

Sunday, January 9, 2011

Our Consolation Abounds Through Christ

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ.”

(2 Corinthians 1: 3-5).

The painful terrorist incident which occurred in the first few minutes of this year at the church of the Two Saints, St. Mark and St. Peter the seal of the Martyrs in Alexandria and resulted in the martyrdom of twenty-two souls and injuring about ninety-six others, is an accident that by no means will shake the faith of the church no matter how horrific it is, and will never take away from us our joy in Christ our God.

First: I would like to emphasize that persecution is not unfamiliar to our church. Throughout her history, she passed through many mass-executions and annihilations. It is enough for us to know, as an example, that dioceses in Lower Egypt, Northern provinces including the Delta, flourish with Christians until the fourteenth century. However, due to a series of killing and destruction, by the end of the eighteenth century, only a very small number of scattered churches remained. Even the city of Alexandria up to the year 1935 didn't have any Coptic Orthodox churches but one, which is the church of Saint Mark. Despite all these harsh conditions, Christianity survived and churches spread once more. Therefore, we are the children of martyrs who realized that they are sojourners in this world and that their real home is in heaven, so they kept the true faith and delivered it to us, pure and orthodox, after they sacrificed their blood for its sake. They counted persecution and suffering to be trivial for the sake of their love to Christ, their King. We will also continue the journey of our fathers and forefathers in the land of sojourn till we crossover to them at the place of comfort and glory.

Our Lord Jesus Christ assured us several times that we

will face tribulations and persecutions in this world. Nonetheless, He commanded us not be afraid nor to be troubled, but to be confident that we will prevail and rejoice if we are patient to the end. We may now recall some of His consoling words:

+ *“A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.”* (John 15: 20).

+ *“For if they do these things in the green wood, what will be done in the dry?”* (Luke 23:31)

+ *“The time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me.”* (John 16: 2-3).

+ *“If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.”* (John 15:19).

+ *“do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do”* (Luke 12:4)

+ *“In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”* (John 16: 33).

Second: Such incidents do not weaken the faith of the Church, but strengthen it. If the terrorists, the enemies of life, were able to kill some people, they will not be able to kill the faith in our hearts. Though they may have succeeded in destroying some buildings, they will neither be able to destroy the Church nor Christianity.

Here, I recall the word regarding the people of God written in the Old Testament, when they were in servitude in the land of Egypt: *“But the more they humbled them, the more they multiplied and grew.”* (Exodus 1:12) Thus,

afflictions don't weaken us, rather the church will grow through these attacks, and the faith will grow with deep roots in the hearts of many, and also outwardly through the testimony of love even to blood shed. The words of the bible also give us comfort:

+ *“You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.”* (1 John 4:4).

+ *“This is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.”* (1 John 5: 4).

+ *“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, ‘For Your sake we are killed all day long. We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.’ Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us”* (Romans 8:35 -37).

Third: We must be receptive to the springs of consolation in the midst of tribulations. This means that we should not be consumed by the sad news, conversations, or emotions, but rather continue to pray and praise and to be armed with the Holy Sacraments and the consoling words of the Bible. Thus, the fountains of consolation become the subject of our primary focus. We also ought to be completely confident that Christ, who we suffer for His sake, is capable of consoling us, but rather He is committed to console us. The words of the Bible are truthful: *“For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ.”* (2 Corinthians 1: 5).

I would like to conclude the article by presenting a kindhearted example of a Nativity greeting written by Makram Mohamed Ahmed, the Egyptian chairman of journalists, in his daily column in the Al-Ahram newspaper on 12/26/2010, few days before the terrorist incident. Notice the genuine language he is using, the facts that he confirms, and the Christian language he uses out of respect for his audience:

“Merry Christmas to the children of Jesus in the Arab world who are the salt of the earth. Despite of what happens to them, their existence is an integral part of the character and identity of the Middle East and is imperative to preserve. They are being subjected to foul conspiracy designed to drive them out of their land. This deserves a serious confrontation from all the peoples of the region and their governments in order to preserve the spirit of the Middle East and its cultural, civilization, religious blend which has made it the most important regions of the earth and one that is most sacred.”

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