

Sunday, February 13, 2011

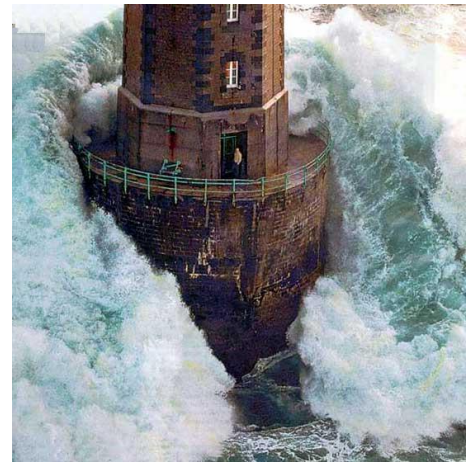
God is our refuge

This beautiful phrase is the beginning of Psalm 45 which we pray at the third hour of the daily Agpeya prayers. This Psalm is filled with confidence in God's love, His power, and care, regardless of the dangers surrounding us, or how severe the hardships are.

In the midst of the difficult circumstances that Egypt is currently going through, perhaps we need to reflect a little in some verses of this Psalm:

+ *"God is our refuge and power, a help in afflictions that severely befalls us."*

It is a magnificent fact that when we are in the middle of severe and heavy hardships, we have a refuge and a fortified fortress where we find shelter and strength. *"The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe."* (Proverbs 18:10) When we are encircled by the danger and peril, we escape to God through prayer, and hasten to the cross to find shelter under the wings of the Lord. He is who described Himself as the bird that gathers her chicks under her wings (Luke 13:34). And we sing with the psalmist: *Will trust in the shelter of Your wings... In the shadow of your wings I will rejoice... And in the shadow of Your wings I will make my refuge, until these calamities have passed by.* (Ps 60, 62, 56)



+ *"Therefore we will not fear when the earth is troubled, and when the mountains are moved."*

The children of God are not afraid at all because they take shelter in Christ's love and His power, they are cared for by a mighty God who protects them, nurtures them, and uses all things for their own good.

+ *"The torrents of the river gladden the city of God; The Most High sanctified His tabernacle."* This is one of the mysteries of the steadfastness and strength of the children of God, for they are continuously nurtured by the work of the Holy Spirit. This Spirit permeates within the church, the city of God, like the rivers, smoothly overflowing with power till it refreshes earth and gives it life. It is through the holy sacraments, prayer and the divine word of God, the Spirit works and enriches the children of God, and also sanctifies them. This is the Spirit that the Lord Jesus left with the church to fulfill His promise: *"I will not leave you orphans."* (John 14:18). *"He who believes in Me... Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."* (John 7:38). *"If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink."* (John 7:37). *"And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely."* (Revelation 22:17). These are the rivers that gladden and sanctify the City of God.

+ *"God is in her midst, she shall not be shaken."* This explains to us the great miracle which is how the Coptic Church endured before the evil powers and the dreadful persecutions through the ages. The secret is that God is in her midst, His tremendous power supports her, His Holy Spirit enriches her, and His faithful promises console her, as stated in the prophecy of Isaiah: *"The mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but My kindness shall not depart from you, nor shall My covenant of peace be removed, Says the Lord, who has mercy on you... All your children shall be taught by the Lord, and great shall be the peace of your children... In righteousness you shall be established; You shall be far from oppression, for you shall not fear; and from terror, for it shall not come near you... Whoever assembles against you shall fall for your sake... No weapon formed against you shall prosper, and every tongue which rises against you in judgment you shall condemn."* (Isaiah 54: 10-17).

+ *"Come, behold the works of the Lord, the wonders He wrought on the earth."* This invites us to meditate upon the great works of God, which is visible before everyone, who want to know the truth... How does He protect his children? How does He fight for them, and they hold their peace? And how He turns things around for their own good?

It is enough to see the **amazing miracle** that occurred in the past few days where, God allowed the bombings of the Church of the Two Saints just prior to the unrest that is taking place now. The bombing incident and the blood of the martyrs and injured ones that resulted from it, have moved the sympathy of Muslims with their fellow Christians in an unprecedented way, and dissolved much of the tension inflammation between them.

Therefore, when the unrest began, there have been no attacks on any Christian or any church, despite the complete absence of the security forces. And this in itself is an **amazing miracle**, one that was not expected by the extremists, as one of them appeared on "Al-Jazeera" network some five months ago talking about alleged weapons in churches and monasteries, and says that the coming upheaval in Egypt will be over the bodies of the Copts!

Here is the wave of upheaval is slipping away completely from the peaceful church, against the will of the wicked and the extremists.

+ *"The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our protector."* This is the song of victory, which we sing over the ages, chanting with our teacher Saint Paul: *"If God is for us, who can be against us?"* (Romans 8:31).

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