BUT THOSE WHO WAIT ON
THE LORD, SHALL RENEW
THEIR STRENGTH; THEY
SHALL MOUNT UP WITH
WINGS LIKE EAGLES,

ISAIAH 40:31

THEY SHALL RUN AND NOT
BE WEARY, THEY SHALL
WALK AND NOT FAINT.

JUST FOR
TEENS

ASKING,
SEEKING,
KNOCKING
Mighty Champions Summer Edition

2016

ASKING, SEEKING, KNOCKING

MIGHTY CHAMPIONS
A PUBLICATION OF THE COPTIC ORTHODOX DIOCESE OF THE SOUTHERN UNITED STATES

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MY BELOVED YOUTH.

When you feel very secure about your relationship with someone, you do not hesitate to go to that person and open your heart completely. Shame and embarrassment do not derail you though you may know that your beloved may deny your request. You know in the depth of your heart that whatever it is you may have thought is what you desire; its significance is secondary to your relationship with that person. It is this kind of relationship that our Lord Jesus Christ wants to have with each of us.

Christ Jesus is a gentle and loving Father and Friend who wishes to give you all that pleases you, but He knows that what may please you, may also take a toll. Sugar is added to food to give it a more savory taste. However, too much sugar has negative results and can lead to serious illnesses. Teenagers like to stay up late, but often suffer the next day because they are too tired to focus at school, or too sleepy to wake up in time for church. If you work on getting to know God better through prayer and reading the Holy Scripture, you will feel more at ease to ask, seek, and knock. You will have confidence to open your heart to Him, and you will be able to wait for His response and accept it, whatever it may be.

Maybe you are thinking that what you are asking is for a certain attractiveness to improve your social status. You may change the style of clothes you wear and your whole attitude to attract that more popular clique. God will reveal to you that it is not mere outer beauty that matters, but the inner that sets one apart from the other, as He chose the little shepherd, David, from amongst his brothers (read 1 Samuel 16). This may take patience and maturity, but in God’s special way, He will reveal what is more important so that not only will you appreciate the friends you do have, but you will also become kinder and friendlier with others, always mindful to not exclude anyone.

The articles in this edition of the Mighty Champions Magazine will engage you in developing that very close relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, do not hesitate to ask, seek, and knock with joy and confidence. “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened (Matthew 7:7-8). In reality, it is Christ who is asking for you, seeking you, and knocking at the door of your heart.

God bless you.

BISHOP YOUSSEF
Bishop, Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States
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Once upon a time, as a man was sailing the sea, a raging storm crossed paths with his boat—tearing it apart in the process. Since he did not know how to swim, he hung onto a strip of broken wood from the boat as he raised his eyes and prayed to God, saying, “I need you, Lord; please save me!”

A while later, a boat passed by the man and offered him a hand, but the man refused the help, saying, “No, thank you. God will save me.” Some time passed and the man grew agitated, so he raised his eyes to heaven and prayed, “My Lord Jesus, when will you save me? A boat came to my rescue before you did!” As he began to lose grip on the piece of wood he was hanging on to, a huge ship passed and threw him a life buoy; however, yet again, he declined, reassuring the men that God is coming for him. The man also declined other helping hands in the same manner, claiming that he was waiting on God to save him. Expectedly, the man drowned some time later. When he went up to heaven, an angel told him that God wanted to see him first.

Enraged, the man stomped his way to the Lord and when he saw Him, he said, “Where were you when I called you? Does ‘Call upon me in the day of trouble and I will deliver you’¹, ring any bells?” Jesus calmly looked at him and said, “I heard you, dear. Who do you think sent you the boat and the ship? Why did you not accept the helping hand? I cannot always make myself known to you, but you have to trust that I am always with you.”

The theme of this issue is “Asking, Seeking, Knocking.” The three actions may appear
different on the outside. However, let’s take a closer look at Matthew 7:7 to see if they share any intrinsic similarities: “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.”

The essence of all three actions is trust. We are trusting God to answer our calls, be there for us when we need Him most, and open the door for us when we go to Him. Trust, however, is a two-way street; it has to be given and received. As many may agree, trust is not very easy to give. In fact, it is also quite difficult to accept receiving it from someone. On one hand, giving someone your trust means knowing in your heart that they will be there to catch you should you ever stumble or fall. On the other hand, accepting someone’s trust means understanding the responsibility placed on you by the person who is choosing to place their trust in you and promising to always be there in their time of need. Therefore, if we combine the acts of giving and receiving trust, we have a fully-functioning relationship in which both parties are promising to take care of one another—as the Truster promises to respond to the signals of help that the Trustee sends and vice versa.

The mistake that the man in the story above made was concentrating on his stressful situation so much so that he missed all the signals of help and aid that God sent him. I would even go as far as describing the man’s prayers to God as a challenge for God to come down to him, not a cry for help from a drowning soul. The man was so focused on getting his way that he lost sight of his original goal: salvation. Therefore, dear brethren, let us not be concerned with how our Trustee will save us; instead, let us free our minds from the shackles of stubbornness and incline our senses to receive the signal He sends us. Ask God for what you want, but remember to say, “Let it be according to Your will, O Lord, and not according to my whim.” Let us seek God in all we do, but also understand that He is with us every step of the way. Let us knock on the door of His church, but believe that if He does not answer the closed door, it is because He is opening a window.

References:
1 Psalm 50:15
2 Movie The Sound of Music
In chapter 7, St. Matthew the evangelist, being inspired by the Holy Spirit, reiterated the words of Christ when he said, “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you.” Let us contemplate on this verse. It contains the Christian life in three stages that are continuously being used by the Christian. These three are asking, seeking, and knocking. Let us break this down to each part.

“Ask and it will be given to you.” In this phrase it is simple to think that we may ask for material or spiritual things. However there is a more profound thing that the Lord is doing aside from telling us to ask. He is teaching us to speak to the living God, to rely on Him, and to confess His real presence in our lives. Why would we ask someone who is dead, not present, or not able to provide? In asking, we are confessing His true presence, His real power to provide, and that He is alive and listening. Do we, as Christians, believe in Christ’s immortality, His presence, and His ability to provide? If we do not, then we will never ask. Or if we do ask, we do it as routine, without the real and deep understanding that He is listening, able, and willing to give you all that is good.

The second phrase in this verse says, “Seek and you shall find.” In this, one may think that seeking is searching for something that is lost. However Christians must have faith that what they are searching for is present and can be found. With the physical, we search day and night and we may say things like, “I know I left it here” or “I think it is there.” This is manifest in our actions. People will usually turn their homes upside down in order to search for something of value to them. However, how much of that effort do we exhaust in trying to search for spiritual gifts? How willing are we to turn the world upside down to attain any one of the virtues, characteristics, or blessings of God? That is why it is difficult for a person without faith to seek the spiritual things. Many times we seek after that which is materialistic because the physical can be attained easily, but what about that which is spiritual?

When the Lord advises us to seek, He is advising us to look for that which was previously thought to be unattainable. He even says, “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righ-
teousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33). Solomon is a great example when the Lord said to him, “Ask! What shall I give you?” and King Solomon responded, “Now give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people; for who can judge this great people of Yours?” The Lord God then responded to Solomon, “Because this was in your heart, and you have not asked riches or wealth or honor or the life of your enemies, nor have you asked long life—but have asked wisdom and knowledge for yourself, that you may judge My people over whom I have made you king— wisdom and knowledge are granted to you; and I will give you riches and wealth and honor, such as none of the kings have had who were before you, nor shall any after you have the like” (2 Chronicles 1:7-12). King Solomon did not ask for physical things that can be easily attained but he asked for that which can only be given by God, and God rewarded him by adding to him all the physical things of the world. How amazing is God, in that while we are still sinners we can attain these spiritual gifts! If we seek with faith the spiritual, we will find it, and it will be more precious than gold and silver, which can easily be corrupted. Do we believe in the existence of spiritual gifts? If we do, then we will not have difficulty in fulfilling the words of the Lord when He tells us to seek.

The third and final phrase is “knock and it will be opened to you.” This entails the beauty of God in that while we knock, God is waiting. God is always waiting for us, and when He opens for us He is welcoming us. He does not speak to a specific group but rather to all. He does not say ‘if the righteous knock, I will open.’ He says, “knock,” which is the only criteria to be welcomed—knock on God’s heart with your prayers and tears, knock on His ears with your praise, knock on Heaven itself with the prayers that are delivered to God through the saints. Do we believe that God is waiting for us? Do we believe that He will accept us given our current condition? If we do not, then we will never truly knock, but if we do, then He is faithful in His word and He will.

May we strive to knock on the very doors of Heaven. For as a child crying to his parents, who is in need of sustenance is not ignored, we also who are in need of Christ’s life-giving sacraments, mercy, grace, and all that He has to offer shall not be ignored. May we entreat God that we may live a life worthy to spend eternity with Him in the kingdom of heaven, and He, as a loving and faithful God will provide for us, His children. Ask, seek, and knock. Glory be to God forever Amen.
Bible Study Q&A:

Q: Matthew Chapter 7: What can we expect when we pray?

A: We will receive what we ask for. (Verse 7)

1. Set fixed times for daily prayer. Morning is best, avoid immediately before bedtime.

2. Have quiet time before you start praying. This helps you clear your mind so you can concentrate.

3. Ask the Lord to teach you how to pray.

4. Pray with all your senses. Pray out loud and follow along in your Agpeya, even if you have the prayers memorized.

5. Pray slowly. It is not a race, it is quality time with your Heavenly Father.
As Christians, we are called to put on Christ and represent Him in our daily endeavors. The term Christian, in fact, means, “Christ-like” and was given to the early believers because their lifestyle was such an anomaly. However, often times, especially in modern society, it is a struggle to stand out lest you be labeled as strange, excluded from friendships, and left out of plans. Therefore, you find yourself talking like anyone else by constantly cursing, objectifying the opposite gender, or joking around inappropriately to sound more mature or appealing. You find yourself in relationships because the people surrounding you would harass you if you are the only person single. You find yourself sinning in this relationship because, “Everybody else is doin’ it, right?” You find yourself going to parties, because being the only one not there might make your friends look down on you. So then, you forget your one true love and sacrifice your relationship with God in order to build a relationship with other humans. You do all this-- not because you are a bad person, or because you have bad intentions, but because you are a human and your humanity is incapable of overcoming the severe fear of loneliness and exclusion by its own power.

However, Christ gives us the opportunity to live as ambassadors to Him and to have the strength to overcome this fear. The methodology to receive this strength is simple and not elaborate. It is give to us in the Gospel according to St. Matthew, where Christ declares, “Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (Matthew 7:7). To the secular reader, this may seem as an opportunity to ask for worldly things, but while reading this we cannot forget the words of Christ in Matthew 6:33 urging us to, “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.” Therefore, this fear of exclusion can be overcome by simply asking God through prayer for His strength in times of temptations and trials, by seeking Christ through the reading of His word in scripture. And by knocking on His door, that is the church, and living a liturgical life through participation in His sacraments. These actions build up our relationship with Christ to the point where we grow nearer to Him, and His friendship becomes more precious than any other. As we grow closer to Christ, we find ourselves resembling Him more, and living lives of true ambassadors of Christ in the world.
Persistence.
What does that word mean to you? It means determination and faith. It means never giving up. It means finding a way to achieve what you want. It means going out of your way. I am going to tell you about someone who was persistent. Her name was Marina. (I am sure you have at least one friend named Marina or you yourself are a Marina. This is not any of the Marinas that you have met.) This Marina’s mother died when she was a little girl. Her father loved her and raised her well. When she was old enough, he desired that she get married so that he would know that she would be in good hands before going to become a monk in one of the monasteries. Marina would have none of this. Determined to devote her own life to Christ as well, she shaved off her beautiful hair and put on the clothes of a man. Seeing her persistence, her father gave all their possessions to the poor, and Marina and her father went to one of the monasteries. They dwelt as monks and shared a cell for ten years, worshiping God night and day. No one knew that Marina was a woman, thinking that her soft voice was due to increased asceticism and vigilant prayers. Her father passed away in peace and Marina continued to grow in asceticism and love for Christ. One time, she went to the city with three other monks on business pertaining to the monastery. They all lodged at an inn. That evening, at the same inn was one of the king’s soldiers who saw the innkeeper’s daughter and defiled her virginity. Fearful of getting into trouble, the soldier instructed the innkeeper’s daughter to tell her father that the monk Marina had done this to her. Becoming pregnant, the innkeeper’s daughter told her father the lie and her father angrily went to the monastery and informed the Abbot of all that he had heard. “I am young, I have sinned, forgive me O my father,” was all that Marina replied when confronted by the Abbot. She was determined to continue to live the monastic life, and she therefore could not reveal to the Abbot that she was a woman and could not have committed this crime. Furious with Marina, the Abbot cast her out of the monastery. Refusing to leave
Persistent Patience

By Miriam Aioub

her home, Marina dwelt just outside the monastery without complaining. After the baby was born, the innkeeper took the newborn and angrily left the child with Marina. Marina raised the child with love and increased in fasting and prayers for the three years that she dwelt outside the monastery. The monks then had mercy on Marina and readmitted her with very strict rules. The child grew surrounded by the love of Marina and all the monks, and eventually became a monk himself when he was of age. St. Marina lived for many more years, never revealing her secret. After she departed in peace, the monks went to dress her with new garments prior to her burial and they discovered that she was a woman. The Abbot wept for wrongfully accusing St. Marina and marveled at her patience in bearing all that happened. When the innkeeper heard the news, he likewise went to her body and wept. God manifested many miracles through the body of St. Marina, confirming to all the holiness with which she had lived. How many times have I decided not to try rather than to try and be disappointed by the results? This is the opposite of persistence. This is laziness and fear. Similarly, and more importantly, how many times have I wished that I was closer to Christ and yet settled to know Him superficially because communicating with Him and spending time getting to know Him intimately was intimidating? St. Marina was extremely persistent. She was determined and hopeful. When Christ gave His sermon on the mountain, He said, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (Matthew 7:7). Asking, seeking, knocking – never giving up – this is persistence. St. Marina sought to live with Christ. She would not allow her father to go to the monastery and leave her behind. Now, my curly hair is very precious to me. If you told me to shave it all off, I do not know that I would. St. Marina did just that because she wanted to be with Christ. She was cast out of her home for three years, raised a child, and carried a blame that was not hers to bear until she passed away because she willed not to be separated from her monastery where she had known Christ. My Lord Jesus Christ, grant that I may know You more. Lord, I knock on the door of Your house, my Church, hopeful and confident that You will open to me. Help me to respect Your home with the utmost reverence. When I stand to participate in the Liturgy, grant me the determination to push aside all my distracting thoughts so that I may focus, in the fellowship of prayer, on You. At home, in the secrecy of my own room, I will seek You. I ask You to allow me to know You and be known by You. Help me to be persistent in clinging to You and in keeping my prayer rule, especially when it means standing to talk to You though I want nothing more than to collapse on my bed and go to sleep. Academically, grant me to always try my best and not give up if I am discouraged by something. In my relationships with others, grant me to love them, for they are Your children. Help me to be persistent when I do not feel love, that no matter how I feel, I may act with love. Grant me the persistence that St. Marina had in seeking You all the days of her life. Grant me to be persistently patient in seeking You and clinging to You all the days of my life.
People believe prayer is an "exercise of faith" to be performed when there is time, at times of dire need, if there is a place for it in our schedule, or just as an activity pertaining to Divine Liturgy. Have you noticed that in the Holy Bible there is no mention of prayers offered by the corrupt, the angry, the adulterer, the murderer, and those that shed the precious blood of the saints? At some point, a faithful Christian must come to the actual realization that those full of strength, impregnated with wisdom, singing joyful hymns—are the ones who prayed.

Prayer is an exercise of patience, discipline, and faith. Prayer offers communion with God. Entreaty in prayer affords the earthly Christian a mysterious, unfathomable, and often difficult to comprehend communion with God that can be undertaken at any time and in the midst of any trial. While the qualities of our prayers are difficult to measure and the responses to our prayers often difficult to gauge immediately, there is an undeniable need within each faithful Christian to pray and communicate with our Lord Jesus Christ.

As early as the first Holy Book of the Pentateuch we are taught the need to pray, "And as for Seth, to him also a son was born; and he named him Enosh. Then men began to call on the name of the LORD" (Genesis 4:26).

Why was it important for Seth, the son of Adam and Eve, to call upon the name of the Lord? We most assuredly know that Cain his brother did not... "And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, as the LORD has said, among the remnant whom the LORD calls" (Joel 2:32).

How important is our prayer life? Did people in Biblical times talk to God and can we be sure their prayers were ever answered? The Lord Jesus Christ's genealogy is traced through Seth to Adam, showing that the true God became incarnate as true Man in order to acknowledge all those who called upon His Holy name. Therefore, we can be certain that prayer is communication with God, the path to salvation. Therefore, it should not be entered into lightly and irreverently. It can be acknowledged with all certainty that prayers were answered according to the genealogy of the Lord Jesus Christ. Biblical beginnings and throughout the Old Testament, it was firmly established that true believers spoke to God through their prayers AND
HE ANSWERED THEM.

Many more examples of prayer were addressed in the Holy Bible. Many varied forms of communication with God are addressed in the Holy Bible, happily through praises and thankfulness, bitterly through complaint, repentantly through confession, and pleadingly through petitions on behalf of the faithful believers and others. "Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name" (Psalm 100:4).

This Holy Psalm of the Prophet David teaches us we need to spend quality time in prayer. Not only is individual prayer called for in the Holy Bible, but group prayer as well. Group prayer was an encouraging invitation to gather and spend time in worshipping the Lord. Following the death of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the disciples spread the Holy Gospel. Churches were first formed in the homes of Christians and later on in church buildings set apart for group prayer and worship emphasizing through the ages time and again the importance of prayer.

The Lord Jesus Christ Himself gave specific reference to prayer. He instructed and modeled prayer... "In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen" (Matthew 6:9-13).

While the importance of prayer has been indisputably established, many questions often arise related to our Coptic Orthodox disciple of praying towards the East, such as whether we are trying to set ourselves apart from other churches. My question to you is: are we actually different or are we the same and unchanged?

The Ante-Nicene Fathers, for example, St. Clement (c. 150-215) of Alexandria, Egypt, Tertullian (c. 160-230) from Carthage, North Africa; Lactantius (c. 250-325) from Rome, Italy who lived in France; and Justin Martyr (c. 100-165) from Samaria, all asserted that we must pray facing the East. This was the exact practice and belief of the early Christians. Accordingly, this is not a popular practice or a mimicked worship-stance taken from the pagans, but it is a necessary part of worship. "Corresponding to the manner of the sun's rising, prayers are made looking towards the sunrise, in the East" (St. Clement of Alexandria c. 195).

Thus, the East, marked by the rising of the sun, likely symbolized the dawning of a new day. It also may have attained importance by those more advanced civilizations that were located east of the Holy Land: "Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem" (Matthew 2:1).

Lactantius, an Ante Nicene father, emphasized the East as the "Fountain of Light and Enlightener of all things." He also established two parts of the earth that are opposite to one another, and of a different character. "I speak of the East and of a different character. I speak of the East and the west. Of these, the East is assigned to God, for He Himself is the Fountain of light and the Enlightener of all things. Furthermore, He makes us rise to eternal life...However, the West is ascribed to that disturbed and depraved mind, for it conceals the light. It always brings on..."
darkness, and it makes men die and perish in their sins" (Lactantius c. 304-313).

Just as the Ante-Nicene Fathers helped to interpret the teachings of the pre-Nicene era, most Biblical scholars agree that they faithfully passed along the instruction that the apostles had taught to the Church. To be sure, if it was important enough to be written about by four major Ante-Nicene Fathers, it must be a substantiated affirmed practice of Church prayer.

After closer examination the reader will note that none of the writers upholding prayer towards the East originated from the same geographical area. None of the Ante-Nicene Fathers writings are from the exact same time frame. Yet prayer towards the East was such an important belief that all four specifically addressed it as a "rule of prayer." So, is the Coptic Orthodox Church different or is it the same and consistent with the early church teachings that originated from the Apostles themselves?

So strong must this belief and "rule of prayer" have been, that not only did early Christians faithfully and diligently carry it out but those outside Christian beliefs took notice of the Christian stance toward the East...

"Others...believe that the sun is our god. The idea no doubt has originated from our being known to turn to the East in prayer" (Tertullian c. 197).

Again the pre-Nicene early Christians founded all their beliefs on Holy Scripture. There were no hundreds of written texts on interpretations, no radio commentaries, no internet searches, and no multiple theological colleges to attend. Early Christians often quoted Holy Scripture from memory. Simply, at the time the early missionaries spread the Holy Gospel, the only reliable source for their fundamental beliefs was the Holy Scripture. It then comes as no surprise that the Apostolic Constitution addressed the East...

"Let the building be long, with its head to the East, with its vestries on both sides at the East end—so it will be like a ship" (Apostolic Constitution c. 390).

Earthly life can be complicated, filled with many complex problems and adversities. Many of the ancient church fathers were prepared for persecution because of prayer. Nehemiah was prepared to start all over in the reconstruction and rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem through prayer, St. Stephen was prepared for death through his prayer, and the Lord Jesus Christ endured on the Holy Cross through prayer.

The Holy Scriptures says, "Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days" (Daniel 6:10).

Prayer helps us make the most of our earthly life, look at the disadvantages to see opportunities, and repent but not repeat. "His name shall rise up above the sun. And again, Zechariah says, 'His name is the East.'" (Justin Martyr c.160).

May we all look toward the mysterious and miraculous East in spiritual seeking.
A couple of weeks before summer break, I was assigned a school project that required me to work with a partner. We would mainly communicate through phone calls, and after a few calls with her, I realized that she never really said much, never gave any input, and seemed to have a passive outlook on the assignment and, most importantly, on our grade. At times she would go for many minutes without saying anything, to the point where I would look at my phone screen to see if we still had a connection. I was frustrated because I was pretty sure that she was still on the line, but for some reason my conversation was only working one-way with me coming up with all the ideas and being the only one talking. Later I got to thinking about my experience and realized that prayer can sometimes feel the same way. I know that God can hear me when I pray, but when His voice feels silent in my life, I sometimes wonder if the connection only works one-way.

In 1 Kings, the Lord tells Elijah to, “Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.’ Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave” (1 Kings 19:11-13). In this account, Elijah was searching for God. First, he looked for Him in a windstorm, then a powerful fire, but God was not in either of those things. This was a very significant experience for Elijah because God had established a pattern of appearing in these ways over hundreds of years when communicating with...
His people. God appeared in a burning bush to Moses in Exodus 3 and in billows of smoke on Mt. Sinai in Exodus 19 with winds that shook the ground. Despite these patterns, Elijah does not feel God’s presence until he hears the faintest of whispers.

We are always hoping to expect God’s voice to come in windstorms and explosive fireworks, because that would be a lot easier, wouldn’t it? When we are desperately seeking God in prayer, we most often want to hear or see His response in very obvious, visible ways. If we are sick, we pray for healing and want to feel better immediately. If we need help with a problem, we want a clear solution. If we are in emotional pain, we want God to make the pain go away by just praying for a few minutes. We sometimes talk to God in prayer but feel and see no change. It is in those moments that we need to remember that God’s voice sometimes comes in a gentle whisper. He does not always work in dramatic ways and never works in the way we think. Our God works in mysterious ways. Sometimes it is in the little things that God moves the most. We might not feel healthy right away, but He may nudge us towards the help that we need. A solution may not present itself to fix our problems, but He can use those problems to make us stronger. The pain may not always go away immediately, but He sometimes uses that pain to remind us of all that He has blessed us with.

Take the story of Joseph in the Old Testament that shows the greatness of putting faith in our “calls with God” and knowing that He is listening even when it is not evident. His ten older brothers conspired against him and sold him to slave traders, while telling their father he had been mauled by an animal. The slave traders took him into Egypt and sold him to Potiphar, one of the Pharaoh’s officers. Joseph served his master well and gained great favor, but the master’s wife tried to seduce Joseph, a young man of impeccable integrity. After he rejected her, she went to her husband with false accusations. It resulted in Joseph’s imprisonment. Once again, God proved His presence and protection for Joseph. The prison keeper befriended him and learned of Joseph’s divine ability to interpret dreams. By earning this reputation, Joseph was called upon to interpret a dream that deeply troubled Pharaoh. None of Pharaoh’s wise consuls had been able to decipher the dream. But Joseph accurately relayed the symbols in the dream to a future time of abundance that would be followed by a time of great famine. Pharaoh rewarded Joseph by making him the second most powerful man in all of Egypt after Pharaoh.

These are just a few tangible ways that God speaks through a whisper. Maybe the connection has not been lost. Perhaps you are just not listening carefully enough.¹²

Before the U.S. mourned the tragic events of September 11, 2001, the Copts had been commemorating that day as the start of their New Year for hundreds of years, as it happens to coincide with the Coptic New Year according to the Coptic calendar (except that it falls on September 12 when there is a leap year).* Interestingly, the Copts have been associating that day with remembering fallen heroes well before it was necessitated by the recent attacks on the U.S.

The Coptic calendar is the Egyptian calendar of antiquity, still in use today by the Coptic Church. Year one of that calendar was reset to remember the day that the infamous persecutor of Christians, Emperor Diocletian, ascended to his throne and embarked on his empire-wide rampage against Christians, of whom so many were Egyptian (as the early church historian and bishop Eusebius attests). Since changing the calendar’s year one date, each year has been called “The Year of the Martyrs,” (Anno Martyrum) just like in modern times we refer to each year as “The Year of the Lord” (A.D. – Anno Domini) (where it was attempted to mark year 1 as the year Christ was born).

To figure out what Coptic Year we are in, it is a simple matter of subtraction.

From January 1st until the Coptic New Year
= CURRENT GREGORIAN YEAR − 284
(Example: January 1st, 2015: 2015 − 284 = 1731 A.M.)

On and after the Coptic New Year (Sept 11 or 12) until January 1st
= (CURRENT GREGORIAN YEAR − 284) + 1
(Example: September 12, 2015: 2015 − 284 = 1731 A.M.
+ 1 = 1732 A.M.)

For more on the Coptic Calendar, go here: http://orthodoxwiki.org/Coptic_Calendar

* For further clarification: Coptic leap years precede the Gregorian Calendar leap year. So, for example, September 10th, 2015 corresponded to what would normally be the last day (the fifth of Nisan) of the of the last Coptic month (the month of Nisan) of the Coptic Year 1731. However, because it was a Coptic Leap Year in 1731, an additional day was added, so that September 11th, 2015 corresponds to the sixth of Nisan. Accordingly, the following Gregorian Calendar Leap Year is in 2016. Thus, whenever there is a Gregorian Leap Year, the Coptic year (1731) preceding the Gregorian Leap Year (2016) is also a leap year.
General Question #1

How do I keep my mind from getting distracted during prayer time?

Look for the answer on another page.
Diocese Photos

Attitudee Middle School Convention
St. Stephen Retreat Center
Titusville, Florida
Family Ministry Program Graduation
Nashville, Tennessee

Fr. Thomas Mansour’s Ordination
St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church
Phoenix, Arizona
His Grace Bishop Peter’s Ordination & Enthronment for the Diocese of North Carolina, South Carolina & Kentucky
Priests’ Family Convention
St. Stephen Retreat Center
Titusville, Florida
Diocese Trip to Austria & Hungary
Mission Experience Trip 2016
Kerala, India
Mission Experience Trip 2016
Kerala, India
Mission Experience Trip, India 2016

His Grace Bishop Youssef with His Eminence Metropolitan Issac Mor Osthatheos, Diocese of Delhi & the Diocese of Mylapore (Chennai) India
Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church

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