



St. Mary & St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church Diocese of Sydney & Affiliated Regions

Monthly Newsletter: March 2020 Issue

Coptic Calendar: 22 Meshir 1736 – 22 Paremhotep 1736

Bible Readings

1st March	22 Meshir	Psalms 25:1-2, 4 Divine Gospel Matthew 6:19-33
8th March	29 Meshir	Psalms 27:8-10 Divine Gospel Matthew 4:1-11
15th March	6 Paremhotep	Psalms 79:8-9 Divine Gospel Luke 15:11-32
22nd March	13 Paremhotep	Psalms 105:3-5 Divine Gospel John 4:1-42
29th March	20 Paremhotep	Psalms 33:5-6 Divine Gospel John 5:1-18

Coptic Feast Days

- + March 8th (29 Meshir): The Martyrdom of St. Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna.
- + March 9th (30 Meshir): The Appearance of the Head of St. John the Baptist.
- + March 9th (30 Meshir): The Departure of Pope Kyrollos VI, the 116th Pope of Alexandria.
- + March 17th (8 Paremhotep): The Martyrdom of St. Matthias, the Apostle.
- + March 17th (8 Paremhotep): The Martyrdom of St. Arianus, the Governor of Ansena.
- + March 19th (10 Paremhotep): Commemoration of the Appearance of the Honorable Cross.
- + March 21st (12 Paremhotep): The Commemoration of the Honorable Archangel Michael.
- + March 22nd (13 Paremhotep): The Martyrdom of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste.
- + March 25th (16 Paremhotep): The Apparition of the Virgin St. Mary in the Church of St. Dimiana in Papadouplo, Shoubra, Cairo, Egypt.
- + March 26th (17 Paremhotep): The Departure of Lazarus, the Beloved of the Lord.
- + March 31st (22 Paremhotep): The Departure of the Just Man Joseph of Arimathea.

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The Feast of the Holy Cross

The Feast of the Cross is celebrated twice a year during which the church conducts a joyful procession to the Cross. This same procession is also celebrated on Palm Sunday. On the 17th Thout in the year 326 AD we remember for three days the discovery of the cross by Queen Helen. On the 10th Paremhotep 627 AD we remember for one day the discovery of a piece of the cross by Emperor Heraclius who returned it to Constantinople after the Persian King had stolen it.

At the center of our Christian life is the sacrifice of the Cross when God the Father offered his only Son for the salvation and redemption of mankind. As such the true meaning of the Cross is sacrificial love, from here comes its true power in the life of the believer. The Cross is a symbol of our faith, a witness to the Crucified Jesus Christ, as a source of strength and support and also as the cross of endurance and suffering we must bare as disciples of Our Lord and Savior.

In Christianity, you suffer, you find pleasure in suffering, and you obtain crowns for your suffering which is transformed into glory. Christianity is not a Cross which you carry, and grumble and protest in your complaint! No, but it is the love of the Cross, the love of suffering and sacrifice and fatigue for the Lord and for the expansion of His kingdom. Sufferings are accompanied by blessings where we find that the sufferings for the Lord are associated with joy and jubilation and with the celestial reward.

Sources:

1. <https://smass.co.uk/contemplations-on-feasts-and-fasts/the-feast-of-the-holy-cross>
2. <https://lacopts.org/story/the-feasts-of-the-cross/>



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The Liturgical Worship in the Coptic Church

The word "LITURGY"

The word "Liturgy" in classic Greek means "a public service undertaken on behalf of the people" it comes from:

1. "Liow," meaning "people."
2. "Ergia," meaning "work."

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, this word means "the service of the altar," or "the priestly service" Heb. 8:6; 9:21. The church used this term since the apostolic age, to cover all that worship which is officially organized by her, and which is offered by all her members, or on their behalf. In the course of time, this term has come to be particularly applied to the performance of the service of Eucharist, although there are other liturgies as the liturgy of Baptism, liturgy of marriage etc.

Liturgical worship and liturgical life

Liturgy does not mean some hours spent by believers - clergymen and laity - in participating in the Eucharistic liturgy, performing on vesper or matin or baptism or marriage celebrations etc., but it is in its essence the true communion with Christ. This liturgical life is not lived only when a believer participates in common worship whatever it is, but it dwells within his heart even when he is alone in his room. In other words, "liturgy" is a life which the church practices, through which she acknowledges her nature, realizes her message and attains her own existence which is life and growth in Jesus Christ.

In fact, we use the word "liturgy" for common worship, because the believer participates in this worship with the members of the community. This membership is alive and active and it represents a part of his entity. He is a member even when he is alone speaking with God in his own room. The holy community is in the heart of the real believer, and the believer is within the heart of the church community. In other words, when a believer prays in his room, he realizes that all the church is within his heart, praying in her name, calling God: "Our Father" and not my Father who art in heaven." At the same time, when the community prays it endows its members, present and absent with love.

The Coptic liturgies are known to be not monopolized by clergymen. They are the liturgies of all the church, laymen and clergymen. The people participate in the hymns, and prayers. Therefore, clergymen should pray in the language of the people, clearly and with a pleasant tone, as the people take their turn in participating. Here the "people" means all the congregation: men, women and children. The Coptic church does not exclude children during the liturgy, and this is one of the resources of our church in Egypt, for even the child feels his positive membership and acknowledges his right in participating in church liturgies. The beautiful rites and heavenly hymns encourage children in worship without feeling bored, in spite of the lengthy services.

The Coptic liturgies not only emphasize church unity, clergy and laity, young and old, men and women, but also aim at revealing that the heavenly life is near and realizable to us! All the Coptic liturgies have eschatological (heavenly) attitude. In the liturgies the church participates in the hymns of the heavenly creatures, its thoughts are attracted to acknowledge the hidden mysteries of heaven. For example, the liturgy of marriage attracts our thoughts to the heavenly marriage of our souls to Christ, and also to the crowns of the saints.

Fr. Tadros Y Malaty, Introduction to the Coptic Orthodox Church.



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The Meaning of the Great Fast

Great Fast is considered the holiest fast since our Lord Jesus Christ Himself had fasted it. Therefore, during Great Fast we follow the example set by our Lord Jesus Christ, Who fasted on our behalf forty days and forty nights (Matt. 4: 2). Also during Holy Week, which comes after the 40 days, we live the Passion of Christ day by day and hour by hour. Because of the significance and holiness of Great Fast, the Church designated a week of preparation to precede the 40 days. The Church is teaching us to prepare for Great Fast in a spiritual manner. We fast to prepare ourselves for the 40 holy days. In fact, the preparatory week is not the only fast which the Church designated to get us ready for Great Fast and Holy Week. Two weeks prior to Great Fast there is Jonah's Fast, also known as Nineveh's Fast. It is a short fast, only three days, and it is a fast of repentance. During this fast, we live with Jonah his fasting and repentance in the whale's belly. We also live with the Ninevites their fasting and repentance. Just as the fasting accompanied by repentance saved Jonah and the Ninevites from perdition, also our fasting accompanied by repentance will save us from eternal destruction and death due to sin.

Great Fast is an Apostolic Fast:

It is mentioned in the Didskalia (chapter 18) the following: "Great Fast should be honored before Holy Week. It starts on the Monday following the Saturday and is completed on the Friday preceding Holy Week. After it, you must pay great attention to Holy Week and fast it with fear and piety." In Canon 69 from the Canons of our Fathers the Apostles, the following is mentioned: "Any bishop, priest, deacon, reader, or chanter who does not fast Great Fast or Wednesdays and Fridays shall be excommunicated, unless he has a physical ailment. As for a lay person, he shall be excluded."

Great Fast is an Ascetical Fast:

The Church teaches us to fast until sunset. Fish is not allowed during this period. Also married couples should refrain from physical relations to give themselves time for fasting and prayer (1 Cor. 7: 5). We would like to emphasize the importance of the period of strict abstention during fasting. It is refraining from eating and drinking for a period of time, followed by eating vegetarian food. Some people practice fasting by abstaining from meat and they eat vegetarian food, disregarding the period of strict abstention. These people should actually be regarded as vegetarians and not as fasting. A vegetarian eats only vegetarian food, but is not considered a fasting person. True fasting must be accompanied by abstention from food and drink until sunset as designated by the Church. However, due to variations in people's physical and spiritual abilities, the Church gave the father of confession the authority to designate to his children the length of their strict abstinence. He determines what is suitable for their spiritual benefit according to the nature of their work, as well as their physical ability to endure fasting.

Great Fast is a Period of Prayer:

The period of Great Fast is distinctive for its many Liturgies. They become the spiritual treasure for the fasting person to help him throughout the rest of the year. In addition to the Divine Liturgy on Sundays, which have specific readings, hymns, and tunes, the Church also arranged special readings for the daily Liturgies during Great Fast. Also, during the weekdays, there are special hymns. The Church celebrates the Divine Liturgy almost daily during Great Fast. It is preferred that these Liturgies start late in the day to offer those fasting the opportunity to practice strict abstinence. It is not permitted to have the Divine Liturgy on weekdays early in the morning, since we pray the hours until the Compline Prayer. How can we pray the psalms of the Compline Prayer at 5:00 A.M.? Also, having an early morning Liturgy means there will not be abstention from food, since we cannot abstain from food following the Divine Liturgy. The proper time to end the Divine Liturgy during



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the weekdays of Great Fast is at sunset. Due to the inability of the elderly and the sick, it is permitted to have it end earlier, but not before noon. That way everyone may receive the blessing of Holy Communion, while benefiting from abstinence.

Great Fast is a Period of Repentance:

Fasting without repentance and changing one's life becomes useless. Unless the fasting person changes his life during fasting, he will only be hungry and exhausted without gaining anything else. Therefore, the Church constantly reminds us of the importance of repentance during fasting. Before Great Fast, we fast Jonah's Fast and we live the story of Jonah and the Ninevites' repentance. During the third Sunday of Great Fast, the Holy Church offers us the Gospel reading of the Prodigal Son as a model of repentance, which requires an awakening, confession of sins, leaving the place of sin, and returning to the Heavenly Father with confidence in His mercies and acceptance. This parable reveals to us the depth of God's love for sinners and how He accepts them no matter how horrendous their sin is. Our Lord Jesus Christ said, "the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out." (John 6: 37) Christ "has come to save that which was lost." (Matt. 18:11) God desires that all men be saved and come to the knowledge of truth (1Tim. 2:4). Christ is the True Physician who is needed by those who are ill by sin. He did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance (Mark 2: 17). Repentance is a result of divine action; it is the Spirit of God, Who moves the hearts of sinners to repent. It is written in the Holy Bible, "For it is God who works in you both to will and do for His good pleasure." (Phil. 2: 13) God's pleasure is in the return of a sinner so that he will not die in his sin. When God sees his sinful child returning to Him, He has compassion and goes to him, kissing him, and welcomes his return by saying, "It is right that we should make merry and be glad." (Luke 15: 32) The return of a sinner and his repentance results in joy to God, as well as all those in heaven, because, "there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance." (Luke 15: 7)

Great Fast is a Period for Doing Mercy:

The Church reminds us of the importance of doing merciful acts during fasting. Therefore, during Great Fast we chant together praising those who have mercy on the poor. The Holy Bible teaches us that the fasting which is accepted by God is the one in which we do acts of mercy to others. "Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from you own flesh?"

Fasting is a beautiful period to do good deeds by helping the poor, feeding the hungry, visiting the sick, and taking care of the needs of others. The person who fasts by not yielding to the needs of the flesh, will feel the needs of others and his heart will be moved to serve them. Also, the asceticism of fasting teaches us to care for the heavenly and not be concerned with the earthly. Thus it becomes easy to forsake our material possessions and offer them to the needy.

Great Fast is a Period of Reconciliation with Others:

Fasting is an act of worship presented to God, and God does not accept the offering and worship of a person who quarrels with others. Instead, He asks him to go and make peace with his brother before coming to worship and present offerings in front of God' altar. Fasting is an appropriate time to evaluate our relationship with others. As we ask God to forgive us our sins, we must also forgive those who have sinned against us.

May God grant us a blessed fast by which we can grow in a life of prayer, asceticism, and repentance. May we always increase in doing acts of mercy and living in peace with one another.

Source:

<https://lacopts.org/story/the-meaning-of-the-great-lent/>