

**The Sermon of HH Pope Tawadros II at SMSK on September 9 2014 (Translated and Transcribed)**

**Meditation on Psalm 103**

***Verse 1-3: Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities and heals all your diseases.***

Baptism is like planting a seed in the human heart, which allows us to find our way to eternal life – the way to Jesus. Jesus is the One who forgives all of our sins. Saint John says, “if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9 NIV).

He is the one who cures us from all of our disease. In the liturgy, we always pray for the release of our spirit. We ask to be cleansed from both physical and spiritual diseases. This is our medicine and we know through a physician’s experience that we cannot do anything without God.

Many of you like to go on mission trips. There was a small village in Africa where people walked a very long distance to go to a medical mission. After a few years, the government decided to open a small clinic in order to make medical care more accessible to the people. To their surprise, however, the villagers continued to travel a long distance to go to the medical mission. The government asked the villagers why they didn’t use the new clinic. One man responded that although the medicine was the same in both places, the hand that provided the medicine was different. The medical mission was full of love, which made it more effective than the government clinic. In the clinic, people saw their work simply as a job rather than a service to God.

***Verse 3 continued: “Who forgives all your iniquities and heals all your diseases”***

Jesus cures all infirmities. While He was able to heal anyone of anything, he still asked the man who had been sick for 38 years if he wanted to be healed (John 5:5-6). He asked this man for permission. If our hearts are not purified and clean, we will not see that we need to be healed – we will not desire to be cured. A sheep that falls into mud will clean and dry itself off in the sun. A pig, on the other hand, stays in its own filth and even resists the help of someone who tries to clean it. We need to desire a pure and clean heart; this is our biggest task.

***Verse 4: Who redeems your life from destruction***

In the Book of Daniel, in the Old Testament, Daniel the prophet is thrown into the lions’ den. While he was there, he prayed to God. I ask you, who was scared – Daniel or the lions? Naturally, Daniel should have been afraid but he knew that he wasn’t alone. Our God and Savior sent His angel to rescue him while Daniel kept his peace.

Like Daniel, our Lord Jesus Christ also rescues us through the cross and His resurrection. Saint Paul prays to know Jesus and the power of His resurrection (Philippians 3:10). We should also have this prayer and always bless the Lord who saves our souls from destruction.

Our church teaches us to remember the resurrection of Jesus Christ frequently. The Agpeya, Book of Hours, has prayers to remind us of His resurrection every morning. In addition, we remember the resurrection every Sunday during the liturgy and on the 29<sup>th</sup> day of each month in the Coptic calendar. We live the resurrection when we let its light shine into our lives every day. The light of the resurrection shows when, like the disciples, we preach and we serve the homeless.

***Verse 4: Who crowns you with loving-kindness and tender mercies***

God crowns us with mercy and love. His mercy means that no matter how many times I fall into sin, He does not keep count. This shows the depth of our relationship to Him and how much He loves us. We are His children. When we fall, He cares and His heart aches. He waits for our return with open arms. He invites us to come back to Him. He said on the cross, "I thirst" (John 19:28). He does not thirst for water but for people, for all those who are lost. When we evangelize and bring back the lost, it is as though we are giving Him water to drink – we are satisfying His thirst. This type of mission service, which occurs here [*at St. Moses and St. Katherine*], is real love for His Holy Name. The Coptic Church appreciates this. Jesus Christ said, "on this rock I will build My church" (Matthew 16:18). The church is the bridge between humanity and God.

Orthodoxy teaches us that we cannot have a relationship with God without the church. You receive grace through the church. The clergy are the outlets of this grace. The black dress of the clergy represents dust of the earth. We come from dust and to dust we will return (Genesis 3:19). The priest and the monk are considered to be dead to the world. Therefore, the priest is not to think for himself or by himself but to be guided by God.

Sometimes I wonder why the hearts of servants are cruel. A servant must have a loving and forgiving heart. At the consecration of a church recently, we poured oil onto the altar. Our hearts should be like this oil. In the old days, when they did not have medicine, they used oil for everything – wounds and everything else. Jesus tells us that when we serve, we should serve honestly until we die and He will crown us with love and life. A crown of mercy. We will receive a place on His right hand that is saved for His true servants who are great in spirit and mercy.

***Verse 5: Who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.***

This is the last point. We are going to eat right? We eat until we are full, until we are satisfied. When I was young and they put food in front of us, we wanted to eat more

but we couldn't because we were too full! They would be so happy and tell us that they were glad that we were full. Compare this to Christ; He also wants us also to be full, happy, joyful, and satisfied. When we are happy with Him we will never consider sin.

This is the end of the Coptic year and we thank Him for all of His blessings at home and at work. We thank Him for good surprises and even in the small things – when it is raining, I thank Him and when it is sunny, I am grateful. We are thankful for all of our blessings.

He will renew our strength like the eagle (Isaiah 40:31). Christianity does not agree with the geriatric concept – that we get older with time – even though at 33 we begin to age and grow white beards, our hearts continue to be as young as falcons in the sky. Even though our biological age increases, our spirit remains young.

He destroys the nest of the chicks and allows them to fall so that He can teach them how to fly. Sometimes blessings can come disguised as trials. They look difficult but they are really meant to help us. People panic when a child falls but it makes his bones stronger.

Brothers and sisters, at the end of the Coptic Year, we thank God. Are you aware of His blessings in your life? Was He your friend throughout the year? Let us prepare for a new year. Thank Him for all of His blessings to you. In this new year let us remember three things: (1) thankfulness, (2) repentance, and (3) to serve and live with Him and to renew our commitment to Him.

God bless you all. We are happy to have all the bishops and the clergy here. I heard a lot about the service here at St. Moses and St. Katherine. We thank God for all the work that Father John is doing. I am dreaming for you to have a church building downtown.

Glory be to God forever and ever.

### **Other questions and comments.**

*1. How can we help Pope Tawadros?*

- Come and serve in Egypt. There are many needy families and children there.

*2. He mentioned the importance of keeping the Orthodox faith and our Egyptian heritage. If there are no roots, there will not be a future. To be strong in a new land we need to have strong roots.*

*3. He talked about coordinating between the churches – the issue of the church calendar years.*