

The Coptic Church is the Church of the Monastics, Martyrs, Prayers and Fastings

1. Our Coptic Orthodox Church has more spiritual blessings than any other Church. The Martyrdom of the Copts on the hands of the Roman Rulers from Augustus Ceasar to Decolation ('decladianus') is very well documented. Decolation promised the Egyptians that their blood will flow until it reaches the bellies of his soldiers's horses, and it did. More than 5 million Copts were martyred during the Roman opression of Christians: 48 AD- 302 AD. They offered their children to die before they were killed because they feared that the children might live to become heathen worshippers of idols. The examples are many Like St. Refkah who offered her 5 children, and St. Abanoub who was 12 years of age when he was martyred. The Coptic Calendar was reset to 281 AD as First year of the Calendar of the Martyrs. That was the year in which Decolotian ascended to the Roman throne.

2. Then came a time of relative calm when Constantine became emperor in 303 AD replacing Declation who was overthrown and killed. We say relative calm because through his interference in the affairs of the Church, Constantine and his two sons who followed him caused The Pope and Patriarch St. Athansassius the Apostolic, 20th Pope of Alexandria and Patrirach of the See of St. Mark to be exiled 5 times (the fifth did not take place). Also, the tribulations caused many to seek God more earnestly and contributed to the flurishing of the life of monasticism. The Jewish Historian Yossefus wrote that when you travel in Egypt from Alexandria to Thebe (Luxor) you hear the prayers and hymnal singing of the monastics coming out of the deserts and prairies of all Egypt all night long. No wonder St. Anthony the Great Egyptian Monastic is the Father of all monks. St. Packhomius is the father of communal life, and St. Shenouti (Shenouda) is the Archmendrite (Head of Solitude), father of all monks who live alone (solitary) life. Also, Egypt produced the three Saints Makarios, great fathers of monks, St. Pishoy, the perfect man the beloved of our good Savior, St. Yahnis (John the Short) the priest of sheheet, St. Moses the Black, who was a thief and hiway robber before he became a great father of monastic life and was father to m ore than 5000 brothers. etc. etc.

3. The Coptic Church became not only a learned Church that taught the way of salvation, but also a monastic Church in which fathers and followers enjoyed fasting and prayers more than any other race. You find in our Church a tradition that exceeds all traditions in Liturgies, Hymnals, Doxologies (glorifications), Theo-tecias (praises to the Virging Mary whom our Patrirach Cyril the Great of Alexandria called the theotokos, mother of God and we add the word in truth). Look at the Book of Annual Psalmody (psalms praise), it is over a 1000 pages long, the Psalmody of Kiahk (Advent) is even larger. Then the Books of Katameros (readings): Annual, Lent, Paschal, Pentecost, and Advent. They are amazing arrangements of readings and singing that covers the Christian faith many times over.

So, our Church teaches us to pray uncesingly, and the best form of prayer is to praise God and give him glory in his saints, and to fast many days because the Lord Christ taught us

the this kind (meaning the devil and his powers) can not be cast out except by prayer and fasting.

Glory always be to the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, one God. Glory be to God in His Church. Amen

Coptic Prayers

Prayer is the relation between man and His Creator, the relation between man and God, so we follow the advice of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ to pray always and to pray believing that everything we ask in prayer will be granted to us, and that if we have faith as small as a mustard seed we can tell a mountain be removed from this place and it will be moved as we command it. Paul the Apostle adds pray for me that a door may be opened for me to preach the gospel of Christ and he says pray unceasingly and pray always and do not be discouraged.

Personal Prayer:

Pray always, at all times. Pray when you rise up in the morning and at the table before you eat, and at night before you go to bed. The Church ordained 7 prayers of the hours of the day and night (Agbeya).

1. Morning (6:00 AM)
2. Third Hour (9:00 AM)
3. Sixth Hour (12:00 AM)
4. Ninth Hour (3:00 PM)
5. Eleventh Hour (5:00 PM)
6. Twelfth Hour (6:00 PM)
7. Midnight Prayer (12:00 Midnight)

The Midnight Prayer is three services. The Monastics, have an additional prayer following the Midnight prayer called The Veil Prayer.

Congregational Prayers:

The Church can hold liturgy (Communion/Eucharist) Prayer every day except during the Paschal Week. The departed Pope Kyrillos (Cyril) VI (1959-1971) performed the Eucharist everyday of the year except during the Paschal Week since he was ordained a priest and until his departure in March, 1971. His Eminence Metropolitan Domadius of Guiza follows the same tradition, and many other bishops do likewise. As a minimum the Church celebrates the Eucharist (Partaking of Christ) on every Sunday of the year.

Some Churches in Egypt celebrate the Eucharist on Wednesdays, Fridays, and Sundays. The Eucharist is celebrated usually in the morning, except the days of fasting when it is celebrated in the afternoon usually around 3 :00 PM.

The night before the Eucharist is the Raising of Incense to prepare the hearts of the Eucharist the following day. Raising of Incense is usually from 6:00-8:00 PM or 7:00-

9:00 PM. It is better to do it early to give members of the congregation some time for confession, although confessional can be arranged between the individual and the spiritual father for a time they both agree on.

There are many feasts celebrating our Lord (14 feasts), the cross (3 feasts) St. Mary (17 feasts), John the Baptist (5 feasts), the Evangelists (4 feasts), the Saints and Martyrs (many feasts) etc. Each of these feasts is an occasion for celebration of Raising of Incense on the Eve of the feast, and Eucharist on the day of the feast.

Special Church Prayers are conducted on the feasts of: Christmas (January 7th), Epiphany (Jan 19th), Easter (floats), Ascension, and Pentecost (floats). There also special church solemn prayers twice a day on every day of the Paschal week.

St. Bishoy the beloved of our good savior used to tie his hair as a braid and tie it to a rope going to the ceiling of his room ('qualiah') so that if he started to sleep the rope will pull on his head and wake him up. St. Shenouti the Archmendrite told a young monk who inquired about the long hours he spends in the wilderness saying: "Joseph, when shenouti is in the wilderness, he is talking to prophets, apostles, and disciples ..."

May the prayers of all who pleased God from Adam to the age of all ages be with us all. Amen. Pray always, and without ceasing.

Coptic Fasting Seasons

This in particular is for those who do not know. If you know it, you can ignore the message: The Coptic Orthodox Church guided by the Holy Spirit ordained the following days to be days of fasting, to abstain first, and not to eat meat or dairy products.

1. The Holy Lent Season. Its days are 55 days: 7 days of preparation, 40 days as the Lord Christ fasted (40 days and forty nights), and the 7 days of Paschal Worship. During the Holy Lent we do not eat meat or fish. No dairy products of any kind. Fasting means abstaining for a number of hours and then eating as explained, usually we eat beans, vegetables, and/or fruits. The required hours of a true fast is from midnight to sunset. But for many of us fasting until 3:00 PM is sufficient. Also, if you attend liturgy, communion breaks the fast. Also, during any fast season the Church teaches not to abstain on Saturdays; i.e. fast without abstaining.

2. The fast of the Apostles is considered one of the most important fasts, because when the Lord was asked why your disciples do not fast like the disciples of John the Baptist and the Pharisees, He replied that it is not proper for the children of the wedding to fast, but when the groom is lifted away (ascended to heaven) then they fast. The fast of the Apostles starts on the day following the day of Pentecost, and ends on July 12th, the feast of the Apostles, and the remembrance of the Martyrdom of Peter and Paul the heads of the Apostles ('hamatta al-roussol'). Peter being the Apostle to the Jews, and Paul being the Apostle to the Gentiles (non-Jews). The Apostles fast floats in date and number of days, but always ends on July 12th.

3. The Fast of the Virgin Mary Starts on August 7th and Ends on August 22nd (15 days). The end of the Holy Virgin Fast is the celebration of the Ascension of her holy body to heaven as detailed in the tradition of the Church.

4. The Advent fast is 43 days, the season starts on November 25th and Ends on the Eve of January 7th, the Birth of Christ (Christmas). Advent fasting is for the Church (believers) to prepare ourselves for the coming of the Savior.

5. All the Orthodox Churches ordained fasting on Wednesday and Friday of every week of the year except during the Pentecost Season (50 days following Resurrection). During the Pentecost Season it is not allowed to fast or do matenias ('prostrating oneself to the ground as a sign of love and honor to God'). Matenias when performed has to be in consultation with spiritual father (father of confession) concerning time and number.

6. The fast of Nineveh or (Jonah the Prophet), three days of fasting usually in February to remember the mercy of God on the people of Nineveh (a city in Northern IRAQ) and their repentance that was brought by Jonah the Prophet. When you fast Younan that starts on a Monday and Ends on a Wednesday, you know that Lent, according to the Coptic Tradition, is exactly 2-weeks away.

7. Days of Preparation ('paramoan') The day preceding any of the Lord Christ major feast is Paramoan, preparation for the feast and the Church ordained that you prepare for the feast by fasting. When the day before the feast is a Thursday, and you fasted Wednesday, the Church adds Tuesday and the paramoan becomes 3 instead of 1 day. Because in our knowledge of God 1,3,5,7,9, and 12 are wholly numbers.

Exceptions:

All exceptions have to be for a strong reason like illness or old age. Exceptions require permission from the spiritual father (father of confession). If you are not accustomed to fasting, try it, you will like it. The abstaining and self control will help you grow in body and spirit and will make a better person out of you and me. And the Church of St. Mark and the Great Fathers of Monastic Life taught us that "ibn al-ta'a te-hel ?aleeh al-barkah" (The Son/Daughter of Obedience Receives the Blessing).

Addition:

1. One who receives the gift of priesthood has to fast 40 days after ordination;
2. One who receives the gift of the episcopate (becomes bishop) has to fast for a whole (one) year following the Consecration. So we pray for our New Bishop, Bishop Kyrillos the head of Mar-Mina Monastery to enjoy the blessings of the coming year of fasting and to remember the safety of the world and all the Orthodox people in all places.
3. You and I might find it proper to fast extra days for a need or a situation that through fasting and prayers you can move mountains if that is needed. The Advent fast was increased from 40 days to 43 days. The extra days were added by the Patriarch Abraam Ibn Zaraa as an eternal remembrance of the moving of "gabal al-moukataam" Mukataam Mountain in the days of Al-mouez Ledin-ellah al-fatimy.

The Blessings of the Church and of the Virtue of Fasting may fill us all. Glory be to God in His Church.

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June 29, 2003