



St. Mark's Coptic Orthodox Church

Heliopolis, Cairo, Egypt

Service is the Solution

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**His Holiness Pope Tawdros the 2nd
Pope of Alexandria
& Patriarch of St. Mark's Diocese**

Contents

Subject	Page No.
• <i>Introduction</i>	7
• <i>Loneliness</i>	10
• <i>Sickness</i>	24
• <i>Sinfulness</i>	33
• <i>Preoccupation</i>	43
• <i>The trial</i>	50
• <i>Failure</i>	56
• <i>Converted</i>	62
• <i>Selfishness</i>	68
• <i>Rationalism</i>	73

Introduction

How enormous are today's challenges!!!

- Addiction .. Deviation .. Atheism .. Depression ..
- Marital Problems .. Professional Problems ..
- Psychological Problems .. Educational Problems ..
- Loneliness .. Frustrations due to Failure, Fright or Injustice.

Everyone is looking for a solution; be that psychological or other but rarely do they find a satisfactory solution. We are here proposing that there is yet one solution for all the above, namely: Service

To serve is to let go of the “self” .. Service is self-denial .. Service is meeting others in the area outside the prison of one’s self .. Service is not escaping from one’s reality .. Contrarily, service is overcoming one’s sorrows and transcending one’s weaknesses.

Any true Christian must be involved in service .. as service is at the core of the life of any human being who truly loves our Lord God .. simply because Service is the real application of our Lord’s most important commandment, namely Loving others.

It is a great blessing that our churches nowadays are absolutely full of all sorts of services and we do hope and pray that one day every single person of

the different churches' congregations would become "Servants".

With the prayers of our beloved His Holiness Pope Tawadros II,.

Pray for me

Fr. Daoud Lamei



Loneliness

Mr. Waheed lost his beloved wife years ago, following a prolonged battle against illness. He used to love her immensely, so she left a huge void in his life, along with three children.

Mr. Waheed poured himself into work and caring for his children, to brush aside his sense of loneliness. Whenever he took a few moments for himself, tears rushed into his eyes as he recalled his wife. So he avoided such moments. His children grew up, married and settled in their new homes, two of them travelling abroad, the third becoming preoccupied with his own children.

Mr. Waheed reached retirement, and had nothing left but his loneliness. His connection with the church had been superficial. He only visited church on Sunday Mass, always missing the Bible reading. His sole prayer was the "Our Father" at bedtime. Thus he considered himself as being satisfying the Lord and his conscience.

One day, Mr. Waheed wept during Holy Mass, entreating the Lord for assistance and Divine intervention for he no longer had his wife or work and contact with his children dwindled to mere phone calls.

Following Communion, Mr. Waheed stepped out of church and bumped into Mr. Farag, who was delighted to meet him. He had been an old school buddy and

he started asking him about his circumstances, and how he managed to while away his time while retired, and he nearly burst into tears again. Mr. Farag sensed the problem, and said to him "Waheed ... you come serve with us. I hardly find the time to go home." He said it with a gentle smile, a tapping on his shoulder, and continued, "I must see you.. in the meeting of the Lord's Brethren this coming .. at .. o'clock. I know you will enjoy yourself." Mr. Waheed thanked him and went home.. alone.

On the day set for the meeting, he was surprised to receive a call from Mr. Farag two hours earlier. He emphasized that he must be seeing him. He was too shy to refuse, so he started to prepare for the meeting.

For the first time, during a spiritual meeting, Mr. Waheed re-entered the church, to attend the ministry meeting. He was embarrassed during prayer, as he had minimal knowledge of the Book of Hours prayers, and couldn't find the page they were reading from. Due to his embarrassing situation, he had to claim he didn't have his reading glasses with him.

They started to chant, and he began to sense a joy he'd never known before... solace. He heard a spiritual sermon on approaching God. It felt as if every word was directed at him, as though he were the sole attendant of the meeting. He would turn left and right to see if anyone had noticed his degree of emotion. All eyes were focused on the sermon.

The meeting was crowded. He assumed he would not be able to find Mr. Farag, and would have to rush back home, because he didn't want to stay out late.

After the final prayer, on his way out of church, he ran into Mr. Farag who said to him -with his gentle smile- "You were such a welcome presence in the meeting. Where to? He replied, "Going home. Isn't it over?". "Of course not! You agreed to serve ... Follow me."

As a loving friend, he took his hand and led him to the front rows again, to the priest. He introduced Mr. Waheed, and the priest received him with a warm welcome, asking him to wait for a while. Mr. Farag remained by his side, and he took the opportunity to ask him: "What kind of service do you do?".

Mr. Farag replied, "We serve poverty-afflicted regions. We visit and see to their needs and wants, live their problems, pray with them and receive their blessing."

Mr. Waheed said, "But I have never served and do not know how to talk about religion."

With another smile, Mr. Farag replied, "We all started like that. But it's really simple and the people are easy-going. You will go with someone who will teach you and hand over to you. It's not a matter of preaching. You must try it."

Mr. Waheed was still hesitant, till he met the reverend priest, who encouraged him and advised him to start with Mr. Farag, due to their deep-seated camaraderie.

Finally, it was the day for service. Mr. Waheed was a disciplined man by nature, due to long years of work and success, so he arrived at the appointed location minutes prior to the appointment. He met a group of church servants of varied ages, and he took heart when he noticed three were retirees like himself. All were “ smiling, welcoming, optimistic ”, he thought to himself.

Mr. Farag came hurrying along in the nick of time, though he was the team leader (the service leader), as Mr. Waheed later discovered. He found they all loved him and joked around like children. Mr. Waheed eyed him and thought, "Lucky you! All these people know and love you."

The group of twenty church servants boarded the small bus, and

commenced prayer. Mr. Waheed found the man seated next to him most amiable. His name was Wadie. He was in his forties. He opened the Book of Hours to the right page and turned the pages with him, with modesty and civility. Mr. Waheed felt comfortable and started to pray using the Book of Hours.

After prayer, Mr. Farag announced out loud, "We'd all like to welcome Mr. Waheed, a new servant among us, and an old friend of mine." A sharp round of applause compelled him to wear a broad smile he had long since forgotten.

Mr. Farag then delved into the topic of the day, which was prayer. His speech was concise, clear, and simple. He spoke as follows: "The bottom line for us is what we will say in each home. People like to

pray, and should pray regularly. They don't want lengthy sermons, as most are simple, and many illiterate. We'd like to encourage them to memorize the Thanksgiving prayer, and Psalm 50, within six months. Today we will tell them the story of the midnight friend. [Luke 11 : 5 - 8]

Mr. Waheed anxiously leaned closer to Mr. Wadie and said, "I won't speak or utter a word". Mr. Wadie smiled and said gently, "Do not worry. You have two months of spectatorship".

Mr. Farag started delegating the responsibilities and pairing servants, so Mr. Waheed impetuously said, "Can I go with Mr. Wadie?" Mr. Farag replied instantly, "Sure you can".

The team arrived at the poverty-stricken area of service, and Mr. Waheed

could not help being surprised at the servants' enthusiasm and love for the poor, and how welcoming they were of them.

Three entered the homes of destitute people, with Amiable, who met Waheed's admiration, due to his simple words about prayer, and his attempts to get them repeating the words "Let's thank the Lord, Doer of good", so they could memorize them. But it was only many months later that he, Mr. Waheed, could admit to Amiable that he himself did not know the words to the prayer.

Some complained of their crises, poverty and circumstances, while Mr. Waheed listened in silence, a spectator as they advised him. He heard Mr. Wadie repeating, "God will arrange what's best..

We'll see.. At your service.. I remember you.." But he promised nothing and paid nothing.

On the return trip, Mr. Wadie stood up to present the problem of one home, which required a concrete roof, before winter set in. Swiftly, another of the servants suggested a follow-up to execute an action, but Mr. Farag admitted the current funds were only sufficient for the widows' monthly allowance and an allowance for the Feast. Everyone suggested they collect funds amongst them for this roof.

Mr. Farag sat next to Mr. Waheed for the remainder of the trip back to church and asked his opinion. Mr. Waheed's response "Brilliant! But I won't be able to speak as you all do". Mr. Farag

said, "Fear not, just come to the meeting and the service regularly, and you will find things come in their own time. You'll surpass us all."

Mr. Waheed returned to the church exhausted, and recalled the days of his career, and hard work years ago. Yet he was happy.

Months went by, and Mr. Waheed enjoyed the service immensely. His duties multiplied, and the tears of loneliness abated, replaced by tears of God's love and prayers for the poor. The other servants grew fond of him.

Two years later, he was summoned by the priest at church. He thought he must have made some mistake, and was anxious about the accountability, when the priest surprised him saying, "Mr.

Waheed, don't you think it's time you take charge of a new group in another area struck by poverty? For the harvest is plenty, and the workers few."

Mr. Waheed blushed in embarrassment, and he blurted out "Me?! No way. I'd never confessed myself till two years ago, and hadn't regularly held the Book of Hours in my hand, nor the Bible. There's so much I still don't know."

With a smile, the priest replied, "Fear not. He who started can continue. Remember, His strength is made complete in weakness. Mr. Farag will accompany you the first few times, to organize the service. You can refer to him or me if you stumble across any problem. I trust you."

Mr. Waheed left the priest's office with tears in his eyes, and glanced up at

heaven. He thought, "I don't deserve this, Lord."

Mr. Waheed was no longer lonely. Time was no longer sufficient.

**Nothing remained in his heart
but the love of God, of others
and of the service**



Sickness

Soad was a social worker.. dynamic.. cherished.. a bundle of activity in her home and the school where she worked. She had a kind husband, an only daughter, and a quiet home. Her ties to the church were minimal.

Soad had an old grudge with her sister. Since their mother had passed away, Lucifer had come between them. Years had gone by without communications between them, and whenever she remembered her, a deep-seated anger welled up from within her, as she recalled all the harsh words they'd exchanged. She would silently repeat "May God punish her".

When her daughter got married and left for a neighboring Arab country, their relationship dwindled down to phone calls and warm wishes.

Soad began to feel a strange pain in her feet, and heaviness in motion, and the journey toward recuperation began. She was extremely disturbed when doctors diagnosed a rare condition of the nervous system, which would inevitably lead to paralysis and it was incurable.

Soad wept profusely and groaned and objected, asking "Why?" Her husband invited a priest to come and comfort her, but she met him coldly and would always say, "What evil have I done to deserve this?" The priest tried to convince her of God's love, our Heavenly Father, and of the blessings of illness and tribulation, but

she would listen unconvinced, and throw tantrums, rejecting any encouragement.

The disease progressed and she could no longer move on her feet. The first day she sat in a wheelchair was a sad day she could never forget. Her daughter came for a few months to serve her, but could not remain any longer, as she had a husband and daughter to look after.

Her husband Saleh, was a sound husband. He served her and gave her patience. He tried to persuade her to have Holy Communion at home, but she fiercely rejected everything.

Iman, a church servant came to visit her. She was her colleague at school and loved her dearly. They would weep together as she poured forth her complaints, frustrations, and Iman would

pray a lot before this visit, so God would grant her strength to talk to the suffering Soad.

Iman asked Soad's permission to read a passage from the Bible, as she was accustomed in her visitations. Soad permitted it reluctantly. Iman chose James 1 to read to her old friend. "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials."

Iman began to explain how tribulation can become a source of joy, with faith, prayer and patience, and perfect work, as God opened Soad's heart to listen this time, and she asked, "Fine, what can I do now?" Iman responded, "Enough grumbling. How about you say, "Lord Jesus Christ, I thank You. Forgive me for everything. Help me cope with my

ailment."? For the first time, Soad said, "Okay, I will try. What else?"

Iman replied, "Try to carefully read at least a chapter daily, and pray with the Book of Hours, Matins and Compline. And listen to a sermon on tape."

Soad laughed, saying, "Easy, Iman!" Iman replied with great faith, "Believe me, try it and you will feel a lot better, and I will ask the priest to come and give you Communion at home."

Soad started to show change, as Iman visited her once a week. They read the Bible together, and Soad remained clinging to the hope of healing in all her prayers. Time was slow and monotonous.

Two months later, during a visit, Soad asked Iman, "How can someone like

me serve? I've heard how crucial it is to serve and be blessed, and I remember from your first visit, Iman, the verse "let each of you have perfect work". What can I do in my condition? Unable to walk?"

Iman was hesitant, and then wisely spoke, "Let's pray this week, so God will open a door for a service that would suit you."

Iman asked her Father of Confession what advice he could give her.

The priest replied, "Phone calls can be her line of service. Let her ask after those who are troubled, and give them words of comfort, a verse or a proverb, especially those in isolation or the elderly, or even those are sick like herself."

Iman brought this idea back to Soad, who stunned her by saying, "I had a very similar idea. I have the phone numbers, on my cell phone, of 100 acquaintances. I will send them verses every other day, from those I read, as I will be too shy to keep calling them, lest I bore them."

Iman replied, "Brilliant.. terrific idea, and it needn't be the same verse. It's a chance for you to write the verses and learn them by heart."

Soad commenced this service, progressing quickly and receiving great responses, with many calling back to thank her and show their appreciation. Some even asked her what the verse meant, and she would attempt an explanation, after researching Bible Study explanations and

sermons. A few told her the verse had come in the nick of time. This service filled up several hours in her day.

Her face altered, her smile returning, along with her joy. Whoever would visit her would make use of her abundant words of Grace and her kind spirit.

After hearing a powerful sermon on tolerance, and with noticeable spiritual growth, her heart was moved toward her sister, with whom she'd parted many years ago, due to animosity and estrangement. Following a fervent prayer, Soad called her bravely, and they both wept. Her sister came to visit her the very next day. It was an ardent meeting, with mutual apologies and remorse. Their initial love was restored more powerfully.

One day, Soad told Saleh, you know, now I truly thank God for my illness. My life now is far more fulfilling. I feel I have a purpose and a mission. I never felt that way before. Imagine, I inadvertently no longer ask God to heal me. All my prayers are, "Lord Jesus, forgive me", "Lord, guide all humans."

Saleh replied, "I learnt from you how to love church and the Bible. Your illness came as a blessing for us all."

**God, we thank You in all
conditions**



Sinfulness

Naeem is a successful accountant.. a tall, broad-shouldered young man.. he married five years ago and has a pretty young daughter. In his childhood, he'd been a religious boy, regularly attending Sunday school, confessing and receiving Holy Communion. During his university years, he got more and more preoccupied, then traveled abroad for several years, received many a tertiary degree, and obtained a high post in a foreign company. Few of his age would reach such success as his on an international scale.

Most of his work was on computers and due to his distance from church and the sacraments, Lucifer found his way

through to him, via the internet and pornography sites. He would return from work exhausted, eat dinner and rest for an hour, then sit at his computer, as his poor wife assumed he was very busy with work, poor thing.

He would spend four to six hours before defiled pictures and movies. It was with difficulty that he went to bed at three thirty a.m. and with even more difficulty that he awoke to go to work the next day. He was involved in several car accidents, and his wife tried to convince him that it was due to his sleepless nights. Yet he was obstinate and would claim, "There's no end to work, dear".

As for his wife Dina, she was raised up attached to the church, a kind, amiable

wife, who loved her husband and home very much.

She was in a constant struggle to concoct excuses for her husband. She rarely ever lost her patience, nor blamed him for distancing her and ignoring her and their daughter. She would meet with nothing but sarcasm, and accusations that she did not appreciate him. She found no solution, but prayer and tears.

As days went by, the situation escalated, and Naeem would seek such pleasurable moments, even at his workplace. One day, he was caught by a colleague, but he lied and fabricated stories, which his colleague believed, because he trusted him and due to his noticeable success.

One day, Dina needed to send an email, which rarely happens. She was shocked at what she saw.. she wept.. and wept.. incredulous to the whole thing. She could not gaze long at these immodest pictures, and she went to reproach him. He burst out in anger, insulting her, "How dare you turn on the computer without my permission?" "Is this the work you've been doing, Naeem?!" "It's just a few moments." "May God forgive you. I was always saying you're busy, and may God assist you."

Dina complained to her Father of Confession, who was also Naeem's Father of Confession, and he spent time with Naeem, getting his confessions after a year of deterioration in all aspects of his

life: home, work, health, concentration, relationships, and morals.

Suddenly, the priest interrupted him,

- "Would you like to serve? You've always wanted to serve, but never enrolled in preparation classes."
- "Father, after all I've told you?!"
- "Son, I want you with us in the church. You won't be teaching, but can work with us towards solving problems for the poor and destitute."
- "No way, Father. I don't deserve to pray or receive Communion. How can I serve?"
- "We will try, Naeem. It all goes hand in hand. Just promise me you won't resort to such sites again."

- "I cannot promise you, Father. I've grown accustomed, like an addict. I've taken to lying and drinking and all vices, all because of this catastrophe."
- "Everything is possible with God. Let's just make a start."

Naeem was impressed with the priest's encouragement and patience, so he started praying and reading the Bible. He took Communion, after receiving absolution. Satan pursued him, he would fall and rise again, to prostrate himself and struggle with God, "Lord, please help me.. save me from myself.. rescue me, Lord."

Naeem joined the church service meeting for the Lord's brethren, and participated in the service. Along with a group of other young men, he was

responsible for developing and serving in a poor village.

He was reluctant at first, but since childhood, he loved his spiritual father and submitted to his will. He longed with all his heart to be rid of this evil vice.

Naeem went along with his brethren for service. They were all reverent, pious, simple.. he would examine himself remorsefully, hardly believing that he, with his sin, was amongst them.

The church servants reached the village of.. and Naeem witnessed the poverty he'd never seen before. There he encountered a small church and a simple, pious priest, and lots of men and women living under the poverty line, yet grateful and content. From home to home they

wandered, Naeem impacted deeply by their love, welcome and generosity, not to mention their simplicity. He remained silent.

In a certain hut, he encountered a little old widow, nearly blind, living alone. She tried to kiss his hand, but he withdrew it sharply, tears welling up in his eyes, as she started to pray and thank the Lord for His blessings and bounty. She continued to wish them all the good, health and blessings for their children. Then, she addressed Naeem, "Son, I want to see you again, you must come." He told her, "Pray for me, mother, and for my wife and daughter." The woman lifted her kind face and hands to heaven and prayed for some minutes, "May God grant you aplenty, and save you from all evil, and keep the

wicked from your path, reform your ways, and grant your heart joy, bless your home, and grant you many children and wealth."

Naeem contained himself with difficulty, sensing he was meeting a saint of whom he'd never read nor heard. He leant down and kissed her hand persistently, and a tear fell on her hand, he sensed the power of this woman's prayer would heal him from this violent warfare.

Naeem returned to tell Dina all he'd seen. For the first time in years, he'd spent an hour chatting peacefully with his wife. For the first time they stood up together to say the Compline. Naeem became a regular churchgoer, and took Communion and confessed regularly. He would rarely get weak any more, and resisted fiercely.

He'd recall the widow's prayers and the Father of Confession's words, along with Biblical verses he would memorize with Dina daily.

Bliss returned to this household, as Naeem loved his service and those poor villages, and he never missed a chance to visit this poor widow, who would constantly say, "May God preserve you, son" As for him, ashamed, he'd say,

**"God preserve you, that you may
always pray for us."**



Preoccupation

Dr. Hady, a successful, bashful doctor, almost an introvert, turned fifty five, as yet unmarried.. possibly due to his timidity, his excessive calm, hesitation, or his parents' illness, before they passed onto heaven in recent years. However, Dr. Hady was always melancholic.

He had no friends, even his old friends had married and procreated, many of them travelled abroad, and most were highly preoccupied. His connection to the church was an official one to the letter: High Mass, confession once every 2 months, prayer for minutes. He would avoid the seven deadly sins, but was swift to anger, as he battled thoughts filled with

suspicion and obsessions. Overall, Dr. Hady was unhappy.

He was sleepless over his having not married, but preferred to drown himself in his work and patients. He was a success, and would fear all the things he heard about marital problems. He would see himself as beyond the marrying age. Still, he was lonely and sad.

Dr. Mamdouh, the only friend he had who was religious, as he called it, kept nagging him to join the church service and he would evade it, saying, "Church service is for those who have nothing else to do."

Even so, Dr. Hady was jealous of Dr. Mamdouh, of his personality and the way others loved him, of his dynamic service and ability to juggle it all with his family and children, and his work.

Under constant nagging, Dr. Hady decided to try it once, when Dr. Mamdouh asked if he'd join in a medical envoy traveling to a poverty-stricken village three hours' round trip away. The time suited him.

Dr. Hady took his medical kit, and the envoy of 4 cars full of doctors made its way out of the church grounds. Some of the doctors were his juniors, others his seniors. All held him in great esteem, due to his renown in the medical field, and his austerity.

Dr. Hady was stunned to see so many people who didn't have "nothing to do" as he'd say, many were famous and each moment of theirs was precious, but many were delighted to serve, without a second thought to time or effort.

The envoy reached the village, and the priest was found to be a simple, yet wise and organized man. He had arranged for some common rooms to be prepared for use as small clinic rooms for this day only. A group of the village youth were to arrange: the queues to be seen by the doctors, a special location for medicines, a system for referring patients to hospital for x-rays, and a small lab, brought by Dr. Mamdouh especially to act as a first aid station.

He was really impressed with all these tight preparations, despite the lack of space and low capabilities of the village.

Dr. Hady was stunned to see hundreds of patients awaiting them in lengthy queues, and a nominal visiting fee

of only 50 cents. He smiled to himself in amusement, "Now I'm a fifty-cent doctor."

Amongst the patients were many non-Christians, treated most respectfully by the villagers, as beloved family and brethren. They started their uninterrupted examinations and time flew quickly, such that he found himself almost dropping with fatigue 7 hours later.

Not one patient left his room without wishing him blessings, bounty and bliss. He was touched by the people's simple ways, and being very tired, all the doctors took a short break to rest and eat.

For the first time in years, Dr. Hady found himself chatting away and laughing with the other doctors, telling them about Um Rady, a woman whom he was trying to get to explain her ailment, when finally

it turned out she wanted birth control pills!

After resting and dining, the service was resumed for an additional three hours. Dr. Mamdouh then came to fetch Dr. Hady, "Let's go, that will do. The other doctors are dead tired." Dr. Hady replied, "Please, Mamdouh, there are three more left, we can't send them away. Dr. Mamdouh left with that answer and thought to himself, "I've got him hook, line and sinker."

On the return trip, almost everyone fell asleep with fatigue.

At the church door, Dr. Mamdouh told Dr. Hady, "We've given you a hard time." Dr. Hady chimed, "This has been the best day of my life, Dr. Mamdouh, so

please don't deprive me of this service. I can't wait till next time."

The next day, Dr. Hady entered his own clinic with a smile on his face, as he recalled the long queues, lovely prayers, and lengthy day, and repeated to himself,

**"Truly, service is much nicer
than work."**



The Trial

Mrs. Malika lost her daughter in a car accident. She had been in the final year at university, and the grieving mother refused to be consoled.

She would always repeat: "She was my daughter, sister, friend and nothing can ever recompense me for her loss."

Year one went by, full of sorrow, slowly, gloomily.. a tasteless life. Even carrying her first grandchild by her son failed to bring her the joy so many expected.

During the first annual memorial Mass, her maternal cousin, Maryam approached her. She was a servant in the church, and addressed her thus: "I've

booked you in for a spiritual confinement trip with the church for two days.", Malika eyed her reproachfully,

- "It's hardly the time, Maryam. How can I go on an excursion?"

- "It's no excursion. It's a change of scene for us and we will pray and hear the word of God. I know you will enjoy it."

- "I can no longer enjoy anything. I'd better not."

- "I've already booked it. Don't turn me down. Please come for my sake."

- "Alright, God willing."

Malika went along to the conference, and was weeping continually during the calm hymns and prayers.. as if she were washing away her sorrows and her heart in tears.

Spiritual words flowed. Malika loved the Scripture reading, finding in it a profundity she had never before seen.

She found comfort in God's promises and words about eternal life and the Kingdom of Heaven.

As the solitude trip came to a close, she heard a call for all who had not commenced serving to commence. Maryam encouraged her. "Try, you've nothing to lose."

Malika went along on the day of service, sensing that all eyes were fixed upon her, knowing her tragedy, pitying her.. a feeling of complete discomfort. Yet, when she entered with the church servants, she learned that each of them was carrying his/her own cross, and a great deal of pain.

Divine Providence awaited her. Malika joined Maryam on visitation of poor families.

She encountered a widow who'd lost her only son a while back, and had no living supporters. The church was supporting her.

Maryam boldly turned the Bible to the story of the son of Nain's widow: how Jesus touched the coffin, as though declaring He'd touch the cross, to bear death in our stead, granting us the power of His Resurrection.

Maryam's words came forth forcefully, most touchingly, about the love God bears towards us, even in tribulation. She spoke at length about our Mother the Virgin Mary, who witnessed her Son die on

the cross and about our eternal encounter with Christ and our loved ones in heaven.

The widow was consoled, as was Malika, with such words.

A sense of relief overcame her. So others have felt her very sentiments: the poor widow, the widow of Nain, Virgin Mary ..!

Visit followed visit, and Malika spoke to the suffering. Each time, she approached one who had parted with loved ones, she would speak boldly, "I too have farewelled my daughter to heaven".

Everyone was impacted by her courage and candor.

Malika became a unique church servant, serving the afflicted and mourning. She learned how to offer Christ,

as the Sole Consoler. "I, even I, am your Comforter".

She commenced praying for dozens of the served people, and her burden was gradually alleviated, her bliss restored.

She would never forget that during a confession, her spiritual father had said,

**"Be assured that your daughter
in heaven is pleased by your
service."**



Failure

Karim was a pleasant young gentleman, loved by all, and yet.. a lazy man.

He enrolled in the Faculty of Pharmacology, and couldn't stand the voluminous amounts of study, so he started stumbling.

He flunked and repeated his freshman year, barely scraping through to sophomore year.

Around mid-year, he realized he'd surely flunk sophomore year too, thereby triggering a chain of doubts and fears.

"I'm a loser, a failure, it's hopeless. I should transfer colleges. What can I tell

my friends? I'll be behind my class. I can no longer enter church and serve as deacon. They're all successful and proactive.

Karim entered a vortex of feeling like a failure.

Both his biological and spiritual father encouraged him constantly, but he never listened, succumbing to slumber. "Why should I go to university? It's useless."

The priest was fond of serving orphanages and hostels. He advised Karim..

- "I want you to come and help me in the St. George children's service."

- "I don't know how to serve, Father."

- "Just join me the first time and give it a go. You will be teaching them chants."

- "Father, I've even stopped being a deacon. You know all my time is frittered away sleeping, or at my computer, and worthless trash."

- "Just come and try, dear."

Karim went along with the priest to a hostel where he encountered around 30 kids of varied ages and very cheeky. The first time he thought to himself, "Just what I need!"

The priest started by saying, "Kids, Mr. Karim will teach us chants on Thursdays at six. There will be prizes for the cleverest memorizer."

Karim started his service with a heavy feeling. He had no self-confidence.

Not all kids were easy to cope with and he had to silence the class often. Even so, several of the kids started to bond with him and await his class, which gave him a higher sense of commitment.

One day Karim found a third-grader in tears. He asked..

- "What's wrong, Abram?"

- "I failed mathematics, and Bishoy called me a failure." The word struck Karim like a bullet.

- "No, dear. You are no failure and you will pass next time."

- "But there are things I don't get and the teacher won't explain, and shouts when anyone asks in class."

Karim was flooded with enthusiasm. "How about, after hymn class, you bring

your arithmetic book and we can go over tough formulae together?"

Karim started to feel attached to Abram. He would spend two hours a week with him, and Abram passed mathematics. Karim discovered he was really smart. The supervisor approached Karim, asking, "Hey, Karim, can you help all third graders in studying? We have plenty of problems here."

"OK, Mr. Girguis, I will find a second day we can agree upon."

He returned jubilant, sensing Abram's success was his very own.

That same night, Karim took hold of his dust-covered pharmacology books, for the first time in months, saying, "I too can pass".

Amazingly, he passed that year, despite falling so far behind. His time was all divided between church, university, studying and the hostel.

Years flew by, and Karim became a success, returning as a beloved deacon.

The hostel held a graduation ceremony for Karim and all the kids brought a gift. Abram presented Karim with the gift, with the words, "Congrats, doc."

Karim's response:

"You're the source of my success. I will never forget you."



Converted

Habib was never religious, as he grew up in a household not knowing its way to the church at all.

He was preoccupied with peers at cinemas, with drugs, and..

He graduated from the Faculty of Commerce, worked at some company, and fell in love with a colleague, who was.. not a Christian.

His parents didn't care much, believing it to be a fleeting passion, and his colleague at university tried to warn him, but he would not heed Mina, whom he considered a "dervish".

Habib fell from one sin to the next, until his relationship with this colleague was exposed, and she insisted he officially ask her hand in marriage, so he had to abandon his faith.

Habib was scared, hesitant, but the pressure was great, sometimes through threats, others through coquettishness.

The forbidden materialized and Habib renounced Christ, marrying outside the church.

His parents were sorry for him, feeling the guilt of not having brought him up within the church, paying no heed to his distance from Confession and Communion.

His connection to his parents and sister was severed. He travelled to a

distant land for work. However, Divine Providence withheld offspring from him. Habib's life was embittered, the love ended and the truth shocked him. He was compelled to give up everything. His customs, upbringing, language, friends, family and of course the church!!!

It dawned on Habib that he'd lost everything, and conflicts mounted with his wife, till they separated. But he couldn't return to Egypt. He was afraid.. and perplexed.

He continued to work in solitude, religion less for many years. But the Compassionate Lord did not abandon him, sending along Mina. They met so many years later on a joint business venture, and Mina didn't hesitate to ask him how he was doing. Habib wept bitterly,

admitting his loss, and asking "Is there a solution?"

Mina rushed to encourage him, writing to his spiritual father in Egypt, who never failed to recall him in every Mass, to tell him the great news.

Years later, Habib returned to Egypt, reuniting with his father and mother, who'd learned to pray for her son's salvation.

Habib threw himself at his spiritual father's embrace, and heard encouragement that with penitence comes the hope of forgiveness.

Habib continued to avoid meeting any of his old acquaintances. After some time, the priest allowed him to partake of

Communion. He remained alone..
remorseful.

Habib had advanced in years. He no longer required work, as he'd made a comfortable fortune working hard and long. His ties with the dark past were all severed. His life had no purpose yet. Till one day, he ventured to ask the priest..

- "Can I possibly serve like you?"

- "Of course you can, son. You are back now, and you pray and fast, read the Bible, partake of Communion."

- "I truly do nothing else but that, yet I want to offer God something by way of apology. I made plenty of monetary offerings to various churches; yet feel I want to do something else."

- "Come, son, serve in poverty-stricken villages, where no acquaintance can recognize you. "The harvest is plenty and the workers few."

Habib took off to serve in poverty-stricken villages. He mingled with, and came to love, people, buying a house amongst the poor to live with them. He would teach, serve and console the needy, visiting all. Nobody knew his secret.

The villagers tried many times to recommend him for the priesthood, but he would reply with a sad smile on his face..

"I'm just glad God accepted me to serve Him. This is more than enough. Just pray I can keep on doing this till the end ..."



Selfishness

Nader was an only child, quite spoiled, his father being very wealthy, showering him in gifts and granting him total freedom, without restraints or fetters.

Nader studied away from Egypt, and married Amira, a lovely girl, who was also wealthy and spoiled.

They both knew nothing of the church except on feast days. They couldn't stand to be inside the church for more than a few minutes at a time. They had no real ties to God.

From day one of their marriage, the troubles started..

- "You don't love me!"
- "You don't respect me!"

The problems spread to their families, and relationships deteriorated. Each of them saw the other completely at fault.

Enter the church at last, to try and reconcile them. The priest discovered a total lack of spirituality, so he set their marital differences aside and began to teach them to pray, read Scriptures, confess, and take Communion.

Nader and Amira responded reluctantly, and their marital issues remained unresolved, and they were practically separated. Months later, the priest called them to serve in the arena of the poor.

As usual, they were not keen. But with constant nagging, the priest managed to convince them to start serving poor areas.

Nader, as was his habit, assumed service required a lot of money. But the ministry secretary explained that money did not equate with service. People need those who love them, visit them, and empathize with them, lifting them from poverty, ignorance and malady.

Nader was generous in giving, and Amira was touched by the extreme poverty. Nader suggested they start a small project in the area to employ youth. He studied the project with the ministry secretary and the priest, thence work commenced.

Amira suggested she start a project to eradicate illiteracy and educate children, convincing her friends to join this service, so a group of women was formed to educate in the local church.

So, the two got preoccupied with serving God. Both loved the poor and formed a bond with the local priest who started visiting them. They would regularly attend the servants' meeting, learning the principles of love, giving, sacrifice and compromise. With time, their problems diminished.

Five years into the marriage, they were still without children, which had been a major cause for problems and anxiety, all but the final year in which they commenced their service. Things

improved as they learned self-reproach, self-control, apologies and forgiveness.

Nader and Amira became two servants who devote more than half the week to serving, their vast home becoming a meeting point for servants to plan their service.

God rewarded them for their penitence and service, and Amira became pregnant, bearing a son whom she called Abram. Everyone rejoiced in his birth; family, church servants and the poor.

**"Their home became a church,
and their life was transformed
into immense joy."**



Rationalism

Ramy was a clever young man.. unique.. successful, not as connected to the church as he should be. He was enticed by philosophy and foreign rational writings. He would read.. and read.. and delve deeper.. Having no sufficient spiritual foundation, he began to doubt everything.

When Ramy debated his colleagues at the university, even the most religious of them, he found no response to appease his questions. He started being sarcastic about all things religious. Nobody could debate him any longer, due to his eloquence, articulateness and vast body of information, the names of philosophers

which he memorized, and their words, which often led to disbelief.

Ramy became further distanced from the church, no longer believing in any spiritual meeting, or clergyman. His parents tried to restore him, but his view of them was they didn't read or know what he knew; they were ignorant people who understand nothing.

Ramy joined a group of quasi-atheists, who deny all things religious, considering religion the opium of the nations. Some denied the existence of God, while others considered humans to be gods, yet others believing only in science, and agnostics who claim that nobody knows the truth.

Ramy stumbled in endless questions..

- Is evolution the start? Was there a creation?
- If God exists, why iniquity, why darkness, why evil?
- Is Christianity alone the truth? Why can't others be right, too?
- Is there really life after death? Where is the proof.

Puzzles and reflections.. dragging him on a dark path, as he started to drink alcohol, and spend his nights in evil, ridiculing all those around him and also himself.

He had a loyal friend, Karim, who sincerely loved Ramy. When all had abandoned him, Karim could not depart with him. He often tried to convince him, but Ramy would belittle his ignorance and

naiveté. Yet Karim never ceased to pray for his friend.

One day, Karim invited him to go on a trip to a poverty-stricken village to distribute Christmas gifts among the children. At first he declined, but Karim reasoned that this would be a chance to see new experiences and a novel world which may prove useful in his ponderings and answer his questions.

As Ramy found no way to dodge Karim's persuasion, he travelled with a group of youths, and tried hard not to ridicule them as was his habit, out of respect for his friend. But he was rebellious at their religiosity and simplicity.

As Ramy arrived at the village, he encountered thousands of children

awaiting them. Ramy forgot himself and his thoughts in the din of distributing gifts and organizing the children. Great indeed was their joy at the simple presents offered and the servants who came to visit them.

Ramy smiled as he heard them call him, "Master, master." thinking to himself, "If they learn I never enter a church, it will be a scandal." It was an exhausting but enjoyable day.

The Christian mayor hosted them for a generous lunch, with enthused welcome. Ramy returned with Karim, his mind never relaxing throughout the return trip. "I am rational, intelligent, and have known plenty, but am not happy. Those simple poor children are more joyous and more alive.

Beyond my questions, I've reached no life, but misery and gloom, moral decline. These servants with their positive service and toil, have become a source of gladness for multitudes.

- The poverty of some poses a chance for others to serve, so love is profound and humanity surfaces in its grandest form.
- Such a vast universe must have a Creator but He let man with his intellect share in organizing its details and balance.
- The truth cannot be both, Truth and its opposite. It's illogical.
- I found no emotional peace in all this multitude of thought. On the contrary, more pride, introverted nature, and waywardness.

- Why can't I admit I don't understand everything? Perhaps I need to read the Bible as a student not a critic.
- If there is true life, it lies in love, in giving, in bringing joy to others. This difficult life we lead must come to a close, so another life may commence, void of suffering, sin and death.

The return trip was like enlightenment within Ramy's mind. He spent the whole three hours lost in silent thought.

Finally, he was moved to tears before arriving at the church, and for the first time in years.. he prayed..

"Lord, forgive me for my stubbornness and pride. Accept me and teach me. Grant me a fresh start.."