



Bishop Rafael's Sermon

PART 2

How did salvation happen? From the beginning He formed, created, and placed us in the Paradise of Joy. When we disobeyed his commandment by the guile of the serpent, we fell from eternal life (banished) and were exiled from the Paradise of Joy. You have not abandoned us to the end. It's true that we disobeyed and were banished but you God because of your goodness and beauty said you won't leave us. Thus you sent us your saintly profits to visit us. And in the last days He himself came to reconcile us and take us back. You see the meaning there. Imagine the president of a nation had a group of youth banished because they were illegal immigrants. They came by sea and survived to become illegal immigrants. They then were arrested and sent back. It's a sad story. So, do you think the country that sent them away would care for them? Of course not. Do you think the president of that country would come to reconcile them and tell them I'll take you back? Well, God did that. He himself came to reconcile us to himself. "He was incarnated from the virgin and taught us the ways of salvation and granted us the birth from on high". Do you know what the birth from on high is? It's not like the green card; it's the citizenship. Someone from Egypt goes through a lot to get the citizenship while his son who was born here got the citizenship already. His little darling has it, but he doesn't. The birth

from on high is what gave us the citizenship. We were born from heaven. That's by baptism. So you get into heaven not by a passport but with an ID that says you're baptized; a citizen of heaven. The angels at the door of heaven would see it and say, "Come on in! You are a citizen." St. Paul used the word citizen when he said: "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." In English translation it says citizenship. Our Citizenship is heaven. "He granted us the birth from on high through water and Spirit." Then he finished the story of salvation by saying that He died, was buried, and rose from the dead and by the way, he would tell us that He will come again to judge everyone according to His deeds. Then we cry out saying: According to your mercy O Lord and not according to our sins. This cry is important in determining our future, because he who says: "According to your mercy", will be treated mercifully. Anyone who won't cry will be judged according to his deeds. Now we finished an important part.

And again there is another question that the priest answers before we ask. Just because God came and reconciled the heavenly with the earthly, does that mean that all are going to heaven? The answer is no. There are some conditions. He instituted for us this great mystery of godliness; these are Jesus' conditions (Guidelines) for entering heaven. Christ took bread in the institution of communion and the priest explains it in details. That includes looked up to heaven, gave thanks, blessed, and broke it and gave it. Same goes with the cup. He who eats of this bread and drinks of this cup has eternal life. Not all go to heaven. Only those who believe get baptized (the birth from on high) and partake of the communion. Note that the priest tells the story from "he instituted for us this great mystery of godliness. For being determined to give himself up to death for the life of the world, he took bread..." we interrupt him with sayings like: Amen, we believe, we believe that this true amen and again we believe. These

interruptions show our eagerness. It is like saying aha, aha to someone who is telling you a story which shows your eagerness to get to the end of the story, but then he would say, "Let me continue." "But I'm eager to know the end". So all these interruptions show our eagerness to partake. He then says, "Patience, for us to partake we have to pray for the Holy Spirit to come to transform the bread to the body and the wine to the blood of Christ." This is called the sacrament of the Advent of the Holy Spirit. In fact at that moment the Holy Spirit comes upon each of us to sanctify us, and upon the oblations to transform the bread to the body and the wine mixed with water to the blood of Christ. Now Christ is present with us on the altar in flesh and blood. Now we pray the litanies for things such as: peace of the church, the pope, the bishops, the priests, and the salvation of the world, the water, the plants, and the air. Then we pay attention to a very important thing. Will Christ come alone? Can a president travel all by himself? There has to be a lot of people with him on planes, his cortege. When Christ comes, the multitude of saints comes along. That's why we call it the commemoration of saints. All saints are present with us. It's once told that a blessed priest while praying the deacons saw him looking up to heaven as he prayed. Then suddenly he motioned to a deacon to move but he didn't understand. So he ordered him to move. The priest said to him, "Didn't you see?"

"See what?" the deacon said.

"Oh, never mind" replied the priest. The deacon insisted to know so the priest said, "Tell no one of this. Every time I said a saint's name, I saw him descending from heaven, and the Virgin Mary stood next to me, and you were in her way." [Laughs]

The spiritual eyes that see all of that are good eyes. People who see bad sights will never see this; it's over, unless they repent. So saints do come to the mass. That's why we say, "May their holy blessings be

with us.” Of course the lineage of saints is very long. It starts with the Virgin Mary and continues with the recently reposed saints. They could be father, uncle, grandfather, etc. That’s why after the commemoration we pray for the departed. Then we say, “Those O lord whose souls you have taken.” Then, it seems like our plane is close to getting to heaven so the priest says, “Lead us to your kingdom”. It is the same as when the captain of the plane sends a signal to the watch tower at the airport for guidance. All during the trip he uses the compass, but as he gets in the air space of the airport he then needs direction so that he gets into the right pathway before the gate. “Lead us in Coptic is more beautiful than in Arabic: She-moit-kha-gon. She=take; moit=the way; khagon=before of us. Take the way before us. This means walk before me to show me the way.

Just like when you don’t know the direction to a place and you don’t have a navigator or someone to drive in front of your car to show you the way. In English it’s lead us or be our leader. The word in Arabic doesn’t have the right meaning. A guy once got upset with a priest for saying this word in Arabic and said may God show you the way. [Laughs]. “Ekhon te tek met oroo.” Ekhon in Coptic means let us into the heart of your kingdom. Christ will lead the way before us to the kingdom. Then we arrive. Christ has flown the plane and now we are in the airspace of heaven. So the priest lifts up his hands and says, “Again let us give thanks to God for He made us worthy now to stand up in His holy place.” Make us worthy to partake of the body and the blood. Afterwards the priest picks the fruit of the tree of life which is the body of Christ and says, “The holy body” and we say “We worship your holy body.” “And the precious blood.” “And your precious Blood.” Now the priest starts to divide the body to give it to us. The fraction symbolizes the passion of Christ. If you have noticed already, that one becomes more melancholy so that we feel the pains of Christ. And the congregation cries, “**Kyrie Eleison, Kyrie Eleison**, Lord have

mercy.” See how sad? It shows the suffering because of us. Then the priest says the confession in which we declare and confess that what we have is the true body and true blood of Jesus Christ our God. After that we partake of this holy body and blood. During partaking the deacons sing praises that say, “Praise God in all His saints” because this is the way to live in heaven. When we go to heaven all our lives will be praises. The priest says go in people. This means get back to earth.

Then we go back to earth and start whining, “Why do we have to go? Can’t we stay?” Don’t you sometimes compare the mass to being in heaven? That’s exactly what happens. We go back. The words, “Go in peace” don’t mean leave, but it’s exactly like when Christ said, “Go, I send you.” It’s a message. When the priest says go in peace you bear the responsibility of preaching about Christ you just tasted today. Every liturgy, you have the responsibility of preaching the Gospel. That’s why He said, “For every time you eat of my bread and drink of this cup you proclaim my death, confess my resurrection and remember me until I come.” We say, “Amen, Amen, Amen your death O Lord we proclaim!” but we do nothing. However, you ought to tell the people on earth that you were in heaven and about the beauty of heaven. Make them eager to come. Starting from Jerusalem then all Judea and Samaria. Meaning start with yourself! Tell yourself “I have to come to church.” Then your family, encourage your kids, your relatives, etc. After that, your neighbors. When people see you joyous coming from church tell them, “We are coming from the liturgy; it’s awesome!” Then, because of that they may want to know. Americans will come and be baptized and the church get’s bigger. Sinners will come back to God by your words. This is our ministry in the places that God has trusted us with.

We return to earth in the hopes that we will go back again. We keep on going back and forth between heaven and earth, as heaven is now our place, until that day comes when you find yourself

praying a mass that never ends. You then ask the person next to you, “When will they say, ‘go in peace?’”

He will answer, “We will stay in peace.”

“Why?”

“Because that’s not a mock heaven anymore; that is the true one.”

“Does that mean I’m dead? I didn’t even feel it.”

Because the difference is that I’m a Coptic and we pray the mass every day. The only difference is instead of a small church you’ll be at a huge one. Instead of a limited number of people, you will find an innumerable number of people. And you will see with your own eyes Christ on the altar, and see Virgin Mary, and you will see the angels and saints and martyrs along with all of those who went before us to glory. It’s all because the church gives us, through the mass, the medicine that grants us eternal life, and makes you live heaven on earth as a practice of heaven’s life so that when you go up there you are not a stranger, but rather it is your eternal house. May God give us to view the mass as our life, frequently come to it, and interact rather than just be there and enjoy it forever and ever and eternal glory be to our God. Amen.

Fr. Mekhail: What do you think of this beautiful trip? Are people asleep or what? Of course it’s a wonderful trip and we are going to apply it tomorrow morning. Bishop Rafael has a spiritual, beautiful voice when he prays deeply. As I told you before the sermon, he is also great at teaching clerical liturgy. That is the truth, really and the sermon about the mass, and I heard many of them, is just different from the others. Every time there is a different contemplation. From deep down he really lives what he preaches vocally, musically, deeply, and lively. May God confirm his priesthood You made us fly and we didn’t want to come back down.

We would like to see him continually among us. We'll take his blessing, a piece of chocolate, then agape upstairs. Every year and your ok! And the holy bread of America. [Laughs]. Hymn, "O king of piece... Our father who art in heaven...." The love of the Lord our God and savior Jesus Christ the father and the grace of his only son and the communion of the gifts of the Holy Spirit be with you all. God peace be with you all.

And with your spirit.