twelve Disciples

Had He been asked, our Lord JC would have said “I have chosen twelve good disciples”. But if asked how they ended up, His answer would have been that a quarter of them made drastic mistakes: one denied Him, another doubted Him, and the third betrayed Him. So 25% of the disciples were at fault, they succumbed to human weakness.

If we asked Him “How did you deal with Peter - surely He should have been cast out by the group?” But after He was raised from the dead, our Lord appeared specifically to Peter, the fisherman. Three times, after the miracle of catching 153 fish, Jesus asked Peter “Do you love me?” and He repeated the question as if to remind him of his big heart. He asked him again “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these others?”. “Yes, Lord,” Peter said “you know that I love you.” And Jesus said “Feed my sheep” (John 21:15-17).

Finally, we find that Jesus’ love has succeeded in restoring Peter’s big heart. He replies “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you” (John 21:17). When Jesus was reassured, he asked him to care for his sheep and he did indeed carry out this instruction, taking the ministry all over the world. Peter died a great martyr: he was crucified upside down. The love of Christ transformed him from denial to ministry, even though, as his disciple, Peter had denied Him.

The disciple Thomas was doubtful of the Lord’s resurrection. Jesus appeared to him and said “Put your finger here. See my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.” (John 20:27). Thomas,

overwhelmed by His big heart, and in deep faith shouted “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28).

As for Judas the traitor, Jesus kept warning him up to the last minute. He tried to draw his attention to his chance to repent. But Judas insisted on following the misguided path and delivered the Son of Man with a kiss. Jesus said to Judas “Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?” (Luke 22:48). Ironically, he used the act of love to betray his teacher and master.

5. The story of the Prodigal Son

In a household there is a father and his two sons, one older than the other. As we all know, the younger son, ‘the Prodigal Son’, lost his way, went far away and sinned. He did every bad thing under the sun.

His brother accused him to their father of consorting with prostitutes “But this son of yours has squandered your property with prostitutes!” (Luke 15:30). How do you think his father felt?

Tired of crying, his father kept waiting for his return every day. Until one day, he saw his son coming from a distance; it was as if his life had come back to him. He ran and took his son in his arms and kissed him. Even though his son had been living in a pig sty, smelt foul, looked terrible and unwell, and his clothes were torn, the father was not disgusted or dismayed. Here, the son said his timeless words “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son” (Luke 15:18). And as he went on to say “make me like one of your hired servants” (Luke 15:19), his father

stopped him. This is true love and genuine fatherhood. The door of repentance is always open and is never closed, and this is the Big Heart that should be found in our churches. Then his father said to his servants “Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fatted calf and kill it. Let us have a feast and celebrate.” (Luke 15:22-23). The fatted calf, which was supposed to have been killed for the older son’s wedding, was killed for the return of the younger son. The father did not just ignore the traditions of the time, but he took his sinful son in his arms and embraced him. Spiritual fathers in our church as well as real fathers should have the same attitude towards their children. Our hearts should always be wide open for everyone.

Every year, this parable is read in our Church at the beginning of Lent, so that we understand that the act of fasting and praying is meant to give us a big wide heart and bring us closer to Christ.

6. The parable of the wheat and weeds

This is about a field of wheat where weeds also grew. Weeds look like wheat but are poisonous. When the farmer asked the owner of the field if he could remove the weeds, he was told to leave them to grow together “Let both grow together until the harvest” (Matthew 13:30).

Thus, is the big and wide heart! At the time of the harvest, the harvesters will come and differentiate between the wheat and the weeds which will be put to the fire, but the wheat will be used to make bread “At the time of the harvest, I will tell the harvesters, first collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be

burned, then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn” (Matthew 13:30). A big heart is also patient and long-suffering!

7. On the Cross

Let me take you to the day of the Crucifixion, when Our Lord JC was hanging on the cross; people were screaming and swearing, shouting loudly “Crucify him! Crucify him!”. There was a thief on his right and another on his left, and from a distance there was his mother weeping quietly. At that hour, the atmosphere was so charged with the priests and the Roman soldiers trying to restrain the crowds who were screaming “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” and there was Jesus on the cross saying ”Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”. [I have changed this to the older version as it is more poetic] (Luke 23:34) How big and wide is your heart, My Lord Jesus!

Later, the thief on the left hurled insults at Christ saying “If You are the Messiah, save Yourself and us” (Luke 23:39) but the other criminal said “Remember me, O Lord, when you come into Your Kingdom” (Luke 23:42). Jesus replied “Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). How wonderful! What a big heart!

His mother Mary was not forgotten by Him either. Despite the pain He felt, and the chaos and turmoil, He looked and saw her weeping. So he said “Woman, here is your son” pointing at John, his disciple (John 19:27).

These are a few examples from the Holy Bible reflecting a big heart.

Examples from Church History



❖ **Saint Macarius the Great (Abu Makar), a Monk & Hermit**

One day a group of monks complained to him about another monk who used to sleep in the church, which to them was neither proper nor right. They expected him to punish this monk, to set him some tough rules or send him away. Abu Makar surprised them with his big heart and said “Go quickly and bring him a pillow to rest his head”.

Let no one think that because monks live in the wilderness, they become harsh or senseless. The longer a monk leads his spiritual life in the wilderness, the more tender his feelings become and his heart grows bigger and wider to encompass the afflictions of the whole world in his prayers.

Real Life Stories



During the Second World War, a general had a long meeting with his officers to discuss an assault plan. It was a very cold winter night, the time was getting late and he noticed that the officers looked exhausted. So he insisted that they come to his house for dinner and reassured them that his wife would be pleased. Eventually they agreed but his wife was asleep, so he woke her up and asked her to prepare some dinner for his officers. She was so angry and started shouting! He calmed her down patiently and after a while she stopped being angry and

became perfectly composed. She put on her best dress, welcomed the officers and did her best to prepare them a meal.

This is what a big heart means: Deal with any situation with a big heart even if the other person was wrong or behaved inappropriately.

Another story concerns John (9 years old) and his sister Sally (4 years old), whose mother asked them to keep the house clean and tidy until she returned from shopping. When she left, John suggested to his sister that he drew her picture. They brought the coloured pencils and paper and sat on the floor, and you can imagine the state of the house after a while! They were so immersed in their painting they did not realise the mess they had made until their mother came back. They froze in their places with fear, but their mother realised that John was painting a picture of Sally. In her big heart and to reassure little John, who was very frightened, she looked at the paper and said in a surprised tone “Oh! Is this Sally?”. And she took him in her arms and kissed him until all his fears were dissipated. When John grew up, he became a world-famous artist. When asked about how he achieved his fame, he answered gracefully “It was my mother’s kiss which made a famous artist of me”.

Another story concerns an international conference attended by 40 church leaders or priests from 40 countries in Africa, Asia and Europe. They met in a hall where they sat in the shape of a square, 10 on each side with the lecturer in the middle.

The lecturer said “The conference management has decided to give one of the church leaders one million pounds, and we would like to know what each of you would do with that

money”. One of them said “I will build a school in the area where I serve”. Another said “I will build a small hospital“, and a third said “I will pave the road leading to the village where I serve”, and so on until one of them said “If the management has decided to give away one million pounds, I will take the money and distribute it to all those attending, so that they can bring joy and merriment to those they are serving”. That was the acceptable answer, which reflects a big wide heart.

Another beautiful instance is when I went to visit Armenia. They used to offer pomegranate with breakfast, lunch and dinner and even when they offered me a gift it was in the shape of a pomegranate. I was puzzled and enquired about the reason behind this choice. They said that the pomegranate was the most popular fruit in Armenia, and that this fruit is the best reflection of the church and the shape of the human heart. The skin is like the tabernacle in olden times, and the seeds inside are full of red juice, a symbol of Christ’s blood which gives us life and resilience. Inside each seed there is a small hard kernel which symbolizes faith. The seeds are gathered in several close gem-like ruby coloured clusters, and the beautiful white pulp which surrounds each cluster is a symbol of the pure white love which binds all.



The whole pomegranate symbolises man’s heart which must be big enough to hold and encompass many people.



1. Wide enough for diversity

Life does not have one unchanged form and human beings are different. Each individual is unique and is scientifically described as a microcosm which means the small world, whereas the world in which we live is called the macrocosm.

Each individual is a candidate for the kingdom of heaven, provided he never abandons his faith in Christ and continues rightly with his spiritual life. Man's heart should be big enough to accept diversity. Humans are not all one colour, shape or language; thus did Christ on the cross.

2. Big enough to hold others' weaknesses

Some people insist on humiliating others for one mistake for the rest of their lives, and some parents refuse to forget their children's mistakes and keep mentioning them in detail on every occasion.

My brothers! A big heart forgives, stops blaming and also forgets. When the crowd brought the woman caught in adultery to Christ, they imagined that her shame as a woman was unforgivable. But Jesus said to her "Has no-one condemned you?" "No one, sir" she replied. "Then neither do I condemn you" Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin" (John 8:10-11). This is a heart wide enough to embrace the failings and weaknesses of others.

3. Wide and Open for the Future

Anyone can make a mistake in his life just like the prodigal son. But look how his father did not bring up any of his dreadful past. On the contrary, he spoke about the future and said “For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found” (Luke 15:24).

Let us drop the past and start a new page.

Thus did JC with Peter and Judas and the thief on the right, whose repentance was accepted in the last few hours of his life, and was told that paradise was ready to receive his soul. This is Jesus and this is Christianity!

4. Wide and Open to New Thinking

In other words, relinquish the old thoughts. Saul was a Jew and a Pharisee. He severely persecuted the Church of God. The mere mention of Saul’s name was enough to terrify Christians, who fled from Jerusalem to Damascus, but Saul followed them. At the gates of Damascus, Jesus spoke to him and Saul’s heart was changed. He asked “What should I do, Lord?” (Acts 22:10). He completely surrendered and placed his life in the hands of the Lord and his name was changed to Paul. And when Paul the disciple started his ministry, he became both a thinker and a theologian, capable of solving any problem.

The issue of slavery which was raised in the time of Philemon and Onesimus, is one of those problems. In his Epistle to Philemon, written in prison, he wrote ‘Onesimus, if he has wronged you at all, receive him as you would receive me, and if

he owes you anything, charge that to me, I will repay it.’ (Philemon 1:17-18). ‘I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment. Formerly useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and me’ (Philemon 1: 10-11). And indeed the name Onesimus means useful. Although he was useless and a thief, he became useful to Philemon and to Paul too. According to some books of tradition, Onesimus later repented and joined the Priesthood and was successful in his service in the name of the Lord.

A big heart adopts New Thoughts, but a narrow heart wastes his time and his life.

5. Wide for the Penitents

However sinful man is, and however great the length and breadth of his weaknesses, the Doors of Repentance are wide open for everyone.

In the miracle of the ‘Paralysed Man of Bethesda’, Jesus asks him ”Do you want to get well?” (John 5:6). “Sir,” the invalid replied, “I have no-one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred” (John 5:7). Then Jesus said to him “Stand up! Pick up your mat and walk” (John 5:8).

This is one of the images of Repentance. The invalid was paralysed because of his sins for 38 years, yet he got up and walked.

Repentance is available to every sinner despite everything. A big heart must be open and ready to welcome each penitent. Every father and mother, every teacher and priest, and every

spiritual mentor, intellectual and cultural leader needs to have a big heart and so does the whole clergy too, each in his location and ministry.

Did you know the reason behind the fame of St John Chrysostom over all the other Saints? And why he was called Golden Mouth? It was not just because he said precious words, but also because he truly had a heart of gold.

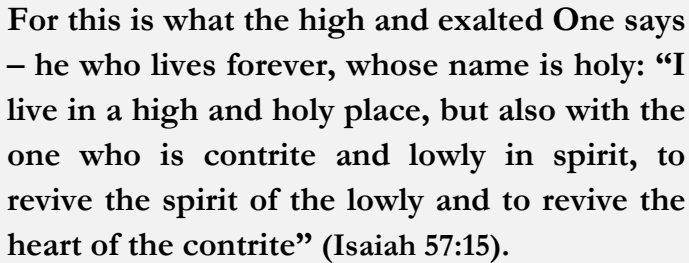
One of his wonderful and memorable sayings is **“A lamp without light is a Christian without love”**.

To face difficult situations and problems in life, you need an open mind and an open hand too. Do not be mean: a miser’s heart is tight and narrow. It is the heart which moves the hand. A hand which reaches out to everyone reflects a heart overflowing with love. Remember what St Paul asked the Corinthians in his Epistle ‘We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. As a fair exchange – I speak as to my children – open wide your hearts also’ (2 Corinthians 6:11-13).

When you pray, remember to ask the Lord to give you His Heart in exchange for yours, if it is narrow or small or miserly or incapable of embracing others. Think of the pomegranate and pray that the Lord fills your heart with the Grace of Love for others just like the countless seeds of that fruit.

A Humble Spirit





For this is what the high and exalted One says – he who lives forever, whose name is holy: “I live in a high and holy place, but also with the one who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite” (Isaiah 57:15).

A humble spirit is the third key to a successful life. It finishes off the beautiful image we launched in the previous chapters. But before everything, I would like to say that it is not enough to possess one key only. In other words, an Open Mind, a Big Heart and a Humble Spirit are ALL ONE PACKAGE!

In fact, the absence of any one of these keys totally hinders man’s journey in life from the spiritual, social and ecclesiastical aspects. It also holds back the progress of societies, services in churches and even churches themselves. Worst of all is that if someone who is in charge, whether in a minor or major position, is bereft of these qualities, he will object to everything.

A Humble Spirit is like a bird which has an Open Mind and a Big Heart as its two wings.

The Meaning of a Humble Spirit



When we thoroughly examine the life of Christ, we find that He performed miracles, delivered teachings, met with people and explained a lot of things, besides His individual meetings with the disciples and His public addresses to the multitude, as in the Sermon on the Mount. But He kept one lesson to teach His disciples until the end. A few hours before His Crucifixion, He washed their feet. Now, let's try to live the concept of this act together. Why did He not do that in the beginning of His ministry? And why after three years spent among the people, did He wash the disciples' feet? Simply because this was the most important lesson any disciple could learn. He who serves in the Church or elsewhere must have a humble spirit!

JC bent down! Our Church teaches us the same lesson in a symbolic manner, during the Laqqan Special prayers on Covenant Thursday. Let every servant in Christ's name and every responsible person, however great or small his responsibility may be, always remember this powerful lesson about humility.

And when Peter, one of the disciples, refused to let Him wash his feet, Jesus said to him "You do not realise now what I am doing, but later you will understand" (John 13:7). That is why I always say: there are no promotions in the Church. This is a worldly concept. But the spiritual concept of promotions in Church and Service is to bend down to reach the feet. The more your responsibilities, the more you have to bend.

It is through the Divine Power of JC that we came into existence, and without His Divine Love we would have all perished. (Luke 19:10)

This humility is a sign of Christ. As St. Augustine said, it is the Humility of the Son of God, that of Love. ‘Be completely humble and gentle, be patient, bearing with one another in love’ (Ephesians 4:2) and ‘All of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tender-hearted, be courteous’ (1 Peter 3:8-9). St Augustine said where there is Humility, there is Love.

The second lesson comes from a quote of St. Ephraim the Syrian ‘Just as the body needs a garment, so does the soul need the cloth of humility’. A soul without humility is a naked soul. How embarrassed would a man be with a naked soul.

St. Pachomius, the father of cenobitic monasticism, was asked by one of his disciples about the best sight a man can ever witness. He replied “If you find a chaste man with a humble heart”. A truly humble, pure and chaste man is the most wonderful thing one can see on earth. It is even better if this man had a big heart and an open mind. Such a man could be called a fully rounded person, and he is like a shining star in the skies.

St. John Sinai (Aldrgi), one of the fathers of the wilderness, once uttered a short but very powerful saying. He said “In humility is the healing from all tribulations”. He meant the tribulations of sins and evil thoughts, of suspicion and ill-intentions. Falling under the axe of sin hinders man and

damages his relationships with others. It is said that he who sits on the floor, does not risk falling and a famous German proverb says that the best accessory with which a man could adorn himself is humility. The world lacks humble people. The Bible says 'Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth' (Matthew 5:5). The meek shall inherit the earth by their reputation, their name and the sweetness of their deeds in life.

Churches normally hold what is called 'Theological Dialogues'. These are meetings held between Churches to discuss together some of the theological issues. They can spend months and even years in discussions without reaching any agreement just because of 'ego'. It is said that while theologians argue about doctrinal issues, the meek will sneak into the kingdom of heaven.

There are many examples of the humble spirit:

St Paul said 'I know a man in Christ who, fourteen years ago, was caught up to the third heaven' (2 Corinthians 12:2). Here Paul was speaking about himself and his experience. However, he omitted to mention his name and kept his experience from all for 14 years. St. John did the same when he referred to 'the disciple whom Jesus loved'.

+ When a spiritual father once asked his disciples "Who sold Joseph?" they replied "His brothers" but the spiritual father said "No. It was his humility, when he did not tell those who bought him that it was his own brothers who had sold him as a slave".

+ In the fourth century, one of the Fathers was asked “Which is better, to speak or to be silent?” He answered “Words are good if they are for the Glory of God, and so is silence”. His answer reflects both his open mind and humble spirit.

+ When an extremely angry father speaks to his son about a certain matter, and the son keeps silent and does not reply, pretending to be humble and meek, this is not humility!

+ It is said in the history of the Fathers, that one day St. Abo Makar sent his disciple to prepare the church for prayers. On his way, he met an idol worshipper. The disciple started to curse him and called him “Servant of the devil”. So the man dropped everything and hit the disciple so hard that he almost killed him. He then went back to his work. Later, Abo Makar was passing from the same way and saw the man cutting wood. He said to him “Blessed are you, O active man!” And so we see the difference between the two men. The disciple had a narrow heart and so he cursed the idol worshipper, but Abo Makar had a big heart and a humble spirit with which he blessed the man. His words fell on the idol worshipper like cool dew drops and he approached Abo Makar and asked why he had said this. Abo Makar explained that he had seen him up very early, working hard and exerting himself to cut the wood. Abo Makar meant to praise this man, purely for his active work. He had a big heart and a humble spirit, that allowed him to notice the good side to this man.

The Qualities of a humble person



To humble oneself does not mean feeling inferior to others or belittling one's own abilities or talents, for these are a blessing from God, which He has bestowed on us so that we complete each other. Humility is the total liberation from self-centred thinking. This is man's main problem and the cause of all these wars between countries. Beware my brothers. Selfishness is the first and foremost enemy within ourselves.

In the following we shall list some qualities for all to consider, in the hope that we become blessed with the humble spirit.

1. Not preoccupied with himself

Regardless of all the great things known about him, David the prophet and king once compared himself to an animal "I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute before you!" (Psalms 73:22).

And Paul, the genius saint, also said about himself "For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle" (1 Corinthians 15:9). He also said "and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born" (1 Corinthians 15:8). How can you say such words about yourself, Paul? Theologian, scientist, intellectual and scholar! You, who are very well versed in the knowledge of the Covenant, and who was taught at the hands of Gamaliel, teacher of the law. Yet, you think of yourself 'as one abnormally born'.

Some people think extremely highly of themselves. If you wish to humble your spirit, do not be preoccupied with yourself,

regardless of what is said about you; just be honest in your ways..

2. Kind-Hearted and tolerant

A humble-hearted person avoids confrontations and rivalry, enjoys living in peace, always jovial and smiling and has a calm and peaceful temperament. He has a tolerant heart and mind and is easy to deal with. He is kind and compassionate, even towards those who offend him, quick to forgive and he never lets hatred fill his heart. He always tries not to upset others, but is patient and long-suffering. His discussions are always calm, objective and impartial. He is not easy to be angered and does not seek revenge, as in the Proverbs of Solomon: 'A gentle answer turns away wrath' (Proverbs 15:1). A kind-hearted and tolerant person is not shrewd or cunning but simply straight and honest in his words and does not complicate matters. Most of all, a kind-hearted person is filled with inner peace, like David in his psalm: 'Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then I will be confident' (Psalms 27:3).

3. Always Thankful

A humble-hearted person never complains, but is always thankful. An immodest person is always complaining and that is a very serious failing. A humble person sees beauty and order in everything and that God is in charge of everything.

Here, we must mention Saint Moses the black. On the day of his ordination as a priest, and as he was entering the church,

the Patriarch said “Who allowed this black man into the church?”. As soon as St. Moses heard him, he turned round and left the church quietly, saying to himself “Who brought me here?”. He did not object or complain or utter a single angry word. Afterwards, the Patriarch, who meant to test St. Moses’ pride, sent after him and ordained him as a priest.

On another occasion, St. Moses was asked by the fathers to attend a trial of one of the brothers for his iniquities. He arrived carrying a big sack on his back, filled with sand. The sack had a hole through which all the sand was falling out. When questioned by the fathers, St Moses replied “These are my sins running behind my back without my notice, and here, I am coming today to condemn someone else for his sins. Objecting or complaining is foreign to a humble-hearted person because he believes that God is in charge of everything.

4. Knows his Responsibilities and Limits

We must have all come across persons who do not know their limits. St John the Baptist was widely known at the time of his ministry, and was also well respected. However, when he met Jesus, he said “He must become greater, I must become less” (John 3:30). He knew his limits very well. In certain difficult situations, people sometimes react either with words or action and, sadly, do exceed their limits. Anba Sarabamoun Abu Tarha (‘The Veiled’), was a Bishop whom God had blessed with the gift of casting out evil spirits. One day, when the Patriarch asked him to cast out an evil spirit, he declined, and when the Patriarch insisted, he agreed, with the condition that he could pray holding the Patriarch’s cross. Nevertheless, the Patriarch

himself knew that the gift of healing from evil was Anba Sarabamoun's and not his own. A humble spirit will surely know its limits and limitations.

When a person chooses to take the route of monasticism, he must be aware that his strength will not be in money or dress or position or title or skill, but that it will be only in his humility.

Why then, was the whole world attracted to the Egyptian wilderness? When we read about the dawn of Monasticism which was described in the third, fourth and fifth century books, we learn about those monks who deserted the world and all that is in it, and moved to live in solitude in the wilderness. It was only their humility which attracted the attention of the world. In the wilderness, a monk drew his strength from God only. His humility was noticeable in his obedience, his words, and even in his clothes. It was reflected in his relationships and behaviour towards other monks.

5. Repeats some prayer expressions

A humble person always repeats expressions such as 'Lord help us complete our days on earth in your peace', or 'Lord! Grant us a good end of life', or 'Lord have mercy'.

These words are uttered in faith from the heart. And if he says "I have sinned", he means it. In our monasteries, a monk will say "I have sinned" and he will prostrate himself on the floor to show that he admits his mistake and genuinely means to ask for forgiveness. I feel very happy when a mother or a father apologises to their son or daughter; even though it is supposed to be the other way round, that the younger apologises to the older.

To be able to say “I have sinned” or “I am sorry” is not demeaning or humiliating and does not harm your dignity. On the contrary, it reflects your true inner humble spirit.

It happened that negotiations to buy the Church of St. John in West Covina, California were halted because of some problems. Many people began to look for solutions. It was a large neighbourhood area, in which lived an increasing number of Copts, and the idea of postponing the purchase was not an option. At the time, the ageing deacon Alfred Hanna was frail and had tragically succumbed to illness, but his heart was burning with the fire of the Spirit of the Holy Father. He repeated with Christ “For the spirit is willing, but the body is weak”. This deacon, who was weak in body, yet strong in spirit, felt that as a member in the Holy church, the Body of Christ, he had a responsibility. He decided that he must buy the building. Early one morning, he headed to the property and entered its spacious garden, and facing the church building he stretched out his hands and began to pray. Not only that, despite his illness, he prostrated himself 400 times, asking for Divine help and mercy. When he returned home, he felt a tremendous joy and confidence that the gates of heaven would be opened to receive his earnest pleading. He carried on praying in the same manner incessantly for days. The Lord then looked upon his love, humility and zeal, and listened favourably to his prayers. The church was bought and virtuous deacon Hanna was a major contributor. He offered his heart, love and spiritual example before any financial donations. He was a living example of the humble-hearted responsible person, always in prayer.

6. Has constant daily reminders

A humble-spirited person has continual daily reminders, which he always keeps before him. As an example, he will be reminding himself of the dust whereof he was made and will go to one day. That is why the entrance to the monks' cells is small and very low so that they bend to enter, and are reminded all the time of their humility.

To think of heaven and long for it is another daily reminder to a humble-spirited person. He constantly reminds himself of the verse: 'Amen. Come, Lord Jesus' (Revelations 2:20) and his personal impression about his life on earth is that it is never long enough to repent and be ready. The thought of that day when he will stand before God to be judged never leaves him, and keeps him alert and ready for his eternity all the time. The Book says 'It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God' (Hebrews 10:31). One other daily reminder is 'The Act of Love'. A humble-spirited person asks himself every day if he has served, helped, encouraged and comforted someone. He never stops being kind.

7. Leads a life of discipleship

A humble-spirited person is always a disciple, forever learning. And here is a nice story for you. In my younger days of service, I travelled to Libya to serve our churches there. I found them closed, so I went with some of the families to visit Catholic nuns living in tiny houses, who served the local community. I asked them for a suitable place to hold a weekly meeting for the Copts in that town. The nuns warmly welcomed

us and offered us a place to hold our meetings. Meanwhile, the children of the families who accompanied me went out into the garden. When we were leaving, we found to our surprise that the children had cut down all the flowers in the garden. I was so embarrassed and actually speechless. The nun noticed my utter embarrassment, picked up the cut flowers and put them before the statue of the Virgin Mary, which was in the garden. She then said with a smile “The children cut the flowers so that we can offer them to the Virgin Mary”.

No one can react so swiftly in this manner except someone with a humble spirit, an open mind and a big heart, a heart which was big enough to embrace those children.

Another example is about Saint Arsany, teacher of kings’ children. When he joined the monastery in the desert, he used to belittle himself and seek to learn about wisdom from the hermits and farmers who were surprised that the teacher of kings’ children was consulting them. He used to say “I learnt Latin and Greek, but not the ‘Alfa Vita’ that the ordinary illiterate Egyptian knows”.

There was a learned man who read and owned a vast amount of books. Once he wanted to cross the river and had some of his books with him. On the way, he held one of his big books and asked the oarsman “Do you know this book?” And the oarsman replied “No”. So the learned man said to him “You have lost a quarter of your life”. A few minutes later he asked him the same question about another book, and the oarsman also answered in the negative. The learned man said “You have lost a

second quarter of your life”. Later, there was a storm and water filled the boat. So the oarsman asked “Do you know how to swim?” But the learned man said “No”, and the sailor’s reply was “Then you have lost all your life”.

He who is humble is always learning.

Train yourself to learn from everyone, young or old, boy or girl. Always try to pick a good piece of knowledge or behaviour wherever you are. Remember to ask God in your prayers to give you an open mind. Keep your Bible and your readings present in your mind, and let your dealings with others be clear and your heart wide open enough to embrace each and every creature of God’s vast creation.

Ask Christ incessantly for the following three gifts:

- Lord give me an open mind and enlighten my thoughts
- And give me a heart big enough for everybody.
- And a humble spirit so that I can live and glorify Your Name every day of my life.



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