

**DONNA RIZK  
FR. JOHN ABDEL-SAYED  
818 489 4185  
EGYPNJORDAN@HOTMAIL.COM**

**INTERPRETATION OF THE**

***BOOK OF***

**EXODUS**

**BY**

**FR. TADROS Y. MALATY**

**Translated by  
DR. GEORGE BOTROS**

**Reviewed by  
Rosette Toma**

## ***FORWARD***

The Holy Book begins with the Book of Genesis, in which God proclaimed the beginning of creation and human life in the bosom of God, Lover of mankind. But quickly man rebelled and was expelled from paradise, bearing in his soul a void that no one can fill; and in his heart an inescapable eternal death.

God did not become indifferent to man -- his beloved creation. If man left off turning his back instead of his face to God, in His love, God remained committed to reach out for him and to turn him back, once more, into His divine bosom. For this reason, the Book of Exodus explains, symbolically, the unconditional salvation of God; describing to us the exodus of the old people, by the mighty hand of God, from the land of bondage toward the freedom of the glorified children of God. Though this Book describes to us actual historical events, the intention is not to record history -- for it is not a historical documentary, its purpose is to let us discover, with deep understanding, our salvation which we are living now. On this subject, the scholar Origen says: [These things are not written for a historical purpose -- for we do not believe that the divine books meant to record the history of the Egyptians, “but are written to teach us and for our admonition” (1 Corinthians 10: 11)].

As well, Origen also says: [We know that the Holy Books are not written to relate to us ancient stories, but aim to the edification of our salvation. So, we know that what we read about the king of Egypt in (Exodus 1: 8), we are living it today in the life of each one of us].

### **Egypt and the Hebrews:**

As this book concentrated on the exodus of the Hebrews from the land of Egypt, we have to understand that Pharaoh represents the devil that captivates the children of God; Egypt represents the world, and the Hebrews represent the believers sojourning as strangers in the world. Speech, in this book, is taking a symbolic form. But now, Egypt became a sign of blessing, according to the promise of God: “*Blessed is Egypt My people*” (Isaiah 19: 25); “*God is known to Egypt, the Egyptians know the Lord ... make sacrifice and offering ... make a vow to the Lord and perform it*” (Isaiah 19: 21). Hence, “Israel” became the sign of the “New Israel”, in other words, it meant those who accepted the faith in the Lord Christ, the Savior, and not faith in Israel as a nation and a particular race.

# **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

## **FORWARD**

## **AN INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK**

### **SECTIONS OF THE BOOK**

#### **FIRST SECTION: THE EVENTS OF SALVATION IN EGYPT**

**CHAPTER 1:** Need for a Savior

**CHAPTER 2:** Preparing Moses for ministry

**CHAPTER 3:** The burning bush

**CHAPTER 4:** Moses' encounter with the people

**CHAPTER 5 & 6:** Moses' encounter with Pharaoh

**CHAPTER 7 to 10:** The ten plagues

**CHAPTER 11 & 12:** The Passover

#### **SECOND SECTION: FROM EGYPT TO SINAI**

**CHAPTER 12 (Cont.):** The exodus of the people

**CHAPTER 13:** Consecration of the firstborn

**CHAPTER 14:** Crossing of the Red Sea

**CHAPTER 15:** The song of triumph

**CHAPTER 16:** The temptation of food

**CHAPTER 17:** The temptation of water to drink

**CHAPTER 18:** Moses' encounter with Jethro

### **THIRD SECTION: IN SINAI**

- CHAPTER 19:** Preparations for the Law
- CHAPTER 20:** The Ten Commandments
- CHAPTER 21 to 23:** The Law
- CHAPTER 24:** The divine covenant and the role of the congregation
- CHAPTER 25:** The Ark, the table, and the lampstand
- CHAPTER 26:** The tabernacle of meeting
- CHAPTER 27:** The bronze altar
- CHAPTER 28:** Priesthood garments
- CHAPTER 29:** Consecration of priests
- CHAPTER 30:** The altar of incense and the laver
- CHAPTER 31:** The final talk
- CHAPTER 32:** The golden calf
- CHAPTER 33:** The covenant renewed
- CHAPTER 34:** The covenant renewed (cont. )
- CHAPTER 35 to 40:** Making, setting, and dedicating the tabernacle

## AN INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK

### **Nomenclature:**

The Hebrews did not give a name to this book, but considered it an integral part of the “Torah - the Law” as a whole. They used to call it “Homis Sini ”, namely, (second of five), or the second book of the “Pentateuch” -- the five books of Moses; and also, “El -shimot”, meaning: (Now These are the names) -- which are the first words in this book. Yet its name in the Septuagint version, as well as in most of the other versions, is as in the Greek language: “Exodus”, which means (Departure – going out). This refers to the events that came in Chapters 1 to 15, in particular 12 to 15, which describe the departure of the children of Israel from Egypt.

### **Author of the book:**

The prophet Moses wrote this book by divine inspiration. That is clear from the following:

1- The book begins by the word “Now”; as though this book is a continuation of the book before it, “Genesis”, written by the prophet Moses.

2- This book relates to us certain events with extreme accuracy and with many details, indicating that the author is an eyewitness, moreover, that he is the leader of that Exodus mission.

3- It records certain events that concern Moses personally. For example, his killing the Egyptian secretly, and that “*he looked this way and that way*” before killing him. As well, it recounted the conversation between him and the Hebrew man who was afflicting his brethren; and told us about him taking his wife and his two sons on donkeys; and about the circumcision of his son ..., etc.

4- The Samaritans, though enemies of the Jews, they accepted this book as one of the five books of Moses “the Pentateuch”. They would not accept the book, unless they were certain of it.

### **Time of the exodus:**

Scholars had different views as to the exact date of the exodus. The following is a summary for the prominent opinions:

1- According to the Egyptian historian “Manitho”, in the year 250 B.C., the exodus took place in the sixteenth century B.C., claiming that the Hebrews were expelled from Egypt together with the “Hyksos”. But this view does not agree with the new discoveries, or with the texts that came in Exodus 1: 11; 12: 40; 1 Kings 6: 1.

2- Some believe that the Exodus took place around the year 1290 B. C., during the reign of “Ramses II”. Those who adopt this view believe that the Jews were afflicted in the days of

“Seti I” (1309 -- 1290 B.C.), and continued to be in the days of his successor “Ramses II” (1290 - 1224 B.C.). They based their view on the fact that the children of Israel built the storehouses of the cities of “Pithom” and “Rameses”, saying that the name “Ramses” is that of the Pharaoh in whose time the exodus took place. But this view is not to be taken into consideration, because this name could have been used in a time long before that of Ramses the second.

3- Another idea is that the Exodus took place in the time of “Jephthah”, about 1230 B C; a view wrongly based on a memorial built by Jephthah, on which he recorded his victory over Israel and other nations that dwelt in the land of the Philistines at that time. Actually, the presence of that memorial is rather a confirmation that Israel had departed and settled down in the land of the Philistines, long time before that war happened.

4- The most probable view is that the Exodus took place at about 1447 B.C., during the reign of the eighteenth dynasty, in the days of “Tohotmes III”, or in those of “Amenophes II”. This fits with Judges 11: 26, in which Jephthah, who lived about 1100 years B.C., mentions that 300 years have passed since the Hebrews entered the land, namely, they entered it about 1400 B.C.; So, if we add the 40 years of their wandering in the wilderness, the time of their exodus would be at about 1440 B.C. This view fits with what came in 1 Kings 6:1, that the house of the Lord was built in the year 480 after the exodus from the land of Egypt. So, if King Solomon began building the temple at the year 957 or 966 B.C., the exodus would have taken place at about the year 1447 B.C. That date also coincides with the discoveries in Jericho and Hazor, and with what was recorded on the plates of “Tal-El- Amarnah”, that a nation would come to the land of the Philistines around this time, or shortly after.

### **Location of the crossing over:**

Scholars also differed in their views concerning the exact location of the crossover.

Miracles were performed on the hands of Moses, in “Zoan” (Tanis) (Psalm 78: 12), the capital of the “Hyksos”, of which “Rameses” was a suburban. At that time, the Hebrews were building storehouses in the cities of “Pithom” and “Rameses” (Ex. 1: 11). From Rameses, they departed to Succoth (Ex. 12: 37); they did take the shortest way to the land of the Philistines, but they journeyed through the wilderness, near the Red Sea (Ex. 13: 17, 18), where, after their departure from Succoth, they set their tents for the first time in “Etham”, which is located eight miles west of Succoth, “*in the edge of the wilderness*” (Ex. 13: 20).

From there, “*they turned and encamped before ‘Pi Hahiroth’, between ‘Migdol’ and the sea, over against ‘Baal Zephon’*” (Ex. 14: 2). It is hard to locate this area, yet it is certain that it is west of the Red Sea. From there they went to the wilderness of ‘Shur’ (Ex. 15: 4, 22; Numbers 13: 10, 15).

Many scholars believe that the Gulf, in the days of Moses, extended to the region of the “Marah” Lakes, as a marsh. Some believe that the crossover took place in the vicinity of the city of ‘Ismaelia’ and others, to the city of ‘Suez’.

It is to be noted that the Hebrew name for the Sea (Yam) Sof, ‘Yam Sûp’, designates a sea of papyrus. According to the opinion of some, this name confirms with the marsh in the

region of the 'Isthmus', that extends for about 72 miles from the Red Sea, to the head of the Gulf of Suez, an arm of the Red Sea.

### **Features of the Book:**

St. Augustine talks about the close tie between the Old Testament and the New Testament saying: [The New is in the Old concealed; and the Old is in the New revealed.] This is most clearly demonstrated in the Book of Exodus. The evangelist St. Matthew saw in the Lord Christ the new Israel and the new Moses. The evangelist used the words of the prophet 'Hosea', "*Out of Egypt I called My Son*" (Hosea 11: 1), as a prophecy about the flight of the Lord Christ to Egypt (Matthew 2: 15). And as the old Israel got baptized in the Red Sea (Ex. 14), the Lord Christ, also, carrying the Church in Him -- the new Israel -- got baptized in the waters of the River Jordan (Matthew 3: 13 - 17). The Lord Christ spent 40 days in the wilderness (Matthew 4: 1 - 11), as though He was recalling the 40 years spent by the first Israel in the wilderness, and the 40 days, spent by the prophet Moses on Mount Sinai (Ex. 24: 18). The first Moses, who received the Law, presented it to the children of Israel, after it was revealed to him on Mount Sinai (Ex. 24: 3 - 8); and the Lord Christ -- the New Moses -- who, Himself, is the Word of God, presented His Law to the people on the Mount (Matthew 5, 6). The covenant of Sinai has been a symbol of the New covenant.

The tie between the Two Testaments in the Book of Exodus needs an extensive explanation. Therefore we leave this matter aside. But we must ascertain that what comes in the Book of Exodus is a confirmation of God's promises, to set "*a kingdom of priests and a holy nation*" (Ex. 19: 6), whose people will enjoy a heavenly food and a spiritual drink, and will set a Sanctuary for God to dwell in their midst (Ex. 25). It was only the onset for a divine friendship with mankind that would be realized in its perfection in the New Testament.

### **The personality of the prophet Moses:**

This Book has a special importance, exposing the life of the prophet Moses, who became a representative for the whole Old Testament, being the one who received the Law, spoke with God, and led the people to freedom of bondage in order to enter the land of promise. So, when the Lord Christ transfigured on Mount 'Tabor', He was accompanied by Moses and Elijah (Matthew 17: 1 -- 8). And in the Book of Revelation, we hear of the song of Moses, sung by the victorious, in heaven (Revelation 15: 3).

The Church received the life of Moses to learn from it vivid aspects for the spiritual life. The scholar Origen, in his symbolic interpretation of the Books of Exodus and Numbers, spoke significantly about the prophet Moses and all his actions, as a sign of the living spiritual Law, that touches the inner life of the believer, and a sign of his spiritual growth. As for his teacher, St. Clement of Alexandria, he was very fond of the personality of the prophet Moses; and as we previously saw in our work "*The early fathers of the school of Alexandria*", he believed that the Greek Philosophers, having come with some truth, actually received it from Moses; thus are counted as babes, if compared with the Hebrews. He quotes the words of 'Eupolemus' in his work "*The kings of Judah*": [Moses was the first wise man; the first to present the 'grammar' to the Jews, who passed on to the Phoenicians, and from them to the Greeks]. He also said: [The philosopher Plato depended, for Law, on the books of Moses]; and, [The philosophers believe

that the wise man, is alone, a king, Law-giver, leader, just, holy, and beloved by God. So, if we realize that all these characters apply to Moses, as it is clear from the Holy Books themselves, we can surely deduce that Moses is the true wise man]. He also believes that the philosophy of Moses bears four aspects: historical, judicial, sacrificial, and visional.

Afterwards, St. Gregory of Nyssa, a disciple of the scholar Origen of Alexandria, recorded for us the “Life of Moses”, in a beautiful spiritual and symbolic form.

Why should we mention the fathers of the Church and their views about Moses? The Lord Christ Himself gave way for this line of thought, saying: “*And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up*” (John 3: 14). And the apostles clarified the symbolism between the Passover Lamb and the Messiah (I Corinthians 5: 7); and that the Rock that followed the Jews was the Lord Christ Himself .

### **The book of Redemption or of Salvation:**

This book begins with affliction and oppression, and ends up with the appearance of the glory of God in the tabernacle, where God dwelt among His people (Ex. 40). It began with the darkness that prevailed upon the land of bondage, and ended with glory. This book proved to us that this change, which is ‘salvation’ was not the fruit of human work, but was, rather, a crucial need for an intervention from God Himself; He, alone, can save and deliver, through the pouring of the holy blood (the sacrifice of Passover). The book, as a whole, shows us with vivid and practical images the features of our way to salvation.

### **The book of the Passover:**

Although the people suffered severely from bondage, they did not think of escaping the place until God sent them Moses telling them about the land of milk and honey, which is Jerusalem. Only then, could they no longer endure servitude or submit to it. For us also, the discovery of the heavenly Canaan, makes us feel the bitterness of the bondage of sin, and, under the divine leadership, we can escape to the barren wilderness, which, although with no rivers, plants, nor dwelling places, would become for us a place for praise and chant (Ex. 15), and a way of crossing over, where we can experience, every day, God’s works for our salvation. It is as though the secret of our continuous crossover lies in our discovery of the higher Jerusalem, and in our meditation in it, through insight.

The possibility of crossover lies in the words of the prophet: “*Came down to deliver them*” (Ex. 3: 8). In the possibility of God’s coming down to us who, alone, can descend from heaven to our earth, to carry us in Him, to His exalted glories. When Moses tried to crossover with his people from the bondage of Pharaoh depending upon his own human arm, he failed even to save himself, and remained a fugitive for 40 years. Therefore, God came down to him through the burning bush, a symbol of the divine incarnation, to crossover with him and all the people. He came down to him in the burning bush, to prove His presence amid His people. He came down to His people, as a Cloud to shade them by day, as a symbol of protection; as a pillar of fire, to give them light, as the secret of their enlightenment and as their Leader; As a Rock to quench their thirst; and in the tabernacle to dwell among them.... All these, were for the

incarnation of the Word of God, and His coming down on earth, so that we unite with Him, and He carries us with Him, to the merits of His precious blood.

### **The book of freedom:**

(1) Pharaoh enslaved the people against their will. Yet much more important is man's surrender through his own will to the inner servitude and his submission to its yoke. This is assuming that it is the source of his peace and pleasure, although it delivers him to oppression and will present him with death. God delivered them through Moses from the bondage of Pharaoh. But, even after their crossover, they remained in the bondage of lust by: (1) sitting near the pots of meat in Egypt (Ex. 16: 3), and by (2) their temporary enjoyment of carnal lusts that led them to worship the Egyptian golden calf, that had remained deep in their hearts (Ex. 32).

And why should we talk about the people, while Moses himself, was in need of internal liberation, in order to be worthy of receiving the rod of God? He was enslaved to his ego -- the "self". So when he assumed, at the beginning, that he was capable of saving the people by his own arm, God let him stay for 40 years in the wilderness, so as to cure him from the bad influence of the 40 years he spent in the royal palace. He had to be also liberated from the bondage of fear of old age. Yet, once he comprehended the concept of freedom, as a permanent existence with God "*I shall be with you, and with your mouth*", he could receive the rod of God, to shepherd the people on their way to freedom.

(2) As Moses set forth with his people along the way to freedom, the devil also set forth to fight him, through presenting to him the 'half solutions', in place of freedom, in order to deviate him from his goal. The way to freedom is not paved with roses, and we cannot walk through it while relaxing in luxury, but it is the way of spiritual strives, till the end.

### **The Book of commandment and worship:**

Despite the fact that there is a separate book for the divine commandment, or the Law, and for the Mosaic worship, Moses was keen on ending the book of salvation with two things: receiving the law, and the tabernacle of the gathering. It is as though the crossover, being a setting forth to freedom through the union and permanent existence with God, is to be realized through the word of God (the commandment), and worship (the tabernacle). The commandment leads the soul to enter the heavens, while worship is a crossover to fellowship with the heavenly in their liturgies.

The worship is the goal of the crossover; "*Let My people go to worship Me*"; through which we learn the law of heaven (the commandment), and practice abiding with God (the heavenly tabernacle).

Crossing the Red Sea, namely the Baptism, is a necessary and essential start, through which we enjoy the new birth and carry the authority to forsake the works of the old man. Yet, we remain in need of continuous progress toward Canaan, supported by the Holy Spirit, that we gained through the Sacrament of anointment (Myron), the imposition of the divine commandment, and of constant worship. By this, we can maintain the power of the crossover by the Holy Blood, so as to enjoy a continuous exodus, until we enter into the divine bosom and encounter God, face to face.

## **The wilderness as a school:**

St. John Chrysostom speaks of the wilderness as a school, which the Hebrews were committed to attend. Unfortunately, their actions and behavior were just like small children that God tolerated and dealt with accordingly. Of these are:

A. - On their exodus, *“the Lord had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they granted them what they requested of silver, gold and garments; thus they plundered the Egyptians”* (Ex. 12: 36). That was somewhat like a down payment for the riches of eternal life; but at the same time, the Lord was like a father who gives his children some money in the morning in order to encourage them to go to school, and to listen to their teachers.

B. - As the time they spent in the school grew longer, they started to murmur, to long for returning to Egypt and forsake their study. They were crying like children, saying: *“Why have you so dealt with us, to bring us out of Egypt?”* (Ex. 14: 11)

C. - The children misbehaved toward God their father and Moses their teacher, so because of their foolish behavior, Moses became angry and broke the tablets of the Law (Ex. 32: 19); as though he wished to stop teaching them. Yet he was compassionate toward them; and when the Lord intended to blot them out of his book, he interceded on their behalf (Ex. 32: 33).

D. - They resembled spoiled children; though their divine father provided them with heavenly Manna, fresh every day, yet they murmured against Him. They longed for the leek and garlic they used to eat in Egypt. Just like a child, who sits at his father’s table while his heart is with playing in the mud.

E. - Because of their weakness, he gave them His Law, *“An eye for an eye; and a tooth for a tooth,”* to keep them from over-avenging themselves. Once they reached the stage of maturity, He could present them with *“Do not pay evil for evil”* and *“Whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also”*. By that, He appeased the childish tendency for revenge, until they advance to the stage of maturity.

F. - When they faced Pharaoh and Amalek, the Lord said to them through the mouth of Moses: *“The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace”* (Ex. 14: 14); *“The Lord will have war with Amalek”* (Ex. 17: 16); and *“I will be an enemy to your enemies, and an adversary to your adversaries”* (Ex. 23: 22). St. John Chrysostom pictures these people as children, saying to their father, *“so and so beats me on my way to school,”* and he answers, *‘he is an evil person; do not worry, I shall beat him back for you.’”*

G. - When Moses stayed a long time on the mountain, the Israelites behaved like children who could not bear the absence of their teacher. So, they behaved unwisely and pressured Aaron into making a golden calf for them.

These are some examples that reveal how God dealt with the Jewish people; how they behaved as children spirituality and had not reached spiritual maturity. Therefore, St. Paul the apostle described them as children, juvenile, and minors.

## **The way of salvation:**

We said that the book of Exodus as a whole describes to us a clear and vivid image of the way to our salvation. They are not consecutive stages, but integrated ways. These features are:

**1- Feeling the need for a Savior.** A sick man may surrender to his sickness and a slave may submit to his oppression, but the work of the Holy Spirit is to expose the extent of sin and the humiliation it imposes on the soul. So, the person may feel the need for God the Savior. This is not a beginning for the Way, but it is the persistent work of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life, all along the way of his sojourn. Whenever we encounter the Savior, we discover more through the Holy Spirit, and by our weaknesses, we begin to feel our need for Him. We remain in an incessant joy with His encounter, and in a continuous repentance for our trespasses until we reach to His eternal glories.

**2- God's descend to us.** Feeling the bitterness of bondage and affliction may lead the soul to despair, but it is delivered by the hastening act of our Lord Christ who upholds it with His blood. So, if the book of Exodus had revealed the people's need for a Savior, it then clarified two Exoduses that are actually one integrated work: the Exodus of the people, and that of God Himself to save the people. Man cannot move by himself toward freedom, as long as the shackles of servitude bind him; he is in need of the Exodus of God with him.

In this book, it is revealed that God has been the Initiator of love. He set Moses as the leader of salvation, working in him and by him, and God continued to work, which has been portrayed and confirmed throughout the ages. That is why the Lord Himself says: "*A sower went out to sow*" (Matthew 13: 3); He went out to sow the seeds of His love in us. And in His invitation to 'Levi', the gospel confirms that once the Lord Christ went to him at his tax office to say, "*Follow Me*", the shackles that used to bind his heart to money were loosened, and he left everything instantly and followed Him. And finally, it was impossible for 'Lazarus' to come out of his grave unless the Lord Himself came to grant him the grace of resurrection, and to free him of the bonds of death.

**3- Need for blood.** The first plague was the change of water into blood, and the last plague was of the slaying of the Passover lamb. There is no crossover for us to eternal life except through the shedding of the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

**4- The new birth.** Through the cross the price of our crossover was paid. But the start of the crossover is our entrance by faith into the water of Baptism; to be buried with the Lord Christ, and to rise together with Him in the newness of life.

**5- The continuous strive.** By crossing the Red Sea, the people did not find themselves inside Jerusalem. Rather they were at the beginning of forty years wandering in the wilderness, fighting "Amalek"; namely the lusts of the body, to discover God's permanent presence with them as Supporter and Fulfiller of all their needs.

## **Sections of the book:**

As subjects, we can divide the book into two complementary sections:

- 1- Salvation: Chapters 1 to 18
- 2- The Law and worship: Chapters 19 to 40

We can also divide this Book into locations where the events listed took place:

- 1- In Egypt: 1:1 to 12:36.
- 2- From Egypt to Sinai: 12:37 to 19:2.
- 3- In Sinai: 19:3 to Chapter 40.

These three sections represent three aspects in the life of a believer. In Egypt, man feels his need for divine salvation. On the way from Egypt to Sinai, man trains himself to complete obedience to God. And in Sinai, man enjoys receiving the commandment, as well as the spiritual worship (the tabernacle). It is as though this book ties the believer's life, faith and work (obedience), worship and commandment. This trinity represents one unity; each of them supports the other and completes it until the believer crosses over to the higher Jerusalem.

**FIRST SECTION**

**THE EVENTS OF SALVATION  
IN  
EGYPT**

(Exodus: 1:1 to 12:36)

# CHAPTER 1

## NEED FOR A SAVIOR

This chapter speaks to us of:

1- Origin of the nation of Israel in Egypt	Exodus 1:1 - 7
2- Their submission to servitude	1:8 - 14
3- The killing of males	1:15 - 22

+++++

### **The story of the servitude:**

This book tells us about the servitude in much detail for the following reasons: First, because it represents the story of our servitude to sin of which the Lord Christ came to set us free; secondly, because these details represent living aspects that touch our life and relationships with God; and thirdly, because we often forget or pretend to forget that bitter servitude. That is why when the Lord Christ revealed His mission to the Jews, said: *“You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free,”* they responded by saying: *“We are Abraham’s descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can you say, ‘You shall be made free?’”* (John 8: 32, 33) St. Augustine comments on that response by saying:

[Even if we considered the freedom in the world (and not freedom from sin), where is the truth in their saying, *“We are Abraham’s descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone”*? Was not Joseph sold? (Gen. 37: 28) Haven’t the prophets been taken into captivity? (2 Kings 24; Ezekiel 1: 1) Were they not submitted to fierce rulers in Egypt to work, not in gold and silver, but in mud? If they have never been in bondage to anyone, why does the Lord always remind them that He saved them from the house of servitude?]

It was ridiculous to say that they were never in captivity when they were under the rule of the Romans. But that is the nature of man: to submit humbly to servitude, yet with thinking that he is free. That is why the servitude of those people and their liberation were recorded, in order to remember always our need for the Lord Christ as the Deliverer of our souls from the captivity of sin.

### **1- Origin of the nation of Israel in Egypt:**

Jacob with his children and grandchildren entered into Egypt as one family and there the nation of Israel had its origin and its first leadership (the prophet Moses). It flourished after the

death of Joseph, and then fell under the oppression of Pharaoh and the servitude by the Egyptians. But God sent Moses, and called on him to fight against Pharaoh in order to deliver the people through the sacrifice of Passover.

Jacob went down to Egypt, together with twelve fathers of his seed. There they sojourned, according to the words of the prophet Isaiah: *“My people went down at first into Egypt to sojourn there; then the Assyrians oppressed them without cause”* (Is. 52: 4). They sojourned and fell under humiliation and servitude. Yet we find their names in the book of Revelation, written on the gates of the heavenly Jerusalem (Revelation 21: 12), and the children of God have their foreheads marked from each tribe enjoy the heavenly glories. Therefore, let Assyria oppress without cause! But God is protecting His children, counting them, and engraving their names in the Book of Life.

The scholar Origen comments on the words of the book: *“All those who were descendants of Jacob were seventy persons (souls in some versions)”*(Ex. 1: 4) saying: [Man does not give birth to a ‘soul’; a ‘soul’ is not produced out of his seed. At the beginning of creation, Adam says of Eve: *“This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh”* (Gen. 2: 23). He does not say: *“This is a soul of my soul!”* Laban also says to Jacob: *“Surely you are my bone and my flesh”* (Gen. 29: 14), and did not dare to speak of soul relationship, but of that of the body - of the bone and flesh. But here, the book intended to disclose a new sort of relationship above that of the body, a spiritual relationship.

The soul does not beget unless it reaches the level of him who says, *“For though you might have ten thousands instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel”* (1 Corinthians 4: 15). Those are who beget souls, to live in the world with the spirit of the gospel, carrying in them the features of the Lord Christ. And saying somewhere else, *“My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you”* (Galatians 4: 19).

This is the description of the new Israel, namely the Church. She is a productive mother, giving birth to holy souls that carry the features of the Lord Christ.

As to the secret of growth, it lies in the following phrase:

*“Joseph died, all his brothers, and all that generation, but the children of Israel were fruitful and increased abundantly, multiplied and grew exceedingly mighty; and the land was filled with them.”*(Ex. 6, 7)

This phrase links between the death of Joseph and the fruits of the children of Israel, and their abundant increase to fill the land. If Joseph carried a symbol of the Lord Christ in many aspects, there would be no increase for the Church and the new Israel, except through the death of the Lord Christ on the cross. The children of Israel also symbolize the virtues that dwell in the heart. There is no growth of the virtuous life, nor an increase of the virtues in the heart, except by the declaration of the power of the crucifixion and death of Christ in it.

The scholar Origen comments on this text, saying: [Before the death of Joseph, who was sold by Judah, one of his brothers, for thirty pieces of silver, there was a small number of the children of Israel. But having tasted death for the sake of all, that *“through His death, he might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil”* (Hebrew 2: 14), the belief of the

people increased abundantly. The Church would not have become so fruitful and would not have come with such a harvest of believers in the whole land, “*unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies*” (John 12: 24). The voice of the apostles “*has gone through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world*” (Psalm 19: 4), and as it is written: “*And the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly*” (Acts 6: 7).]

This is the spiritual interpretation. However, for the benefit of the listener, let us also consider the teaching aspect: [If Joseph dies in you; if you carry in your body “*the dying of the Lord Jesus Christ*” (2 Corinthians 4: 10), if your members die to sin, (the children of Israel), namely the exalted spiritual commitments would increase abundantly within you. Through the mortification of bodily lusts, the commitments of the spirit grow. By the daily mortification to your sins, your virtues would increase, and the earth, namely the body, would become filled with good deeds.

Would you like me to prove this from the Holy Book? Consider the words of the apostle Paul: “*If I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard pressed between the two, having desired to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you*” (Philippians 1: 22-- 24). Now, do you realize how the earth became fruitful through him? As long as he is still on earth - namely in the flesh - he carries the fruits of establishing Churches, and gains people for God through preaching the gospel.

## **2- The submission of the Israelites to servitude:**

The natural result of that increasing growth – the salvation by the crucifixion and death of Christ -- is the agitation and frustration of the devil. The Book says:

*“Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, ‘Look, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we; Come let us deal wisely with them, lest they multiply, and it happen, in the event of war, that they also join our enemies and fight against us, and so go up out of the land’. Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with their burdens”* (Ex. 1: 8 - 11).

Who is this new king but the devil who becomes terrified when he sees the Lord reigning over the hearts of His children? He exerts all his energies to dedicate his hosts and evil capabilities to enslave men, and to humiliate them by laboring in the mud, namely through making them preoccupied with earthly things.

The scholar Origen sees the devil in a state of terror, because of our affiliation to the Crucified, who deprived him of all authority and exposed him, saying: [This line of thought terrifies him such as to say: “*lest they fight against us, and so go up out of the land*” (Ex. 1: 10); he does not want us to go up out of the land, but to remain “*bearing the image of the man of dust*” (1 Corinthians 15: 49). Therefore, if we happen to cross over to his enemy, He would bring us to the Kingdom of heaven and compel us to abandon the image of the man of dust, and adopt that of the heavenly].

If he sets enslaving taskmasters to oppress us, by working us in the mud, the Lord Christ has prepared for us other kinds of taskmasters to teach us, in order to abandon the mud, namely,

to cast off the works of the old man, and to live according to the new man: the image of our true King.

*“And they built for Pharaoh supply cities, Pithom and Rameses.”* (Ex. 1: 11)

As the name “Rameses” means land of corruption, the scholar Origen believes that the devil wishes to humiliate us by making us labor in mud for the account of corruption and evil. And here, we may wonder, ‘Why would God allow affliction toward His children?’ So...

A – They yearn for a better life. If the people were to remain in a state of leisure, they would not be in need to set forth to Canaan. So God allows afflictions and troubles to prepare us for a better life, and to enjoy the heavenly Canaan. St. John Chrysostom says: [God is good and compassionate, not only as He grants us gifts, but also as He chastises us; His chastisements and punishments are out of His goodness as a great expression of His help for us].

B – That they become close to God. Affliction leads us to feel our need for God’s work within us and through us.

C - If God seems to have forsaken His people to humiliation, the Book confirms:

*“The more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew”* (Ex. 1: 12).

Even when the hand of servitude became severe, God did not forsake His people, and labored to save them in all ways.

### **3- Killing the males:**

The king of Egypt called the two Hebrew midwives ‘Shiphrah’ and ‘Puah,’ and commanded them to kill every male child at his birth, and to leave every female to live. That task was not difficult to do, as it was the custom in Egypt at that time to conduct childbirth on a birth stool; so the midwife could kill the male child before being seen by anyone. But the two midwives feared God and saved both the male and female children.

The Hebrew people were called “Hebrews” after “Eber”, one of the grandfathers of Abraham (Genesis 10: 21). The word “Hebrew” was therefore used to refer to the genuine Jew, to designate him from the Jew who intrudes from the Gentiles. The believers, likewise, may be called “Hebrews”, as the nature of their life is a continuous ‘crossover’; feeling as a sojourner, and setting forth all the time from the earthly to the heavenly.

St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa, believes that the midwife, who helps the Hebrew women, refers to the free will that brings forward the virtue in the life of believers, amid the bitter pains of labor. The believer, even while acting through God, would not have fruits outside His divine will. As for Pharaoh, who refers to our enemy, the devil, he cannot bear to see ‘our free will’ granted to us by God, and working for our growth through Jesus Christ.

But the scholar Origen sees in the two midwives the “knowledge” that sustains the children of God, in the birth of both the males and females. Namely to let them have fruit in the

divine rational meditation, and in the sanctification of emotions. The males refer to the mind, and the females to the emotion.

The two midwives also refer to the Holy Book, both the Old and the New Testaments, through which the children of God enjoy the multiplied fruits rationally and emotionally, or spiritually and physically.

The names of the two midwives: ‘Shiphrah’ and ‘Puah’, are two Hebrew words that mean ‘beauty’ and ‘girl’. But the scholar Origen believes that the word ‘Shiphrah’ means a ‘sparrow’ or ‘bird’, and ‘Puah’ means ‘chaste’. As though the two midwives act in the Church to let her produce fruit, first through lifting up the heart, to fly in the sky as a flying sparrow, and secondly by the spirit of shyness and chasteness.

If the two midwives refer to the two Testaments of the Holy Book, we should accept the Old Testament as a sparrow. Namely, we should comprehend it in a spiritual way, and not literally. As to the New Testament, it represents the ‘shyness’ (reddening of face), a sign of spattering with the blood of the Lord Christ, through which we have the fruitful knowledge in the world.

We said that the male refers to the mind or spirit, while the female refers to the body or emotions. Pharaoh’s intention was to kill the spiritual comprehension of the Holy Book, so as to care only for the material side, so to make our evangelic comprehension, dry and dead.

While the war of Satan against the children of God is aimed to make them lose the prudent way of thinking, and to agitate in them the bodily lusts, the honest evangelic knowledge binds the two sides together: the intellectual with the emotional; the sanctification of both the Spirit and the body, namely to keep both the males and the females alive!

The Holy Book says:

*“Because the midwives feared God, He provided households for them”* (Ex. 1: 21).

Does God provide households? If the two midwives refer to the Holy Book, when it is studied with the fear of God, and lived by believers, God will provide for the Book a place in many locations. Namely, He will open up the range of ministry, and establish households for Himself. Thus the world needs to see in us the word of God working in our hearts with His divine fear to provide for the gospel a place in every heart.

This text caused some controversy. Why would God reward the two midwives who lied to Pharaoh? Is it permissible to lie, as ‘Rahab’ the harlot also did (Joshua 2)? St. Augustine wrote two essays on this issue, in which he made it clear that it is not permissible to lie, not even if it involves some benefit for others. As the Lord Christ Himself commanded us: *“Let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes’, and your ‘No’, ‘No’; for whatever is more than these is from the evil one”* (Matthew 5: 37). The apostle Paul likewise warns us saying, *“Therefore, put away lying, ‘Let each of you one speak truth with his neighbor’”* (Ephesians 4: 25). The Saint explained God’s rewarding of the two midwives, by saying that He dealt with them according to their spiritual stature, and their ability to act. And from another aspect, he says that God rewarded them, not because they lied, but because they had mercy towards the people of God. He did not reward them for deceiving Pharaoh, but for their acts of kindness and for having a compassionate heart.

The Holy Book says:

*“Pharaoh commanded all his people, saying, ‘Every son who is born, you shall cast into the river; and every daughter, you shall save alive’ (Ex. 1: 22).*

The scholar Origen comments on this saying, [Do you see what the prince of this world commands his servants? He commands that our children be stolen and cast into the river; to snatch them into his nets since their birth. He commands to attack them, once they touch the breasts of the Church, to take them away from her, and to chase them until they are devoured by the raging waves of this world.]

Behold the danger that threatens you from the time you are born, or rather from that of your second birth (namely from the time you are baptized); *“Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil”* (Matthew 4: 1). That was the command of Pharaoh to his people concerning the Hebrew children, to attack and snatch them once they are born, and then to cast them into the river. Yet Christ conquered the devil to open the way of victory before you. He conquered while fasting to let you realize that *“this kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting”* (Mark 9: 29).

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **PREPARING MOSES FOR MINISTRY**

After the first chapter revealed the need for salvation, chapters 2 to 4 tell us about preparing the prophet Moses for ministry.

1- Moses in the river	1 - 4
2- Moses in the palace	5 - 10
3- Moses ministers with human zeal	11 - 15
4- Moses in the land of Midian	16 - 25

### **1- Moses in the river:**

God allowed the people to pass through a severe temptation. Yet, at the same time, “*He also made the way of escape*” (1 Corinthians 10: 13). For their sake, He prepared Moses and trained him for the duration of 40 years along three stages:

The first stage: For 40 years, Moses grew up in the palace under Pharaoh’s daughter, and he was educated according to the wisdom and knowledge of the Egyptians. However, at the same time, he was fed the breast-milk of his Hebrew people, so assumed that he could serve God as he depended on his eloquence, his management abilities, and wisdom. But he failed.

The second stage: He spent 40 years in the wilderness training on the knowledge that without God he is worth nothing. He realized that he is “*not eloquent, slow of speech, and slow of tongue,*” (Ex. 4: 10) and incapable to work by himself (Ex. 4: 14).

The third stage: This started by his encounter with the burning bush, when he got to know God, who works through ‘nothing’ to show forth His glory.

After this introduction, we go back to the childhood of Moses. Listen to words of the apostle Paul speak of his parents as heroes of faith saying, “*By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king’s command*” (Hebrews 11: 23). So are we. By our faith in God, who in secret sees our actions, we should hide every virtue, lest it be attacked by Pharaoh (the devil), and would be devoured by the waves of the river.

Seeing how God turned Pharaoh’s command into a blessing for Moses, St. John Chrysostom says, [If the children were not cast into the river, Moses would not have been saved, and would not have been raised in the security and dignity of the palace. The Saint believes that all events, even the most fierce, against the children of God, are used by the Lord, as part of His plan for their salvation.]

*“When she could no longer hide him, she took an ark of bulrushes for him, daubed it with asphalt and pitch, put the child in it, and laid it in the reeds by the river’s bank”* (Ex. 2: 3).

St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa, believes that Moses, representing the virtuous life, born by the free will through the bitter pains of labor, has to be put in an ark of papyrus, or in a casket of wooden boards in order to keep that virtuous life secure against the river’s waves. That ‘ark’ is the ‘learning’. When man always cares to learn, and yearns for renewed and flourishing spiritual

knowledge, he would be like Moses, secure against all deadly currents. No waves can devour him, but would rather push him to the security of the river's bank.

The ark has been the apparent keeper of the child, but his mother's tears were his concealed protection. About this, St. Gregory of Nyssa says, [Whoever escapes such things should follow Moses' example, and should never stop shedding tears; for although having been secure inside the ark, yet the tears are the strong keeper of him who is saved by virtue. Tears of repentance are the protection of every hidden inside the heart, and its shield, lest it would be devoured by the evil one.]

## **2- Moses in the palace:**

St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa, believes that the 'daughter of Pharaoh', represents the philosophies of the world, laboring while being barren and fruitless, yet doesn't deliver. The 'daughter of Pharaoh', despite her beauty, authority, wealth, charm, and many admirers, is barren, and her soul is unfulfilled. Yet the Church is not against her. Although Moses was taken into her palace, he was fed from his mother's breast milk. We likewise, accept the philosophy and science of the world, and do not despise them; nevertheless, we abide to the traditions, gospel, teachings, thoughts, and the whole life of our Church.

The school of Alexandria since its beginning was keen on adopting such a line of thought, namely the acknowledgment of world philosophy without deviation from evangelic thought. The historian 'Shaff' says, [The Theology of Alexandria intended to reconcile with that of the world... basing that unity on the Holy Book and teachings of the Church.] St. Clement of Alexandria, criticizing those who say that philosophy is evil, declared that there is no animosity between Christianity and philosophy, and that philosophy is not the work of darkness, but it's in every one of its principles a ray of light from where the 'Logos' shines. He said that God used the philosophy of the Greeks to get them into knowledge of Christ the "Truth".

The scholar Origen believes that the daughter of Pharaoh refers to the Church of the Gentiles that received Moses (the Law) from the Jews through the river (Baptism), and comprehended it with a new concept, having carried him to her palace. He says: [I believe that the daughter of Pharaoh represents the Church that embraces all nations. Although her father is a pagan, she was told, "*Listen, O daughter, consider and incline your ear; forget your own people also, and your father's house; so the King will greatly desire your beauty*" (Psalm 44: 10, 11). She gets out of her father's house, comes to the water to wash herself from the sins she had committed in it, and from there she gets compassionate toward the child. This is the Church, coming from Gentiles, to find in the river, Moses who was rejected by his own. She gets him a nurse of his own race, with whom he spends his early childhood, and then she adopts him. I often referred to Moses as representing the Law. By coming to the water of Baptism, the Church takes up Moses who was hidden in an ark of bulrushes, and daubed with asphalt and pitch. The Law was motionless in such a place, being confined of the defiled bodily lusts of the Jews, until the Church of the Gentiles came to draw him out, which gives him a dwelling place in the court of the royal palace of wisdom. Thus the Law left its own, as they did not know how to listen to it spiritually considering it a milk-fed infant. And once they were introduced to the Church and entered it, they grew up and gained strength, casting away the garment of humbleness and weakness, to be clothed with greatness, exaltation, and beauty. What is this greatness, but the

eminence of spirituality? Therefore, let us beseech our Lord Jesus Christ to reveal Himself to us, and to let us also see the greatness of Moses.]

As for the Moses' name, the daughter of Pharaoh named him "Moses", meaning "water" in the old Egyptian language (Ex. 2: 10). By this name, God Himself called him. And as St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa, says, [God did not refuse to call His servant by this name and did not consider it abominable, to let the child keep the name given him by that foreign woman, this which actually expressed the prophet's situation.]

St. Clement of Alexandria believes that "Moses", the Egyptian name, meant "the one taken out of water", but his Hebrew name, given him on his circumcision, was "Yaweh Yoakim"; and he had a third symbolic name in heaven -- "Melchi" (Deuteronomy).

### **3- Moses ministers with human zeal:**

Having acquired the wisdom of the Egyptians for over 40 years, Moses assumed that he became capable of serving the Lord. As a result of his eloquence and wisdom, he got confused, "He looked this way and that way" (Ex. 2: 12), although a minister of God, he should not care whether those around him are pleased or displeased with his ministry, as long as he knows that he is sent by God. Moses started his ministry depending on his own abilities; therefore he became scared and escaped from his ministry (ch.15).

Moses' experiences are significant, showing us that everyone who dedicates his life to God faces two kinds of war: a 'left war' and a 'right war':

(1) A left war: This is the war against the obvious evil, as when Moses saw the fight between an Egyptian, and a Hebrew, one of his brethren. Moses killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. This carried a symbolic portrait of the believer, who strikes, not a human being, but every evil in his heart, and buries it, so that any sin foreign to our nature would have no place in us.

(2) A right war. This is a war against self-righteousness. When man assumes that he is righteous and is better than others, without remembering his sins. This war is by far worse than that between the two: the Egyptian and the Hebrew brethren, namely, between man and his ego "self".

Such is the case with the believer who faces two wars: a war against sin, (this war is obvious and relatively easy) and then the war of the schism inside the Church, which is much more dangerous and cruel, leading many to abandon the ministry, as Moses was forced to do.

St. John Chrysostom comments on the words of the Hebrew party: "*Who made you a prince and judge over us? Do you intend to kill me...?*" (Ex. 2: 14) saying, [The people were just like a sick man who seeing the physician holding a scalpel in his hand and says to him in fear: 'Who made you a physician, and gave you a scalpel to use?']. From another aspect, God used that incident for Moses' benefit, to let him flee, to learn philosophy in the wilderness, and to see the divine vision.

### **4- Moses in the land of Midian:**

When Moses was 40 years of age, he left to the wilderness to experience the truth of his self value. He is actually 'nothing', to say, "*Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh?*" (Ex. 3:12) By that, he became worthy of gaining the divine strength.

A minister is sometimes in need to leave his position of ministry, and set forth to a "life of solitude", where he would practice unity with God, in order to be worthy of attaining a bigger heart to accommodate more love for those he ministers.

In the wilderness he joined 'Reuel', meaning (God is a Friend), and married 'Zipporah', (meaning a sparrow), who gave birth to 'Gershom', (meaning a stranger). As though Moses here represents the minister who, in his solitude, encounters God as his Friend, unites his life to the sparrow, namely, the heavenly thought soaring in the heights, and always has a feeling of being a sojourner.

It is to be noticed that 'Reuel', his father-in-law, has been called 'Jethro' (Ex. 3:1), most probably a title of honor, having been the priest of Midian, (meaning with noticeable greatness); also called 'Hobab', that may also mean 'Reuel'. He was probably a descendant of Abraham and Keturah (Genesis 25: 2).

Moses' job was to shepherd the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law (Ex. 3: 1). St. Clement of Alexandria, and the scholar Origen see in this task a type of the Lord Christ, the Good Shepherd, who takes care of the inner thoughts of the soul as if they were a flock.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE BURNING BUSH

This chapter deals with:

1- The burning bush	1 - 4
2- Taking the sandals off	5
3- Calling Moses for ministry	6 - 10
4- Moses tries to find excuses	11 - 13
5- God's name	14 - 17
6- The secret of the three days	18
7- The mighty hand of God	19 - 22

#### **1- The burning bush:**

While Moses was keeping the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law:

*“He led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God; and the angel of God appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush burned with fire, but the bush was not consumed. Then Moses said, ‘I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn’” (Ex. 3: 1 - 3).*

Here, Moses entered into a new stage, which is to encounter God, the Secret of Strength, and the Hidden Shepherd who works for the salvation of the world, and the edification of the Church.

And now, to what does that burning bush refer to?

A- The bush in Hebrew means ‘the thorny bush’. That is why the Jews see in it a symbol of Israel, surrounded by thorns and troubles. This line of thought has been also adopted by some of the early fathers of the Church. The scholar Tertullian, as well as St. Hillary, Bishop of Poitier, see in the bush a reference to the Church burning, yet not consumed by the fire of oppression.

St. Hippolytus the Roman says, [God speaks through His saints in the Church, as though in the burning bush.] It is as though the prophet Moses saw in the burning bush the militant Church of the Lord Christ, surrounded with thorns, but not consumed. For it is aflame by the fire of the divine Spirit. That was the ministry to which he had been called.

B- St. Augustine believes that it refers to the glory of God that dwelt in the Jewish people, yet it did not abolish the hardness of their hearts filled with thorns.

C- St. Clement of Alexandria sees in the bush a revelation of the virgin birth. The Lord Christ indeed has been born from the Virgin, yet by His birth her virginity was not corrupted. That is also what St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa, meant by saying, [The light of Divinity that shone from her on human life, through giving birth to the Lord Christ, did not consume the burning bush; so also the flower of virginity in her did not wither by her delivery of the divine Child].

D- St. Cyril of Alexandria believes that the burning bush carried the secret of the divine incarnation; the Godhead united with humanity without devouring it. The prophet Moses could not have started his salvation mission unless he felt the shadow of the divine incarnation, and recognizing the incarnate “Divine Word” as a friend of humanity, as one of us, Who lives among us, carried our body and humanity to get us to enter His divine glories. Concerning this, St. Gregory of Nyssa says, [The light did not shine through a celestial star, but through an earthly bush; nevertheless it surpassed in splendor all heavenly lights. At the same time, to let nobody think that it comes from an imaginary object].

E- Finally, St. John Chrysostom sees in the burning bush a living symbol of the resurrection of the Lord Christ, who carried a real body, actually died, but was not permanently captured by death.

We mention here what St. Jerome wrote to Apiphaeus, the priest of Bactica, Spain, to comfort him for his loss of eyesight saying, [You should not grieve because of your deprivation of bodily eyes that we share with ants, flying insects, and reptiles; but you should rather rejoice to have the kind of eyes mentioned in the book of the Song of Songs, by which you behold God, referred to by the prophet Moses, when he said: “*I will now turn aside to see this great sight*”.]

Note that the Book says: “*The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush*” (Ex. 3: 2). The word “angel” here designates a Messenger, and refers to the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the Son sent by God the Father to reveal this work, and sent it to the prophet Moses. If it were an angel, and not the Second Person, it would not have been said:

*“God called him from the midst of the bush ... Then said, ‘I am the God of your father - the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’, and Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God”* (Ex. 3: 4 - 6)

Some fathers believe that God the Father cannot be seen. But it is His Word that was declared in the burning bush, that God Himself would come incarnated at the end of time to “tell” about the Father.

## **2- Taking the sandals off:**

The Lord said to Moses:

*“Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground”* (Ex. 3: 5).

In our talk about the holiness of the altar, we said that till this day we enter into the altar barefooted, according to God’s commandment to the prophet Moses. Taking the shoes off refer to the feeling of our unworthiness, even for standing in this holy place, where the sacrifice, that angels yearn to behold, is offered. This action has, according to the fathers, several and deep other meanings, of which we mention the following:

A- In the old days, shoes were made up of dead animal skin. By this commandment, it is as though God requests from us to take off our love for dead worldly things, so as to attach ourselves to the eternal heavenly, until we encounter Him. This is a view adopted by the scholar Origen, and also by many Church fathers. St. Augustine says: [What is holier ground than the Church of God? Therefore, let us stand in it barefooted, namely reject the dead works.] And St. Ambrose says: [Moses, as a symbol of the people, was commanded by the Lord to take off his sandals, to set the steps of his feet and of his spirit free of the shackles and bonds of the body, to walk in the way of the Spirit]. St. Gregory of Nyssa says: [I wish that whoever approaches the holy ground of God’s sanctuary, will take his sandals off, as Moses did, so as not to enter there with something dead, and would have nothing between him and God. As to him, who intends to flee from Egypt (love of the world, and things related to it), let him put them on for the sake of his safety, lest the numerous serpents and scorpions found there, would *“bruise his heel”* (Gen. 3: 15). But let him, as commanded, *“trample on them”* (Luke 10: 19).]

B- The skin from which these sandals are made, according to the scholar Origen, are also used to make drums. The reference here is to refrain from using the drums, namely, love of appearances in our worship. But, through spiritual strife, filled with humility, the soul would enter into the divine sanctuaries to encounter God.

C- The scholar Origen also believes that taking the sandals off is related to what comes in the Old Testament, that is, when someone refuses to obey God’s commandment. To marry the widow of his deceased brother, in order to bear a descendant to his dead brother, the widow would come to him in the presence of the elders, remove his sandals from his feet, and his house shall be called, ‘The house of him who had his sandals removed’ (Deuteronomy 25: 5 - 10). Therefore, by taking his sandals off, Moses declared that he is not the Groom of the Church. And every time the Bishop, the Priest, or the deacon, takes his footwear off, as he enters the altar, he is acknowledging his real status: that he is not the true groom of the Church, but he is just the Groom’s friend and servant.

St. Ambrose adopts that same view as the scholar Origen, and says, [Moses was not the groom, so he was told to take his sandals off, as did Joshua (Joshua 5: 16), so that the similarity of his name to that of ‘Jesus’, would not lead him to think of himself as the groom of the Church. No one is the Groom, except the Lord Christ, of Whom St. John the Baptist said, *“He who has the bride is the bridegroom”* (John 3: 29). All those people took their sandals off, but not the Lord Christ, *“Whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose”* (John 1: 27).]

D- St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa, related the taking off of the sandals made of animal skin, and the two tunics of skin worn by Adam and Eve (Genesis 3: 21), after their fall into rebellion saying, [That light (of the burning bush) teaches us, how we should stand before the true light. As the feet with sandals on, could not be lifted up to a height, from which they may behold the truth, we should take off the dead earthly cover from the feet of our souls, that had been put at the beginning, around our nature, as we were bared through our rebellion against the divine will. By that, we may acquire the knowledge of truth, that proclaims itself to us, and realize the perfection of knowledge of the existing things (the truth), by purifying our thoughts of the non-existing ones (the evil or untruth).] The teaching of St. Gregory on the “tunics of skin”, occupied a prominent place in his writings, as his saying for instance: [Circumcision means casting off the dead skin, that we got on as we were expelled out of the life of exalted nature after our rebellion.] That is why Baptism, according to him, is taking off that tunic of skin surrounding our nature; casting off the works of the old man, who proclaims our death and our lusts that entered into us, and attain the image of God within us.

### **3- Calling Moses for ministry:**

Through the burning bush, while standing bare-footed, Moses was called to minister to the people of God. Here we notice:

A- Moses saw that, although the bush was full of thorns, it was not consumed by the flames. He may have seen in this, the fiery work of God, who uses us despite being full of thorns, enflames our hearts, and works through us despite all our weaknesses. And as St. Ambrose says, [Why should we despair; God who speaks in man, spoke in the burning bush, full of thorns! He did not despise the bush! He shines in my thorns!] He who talks is indeed a “Consuming Fire”; and the call came from the divine fire, so it does not harm Moses, but supports and enflames him as the fiery Holy Spirit did to the disciples, burning their weaknesses, and granting them the power of the new life of preaching (Matthew 3: 11; Acts 2).

B- When God called Moses, He did not talk to him about his qualifications and human capabilities, but talked about Himself and the divine means He is granting him, saying: “*I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob*” (Ex. 3: 6). These are words that came out with authority and fiery power, so that “*Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God*” (Ex. 3: 6). He also talked about taking upon Himself the plan of salvation, as He saw and knew the oppression of His people, knowing He would come down to save them.

The secret of Moses’ power was God’s promise, “*I will certainly be with you*” (Ex. 3: 12); the same promise He gives to His prophets, apostles, and all those who work in His vine. He says to Joshua, son of Nun, “*As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not leave you nor forsake you*” (Joshua 1: 5). To the prophet Jeremiah He confirms: “*For I am with you, to deliver you*” (Jeremiah 1: 8); and to His disciples He says: “*I am with you always, even to the end of the age*” (Matthew 28: 20).

### **4- Moses tries to find excuses:**

Moses tried to excuse himself from that mission, saying:

*“Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?”*  
(Ex. 3: 11)

The weak nature of Moses, despite being a man of faith, led him to be reluctant to accept the call, probably because of his initial failure as he began his ministry and how he depended only on his human power. He should not have said: “Who am I?” knowing that it was God Himself who was sending him, and who was coming down to save us.

Moses persisted on his attempts, sometimes raising questions and objections, like saying for example: *“If they say to me ‘What is his name,’ what shall I say to them?”* (Ex. 3: 13) When God answered him, he went on to say, *“But suppose they will not believe me...”* (Ex. 4: 1). God responded by granting him the capability to perform signs, miracles, etc. When he tried to raise the problem of his personal weakness saying, *“I am slow of speech and slow of tongue”* (Ex. 4: 10), God confirmed that He is the Creator of both and said, *“Go, and I will be with your mouth, and teach you what you shall say”* (Ex. 4: 12). Finding no more excuses, he said, *“O my Lord, please send by the hand of whomever else you may send”* (Ex. 4: 13). Now *“the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses”* (Ex. 4: 14), and He gave him his brother Aaron to share his ministry.

Thus, when God calls us for ministry, He will not let us seek excuses, but will provide us with practical answers to all our questions, support every weakness we may have, and complete every lack of our possibilities. He is the hidden Shepherd of His holy flock.

### **5- God’s name:**

Moses realized that it is God who speaks to him, and when he asked about His name, God responded:

*“I AM WHO I AM”; and He said, ‘Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you...the Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you’”* (Ex. 3: 14, 15).

God’s answer carried two aspects:

- (1) That God is incomprehensible, and above any name: “I AM”.
- (2) He is God, mankind kin, especially a kin to His beloved, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The first name: “I AM WHO I AM: (AHIA) (Yaweh):

‘Philo’, a Jew from Alexandria, believes that this name, “AHIA” (Yaweh), reveals two sides of God. The first is that He alone exists, and all next to Him are as non-existing. And the second is that no name can suit Him. In this He says to Moses: [Tell them first, that it is Me who exists, in order to realize the difference between Him who exists and who does not. And tell them as well, that no name used, is worthy of Him, to whom alone existence is referred].

St. Augustine believes that this expression means that all worldly matters, if compared to God, would become 'vain' or 'nothing'. And that it proclaims the existence God, as the foremost, exalted, and unchanging.

This expression reveals that God is Everlasting, with no past and no end. He is beyond time 'Omnipresent'. In this 'omnipresence', or 'actual eternity', we find for ourselves a refuge to which we resort from all troubles and abide in Him eternally.

Therefore, if God is the 'Omnipresent', anyone taking an opposing view is heading toward naught.

In a speech for father 'Methodius' on virginity and the greatness of Christian righteousness, he says: [No one can behold with his eyes the greatness, shape, or beauty of righteousness, of understanding, or of peace. But all these appear complete and clear in Him who said that His name is "I AM"].

### The second name: "God of your fathers":

In saying: "*I am the God of your fathers, God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob*" (Ex. 3: 15), and repeating it three times in the conversation between God and Moses, the first leader of the people (Ex. 3: 6; 15; 16), God has captivated the hearts of the fathers of the Church. St. Clement of Alexandria saw in these words a sign of the divine - human friendship. Although God is the God of the whole world, of the heavenly and the earthly, yet He relates Himself to His own friends. He does not wish to be a Lord or Master, but a friend. So we see Him talk to Moses face to face, as one talks to his friend (Ex. 23: 11) and says to him, "*Present yourself to Me there*" (Ex. 34: 2). St. Aphrahat says: [God's names are numerous and revered ... yet the name that is dear to Him does not concern His righteousness, but His relationship with mankind, as His own creation.]. And St. Augustine says: [Through His mercy, He connected His grace to mankind saying, "*I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob*", confirming that He is God of them and that they are living with Him forever. He states that so His children would understand that He is committing them by the power of love, to know how to seek His Face eternally, and as much as they can, to comprehend Him who is "I AM WHO I AM"].

And now, by binding the two names together: "AHIA", and "God of your fathers", we say that God, the Incomprehensible, the Unchangeable, and Who is beyond all time, reveals Himself to be recognized by mankind, as their own God, Who fulfills all their needs. No prophet has ever spoken of himself as something to be acquired. But the Lord Christ is the "Word of God", who in many occasions presents Himself, saying: "I am". He presents Himself as a Friend, a Firstborn Brother, a Savior, the Bread coming down from heaven, the living Fountain, the Resurrection, the Gate, the Way, the Truth, and the Life. And finally He says, "*I am the Alpha and the Omega*", namely the Fulfiller of our whole life.

Finally, we notice that the Lord Christ used the second name to confirm the resurrection to the Sadducees saying, "*The God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, is not the God of the dead, but of the living*" (Matthew 22: 31, 32). Therefore the living God is referred to us, granting us life to stay forever with Him.

### **6- The secret of the three days:**

God commanded Moses to request together with the elders from Pharaoh, saying:

*“Please, let us go three days journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God”* (Ex. 3: 18).

The Lord commanded them to go into a three days journey into the wilderness to sacrifice to Him, while Pharaoh instructed Moses and Aaron to offer these sacrifices in the land of Egypt. Moses responded, *“It is not right to do so ... we will go three days journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to the Lord our God as He will command us”* (Ex. 8: 26, 27). Finally, allowing them to go, he told them *“You shall not go very far away”* (Ex. 8: 28) Why did Moses insist on going on the three-day journey?

The way through which the people go to sacrifice to God is the Lord Christ Himself, who was raised on the third day, and through His resurrection every worship and offering from us to the Father is received.

There are long talks about the secret of the three days by the scholar Origen of which we quote the following phrases: [We should go out of Egypt and forsake the world, if we intend to serve Him! Not to do that physically, but as far as our thoughts are concerned. Not going by regular material ways, but moving by faith.] Listen to what St. John says in this concern: *“Do not love the world or the things in the world... for all that is in the world -- the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life-is not of the Father but is of the world”* (1 John2: 15, 16).

What does Moses say? *“Let us go three days journey into the desert, and sacrifice to the Lord our God”* (Ex. 5: 3). What is that way, through which he would go for three days from Egypt to the place where he should sacrifice to the Lord His God? It is the Lord Himself who says, *“I am the way, the truth and the life”* (John 14: 6). Along that way, we should journey three days for *“If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved”* (Romans 10: 9). These are the three days during which you go to reach the place to sacrifice to the Lord, and to offer *“The sacrifice of praise”*.

That is the secret meaning. But the behavioral (or ethical) one, which is more significant, is that we go out of Egypt to journey three days, when we are pure in body and spirit, according to the words of the apostle: *“That you keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ’s appearance”* (1 Timothy 6: 14). We go out of Egypt and journey for three days when we separate our mind, nature, and senses, from things related to this world, to get attached to the commandments of God. We go out of Egypt and journey three days when we purify our actions, words, and thoughts; as there are three chances for sin: through actions, words, and thoughts.

The devil (Pharaoh) does not want us to advance nor wants us to journey for three days (Ex. 8: 28) because his intention is to deprive us of the enjoyment of the power of the Lord Christ resurrecting in us. From another aspect, he does not want us to journey in the Lord three days, that is to say, does not want our actions, words, and thoughts, to get purified. But according to the scholar Origen, [The devil wants to have in us a place for him, if not through action, let it be through thought, or at least through the tongue. He does not want them to go very far away from him, not for three whole days. He wants to have in us a minimum of one day; he has in certain people two and in others all the three days. Therefore blessed be he who separates from the devil the three whole days, who have not a single day for him].

By journeying three days, we enter into the knowledge of “Resurrection”, and our insight would be enlightened by the true knowledge. So if Pharaoh represents the devil “*the ruler of the darkness of this age*” (Ephesians 6: 12), he does not want you to leave the circle of this darkness to the light of knowledge. He wants you to remain in the darkness of the grave, and not to enjoy the grace of Resurrection. That is why, in his talk to Moses, we find him admitting his ignorance, namely, his darkness saying, “*I do not know the Lord*” (Ex. 5: 2).

The three days, namely the resurrection with Lord Christ, were experienced by Abraham, the father of fathers, who journeyed three days before seeing the sign, then offered his son, a sacrifice of love to God (Genesis 22: 4). What is that sign through which Abraham offers his only son Isaac, but that of the resurrection of the crucified. That is why the apostle Paul says about him, “*accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead*” (Hebrew 11: 19). He saw the resurrection of Lord Christ, so he offered his son Isaac, believing that God is able to raise him from the dead (Hebrew 11: 19).

### **7- The mighty hand of God:**

Every now and then God confirms to Moses His ability to save, saying:

*“I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all My wonders which I will do in its midst; and after that he will let you go”* (Ex. 3: 20).

In their exodus, they would not go empty-handed, but He would let them find favor in the eyes of the Egyptians “*to lend them articles of silver, articles of Gold, and clothing*” (Ex. 3: 22). As a reference to the power of salvation in the believer’s life, he would not only have his soul sanctified, but in his journey to the heavenly Canaan, he would carry with him several spoils: his inner energies, emotions, feelings, and motives. He would have all what is inside him, all which was dedicated to evil and a cause for his death, and all this would be sanctified and blessed. From another angle, having been robbed and oppressed by the Egyptians, God would let them have favor in their proper eyes to give them by their own free will silver, gold, and clothing.

The ultimate goal of this divine work of salvation is so that God “*will bring you up... to a land flowing with milk and honey*” (Ex. 3: 17), where the simple children would find their strength, and attain their sustenance. Milk and honey are a reference to the life of fulfillment and spiritual pleasure. That is why those who got baptized in the early Church used to be offered milk to drink and honey to eat during the rites. As we do through Baptism, they got the right to enter into the promised heavenly Canaan.

## CHAPTER 4

### MOSES' ENCOUNTER WITH HIS PEOPLE

When Moses encountered with God through the burning bush, the prophet had to leave Midian to encounter with his brother Aaron and with his people in Egypt.

1- Three miracles for his people	1 - 9
2- "I am slow of speech and slow of tongue"	10 - 13
3- Aaron as support to Moses	14 - 17
4- Leaving Midian	18 - 23
5- Circumcision of Moses' son	24 - 26
6- Commencement of work	27 -- 31

#### 1- Three miracles for his people:

As God appeared to Moses through the burning bush to declare the secret of salvation through divine incarnation, the virgin birth, and the Passion, Moses had to be given the ability to perform certain miracles that carry a shadow of that secret, namely, salvation through the divine incarnation, and the cross. God granted him three miracles to perform before his people, not just to reveal a supernatural power, but also to proclaim the exalted work of God toward man. His miracles were a rod becomes a serpent, Moses' right hand becomes leprous, and water becomes blood.

##### (1) A rod becomes a serpent:

The Lord asked Moses: "*What is that in your hand?*" and he said, "*a rod*" (Ex. 4: 2). Doesn't God know what Moses has in his hand? So why ask him? St. John Chrysostom answers this saying, [So that when Moses sees that it became a serpent, and recalls his own words, he would not forget that it is what was before a rod]. This is God's way in dealing with us; as, in the case of 'Lazarus', when He asked, "*Where have you laid him?*" (John 11: 34). This question is so that the Jews themselves would testify that Jesus raised his from the dead.

The Lord commanded Moses to cast the rod which was later called '*the rod of God*' (Ex. 4: 20)), on the ground, to become a serpent that swallowed up all the serpents of the Egyptians. God the Word, is the Rod and power of God, who descended to earth for our sake; He, "*who knew no sin, to be sin for us*" (2 Corinthians 5: 21), to kill all our sins. That is to say that, that miracle carried a shadow of the two secrets of incarnation and of the cross.

St. Gregory of Nyssa says: [The transformation of the rod into a serpent should not confuse the followers of Christ. If we accept the teaching concerning the incarnation, through an unfit serpent, the Truth Himself, did not reject that analogy, saying: "*As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up*" (John 3: 14). It is

obvious that if the (father) of sin was called (a serpent) by the Scripture, the offspring of a serpent is surely a serpent. The apostle testifies that the Lord became a sin for our sake, having been clothed by (an image) of our sinful nature.

This symbol truly conforms with the Lord for if the sin is a serpent, and the Lord became sin, therefore the logic result becomes obvious to all. Becoming sin, He also became a serpent, which is nothing but sin. For our sake, He became a serpent to swallow up the serpents of the Egyptian wise men and sorcerers.]

St. Augustine also says: [To what did the serpent tempt man? The answer is to death (Genesis 3: 1). That is why death came by the serpent ... therefore the rod that became a serpent is Christ who entered into death.]

Likewise, St. Irenaeus, and St. Cyril of Alexandria spoke of that rod, transformed into a serpent as a symbol of the divine incarnation. St. Justin and St. Ambrose spoke of it as a symbol of the cross. While the scholar Tertullian, and St. Ambrose also saw in it a symbol of resurrection. The latter says: [He, who transformed the rod into a serpent, can He not, by His divine might, restore life to the dead and revive the bones?]

St. Augustine comments on how Moses became afraid of the rod transformed into a serpent, and fled from it, saying: [Have the disciples not become afraid and fled, when Christ died?] St. John Chrysostom also compared between Moses' fear and that of the disciples, as they saw the Lord walking on the water saying that man normally becomes afraid and terrified when he realizes the power of divine work.

The rod refers to faith as St. Gregory of Nyssa says: [By that rod -- the word of faith - in his hand, he overcomes the serpents of the Egyptians]. Our faith in the incarnated and crucified Word of God; even if it is 'foolishness' in the sight of the Greeks and a 'stumbling block' for the Jews. Yet, it swallowed up the wisdom and philosophies of the world, presenting a real healing for the wounds of man. And as the apostle Paul says, "*For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.... because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men*" (1 Corinthians 1: 21; 25). St. Ambrose speaks of the healing power through that serpent, saying: [This means that the Word became flesh to cancel the venom of the deadly serpents, for the forgiveness of sins. It is true that that royal rod of authority represents the Word. The rod became a serpent, as the Son of God, begotten from the Father, was born by a woman, and was lifted up like the serpent on the cross, pouring the healing medicine on the wounds of man, according to the words of the Lord Himself: "*As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up*" (John 3: 14).

Finally, the serpent, turning again into a rod, refers to the Lord Christ, ascending to heaven, to His glories, having paid our debt, to raise us, and to let us sit with Him in the Heaven, to share His glories, and to abide in His Father's bosom.

## (2) His right hand turns leprous:

St. Ambrose says that the right hand of God the Father is the Son sitting on his right side, namely, the Power of the Father, who is in His bosom. He descended to us, bearing our sins (Leprosy refers to sin), to cleanse and sanctify us, then to get us back to His Father's bosom, whole and without sin. It is, as though, this miracle is a confirmation of the previous one.

St. Jerome sees in this miracle, a declaration of the death in flesh of the Lord Christ, His hand turned white; and of His Resurrection, his hand returned to its original state.

St. Augustine sees, in the words of the Psalms: “*Why do you withdraw your hand, even your right hand? Take it out of your bosom and destroy them. For God is my King from the old, working salvation in the midst of the earth*” (Psalm 74: 11, 12), cries directed to God the Father, asking Him to send His only begotten Son (His Right Hand), who is in His bosom to destroy evil and to present salvation in the midst of all nations. The Saint says that the Jews were blind and did not recognize the Lord Christ as a Savior to consummate the salvation of the nations.

(3) Turning water into blood:

This miracle came to confirm the two previous ones, as there is no salvation for us, except through the blood of the Lord Christ who sanctifies the cold water of our hearts.

***“I am slow of speech and slow of tongue”:***

Moses tried to excuse himself of that mission, saying:

*“O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech, and slow of tongue’. So the Lord said to him, ‘Who has made man’s mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the Lord? Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth, and teach you what you shall say”* (Ex. 4: 10-12).

When did Moses realize that he is slow of speech and slow of tongue? When he was in the palace, a son to the princess daughter of Pharaoh, learning all the wisdom of the Egyptians he felt capable of talking. But now, being in the presence of the Lord Himself, he felt slow of speech, and slow of tongue! And as said by the scholar Origen: [As he was in Egypt, Moses has been in the eyes of the Egyptians, of incomparable eloquence. Yet when he listened to God’s voice and commandments, he felt himself mute when he started to understand the true Word who was from the beginning with God (John 1: 1). To make this easier to understand, I shall present the following analogy:

Compared to the dumb animals, man seems to be reasonable, even if he is illiterate and without education. He seems eloquent, as dumb animals have no voice, nor reason. Yet compared to highly educated persons and people of eloquence, he looks as though mute. The same way, when you meditate in God’s word, and lift your eyes to the divine wisdom, whatever your work and your wisdom are, you would admit before God that you are like a dumb animal and even less. That was how the blessed prophet David felt when he compared his wisdom with the divine wisdom. And that was what Moses, the greatest among the prophets meant, when he said, “*I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.*” Compared to God the Word, all men, not only the non-eloquent, are mute.

Standing before God, Moses felt meek within himself, so he excused himself from ministry, only to become more worthy before God to fill his mouth to minister. The fathers dealt abundantly with that issue of Moses’ humility.

St. Clement the Roman says: [Moses was called faithful in all God's house (Numbers 12: 7; Hebrew 3: 2) and although he was so highly dignified, he was truly humble. As he heard God's voice in the burning bush, he said, "*Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh ... I am slow of speech, and slow of tongue*" (Ex. 3: 11; 4: 10)].

And St. Gregory of Nyssa says: [It is good for you to act like Moses, when God calls you for ministry (Ex. 4: 10; and Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1: 6), but up to a certain extent, then to hasten to Him, as did Aaron (Ex. 4: 27), and Isaiah (Isaiah 1: 6). Yet we should do both things with a spirit of submission: do the first with a feeling of our need to strength, and the second because of the ability of Him who called us.]

And he also says: [Aaron was eager to serve, but Moses was reluctant. Isaiah submitted instantaneously, while Jeremiah was afraid because of his young age and did not dare to prophesy until he received from God a promise of strength that surpassed his years].

The scholar Origen says: [As Moses reached the depth of understanding, that is 'recognition of his real value,' God granted him great graces: "...*I will be with your mouth, and teach you what you shall say*" (Ex. 4: 12). Blessed are they, whose mouths are opened by God to speak! He opens the mouths of prophets and fills them with eloquence, as God says on David's mouth: "*Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it*" (Psalm 81: 10). And with the same meaning, the apostle Paul says: "... *that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel*" (Ephesians 6: 19). Therefore, it is God who opens up the mouths of those who utter the divine words].

It was not only Moses' mouth that was opened to utter God's words, but also his brother Aaron's mouth as well, who encountered Moses on the mountain of God (Ex. 4: 27). It is as though he who wants his mouth be opened, to enjoy God's words and knowledge, has to encounter with Moses (the Law) spiritually on the mountain of God, namely inside the divine, holy Church. Concerning this, the scholar Origen says: [Peter, James, and John ascended to the mountain of God, to be worthy of beholding the Lord Jesus Christ transfigured, and with Him in glory, Moses and Elijah. You too, if you do not ascend on the mountain of God to encounter with Moses, if you are not lifted up to the spiritual understanding of the Law, if you do not reach to the summit of spiritual apprehension, God will not open up your mouth! But if you stop at the hateful literal concept, and get confused with the historical record of Jewish events, you will never catch up with Moses on the mountain of God, never have your mouth open, and will never be taught what you should say].

God does not only open our mouths to fill them with His words, but He also opens our eyes to enlighten them with the Holy Spirit, to behold the divine glories, and He opens our ears to hearken to His divine voice. Also our senses and inner energies are ready so as to be completely emerged in God. The scholar Origen says: [As God opens up the mouths of the Saints, he also opens up their ears to hearken the divine words. So testifies the prophet Isaiah who says: "*The Lord God has opened my ear; and I was not rebellious*" (Isaiah 50: 5). God also opened up the eyes of Hagar to see the well of living water, and as the prophet 'Elisha' prayed saying: "'*Lord, I*

*pray, open his eyes that he may see'; then the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha" (2 Kings 6: 17). Thus, God opens up the mouth, the ears, and the eyes, to say, hear, and see the divine things].*

And as God's children have their senses and spirits opened to receive the work of God in them, likewise, the children of Satan, have their senses and spirits opened to receive the works of their father in them. The scholar Origen says: [Behold, what is written about Judas, which is that "*Satan entered Judas*" (Luke 22: 4). He opened his mouth to confer with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray Him to them, after he got the silver].

Someone will probably ask: who will open our mouth? Do we open it ourselves, and God will fill it, or He will do both? St. Augustine answers this in his letter to the Pelagians, saying: [Although we, without His help, can not do a thing, yet we may open our mouth with His help, doing something on our own. But it is God who fills it up, with no role on our part].

### **3- Aaron, as help to Moses:**

Despite all God's confirmations to Moses, that He will work in him, and His promise to give him success, Moses again said:

*"Oh my Lord, please send by the hand of whomever else you may send. So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses" (Ex. 4: 13)*

Moses lost his sole role in doing that mission and was offered someone to share it with him. Indeed, fellowship in ministry is beautiful and rejoicing, as when the disciples of the Lord were sent two by two. However, what happened with Moses was the result of his weakness, and his insistence on escaping responsibility.

Anyhow, God turned that weakness into something good, as Aaron became a helper to Moses, and a symbol of a guardian angel. He became a priest, to intercede on behalf of the people, and a helper to Moses in his ministry. And as St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa says: [There is a teaching, based on the tradition of the fathers, that God did not forsake our nature after our fall to sin, but supported it with his care. From one side, He sent an angel, carrying a non-corrupt nature, to support the life of man; and from another side, he also sent the corrupt and killer devil, to oppose his nature. Thus man finds himself between those two, who carry two different goals, so that he can let one prevail on the other. The good angel, with his prudence, would reveal the benefits of virtue, so as to fill those walking straight, with hope; while his adversary, would present the temporary lusts that do not give hope in the coming goods. If man prudently gets away from those trying to attract him to evil, gives his back to evil, and sets forth to hope in goods, such man would have, imprinted on his pure soul, the images of virtue proclaimed to him by God. To such a man, God will present a brother (Aaron) as a support and companion. As the angel, it is nothing but a brother to the balanced and prudent soul to give support when confronting Pharaoh].

Aaron also refers to the priestly work of worship. His clinging to Moses symbolizes the bond between the commandment and worship, to work in God's Spirit for the salvation of the world. Thus, preaching is based on the declaration of the commandment or the divine word, in the Spirit of pious worship.

#### **4- Leaving Midian:**

Commanding Moses to go back to Egypt to lead the people out of it, he said to him:

*“See that you do all those wonders before Pharaoh which I have put in your hand. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go”* (Ex. 4: 21)

Thus God proclaimed beforehand to Moses the possibilities He granted him, and the temptations he is going to face so that he would not collapse on the way. That was what the Lord Christ did with us when He confirmed to us, *“Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world”* (John 16: 33). Yet at the same time, He said: *“Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves”* (Matthew 10: 16).

Does God harden the heart? It is obvious in the Holy Book (Ex. 8: 32) that Pharaoh is hardening his heart by his own free will. By that we know that God, for His justice, lets Pharaoh execute his free will, which is the hardness of heart, and does not stop him, so as to be glorified in him. And according to the words of the apostle, *“God gave them up to the lusts of their hearts ... and gave them over to a debased mind”* (Romans 1: 24; 28).

#### **5- Circumcision of Moses' son:**

It seems that Moses' wife, of foreign origin, 'Zipporah, daughter of Jethron', was reluctant to have her son circumcised and Moses submitted to her will. Thus we see that even great men in their spiritual life sometimes become exposed to weaknesses that might get them into complete destruction.

Moses had to set forth with his wife from Midian, to work in the vine of the Lord. And he had as well, to have his son, the fruit of his union with that wife, circumcised. This is an alive symbol of the Church, that did not despise the foreign wife, did not antagonize foreign philosophies, but embraced her and was committed to set forth with her from the house of her father, and to have the fruit of their union circumcised. As a result, her shortcomings and faults may be taken away from her in order to keep believers from perishing. In this regard, St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa says: [The foreign wife follows him, as there are in the teachings in this world, things that we do not despise. Indeed, the ethical and natural philosophy can be at a certain time, a companion and a friend to exalted life, on condition that nothing defiled or foreign would enter into the fruit of their union]. And he says: [As her son was not yet circumcised, namely that harmful and defiled things were not completely removed from him, the angel who encountered with them terrified her; but she calmed the angel down, by presenting her son pure; namely by completely removing from him the sign of foreigners (the uncircumcision)].

St. Gregory took this line of thought after the Alexandrian scholar Origen, who saw in marriage to foreigners as a symbol of adopting philosophies.

#### **6- Commencement of work:**

Moses encountered with Aaron, namely the divine commandment with the pious priestly worship, and gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel, who submitted to the work and words of God. The people then “*bowed their heads and worshipped*” (Ex. 4: 27). This is a living portrait of the submission of all the energies of the soul and flesh to the work of God, through worship and receiving the word of God.

We are indeed in need of working in our heart - the holy vine of the Lord, through the word of God, and with a spirit of worship, so as to have the whole heart sanctified in submission for the Lord.

## CHAPTERS 5 AND 6

### AN ENCOUNTER WITH PHAROH

Moses encountered with God through the burning bush, and with Aaron on the mountain of God, and then the two together went to the elders and all the people. Now, it is time to go to Pharaoh, himself, to meet the lion in his den.

1- An encounter inside the palace	5: 1-5
2- Making servitude more severe	5: 6-15
3- A murmur among the people	5: 16-23
4- God's confirmations to Moses	6: 1-13
5- The heads of their father's houses	6: 14-28
6- I am of uncircumcised lips	6: 29-30

+++++

#### **1- An encounter in the palace:**

A- Moses and Aaron requested from Pharaoh to let the people go for a three days journey (namely through the power of resurrection of the Lord) to sacrifice to God. To which Pharaoh responded by saying, "*Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice? I do not know the Lord*" (Ex. 5: 2).

Is this not the same response by the Sanhedrin, when they called the two apostles, Peter and John, and "*commanded them not to speak at all and nor teach in the name of Jesus*" (Acts 4: 18)? In writing to Emperors Orelius, Antony, and Comodus, Philosopher Athenagorus said that the true accusation against Christians is their 'name,' for they carry the name of the Lord Christ of Whom the world cannot stand.

B- We have previously seen that Pharaoh's words: "*I do not know the Lord*", reveals the darkness of ignorance in which the devil exists.

C- The scholar Origen sees in Pharaoh's complaint that Moses and Aaron are taking the people from their work (Ex. 5: 4), the complaint of the devil in every age. As many people believe that by dedicating their life to worship and ministry, the youth are wasting their energy. Pharaoh does not know except mud and straw, and wishes to bury everyone in them. So whoever sets his thought free to the spirituals is wasting his time and energy!

#### **2- Making servitude more severe:**

Instead of letting the people go to worship God, Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters and officers of the people to oppress them more, and to increase their burden, accusing them of being idle. The scholar Origen comments on that by saying, [Indeed, before preaching starts, no affliction or temptations are known. No war begins before the horn blows; but once the horn of preaching blows, that will be the start sign of spiritual war, and the start of afflictions].

He also says: [Before the battles between virtue and evil start, evil live in inner peace within your soul. But once every evil stands trial, there would be an intense action, and a fierce war would develop within you, for “*what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what Communion has light with darkness*” (2 Corinthians 6: 14)? Therefore do not be troubled if we become abhorrent before Pharaoh as the smell of virtue is abhorrent before evil].

### **3- A murmur among the people:**

Before that response of Pharaoh, the people of Israel said to Moses and Aaron:

*“Let the Lord look on you and judge, because you have made us abhorrent in the sight of Pharaoh, and in the sight of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to kill us”* (Ex. 5: 21).

As fear entered the hearts of people, the sweet fragrance of the word of God through the mouths of Moses and Aaron turned from being “*an aroma of life to life*” to “*an aroma of death to death*” (see 2 Corinthians 2: 15, 16).

Their complains were not as severe at that time as much as it was later in the wilderness, despite God’s great care for them. Therefore, in our speech, we should not put the blame on the circumstances surrounding us; the blame must be set upon our hearts because of it being filled with fear, and not trusting in God.

### **4- The confirmations of the Lord to Moses:**

As a response of the murmur of the people,

*“Moses returned to the Lord and said: ‘Lord, why have you brought trouble on this people? Why is it You have sent me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done evil to this people; neither have You delivered Your people at all’*” (Ex. 5: 22, 23)

How nice for a minister to enter into admonishment with the Lord when he feels as though his ministry has failed!

God accepted that admonishment, and responded to the bitterness of his servant’s heart. If Pharaoh had proclaimed his ignorance of God, saying: “*I do not know God*” (Ex. 5: 2), God’s confirmations to Moses all the time have been “*I am the Lord*” (Ex. 6: 2, 7, 8, 28). He is the Lord who worked in the fathers of the old, who appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob (Ex. 6: 3); and still works in the present, listening to the groaning of his people, to bring them out of the cruel bondage (Ex. 6: 5, 6) and to get them to the land He swore to give them (Ex. 6: 8).

He is the Lord, Who works for the sake of His Holy Name, opposed by Satan, and for the sake of His promises to His children who remain faithful, working to set for Himself a holy people. He enters with His children in unity saying, “*I will take you as my people, and I will be your God*” (Ex, 6: 7).

## **5- The heads of their fathers' houses:**

After God confirmed to Moses that He will set the people free from their bondage, the Holy Book mentioned the names of the heads of their fathers' houses. As though the Lord wants to confirm that He cares not only for the people as a congregation, but He also cares for each single individual by name. God's relationship with His people is always both on the collective and the individual level. In His care for them as the Holy Body of the Lord Christ, not even a single hair will fall down without His permission!

Some fathers found several meanings in these names, of which we mention what the scholar Origen saw in the names of the sons of Korah: Assir, Elkanah, and Abiasaph (Ex. 6: 24), who wrote down a beautiful prayer of praise, with one harmonious spirit, with the following introduction: "*As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God*" (Psalm 42: 1). The secret of their harmony in praying and praising was that the name 'Assir' means "learning", 'Elkanah' means "God's possession," and 'Abiasaph' means in Greek "congregation of the Father." As though when the soul is like 'Korah', and has such sons: persistent love for learning, and the feeling of dedication to God. That is to say, in His possession, and binding in the spirit of one congregation, the heart becomes flooded with a poem of love, and a prayer, that God accepts and in which He find pleasure.

## **6- I am of uncircumcised lips:**

Moses tried to find excuses for himself, and said to the Lord:

*"I am of uncircumcised lips, and how shall Pharaoh heed me?"* (Ex. 6:30)

But the Lord confirmed to him that He is the Lord, and that He will save....

How beautiful it is for man to feel that his spiritual weakness and his sins are the cause of the failure of his ministry, and to say with Moses, "I am of uncircumcised lips", that his lips are not sanctified enough to act with authority against the devil. Or when the prophet Nehemiah heard the sad news about the ministry said, "Both my father's house and I have sinned" (Nehemiah 1: 6). He did not put the blame on the circumstances, nor on other people, and did not claim that God has forgotten His children, but placed the blame upon himself, together with his father's house, because they sinned.

Moses understood the concept of circumcision on an inner spiritual level; he considered his lips to be in need of inner circumcision. Then came Jeremiah to speak of the secret circumcision of the heart (Jeremiah 4: 4), and of the circumcision of the ear (Jeremiah 6: 4). The apostle Paul spoke more clearly of the need for spiritual circumcision in Baptism, when the believer takes off the works of the old man, to put on the new, and be according the image of his Creator.

## CHAPTERS 7 TO 10

### THE TEN PLAGUES

These four chapters (7 to 10) speak of the first nine plagues, while the two chapters (11 and 12) speak of the last plague that concerned the Passover lamb.

1- An introduction to the plagues	7: 1-13
2- Turning water to blood	7: 14-23
3- The plague of frogs	8: 1-15
4- The plague of lice (gnats in King James version)	8: 16-19
5- The plague of flies	8: 20-32
6- The epidemic plague against livestock	9: 1-7
7- The plague of boils	9: 8-12
8- The plague of thunder, hail, and fire	9: 13-30
9- The plague of locusts	10: 1-20
10- The plague of darkness	10: 21-29
11- The plague against the firstborns	(Chap. 11 & 12)

#### **1- An introduction to the plagues**

Before starting the plagues, God confirmed to Moses the following facts:

a- ***“I have made you as God to Pharaoh”*** (Ex. 7: 1)

Meaning: I made you his master. So do not fear him or his cruel heart. St. Basil says, “That title presents a proof of a kind of authority.” The believer is cautious of the devil, yet he believes in his own authority over him. According to God’s words, *“I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you”* (Luke 10: 19). As St. John Chrysostom confirms in more than one essay, “Satan has no authority on us, but he offers his uncommitted persuasions, tricks, and deceits to draw us to fall into his traps.”

b- ***“Aaron your brother shall be your prophet”*** (Ex. 7: 1)

Meaning: he shall be the speaker on your behalf. The commandment (Moses) has bonded with the priesthood work of worshipping (Aaron); worship became a declarer and a revealer of the commandment. This is our belief, that our liturgical worship is not separate from our gospel, but working according to it and preaching it. The illiterate and the child can comprehend the biblical secrets through the simplicity and the spirituality of the liturgy as well as the educated and the mature find in it the deep meanings of theological evangelism.

c- **The goal of the plagues:**

***“And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord”*** (Ex. 7: 5)

He scatters the darkness of ignorance, which blinds the eyes of man with evil. In other words, God's intention was not to bring terror to them, but to be a cause of salvation. And as St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa says, "By these same signs, the enemy (the devil) is defeated, and the people of God become stronger." The Lord, after several centuries, reminded His people of them to bring them back to Him. In Psalm 78:43-53, He admonishes them and recalls how He saved them with a Mighty Hand, and how He plagued the enemy to help them. As for them, they remained in the hardness of their hearts.

d- "***Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers***" (Ex. 7: 11)

The apostle Paul mentioned the names of two magicians, 'Jannes' and 'Jambres' (2 Timothy 3: 8) after the Jewish tradition. These magicians opposed Moses, not through terror and threats, as Pharaoh did, but through a dangerous war, that of confusion between truth and vain - between the work of God and that of the devil. They tried to imitate what Moses and Aaron did, but they failed. The Scripture says,

- ❖ "*Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods*" (Ex. 7: 12)
- ❖ "*The magicians so worked with their enchantments to bring forth lice, but they could not ... Then they said to Pharaoh, 'This is the finger of God'*" (Ex. 8: 18, 19)
- ❖ "*The magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils were on the magicians and on all the Egyptians*" (Ex. 9: 11)

In other words, although the magicians tried with deceit to present some works that carried some similarity to what Moses and Aaron did, they were weak and fell victims to the plagues like the rest of the people. They could not cancel the plagues nor help Pharaoh and his soldiers, and finally they admitted that it was "the mighty finger of God."

In our interpretation of the Book of Revelations, we saw a similar war. As the Holy Trinity proclaims His work with man, the defiled trinity, "the dragon, the beast from the land, and the beast from the sea," tried to deceive mankind, and even to present works that look similar to those of the Holy Trinity, like signs and miracles through devilish actions.

e- **The rod in Moses' hand** was called "*The rod of God*" (Ex. 4: 20), "*The rod of Aaron*" (Ex. 7: 22), and "*The rod of Moses*" (Ex. 10: 13). It is the rod of salvation that works in our life, referring to faith in the life-giving cross, thus called "*the rod of God*". It refers to the divine commandment or the word of God preaching the cross (the rod of Moses), and also to the life of worship, through which we enter into life of fellowship with the Crucified (rod of Aaron). It is as though faith molds with the Holy Book and worship with no separation.

f- **The rod between the Law and the cross:**

The rod that Moses brings to Egypt is the Law with which he strikes the ten plagues, namely, condemns and exposes sin. It is also the cross that disarmed Satan of his authority and defeated his power, giving the believers the power of conquest and salvation. Concerning this, the scholar Origen says, "Moses comes to Egypt carrying the rod, with which he punishes, and strikes by the ten plagues, namely, by the Ten Commandments. But the rod that truly submitted Egypt and tamed Pharaoh is the cross of Christ that conquered the world, the 'prince of the world', and the 'principalities and powers' (Colossians 2: 15). When it is cast on the ground, it turns into a serpent that swallows up the serpents of the magicians of Egypt, who did the same thing. The Bible reveals to us that that serpent is the 'wisdom', according to the words, '*Be wise as the serpents*' and '*The serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord has made*' (Gen. 3: 1). Therefore the cross of Christ, the preaching of which was considered as a kind of folly, had existed in

Moses, namely, in the Law, according to the words of the Lord, *'He wrote about Me'* (John 5: 46). That cross about which Moses wrote, if cast on the ground, (if man believed in it), it would turn into wisdom that swallows up all the wisdoms of the Egyptians, or all the wisdoms of this world. Behold how God *'destroyed the wisdom of the wise, and brought to nothing the understanding of the prudent'* (1 Corinthians 1: 19) by lifting Christ up on the cross. That is the power and wisdom of God."

**g- The secret of the ten plagues**

Some fathers see in the ten plagues a symbol of the work of the cross in the life of man who becomes a lover of the world, who becomes like the land of Egypt, to set forth with him to the holy life. In short, we say that the first plague, turning the water of the river into blood, refers to the necessity of turning the cold water of the heart into life of strife, as St. Paul said, *"You have not yet resisted even to bloodshed"* (Hebrews 12: 4). The second plague of the frogs refers to the life full of vain talk with no work, like the croaking of frogs all night long. By the Holy Spirit, we shift from the vain talk to the active life of faith. The third plague of lice (gnats in King James Version), refers to the evil thoughts, as man does not feel that a gnat is on his body until it stings him. So it is when man surrenders to evil thoughts and does not become aware of them, until they lead his senses to sin. Therefore, the words of the Holy Book apply to him, *"They drink transgression like water"*. By the Holy Spirit, we close our mind to evil thoughts to open it, and set it forth to positive, constructive actions. The fourth plague of flies that comes from dirty places and causes illness, refers to the necessity of getting away from the sources of sin, and things leading to it, like wicked friends and locations of defilement, to avoid possibilities of weakness. The fifth plague against the livestock refers to falling into carnal thoughts. It is fit for us, not to act according to the lusts of the body, but according to the Spirit. The sixth plague of boils refers to the defilement of the body, and failure to sanctify it. Therefore, we must receive the work of the Holy Spirit completely, even into the members of our bodies. The seventh plague of thunder, hail, and fire refers to the work of God within the heart, thundering by His Holy Spirit in us, to shake up every sin that has settled down in the heart, by hail, to kill from the start any satanic ideas (weeds), and by His holy fire, to burn up all thorns that choke the soul in order to enflame the heart with the fire of divine love. The eighth plague of the locusts refers to the necessity of not leaving any trace of sin in our life, like what locusts do with all green leaves on earth. The ninth plague of darkness refers to when man discovers the blindness of his spiritual insight, and he cries out to God to grant him the inner spiritual enlightenment. Finally, the last plague, which is of the striking of the firstborns, refers to killing the devil and his hosts, so as we become members in the Church of the firstborns.

The scholar Origen presented us with an interpretation of the ten plagues saying, *"Every soul in this world, living in delusion and ignorance of the truth, is symbolized by Egypt which, when approached by God's Law, her water turns into blood. Her lax and lazy life, would turn into the blood of the Old and New Testaments, then it would be turned away from pointless words - that are like the croaking of frogs, in the sight of God. Then it would be purified from the evil thoughts, which are like the stings of gnats. Afterwards, it would heal the wounds that are inflicted by lusts, symbolized by the flies, and in it, abolish all follies. The Law would care for the wounds of her sins, and uproots the haughtiness of pride and the fuming of anger. And would present to her the sound of thunder, namely the*

teachings of the Bible, the chastening of hail to suppress in us all whims of the senses, as well as blaze of repentance, to say with the two disciples, *'Did not our hearts burn within us?'* (Luke 24: 32) The Law would also send her the locusts, to consume the rebellious emotions, so that the soul would behave according to the teachings of the apostles *'Let all things be done decently and in order'* (1 Corinthians 14: 40). When the soul forsakes her evil habits, and commits to change its life to the better, she would then, acknowledge the One who gave the plagues, and would admit that it is the *'finger of God.'* When she comes to realize and confess the darkness of her works, God would then destroy in her, the firstborns of Egypt (the evil)."

## **2- Turning the water into blood**

It is to be noticed that the ten plagues were directed by God to the gods of Egypt, to expose their weakness, saying:

*"Against all the gods of Egypt, I will execute judgment; I am the Lord"* (Ex. 12: 12).

On another note, He intended to expose the evil in their life. Turning the water of the Nile into unclean blood, brought confusion to the Egyptians, as they saw their gods become unclean and revealed to them that all their thoughts were lustful, seeing everything according to flesh and blood, and not with a spiritual sight.

The Nile River refers to the wisdom and changing philosophies of the Egyptians. By being turned to blood, they realized that there is no salvation to them by human wisdom and worldly philosophy, but by faith in the blood of the Lord Christ, that absorbs all wisdom and philosophy. That is why the plagues started with blood, and also ended with blood, as the Passover Lamb was slain, and the mark of blood was put on the lintel and the two doorposts. So then the firstborns of the Egyptians perished, and the people of God were rescued.

God commanded Moses to go to Pharaoh in the morning (Ex. 7: 15), because our war with the enemy starts with the beginning and it flourishes our spiritual life. He commanded him to meet him at the riverbank where He would come to him (Ex. 7: 15), as though it's a proclamation to the believers to confront the philosophers using their own philosophies. However this does not mean that the Church should refrain from studying philosophy. He also commanded him to hold his rod, which once he held it, turned into a serpent. Thus, there is no chance of predominance over evil without the cross that grants victory.

The ultimate result will be:

*"There shall be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, both in buckets of wood and pitchers of stone."* (Ex. 7: 19)

If men becomes a "land of Egypt", meaning lovers of the world, blood will flow into them to sanctify them; it will run in their lifeless thoughts to turn them into a fruitful living tree; and it will enter their hardened hearts to make of them the "children of Abraham", according to the saying of the Lord Christ, *"If these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out"* (Luke 19: 40).

As to saying that fish will die and stink (Ex. 7: 18, 21), it refers to the corruption of philosophies the time that the Egyptians considered as their source of their strength. Thus, compared with faith, the pagan philosophies become unacceptable and not soothing to the soul.

Let us note that water for the Hebrews did not turn into blood, and as St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa says, "It is not strange that the Hebrews living in the midst of the Egyptians are not affected by their evils. This may be noticed in crowded cities, where people adopt contradictory principles. For some, the sources from which they draw their divine teachings are clear and

refreshing, while for others, who live like the Egyptians, according to their evil lusts, water became foul-smelling blood.”

### **3- The plague of frogs**

Frogs used to be dedicated to the god ‘Osiris’. Their swelling was claimed to be a divine inspiration. So, God allowed frogs to increase in abundance and to become a plague to the Egyptians.

St. Augustine believes that frogs refer to incessant and fruitless talk. The scholar Origen believes them to refer to the songs of poets, which resembles the useless and disturbing croaking of frogs. A believer should through the cross of the Lord Christ, rid himself of such vain and unfruitful talk.

If Pharaoh made the children of Israel work in mud, he was severely punished by having frogs jump on him from mud, with their ugly forms, repulsive smell, and disturbing voice. *“To go up and come into his house, into his bedchamber, on his bed, into the houses of his people, into their ovens and into their kneading bowls”* (Ex. 8: 3). Their life of Egyptians turned into mud and dirt. It was done to them as they did unto others.

### **4- The plague of gnats**

As the priests in ancient Egypt used to care very much for cleanliness, and against getting defiled by gnats and lice, they were struck by gnats, insects that their magicians could not get rid of, so they admitted before Pharaoh, saying,

*“This is the finger of God”* (Ex. 8: 19)

What is the meaning of *“The finger of God?”* According to St. Augustine, “The Psalmist says, *‘When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers’* (Psalm 8: 3). And we read that the Law was written by the finger of God (Ex. 31: 18; 34: 28; Deuteronomy 9: 10), and given through Moses, His blessed servant. Here many understand that the finger of God is the Holy Spirit.

The scholar Origen sees in the plague of gnats a reference to the fruitless sweet words that deceive man who, unknowingly, falls because he does not feel or see them.

Here St. Augustine wonders, “Why does God allow man to be chastised through these feeble insects? He answers saying: Why would we get evil from a creation of God? Because we antagonize Him! Do the angels suffer such thing?! If we live as they do, there would be nothing we may be afraid of. Because of our pride and arrogance, God allows such tiny despised creatures to torture us...”

### **5- The plague of flies**

The Egyptians used to worship some gods who were supposed to protect them from flies, so God intended to uncover the helplessness of these gods.

### **6- The epidemic plague against livestock**

The Egyptians used to believe that certain animals are holy, as for instance the calf ‘Ebis’, believed to embrace the spirit of their god ‘Osiris’. So by that plague, they would realize the futility of their beliefs. St. Augustine believes that such a plague was intended to let man control the animal lust in him and to lead a more pure life.

### **7- The plague of boils**

The Egyptians used to have several gods, to whom, it was believed, they offered human sacrifices - most probably some Hebrews whom they used to burn on a high altar, and then scattered their ashes in the air to come down as blessings. That is why Moses took handfuls of ashes from a furnace, and scattered it towards the heavens, to become fine dust that caused boils

that broke out in sores on priests, people, and beasts throughout all the land of Egypt. The magicians could not stand before Moses because the boils were on them (Ex. 9: 12). It was as though God intended to proclaim that after so long suffering, He would avenge those whom they have burnt.

### **8- The plague of thunder, hail, and fire**

That was a hard plague to bear, as the Egyptians were not used to such extreme weather phenomena. We saw that the sound of thunder refers to God's proclamations and warnings; the hail, to the destruction of the weeds, sown in the heart by the enemy, and the fire, to the burning of the thorns that choke the soul, to let the heart become aflame with the love of God.

St. Augustine believes that hail refers to the sin of unjust confiscation of what belong to others; and that fire refers to the sin of anger, that flares in the heart, and leads to murder.

### **9- The plague of locusts**

The locusts devastate crops and cause famine, so that plague was meant to expose the weakness of their gods to sustain them even physically.

St. Augustine believes that the locusts refer to false testimonials that, like locusts, bring harm through the mouth.

### **10- The plague of darkness**

The Egyptians used to worship 'Ra', god of the sun. It is as though this plague was directed against that god. At the same time, it revealed the blindness of their insights, and proclaimed their need for the coming of the Sun of Righteousness who shines on those sitting in the darkness. This plague remained three days, which probably refers to the waiting of the soul to enter into the light of resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **The reaction of Pharaoh to these plagues**

Pharaoh tried to negotiate with Moses and Aaron, offering futile solutions:

a- At the beginning, he accused Moses and Aaron of taking the people away from their work and that the people are idle (Ex. 5: 17).

b- When the plagues began, he cried out to them. But once he saw relief, he hardened his heart again, and did not heed them (Ex. 8: 15).

c- When the plagues became more severe, he said to them: "*Go sacrifice to your God in the land of Egypt*" (Ex. 8: 25); to worship God without forsaking evil, and without changing their way of living.

d- When Moses and Aaron persisted on their stand, he said: "*I will let you go that you may sacrifice to the Lord your God on the wilderness, only you shall not go very far away. Intercede for me*" (Ex. 8: 28). He pretended to be in need of their intercession and prayers, yet he does not want them to go for a three days journey. He does not want the people to enjoy the power of the resurrection of the Lord Christ, the Savior.

e- As the situation worsened, he allowed them to go their way (namely to go for three days), but he said: "*Go now, you who are men, and serve the Lord, for that is what you desired*" (Ex. 10: 11). He was not allowing them to take their children, their wives, or their beasts. The enemy, although allowing us to worship God, yet without our women, (which are our bodies to which wives refer according to the letter of St. Paul to the Ephesians), to love their women as they do their bodies; without their children - the fruits of the Spirit; and without the beasts, meaning without sanctifying their senses and emotions. The devil wants to separate worship from man's whole active life, even from the sanctification of his body and emotions.

f- Finally, he allowed them to take their women and children, but, “*Let your flocks and herds be kept back*” (Ex. 10: 24). The response of Moses and Aaron was: “*Not a hoof shall be left behind*” (Ex. 10: 26). Likewise, we have to go with all our women, children, and beasts, to offer every thing to God, and not to leave for the devil any place in our life. We shall not leave him any hoof, lest he would have any chance for his evil work in us.

## CHAPTERS 11 & 12

### THE PASSOVER

## Between the Passover lamb and the resurrection of the Messiah

The Passover is considered a turning point in the history of the old people, through which they crossed from the land of bondage to the wilderness, to set forth toward the land of promise. The Passover lamb, with all its rites, carried special concepts: “*It shall be the first month of the year*” (Ex. 12: 2); “*This day shall be a memorial, and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord throughout your generations*” (Ex. 12: 14); and it is to be kept by the whole assembly of the congregation (Ex. 12: 6). It also carried a spiritual concept that touches the life of the congregation of the Church in its relationship with God. The Passover lamb is not merely a memorial of a historical event that took place in the past, but it represents a present and continuous work of God in the life of His people. The Passover feast also means a personal relationship between every member of the congregation and God Himself, concerning the symbol of the Passover lamb. But as the Lord Christ offered Himself a true “Passover” for the whole world, His Passion, crucifixion, burial, and resurrection become a continuous and permanent Passover in the life of the Church that it celebrates, not only once every year, but in every Divine Liturgy, and experiences its strength throughout everyday. That divine Passover work became the subject of meditation for every true believer, through which he passes over from glory to glory, to enter, by the Holy Spirit, into the Father’s bosom.

That made the two chapters: 11 and 12 of the Book of Exodus, the center of the whole Book, if not, of the whole Old Testament, as the crucifixion and the resurrection of the Lord Christ are the center of the Bible as a whole. That is why I find it imperative, to present an accurate, yet concise study, as much as possible, of the Passover lamb, in the light of the old Jewish traditions known at that time, and the passion, crucifixion, and resurrection, in order to know its significance in the life of the catholic (universal) or global Church, and in each of its members.

#### **The Passover and the old traditions:**

In the days of the first Adam, his two sons offered two different offerings to the Lord. Abel, as a man of hunting, offered a blood sacrifice, as atonement for his sins – which he obtained after his parents, while Cain, as a worker in the land, brought an offering to the Lord of the fruit of the land. Anyhow, humanity received those two actions, and disfigured them, through deviation from the divine way. The nomadic Bedouins, used to splash the sign of blood over their tents, with the assumption that it chases away the evil spirits. Those laboring in agriculture adopted a different tradition, abstaining from eating leavened bread, for several days, at the beginning of the new agricultural season, lest the leaven of the old crop would get into the new one. By that, they start a new year with new food, and a new life.

Let us note that those two rites (splashing of blood and abstaining from leavened bread) had their origin in pure faith; yet humanity deviated from their way of faith. So, the rite of Passover came to return them back to another and better way of life.

The Passover carries the ‘sign of blood’, with the concept of reconciliation between God

and man, through the blood of the Redeemer. The believer feels himself like a Bedouin with no place here to settle down in a permanent Passover, in a continuous movement toward the higher Jerusalem. He puts blood on the two doorposts and on the lintel, namely on his heart and mind, not to drive away the evil spirits, but to pass over with all his thoughts and feelings to the Fatherly bosom, through his union with the Savior, defeating the hosts of evil under his feet.

As to the second rite, concerning eating only unleavened bread, and removing the leaven from his house, it concerns the life of the believer, who, although, in a permanent movement toward the heavenly, and in a state of sojourn on the earth, he feels from within that he is leaning on the bosom of the Lord, working in the vine of the new land. Hence, he eats unleavened bread for the seven days of the week - keeps on eating, all the days of his life, the new food that will never get old. He will continuously enjoy the new life, enjoy the food of the angels, and sing the new praise, saying with the apostle, "*Behold, all things have become new*" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

It is amazing how the Church, in her celebration of the feast of Passover (Resurrection), has practiced since the early days two integrated rites together: the Baptism of the catechumens (the new converters to Christianity), and the Eucharist. In the eve of the Passover, the Bishop baptizes the catechumens, to let them bear the sign of blood on their inner foreheads and in their hearts, to enjoy the reconciliation with God the Father, in His Son Jesus Christ, by His Holy Spirit, and to enjoy the spirit of sonship, that will help them cross over to the divine glories. Then they would approach, together with the rest of believers to partake of the other rite - the Eucharist - in which the Church, striving on earth, appears, as though she, amid her strife, has settled down around the eternal divine altar, feeding on the forever new unleavened bread, and enjoying the holy body and blood, that would never get old. This is our new Passover, the shadow and symbol of which the old Passover bore.

#### **A personal Passover:**

God commanded the whole congregation to keep the Passover. It is the Passover of all the Church, united to her Groom. Later on, He commanded to hold it only in Jerusalem, the city that carries His name, as it is a Passover of the Lord.

That vivid collective image did not disregard the personal role of every member of the congregation, but rather it concentrated on it, through the union of every member with the congregation. Not only did God command that every house should be splashed with blood, but also committed every man and woman to eat the flesh of the Passover lamb, roasted on fire. The act of eating here is a sign of a personal relationship, and of personal partaking of that rite. Indeed, it was not possible for very little children to take part of it, yet they attended the rite and rejoiced in it, besides getting saved through the faith of their parents, who partake of eating the flesh of the Passover lamb.

It was not just a matter of the crossing over of the congregation as a whole, but for every individual person, whether it be a man, woman, or child. But, even after the crossover, while keeping the feast year after year, along the ages, every single partaker of that feast is considered as though he or she has personally enjoyed the fellowship of faith, together with those who have been saved, and as though they received a portion of the freedom gained by the early fathers. In the Book of Exodus it is said, "*You shall keep the feast of unleavened bread... for in it (you) came out of Egypt*" (Ex. 23: 15), addressing every single member of the congregation, as though he or she came out of Egypt. And in the Book of Deuteronomy, it is said, "*Observe the month of Abib, and keep the Passover to the Lord your God, for in the month of Abib the Lord your God brought you out of Egypt by night*" (Deuteronomy 16: 1). That command was addressed to every

believer along the ages, as though he or she has come together with the early fathers by night out of the land of Egypt.

That is also confirmed by the Jewish tradition, saying in the 'Didache: "Your forefathers were not saved alone; but, while saving them, he saved us as well." Therefore, celebrating the feast of Passover, even in the sound Jewish thought, carried an inner trend, that touches the believer's life and his personal relationship with God, through his union with the congregation. It is the same thing meant by the Church, as it celebrates the new feast of Passover, in order, for every believer to enter into the enjoyment of the new resurrected life, through his crossing and settling in the bosom of God, as a member in the holy congregation.

### **From the Law to the Messiah**

The feast of Passover had its special rites for the Jews, that's recorded in the twelfth chapter of the Book of Exodus, that carries certain other traditions that included prayers of blessing, praises, and psalms, mentioned in the 'Mishnah', (which I previously dealt with) as well. That feast was rich in its memories and promises that carried God's care for man, especially through the salvation presented by the Messiah. They used to recognize that night as an anniversary of the creation of the world, of the circumcision of Abraham, the sacrifice of Isaac, the release of Joseph from the prison, the anticipated release from captivity, the appearance of the Messiah, the coming of Moses and Elijah, the resurrection of the fathers, and the end of the world. That is why the Lord Christ offered Himself a Passover to the world in the feast of Passover, in order to proclaim that the Truth swallows up the symbol, and brings it on to the consummation of its goal.

Father Melito, Bishop of Sardes says, "The secret of Passover is realized in the body of the Lord... He was led like a lamb, and was slain like a she-goat; saving us from the bondage of the world (Egypt), and setting us free of the servitude of the devil (Pharaoh), putting his seal on our souls by His Spirit, and on our body members by His blood... He is the One who brought us from servitude to freedom, from darkness to light, from death to life, and from oppression to eternal Kingdom... He is our Passover to salvation... He is the silent Lamb that was taken out of the flock and slain in the evening, and buried by night... for that, that feast was bitter. As said in the Holy Book, '*You shall eat unleavened bread with bitter weeds.*' (Ex. 12: 8). Bitter for you were the nails that were used... bitter was the tongue that blasphemed... bitter was the false testimony uttered against Him..."

He also says, "Contemplate, O dear brother, how the secret of Passover is new and old, eternal and mortal, non-corruptible and corruptible... It is old according to the Law, and is new according to the Logos (the divine Word). It is mortal through the symbol, and eternal in the words of grace... corruptible through the death of the lambs, and non-corruptible through the life of the Lord. So are the sacrifice of the lambs, the rite of Passover, and the letter of the Law, all of which have been realized in Jesus Christ. In place of the Law came the Logos, so that the old became new, the commandment became grace, and the symbol became fact."

### **From the earthly Passover to the heavenly Passover**

St. Hippolytus, the Roman, says, "The Jews celebrate the earthly Passover, yet deny the heavenly one. But we celebrate the heavenly Passover crossing over the earthly one. The Passover they celebrate is a symbol of the salvation of the firstborns of the Jews. The death of the firstborns of the Egyptians, while the Jewish firstborns were saved, occurred because they were protected by the symbol, by the blood of the Passover sacrifice. But the Passover we celebrate brings salvation to all people, starting with the firstborns who are saved..."

St. Ambrose says, “And now, as you celebrate the ‘Pascha’, the holy Passover, you should know, O brethren, what the ‘Pascha’ is! Pascha means ‘Passover’. So this feast is so called, as in it, the Son of God passed over from this world to His Father.

What would be your benefit from celebrating this feast, if you do not follow the example of Him, whom you are worshipping... and pass over from the darkness of wicked deeds to the light of virtue, and from the love of this world to the love of the heavenly home?! There are many people who celebrate and observe this holy feast, yet they do that unworthily because of their evil, and because they do not pass over beyond this world to their Father, and because they do not pass over from the carnal lusts of this world to the love of heaven. How miserable Christians they are?! They are still under the authority of the devil, and comfortable with his evil...

That is why, I am warning you, my brethren, that you should celebrate this feast as you should by passing over. If any of you is still in sin, let him sanctify this feast, passing over from the wicked deeds to the life of virtue. As for him, who walks in a holy life, let him pass over from virtue to virtue, and hence, none of you would not be passing over.

St. Athanasius, in his Passover messages, spoke often of passing over from the worldly Passover to the heavenly Passover. “Now, my brethren, Satan (Pharaoh) is slain; that tyrant who antagonizes the whole world. Now, we are not dealing with a worldly feast, but a permanent heavenly one, proclaiming it, not through shadows (and letters), but in Truth. Those, after getting fulfilled through eating the flesh of the dumb lamb, and splattering the doorposts of their houses with its blood, they consummated the feast, and were saved from the destroyer. But now, as we eat the ‘Word of the Father,’ and splatter our hearts with the blood of the New Testament, we recognize the grace, granted to us by the Savior, who says, ‘Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy’ (Luke 10: 19). As death has no more authority, but life reigns in place of death; The Lord says: ‘I am the life’ (John 14: 6). Everything is filled with joy and happiness, as it is written: ‘The Lord reigns, let the earth rejoice’ (Psalm 97: 1).”

We should come to the feast with zeal and joy; so by starting with joy here, our souls would yearn to the heavenly feast. If we actively celebrate here, we shall surely receive the complete joy that is in heaven. And as the Lord says: “*With fervent desire, I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it, until it is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God*” (Luke 22: 15, 16).

For those who keep this feast with purity, the Passover will be their heavenly food. I wish we do not celebrate the feast in an earthly way, but rather like keeping a feast in heaven with the angels. Let us glorify God through life of virtue and righteousness! Let us rejoice, not in our souls, but in the Lord to be with the saints!

### **The rites of the Passover:**

St. Melito, Bishop of Sardis, believes that the Law was an introduction to the covenant of grace, not only through commandments and words, but also through the symbol saying, “The words and acts of the rite, brethren, are meaningless, if they are severed from what they symbolize.” This is actually the view of the Church that it received, with an evangelical Spirit, since its beginning.

And now, let us speak about the rite of the Passover, as it came in the Book of Exodus, and what it symbolizes, with the help of biblical texts and writings of the fathers.

#### **1- Why did it happen by night?**

The Lord says to Moses: “*About midnight I will go out into the midst of Egypt*” (Exodus

11: 4). And He confirms in the Book of Deuteronomy: *“For in the month of Abib, the Lord your God brought you out of Egypt by night”* (Deuteronomy 16: 1). St. Hypolites interprets this by saying, *“The strike took place by night in the darkness as in the veil of darkness, away from the bright light of the day, justice is realized in the devil and his dark crimes. “And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord,”* (Joel 2: 30, 31) and *“Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! For what good is the day of the Lord to you? It will be darkness, and not light. It will be as though a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him! Or as though he went into the house, leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him! Is not the day of the Lord darkness, and not light? Is it not very dark, with no brightness in it??* (Amos 5: 18 - 20).”

It is as though, while the devil dwells in darkness, the Lord is destroying him in his den. While he is sure that there is no one to oppose him, he will be destroyed together with all his works. The Lord (our new Passover) delivered his Spirit by the end of the day, and entered by night into Hades, to set those captivated in the darkness free, and to bring them forth to the light of paradise, without darkness!

## **2- In the month of Abib, the beginning of months**

The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron saying, *“This month shall be your beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you”* (Ex. 12: 1). It is as though, with every Passover, they enter a new year, to live in a continuous state of renewal within the heart, through the slain Jesus Christ.

As the Lord Christ (our Passover) is the head of creation, and is its Firstborn, this month became the “firstborn” of ages, and the beginning of the new life. According to the words of the apostle, *“Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life”* (Romans 6: 3, 4). St. Hypolites says, *“That means that the true sacrifice of Passover to us, is the beginning of eternal life.”* The symbolic Passover came at the beginning of the months; but the Lord (the true Passover) came at the end of ages (Hebrew 9: 26), to proclaim that He is the end and goal of the Law (Romans 10: 4). It is noteworthy that the word “Abib” means a head of grains, as though, through Passover, the soul becomes the “head of grain” of the Lord, namely, His harvest.

## **3- Taking the lamb on the tenth day of the month** (Ex. 12: 3)

That was a reference to the entrance of the Lord Christ into Jerusalem, to be kept there, until He offers Himself a Passover for our sake. Choosing the tenth day refers to His coming after the Law (the Ten Commandments) to consummate the commandment that was broken by man, granting us the possibility of its fulfillment.

## **4- Keeping it until the fourteenth day** (Ex. 12: 6)

In the fourteenth day, the moon becomes full; for the sun is a symbol of the Lord Christ, and the moon of the Church. It is as though, through Christ (our Passover) (1 Corinthians 5: 7), the enlightenment of the Church is consummated, and its splendor is proclaimed.

The days of keeping are five (10 to 15 of Abib), representing the five beginnings of the world, in the history of salvation. With it, Adam began the human race; Noah, began the new world after the great flood; Abraham began as a father to believers, (from whose seed came the people of God); Moses began the world in the written Law; and finally Christ came on the fifth

day to begin the age of grace, in which He offered Himself a Passover, having its activity in all the five eras.

The five days also refers to the activity of the true Passover, for all those who work in any of the five hours of the day; those who began their work in the first hour, the third, the sixth, the ninth, or the eleventh hour.

**5- Inviting the neighbor next to his house** (Ex. 12: 4)

This refers to the invitation of the Gentiles, being the (next neighbor), to share in the enjoyment of the true Passover.

**6- The lamb should be without blemish** (Ex. 12: 5)

It should be either a lamb, a symbol of meekness, according to the words of the prophet Isaiah, *“He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; he was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearer is silent”* (Isaiah 53: 7), or *“a kid of the goats as a sin offering”* (Numbers 7: 16).

The Savior Lord Jesus Christ was called a Lamb, as in the Book of Jeremiah said, *“I was like a docile lamb brought to the slaughter, and I did not know that they had devised schemes against Me, saying, ‘Let us destroy the tree with its fruit, and let us cut Him off from the land of the living, that His name may be remembered no more’”* (Jeremiah 11: 9). And as seen by St. John the Baptist, who said, *“Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”* (John 1: 29). In heaven, St. John the evangelist saw Him, *“In the midst of the elders, stood a lamb as though it had been slain”* (Revelations 5: 6).

Being perfect and without blemish, is because the Lord Christ, holy and without sin, is capable of atoning our sins by His own blood (Hebrew 9: 14). St. Hippolytus, the Roman says, [Because the Lord Christ alone, without blemish or spot in every virtue, presents all righteousness, from the beginning to the end. Having said of Himself: *“It is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness”* (Matthew 3: 15)] And according to the apostle, we have been redeemed by a perfect blood, as though of a lamb without spot, the blood of Christ.

Being a male, that refers to His status, as a Groom to all believers (2 Corinthians 11: 2); and *“Who has the bride is the Bridegroom”* (John 3: 29).

Being *“Of the first year”*, means that it should be young and strong; to stay new in our lives forever, though He is the Old of age, the Eternal.

**7- The whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it** (Ex. 12: 6)

On one side, this had been realized in the Person of the Lord Christ, of Whom it is said, *“For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together”* (Acts 4: 27). On another side, the Lord Himself was the One who came forward to offer Himself as a sacrifice of love for our sake. St. John Chrysostom says, *“The Lord Christ was not commanded to do that, but came forward to offer Himself as a sacrifice to God.”*

Despite the great number of families that offer lambs, yet all of them share in one sacrifice. The Lord Christ had offered Himself as One Passover, for the atonement of all nations and peoples gathering all around Him, as though in one house. Concerning this, St. Hippolytus says, *“As it was the case with the houses of the Hebrews, although numerous, yet counted as one house. Churches, though numerous in a city, they represent one Church. Christ, who is whole, is undivided in various houses, as is said by the apostle Paul, that we are one in Christ.”*

It should be kept inside the house. St. Hippolytus says, *“It is one assembly and one house. It is one Church where the Holy Body of Christ is eaten. It is not to be moved out of that one*

house, or Church. Whoever eats it in any other place, will be condemned as a wicked thief.”

#### 8- **To be killed at twilight** (Ex. 12: 6)

Is a reference to the fact that the Lord Christ has offered Himself for the world at the fulfillment of ages.

#### 9- **The blood to be put on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses** (Ex. 12: 7)

Speaking of the activity of the blood, He says, “*When I see the blood, I will pass over you*” (Ex. 12: 13). “*Without shedding of blood, there is no remission*” (Hebrew 9: 22).

The Egyptians, no doubt have seen the slaying of the lambs and the sprinkling of the blood, and mocked the Israelites for it, but they perished. If any Hebrew had tied the lamb to the door, instead of slaying it, he would also perish, as there is no salvation for us, except through the death of the Lord Christ, and the shedding of His blood. That is why He says: “*Most assuredly I say to you. Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain*” (John 12: 24).

The blood of the lamb was a symbol of the blood of the Lord Christ, without it, there is no salvation. And as St. Lactantius says, “The Hebrews were alone saved by the sign of blood. Not because the blood of the lamb had in itself the activity to save mankind, but because it was a symbol of the coming things.”

St. Hippolytus, the Roman, says concerning the power of the sign of blood that “It is put on the houses as well as in the souls, where the Spirit of God finds its holy dwelling.” And he also says, “The blood on the upper lintel, namely on the Church; and on the two doorposts, namely, on the two peoples (the Jews and the Gentiles).”

St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa, believes that putting the blood on the upper lintel and on the two doorposts, refers to the sanctification of the three sides of the soul: the mental, the emotional, and the spiritual. Man is sanctified with all his mental energies, desires, emotions, and inner feelings.

So, it was the belief of the fathers, as far as the sign of blood is concerned, that it implies the sanctification of the catholic, or global Church, as well as the human soul, as a member in that Church.

It is noteworthy that the blood is not to be put on the doorstep, lest it would be trampled over with the feet. The apostle says, “*Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy, who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant, by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?*” (Hebrew 10: 29). As to our strife to enjoy the fruit of that blood, St. Athanasius says, “It is fitting for us to prolong our prayers, fasts, and watching, so that we can anoint the doors of our houses with the precious blood, to let the destroyer pass over them.”

#### 10- **Use of a bunch of hyssop** (Ex. 12: 22)

“*And you shall take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is the basin, and strike the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood...*” (Ex. 12: 22) The scholars could not reach a definite view about that hyssop; however the traditional one is that it is the ‘Zaatar’ plant. This plant was used, according to the holy Book, to purify from leprosy (Leviticus 14: 4, 6) and from sin (Psalm 51: 7), for ritual purification (Numbers 19: 6, 18), and was also used to lift up a sponge filled with sour wine, and presented to the Lord Christ on the cross (John 19: 29). It is said that hyssop is an aromatic plant that grows on walls and rocks.

St. Augustine believes “that hyssop, although a weak and lowly weed, yet has deep and strong roots. It is as though it penetrates with its roots deep into love, “*to comprehend with all*

*the saints what is the width, length, depth, and height (of love)*” (Ephesians 3: 17, 18), and to recognize the cross of our Lord.” Through the blood, springing from the limitless love, we are sanctified, we destroy the leprosy of sin, receive healing from all of our sicknesses, our souls are purified, and we share with Christ His Passion on the cross.

11- **To eat it “roasted in fire”** (Ex. 12: 9)

a- The rite does not stop at the splattering of blood, but the believers should eat the flesh of the lamb, roasted in fire to unite with the Lord Christ, who went through the divine justice, as through fire.

b- We should not stop at believing in the suffering Lord Christ, who passed through fire for our sake, but we should also partake of the communion of His body and blood shed for us, so as to have the fellowship of His Passion, to recognize the power of His resurrection, and to abide in Him and He in us.

c- St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa, believes that the food of Passover is “the hot and flaring faith.” The scholar Origen also says about it, “Let us have the hot Spirit, and get hold of the fiery words presented to us by God, as He did with the prophet Jeremiah, saying to him: *‘Behold, I will make My words in your mouth fire’* (Jeremiah 5: 14). Let us make sure that the flesh of the lamb is well cooked, so that those who partake of it, would say with the two disciples of Emmaus, *‘Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?’* (Luke 24: 32)”

d- It was the custom to roast the lamb on two crossing iron bars that symbolizes the cross.

12- **“Do not eat it raw, nor boiled at all with water”** (Ex. 12: 9)

He wants us to enjoy the divine Word, flaming with fire, and not to eat it raw nor boiled with water - not to receive it with a lukewarm attitude (like water), but with a hot spirit, serious in enjoying it. He wants us to receive faith through the cross and Passion, and not by a loosely spirit.

13- **“Its head with its legs, and its entrails”** (Ex. 12: 9)

As we eat our new Passover, we enter into the head, the feet, and the entrails. We recognize the love of Christ, with the hope of comprehending its height (head), its depths (feet), and its width (entrails), and we shall find it surrounding us from all sides.

St. Hippolytus, the Roman, believes that the head is the Law that revealed the “secret of the Passover”, the feet are the disciples, who preached peace on the mountains of Zion, while the entrails are the Passover itself that we came to know through the Law and the Bible.

14- **“With unleavened bread”** (Ex. 12: 8)

The leaven refers to “*malice and wickedness*” (1 Corinthians 5: 7, 8), and to hypocrisy. That is why St. Ambrose advises us, saying, “If people (the Jews) celebrated the feast of Passover by eating unleavened bread for seven days, every Christian is committed to eat of the body of the true lamb, Christ, and to lead a simple holy life all along the seven days, all the days of his life. Be careful to keep away of the old leaven, and do not remain in it, O brethren. According to the warning of the apostle, *‘Purge out the old leaven’* (1 Corinthians 5: 7), that is to say, purify yourself of it. If you kept yourself away from all the evil, so called the old leaven, and fulfilled by faith all your resolutions when you were baptized, then you will be true Christians.”

St. Athanasius, the apostolic, comments on the words of the apostle, “*Let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth*” (1 Corinthians 5: 8)... “*that you put off, concerning your former*

*conduct... that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in righteousness and holiness”* (Ephesians 4: 22, 24), with meditations from God’s law day and night, with a humble mind and a pure conscience. Let us then, cast away from us every hypocrisy and deceit, get away from every pride and malice. Let us promise to love God and our neighbor to become a new creation... we would then be celebrating the feast as we should.”

Some fathers like Origen believe that the old Passover was connected to the unleavened bread, so as to keep the believers from getting leavened by the leaven of the world anticipating the new leaven of the Kingdom of God (Matthew 13: 33).

It is noteworthy that the Lord Christ, in the sacrament of the Eucharist, used leavened bread, as He carried our sins in His body.

15- **“With bitter herb, they shall eat it”** (Ex. 12: 8)

a- St. Jerome believes that God forbid the use of honey in the offerings; yet, at the same time, commanded eating the lamb of Passover on bitter herb, as though He does not want us to lead a spoiled life, but bear the affliction in this world.

b- The bitter herb reminds the people of the bitterness of servitude, from which they are set free through the lamb of Passover.

c- The bitter herb refers to our commitment to approach the sacrament of the new Passover, with bitterness of heart and spirit because of our sins. When our mouth is embittered, because of sin, our heart would get filled with the sweetness of God’s body and blood. In other words, we do not enjoy the sacrament of the Eucharist without repentance and confession.

16- **“You shall let none of it remain until morning”** (Ex. 12: 9)

A reference to the sacrament of Passover was the secret of “the new life”. Our Church is keen to let no divine sacrament remain to the next day.

17- **“Nor shall you break one of its bones”** (Ex. 12: 46)

This refers to the Lord Christ, who, *“when they came to Him, and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs”* (John 19: 33. St. Hippolytus believes that, by this, we can recognize His resurrection (John 20: 27). He carried the marks of several wounds, but it was not fitting for Him to rise with broken legs.

As the bones of the Lord were not broken, it is fitting for us to receive the “Word of God”, that we eat, enflamed with fire, yet without breaking its bones - to understand it, not in a killing human literal way, but through the constructive Spirit.

And as the bones of the Passover are not broken, so also, the righteous, united with the Lord Christ, their Passover, will have their bones unbroken, as King David the Psalmist said, *“He guards all their bones; not one of them is broken”* (Psalm 34: 20). And as St. Augustine says, *“The Psalmist does not mean the bones in the literal sense, but the unbreakable living faith, as we see from the incident of the right-hand robber, who although his feet bones were broken, yet the bones of his soul were kept by the Lord. In the moments of bitter affliction he abided in the faith, to be worthy to enter paradise, to be kept in the hands of God.”*

18- **They will eat, ready to depart** (Ex. 12: 11)

*“You shall eat it: with a belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. So you shall eat it in haste; It is the Lord’s Passover”* (Ex. 12: 11).

St. John Chrysostom says that this phrase has two interpretations:

(1) A historical interpretation: to let the Jews take into consideration that they are going to depart; as though by so doing, they say, ‘We are ready to depart; we are going out of

Egypt to the land of promise; we are departing'. As those people were known for their forgetfulness, He gave them that commandment to remind them of the goal of the Passover.

- (2) A symbolic interpretation: saying, "We also, as we eat the Passover, the Lord Christ (1 Corinthians 5: 7)... we should eat it *"with a belt on our waist, and sandals on our feet."*

Why? So we also may be ready to depart and rest. I wish everyone eats this Passover without looking down to Egypt (the world), but up to heaven, to the higher Jerusalem. Bracing with a belt is an indication of the departure of the soul. Listen to what God says to a righteous man: "*Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me*" (Job 38: 3). That is what He also said to all prophets, and to Moses. The Lord Himself appeared in a similar way to Ezekiel, and the angels, being soldiers, appear likewise (Revelation 15: 6). Let us then brace ourselves and courageously stand. We should have no fear, because the Leader of our exodus is Jesus, and not Moses!

They were therefore, eating it, ready to depart and to pass over from the land of bondage, heading to the land of promise; ready by their bodies (the belt), their hands (the staff), and their feet (the sandals). That is the same concept of getting ready to partake of the sacrament of the Eucharist; in having it, we yearn to pass over to where the Lord Christ is sitting.

The belted waist refers to controlling the body lusts, so man could walk, not according to the desires of his body, but to those of the heavenly Spirit. That is why St. John Cassian, speaking of, why a monk braces his waist with a belt, he says, [So that the soldier of Christ, will have his mind ready to carry out any work in the monastery; to have his movement unhindered by his clothes, and to comprehend that, using a belt made out of dead animal skin, implies his putting to death all his members, that contains the seeds of fornication and uncleanness, and in order to abide all the time in the commandments of the Bible, saying, "*Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry*" (Colossians 3:5)].

The sandals on the feet refer to what happened with the prophet Moses, when he took off his sandals, made out of dead animal skin, in order to be able to enjoy the burning bush. But here, we put on sandals of a different kind, that of the Lord, of which St. John, the Baptist said that he is not worthy to bow and loosen its straps. Therefore, let us have the sandals of the Lord, so that, as he walked, we do likewise, not fearing the thorns of this life, nor the violence and authority of Pharaoh, but to trample over all the forces of evil under our feet. And as St. Ambrose says, "Whoever celebrates the Passover of the Lord, and the Lamb, should have his feet protected against the fierce spiritual beasts, and the stings of the serpent."

The staff in our hands is the rod of God, also called the rod of Moses, and the rod of Aaron. We lean on the power of God for salvation (the cross), hold the rod of commandment (Moses), and practice the spiritual worship (Aaron). Some fathers see in the staff, the hope on which the soul leans, on her way to heaven, to cast away the destructive threats of the devil, as a traveler does to chase away dogs with his staff.

Finally, St. Athanasius, the apostolic, speaks of the readiness to that trip, saying, "Our Lord Jesus Christ is the true light, who is our royal staff, and in place of the unleavened bread, is the bread descending from heaven. And in short, the Lord leads us, by all that, to His Father."

As to eating it in haste (Ex. 12: 11), St. Hippolytus says, "Whoever approaches that great and exalted body, should be watching and fasting;" he should be ready to set forth.

19- ***“You shall keep it as a feast to the Lord throughout your generations”*** (Ex. 12: 14)

As a confirmation of the eternal Passover and also, so that the old people would remain anticipating for the coming of the true Passover, whose blood will be forever sanctified.

20- ***“No outsider shall eat it”*** (Ex. 12: 43, 48)

No uncircumcised should partake of it, only the circumcised. Therefore, nobody can enjoy communion of the holy sacraments, except he who gained the spiritual circumcision, the Baptism by which he became a son to God, having the right to unite with Him in Christ Jesus.

In his fourth homily on the Resurrection, St. Athanasius, the apostolic, says, “The deceitful person, with impure heart, and defiled soul... is surely a foreigner to the saints, and counted unworthy of eating the Passover. For this reason, when Judas assumed that he could keep the Passover while plotting a deceit against the Savior, he turned as a foreigner to the city up high and a stranger to the apostolic company. The Law commanded that the Passover should be eaten with fitting caution, yet Judas, while eating it, the devil entered his soul (John 13: 27).”

21- ***“It is the Lord’s Passover”*** (Ex. 12: 11)

The Holy Book differentiates between the “Lord’s Passover”, and the “Jews’ Passover.” In the Law, He does not say “Your Passover” or “The Jews’ Passover”, but He says “The Lord’s Passover” in reference to Himself. But when the people fell to evil, and lived without repentance, He refers it to them, saying: *“The new moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies - I cannot endure... Your new moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates”* (Isaiah 1: 13, 14)

The scholar Origen noticed that this thing happens with all sorts of worship, calling the Sabbath, “the Lord’s Sabbath”; and in the Book of Numbers, He says: *“My offering, My food for My offerings made by fire as a sweet aroma to Me, you shall be careful to offer to Me at their appointed time”* (Numbers 28: 1). He also calls the people “My people”; yet when they deviated from worshipping Him, He said to Moses: *“Go, get down, for your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves”* (Ex. 32: 7).

It is no longer the people of God, but that of Moses.

## **Killing the firstborns**

a- The scholar Tertullian believes that the Egyptians have paid the price of what they have done to the Hebrew children by throwing them in the river. The Lord punished them by their own deeds.

b- God allowed all the firstborns to be killed, even those of the beasts with no exception. That is a symbol of God’s work in devastating evil. Yet His children, even the hairs of their heads are counted and under His care.

c- St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa, sees in killing of the firstborns as a reference to the destruction of every cause of sin, saying, “It is fitting for whoever seizes evil through virtue, to destroy it since its onset. By this he destroys every thing that would follow. That is what the Lord teaches us in the Bible, inviting us, very clearly, to kill the firstborns of evil... instructing us to destroy lust and anger, and not to be afraid before the sins of adultery and murder. Those two do not come all of a sudden, but the anger produces murder, and the lust gives birth to adultery... thus by destroying the firstborns (lust and anger), we kill all that would follow. If we take the serpent as an example, by crushing its head, all of its body would be killed at the same time.”

## SECOND SECTION

### FROM EGYPT TO SINAI

(Chapters 12 to 18)

In this section, the prophet Moses wrote about the departure from Rameses, and established the Passover ordinances, the conditions under which the outsider can partake of this feast (Ex. 12: 43 - 51), and the ordinance of consecration of the firstborn (Ex. 13). He also spoke of the following events:

The crossing of the Red Sea	Exodus 14
The song of salvation	15
The bitter water and the bread from heaven	15, 16
Water from the rock	17
Victory over the Amalekites	17
A visit by Jethro, Moses' father-in-law	18

+++++

## CHAPTER 12

(Continued)

### EXODUS OF THE PEOPLE

*“Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, ‘Rise and go out from among my people, both you and the children of Israel. And go, serve the Lord as you have said. Also take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone; and bless me also’. And the Egyptians urged the people, that they might send them out of the land”* (Ex. 12: 31 - 33)

That is how God works in our life. Not only does He call us to cross over to Him, and or flares our hearts within us for the longing to do that, but He motivates those who oppose us, urging us to go, if we persist till the end.

*“The children of Israel from the Egyptians articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing”* (Ex. 12: 35)

We saw that this was allowed by God to make up for the wages that was robbed by the Egyptians from the children of Israel during the years of bondage. And it carried as well, a symbol of the sanctification of energies and feelings that were previously used for the benefit of sins, to turn into tools of righteousness for the Lord. St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa, sees in that action a symbolic portrait of the work of the Church, that adopted from the world, its philosophies and knowledge, and made use of them: [These things become useful, if used to adorn the secret of the divine altar, by the riches of the mind]. Many people presented to the Church their worldly knowledge, as a kind of offering, as St. Basil, the Great did when he sought the Egyptian wealth everywhere, at the time of his youth, then dedicated all that wealth to the Lord, for adorning the Church, the true Tabernacle.

#### **The stations or stops of the journey:**

The scholar Origen spoke often of the stations or stops of that journey, as carrying the features of the set off of the soul from the land of bondage to the higher Jerusalem. In our present study, and that of the Book of Numbers, we shall try to deal with these stops:

Rameses: That was the start of the journey; then the people set forth to ‘Succoth’. ‘Rameses’, according to Origen, means (the city of corruption), as though the start of the way is for man to get out of (the city of corruption), from motives of sin and evil. We cannot enjoy the journey of salvation, while we stay where sin dwells. Concerning this he says: [If you want the Lord to be your guide, to precede you in the pillar of cloud, to provide you with the rock, the spiritual Manna, and to let you enjoy the spiritual drink, you have to depart from ‘Rameses’]. The Lord speaks clearly about this, saying: *“Do not lay for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and*

*rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal” (Matthew 6: 19); and “If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have, and give to the poor ... and come, follow Me” (Matthew 19: 21). This is the meaning of departing from Rameses and following Christ.*

**Succoth:** According to Origen, ‘Succoth’ means tent, as though the believer, as he forsakes the motives of sin, he should consider his life here as a sojourn. He says: [As you cast away corruption, and get away from evil, you should dwell in tents so you do not want to take off, but “*to be further clothed*” above it (1 Corinthians 5: 4). He would be dwelling in tents, he who runs toward God, free and without shackles or burdens.

**The number of those who took part in the exodus:**

*“The number of the children of Israel who journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, were about 600, 000 men on foot, besides children” (Ex. 12: 37).*

This number carries a symbol of the crossover of the Church: “6 x 100 x 1000.” The figure 6 refers to the consummation of human work, as in 6 days, God created the world, and in the sixth day, He created man, His most perfect creation on earth. It is as though man comes, carrying the perfection of his human possibilities, of thoughts, motives, feelings, emotions, and abilities, dedicating his whole body and spirit to God. The figure 100 refers to the consummation of the number of the congregation, as though it is fitting for the Church to set forth in its wholeness toward God, leaving back no living member. As to the figure 1000, as we saw in our interpretation of the Book of Revelation, it refers to the heavenly life, as the Church goes with all its children, with their whole spiritual and physical energies, setting forth towards the higher Jerusalem, with a heavenly thought and a heavenly life.

As to calling them “journeying on foot”, this means that the Church is in a continuous movement toward heaven, with the Spirit of strife and persistence, with no despair; and would never stop its crossover. And saying “besides children”, refers to being “men” who carry steady spiritual fruits.

=====

**CHAPTER 13**

## CONSECRATION OF THE FIRSTBORN

This chapter includes:

1- Sanctification of the firstborn	1 - 16
2- Wandering of the people	17 - 18
3- The bones of Joseph	19
4- Camping in Etham	20 - 22

+++++

### 1- Sanctification of the firstborn:

*“Sanctify to Me all the firstborn, whatever opens the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and animal; it is Mine” (Ex. 13: 2)*

That was the first commandment of the Lord to Moses, directly after the exodus. It is not a command or a commandment, as much as it is a gift and a promise. As by the exodus of the people from bondage, and their setting forth to the higher Jerusalem, the believer enters into the possession of God, to become a living member in His royal Kingdom, saying: *“He is Mine”*.

#### d- Christ; our Firstborn:

God requested the firstborn of man and animals, and later requested also the first fruits of the harvest, vine, and oil. The Lord had been particular in this issue as it is clear in the Books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. By offering the firstborn to the Lord, the whole lot would be sanctified, as though offered to the Lord. That was a symbol of the Lord Christ, our Firstborn, and the Firstborn and head of all creation (Colossians 1: 15, 18; Romans 8: 29). He presented Himself on our behalf, we, His lowly brothers, offering His life to God the Father as a sacrifice of obedience, and of unblemished love. So we may be accepted by His good Father, as a fragrance of pleasure. Hence, humanity united to Him, and became an object of pleasure and favor to God the Father.

To clarify this, we say that God the Word, became One of us. And although, according to the flesh, He came later than others, yet He was called, “The second Adam”, and was counted as the Firstborn, after the first Adam lost his first birth right, because of his sin. So, did Esau, and Reuben (Genesis 49: 3; 1 Chronicles 5: 1), and as Isaac was counted as his father Jacob’s firstborn, and inherited every thing (Genesis 21: 10), although he was younger than his brother Ishmael. Nobody can have the first birth right to humanity in the presence of the Lord Christ, the only Holy One without blemish, who presented Himself to God the Father, as the First fruit of

humanity. In Him, all those who believe in Him, were accepted, and sanctified in Him, and every one of them heard from the divine mouth, the words: “*You are Mine*” (Ex. 13: 2).

This becomes very clear in the case of the first fruit of a tree (Leviticus 19: 23), that are to be counted as uncircumcised, meaning spiritually unsanctified, for three years, and in the fourth year, all its fruit would become holy and would be offered to the Lord, who then says: “*I am the Lord your God*” (Leviticus 19: 25). That tree is nothing but humanity, which remained uncircumcised for three years: the first in paradise, where Adam and Eve had fallen, the second, during the time of the fathers, in the shadow of the natural law, and the third year, in the shadow of the Mosaic Law. Then in the fourth year, all its fruits would be accepted, in the time of grace, when the Lord Christ presented Himself as a holy fruit on our behalf.

It is noteworthy that the idea of first birth has been known to man, even before the Mosaic Law. Man rejoices by his firstborn son and the farmer by the first fruits of his harvests. That is why God, as He presented His only-begotten Son as a ransom for us, demands that we pay back love for His love. He wants us to present the firstborn of our sons to serve Him, beside those of our livestock and the first fruits of our harvest, and wants the best of what we have, and not our leftovers.

#### b- The Church of the firstborns:

In the old days, God demanded the firstborn males of His people, as a sign of His work of salvation with them; saying:

*“So it shall be, when your son asks you in time to come, saying, ‘what is this?’ that you shall say to him, ‘By the strength of hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. And it came to pass, when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go, that the Lord killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of animal. Therefore I sacrifice to the Lord all males that open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem’. It shall be as a sign on your hand, and as frontlets between your eyes, for by the strength of hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt”* (Ex. 13: 14 -- 16)

Presenting the firstborns is the sign on the hand which is a practical sign, and between the eyes, so as not to be forgotten. Through these signs they would recall the salvation works of God, how He killed the firstborns of the Egyptians because of the wickedness of Pharaoh, in order to set the Israelites as the “*The Lord’s firstborn*” (Ex. 4: 22; Jeremiah 31: 9). God had set his people as His firstborn, and when the True Firstborn came to the world, and the Church became united in Him, it truly became the “Church of firstborns”, as it is written in the Holy Scripture.

#### c- The system of the firstborn:

The system of the firstborn has been known before the Mosaic Law, yet the later came to regulate it in a detailed way, that carried symbols of the heavenly Church of the firstborn. Leaving the study of this issue to the future, I want to present some of its prominent points:

- 1- The firstborn is given a double portion of everything (Deuteronomy 21: 17), as a reference to the abundance of God’s graces on us in the eternal inheritance.

2- The first male to be born is counted as a firstborn, even if his mother is not beloved by her husband (Deuteronomy 21: 15-17). The two wives (the beloved and the unbeloved) probably refer to the Jews and the pagan Gentiles. The believer is counted as firstborn in the Church of the firstborns, without distinction, whether he is of Jewish or a Gentile origin.

3- The firstborn of kings almost always inherit the throne (2 Kings 21: 3). We are as sons of the King of Kings, are counted as kings also.

4- The firstborn is offered to serve the Lord (Ex. 13: 12; 34: 19) as a sign of dedication of the whole family to the Lord. This was then replaced by the Levites, which we shall deal with in our interpretation of the Book of Leviticus.

5- Dedication of the firstborn of animals to the service of the Lord, with the exception of the unclean animals, that are to be redeemed with a clean animal, or have its neck broken (Ex. 13: 13; Leviticus 27: 37). This is the case of the sinner, who is not redeemed except through the Lord Jesus Christ, or else he dies.

## **2. The wandering of the people:**

The people got confused when they found themselves walking in a route different than the one that leads to the land of the Philistines. As they were not yet trained to freedom, God intended to let them go through a bit of training in the wilderness, before they reach the land of freedom, *“lest perhaps the people change their minds when they see war, and return to Egypt”* (Ex. 13: 17).

## **3- The bones of Joseph:**

*“And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for he had placed the children of Israel under solemn oath, saying, “Surely God will visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here with you”* (Ex. 13: 19).

It is as though Joseph prophesied that his people would eventually come out of the land of Egypt, and settle down in the land of promise. So his request to them carried a symbol of his yearning for resurrection. He desired for his body to rest in the higher Jerusalem, when he carries the new nature fitting for the heavenly. St. Aphrahat comments on what Moses did saying, [The bones of that righteous man, were to him, far more valuable and better than all the gold and silver that the children of Israel took with them from Egypt, and then corrupted]. The bones of Joseph remained forty years in the wilderness, and when Moses died, Joshua inherited them, and buried them in the land of promise as a treasure.

## **4- Camping in Etham:**

We talked before of the departure from Rameses to Succoth, as a departure from the motivations of sin, together with a feeling of sojourn. But now, having reached Etham, which, according to the scholar Origen, means a sign, and is the third station at the edge of the wilderness (Ex. 13: 20). It is not possible for the believer to enter into the wilderness with all its passions and temptations, unless he reaches the third station, which is the experience of the resurrection with the Lord Christ, and to have God proclaim Himself to him, supporting him day and night.

The scholar Origen says: [We should not stop here (in Succoth), but consummate the route. We should lift up the tent from Succoth and hasten to Etham. The word Etham means a sign, which is an appropriate name, and where the scripture tells us,

*“God went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light” (Ex. 13: 21)*

You do not see this sign in Rameses nor in Succoth, during the first and second stages of the journey, but it comes with the third stage, where God’s proclamations begin. Recall what was written, when Moses said to Pharaoh, *“We go three days journey into the desert and sacrifice to the Lord our God”* (Ex. 5: 3). By that he did not want Pharaoh to let the children of Israel go to where God’s proclamations will be, unless he allows them to proceed to enjoy the secrets of the third day. Listen to what the prophet says about the Lord, *“On the third day He will raise us up, and we may live in His sight”* (Hosea 6:2).

The first day represents the Passions of the Savior. The second day represents His descent to Hades. The third day represents His resurrection.

The Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light. If we follow the apostle’s words, showing us that these signs signify “Baptism,” that whoever is baptized into Christ Jesus, is baptized into His death (Romans 6: 3), and is raised with Him on the third day. The apostle talks about such a man, saying, that God raises him up, and lets him sit together with Him in the heavenly places (Ephesians 2: 6). Therefore, when you acquire the secret of the third day, you will be led by God, and shown the way to salvation.

If the apostle sees that in the pillar of cloud it gave shadow to the people, (the Baptism, through which we gain the Spirit of adoption by the Holy Spirit), St. Basil, the Great, sees in it, the shadow of the grace of the Holy Spirit, that cools down the flame of our lusts, by putting our members to death. (Colossians 5: 3). By that, the pillar of fire would be a shadow of the enlightenment that we gain through Baptism, to walk along to the way of God the Savior, through the darkness of this life.

## **CHAPTER 14**

### **CROSSING THE RED SEA**

This chapter deals with the following subjects:

1- Camping before ‘Pi Hahiroth’	1 - 2
2- Pharaoh regrets having to let the children of Israel go	3 - 9
3- The people murmur against Moses and Aaron	10 - 14
4- The silent cry of Moses	15
5- The crossing of the Red Sea	16 – 31

+++++

### **1- Camping before ‘Pi Hahiroth’:**

By a divine command, the children of Israel turned and camped before Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, opposite Baal Zephon (Ex. 14: 2). The scholar Origen believes that ‘Pi Hahiroth’ means the severe ascent or the barren ascent, ‘Migdol’ means tower, and ‘Baal Zephon’ means ascending lightly and swiftly.

Before crossing the Red Sea to wander 40 years in the wilderness, on their way to the land of promise, the Lord committed them to camp before Pi Hahiroth, before the severe ascent, as though proclaiming to them beforehand, that the way to salvation is a continuous ascent along the difficult way and through the narrow door. The believer does not know laziness, but persistent strife, through his fellowship with God. Pi Hahiroth is located between ‘Migdol’ and ‘Baal Zephon’, between the tower and the swift ascent. In other words, the believer should count the cost of building the tower, lest he is not able to finish it, and be mocked by the passers by. But once he knows where he stands, he should not linger on his way, but should ascend swiftly toward the heavenly life. Being by the sea, this is a sign of our entrance into temptations (the sea), and afflictions all along the way of our strife, until we cross over to the new land and the new heaven, where “*there is no more sea*” (Revelation 21: 1).

Origen continues to comment on this saying, [You might think that the way of God is easy and even, and does not need any effort on your part; No! It is an ascent, and a difficult one. The way of virtues does not head down, but leads up on a tiresome and a narrow way. Listen to what the Lord says in the Bible: “*Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life*” (Matthew 7: 14)]. Look, how the Bible conforms with the Law! The Law reveals that the way to life is a difficult ascent, and the Bible proclaims its narrowness, and that the Lord Himself is the way leading to life.

Therefore the way, along which we should walk, is an ascending and a narrow way that needs watchfulness and faith, and requires great efforts and strife. Whoever wants to walk according to God would face a lot of temptations and afflictions.

On that way, we shall find a tower, of which the Lord says, “*For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it*” (Luke 14: 28). This tower is the firm foundation, on which virtue is set high.

In your exodus, likewise, you will come to the sea, where you will encounter waves, as there is no way to life, without waves of temptations. According to the words of the apostle, “*All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution*” (2 Timothy 3: 12), and as Job also says, “*Is there not a time of hard service for man on earth? Are not his days also like the days of a hired man?*” (Job 7: 1). That is what reaching of the sea means.

## **2- Pharaoh regrets having let the children of Israel go:**

- a- The Lord clarified the significance of their camping at ‘Pi Hahiroth’, saying: “*I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, so that he will pursue them*” (Ex. 14: 4). How did the Lord harden Pharaoh’s heart? “*He gave him up to the lusts of his heart*” (Romans: 24), and as St. Augustine says: [If God gave Pharaoh up to the hardness of his heart, yet we can not disregard his free will to do evil.]
- b- Pharaoh pursued the children of Israel with 600 chariots. We said previously that the figure 6 refers to the consummation of human work, and the figure 100 to the consummation of the number of the congregation. It is as though Pharaoh went with all his human energy and all his men, but because they did not carry the heavenly nature (the figure 1000), he failed and perished.

## **3- The people murmur against Moses and Aaron:**

- a- The people, before their first affliction and after their departure, desired to go back to the life of bondage, in stead of life of freedom with strife. But, it would be better for them to die on their way seeking the life of perfection than to refrain from seeking it.
- b- Moses requested from the people to stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord which he will accomplish for them that day, saying to them:

*“The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace”* (Ex. 14: 14)

He does not motivate them to fight against Pharaoh, as he would do later on, in their battle against Amalek and others. For they left Egypt without any striving experience, and did not experience the heavenly Manna, or the spiritual drink. So, man is not requested to strive, except within the limits of his possibilities and capabilities.

## **4- The silent cry of Moses”:**

*“And the Lord said to Moses, ‘Why do you cry to Me?’*” (Ex. 14: 15)

Although Moses did not openly cry to the Lord, but talked to the murmuring people with bitterness of heart, trying to strengthen in them the spirit of hope in salvation, saying: “*The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace*”. There is no doubt that Moses cried in his heart, a cry of bitterness that shook heaven, heard only by God, but not by the people, and his response was swift. Several fathers were so impressed by that silent cry, and put forward strong comments of faith. The scholar Origen said, [God hears the silent cries of saints by the Holy

Spirit]. And, [God said to Moses, ‘Why do you cry to Me?’, although Moses never cried in an audible voice, and the Book of Exodus never recorded that he did. But Moses gave a strong cry, presented as a prayer to be heard only by God. That is why the prophet David also says, “*I cried out to God with my voice and He gave ear to me*” (Psalm 77: 1)].

St. John Chrysostom says: [You can control your thoughts, and praise the Lord without being heard by others, even if you are in the market, the same way Moses did, when he cried out in his thoughts with a contrite heart, to be heard by the Lord alone. Man can pray to God, even while walking on his way]. And he also says: [*“Hanna also spoke in her heart, and only her lips moved”*], and she got all what she cried out for (1 Samuel 1: 13). Abel, did not only silently pray, but even prayed after he died, when his blood cried out to the Lord from the ground, in a voice louder than that of a trumpet (Genesis 4: 10). From the depths of the heart, the voice comes out loud, and your prayer remains a secret].

St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa says, [The thought of Moses that was raised to God was called a cry, although it silently took place in the inner heart].

## **5- The Red Sea crossover:**

The people walked with faith as they saw the sea, a way of salvation opened before them, while the enemies, on the other hand, also saw the way, and walked through it, but to die and perish. In this crossing we notice the following:

(1) The Red Sea crossover carries the symbol of Baptism, where the believer enjoys salvation through burial with the suffering Christ, and enjoyment of the power of His resurrection, while the devil and his hosts are agitated, and their wicked works are demolished. As St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa, says, [Up till now, when people enter the water of renewal, escaping from Egypt (as a symbol of love of the world), from the weight of sin, they are set free and saved, while the devil and his hosts, (the wicked spirits), will be shocked by sorrow and perish, seeing the salvation of humanity as evil to them].

St. Augustine says: [The people of God were set free from Egypt (as a symbol of love of the world), with its greatness and vastness, and was led to the Red Sea, where they saw the end of their enemies (the devils) in the water of Baptism. For by that sacrament - as in the Red Sea - they become sanctified by the blood of Christ, while the sins chasing them would perish....].

And St. Jerome says, [Having regretted that they let the people of God go, Pharaoh and his army, drowned in the Red Sea, become a symbol of our Baptism. The Book of Psalms describes how they perished, “*You divided the sea by your strength; You broke the heads of the sea serpents in the waters; You broke the heads of Leviathan in pieces*” (Psalm 74: 13); That is why the serpents and scorpions dwell in the thirsty land where there is no water (Deuteronomy 8: 15), and if they come to water, they turn wild and fierce].

St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa, believes that the destruction of Pharaoh, his army, and all his chariots, refer to the destruction of evil, with all its energies; greed, lust, wicked thoughts, anger, envy, ...etc., in the secret water of Baptism. He also believes that as the people were committed in the Passover, to eat the unleavened bread, to keep the leaven of the old crop from contaminating the dough of the new crop, that it is fitting for us, after crossing the water of Baptism, not to let the hosts of Pharaoh live in our life, but that we should walk in the new life, without turning back to the works of the old man.

- (2) Pope Athanasius notices the difference between the Lord Christ rebuking the wind and sea, to obey His divine authority (Mark 4: 37 - 41), and the division of the Red Sea that happened on the hand of Moses, yet through a divine command, saying, [Although the Red Sea was divided through Moses, yet it was not Moses who did it, but it has been done by a divine command].
- (3) I wish we follow the lead of Moses, and hold the rod of God, His holy cross, to strike with it the raging waves inside us, to have before us a way that destroys our spiritual enemies. The scholar Origen also sees in that rod, the Law or the divine commandment, saying: [Strike the raging waves with the rod of Moses, to have a way opened to you in the midst of your enemies].
- (4) That action revealed the love of God to man, and his work of salvation. The scholar Origen says: [The waters turn into mountains! The retreating waters become a wall! The bottom of the sea is exposed, to reveal only sand! I wish you realize the love of the Creator because if you obey His will, and keep His Law, He will let things act, contrary to their nature, in order to serve you]. The love of God is also proclaimed, when in order to hide and protect the people from the eyes of Pharaoh and his army,

*“the pillar of cloud went from before them and stood behind them”* (Ex. 14: 19)

- (5) That salvation symbolizes the work of the Lord Christ from many aspects, of which:
- a- He hardened the heart of Pharaoh against the children of Israel, to have him drown together with his army. In the same way the devil also hardened his heart, and wanted to kill the Lord Christ, and blot His name out of the land of the living, only to find himself perish together with his hosts.
  - b-When Pharaoh saw the Sea divided, instead of getting afraid and terrified, he rushed after the people of God, to destroy them. In the same way, when the devil saw how nature was disturbed, in the moments of crucifixion, he did not care but went forward to complete his evil work.
  - c- Moses stroke the Red Sea by his rod, and Pharaoh died. Likewise, the Lord Christ stroke Satan by the cross, and destroyed him in Hades.
  - d- After the crossover, the people set forth into the wilderness. We also, having enjoyed the work of the cross in Baptism, go forth through the wilderness of this world, together with our Leader Jesus Christ, till we reach the heavenly Jerusalem.

- (6) St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa, comments on the phrase:

*“The people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord, and his servant Moses”* (Ex. 14: 31).

To say: [Whoever crosses the sea, and sees the Egyptians (the earthly lusts) dead inside it, will not any more see only Moses carrying the rod of virtue, but will believe in God, and be obedient to His servant Moses] (Ex. 14: 31). We likewise, see the same thing happen with those who cross the water of Baptism, and dedicate their lives to God in obedience and submission to those who serve Him in priesthood (Hebrew 13: 17).

=====

## **CHAPTER 15**

### **THE SONG OF TRIUMPH**

This chapter includes:

1-The song of triumph	1 - 19
2- Miriam the singer	20 - 21
3- From Marah to Elim	22 - 27

+++++

## 1- The song of triumph:

This song symbolizes those redeemed in heaven, whom the Lord Christ saved, and crossed over with them to heaven (Revelation 15: 3). That is why the Church put it in the daily praise as the first ‘Hoos’ (Canticle) to confirm to her children the importance of praising the Lord, and of persistently offering Him thanks, acknowledging His redemptive work with us, and granting us a daily triumph over the devil and his hosts, not by our human actions, but through His work of grace in us.

It is noteworthy that Moses and the people, did not utter that song, except after having been baptized, and seen the amazing salvation of God. Thus, by Baptism, being buried together with our crucified Christ, and being raised with Him in the newness of life, we shall have our inner tongue opened to praise and thank God.

That song came to represent a living aspect of Moses’ life. When Pope Athanasius, the apostolic, spoke in one of his messages of the Christian Passover, he said that the saints spend their whole life, as though celebrating the feast. One finds comfort in praying, like the prophet David; another glorifies God through songs of praise, like Moses; while others worship with persistence, like the great Samuel and the righteous Elijah. So Moses became a role model for a life of praise to the Lord by his song.

That song carried beautiful expressions and meanings, which needs a separate book to explain, but here I shall deal with certain of its phrases:

*“I will sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider, He has thrown into the sea!”* (Ex. 15: 1)

The song began by praising God who was glorified by the cross, where He trampled on the devil and all his hosts, to set those he captivated free.

It is a sweet song, sung by the Christian every day, as he sees sin falling by the cross under his feet. And as St. Athanasius, the apostolic says, [Let us sing and praise with Moses, as we see the sin in us thrown into the sea, and while we cross over to the wilderness].

*“They sank to the bottom like a stone”* (Ex. 15: 5)

St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa, believes that whoever walks in the life of virtue will be of lightweight, while the wicked man will be heavy and sink in water. Virtue is light, and floats on water, and those who walk in its way, fly like a cloud or a bird, by their little wings (Isaiah 9), while sin is heavy like lead (Zechariah 5: 7).

He quoted this view from his teacher, the scholar Origen, who said: [Why did they sink? It was because they were not made of the stones from which the children to Abraham are raised. They were lovers of lowly places, who sought lusts and escaped from actuality.] That is why, it was said of them, *“They sank like lead in mighty waters”* (Ex. 15: 10). Sinners are heavy with evil, to which the prophet Zechariah referred, saying: *“Here is a lead disc lifted up, and a woman (is there) sitting inside the basket”* (Zechariah 5: 7). When he inquired about her identity, the answer was: *“This is wickedness”* (Zechariah 5: 8). While the wicked sink like lead in mighty

waters, the saints do not sink, but walk over the waters, not having the weight of sin that let them sink.

Our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ, who does not know sin, walked on the sea (Matthew 14: 25), and His disciple Peter did likewise, although he became fearful, as his heart was not completely pure, but included some lead. That is why the Lord said to him, “*O you of little faith, why did you doubt?*” (Matthew 8:26). He who is saved, is saved as through fire (1 Corinthians 3: 15), so that, even if he has some lead in him, it will melt.

The wicked then, are like stones, that rejected the work of the Holy Spirit in them, to be raised as children of Abraham, and they are like lead that sinks in water, meaning to sink in lusts. Saints, on the other hand, are like gold purified by fire.

*“Your right hand, O Lord, has become glorious in power; Your right hand, O Lord, has dashed the enemy in pieces”* (Ex. 15: 6)

St. Ambrose clearly sees in this song, the work of the Holy Spirit. This phrase acknowledges the Son, who is at “*the right hand of God*”, and then spoke later concerning the work of the Holy Spirit, “*You blew with your wind, the sea covered them*” (Ex. 15: 10), and how He works in the sacrament of Baptism, destroying evil, and saving the children of God.

*“The enemy said, ‘I will pursue; I will overtake; I will divide the spoil; My desire shall be satisfied on them. I will draw my sword; my hand shall destroy them’*” (Ex. 15: 9)

This verse reveals the work of the devil, how he terrorizes and persecutes. That is why, when Pope Athanasius wanted to defend his escape before his persecutors, the followers of Arius, he said, [The Lord commanded us to escape, and the saints escaped. Persecution is evil, the work of the devil, against the righteous].

Speaking about St. Anthony, St. Athanasius, the apostolic says, [The devil deceives the righteous with his boasts. But, even in this, we should not fear, nor care for his words, because he is a liar, and does not utter one single word of truth. He boldly speaks too much. Yet, as Leviathan, the Savior can draw him out with a hook (Job 41: 1).

The enemy tried to use the same tactic with the Lord Christ, assuming that he is capable of uprooting His name from among the living; yet, his threats did not shake the heart of the Lord, but destroyed the enemy himself.

*“Who is like You, O Lord?”* (Ex. 15: 11)

Nobody is like God in His capability, His love, and His nature, being Incomprehensible, Imperceptible, Unchangeable, with no beginning or end. He, who has no one equal to Him, granted us, by adoption, to be counted as His children, according to His image. And as the apostle St. John says, “*Beloved, now we are the children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is*” (1 John 3: 2).

*“You stretched out Your right hand; The earth swallowed them”* (Ex. 15: 12).

The scholar Origen comments on this phrase, saying: [Today, the earth swallows the wicked, those who have nothing but the earthly thoughts and works! Those who covet the earth, and put on it all their hopes, never look up toward heaven, nor think about the coming life, and do not fear God's judgment, nor desire His eternal promises, thinking all the time about worldly affairs, and run after the earthly things. If you see someone like that, you should say that the earth has swallowed him! If you see someone who pours himself over the desires and lusts of the flesh, and see how his spirit is helpless, for his body has the upper hand over all his life, you should say, that the earth has swallowed him!]

The song says: "*You stretched out your hand; and the earth swallowed them.*" Behold the Lord, stretching out His hands on the cross, "*I have stretched out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good*" (Isaiah 65: 2). That rebellious people cried out, 'Crucify Him! Crucify Him!' to be punished by death].

The earth swallowed the arrogant Pharaoh, who assumed that he could destroy the people of God, as those who were swallowed by Hades, the Lord Christ descended into the lower parts of the earth (Ephesians 4: 9), to lift them up from there, and not to the surface of the earth, but to His holy dwellings.

*"Till Your people pass over, O Lord; till the people pass over, whom You have purchased"* (Ex. 15: 16).

The prophet Moses repeated the words "*till the people pass over*", to proclaim that the ultimate goal of the work is salvation and passing over to eternity, and to confirm that those passing over are one people of two roots: Jewish and Gentile.

*"You will bring them in and plant them in the mountain of Your inheritance"* (Ex. 15: 17).

The scholar Origen says, [God does not want to plant us in Egypt (love of the world), nor in wicked and evil places, but He wants to set us in the mountain of His inheritance. Those words: "bring them in and plant them..." sound, as though he is speaking of children, whom He is taking to school to learn. Let us see how He does that! "*You have brought a vine out of Egypt; You have cast out the nations, and planted it. You prepared room for it, and caused it to take root, and it filled the land. The hills were covered with its shadow, and the mighty cedars with its boughs*" (Psalm 80: 9 - 11)...He does not plant it in the valleys, but on the high mountains. He leads those coming out of Egypt, from the world to faith. He wants to set us on the high grounds, and does not want to see us crawl on earth. He does not want the fruits of His vine to touch the ground, but wants its branches to grow without getting entangled with the branches of any other trees and to attach to the mighty cedars (Psalm 80: 11). The cedars of God, I assume, are the prophets and apostles. If we get attached to them, we, the vine that God brought out of Egypt, would have our branches grow with their branches. If we lean on them, our branches would become planted with bonds of mutual love, and would bring about a plenty of fruits].

*"The sanctuary, O Lord, Your hands established..."* (Ex. 15: 17)

The scholar Origen says: [What is this sanctuary, established, not by man, but by the Lord? "*Wisdom has built her house*" (Proverb 9: 3). This involves the incarnation of the Lord. The flesh He has taken, is not of the seed of man, but is established in the Virgin, as Daniel

prophesied: “A stone was cut out without hands ... and became a great mountain and filled the whole earth” (Daniel 2: 34, 35). That is the Sanctuary, who appeared in the flesh, who was cut out without hands, and not established by man].

*“The children of Israel went on dry land, in the midst of the sea”* (Ex. 15: 19)

The scholar Origen says: [If you are of the new Israel, you can walk on dry land in the midst of the sea. If you find yourself “*in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among them you would shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that you may rejoice in the day of Christ*” (Philippians 2: 15, 16). You can walk among the wicked, without getting defiled by the waters of sin.

Whosoever follows Christ, can walk like Him on the water that would be like a wall on his right and left sides. He would go on dry land, until he reaches freedom, to sing to the Lord the song of triumph, saying:

*“I will sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously”* (Ex. 15: 1)

## **2- Miriam, the singer:**

St. Jerome sees Miriam, the sister of Aaron, as a spiritual leader of women at that time, a living portrait of the work of a woman in the Church, who dedicates her life to praise the Lord, and teaches other women to do that as well. In a message to the widow ‘Furia’, who intended to get married, then changed her mind, He wrote to her, [Miriam taught her fellow women to be musicians, yet for Christ; to play on the harp, yet for the Savior; to work day and night to fill their lamps with oil, and stay watchful for the coming of the Bridegroom].

St. Ambrose sees in her a symbol of the Church, continuously praising the Lord. In his talk about the Virgins, he says: [Were they not a symbol of the virgin Church, who, with an unblemished Spirit, gathers together the religious congregation to sing divine songs? We hear of virgins, who were dedicated to that task in the temple of Jerusalem]. In the same article, he described Miriam’s procession as representing a heavenly procession, in which the heavenly rejoice, seeing the earthly setting forth toward heaven.

## **3- From Marah to Elim:**

The way of the wilderness is that of afflictions, or it is rather of experiencing the divine work in our life, in the midst of sufferings, and of the opening of the heart to the heavenly.

After crossing over and rejoicing, the joy of the people turned into bitterness, and they murmured against Moses, because they found only bitter water to drink (Ex. 15: 24). God commanded Moses to cast a tree into the waters, and the waters were made sweet.

What are these waters, but the commandments of the Law that brought bitterness to the people, because they were unable to keep them? But once the Lord Christ, the Tree of life, entered into the Law, He turned it to spiritual, and made it (drinkable) to the soul. Concerning this, the scholar Origen says: [The chalice of the Law is bitter... but when we cast in it the tree of wisdom of Christ, that reveals to us how to apprehend the statutes of circumcision, of the Sabbath, and those of the leprous, and how to discern between the clean and the unclean. Then

the waters of 'Marah' would be made sweet. The literality of the Law turns into the sweetness of spiritual meaning, and then the people of God could drink]. He also says: [If somebody wants to drink out of the literality of the Law, away of the tree of life, away of the secrets of the cross, of the faith in Christ, and the spiritual comprehension, he would taste bitterness. The apostle Paul realized this fact, and said: "The letter kills"]. And he also says: [When the cross entered into the commandments, it made them sweet. Following them spiritually, these same stiff commandments turned into ones for life].

Many fathers see in the tree a symbol of the cross, which works in the water of Baptism, to transform our life from bitterness to sweetness. And instead of carrying the works of the old man, we would enjoy the new nature we acquired in Christ Jesus.

St. Ambrose says: [The water of Marah has been very bitter, but then, when Moses cast the tree into it, it was made sweet. For the water without preaching the cross of the Lord, is useless for salvation. But once it is dedicated by the secret of the cross of salvation, it becomes suitable to be used in the spiritual font, and the chalice of salvation. As Moses cast the tree into the water of Marah, in the same way the priest utters, over the font of Baptism the testimony of the cross of the Lord, to turn the water sweet, because of the work of grace].

St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa, sees in that tree "the secret of resurrection", through the cross of the Lord, where the virtuous life, with all its strife and bitterness, would turn into a sweet and easy life, saying: [For man, who leaves behind the (Egyptian) pleasures, that he used to enjoy before crossing the sea, life, that seemed to him, without these pleasures, difficult and unacceptable, once the tree - the cross - is cast into it, meaning once he accepts the secret of resurrection that begins by it, the virtuous life would then turn sweet, through the hope in the coming things, and would be even sweeter than what the senses feel, out of lusts].

If Marah carries a reference to the Law, becoming spiritual by the cross, and to Baptism, with what it embraces of the work of the cross and the power of resurrection, the people have to cross over from Marah to Elim (Ex. 15: 27); from the Law to the New Testament in which they found twelve wells of water and seventy palm trees, as a reference to the twelve apostles, and the seventy disciples.

Concerning this, the scholar Origen says: [God made it on purpose, not to bring the people to Elim from the beginning, to where there are twelve wells with no bitterness whatsoever, and where there is a place of comfort under the palm trees ...

When the bitterness of the Law turns sweet by the tree of life (Proverbs 3: 18), we shall then comprehend the Law spiritually, and the crossover from the Old Testament to the New Testament will be completed. By this we shall reach the twelve wells of water and the seventy palm trees.

It is not enough for the people of God to drink from the water of Marah, after it became sweet by the tree of life, and after it lost the bitterness of the letter by the sublimity of the cross. As the Old Testament alone is not enough for drinking, we have to come to the New Testament, to drink from it without difficulty.

St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa, says: [The secret of the tree, through which the water of virtue becomes joyful for the thirsty, would lead us to the twelve wells of water, and to the seventy palm trees, namely to the teachings of the gospel].

=====

## CHAPTER 16

### THE TEMPTATION OF FOOD

1- In the wilderness of Sin	1
2- Murmur of the people	2 - 3
3-The Manna and the quails	4 - 21
4- The Law of the holy Sabbath	22 - 31
5- The pot of Manna	32 - 36

+++++

#### **1- In the wilderness of Sin:**

In the Book of Exodus, it is said, “*And they journeyed from Elim, and all the congregation of the children of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin*” (Ex. 16: 1). But in the Book of Numbers, it is said in more detail, “*They moved from Elim and camped by the Red Sea. They moved from the Red Sea and camped in the wilderness of Sin*” (Numbers 33: 10, 11).

The scholar Origen believes that Elim means rams, although some others believe that it means trees. According to him, rams represent the leaders of the flock, namely the twelve apostles (wells of water) and the seventy disciples (palm trees), who, by the Lord Jesus Christ,

led the people to the coast of the Red Sea (Numbers 33: 10), specifically on its more secure side. They crossed it once, and in it, Pharaoh and his army perished. Now, they can look at the sea with no fear of its waves or storms.

The holy congregation journeyed from the Red Sea and camped in the wilderness of Sin, where God rained on them bread from heaven for the first time. Probably in its place now, is 'Debbat- El-Ramleh'. The scholar Origen believes that 'Sin' means either bush or temptation. As the first appearance of God to Moses had been in the burning bush, to proclaim to him the secret of divine incarnation; in 'Sin', God gave His people, for the first time, the manna - a reference to the Lord Christ, who descended from heaven, for the fulfillment of the human soul. As for its other meaning as temptation, it is to remind us that where there are proclamations, we should have the spirit of discernment (1 Corinthians 2), lest the devil will deceive us with his temptations, in which he sometimes appear as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11), to deceive, if possible, even the elect.

## **2-Murmur of the people:**

Only after one month since their departure from the land of bondage, they murmured against God, instead of praising Him; saying to Moses and Aaron:

*“Oh, that we have died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and when we ate bread to the full! For you have brought us out into the wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger”* (Ex. 16: 3).

The Book says: *“They got back by their hearts to Egypt”*. Although they tasted the bitterness of servitude and oppression, they experienced an advance payment of the land of promise, and a life of triumph and conquest. Yet they often yearned for the smell of the pots of meat, for the lust of the eye, of the flesh, and of the haughtiness of living. Before the pleasure of such lowly sins, man forgets God's blessings and graces, and desires humiliation more than freedom.

Many fathers warned us against the 'devil of greed', lest our bellies become our gods, and as St. John Chrysostom says: [When the Jews remembered the pots of meat, the great authority of the belly was demonstrated]. And when Father Oghris spoke about the wars of the devil through eight wicked thoughts, he counted the 'greed in eating', as the first among them. St. John Climacus calls the stomach 'the tyrant master', and he says, [Be master of your stomach before it turns into your maste. Whoever cares for his greed, while hoping to conquer the spirit of fornication, is like someone trying to quench fire with oil]. And according to Father John of Cronstadt, he said, [Be completely sure that the enemy attacks the heart through the fullness of the belly].

From another point of view, murmur was a part of the nature of those people. When it reigns over their hearts, they tend to justify it by some reason or another. That is why St. John Chrysostom says that they were like little children, who sought any excuse to avoid going to school, saying: [The wilderness to them has been like a school; and like kids, who stayed long in school, they wanted to stop attending it. Thus they yearned to go back to Egypt, saying: “We are lost! We are dead!”].

It was not hunger that motivated their murmur, as much as it was their nature. Even after they were granted that daily fresh food, without any labor or effort on their part, they did not stop murmuring, but wept again, and said,

*“Who will give us meat to eat? We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now our whole being is dried up ; there is nothing at all except this Manna before our eyes”* (Numbers 11: 4 - 6)

And as St. Jerome says: [They despised the food of angels, and yearned for the meat of Egypt. Moses fasted forty days and forty nights on the Mount of Sinai, revealing that man does not subsist on bread alone but on every word of God. God says that, when the people got fulfilled, they made idols for themselves. Moses received the Law, written by the finger of God, on an empty stomach, while the people ate, drank, then began to dance around the golden calf, referring the Egyptian calf to the glory of God. Indeed, the labor of many days had been wasted, through the fulfillment of one hour].

### **3- The Manna and the quails:**

The people murmured against Moses, who having no storehouses to fulfill them, yet, *“esteeming the reproach of Christ, greater riches than the treasures in Egypt”* (Hebrew 11: 26), God did not leave him nor his people in need of anything. And as St. Ambrose says: [Moses counted the treasures of Egypt as loss for himself, revealing in his life the reproach of the crucifixion of the Lord. When he used to have plenty of money (in the palace of Pharaoh), he was not rich. And when he was in need of food, he did not become poor. When he felt less happy, being in need of bread to feed his people, he was presented with Manna from heaven, that is the food of angels, a sign of blessing, as well as a flood of meat that rained on him for the fulfillment of his people].

That Manna refers to the Lord Christ, who offered his holy body as food for the soul, saying: *“Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world ... Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world”* (John 6: 32, 33; 49 - 51).

The following is a comparison between the old and the new manna:

a- After crossing over the Red Sea, the people had to eat new food, other than that which they used to eat in the land of bondage. And us also, as we entered into a new covenant, the Lord presented us with true spiritual food, capable of fulfilling the soul, and of granting it eternal life.

It is amazing that the manna started to come down on the people on a Sunday, this is obvious from the words of God to Moses:

*“And it shall be on the sixth day that they shall prepare what they bring in, and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily” (Ex. 16: 5).*

The day of preparation for the Sabbath (Friday), was the sixth day of the manna coming down, which means that it started coming down on a Sunday. By the resurrection of the Lord Christ from the dead on the dawn of Sunday, He offered to us His body risen from the dead, as a secret to the resurrection of our souls and bodies. Moreover, Sunday became the weekly feast of the Church, in which we enjoy the heavenly manna.

b- The manna came down from heaven (Ex. 16: 4), and *“every man gathered according to each one’s need”* (Ex. 16: 18), and all of them were fulfilled. The Lord Christ, the Word of God, came down from heaven, and offered Himself, a Sacrament for the fulfillment to all. He offered Himself as milk to the babes, and solid rich food to the elders, to leave no soul hungry or in need.

c- For those who took the manna without faith, against the commandment, and left part of it until morning, it resulted in the coming of worms, and of a bitter smell. In the same way, whosoever eats from the flesh of the Lord without faith or worthiness, will carry in it the sting of death, instead of the life and sweetness that the believers taste, when they enjoy it.

The Word of God is like manna; a secret of life for the repentant believers, and a secret of corruption for the unbelieving (Egyptians).

Concerning this the scholar Origen says, [In the manna, now, there is the sweetness of honey for the believers, and worms for the unbelievers. The Word of God (the Lord Christ), discerns the thoughts, pierces the conscious of sinners with sharp goads, and enflames the hearts of those who open them to him, to get them to say, *“Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and expounded to us in all the scriptures?”* (Luke 24: 32; 27). On the other hand He is fire to consume the thorns on the bad soil.

Whoever gathers from it, to keep without eating it, namely, does contrary to the commandment and without faith, would be like someone who studies the Holy Book, and recognizes the Christian faith on a theoretical basis, and also to have a dead faith, according to the apostle St. James (James 2: 14, 15, 26). Concerning this the scholar Origen says: [If the unbeliever takes the word of God and did not eat it (did not live according to it), but hid it, worms would breed in it].

d- The prophet Moses says:

*“The Lord shall give you meat to eat in the evening, and in the morning bread to the full”* (Ex. 16: 8)

What is that evening but the end of days or the fulfillment of time, in which the Word of God took a body, offered Himself to us to eat and to be fulfilled? By His coming at the fulfillment of time, amid the darkness of the evening, He shone His light on us, turned our evening into daylight, and we entered a new morning, offering us new bread, by which the believing humanity was fulfilled.

Once more he says:

*“At evening you shall know that the Lord has brought you out of the land of Egypt; and in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord”* (Ex. 16: 6, 7)

What is that evening but those moments in which the Lord Christ delivered His Soul to the hands of the Father, when the darkness covered the face of the earth; when He delivered us from the servitude of the devil, and set free those who were in Hades?! And what is that morning, in which we saw the glory of the Lord, at the dawn of Sunday, in which He rose from the dead, and granted us the power and joy of His Resurrection?!

- e- The people did not know what was that manna (Ex. 16: 15), and the people could not recognize the true nature of the Lord Christ (1 Corinthians 2: 8).
- f- The manna came down over the tents, which refer to our bodies; and the Lord Christ came to our homes, and into our bodies. He became as one of us.
- g- The manna came down after the murmur of the people; and the Lord Christ came after enmity prevailed between us and God. And according to the apostle Paul, *“When we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son”* (Romans 5: 10). By the coming down of the manna, God proclaimed His love and compassion; and the coming of the Lord Christ to us, is a sign of God’s care and eternal love.
- h- The manna was described as *“fine as frost on the ground”* (Ex. 16: 14); and the Lord’s robe, as He transfigured on the mount, *“became white and glistening”* (Luke 9: 29).
- i- The manna *“tasted like wafers made with honey”* (Ex. 16: 31); As for the Lord Christ, *“His mouth is most sweet, Yes, He is altogether lovely”* (Songs 5: 16).
- j- The people gathered the manna every morning; and our fellowship with our Lord Jesus Christ is renewable every day, and our encounter with Him is very early. For *“those who seek Me diligently (early) will find me”* (Proverb 8: 17).
- k- The manna, after it was gathered, was ground, and cooked, to be fit for eating; and the Lord Christ came incarnated, crucified, suffered, and died, and became bread and a secret of life to those who eat Him.
- l- When the people despised the manna, God struck them with a great plague (Number 11: 33); and whoever unworthily eats from the flesh of the Lord, will face judgment (1 Corinthians 11).

Finally, when we speak of the manna, we find in it a perfect symbol of fulfillment and satisfaction, yet without excess luxury or greed. St. John Chrysostom says: [We have only one stomach to fill. But you, who intend to feed it with excess luxury, are giving it what it can do without. As those who gathered more than they should have of the manna, gathered only worms and stench; those who live a life of luxury, and greed, are gathering for themselves corruption and not delicious food].

### **3- The Law of the holy Sabbath:**

Whoever gathers for himself extra manna for the next day, gathered worms and stench, and acquired the wrath of God and the displeasure of Moses. Yet, when the sixth day came, all were committed to gather twice as much, as a reference to the preparation for the day of rest - the great Sabbath. And as St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa, says: [That day of preparation, refers to the present life, in which we prepare ourselves for the coming one].

What should we prepare for the coming life? The apostle says: "*For he who sows to his flesh, will of the flesh reap corruption; but he who sows to the Spirit, will of the Spirit reap everlasting life*" (Galatians 6: 8). And the scholar Origen says: [It is fitting for us, on the sixth day, to gather and store what would be enough for the next day. If you gather here good deeds, if you gather here treasures of righteousness, of mercy, and of piety, these would be your food in the age to come. Don't you hear in the gospel, that he, who earned ten minas, was given authority over ten cities, and he, who earned four minas, was given authority over four cities (Luke 19). Also expressed by the apostle is that "*whatever a man sows, that he will also reap*" (Galatians 6: 7)]. The scholar Origen also says: [Whatever you collect for the Sabbath will not be corrupted by worms, or stench, but will remain intact. Yet if you are gathering for the present life, for love of the world, what you gather will be corrupted by worms and will stink].

### **5- The pot of manna:**

Moses commanded Aaron to take a pot and put an omer of manna in it, and lay it up before the Lord, to be put later on in the tabernacle. That remained a memorial to the work of God with them, and carries a symbolic testimonial to the coming of the Lord Christ, the true Manna, coming down from heaven. The Church sees in the pot, a symbol to the Virgin St. Mary, who carried the Lord Christ in her womb.

=====

## CHAPTER 17

### THE TEMPTATION OF WATER TO DRINK

1- In Rephidim	1
2- The murmur of the people	2 - 4
3- Bringing out water from the rock	5 - 7
4- War with Amalek	8 - 16

+++++

#### **1- In Rephidim:**

*“Then the congregation of the children of Israel set out on their journey from the wilderness of Sin, according to the commandment of the Lord, and camped in Rephidim; but there was no water for the people to drink” (Ex. 17: 1)*

The Book of Numbers says in more details (Numbers 33: 12 - 15) that the people of Israel journeyed from the wilderness of Sin and camped in Dophkah, departed from Dophkah and camped at Alush, and from there to Rephidim.. The Book of Exodus intended to speak directly of Rephidim after the wilderness of Sin, in order to connect between the temptation of drinking (the rock) and that of food (the Manna and the quail). The Book of Numbers, on the other hand, spoke of that in more detail. The scholar Origen believes that these locations have a special meaning that relates to the journey of the believer in his setting forth from servitude to the freedom of glory of God’s children. The word ‘Dophkah’, according to him, means good health, as though the soul that experiences God’s proclamations, with wisdom and discernment, and gets purified

through the temptation 'Sin', would cross over to a condition of peace or good health. The word 'Alush', according to him, means works. That is why he says: [Works come after good health, because as the soul enjoys good health as a gift from God, it would carry out works, readily and joyfully, then to be told: "*When you eat the labor of your hands, you shall be happy, and it shall be well with you*" (Psalm 28: 2)]. After works, you would set forth to 'Rephidim', which, according to him, means sound discernment, or sound decision; when the soul would be spiritual and "*judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one*" (1 Corinthians 2: 15).

The scholar Origen believes that the congregation of the children of Israel set out on their journey according to four stages in good order: from the wilderness of 'Sin', to Rephidim, from the temptation, to reach the sound discernment and decision. So he says, [Whoever gets out of temptation with a good ordinance, would appear sound, on the day of judgment, in good shape, not hurt by the wounds of temptation, or according to the Book of Revelation, "*To him who overcomes, I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God*" (Revelation 2: 7)].

## **2- The murmur of the people:**

In Rephidim the people contended with Moses, and said:

*"Why is it you have brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst? So Moses cried out to the Lord, saying: 'What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me!'"* (Ex. 17: 3, 4)

In the wilderness, you may get murmuring thoughts, when you experience affliction. But if you have Moses' heart and tongue, and cry out to the Lord, He will bring out water from the rock!

Moses cried out, believing that divine grace is far above natural possibilities. God is capable, by one way or another, of quenching the thirst of the people. Moses' life, with all what it contained of supernatural divine works, represented the work of grace in the Church. And as St. Ambrose says: [Grace has a stronger power than nature: Moses strikes the sea with his rod, and it divides, touches the rock, and water comes out, and cast a tree in bitter water, and it becomes sweet ... that is the exalted, and supernatural work of the Holy Spirit in the Church!]

## **3- Bringing out water from the rock:**

(1) The rock refers to the Lord Christ, according to the words of the apostle: "*All ate of the same spiritual food, and all drank of the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ*" (1 Corinthians 10: 3, 4). As to the water coming out of that Rock, it is the Holy Spirit, presented to us by the Lord, as the secret of our comfort, sanctification, and fellowship with the Father in His Son.

The Rocks Symbolizes our Lord in many ways:

- a- The people enjoyed the water of the rock, after crossing the Red Sea and the perishing of Pharaoh and his army, after drinking of the water of Marah and the wells of Elim, and

enjoyment of its palm trees. Thus no one will get to know the secret of Christ, and quench his thirst by the springs of the Holy Spirit, except after he crosses over the water of Baptism, denies Satan and all his evil works. He then enjoys the Law, that became sweet through the cross, not through its killing letters, but its Spirit, and believes in the works of the apostles (the twelve wells of water) and the disciples (the seventy palm trees).

And as St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa, says, “Whoever forsakes the love of the world (symbolically the Egyptians, drowned in the sea), tastes the sweetness through the tree, enjoys the apostolic wells, and the shade of the palm trees, would be able to receive God, and as the Rock here, according to the apostle, is Christ, which is, for unbelievers, hard and solid. But for him, who uses the rod of faith, it would be a spring to quench his thirst, having said, “*We will come to him and make our home with him*” (John 14: 23)].

St. Ambrose says: [Grace has a stronger power than nature: Moses strikes the sea with his rod, and it divides; touches the rock, and water comes out; and cast a tree in bitter water, and it becomes sweet...that is the exalted, and supernatural work of the Holy Spirit in the Church!]

- b- The Rock quenched the thirst of all; and that was a symbol of the fountains of the New Testament, brought forth by the Lord Christ, Who called the thirsty for righteousness to come forward to drink out of the living water (John 7: 37 - 40). It is amazing how the Psalmist saw in the rock a living symbol, saying: “*With honey from the rock, I would have satisfied you*” (Psalm 81: 16). On this, St. Augustine comments, saying: [In the wilderness, He brought out for them water and not honey. Honey refers to wisdom that occupies the first place as far as the sweetness of food for the heart is concerned! When people eat of that honey, they would cry out, saying: ‘It is so sweet that there is nothing better to think of or to talk about!’].
- c- As the people could not have quenched their thirst from that rock, unless it is struck by the rod; likewise, we would have not enjoyed the limitless wells of God’s love, and the Holy Spirit in us, unless the Lord Christ is struck, to bear on the cross, through the divine justice, the price of our sins. And as the rock was publicly struck once, so also the Lord Christ was visibly lifted up on the cross, and offered up Himself, once, for all (Hebrew 7: 27), and from Him a flow of blood and water came out (John 19: 34), as atonement and purification for all who believe in Him.
- d- God said to Moses, “*Go on before the people, and take with you some of the elders of Israel. Also take in your hand your rod, with which you struck the river, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock in Horeb...*” (Ex. 17: 5, 6) The invitation of the elders of Israel to accompany Moses as he strikes the rock to bring out the water, carries a symbol that, not only the Law (Moses) testifies to the cross, but the Patriarch Fathers and all the prophets have partaken this testimony with the Law for the work of redemption through the cross.

(2) The Psalmist says: “*He split the rocks in the wilderness, and gave them drink in abundance like the depths*” (Psalm 78: 15). Here he does not say the rock, but he says the rocks, probably referring to another symbol, that from the believers, whose hearts were before hard and dry as rocks, and then wells of living water came out, through the cross, not to quench their own thirst, but to flood on all others.

On the last day, that great day of the feast, as the high priest stood to pour water before the people, to proclaim the work of God in their life, Jesus stood and cried out, “*If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water*” (John 7: 37, 38).

The people tempted the Lord for water to drink. This is the question: is the Lord with us? Have we lost faith in Him? This is the first question we will ask ourselves, to examine which side we will lie on. Moses too lost faith, for he feared that the people would stone him. So Moses called the place “Temptation and Reviling” because of the reviling of the children of Israel. We will continue this story in the prophesies in the third hour. This is related to the gospel reading, where they take counsel against the Lord, this time the Savior.

St. Jerome has said, “When Moses was being stoned by the people he made intercession for them. Even more so he wished to be blotted out of God’s book sooner than that the flock committed to him should perish. He sought to imitate the Shepherd who would, he knew, carry on His shoulders even the wandering sheep.”<sup>1</sup>

“The people of the fathers thirsted, Moses touched the rock, and water flowed out of the rock. Did not grace work a result contrary to nature, so that the rock poured forth water, which by nature it did not contain?”

-St. Ambrose of Milan<sup>2</sup>

“It does not surpass faith that a virgin gave birth, when we read that even a rock poured out water and that the waves of the sea were made solid in the form of a wall.”

-St. Ambrose of Milan<sup>3</sup>

#### **4- War with Amalek:**

That was the first time for the children of Israel to enter into a war with another people. Before that, when Pharaoh and his army came to attack Israel, the divine command was, “*Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will accomplish for you today...the Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace*” (Ex. 14: 13-14).

But now, having enjoyed the crossing over of the Red Sea, and having received all fulfillments from the Lord: the manna, the quails, and the water from the rock, the people were committed to fight, not by their own human power, but through the work of God in them. That war has been a symbol of the spiritual war between the Kingdom of God, and that of the devil, where the conquest will be for the children of God through the cross. In this war, we notice the following:

a- Moses was expected, in that first war, to cry out to God, and to kneel or to lay flat on his face, but we see him here, stretching his hands as a cross. This is a symbol of the conquest of the cross.

On this matter, the scholar Tertullian says when answering the Jews, [I am amazed, how Moses, while Joshua was fighting Amalek, was sitting with stretched hands. Although in

<sup>1</sup> St. Jerome, Letter 82.3, NPNF v. 2, s. 6, pp. 171-172.

<sup>2</sup> St. Ambrose, On the Mysteries 9-51, NPNF, s. 2, v. 10, p. 324.

<sup>3</sup> St. Ambrose, Letter 15, Extra Coll. 42.7, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, Vienna, 1866, cited in ACCS, Old Testament, III, p. 90.

those critical moments, he should have been praying with his knees bent, his hands knocking on his chest, and his face flat on the ground ...but, for Joshua, it was more important to carry the symbol of the cross; to conquer with the cross].

Father Victorinus says, [Seeing the ferocity of the enemy, Moses raised his hands, symbolically connecting himself to the cross].

St. Cyprian, the martyr also says, [Joshua conquered Amalek with that sign of the cross through Moses].

And in a comment by the scholar Origen on this issue, he says: [When Christ stretched His hands on the cross, He embraced the whole world].

b- Moses, on the top of the hill, symbolized the Lord Christ who was crucified on the Mount of Calvary, while Joshua, with his men of war, and fighting against Amalek, symbolized the persistent strife of the Church against sin. It is as though the Church, with Christ, is partaking of His crucifixion, through its union with Him and its daily strife; to say with the apostle, *“I have been crucified with Christ; It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me ...by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world”* (Galatians 2: 20; 6: 14).

c- ‘Hur’ was not as great as Moses, yet, it would have been impossible for Moses to remain stretching his hands, without the help of Aaron and Hur. By this, every believer should realize his status within the divine work, and should not underestimate his possibilities, even if they appear worthless.

d- The stretching of Moses’ hands also refers to life of perseverance until the end. And as said by the scholar Origen, [When Moses held up his hands, Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hands, to give them some rest, Amalek prevailed. Therefore, let us hold up our hands with the strength of the cross of Christ; and let us, everywhere raise pure hands in prayers, *“without wrath or a doubting”*, in order to be worthy of God’s help. That is what the apostle James persuades us to do, when he says: *“Resist the devil, and he will flee from you”* (James 4: 7). Therefore, let us start with full faith, then the devil will not only flee away from us, but he will be crushed under our feet; as was Pharaoh, when he drowned in the sea, and was swallowed by the depths of the abyss.].

And in another homily, he speaks in more detail, of holding up the hands to prevail over Amalek, saying, [Holding up the hands, is a holding up of all works to God, to be neither lowly nor earthly, but working for the glory of God and heaven. He holds up his hands, who *“lays up for himself treasures in heaven...for where your treasure is, there your heart will be”* (Matthew 6: 20, 21); and there will also be your eyes and hands!

He holds up his hands, as David the prophet said, *“I lift up my hands as the evening sacrifice”* (Psalm 141: 2). But the apostle advises us to *“lift up holy hands, without wrath and doubting”* (1 Timothy 2: 8).

If the people keep the Law (the commandments), Moses holds up his hands, and they would prevail, but if they do not keep it, Amalek would prevail; for we wrestle *“against principalities, against powers, against rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places”* (Ephesians 6: 12).

If you want to prevail, hold up your hands, lift up your works, and do not waste your days on earth. Hold up your hands toward God, and keep the apostle's advice, "*Pray without ceasing*" (1 Thessalonians 5:17); so as the scripture that says: "*This company will lick up all that is around us, as an ox licks up the grass of the field*" (Numbers 22: 4). This means that the people of God (the company), uses their tongue, (licks up) and voice more than their hands and weapons. By pouring its prayers to God, they prevail on their enemy. This is the way to have victory in the battle over the enemy (the sin)].

- e- Having prevailed over the enemy, Moses went up the mountain, to receive the Law from God, after making great preparations among the people and priests. As though the believer, after every conquest over Amalek, fighting against him, the sin, is called by God to ascend the mountain of the knowledge of God, to receive from Him a deeper understanding, and knowledge of the secrets of the divine commandment. Our knowledge should not be based merely on reading and research in books and sermons, but more on a life of strife against sin by the cross.
- f- Moses' fight against Amalek was not in a material way, but was more through sanctifying his life to God, and carrying the symbol of the cross, the secret of the people's conquest and triumph. St. Ambrose comments on this, [When Moses was silent, he was crying out; and when he fought, he did that sitting comfortably, and prevailed over his enemies without approaching them. Although he was sitting comfortably, and Aaron and Hur were supporting his hands, he was laboring more than all others, as his hands lifted up, were defeating the enemy; and without them, those who did the actual fighting could not have prevailed. Thus, Moses spoke up when he was silent, and fought while sitting comfortably! Did he have greater works, than what he did, during his 40 days retreat on the Mountain, receiving the Law (Ex. 24: 17)? In his solitude, he encountered with Him, who was not far from him, and was talking to Him].

=====

## CHAPTER 18

### MOSES' ENCOUNTER WITH JETHRO

1- Jethro encounters with the prophet Moses	1 - 7
2- A talk about God	8 - 12
3- Jethro's counsel	13 - 27

+++++

#### **1- Jethro encounters with the prophet Moses:**

*“And Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses’ father-in-law, heard of all that God had done for Moses and for Israel His people...” (Ex. 18: 1)*

He probably heard from Zipporah, his daughter, who accompanied Moses all the way, and crossed the Red Sea with him. And when she came close to where her father dwelt, she went to preach to him the marvelous works of God, and to brought the pagan priest to hear and see the work of God, and to sacrifice a burnt offering to God (Ex. 18: 12).

If Jethro came with his heart to glorify God for His work of salvation, Moses also, went out to meet his father-in- law with humility, *“bowed down and kissed him”* (Ex. 18: 7), even though he was one of the greatest among the prophets whom God granted all those wonders. Prophecy did not teach him to feel haughtiness over others, but humility; and by that, he most probably gained him to recognize the works of God.

#### **2- A talk about God:**

The encounter of Moses’ father-in-law was from the Lord. It was all about glorifying His name, and it was characterized by spiritual joy. The Scripture says:

*“Then Jethro rejoiced for all the good which the Lord had done for Israel...and Jethro said, ‘Blessed be the Lord, who has delivered you...now I know that the Lord is greater than all the gods’...then Jethro...took a burnt offering and sacrificed to God” (Ex. 18: 9 - 12)*

How wonderful are the encounters that take place in the circle of God and His amazing works of salvation. As they fill the heart with joy, let the tongue utter praise, and gain even the unbelievers to faith.

It did not stop at that, but, as the Holy Book tells us:

*“Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses’ father-in-law before God”*  
(Ex. 18: 12)

As though, recognizing God as his Friend, Jethro, even in his eating and drinking, was feeling His presence. The scholar Origen comments on that, saying: [All what the Saints do, they do before God, but the sinner escapes from His face. Adam, after his fall, He and his wife, *“hid themselves from the presence of the Lord”* (Genesis 3: 8). Cain, as he carried the curse of God, for killing his brother Abel, *“went out from the presence of the Lord”* (Genesis 4: 16). So, he who is not worthy of God’s face, gets away from His presence]. It is not only as far as good deeds are concerned, but even when the Saints do something wrong, they do that *“before the Lord,”* and that is why they repent quickly. And as the scholar Origen says: [Those who have abundant knowledge of God, and are saturated with His divine teachings; even if they err, they do that in the presence of God and before Him; as says the prophet: *“I have done this evil in your sight”* (Psalm 51: 4). The privilege of him, who errs before God, is that he soon repents; while he, who escapes from His presence, can not repent, nor purifies himself of his transgressions].

### **3- Jethro’s counsel:**

- (1) Seeing that Moses was taking alone all the responsibility upon him, deciding on every minor and major matter from morning to evening, Jethro, his father-in-law, gave him the following advise,

*“You shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness, and place such over them to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens; Let them judge people at all times. Then it will be that every great matter they shall bring to you’. So Moses heeded the voice of his father-in-law, and did all that he had said”* (Ex. 21 - 24)

The fathers see in Moses’ attitude, a real heroism, as far as humility is concerned. St. John Chrysostom says, [God says of Moses, *“The man Moses was very humble more than all men who were on the face of the earth”* (Numbers 12: 3). He, who, despite being a leader of such a great people...; who caused Pharaoh with all his army to drown in the Red Sea...; on whose hand all those miracles and signs were made in Egypt as well as in the wilderness; and who received such a great Law...; despite all that, he felt that he was only a mortal man. As a son-in-law, he was more humble than his father-in-law. He could have said to him: ‘What is this?! After all what I did, are you in a position to give me counsel?! But instead, he cordially received his counsel.

Out of his sound and high spirit, as a fruit of humility, he despised the royal court (Hebrew 11: 24, 26). Kings of old Egypt were counted as gods, and used to enjoy incredible and limitless wealth. Yet Moses cast all that away, to get attached to his people, laden with labor and servitude; and living in mud and dirt, those whom his own slaves would be disgusted even to touch. He hastened to them, preferring them to their masters!

St. John Chrysostom also says: [Moses left that incident (his amiable acceptance of the counsel of his father-in-law), to the world, as though engraved on a high column, feeling that it would be of great benefit to others. If Moses found it fit to learn from his father-in-law, how should it be, in the Church?! Every one of us should learn from the others].

The scholar Origen sees in that incident, a symbol of how the Church should receive the knowledge and philosophies of the world. It should not antagonize them, but should make use of them, saying: [When I think of Moses, filled with God, with whom he used to talk face to face; when I see how he responded to the counsel of Jethro, the pagan priest of Midian, and his father-in-law, I get impressed and astonished. The Book says, "*Moses heeded the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said*" (Ex. 18: 24). He did not look at him, who was speaking to him, but listened to his words. So should we, if we find ourselves in such circumstances, we should not reject the wisdom of unbelievers, for the sake of its source; with the assumption that we, who received God's Law, have the right to swell with haughtiness, and to despise the counsel of the worldly wise.

Moses, who has been exceedingly humble, more than all men (Numbers 12: 3), accepted the counsel of somebody less than him, giving an example of humility to the rulers of his people, and a portrait of the anticipated secret].

- (2) If we refer to the Book of Numbers, we see Moses addressing the Lord, saying: "*Why have you afflicted your servant? And why have I not found favor in your sight, that you have laid the burden of all these people on me? Did I conceive all these people? Did I beget them...?*" (Numbers 11: 11, 12).

Moses should have known that God is the true Shepherd, who takes care of his flock. So, when God instructed him to gather to him seventy men of the elders of the people, He said to him: "*I will come down and talk with you there; I will take of the spirit that is upon you, and will put the same upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, that you may not bear it yourself alone*" (Numbers 11: 7). It is as though, God who give Moses, drew from him to give his helpers.

We do not underestimate making use of the spiritual energies in the Church; yet, we should not do that with a spirit of reluctance, as though we are the only ones who should bear the burden of all the people in the church. We are actually bearing the blessing of sharing it with the Lord Christ, the High Priest, and the hidden Bishop of our souls, the Bearer of the weaknesses of all.

=====

## **THIRD SECTION**

### **IN SINAI**

(CHAPTERS 19: 3 to 40)

In this section, concerning the delivery of the divine commandment (the Law), and the proclamation of worship to God, it presents to us:

1- Preparations for the Law	Chapters: 19, 20
2- Civil and criminal Laws	21 - 23
3- Setting a covenant between God and man	24
4- The Ark of Covenant and the worship	25 - 34
5- The tabernacle, its contents, and anointment	35 - 40

+++++

## CHAPTER 19

### PREPARATIONS FOR THE LAW

1- Need for the Law	
2- The Law of Sinai	1, 2
3- The goal of the Law	3 - 6
4- Preparations for the Law	7 - 15
5- Speaking to God	16 - 19
6- Warning to the people and priests	20 - 25

+++++

#### **1- Need for the Law:**

It was not possible for those who exit the land of bondage, who walk along the way of the wilderness, to reach the land of promise, and to settle down in Jerusalem, without receiving the divine commandment and Law. That is why the Psalmist in his land of sojourn, cries out saying, *“I am stranger in the earth; Do not hide your commandments from me”* (Psalm 119: 19).

The people received the Mosaic Law, presented to them in a way that suited their spiritual childhood. Yet, at the same time, they carried in its depths the secrets of the “Divine Word”. For what is the Law, but the Word of God, Who is alone, the Leader, the Savior, and the fulfiller of the soul; who leads it to the bosom of the Father, and brings it into His divine glories? That is why St. Mark, the hermit says, [The commandment carries in it the Lord Christ. Whoever enters into its depths, and lives it with spirit, would encounter the divine Word Himself]. And the scholar Origen says, [In the depths of the commandment, the soul discovers its heavenly Groom, and enters with Him into His secret place]

The Psalmist, in Psalm 119 (118), speaks of the divine Law, as his support in his sojourn; and sees in it:

- a- A secret of his joy amid the sufferings of the wilderness: *“I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your word”* (v. 16), *“And I will delight myself in Your commandments which I love”* (v. 47), and *“How sweet are Your words to my taste; sweeter than honey in my mouth”* (v. 103).
  
- b- A secret of his praise and rejoice: *“Your statutes have been my songs, in the house of my pilgrimage”* (v. 54).

c- A secret of his inner wealth: *“The Law of Your mouth is better to me, than thousands of shekels of gold and silver”* (v. 72).

d- A benefit for the soul, and a guide amid the afflictions of enemies: *“Your word, I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You”* (v. 11); *“The cords of the wicked have bound me, but I have not forgotten Your Law”* (v. 61); *“Unless Your Law had been my delight, I would then have perished in my affliction”* (v. 92).

e- A secret of his life: *“My soul clings to the dust; revive me according to Your word”* (v. 25).

f- A secret of enlightenment: *“Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path”* (v. 105); *“Make Your face shine upon Your servant, and teach me Your statutes”* (v. 135).

g- And finally, the commandment, in its Spirit and depths, present to us the person of the Savior, the Groom of the soul, and its fulfiller. So he says, *“I have seen the consummation of all perfection, but Your commandment is exceedingly broad”* (v. 96).

## **2- The Law of Sinai:**

*“In the third month after the children of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on the same day they came to the wilderness of Sinai”* (Ex. 19: 1, 2)

The figure 3, as we said before, refers to the resurrection of the Lord Christ, on the third day. It is as though God wants us to have an encounter with Him through the commandment, in the glory of resurrection, so as not to look at it as orders, statutes, and laws, but as a secret of resurrection in the divine glories. Through resurrection, the commandment, with all its cross and burdens, becomes sweet and enjoyable. Its difficult way would turn into an easy yoke, a light burden, and a fellowship in the passions of Christ, to enjoy His glories.

The choice of the location (the Mount of Sinai), was not without meaning. According to the scholar Origen, ‘Sinai’, like the wilderness of ‘Sin’, means bush or temptation, where man is committed to have the spirit of sound discernment, in order not to fall into temptation, through visions of a false bush. According to him, ‘Sinai’ means that the soul started to acquire the ‘sound judgment’, through receiving the divine commandment or Law, to become capable of enjoying the divine secrets and the heavenly visions.

## **2- The goal of the Law:**

Before speaking of the goal of the Law, God proclaimed His practical love for His people, saying:

*“I bore you on eagle’s wings”* (Ex. 19: 4)

As though He wanted to clarify that mutual love, is the basis of that Law. He loved us, and bore us by the Holy Spirit (eagle's wings), and brought us to Himself, namely, to His divine bosoms, in order to experience His love, and to recognize His fatherhood. The goal of the Law is:

*“You shall be a special treasure to me above all people; For all the earth is Mine. And you shall to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation”* (Ex. 19: 5, 6)

Although He does not need all the earth, yet He desires us to be His own, with the privilege of sonship; a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation, dedicated to Him, and bearing His holy nature.

#### **4- Preparations for the Law:**

(1) *“So Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before them all these words which the Lord commanded him. Then all the people answered together and said, ‘All that the Lord had spoken we will do’”* (Ex. 19: 7, 8).

Unfortunately, they received God's covenant with them, only by words, but rejected it in practice; the Law thus became for them of no avail. They said, *“All that the Lord had spoken we will do”*, but they broke the commandment, and did not respect the covenant; until the Savior came, Who, alone, is able to consummate the will of God and His commandment in perfection. And in Him, we would also be perfect, and keepers of the Law.

(2) Then the Lord said to Moses:

*“Go to the people and sanctify them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes. And let them be ready for the third day. For on the third day, the Lord will come down upon Mount of Sinai in the sight of all the people”* (Ex. 19: 10, 11).

As it was on the (third month) of their departure from the land of Egypt, they had to be ready for God's coming down in their sight, on the third day. Thus, this Book, bore several confirmations of our receiving the power of resurrection in us. The people would not have benefited from the Law, unless they recognize the possibility of keeping it through Christ, risen from the dead; Grantor of the new nature; and Who was capable of keeping the divine commandment.

Concerning the sanctification and washing the clothes, all that revealed the need for internal and external preparations, before ascending the Mountain of Knowledge (as Moses did), and recognizing the divine secrets.

The scholar Origen says: [If you come with dirty clothes, you would hear this word, *“Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?”* (Matthew 22: 12) Thus, no man can listen to God's words, unless he is holy both in body and in spirit (1 Corinthians 7: 34), washes his clothes, in order to enter into the banquet of the Groom, and eats the flesh of the Lamb, and drink the chalice of salvation. Nobody can attend that banquet with dirty clothes. The wisdom confirmed that, saying on another occasion, *“Let your clothes always be white.”* Your garments were washed once you gained the grace of Baptism; your body was purified, and you got rid of all defilement of the flesh and spirit. Therefore, *“What God has cleansed, you must not call common (impure)”* (Acts 10: 15)].

And in a talk by St. Ambrose, concerning the duties of the Clergy, he says: [You should learn O priest, and deacon, the significance of washing your clothes. It is also fitting for you to approach the holy secrets with a pure body. If the congregation were warned against approaching the sacrifice with dirty clothes, can you request that from others, while there is defilement in your own heart and body, and dare to offer a sacrifice on their behalf ?! ].

St. Athanasius sees in this preparation a symbol of entering the virtuous life, without which, it would have been impossible for Moses to enter into the presence of God, and to receive the Law, saying, [Through virtue man can enter into the presence of God, as Moses did in the thick cloud, where God was. But through wickedness, man would exit from His presence, as did Cain, when he killed his brother (Genesis 4: 16), and his soul got disturbed].

The command was clear:

*“Be ready for the third day; do not come near your wives”* (Ex. 19: 15)

That does not imply that marital relationships are defiled, but for the sake of dedicating all energies, and thoughts in anticipation for the divine commandment. Fathers saw in this commandment a reference to keeping body relationships pure, not doing it with lust, in order for the soul to ascend with Moses on the mount of knowledge, and to recognize God. In a speech by St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa concerning virginity, he says: [If you yearn to God, proclaiming Himself to you, why don't you listen to Moses instructing his people to refrain from marital relationships, before being taken to behold God?!].

And as the people of the old days prepared themselves for receiving the word of God, engraved on the two tablets, by refraining from marital relationships, and cleansing their bodies, the Church is instructing its children to do the same on the eve before they approach the “divine Word.” It has also established a beautiful rite, for priests to cleanse their hands, before receiving the “Lamb,” in which the priest washes the purity of his own soul, and his inner readiness for the service.

- (3) *“Take heed to yourselves that you do not go up to the mountain or touch its base. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death...whether man or beast, he shall not live. When the trumpet sounds long, they shall come near the mountain”* (Ex. 19: 12, 13).

In order for our inner Moses to ascend the mountain of knowledge and to enjoy the divine secrets, we shall have to keep our senses, like seeing or hearing, from getting preoccupied by material things, or carnal thoughts. By that, neither man nor beast would ascend with us; only our inner Moses, to get to enjoy *“what eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man”* (1 Corinthians 2: 9). Our inner man would be lifted up to seek what is greater than senses and sensed things - the godly themselves.

Therefore, you should never allow man or beast inside you to hinder your vision of God on the holy mountain in you, and your talking with Him face to face. As to his saying, *“When the trumpet sounds long, they shall come near the mountain.”* This means that our inner man is enjoying the vision of God, hearing the divine voice, and enjoying direct talk with Him, and all our senses, yearnings, and emotions, would be sanctified in the Lord.

Things that were before, obstacles to life with God would become holy in the Lord, and tools to His account.

## 5- Speaking to God:

(1) The fathers compared between the encounters of God with people, in the Old Testament, and in the New Testament. In the Old Testament, Moses set boundaries for the people, on all sides saying, “*Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death, he shall surely be stoned or shot with an arrow; whether man or beast, he shall not live*” (Ex. 19: 12, 13). But in the New Testament, the Word of God, Himself comes and sits on the mountain (Matthew 5), surrounded by sinners as His children, and He opens His door to all whom are seeking His sonship.

In the Old Testament, “*there were thunderings and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain, and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled*” (Ex. 19: 16), and “*They said to Moses: ‘You speak with us and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die’*” (Ex. 20: 19).

But in the New Testament, the Lord spoke in a gentle and meek voice that drew all to Him. As St. Augustine says: [Then, He gave the Law externally, to let the wicked tremble. But now, He gives it internally to justify them]. In the old days, He dealt with humanity as though with little children, who becomes afraid as they hear the terrifying voice. But in the New Testament, He speaks to us as mature children, seeking our love and friendship.

Comparing between the two calls: the old with narrow minds, fear and trembling, and the new, the invitation open to all, St. John Chrysostom says, [He is inviting us to heaven, to the banquet of the great and amazing King. Shall we linger and hesitate, instead of making haste and running to it?! In that case, how much hope do we have for our salvation? We cannot excuse ourselves on the basis of our weakness, nor our nature. It is actually only laziness that makes us unworthy].

Thanks be to God who opens before us the way to the holy mountain, and makes His Word invite us all, without exception, to receive, not the Law engraved on two tablets of stone, but to give His Word, living within us, and His commandment written on our hearts.

(2) God used the sound of very loud trumpet, “*so that all the people who were in the camp trembled...and when the blast of the trumpet sounded long and became louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him by voice*” (Ex. 19: 19).

Why did God use the sound of a trumpet? St. Athanasius answers this, saying, [The sound of trumpets brings with it alertness and awe, more than any other sound. This way was used to teach them, having been still like little children].

St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa, believes that the sound of trumpet symbolizes the preaching of divine incarnation, something that prophets sounded high, to proclaim to humanity its imminent coming. But, with the coming of the apostles, and their ascension to the holy mountain, “*The blast of the trumpet sounded long and became louder*” (Ex. 19: 19), they proclaimed it more strongly, so that their voice and message reached the ends of the world.

- (3) God descended on the Mount Sinai in fire. Himself being Fire, and His minister around, preceding Him as a flame of fire (Psalm 104: 4), consuming everything that is wood, weed, or straw, and purifying at the same time, what is gold, silver or precious stone.
- (4) God says to Moses: *“I come to you in the thick cloud”* (Ex. 19: 9), and *“Then it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were thunderings and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain”* (Ex. 19: 16).

The Book says: *“And the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up”* (Ex. 19: 20). What is that cloud to which Moses approached to listen to the voice of God?

St. Jerome answers this question in his comment on the words of the Psalmist, *“Clouds and darkness surround Him”* (Psalm 97: 2); saying, [Two things surround the Lord: clouds and darkness. I assume that it is the same cloud, that was mentioned in the Bible, *“A bright cloud overshadowed them”* (Matthew 17: 5), that happened when the Lord transfigured, and His disciples fell on their faces before Him.

I assume that it is similar to the cloud, spoken of in another situation: *“Your faithfulness reaches to the clouds”* (Psalm 36: 5), the faithfulness of the Lord spoken of in the Bible: *“I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life”* (John 14: 6). The faithfulness of God is Christ, reaching to the cloud, namely, to the apostles and the prophets, and to those who were like the cloud, commanded by God to *“rain no rain on Israel”* (Isaiah 5: 6). That conforms with what came in the Book of Judges, when the fleece of wool on the threshing floor was dry, while rain came down on all the world (Judges 6: 39), which implies that Israel became dry, while it rained over all the world.

*“Clouds and darkness surrounded Him”*; *“Behold, the Lord rides on a swift cloud”* (Isaiah 19: 1). Let us meditate in the meaning of this. The Lord is coming to Egypt where we live; coming to the land of darkness, of Pharaoh. But He is coming riding on a swift cloud; what is this swift cloud? I think it is the Virgin St. Mary, who conceived the Word without human seed. That swift cloud came to the world, bringing with it the Creator of the world. What does Isaiah say? *“The Lord will come into Egypt...the idols of Egypt will totter at His presence; and the heart of Egypt will melt in its midst”* (Isaiah 19: 1). That cloud that destroyed the temple of ‘Serapis’ in Alexandria, which was not destroyed by a human hand, but by that cloud, that was carrying Christ. Having known the cloud, let us now deal with the darkness.

The Lord is in the light as well as in the darkness. He is in the light, for the beginners, with whom He speaks clearly, but for the more advanced, He speaks. With the apostles, he does not speak as He does with the multitude, but mystically saying *“He who has ears to hear, let him hear”* (Luke 8: 8). This is the meaning of *“... darkness surrounded Him”*, meaning mysteries surrounded him. That is why the Book of Exodus says that the people were down at the base of the mountain, while Moses alone went up the Mount of Sinai in a thick cloud because all the people of God, except for Moses, were still not capable of recognizing the secret. That is why the Book says: *“He made darkness His secret place”* (Psalm 18: 11).

## **6- A warning to the people and the priests:**

*“And the Lord said to Moses, ‘Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to gaze at the Lord, and many of them perish. Also let the priests who come near the Lord sanctify themselves, lest the Lord break out against them” (Ex. 19: 21, 22).*

The mountain was transformed into a ‘Most Holy’ place, through God’s descending on it. So the Lord feared for His people and priests, lest they perish because of their curiosity, by breaking through the awesome divine sanctuaries.

Only Moses and Aaron ascended the mountain; Moses, as a representative of the divine Word, and Aaron, as a representative of the priesthood of the Lord Christ. Christ is, alone, the divine Word, and the Priest who enters into the divine sanctuaries; and without Whom we perish.

=====

## **CHAPTER 20**

### **THE TEN COMMANDMENTS**

- 1- An introduction to the Ten Commandments. --
- 2- The Law between the letter and the Spirit. --

3- <i>"I have not come to destroy (abolish) the Law, but to fulfill it"</i>	
4- The first commandment: <i>"You shall have no other gods before Me"</i>	1-3
5- The second commandment: <i>"You shall not make for yourself any carved image"</i>	4-6
6- The third commandment: <i>"You shall not take the name of the Lord in vain"</i>	7
7- The fourth commandment: Keeping the Sabbath.	8-11
8- The fifth commandment: Honoring the father and the mother.	12
9- The sixth commandment: <i>"You shall not murder"</i>	13
10- The seventh commandment: <i>"You shall not commit adultery"</i>	14
11- The eighth commandment: <i>"You shall not steal"</i>	15
12- The ninth commandment: <i>"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor"</i>	16
13- The tenth commandment: <i>"You shall not covet ..."</i>	17
14- People's fear of God's presence.	18-21
15- A confirmation against idol worship.	22-25

+++++

### 1- An introduction to the Ten Commandments:

It was not possible for the people to receive the divine commandments, or to appreciate the Law, while still in the land of servitude. That is why God brought them out into the wilderness to give them the law, which He begins by saying:

*"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Ex. 20: 2)*

Although this phrase came as an introduction to the commandments, and not in the form of a commandment, yet the Jews considered it as a part of the first commandment.

The Ten Commandments were written on two tablets of stone (Ex. 32: 15), they were called the 'Decalogue' (Ex. 34: 28; Deuteronomy 4: 13; 10: 4), were also called 'The words of the covenant' (Deuteronomy 29: 1), 'The two tablets of Covenant' (Exodus 31: 18), and 'The Covenant' (Exodus 25: 16).

The same text of these commandments came once more in the Book of Deuteronomy (5: 6 - 21). The difference between the two is that the text in the Book of Exodus presented as a justification for the commandment of the sanctification of the Sabbath, that God rested on the

seventh day of His work of creation; while the Book of Deuteronomy made a point, that keeping the Sabbath is a memorial of the salvation from the land of servitude, to enter into that of rest.

The Ten Commandments, in the Holy Book, did not have designated numbers; that is why two ways of classification appeared:

- (1) The old classification is known by the Jews, mentioned by Josephus and Philo, adopted by the scholar Origen, and still followed by the non-Lutheran Protestant Churches. It is based on the differentiation between the commandment concerning forbidding the worship of other gods (Ex. 20: 3), and that concerning forbidding the making of any carved image or idols (Ex. 20: 4); considering them the first and second commandments, beside considering “*You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife*”, an integral part of that forbidding to covet “*your neighbor’s house*” (Ex. 20: 17).

By this classification, the first four commandments would concern man’s relationship with God, while the other six would concern that between man and his neighbor. As each of the two tablets carried five commandments, the fifth commandment concerning honoring the father and the mother, is engraved together with those concerning the relationship between man and God, on the first tablet. Those adopting this view justify it, by the fact that the Jews considered honoring the parents as something absolute and unconditional, as though that commandment is an extension of those concerning man’s relationship with God. It is to be noticed that the apostle Paul, as he amalgamated together, the five last commandments, he did not include in them the commandment under consideration, while the Lord Christ included it in that same group (Mark 10: 19).

- (2) The classification adopted by the Catholic and the Lutheran Churches is based on the point of view of St. Augustine that the commandment, forbidding the worship of other gods, embraces with it that, forbidding making carved images and idols. Yet, he considered the commandment concerning not coveting your neighbor’s wife, as independent of that of not coveting his house. By this he believes that the commandments concerning the relationship of man to God are three, while those concerning his relationship with his neighbor are seven. The first tablet includes the first three, and the second one includes the seven last commandments.

Note that the Ten Commandments carried a negative aspect, except the two commandments of keeping the Sabbath and honoring the parents, and that the later commandment is the only one with a promise.

The Lord Christ has summarized all these commandments in one, which is to love God and love your neighbor (Matthew 22: 37; Romans 13: 9; Galatians 5: 14; James 2: 8).

## **2- The Law, between the letter and the Spirit:**

As long as we are dealing with the Ten Commandments, which are the backbone of the Law, we should study them in the light of the words of the apostle Paul: “*You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. <sup>6</sup>He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant--not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. Now if*

*the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! (2 Corinthians 3: 3-9)*

Many fathers were interested in revealing the significance of the phrase, “*The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life*”, but I shall only present some sayings of St. Augustine, from his essay “About the Spirit and the letter”, from a book he sent to ‘Marcilinus’ in 66 chapters, in which he clarified the following points:

1- By the Law, sin was exposed, but was not cured. The letter of the Law, that instructs us to refrain from committing sin, would kill, if it lacks the Spirit that gives it life. As it lets us know the sin, without knowing how to avoid it, causing it, as well to increase instead of decrease, and adding to the evil lust (forbidden by the Law) by breaking of the Law itself. Although the Law is good in itself, yet it enhances the evil lust, as it forbids it. So it resembles a strong flow of water, going steady in one direction; if it meets a certain obstruction, it would get stronger and more vigorous, once it overpasses that obstruction, to turn eventually into a mighty torrent. Whatever we covet, would become much more attractive when it is forbidden. That is the sin which deceives and kills through the commandment, “*Because the Law brings about wrath; for where there is no Law, there is no transgression*” (Romans 4: 15).

2- The Law proclaimed the need for a physician. “*The Law entered, that the offense might abound*” (Romans 5: 20). Through its existence, man appeared guilty and confused and in need, not for a physician, but for God Himself as his Helper, to guide his steps, to protect him from being controlled by sin. In order to be cured, man was committed to deliver himself to the mercy of God. So “*where sin abounded, grace abounded much more*” (Romans 5: 20), not out of worthiness of the sinner, but through the intervention of God who helps him. Actually the Law, by giving commandments, together with threats, and by justifying nobody, reveals that justification of man is a gift of God through the help of the Holy Spirit, “*being justified freely by His grace*” (Romans 3: 24).

3- The Law is good and the commandment is just. And we, as Christians, are committed to keep the Ten Commandments (taking into consideration to consider the Sabbath as a symbol of Sunday), the Scripture says that the Ten Commandments are beneficial to him who keeps them and no one can enjoy life, unless he keeps them. Yet, they sadden the literal man, by being unable to set him free of sin. That is why it is said: “*For in much wisdom is much grief, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow*” (Ecclesiastes 1: 18). While to him who keeps the Law spiritually, according to the inner man, the Law would be a joy. St. Augustine says: [“*If there is faith working through love*” (Galatians 5: 6), man would rejoice in the Law of God, “*according to the inward man*” (Romans 7: 22). That is the gift of the Holy Spirit, not the gift of the letter, even with the existence of another physical law that fights the Law of our mind. Thus we change from our old self and go on progressing from day to day, and by the grace of God, our inner man will be set free from the bodily death, by our Lord Jesus Christ.

4- The Law and the New Testament. St. Augustine says: [In a clearer testimonial given by the prophet, he says: “*Behold, the days are coming*’, says the Lord, ‘*when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judas – not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them*’, says the Lord. ‘*But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel: After those days, says the Lord, I will put My Law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord*’, for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more” (Jeremiah 31: 31, 34). What is the difference that God revealed, between the Old and the New Covenants? The change happened, because of the life-giving Spirit, without which, the letter kills]. He believes that the Old Testament, was called ‘Old’, because sin that was in the old man, had been working in him, and the letter of the Law was unable to cure. The New Testament, on the other hand, was so called, on account of the Spirit of the living God (2 Corinthians 3: 3), who engraved the commandment, according to a new way, not on tablets of stone, but on ones of flesh. In the Old Testament, the commandment was warning from outside, while in the New Testament, we gained the grace of the life-giving Holy Spirit inside in the heart. Concerning this he says, [The difference between the Old and the New Testaments, is that the first was written on tablets, in order to warn from outside, while the second acts within. By the first, man became a transgressor through the killing letter, while by the second, he became living through the life-giving Spirit].

St. Augustine believes that all the Law was summarized by the Lord Christ, in the love for God and for the neighbor. So before, if we were hearing commandments that we are unable to keep, in the New Testament, “*The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us*” (Romans 5: 5). By that the commandments of the Law became easier to keep, as this is the work of the Holy Spirit, who pours out the love in us; thus all the Law would be achieved.

### **3- “I did not come to destroy (abolish) the Law, but to fulfill it”:**

Through that confirmation (see Matthew 5: 17), the Lord Christ, on one hand, revealed the depths of the Law, and brought us from its literality to its hidden Spirit. The Law is no more just commandments and statutes, but an encounter with the hidden “Word of God”. And St. Mark, the Hermit says: [The Lord hides in His commandments. Whoever seeks Him in them will find Him], and [Do not say that you have consummated the commandments, yet you have not found the Lord; as whoever truly seeks Him, would find peace].

From another aspect, the Lord commands us in the New Testament, to kill the source of sins. Not only He does not want us to kill, but also to refrain from anger, which is the start for the way to killing. He does not only warn us against committing adultery, but also advise us to refrain from looking lustily to a woman, which is the start of falling into adultery.

He also gives us the possibility to practice. In the old, the commandment or the Law proclaimed the complete inability of man to sanctify and justify himself. Then came the Lord Christ, to grant us the grace of the Holy Spirit that is capable of sanctifying our souls and our bodies. Therefore the commandment, that has been impossible to keep, became the Law of our new man.

### The figure ten:

The figure 10 refers to perfection on earth. The whole world was likened to 10 virgins (Matthew 25: 1); and to 10 servants of God, to each of whom he gave 10 minas, to trade with (Luke 19: 13). The Church was likened to a woman who has 10 silver coins (Luke 15: 8). Then, the commandment of the tithes, assuming that man possesses 10 units, that constitutes all his wealth, out of which he gives one unit to God (1+ 10).

Finally, as I talk about the Ten Commandments, to make it short, I shall ask the reader to refer to the book “The Ten Commandments according to the Christian concept”, by His Holiness Pope Shenouda III.

#### **4- The first commandment: “You shall have no other gods before Me”:**

*“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me... for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God” (Ex. 20: 2 -- 5)*

Saying “*You shall no have other gods before Me*”, does not imply the existence of other gods, but He is warning his people of falling into worshipping the gods of pagans beside worshipping Him. St. Athanasius, the apostolic, believes that God gave us this commandment, in order to divert man away from the wrong and unsound fantasies pertaining to idol worship. Not that there are other gods that He is warning us against their worshipping, but He commands that in order to protect us from straying from the True God, and from making gods out of nothing, as did the poets and writers.

Now, as idol worship is no longer an issue, yet God warns us against other gods that reign over the heart as: love of the world, of dignity, of compliments, or of lusts, “*whose god is their belly*” (Philippians 3: 19).

He wants us to love Him so He can completely reign over our hearts. Not to enslave or humiliate us, but because He is, as He describes Himself, “*a jealous God*”. St. John Chrysostom commented on this phrase, saying: [God says that, to demonstrate the strength of His love, so as to love Him as much. If we forsake Him, He keeps on calling us to come back; and if we do not, He chastens us with His wrath; though not for the sake of chastisement in itself. Listen to what He says in Ezekiel, about the city, His beloved, who despised Him: “*I will gather all your lovers with whom you took pleasure ... I will give you into their hands... they shall stone you with stones, and thrust you through with their swords... So I will lay to rest My fury against you, and My jealousy shall depart from you. I will be quiet, and be angry no more*” (Ezekiel 16: 37 -- 42). What more could be said, by a Lover whom his beloved despised. Despite that, He goes back and loves her warmly once again! God did everything possible for us to love Him; He even did not spare His own Son for our sake.

The scholar Origen comments on the same phrase, saying: [Behold the love of God. He endures the weaknesses of mankind, to teach us, and to lead us to perfection... Every woman submits to her husband, or else she would be considered as an adulteress, who seeks freedom to err. And whoever goes to an adulteress, knowing that this woman gives herself to anybody who pays the price, would never get angry if he sees others with her. While the legally married man, on the other hand, would not bear to see such behavior from his wife, but would do his best to

control the purity of his marriage, to make sure that he is the real and legal father of his children. If you understand this parable, you can say that the soul can be defiled by both good and evil lovers: if the spirit of adultery enters into it. Once it does, the spirit of greed, then that of wrath, of adornment, or of vain glory, etc., would also enter to commit adultery with the same soul. None of them would get jealous from the others, or would hate the others, but would tend to give them all due consideration. We know, from the Bible, of the unclean spirit, who after getting out of a man, *“he goes through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came’. And when he comes, he finds it swept and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there...”* (Luke 11: 24, 25)].

But, if the soul is united with a legal husband; the groom whom the apostle Paul betroths to souls, saying: *“For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ”* (2 Corinthians 11: 2). That wedding was spoken of by the Bible, saying: *“A certain king arranged a marriage for his son”* (Matthew 22: 2). To him the soul gives herself, and legally unites with Him, even if she has been a sinner in her past, and behaved as an adulteress. Yet, once she unites with Him, she would commit herself to Him. The soul that has chosen Him as her Groom, and He would not bear to see her sin again; He would jealously defend the purity of His marital life.

God calls Himself “a jealous God”, as He does not bear to see the soul that who gave herself to Him unite with demons.

Coming to know Him, after having been enlightened by His divine words, been baptized, after confessing in faith, and being united to such great sacraments, we become aware that He does not like us to fall into sin again, and does not bear to see that soul of whom He is a Groom and Husband, play with demons, and commit adultery with unclean spirits. Yet, even if that catastrophe did happen, He wishes her to repent and to come back to Him.

That is a new kind of His love to us: to receive back the soul that repents with all her heart after adultery, according to the words of the prophet: *“They say, ‘If a man divorces his wife, and she goes from him, and becomes another man’s, may he return to her again? Would not that land be greatly polluted? But you have played the harlot with many lovers; yet, return to Me,’ says the Lord”* (Jeremiah 3: 1). Then He says, *“She has gone up on every high mountain, and under every green tree, and there played the harlot. And I said, after she had done all these things, ‘Return to Me’, but she did not return”* (Jeremiah 3: 7).

Therefore, God is a jealous God; yet He seeks you, and wishes you would unite yourself to Him, to keep you from sin, even though He may chastise you, and get angry with you. So, if He shows a sort of jealousy toward you, be sure that, for you, it would be the hope of your salvation.

Finally, this marital love, that binds a soul to her Groom, has drawn the hearts of sinners and adulterers to repentance, and has drawn the hearts of many to a life of virginity and monasticism; having seen in the heavenly Groom, what abundantly fulfills the heart. That ‘love’ has occupied the center of prominence in the spiritual writings of the early fathers.

**5- The second commandment:** *“You shall not make for yourself any carved image”*

*“You shall not make for yourself any carved image, or any likeness of anything, that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them; For I the Lord, your God, am a jealous God” (Ex. 20: 4, 5)*

We have already dealt with this commandment in some detail and said that the Church is surely committed to keep it; yet, according to the spirit and not to the letter, for *“the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life”* (2 Corinthians 3: 6).

The Spirit of this commandment is to keep the pagan worship from infiltrating the people and not to forbid the use of the images themselves. The Jews were known for falling to two kinds of pagan deviations:

- (1) To follow the example of the pagans surrounding them, as did king Solomon, who fell into the worship of foreign gods, when he married pagan wives.
- (2) Mixing between pagan worship and that of the Living God, as demonstrated when they worshipped the golden calf, with pretense of worshipping the living God through that symbolic act (Exodus 32: 5).

On the other hand, according to father John Damascene, banning the use of images in the Old Testament was based mainly on the inability of the Jews to discern between ‘Lateria’, a worship of God alone, and ‘Probynesis’, a sort of recognition that can be given to anybody, other than God.

This is clearly demonstrated in God’s command to His people of the old, to put particular images in the House of the Lord, not as articles of adornment, but as a living part in the rites of worship. The tabernacle, and the temple, later on came according to a divine pattern, as a shadow of the heavenly things (Hebrew 8: 5; Exodus 25: 40), and included images of the two Cherubim, covering the mercy seats with their wings on top of the ark.

Moses and all the people used to prostrate before the ark, while God was speaking from between the two Cherubim (Numbers 10; Exodus 25). The image of a cherub was a unit of art that was repetitively engraved all over the walls of the temple, as a sign of the presence of God in His holy house (1 Kings 6; 2 Kings 3).

God instructed Moses to make a bronze fiery serpent, and put it on a pole in the wilderness, so that if a serpent had bitten anyone, when that person looked at the bronze serpent, he lived (Numbers 21: 8, 9).

Therefore, God did not ban icons and statues, except for fear that His people might fall into pagan practices. But, otherwise these icons play an education role, being a kind of language understood by every man, whatever his race is. Concerning this, father John Damascene says: [If some pagan asks you to tell him about your faith, take him to Church, and let him stand before the icons]. St. Gregory, the Great, also wrote a message to Cerynus, Bishop of Marseille, who ordered all icons to be destroyed, on presumption that he is abolishing some evil practices, saying: [We heard that you destroyed the images of Saints, in an unprecedented zeal; justifying your action, that images should not be worshipped. Forbidding the worship of icons is something to be complimented; yet destroying them is to be blamed for. An image for the illiterate is like written words for the educated. Icons in churches are used to give the chance to the illiterate to read on the walls, what they are unable to read in a book.].

Father John of Cronstadt says: [Icons in homes and churches, are not items of art for display or decoration, but they are to help us to realize a life of prayer through seen objects]. And Father Leonidus says: [As through your probynesis to a book of law, you are not bowing to the material of leather or ink, but to the words of God written in them. In the same way when I prostrate before the image of Christ, I do not do that to the wooden frame nor to the drawing itself].

#### Visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children:

Many people may ask: What have the children done, to be responsible for the iniquity of their parents?! In the following we shall respond to this question:

- (1) We do not deny that children may bear the fruit of their parents' wrongdoings. The fetus that, all along the months of pregnancy, is nourished on the blood of an angry mother of a fiery nature, would surely bear the fruit of that nature physically and psychologically, and would be born with certain physical defects and abnormal habits. But God had confirmed to us that He is not judging man according to the faults of his parents. For, through repentance, many hot-tempered people have become saints, receiving greater blessings than others. God confirmed this issue by the mouth of the prophet Jeremiah, saying: *"In those days they shall say no more: 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.' But every one shall die for his own iniquity; every man, who eats the sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge"* (Jeremiah 31: 29, 30).

Ezekiel explained that matter more clearly, saying, *"The word of the Lord came to me again, saying, 'What do you mean when you use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying: 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge', 'As I live', says the Lord God, 'You shall no longer use this proverb in Israel'. 'Behold, all the souls are Mine. The soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine; The soul who sins shall die... The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself'"* (Ezekiel 18: 1- 25)

- (2) The words of the Lord do not mean that God avenges Himself by punishing the children for what their fathers have done, but He wants to confirm His long-suffering. He gives the wicked the chance to repent, year after year, and generation after generation, and if man persists on doing evil, he will be chastised in the third or fourth generation; not for the sins of his fathers, but for the persistence of the children to keep on the evil behavior of their fathers.

In this concern, St. John Chrysostom says: [This does not imply that man bears the punishment of crimes committed by others; but as long as he persists on doing the crimes that were done by his fathers, he will be, like them, justly condemned]. St. Augustine says: [Whoever changes his life in Christ, will become no more a son of his wicked father, as he, no more follows his example].

Therefore, when the Jews said: *"His blood be on us and on our children"* (Matthew 27: 25), they rightly said so, as their children are still bearing that blood which was shed by their fathers, as long as they persist on denying it. But if they accept the Savior, they would, no longer, be children of those who crucified Christ, but children of God.

**6- The third commandment:** *“You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain”*

The first and second commandments concern the worship of the living God away from any pagan deviation, while the third commandment concerns the name of God.

God, not wanting His people to swear by the names of other gods, allowed them to do that by His name, as a proclamation of the name of their God, and to make them distinct (Deuteronomy 10: 20; Isaiah 48: 1; Psalm 63: 1); and He commanded them as well, *“Lest you go among these nations...You shall not make mention of the name of their gods, nor cause anyone to swear by them; you shall not serve them nor bow down to them”* (Joshua 23: 7). Yet He commanded them, *“You shall not swear by My name falsely”* (Leviticus 19: 12); and to fulfill what they swore, they swore by His name.

That is what concerns the oath, but He also commanded them to refrain from taking His name in vain, because *“Holy is His name”* (Luke 1: 49); *“Awesome”* (Psalm 11: 9); *“Great among the nations”* (Malachi 1: 11); *“Excellent in all the earth”* (Psalm 8: 9). We should fear and respect it, and should utter it with awe and submission, as we are instructed by Moses: *“You may fear this glorious and awesome name, THE LORD YOUR GOD”* (Deuteronomy 28: 58), and the subject of our love, fulfillment, and our prayers: *“I will lift up my hands in Your name ; My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness”* (Psalm 63: 4); *“Oh, how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day”* (Psalm 119: 97).

Yet, in the New Testament, as the believer has reached spiritual maturity, it is fit for him not to swear at all, according to the words of the Lord: *“But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes’, and your ‘No’ be ‘No’, For whatever is more than that is from the evil one”* (Matthew 5: 37). We have known the name of the Lord Christ, the Savior; *“Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved”* (Romans 10: 13); *“We have labored for His name’s sake, and have not become weary”* (Revelation 2: 3); *“In His name, we cast out demons”* (Mark 16: 17), and *“Signs and wonders may be done through the name of... Jesus”* (Acts 4: 30).

**7- The fourth commandment:** Keeping the Sabbath.

We have already dealt in detail with this commandment. So, to avoid repetition please refer to that study.

We said that it is an eternal commandment, that the Church is committed to keep, by entering into the true “Sabbath”, namely the “Rest” that became ours through the resurrection of the Lord Christ. As God had rested on the seventh day, after He finished creation, our rest came with the start of the new creation that became ours through our resurrection with the Lord Christ. The following are some of the sayings of the fathers in this concern:

\* Joyfully, we keep the eighth day; the day when the Lord has risen from the dead; to proclaim Himself, ascending to heaven.

(Epistle of Barnabas - the second century)

\* He gave us the seventh day to rest, because our body needs it. As to God, He does not get tired, and never feels pain or need.

\* We keep the spiritual Sabbath (Sunday), until the Savior comes; as, in it, we had rest from sin.

(St. Clement of Alexandria)

\* Those who live according to the old ordinance, concerning things of the future, do not keep the Sabbath, but keep the day of the Lord, the day our life was resurrected through the death of Christ.

(St. Augustine)

St. Basil the Great says that we have received many things from the tradition established by the apostles, beside the written teachings, among which is the sanctification of the first day (Sunday) of the week in which the Lord Christ used to meet with His disciples after His resurrection (John 20: 19; 26; Luke 24). That day was the day of collective worship of the Church at the time of the apostles (1 Corinthians 16: 2; Acts 20: 7).

### **8- The fifth commandment: Honoring the father and mother.**

God put honoring the father and mother, as the first of the commandments pertaining to our relationship with others, even before commanding us not to kill or to commit adultery, etc. It is the only commandment with a reward or a promise (Ephesians 6: 2). The Law was very strict on him who breaks this commandment: *“He who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death ... and he who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death”* (Ex. 21: 15; 17; *“If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother; and who when they have chastened him, will not heed them...all the men of his city shall stone him to death”* (Deuteronomy 21: 18 - 21); and *“Cursed is the one who treats his father or his mother with contempt”* (Deuteronomy 27: 16).

It seems that the Jews abused this commandment, and mistreated their children, demanding absolute obedience, disregarding their psychology and personality. Then the Lord Christ came to reveal the deep concepts of this commandment. While he has been subject to his mother the Virgin St. Mary and to St. Joseph (Luke 2: 51), He, to whom every knee should bow, of those in heaven and of those on earth (Philippians 2: 10) took care of His mother, while he was on the cross, preoccupied with the salvation of the world, and fallen under His Passion, delivering her to the care of His disciple St. John (John 19: 27). He also presented a new concept of that obedience, when His mother admonished Him, saying, *“Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have sought you anxiously.”* (Luke 2: 48, 49); He answered her, saying: *“Why is it that you sought Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?”* (Luke 2: 49). The Evangelist comments on this answer, saying, *“But they did not understand the statement which He spoke to them”* (Luke 2: 50).

That answer of the Lord Christ constituted a kind of revolution in the world of childhood, giving the children the right to react to their parents and to *“obey them in the Lord”* (Ephesians 6: 1). Not to the absolute obedience, as the Jews, and as all humanity, at that time, understood it.

This biblical concept also covered the obedience to spiritual fathers (or guide). The apostle Paul says: *“But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed (condemned)”* (Galatians 1: 8); giving his spiritual children the right to disobey his preaching if it is not in the Lord.

St. Jerome speaks about obedience in the Lord, and says: [The commandment says, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; but only in what does not separate you from your real heavenly Father. You should remember the bond of blood, as long as your father knows his Creator, or else, the prophet David would sing to you, saying, “*Listen, O daughter, consider and incline your ear; forget your own people also, and your father’s house; so the king will greatly desire your beauty*” (Psalm 45: 10, 11). In this case, your reward would be great for forgetting your father].

The concept of honoring the father and mother is wide. It includes obedience and submission, for which Isaac presented a living example, when he submitted to his father Abraham, as he intended to offer him a sacrifice to God, according to God’s command. It also includes love and respect, for which we see king Solomon as a role model, as when his mother came to him, “*The king rose up to meet her, and bowed down to her, and sat down on his throne, and had a throne set for the king’s mother; so she sat at his right hand*” (1 Kings 2: 19). Success is a way of honoring the parents. The Book says, “*A wise son makes a glad father; but a foolish son is the grief of his mother*” Proverb 10: 1). Submitting is also a practical way of honoring parents; and as St. Jerome says: [Honoring parents are not to be interpreted in mere words; but children should submit to them by provision of their necessary needs for life]. God commanded us to support our needy parents, to pay back the good deeds they gave us during our childhood.

The Lord Christ rebuked the Pharisees who set a tradition that contradicts the word of God, allowing children to give what their parents need to the treasury of the temple, on the account of the poor; then, if asked by their parents for some assistance, they say: “Corban” (Matthew 15: 4). By that they abolished God’s commandment by their evil tradition.

Finally, if this commandment implied honoring fathers and mothers according to the flesh, it would be more appropriate to apply it to the spiritual fathers; God being our Father and the Church is our mother. St. Clement of Alexandria believes that parents here are God, being our Father and Lord, and the mother is the true knowledge, and the wisdom that begets the righteous.

### **9- The sixth commandment: “You shall not murder”.**

God does not bear to see the shedding of innocent blood, as He told Cain, “*The voice of your brother’s blood cries out to Me from the ground*” (Genesis 4: 11). He even does not stand the shedding of the evils’ blood, saying: “*Whoever kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold, and the Lord set a mark on Cain, lest anyone finding him should kill him*” (Genesis 4: 15). His hate for blood shedding is clear in His saying to His beloved prophet David, “*You have shed much blood, and made great wars; you shall not build a house for My name*” (1 Chronicles 22: 8).

Yet God, who commanded not to murder, allowed it for the adulterer and the adulteress (Leviticus 20: 10 - 16), for the murderer (Ex. 21: 14), for the striker or curser of his father or mother (Ex. 21: 15, 17), for the breaker of the Sabbath (Ex. 31: 15), for the blasphemer against God’s name (Leviticus 24: 16), and He commanded it in some wars against the pagans. All that was fit for the Old Testament; when man could not discern between the sinner and the sin, and between the idol worshipper and idol worship. Thus by allowing killing, He intended to confirm His absolute rejection of sin and idol worship of the pagan nations. But in the New Testament, as believers reached spiritual maturation, killing the sinner, no longer, became the solution for the sinner, but the commitment to save him from the sin, the cause of his death.

Killing does not only imply blood shedding, as there are those who kill by the tongue, according to the words of the Book: “*Their tongue is an arrow shot out*” (Jeremiah 9: 8); “*His words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords*” (Psalm 55: 21). Then, there is murder through intention, “*Whoever hates his brother is a murderer*” (1 John 3: 15), and there is murder through responsibility, as is the case when the owner of an ox, who knows that it tended to thrust with its horn in times past, left it to attack and kill someone (Ex. 21: 28, 29). And there is the killing of the Spirit, according to the words of the Book: “*The letter kills*” (2 Corinthians 3: 6). St. Clement of Alexandria considered the Heretics to be worse than murderers, saying: [Murder is a sure perish ability. So setting aside the true teaching that concerns God and eternity... is more harmful than murder].

**10- The seventh commandment:** “*You shall not commit adultery*”.

The apostle says: “*Flee sexual immortality; every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he, who commits sexual immortality sins against his own body*” (1 Corinthians 6: 18), and “*we are taking the members of Christ and making them members of a harlot*” (Corinthians 6: 15). By adultery we defile our bodies that are the members of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6: 19).

There is no sin that God hates more than adultery, that the Holy Book calls “uncleanness” (2 Peter 2: 10), by which a man or a woman defile themselves, and defile their garments (Revelation 3: 4), and even defile the land (Jeremiah 3: 6 - 9).

Because of its abhorrence, idol worship was called adultery (Jeremiah 3: 6 - 9); and because of it, God punished the earth by the great flood (Genesis 7), consumed Sodom and Gomorrah by fire (Genesis 19: 24, 25), and almost abolished all the tribe of Benjamin (Judges 20). The apostle Paul gave such a harsh chastisement, that the adulterer could have been swallowed by his deep grief (1 Corinthians 5), and God considered it the sole cause of dissolving marital bond (Matthew 5).

The Lord Christ, in order to protect us completely from it, commanded us not to look with lust to a woman; as though intending prevent adultery before it begins.

Then the strict statutes of the Church came afterwards, to punish the Priest who falls into it, by banning him forever from clerical work.

St. Clement of Alexandria sees that adultery has a concept, wider than what is commonly known, saying: [Whoever forsakes the true knowledge of the Church, and faith in God, and runs after his vanity, is committing adultery]. The Fathers of the Church have many writings on the life of chastity and purity, of both the married people and the virgins.

**11- The eighth commandment:** “*You shall not steal*”.

Stealing is not taking what belongs to others, but robbing it. The disciples, when they got hungry, they plucked heads of grain from a field; and the Law says: “*When you come into your neighbor’s vineyard, you may eat your fill of grapes at your pleasure, but you shall not put any in your container. And when you come into your neighbor’s standing grain, you may pluck the heads with your hand, but you shall not use a sickle on your neighbor’s standing grain*” (Deuteronomy 23: 24, 25).

Accusing Jacob of stealing Laban's gods (Genesis 31: 30, 32), and accusing Joseph's brothers of stealing the silver cup (Genesis 44: 7 - 9), had been considered horrible accusations.

The abhorrence of this sin is more serious, if the robbed party is needy, like a widow, or if you lend money to the poor, and charge interest like a moneylender, or pawn his covering or garment (Exodus 22: 25 -- 27), or if the thing robbed is a sanctified item.

God considered refraining from giving tithes a kind of robbery. And St. Clement of Alexandria considered whoever refers anything to someone who is not its real owner, as though he is robbing; as for example the one who steals the thoughts of others and attributes them to himself.

## **12- The ninth commandment:** "You shall not bear false testimony".

To bear false witness means to lie; and as the devil is "*a liar and a father of it*" (John 8: 44), he who lies is doing the deeds of his father the devil.

Because of its serious effects on the congregation, according to the Law, "*by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established*" (Deuteronomy 19: 15). The Holy Book took interest in the 'holy silence', as excessive talk leads to iniquity, and hastening to answer may let one lie, even unintentionally.

## **13- The tenth commandment:** "*You should not covet ...*"

*"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his maid, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's"* (Ex. 20: 17).

This commandment revealed the depth of the Law, as it intended to kill sin from its root; yet the Jews did not understand.

Some may ask: The Mosaic Law commanded, "*You shall not covet*"; and the New Testament gave the same commandment; so what is the difference? The Law commanded it, yet it did not give the remedy. It revealed man's inability to keep the commandment, in order to seek the remedy. But the New Testament, on the other hand, gave us the possibilities of keeping the commandment, by the Holy Spirit working in us. About that, St. Augustine says: [By the Law of works, God says to us: do what I order you to do: "*You shall not covet*"; But, by the Law of faith, we say to God: Give us what You ordered us to do].

Coveting does not only concern lusts of the body, but includes coveting of possessions, and of wealth. St. Ambrose says: [Love of wealth is an old and ancient evil, that revealed itself even in the proclamation of the Law; as the Law came to abolish it]

## **14- People's fear of God:**

In the previous chapter we talked about the lightnings, the thunders, and the thick clouds, that Moses approached to encounter with God. Here I shall only give a comparison between fear and trembling of the people, as Moses was receiving the Law, and the scene at the upper room in the New Testament, where the Holy Spirit came down on the Church. According to St. Augustine, [In the Old Testament, the people were banned, through horror from approaching the mountain, where the Law was given; while in the New Testament, the Holy

Spirit came down on those who gathered together waiting for God's promised gift]. There, the finger of God wrote on tablets of stone, but here, it worked in the hearts of people. There, the Law was given publicly, to put fear into the hearts of the wicked, but here it is given in secret to justify them (Acts 2). *"For the commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery', 'You shall not murder', 'You shall not steal', 'You shall not bear false witness', 'You shall not covet'; and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'; Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the Law"* (Romans 13: 9, 10).

**15- Confirmation against idol worship:**

God started His commandments by a confirmation that He is the One God, with Whom no other gods should be worshipped. After ending the commandments, God warned Moses, lest the children of Israel would deviate to idol worship.

=====

**CHAPTERS 21 - 23**

**THE LAW**

The people came out of Egypt as a nation with no experience. That is why God committed Himself to fulfill all their needs, not only those concerning setting them free of servitude, but also taking care of their daily bread; shading them by day and giving them light by night. He also took care of providing them with statutes to organize their worship, their civil life, even their medical, architectural and agricultural needs. As a primitive congregation, God became for them, the Father, Judge, Physician, Civil Engineer, and the Agricultural Engineer. That is what we clarified in the booklet we published with interpretation of the Book of Leviticus, which I hope to refer to with some detail.

1- The three chapters (Exodus 21 to 23), came like a practical application of the Ten Commandments, to suit the circumstances in which the Jews lived at that time. They present us with living faith, understanding about our relationship with God and with our fellow men, and even with the beasts and the earth. That is why we do not study these chapters in detail, as laws and statutes, but we want to recognize the divine view as to human life. As an example, we find some regulations to organize the mutual relationships between slaves and their masters. But now, as there is no more slavery, we do not ignore these regulations, because they bear the spirit of mutual relationships among human beings.

2- In these statutes, justice clearly was demonstrated; there being no privilege to the rich or the noble, despite the circumstances under which man lived at that time; when some have gone so low, to lie with a beast (Ex. 22: 19; or to sacrifice to an idol (Ex. 22: 20).

3- God has not only cared for the relationship of man with his fellow men, particularly with the slave, the orphan, the widow, or the poor, but cared even for the beasts of the field, commanding man to give them rest, one day per week (Ex. 23: 12), for his neighbor's donkey lying under its burden (Ex. 23: 5), and even for the land, letting it rest for one year every seven years, "*that the poor of your people and the beasts of the field may eat* (Ex. 23: 11). If God so cares for the slave, the orphan, the widow; and even for the beasts and the land, how much would His care be for His children? The St. Paul believes that these statutes bore hidden meanings that concern the people of God as well as our inner life, saying: "*For it is written in the law of Moses, 'You shall not muzzle an ox, while it treads out the grain'* (Deuteronomy 25: 4). *Is it oxen that God is concerned about? Or does He say it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt this is written, that he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope.*" (1 Corinthians 9: 9, 10). That is why the scholar Origen and other allegoric fathers were interested to seek the hidden meanings beyond these statutes, of which I shall give here some examples.

4- The Ten Commandments began by the commandments pertaining to the relationship of man with God, followed by those pertaining to his relationship with his fellow men. Then the Lord Christ came to summarize all those commandments in one phrase, "*You shall love God and your neighbor*". But here, they start by the commandments or statutes concerning the neighbor, like those concerning the slave, the murdered, the afflicted, those in debt, the strangers, the widows, and the orphans, etc., followed by commandments that concern the feasts, and then those pertaining to our relationship with God. Thus, if these statutes are interpretations of the Ten

Commandments, it is as though God intends not to separate commandments concerning our relationship with God, from our relationship with our fellow humans. They are all forming one unit, or one life. We should never assume that we could please God by worshipping and giving, on the expense of our relationship with others. We should not, as well, assume that our good relationship with our fellow men, atone for our negligence in our relationship with God.

Contents of the divine statutes: These chapters spoke of the following:

1- The Hebrew slave	21: 1 - 11
2- Violence	12 - 36
3- Stealing	22: 1 - 15
4- Adultery	16 - 20
5- Oppression	21 - 27
6- Reviling and cursing	28
7- Robbing the right of God	29 - 31
8- Hypocrisy and partiality	23: 1 - 3
9- Helping others	4 - 6
10- Justice and taking no bribe	7 - 9
11- The Sabbath and the rights of others	10 - 13
12- Feasts	14 - 19
13- The divine presence	20 - 21
14- No dealing or mixing with the nations	24 - 33

+++++

## **CHAPTER 21**

### **THE LAW** (Continued)

1- The Hebrew slave	1 - 11
2- Violence	12 - 36

## 1- The Hebrew slave:

This chapter talks about the rights of the Hebrew slave, as the Law distinguishes between the Hebrew slave and the foreign slave (the Gentile). In order to understand what came in the Law, we have to be aware of the paganism's view of the system of slavery, the situation of the Jewish Law, and the role of Christianity in this concern.

### Paganism and the system of slavery:

The pagan nations knew the system of slavery, both the underdeveloped and the developed nations - like the Greeks and the Romans. Some philosophers of the pagan world supported that system, as natural and at the same time necessary system; Aristotle proclaimed that all Barbarians (the uncivilized) are slaves by nature, and are not fit for any other way of life. The Roman law did not give the slaves any right, neither civil nor human. A master is not to be prosecuted if he tortured, killed a slave, committed adultery with him, or took by force his wife to become his mistress or even to make of her a prostitute! ! !

### The Judaism and the slavery system:

It was not possible for the Jewish Law to ban the system of slavery by one stroke. That is why it began by setting ordinances and systems that provides the slave with his human right and relieving him, to a great extent, of humiliation, to let him live as a human being and a brother under his severe conditions. The Jews experienced two kinds of slavery: of the Hebrews, and of the Gentiles.

(1) Slavery of a Hebrew: It used to occur under the following circumstances:

- a- Out of poverty, one may sell himself (Leviticus 25: 39), or his children (2 Kings 4: 1)
- b- Because of stealing; if he has nothing, he should be sold for his theft (Ex. 22: 3).
- c- Someone may sell his son or daughter as a slave (Ex. 21: 7; 17; Nehemiah 15: 5).
- d- Man can be a slave by birth, if his father is a slave.

The rights given by the Jewish Law to the Hebrew man- or maiden slave are:

- a- The Hebrew slave is to be treated as a brother, and not with humiliation: *“You shall not compel him to serve as a slave. But as a hired servant and a sojourner he shall be with you...for they are My servants whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves. You shall not rule over him with rigor, but you shall fear your God”* (Leviticus 25: 39 - 43). By that, the Law presented a new look at the slave; that he is a brother, a fellow in the slavery to the One God.
- b- The slave will get his freedom on the seventh year of his servitude (after six years); namely in the Sabbath year, or the year of rest. This is in reference to the freedom that became for all of us through the coming of the Lord in the Sabbath year, in the fulfillment of time, as

He presented Himself (as the secret of the true rest), putting an end to the servitude to sin. Concerning this He says, *“If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed”* (John 8: 36).

The slave would then have the right to choose between leaving his master’s house, or to request to stay with him all his life. If the slave loves his master, his mistress, and their children, he would have to enslave himself to his master by his own choice till the end of his life; *“then his master shall bring him to the door ... and shall pierce his ear with an awl, and he shall serve him forever”* (Ex. 21: 6), as a sign of complete obedience, according to the words of David, the Psalmist: *“My ears You have opened (pierced)”* (Psalm 40: 6). That is what the Lord Christ did, who, though a Son, became a slave for our sake; loving His Father, His bride, and His children (Ephesians 5: 25 - 27); He carried in His body the wounds of the cross, for our salvation. He became a slave to free us from servitude in order for us to become the sons of God.

- c- In the year of the Jubilee (Leviticus 25: 39, 40), all the slaves would be freed, even those who did not complete the six years of service to their masters. The Jubilee occurs in the fiftieth year, as a symbol of the work of the Holy Spirit, who grants the Church the consummation of freedom in the merit of the blood of Christ. By the Holy Spirit, we gain the forgiveness of our sins, and enjoy the fellowship with God in His Son, and carry the Spirit of adoption, through which we are to address God as our Father.
- d- The liberated slave will not go empty handed, but will take with him of the crops, the flocks, the threshing ground and the winepress. Thus the Lord Christ did not only set us free, but He granted us the riches of His Holy Spirit, to set forth bearing His righteousness and holiness in us.
- e- A slave may marry his master’s daughter (1 Chronicles 2: 35); and the master may marry his maiden slave, or give her in marriage to his son, but he has no right to sell his Hebrew man slave nor his maiden slave to a foreign master (Ex. 21: 7 - 11). Thus, a Hebrew maiden slave was considered as a member of the household, with all rights, like any other of its members. This is a concrete symbol of God’s work with us; having presented us - His slaves - as a bride to His Son; by which we got the fellowship in His heavenly glories.
- f- In case the master or his son did not give the maiden slave - to whom either of them got married - her due care, as to food, clothing, or her marital rights, should be freed. Eventually, that custom of taking Hebrew slaves was abolished and banned after the return from captivity.

(2) Slavery of a Gentile: These were almost always captives of war (Numbers 31: 9; 2 Kings 5: 2); or purchased (Genesis 17: 27; 37: 28, 36; Exodus 27: 13); or by birth (Genesis 17: 12). But we do not find, in the Holy Book or in history, any indication that the Jews had slavery markets.

Before the Mosaic Law, Abraham, the father of faith, presented us with a living portrait of dealing with slaves; having put in his heart to leave his inheritance to one of his slaves - Eliezer of Damascus (Genesis 15: 2), who was the steward on all his wealth. And, in Isaac’s marriage to Rebecca, (Genesis 24), Abraham’s trust in his slave was obvious, and the behavior of the later proved him worthy of that trust.

The Mosaic Law came to give the slaves certain rights that guaranteed their position as human beings; of which are the following:

- a- *“He who kidnaps a man and sells him, or if he is found in his hand, shall surely be put to death”* (Ex. 22: 16).
- b- *“Whoever kills any man (either free or slave), shall be put to death* (Leviticus 24: 17).
- c- *“If a man destroys the eye of his slave, he shall let him go free”* (Ex. 21: 26).
- d- The law gave the slaves the right to worship their own gods; namely acknowledged the freedom of religion, even if they were wrong; but it gave the Hebrew master the right to circumcise his slaves.
- e- The law gave the slaves the right to partake of the Hebrew feasts (Ex. 20: 10; 23: 12)

Christianity and the slavery system: Christianity dealt with the slavery system in an objective way; to avoid agitating the slaves against their masters. Slaves in the Roman Empire constituted half its population; Bellini wrote that a Roman esquire, by the name Claudius Osidorus, in the days of Augustus, left among his possessions to 4116 slaves after his death. Christianity requested from slaves obedience to their masters (Ephesians 6: 5 - 8: Colossians 3: 22 - 25; 1 Timothy 6: 1, 2; 1 Peter 2: 18, 21). It is also believed, according to St. John Chrysostom, the possibility that a slave may influence his master through his holy life in the Lord.

The Church worked hard to bring back a slave to his master, as St. Paul did in his letter written to Philemon concerning his slave Onesimus, who escaped from his service, to give the latter the chance (Philemon) to set him free and to forgive him, by his own free will.

The slavery system started to collapse, and that was one of the main causes of the animosity of the Roman Empire toward the Christian Church. The secret of its collapse was based on the following:

- a- The Church committed its children to treat slaves as their own brothers (1 Corinthians 7: 21, 22; Galatians 3: 28; Colossians 3: 11). We should not forget that the Lord Christ was delivered to His enemies for thirty pieces of silver, as though a slave. So, He included Himself among the slaves, and so sanctified the believers among them.
- b- When the apostle Paul returned the slave Onesimus, who escaped from Philemon to his master, he sent with him an awesome message, calling the slave *“...my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains...you therefore receive him, that is, my own heart...for perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose, that you might receive him forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother, especially to me...”* (Philemon 10 - 16).
- c- Having lived with the Spirit of the Bible, some masters set their slaves free through an inner motive, without any compulsion to do so.

- d- Several of those who have been slaves, have earned exalted dignity in the Church; either through martyrdom, like Blandina, Bablis, and Felictas, whom the Church consider as heroes of faith; or occupied high places in the clergy, like Onesimus, the disciple of St. Paul, who became a Bishop on 'Borea' in Macedonia, and Calistus, Bishop of Rome in the third century.
- e- The early Church writings have enticed to the collapse of that system; like for example, what was written in the 'Didache', [Do not bitterly rebuke your man- or maiden slave who worship the Lord your God, lest they might lose the fear of God, who is above all, and do not look at the faces].

St. Clement of Alexandria says: [Slaves are human beings just like us]. And Father Lactantius says: [Slaves are not enslaved to us, but they are our brothers in the Spirit; fellow slaves in religion]. St. Ignatius of Antioch wrote: [Do not despise the slaves, or let them swell with pride; but let them rather have humility for the sake of the glory of God]. St. Augustine believed that the appearance of slavery was the fruit of sin, as the divine ordinances would never allow someone to enslave his fellow man, and to have authority over him. St. John Chrysostom adopting the same idea, and said that slavery appeared only when Canaan fell under the curse (Genesis 9: 25).

## 2- Violence:

The commandment proclaimed that God hates killing, is stated clearly in the Bible, "*You shall not kill*", while the statutes of the Law came to reveal more details for that commandment, and tied between killing and striking, leading to permanent marks on the body. It is summarized as follows:

- a- Killing with premeditation: The killer should die; nothing could protect him, even if he takes refuge in the Lord's altar (Ex. 21: 14). Killing a free man or a slave are equally punished (Ex. 21: 16). The Law considered striking or cursing a father or mother, a kind of killing that should also be punished by death (Ex. 21: 15, 17).

The Law commanded that no ransom shall be taken for the life of a murderer who is guilty of death, "*for blood defiles the land*" (Numbers 35: 31, 33). By that it treated the rich like the poor, and the one with authority like the one without.

*"Whoever kills a person, the murderer shall be put to death on the testimony of two or three witnesses"* (Numbers 35: 30).

- b- Killing through responsibility: If somebody knew that his ox tended to thrust in time past, and has not kept it confined, and the ox killed a man, the ox with his owner would be put to death. But, if the ox killed another animal, the living ox would be sold, and its price would be divided among the two owners (Ex. 21: 36). Yet, if it was proved that the owner of the ox was not negligent, the ox would be killed, but its owner would be considered not guilty.

Man would submit to the same responsibility if he digs a pit and does not cover it, and someone falls in it (Ex. 21: 33); or if he does not build a parapet around the roof of his house,

and someone falls from it, he would be considered in either case as a killer (Deuteronomy 22: 8). Thus, the Lord counted negligence a sin, to be punished.

- c- Killing without premeditation (Ex. 21: 13): The killer in this case has the right to flee to a city of refuge from the avenger of blood, and he shall dwell in that city until the death of the one who is the high priest in those days. Then, the slayer may return and safely come to his own city from which he fled (Numbers 35: 11; Deuteronomy 19: 3; Joshua 2: 3). The cities were symbols of the Lord Christ, to whom the repentant soul would find refuge from the sentence of death. But if it forsakes faith, it would perish by its transgression. God designated these cities of refuge, and commanded putting marks that help the refugees find these cities. I hope to expose these issues in my study of the Book of Numbers.

Here, the sanctification of the value of human life in the law is apparent; commanding the killing of the killer with premeditation, with the intention of checking future crimes. But, at the same time, protecting the one who killed without premeditation, presuming that what happened is accidental, but “*God delivered him into his hands*” (Ex. 21: 13).

- d- Striking: God’s holy view of human life is not only demonstrated in refraining from killing, but also in his intolerance to any harm done to man, whoever he is. Thus, if a man strikes and permanently damages an eye or a tooth of his slave, male or female, he shall have to let him go free for the sake of his eye or tooth (Ex. 21: 26). If a permanent damage occurs to a free man, then it will be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe (Ex. 21: 23 - 25), in order to punish the striker, and to check the tendency to violence. Yet, the Law forbade the one who was stricken to avenge himself with a more severe strike, as the normal tendency of man would be, because the one who has stricken had started the fight. For the time will come, that when man would mature spiritually, he would know how to pay evil with goodness. St. Augustine spoke of five degrees of love and anger that are:

- 1- The tendency of man to attack his fellow man with no reason, as it happens among primitive tribes.
- 2- Man does not initiate attack, but would pay back with double force if attacked.
- 3- If attacked, man pays back with no more than an equal force; namely eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth, etc. The Mosaic Law managed to lift man up to this stage, a great achievement at that time, but it did not commit man to pay back an eye for an eye, but forbade him of paying back two eyes for a single one.
- 4- Paying back the harm with one of less intensity, for the sake of mere chastisement.
- 5- Paying back the harm with love, the evil with good, and treating the one who started it as a sick man...the Lord Christ elevated us to act in this manner, in His sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5: 43 - 48). Let us then follow the example of our heavenly Father, whose sun shines on the wicked and the righteous, and rains on the just and the oppressors.

Now if we look back at the Mosaic Law, we find that it gives the one stricken the right to get a compensation for the loss of his time, and to be provided for, until thoroughly healed.

A miscarriage of a woman because of men fight:

*“If men fight, and hurt a woman with child, so that she gives birth prematurely, yet no lasting harm follows, he shall surely be punished accordingly, as the woman’s husband imposes on him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. But if any lasting harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth ...”* (Ex. 21: 22 - 25)

The scholar Origen comments on this statute saying, [Men who fight, are those obsessed with disputes over certain points in the Law, using what the apostle described as *“arguments over words”* (1 Timothy 6: 4)]. We know how this often occurs among the brothers. That is why the apostle advises, saying: *“Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord, not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers”* (2 Timothy 2: 14), and to *“avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all”* (2 Timothy 23). Those disputing over such things are destroying hearers; namely hurting the pregnant woman and causing her miscarriage. That pregnant woman is the soul that conceives with the word of God, as pregnancy is talked about in the Book of Isaiah (26: 18). Those who get pregnant and deliver are not likened to women, but to perfect men. Listen to the prophet saying: *“Who has heard such a thing?... Shall the earth be made to give birth in one day? Or shall a nation be born at once?”* (Isaiah 66: 8). That is the generation of the perfect, who are delivered on the same day they are conceived.

Do not assume that I am talking of something strange, when I proclaim that men deliver; I have already instructed you about the way we should understand these words; how we should avoid carnal interpretation, and seek that of the inner man.

Listen to what the apostle also says: *“My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you”* (Galatians 4: 19). Therefore, those who deliver directly after conception are strong and perfect men, and those who give fruits by work through the word of faith that they have received. But the soul that conceives, then keeps the fruits inside her without delivering, would be called a woman, according to the words of the prophet: *“The children have come to birth, but there is no strength to bring them forth”* (Isaiah 37: 3). That soul is called a woman because of her weakness, suffering and stumbling, as men fight and dispute. That is the sure result of dispute: rejecting the word of faith conceived, and ending up in the destruction of hearers.

If the soul that stumbled rejected the word before having the chance to respond to it, he who caused it to stumble will have to be punished.

Do you wish to know whether certain souls had the word formed in them or not? The apostle Paul instructs to see *“if Christ is formed in them”* (Galatians 4: 19). The Lord Christ being the Word of God, the apostle Paul said that the Word of God had not been formed in them, at the time he wrote his epistle. So rejecting of the Word, before being consummated inside, would be worthy of judgment.

The apostle also tells us about judgment of teachers, saying: *“If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire”* (1 Corinthians 3: 15). The Lord Himself says in the Bible, *“For is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?”* (Matthew 16: 26).

The scholar Origen comments on the phrase, *“as the woman’s husband imposes on him”* (Ex. 21: 22), saying: [The husband of the soul that learns is her master ... Christ, the head of the Church]. This Master will cut the stumbling teachers, off the Church’s body.

What does he means by saying that he hurts her eye, her teeth, her hand, her foot, or he gave her a burn? The scholar Origen believes that for those with little souls, the eye hurts, being their apprehension of God, and their inner insight. As for the teeth, that refers to the soul's ability to digest the word of God, to comprehend its secrets, and to get fulfilled with it. The hand refers to the ability of the soul to hold fast the spirituals, while the foot, refers to its ability to walk toward God. Concerning the burning, this refers to the suffering of the soul that burns because of its deprivation of God. These are how the spiritually little stumble because of foolish disputes.

=====

## CHAPTER 22

### THE LAW (continued)

1- Stealing	1 - 15
2- Adultery	16 - 20
3- Oppression	21 - 27
4- Reviling and cursing	28
5- Robbing the rights of God	29 - 31

+++++

#### **1- Stealing:**

God considered Himself responsible, not only for the life of man and his body, but also for his possessions, and for selfishness through which someone intends to acquire for himself what belongs to his fellow man, is considered a sin committed by man against God Himself. Statutes concerning thefts, thieves, and the victim of that crime, came very flexible, for that time. As for example:

a- If the theft is found in his hand, the thief shall restore double what he stole; but if he had already sold or had it slain, he will have to retribute an ox by five oxen, and a goat by four goats, even if he has to sell all his possessions, or to sell himself as a slave.

Yet, the robber's life was the object of God's care; if he is found breaking in, and is struck, by night, so that he dies, there shall be no guilt for his bloodshed. But if the sun has

risen on him, there would be full restitution for his bloodshed from his killers, for God does not want the spirit of vengeance but only that of chastisement

- b- Theft is not confined to breaking in, but may happen also through negligence. For example, if man lets his animal loose and it feeds in another man's field, or if he kindles fire to consume thorns in his field, so that it also consumed his neighbor's crops, he shall have to give restitution.
- c- If a man delivers to his neighbor money, articles, or animals to keep, and it is lost through negligence from the man's house, the matter should be brought to the judges to decide the amount of restitution, depending on the financial ability of the responsible party.
- d- Everyone is committed to look after his neighbor's possessions during his absence; as there were no bank safes or insurances at that time; the cooperation of the whole congregation would be the insurance for all.

## **2- Adultery:**

We have already dealt with the crime of adultery in chapter twenty (the sixth commandment). Here, the concept of adultery goes far to include sorcery and sacrificing to foreign gods. Whoever uses sorcery for his benefit would be like a wife who forsakes her man, and seeks another to sustain her. Sacrificing to idols is like a bride who, instead of offering her life as a sacrifice of love to her only groom, she offers her heart a sacrifice of lust and defilement to others.

Some wrongly assume that adultery was banned by God, because it hurts one of the parties, physically, socially, or emotionally. But the Law reveals it as a sin of uncleanness, which is hated by God, Who commands that whoever lies with a beast, be put to death, as he defiles his soul and body, together with the earth itself.

## **3- Oppression:**

God cannot stand the oppression of man against his fellow man, especially if the party oppressed is a stranger, a widow, an orphan, or a poor person. God banned lending for interest (Ex. 22: 25), as these loans were not used in honest commercial business, but they were done because of poverty, that leads some to pawn his only garment. God, the gracious says, "*If you ever take your neighbor's garment as a pledge, you shall return it to him before the sun goes down*" (Ex. 22: 26).

He warned His people against oppression, reminding them of two things: first, having tasted and experienced the humiliation of being a stranger, how could they not feel the pain of one? Second, He could not stand to hear the crying out of the oppressed and the needy, which would kindle His wrath against the oppressors.

## **4- Reviling and cursing:**

*"You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people"* (Ex. 22: 28).

The Church is set on mutual respect and on obedience of the young toward the old. The believer, who feels God's care, would never revile Him, and would always obey rulers in the Lord.

### **5- Robbing God's rights:**

Speaking in this chapter of refraining from stealing the possessions of others, and from oppressing the strangers, the weak, and the needy, He also speaks of refraining from robbing God's right in the firstborns and first fruits (chapter 13), as a sign of consecrating the whole congregation to God.

It is amazing that His care for the firstborns and first fruits are not only in order for the needy to find their fulfillment in the house of the Lord, but He even cares for the dogs, saying, *"And you shall be holy men to Me: you shall not eat any meat which is torn by beasts in the field; you shall throw it to the dogs"* (Ex. 22: 31).

On the other hand, He commanded us to be holy to Him, from the practical point of view, through giving the firstborns of our sons, beside those of beasts of the field, and the first fruits of our ripe produce; and abstractly, through refraining from eating unclean items: *"You shall not eat any meat that is torn by beasts in the field"*. It is as though the believer, in his fellowship with God, strives to do virtue and also refrains from wickedness. He acts in righteousness and refuses evil.

=====

## CHAPTER 23

### THE LAW (continued)

1- Hypocrisy and justice	1 - 3
2- Helping others and justice	4 - 6
3- Taking no bribe and justice	7 - 0
4- The Sabbath and the rights of others	10 - 13
5- The feasts	14 - 19
6- The divine presence	20 - 23
7- No mixing with foreign peoples	24 - 33

+++++

#### **1- Hypocrisy and justice:**

The Law cared for the sanctification of the congregation as a whole, and of each of its members individually. For the sake of the congregation as a whole, one should not accept or circulate a false report, or should not partake of the oppression of a hypocrite. It is also for the sake of his own sanctifying, that he should not follow a crowd to do evil (Ex. 23: 2), and should not talk lies, so as not to kill the innocent and the righteous (Ex. 23: 7).

God also cares for the poor, lest he would be oppressed by the rich, “*You shall not pervert the judgment of your poor in his dispute*” (Ex. 23: 6); equally He requests that, in our

compassion for the poor, we do not become unjust toward the rich, “*You shall not show partiality to a poor man in his dispute*” (Ex. 23: 3).

## **2- Helping others, and justice:**

Helping others is not optional, but it is a divine commitment that does not apply only to humans, but it extends even to the donkey of an enemy, lying under its burden.

If man - under the Law - is committed not to refrain from helping the donkey of his enemy, lying under its burden, what would be his responsibility, if he delays supporting his enemy or his brother, while in the time of grace? And as St. John Chrysostom says: [If the matter is like this, as far as the donkey is concerned, how can one gain forgiveness, if he despises the soul of his enemy, or disregard that of his friend?].

## **3- Taking no bribes, and justice:**

The law warns against taking bribes, “*For a bribe blinds the discerning and perverts the words of the righteous*” (Ex. 23: 8).

## **4- The Sabbath and the rights of others:**

We have heard of the Sabbath, concerning the gathering of manna (chapter 16), and the Ten Commandments (chapter 20), but here, speaking of the rights of others, the law deals with the Sabbath from a new angle. The Sabbath here, is not a sanctification of the life of man, when, in it, he remembers God who took rest in the seventh day, or a reminder of his going out of the land of Egypt, and the works of God with him, to bring him to rest; the Sabbath is here, mentioned for the sake of the right of others: to give the land a Sabbath, “*to let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of the people may eat, and what they leave, the beasts of the field may eat*” (Ex. 23: 10). Beside giving rest, not just to himself and his family, but “*to his ox, his donkey, the son of his maidservant and the stranger*” (Ex. 23: 12).

## **5- The feasts:**

The Book of Leviticus speaks in more details about the Jewish feasts and their rituals. But here, the Book of Exodus concentrates on a particular concept, namely their importance in social life; it dealt with three of these feasts, from three aspects:

- a- They ate unleavened bread, not only in the feast of the unleavened bread, but also in the two other feasts. As we said in chapter 12, the unleavened bread refers to the new life. As though the feast is a chance for man to reconsider his inner accounts, and his relationships with others, lest he might have oppressed anyone, or disregarded the right of the poor or the stranger.
- b- “*...Nor shall the fat of My sacrifice remain until morning* (Ex. 23:18). He says here, “*My sacrifice,*” for it is not the feast of man, but that of God, in which He rejoices in man. He

probably meant by that commandment to tell man to distribute all what concern the feast on that day among the poor, and not to keep any of it for himself or his family.

c- Presenting the firstborn, which we dealt with before.

The major feasts of the Jews are: the feast of the unleavened bread, which is inseparable from the Passover (Exodus 12; 13; Leviticus 23: 5); the feast of the harvest, on the beginning of harvest season, when they used to offer the first fruits of their produce (Leviticus 23: 15 - 22; Numbers 28: 26 - 31; Deuteronomy 16: 9 - 12); and the feast of Tabernacles at the end of the season (Numbers 29: 12; Leviticus 23: 34, 43; Deuteronomy 16: 13, 43).

St. John Chrysostom comments on the commandment of the Law: "*None shall appear before Me empty*" (Ex. 23: 15), saying: [It means that you should not enter the temple without sacrifices. Do not go to the assembly, unaccompanied by your brothers; a sacrifice far better than any other is when you offer to God another soul with you to the Church].

## **6- The divine presence:**

This is considered the farewell commandment, that

*"I will send an angel before you to keep you in the way, and to bring you into the place which I have prepared"* (Ex. 23: 20).

Here He speaks of the presence of the Lord in their midst, to become as an angel to protect, to guide, and to bring them into the divine promises. The word "angel" means a messenger, a carrier of a message. When God descends among us, it is as though He is bringing us a message from Himself (Ex. 33: 15, 16).

This is a reference to the incarnation of the Word of God, and His descending to us, to guide us to the higher Jerusalem. And as the Law ended its commandments by this promise, the Lord Christ ended His life on earth by the same promise, saying: "*I am with you always, even to the end of the ages*" (Matthew 28: 20). St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa, tells us that, by His angel, it means the Lord Himself. Moses, after a while begs the Lord to go in their midst (see Ex. 33: 15, 16), to which the Lord responded by saying: "*I will do the thing that you have spoken*" (Ex. 33: 17).

## **7- No mixing with other peoples:**

This is not a separate commandment, but an extension of the last one; for if from the practical view they accept God's presence in their midst, and His guidance of their life, on the other hand, they have to refrain from mixing with other nations, and to reject their gods. The Jews could not discern between the sinner and the sin, and between pagan people and pagan life.

=====

## CHAPTER 24

### THE DIVINE COVENANT

### AND THE ROLE OF THE CONGREGATION

In the previous chapters we see the incessant movement of God toward His people; He gave them Moses to rescue them, He moved Pharaoh's heart, He made them cross the Red Sea, and put an end to their enemies (the devil and his hosts), He sustained them with the heavenly manna, and turned the bitterness of water into sweetness, etc. Now the congregation (the Church) is committed to move toward God with His support. So, this chapter came to reveal how the Church functions in God; that could be summarized in the following points:

#### **1- The collective Spirit:**

Although "*Moses alone shall come near the Lord*" (Ex. 24: 2), without the people, yet God instructed Moses to "*come up to the Lord, he and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel*" (Ex. 24:1). The Church knows no individualization, but the spiritual leadership, with all its various capabilities and capacities, should come together in one Spirit. Moses, who received the Law, should join Aaron, the High Priest, and his two sons, Nadab and Abihu, as representatives of priests and Levites, and with them seventy of the elders of the people. Concerning this the apostle says, "*For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function; so we, being many, are one body to Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness*" (Romans 12: 4 - 8).

All should work together with one Spirit, even with the different gifts. No one should boast his gift over the others, or underestimate the talents that God gave him. Let him work, not with the Spirit of haughtiness, or with lowliness of soul. And as St. John Chrysostom says: [I wish we take all these things into consideration; not to envy or harbor grudge toward those with greater gifts; and at the same time, not to despise those with lesser ones].

## **2- A spiritual and not a carnal bond:**

Moses did not take with him one of his sons, and we did not hear that he gave them a certain responsibility that they could not bear. But, when God ordered him to have his brother Aaron work with him, he did not refuse (Ex. 4: 14). And he took with him Aaron and his two sons, Nadab and Abihu (Ex. 24:1). Here, the living spiritual leadership that works only for God's sake is demonstrated.

Nadab is Aaron's firstborn, and his name means generous, and Abihu means a father. Unfortunately, both of them perished, when they offered profane fire before the Lord (Numbers 26: 61), probably because they were drunk. Anyway, these two became horrible examples to the priests of the Lord. For, although they accompanied Moses and Aaron, together with 70 of the elders, and saw the God of Israel, with heavenly glories under his feet (Ex. 24: 9), and although they took part in the priestly work from the beginning, yet they deprived themselves of enjoying God, through their offering profane fire. That is why the apostle warns us saying, "*Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he falls*" (1 Corinthians 10: 12); and he also says, "*But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified*" (1 Corinthians 9: 27).

## **3- The role of the people:**

If Moses, being the leader of the people, Aaron, their High Priest, and his sons, together with 70 of their elders, went up, yet the Church life would never be set upon passive people. Thus, before Moses offers the burnt offerings and sacrifices to the Lord, and before he sprinkled the blood over the altar and the people, "*he told them all the words and judgments of the Lord*" (Ex. 24: 3), which they readily accepted. For the sake of the people, Moses came, and for their sake the priesthood was set. Therefore, they should have the first word in their relationship with God.

In the Church, the congregation has a positive role. There is no secret liturgy, but the congregation openly partakes of the service with the priest. And just as the priest prays on behalf of the congregation, the deacon asks them to pray for the Patriarch and all the clergy, and the congregation are committed to testify and preach the gospel, being the message of Christ, read by all the people.

## **4- The role of the young men:**

*"Then he sent young men of the children of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the Lord"* (Ex. 24: 5).

The role of the young men is not just to listen and obey, but they carry on an essential role in the life of the Church. God requests from you, in the days of your youth, offerings of love and peace; saying, "*Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth*" (Ecclesiastes 12: 1).

## **5- Spirit of discipleship:**

*“So Moses arose with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up to the mountain of God”*  
(Ex. 24: 13)

St. Ambrose saw in Joshua’s attachment to Moses a live symbol of discipleship. A successful leader presents to the Church disciples for the Lord. After his departure, his success is assessed by the disciples he left behind to complete his ministry, or if his work ends at his departure. St. Ambrose says about Joshua: [He was attached to the blessed Moses everywhere, and amid all those amazing works and awesome secrets...how beautiful is this unity between the old and the young; the first was given a testimonial (the two tablets of the Law), and the second was given rest (the land of promise); the first gave leadership, while the other gave happiness...the first had control over the sea, and the second over heaven (Joshua 10: 12)].

#### **6- Working by the Spirit of prayers with wisdom:**

Aaron was attached to Hur; they worked together as they were supporting Moses’ hands during the battle between Israel and Amalek (Ex. 17: 12); and then, they worked together on judging the people’s disputes during the absence of Moses. Aaron represented priesthood, while Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and a grandfather of Bezaleel, about whom Moses said, *“See, the Lord has called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judas ... and has filled him with the Spirit of God in wisdom and understanding, in knowledge and all manner of workmanship”* (Ex. 35: 30, 31), represented the divine wisdom. If Moses by stretching his hands represented the cross, that cross was set on the priestly work of Christ, and on the wisdom of God for our salvation. Here also, in his absence, Moses assigned Aaron and Hur to judge the people’s affairs. The Church, in its care for the people, needs priestly work mixed with both, compassion and wisdom of organization.

#### **7- Sanctification with blood:**

The Church work could not be offered, except through sacrificing and sacrifice, that is why *“Moses rose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel”* (Ex. 24: 4). As these tribes could not exist except through the altar, and could not be sanctified except by sprinkling half the blood on the altar, and the other half on the people. Through the blood of the true sacrifice, that of the Lord Christ, the people would enter into the Holy of Holies; and as the apostle Paul says, *“Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is His flesh; and having a High Priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water”* (Hebrew 10: 19 - 21).

#### **8- Connecting heavenly life to contemporary actuality:**

*“They saw the God of Israel, and there was under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, and it was like the very heavens in its clarity”* (Ex. 24: 10).

It is as though God wants all ministers of God, working in the Church, to carry His heavenly nature and His heavenly thoughts, yet without disregarding their physical existence, and the needs of their bodies. As the Scripture says: “*They saw God and they ate and drank*” (Ex. 24: 11).

**9- Moses spends forty days on the mountain:**

We talked previously about the clouds and the appearance of God as fire. Now, let us behold Moses on the mountain “*forty days and forty nights*” (Ex. 24: 18). St. Augustine believes that the figure 40 refers to the wholeness of our life on earth; as though it is fitting for the believer to spend all his life on the mountain of God; according to God’s law and his commandments, contemplating in God’s glory, and enjoying His encounter face to face. And as Moses fasted forty days and forty nights, the true believer should live all his days of sojourn in some sort of abstinence, not for its own sake, but in order to lift up his heart to a life of fellowship with God and continuous contemplation in Him; or in other words, to say with the scholar Tertullian: [Moses and Elijah fasted forty days, subsisting on God alone]. God became their fulfilling food!



## CHAPTER 25

### THE ARK, THE TABLE, AND THE LAMPSTAND

1- Between the Tabernacle, the Church, and heaven	
2- Offerings for the Sanctuary	1 - 9
3- The Ark of Testimony	10 - 22
4- The Table of the Showbread	23 - 30
5- The Gold Lampstand	31 - 39

+++++

#### **1- Between the Tabernacle, the Church, and heaven:**

We have previously published a work on the building of the Church, the house of God, and its development from the paradise, where our foreparents were, until our crossover to the heavenly city, and our entrance into the eternal Holy of Holiness. We talked in it about the inter-relationships between the Church building and the Church assembly, the liturgical worship, and the believer's inner life. We talked, as well, about the details of the furnishings of that building, and their relationship to those of the tabernacle and the old Temple, in the light of biblical thoughts, and writings of the early fathers. For this reason, I have to refer to that study, when I deal with the tabernacle and its furnishings, to avoid repetition.

Now, going back to chapter 25 of the Book of Exodus, we see the prophet Moses isolate himself from any worldly hindrance, and ascends the mountain of knowledge, to receive the ten commandments and the Law. Now, God grants him a new vision, "the heavenly Sanctuary", not made by human hands, where God dwells with His beloved creation, and commands him to make a shadow of the image of that Sanctuary, for the sake of those at the foot of the mountain, for God to dwell in their midst, and prepare them to enter into the heavenly Sanctuary. In other words, the tabernacle came as a shadow of heaven itself, so that the people would cross over to the New Testament, and enter into the image of heaven or its (advance payment); and finally would set forth in eternal life to the perfection of the heavenly Sanctuary.

This is what St. Methodius expressed, saying: [The Jews prophesied our situation, while we prophesied the heavenly, whereas the tabernacle is the symbol of the Church, the Church is the symbol of the heavenly]. And he says: [God commanded the Hebrews to adorn the tabernacle, as a model of the Church; so that, through the things seen, they could proclaim beforehand the image of divine things. The pattern that appeared to Moses on the mountain, according to which he was committed to build the tabernacle, has been a kind of true

resemblance to the heavenly Sanctuary that we see now more clearly than it was through the symbols. Up till then, the truth could not be delivered to humanity, as it is in the present life, as it was incapable of seeing the pure eternal things, as it is impossible to look directly at the sun].

The Jews, to whom the shadows of the image of heavenly were proclaimed, understood one third of the truth; we, on the other hand, have beheld the whole image of the heavenly pattern.

But, after resurrection, the truth has been clearly represented, as we see the heavenly Sanctuary, “*The city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God*” (Hebrews 11: 10). We see it face to face, not in the darkness, or in parts (1 Corinthians 13: 12).

This is what the apostle revealed to us in the Book of Hebrews, as he, through the Spirit, humbly and reverently, approached the tabernacle to see it as “*the copy and shadow of the heavenly things*” (Hebrew 8: 5), that proclaims the secrets of God’s work among His people, “*Of these things we cannot now talk in detail*” (Hebrews 9: 5).

## **2- Offerings for the Sanctuary:**

The Lord commanded Moses to ask the people to participate in the building of the Sanctuary, in which the Lord would dwell amid His people,

*“Whoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it as an offering to the Lord”* (Ex. 35: 5).

*“And this is the offering which you shall take from them: gold, silver, and bronze; blue and purple and scarlet yarn, fine linen thread, and goats’ hair; ‘rams’ skin dyed red, badger skins, and acacia wood; oil for the light, and spices for the anointing oil and for the sweet incense; onyx stones, and stones to be set in the ephod and in the breastplate”* (Ex. 25: 3 - 7).

What are these items with which we may participate in that building to be owned by God, and where He will encounter with us? Let us take some examples of these items, and try to appreciate their spiritual significances:

a- Gold: The scholar Origen believes that gold is faith that turns the heart into a heaven. That is why gold refers to the heavenly; it refers as well to the saints as being a heaven, and God dwelling in their hearts.

He says: [If you believe, you offer your heart and mind as gold ...that is why, Moses, representing the spiritual Law, proclaims, “*Take from among you*” (Ex. 35: 5), If they are from among you, they are therefore inside you. You can offer God out of your feelings and of your words ... etc.].

Father Methodius believes that gold refers to life of virginity, saying: [He commanded that items in the Holy of Holiness should be made of gold, for two reasons: first, so that it does not rust; and second, that its color is close to that of the sun, by which it fits virginity, that embraces no defilement nor wrinkles, but always radiates the light of the word. Through it we stand close to God, inside the Holy of Holiness, and before the veil, with undefiled hands as incense, to offer the Lord prayers with sweet fragrance, in the golden bowls of the twenty four elders, full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints].

- b- Silver: If gold is the faith of the heart, silver would be the word of preaching; as the word of God is like silver that is seven times purified. And if gold refers to virginity, fathers see in silver a reference to the purity of marriage.
- c- Bronze: It refers to patience or strength. The Lord Christ's hands appeared as "*rods of gold*" (Songs 5: 14), because His works are heavenly, while His feet were "*like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace*" (Revelation 1: 15), and with them we fearlessly crush all the thorns and afflictions of this life.
- d- Wood: Which is not infected by bugs, but the wood is referring to knowledge or abstinence that never gets old or corrupted.
- e- Fine linen thread: Referring to the body which is under strict control. According to the words of the apostle: "*I discipline my body and bring it into subjection*" (1 Corinthians 9: 27). The trials we encounter to control the body, and to bring it into subjection in Christ Jesus, is an offering to the house of the Lord.
- f- Scarlet: If the scarlet cord that saved the life of 'Rahab' and all her household (Joshua 2: 18), refers to the blood of the Lord Christ, the Savior, the scarlet that we offer is our testimonial to Him, even to blood, according to the words of the apostle: "*For your sake we are put to death all day long,*" as though the scarlet refers to martyrdom; either through shedding the blood of believers during the time of martyrdom, or through the daily strife for the sake of the Lord.
- g- Purple: As purple is the color of royal garment, just as when the soldiers wanted to mock the Lord Christ as a king, "*they put on Him a purple robe*" (John 19: 2). We put on the purple royal robe, which is "love".

The scholar Origen believes that it refers to the shine of love, as well as to fire. As the true Christian carries fire in his heart, which is the fire of the Holy Spirit that enlightens the way, and consumes the thorns that strangle the soul.

The Lord Christ confirmed the existence of this fire in our hearts, saying: "*I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled*" (Luke 12: 49); and in the Book of Jeremiah, the Lord says: "*Behold, I will make My words in your mouth fire*" (Jeremiah 5: 14), which makes our hearts engraved with the fiery Holy Spirit. The two disciples of Emmaus received divine fire as they heard the words of the Savior, and said: "*Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?*" (Luke 24: 32). And the Church received the Holy Spirit as tongues of fire on the day of the Pentecost (Acts 2).

- h- Goats' hair: This refers to death to sin (Ex. 35: 6; Leviticus 4: 23). The scholar Origen says: [Offering it refers to destroying sin, so that it reigns no more in his members].

i- Rams' skin: If goats refer to sin, rams refer to anger; who offers them proclaims the death of anger in him.

### **All partaking of the offering:**

The scholar Origen says: [Partaking of all in the offering is not something to be disregarded by the Lord. How great will be the dignity that you would gain ... and on the contrary, how great would be the shame, when the Lord discovers that you have not offered anything to build His Sanctuary! If you lead a life of no piety or honesty, you are leaving no moment in the house of the Lord. When the prince of this world comes, he seeks anything in our hearts that could belong to him, to claim it. But the Lord, if He finds in your heart an offering to Him, He will surely defend you and set you a king].

My Lord Jesus, grant me the worthiness to leave in Your house a momentum. I yearn to partake of that gold, of which the altar is made, the cover of the Ark, or the lampstand. Or at least, give me the privilege to partake of the silver offered for the pillars or their bases; or even to partake of the bronze, of which other items mentioned in the Holy Book, are made. I wish I am a prince to be capable to offer precious stones for the ephod and the breastplate of the High Priest; and if I cannot afford it, let me offer goats' hair, so as not to be altogether without fruit.

Chapter 35 testifies that both men and women came to Moses with their offerings, which we shall deal with it in due time if God wills.

### **From where did they get the offerings?**

The scholar Origen believes that the people used the gold, the silver, the precious stones, and the clothing, that they brought from the house of bondage, to build the tabernacle with all its furnishings, saying: [The Egyptians misused these things, but the Hebrews put them into better use, having had the wisdom of God in them].

### **To make a Sanctuary for Me:**

The Lord commanded Moses to make a Sanctuary, where He would dwell with His people; to be a shadow of the heavenly, saying: "*According to all that I show you, that is, the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so you shall make it*" (Ex. 25: 9).

As the original building of the Church carries an image of the heavenly; in the same way we can also set within our hearts a sanctuary for the Lord that carries an image of the heavenly. Concerning this, the scholar Origen says: [Every one of us could make a sanctuary for the Lord within his soul]. And he says, [God wishes us to make for Him a sanctuary, promising us to behold Him there]. The apostle says to the Hebrews: "*Pursue peace with all men, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord*" (Hebrews 12: 14). That is the sanctuary He commands us to make; that the apostle yearns to see in the virgins, to be holy in body and Spirit, realizing that making a sanctuary for the Lord, would be through the purity of the heart and body, in order to behold the Lord. Therefore, let us make a sanctuary for the Lord; let us all make it together, and let each one of us make one inside himself. As to the Sanctuary that we make together, it is the holy Church, "*that has no spots or wrinkles*" (Ephesians 5: 27).

### **3- The Ark:**

We expected that the Book of Exodus would, after the invitation to partake of the offerings to make the tabernacle, to speak of its dimensions, building materials, sections, and finally its furnishings, but we find it here, talking first of certain of its furnishings, before even talking of the tabernacle itself. In this chapter, he talks to us about the Ark of the Testimony, the Table of the Showbread, and the Lampstand. It probably meant to talk first, of the most holy items, in the most holy place at the time. These three items represent the secret of God's presence among His people (the Ark), the secret of their fulfillment in God (the Table of the Showbread), and the secret of their enlightenment (the gold Lampstand).

The writing of these three things came after receiving the Ten Commandments and the Law, as though God by this intended to present to His people the possibilities that would support and help them to keep these divine commandments. As through his free will alone, man could not keep them; but he is in need of the Ark, which is the dwelling of God Himself in the heart, of the Table of the Showbread, which is the fulfillment with the bread of the angels, and of the Lampstand, which is the enlightenment with the Holy Spirit. By all this, the commandments would not only be possible to keep, but would become natural in the life of the children of God, and joyful to their souls.

#### **The specifications and materials of the Ark:**

The Ark was called in Hebrew 'Aaron', namely a (box); two and a half cubits in length, and a cubit and a half in width, and a cubit and a half was the height. It was made of Acacia wood, overlaid with pure gold inside and out (Ex. 25: 10). On it was a cover of pure gold, also called 'the Mercy Seat', having represented the throne of God, full of compassion toward His children. There were two cherubim of gold at the two ends of the Mercy Seat, stretching out their wings above, covering the Mercy Seat with their wings, and facing one another. On each side there were two rings of gold, to put the poles into the rings on the sides of the Ark, that the Ark may be carried with them. The families of the children of Kohath were assigned to carry and to watch the Ark (Numbers 3: 29 - 31).

#### **History and significance of the Ark of Testimony:**

The Ark represented the presence of God; according to the divine words:

*“And there, I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are on the Ark of the Testimony, of all things which I will give you in commandment to the children of Israel” (Ex. 25: 22).*

By this, the Ark used to go before the people, preceded by the pillar of cloud by day, and that of fire by night.

*“Whenever the Ark set out, Moses said: ‘Rise up, O Lord! Let Your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate You flee before You’; And when it rested, he said: ‘Return, O Lord to the many thousands of Israel’”* (Numbers 10: 35, 36).

When the people came to crossover the Jordan, with the Ark carried by the priests before the people, the water of the Jordan was cut off (Joshua 3: 14 - 17). It stayed for a while in ‘Gilgal’, and then, was moved to ‘Shiloh’, where it remained for a duration between three and four generations (Jeremiah 7: 12 - 15). Because of the wickedness of the two sons of ‘Eli’ the priest, the Ark was captured by the Philistines in ‘Aphek’ (1 Samuel 4: 1), and brought by them into the temple of ‘Dagon’ in Ashdod (1 Samuel 5: 2). When they were struck by deadly illnesses throughout the city, and had to return it, it was placed in the village of Jearim (a Samuel 6, 7); to be taken later on by King David to Jerusalem, until the temple was established (2 Samuel 6: 1 - 15; Chronicles 15: 25 - 29).

### **The Ark and the Christian Altar:**

The Ark of the Testimony does not only refer to the presence of God, but also to His salvation work through the sacrifice of the Covenant. That is why the Altar came to consummate what the Ark signified in all its details and contents; of which we mention:

- a- The Ark was made of Acacia wood, as a reference to the wooden cross, the secret of our unity with God, and our entrance into His divine sanctuaries.
- b- It was overlaid, inside and outside, by gold, although the inside was not visible to the eye, so it may act like the sacrifice in our inner depths, as well as in our outer actions, and so we may live with a heavenly Spirit (golden).
- c- A molding of gold is made on it all around, a sign of our entrance into the heavenly glories through the divine Altar.
- d- Two Cherubim stretch out their wings above the cover (the mercy seats); a sign of our opening on the heavenly creatures, and our fellowship with the Seraphim and the Cherubim, in their liturgies and praises.
- e- The appearance of clouds between the Cherubim, the presence of God, hearing His voice there, and the appearance of a heavenly blue color were evidences of the eschatology of our liturgy in the new Altar.
- f- Inside the Ark were the two tablets of the Law, referring to the salvation words of God that we receive through the sacrifice; a pot of manna, referring to the holy body of the Lord; and the rod of Aaron, referring to the shepherding work of the Church, and its connection with the sacrifice.

### **The Ark and the Church:**

When I speak of the Church, I can not separate the catholic or global Church from that of the heart, as the latter is a member in the whole holy congregation. The Ark came to carry a symbol of this one Church: the Church of the holy congregation, and that of the heart.

St. Jerome says: [It is fitting for the bride of Christ to be, like the Ark of Testimony, overlaid by gold inside and outside, and to be a guardian of the Law of God (the two tablets). And as “*there was nothing in the Ark except the two tablets of stone*” (1 Kings 8: 9), there were no other tablets. And as the pot of manna, and the rod of Aaron are concerned, both enter within the Law and the word of God)]. So it is fitting for you to have nothing in your mind but the Law. God will have pleasure to abide in your mind, as He does on the mercy seat and the two Cherubim (Ex. 25: 22).

As the Ark represents the Church, it also represents the holy Virgin St. Mary, being a bearer of the Lord Christ; and the most ideal member of the holy Church. We have spoken in more detail of the similarities between the Ark of the Testimony and St. Mary, that she is overlaid by virginity (gold), physically and spiritually, from inside and outside. And as the Ark used to bring joy to the people, (as David danced before it with all his might (2 Samuel 6)); likewise, when the Virgin St. Mary, bearing the Lord Christ inside her, came to visit her pregnant relative Elizabeth, the babe John the Baptist leaped in her womb for joy.

#### **4- The table for the Showbread:**

The table for the Showbread was also made of Acacia wood; two cubits long, a cubit wide, and a cubit and a half high. It was also overlaid with gold, with a molding of gold all around; and with four rings of gold on the four corners, as holders for the poles to bear the table. The dishes that were for the bread, the pans that were for the frankincense, and the bowls and pitchers for the wine were all made of pure gold.

The table for the Showbread used to be put on the northern side of the tabernacle of meeting, outside the veil (Ex. 40: 22). In the temple of Solomon, there were ten tables for the showbread, as well as ten golden lampstands, but it is most probable that only one of each was used at one time. (2 Chronicles 4: 8, 19; 3: 11).

As to the second temple, its table was taken by Antichos Epiphanius to be replaced by another one made by Judah the Maccabian.

#### **Nomenclatures of the Showbread:**

There are several names for this bread that carry spiritual meanings that refer to our relationship with God. It is called ‘Showbread’, ‘Shewbread’, or ‘Bread of presence (Ex. 25: 30; 35: 13). The exact translation of the Hebrew name is Bread of the face, referring to its presence before God and in His presence, as though God is personally committed to fulfill the needs of His people. That is why the number of breads was twelve, a sign of God’s commitment to fulfill all his people (all the tribes). The figure 12 also refers to the months of the year, as though God is committed to fulfill His people all the year long. So it is also called ‘the continual Showbread’ (2 Chronicles 2: 4). The continuity of offering it refers to the standing or permanent covenant between God and His congregation. It is called ‘the holy bread’ (1 Samuel 2: 4), to be eaten only by the consecrated priests, on the Sabbath, in the tabernacle; as though it does not refer to carnal

material fulfillment, but to spiritual fulfillment; fit for the life of holiness, and to be eaten on the Sabbath, namely on the day of rest, as though concerning the eternal rest.

### **The ritual of the bread:**

That bread used to have a particularly exact ritual that comes in the Book of Leviticus (24: 5 -9). It was made every Sabbath in which no work is allowed, as it refers to the heavenly bread, that is out of this world, namely the Lord Christ Himself; offered hot on the golden table, as a confirmation of His heavenly feature and His heart enflamed with love to fulfill us. The bread is set in two rows, six in each row, and on them is put pure frankincense, which was, according to Josephus the historian, put in golden cups, to be burnt on the Sabbath.

Josephus believes that it has been unleavened bread; each two tenth of an ‘ephah’ of fine flour, which used to be offered to the elite guests, on the tables of kings (Genesis 18: 6; 1 Kings 4: 22), as well as in some offerings.

### **5- The Lampstand and its lamps:**

Its design, material, and measurements, were set by the Lord. Being six feet high, it was formed of a base, a shaft, and six branches, three on each side. It was adorned with bowls like almond blossoms, with ornamental knobs and flowers, all made of pure gold, carrying seven lamps that are provided with very pure oil, to emit light continually.

The lampstand was not just for illumination, but was an integral part of the rituals of worship which has spiritual theological concepts. The light reminds us of God, Who formed it as His first creation (Genesis 1: 3). In light God dwells, for He is the light to Israel (Isaiah 10: 17), as well as to the Gentiles (Isaiah 42: 6; 49: 6), Who shines on them, by coming for their salvation (Isaiah 9: 2), and to convert them from being the children of darkness to those of light. That is why, he who seeks Baptism, as he denies the devil, he looks toward the west, in reference to the kingdom of darkness of the devil; then, as he confesses the salvation work of God, he looks toward the east, in reference to the kingdom of light of God.

The Lord Christ is the light of the world (John 8 12; 12: 46), and by shining on His disciples, He made them the light of the world (Matthew 5: 14, 16). In the Book of Revelation, we see the Churches referred to as ‘lampstands’ (Revelation 1).

The seven lampstands refer to the work of the fiery Holy Spirit, who shines in the Church and enflames it by the fire of divine love. And also, works in its secret life (through the seven sacraments), and in every spiritual work, to which the hand of the Church extends, in order that the believers live in a continuous enlightenment.

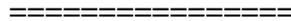
### **The light in the Church of the New Testament:**

The Church received from the Jewish tradition the Torah, the writings and the worship rituals (of certain spiritual concepts of light), and the Church of the disciples used the light in worship. The Book of Acts could not have told us of the presence of many lamps (20: 8), during the Eucharist in ‘Troas’, without meaning. If it was just for giving light, it would have been only natural, and there was no need to mention it. But the Christian Church, since its beginning, saw in the use of light a spiritual rite that touches the life of worshippers. We find the Spanish poet

'Prudentius', of the fourth century, speak of how the light of the lamps in the Church shone on its pure glass windows, as though they were the stars in heaven; and in the same century, father Polinus, Bishop of Nola, presented a similar testimony on the use of lights in worship.

We have previously spoken of the light shining day and night in the eastern end of the Church, as though it is the star of the east that appeared to the wise men to lead them to Christ the Savior; and of the two lampstands on the altar, as though they are the two angels standing guard on the body of Christ in the tomb, one at the side of His head and the other at that of His feet; and of the lamps shining before the icons of the saints, having become, by Jesus Christ, light for the world, and stars shining in paradise.

In the Divine Liturgy according to the Byzantine rite, the Bishop blesses the people with a candle of two branches (dikri), or of three branches (trikri), while in the Coptic rite, the ministering priest blesses the people with the cross together with three candles, during the raising of incense, asking God for mercy. During the reading of the Bible, all the lights of the Church are on, and two deacons carry candles on the right and left sides of the Bible, according to the words of the Psalmist, and in reference to the work of the Bible in enlightening the world. Lights, lamps, and flames are used during the rites of funerals; as it came in the description of that of St. Cyprian, of St. Macrina, sister of St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa, and that of the emperor Constantine, as a reference of the crossover of the departing soul to the heavenly light and the eternal joy.



## CHAPTER 26

### THE TABERNACLE OF MEETING

The Book of Exodus tells us that God showed Moses a pattern of the tabernacle, to build one accordingly (Ex. 25: 9). He showed him the actual one, in order to make a symbol of its model. The Book of Acts (7: 44), and the Epistle to the Hebrews (8: 5; 9: 23) confirm that Moses saw an actual model, which indicates that God wanted the tabernacle with all its details and specifications to serve, not for the sake of adornment, but as a symbol proclaiming an actual fact, and a reference that prophesies a future spiritual one.

And as the topic of the tabernacle occupies most of the remaining chapters of the Book, I find it convenient to present a simplified version, as to its names, measurements, sections, materials, and furnishings, to help the reader to understand the contents of these chapters.

#### Names of the tabernacle:

- a- The Sanctuary: As God commanded Moses to set it, “*that He may dwell among them*” (Ex. 25: 8, 9).
- b- The tabernacle of the testimony: (Ex. 38: 21); or the tabernacle of witness (Acts 7: 44); as in it, the Ark of Covenant that contains the two tablets is kept, as if, in its essence, the tabernacle became a practical testimony to the covenant that God made with His people, (which He wrote with His finger on the two tablets).
- c- The tabernacle of meeting: It was so called, not because the people used to meet together, there, but because God Himself used to meet with His people in it (Ex. 33: 7), to confirm His care for them, and His keeping of His covenant with them.
- d- The house of the Lord: It was not just a place of meeting, but a place offered by the people to God, to be accepted by Him who fills the heaven and earth, owning it as His private dwelling, even though He does not dwell in a house. It is to let His men and children enter into it, as though entering into heaven, the dwelling place of God (Joshua 6: 24).

#### Dimensions of the tabernacle:

The tabernacle took the shape of a rectangle; 30 cubits long, 10 cubits wide, and 10 cubits high, with an entrance to the east. The two sides and the rear end are made of 48 boards: 20 boards on each side, and 8 boards for the rear end. Each board is 10 cubits long, and one and a half cubit wide, overlaid with gold. Each board has two silver tenons that fit into two silver sockets. The boards are connected with bars of acacia wood, overlaid with gold, and coupled together by golden rings (Ex. 26: 15 - 30).

The entrance to the east was open, but covered by a veil; woven of blue, purple, and scarlet yarns, and fine linen threads, and was hung upon 4 pillars of acacia wood, overlaid with gold, set on bases of brass.

### **Sections of the tabernacle:**

The tabernacle is divided into two sections, by means of 4 identical pillars, set upon silver bases, with a veil hung upon them by golden hooks (Ex. 26: 31, 33, 37). It was woven of blue, purple, and scarlet yarn, and fine linen thread, with the design of cherubim made on them by a clever weaver. The veil divides between an eastern section, the holy place, and a western section, the Most Holy. The Most Holy place, on the western side, is like a cubicle, each side 10 cubits in length; and houses inside it the Ark of the Testimony. The holy place, on the eastern side, is 20 cubits long, 10 cubits wide, and 10 cubits high (Ex. 26: 16, 18, 22 - 24). It houses the table of Showbread on the right side, facing the golden lampstand on the left, and between the two is the golden altar of incense, opposite to the Ark of the Testimony (in the Most Holy place).

### **The material and covers of the tabernacle:**

- 1- In the tabernacle, the huge curtain that covers the roof, the two sides, and the rear end, does not reach down to the ground, but hangs over it by one cubit on each side. This curtain is formed of 10 pieces woven of fine linen thread, and of blue, purple, and scarlet yarn, with artistic designs of cherubim woven on them. Each piece is 28 cubits long, and 4 cubits wide. Every 5 curtains are coupled to one another; one to represent the roof and three sides of the Most Holy Place, while the other to represent the roof and sides of the holy place. The two sections are bound together by means of fifty loops of blue yarn on the edge of the curtain, connected to one another by clasps of gold, so that the whole tabernacle appear as one piece.
- 2- The main covering of the tabernacle is made of goats' hair, to be like a tent over the tabernacle. Its formed of 11 curtains, each 30 cubits long, and 4 cubits wide. By this, the length of the cover is 2 cubits longer than the inner curtain, one cubit on each side to cover the tabernacle down to the ground. Five curtains are gathered alone, to cover the roof and the sides of the Most Holy place, and six curtains are coupled by themselves, to cover the roof and the sides of the holy place, together with a portion of the entrance.
- 3- Two other coverings of rams' skin were dyed red to protect the tabernacle against the sun and rain.

### **The outer court of the tabernacle:**

Surrounding the tabernacle is a rectangular court; 100 cubits long, and 50 cubits wide. The court is bound by 20 pillars on each side, and 10 pillars between, its height is 5 cubits, namely half that of the tabernacle. On the pillars there are hangings, woven of fine linen thread, and the twenty pillars have their sockets made of bronze, their hooks and bands of silver.

For the gate of the court to the east, which is 20 cubits wide, there is a screen 20 cubits long, woven of blue, purple, and scarlet yarn, and fine linen thread, hung on 4 pillars (Ex. 27: 9 - 18). In the court, outside the tabernacle, there is the laver, and the altar of the burnt offering.

### **Erecting the tabernacle and its location:**

The tabernacle was erected on the first day of the second year of the exodus (Ex. 40: 17). It took the builders nine months to finish it, then it was dedicated by religious rituals.

It was erected during the journey across the wilderness, in the middle of the camp, surrounded by tents of the priests and Levites, then the tents of the rest of the tribes, arranged in four sections (Numbers 2: 2 - 34).

On the day, the tabernacle was erected, God's glory appeared as a cloud that filled and covered it. When the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, it became a pillar of cloud that went before the children of Israel in all their journeys. But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not journey till the day it was taken up. By night, the cloud was transformed into a pillar of fire that also went before them (Ex. 40: 35 - 38; Numbers 9: 15 - 23).

When they ended their journeys in the wilderness, the tabernacle settled down in 'Gilgal' on the east border of 'Jericho' (Joshua 4: 19), then it was moved to 'Shiloh' (Joshua 18: 1), to remain there between three and four centuries. After that it was moved to 'Nob' (1 Samuel 21: 1 - 9), and then to 'Gibeon', in the days of King David (1 Chronicles 21: 29). It was there at the beginning of the reign of King Solomon (2 Chronicles 3: 13), until he finished building the temple, according to its pattern, yet with double its dimensions: length, width, and height.

### **The tabernacle as a symbol of the Lord Christ:**

(1) The materials of which the curtains are made, are the same as those of the veil which divides the holy place from the Most Holy, the curtain on the gate of the tabernacle, and as those from which the garments of Aaron, the High Priest, are made. They represent the Person of the Lord Christ from four aspects; as though the Lord Christ is the ultimate subject of all these symbols:

- a- The fine threads of linen, refer to complete purity.
- b- The blue, refers to the fact that He is of heaven (John 3: 13).
- c- The purple, is the royal color, a sign of His Kingdom (Psalm 2)
- d- The scarlet, is a reference to His redeeming work; through shedding of His blood for our salvation.

This is the foundation on which the tabernacle is set. It is the Lord Christ Himself, in Whom the Father encounters humanity, and through Him, our reconciliation with the Father is achieved.

(2) Those marvelous and beautiful curtains were covered by three coverings:

- a- The first covering is made of goats' hair (Ex. 26: 7), of no beauty. For, despite the divine beauty that the Lord Christ carried within Him, His outer appearance carried affliction and passion. The prophet Isaiah saw Him with no beauty; He appeared to him as though He was despised and rejected by God and men (Isaiah 53). Yet He is the Lamb of God, on Whom the burdens of our sins and iniquities are given.

What we say of the Person of the Lord Christ, we also say of His commandment and preaching; His commandment is difficult, its way is rough and its door is narrow. Yet, whoever meditates and practices the commandment, will find in it the Lord Christ, Who grants exaltation and exuberance to the soul.

And what we say of the Lord and His commandment, would also apply to His followers. Whoever walks with Christ, would not carry outer beauty, as “*The royal daughter is all glorious within...*” (Psalm 45: 13). On his outside, the Christian looks as though he carries affliction and passion, while inside he carries glory and joy.

- b- Rams’ skin dyed red (Ex. 26: 14), as a symbol of the obedience of the Lord Christ to the Father, even to death.
- c- Badger skin (Ex. 26: 14), to cover all the coverings, symbolizing the predominant trait of the Lord Christ: His steadfastness in the testimony to the Truth even to death.

### **The pillars and boards:**

What are the pillars that carry the pieces of curtains, and what are the boards that bind the pillars together?

The scholar Origen says: [The tabernacle has to have pillars, namely, the teachers, who are its ambassadors, of whom the apostle says: “... *James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, ... gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship*” (Galatians 2: 9). In the tabernacle, the pillars are bound together by the boards (Ex. 26: 19); the same way the teachers in the Church are united]. The bases of the pillars are made of silver; two for each pillar. The silver refers to the word of God and gaining the gift of the Holy Spirit; as the words of God are as pure as silver in a crucible.

The foundation of the preaching of the apostles is the prophets; as “*the Church is built on the foundation of apostles and prophets*” (Ephesians 2: 20), and through their testimony, faith would be strengthened in Christ, the crown of the pillars, as expressed by the apostle Paul, “*The head of every man is Christ*” (1 Corinthians 11: 3). The boards that bind the pillars together, as we stated, are the hands bound together through the apostolic fellowship.

Therefore, the tabernacle is a symbol of the Lord Christ, and the Church as His body, set upon the apostles (the pillars), bounded and united by the Spirit of love and fellowship (the boards), who preach what has been prophesied by the prophets (the silver bases). It is an apostolic Church that walks by apostolic thought, yet does not ignore the Law and the prophets, but depends on them with a biblical spirit.

### **The pillars of the veil, and those of the gate:**

The veil that separates the holy place from the Most Holy is set upon four pillars. If that veil represents the isolation of man, and his deprivation from enjoying and entering into God’s presence, it actually refers to our love of the world, namely to the lusts of the body, that was taken from dust (the world). Thus the four pillars here, refer to the world (the four corners of the

universe), namely the carnal lusts, things that collapsed through the lifting up of the Lord Christ on the cross, when the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom (Matthew 27: 51).

The screen for the door of the tabernacle are supported by five pillars; the figure five most probably refers to the five senses, as there would be no entering into the tabernacle without sanctifying them. That is why the Kingdom of heaven was likened to the five wise virgins, who had their illuminated lamps stocked with oil; they had the sanctified senses, illuminated by the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, the kingdom of the devil, at the same time, is like the five foolish virgins with their lamps going out; their darkened senses that made them unworthy of entering into the heavenly wedding (Matthew 25).

### **The curtains:**

The tabernacle, in its essence, is a huge curtain, formed of two connected pieces. Each is formed of five curtains: measured 28 cubits long, and four cubits wide, woven of fine linen thread, and blue, purple, and scarlet yarns.

The collective curtain, that represent the catholic or global Church, being the tabernacle and garment of Christ, is 28 cubits long and 40 cubits wide (10 curtains each 4 cubits wide). These dimensions are not without meaning: as the figure 28 refers to the Church of the New Testament, where the figure 7 represents perfection, as we have seen before. So if the gospel is preached in the 4 corners of the universe, the Church of the New Testament would be symbolized by the figure 28. As to the figure 40, it refers to the era of the Law (The 10 commandments times 4 corners of the Universe). The Lord Christ, as well as the prophets Moses and Elijah, fasted 40 days; a sign of the necessity of worship all the days of our life. Therefore the curtain refers to the perfection of the Church, united through the two Testaments, the Old and the New.

Note that the collective curtain, forming the tabernacle, is actually formed of two united pieces, each of five curtains, as though the tabernacle is actually the fruit of union of two peoples that sanctified their 5 senses, to resemble the 5 wise virgins: the Jewish people and the Gentile people. The two peoples both represent one tabernacle, which is the holy body of the Lord Christ.

The two curtains are united by 50 loops, on each side (Ex. 26: 4, 5), all clasped together by 50 golden clasps. Therefore the secret of the union between the two peoples is the figure 50; namely the coming down of the Holy Spirit on the day of the Pentecost, that united the Jewish people to the Gentiles, granting the disciples the gift of talking with the tongues of all the peoples at that time, having all of them gathered together with the tongue of union, love, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. As to the clasps, being of gold, it is because the secret of the union, granted by the Holy Spirit, is achieved through our enjoyment of the heavenly thought. In heaven, there is no dissension, nor schism, but union and love.

Being woven of fine threads of linen, of blue, purple, and scarlet yarns refers to the fact that the Church is compared to its Head, the Lord Christ, symbolized by the 4 materials. The golden loops that bind the curtains together, that attaches tightly to the pillars and boards, refer to the faith that supports the Church.

### **The coverings:**

The tabernacle is formed of 10 curtains, a reference to the ten commandments of the Law, as though in order that God may dwell in our midst, we are committed to keep His Law and commandments. By obeying Him, we enter into His paradise, and live with Him as His children.

The covering, made of goats' hair, is formed of 11 curtains and not of 10 (Ex. 26: 7). According to St. Augustine, if the figure 10 refers to the Law, there is an eleventh commandment, which is known inclusively, which is "keeping the Law itself". The figure 11 refers then to our not keeping the Law or breaking it. So, if we, by this commandment, confess that we are breakers of the Law, we shall, in the merit of the blood, gain the forgiveness of sins. In other words, from outside, the 11 curtains appear to proclaim the necessity of confessing our sins, as a condition to enter into that divine dwelling place.

St. Augustine sees in the answer of the Lord Christ to the question of the apostle, concerning the number of times one should forgive his brother, that it is 77, a reference to the perfection of forgiveness. The sins (breaking the Law), are referred to by the figure 11, and the figure of perfection is 7. Therefore we cannot enjoy the perfection of the limitless mercies of God, unless we forgive our brothers their sins.

Note that the covering is, likewise, formed of two sections: one of which is formed of 5 curtains, and the other of 6 curtains; each with 50 loops, and the two sections are bound together by 50 clasps of bronze.

The two coverings may refer to the superficial worship of both the Jewish and the Gentile peoples: the Jewish people have the 5 sacrifices, the center of their worship; and the worship of the Gentile people are symbolized by the figure 6; being a failed human earthly worship. In our interpretation of the beast and the figure 666 in the Book of Revelation, we said that the figure 7 refers to perfection, and the figure 8 refers to the second or heavenly life, having exceeded the 7 days of the week, and entered into the new week, or the new second life. The figure 6 refers to imperfection; thus referring to the beast by the figure 666, means that it is all imperfection and no good. The Gentile worship embraced devilish fantasies, and imperfect practices. But through the 50 loops, meaning through the work of the Holy Spirit, that descended upon the Church on the day of the Pentecost, the five old Mosaic sacrifices came to an end, and so also did the imperfect pagan worships. And the Holy Spirit gave a fellowship of union in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Here, the clasps on the cover are of bronze and not of gold, as they are on the curtains of the tabernacle itself. The gold refers to the heavenly glory, that is in the inside, deep in the soul, while the bronze refers to the strife.

=====

## CHAPTER 27

### THE BRONZE ALTAR

1- The bronze altar	1 - 8
2- The court of the tabernacle	9 - 19
3- The care of the lampstand	20 - 21

+++++

#### **1- The bronze altar:**

If we have spoken of the inner holy places in the tabernacle: of the Ark of the testimony in the Most Holy place, and the table of the Showbread, the lampstand, and the altar of incense, yet, there is no access to these holy places except through the Bronze altar and the laver. The bronze altar was dedicated for sacrificing animals to the Lord. The epistle to the Hebrews

compares between the bronze altar with its incessant fire, to burn daily sacrifices, and the cross of the Lord Christ, that carried one sacrifice at the fulfillment of time.

As to the bronze altar, the apostle says that the High Priest used to enter into the Most Holy place, once a year; yet, *“not without blood, which he offered for himself and for his people’s sins committed in ignorance”* (Hebrew 9: 7). His entrance once a year was a sign of the limitations of the earthly service through sacrificing the blood of animals. The Lord Christ, the Chief High Priest, on the other hand, has entered, not into the symbols or shadows of the heavenly sanctuaries, but into heaven itself, yet, *“not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption”* (Hebrew 9: 12). He offered Himself on the cross, to present a possibility on an eternal level, with no repetition. The early High Priest suffered incessantly through offering the blood of animals every year, a sign of inability to put away sins. But the New High Priest, by His own blood He cast away sin, and entered with us into the same sanctuaries. And as the apostle says: *“For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God’s presence. Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment”* (Hebrew 9: 24 - 27).

That was concerning the high priest. As to his subordinate priests, *“Every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifice”* (Hebrew 10: 11). The apostle sees in the daily repetition of that process a sign that the blood of goats and calves is incapable of purifying the soul by taking away sin (Hebrew 10: 11), but sanctifies the flesh (Hebrew 9: 13). It carried a symbolic work, until the true and perfect sacrifice comes to purge the conscience from dead works (Hebrew 9: 14).

### **The material of that altar, and its dimensions:**

That altar was made of Acacia wood (Ex. 27: 1), being a symbol of the cross, the tree of life, overlaid with bronze (Ex. 27: 2), and not with gold. As on the cross, the Son receives, with steadfastness (like bronze that refers to patience and persistence), the price of the sin that we committed.

We do not find traces of gold outside the sanctuary, as the heavenly glories stay inside. But we find bronze and silver (Ex. 27: 1, 2, 3, 4, 6), in order for us to share with Christ His patience, passion, and persistence. In the Book of Revelation we read: *“His feet were like fine brass as if refined in a furnace”* (Revelation 1: 15). As we put on the Lord Christ, we shall have the bronze, by which we crush all affliction and troubles, and walk toward heaven persistently, with no delay. As to the presence of silver (Ex. 27: 10, 11), it is a sign of our need for the word of God, to support us in our strife and persistence.

The altar is overlaid with bronze, together with all its vessels, its networks, rings, and the two poles to carry it, all are overlaid with bronze.

The altar is 5 cubits long and 5 cubits wide, as though the sacrifice is offered for the sanctification of our 5 senses, to prepare us to enter into the secret sanctuaries. The figure 5 also reminds us of the 5 sacrifices and offerings, that were mentioned in the Book of Leviticus, as

they all symbolize the sacrifice of the cross that we dealt with in the introduction of our interpretation of that Book.

The altar is 3 cubits high, as though it refers, not only to the cross, but also bears the symbol of resurrection (the figure 5). The power of the sacrifice lies, in that it lets us enter into the cross, to let us crossover to the resurrection. Our thoughts, words, and works are set upon the figure 3; we practice the secret of the figure 3, by entering into the passion, burial, and resurrection, through which the altar elevates us to the height of the 3 cubits.

### **The court of the tabernacle:**

We have mentioned in the previous chapter that it is 100 cubits long and 50 cubits wide; its linen hangings are set on pillars and boards: 20 pillars on each side, and 10 pillars to the rear. On the eastern side, there are 3 pillars on the right and 3 on the left; and the curtain on the gate is set on 4 pillars.

As far as the court is concerned, let us note that it also lacks gold; the pillars are set on bronze bases, while their hooks and bands are of silver, to conform with our description of the bronze altar.

All the curtains (except that of the gate) are woven only of linen threads; set upon pillars, 5 cubits long, as though the outer court is meant to concentrate on purity (linen), and set upon pillars of permanent persistence, and leaning upon the word of God (silver). The length of the pillar refers to the necessity of purity of the 5 senses.

The curtain of the gate had to be only of linen, for there is no entrance into life of purity (linen), no ability for persistence (bronze), and no understanding of the word of God (silver), except through the Lord Christ, the gate of the sheepfold.

That curtain, which symbolizes our life in Christ, or our entrance into the court through Christ, is set upon 4 pillars, as it happens through our strife in the 4 corners of the earth. Yet if we look to the right or to the left we see 3 pillars, just as we enter by Christ, here on earth, into the spiritual divine court, we have to enter by the power of His resurrection.

### **The golden lampstand:**

Here, He confirms again that the lampstand is not only meant for mere illumination, but it is a sign of a covenant in which we receive divine enlightenment. He commands the use of “*pure oil of pressed olives... a statute forever to their generations*” Ex. 27: 20, 21).

=====

## CHAPTER 28

### PRIESTHOOD GARMENTS

1- Presenting Aaron and his sons to minister as priests	1
2- Making priestly garments	2 -5
3- The ephod	6 - 14
4- The breastplate	15 - 29
5- The urim and the thumim	30
6- The robe	31 - 35
7- The turban	36 - 38
8- A tunic woven of fine linen threads	39
9- Sashes, hats, and trousers	40 - 43

+++++

## **1- Presenting Aaron and his sons to minister as priests:**

After proclaiming to Moses the heavenly Sanctuary, to make the tabernacle according to its pattern, God commanded him to present Aaron and his sons to minister as priests to Him. Worship, connected to the house of God, is one of reconciliation, through which appears the priestly work of Christ in reconciling us with the Father. And as the tabernacle in its wholeness and details came to testify to the Lord Christ and His shepherding work with us, the priesthood, with all the details of its garments and worship rites, has carried a magnificent portrait of the same thing.

Our concept of the Jewish priesthood is that it is a symbol of the priesthood of the Lord Christ, the High Priest and “Overseer of our souls” (1 Peter 2: 25). The Christian priesthood, on the other hand, is the disappearance of those working in His spiritual house, in that High Priest, Who alone, in the bosom of the Father, is capable by His pure blood, of interceding on our behalf to make us enter into that divine bosom.

The Christian priest works on the account of Christ and in His name, not on his own account. Concerning this, St. John Chrysostom says: [The steward manages well the affairs of His Master, without referring to himself what belongs to his Master; On the contrary, he refers what he has to his Master; ...Do you wish to see an example of honest stewards? Listen to what the apostle Peter says: “Why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?” (Acts 3: 12); and in the house of ‘Cornelius’, he also said to him, “Stand up, I myself am also a man” (Acts 10: 26). The apostle Paul is not less honest, as he says, “I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Corinthians 15: 10); and when he was opposed by those dishonest people, he said, “What do you have that you did not receive?” (1 Corinthians 4: 7)].

## **2- Making priestly garments:**

You cannot understand the significance of those holy priestly garments, except through the Lord Jesus Christ, as they are made “for glory and for beauty” (Ex. 28: 2), not for those of the priest, but for those of the Lord Christ, Whom the priest represents, carries His features, and disappears inside Him.

A father, hearing about the asceticism of St. Basil, Bishop of Caesarea, went to visit him, only to get shocked by finding him clothed in magnificent garments, while ministering in the Church. Seeing his astonishment, the saint, by divine inspiration, had to reveal the truth that he is actually dressed in sackcloth underneath, but is dressed in those magnificent garments for the sake of the splendor of the priesthood of the Lord Christ Himself.

St. John Chrysostom, comparing the splendor of garments of the priests of the Old and the New Testaments, says: [Things concerning the time prior to grace, are very fearful and terrifying... as for example the pomegranate and precious stones adorning the breastplate, the ephod, the sashes, the hats, and the plate of the Most Holy place ... while if you behold those things in the era of grace, although comparatively few, yet they are as fearful and terrifying; You behold the Lord put on the altar as a redemption, the priest praying to the sacrifice, and all worshippers prostrating to the precious blood. Therefore,

O Priest, do you imagine that you are still among humans, and still standing on earth?! Have you not directly crossed over to heaven, severing every carnal thought away from the Spirit?! Are not you now, with a pure mind, meditating in heavenly things?! What a miracle! How great is God's love to man! He, Who dwells in the highest with the Father, is carried at this hour in the hands of all, and giving Himself to those seeking to embrace and to get Him! Can you despise these things or boast above them?!].

St. Athanasius, the apostolic, believes that Aaron put on priestly garments to minister as a priest, as a symbol of the Son of God, Who puts on a human body to serve us, by His own blood, as a priest Who intercedes on our behalf.

### **3- The ephod:**

It seems to be an outer short shirt, connected with two shoulder straps, but open from the sides, and it has an intricately woven band on it. It is amazing that the tunic and the band were made of the same material as the tabernacle, namely, woven of gold, blue, purple, scarlet thread, and fine linen thread, as though the priestly work is connected to the Church. It presents a living portrait of the features of the Lord Christ Himself, namely: purity (linen), heavenly life (the blue and gold), the royal thought (the purple), and the sanctification by His precious blood (the scarlet).

Whenever the fathers realized this fact, they became terrified, and felt the seriousness of a priest falling into sin. The following are some of their sayings:

\* Actually, there is nothing more horrible than an ill-mannered priest, reluctant to mend his ways.

\* The honor of priesthood is great, but if a priest does wrong, he would perish horribly.

\* A priest is not saved for the sake of his honor, but if he walks as fit for his honor.

(St. Eronimus)

\* God is never insulted, as much as he is, by those sparkling with the honor of priesthood, if they do wrong. The sin of a priest is heavier and more horrible, because of his denial of such an exalted honor given to him by God.

\* How could it not glitter with holiness, more than the rays of the sun, the hand of the priest that touches the body of the Lord, his mouth filled with heavenly fire, and his tongue that tastes the blood of Christ?!!

(St. John Chrysostom)

\* The priest who ministers to the divine altar is committed, before anything else, to be adorned with purity.

(The scholar Origen)

Now we go back to the garments of the high priest, to find two onyx stones placed on the shoulders of the robe, and on them are engraved the names of the tribes of the children of Israel. It is as though the high priest, as a type of the Lord Christ, puts on his shoulders all the needs of

his people, and of every soul that asks him to! He is like a father committed to a responsibility toward his children. St. John Chrysostom has practical and enjoyable speeches about this committed fatherhood that came as a fruit of honest care for many years.

A priest, whatever his personalities or capacities are, cannot carry the burden of his people on his shoulders. So, he engraves their names on his shoulders as a part of the worship rite, and then enters with this burden to cast it on the shoulders of the Lord Christ, personally. That is why in every divine liturgy the priest cries out in his heart several times saying: “Accept this sacrifice for my sins and the ignorance of Your people”, as though he casts his own and his people’s burdens on the Lord, Who alone is capable to carry and to help!

#### **4- The breastplate:**

It is a piece of cloth woven according to the workmanship of the ephod (Ex. 28: 15), doubled into a square; adorned with twelve precious stones, in four rows, each engraved with the name of one of the tribes of Israel. The two upper corners of the breastplate are connected to the ephod by means of golden chains, so that it does not come loose from the ephod (Ex. 28: 28), the two lower corners are connected to it by the woven band. The rings and its connecting cords are all made of gold. The stones on the breast of the High Priest, as though in his heart, are called “memorial” (Ex. 12; 29), so that he would not forget any of them. According to what the apostle Paul said of ‘Onesimus’ (See Epistle to Philemon), if the two onyx stones refer to the responsibility and commitment to their needs, the breastplate refers to how he carries them in his very heart and vice versa.

It is called ‘memorial’ because whenever the priest puts them on, he would remember his commitment to pray for his congregation. If the Lord Christ is the High Priest and the permanent intercessor on behalf of His people (Hebrews 7), before the Father, through His blood, the priest, hidden in the Lord Christ, is called ‘Presbyter’, namely an (intercessor), whose main work is to pray all the time for his spiritual brothers and children. In this concern, St. John Chrysostom says: [The priest as a representative of God, is committed to care for all people, as he is considered as a father of the whole world]. And St. Eronemus says: [The Savior wept over Jerusalem, because its inhabitants did not repent] (Luke 19: 41) ... So did Jeremiah who bemoaned his unrepentant people, saying, “Oh, that my head were water, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I may weep day and night, for the slain of the daughter of my people” (Jeremiah 9: 1); explaining the cause of his grief, saying, “Weep not for the dead nor bemoan him; but weep bitterly for him who goes away, for he shall return no more” (Jeremiah 22: 10). Therefore we should weep for the sake of those who, because of their sins and trespasses, have isolated themselves from the Church. ... In this light, the same prophet calls the ministers of the Church, “Walls and towers”, saying to each of them, “*O wall of the daughter of Zion, ... Let tears run down like a river*” (Lamentations 2: 18), because by his tears, he would soften the hearts of sinners, to join him in weeping.

In the New Testament, the High Priest puts on a breastplate, with the images of the twelve apostles woven on it in two vertical rows; so as to follow their example, and to remember continuously his people with tears; carrying them in his heart.

#### **5- The Urim and the thumim:**

The literal meaning of these two words is (enlightenments and perfections). Some believe that they are two tiny objects, probably precious stones, placed on the breastplate over the heart (Ex. 28: 30), so the High Priest may know the will of God in the important priestly and national issues. The two words, according to some, refer to the fact that enlightenment and perfection come from God, through the twelve stones that adorn the breastplate. Where the stones are mentioned, the Urim and the thumim are not, and vice versa (Ex. 29: 10; Leviticus 8: 8).

Jewish scholars say that God spoke to the people by the Urim and the thumim in the tabernacle; but once the temple was built, He spoke to them by the prophets. In any case, the Urim and the thumim confirm in the priest's life, that in his ministry he should not depend upon human work and counsel, but he should resort first to the altar, to pour his soul before God, seeking His divine light to shine in his heart, and to consume his weaknesses. The many complex and serious commitments of the priest are counseling people in their most precious concerns, the salvation of their souls, and dealing with different kinds of people, under different circumstances. All these make him in need of being permanently in contact with God, his Guide, so that no soul would perish because of his ignorance or inability to perform. St. John Chrysostom talks about the responsibility of the priest for every failure of the ministry, and for the loss of every soul, as a result of his lack of wisdom. Saul, having acted with no wisdom, could not claim that the prophet Samuel anointed him against his will. Ali the priest could not excuse the sins of his sons, that he inherited the priesthood against his own will; and the blessed Moses himself, despite all his efforts to avert the work of leadership, when he erred at the water of Meribah, those efforts could not intercede for him. And Judas could not be saved, despite the fact that it was the Lord who chose him for the apostleship in the first place... Therefore it is fitting for the priest to be wise, and to seek divine counsel all the time, so as not to fall under judgment.

#### **6- The robe:**

This is made all of blue (Ex. 28: 31), to be worn directly under the ephod; as though to refer to the inner nature of the priest - the heavenly thought - carrying heaven, not just as a material for preaching or talk, but to fill up his heart and to occupy all his thoughts. St. John Chrysostom says: [Whoever takes upon himself this leading role, should have more splendor than any shining star; his life should be spotless; to be looked up to, and to be taken as a role model].

The robe probably reached to a little below the knees, sleeveless and open only from above; it was probably woven in one piece without sewing (Ex. 28: 32). Upon the hem of the robe all around, there were pomegranates of blue and purple and scarlet yarns, and bells of gold between them (Ex. 28: 33, 34). The Pomegranates refer to the necessity of the presence of fruits in the priest, to be fruitful in his deep words of preaching, in his silence, discussions, instructions, and in his dealings with everybody. The bells refer to the proclamation of the voice of Bible preaching wherever he goes, warning everyone to repent for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven. St. Justin believes that the number of bells was twelve, as a reference to the twelve apostles, who depended on the power of the Lord Christ, the Eternal Priest. Their voice reached the four corners of the earth for the glory of God and the spreading of His Word. The scholar Origen believes [that these bells must ring continually, meaning that the priest should not stop speaking about the last days and the end of the world.

## **7- The turban and its golden plate:**

The turban is analogue to the crown worn by the Bishop; this was not originally known in the Coptic Church; it was adopted from the Byzantine Church. On the front of the turban, a plate of pure gold is placed, and engraved on it are the words: "HOLINESS OF THE LORD". This golden plate is nothing but the proclamation of the Lord Christ, the Firstborn accepted by the Father on our behalf. The Lord has made His life holy to the Father in our name, for us also to be holy in Him, saying that, for their sake, He makes Himself holy, so that they may also be holy in the truth.

The priest enters into the altar, the divine throne, not out of his own righteousness, or because of his own strife, but hidden in Christ the Lord, who is the object of the Father's pleasure. That is why St. John Chrysostom says: [When you see the priest offering the sacrifice, contemplate in the hand of the Lord Christ secretly stretching]. St. Ambrose also says: [Believe then that the Lord Christ is present during the prayers of the priest; ... If He has said, "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst" (Matthew 18: 20); How much more He would grant us His presence, when all the congregation are assembled, and the sacraments are consummated].

## **8- A tunic woven of fine linen threads:**

It is made of white linen, worn underneath the blue robe, to appear only on the arms, and beyond the robe down to the feet. If the blue robe refers to the inner heavenly heart, the woven linen tunic, refers to the pure angelic life, that works inside, yet appears on the arms, namely would be reflected on the outer behavior; and extends down to the feet, as though purity also covers all the steps of the feet; wherever he goes, he walks with purity.

## **9- The girdle, hat, and trousers:**

To offer the sacrifice, the priest should put on a girdle, a belt of cloth to gird his waist during service, as a reference to the necessity for the shepherd of being alert (Ephesians 6: 14; 1 Peter 1: 13). We have previously dealt with "girding" during eating the Passover lamb.

Girding is meant for the servants who minister to their masters. Thus it is as though the priest, in his ministry, feels that he is a servant to his master's children, and not their overseer who has authority over them.

Girdling is also associated with military service. The priest, as a good soldier, spiritually strives in the army of salvation. It is also associated with preparation for departure, to let the priest feel that he is only sojourning on earth, seeking, not the earthly but the heavenly.

In the Book of Revelation, we saw how the golden band girding the chest of the Lord Christ (Revelation 1: 13), refers to the people feeding on His breasts, namely on the New and the Old Testaments. Likewise, the priest carries his people on his chest, and offers them his whole life in Christ.

As for the trousers of the priests, God Himself proclaimed that they are meant to cover their nakedness ... That is why St. Ambrose says: [Some of us still keep this command, while the majority interpret it spiritually, assuming that is meant just to be clothed decently, and to keep purity]. The priest should be decent, not only in his attire, but also in his behavior and even his words (1 Timothy 3). These are two quotations from the fathers, on this matter:

\* The voice of the priest should not be low or floppy, namely, feminine-like, as is the custom of many.

(St. Ambrose)

\* A single hour of laxity, led Noah to get naked, after 60 years of decency.

(St. Eronimos).

=====

## CHAPTER 29

### CONSECRATION OF PRIESTS

1- Need for consecration	1 – 3
2- Washing the priests with water	4
3- Clothing the priests with priestly garments and anointing them	5 - 9
4- A sin offering	10 - 14
5- A burnt offering to the Lord	15 - 19
6- A ram of consecration	16 - 22
7- A wave offering	23 - 28
8- Anointing the holy garments	29 - 30
9- The priests eat by the door of the tabernacle of meeting	31 - 35
10- Anointing the altar	36 - 37
11- The daily offerings	38 - 46

+++++

#### **1- Need for consecration:**

God called Aaron and his sons to minister to Him, and designated for them the garments to wear, to let them realize that the secret of their authority was not in them, but in God who called and clothed them. Now, before practicing any priestly task, God presents them with an elaborate ritual for their consecration and the consecration of their priestly garments and the altar on which they are going to minister. As though the three of them represent one unit, there is no consecration of the priests, unless they put on the Lord Christ Himself (the holy garments), and carry His features in them to minister to the holy altar (the cross). Choosing the priests, (calling and sanctifying them) was a reference to choosing the Holy, Only-Begotten Son, who sanctified Himself to bring salvation. For, although He is Holy and blameless, He says: “For their sake I sanctify Myself, that they also be sanctified by the Truth” (John 17: 19), not that He is acquiring a new sanctification, but is offering His sanctified life to this task, as “*a Priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek*” (Psalm 110: 4; Hebrew 5: 6; 7: 11). As the priests were committed

to put on the holy garments to approach the altar, likewise, the Holy Son of God, put on our body and became as one of us in order to approach the cross on our behalf and to achieve the redemption. The sanctification of the altar refers to the cross that was sanctified by the precious blood.

## **2- Washing the priests with water:**

Aaron and his sons come to the door of the tabernacle of the meeting, where Moses washes them with water (Ex. 29: 4). It is as though their choice by God and their calling to that holy task commit them to have themselves purified, before entering into the tabernacle or practicing any priestly work. The priest, even though granted the honor of praying for his people, yet this should not create pride in him, to assume that he became better or more righteous than them, but, on the contrary, this would give him the responsibility to strive also for himself, lest the people should perish because of him.

In the holy liturgy, the priest learns to include himself in his supplications for the people, saying: "... Grant, O Lord, that our sacrifice may be accepted before You, for my sins, and for the ignorance of Your people." And in all his secret prayers, he keeps on asking on his own behalf, as though feeling that when he sins, he does it knowingly, while the people may sin unknowingly.

The fathers realized their continuous need for God's care, and for the continuous learning, together with their congregation. St. Augustine says: [Although we are, for you, the shepherds, yet we are like you, lambs under God's care. We are teachers to you, yet we all are under the authority of One God; we all are colleagues in His school].

His call for priesthood confirms his fellowship in the holy congregation of God, to remain forever-seeking purification in the worthiness of the blood, and continuous learning on the hand of God. That is why the apostle Paul writes to his disciple Timothy, saying: "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief" (1 Timothy 1: 15). The apostle should not consider himself a chief, a teacher, and a director, but mainly, the chief of sinners, who needs to remain all the time in the bosom of his Savior.

St. John Chrysostom believes that God allows for His priests to feel their weakness, in order to have compassion upon their brothers.

## **3- Clothing the priests with priestly garments, and anointing them:**

Putting priestly garments is a part of the sanctification of the priests, as we saw before. Once the High Priest puts on the golden plate and the holy crown (Ex. 29: 6), on which is engraved "Holiness to the Lord", he becomes a representative of the Lord Christ. That is why the anointing oil is poured on his head (Ex. 29: 7) before he can offer any sacrifice, a reference to the fact that the Holy Spirit dwells in the Lord Christ, since eternity, being His eternal Spirit, and not a grace granted to Him.

Aaron and his sons, having put on their garments, come to get the holy anointment (Ex. 29: 21) in order for Aaron and God's priests to know that they would not be anointed as priests, before having sacrifices offered on their behalf, and having the blood

of Christ sprinkled on them for their sanctification. The divine inspiration confirmed to them that they are in need of sanctification, as there is no human without sin, even if his life is just one day on earth. We shall deal with the holy anointment in the next chapter, with the will of God.

#### **4- A sin offering:**

This sacrifice will be mentioned in more details in the Book of Leviticus (4:& 5). It carries many marvelous meanings, of which we shall present only the following:

- a- This sacrifice refers to the Lord Christ, on Whom we have counted to bear our sins, and He was led to death (1 Peter 2: 24). That is why Aaron and his sons put their hands on the head of the bull, and kill it before the Lord, by the door of the tabernacle of meeting (Ex. 29: 10, 11). We do not hear that it is a sweet aroma or pleasure to the Lord, as in the case of the burnt offering. Rather, it refers to the load and bitterness of the sins that the Lord bears on behalf of both priests and congregation! That is why the Lord Christ cried out saying that His soul is grieved even to death.
- b- Some of the blood of the bull is put, by the finger, on the horns of the altar, and poured beside its base. All the fat that covers the entrails, the fatty lobe attached to the liver, and the two kidneys, and the fat that is on them, are burnt on the altar (Ex. 20: 12, 13), as though God wanted to confirm to the priests that, by His blood on the altar, He atoned all their sins, even the ones hidden in their depths, to let them live with inner purity.
- c- Burning the flesh of the bull, with its skin and its offal, with fire outside the camp (Ex. 29: 14), refers to the Passion of the Lord Christ outside the camp, so that the priests come out with Him carrying His shame in ministering His people.

#### **5- A burnt offering to the Lord:**

After presenting a sin offering, a whole ram is burnt on the altar to the Lord, "*It is a pleasing aroma, an offering made by fire to the Lord*" (Ex. 29: 18). This sacrifice presents another side of the cross. Carrying the burden of our sins, the first sacrifice is offered with moaning and crying; The sacrifice manifests, in the cross, joy and sweet aroma, revealing the complete obedience of the Lord Christ to the Father (Hebrew 5: 5; 10: 7; John 6: 38; Philippians 2: 8), obedience through free will, and not compulsion (John 10: 18).

Aaron and his sons put their hands on the head of the ram, to become as one with the sacrifice, to bear the spirit of complete obedience, that is the Lord Christ's in them, so that it would be to God a sweet aroma and pleasure (Leviticus 1: 9; 13; 17). Thus, to be joined to the Lord is being one Spirit with Him (1 Corinthians 6: 17).

They will kill the ram, sprinkle its blood all around on the altar, cut the ram in pieces, wash its entrails and its legs, and put them with its pieces and its head, as though to reveal all

its depths of the Lord Christ, found blameless by the Father (Luke 23: 22; Isaiah 53: 9; John 8: 46), has been accepted by Him. Therefore it is fitting for the priest to be sanctified in his inner depths, so that, if found blameless before God, he would bring Him pleasure in Christ Jesus.

#### **6- A ram of consecration:**

This act bears a living portrait of sanctification. After putting their hands on the ram, by which Aaron and his sons proclaim their union with him, they offer its life as redemption for them in its blood, that is sprinkled on their bodies and their garments, to purify and sanctify them completely; so that their lives and works would be all for the Lord.

Moses would then take some of the blood of the ram and put it on the tip of the right ear of Aaron and of his sons, on the thumb of their right hand, and on the big toe of their right foot (Ex. 29: 20), as though their ears, hands and feet, are completely sanctified and dedicated to the ministry of the Lord. Every word heard by the priest and every movement or work shall be to the account of his Master; having been wholly sanctified for Him. That is why this sacrifice of consecration is *“a sweet aroma for the Lord; an offering made by fire to the Lord”* (Ex. 29: 25).

#### **7- A wave offering to be waved before the Lord by the priests:**

Moses shall put in the hands of the priests, which have been sanctified, the consecrated parts of the sacrifice, and ‘wave it as a wave offering before the Lord’. It shall be the first sacrifice offered to the Lord by their sanctified hands.

#### **8- Anointing the holy garments:**

The priest shall put the priestly garments on, which have been sanctified by the blood and the holy oil (Leviticus 8: 30), and shall not go outside the door of the tabernacle of meeting for seven days (Leviticus 8: 33); the Lord saying: *“Therefore you shall abide at the door of the tabernacle of meeting day and night for seven days, and keep the charge of the Lord, so that you may not die; for so I have commanded”* (Leviticus 8: 35).

This is a serious warning to the priest, who has presented his life as a sacrifice of love to the ministry of God. After putting on the holy priestly garments, and after having all his inner life and outer actions sanctified, it is fit for him to remain all the days of his life (seven days) abiding to the statutes of the Lord, and should not be preoccupied by any worldly affairs.

#### **9- The priest to eat by the door of the tabernacle of meeting:**

God commands Aaron and his sons to eat by the door of the tabernacle of meeting (Ex. 29: 30) as a reference to entering into a covenant with Him. God would take care of their needs as His ministers, and they would dedicate their whole life to Him. He probably wants to proclaim to them that even their food and drink, and all their actions, should be in His presence, as they are His share, and He is theirs.

Aaron and his sons would eat the flesh of the ram and the bread that is in the basket (Ex. 29: 32) that are of three kinds:

- a- Unleavened bread made of wheat flour; about which we have talked as a symbol of the new life. The priest shall not eat leavened bread for seven days. That is to say, he shall live all his life refraining from doing evil. He shall forget his old man and his works, to live all his days according to the new man. His life and his thoughts should be renewed by continuous repentance every day, without interruption.
- b- Unleavened Cakes kneaded with oil; referring to his life that became kneaded internally with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, to carry its fruits all the time.
- c- Unleavened wafers touched by oil; namely, the fruits of the Holy Spirit should also appear in their outer behavior.

If the unleavened cakes, kneaded with oil refer to the good testimony by those who are inside, the wafers touched by oil, refer to the importance of the good testimony by those who are outside (1 Timothy 3: 7); and as said by St. John Chrysostom: [If even the heathens respect a blameless man, I wish we could live accordingly, so that no enemy or an unbeliever, would speak evil about us; Whoever has a good life, would shut the mouths of even the enemies]. St. Irenaeus says: [A Christian Bishop should be like that; those who may dispute the dogma with him, could not dispute his personal life].

#### **10- Anointing the altar:**

*“Seven days you shall make atonement for the altar and sanctify it. And the altar shall be most holy. Whatever touches the altar must be holy” (Ex. 29: 37).*

So God accepts from His people that altar that He sanctifies and makes of it the Holy of Holies, to receive sacrifices to atone for the sins of His people.

#### **11- The daily offerings:**

God commanded daily offerings according to special rituals by day and night. The goal of these rituals is proclaimed in the following divine words: *“And there I will meet with the children of Israel, and the tabernacle shall be sanctified by My glory” (Ex. 29: 43).* As God is glorified in their life and their behavior, they would be sanctified by His presence in their midst. He intends to live in our midst, to sanctify us for Him.

=====

## **CHAPTER 30**

### **THE ALTAR OF INCENSE AND THE LAVER**

1- The altar of incense	1 - 10
2- The Ransom money	11 - 16
3- The Laver	17 - 21
4- The holy anointing oil	22 - 33
5- The holy incense	34 - 38

+++++

### **1- The altar of incense:**

The talk about the golden altar of incense comes after that about the bronze altar of the burnt offering. In the tabernacle, the sinner will first encounter the bronze altar, to see his sin transformed into ashes underneath the altar. Then, he would be able, through the Most High Priest --the Lord Christ, the Savior - to enter into the divine sanctuaries, to see before him, in the Most Holy Place, the Ark of Testimony, the table of the Showbread on his right hand, and the lampstand on his left; it presents his life on the golden altar, as sweet aroma of incense, that God the Father will smell as pleasure in Christ Jesus. Through the bronze altar, the debt is paid, for us to enter into the righteousness of Christ, in a fellowship with Him, to eat the bread of angels, and to be enlightened by the Holy Spirit, and to behold the divine glories above the Cherubim.

This view shook the depths of the soul of the scholar Origen, to say: [Let each of us try to set within himself a sanctuary for God! Let there be, for the soul in the depths of our hearts, an altar of incense, to be able to say: "We are to God, the fragrance of Christ" (2 Corinthians 2: 15). Let there also be the Ark of testimony that includes the two tablets of the Law: to "meditate in it day and night" (Psalm 1: 2). Let its thought itself be an ark and a library where divine books are kept, according to the words of the prophet: "Blessed is he, who keeps in his heart the Law of the Lord, and who acts according to it". Let it carry in its heart the pot of manna, namely the true and sweet comprehension of the word of God. Let it have the rod of Aaron, namely the priestly teaching, and the continuous keeping of piety. And above all glories, let it bear the priestly adornment; as inside it, there is, who plays the role of the priest ... who binds us to God ... Some call it the heart, and some call it the sense of reason, while others still call it the thought.

Let us have the adornment of a priest: the linen ephod that hangs down to the feet, in reference to the first virtue that we should have -- the purity. Let us have the breastplate with its precious stones, that refers to the shining good works: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5: 15)].

Let us also talk about the inner altar of incense, saying, that the soul which finds no comfort until it finds a dwelling place for the God of Jacob, would set for itself an altar in its heart, to be able to present offerings to the Lord.

Father Methodius sees in the golden altar, a symbol of the congregation of pure celibates in the Church, who bear the sweet fragrance of the celibacy of Christ saying: [We have been informed, that the bloodless altar of God, refers to the congregation of the pure virgins; Virginité appears to be a great and good thing that should be kept completely pure, and with no share with the

defilement of the flesh; to stand in the presence of the testimony in the sanctuary, adorned with the golden wisdom, smelling of the sweet divine fragrance].

## **2- The ransom money:**

If the incense is the sacrifice of love, offered by the priests inside the sanctuary, on behalf of the whole congregation, yet the people were committed to offer a contribution of love in the expenses of the tabernacle, from all men -- over 20 years old -- without distinction between the rich and the poor (Ex. 30: 15). This contribution refers the fact that, besides bearing a collective spirit, each believer shall also bear a personal relationship with God. The ministry of the tabernacle is that of the whole congregation, without losing the identity of the individual believer as a living member, who has a direct relationship with God and, at the same time, through his union with the congregation.

Note that the contribution is symbolic, that anyone can afford (half a shekel), lest the rich would assume that they have a special status more than the poor. Salvation is free for all, and all souls are equal before the Lord and His ministers.

## **3- The Laver:**

A round bronze basin put in the outer court, between the tabernacle and the altar, for Aaron and his sons to wash their hands and feet in its water. It is so located, as though it refers to the font of Baptism. No one can enjoy the divine holies, namely, enter into the tabernacle of meeting, to encounter with God, unless he is purified in the water of Baptism. Being located between the altar and the door of the tabernacle, is because no purifying by the water of Baptism, except through the redeeming sacrifice of Christ.

St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa says: [When we hear of the laver, we should understand that in it, we wash ourselves of the disgrace of sins by the secret water].

## **4- The holy anointing oil:**

The anointing oil occupies a special position among God's commandments in the Old Testament, referring to the anointment by the Holy Spirit of prophets, priests, and kings, to do leading tasks, which are all done by the Person of the Lord Christ Himself. He is called Christ, meaning the (Anointed), having been anointed for His salvation work, before the beginning of the world. To Him, the Psalmist testified, saying, "You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions" (Psalm 45: 7; Hebrews 1: 9) ... We have previously dealt with this issue in our interpretation of the Book of the Songs of Solomon.

This anointment also refers to the anointment given generally to Christians after baptism and which is called (The anointment of Myroon - or confirmation). St. Ambrose says: [Every believer is anointed a priest and a king; not to be a real priest or king, but a spiritual priest and king, to present to God spiritual sacrifices, and offerings of thanksgiving and praise]. And St. John Chrysostom says: [In the Old Testament, only prophets, priests, and kings were anointed; But we, the Christians of the New Testaments, have to be anointed, to become kings, reigning over our

lusts; priests, to slay our bodies, and to sanctify them “a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is our reasonable service” (Romans 12: 1); and prophets, having known very great and important secrets pertaining to eternity]. St. Augustine says: [The name Christ comes from (anointment); as every Christian receive it, as a proof that he became, not only a fellow in the Kingdom, but a warrior against the devil].

### **5- The holy incense:**

As we said, when we talked about the golden lampstand, that it was not just a way of illuminating the tabernacle, but a worship ritual, that carries a theological concept, concerning our relationship with God, the same thing applies here, the incense was not meant, just to give a sweet smell to the tabernacle, but it carried a theological concept that touches our life in God. That is why God commanded the use of a particular kind, its proportions, the time to offer it, and those who do it; banning its use (with the same proportions), outside the tabernacle, and offering it by foreign hands.

Addressing His bride, the Lord Christ says: “Who is this coming out of the wilderness, like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all the merchant’s fragrant powders?” (Songs 3: 6); As though the smoke from the bronze altar (the daily offerings), has intermingled with the incense coming up from the golden altar. So, the sacrificial work of Christ in our life intermingles with our prayers, for God to smell a sweet fragrance of pleasure.

In our study of the house of God, from the spiritual ritual aspect, we dealt with the topic of incense and its use in the early Church. We saw how the Jewish rites (Ex. 30: 34 - 38), intermingled with the Christian rite (Malachi 1: 10 - 11), and with the heavenly one (Revelation 8: 3 - 4). The Church of Jerusalem easily accepted the use of incense, having known it in the tabernacle of meeting and in the temple; we have seen in the prophecy of Malachi (1: 10 - 11) how the Church of the New Testament would offer it “from the rising of the sun, even to its going down,” and in how the heavenly, in the heavenly worship, offer it to God (Revelation 5: 8; 8: 4). Yet the Churches of the Gentiles were apprehensive, lest the new believers of Gentile origin, would be confused between incense for God and that for the idol. But soon we saw in the early liturgies, continuous confirmations to offering the incense to God.

=====

## **CHAPTER 31**

### **THE FINAL TALK**

The Lord ended His talk with the prophet Moses on Mount Sinai, by appointing the names of the two persons He chose to build the tabernacle and all its furnishings; confirming the commandment pertaining to the Sabbath Law; and then giving him the two tablets of testimony, before letting him go down to the people.

1- The workers on the tabernacle	1 - 11
2- The Sabbath Law	12 - 17
3- Giving Moses the two tablets of testimony	18

+++++

### 1- The workers on the tabernacle:

After commanding Moses to build the tabernacle with all its furnishings, according to a living pattern that He showed him, He did not let him choose those who were to do the work, but called by name ‘Bezaleel’ the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, whom He filled with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship. He appointed with him ‘Aholiab’ the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, to help him in his task. He also commanded him to appoint all who are gifted artisans among the people that they may make all that He had commanded. In this command we notice the following:

- a- God chose already gifted persons, then filled them with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, and in knowledge; and so, as said by St. John Chrysostom, the wisdom of the worker, naturally given to him by God would be supported by a heavenly wisdom, to accomplish his designated task. God did not disregard the natural wisdom, as it is also His gift, but sanctified it by His Holy Spirit, that supports and helps.
- b- If God chose ‘Bezaleel’, and filled him with His Spirit ... (Ex. 31: 3), as a confirmation of the importance of God’s role in choosing the overseer, He also chose ‘Aholiab’, to support him. As though the guidance work in the Church is set on the spirit of fellowship, love, and counsel, and not on individual spirit. The secret of success of a priest or minister, whatever his rank is, is not in his individual work, but in his cooperation with his brothers by the one spirit.
- c- The Lord says, “*I have put wisdom in the heart of all who are gifted artisans, that they may make all that I have commanded you*” (Ex. 31: 6). He is proclaiming to Moses his commitment to engage all energies, as God has granted among His people, those with the wisdom of heart, to support the overseers in their work.
- d- It is to be noticed, that the hand of God intervenes in the choice of the workers in His vine; either through, directly designating particular names for particular tasks, or indirectly indicating their required qualifications. That is what the Lord Christ confirmed, when He asked us to pray that God sends workers for His harvest. That is why the priest, in every Divine Liturgy (St. Basil’s) cries out saying: “... Those who rightly define the word of truth with

Him (namely with the Patriarch), grant Your Church, to shepherd Your people in purity and righteousness”.

## **2- The Sabbath Law:**

From all the statutes and commandments that He delivered to Moses, God chose this one (Keeping the day of the Lord) to be His final commandment; previously dealt with it in our interpretation of the twentieth chapter.

Here, we notice that God said to Moses: “My Sabbaths you shall keep” (Ex. 31: 13). He did not say “The Sabbaths” or “Your Sabbaths”, but referred them to Him saying: “My Sabbaths”. So, if “Sabbath” means (rest), by keeping the day of the Lord, we rest in Him, encountering with God the secret of our true rest, and, at the same time, God would find rest in us, a place in our heart, we, the subject of His pleasure. That is why He calls them, “*My Sabbaths*”, namely, “*My rest*.”

What are these Sabbaths to keep, but the Lord Christ Himself, in Whom, alone, we find our rest, and in Whom, as well, God the Father finds His rest. In Him, we find rest, for He is to us, the Friend, the Redeemer, and the Savior, Who brings us to His Father’s bosom. In Him, God the Father finds His rest, for He reconciled us with the Father.

About the Sabbath, He also says: “It is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you” (Ex. 31: 13). The Lord Christ is the sign of the covenant and reconciliation between God the Father and us. in Him, we enjoy sanctification, as He is our righteousness and sanctification. That is why the penalty was very severe, “Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among the people” ( Ex. 31: 14). Whoever despises the Lord Christ, will be deprived of his eternity, will die forever, and will lose his fellowship in the eternal kingdom. In this chapter, the Lord concentrated on the Sabbath, as an eternal covenant (Ex. 16; 17), as it concerns our eternal life.

## **3- Giving Moses the two tablets:**

“God gave Moses the two stone tablets of the testimony, written with the fingers of God” (Ex. 31: 18), namely by the Holy Spirit, that inspired the whole Holy Book.

These tablets would get broken through man’s anger and weakness, to be replaced by new tablets, that refer to the replacement of the letter of the Law by the grace; according to the words of St. John, the evangelist: “For the Law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1: 17).

# **CHAPTER 32**

## **THE GOLDEN CALF**

1- Making the golden calf	1 - 6
2-God’s wrath against the people of Moses	7 – 14

3- Moses gets angry and breaks the two tablets	15 – 19
4- Grinding the golden calf to powder	20
5- Moses chastises the people	21 - 29
6- Moses' intercession	30 – 35

+++++

### 1- Making the golden calf:

The people in Egypt used to worship calves, and to commit fornication behind them (Leviticus 17; Joshua 24; Exodus 20: 4), they used to worship a seen and touched god. The presence of Moses before them, presenting to them the amazing visible works of God, has temporarily satisfied their need for a materialized God before their eyes. That is why, when Moses disappeared from their sight, they said to Aaron: “*Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him*” (Ex. 32: 1). They did not mean to disregard God who brought them up out of the land of Egypt; but intended to worship Him through the calf that is in their hearts; which is apparent in Aaron response: “*Tomorrow is a feast to the Lord*” (Ex. 32: 5).

We cannot disregard that what they did has been through the influence of their old worship to the calf, that was still inside them. St. (Mar) Ephraim, the Syrian says: [Moses was temporarily taken away from them, to let the calf inside them materialize, and be worshipped publicly by them, that which they secretly worshipped in their hearts!]

Actually, they had no excuse. If Moses was temporarily delayed, yet the works of God through Moses did not stop: the manna kept coming down every morning, the rock kept following them, the pillar of fire kept guiding them by night, and the pillar of cloud kept shading them by day. They were without excuse.

The Book of Deuteronomy gives another cause for that deviation, which is their care for carnal pleasure through eating, drinking, and having fun, saying: “...You grew fat and thick ...Then (you) forsook God who made (you); ... Of the Rock who begot you, you were unmindful; and have forgotten the God who fathered you” (Deuteronomy 32: 15 - 18)

St. John Chrysostom believes that drinking and fun were the tools that drew the people toward idol worship, like the case when, through his craving for food, Esau lost his birthright, and threatened to kill his brother. St. Jerome quotes the words of the Book, “*The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play*” (Ex. 32: 6), to prove the role of greed in provoking sins, saying: [The labor of so many days was wasted by the fulfillment of one hour]; and he also says: [Boldly, Moses broke the two tablets of stone, being convinced that drunkards could not appreciate the word of God].

Finally, those people represent corrupt humanity, that seeks for itself a god after its whims; a god that satisfies their wicked consciences, and allows for its carnal lusts; they are in no need for a cross or passion.

### 2- God's wrath against the people of Moses:

Having chosen for themselves another god according to their wicked hearts, God could not refer these people to Himself. He, no longer, called them “My people”, but we see Him say to the prophet Moses: “Go, get down! For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves” (Ex. 32: 7). The scholar Origen comments on that, saying: [As the people are counted as “God’s people”, when they obey Him, and are not referred to Him when they do not; so also are their feasts; when hated by God, He calls them “feasts of sinners”; although, when He presenting their statute, He called them “Feasts of the Lord”].

Although God got angry for what the people did, He left the door open before Moses to intercede on their behalf; saying to him, “*I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people; Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them, and I may consume them; and I will make of you a great nation*” (Ex. 32: 9, 10). Saying to Him: “*Let Me alone*”, He is giving him the chance to intercede and proclaim his love for his people; namely, to practice his fatherly emotion.

And actually, Moses pleaded with the Lord, presenting Him with three excuses: First, reminding Him, of how He brought this people out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand (Ex. 32: 11); secondly, that the enemy would say, “*He brought them out to harm them, to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth*” (Ex. 32: 12); and thirdly, he reminds Him of His promises to their fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, His servants, to whom He swore by His own self, to multiply their descendants as the stars of heaven, and to give them the land of promise (Ex. 32: 13).

Before Moses’ pleadings, the Book says: “The Lord relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people” (Ex. 32: 14). We shall leave, for now, talking of Moses’ loving fatherly heart; to say that God, is not like man, who would transgress then relent. He speaks to us here in a way that we can understand. When we repent, we come under God’s mercy and compassion, and not subject to punishment.

### **3- Moses gets angry, and breaks the two tablets:**

The prophet Moses could not bear to hear God’s words against his people, so he interceded on their behalf, that God relented from the harm which He said He would do to them. As he went down from the mountain, he could not stand to see the calf and the dances, so, with extreme anger, he cast out the tablets from his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain. (Ex. 32: 19). On the top of the mountain of Knowledge, Moses entered into glories and was given the divine commandments; but, going down to the foot of the mountain, he broke the two tablets. Thus, we should always stay up, and rise from glory to glory. Going down to the foot of the mountain, would make us break the commandment and lead us to fall under God’s wrath.

Even in his anger, Moses prophesied. By breaking the tablets, he manifested the status of humanity, fallen under the curse of the Law, because of breaking the commandment. Here it is now, waiting for the work of divine grace instead of the Law, according to the words of St. John, the evangelist, “*For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ*” (John 1: 17). In the epistle of Barnabas, it came: [Moses cast the two tablets from his hands, and their covenant was broken, so that the covenant of the beloved Jesus would be set, sealed in our hearts on the hope that emerges from our faith in Him].

Breaking the two stone tablets, revealed the burden of the law, and its curse over humanity that is unable to keep it. That stone had to be taken away, namely, the killing of the law, by the letter, only to be replaced by the grace of the Lord Christ. This was clarified by St. Augustine, in his symbolic interpretation of the words of the Lord Christ: *“Take away the stone”* (John 11: 39), when He raised Lazarus from the dead, saying: [By these words He means: Preach by the grace. As the apostle Paul calls the ministry of the New Testament, the ministry of the Spirit and not of the letter; saying: *“For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life”* (2 Corinthians 3: 6). The letter that kills, is like the stone that destroys; So He says Take away the stone; namely, take away the heavy weight of the law, and preach the grace; Because if a law, capable of giving life, was given, it would have been possible to realize righteousness through it; But the Book had been closed to all under sin, to give the promise through faith in Jesus Christ, for those who believe in Him].

#### **4- Grinding the golden calf to powder:**

*“He took the calf which they had made, burned it in the fire, and ground it to powder, and he scattered it on the water and made the children of Israel drink it”* (Ex. 32: 20).

Why did Moses do that? That was a reference to the fact that every man is committed to drink the fruits of his sins, according to the command of the law, that a woman who is under doubt that she got pregnant by a man other than her husband - but there was no witness against her, or was she caught - to drink the bitter water that brings a curse. If she were innocent, she would give birth with no harm; but if she has defiled herself while under her husband's authority, the Lord makes her thigh rot and her belly swell (See Numbers 5: 11 -28).

St. Augustine comments on Moses' action, saying: [The head of the calf is a great secret; as it is the head of the body of wicked people, who, like a calf feeds on grass; seeking earthly things every day, for *“All flesh is grass”* (Isaiah 40: 6)]. Moses cast it in fire to abolish its form, then ground it to powder, scattered it on the water, and made the children of Israel drink it. What does all this mean, but that the devil worshippers, have become a body similar to him?! The same for those who confess Christ, they are Christ's body, *“You are the body of Christ and His members”*.

St. Augustine believes that the people drank and consumed that statue, through grinding it to powder and scattering it on water; as a reference to the fact that, from the Israelites who have abolished the devil's body; emerged the apostles, who preached among the Gentiles, to deprive the devil of its body members].

#### **5- Moses chastises the people:**

When Moses saw that the people were unrestrained (got out of control), to become a laughingstock to their enemies (Ex. 32: 25), he interceded on their behalf to protect them from the evil that was about to befall them, and the Lord accepted his intercession (Ex. 32: 14). Yet he firmly commanded those who were on the Lord's side (the sons of Levi), to kill all those who were outside their tents; about 3000 men of the people fell that day (Ex. 32: 28). The people sinned, and should be chastised: Those who retreated to their tents, ashamed of their sin, were

spared the sword; as proved by the fact that they were told by Moses on the next day, “*You have sinned a great sin; so now I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin*” (Ex. 32: 30). While those who remained outside their tents, not caring for what they did, were killed.

## **6- Moses’ intercession:**

God said to Moses, “*Let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them, and I may consume them; and I will make you a great nation*” (Ex. 32: 10). But Moses, with his fatherly love, refused to forsake his people, however hard their hearts are, and strongly interceded on their behalf saying: “*Now, if you will forgive their sin - but if not, I pray blot me out of Your book which You have written*” (Ex. 32: 32). This intercession remained a living well, from which priests and ministers draw the water of love, up to this day. The following are some of the comments of fathers on that intercession:

\* God said to Moses: “*I will make you a great nation*” (Ex. 32: 10). Yet he rejected that offer, stuck to the sinners, and prayed for them. How did he pray? He acted with the compassion of a mother, something that I like to talk much more about. Moses’ gentle heart was terrified by God’s threat against his people, so he risked his own life for their sake, saying: “*If (You will not forgive them), I pray, blot me out of Your book which you have written*”. By that, he anticipated, at the same time, both God’s justice and His mercy. Being just, He would not consume a righteous man (Moses); while, being merciful, He would forgive the sinners.

\*He says: It is easier for me to die together with them than to be saved without them! It is, truly, Love with no limits.

\*He said that for being a friend of God, bearing His trait (love).

\* That was the top care of great and noble people, not to seek what is theirs, but what is their neighbor’s. By that, they gained more light and splendor.

\* Moses did many wonders and miracles. Yet, it was one thing that made him the greatest, that blessed talk with God.

\* Is he not the same person who escaped for fear of one man (Pharaoh), and went to exile? Yet, having tasted the honey of love, he offered to die together with his beloved.

\* This is how the saints are. They count the death together with their children, sweeter than the life without them.

(St. John Chrysostom)

\* Behold the strength and incomparable perfection of love!! The servant talks freely to his Master, asking Him to pardon his people, or else to let him die together with them.

(St. Clement of Rome)

\* How great he is; He would rather die together with his people, than to get saved alone.  
(St. Clement of Alexandria)

Some fathers, like St. Augustine, and St. Ambrose, also believe that Moses was sure of God's love; that he would accept his intercession on their behalf, and would not blot him out of the book He has written.

Through that action, Moses became such a living example of love, meekness, and humility; that St. John Chrysostom believed that his appearance, together with Elijah, on the day of transfiguration of the Lord Christ before His disciples, was a manifestation of how the disciples should be, to have the meekness and humility of Moses, that made God forgive the sin of the people, and the firmness and zeal of Elijah, who asked God for three and a half years of famine for the sake of chastisement.

As to the activity of Moses' intercession on behalf of his people, St. John Chrysostom says: [The prayers of saints on our behalf, have great activity, on one condition, which is our repentance, and mending our ways. Moses, who saved the lives of his brother and 600 thousand men, could not save his own sister].

St. Jerome also said: [If one single man, Moses, gained forgiveness for 600 thousand men of war; and St. Steven, the Christian martyr prayed for forgiveness of his prosecutors; When those people get to enter with their lives to Christ, would their strength be less than that?!].

Finally, having accepted Moses' Intercession, God said to him:

*“Now therefore, go, lead the people to the place of which I have spoken to you. Behold, My Angel shall go before you. Nevertheless, in the day when I visit for punishment, I will visit punishment upon them for their sin”*

(Ex. 32: 34)

*“So the Lord plagued the people because of what they did with the calf which Aaron made”* (Ex. 32: 35).

God accepted Moses' intercession. He would not consume them, but would go on helping them, and would consummate His promises to them; Yet not without condition; Having sinned, when He visits them for salvation, he will visit the sin in them, namely, He will punish them; That is why He plagued them, until the day He would return and proclaims His salvation work in their life.

God's love or mercy is not in contradiction with His justice. Though He forgives, yet He does not tolerate carelessness, and would not unite with a man still in his sin. By saying, “I will visit punishment upon them for their sin”, He is probably referring to His paying the price of their sin, and dying for them, on the day He visits them on the cross, to bring them over to the true land of promise

=====

## CHAPTER 33

### THE COVENANT RENEWED

The fall of the people to worshipping the golden calf was not a minor matter, for this, God hastened to let Moses go down to them. Hearing how God intended to destroy them, Moses interceded on their behalf and God accepted his intercession. Returning to the foot of the mountain, and seeing how the people were falling into sin, Moses angrily broke the two stone tablets, and bitterly chastised the people. He then interceded on their behalf, asking God, either to forgive them, or let him die together with them, and God again accepted his intercession. There had to be new dialogues for the renewal of the covenant that the people broke by their sin, and that was symbolized by breaking the two tablets of stone. That is what we see in the two chapters: 33 and 34.

Chapter 33 included the following:

- |  |         |
|--|---------|
| 1- A divine admonishment to the people             | 1 – 6   |
| 2- Moses' tent as a tabernacle                     | 7 – 11  |
| 3- Moses pleads for God's presence with His people | 12 – 17 |
| 4- A divine friendship                             | 18 - 23 |

+++++

## **1- A divine admonishment to the people:**

God accepted Moses' intercession, and confirmed to him that He will stay honest to the people, despite their dishonesty; saying to him:

*“Depart and go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, ‘To your descendants I will give it’ (Ex. 33: 1).*

Although He is realizing His promises to their fathers, yet we notice some change in the way He is going to do that:

a- He still feels bitterness toward the people. He does not call them “My people”, as He used to, and does not use His language of friendship ... Probably, so that the people would not find sin easy, and would not abuse God's love and mercy.

b- God would not personally go up in their midst, saying:

*“I will send an Angel before you...I will not go up in your midst, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people” (Ex. 33: 3).*

He is sending an Angel, to defend, help, and guide them. Yet he is not the same Angel that He talked about in the twenty-third chapter, Who is the second Person, saying, “For My Name is in Him” (Ex. 23: 21). God would not go up in the midst of those people, as what fellowship would there be between God and the stiff-necked man? (Ex. 33: 5), and man, himself would not bear it, hearing God say:

*“Say to the children of Israel, ‘You are a stiff-necked people. I could come up into your midst in one moment and consume you” (Ex. 33: 5).*

As though, it is out of God's mercy, not to come up into their midst while they are still in their sin.

d- God opened the door of hope before Moses and the people, by talking of repentance, saying:

*“Now, therefore, take off your ornaments, that I may know what to do to you”(Ex. 33: 5).*

As though He is saying to them: Stop leaning upon yourselves, forsake the lusts of your bodies and give Me a chance to work in your midst!

## **2- Moses' tent as a tabernacle:**

When the people heard these great tidings, they mourned, and no one put on his ornaments

(Ex. 33: 4; 6), as a sign of their sacred grief and their repentance. But God stopped meeting with Moses in the camp that was defiled by that horrible sin; and Moses had to take his tent and to pitch it outside, far from the camp, and called it the tabernacle of meeting (Ex. 33: 7).

This is not the tabernacle that God commanded Moses to make later on, but it was Moses' personal worship tent, namely, his secret place of prayers, that he took away from that evil place, in order to be able to meet and to "speak to God face to face, as a man speaks to his friend" (Ex. 33: 11).

That does not imply that Moses has seen the face of God, but that phrase means that he spoke to Him in a direct way, with a clear and distinct voice, and not as it was with the rest of the people who stood very far, "each man stood at his tent door, watching the pillar of cloud standing at the tabernacle door" (Ex. 33: 8 - 10). Moses, through his love to God and his people, entered into a personal friendship with God. St. John Chrysostom says: [Because "Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth" (Numbers 12: 1), he was accepted by God, and an object of His love].

By that tent, God prepared the people for the tabernacle of meeting, which Moses was to make through the command of God. As they saw the glory of God at the door of Moses' tent, all the people rose and worshipped, each man in his tent door; and they began to dignify Moses, 'Whenever Moses went out to the tabernacle, that all the people rose, and each man stood at his tent door, and watched him until he had gone into the tabernacle' (Ex. 33: 8). They started to realize the holiness of the encounter with God, and the holiness of God's ministers.

Yet, a Disciple of Moses, on the holy mountain of knowledge, Joshua, Moses' young assistant, did not go up with him to its summit (Ex. 24: 13). Here, Moses instructed Joshua with the spirit of worship; the Book says, "He (Moses) would return to the camp, but his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, did not depart from the tabernacle" (Ex. 33: 11). Discipleship does not stop at knowledge, but is supposed to go hand in hand with pious life of worship.

Leaving Joshua in the tent, could probably also be to support his master through praying for him. It is as though preaching and worship are complementary. There would be no success for ministry without the spirit of praying and worship.

Father Aphrahat believes that by keeping inside the tent, Joshua committed himself to life of celibacy; as no woman was allowed to approach or minister in the tent; Joshua stayed in it, dedicating his whole life to worship, away from any family preoccupation.

### **3- Moses pleads God's presence with His people:**

Moses knew how to deal with God with the spirit of humility, together with that of love and boldness ... ; he was an (opportunity snatcher), who used every opportunity to go deeper into the divine bosoms, and to lay hold for himself and for his people, of both love and mercy. That is why the Lord Himself says: "The forceful men lay hold of the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 11: 12).

After God forgave the horrible sin of the people, and resumed speaking with Moses face to face in the temporary tabernacle outside the camp, Moses started to admonish the Lord, with boldness, yet with humility:

*"See, You say to me, 'Bring up this people', But You have not let me*

*know whom You will send with me. Yet You have said, 'I know you by name, and you have also found grace in My sight...'*” (Ex. 33: 12).

It is as though Moses is saying to God, do I need to draw Your compassion on Your people?! Who has sent the other?! You are the One who commanded me to bring this people up from the land of Egypt. Would You forsake me now?! You told me that You know me by name; and that I have found grace in Your sight. Therefore, listen to me, and do not forsake me.

With love he says, “*See*” and, “*You have said, 'I know you by name'*”; and according to the Septuagint version, “*I know you above all*”. God knows all, as He knows every thing, yet knowledge here is not that of understanding and comprehension, but of acceptance and friendship. The apostle Paul says, “*The Lord knows those who are His*” (2 Timothy 2: 19); but to the wicked, he says, “*I never knew you*” (Matthew 7: 23).

Again, with true love he says to Him,

*“Show me now Your way, that I may know You”* (Ex. 33: 13).

If You, as God, have known me by name, and granted me that grace, allow me to know You, through Your dealings with Your people! As You know me by name, let me know You, not the knowledge of understanding and comprehension, but that of love and friendship!

Three times, he says to God the word, “*Your people*” (Ex. 33: 13; 16); as though he is saying to Him, ‘If You are calling them (the people), then, they are related to You and all the world knows that’.

Finally, having entered through love into such an amazing level, Moses says to the Lord,

*“If Your presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here”* (Ex. 33: 15).

We shall not do without You; and shall not find comfort without You! Before such love, God responds to Moses, saying:

*“My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest ... And I will also do this thing that you have spoken”* (Ex. 33: 14; 17).

Who can manage to lay hold of God’s heart in such a way, that the Creator does what His servant speaks of ?! I wish that we entreat God with Moses, before any work or action: “*If Your presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here*”. God’s presence, here, refers to the second Person, Who incarnated, and came to us to lead our lives, and bring us up to the bosom of God the Father.

#### **4- The divine friendship:**

Moses' requests from God did not stop at this. Indeed, every thing came back to what it was before the people fell into their horrible sin by worshipping the golden calf; and God promised to do what Moses asked for: to go with His presence among them. Yet Moses went so far to request boldly, "Please, Show me your glory" (Ex. 33: 18). Moses dared to ask God for what nobody before has dared to ask. As his heart was enflamed with divine love, he yearned to see God as He is? He wished to see the Incomprehensible, and to perceive the Imperceptible. God's response to him was:

*"I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But, He said, 'You can not see My face; for no man shall see Me and live'"*  
(Ex. 33: 19, 20).

It is as though God is saying to Moses: You have asked for what you cannot hold out. I would not keep from my creation any of My goodness, graciousness, and compassion. Yet My face, no man can see It and live! That ultimate and complete vision is beyond any human capacity!

In Moses' request, "*Show me Your glory*", is a clear declaration that our knowledge of God is not through human wisdom, but through God's strength. St. Clement of Alexandria says: [Moses was convinced that God is not to be known through human wisdom ... and he was committed to enter into the dense darkness (the cloud), where God's voice was, to reach to the thoughts pertaining to the presence of God, the Incomprehensible and the Imperceptible. God is not in darkness, nor in a place, but He is beyond place and time, and above everything]. He also says: [By so saying, he has clearly referring to the fact that God can not be learned through man, nor can be expressed by words, but is known through His power].

God, the Imperceptible, proclaims Himself in the soul, as much as it can hold to see; but the essence of His divinity could not be perceived; as "No one knows the Father except the Son" (Matthew 11: 27; John 6: 46). St. John Chrysostom believes that all the visions enjoyed by the fathers and prophets, were through God's will proclaiming Himself to them as much as they could hold, even the heavenly creatures see God as such. Only the Son knows the essence of the Father, having incarnated, not to manifest the divine essence, but to manifest Himself through His Human Person.

When the apostle Philip said to the Lord, "Lord, Show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us" (John 14: 8), the Lord's response: "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14: 9), according to St. John Chrysostom, as though He is saying to him, [You can not see neither Him nor Me; because Philip assumed that, as he can see and know the Lord Christ through his sense of vision, he wished, likewise, to see the Father. But the Lord clarified to him that he did not yet see, even Christ Himself].

We see Him here, through His work in us. We follow His example, to become His own and His friends. By that we behold Him, not in the essence of His Deity, but through the relationship of love and fellowship with Him. St. Clement of Alexandria says: [It is obvious

that nobody in this life can clearly behold God; but those “Pure in heart shall see God” (Matthew 5: 8); as, through the ultimate perfection, they can reach Him].

Finally, God responded to Moses saying:

*“Here is a place by Me, and You shall stand on the rock. So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by. Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen”*  
(Ex. 33: 21 - 23).

These words refer to the divine incarnation; he says, “Here is a place by Me”, means: (I shall realize your request as far as you are able to hold; I showed you the secret of incarnation, to let you lean on the Rock. Namely, lean on the Lord Christ, the true Rock. His words: “You shall see my back”, refer to the end of time, when God crosses the world, manifesting His love, that we will see through divine incarnation, as protected by the hand of God (Christ); we can behold the divine glory (in the cleft of the rock), to say with the apostle John: “We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1: 14).

St. Basil has the following spiritual interpretation for the Lord’s response: [What does He mean by saying, “Here is a place by Me”, but the vision in Spirit? Through which Moses could behold God in a way he could recognize Him. That is the place designated for the true worship; as He said: “Take heed to yourself that you do not offer your burnt offerings in every place that you see; but in the place which the Lord chooses” (Deuteronomy 12: 13). Namely, the spiritual burnt offering - the sacrifice of praise - should be offered in the Holy Spirit! From whom did we learn that ? From the Lord Christ Himself, who says: “The true worshippers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth” (John 4: 23). When Jacob saw that place, he said: “Surely the Lord is in this place” (Genesis 28: 16). The Spirit is the place of the Saints; and the Saints are a special place for the Spirit; as they offer themselves to God to dwell, to be called the temple of God. In this same way, the apostle Paul says that he speaks in the presence of God; as he speaks of secrets in the Spirit that also speaks in him].

=====

## CHAPTER 34

### THE COVENANT RENEWED (Cont.)

1- Two new stone tablets for the covenant	1 - 4
2- The Lord descends in the cloud and speaks to Moses	5 - 10
3- Two conditions for renewing the covenant	11 - 26
4- Moses fasts	27 - 28
5- Moses' face shines	29 – 35

+++++

#### **1- Two new stone tablets for the covenant:**

In the first time, God gave Moses the two tablets ready cut with the commandments engraved on them (See Ex. 31: 18). But, this time, God commanded Moses to cut two tablets of stone like the first ones, then the Lord will write on them the words that were on the first tablets; God renewed the covenant with His fallen people, but the people lost the two tablets that were cut by God.

#### **2- The Lord descends in the cloud and speaks to Moses:**

God realizes His promise to Moses: “*So it shall be, while My glory passes by ...*” (Ex. 33: 22); we see Him here, “*The Lord passed before him*” (Ex. 34: 6); and proclaims His nature, that He is:

*“The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children to the third and the fourth generation”* (Ex. 34: 6; 7).

He is also realizing His promise:

*“I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion to whom I will have compassion”*  
(Ex. 33: 19).

He explains what He means. It is not as it may sound, that God has partiality, to be merciful toward whomever He wants, even so, he is not repentant; and to condemn whoever He wants, even so he is repentant! But His ordinances are above human thoughts. He is merciful, when He finds that man presents repentance, or longs to repent. Now, He proclaims His mercy by renewing the covenant, yet not without justice, but after they have presented true repentance, and “*stripped themselves of their ornaments*” (Ex. 33: 6), and “*mourned*” (Ex. 33: 4).

According to His words: “Being gracious to whom I will be gracious”, the apostle Paul says, “*I planted, Apollo watered, but God gave the increase*” (1 Corinthians 3: 6). Indeed, God gives the increase to His vine, namely, to His Church. Yet, shall God work, unless those in charge plant and water the vine?! And will those in charge quit working, because God gives the abundance?! They do their best, yet there is no life without Him! So are we. We offer repentance, yet mercy is not for any righteousness in us, but for the sake of God, who has compassion on whom He will have compassion on. And as St. Augustine says: [Whoever thinks that God is unrighteous, because He justly chastises whomever deserves chastisement; or be longsuffering and merciful ... would be an idiot].

The apostle Paul quoted that phrase in his epistle to the Romans, saying: “What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For He says to Moses, ‘*I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion*’. So it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy” (Romans 9: 14). What does this mean? Should we not be ambitious and strive because He shows mercy or denies it, at His own will? Of course not, but the apostle wants to confirm that God’s mercy is unconditional, and Love is His nature. He grants to those who offer sincere repentance and who truly seek Him, those who do not just His unconditional love, mercy, and salvation. The apostle, in that chapter, wanted to make it clear, that if God had accepted and had mercy upon the children of Israel in the old days, yet that was not for any righteousness in them; and if the Gentiles yearned for salvation, and believed, that also was not for any righteousness on their part. God, who had mercy on Israel before, still has it on all the nations now. Nobody has any right to object!! The prophet Hosea has prophesied saying by the mouth of God: “*I will call them My people, who were not My people, And her beloved, who was not beloved*” (Romans 9: 25), not on the expense of the old people, but because the old people have rejected, and the Gentiles accepted! As to His saying, that He would come down upon the children and the children’s children for the iniquity of their fathers, we have already discussed that, when we dealt with the first commandment (Chapter 25).

As Moses listened to the voice of God, he “*made haste and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped*” (Ex. 34: 8), thus was presenting submission and

repentance on behalf of all the people. So God renewed His covenant, saying: “*I make a covenant*” (Ex. 34: 10).

### **3- Two conditions for renewing the covenant:**

To renew the covenant with the people, after falling to idol worship, God presented two main conditions:

a- A negative condition: Which is abolishing sin in all its forms; saying,

*“Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land where you are going, lest it be a snare in your midst. But you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images. For you shall worship no other god, For the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God”* (Ex. 34: 12 - 14).

As we said before, the people could not discern between the sin and the sinners. So, destroying all what concerned the sinners, has been a symbol of destroying sin in their lives.

b- A positive condition: Escaping from evil was not enough. But a concrete side of the covenant was imperative: observing the feasts, offering the firstborn, and keeping the Sabbath, things that would kindle man’s heart with the flame of God’s love, and would give him joy and comfort! We have already dealt with all this.

### **4- Moses fasts:**

The Covenant goes hand in hand with fasting:

*“He was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water”* (Ex. 34: 28).

Having been with the Lord, he was in no need of bread or water; The Lord was his fulfillment. We saw previously that the figure 40 refers to life in the world, as though man, to enjoy the commandment and the fellowship with the Word of God, he is committed to spend his whole time on earth away from loosely life.

### **5- Moses’ face shines:**

As Moses stood before the Lord, *“The skin of his face shone while he talked with Him”* (Ex. 34: 28); something that never happened before all along the previous years, neither during his encounter with the Lord through the burning bush, nor when he was given the ten commandments, in the first and second times. It is as though God intended to reward him for his great love of his people. If through love, he was ready to have his name blotted out of

God's eternal book, it was also through love that the skin of his face shone while he was still on earth! That is the splendor and glory of the true life of love.

St. Clement of Alexandria sees in the shining of Moses' face, a symbol of the Gnostic man, namely, he who has the true practical knowledge; He would be like Moses, glorified, here on earth, so that his body would carry the features of the righteous soul. The scholar Tertullian sees in that event, a proclamation of God's work in resurrection. As Moses was so glorified that the people could not look at his shiny face, so will we be in resurrection.

As to the veil that Moses put on his face when he spoke to the people, it is that which was taken away in Christ through gaining His grace (2 Corinthians 3: 13; 14). And as the apostle Paul says, that until this day the same veil remains un-lifted from the hearts of unbelieving Jews. That is why they are unable to comprehend the secrets and hidden Spirit of the law!

The scholar Origen says about this veil: [If we read without zeal for the sake of comprehending and understanding, all the Book would be for us, covered with a veil, even the gospels and the epistles].

[Some of you come to the Church after the gospel and the epistles are read; and some do not contemplate in what he hears, and do not remember the divine commandment of the law, saying, "*Ask your father and he will show you; Your elders and they will tell you*" (Deuteronomy 32: 7). And some do not wait until the consummation of the readings; or would not even care if those readings were said or not. For those people I would say, that around their hearts, there is not only a veil, but also a wall].

Studying the holy Books is not enough as coming to know them, but it is fitting for us to beseech and entreat the Lord, day and night, "until the lion of the tribe of Judas, the root of David, would prevail to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals" (Revelation 5: 5), who, when he opened the Scriptures to His two disciples, their hearts burned within them (Luke 24: 32). I pray the Lord to have compassion on us now. As it is said, "*The Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty*" (2 Corinthians 3: 17), so that the liberty of knowledge would abide, and we get free from the bondage of the veil. That is why the apostle added, "*We all, with unveiled face, behold as in a mirror the glory of the Lord*" (2 Corinthians 3: 18)... Yet, how can we gain that liberty, if we remain in the servitude of the world, the wealth, and the carnal lusts].

=====

## CHAPTERS 35 TO 40

### MAKING, SETTING, AND DEDICATING THE TABERNACLE OF MEETING

These chapters (35 to 40) presented a detailed account of the making, setting, and dedication of the tabernacle, where the Lord has proclaimed His glory. We have already dealt with the tabernacle and its furnishings (Chapters 25, 26, 27, 30, 31). Here, I shall only mention the following few remarks:

#### **1- Why going again into the details of the tabernacle?**

a- The Holy Book intended to confirm that the workers were committed to great accuracy in making the tabernacle and all its furnishings, according to the pattern shown by God to Moses. God cares for setting inside us a spiritual sanctuary, with a similar accuracy in following His commandment.

b- Recording the acts of obedience of the people, to become a living part of the word of God, is to proclaim that we, through obedience, would have our life likewise recorded in the book of life, and would get eternity.

#### **2- The offerings:**

The words of the Book, “Take from among you an offering to the Lord” (Ex. 35: 5), also bears an inner offering, in which man presents his life, heart feelings and thoughts ... Such was the diversity of offerings. Yet, we do not find ‘lead’ among them, as it refers to sin, but we find gold, silver, and bronze; even goats’ hair, red skins of rams, and badger skins; that refer to bringing to death and control of carnal lusts.

The Book confirms, “*They came, both men and women, as many as had a willing heart ...*” (Ex. 35: 22). This sharing in giving, refers to the soul sharing with the body, and the thought with the emotion; namely, to the sanctification of man as one unit. And as said by the scholar Origen, [Good women obey their husbands; the good body does not rebel against the Spirit, but obeys it and works in harmony with it].

As the body, could destroy the soul by working against it through wicked lusts, leading to the deprivation of both of them of the divine glories, so also by submission , the body works together with the soul under the leadership of the Lord Christ, through His Holy Spirit, in order that both of them gain the heavenly crown. And as the scholar Origen says, as the soul and body spiritually work together in harmony and union, God would dwell in man, according to His words: “*Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them*” (Matthew 18: 19).

From another aspect, we find also in this, a portrait of the living Church, in which men, women, old and young, work together; every one offers something; no lazy or barren member in the body of the Lord Christ.

*“Rulers brought onyx stones, and stones to be set in the ephod and in the breastplate; and spices and oil for the light, for the anointing oil, and for the sweet incense” (Ex. 35: 27, 28).*

Those rulers refer to the leadership work. That is why they offered the stones we spoke of previously, which refer to bearing the people over the shoulders and breast, to bring them over to the temple of God with fatherly spirit, carrying their responsibility and praying for them! They fill up the lamps with oil, in order that their life would be enlightened with the living practical light of faith, to testify to God before all. They offer the anointing oil, to have their actions anointed with the Holy Spirit. And they offer the sweet incense, because the secret of their success is their persistent prayers, and offering of their life as a sacrifice of love, a sweet fragrance of incense to the Lord.

### **3- Wisdom and understanding in work and offering:**

We are committed to have, beside the material to build the tabernacle, the wisdom, the knowledge, and all manner of workmanship, necessary to do the work. As the scholar Origen says; [What would be the use, if you have all the necessary material, yet you could not properly put them into use?! Therefore, we should strive to gain wisdom, to be capable of putting into use what we learn from the Holy Books, in the proper way, and in the proper time, in order to build up and adorn the sanctuary of God].

### **4- Early and diligent offering:**

The children of Israel continued to bring to Moses freewill offerings *“every morning”* (Ex. 36: 3). All the craftsmen were doing their work, not with a temporary zeal, but with persistent and steady spirit, that there was more than enough for the service of the work commanded by God. That is a symbol of offering to the Lord, the inner life and works *“every morning”*, namely, offering it early, not waiting to offer Him whatever is left over of them at the day’s end. It is giving Him priority in the whole life: God first, and before any man or any work! That is why the Wisdom says: *“I love those who love me; and those who seek me diligently will find me”* (Proverb 8: 17). And the Psalmist says: *“O God, You are my God; early will I seek You; my soul thirsts for You; my flesh longs for You. In a dry and thirsty land, where there is no water, so I have looked for You in the sanctuary”* (Psalm 63: 1, 2). Presenting their offerings early in the morning, does not only imply that they are giving out of their need, but they are giving joyfully and happily, with no hesitation or postponement, as though following the example of Mary Magdalene, who came in the early morning, carrying the fragrant oils of love, to encounter with the Lord Christ risen from the dead.

### **5- Dedication of the tabernacle:**

Having obeyed the commandments of God with absolute accuracy, the tabernacle was erected, and was accepted by God, for whom the heavens and earth are not wide enough, to become His dwelling place amid His people.

It was a joyful day; the priests were anointed, and the tabernacle, with all its furnishings, was dedicated. Then:

*“Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle”*(Ex. 40: 34; 35).

Here, Moses, with all his closeness to the Lord, could not enter into the tabernacle, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of the Lord filled it. It is as though he intended to proclaim to his people, that he had fully presented the symbol; then left the stage to the Only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of God the Father, because He alone can enter into the Holy of Holiness, carrying us in Him to enjoy the cloud of the Holy Spirit, that fills the sanctuary, and enter by Him forever, into the splendor of the Lord, and the fellowship of His glories.

=====

