

# **BOOK NINE**

## **ST. MARK**

### **A CARD OF THANKS**

Before writing this book, I thought of taking a brake. I have already written eight books at the rate of one book every year, and I thought that I deserve a rest. But I was surprised to find that I really did not enjoy having nothing serious to do.

After a period, during which I found myself with a lot of time on my hand, I began to feel that writing another book is the thing to do. But the problem was what shall I write about? In previous years I had a good idea about the topic I wanted to write about. Not this time. I began thinking about a possible topic, but came up with nothing. There were several ideas but none of them was interesting enough to begin the serious task of researching and compiling the relevant information before the actual writing begins.

Then I began to pray to God to help me. It wasn't too long before the name of St. Mark began to invade my attention. I first dismissed it, looking for a more exciting topic. But the name did not go away. It persisted and remained with me. That is how I settled

on writing about the evangelist who introduced Christ to us in Egypt, and gave his life doing it.

I thank Almighty God for His guidance not only in choosing the life of that distinguished apostle for me to write about, but for His guidance throughout the writing process that resulted in this book.

## **DEDICATION**

**To:** All the adults who do not know too much about the history of their church.

**To:** Our young people who should know a lot about the Saint who died while he was trying to enlighten their fore fathers about salvation from sin and the good news that it entails.

**To:** All who lack strong interest in their religion to motivate them to love God, and live a virtuous life.

### **I DEDICATE THIS BOOK**

Hoping that it might ignite their interest in their eternity, and motivate them to repent of their sins and dedicate their lives to our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ as young Mark did more than twenty centuries

ago

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## INTRODUCTION

Our Coptic Church is a church with so many distinctions in her long history that make her very proud and very humble. She is Proud because of many reasons. Among these is the fact that she was selected by God to receive His son and the Holy family and hosted them for more than three years when King Herod decided to kill the child Jesus and ended up killing the children of Bethlehem.

She also responded to God's call when it came with an unusual zeal, and strong determination. This unleashed the fiercest response from those who were in power. The result was a brutal persecution of her leaders. Many of the new Christians were killed on the streets of Egypt in an attempt to stop the conversion of those last descendants of the mighty Pharaohs to the new religion.

The persecution of the Copts, as the Christians of Egypt are called, continued from that time till today. Their persecutors were in the beginning the Romans, but Christianity did not disappear from Egypt despite their barbaric persecution, but it flourished and produced a strong Church; the Church of Alexandria which played an important role during the first four centuries and a half of the Christian World.

She was at the helm of the fight against the several heresies that sprang from within the church. Her popes

She headed the four Ecumenical World Councils held in Nicaea, Constantinople, and Ephesus 1, and 2. She led the fight against the heresies of Arius, Mcdonius, Ysabius, Apolenarius, Nestorius, and others.

One of her leaders St.Athansius wrote most of the Nicene Creed that spelled out our Christian faith, and which was adopted by all the other churches and is still repeated in most of them.

After the Romans, the Arabs invaded Egypt which was at that time a strong and thriving Christian country with some fifty millions devout Copts living in it. Islam was forced on them by the sword. Those who refused to convert were given two choices; paying a hefty ransom or face death. Those who paid to keep their religion became second class citizens who suffered severely under the rule of the Muslim Caliphs, something that continued till today.

Our church remained strong and defiant despite all the discrimination and the persecution that she endured. This is why it is called the Church of Martyrs.

Our Church in the midst of all that came up with the concept of monasticism. Our St. Anthony was the founder of this way of worship which spread after that from the Egyptian deserts where thousands of monks

left the world and lived an ascetic life worshipping God, to the rest of the world.

The reader can see why we are proud of our church. One more reason for our pride which was not mentioned, and which stands at the top of the list was the person who introduced Christianity to our ancestors.

This is the beloved Evangelist, Apostle and Disciple of Jesus Christ St. Mark who came to Egypt in the middle of the first century, and introduced the new religion to her citizens and began the ball rolling for all those unusual accomplishments that we have talked about so far.

It is amazing that our church which was discriminated against at the fifth World Council held at Chalcedon in the year 451 AD for political reasons, continues to be singled out for another aspect of discrimination, namely shedding doubt on the identity and credentials of her Evangelist and Patron Saint.

They claim that St. Mark never saw Christ. This is strange because his house was the place that was frequently visited by Jesus and His disciples, and in which the last Supper was held. He attended the wedding at Qana, and tasted the wine that Lord made in His first miracle. He was with Christ in Gethsemane where He was arrested and fled leaving his robe

behind. This is the reason for us giving him the unusual title of “The Beholder of The Lord”.

They also deny that he was one of the seventy disciples that Jesus chose and sent before Him to the places that He intended to visit. A fact that was attested to by many historians.

They also deny that he was the writer of his gospel, and claim that it was Peter who was the writer and that he dictated it to St. Mark. More on that later.

This book is written as a tribute to this wonderful saint who was the reason for the spread of Christianity not only in Egypt but also in many other places. It is our hope that this book will provide generations of young men and women in our new country with authoritative information about our saint to whom we owe too much. His blessings be with us all Amen.

Sami I. Boulos

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **EGYPT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT**

The reader may wonder about beginning a book about St. Mark with a chapter on Egypt in the Old Testament. The reason is the different attitude of the Egyptians toward God before the coming of Jesus and after His coming. Egypt was against God throughout its history. This attitude brought nothing but contempt from God as evidenced by what He ordered His prophets to say about her in the Old Testament. Out of the thirty nine books that constitute the Old Testament, Egypt was mentioned five hundred eighty six times in twenty four of those books. Only in three out of these hundreds was the prophecy favorable. The rest was not favorable. So, it can be said that God was by and large against Egypt before the birth of Our Lord.

As one looks for the details of this enmity between God and Egypt, one comes across few facts. The first is that the origin of the Egyptians was Mizraim the son of Ham the son of Noah. The Bible tells us that after the flood, Noah planted a vineyard and made wine from its grapes and got drunk and he was uncovered in his tent. Ham and most probably his son Canaan were the ones who

saw him and probably made fun of him. They were cursed by Noah because of that.

Another fact comes to us from the story of Abraham. When he and his wife Sarah went to Egypt, they acquired an Egyptian girl as their servant called Hagar. She went to Canaan with them when they returned. When Sarah did not get the child that God promised, she asked Abraham to take Hagar as his second wife hoping that she will give her the son that she wanted badly. Hagar had a child by Abraham, and called him Ishmael, but Ishmael never became Sarah's son. And Hager began to despise her mistress.

Sarah began to deal with her harshly, so Hagar took her son and fled. An angel appeared to her and ordered her to go back, which she did. After Sarah was given Isaac she asked Abraham to get rid of Hagar and her son. He did not like that, but the Lord told him to obey his wife and promised that He will keep Ishmael and make him a great nation also. Ishmael became the father of many of the Arab nations.

Another fact comes from the story of Joseph, who was sold to the Ishmaelites who sold him in Egypt. He was mistreated in Egypt and was put in prison for no reason. And if it were not for God who made Pharaoh dream a dream that none of his wise men was able to interpret, he could have been left in the prison indefinitely. But he was brought to interpret Pharaoh's dream. This pleased

him to the extent that he made him his prime minister. Then Joseph's family came and settled in Egypt where they were well treated by the Egyptians.

The Bible tells us that after several years a new Pharaoh who did not know Joseph or his people saw them as a threat to the country's security and decided to finish them off by ordering that all the male infants be thrown in the Nile. Moses was born during that time. But his mother concealed him for few months and then put him in a bed made of bulrushes and put it in the Nile near Pharaoh's palace. When Pharaoh's daughter saw it she took Moses and took care of him saying that he is her son. When he discovered that he is not her son but the son of an Israelite woman he left the palace and tried to improve his people's life. So, he killed an Egyptian who was beating an Israelite. He had to flee the country when this was known. After forty years he was asked by God to come back to Egypt to lead his people out.

This is a long story. But the upshot was that Pharaoh would not let the people go and God had to hit Egypt with ten strong plagues before Pharaoh's defiance ended by releasing the Israelites. But when he regretted what he did and pursued them and caught them with their backs to the Red Sea, and tried to attack them, God opened the sea for them and they crossed it on the dry land to the other side. And when Pharaoh followed them God returned the water and he and his army drowned and died.

After the Israelites settled and became a country, the Egyptians attacked them several times, siding sometimes with their enemies. And God began to send prophecies against Egypt through His prophets; the overwhelming majority was against her. Some of those prophecies occupied whole chapters such as the one in the Books of Isaiah chapter 19, and the book of Ezekiel chapters 29-32.

The following is a small sample of those prophecies:

+ ***“And the spirit of Egypt shall be made void in the midst of it; and I will destroy the council thereof: and they shall seek unto the idols, and to the charmers, and to them that have familiar spirits, and to the wizards. And I will give the Egyptians into the hand of a cruel lord, and a fierce king shall rule over them, says the Lord” (Is 19: 3,4)***

+ ***“Son of man, set your face against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and prophesy against him, and against all Egypt ... Behold, I am against you, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great dragon that lies in the midst of his rivers, which he has said, my river is my own, and I have made it to myself. I will put hooks in your jaws....and I will leave you thrown into the wilderness ....I have given you for meal to the beasts of the earth, and to the fowls of the heaven” (Ez29:3-5)***

The only favorable prophecies came to Isaiah when God told him to write the following prophecies:

+***“Behold, the Lord rides upon a swift cloud and comes unto Egypt, and the idols of Egypt shall be moved in his presence, and the heart of Egypt shall melt in the midst of it” (Is 19:1)***

+***“In that day there shall be an alter to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar at the border thereof to the Lord. And it shall be for a sign and for a witness unto the Lord in the land of Egypt, for they shall cry unto the Lord because of the oppressors, and he shall send them a savior and a defender, and he shall deliver them. And the Lord shall be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians shall know the Lord in that day. Yea, they shall worship with sacrifice and oblation, and shall vow a vow unto the Lord and shall perform it” (Is 19:19-21).***

At the end of the chapter he wrote his second favorable prophecy:

***“Blessed be Egypt my people” (Is 19:25)***

The third favorable prophecy came to the prophet Hosea when he wrote:

***“I called my son out of Egypt” (Hos11.1)***

This change in God's attitude toward Egypt was so sudden and may have confused those who read it or heard of it at that time, because the rest of the many prophecies were all unfavorable. The reason behind the change was God's knowledge that Egypt was going to accept His call. When St. Mark invites them to become Christians, and that Christianity will flourish in Egypt and the Egyptians will distinguish themselves in His knowledge and become a world leader in witnessing to Him and in their faith in Him. All this and what the Church of Alexandria did in the early days of the spread of Christianity happened as a result of what St. Mark did in Egypt. Christianity was easily accepted by the Egyptians and they continued to stand fast against any persecution, ready to die for their faith till this day.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **St. Mark's Early Life**

#### **His Family**

St. Mark came from a Jewish family that lived in Northern Africa, in what is often called the Five Western Cities, and sometimes identified as Cyrene. This is the region which is called now Libya. His father's name was Hristopoulos and his mother's was Mary. They were both from the house of Levy, and they were true to their origin, and consequently lived a righteous life even though they were away from the center of their religion.

#### **His Birth**

When was he born is not known. This is one of the normal things that we accept and even expect for those who lived that early. The exact date on which Jesus himself was born is not known. Part of the reason was that records of such events were not made. And if they were made they were lost as hundreds of years went by. Despite the fact that no records of his birth were found, it is generally agreed that St. Mark was born in the beginning of the first century. It is also agreed that he

was several years younger than Jesus and most of the disciples.

As to where he was born, there is some disagreement among historians about it. Some claim that since his family's home was in Jerusalem, most probably he was born there. But more learned historians such as Sawiris Ibn Elmokafa say that he was born in Cyrene in a city called Adernapoulos which was more recently called Darnis. Our Coptic Church agrees with that, and consequently considers him African by birth.

## **His Names**

The region where he was born was under Roman rule, while the inhabitants were mostly Greeks with few Jews and Romans. This is why he was given two names, one Jewish, that was "John" which means "Yahweh is loving". The other was Roman; "Mark" which means "The Hammer". There is no doubt that the Roman name was not used as much by his family, who preferred his Jewish name. But his Roman name was the name used in the Bible by St. Paul and St. Peter in their epistles. But St. Luke in "The Acts of the Apostles" used both names, though the name "John" was used only two times (in Acts 13:5 and 13), while the name "Mark" was used several times. And last but not least, it was also used to call the gospel that he wrote.

## **The Family moves to Jerusalem**

His family was reported to be wealthy, and they owned a lot of good land on which they raised a variety of crops and livestock which made them rich. They lived a comfortable living in a big house, enjoying many luxuries that few could afford at that time. But they were close to an area where barbarians lived. One day those barbarians invaded their land and plundered everything in their path. This is when the family decided to leave for Judea. They were helped to settle there and buy that beautiful home in Jerusalem by St. Bernaba who was either St. Mark's uncle or his cousin.

### **His Family and religion**

One of the important facts about his parents, and the atmosphere that they created in their house while young Mark was growing, is that they were devout Jews. They were not among those who had the image of religion but denied its strength. They loved God and lived a righteous life. This explains how they became close to Jesus as He began His ministry. We do not know anything about St. Mark's father and his role in this. He is not mentioned in the record because most likely he had died early. But the Bible mentions that Mary his mother served Jesus and helped to support Him and His disciples with few other women, from their own possessions.

It is also known that his father was a cousin to St. Peter's wife. This relationship got stronger as the family moved to Jerusalem. St. Mark was impressed by St. Peter, and in the absence of his father, a strong bond between them was formed, and continued to the extent that St. Peter used to call him his son. St. Mark used to meet with St. Peter and talk with him about Jesus. It is possible that Jesus got acquainted with the young Mark through Peter, and seeing his character and personality selected him to become one of the seventy disciples that he ordained after He ordained the twelve.

St. Mark was the beneficiary of the wholesome and religious household atmosphere in which he grew. He was convinced that following the commandments and the laws of the Old Testament is the best path for him. Another privilege contributed by his family was their decision to spend whatever necessary to give him the best education available. He responded to that by taking full advantage of the chance he was given. He excelled in learning Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and all the subjects of the civilized world. This made him one of the most educated disciples whom Lord Jesus selected. The other one who shared in this quality was Judas Iscariot who betrayed Him.

But when one compares the attitudes of these two learned disciples, one is struck by the difference. Judas was very disappointed with Jesus not responding to the feelings of his people and their craving about having a

savior who will restore for them their political and military glory. This was the main reason for them to reject Jesus, and was the basis on which Judas decided to betray his friend. St. Mark on the other hand was one of those who understood Jesus when he said that His kingdom is not from this world. Based on this he accepted and loved everything that He said and when he heard about Him saying to the disciples

***“Go and make disciples of all nations and baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit “(Mt 28:19).***

He did not hesitate to join the evangelical work that the disciples decided to undertake, and gave his life to follow His master’s last command.

## **The Story of the Lion**

We always see a lion with St. Mark in all his pictures, and people often ask why? What is the story behind this? There are two different explanations for this.

+ The first and the most believable is that while St. Mark was travelling with his father suddenly they saw a lion and a lioness coming their way. The father realizing the danger to both, decided to sacrifice himself in an attempt to save his son. So, he told St. Mark to begin running while he will wait for the two beasts to attack him and in the meantime St. Mark will have a chance to

get away. But St. Mark who had already met Jesus and saw His power saw this as a chance to save both of them and at the same time gain his father's approval of Jesus and his faith in Him.

He told his father that Jesus is capable of saving both of them, and immediately prayed to Him to destroy the two beasts which were getting close to them. The prayer was answered promptly and the two fell dead. His father as expected believed in Jesus and praised God for what He did.

+ Another story says that because St. Mark began his gospel with the sentence "The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God". And because Jesus is the King of Kings, it is appropriate to use the lion as the symbol for the story that describes the details of what the King did when He came to our earth.

Who began those stories? We do not know. But it may have been the Venetians, because they consider St. Mark as their Patron Saint, and they have a huge winged lion in St. Mark square, in front of His Cathedral.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **St. Mark before the Crucifixion**

#### **His relationship with Jesus**

As mentioned before the Coptic Church was wrongly accused during the fifth World Council held at Chalcedon that her Pope St. Dioscorus who presided over the fourth World Council, and the second at Ephesus was wrong in forgiving Eutychus after he convinced the council that he abandoned his heresy. Despite the fact that Eutychus submitted this in writing which was seen by the 130 bishops present, no body was punished except Dioscorus of Alexandria, who was deposed and banished to the island of Ghinghra for political reasons \*.

This was the beginning of a wave of discrimination that The Catholic Church which presided over the rest of the Christian churches carried against the Coptic Church. She began to deny some of the facts about St. Mark.

Among these is their claim that he never saw Jesus or became one of His disciples.

Our church that closed its door and quietly preserved the faith as practiced by the Universal Church for four

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\* Sami I. Boulos: “Reflections on the life of Jesus Christ.” Book Four, p146.

and a half centuries continued its belief that St. Mark has seen Jesus many times and that he was selected by Him to become one of the Seventy.

## **Has Seen Jesus**

Some of the evidence behind this fact can be summarized in the following:

+ St. Mark’s house was one of the most known houses to those who lived in Jerusalem during our Lord’s ministry in Judea. He and His disciples ate there; one of these was before He was crucified. At that night He founded the sacrament of the Eucharist, taught His disciples a lesson in humility when he washed their feet. He also told them that one of them will betray Him, and told Judas to do what he intended to do without delay.

+The disciples after the crucifixion gathered there and felt secure. They stayed there until Sunday when they heard about His rising. Jesus appeared to them in that house. And they may have stayed there until the day of Pentecost, when they received the Holy Spirit, and spoke with tongues. Many famous historians agreed that St. Mark's house was the first Christian Church.

+ They also agreed that St. Mark was the person whom Jesus described as a man carrying a jar of water, who will guide them to the upper room in his house where the last supper took place.

+ He was also in Cana where Jesus changed the water to wine during his attendance to the wedding to which He, His mother, and His disciples were invited. Some historians even say that he was one of those who filled the empty jars with water, and served the people the new wine.

+ When St. Peter was released by the angel from the prison, he went directly to that house where the others were gathering. This was reported by St. Luke in The Act of the Apostles, when he wrote:

***“He went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying” (Acts12:12).***

All these facts which show that St. Mark was brought up in this fantastic. spiritual atmosphere, where his mother was a servant of Christ who hosted Him and His disciples in her house. Beside his mother, he grew up with few of his relatives who were disciples of the Lord such as St. Bernabas, and St. Peter. It is difficult to believe that that person never saw The Lord.

### **He was One of the Seventy**

It is amazing that some still deny that St. Mark was one of the seventy disciples who were selected by Jesus after he selected the twelve. The amazement is based on the following facts:

+ All the historians whether they were Christian or Muslims agreed that St. Mark was indeed one of those seventy. Among these are Sawiris Ibn El Mokafa, Ibn Kibr, Ibn El Saleeby, and El Makreezy.

+ Many of the early fathers of the Church wrote clearly that he was one of them. These include St. Oregon, and St. Epiphanius.

So, it can be said that young Mark witnessed the life and teachings of the Lord closely and from the beginning. He saw Him treating people with a strong and unbelievable love. He observed Him serving all their needs, with passion and determination. He saw Him feed their hungry, heal their sicknesses, raise some

of their dead. He noticed how He was so patient with them. He was impressed by His humility with the lowly while He was so bold, honest and straight forward in criticizing their leaders who did not do what they were supposed to do.

He listened to Him preach the word of God, as nobody has preached it. He was drawn to Him and loved Him and realized that He is the long awaited Messiah who was mentioned in more than three hundred prophecies in the Old Testament. He was delighted that he was given this gift from God that He let him be born in this age where he not only saw the Lord, but served Him. And when he saw Him giving His life willingly to save mankind from the death that they deserve, he was ready to sacrifice his own life for His sake.

One can imagine him as he went through the events that followed the crucifixion and the rising of the Lord from the dead, and what followed including appearances by the Lord and what transpired in the exchanges that took place between Him and the disciples and His deeds and orders. As he shared or observed the doubt, the fear, the feelings of uncertainty, belief, and confusion, he may have felt lost or numb. There is a possibility that he refrained to contribute to the shatter and the events that took place because of his young age. He probably preferred to watch and listen.

But as the days went by and there were more meetings during which the risen Lord taught the disciples more about what they are supposed to do after His departure, He felt that his faith is coming through strong and clear. He decided to participate in serving the one wish that the ascending Christ gave all of them.

When the older disciples began to organize themselves, he opted for going with some of those who were older and with whom he had a good relationship. When he did he was on his way to assemble his thoughts in the first Bible to be written about the story of salvation as executed by none other than his friend Jesus of Nazareth. This accomplishment alone made him stand out as one of the most faithful disciples to his Savior and his God.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### St. Mark's Work after the Ascension

We do not know for sure whether St. Mark was with the rest of the disciples when the Lord ascended into heaven. The Bible tells us about this event in three places; the Gospel of St. Mark, and that of St. Luke, and the Acts of the Apostles. None of them mentioned any names for those who were there and observed this important and crucial event. They mentioned that as the disciples got together for the last talk from the risen Christ, in which He repeated what He said before, about his departure, and them receiving the Holy Spirit, He simply was lifted up and a cloud took Him while they were all watching.

This was always the case when anyone was directed by the Holy Spirit to write about any event in which the Lord was present, to put all the attention on Him rather on anyone else. No names were mentioned for any of those present unless that person contributed in some way to what happened and ignoring telling about it would make the record incomplete. Mark's name was not mentioned when the Lord asked two of His disciples (also unnamed) to go to Jerusalem, and there they will meet a man carrying a jar of water (Mark). They were to ask him to show them the place where they would celebrate the Passover.

Many other names were ignored in the Bible for example, none of Adam's daughters was mentioned by name, and also none of Adam's sons was with the exception of three Cain, Able, and Sheth. Moses' mother was not mentioned when his story was written in Genesis. The Shunamite woman, who hosted Alisha the prophet, was not named, also the woman who supported Elijah. The Canaanite woman who asked Jesus to heal her daughter also was not named, Even the thief who called on the crucified Jesus to "remember him when He comes into His kingdom" was not named.

It is almost universally agreed that knowing St. Mark, and the fact that he mentioned this event in his Gospel, and realizing the importance of what happened, one cannot imagine that he was not there when the Lord was glorified in front of His disciples.

The important thing that he and the rest of the disciples learned from being there while this unprecedented event unfolded before their own eyes, is that it convinced them beyond a shadow of doubt, that Jesus was truly the Son of God. They also heard Him say to all of them "

***"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, and baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19)***

## **The Pentecost**

St. Mark was impressed by what he heard from Jesus, and decided to wait to see what the older disciples will do. He was with them on the day of Pentecost when they received the Holy Spirit which as we mentioned before happened in his house. He must have been awe struck, when he listened to the heavenly sound caused by the rushing of the Holy Spirit, and to see it rest on every one of them including him in the form of tongues of fire. Then he listened as many began to talk in tongues. He was there and witnessed all that, and saw it as the first effort by the disciples to follow what the Lord told them to do. It was normal to begin evangelizing the Jewish people, who were responsible for crucifying their Lord and Master in the first place.

And suddenly in the midst of the noise of the reaction or the multitude to what was happening, he observed St. Peter who denied Him, stand before the assembled people who attended the event and heard everyone talk in tongues, stand up and courageously explain to them the events up to this point. He told them that Jesus' death was prophesied and had to happen to offer us salvation,

He reminded them of David's prophecy when he said,

***“For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, nor let your Holy one see corruption.....My brethren, David***

***has died and was buried and his tomb is with us to this day” (Acts 2:27)***

And that what they are observing is not the result of being drunk but this is also a fulfillment of a prophecy.

***“I will pour my spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams” (acts 2:17)***

St. Mark was there in Gethsemane and shared in the fear that all of them felt as Judas approached them accompanied by the mob and few soldiers carrying clubs, torches, and weapons to arrest Jesus. One of them tried to arrest him, and held him by his robe. St. Mark got rid of the robe and fled almost naked.

As he remembered this and recalled the fear that all of them felt while Jesus was in the tomb, and how all of them hid in his house, he looked again at St. Peter and saw another man. He saw a courageous man unafraid to declare his faith in the risen Christ to the same people who cried feverishly when Pilate asked them whom do you want me to release for you, Barabbas the thief, or Jesus the Christ, they roared “ Barabbas , Barabbas”. And when he asked them what shall I do with Jesus? They thundered back “Crucify him, Crucify him”

He realized that what he is observing is the effect of the Holy Spirit. As a matter of fact, He must have felt that effect himself. He suddenly found himself admiring the new spirit that he saw, and may have vowed at that moment his full obedience to the Lord's last words for them before His ascension "Make disciples of all nations"

### **St. Mark's early evangelism**

The first source that one has to examine when the topic is the evangelism of one of the disciples is "The Acts of the Apostles". Doing that one finds that by and large this book is devoted to St. Paul, and his evangelism among the Gentiles or the non Jewish nations. Few other names are mentioned beside his name. The names of St. Bernabas, St. Luke, St. Peter, St. Philip, St. John, St. Jude, St. Silas, were mentioned. The reason these names were mentioned was that they either did something independent from St. Paul or helped or assisted him sometime, and the author of the Book; St. Luke wanted to give a complete record of St. Paul's work, so he had to include their names.

Some of these names were mentioned often in the first eight chapters, simply because St. Paul had not appeared on the scene yet. He was still Saul the overzealous Pharisee who hated Jesus and His disciples and volunteered to destroy whatever legacy and influence He has left. But from chapter nine till the end

of the Book, when he saw the vision on his way to Damascus, and during which Jesus addressed him and revealed to him his identity, and called him to serve Him, it was all St. Paul and what he did to spread the faith among various gentile nations. That part of “The Acts of the Apostles” could have easily been called appropriately “The Acts of St. Paul”

We also notice that the record as it was written in the Books of the New Testament has ignored most of the work undertaken by most of the disciples. Few of these were mentioned such as the work of St. Philip in Samaria, and St. Peter, and St. John there. We read about other disciple’s work from other writers such as Josephous , Ibn El mokafa, and Maximous. We also find more of that history in our own Senexarium.

From all these sources we find that St. Mark’s earliest efforts were when he joined his friend St. Peter in his efforts in Jerusalem and the rest of Judea. This was expected because of the strong relationship that developed between the young disciple and St. Peter the outspoken disciple who stood among the twelve and distinguished himself with whatever he jumped to say to contribute to what was happenings, sometimes drawing praise from Jesus and sometimes condemnation. He was also related to St. Mark as we pointed out before. His father was the cousin of St. Peter’s wife.

After this, and when St. Paul became a disciple and decided to leave on his first trip, he took with him St. Bernabas, and St. Mark. They went to Cyprus, where St. Paul preached the word of God. But a magician called Alymas resented their message and began to publicly criticize them. St. Paul punished him by telling him that he is going blind, which immediately happened. When the ruler, whom St. Paul was trying to convince, saw that, he suddenly accepted the faith.

Then St. Paul and his company left and sailed to Perga in Pamphylia. Here St. Mark decided to go back to Jerusalem. The Bible does not tell us the reason. Some sources say that he went back because he became sick. We are not sure, but he must have had a good reason to do that, and St. Luke did not want to get into that, because he considered this a personal matter which is not suitable to put in the record.

The Bible tells us that after that, the group proceeded toward Antioch, and then to Iconium. Then they went to Lystra and Derbe. After some time has passed, visiting few other places St. Paul suggested to St. Bernabas that they should go back to some of the places in which they preached to check on the believers. St. Bernabas wanted to take with them St. Mark, but St. Paul refused because he had left them before and went to Jerusalem. They undoubtedly discussed the matter, but somehow they did not arrive at a mutually agreeable result. The Bible tells that

***“And there arose a sharp contention, so they separated from each other; Bernabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and departed ....to Syria, and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.” (Acts 15:39)***

As we reflect on that situation, we find ourselves asking few questions. The first is why was this situation mentioned in the Bible? The answer is that this and many other such episodes that describe conflicts between saints, or wrong decisions made by some, are put there to teach us many lessons. The first is that Saints are not immune from making mistakes. They are not a special breed of humans imbued with immunity against sin. They are human beings who chose to worship God, and who had to learn from experience that without divine guidance and interference they make mistakes.

This fact has a tremendous effect on those sinners who are called but may hesitate because they are heavy sinners. Reading about those giants like David, Samson, Solomon, and even Peter who sinned but came back and repented a true repentance will encourage them to proceed and surrender their lives to that who said once to His disciples “Without me you can do nothing”.

Another lesson is the fact that Christianity is a religion that accepts human frailty, and allows its people to

make mistakes as long as they realize that they have a way back. They also have to believe that the way they are judged by God depends on how they end and not how they began. One of the two thieves who were crucified with Jesus was accepted by Him when he changed his behavior from mocking Him as the other thief, and confessed his sins and asked Him to remember him when He comes into His kingdom.

Another question related to this episode, is who was wrong and who was right? This is a difficult question, because we do not know any details of what happened. For instance did they tell St. Mark about the situation? Did they give him a chance to defend his behavior, leaving them and returning to Jerusalem? If they did, what did he say? Was he wrong in leaving them in the first Place? If he was, did they give him a chance to apologize for what he did?

As a result of all this, one cannot make a judgment in this case. There were three characters involved in this episode. And if we look at each and what he did. We can only make some general comments about each of the three. We can say that St. Paul was strict in what he did. And we can understand and respect his decision because. He was reflecting what the Lord once said “Whoever puts his hand on the plough cannot look back” As a Pharisee he cannot condone some one’s leaving the field while serving God no matter what the reason is.

St. Bernabas on the other hand was not as strict as his friend. He was not a Pharisee, and so had a higher level of tolerance to human behavior, even human mistakes. He did not see what St. Paul saw that once you begin serving God you cannot leave for a good reason. He was more realistic, and more human than St. Paul, and consequently did not agree with his decision, and based on that he invited St. Mark to join him and gave him a chance to resume his work serving God.

The record gives us another insight in what happened when it tells us that later on St. Paul in a gesture that could be interpreted as an apology for his previous decision about St. Mark, asked him to come back. When did this happen we do not know. But we know that he was with him while he wrote his epistle to the Colossians in which he wrote:

***“Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Bernabas (concerning whom you have received, if he comes to you receive him).” (Col 4:10).***

We also know that he was with him when he wrote his epistle to Philemon, in which he wrote:

***“Epaphras my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends his greetings to you, and so do Mark” (phl 23)***

This shows that St. Mark was with him in Rome and was helping him. He was also thinking of sending him to the Colossians. It is interesting that St. Paul was not sure if St. Mark will go to them or not. The reason may have been that he wrote this before he discussed the matter with him. If this is the case then we can see that St. Paul has changed from his previous position which was rigid and inflexible, to a position in which he saw the value of some flexibility and this meant allowing St. Mark the right to share in making that decision. The reason may have been that St. Paul himself was not sure about what may happen in the near future. And consequently could not tell for sure whether he will be able to send St. Mark to them or not.

As we examine this, there is no way one can deny that by allowing St. Mark to join him amounts to a recognition of his worth as a helper and a significant factor in his evangelical work.

### **St. Mark's other Evangelical Efforts**

As we mentioned before neither most of St. Mark's neither evangelical efforts nor those of the rest of the disciples were reported in the Bible. It is universally agreed that after the initial stage of confusion and as things began to settle down, the disciples decided that it is time for them to begin implementing the Lord's command to evangelize the whole world.

Many historians who wrote about that period agreed that they assigned to every one of them a place to begin spreading the good news. As one looks at the writings of those historians, it becomes obvious that they did not spare an effort to do everything they could to spread the word of God. The task was a daunting one to begin with. The enemies of the word were strong and entrenched in powerful philosophies, successful histories, and solid traditions.

The three main groups of people who gave the disciples the most resistance were the Romans, the Jews, and the Greek. The Romans were the masters of the world. They believed in themselves and no body else. And they had the power and the arrogance to win any conflict whether it is military or otherwise.

The Jews were the chosen people of God, whose history that the whole world knows, proves that they need no body to tell them about God. They are the ones who have the authority, the knowledge, and the history to teach the rest of the world what to believe and what not to believe.

The Greeks felt that they are the ones whose superior intellect and ethics helped them to invent democracy, and practice it as a way of life in a way no other nation was ever able to emulate. They also had at one time dominated the world militarily. And despite the fact that they are no longer a world power, nevertheless they are

the only civilized nation in the world. Consequently they do not need anybody to preach or to teach them.

On top of all that those superior human beings found themselves approached by members of the lowly nation of the Jews telling them to believe in a Jewish carpenter who lead a rebellion against his own people and was captured, tried, convicted, crucified, and died a shameful death.

The disciples knew all that and realized how difficult it is going to be. But these were not ordinary people who would sit, evaluate the situation and when they find that it is almost impossible they quit. They stopped using the thinking and the logic of the world. They knew they have a good cause. They knew in whom they have faith. They have received the Holy Spirit, and have acquired a new power from God. They knew that they don't even need to prepare themselves for what is coming. Their Lord told them before He ascended to heaven to depend on Him in everything they do. And He also promised them that He will be with them till the end of time.

St. Mark was aware of the rough road ahead of all of them including himself as they began to spread out to do what their Lord asked them to do. They immersed themselves in the task with a strong faith that they will do what they can and that the Lord will take care of the rest. They were sure that He will not leave them nor abandon them, but will stand by them and take care of

whatever problems will develop. They were even ready to suffer and die in the course of what they intended to do. And most of them did including St. Mark.

He began to carry the good news to others looking for guidance from the Lord whom He knew and served. He had a great faith and ended up doing a lot of work for Him. He seemed to have contributed to bringing the word to many nations, whom a lot of knowledgeable people did not know about. This can be verified through two sources; the early historians who studied the early years of Christianity such as Josephous, Saweeres Ibn El Mokafaa, Ibn Kibr, also El Makreezy, St. Oregon, and St. Epiphanius

Going through those histories we find that St. Mark evangelized in the following areas; Jerusalem, parts of Judea, Syria especially Antioch, Cyprus, Pafos, Rome, Coloccy, Venice, and Aquila, Lebanon, the five Western cities in North Africa, and Egypt.

The second source of verifying that St. Mark really served in those areas and brought Christianity to them comes from the way the people in all of those places say and do. In each one, we find people telling stories, many of which include miracles that sound like fairy tails. They show any visitor places that have witnessed the apostle staying there, and point to relics and ancient artifacts that they associate with him. Observing all that one cannot deny that despite the possibility of a little

exaggeration, these people are reporting about something their fathers and grandfather told them and can't help feeling that it must be true. You feel that they truly honor and appreciate St. Mark's contribution to their lives.

We rejoice in the fact that our Patron Saint was so universal in his efforts. And we add to this that his universality was widened and made stronger by the fact that he wrote one of the most sacred and revered books of the New Testament ; The Gospel according to St. Mark. Another one of his works which may not have had the appeal or the wide distribution that his gospel enjoyed is the very popular liturgy that he authored, which was later modified by St. Cyrel and called by his name, and which is still used in our churches today.

But we do not rejoice nor agree with some of the claims made about him. For instance some say that he was ordained bishop over Aquila. Some others say that he was the bishop of Gabeel. We know that he was the first bishop of the Church of Alexandria. It is impossible for anyone to be bishop in three different places. This is one of the rules that was agreed upon very early and practiced by the Universal Church and was never violated or broken since then till now. The relationship between the bishop and his diocese is like that between husband and wife. This is why no bishop can have more than one diocese. And also that he cannot be moved

from one diocese to another. Once he is ordained a bishop for it, he will remain its bishop until death.

Another aspect of that claim that we do not accept is the claim that St. Mark was ordained by somebody most likely St. Peter. This demotes him from being an apostle to nobody. We believe that he was one of the seventy disciples, and that he was the first Bishop of The Coptic church and that before he left Egypt he ordained St. Inianous as his successor, and the second bishop of the Church of Alexandria.

As we bring to a close this chapter in which we talked about St. Mark's work in many places spread over three continents, we thank Almighty God for sending him to Egypt, and for supporting and strengthening him during his efforts to bring Christianity to the land of the Pharaohs, and to us, the Copts of Egypt.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **St. Mark in Egypt**

After St. Mark finished his evangelical work in the areas outlined in the previous chapters, he decided to go to North Africa, to the five Western cities where he was born. He felt that he owes that region a debt for giving him and his family a home away from home. And which treated them very well until the barbarians raided their home. He grew up in that region, and probably felt homesick after he and his family left for Judea.

St. Mark knew his way around, and wondered how his former friends and fellow citizens would receive him and how would they react to his new religion. So, he decided to go first to Cyrene where he was born. There he felt more secure than he had felt in all the other places that he visited before. Historians say that he did very well, and the new religion was accepted by the inhabitants of Cyrene. St. Mark was helped by few miracles that the Holy Spirit gave him to establish the truth of his message.

After this initial success he went to the other cities which were named Hisperides (beni Ghazi now), Berce ( El Marg now), Tauchera , and Apollonia. His mission

was equally successful and the nations of North Africa gave their approval to Christianity as it was welcomed in all the other areas where St. Mark and the other disciples introduced it. The world seemed to have been waiting for a new direction other than the one chartered by the barbarian Romans.

After St. Mark organized the new church and ordained few priests and may be a bishop, and taught them how to run things, he decided to visit Egypt.

### **Egypt before St. Mark**

Many ask why did St. Mark come to Egypt. What attracted him to her? To answer this question one only needs to describe Egypt at that time. It is true that Egypt was no longer the dominant military power it once was. And she was not even independent, but was under the Roman rule. But despite all that Alexandria was one of the most famous cities in the world. It was founded by Alexander the Great almost three and a half centuries before, but her glory did not come from that as it came from what the Egyptians made of it. Alexandria was the world's most famous cultural center of knowledge, Philosophy, and the arts at that time.

It had two components which were unparalleled in their effect on those who came to learn from what they offered. The first one was the famous School of Alexandria that had among its faculty some of the most

renowned and famous scholars, teachers and philosophers in the world. The second was the Library of Alexandria, which was part of that school, and which had hundreds of thousands of books, manuscripts, and art portfolios that no other library in the world had.

Together with this distinction, Alexandria which was the capital of Egypt at that time had a mixture of people whose behavior was unbelievably decadent and corrupt that it was difficult to reconcile this with the nobleness of that lighthouse of knowledge, called the School of Alexandria.

The population of Egypt during that period of her history was made of the following. Beside the Egyptians there were the Romans, the Jews, the Greek, the Ethiopians, the Nubians, and few other nationalities.

One possible reason for all the moral decay which was rampant may have been the fact that every one of those groups brought with it its religion. So, there were the relics of the ancient Egyptian gods such as Isis, Osiris, Horus, Amoun, Raa, and Abis. The Greeks had their gods; presided over by Zios. The Romans had also their gods under Jupiter. The Jews brought with them all their prophets, their commandments, and their history. The differences between these religions which were enormous could have lead to discord between people and bred confusion as to which of these gods is the true God. Moral decay could have begun with those who

decided to deny all those deities and resolve to do what their instincts dictated to them. This is what Egypt was when St. Mark came to visit.

### **When Did St. Mark Reach Egypt?**

The time of his arrival to Egypt is not something that historians agree upon. Not only that but also the route he took to come. The differences about the route may not be as important, as the differences about the time but both add to the uncertainty about his visit to that region of the world, which may have been originated by some biased historians who claimed that he never came to North Africa.

There are two routes suggested by historians whecknowledged that he did a lot of work in Egypt and the Five Western Cities.

The earliest date that the famous historian Josephus came up with was the year 43 A.D. Others said that the date was 45 A.D. or 49 A.D., or 55 A.D., or 58 A.D., while others put it at 60 A.D. or 61 A.D.

As one looks at all these dates one cannot help but wonder, how did this happen? Then one realizes that we cannot do anything to clear that confusion. But it seems to some that the early dates cannot be accurate because St mark was too young at the times suggested to have done all those trips with others like St. Paul, St. Peter or

St. Bernabas before he went to Egypt. It is agreed upon that after all those trips with others he decided to go alone. This makes the late dates such as those in the sixties more credible than the early ones.

## **The Way He Came to Egypt**

As we mentioned before historians do not agree on the way that St. Mark took to Alexandria. Most of them say that after he finished his work in the Five Western Cities he decided to go to Alexandria. He was probably attracted to it by its fame and its importance.

There are two ways which came in the early records of history. The first was that he just took the obvious route and walked next to the shore of the Mediterranean until he hit Alexandria. The second was that he had few friends with him whom he had converted during his efforts in the Western Cities. And when he told them that he intended to Visit Egypt they volunteered to go with him.

Somehow this group under the leadership of St. Mark wanted to go to Thebes. As they approached their destination lo and behold a ferocious lion roared at them. They all panicked except St. Mark, who tried to assure them that Lord Jesus whom they just believed in will no doubt save them from that beast.

The lion continued on its path and became very close, and then suddenly it stopped, approached St. Mark, bent its head, and knelt before him. There was jubilation among the group and they thanked God for rescuing them. They expected that the lion will leave, but it did not. It stayed with the group until they decided to go north. It remained close to St. Mark, all the time obeying him and behaving as a faithful dog.

The question here is how credible is this story? As we observe the pictures of St. Mark left to us by master painters, we almost always see a lion at his feet, which the artists made gentle and without the ferociousness that is its nature. So, as we think about this episode, and the other one which we wrote about before, we cannot see that lion as one of the two lions that St. Mark destroyed. But we can see it as the one that he met in Egypt.

These stories about those lions make St. Mark's history a bit unique because of those three lions that he met. The first two were the lion and his mate who met him near Jordan while his father was with him, and the third was the one in Egypt. These lions helped him to convince those with him that the God that he is preaching is the true God, who can close the mouths of lions, and save people from them. These two episodes were among the first miracles that St. Mark performed. Historians tell us that he did many miracles after that. We will report about these in a separate chapter.

## **St. Mark in Alexandria**

After a long trip, either coming from The Five Cities or Thebes, St. Mark arrived at Alexandria exhausted, but probably fascinated by the mere fact that he is finally in the great City.

As he walked the streets of the famous city, he was probably struck by what he saw. He saw a city that swam in all kinds of extremes. He observed the fabulous temples and the huge statues of many deities filling the streets. Some of these belonged to the ancient Egyptians, some to the Romans rulers, and some to the Greeks. He also observed the open and vulgar sexual behavior side by side with those symbols of a religious life. He saw some kind of a laissez faire atmosphere which indicated a universal permissiveness or a freedom that held both a promise to anything new and also a hindrance to any change.

He may have known through his studies something about the believes of the prevailing cultures, and realized that they will probably offer strong resistance to the spread of Christianity. But he was not worried, because he had confidence in His God, whom he saw, perform miracles in few other places and how fast the Church has acquired hundreds and thousands of new members every day. He may have remembered that somewhere in the Egyptian mythology there were some

components that will help the Egyptians accept the new religion.

He may have remembered that Pharaoh Ikhnaton preached monotheism and that he tried to get the Egyptians to worship only one God, the god sun Raa. Also there was a trinity of Egyptian gods represented by Isis, Osiris, and Horus. Added to this some other resemblances existed between the two religions. For instance the belief in the life after death was practiced in Egypt, and was the origin of many aspects of the ancient Egyptian culture. Even the sign of the cross resembled closely the sign of the “Ankh”, and the practice of Christian baptism was close to the washing with holy water which was practiced in the Ancient Egyptian religion.

All these resemblances helped the Egyptians in accepting the new religion, but St. Mark was not depending on these factors. He had enough faith in his God. So, he enjoyed his walk in the streets of Alexandria and decided to continue until he reaches the Jewish district. By the time he was there he noticed that his shoes have been worn out, and that they needed to be repaired.

As he looked for a shoe shop, he saw one owned by a Jew called Annianus. He greeted him and gave him his shoes to repair.

## **The First Christian**

While his shoes were being fixed, St. Mark was probably thinking whether the name or the story of Jesus has in anyway reached Egypt. He may have recalled that on the day of Pentecost Jews from all over the world were present in Jerusalem. And that they were surprised when they heard the disciples talking in tongues, and each heard them talking in his own language. He probably thought that some may have come to Jerusalem from Egypt, and when they came back told others about what they have witnessed.

Suddenly he heard Annianus screaming and calling in Greek “Eis Theos” Which means “Oh the only God”. While he was working on one of the shoes, the big needle pierced one of his fingers and caused a painful wound. When St. Mark heard and saw what happened he knew what he will do. First he spit on some soil and anointed the wound with it asking God to heal it. The finger was healed instantly, something that shocked Annianus and made him look at St. Mark for an explanation.

St. Mark was thinking before the accident how is he going to introduce the story of Jesus to the shoemaker. But he was happy with the chance that God gave him. In answer to Annianus’ look, St. Mark began to talk to him about the one God whom he cried to, and probably did not know anything about. He told him the whole

story beginning with the creation of Adam and Eve, and their disobedience to God. He followed that by a story after a story from the Old Testament. He explained to him how mankind has drifted away from their creator, and how evil increased in the world. This made it necessary for a savior, who can save it from the death that it deserved. He undoubtedly told him about the hundreds of prophecies about that savior in the Old Testament.

Finally he told him about Jesus and His story. He explained how He was God, who took flesh and became man. He was born lived on earth thirty three years, then he died on the cross to save His beloved man from eternal death. He ended that story by talking about His resurrection and ascension and His order to His disciples to evangelize the whole world and spread the good news to all nations. Finally he probably explained to him that He will also come again to judge the world and reward every one according to his deeds.

Annianus was convinced that what he heard was true, and responded by expressing his gratitude to God for sending St. Mark, to whom he declared that he wants to become a follower of Christ. Then he invited St. Mark to come to his house, and introduced him to his family. The family followed its head and became Christians, and were baptized by St. Mark. They became the first Christian family in Africa, and Annianus' house became the first Christian Church in Africa as well. From that

small house Christianity spread in all of Egypt, as the Egyptians embraced the new religion with enthusiasm and zeal rarely seen in any other place on earth. St. Mark worked alone at first and then with Annianus, and then with others who were converted. Christians increased in number every day. Finally they became noticed by the other groups, which began to be annoyed by the new religion.

The group that felt the spread of Christianity more than the others and perceived it as an enemy to their religion were the Egyptians who worshipped their pagan gods in the temple called Serapium. The Romans also felt the danger of that stranger who continued to preach against their gods. These two groups began to cooperate in a plan to kill St. Mark. They thought that by killing him they will stop the spread of Christianity in Egypt.

When word reached the Christians that those two groups were plotting to kill St. Mark, they urged him to leave Egypt. Before he left he visited few places where a significant numbers of Christians lived. Then he ordained Annianus bishop over the young church and with him three priests, and seven deacons.

Sometime before he left St. Peter visited Egypt to check on the Jews in the Egyptian Babylon whom he had evangelized before. He may have taken St. Mark with him. While they were there St. Peter wrote his first epistle, which he concluded by saying,

***“She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings; and so does my son Mark” (1Pet5: 13)***

St. Mark left Egypt after seven years, and went back to the Five Western Cities to check on the Christians there and to deal with any problems that they may have. He found that the church was doing fine, and the number of the faithful had increased. He stayed with them for two years preaching and teaching. He also ordained for them some priests and deacons.

### **St. Mark Goes to Rome**

While in the Five Cities St. Mark got word that St. Paul needed him in Rome, and that he asked Timothy to bring him with him before he comes to Rome.

St. Paul had written to Timothy saying;

***“Luke alone with me. Get Mark and bring him with you; for he is very useful in serving me” (2Tim:11)***

Without any hesitation St. Mark left for Rome with Timothy. He served with him in establishing the Church of Rome. He may have sent him to the Church in Colossi as he wrote in his epistle to them,

***“Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Bernabas (concerning whom you have***

*received instructions, if he comes to you receive him” (Col 4:10).*

St. Mark stayed with St. Paul until St. Peter came to Rome to check on the Jews there. He was there when both apostles were killed one after the other by the mad Emperor Nero. His stay in Rome was estimated by some as two years. After this he went back to Alexandria.

### **The Martyrdom of St. Mark**

When he came back, he was received by the people as their beloved leader and teacher. They have missed him and wanted to show how much they missed and loved him. He found that the church that he founded has grown and its presence began to be felt by everybody. He found that they have built a church in a district called Baucalia, and in front of the church they built a number of houses for the purpose of serving the poor and the strangers.

They may have heard about the communal life that the believers lived in Judea and decided to emulate them. So, they lived together and everything they had was shared by all. They were living the word of God, and practicing what they learned, to the extent that more joined them and the number of Christians increased by leaps and bounds.

When St. Mark heard and saw that, he was joyful and thanked the Lord for taking care of His flock. Then they asked him to write something to guide them and keep them focused on the Lord, His life, His miracles, and His new commandments. This is when St. Mark began to write his Bible.

## **The Martyrdom of St. Mark**

We do not know how long it took him to finish his gospel as he called it. But sometime after that, the Lord may have seen that His saint has done enough, and wanted to honor him in a better environment, He called him upstairs. This happened on April 26 in the year 68 A.D. It was Easter Eve, and the big church at Baucalia was full with worshipers some of whom came from the Five Western Cities to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus with St. Mark and their friends in Alexandria.

St. Mark was leading the clergy in praying the Ester mass that he wrote. And all felt the presence of the Holy Spirit, and thanked the Lord for being in their midst in this happy occasion. While this was going on, something else was going on nearby. The pagan Egyptians were celebrating the feast of Serapis their god in his great temple, the Serapium. Encouraged by the Roman ruler, with whom they must have met before, they left their temple and rushed toward the church. And suddenly the Christians heard noises, cries and shouts. As they wondered what that may be, the door of

the church was broken down and the mob rushed toward St. Mark who was praying and seized him. Obviously they wanted only him. He was the origin of their problems. He was the one who introduced the new religion which took away hundreds of their friends and supporters, and caused a severe decline in their membership, income, prestige and influence. He alone was the one who had to be removed. They have tried him, convicted him and decided that he deserved death.

After they seized him, they put a rope around his neck, and dragged him outside the church where they had a horse waiting. They tied St. Mark to it, and the horse galloped and dragged him in the streets of the city until his body was totally and brutally ripped apart and severely injured. The rioters were happy and were celebrating their barbaric act while St. Mark who hurt nobody was slowly dying.

As it became dark and they decided to end the carnage for now, they realized that the victim was still alive, so they put him in jail, until tomorrow. At night an angel from the Lord visited him, encouraged him, and told him that he will be rewarded in heaven for all that he did especially his martyrdom.

St. Mark raised his hands and said:

***“Thank you my savior, who never abandoned me, and for putting me among those who enjoyed your mercy”***

Immediately after the departure of the angel, The Lord Himself appeared and called on St. Mark and told him:

***“Mark, My good servant, writer of the gospel, peace be with you”***

St. Mark was happy to receive that message, and responded by saying:

***“My Lord Jesus”***

As he finished his phrase the Lord left. St. Mark must have felt that finally he is going to rest and see his friends the disciples, and above all His Lord whom he loved so much and felt happy to offer his life while serving Him.

Very early next day they took him from jail and dragged him through the streets again until he died. Some say that as a result of that brutal treatment, his head was severed from his body. The mob wanted to burn the body and thus destroy what could be an object of reverence to his people something that can encourage them to continue his work. As they tried to do that, a strong wind came upon them and literally prevented them physically from doing that. Some were thrown away so violently that they were killed. The rest fled to their homes, leaving St. Mark's body in the street.

The faithful came and sadly and respectfully collected his body. They held a solemn ceremony during which they eulogized their beloved leader and buried him in the Church that he worked so hard to establish.

The first official act of the church was to install Annianus as the Pope of the See of St. Mark. So, he became the second Pope of Alexandria, after St. Mark who was its first Pope. The church under his leadership continued to grow, in a tribute to the leadership of St. Mark. Many more Egyptians were converted and many more churches had to be built to accommodate them. As a result there were more raids on the churches, and persecuting the church became a daily exercise by those in power against the new religion. This wave of persecution was led by the Romans. This is another story which is so known to the rest of the world, that the name “The Church of Martyrs” is viewed by many as a name that the church of Alexandria richly deserves.

### **What Happened to His Body**

What happened to the body of our beloved evangelist did not happen to any of the saints that we all know, whether they lived in the Old or the New Testament.

Historians tell us that after he was buried in his church at Baucalia, he remained there until the year 644 A.D. Somebody entered the church and stole his head and hid it in his boat. This happened shortly after the Arab

invasion. And when Amr Ibn Elas, the commander of the invasion ordered all the boats in the harbor to sail, all did except one which could not. When Amr ordered it inspected they found St Mark's head, and knew that it must have been the reason.

When the news became known that it belonged to St. Mark, Amr gave it to Pope Benjamin. He also gave him a large sum of money to build a church and name it after the saint. The church was built and named "El Moalaka" and St. Mark head was buried there. The result was that the body and the head were buried in two different churches. This continued until the ninth century.

Some may ask why did the Christians accept that? And why didn't they move the head and restore it to the rest of the body in the original Church at Baucalia? The reason was that the Christians did not have control over the church at Baucalia at that time. After the Council of Chalcedon, their Pope Dioscorous was banished and most of the Egyptian churches were put under Roman rule. One of those churches was that at Baucalia.

In the year 815, or 828, or 829 A.D. the body was stolen. There are few versions of that episode as reported by different historians. But the most credible one is that it happened when one of the rulers of Venice sent his people to Alexandria. These communicated

with the two Greek priests who were guarding the body, and offered to take the body and to keep it safe, because the Romans were going to hit the Egyptian churches soon, to destroy them. The two priests believed them and gave them the body. As expected they never consulted with anyone, and did it on their own.

When the body reached Venice, it was welcomed by the Venetians with unparalleled enthusiasm. And they built for it one of the most magnificent churches in Europe; The Saint Mark Cathedral in Venice. They also named Venice “The Republic of St. Mark”

The head was put in St. Mark Cathedral which was begun by Pope Benjamin (and called El Moalaka), and finished by Pope Agathone, who changed its name. It stayed there until the tenth century, but the Copts did not feel that it is absolutely safe there, because everyone knew where it was. So, they hid it in St. Makarios Monastery, in Wadie El Natroun, in the year 1013 A.D. In the year 1077A.D. it was returned to the Cathedral.

During the eleventh century, the anxiety about the safety of the head returned. This time the solution was to change where it is hidden so nobody can get to it. So, the head was shifted from one house to another. Those chosen to guard it in their homes were few of the important laymen who took turns to host the head in absolute secrecy. This went on until the fourteenth century.

At the beginning of the fifteenth century, the Copts heard rumors that the Venetians are determined to steal the head as they stole the body. So, in order to protect it, they began to put other heads of other saints with St. Mark's in an attempt to confuse any body who tries to steal it.

These efforts seem to have persuaded those interested in stealing it, not to try. Some of these were merchants who wanted to steal it and sell it to whoever is interested for a high price.

Finally the saga of the body of our beloved evangelist was destined to end on a positive note. In the year 1968 A.D., the one hundred sixteenth Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark the saint Abba Kyrollus sent a letter to the Roman Pope Paul VI asking him if it is possible to send back the body of St. Mark to be joined with his head which is in Alexandria.

Pope Paul VI agreed to return a part of the body to Egypt. Pope Kyrollus sent a delegation made of several bishops, priests, and laymen to Italy to escort the body of their saint in its trip to Egypt. After a huge ceremony in which Pope Paul VI expressed his respect to St. Mark, and a prayer in which both parties participated the gift was given to the delegation and after a few hours the plane carrying the precious cargo landed in Cairo's international Airport, returning a part of St.

Mark's body home after a period of about eleven centuries.

Pope Kyrollus was waiting in the airport. As soon as the plane landed he got up the stairs and received and carried on his shoulder the body of the man who was the spark that ignited the hearts of Egyptians almost twenty centuries ago, and who believed in the Son of God that this young evangelist preached to them, and established one of the most famous and powerful churches in the world.

The part of the body was finally brought to the new St. Mark Cathedral in Cairo, where it joined the head. This church is the first church in the country, in which the Pope celebrates mass, and delivers his sermons and the rest of his services to the congregation.

We thank you, Almighty God, for all your favors to our church over twenty centuries of suffering at the hands of those who chose not to believe in you. You have given us the courage and the perseverance to stay the road. We also thank you for making us worthy to suffer because of our relationship with you. We ask you to keep watching over us and to give us the privilege to serve and suffer for you as you have suffered for us. Lord you know how much your people have been subjected to in Egypt and else where. We ask you to continue to help us to accept that with thanksgiving. And to attract others to your kingdom by showing them

how much you have loved them, and died on the Cross to save them. Amen.

## Chapter Six

### ST. Mark's Miracles

#### What are miracles?

Before we talk about the miracles of St. Mark, it may be useful to discuss first the nature of miracles. What are they? Why and when are they performed? And who is supposed to perform them?

To answer these questions, we have to begin with our world and try to understand how it works the way it does without what we call miracles. After God ushered Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, they left to live in the world which God had created and changed to make it more suitable for them, before they arrived on the scene. They did not know that an important part of what He did in creating it was to put order in the universe, put there by God Himself. This order was based on a series of laws that governed the behavior of all the components of that universe, under specific circumstances. These laws varied in their complexity from the law of universal gravitation to those governing motion, to those involved in the theory of Relativity, or the equation  $E=MC^2$ .

These laws were put in place to give the universe stability and give its inhabitants a sense of security coming from their ability to predict what is going to

happen under different circumstance. Just imagine the feeling of people if there was no gravity on earth. Objects under such condition would fly without any reason if moved by someone. There would be no security to live in such a world.

Normally God leaves these laws in place. They do their job and people accept what happens because this is the nature of things, and if you dealt with it you will soon find that whatever happens is easily predicted. But under certain conditions God chooses to go around one or more of those laws. In those cases something unusual and unexpected happens. We call this a miracle.

Miracles happen then when God wants to suspend one or more of the laws that He created in the first place. He usually does this for a specific purpose. It may be to meet a need of one of His favorites. It may be to meet a request made by one of His people. It may be to show His glory, or convince someone to believe in Him. As we go through the Bible one is amazed at the the variety of those unusual things that God did for those whom He loves.

We find Him parting the water of the Red Sea so the Israelites can escape from Pharaoh's army by walking to the other side on the dry land. We read about HIM feeding Elijah and giving him strength to walk for forty days and forty nights without eating anything. We hear about Him destroying 185,000 of the Chaldeans army

which was threatening Jerusalem. We find Him giving Jericho to Joshua and his army without lifting a finger against it. All they were asked to do was to walk around it once every day and on the seventh day they had to walk around it seven times.

Both the Old and the New Testaments are full of those miracles. In performing them, He either uses angels or people, usually saints to perform them for Him. This is a gift that God bestows on them. Some are given more of this gift than others. Some may think that the reason may be the level of their spirituality. But as we look at the record as it came in the Bible, we do not find any support for this. We find for instance that the Prophet Alisha performed more miracles than any prophet in the Old Testament, including His mentor the great Prophet Elijah, who was chosen by God to ascend to heaven alive without tasting death. Was he more spiritually gifted than the others?

The answer is no. God seems to give those whom He wants to perform gifts, according to the circumstances they live in, and the spiritual or the physical needs that they face.

Our church since its inception has been given the special gift of an abundance of miracles. No other church has ever claimed as many miracles as our church. These miracles began with St. Mark, and continued through the centuries until now. We are not

saying that we are more pious than others. We are saying that our church since its beginning was subjected to an unusual persecution that merited a special dispensation of an enormous amount of miracles that she needed to overcome the circumstances that she lived in.

St. Mark had his share of those miracles. Here is a summary of few of them.

### **+ The Miracle of the Two Lions**

This was the first miracle that St. Mark performed, which was mentioned by many historians, who did not specify the date on which it happened. As we examine the available history of the family, we can conclude that this miracle happened very early in St. Mark's adult life, when his father was still an unbeliever. We also know that his father died shortly after he believed because of this miracle. From that we can say that it probably happened after the family moved from Cyrene to Jerusalem.

After St. Mark was introduced to Jesus and believed in Him, he was traveling with his father going to Jordan. Suddenly they heard a roar, and looking they saw two ferocious lions coming their way. His father realizing the danger asked his son to flee while he intended to wait for the two beasts to kill him while St. Mark gets away. He asked his son to flee. But St. Mark knew that

his friend Jesus can save them even though He was not near them. So, he told his father:

***“Jesus Christ who has in his hand our lives will not allow them to kill us”***

Then he prayed;

***“Jesus the Son of God, save us from those two beasts, and don’t allow them to bread in this area”***

Immediately the two lions dropped dead at their feet. His father declared his belief in Jesus on the spot. We don’t know whether St. Mark’s mother followed her husband in his belief when she heard the story, or that she believed in the Lord before that.

### **+The Tame Lion**

Some historians recognize this miracle, while others did not mention it. We mentioned its details before on page . We said that because of the fact that all the Saint’s pictures include a tame lion lying next to his feet, that this gives credibility to the story of the lion, that they met as they were coming to Alexandria from upper Egypt.

### **+ Healing Anianus’ wound**

As St. mark began his evangelism in general with the miracle of killing the two lions, he also began his evangelism in Egypt with the miracle of healing Anianus' wounded finger. As he was walking in the streets of Alexandria and saw what kind of city it was, he must have prayed to God to facilitate his job of bringing faith to this atheist city. He had full faith in God who ordered him to carry His message to this nation whom He had blessed when He visited with the Holy Family when He was young. He knew that He will help him with any thing that he needs including miracles in convincing the Egyptians that the savior is here.

The details of this miracle were mentioned before on page . We cannot exaggerate the impact of that miracle on converting Annianus and his family to Christianity, or its importance to their neighbors and friends who also converted to the new religion. One of the benefits of this miracle is not only to show God's power, but also His compassion. It shows that He is a good God, who sees the suffering of his people and uses His power to stop their suffering.

### **+His Many Miracles in the Five Cities**

Most of the historians acknowledged that St. Mark performed many Miracles while evangelizing the Five Western Cities where he was born. They did not mention any details, just as the writers of the four

Bibles who often mentioned that Jesus, after receiving a multitude of people, healed all who were in need of healing, without naming any specifics.

This meant that in both cases the miracles were so many that the writer felt that his summary statement indicates that many miracles were performed. In St. Mark's case the following acts were mentioned: Healing many diseases, including leprosy, and casting out evil spirits.

They also said that many of those who received these miracles were fast in accepting the faith, and to show it by destroying their idols on the spot.

### **+ The Heavenly Visions in Prison**

As we read the history of our church, we find that after the first day or days of any martyr's suffering, the Lord usually either sends one of His angels or one of His saints to appear to him/her. They most of the time heal the martyr from whatever he suffered. They also support them and show God's pleasure and appreciation with what is happening, and almost always tell whoever is suffering that his glory is near, and that his suffering is about to end.

So, after the first day of St. Mark's martyrdom was over and St. Mark suffered a lot of damage and was near death, an angel appeared to him and gave him a message from the Lord. St. Mark was comforted and

felt grateful to Him for sending him such an encouraging message. After the angel disappeared Jesus himself appeared and added words of love and appreciation. At that St. Mark was ready and anxious for what happened on the next day.

The record did not say whether during these visions St. Mark was healed from his wounds or not. We do not know. But we know that he was definitely healed morally and spiritually. And that he died happy and content that the Lord considered him worthy to die for Him. And he received death with open arms.

### **+ The Storm that Stopped Burning his Body**

As we mentioned before the pagan Egyptians wanted to destroy his body after he died, and in the absence of any power to stop them, they were sure that they will certainly do it. During that time the Christians were hiding just as the disciples were hiding after Jesus' death.

They never expected what happened. God wanted his remains to stay, knowing what effect it will have over many generations to come. So, he ordered a storm to rise and stop what the mob wanted to do. The record shows that not only that the burning did not happen, but that some of the perpetrators were physically punished, and a few of them died.

**+The Angel who told St. Mark that  
Venice will be built at the location he was at.**

The Venetians are the ones who repeat this miracle. They say that while St. Mark was evangelizing in an area on the shores of the Adriatic that a storm pushed his boat to the place where Venice is now. Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him and those with him. He told them that a big city will be built in this place and that St. Mark's name will be associated with it.

After about 400 years a group of Italians built the city of Venice in that spot, and considered St. Mark their patron saint. Then they built a huge cathedral in his name and erected a huge statue of a winged lion in St. Mark Square in front of the cathedral.

**+Saving the City of Venice**

This is another miracle that the Venetians often repeat with a great deal of pride. They say that sometime after Venice was built, its inhabitants strayed from the Christian behavior and became evil people. During that period one of the sailors was asked by three men to take them to a town called Lido. One of them was nicely dressed and looked like someone with authority. The other two were dressed as soldiers.

As they were sailing on their way to that place, suddenly a violent storm descended on them. And evil

and satanic ghosts appeared threatening the boat. Then the sailor, who was scared to death, saw the leader of the three look up and pray to Almighty God passionately. Next to him he saw the two soldiers raise their weapons as if they were defending the boat against some enemy.

Shortly after that, the storm stopped and the ghosts disappeared and calm prevailed. The boat continued until it reached its destination. As the three passengers were disembarking their leader talked to the sailor, and said:

***“I am Mark Christ’s apostle. Take this ring and give to the governor of the City. He will compensate you for your efforts with us tonight. I came to night with these two martyrs George and Tawadrous, to save the City from the satanic influences that surrounded it. The Venetians have followed them with no shame or regrets. But I am sure they will repent and come back to God.”***

These are some of the miracles that St. Mark performed during his life and after his death. He may have done more than the ones mentioned here, and he may have not. The important lesson that you, dear reader should learn from reading these miracles or any other miracles performed by any other saint, is the following.

God is capable of anything, even giving us His body and His blood to consume during the Eucharist for the forgiveness of our sins, even when some deny that. He is a wonderful God who listens to His children and gives them what is good for them, even if He has to suspend the laws of nature to do that. He is willing to do anything to serve those who have voluntarily surrendered their lives to Him. He promised that every one who asks will be given, and who knocks, it will be opened for him. He only asks us to be faithful to Him and to do our best to remain faithful. He knows our weaknesses and stands ready to carry us the rest of the way, because He loves us so much.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### ST. MARK'S GOSPEL

One of the most important contributions of St. Mark toward the spread of Christianity is the Bible that came to us associated with his name. With it also came few claims, claimed by some, about certain facts connected to it. One of them is that it was written by St. Mark, but it was not his. It was St. Peter's who dictated it to him. Other claims were mentioned about where and when it was written.

Some also claimed that it was written after St. Matthew's Bible, and that the similarities between them are a proof that St. Mark may have copied those parts from St. Matthew's Bible. But some others said that those similarities were the result that both were dictated by the Holy Spirit. And that this is a proof of the authenticity of both.

These claims were promoted by some for the purpose of shedding doubt on the prestige of the Coptic Church and its faith. But other opinions from famous historians including Eusibias, Clement, Tertullian, and Oregon, testified that St. Mark's Bible was written by him and it was the first to be written. And that both St. Matthew and St. Luke were guided by it when they wrote theirs.

One of the most famous Christian writers; William Barkley called St. Mark's Bible "The most important book in the world".

### **+ Whose Bible is it? St. Mark's or St. Peter's?**

Those who claim that it is St. Peter's, build their claim on few assumptions. The first is that the Church of Rome was founded by St. Peter. And that St. Mark spent a lot of time with him there. They add that because St. Peter did not write a Bible, he was happy to dictate one to St. Mark. Others say that after his martyrdom, the Romans asked St. Mark to write what he heard from their Saint, since he did not write a Bible.

They base their claim also on another so called fact, which a historian named Papias wrote that St. Mark never saw or knew Jesus. We refuted that claim before.

In reflecting on these claims, one has to go to the established facts that had a bearing on those claims. Based on that, one can build a conclusion whether those claims can stand or not. His Holiness Pope Shenouda III went that road in his book "Mark the Apostle". He commented on the claim that the Church of Rome was founded by St. Peter, by pointing out that it was St. Paul who founded that church, as it becomes obvious to any body who reads the Acts of the Apostles and his epistle to the Romans.

He also said that St. Peter came to Rome toward the end of his life, only to check on Simon the magician. Simon was a Jew and St. Peter did this in his capacity as the Apostle of the Jews, while St. Paul was the Apostle of the Gentiles. He also pointed out that there is a conflict between those who say that St. Peter dictated the bible to St. Mark, and those who say that the Romans asked St. Mark to write down all the things that St. Peter said before he died. Whom are we supposed to believe?

### **+When and where was it written?**

As to when it was written some historians claim that it was written as early as 45 A.D., while others say that it was written as late as the year 67 A.D. or later. Knowing that St. Matthew's Bible was written in the year 60 A.D., and St. Luke's in the year 70 A.D. And since we know that St. Mark's was written before that, it is reasonable to conclude that it was written either in the forties or the fifties. As for the forties, we can say that this is too early. It is reasonable then to settle for sometime during the fifties, may be late fifties.

Where was The Bible written? Here also the historians do not agree. Some who claim that St. Mark stayed in Rome from the year 42 A.D. to the year 67 A.D. say it was written in Rome. Others say that it was begun in Rome and finished in Egypt. But St. John, the golden mouth said that it was all written in Egypt.

## **+The Uniqueness of St. Mark's Bible**

We have already mentioned one aspect of its uniqueness, the fact that it was the first Bible to be written. Another is the fact that it was written in Greek, one of the languages that St. Mark mastered. It was translated to the ancient Egyptian language after it was finished. Later it was translated to Aramaic.

### **For whom was it written?**

Every one of the four Bibles was written for a different audience. St. Matthew's Bible was written for the Jews, who rejected Jesus. This Bible was supposed to have proven to them based on the hundreds of prophecies about Him in the Old Testament, that He was the one. It quoted the Old Testament very often and pointed out how a given situation in the life of our Lord coincided with certain prophecies.

St. Luke's Bible was addressed to a man called Theophilus who lived in Egypt informing him of what was happening in Judea at that time, and probably trying to get him to believe in the Lord and become a Christian.

St. John's was written to all Christians and non Christians to stress the deity of Christ, and some of His qualities especially His love for the human race.

## **It was written for the Romans**

St. Mark's was written for the Romans who crucified Him and began a brutal persecution of His followers. In this he joins St. Paul in serving the Gentiles. The Romans which he addressed belonged to two groups. We already mentioned one; those who did not believe in Him, and who brutally treated those who did. The other group was those who became Christians, and had to suffer for their belief. This becomes obvious when one reads it chapter after chapter and finds himself, discovering certain trends that repeat themselves throughout the book.

For the first group St. Mark presented to them Jesus as the All mighty King of the Universe. For the second group He was presented as the one who loved them so much and suffered a lot to save them. They were supposed to appreciate what He suffered just to offer them salvation, and from that learn that they should accept whatever suffering they have endured on His behalf.

## **The birth of Jesus was not mentioned**

+The first is that St. Mark ignored the story of Jesus' birth, His childhood, and life before He began His ministry. Why did he do that? It may seem strange since His birth was miraculous, and it would have made the

report on His life more interesting and complete. But somehow St. Mark thought that this will not add to the picture of Jesus that he wanted to communicate to the Romans.

### **The Old Testament was mentioned little**

+ Another thing is that he did not refer to the Old Testament as the writers of the other Bibles. He did not quote many of the prophecies that it included about Jesus. He ignored these too. He did that probably knowing that the arrogant Romans would not be interested or impressed by Jesus when he is presented to them as a Jewish prophet, who's coming was prophesied in their old book.

### **The Aramaic words were translated**

+ St. Mark knew that the Romans do not know Aramaic. So he was careful to translate the few Aramaic words that he used to give the reader a taste of reality to what happened. The following are these words. The word "Bo-anerges" (Mk 3:17) was translated to "the sons of thunder". The words "Taletha cumi" (Mk 5:41) was translated to "Little girl I say to you rise". The word "Corban" (Mk 7:11) was translated to "Given to God", and the word "Eph pha tha" (Mk 7:34) was translated to "Be opened". The word "Hell" (Mk 9:43) was translated to "unquenchable fire", the word "

Eloi Eloi Lama sabach-thani” (Mk 15: 34) was translated to” My God my god why have you forsaken me?”, and the word “Golgotha” (Mk15: 22) was translated to” the place of the skull”

## **The Jewish customs were explained**

St. Mark did not want to include anything in his Bible that the Romans or any other Gentile nations would not understand. This is why he translated the few Aramaic words that he used into Greek. This also made him explain to the readers any Jewish customs that they are not familiar with.

So, when he was talking about how the Scribes and the Pharisees criticized the disciples when they noticed that they ate with defiled hands, he explained this by telling them that this meant without washing their hands. Then he added the following to further explain what happened:

***“For the Pharisees and all the Jews, do not eat unless they wash their hands, observing the tradition of the elders; and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they purify themselves, and there are many other traditions which they observe, the washing of cups and pots and vessels of bronze” (Mk 7: 3).***

And when he talked about the feast of the unleavened bread, he explained that this is when they sacrificed the Passover lamb. Also when he talked about the Sadducees, he explained that they are the sect that denies that there is life after death. And when he wrote about the meeting between the woman who had the daughter who had an evil spirit and Jesus, he did not call her as the Jews call her; a Canaanite woman. But he called her a Greek woman as the Romans call such a woman.

### **St. Mark introduces Jesus as the King of Kings who has absolute authority and power**

Knowing that the Romans are doers, who respect achievements, and power, St. Mark was careful to present Jesus to them in this image. This was easy for him, because Jesus was. So, he began his Bible with the impressive phrase

***“The beginning of The Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God”***

Then he followed this by the statement that emphasized the fact that He was the King of Kings, who should have a messenger sent before him to prepare the people for his coming. He did this by quoting the prophet Isaiah when he said:

*“Behold I send my messenger before thy face , who shall prepare thy way, the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight”(Isa 40:3)*

Then he talked about the role that John the Baptist played, and he intentionally mentioned his phrase when he told the people about Jesus. He said:

*“After me comes he who is mightier than I, the thong of whose I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” (Mk 1:7,8)*

## **The evidence of His power**

St. Mark showed his power by His authority over demons and unclean spirits, storms, and other natural forces, diseases, death, and also in knowing the future.

### **Authority over Demons and unclean spirits**

His authority over demons was demonstrated in several miracles in which He ordered unclean spirits to leave those whom they dwelt in. In all of them the spirits acknowledged whom He was and begged Him not to torture them. He silenced them refusing to accept praise from them, and all obeyed Him. Once He demonstrated that His authority is not bound by a place or a distance.

A Greek woman asked Him one day to cast the demon from her little daughter who was at home, and He refused in the beginning. But when she persisted He granted her wish. Her daughter was healed immediately.

### **Authority over All diseases**

St. Mark included in his Bible several miracles in which Jesus showed His authority over many diseases. Among these are opening the eyes of the blind, cleansing the leper, healing the paralytic, the man with the withered hand, and the woman with the issue of blood. These were the individual cases. But he also mentioned that in some cases the multitude brought to Him tens may be hundreds of people with all kinds of diseases and He healed them all. In every case the healing was swift and all who received it demonstrated their healed condition by doing something to indicate it.

### **Authority over nature**

St. Mark was careful not to neglect the miracles in which Jesus demonstrated His authority over the storms, the waves of the sea, and the strong wind. He mentioned that He was with the disciples when they sailed across the Sea of Galilee. Suddenly a storm came upon the boat. He describes it this way:

*“And a great storm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so the boat was already filling. But He was in the*

*stern asleep on the cushion, and they woke Him and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care if we perish? And He awoke and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “peace be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.” (Mk 4:37-39).*

St. Mark finished describing this episode by mentioning the disciples’ reaction to what they witnessed by quoting them when they said:

*“Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey Him?”(Mk4:41).*

On another occasion after He fed the five thousand using the five loaves and the two fish, He told the disciples to get in the boat and sail to Beth-Saida without Him. He went up a hill to pray. As the night fell a strong storm threatened the boat. This time He was not with them. So, they had to depend on themselves. All night long they tried hard to stay afloat. But it was a daunting task. As the dawn approached they were about to give up when they saw something that resembled a ghost walking toward them. They did not identify Him at the beginning, but as He became near, He tried to pass them by. But they recognized Him and cried after Him. Then He stopped and said to them:

*“Take heart, it is I; do not fear” (Mk6:50)*

He also mentioned that when He was crucified and as He gave the spirit and died, the sun was darkened for three hours and the curtain of the Temple was torn from top to bottom.

The third episode that St. Mark recorded which demonstrated His authority over nature was when he wrote about the one time in which Jesus went to a fig tree looking for some figs to eat, and finding none, He cursed it saying:

***“May no one ever eat fruit from you again” (Mk 11:14).***

Next morning the disciples passed by the tree and found it withered to its roots.

### **His authority over death**

Jesus raised three people from death during His brief stay on earth; the daughter of Jairus, the widow’s son, and Lazarus. Out of the three St. Mark wrote only about the first one. Why? Nobody knows. Certainly it was not the most dramatic, for she was only dead for an hour or a little more, while Lazarus was dead for four days. He may have felt that one of the three episodes is enough to show His authority over death, beside what He wrote about His suffering and resurrection from death which were fully treated with many details.

## **His authority over several things**

St. Mark was careful to mention that His authority was not only obvious in those areas, but was also evident in other behaviors that showed His capacity to do anything He wanted to do. So, He knew what people were thinking and responded to them. He predicted what was going to happen in the future, and even talked to His disciples several times about His own crucifixion and resurrection. He saw the future and told the disciples about it.

## **His authority over the people**

This was evident in people's reaction to Him and to His teaching. So, St. Mark writes in the first chapter that He was always surrounded by many people everywhere He went. People were fascinated by Him and His personality. And they mentioned that His teaching was different from that of the Pharisees for He taught with authority while the Pharisees did not.

St. Mark emphasized the fact that He was the master teacher whom the multitude adored. He was always called "Teacher or Rabbi" by the people on whom He had a tremendous effect.

As a result he wrote that:

*“At once His fame spread everywhere throughout the surrounding region of Galilee” (Mk 1:28)*

In the same chapter he writes that as He came to Capernaum where His home was, and the people knew that He was there

*“The whole city was gathered together about the door” (Mk 1:32).*

### **+ Jesus’ courage**

Another aspect of His power that St. Mark knew would appeal to the Romans was His courage. This was evident in His criticism of the religious leaders something which He did not hide but announced publicly and in the hearing of all including them. It was also obvious in few other decisions that He made. One of them is His journey to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday knowing full well what waits for Him there. He talked with His disciples several times about this. Also when the time came for his arrest, He went to the garden of Gethsemane to meet His betrayer and the mob which he brought with him.

### **+Jesus’ humility**

It was a known fact that most Roman did not believe that humility is a virtue, but considered it a weakness. But because St. Mark included in his Gospel some facts

that reflected Jesus' powers, he may have felt that with all the convincing evidence that he included which proved His might and authority, they may change their mind and see His humility as a virtue, and not a weakness.

The most important concept, around which Christianity is woven and built, is the idea that God who created the awesome universe that we see and hear about, left His exalted position in heaven and became man. Not only that but He came to die to save His beloved creation from the death that it deserved. He paid the price of our sins and offered us salvation free of charge. This is the utmost in humility. It was imperative that those who decide to accept the call of the new religion have to believe in humility.

This may also help them to accept His teachings about humility and its importance in the behavior of believers. The combined image of our God which St. Mark attempted to create in his Gospel is that our God is humble, compassionate, loving, and forgiving. But at the same time He is not a pushover. He is a consuming fire, and a jealous God. We have seen a glimpse of that in the Book of Revelation. St. John who saw the vision talks about what happened to him when he saw Jesus in His glory. This man whom Jesus loved more than all His disciples and whose head at the Last Supper was resting on Jesus' breast, dropped as if dead when he saw

Him in heaven. And Jesus consoled him, and raised him up.

So, St. Mark included several episodes that showed the Lord's humility. First was the fact that He called himself "The Son of Man". St. Mark began his Bible by introducing Him as the "The Son of God". But, because of His extreme humility He loved to call Himself "the Son of Man". He also refused any recognition by anybody whom He had healed or cast from him an evil spirit. He always told them not to share this with anybody. And when the evil spirits recognized him and called Him by names that revealed His identity as "The Son of the Most High", He rebuked them and prevented them from repeating it.

The second proof of our Lord's humility came when he wrote about the argument that happened among the disciples on their way to Capernaum where His home was. He knew that they were arguing about something, and He also knew what they were discussing. But as His habit always, He asked them about it. When they told Him that they were arguing about who among them was the greatest, He taught them a lesson.

He said to them:

***"If any one would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all". (Mk 9:35).***

Another time He warned them against pride, and drew their attention to some indications of that behavior among the religious leaders when He said:

***“Beware of the scribes, who like to go about in long robes, and to have salutations in the market places, and the best seats in the synagogues and the best places at the feasts, who devour widows’ houses and for a pretence make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.” (Mk 12: 38).***

Jesus also talked to His disciples about forgetting about their egos, if they want to stay with Him. He said:

***“If any man would come after me let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” (Mk 8: 34).***

A footnote that St. Mark was careful to use over and over again to reiterate the power and authority in everything which Jesus did, was the use of the words “At once” and “immediately” in reporting about what happened. There was no waiting period, no reluctance, or delays of any kind. When He ordered something to be done, it was immediately done. St. Mark put this in as another indication of His absolute power.

**+St. Mark introduces Jesus as the Savior of the whole world**

As we examine St. Mark's Bible we find that it devoted the last six chapters for His sufferings, and the episodes related to it. But even as one reads the other chapters you can feel that the shadow of the cross was there from the very beginning.

The fact that He was accepted by the people but rejected by those in positions of authority did not guarantee His safety. Then the fact that He did not shy away from one confrontation with them after the other, did not exactly increase His stature in their eyes. He went out of his way to expose what they did and cautioned the people from emulating them. This proved that He was not afraid of them, even though He knew that they conspired to kill Him from His first confrontation with them.

He declared to His disciples several times that He came to die and that He has to suffer at the hands of the leaders of the people. But they refused to believe Him. Peter rebuked Him once for telling them about it, and the rest of them did not understand it, and abandoned Him when it happened.

St. Mark also pointed out that He did not come to save His people only, but came to save all the people. He emphasized this when he wrote about Jesus visiting the region of Tyre and Sidon, where a Greek woman begged Him to cast the demon out of her daughter. He refused to grant her what she asked for. But she was

persistent, and when Jesus told her in an attempt to test her faith:

***“It is not good to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs. She answered him,” Yes Lord yet even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs” (Mk7:27, 28).***

She obviously passed the test with flying colors, and Jesus rewarded her by granting her wish, and telling her that her daughter was healed.

On another occasion He made it clear that the Temple that Herod the Great built was not meant only for the Jews, but for all the nations. This may have sounded strange to those who were in the Temple when He said it. But what He declared that day was a new bit of information that became true with the coming of the Messiah. He said this after He turned the tables of the money changers and drove out all who sold and bought out of the Temple. He said:

***“Is it not written, My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations? But you have made it a den of robbers” (Mk11:17).***

Other encouraging news for the Romans and the rest of the Gentile nations came in St. Mark’s account of What the Lord said among the signs that will precede the end of the World. He said that:

***“The Gospel must first be preached to all nations”  
(Mk13:11)***

He also reported the last words that Jesus entrusted to His disciples including St. Mark before He ascended to Heaven when He said:

***“Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation” (Mk 16: 15).***

### **The contents of St. Mark’s Gospel**

When people carefully examine it, they differ in what they see in it. Some see that it is a record of the Lord’s suffering to the extent that they call it the “Bible of the suffering Jesus”. They point out that the last six chapters were devoted to his suffering, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. Beside this there was enough space given in chapters 8, 9, and 10, for what He said about what He expected to suffer. Throughout the Bible there were indications of that. So, in the parable about the vineyard the end was that the workers plotted and killed the owner’s son. Another time He called himself “The corner Stone” which the builders have rejected. And very early in the Bible Jesus was met with hostility from the leaders and sometime from ordinary people that pointed to the feeling that He was going to be killed. In chapters two (Mk 2: 20), three

(Mk 3: 6) and six (Mk 6: 4, 14), St. Mark talked about that.

Some others found it transferring to its readers a message of joy through faith. They say that it is true that it has an extensive treatment of His sufferings, but isn't this why He came. They say that He was not pushed to do it; He did it voluntarily because of His great love for the human race. Nothing is worth our joy more than this. This is why St. Mark called what he wrote "The Gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God", which means the good news coming from Jesus Christ.

### **Classifying the content**

Every part of the Holy Bible has been carefully examined by literally hundreds of historians, saints, philosophers, and a host of other interested people. Some of these have undertaken such a task for the purpose of supporting and promoting the word of God, while others did it to discredit it and persuade people not to follow it.

St. Mark's Bible being the first and the oldest record to be written about the life of Jesus, was subjected to more study and analysis than many of the others. We have already talked about some of the negative claims about it and refuted them. We also have talked about the impressions that different people get out of it as they read it. The question now is: What are the main ideas,

understandings and concepts, beside the ones that we have already discussed, did St. Mark want to communicate to his readers when he wrote his Bible?

**The following are the main themes  
By chapters:**

1. Establishing Jesus' credentials. (Ch. 1)
2. Outlining His message. (Ch. 1)
3. Introducing His Kingdom. (Ch. 1, 2)
4. Defining His relations. (Ch. 3)
5. Developing His Teaching. (Ch. 4)
6. Exercising His authority. (Ch. 4, 5)
7. Acknowledging His limitations. (Ch. 6)
8. Showing His compassion. (Ch. 6)
9. Meeting His opposition. (Ch. 7)
10. Dealing with signs. (Ch. 8)
11. Revealing His nature. (Ch. 8)
12. Teaching His disciples. (Ch. 9)
13. Addressing His society. (Ch. 10)
14. Personalizing His purpose. (Ch. 10)
15. Claiming His leadership. (Ch. 11)
16. Finalizing his authority. (Ch. 11, 12)
17. Challenging His enemies. (Ch. 12)
18. Preparing for the future. (Ch. 13)
19. His sacraments. (Ch. 14, 15)
20. Celebrating His triumph. (Ch. 16)

**Commenting on some of the above themes:**

## **+Jesus the King of Kings**

From the opening statement of calling Him “The Son of God” St. Mark was careful to present Jesus as the true king who is above all the gods and deities of the Gentiles including the Roman gods. He did not quote Him a lot, but described in beautiful details what He did during His short stay on earth. He was majestic in every thing that He did.

He talked to the people about His kingdom which was not of this world, but was much more superior. He used many parables to make His listeners understand it, and asked them to join and become citizens of that kingdom. He gave them an example to be contrasted with the example that King Herod provided them with. He was loving, forgiving, and especially generous in what He gave in His service to the people.

## **Jesus the Teacher**

Jesus was the teacher who wanted to teach His people not by telling them a series of rules, regulations, and commandments, as the Scribes and Pharisees did, but by treating them the way He wanted them to treat each other. He was asking them to accept and believe in Him because of what He did. He wanted them first to believe that He was the Son of God. Then He wanted them to know that He came to die for them and asked them to

accept His suffering, and to share with Him in accepting them because they are the only way to salvation.

## **Revealing His nature**

St. Mark wrote about the many miracles that Jesus performed, for which He was pursued by the people all the time. He was careful to state that He did this because of His compassion and love for the people. He also mentioned several times that He ordered those who received a miracle not to talk about it. One day after a day full of miracles He asked His disciples,

*“Who do men say that I am? They answered saying some say; John the Baptist, some Elijah, and some one of the prophets.*

Then He asked them and what do you say? Peter said “You are the Son of the Living God”. Then He ordered them not to repeat that to anyone. He did not want to reveal His identity to the people. Why? There are few possible explanations. One of them is His humility. Another is probably His desire to hide His identity from Satan. Satan was there when God said to the serpent,

*“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Gen3:15)*

He understood what God meant by that verdict. He knew that one day God will send someone who will have a woman as a mother, but will have no human father. This person will conquer him, save the human race from his grip, and cast him in hell. So, he began to watch all humans in an attempt to recognize that who is supposed to bruise his head. Before Jesus nobody fit that description. But when Jesus was born Satan seeing that He had no human father, he suspected that he may be the one.

This is why Satan tried to find out when Jesus fasted and became weak and hungry. He approached Him and tempted Him about His identity, asking Him if He was the Son of God to do something to test that. Jesus beautifully answered his suggestions without revealing His identity. And Satan was definitely disappointed, and he temporarily left him.

After this confrontation, Satan probably remained in doubt. But Jesus being aware of this, kept him guessing by a number of utterances designed just to do that. For instance, when He was asked by one of the lawyers

***” Good teacher, what shall I do to obtain eternal life?”  
Jesus answered him,” Why do you call me good?  
Nobody is good except God.”***

Any body who hears this can conclude from it that Jesus is confessing that He is not God. While Jesus probably

said this to tell the man who said it, that what he is saying did not make any sense. Since you know that nobody is good but God. So, why are you calling me good while you don't believe that I am God?

On another occasion He said” *My Father is greater than Me*”.

Any person who hears that can interpret it as another confession in which Jesus admits that He is not God.

A final thought: If everyone living in Judea at that time somehow truly believed beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus was God in the flesh, would have they crucified Him? I don't think so. So, hiding His identity from as many people as possible, especially Satan helped Him to accomplish the only purpose for which He was born, to die and save His beloved man from eternal death.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **ST. Mark's other accomplishments**

In the previous seven chapters we talked about St. Mark's efforts in obeying the last words of his friend and master Jesus Christ to evangelize the whole world, and how he decided to serve Him for the rest of his life. We detailed his work in several areas including Egypt, and how he wrote the first Gospel and kept working to spread Christianity until he was killed in the streets of Alexandria.

Beside his evangelism, he contributed significantly to the future of the new religion in Egypt. As a result of those efforts the young church which he founded during the first century, became a giant church that assumed a strong leadership role during the first 450 years that followed the ascension of Christ. Among his many contributions that may have suffered from neglect or simply were forgotten, there are two important accomplishments that reached us and which nobody can deny or claim that they were not his. These are The Theological School of Alexandria which he founded, and the first Devine Liturgy which he wrote.

### **The Theological School of Alexandria**

As Christianity began to spread in Egypt by the power of the Holy Spirit, and helped by the strength of the Gospel that he wrote, and his inspired preaching, St. Mark felt that there is a need for a place which will educate those who convert in the essentials of the new religion. He also felt that those who became Christians had many questions that needed to be authoritatively clarified and answered. There was also a need for educating the future leaders of the church in the principles of the new religion.

Another strong reason that hastened the decision to start the school was the strong objections, and the verbal attacks launched against Christianity by the learned scholars, philosophers, and teachers of the famous and pagan School of Alexandria. Christianity was seen as the new religion that preached new and odd ideas that sounded absurd, and even heretical to those sophisticated leaders.

One of those ideas that made no sense to them was the idea of the resurrection of the dead. The old religion had embraced this idea way before Christianity preached it. It was implemented by developing and creating several discoveries and innovations which they perceived as important in getting themselves ready for that eventuality. They found it necessary to embalm the body after death in order to guarantee that when the call is made to get up and begin another life after death, the body will be there to comply. But Christianity said that

the body will be resurrected no matter what happened to it after death. This meant that even if the body had been destroyed somehow, the residues of that body will still come together and be resurrected. This was impossible for them to believe.

Other Christian beliefs such as ascetism, the disdain for the world, the lack of concern about the worldly pursuits, forgiveness, and the love of all even the enemies, did not sit well with these people who lived in a materialistic world and enjoyed it. They attacked the new religion using their prestige and knowledge in an attempt to stop it.

St. Mark felt that the young church, in order to survive those attacks, needs an institution that will be able to defend those basic beliefs on a scholarly level.

### **A brief history of the school**

When the school was opened by St. Mark it began small. But he knew the difficult job that it will be facing. He realized that his school will try to refute some of the claims that the pagan school is making about Christianity. He also knew the strength of that school and its famous professors.

He felt that the new school will have to go head to head with it, debating the basics of the Christian beliefs. This is why he designated a noted scholar named Justus as its

first dean. Dean Justus remained as dean during the reign of the first five popes, after which he himself became the sixth Pope of the See of St. Mark in the year 118 A.D. He appointed another distinguished scholar; Eumanios as dean in his place. And when Pope Justus died in the year 129 A.D. Eumanios became the seventh Pope, and appointed Markianos as dean, and he too became the eighth Pope in the year 142 A.D.

This succession clearly shows the high caliber of the leadership of that school from the outset. Needless to say that those distinguished leaders were careful to appoint high quality faculty members who gave the new school a fantastic reputation from the very beginning.

The school continued to attract famous Scholars to its faculty and administrators. Among these were Pantaenus, Clement, and Oregon, Theognitus, Petros, Serapion, and Didymus (the Blind Seer). Every one of these noted scholars distinguished himself in the service of the school. No wonder it became one of the bright spots for Christian knowledge in the world, and thus outshined the famous pagan school.

As an indication of the high quality of its curriculum, and the kind of student it attracted, one has to look at some of its graduates to realize that. Among these were Pope Yulianus the eleventh pope, Pope Archelaus the seventeenth pope, Pope Athanasius the twentieth pope, and Pope Timothy the twenty second pope.

One of the outstanding proofs of the high quality of the school and its success comes from what one of the most famous philosophers of his time whose name was Athanagoras did. He occupied one of the highly coveted professorial chairs of the pagan school. He was like St. Paul before him a serious foe of Christianity, who vowed to destroy it. To do this he decided to read all that it produces in essays, sermons and other publications. As a result he himself became convinced and converted to Christianity. After this he became one of the strongest advocates of the new religion.

One of the unique characteristics of the school is that it had no building, which was supposed to house all those distinguished teachers and students. But those who administered the school felt that to concentrate all their efforts on recruiting the best faculty and students, and keeping them adequately rewarded is their prime concern. The place where the school functioned remained a rented place which sometimes changed from year to year.

The curriculum of the school in the beginning, as expected was a religious one whose components were totally taken from the Old and the New Testaments, the history of the church, the basic beliefs, and practices of Christianity. This was not taught in the traditional way, as lectures pontificated by the famous professors. It was taught by persuasion and by example. So, the lectures

were followed by open discussion in which students participated and expressed their belief or the lack of it. Not only that but the students and the professors lived together a Christian life in an attempt to implement what they learned and become true and faithful citizens in the Lord's kingdom. They prayed, fasted, partook of the Holy Communion together. They also had a communal living in which every one shared with the rest whatever he owned, emulating the model of the early Christian community.

After sometime the leaders of the school realized that their students lacked knowledge in the non religious disciplines such as science, mathematics, logic, and philosophy. This lack of knowledge made them vulnerable in debating the students of the pagan school who were well versed in those disciplines. So, these subjects were added to the curriculum later. This was welcomed by the students and had the effect of making the school one of the strongest bastion for Christianity in the world.

As the Theological School continued its success in attracting pagans and converting them to Christianity, the leaders of the pagans doubled their efforts to stop that movement, but to no avail. The success of the school was not confined to Egypt, but spread through the work of its graduates to many areas such as India, Arabia, Yemen, Ethiopia, Syria, Palestine, and even Rome.

The light of the Theological School shone far to the East and the West, while the light of the pagan school gradually faded and finally it was closed in the year 529 A.D.

There were other theological schools in other locations such as Ephesus, Rome, Smyrna, Caesarea, Edessa, Nyssus, and Seleucia. But that of Alexandria outshone them all to the extent that Emperor Theodosius issued a decree proclaiming that whoever ran away from it would be considered a pagan and an atheist.

The school continued to spread its message and exercise its spiritual authority for few centuries. Unfortunately this success did not continue beyond the fifth century. Its decline began after the Council of Chalcedon which was held in the year 450 A.D., and during which the Coptic Church was unfairly punished and her pope St. Dioscorus was banished.

Another pope was sent by Emperor Marciano to replace St. Dioscorus . The Copts refused to recognize him. These actions and what followed of almost open war between the church and the Emperor, affected the school. Many members of its faculty left, and the number of its students declined steadily. After a period of struggle to survive, which lasted for an unknown period, the school was finally closed.

This period did not last long. After Emperor Marciano died, the new Emperor was friendly toward the Coptic Church and the relationships between them improved. As a result the Church resumed having its own Pope, and a movement of reform gradually began. The reform began in several areas such as the monasteries, the schools for children, and the caliber of priests.

This modest reform movement ended when a new chapter in the history of the church began when the Muslim Arabs invaded Egypt and occupied it and Omar Ibn El Aas the Muslim Caliph became her ruler. He offered the Copts three choices; to convert to Islam, or pay a hefty ransom to remain Copts, or submit to the sword. Egypt struggled against the new rules and regulations which were put in place by Muslim rulers. But the inevitable happened and the country which exercised international success and authority during the first four and a half centuries of Christianity became a Muslim country, in which the mighty Copts became second class citizens in their own country.

The church never gave up. It endured severe persecution at the hands of the increasing Muslim population, but continued to persevere helped by God's Holy Spirit, and gradually another reform movement started. It was slow because the Muslim

Leaders vetoed any attempt that they saw as threatening to their absolute dominance over the Copts.

Slowly things began to get worse, as the people and the clergy almost gave up in face of the stubborn persecution waged against the church. Churches were neglected; priests with little knowledge and poor or no preparation were ordained. Monasteries were filled by those who couldn't make it in the outside world.

Finally in the year 1816 A.D. a new pope was ordained by the name Kyrillos IV. He was one of the best popes to sit on St. Mark's throne. He began a series of changes that touched almost every phase of the religious practices of the church, to the extent that he was called "The Father of reform". He fixed the churches, monasteries, and other buildings that were ignored and had deteriorated. He opened new schools, and bought a printing press, and looked personally into the different problems facing the Copts, and used his prestige to help those who needed help.

This reform resulted in improving conditions in the church, and the Copts felt that God has finally listened to their prayers and sent them some one whose piety and personality initiated and sustained those wonderful changes that he was inspired to undertake.

One of the reforms that he was anxious to begin was the resurrection of the famous Theological School. He intended to open it, and had many talks with his key people about it, but he died before anything was done.

His successor Pope Kyrillos V Proceeded with the idea and appointed one of the known scholars as its dean.

The second dean was Mr. Habib Guirgis a devout layman who refused to get married because of his devotion to the church. He served it with distinction, and when he was appointed dean of the new Theological College, he worked hard to make sure that one day it will shine as brightly as the old school.

When the school began it had two levels. One for those who finished high school. These spent four years, and after they graduated, they became priests in one of the big cities. The other was for the less qualified students and after they spent five years, they graduated and were allowed to become priests in any village.

After several years two other levels were added; one for college graduates who after spending three years they graduated with a B.A. in Theological and Ecclesiastical Sciences. The other admitted graduates of junior colleges and who were awarded a diploma of the Theological College when they finished their studies.

Mr. Habib Guirgis noticed that our children were not getting the attention that they deserve in the area of religious education that they need to grow into good Christians. He also found that our priests were overloaded by many duties and could not give out of their limited time the proper attention to children. So, he

began a movement to enlist college students to teach the children in what was called “Sunday schools”. This was a blessed innovation which paid a lot of dividend for our families and their children. College students welcomed the idea and soon all our churches participated in the movement. Few laymen distinguished themselves in serving the children and became known for their excellent work. One of these was Mr. Nazeer Gayed, who was a student in the Theological School under Mr. Habib Guirgis, and was noticed and encouraged by him, and who became a monk, and then the Bishop of Education, during the time in which Pope kyrillos VI, was our Patriarch. After Pope kyrillos died, Bishop Shenouda became the one hundred and seventeenth pope of the See of St. Mark.

## **THE LITURGY OF ST. MARK**

### **It’s Origin:**

Modern scholars and historians who wanted to explore this aspect of St. Mark’s work did not find enough records or details of this important and exceptional contribution which he made. But most, more or less, agreed that most liturgies whether they are used in Orthodox churches such as the one in Egypt or the one in Russia, or in Greece, or used in Catholic churches all over the World must have their origin in what Lord Jesus said to His disciples during the forty days that He spent with them before His ascension.

St. Luke wrote in The Acts of the Apostles, which was his second letter to his friend Theophilis, that in his first letter (The Gospel according to St. Luke):

***“I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day He was taken up, after He had given commandments through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. To them He presented Himself alive after His passion by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days, and speaking of the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:2-4)***

As one reads this, the question that immediately presents itself is: What did He talk about with His disciples during those forty days? Forty days without any interruptions or trips or wondering among the people serving them and attending to their needs. Forty days of concentrated lectures and instructions. During those long days He did not talk about salvation, or His identity or His message. All that was talked about before His crucifixion. And His resurrection answered many of those topics. So, what was left? He must have concentrated on how to conduct and organize the worship in the new church. He must have instructed His disciples in how to behave in implementing the seven sacraments of the Church. These were organizational meetings, a workshop during which the master teacher talked about the nuts and bolts of practicing Christianity, and the disciples listened and took notes.

St. Mark must have listened to every word that Jesus uttered during those meetings, which may have taken place in his house. Being the learned person that he was, he must have taken detailed notes of what the Lord commanded. It is safe then to state that he had followed what Jesus said about implementing the sacrament of the Eucharist, and organized his liturgy according to what He had heard from the master about it.

It was said that Jesus has been asked by His disciples before His crucifixion to teach them how to pray. They did that because they probably felt that the prayers that their old religion taught them were inadequate as Jesus continued to explain to them new secrets about the Kingdom of God. So, after His resurrection they might have felt a more urgent need to ask Him to detail to them His commandments about worshipping in the new church. He must have told them, among other components that the prayer that He taught to them before must be included in the liturgy and must occupy an important position. This was done in all the three liturgies that we use in our church.

### **How long did it last?**

Several historians mentioned that St. Mark's liturgy was composed by him shortly before he died and was written first in Greek. They also mention that it was the first liturgy to be written and used in the church, and

that many of the other liturgies which were written afterwards were influenced by it.

They also say that since it was not translated to the Egyptian language, it was transmitted orally from generation to the next. It was therefore learned word for word by the priests, the deacons, and by many laymen in order to preserve it.

This continued until the time of the 20<sup>th</sup> Pope of the Church of Alexandria ; the famous St. Athanasius, who recorded it in the Egyptian language and gave a copy of it to St. Fromentius the first Egyptian head of the Ethiopian Church. This happened in the year 330 A.D. After St. Athanasius it continued to be used in both Egypt and Ethiopia until the beginning of the fifth century. So, this liturgy survived for approximately for four hundred years.

When St. Cyril the first sat on the throne of St. Mark he added few additions to St. Mark's liturgy. And because of his fame and respect in the Christian world, his name was put on St. Mark's liturgy, and thus it became known from that time as the "Liturgy of St. Cyril".

This author looked at all possible references in an attempt to find who was responsible for that change, but found nothing that can lead him to the correct answer to that question. It is the best guess of this author that this was not done by Pope Cyril himself, but by the church

leaders after St. Cyril died as a way of recognizing his contribution and services to the universal Church in general, and to the Coptic Church. This was not what was expected of the church that St. Mark shed his blood during establishing and defending it, but this was what happened.

This seems to be diametrically opposite the Coptic Church's attitude toward her Saint whom she loved and admired and tried hard to defend him against the claims of other churches which meant to rob him of many of his important accomplishments. This was a slip that needs to be corrected by constantly recognizing the fact that the liturgy named as St. Cyril's was composed by St. Mark and stayed recognized by his name for about four centuries before it was changed and called after Pope Cyril in the beginning of the fifth century. It may also be appropriate to call it St. Mark, and St. Cyril liturgy.

The fact that the Copts revere their patron saint is evident in few facts. The first is that his both names; Mark and John are among the most popular names which are used by the Copts till this day. Also the number of churches named after him are numerous. And among the popes who followed him on his throne eight were named by his Roman name Mark, and nineteen by his Jewish name John. The Copt's reverence for their evangelist was attested to by their continuous attempts to recover his remains which were

stolen in the ninth century. Their efforts were finally met with success in the year 1968 when Pope Kyrillos (Cyril) VI appealed to the Catholic Pope to return the body to the Coptic Church. A Church delegate made of several metropolitans and bishops went to Rome to receive the sacred remains and after a religious ceremony in which several Vatican personalities headed by Pope Paul VI participated, the remains were put in a box for the trip to Cairo, Egypt. As the plane touched down, Pope kyrillos VI ascended to the plane and carried on his shoulder the box that contained the precious remains and took it to St. Mark Cathedral where it joined the head. They were buried in a special room located under the main alter of the Cathedral with a great deal of joy, respect and reverence.

So, after eleven centuries of separation the body and the head of the Patron Saint of Egypt were finally joined to remain in the land of Pharaohs which he had the honor to evangelize some twenty centuries ago.

The Copts felt so blessed to receive the remains of their Saint after he blessed other areas of the world by his evangelism, and looked on this return as another sign that the Lord never abandoned or forgotten His flock in Egypt. They became more convinced that what He promised them when He said” Blessed my people Egypt” will continue to protect and watch over them forever regardless of what He may allow in their lives.

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