

What is Orthodoxy?

H.G Bishop Moussa

In the name of the Father, the Son and of the Holy Spirit, One God. Amen

It gives me great pleasure to stand here in front of my big brother, His Grace Bishop Suriel, and all the holy fathers.

I will speak to you in a very simple way.

The first point is that I am very afraid; because this is the first time for me to stand in front of people in a convention like this, so forgive me if I commit any mistakes.

The second issue - Happy New Year for you all.

I would like to talk to you about "what is Orthodoxy?" When we say this, we have to see the foundation of the Orthodox Church. What is the beginning of the Orthodox Church? From where did it come?

The first step that the Lord put in his mind to establish the Orthodox Church is to create man - to create a human being; our father Adam, and our mother Eve. Then our God, the Pantocrator, the almighty, put them in Paradise, which is mentioned in Genesis chapter 2. It was no sin in Paradise, and God meet with man, without any mediation. Our father Adam was very happy in the Paradise of Joy, and every morning he'd meet with the almighty God, and the almighty God would meet with him and Eve. Everything was going well. There was only one commandment that our almighty Lord said, and that was, not to eat from a certain tree. However, when Adam ate from the tree, he committed a sin. Therefore, there must be judgement, and our almighty Lord said, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." (Genesis chapter 2, verse 16-17)

So, the almighty Lord prepared the human mind to think about the redemption, or the Redeemer, at so many stages. In Genesis chapter 22, verse 2, our Lord ordered Abraham to offer his son Isaac, as a live human offering, on the altar. This altar was made from stones. This is the first time we hear of a human scarification. However, before this, there was something that happened in the Paradise, when our father Adam committed the sin, the almighty God covered him with the skin of an animal after killing the animal to use the skin from it to cover the body of our father Adam. Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness. This is a principle, which we will discuss in our third lecture on dogmas. But blood

has to be shed, in order to forgive our sins. So, in this step, the lord covered the man with the skin of the killed animal. The almighty Lord then started to elevate the human mind, to accept the human scarification. Here we have two points - the altar, which represents our relationship with God as individuals, as mentioned in Exodus chapter 24, verse 4. Also, our relationship with God as a group or community as mentioned in 1 Kings chapter 18, verse 30. Here, the altar is the mediation between man and God. For the first time in Genesis, we start to see this concept of a mediation altar, and human scarification, which was Isaac. In the second stage, the sin was still present - no redemption. Stage number three is the house of Eel. The house of Eel was mentioned in the book of Genesis chapter 28, verse 35. When our father Jacob had escaped from his brother Isu, he slept in the desert and he saw a ladder, extending from earth to heaven, with angels coming down from heaven to earth, and the almighty God standing at the top of the ladder. So our father Jacob said, "this is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!" (Genesis chapter 28, verse 17). This place is a very holy place, and is the house of God". At the top of the ladder, he saw that the heaven was open, and he could see the angels coming from heaven to earth, and vise versa. The ladder represents the fact that man can come from bottom, from earth to heaven, through the ladder. There are four points concerning this ladder, or house of Eel:

1- the ladder represents that God is with us, like God was with our father Jacob.

2-the ladder represents the open heaven, as the heaven here was open.

3-the ladder represents the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, because he is the man

Who is incarnated from heaven to earth to redeem us.

I would like to stop here to discuss with you the characteristics of our Redeemer.

Suppose that we have four levels, with level four representing priesthood. The other levels are the elder, the youth, and the children. Say the youth slaps the child, the child's reaction is forgiveness. Now say that the youth also slaps the priest, is the sin that the youth committed to the priest similar to that which he committed to the child? No! Our father Adam, when he committed the sin against our almighty God, he committed the sin against God. As the right is unlimited, therefore the sin is unlimited. There is a different level to the sin committed against a man. So the sin which was committed by our father Adam was committed against the Lord, and the Lord is unlimited, so the sin is unlimited. As the sin has a punishment, so too must Adam have a punishment. What was the punishment for our Father Adam? Death. Therefore, the Redeemer must have the characteristic of

being an unlimited man. The Redeemer must also be a man, to be able to save the man. He must also be without sin, in order to be able to save the sinners. How can we imagine a child without sin? All of us come from our father and mother, and we inherit the sin from our father and mother. The only man who is without sin, is the Lord Jesus Christ, who was born from our Queen, the Lady of us all, St. Mary, the virgin. He was born from St. Mary, by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Redeemer must also die, and must also rise from the death.

Therefore, the ladder seen by Jacob represents the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who makes the reconciliation between heaven and earth.

At stage number four, we talk about the tabernacle, which is mentioned in Exodus chapter 25, verse 9. The tabernacle represents the God's design. Our almighty God designed the tabernacle Himself. So this is a very important point, that the God who created the heavens and the earth, put the design of the tabernacle, by himself. It is also a place of gathering people together, and also, gathering people with God. This is a holy place where God appears to man, and man can see God. Is the beauty of the tabernacle from the outside or the inside? What is the shape of the tabernacle from the outside, and what is its color from the outside? The color of it is black. So you can see all the tents of the Israelites in the desert, but when you see a tent, which has a black roof, this represents the house of God, in the midst of the houses of the Israelites. So, what does this mean? The tabernacle from outside is black, and on the inside, it is very, very beautiful. It has so many colors, so many wonderful designs, and so many holy places. The tabernacle represent the afflictions/temptation which comes to the church, but as the tabernacle is black, these troubles come to the outside only. Another thing about the tabernacle is that it sanctifies the people when they commit sin, by blood. So if one of the men committed sin, he would bring a lamb to the priest, who would kill this lamb, put the blood of it on the altar and would pray for him to has his sins forgiven. So we have the sanctification by the blood, and the purity by the water. There is a place in the tabernacle called the water place, so that anyone who comes inside the tabernacle, must wash his body and hands, to become pure, and to become a man of God, after his forgiveness of sins.

Also, he who comes to the tabernacle would be consecrated by the holy oil, which is inside the tabernacle. So inside the tabernacle there is blood, water, and the holy oil. One other important point is that this tabernacle is mobile. It is moveable. When the Israelites moved from place A to place B, they would take their tabernacle with them. Thus it is moveable; it's not constant/stable in any one place. This means that we are strangers on this earth - we have no place here. We have to consider this as a very important point, that the tabernacle is moveable, representing that our life on earth is like that of a strangers, and we have to look after our eternal life.

These are the four stages of establishing the Orthodox Church, but we still

have stage number five and six.

Step number one in establishing the Orthodox Church is the Paradise, step number two is the altar of our father Abraham, step three is the house of Eel, and step four is tabernacle. Step number five is the temple. The temple was in Jerusalem, but was destroyed in the year 70 A.D. by Titus. This temple is from God's design as well. Solomon built the temple of God. David wanted to build the temple, but was refused due to his sin of murder and adultery. The name of the temple means 'the great house of God'. The temple being in Jerusalem represents one country from the world, and the Jews representing one nation only, thus the temple represents one place and one nation. The temple was destroyed because the house of God must be all over the world, for all the nations. We do not want to go into great detail about step number five, as the Jewish believe that they will one day rebuild the temple, and there is a website on the internet called, 'We are ready to rebuild the temple', and we don't know what will happen, but we know that as this temple is from one nation and from one country, it is not going to work for the kingdom of God.

Now we are going to enter stage number six, in which there is a church. In the church we are practicing the Holy Mass, and the sacrament of our Lord. The church has authority. It is one of the biggest authorities in the world. There are 4 authorities in this world. Authority number one is God, number two is church, number three is the government, and number four is the humans or our family. The church has authority to ordain priests, perform the mass, perform marriage, and to perform the seven sacraments. This church is the second authority, after the authority of the Lord. But what about the Coptic Orthodox Church? What does Orthodox mean? "Ortho" means sound, "doxy" means glory. So therefore, "orthodoxy" means the sound way to glorify God. The Orthodox Church was founded by St. Mark, who was one of the apostles. He founded the church in Egypt. Hosea chapter 11, verse 1 says, "Out of Egypt I called my son" Our Lord Jesus Christ visited Egypt for four years and a half, as our Holiness Pope Shenouda said. Then St. Mark came to Egypt and established the Orthodox Church, or the sound way to glorify God, in the year 64 A.D. He also ordained a bishop called Arianus, and seven priests. After the martyrdom of St. Mark, Bishop Arianus became the first Pope of the Orthodox Church. Now we have our beloved father, Pope Shenouda, whose number is 117. Was this chain of Orthodox Popes continued, or was it cut somewhere? This chain was continued from St. Mark till now, with our father Pope Shenouda.

The doctrine of the Orthodox Church means the teaching of the Orthodox Church, and the dogma of the Orthodox Church means the principles of the Orthodox Church. The rite of the Orthodox Church, means the worship of the Orthodox Church. All this is taken from the Holy Bible.

The last point of today's lecture is the hierarchy of the Orthodox Church.

This goes in the order of God, Pope, Bishops, Priests, and high Priests, followed by Deacons. However, we only have three orders of hierarchy in the church, and this consists of Bishops being first, then Presbyterians or the Priest, and the third category is the deacons. In the category of the Bishops, they can be a metropolitan who has assistant Bishops. The Priest can be a hegomen who has assistant priests, and the deacons can have seven ranks. So these are the three main categories of the Orthodox Church, which are also mentioned in the Holy Bible.

Questions & Answers:

Where you a priest or a monk before you became a bishop?

The bishop has to be chosen from the monks.

What do you do as a bishop?

We pray, we take care of the congregation. The bishop must do two particular roles of the church - the pastoral role and the administrative role. The pastoral means the spiritual side of things. The administrative means the social side of things.

Why can't a bishop, pope or patriarch get married?

This question is very important, however, we are going to answer it in the third lecture, so just wait.

How can we become a bishop?

It's a very easy way. You have to spend all your life praying, then you must become a monk, then you have to be a priest. If God wishes, you will become a bishop. If He does not wish, then you will not become a bishop. Any of you who want to become a monk must enter the monastery with the aim to worship God, without the desire to become a bishop.

Why is it wrong to go out with someone of the opposite sex, if our parents expect us to get married one day and have a family?

This is an important question. We are not preventing you to go out with someone as a boyfriend or girlfriend, but we want you to wait for the suitable situation. Is this the right time for you to be going out with someone to establish this relation? Is this the suitable age? What kind of relation is this? Is it going to include wrong contact? This is not the right time to have such things. We advise you to have your partner after you finish the university. This is because, as you are still maturing, you may choose someone now, but will change your mind in a few years time. So wait till the suitable age.

Why do some boys hate girls? Are we not God's children? They act like we are there to give them something.

Hating is a sin, and you are God's children. Take care of giving boys anything. But what is this something? Just take care of what you give them.

Why do bishops wear white in the mass, and why do they wear a hat?

The hat of the bishop represents the heaven. The white clothes represents the purity.

Why do we celebrate Christmas on the 7th of January?

This question is very familiar to us, and we are going to negotiate this in the ecumenical meetings with the sister churches, as we cannot decide to celebrate the nativity on the 25th of December, as this decision must come from His Holiness Pope Shenouda. This is according to the Coptic calendar. The 7th of January corresponds to the 28th of Kiahk.

Our father Abraham sent his servant called Alliazerr El-Damasky to choose the wife for his son Isaac from Rebecca. The question is why is it not permitted to wear a nose ring in our church, when it is mentioned in the Holy Bible?

Did you read that in the Holy Bible, Rebecca put on a nose ring? We will review this together, but now we see many different types of piercing, and this is wrong. Don't do it.

Is the Coptic Orthodox Church the oldest church?

Yes, because we were founded by St. Mark in the year 64 A.D. We don't know of any church that was founded before us. We are also the pioneers of the monastic life by St. Anthony, we are the pioneers of the defenders of the doctrine, and we are the pioneers of the theological education by St. Cyril of Alexandra.

Why do priest and monks beat their chest during the mass?

This is a sign of weakness, saying to God, "I am weak, please help me."

Is the world coming to an end, and if so, what are the signs?

The world will come to an end one day, and the signs are mentioned in the book of Matthew chapter 24.

Is it wrong to marry people who are not from the Orthodox Church?

We advise you to choose your partner from the Orthodox Church, because if

you marry from another church and you have children, which church will the children go to? What kind of worship are you going to offer to God? Is it the worship of Orthodox doctrine and dogma, or worship and doctrine and dogma of the other church?

How about the Greek Orthodox Church? Is it permitted for us to marry from them, and to have communion with them?

There are two groups of churches that call themselves Orthodox - there is the Oriental Orthodox Churches, which our church is part of. They consist of six churches - the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Syrian Orthodox Church, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church the Indian Orthodox Church, the Aritrain Orthodox church and the Armenian Orthodox Church. These six churches have the same theme, we can go to any of these churches and have Holy Communion in these churches, we can have marriages from these churches, we can celebrate all of the sacraments in each of those six churches? So any priest or bishop from any of those churches could come and do the Divine Liturgy in our church, and they can celebrate and participate with us. Then there is another family of Orthodoxy the Eastern Orthodox Church. This is a group of about 15 or 14 churches, which includes the Greek Orthodox, the Russian Orthodox, the Antiochian Orthodox, Romanian Orthodox, and many, many such churches. These two families of churches are very close together, but there is no communion between us. I can't go to a Greek Orthodox Church and have Holy Communion, and I can't participate in a marriage in a Greek Orthodox Church. And a priest from a Greek Orthodox Church cannot come into our Church and have Holy Communion. This goes back about 1500 years in the division between us, in what was called the council of Chalcedon, in the year 451. Some problems arose at this time, which had a lot to do with politics and language. We were saying things the Nature of Jesus Christ in one way, using one language. They were saying the same thing but in the Greek language. Thus, some confusion took place, and unfortunately, a division took place between these two families of Orthodoxy. So they put a nathamest on each other, which means that the Oriental Orthodox Church said, "We don't recognize the priesthood or the sacraments of the Eastern Orthodox Church," and vice versa. So these restrictions were made and a nathamest put in place. However, now in this time we are living in, this is starting to change. Now there are many dialogues and discussions between the Eastern Orthodox and the Oriental Orthodox, so that they may be united again together, and become one family. So all of the scholars have met together and have agreed that we are really one in faith. So what is remaining now to do in order for these two families of Orthodoxy to unite back together again, is that for each of the separate churches to say that we are going to lift these nathmes. 'We recognize your priesthood and sacraments, we can have Holy Communion together, and can participate in all the sacraments together.' But until that takes place, there is still unfortunately that division, but we hope that this division can be healed.

Why do we have the emus egg in the front of the altar in the church?

As the emus takes care of its eggs, it represents God's pastoral care to us.

Why does the Coptic Church wait 50 years to consecrate a departed person as a saint, who lived a good life?

The Holy Synod of our church agreed this, because we want to make sure of the holy life of that saint. If we can see his/her body after death, if there are books we can read, so we wait for 50 years just to make sure of his/her holy life.

Did God make sin?

No. God cannot make sin because of His nature. His nature does not know the sin.

As there is no big sin and small sin, if you kill someone, and swear, is it the same?

In Revelations chapter 21, verse 8, the people who lie are equal to those who commit adultery. In 1 Corinthians chapter 6, verse 9, all the sinners are equal - the swearers, the killers, the adulaters, etc.

I think it says in the bible, that when the temple of Solomon is rebuilt, it is the end of the world. What does this mean?

The end of the world has many signs, which are mentioned in Matthew chapter 24. These signs have not come to completion yet.

Why do the priests wear black, but in the mass they wear white?

The black means sorrow and sadness because the priest must carry the sin of the congregation and must feel sorry for their sins and the sins of the congregation as well, at the same time. They wear white in the altar because they are happy to be celebrating the Holy Liturgy.

What should we do if we think that the world is against us?

The world is against the sons of God, and the world is always fighting us to fall into sin. It is mentioned in the Mass, 'don't love the world and everything in it, because the world and everything in it will demolish.'

Is it true that jinxing is real?

It is the same as envy. It is real, as we saw with Joseph's brothers. Joseph experienced envy from his brothers, and Cane experienced the same thing from his brother. So, in my opinion, there are some weak people who have

this sin in their mind, and we have to take care of this. Don't give the people a chance to envy you.

Why do we have so many rules to enter heaven?

Because heaven is the best place and we have to be very qualified to enter that place. We also have to be holy because there is no sin in heaven, we have to be God's children, we have to have the virtues of being a good person, and thus we have the right to go to heaven. Heaven is very joyful. There is no sorrow, no pain, no sadness.

Do non-Christian people go to heaven?

In order to go to heaven, you have to be baptized. Without being baptized, you will not be able to enter the heaven.

What if I didn't hear about God?

Your conscience will be your guidance. It will guide people who live in very far away places, in which there is no preacher. So their conscience will be their judgment, and God will consider their situation according to His unlimited wisdom.

If a person baptized in the Catholic Church, will he/she enter into heaven?

We have so many differences with the Catholic Church, and we are in dialogue with them. But this issue falls under the umbrella of the wisdom of God. But at the end of the day, we are sure, that he who is baptized in the sound way of glorifying God, and he is a committed Christian, and is obeying the commandments, will enter the heaven.

When reading the Bible and Agpeya at home, must we stand or is it ok to sit down?

It is important to stand while praying from the Agpeya, but you may sit while reading from the Holy Bible.

Amen

