



1. Always Faithful

"I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); ... Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer... and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life." Rev 2:9-10

This was the advice and the commandment that God gave the angel of the Church of Smyrna (Bishop of the Church of Smyrna).

St. Polycarp was the Bishop of Smyrna (known today as Izmir), a city on the west coast of Turkey. The letters to the "seven churches in Asia", at the beginning of the book of Revelation, include a letter to the church of Smyrna, describing it as a church undergoing persecution.

Story of the Saint

St. Polycarp is said to have been a disciple of St. John the Beloved and was instructed by him in the Christian faith. The name "Polycarp" is a Greek word which means "many fruits". In fact he was fruitful in all his good works. When he was forty years old, St. Polycarp became the bishop of Smyrna. He was a righteous bishop, a model of faith, a gifted teacher and a good shepherd, who led his flock with apostolic zeal.

St. Polycarp is recognized as one of the apostolic fathers and a strong defender of orthodoxy. He resisted Marcion's Heresy and refuted Gnostic heresies that were beginning to spread throughout the Christian church.


During the persecution time against the Christians, the pagans demanded that the governor search for St. Polycarp and kill him. When St. Polycarp heard the news about his death sentence, he did not want to leave but rather remain in the city. However, because of the persistent urging of his flock, he fled to a small village not far from Smyrna.

He devoted all his time there, day and night, to continuous prayer for all the people and churches throughout the world. While in prayer, he had a vision in which he saw his pillow burning with fire. From that, he understood that God was calling him for martyrdom and that he would be burned alive. Soon after the vision, the Roman soldiers found him and he was arrested.

St. Polycarp was condemned by the government and tried on the charge of being a Christian. When the governor urged him to save his life by denouncing Christ, he replied: "Eighty-six years I have served him and he never did me any wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?"

St. Polycarp was sentenced to be burned at the stake for refusing to burn incense for the Roman Emperor.





As he waited for the fire to be lit, he knelt down, looked up to heaven, and said his last prayer; they lit the fire while he was praying and his face was glowing with grace, joy and gladness.

Thus, the beloved Bishop of Smyrna went on to join the triumphant Church in Paradise.

May his blessing and prayers be with us all. Amen.

“I will give you the crown of life.”

Indeed, St. Polycarp entered paradise and his soul still rejoices in the presence of Jesus Christ, his angels and all the saints. In the Second Coming, he will rise in a luminous, spiritual, heavenly and glorious body.

Luminous: His new body is made of light.

Spiritual: His new body is anointed with divine holiness.

Heavenly: He will travel as a thunder bolt to heaven with Jesus Christ in His second coming.

Glorious: He will wear everlasting crowns in eternity.

THE MAIN CROWNS ARE:

1. The Crown of Righteousness (Holiness): He will live in heaven with a spiritual body that shall no longer hunger, thirst or sin.
2. The Crown of Rejoicing: As he hears the mighty voice saying, “Enter into the joy of your Lord”.
3. The Crown of Fellowship: As he worships, praises and sings with angels and saints.
4. The Crown of Eternal life: There is no death, but rather joyful eternal life with God.

Faithfulness is the Way to be Crowned

The faithful life of St. Polycarp led him to be crowned and receive eternal life. Our faithfulness will do the same for us. That is why Mahragan Alkeraza’s 2010 main theme, under the See of St. Mark, is “Always Faithful”

There are 5 areas to be discussed in the faithful life:

1- Be faithful in your spiritual life:

Each person should be faithful in his/her spiritual life with God and continuously maintain the meditations of grace which are: Bible reading, praying, partaking of the Holy Communion, attending spiritual meetings and readings.



2- Be faithful within your church:

Submerge your life in the holy church by learning the Coptic language, hymns, following the Agpeya prayers, reading about the lives of saints, fasting, attending mass, Holy Pascha, Kiahk, etc.

3- Be faithful in your talents:

Be faithful in your time, education and different talents (such as arts, music, poetry, etc.). Above all, serve your friends, colleagues, the sick, needy and the elderly. Utilize your energy towards sports, scouts, missionary work, etc.

4- Be faithful with your family:

Be faithful in your relationship with your parents, siblings and relatives. Be sure to serve your family and tend to all their needs.

5- Be faithful in your relationships

Be faithful in your social relationships at school, with your neighbours and friends. Remember that Christians should be the light of the world and the salt of the earth.





5. Different ... Yet the Same!

The family is a system created by God

God created man in a family to establish a form of social relations and the unity that can provide a safe environment to care for individual family members. In this system God has given parents the responsibility to look after their children and provide for their needs. The Holy Bible speaks about forming the first family of Adam and Eve. The story of salvation begins with the Holy family.

Matthew 1:18 "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit."

Since God made parents responsible for their children, He gave them authority, and asked children to obey their parents.

Ephesians 6:1 "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right."

As time goes by, a young person gradually becomes independent. However, youth usually falls between dependence and independence, which results in a conflict between parents and children. From one perspective, a young person asks for more freedom, while the parents hold tight to their responsibility towards their children.

Areas of conflict within a family

The following are a few areas of conflict within a family. Arrange them based on what is important to you first and gradually go through the list to the least of your concerns.

Going out frequently - time of curfew - helping with house chores - keeping your room tidy - watching T.V. - going to church - friends - clothing and its trends - food - studying - listening to your parents' advice and following it - computer usage and internet surfing - Facebook and how long you spend on it. Name any other areas you would like to add.

Reasons for family disputes

Discuss with your servant




The main reasons behind these conflicts (you can add other reasons if you wish):

1. **Age difference and the generation gap:** There are always differences in experience and social circumstances, etc. However we need one another; I need my father, because he represents the experience of life. He too can benefit from my knowledge of what's new. In short, we need both generations; what's new represented by the youth and on the other hand what is traditional and experienced, which is represented by our parents.
2. **The pressures of everyday life:** Everyday life has changed tremendously from what it used to be. Lifestyle, relationships, new technology, means of communication (from phones to cell phones), to internet chatting, to text messaging, surfing the internet, etc. All of these devices have reshaped our daily lives.
3. **Inconsistent expectations between generations:** Youth have certain expectations and images of how they should be treated, which could exist only in their minds. They believe that their parents fall short of their expectations. On the other hand, parents are expecting certain behavior from their children, while the children feel it is impossible to achieve, due to the demands and pressures of modern day life. For example, a parent might expect his son to live and behave the same way he himself used to do. However, this is not accepted by today's youth and their lifestyle. Children will want to act and live according to today's social parameters regardless of whether or not their life choices are consistent with the values of being children of Christ.
4. **The tendency for independence:** As important as independence is, parents usually have their own reasons for not allowing it fully. The questions usually concern when and how much independence can be given versus the responsibility that comes with it. In fact, freedom is more of a responsibility than it is a form of freedom.
5. **Not giving the Lord His position as the head of the whole family:** The place of our Lord Jesus in our family is the most important in family issues. Does each person walk in his or her life realizing that God sees him or her? Every person will have to account for all his or her actions and therefore we must look to our Lord Jesus Christ as the ultimate example upon which to model our lives.

Imagine yourself in the following situation.

Fady and his sister Christina are among the church youth and they always complain about their parents' strict control. They force them to study a lot, do a lot of chores, and do not permit them to watch television during school days. Moreover, they feel that their father does not spend money on them the way he should. He refuses a lot of their requests and their mom doesn't always cook what they like, etc. While they were thinking about these





things, Fady turned on the radio and heard the following announcement: "A new ruling has passed today and for one day only, the government decided that all parents will become children and the children will be parents, but for one day only!!!" Imagine this situation and complete the rest of this story. Discuss it with your servant.

God chose our family for us and it is His intention that we live happily together. It does not follow, however, that there won't be any disagreements occasionally. This means that all disagreements will be in an atmosphere of love and appreciation for one another.

Identify the mistakes that occurred among these families:

- Genesis 25:28-34
- Genesis 27: 1-41

Read Genesis 33:1-11 - Was there an answer to this problem?

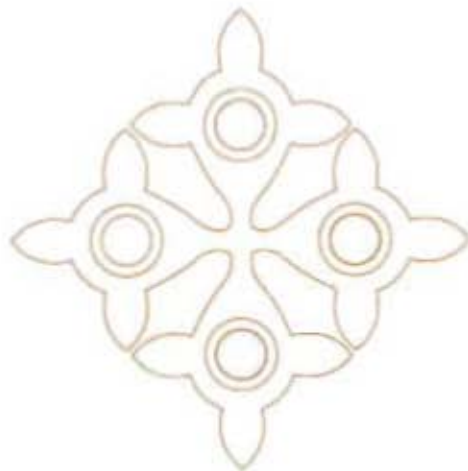
How can you build a good relationship with your own family?

Find out the principles of this relationship from the following verses and discuss it with your servant.

- Exodus 20:12
- Proverbs 1:8, 23:24, 8:33, 12:1, 15:1-2, 18:13, 17:1
- Ephesians 6:1, 4:26

If you disagree with your parents in certain situations, what should you do?

- Proverbs 15:23, 15:1, 17:14
- James 1:19
- Matthew 5:37





7. An Invitation to Joy

Imagine travelling back in time to the times of Jesus; more specifically, to the city of Jerusalem where Jesus taught the multitudes and healed the sick. Imagine looking directly at Him as you stand among the crowd. Suddenly, you cross eyes with the Lord Jesus. He speedily comes towards you, embraces you and kisses you in front of the entire crowd.

In one word, describe your feelings and emotions at that very moment.

What do you think you did in order to deserve such a warm embrace?

“And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off...” Luke 15:20

Write the following:

1. What did the son do? _____
2. What did the father do? _____
3. Conclusion: _____ is the door of enjoyment of the warm embrace of Our Heavenly Father.

The Foundation of Repentance

Mark the following either TRUE (✓) or FALSE (X), based on what you believe:

1. In Orthodoxy, repentance means changing our direction from the way of sinning to the way of striving to live God's way of life.
2. Repentance does not only mean abstinence but also fulfillment.
3. Repentance is striving and grace. Striving means being determined to never sin again and hating sin. Grace means the work of God in my path to repentance and His strong hand that supports me.
4. Repentance means holiness without falling into sin.
5. Repentance is a lifetime and on-going process of self-renewal.
6. There is no sin that does not yield to repentance. Repentance is boundless. Regardless of how great our sins may be, there is no sin that is greater than God's love.

God is calling YOU

After falling into sin, a person tends to flee from God. But God with all His great love and mercy has a message for us. Find out God's message in Jeremiah 15:19. In this verse there are two actions; which one comes first?

Story - The White T-Shirt

After a long day of activities, your white t-shirt is no longer white. Does this mean that the T-shirt is now useless? Of course not! If washed, it will be as good as new. Does this mean it won't get dirty again? Of course not! It will get dirty over and over again. Therefore all you have to do is simply clean the t-shirt whenever it gets dirty!


This is the story of our lives. Whenever we get dirty with sin, we have to sanctify ourselves through repentance...over and over again, throughout our entire life. This is our journey of striving on earth. Put simply, you have to be eager to clean your t-shirt and not be careless, thinking that you have a lot of time to clean it.

A Saint Wins the World Record in Speed

Not only was she immersed in practicing sin, but it was her daily job. She was very famous for her evil life. One day, the beautiful Paesia received an unexpected visit from a famous and great man. Do you know who this great man is? Paesia's house, which is known well as a house of sin, always welcomed famous and rich people from the city. However, this time it was different. The great man was St. John the Short. Do you know the full story about how St. John led her to repentance?

During this visit she decided to abandon everything she used to do in her old life. Her repentance was so strong. As St. John's words touched her heart, she cried and asked, "Can God accept the repentance of someone like me?" St. John answered her saying, "Yes, but not in this place." She decided to leave her house and go wherever St. John would lead her. During their journey, the night fell upon them. St. John left her beside a big boulder to go and pray. As he was praying he saw a vision that angels came and carried the soul of Paesia to heaven. The next morning, St. John went to where he had left her, in order to continue their journey, but to his surprise he found her dead.

St. John wept and asked God why He didn't give her a chance to repent. Then he heard a voice from heaven telling him that her repentance was perfect before God and had been accepted since she was still at her home, for it was a true and genuine repentance.



St. John felt comforted and thanked God for His infinite love and great mercy to sinners.

Note 1: Paesia transformed from a sinner into a repentant person and from a repentant person into a saint. All of these stages occurred in a matter of hours during one day.

Note 2: True repentance is manifested through joy.

Confession

Have you ever asked yourself why it is important to confess to a priest?

I don't like to confess because _____

What is a father of confession? The father of confession is filled with compassion. You can feel the heavenly fatherhood in him, which includes kind-heartedness, firmness, support and discipline. When we confess, the father of confession gives us absolution from our sins and also a solution to our problems.

The Map of Confession

- In front of God
- In front of the father of confession
- In front of others
- In front of yourself

Confession is:

1. Regretting within yourself
2. Apologizing to others
3. Repentance and asking God for forgiveness
4. Confessing to your father of confession to receive the absolution

Examine, Analyze, Decide and Follow-through

1. Examine:

The sacrament of confession does not mean verbal words before the father of confession; it should first be a true and sincere repentance. In other words, the need to repent stems from the sincere feeling of regret and being sorry for what we have done. At the same time, there is a strong urge to go back to God. The will power to change one's mind is ignited and within us there is steadfast intention to improve. You must acknowledge that pouring out your sins in confession is not in front of a person but in front of God, for during confession the Holy Spirit is present; It hears your sins and has the power of forgiveness.



(Read the stories in Acts 5:3 and Joshua 7:1)

Inspection means examining yourself. Get a paper and pen, sit alone and begin to pray and examine yourself in the light of the Holy Spirit.

Types of Strife:

1. Positive Striving (Spiritual growth):

- i. Prayer: Its importance. The kind of prayers that you pray. The obstacles.
- ii. Holy Bible: Daily reading. Both Testaments. Meditation. To what extent do you apply what you read? Memorization.
- iii. Giving
- iv. Attending mass and taking communion.
- v. Fasting.
- vi. Spiritual meetings and spiritual readings.
- vii. Spiritual practice and merits
- viii. Serving others and visiting the sick.

2. Negative Striving (Overcoming sin):

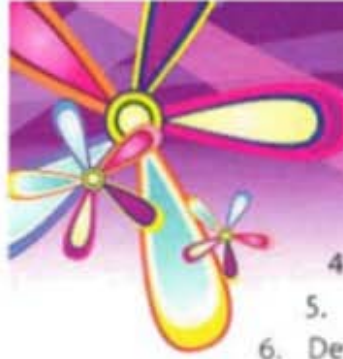
- i. The sin of thoughts include: adulterous thoughts, lusts, anger, hateful thoughts, revenge, judging, day-dreaming, pride and false presumptions.
- ii. Sins of the heart and feelings: Feelings that don't please God such as envy, jealousy, hatred, love of materialistic things, love of control, love for the world, losing hope, discontent, severe mourning, etc.
- iii. Sins of actions: Adultery, stealing, fighting, carelessness, bad habits, disobedience.
- iv. Sins of the tongue: Lying, gossiping, judgment, blaspheming, cursing, swearing, sarcasm, bad jokes, inappropriate conversations, excessive talking, words of foolishness.
- v. Sin in your relationships with others: Anger, hurt, disputing, inappropriate relationships, harshness and violence, pride, love of compliments, hypocrisy, cheating and injustice.

Traffic Lights Game

Remember this game should take only 3 minutes!

Colour in green the circle beside the sentences that you should say during confession. For the sentences you shouldn't say, color the circle red. If you are not sure, mark the circle in yellow.

1. I feel that...
2. I did that because...
3. This person told me to do it...

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4. It was my fault that I did it...
 5. I think of...
 6. Details of places and situations...
 7. I made a mistake while doing...
 8. When the father of confession begins to advise you, you should listen and not talk...

From the previous games, choose 4 sentences that are already included in your confession.

- i. _____
- ii. _____
- iii. _____
- iv. _____

2. Analyze:

When you feel the severity of your sins and you degrade yourself, you have to sit in front of God and regretfully confess everything you have done. You should speak to Him in detail with simplicity and honesty, just as a son speaks to his father. Find the reasons for your sin and look for patterns and triggers in order to avoid repeating them.

3. Decide:

Feeling remorse for your sins is not the final stage. Take a decision to turn to God and enjoy the warmth under His wings. Now that you are under God's guidance, you must take another firm decision: never to return to the life of sin again. In your prayer, always remember to ask for God's grace to support you in your repentance. Then go to your father of confession, confess and take the absolution.

When you sit with your father of confession, do not take advantage of knowing him personally. Don't mention your sins as a story-teller, but rather in humility and with a contrite heart.

Do not hide any secrets or thoughts no matter how embarrassing they may be, but reveal all frankly before the priest to enable him to offer the best remedy.

Remember, "When the righteous rejoice, there is great glory; But when the wicked arise, men hide themselves." Proverbs 28:12 Don't try to cover up your sins because you are embarrassed. Say what you have done in all honesty, even if it is something against the father of confession himself. Listen carefully to his advice and accept it. If you find any of his advice hard to apply, tell him.



Source of Power

After confession, the confessing person kneels before the priest, bowing their head and repeating the words, "God be merciful to me for I am a sinner" (Luke 18:13). The priest, standing, places the cross in his right hand on the confessing person's head, and prays the absolution. This denotes the compassionate fatherhood of God accepting His repentant sons and daughters.

Absolution

Read the absolution after confession and write the request that you like the most.

Part of absolution prayer: "Dispense unto us Your mercy, and loose every bond of our sins, and if we have committed any sin against You, knowingly or unknowingly or through anguish of heart, or in deed, or in word, or from faint-heartedness, You O Master, who knows the weakness of men, as a good and loving God, grant us the forgiveness of our sins. Bless us, purify us and absolve us."

4. Follow-through:

1. After confession the confessor should leave immediately, go home, offer a thanksgiving prayer and meditate upon God's mercy.
2. You will be filled with joy after confession knowing that God has cut off all your ties with sin and has forgiven you.
3. The repentant must walk along the pure path of repentance, and should not willingly return to sin but rather ask for God's grace to support his struggle against sin.

Story: Black Dots

Ramy was doodling black points, when Arsany came and asked him why he was ruining the white paper. Ramy responded that he had to wait and see.

Ramy started to connect the black dots in horizontal and vertical lines, until he formed a beautiful musical note that he began to compose. Arsany really liked it.

Our life also is full of black dots. With black dots of our weakness God can create a beautiful symphony through His love and change the weakness into strength.

Finally, write down two incidents from the Holy Bible which involve repentance and confession of sins.

