



# Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria

St. Mary and St. Moses Coptic Orthodox Church

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*Under the auspices and guidance of H.G. Bishop Mina bishop of Mississauga, Vancouver and west of Canada*



## The Joyful Fifty Days

by Metropolitan Serapion

### The Holy Resurrection

Easter is the greatest and earliest festival of the church, at which Christians celebrate the anniversary of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and His victory over death. The observance of Easter started as early as the apostolic era. Writing to the Corinthians, probably at or near the Passover season, St. Paul declares this feast in 1 Cor. 5:7-8.

In the course of time, the Holy Fathers called it various names. For example, Justin Martyr (c. 100-165 AD) called it "the paschal feast." St. Cyril of Jerusalem (315-386 AD) called it the "holy day of salvation." Gregory of Nazianzus, also known as Gregory the Theologian (323-389 AD) called it "the queen of days, the feast of feasts, and the solemnity of solemnities."

During the first three centuries, there was divergence among the churches about the date of celebrating Christ's resurrection. In Egypt, Patriarch Demetrius I (189-231 AD) devised the Epact method of calculating the exact day of Resurrection Sunday, so that it would always follow the Jewish Passover, in close adherence to the first Resurrection. The difference was then settled in the Council of Nicaea (325 AD).

The celebration of the Liturgy starts late in the evening after Bright Saturday, and ends in the early hours of Sunday, in conformity with the New Testament (Mk. 16:2, 9; Lk. 24:1; Jn. 20:1). An impressive feature of this service is the enactment of the Resurrection. The clergy and deacons go in procession three times around the altar, carrying the icon of the Resurrection, banners, crosses, candles, and censers, and then, coming out, they go thrice around the church singing in Coptic and English the Resurrection Parallax.

Finally, the procession enters the sanctuary again and goes around the altar once. Thus, it will be noted that the number of circuits made in the procession is seven, symbolical of the seven circuits



made by Joshua, son of Nun, around the gates of the city of Jericho, which finally fell down. This also alludes to the collapse of the gates of Hades upon the death and the resurrection of Christ.

### The Holy Ascension

This day commemorates the ascension of Christ to heaven from the Mount of Olives. Luke 24:50-53 seems to imply that the Ascension occurred during the evening of the day of the Resurrection, but it is stated in Acts 1:3 and Mark 16:19 that this event took place in presence of the apostles forty days later. Further implicit references to this are found in John 6:62 and 22:17; Ephesians 4:8-10; Hebrews 4:14 and 7:26; 1 Peter 3:22; and 1 Timothy 3:16.

This feast is solemnly celebrated by the Copts on the fifth Thursday after Easter Sunday, that is, the fortieth day after Christ's Resurrection. It is always accompanied by the same liturgy as the Resurrection, and a procession here commemorates the journey of Jesus to the Mount of Olives from which he went to Heaven.

### Pentecost

This major feast in the Coptic Church commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit on the apostles on the fiftieth day after the Resurrection (Acts 2:1-4). This was in fulfillment of the promise made by Jesus before His crucifixion: "The counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (Jn. 14:26).

Saint Mark explicitly mentions the promise to enable them "to speak in new tongues" (Mk 16:17). These and similar pledges were all fulfilled ten days after the Ascension, that is, fifty days after the Resurrection, equivalent to the Jewish Feast of Weeks that occurred on the fiftieth day after the Passover (Dt. 16).

In the Acts of the Apostles, the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples is described as "tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each of them" (Acts 2:3). The Coptic translation of the Bible clearly distinguishes between the term "Holy Spirit" when it is used to indicate the Hypostasis and the term when it indicates the gift or grace bestowed upon those who are blessed by the Holy Spirit.

### Spiritual Application

This entire period is fifty days of joy, so there are no fasts or prostrations. It is a unique stretch in the Coptic year in how the church worships due to the reduced asceticism. But the church teaches us how to also grow without these practices and to focus on praising which is the highest form of worship.

We have gone through the journey of asceticism, self-control, and tears of repentance. It is now time to rise up in the spirit and rejoice in our resurrection with Him. Actually, this journey teaches us to not lose hope during the long stretch of toiling in repentance as it ends in the return to Christ and the joy of victory and resurrection. A feasting time is not a break from being spiritual; this period is a time of praising our Savior, enjoying our restoration to Him, and growing in our relationship and closeness to Him.

Follow along with the Sunday gospel readings for the theme of each week, starting with the first Sunday after the Resurrection, as we journey throughout this season and grow in familiarity with our God in His glory:

1. My Lord and my God - Thomas Sunday
2. The Bread of Life
3. The Living Water
4. The Light of the World
5. The Way, the Truth, and the Life
6. The King of Peace
7. The Comforter

The Feast of the Holy Resurrection - Days 1-39

"For every time you eat of this bread and drink of this cup, you proclaim My death, confess My Resurrection, and remember Me till I come." (1 Cor. 11:26)

During this period, Christ remains with us on earth for forty days. This is a time to contemplate on the joy of being close to the Bridegroom in His glory. It is not a time to linger in sin but rather to rise up quickly when we fall and utilize the salvation that has been freely given to us. This is a time of renewal, living a new life as Christians.

The church celebrates the divine liturgy weekly on Sunday mornings in observation of His glorious Resurrection. Every time we take communion we celebrate our union with the Bridegroom. Therefore, the church tradition is to spend the night before the liturgy praising in anticipation for the Heavenly Wedding to take place on Sunday morning.

Spiritual exercise:

This is a time of praising. Dedicate this period to increasing in praises to God. Become more familiar with the Vespers Praises, Midnight Praises, and Morning Praises. This is not a period where we should abandon all restraint. Although we are not restricting the types of food we eat, the church replaces fasting and prostrations with praises and frequent celebration of the Divine Liturgies. Be cautious to still practice self-control and not fall into gluttony. Fasting is simply a tool to reach Christ, our Goal; now we have the bridegroom with us. Often times we are closest to God in tribulations and in times of need, but we then quickly drift away once we are satisfied. Utilize this time to learn how to reach the heights of love and a deeper relationship with Him after the return. Increase in knowledge of Him by growing in your bible readings, and increase in the time you spend with Him through your daily quiet time early in the morning.

**THOMAS SUNDAY - DAY 7 (FIRST SUNDAY AFTER RESURRECTION)**

"Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (John 20:29)

Thomas Sunday is one of the Minor Feasts of our Lord. The church places importance on this feast because believing in Christ and confessing His Holy Resurrection is essential to be saved. We should not consider this day as just another Sunday of the Holy 50 days. We should celebrate the revelation of Christ being resurrected, and we should believe and confess His Resurrection as a true event. Sometimes we could be passively practicing the seasons while having doubts deep down inside or not really considering the reality of the events. Without the Resurrection, we would still be in our sin. The belief in Christ's Resurrection was a necessary event for preaching salvation to the world. Therefore, it was necessary for Him to reveal Himself to the believers so that they could go and preach this truth with a strong faith.

Spiritual exercise:

Examine your heart for any possible doubts that may exist. Research the strong evidence of the Resurrection by scholars such as William Lane Craig, a prominent Christian Apologist of our time who completed a doctorate degree in the historicity of the Resurrection. Although we haven't witnessed the Resurrection with our own eyes, through revelation from Christ we still believe. Ask the Lord to strengthen your faith in His saving Resurrection. The greeting "Christ is risen" (Khristos Anesti in Greek, Piekhristos Aftonf in Coptic), "Truly He is risen" (Alithos Anesti in Greek, Khen Omethmi Aftonf in Coptic) is shared among believers during this time. Rather than just saying this phrase as a way of saying hello, say it with a heart of confessing the truth of Christ's Resurrection. Look for opportunities to also go into the world and share your faith in this glorious event.

(To be Continued)

## OUR FAITH IN REDEMPTION AND RESURRECTION

*Fr. Hegomen Ephraim El-Anba Bishoy*

*(continued from last issue)*

A person may wonder: why doesn't the Lord Jesus appear to us now, invite us to believe, and reveal His glory openly? Wouldn't that put an end to fruitless debates and lead many to believe? We can find part of the answer in the appearance of the Risen Lord to doubting Thomas:

"After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, 'Peace to you!' Then He said to Thomas, 'Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.' And Thomas answered and said to Him, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him, 'Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'" (John 20:26–29).

God has given us freedom and does not want us to believe in Him by compulsion or coercion, whether through material or intellectual temptation or intimidation. Instead, we are to use our reason and free will to choose to believe or not—while bearing the consequences of that choice.

The apostles and disciples carried the torch of faith to the world. After the Holy Spirit descended upon them, they went forth with a love and boldness that overcame the violence they faced, bearing witness to the faith in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth—even to Rome. This radical transformation in the disciples is one of the most convincing evidences of the resurrection and its powerful effect on their lives. They were recognized as ordinary men, yet they were transformed.

Certainly, the disciples and apostles would not have sacrificed their lives to testify about the risen Christ unless they were fully confident and sure of His resurrection and divinity. It would have been easier to honor a dead Christ as one of the prophets or martyrs, whose tombs are still revered by the Jews to this day.

We have believed through the faith of our apostolic fathers, and the belief in the crucified and risen Christ has spread throughout the world:



“And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.” (John 20:30–31).

This faith has formed the saints and given us confidence and assurance in the victorious Christ. Through Him we proclaim His life-giving death and declare His glorious resurrection to all, as the source of the hope within us.

Faith in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead is the firm foundation of Christianity and the source of our comfort and hope in eternal life. Just as the Lord rose, so we too shall rise and be with Him forever. Surely the faithful must be rewarded for their labor of love and patience, and the wicked punished for their denial and evil. The Just One must give each according to his deeds, and His mercy calls us to faith and repentance, offering us forgiveness and eternal life.

Just as sin and death entered the world through Adam, so in Christ Jesus all will be made alive, as the Scriptures say:

“And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the first-fruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming.” (1 Corinthians 15:17–23).

The enemies of Christ challenged Him to come down from the cross, not realizing that by His authority He willingly laid down His life for our sins and rose again for our justification. He kept the marks of the wounds in His risen body as a testimony of His love for us. The wounds were a symbol of His life and of what sin does breaking God’s commandments. They serve as a reminder of His love. Though the wounds have become a memory, they remain a living witness to God’s love, redemption, and salvation.

### The Fruits of the Resurrection in Our Spiritual Life

To recognize the fruits of the resurrection in our spiritual life, we must look at its impact on the disciples and apostles and follow their example, looking to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. The lives of the apostles changed dramatically in just a few days, and their perception of the world shifted according to God's will. Their weakness turned into strength:

“And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all.” (Acts 4:33).

Their fear turned to peace, and their hearts were filled with it despite the tribulations they endured, trusting in the One who said:

“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33),

And “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” (John 14:27).

Their sorrow turned into joy:

“When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.” (John 20:20).

They were filled with a living hope—so much so that Peter, who once weakened, was filled with power and through one sermon brought three thousand souls to faith. The resurrection was the foundation of Peter’s hope:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” (1 Peter 1:3).

The holy apostles went throughout the earth proclaiming their faith:

“And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.’” (Mark 16:15–16).

And so we were discipled and believed:

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19–20).

We are called to also receive the fruits of faith in the risen Christ in our own lives. God is the same yesterday, today, and forever:

“With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible.” (Mark 10:27).

We are invited to live in peace from the Prince of Peace. As long as God is in the boat of our lives, we can trust it will never sink. He will come, even in the fourth watch of the night, and command the winds to be still and the waves to calm:

“But He said to them, ‘Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?’ Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm.” (Matthew 8:26).

Through the resurrection, we live a life of spiritual joy as sons and daughters of the Kingdom, called from the world of darkness into His marvelous light. We rejoice in God’s salvation, in His love, in the comfort and fruits of the Holy Spirit, and in His faithful promises—hoping for the glory of His Kingdom and eternal life, and for the reunion with our departed loved ones, the saints, the angels, and life with God.

We must pray with confidence and ask God to strengthen our faith so that it may work through love and deepen our hope in Him, the One in whom the nations put their trust:

“Through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” (Romans 5:2).

The risen Christ wants to work with us and through us, calling us to live by faith, to bear fruit, and for our fruit to remain, so we may live with Him the glory of the resurrection at His second coming. To Him be all glory. Amen.

## Rites:

### THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE RITES OF THE HOLY LITURGY IN THE COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH

#### SOME POINTS ABOUT THE INCENSE CIRCUIT

In ancient churches the words, “Hail to the sanctuary of God the Father”, was written on the front of the sanctuary door. The Church insists on calling it the sanctuary of “God the Father” for three reasons:



- ❖ The Liturgy that is celebrated in the sanctuary is for God the Father.
- ❖ The sacrifice of the Liturgy is the Body and Blood of God the Son.
- ❖ God, also being The Holy Spirit, sanctifies the mysteries and turns them into the True Body and Blood of Christ.

The priest offers incense to the icons of the martyrs and saints, believing that they are with us in spirit and praying with the priest. The martyrs and saints accept the incense and support us with their prayers and supplications exactly as though they were living; as they are now living in the unseen victorious Church while we are living in the struggling Church on earth.

Incense is only offered before icons that have been consecrated by the holy Mayroun oil. There is a special ritual for consecrating the icons which is performed by a bishop. On the issue of offering incense to the Icons of our Lord, God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, there are two opinions; one is that we should say, “Holy God”, both for the regular offering and on a special occasion, and the other is that we should say, “Hail to the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ”, for the crucifixion icon, “Hail to the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ”, for the resurrection icon, “Hail to the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ”, for the ascension icon, and so on.

## AUDIO SERMONS

### THE HOLY FIFTY DAYS AFTER THE RESURRECTION

*FR. RAPHAEL HANNA*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iZd-Pr6V6pc>



## **SAINT OF THE MONTH:**

***"Whose faiths follow, considering the outcome of their conversation?" Heb 13:7***

### **THE HOLY FATHER ABBA ISAAC, THE PRIEST OF EL-QALALI (CELLS)**

He was born in an Egyptian village from poor parents, but he was rich in his righteous works. He took the opportunity of the presence of the elders of the monks in the village to sell the works of their hands, and followed them to the wilderness. He served them under the yoke of obedience. When he became a monk, he excelled in asceticism and worship to the point that he never possessed two garments at the same time. They asked him once: "Why don't you possess two garments?" He answered: "Because when I was in the world before being a monk, I did not have two garments at the same time." He wept very often during his prayers, and he mixed his bread with the ashes of the censer and ate it. Once he became sick of a grievous sickness, and some of the brethren brought him food, but he did not eat it. One of the brethren described to him the benefits of food and urged him again to eat some of it. He insisted on not eating anything of it, and said to him: "Believe me my brother that I desire to remain sick for thirty years." When he became seasoned and everyone heard about his virtues, the fathers by consensus decided to ordain him a priest. He fled and disappeared among the fields. When they were looking for him, they passed by the field, where he was hiding in and sat to rest. They had with them a donkey, which went into the field and stood where the father was. When they went after the donkey to catch it, they found him, and they wanted to bind him so that he could not escape again. He said to them: "I will not escape now, for I know that this is the will of God." He went with them, and they ordained him a priest, and he increased in obedience to the elders and in teaching the beginners the virtues. When the time of his departure drew near, they asked him: "What can we do after you leave us?" He told them: "Do exactly as you have seen me do, if you wish to steadfast in the wilderness", then he departed in peace.



May his prayers be with us. Amen. the holy father Abba Isaac, the priest of El-Qalali (Cells). He was born in an Egyptian village from poor parents, but he was rich in his righteous works. He took



the opportunity of the presence of the elders of the monks in the village to sell the works of their hands, and followed them to the wilderness. He served them under the yoke of obedience. When he became a monk, he excelled in asceticism and worship to the point that he never possessed two garments at the same time. They asked him once: "Why don't you possess two garments?" He answered: "Because when I was in the world before being a monk, I did not have two garments at the same time." He wept very often during his prayers, and he mixed his bread with the ashes of the censer and ate it. Once he became sick of a grievous sickness, and some of the brethren brought him food, but he did not eat it. One of the brethren described to him the benefits of food and urged him again to eat some of it. He insisted on not eating anything of it, and said to him: "Believe me my brother that I desire to remain sick for thirty years." When he became seasoned and everyone heard about his virtues, the fathers by consensus decided to ordain him a priest. He fled and disappeared among the fields. When they were looking for him, they passed by the field, where he was hiding in and sat to rest. They had with them a donkey, which went into the field and stood where the father was. When they went after the donkey to catch it, they found him, and they wanted to bind him so that he could not escape again. He said to them: "I will not escape now, for I know that this is the will of God." He went with them, and they ordained him a priest, and he increased in obedience to the elders and in teaching the beginners the virtues. When the time of his departure drew near, they asked him: "What can we do after you leave us?" He told them: "Do exactly as you have seen me do, if you wish to steadfast in the wilderness", then he departed in peace.

*May the blessings of his prayers be with us all, and Glory be to God forever Amen.*

### **Sayings of the Fathers:**

- ❖ The Lord rose while the stone was still sealed on the tomb's entrance, just as He was born of the Virgin while she remained a virgin—according to the prophecy of Ezekiel. As for the angel rolling the stone away from the entrance of the tomb, it was to clearly declare the Resurrection, lest, if the stone had remained sealed, it be thought that His body was still in the tomb

***Saint Polycarp bishop of Smyrna***

- ❖ The tomb was transformed into something like heaven, which the angels long to dwell in—whereas, according to the Law, tombs were considered a source of defilement.

- ❖ The Lord rose and the stone was sealed over the door of the tomb, and as he was born of the virgin, as prophesied by Ezekiel. As for the angel rolling the stone from the door of the tomb, it was to announce the resurrection well, so that if the stone remained sealed, it would be thought that his body was in the tomb..

Abba Boulus El-Booshy

## Question and Answer:

**By:** *HE Metropolitan Youssef*

**Question**

*How do we attain Resurrection?*

**Answer**

Resurrection, for the believer is experienced through obeying God's commandments and participating in the Holy Sacraments of the church. In Baptism, we attain the resurrection in "a newness of earthly life". In Confession and Communion, we receive the potential of the second of resurrection, that of our Lord Jesus Christ "anticipating newness in the eternal life to come". Through the cherishing of the Holy Sacraments one becomes virtuous, bearing love for others, and striving to obtain perfection in the Divine worship of God thus travelling down the path to the eternal life.

Loving those nearest to us involves the heart. The Lord Jesus Christ was full of love for those that believed in Him, accepted His Holy teachings and accompanied Him during His earthly journey.

"When he was raised from the dead, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James. He then appeared to Cleopas on the way. After that, He appeared to His disciples" (Apostolic Constitutions compiled c. 390).

What kind of worship befits God? It is one in which love is manifest through a humble and pious worship that incorporates both the heart and mind. Such a type of worship requires liberation from all unworthy worldly entanglements living a life of love, humility, piety and poverty of the Spirit. As St. Paul says, "Set your mind on things above, not on things of the earth" (Colossians 3:2).

## **VERSE OF THE MONTH**

*This is the day that the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.*  
**Psalm 118:24**

## **THE CHURCH COMMEMORATES THIS MONTH “SYNAXARIUM”**

- ❖ Martyrdom of St. George, Prince of Martyrs (23 Baramouda) .....1 May
- ❖ Departure of Pope Sinuthius (Shenouda I), 55th Pope of Alexandria  
(24 Baramouda) .....2 May
- ❖ Commemoration of Saints Babnuda (Paphnute) the hermit (25 Baramouda) .....3 May
- ❖ Departure of St. Erastus, the Apostle (29 Baramouda) ..... 7 May
- ❖ Martyrdom of the Great Saint Mark, the Apostle, the Evangelist of the  
Land of Egypt (30 Baramouda) ..... 8 May
- ❖ Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the mother of God (1 Bashans) ..... 9 May
- ❖ Martyrdom of St. Jeremiah the Prophet (5 Bashans) ..... 13 May
- ❖ Departure of Father Paphnute of El-Bandarrah (6 Bashans) ..... 14 May
- ❖ Departure of St. Macarius of Alexandria (6 Bashans) .....14 May
- ❖ Departure of St. Athanasius the Apostolic, the 20th Pope  
of Alexandria (7 Bashans) .....15 May
- ❖ Departure of Pope Yoannis the Eleventh, the 89th Patriarch  
of Alexandria (8 Bashans) ..... 17 May
- ❖ Commemoration of the Appearance of a Cross of light  
above Golgotha (12 Bashans) .....20 May
- ❖ Commemoration of the honorable Archangel Michael (12 Bashans) .....20 May
- ❖ Commemoration of the Consecration of the Church of St. Demiana (12 Bashans) ..20 May
- ❖ Departure of St. Arsanius, the Tutor of the Emperor's Children (13 Bashans) .....21 May
- ❖ Departure of St. Epiphanius, Bishop of Cyprus (17 Bashans) .....25 May
- ❖ Commemoration of the Virgin St. Mary (21 Bashans) ..... 29 May

### **CHURCH SERVICES SCHEDULE:**

Please check church website in the first page

### **YOUTUBE SERVICE STREAMING ADDRESS:**

[https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC\\_Ml2B3NKLi1Y8P3nQR5Amw/video](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC_Ml2B3NKLi1Y8P3nQR5Amw/video)