

*Experiences about the Coming Age*

# THE LIVING CHURCH

**And the practical look for the Joyful life**

*“For He is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all  
live to Him. (Luke 20:38)*

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## **CROSSOVER WITH THE LIVING CHRIST**

Many times I longed to write about the believer's point of view toward the coming age. There, the soul will settle with the body into a glorified partnership with our Heavenly Jesus Christ.

With every breath of my life, I encounter with the Church and I find her a living invitation to meet with my Christ, who carries me with His Holy Spirit. Thus, I would experience every day the everlasting bosoms of the Father which He opens for me.

Briefly, I register our daily ecclesiastical experience, as it is a new delightful view for everything within us and around us, for example:

1. **The purpose of our existence:** Our lives does not end with death, which would destroy all our labor, causing us to live restless or on edge. But, the heavenly Word of God was incarnate and dwelt among us to share our life. He entered with us to the grave. He was raised and He raises us with Him. Therefore, we are not dealing with the matters of the coming age as some abstract philosophical ideas, but as a living experience within His Own life. **He presented to us a biblical knowledge about the second life that existed in His body which was risen from the dead. And that will make us perceive through our daily partnership with Him in terms of the experiences of the coming age. "That I may know Him, and the power of His Resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death." (Philippians 3:10).**

2. **The Creation** is a wonderful divine gift; its aim is to stimulate the heart with love toward the Creator Who offers to us the open heaven.

3. **The Virtuous Life:** It is an enjoyment of the

Righteousness of Christ, who prepares us to the everlasting wedding!

4. **The Body:** Shares with **the soul** in struggling by the power of the Holy Spirit to share together in the inheritance of the eternal life without duality! So, there won't be enslaving to the body by temptation or contempt for it!

5. **The Human Freedom and the Divine Choice:** God loves us promising His glory without forcing us! He sanctifies our human freedom!

6. **God, His Angels and the Mankind:** They consist of immaculate partnership, hard to be perceived. It is strongly revealed in the eternal life!

7. **Worshiping God:** It is not a duty we have to fulfill; it is a preparation for the heavenly eternal life where it takes place on a celestial level.

8. **Death:** The true death is not the separation between the soul and the body, where the body will turn into dust, but it is the deprivation of the person as a whole from God, the Life-Giver. So, the soul and the body will perish forever.

9. **The Ecclesiastical Life:** The Church is the icon of eternity, so the true Christian is joyful all the time. He cries from the bottom of his heart with St. Paul: "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light." (Ephesians 5:8).

10. **The Holy Sacraments:** It is a preparation for the soul to enter the eternal wedding. So, the believer will live in heaven while he is still in the body.

11. **The Building of the Church:** It is Noah's arch that carries us in safety to cross the tribulations of the world. It will settle on the Holy Mountain of the Lord. We will exit to the heavenly celestials to live with them sharing their praises and their un-ceased thanks.

12. **The Icons of the Church:** They are our pathways to heaven. They are an invitation to enjoy the heavenly life. They will stop the fear of death or the world's events

regardless of their violence.

## **IT WILL NOT BE DEATH TO YOUR SERVANTS, BUT DEPARTURE**

Our beloved Christ in His amazing love, let us enter with Him to the death of the Cross, that we may see Him victorious with the power of His own Resurrection. He granted us a new resurrected life. Death has no place within us, but we view it as a happy crossing into an eternal life.

We entered into the water of Baptism through the cross that we may test the burial with Him, so we may get raised through experiencing the resurrected life. “Therefore, we were buried with Him through Baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4). We should practice our membership in the church of the living, which will not be approached by death of sin. And Satan will not be able to isolate it from God, the source of her life.

For the Psalmist praising: “Blessed is the man You choose, and cause to approach You, that he may dwell in Your courts” (Psalm 65:4). Who will dwell in the house of the Lord forever but the one who enjoys the power of Christ’s resurrection and hear the Divine Voice? “I am the Resurrection and the Life, he who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live, and whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.” (John 11:25-26). Also, “Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word, he shall never see death.” (John 8:51).

- ❖ After the advent and death of Jesus for the sake of the world, death became slumber and repose.
- ❖ Don’t you know how the Cross restores many mistakes?  
    Didn't it destroy death, delete the sin, eliminate Satan’s power and satisfied our good body?  
    Didn't it maintain the whole world? and, you still unable to trust in it?!

- ❖ Who can tell about the Lord's wonderful deeds?

From death, we became immortal. Did you understand the victory and the way by which that was achieved?

Learn how you obtained this victory without effort or sweat. Our weapons did not smear with blood nor we stood in the battle field, we did not get wounded and we did not witness the battle but we cultivated its fruit.

Christ is our Fight and the Crown of victory belongs to us.

As long as the victory is our share, then today, it is befitting for us as soldiers to sing with joyful voices the victorious praises. Let us praise our Master saying:

**“Death is swallowed up in victory.**

**O Death, where is your sting?**

**O Hades, where is your victory?”** (1 Corinthians 15:54-55).

- ❖ If you love the departed, you need to be happy and pleased that he was saved from the current death.

**St. John Chrysostom**

- ❖ Death is **immortality** for knowledgeable people. But for the foolish, death is mortal. We should not fear death. But we should fear the destruction of the soul which is a result of ignoring the knowledge of God. Being away from God terrifies the soul!
- ❖ Under any circumstances, it is impossible to escape death. Since the wise people acknowledge that, they practice all the virtues, thinking about God's love. They face death without groaning, fear or tears, realizing that death is inevitable, as well as, **it frees us from all the diseases that we are to face in our life.**

**St. Antony the Great**

- ❖ This world has been alienated to the believers because they live as sojourners. They care about their return to the

heavenly place at the second life praising the Lord.

#### **Onesimus of Jerusalem**

- ❖ Our desire is the quick advent of the Lord to avoid the period of our servitude (in this world).

#### **Tertullian**

- ❖ We are sojourners or strangers on this earth. Our home is in heaven, once we get there, we will not depart (from it).
- ❖ Those who converse with the heavenly, they are skillfully residing on earth, while they are in fact sojourners.
- ❖ If we imagine the whole world as a one big mansion, heaven is the dome and earth is the pathway. The Lord's plan is to save us from the perishable grounds, so we could say with the apostle: **"Our citizenship is in heaven"** (Phi 3:20). The attachment to the terrestrials would destroy the soul. In contrary of what the Psalmist is praying for and saying: "Make me alive!" (Ps. 118:17)
- ❖ The Psalmist passionately longed toward the heavenly Jerusalem. He looked up to the upper kingdoms and said: **"O Lord, your word is forever in the heaven."** It is always available among your angels who are unceasingly serving you.

#### **St. Augustine**

- ❖ My brethren, remember and meditate... who from our former generations is still here living in our present world as an immortal forever?!...

Therefore, when the wise men receive good matters, they place it before them, as Job said: "Surely even now my witness is in heaven" (Job 16:19). The Lord commanded those who own properties. "And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home" (Luke 16:9). "But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where

thieves do not break in and steal.” (Matthew 6:20).

**Fr. Aphrahat**

**Death teaches a big lesson to the man, who did not acknowledge his own origin, thinking about the importance of his existence. So, God allowed man to return to his original status, “the dust,” for him to thank God who first created him and now He would resurrect him from the dead.**

❖ O Man, you had not seen your Creator when He made you from the dust. **Truly, if you had seen yourself being created, you would not had to cry for you were going to die.**

You had seen yourself in a perfect shape. You were created in full beauty as an alive being. You see yourself in the image of your Creator.

You did not see yourself being born or dying. How would you know where are you from? Or who are you? That is why you relate everything to the nature, and you claim your existence to yourself and not to God. **Therefore, your God returned you (to dust) through the nature, to perceive who you were, and to be thankful for Him when He raises you from the dead.**

**Fr. Botros Christologos**

## **FAREWELL TO THE DEATH OF SIN!**

We leave the death of sin without return, as we practice our new life in Jesus Christ who was raised from the dead. After we had heard God telling Adam: “For dust you are, and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:19). Then, we will hear the Father’s voice: “For heaven you are, and to heaven you shall return.” The true death is not the separation of the soul from the body, so the body would turn into dust. But, it is the deprivation of the whole man from God who is the Source of his life. And so, the soul would perish with the body forever.

This is the death that our Lord wanted to destroy under our feet through the life of repentance which is built upon the acceptance of Christ's work, Who destroyed death by His own death. Therefore it was said:

- “But, if a wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed, keeps all My statutes. And, does what is lawful and right; he shall surely live; he shall not die.” (Ezekiel 18:21)
- “Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? says the Lord God, “and not that he should turn from his ways and live?” (Ezekiel 18:23)
- “For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies,” says the Lord God. “therefore turn and live!” (Ezekiel 18:32)
- “Say to them: “As I live, says the Lord God, “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?” (Ezekiel 33:11)
- “Nor can they die anymore, for they are equal to the angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.” (Luke 20:36).
- “The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law.” (1 Corinthians 15:56)

## **THE RESURRECTED LIFE**

The Church in its essence is the “**New Life**”, and as St. John Chrysostom says, it is the joyful resurrected life.

This is what we perceive through our personal worship in church and even in the church's building and its icons. Since, the only message of the whole Church is to carry every person on its arms to be lifted by the Holy Spirit to enjoy heaven, which is no longer far from us but is established deep down within us.

## **THE JOYFUL RESURRECTED CHURCH**

The death and resurrection is a daily experience in the life of the Christian. He finds pleasure in entering the grave with Jesus Christ, to die with Him and to be raised with Him, and reside with Him in the Heaven. This is the secret behind his unceasingly praise. St. Paul says: **“And raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”** (Ephesians 2:6).

The true Christian is always joyful. He cries from the depth of his heart with St. Paul: **“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.”** (Ephesians 5:8).

I remember when I was in the Elementary School, one of my relatives died when he was about 10 years old. His body was carried to the church for prayers. Then, his casket was carried again to the cemetery, which was about 5 kilometers from the city. When the grave was opened to place the casket in it, the body carriers felt some movement inside the casket. They opened the casket and found out the boy was alive!! Who can express his parents' joyful feelings upon their son's return to his home alive?... These are the same joyful feelings of each believer when his soul rises from the grave to return to the bosom of her Heavenly Father and her Mother the Church. What could possibly strip the joy from that believer?

## **CHURCH SACRAMENTS OR ETERNAL WEDDING**

One day, I longed to write about the seven Sacraments of the Church. I found out that they are for the preparation of the soul to enter into the eternal wedding, where the believer may live in heaven while still in the body.

For example, man gets buried with his Christ through the **Sacrament of Baptism**. So he may rise as the child of God the Father, and be qualified to be the bride of the Lord, the Only Begotten Son. Baptism is death and resurrection. Through them we shall be ascended to heaven.

In the **Sacrament of Chrismation (Myron)**, we accept the Holy Spirit to dwell in us, and sanctifies every organ of our body and renovates our existence. So, we may become an icon to the Heavenly Groom, Jesus Christ. He may raise heaven from our depths and prepare us to enjoy the unification with our Groom.

We do not live in an isolated world, and we do not suffer from weakness nor imperfection. For the Holy Spirit leads us in a victorious parade of Christ who defeated death. So, we can be seated in the heavenly places victoriously forever.

Through the **Sacrament of Confession and Repentance**, the believer always enjoys **the returning to God, our Father**. We do confess that we are sinners, but without overlooking the Lord's work toward us through His grace.

The priest as a father takes care of his children during their confession and assists them to open their hearts not only to disclose their mistakes and sins and challenges, but to accept the Heavenly Groom, the Savior.

And through the **Sacrament of Eucharist**, we receive the Lord's body and blood which were shed for us. We become members of the One who conquered death, the crucified Jesus Christ! We wish to die with Him! It is the triumph of the Divine Love working within us.

Through the **Sacrament of Marriage**, the guests should not become occupied only with the bride and the groom, but also with the Eternal Wedding. All of them should lift up their hearts to heaven while listening to the priest saying, "God who crown His saints with imperishable crowns." All of them should challenge the time not caring about death which is the only pathway to heaven to enjoy the Groom.

**The Holy Spirit lifts us through all the sacraments to choose death as a divine gift that we may return to the bosom of the Father, and to be with our Groom enjoying the partnership of His Eternal Glory.**

## **WINDOW TO HEAVEN**

If we look at the church in terms of its building and icons, we will see it as the new Noah's ark. It will carry us safely to cross this world's tribulations, so we may settle upon the Holy Mountain of God to reach the Heavenly Hosts, living with them and sharing their unceasingly praises and thanks. At one point, we may see the building as a ship taking us to a safe harbor; or in the shape of a cross, the key of heaven; or is shaped like a circle, the symbol of eternity.

As we look upon the icons, we see an invitation for enjoying the heavenly life without worrying about death or the events of the world, no matter how violent. For example, I mention the following:

1. You would not see an icon for a martyr, a saint or an angel in a state of confusion or sadness. But, all the icons radiate gladness. Even the martyrs, we see them while the angels come down full of joy to crown them.
2. There is no Coptic icon portraying Hades or hell, because it is befitting for the believer to expect and hope for inheriting the Paradise of Joy. Also, in these icons you would not see except a very small portrait of Satan defeated under the feet of the believers, without any authority upon them.
3. You would see the believer's faces with their eyes opened, looking with one eye upon the world which belongs to the Lord, and they see with the other eye the coming World which is prepared for them. So, Satan would not be able to spoil their views to the present world, which they consider as a Divine gift, nor to the coming World which will be their future eternal residence.