



**COPTIC ORTHODOX DIOCESE OF MELBOURNE
& ITS AFFILIATED REGIONS
ST. MARK'S CHURCH, 128 RATU MARA RD SAMABULA,
SUVA, FIJI**

ST. MARKS COPTIC NEWSLETTER

Thy Word is a Lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. "Ps 119:105

Volume 1, Issue 1

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WELCOME LETTER

It is with great pleasure that we, the Coptic Orthodox Church in Suva, launch our first newsletter to you, the blessed people of Fiji. "St. Marks Coptic Newsletter" is run by the Coptic Orthodox Church in Fiji. The aim of the newsletter, is primarily to provide spiritual nourishment and guidance about biblical, historical and theological topics. The newsletter will also serve as a means of informing our readers about the meetings and activities of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Fiji. Everyone is welcome to attend.

I pray that this newsletter be a source of joy and blessing to all those who read it.

Fr Mark Attalla, (ph) 9203 971

WHO IS THE COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH? (PART 1)

Come and discover a spiritual Christian treasure that was founded in Egypt 2000 years ago, prophesized about in the Bible, blessed by the Lord Jesus Christ in His visit to Egypt, and now transferred to thousands of locations around the world,

The Coptic Orthodox Church was founded in 56 AD by St. Mark, the writer of the second Gospel of the New Testament. He was one of the apostles who conversed with Jesus about theological issues, listened to His public sermons and His private teaching to His disciples, witnessed His miracles, and learned how to live a fulfilling spiritual life. St. Mark arrived in Alexandria, Egypt, approximately 23 years after the crucifixion of Jesus. On entering the city, St. Mark broke his sandal strap, so he went to a cobbler to repair it. The cobbler, whose name was Anianus, accidentally pierced his hand and cried out "O the One God." St. Mark rejoiced at hearing this expression, he healed the cobbler's hand and preached to Anianus and his family about Christianity. Anianus and his family were baptised and many others followed. The apostle appointed Anianus as bishop and ordained three priests and seven deacons. Hence the dawn of Christianity and the Coptic Church in Egypt.

St. Mark then established the first Christian theological school in the world - historically known as the "The Theological School of Alexandria," which guarded the original Christian teachings and served as the founder of Christian theology. It was also famous for the spirituality of its professors, such as St. Athanasius and St. Clement, and its students alike who came from all over the world.

St. Mark is the first of an unbroken chain of 117 Popes. The current pope of the Coptic Orthodox Church is His Holiness Pope Shenouda III whose title is "Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark." St. Mark is the founder of the church, & the first saint and martyr of the church. He was dragged through the streets of Alexandria by the pagans on Easter day in 68 AD and tortured until death the next day.



Pope Shenouda III

COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH MEETING TIMES

- + Divine Liturgy, 5-7am Wednesday mornings
- + Bible Study for new members, Thurs 7:30pm
- + Family Bible Study, 7:30 pm Friday nights
- + Sunday School, 2 pm Saturday
- + Youth Meetings, 6 pm Saturday Nights
- + Vespers Prayers & Sermon 5 pm, Saturday Nights
- + Divine Liturgy 8—11am, Sunday

*All services are held at St. Mark's Coptic Orthodox Church, Level 2, 128 Ratu Mara Rd, Samabula

** St. Abraam's Secondhand Clothing Store & Photocopy center is located below the church.

What is prayer, and how can it lead me to God ?

Based on the book "The Spiritual Means - Ch 1" by HH Pope Shenouda III



Prayer is a bridge that links man to God. It can be likened to Jacob's Ladder which was set up on earth and its top reached heaven (Gen 28:12). Prayer is not just words it is a relationship between you - your thoughts and heart - and God. Prayer should make you feel as though you are in the Divine presence of God. Without this feeling, it would not be prayer.

Prayer does not have to be expressed in words because the heart can talk to God through feelings and emotions more than the mouth can say with words. Feelings of love towards God are a prayer. If you love God you will pray. If you pray, your love for God will increase. If this love towards God is not present then prayer will be mere words unacceptable to God. In the book of Isaiah it says, "... these people honour Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts from Me" (Isa 29:13).

Prayer is the gate of help through which the sinner enters to repentance. Ask for repentance in your prayers. Prayer is opening the heart to God so He would enter and purify it. For the acceptable prayer is one that comes from the pure heart. Therefore you should pray to acquire the purity of heart, while you say to God in your prayer, "Purge me with hyssop and I will be clean..." (Ps 50).

Prayer is consecrating the lips and the thoughts and it is the sanctifying of the soul. Furthermore, it is reconciliation with God. When one has a dispute with God it is natural for him not to want to talk to God. But when he begins to pray, it means he wants to be reconciled with God.

Prayer is the horror of the devils and the strongest weapon against them. The devil fears the person who prays, for this person may gain strength and defeat the devil. So the devil fights vehemently to prevent us from prayer. He insinuates that the person is too busy and has no time, or he makes the person feel too tired to pray. But remember what the Apostle teaches, "Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (Jas 4:7).

In your prayer open your inmost soul to be filled by God. Say to Him 'O Lord, I cannot find anybody except You who understands me.' For when you feel safe with Him, you can open your heart to Him, tell Him all your secrets and explain your weaknesses. This is the prayer that is from the heart, not mere words but a relationship between you and God whom you love. This is the prayer of love whose level is higher than that of request. Your prayer could be thanksgiving for what He has given you, for taking care of you, for His unlimited love and protection. Your prayer could be praising God like the prayer of the Seraphim, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts; heaven and earth are full of Your glory" (Is 6:3).

Your prayer could be contemplation on God's beautiful attributes. Some of the Fathers say Prayer is "A taste of the Kingdom." For it is being in the presence of the Lord. So we taste on earth what we will enjoy in heaven. Blessed is He, our good Lord, who granted us to pray. It is humility from Him to allow us to talk to Him, and it is humility from Him to listen to us. Therefore it is a great shame and most serious sin to say you have no time for prayer. We often find time for fruitless conversations, but why is that we run out of time to talk to God? King David, undoubtedly a very busy leader says to the Lord, "Seven times a day I praise You ..." (Ps 119:164) and "At midnight I will rise to give you thanks" (Ps 119:62).

You must know that prayer is a blessing. In it you take and do not give. The Lord does not need us to pray but it is us who gains strength, support and blessings from praying. You must change your thoughts about prayer so that you realise that you cannot survive without it, for it is the strength of prayer that you will depend on. Once you realise this, you will rely on prayer as an essential spiritual means in your life.

The spiritual prayer is one of understanding and concentration. As for the one who prays without this, his thoughts will definitely stray in various matters because his heart is not free yet from worldly concerns. The spiritual prayer is one of reverence and respect before God. It is not the fear of slaves but the respect of children to their father.

The following exercises may help you strengthen your prayers:

1. Train yourself to extend the time you spend in the presence of God. Decrease the amount of time wasted in idle conversation and try to spend more time talking to God.
2. Train yourself to get up early and start the day with prayer. God will be the first one you will talk to and bless your whole day.
3. Give more care to the Agpia. This is a prayer book used by the Coptic church. It contains psalms, gospel readings and other prayers.
4. Try to practice praying in all places. As the bible teaches, "Pray without ceasing." (1 Thess 5:17). Pray within your heart in all places, on the road whilst looking at nature, before entering home or work, whilst with other people.
5. Train yourself to pray the repetitive short prayers. For example the prayer, "My Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me." Say it at all times so that it registers in your heart and that you even start to say it in your sleep.
6. Train yourself to pray for others. Practice praying for those in need, your relatives and friends, for the church and its services, for the world and the nations. Pray for the sick and those who need repentance. Remember also to pray for your enemies and those that resist you.
7. Train yourself to bring God into each topic and each problem. Do not face problems on your own but always remember that you can "cast all your cares on the Lord, for He cares for you." (1 Pet 5:7)
8. Train yourself in personal prayers, besides the ritual ones. Talk openly to God and reveal all that is in your heart. Let your prayer be plain words that spring from your heart expressing how you feel.
9. Pray with understanding. Train yourself to contemplate on the psalms, the Agpia prayers and all the memorized prayers.
10. If you haven't reached yet the pure prayer, do not stop praying for this reason. It is through constant prayer that we reach the perfected and pure prayer.
11. Train yourself to continue praying, when ever you want to end it.

May God grant you a prayerful life.