

Sunday, March 25, 2012

A great Pope, a Great Teacher

Before sunset of Saturday, March 17, 2012 H.H. Pope Shenouda III departed to heaven surrounded by the angels and the saints.

He was a great Patriarch, who served the Church with complete love and devotion starting in his early youth and for more than seventy years. He raised generations of servants, bishops, priests and laity through his fragrant life, compassionate fatherhood, and overflowing teachings like an abundant spring. He deserves the words that were said about the righteous Abe, *"He being dead still speaks."* (Heb. 11: 4). Indeed he believed in teaching and lead by example.

First: Pope Shenouda believed in the great importance of teaching, because destruction comes from the lack of knowledge (Hosea 4:6). God has bestowed upon him an ingenious talent to simplify concepts and explain profound thoughts in a easy and interesting approach, no matter how difficult the topic may be. He, in turn, polished this talent by reading many books to the extent of becoming like a walking encyclopedia. Thus, his teaching was comprehensive and simple, yet profound and deep in same time. He possessed an extraordinary ability to size up the level of his audience and adjust his language level according to their level of comprehension, and he used all these abilities to deliver the living word of God to millions of people.

He was adorned with the spirit of discipleship and that is what made him a great teacher for many generations bringing out of his treasure things new and old (Matthew 13:52). As he took an interest in teaching, he also took an interest in learning and to acquire what is beneficial and new. Perhaps when God saw his love for learning and his faithfulness in trading with this talent in his young age, He [God] prepared an opportunity for him in the monastery, so he deeply immersed himself in the books and manuscripts at the library of the monastery. When God found him more faithful, He made him the Bishop of teaching in the Church in 1962, and when He saw faithful over a few things, He made him responsible over many things, and gave him the responsibility of teaching and leading the whole congregation of the See of Saint Mark in 1970.

His Holiness, Pope Shenouda will remain a radiant star of Church teaching for many generations to come. He adopted a very distinctive approach in teaching, one which is characterized with being simple yet deep, as well as being abundant and comprehensive yet accurate and balanced. He took interest in teaching large crowds as well as one-on-one counseling. He preached everywhere and at all possible times, not passing any opportunity to provide a nugget of information, share an experience, or give an advice. He valued both written and oral teaching alike, and was always keen on providing pure Christian and humanistic reflections in all venues.

I recall once that one of the Muslim Clerics in Alexandria told me that the Friday speech he delivered in his Mosque that week, was the very talk that he heard from H.H. Pope Shenouda about "Giving"! Pope Shenouda had delivered that talk the week before in a public gathering in Sporting Club, that Shaykh was present at the gathering and was deeply moved by the word of Pope Shenouda, he took a note of it, and decided that he would make it the topic of his speech in the Mosque where he works. This reveals the extent to which Pope Shenouda's teaching reached out with no limits.

Second, he provided a teaching that was supported by a holy, faithful, and striving life. He lived what he taught, and his life was a witness to his words. Therefore, his teachings came out pure and powerful, and were captivating the hearts and edifying to everyone. His life was a living sermon before he even gave a sermon, and he was a living epistle, which was read and heard by everyone (2 Corinthian 3) before being a writer, a poet, or a teacher. This was the secret of his success as a teacher with a unique style among all teachers. When a teacher reaches that level, his teachings remain alive and fruitful forever.

O' what a joy do we have in our generation that we have lived and learned at the hands of this honorable saint! We thank God for allowing thousands of his sermons to be recorded in order to enlighten and nourish many generations, in addition to hundreds of thousands of encounters and memories that bear valuable teachings which will remain a source of blessing and comfort over the ages.

Finally, it is not enough to say that we are the children of Pope Shenouda, but we ought to have within us at least some of his character, and always allow his sayings and teachings to nourish our hearts and minds. Thus, we would have a sanctified life that qualifies us to have a share with him in the heavenly glory.

May the Lord comfort us all.

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