

Sunday, April 1, 2012

A Divine Choice

The enthronement of H.H. Thrice Blessed Pope Shenouda III on the throne of St. Mark was undoubtedly a divine choice. During his blessed pontificate, the Church expanded both inside and outside Egypt, and the congregation grew in the love of God, in spiritual knowledge, and being closely tied to the church to a great degree.

Perhaps one of the most important reasons for this great success of the ministry of H.H. Pope Shenouda III, is that he carefully selected the bishops and the priests for the ministry. He appointed the best and the most capable servants in leadership position, and never had any favors towards anyone in this matter. And because of his fatherhood and continuous encouragement, everyone served wholeheartedly in the ministry, so the Church became revived.

Whenever someone praised Pope Shenouda for his success, he would speak about **the great work of God in the Church**, and that we are merely instruments in his hand trying to be honest and faithful in trading with our talents. Nevertheless, the ministry itself is God's work and we are honored to participate in it with the Holy Spirit. Indeed, the Holy Spirit has been leading the Church since the Pentecost and until now. He gave the apostles the gifts (1 Corinthians 12) and adorned the church with virtues and Fruits (Galatians 5: 22-23). He inspired the Apostles to write the books of the New Testament, and also guides the Church in making important decisions for the edification of its members. We see, for instance, in the council of Jerusalem, after many prayers and deliberation sessions, how the proceeding was issued which was a confirmation that the Holy Spirit was leading the Church: *"it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us..."* (Acts 15:28). This clearly means that the faithful servants of the Church always try to find out what the Holy Spirit wants, then precisely carry out His guidance and advice. This is one of the secrets of the success of Pope Shenouda's ministry. The more there are sanctified people, diligent in prayer, obedient to the voice of the Holy Spirit, the more divine blessings are poured upon the ministry and it becomes flourished, and the whole world becomes enlightened with the divine light which radiates from the Church and her saints.

While, the bishop leads the church according to the divine tradition dating back to the apostolic era, a successful bishop does not act according to own impulses, but rather first listens to what the Spirit says to the Churches (Revelations 2: 7), and subsequently takes actions according to the guidance of the Spirit.

Here, I remember the servant of Abraham. This righteous man who learned faith, prayer, and reliance on God from the spirit of his master Abraham. When he was appointed to search for a wife for Isaac from his land and kin in Mesopotamia (Genesis 24), he didn't focus searching a girl of great physical beauty, wealth, or merely good manners. Nonetheless, he focused on

finding out who is the girl that God chose for Isaac, the son of his master. He believed that the God's choice is the best choice, he only wanted to find the girl who was already chosen by God and to bring her back with him to become Isaac's wife. Therefore, he prayed the entire time and asked for God's help and His plan, and indeed God revealed to him His choice quickly and very clearly.

Likewise, we now want God to choose for the Church because we trust that He will choose a Good Shepherd for the church as He chose Pope Shenouda III and Pope Cyril VI. After we pour our supplications before God over the next few months, the "Sanctuary Drawing" will be a declaration of God's blessed choice to His beloved Church.

So, let's remember very well that God has already chosen the new Patriarch, and we trust that God exists in the midst of His church providing for her all goodness, peace, and edification. Therefore, let our prayers to Him be the same as those of our fathers the Apostles before drawing a lot: *"You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen"* (Acts 1:24). And as the church teaches us through the deacon's response for the litany of the fathers during this period:

❖ Pray and ask for the repose of the soul of our blessed and honored father, Pope Shenouda the third, that God may repose his pure soul in the paradise of delight.

❖ Pray and ask that the Lord grant us a good shepherd according to His heart, to shepherd His people in purity and righteousness.

❖ Pray and ask for all our Orthodox bishops.

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