



Bishop Rafael's Sermon

PART 1

Christ dwells in us with all the power of His resurrection. Are you following the concept? All the power of the resurrection of Christ is now in us. How will he dwell in us? He said: "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me and I in him." He also said, "Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." And He clearly said, "He who feeds on Me will live because of Me." St. Paul said, "It's no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me." How can he say so? When we partake of Him we take Him within us. Are there other ways around communion for us to live by Christ? A skeptic might say, "By faith, reading the Bible, sermons, church gatherings, or by prayers; can't that give us eternal life?" Christ tells us: "Most assuredly I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you." Clearly, without communion, there is no eternal life. Like a sick man whose doctor told him that this prescription is very important, there is no alternative for this medicine. Therefore, at the pharmacy he can't accept an alternative medicine from the pharmacist. If he doesn't find it he goes somewhere else. So, if you go to a church that does not have communion, you tell them, "Let me find another with my medicine for Christ said there is no alternative. He said, "Most assuredly I say to you, unless you eat the

flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you". Imagine how God descended from heaven especially to offer us bread with the secret of life. That's why it's called the bread of life. Christ said that He is the living bread from heaven that grants life to the world. "I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever." So there is no death to whoever eats of this bread. That is how you will understand that without communion the Christian ideology will not be clear. If you tell an unbeliever that Christ incarnated and died for us he would say, "What's the point; He should have stayed in heaven and acquitted humanity. Like any king who was upset with his people but was gentle enough to forgive, God is also gentle. He could have acquitted Adam. End of story. Why did He have to come? The only reasoning that makes our faith clear is that He came to bring us the medicine. He couldn't have sent medicine because He himself is it. He said, "Who feeds on Me will live because of Me". How can one eat him if He's divine? His divinity came in human's body. One can't eat fire but you can eat hot bread. The bread acquired heat from the fire which was united with it. We can't eat divinity, but we can eat the body that was with it. The heat of the bread warms me and the divinity of the body revives me. That is why no one can live without the body and the blood of Christ. A person who only preaches and doesn't have the communion is like a professor who lectures about medical science but doesn't have the medicine. He would lecture about diseases. He would say,, there is a dangerous contagious disease that can kill you, so be careful. Someone says, I caught the illness what can I do. He would tell him you'll die, I don't have the medicine. What are you doing here then? I'm lecturing you because prevention is better than medicine. But I'm sick; is there a treatment? He would answer no. You wasted my time; I need someone who can prescribe me medicine. So a preacher who doesn't give out communion is not helpful. Imagine we are taking a trip, from here (Oregon) to Vancouver, by bus on which there are 40 passengers one

of which is a doctor. On the way, someone got a stomachache and a doctor was needed. What if the doctor said, "I don't have any medicine ready. You should have told me earlier so that I could bring my medicine kit; I'm not ready." A doctor without medicine is useless. He would probably ask him what he ate. The guy would answer, "I ate dirty food." "Don't do that again; that was wrong" the doctor would say. "I know it's wrong, please help me!" "But I'm not ready with the medicine; there is nothing I can do!" Do you see the benefit of the communion? It's what gives Christianity the power to raise the dead. Without it we are just preachers; only lecturing. That's why our Coptic church puts the mass as #1 in priorities; then everything else. Vespers is to prepare for the Mass, the Sermons are to help us understand the communion, the Bible studies are to help us with the knowledge of God at the end of which we have to partake of the communion, Sunday school and teaching hymns follow the same concept. So the main work of the church is giving communion. This is why we should count the mass as fundamental and not slack about coming and partaking of the communion. Sometimes people leave the mass without knowing its benefit. They claim that they don't know the benefits of the mass because of the language. If the priest prays in Coptic the people space out. The young people who are raised up in the United States and don't know Arabic ask for English, but then the elders would say we can't understand English. In some churches they pray the mass in Arabic and English, but then the pious deacons say what about Coptic. The priest doesn't know what to do. In reality language is not the barrier. Even if we prayed in Chinese we will still comprehend if we just have an understanding of the components of the Mass. Even if the mass was prayed in your first language, if you don't have a clear understanding of the mass, you'll still get lost. It's important that today you understand how the mass works. Think of it as a journey. In this journey you will fly, because you're going to heaven. So let's see how it goes.

The intro consists of Vespers, the praises, and Matins. These help us prepare just like preparing for a flight by packing, having your ticket ready, and Id or passport if needed. Also when taking a flight, do you go to the airport just in time for departure, or before time by an hour or so? Well for us communion is our goal; do you come on time or before time by an hour and so? See you have to come early. If you are late for your flight, your trip will be cancelled. Your money is gone. Always be on time for the mass. I know that some live far, but I leave you to your consciousness. I know you still have living Egyptian consciousness [laughs]. If you live far from work; does that give you the right to be late? If the mass starts at 9:00 am, and it takes 2 hours driving, you wake up at 7 and not 8. It's worth it to wake up a little early for God. This is your first practice, come to church on time or before time, but not after time. Some late comers may have kids to dress and that takes time, but if you can do it, then it's a blessing to come early. Be sure that whenever you go early to church you get a blessing in your: home, work, income, independence, and peace, because you have told Christ that by coming early that you love Him. People who come late tell Him "See I came. I'm signing in, anything else?" Your relationship with God should be based on love. If your dear friend's daughter is getting married, you'll go early and be by his side, and help him with all his needs. If he's not that close of a friend, you will find it hard to make yourself go, and instead you will feel obligated. You'll probably just shake hands with the bride and the groom, and appear on tape to prove your presence and then you leave. Also, if a friend is in the hospital then you will pay him a visit. As you know it doesn't take much time. His family is in the reception all day & night. They will be told to leave, but they'll say: "No way!" The hospital staff will say, "You are doing nothing here." The family will respond, "We can't leave him." Sometimes the hospital will even kick them out. In Egypt we go and bring a pot of stuffed cabbage to the hospital; it's a big deal. This shows love. If it's

a stranger, you'll go just one why spent time. If you love Christ you will come early.

Also, part of the introduction to the mass is the readings from the Katamares. Its goal is purifying humans. "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you". The word of God purifies us and qualifies us for partaking of the communion. I would like for you to come early and hear the readings. Some people say that they will just come for the Gospel reading so that they can partake of the communion, but what about the Pauline, isn't it from God too? What about the Catholic Epistle, the Acts, and the procession of the Resurrection? Come early and take the blessings of these readings. And while the deacon reads please be attentive. Also, I ask deacons to read clearly whether in English or in Arabic. People have to understand. As for the youth, read in a way that can be understood by the youth and the elderly too. Even the elderly know some English and if you read clearly they'll get it. Sometimes people don't read much in the Bible, they need to at least hear it in church. Not just the Gospel but all the readings; the Pauline, the Catholic Epistles, the Acts, and the Psalm. While we listen to the reading we must know that it purifies us for the communion.

After that we go through the procedures of the trip itself. First, at any airport you must go through security. When you go through the security door, if the bell goes on, then you must go back. If it doesn't ring you are fine. The security door of the mass is the Prayer of Reconciliation. When you go through it the bell will go on if you are in a dispute with someone. You must go back and not partake; that's what Christ said. See, why we have a gate in the reconciliation prayer? It's so that a person with hate in his or her heart can't go through. We will all fly and this person won't. Disputes hinder the work of the Holy Spirit. Christ said: "Therefore if you bring your gifts to the altar, and there remember that your brother

has something against you, leave your gifts there before the altar and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gifts”. Before I continue with the journey I remembered a story told by a preacher. A person went to work on Thursday and his Muslim coworker yelled at him, insulted him, and made him upset. This person was so meek that he just asked what that was for and that was it. He went to his boss and asked to leave an hour earlier and he agreed. He thought about how he did nothing wrong and wondered why was he treated this way? Then on Friday, that person went to attend the mass early and decided to clear his conscience with the priest.

He told the priest, “A peer of mine yelled at me and insulted me and I said nothing in return, but I’m now upset. Give me a shrift.”

The priest said, “Go and reconcile with him”.

Man: “Father, please focus I did nothing and the man just insulted and yelled at me and I didn’t do anything. I was just telling you to clear my conscience.”

Priest: “You won’t partake unless you reconcile with him.”

Man: “Father he is not even a Christian.”

Priest: “So what, you still have to go and reconcile”.

Man: “Today is Friday and it’s a holiday.”

Priest: “You won’t partake unless you reconciled just like Jesus said”.

The man left saying, “I shouldn’t have told him”. [Laughs] “I should have been partaking right now? Now I missed the mass. What should I tell him this early in the morning?” At 7:00 AM the man hesitated. Then he decided to knock lightly so that no one would hear and then he could tell the priest he found them asleep. He knocked lightly and

the door opened. It was the man's wife who opened the door and said, "Please come in". He said, "Sorry that I came so early, I'll just have a short talk with your husband." She invited him in and led him to the living room then told her husband that one of his coworkers is waiting outside wanting to talk with you. He wondered what time it was and who that person outside is. Goodness, I yelled at him yesterday at work and he did nothing. Why is he here now?! His wife told him to go and see him. Rubbing his eyes he said, "Good morning. Is everything Ok?" Man: "I'm just here to say I'm sorry and don't be mad at me; forgive me."

Coworker: "What are you talking about; it was my fault."

Man: "It's Ok; just don't be mad at me."

Coworker: "Well, why didn't you wait till tomorrow at work? Why did you come so early for that?"

The man said, "The truth is that the priest at my church said that my prayer won't be accepted till I reconcile with my coworker."

Coworker: "How did the priest know?"

Man: "Well, we have a sacrament called confession. If I do something wrong I confess and the priest tells me how to correct it."

Coworker: "You told him right away."

Man: "It's my habit to tell him right away and he prays for me and tells me what to do; so I told him I made you upset!"

Coworker: "You didn't upset me! I was the one who wronged you."

Man: "It's my conscience. I couldn't have possibly prayed when we are upset with each other."

The Muslim said, "Are you always like that."

“The man replied, “Because the Bible tells me so.”

Coworker: “From now on I will never upset a Christian again.”

The man who once hesitated is now proud. His friend offered him tea, but he said that he’s fasting for the Mass. “Are you like that?” The coworker asked. “Yes.” “I never knew.” “Now you know”. When he went back to church he said to the priest, “Thank you for pushing me to do the right thing; I’m now happy and of Christ, the Bible, and the church. Reconciliation is mandatory; it’s the gate of security.”

Once we get through it, we hear three callings from the priest. Just like a pilot’s announcement, there are three callings. The first, “The Lord be with you all.” I remember once that an American pilot announced that there were American troops boarding the plane, and everyone applauded. Now the priest is saying that God is with us aboard. Second, “Fasten your seat belts.” In the church language we say: “Lift up your hearts.” Whoever doesn’t fasten his seat belt will fall; likewise the person who doesn’t lift up his heart will fall. The third is: “Give thanks to the Lord.” This indicates that we are going to leave for the Eucharist meaning thanksgiving. In Coptic we say Ef-Karisti So-meen to Ki-ri-yo. Ki-ri-yo means Lord and Ef-karisiti so-meen means let’s give thanks. We are going for thanksgiving. Thanksgiving means that God gave us a blessing and we accepted it.

The plane departs and flies and our hearts are with the Lord (Fasten your seatbelts). On the way sometimes they show a program for fun. It could be a movie or information about the destination such as the temperature, time, and currency for foreign countries like the Yen, Dollar, Pound, Grdl, etc. Grdl (bucket) is a real currency. When the Euro was made in Europe, an Arabians suggested a unified currency for the Middle East called Grdl. Why Grdl? G is for Genie (pound), R for Rial, D for Dinar, and L for Lira. [Laugh] Whoever is interpreting will have a hard time interpreting The Grdl parable. The

priest also gives us information about the place we are going to. Heaven is dwelled by God who sits upon the throne of His glory and who is worshiped by all the holy powers which are sorted into Angels, Archangels, Principalities, Authorities, Thrones, Dominions, and the Powers along with the Cherubim, and the Seraphim. What do they say? We praise along saying, “Holy, Holy, Holy Lord of hosts.” We participate in their praise. The praise Holy, Holy, Holy is like the National Anthem of heaven. In Egypt the Anthem starts with my country repeated three times just like Holy, Holy, Holy. [Laughs]

After that the priest answers a question that we bear within without asking it. The question is: “were we in heaven before and we got banished because of Adam?” “Yes.” “How come we are going back?” If you break your visa at a country and they send you back, can you possibly come back? Once you land in the airport you will be arrested. So how come we are going back to a place we were banished from? Well, the problem was solved by salvation.