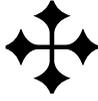


THE SPIRITUAL MINISTRY

**BY
H.H. POPE SHENOUDA III**



**COPTIC ORTHODOX
PATRIARCHATE**



See of St. Mark

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**BY
H. H. POPE SHENOUDA III**

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Author : H. H. Pope Shenouda III.
Translated by : Mr. Roger Gad and Laurice Saleeb
Illustrated by : Sister Sawsan.
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*H.H. Pope Shenouda III, 117th Pope of
Alexandria and the See of St. Mark*

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INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that servants are in continuous need for learning about the spirituality of the ministry, in case they should think that the ministry is just teaching information or transferring knowledge. This book contains some lectures addressed in the great Cathedral of Anba Rowais in Cairo; these meetings are attended by thousands of servants. These lectures deal with the spiritual ministry, the position of God in our ministry, the proper spiritual measure for the successful ministry, and the consequences when guided by the wrong measurements. This book will also deal with the minister as a good example who is blessed and spiritual, as well as the characteristics of ministry in his life.

This book is the sixth in a series of books directed to Sunday School servants and servants preparation classes. The other five books are *Holy Zeal, Discipleship, How to Deal with Children, Verses for Learning in Alphabetical order and Quizzes on the Holy Bible*.

We hope, through the grace of the Lord, to continue publishing more books in this series. We pray for the success of this blessed ministry world-wide.

**Pope Shenouda III.
November 1993,**

CHAPTER ONE

WHAT IS THE SPIRITUAL MINISTRY?

The ministry is not just teaching or tutoring, otherwise it becomes a mere intellectual work. The servant is not just a teacher, or a store of knowledge, transferring information to the minds of the children. So what is the ministry, then?

1. The Ministry Is Love:

This love fills the heart of the servant towards God and His Kingdom, towards people and especially the children. He loves God and wants everyone to love Him too. He loves people and wants them to reach God, and his service is an expression of this love.

The Ministry is a natural outcome of something greater than the service itself - Divine Love:

Service is an expression of love overflowing from the heart, it is a desire to serve. If it is without love, it becomes dry, routinely and without spirit or fruits. It will just be a transfer of knowledge.

Then we love those whom we serve, as God loves us, and then we will be successful in our ministry:

Let us fill our hearts with love, as much as we can. Love was the basis of our Lord Christ's ministry "...*having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.*" (John 13:1). The act of salvation is a clear expression of this love. St. John the Beloved also writes "*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*" (John 3:16)

As for you, you can never have a spiritual effect on a person unless there is love between you and that person. Through the child's love for you, trust will develop and the child will accept your words. Eventually, they will tell you what is inside their hearts. In this event, you can know their spiritual needs and guide them to God and His Kingdom.

So, the Sunday School servant is a loving and loved person. They love their children and their children love them. The servants love their ministry and this love will run into their hearts and their bodies.

The servants who love their children will serve with feeling:

If any one of their children are absent, they will miss them. Even if twenty eight out of thirty are present, the true servant will keep thinking about the other two. This feeling will be apparent when they go to visit them.

The ministry (service) is not a formal work, it is an expression of love for God and the people:

In all their activities and ministry, servants do not concentrate on themselves, in case they desire to appear as good and honest servants in their own eyes. This type does not fear God's judgment. The true servants serve out of love towards their children.

When preparing a lesson, the main objective should be to give the children all what they can offer, so they try to find interesting stories, collecting any beneficial ideas and useful information. The intention is not for the lesson to be perfect, but to make others happy, to work for their benefit, and to suffer for their sake.

2. The Ministry Is Giving To Everyone:

The servant gives without obligation, naturally, without being pressured to do so. As the sun, by its natural law gives heat and light, and the tree gives shade, flowers and fruits, so the servant gives freely to all. Also, as the spring gives water and quenches everyone's thirst, so the servants who freely give, refresh the souls of all they meet. By their nature, they love, teach, visit, help and support everyone, without partiality.

They give to everybody in every occasion and everywhere:

In their home, with their families, at work, at university or at Church, they are like their Master, Jesus "...*who went about doing good ...*" (Acts 10:38) . They try to draw people closer to God by all means.

Service, then, means to do good deeds, lovingly towards people:

This is planted by God, through a useful word, a blessing and giving help. It moves the heart of the servant towards the people he meets. They are constantly giving themselves to everybody.

3. The Servant Gives Spiritual Nourishment:

Nourishment is offered by the servants to the souls of their children, to feed them with the good word of God. The Lord says *"Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season?"* (Luke 12:42).

Servants give their children rich meals from spiritual books, the lives of the saints and hymns. They also include teachings related to the theological beliefs and doctrines of the Church in a simple and spiritual method.

How can the servant offer a rich, spiritual meal to his children in just one hour per week?

Spiritual influence does not depend on how many hours spent with the children, but on the power of the spiritual word coming from the spiritual servant. They should be led by the Holy Spirit of God *"...the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."* (Heb 4:12). St. Anthony heard just one word in Church, and his whole life

was changed. This was the reason for the founding of the angelic (monastic) life in the Church.

4. Ministry Is Holy Zeal:

It is a flame of fire inside the heart which makes it full of love towards others and desire their salvation. David the Psalmist says "... *zeal for Your house has eaten me up ...*" (Ps. 69:9). Similarly, St. Paul says "*I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.*" (1 Cor 9:22).

The Good Shepherd says "*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own.*" (John 10:11, 14). Also, "*I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick.*" (Ezek 34:16).

It is a great favour from God to give us the chance to share with Him in caring about His children. He can do this work alone, but because He is so humble, he allowed us to work with Him, Glory be to His Name. This is why St. Paul the Apostle says about himself and Apollos "*For we are God's fellow workers;*" (1 Cor 3:9)

Service is Co-operation and communion with the Holy Spirit:

The Holy Spirit is working for the establishment of the Kingdom, we are just His instruments. The Holy Spirit works in us, through us and with us. He gives words to those who evangelise and makes the word effective to the listeners. The Lord said "*...for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your*

Father who speaks in you.” (Matt 10:20) How beautiful are the letters addressing each of the Bishops of the seven Churches in Asia “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” (Rev 2:7)

5. The Ministry Is A Bridge Between God And People:

You should be a strong bridge in your service, delivering what the Holy Spirit says. The spiritual servants are the ones who take from God and give to their children, they do not give from their own resources. Service is like Jacob’s ladder, reaching up to heaven from earth, where the angels of God were ascending and descending on it (Gen 28:12); they were ascending with the needs of the people to present them before God, and descending with their fulfilments from God.

Didn’t the Lord say *“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” (Matt 7:7).* Servants, in their ministry, are like the angels of God in heaven. They raise their prayers up to heaven on behalf of their children that God might give them utterance, to open their mouths...(Eph 6:19), and from the ladder of Jacob, the word shall descend, and they preach it to their children.

6. Ministry Is The Work Of Angels And The Apostles:

St. Paul said about the angels *“Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?” (Heb 1:14).* He also said about himself and the rest of the Apostles, *“Therefore, we are ambassadors for*

Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.” (2 Cor 5:20).

7. Ministry Is Payment Of A Debt:

The Church has brought us up, taught us, guided us to God and granted us the spirit of service, so we are indebted to God who loved us so much, gave us everything and taught us His ways. We have to love Him exactly as He loved us, declaring this love towards His children whom He placed in our care.

8. Ministry Is An Obligation:

It is a spiritual obligation, whoever loves God and loves people should serve. He can't just stand by, watching others going apart from the way of the Lord. Since the servants experience God's love, they will be keen to help God's children and guide them to God. When the Samaritan woman knew Christ, she went immediately to tell everyone, calling, “*Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did*” (John 4: 29). She was turned from a sinner, into a repentant, then to a preacher, who loves Christ and talks to people about Him. This happened with so many other people whom Jesus had healed, and they went all around talking about Him.

Every person can serve according to their talents

People can serve in so many areas: caring for the sick, solving problems, tutoring, being a good example.. and so on. As for people who do not serve at all, they are neglecting their

obligation towards their brothers and sisters. This is a sin and should be confessed to their spiritual Father, because this means that their love for God, His kingdom and His children is incomplete.

9. Ministry Is A Scale, A Talent And A Responsibility:

We will have to stand before the Lord and give an account on how honestly we served our children. What did we do to build them up spiritually? The ministry then is a critical responsibility before God and the Church. This is because **the servant might be the only source of religious education at this stage of the child's life.** Maybe there is no one at home or at school to nourish them spiritually, and the Church has depended on you for this responsibility. If they cannot find the spiritual nourishment through the servants, they might lose their souls!! Servants should fill their hearts with the love of God and His knowledge, otherwise, their children will be empty from inside and lose their spiritual way. God shall ask the servant *"Give an account of your stewardship"* (Luke 16:2). Let us always remember that service is not an activity, but a responsibility and a talent which we should offer to God with profit.

10. Ministry Is About Being A Good Example And Caring:

Ministry is more than teaching, it is caring for the lives of others; nourishing the divine image, through their good example. **So, the teacher is important in the ministry - not the lesson.** The teacher who tasted the sweetness of the Lord, wants others to taste it too *"Oh, taste and see that the LORD is*

good; Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!" (Ps 34:8). It is the life of a person filled with the Holy Spirit, which overflow into the hearts of others. The children do not need a teacher to fill their minds with different information, they need a clean heart, close to God; to guide them in the way of God and intercede for them. **They need a good example to follow, in which they can see Christianity in practice.**

There might be some Sunday School teachers who are not so eloquent or rich in knowledge, but they have a great influence on the children. Just the look of them implants the love of God in the children's' hearts; the way they talk or deal with others, their spiritual behaviour, their quiet, smiling features, all this can teach them more than a lesson given inside the class. **They see the image of God in their servants, so they love God who works in their lives.** Children like to imitate , so let us be a good example for them to follow. They are high in spiritualities, with clean hearts and noble principles. They are white pages during their childhood, and the Lord Jesus says "*Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.*" (Matt. 18:3). Jesus did not mean us to be as young as children, but to grow in spirituality and innocence like children.

If you cannot be a good example, at least don't be a stumbling block because they are so simple, they accept and believe whatever you say or do. Let your words be the truth and righteousness, because the Lord says "*But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea.*" (Matt. 18:6).

Preaching by example is called the Silent Ministry. This is where a person teaches without speaking. People learn just from their behaviour, their lives are sermons - not their speech.

11. Ministry Is Fullness And Overflowing:

It is life, not just words, the words should be turned into living behaviour, giving a good example to others, as our Lord Jesus says *"The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life."* (John 6:63). Do your words give life to others? Listen to what the Lord says: *"I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly"* (John 10:10).

Does your ministry change the life of others? You should first have a life with Christ as well as communion with Him, so that you can give life to others. There is a well known saying amongst the servants "You can never overflow before you are filled us." The disciples spent three years with Jesus learning from their Good Teacher, the Greatest Teacher, learning from His pure sermons and practical experiences. They observed Him in His ministry and the lessons He taught through miracles and wonders. In spite of all this, He said to them; *"But tarry in the city of Jerusalem, until you are endued with power from on high."* (Luke 24:49), and also *"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."* (Acts 1:8). When the Holy Spirit descended on them on Pentecost Day, they were filled with the Holy Spirit. Only after this, did they start their ministry, preaching to the whole world.

12. Ministry Is A Way Of Life, Transferring From One Person To Another:

This is not only done through being a good example and caring. We have an excellent example in the Holy Bible talking about the service of the seventy elders who helped Moses the prophet in his ministry. *“So the LORD said to Moses: "Gather to Me seventy men of the elders of Israel;... bring them to the tabernacle of meeting. ...Then I will come down and talk with you there. I will take of the Spirit that is upon you and will put the same upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you....”* (Num 11:16-17).

13. Ministry Is A Working Power:

It is the power of the Holy Spirit working in the servant and those whom he serves, it is the power of the word of God that never returns void (Is 55:11). It is exactly like the power of life found in a seed, you plant it in the soil and it never stops working and growing, until it gives you fruits: a hundredfold, sixty and thirty (Matt 13:8).

14. Ministry Is Spirit, Not A Formal Work:

Some people might think that the Ministry is just the surface appearance: the preparation book the attendance records and visitations. This is not all that the service involves - The ministry is spirit before anything else. It is the spirit of the servant delivered to their children, the spirit with which he teaches and deals with them, it is his heart before his tongue, the warmth of his heart before his spoken message.

15. Ministry Is A Way Towards Spiritual Growth:

Not only for children, but also for the teacher. If the servants do not make use of the lesson themselves, this lesson can never affect the children. The lesson must be a spiritual means for the servant's and the children's growth. A servant who thinks that the lesson is just for the children is not a true servant.



CHAPTER TWO

THE PLACE OF GOD IN THE MINISTRY

God is the reason of the ministry, He is the One who invited us to do it. He is working with us to obtain the goal.

Some servants talk on so many subjects, except God. You can never recognise God in their words, they never affect your heart, your thoughts or your life, even though they mention the Name of God.

They just give information, not subjects leading to God. They may speak about virtues, history, doctrine and rites without the clear image of God. Here, we would like to mention that:

1. Ministry Is The Humility Of God:

God, of course can do everything alone, He can turn the whole world into saints, and He can organise the service without you or me. But, **out of His humility, He gives us the opportunity to share with Him in His work. He allows us to share in the work of the Holy Spirit. He works with us, in us and through us. He is the One Who does all the work, then attributes it to us !!!**

After all that, can we forget God in our ministry?

Sometimes, people get off the track and are more concerned with their personal glory and fame, hence, the Name of God disappears.

2. God Invites Us To The Ministry:

The Lord Jesus said to His disciples *"You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit."* (John 15:16), also, *"And no man takes this honour to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was."* (Heb 5:4). This applies either to priesthood or any other ministry.

3. God Is The Speaker In The Ministry:

No one can talk on their own authority in the ministry, even Balaam says: *"The word that God puts in my mouth, that I must speak."* (Num 22:38).

So, the servant is a person speaking the words that God puts in their mouth. They take from God and give it to the people. We read so many times in the Bible "Now the Lord called to Moses and spoke to him saying "Speak to the children of Israel....." So, Moses used to take from the mouth of God and speak to the people, because Moses didn't know how to speak, he said to God at the very beginning *"O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue."* (Ex 4:10). Lord Jesus Christ says to his disciples comforting them; *"for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who*

speaks in you.” (Matt 10:20). How beautiful to think that it is not us who speak, but God! It is the words of God, the thought of God (1Cor 2:16).

Do you always pray to God to give you His words when you speak? *“The Lord gave the word; Great was the company of those who proclaimed it:” (Ps 68:11).* It is very dangerous to speak if you haven’t taken the words from God, it is not safe to fill the minds of others with human wisdom, as the Apostle says *“And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power...” (1 Cor 2:4).* Pray from all your heart before starting your ministry, so that He might give you suitable and beneficial words to say to the people.

4. God Gives Us Power To Influence Our Listeners:

The Lord Christ ordered His disciples not to *“depart from Jerusalem until they are endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:49).* What was that power? He says, *“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be a witness to me ...” (Acts 1:8).*

It is true, they didn’t service except through this power taken from the Holy Spirit. If you haven’t taken power from the Holy Spirit, how can you serve?!

Preparing the Servants:

Many servants are being prepared through lessons in the Holy Bible, in history, in rites and doctrines which are all useful, but

preparation should not stop here, **there should be a spiritual preparation, in which the servant is filled with the Spirit of God, taking from Him, and giving to others.**

The servants do not just take words, they also take power, spirit and divine influence. They also take God's deep love, to love their children with, and work hard for their salvation.

St. Peter the Apostle addressed a sermon on Pentecost Day which cut the hearts of the listeners, and three thousand were baptised on that day!!! (Acts 2:41). How did this happen? Can any normal sermon have that great effect? Of course not, **these words were powerful and spiritual.** There is a difference between someone who tells you something and convinces you without causing you to act on it, and someone who convinces you to act on their advice.

Therefore, preparing your lesson is preparing yourself spiritually. You will be in a spiritual state when God's grace fills your heart, and gives you words of power and spirituality. You can invite God to come with you to attend the lesson. He will talk, and work in the hearts of your children. Everyone will feel His presence and say; "Truly, this lesson was full of the Spirit of God, we felt that God was touching our hearts."

Real servants are people carrying the Lord inside themselves (THE OPHOROUS):

There is a difference between ministry and teaching. Teaching is just transferring knowledge to the minds of our listeners, whereas service is leading souls to God by being a spiritual person. It is not only giving information, but giving them spirit, the love of God and His Kingdom.

In Sunday School, we have so many teachers who are not servants:

They read many books to gain knowledge and just transfer this knowledge to their students. But this is not service - it is education. Ministry or service is the transfer of the spirit to the children, and filling their hearts with the love of God. In other words, a servant transfers the spirit and love - not just information. The servant is a person who loves people, and gives them the love of God. They abide in God, and consequently, abide in love, because God is love (1 John 4:16). God trains His servants to love, because love is an important element in the ministry. Without love, the ministry will be just a fruitless activity.

If you haven't reached that level of love, you are not yet prepared for the ministry:

What is this love we need for the service? It is to love all people, as God loves them. To love them as your brethren, because they are the children of God and you must desire the salvation of their souls. Love the Church which contains Christ's body, love the Kingdom of Heaven where people will enjoy being with God. From all your heart you should try to lead them to the love of God, because He loved them first (1 John 4:19).

Here, we will introduce an example from Revelations declaring the relationship between God and His Church with its servants.

The Lampstands and the Stars:

St. John the Beloved said that he saw the Lord in the middle of the seven golden lampstands which are the seven churches, holding seven stars who are the angels of the Churches (Rev 2:1, Rev 1:20). St. John explains that the Lord is walking “*in the midst of the seven golden lampstands*”, for He said “*For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them*” (Matt 18:20). **He is the True light, giving light to the flames of the seven lampstands.** He is the Holy oil feeding the wick, and so it gives light. He is holding the servants in His right hand and leads them. While they are in His hands, every servant chants with David “*The right hand of the Lord does valiantly, the right hand of the Lord is exalted*” (Psalm 118:15-16). If the servant is on the right hand of the Lord, they will never fear anything or lose the way, because the right hand of God is leading them. So we must make sure that God is walking in the midst of our lives, holding us in His right hand.

If you are not in God’s right hand, you cannot serve:

The servant is trying always to acquire power from God. He is praying and saying: You can see, Lord, that we live in a lustful world, who am I to resist all this? Please Lord, grant me the power, give me your words and your wisdom to lead me. Preserve me, so that I might not be a stumbling block for anyone. **Oh Lord, lead me and lead them, teach me and teach them, guide me and guide them to the green pastures and to the springs of living waters.** St. Augustine said, “I am a teacher to them, but a student in Your class, I am their

shepherd, but one of your flock”, here, you invite God to share in your ministry, that your lesson will be a lesson from God to you, and then to them.

The Lord will be the lesson and the teacher:

The service, therefore, is a grace from God, working in a person for the benefit of others, connecting both to God. The service is the communion of the Holy Spirit, where the Spirit shares the ministry with the servants. If this is ministry, what is consecration then?

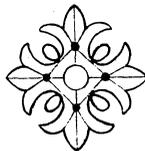
Consecration is growing in love, until all the heart is owned by God, praying, pleading and serving all the time. But what about those who become so busy in their ministry, forgetting God? They become busy with the means rather than the aim! Their own self becomes the core of the ministry, and they stray far away from God Himself.

Examples In Teaching:

1. Do you give the children information from the Holy Bible, the story of God with His people and His love, care and suffering? Do you just retell stories or relate them to God and the way He deals with His people. How can we talk about the creation without talking about God’s love and wisdom in preparing everything for man.
2. If we talk about sin and repentance, do we talk about God? Sin is not only corruption and

deception, it is separation from the Lord, and rebellion against Him. Repentance also, is not just to become good, but also to reconcile with God and return to Him.

3. How can we teach the lives of the saints? Is it not just telling the history of their lives and works? We should explain how the Lord prepared those souls until they reached that high level of spirituality. It was God who strengthened and protected them, we should relate how they loved Him from all their hearts, and this love appeared clearly in their lives. Therefore, we cannot tell a story about a saint without referring to God in his/her life.
4. The eternal paradise, can we talk about it without including God? Is it just heaven, happiness and the Heavenly Jerusalem? Or is it enjoying the presence of God, the continuous life with Him and those who loved Him. It is a fulfilment of the Divine promise: *“that where I am, there you may be also”* (John 14:3). and *“He will dwell with them”* (Rev 21:3).
5. The same pattern should be followed when teaching theology, Church doctrines and rites: They should be related to God, not taught as delivering dry information.



CHAPTER THREE

HUMILITY IN THE MINISTRY

The servant should have certain spiritual characteristics, the first of which should be humility. This characteristic is very important because the Lord Jesus said to His disciples, “*learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart*” (Matt 11:29). He could have concentrated on many other virtues in His Holy personality, but He stressed on gentleness and lowliness, because they that serve, usually face the wars of vain glory and pride. They feel that they are an important pillar of the Church, where people should consult them on different matters. Here we would like to point out that **a servant should not forget that he/she is a servant.**

A Servant:

This is a humbling label since a servant is not a master, a preacher, a tutor or a teacher. His job is to serve, not to rule or be proud. Although our Master Jesus Christ is the King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev 19:16), He lowered Himself and washed His disciples’ feet giving them an example in humility. He also said, “*The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.*” (Matt 20:28).

The title servant was given to the angels also, in Hebrews 1:14 it says “*Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister*

for those who will inherit salvation?” Also, in (Psalm 104:4) “Who makes His angels spirits, His ministers a flame of fire.”

The Apostles Were Also Called Ministers:

St. Paul says about himself and His partner in the ministry, Apollos “*Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one?*”

(1 Cor 3:5). He also says about Tychicus “*...Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make all things known to you;*” *(Eph 6:21).* He says about Epaphras “*as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf..*” *(Col 1:7).*

The priest who offers the Holy Communion in the Holy Liturgy is called the serving priest. Even the meeting of Sunday School teachers is called the **servant’s meeting**.

So, as you are a servant, my dear brethren, I ask you to be humble, and to understand the nature of the service. If you are a servant, you have to be obedient, to God, to your supervisors and to those who organise your service. Some Sunday School servants do not obey or respect the priests, although they call themselves servants, the same situation occurs with the priests who do not obey their Bishop and so on. **To be humble, you must always practice humility.**

Discipleship:

Some servants might think that they do not need to learn any more now, as they are actively serving, and this is wrong. To keep your humility, you have to keep your discipleship. All the

Christians during the Apostolic era were called disciples, and the Lord Jesus, when He sent the eleven out to preach, He said *“Go therefore, and make disciples of all the nations”* (Matt 28:19).

Always be a disciple to the Lord and to the Church, do not be proud. **If you feel that you have become a teacher and not a disciple, you are starting to fall in pride. If you live as a disciple, you’ll get rid of many problems.** First, you will get rid of arguments, and be ready to accept other people’s opinions with pleasure. Keep your spiritual childhood as the Lord says *“Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.”* (Matt. 18:3).

There are many examples of saints who lived as disciples:

Joshua was Moses’ disciple until Moses died. Also, **Elisha** was Elijah’s disciple until Elijah ascended into heaven, so he farewelled him saying *“My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and its horsemen!”*(2 Kin 2:12). Although **St. Athanasius the Apostolic** was the Pope of Alexandria, he kept being a disciple of St. Anthony the great saying “I used to pour water on his hands”, which means that he was serving St. Anthony. In ancient times, the disciples used to sit at the feet of their teachers. They did not sit next to them or in front of them, but the teacher used to sit on a chair while his disciples sat on the ground at his feet. About this, St. Paul said, *“I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers’ law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today.”* (Acts 22:3). Try to be a disciple to your confession

father, in spiritual meetings, a disciple to nature - the gardens, flowers, birds and books.

Humility In Teaching:

Believe me, one of the major problems in our Church today is the lack of humility in teaching. If a servant has got a new thought from his readings, he tries to force it on others and make it a doctrine. **The problem here is that you present a personal belief and not the Church's doctrines.** The first Church was characterised by One thought because it was a humble Church submitting to its leaders. As the Protestants called for liberty in explaining and teaching, they were split into hundreds of beliefs. The traditional Church, however, keeps its true faith, and does not allow individual beliefs to pollute the original doctrines handed down by the apostles. **Humble servants do not show off their knowledge.** They present the lesson in a simple and spiritual manner rather than in a philosophical manner. They should speak at the same level of their students or listeners. **Humble servants should care about preparing their lessons,** not depending on their existing knowledge as some servants do.

Humility In Our Lives:

Humble servants should deny themselves so that the Lord might appear in their lives. As St. John the Baptist said, *"He must increase, but I must decrease"* (John 3:30). Some people become proud of their long period of service, so they keep telling stories about their experience in **Humility**

CHAPTER FOUR

EVALUATING SUCCESSFUL MINISTRY

The measurements of God are different from those of people. He is looking at the hearts and He knows everything. When he evaluates the service, for sure, we will discover very strange facts on judgment day. Maybe we will see servants of whom we never heard about before!! Maybe we won't see the servants that we served with!!

Incorrect Evaluation Of The Ministry:

Evaluating The Service According To Responsibilities:

People evaluate the service according to the responsibilities of that servant. God, however, has different measurements. Let us turn to **St. Stephen** the first deacon, as an example. He was just a deacon, without any high rank. If the Church measured the strength of his ministry according to his rank in the Church, he would not be considered very highly, but, as it stands, he is mentioned even before all the Patriarchs. His ministry is measured according to its depth, for he was full of the Holy Spirit, wisdom and faith (Acts 6:3,5). Acts 6:8 mentions *“And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people.”* He faced three synagogues of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians and those from Cilicia and Asia), they were disputing with Stephen, but *“they were not*

able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke” (Acts 6:10).

This is why, after the laying on of hands (ie. after he became a deacon), *“...the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.” (Acts 6:7).* This was the powerful ministry of a deacon, which the Jews couldn’t bear, so they stoned him. During this, he said, *“Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!” (Acts 7:56),* and *“and they saw his face as the face of an angel” (Acts 6:15).*

Let us also look at **St. Abraam the Syrian**. He resisted the Arians strongly, and fought for the sake of the true faith, although he was just a reader in the Church, a rank given to thousands and thousands of Sunday School servants. He was called the “violin of the Holy Spirit” and “The Teacher” because of his poems and spiritual writings which influenced so many people. Can we then measure his ministry according to his rank as a reader?

Another example is **St. Athanasius** at the council of Nicea. At that time, he was just a deacon among 318 of the well known fathers, bishops and priests representing the Churches of the whole world. His work is measured according to his attitude against the Arians, and his zeal in defending the proper faith. He also extended the Creed to refute this heresy, the creed in which all the Churches of the world believe. Here, the ministry is not measured according to its rank, but according to its power and influence.

Also, **St. Simeon the Piercer** was a man without any rank in the Church - he was merely a layman. But the strength of his service was in the depth of his prayers. He saved the whole Church through the miracle of moving the Moqqatam mountain. This was done during the rule of Pope Abraam Ibn Zaraa.

Anba Roweis was not a bishop, priest or even a deacon, he was without any job or service in the Church, but in spite of that, the Church ranks him as one of its fathers.

We can also remember here, **Ibrahim El Gohary**, who was a layman occupying a job in the Government, but, he had a deep love for the church. Nobody can forget his services in building monasteries, Churches and helping the poor in a way which puts him above many servants.

An example apart from the Coptic Church is **Michael Angelo**. He was an artist, but his services in painting the Church's icons, made him famous in history, especially St. Peter's Cathedral. We don't ask about his rank, but about his deep and sincere service.

The Place Of Ministry:

Some people relate the importance of the servant to the place where they serve, but this is wrong. An example is **St. Gregory of Niazinza**. He was a Bishop of the city of Niazinza which is a small, unknown city. Yet, because of his deep, precious sermons and theological understanding he was called St. Gregory the Theologian. He made this city famous, it wasn't the city who made him famous.

The same applies to **St. Gregory the Bishop of Nicea**. He was the brother of St. Basil the great, and wrote many articles against the followers of Arius. He also had many holy contemplations, and wrote books about the blessings of God. Nobody can say that his service was useless because it was exercised in a small town.

The **Lord Jesus** Himself was born in a village, Bethlehem, the least of cities in Judea (Matt 2:6). He was related to Nazareth and some were wondering “*can anything good come out of Nazareth?*” (John 1:46), but He made Nazareth famous and was called “*Jesus of Nazareth*” (Matt 26:71). He also made Bethlehem famous, and it became a holy place.

The Length Of Time In The Ministry:

Many servants measure their greatness according to the long time they have been in the ministry. There are however, servants with shorter periods of service who are more effective and productive.

John the Baptist served only one or two years, and during this short period, he prepared the way for the Lord, “*He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah*” (Luke 1:17). The period of **Christ’s** incarnation was very short. He served for just over three years. After which, He said to the Father, “*I have finished the work which you have given me to do*” (John 17:4). He also said “*I have glorified you on earth...*” He completed the salvation, teaching and being a perfect example.

Pope Kyrillos IV served as Pope for around 8 years, but the Church called him “The Father of Reformation” because of his deep services to the Church.

Many priests have proven to be successful over their short ministry, one such man was **Father Manassa Yohanna** of the city of Mallawi (Upper Egypt). He departed when he was 30 years old. During this short time, he delivered thousands of sermons, wrote many books, and had great spiritual influence on his congregation.

Another priest who served for a short time was **Father Antonious Baqui of Queens**. He was the first priest sent to America in 1972. He served for only 5 months. However, his ministry was crowned with the sentence spoken by his congregation “We knew the Lord the day we knew you”. A person might come to Church as a guest and present a sermon, maybe this is all what he did in that Church, but his words may be so effective that many years later, the people still remember his words. Another may preach in one Church for many years and not have that degree of influence.

One day of **St. Paul’s** service is greater and deeper than many years of another’s service.

The Number Of People You Are Serving:

This criteria cannot be used as a tool for measuring the effectiveness of one’s ministry. What counts is the number of those who are influenced by your service and those who reached God as a result of it. Our **Lord Jesus Christ**, Himself preached to thousands, He also ministered to the twelve

disciples. These were more important than the thousands since they attracted cities and countries to the faith after Christ's ascension. The number of listeners is not important, but the number of those accepting the word with joy, in whom the word bears fruit and leads them to the life of repentance, holiness and perfection.

The Quantity Of Service

This is in regards to doing so many services at one time. Maybe you will be so busy doing all these things, you will lose control of everything, as a result the ministry loses its spirituality. **So, how can a spiritual ministry be measured?**

Elements of Successful Ministry:

The Source Of Power In The Ministry:

The importance of the ministry comes from its strength, depth, love and giving. The way it affects and changes people.

The Effective Word:

This was clear in the Lord Christ's service, Glory be to Him. We should take notice of the Lord Christ's invitation to St. Matthew, *"And as He passed by, He saw Levi, the son of Alphaeus, sitting at the tax collector's post and said to him, "Follow me". And he arose and followed Him" (Mark 2:14), (Matt 9:9).*

It was just a word said to a person responsible for tax collecting. As a result, he left his job, arose and followed Him without even asking where to?

The same powerful invitation was used when calling the four fishermen disciples. As it is written, *“And as He walked by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Then Jesus said to them, “Come after Me, and I will make you become fishers of men.” And immediately they left their nets and followed Him. When He had gone a little farther from there, He saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the boat mending their nets. And immediately He called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went after Him.”* (Mark 1:16-20).

Through the power of the Word, they left everything and followed Him immediately, without any hesitation, delay or argument. They left their father, their nets, and everything. St. Peter summarised it all by saying *“...“See, we have left all and followed You.”* (Matt 19:27).

The **Lord Jesus** also used to influence others through His teachings and sermons: When He ended His sermon on the mountain, it is written, *“... the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.”* (Matt 7:28). The same was written about His teachings in Capernaum (Mark 1:22).

His words had the power of convincing even those who argued with Him. When He explained to the scribes and Pharisees how a person is allowed to do good deeds on the Sabbath (Matt 12:1-12) and about the Resurrection, it was written *“.....He*

had silenced the Sadducees” (Matt 22:34). Also, “...no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore.” (Matt 22:46).

His words also influenced others because of their warmth and love. When he said to Zacchaeus, *“Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house.” (Luke 19:5).* A word, so deep and warm, led this person to repentance, so that he said to the Lord, *“Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold.” And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house” (Luke 19:8, 9).*

All this because of one strong, warm word spoken by the Lord.

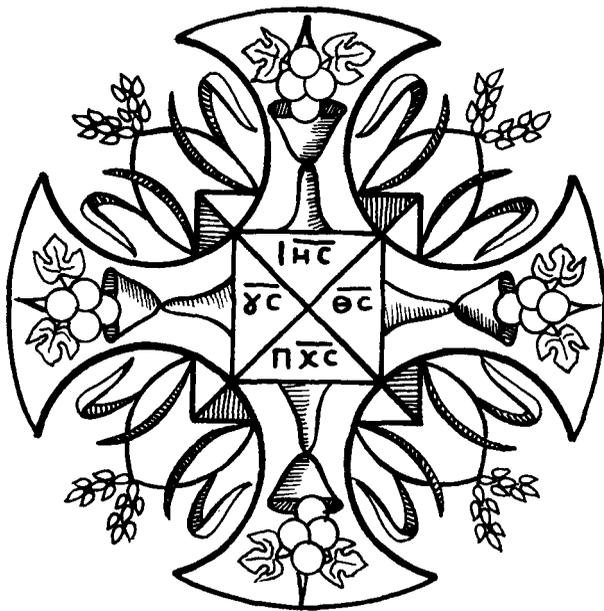
The same powerful words characterized the ministry of our Fathers, the Apostles. A sermon said by St. Peter the Apostle on Pentecost, attracted three thousand people who were baptized that same day (Acts 2:37-41). The strength of the word also appears in St. Paul’s ministry, even when he was captured and judged before Felix the governor *“Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid...” . (Acts 24:25).*

Also, King Agrippa said to St. Paul, *“You almost persuade me to become a Christian.” (Acts 26:28).*

The Power Of Giving:

Some servants like the easy service, with no troubles or effort, but the power of the ministry appears in bearing its hardships, in love, giving and rejoicing. An example of this is St. Paul the

Apostle's ministry *"...in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren, in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness (2 Cor 11:26, 27).*



CHAPTER FIVE

THE SPIRITUAL MINISTER

The attribute of the spiritual ministers (as will be discussed below) raises concerns and a question - Are we really spiritual servants?

The Real Servant:

It is easy for anyone of us “*to think of himself more highly than he ought to think*” (Rom 12:3). We think that we are servants of the Lord while the ministry in its spiritual depth has high standards. We may not have reached these yet. Alternatively, we may have started as spiritual ministers but did not continue that characteristic through. So who is the spiritual minister?

Spiritual Ministers:

Spiritual ministers are a beautiful tune in the ears of the Church:

They are clean, pure icons, a source of blessing to whoever sees them. They are ladders reaching up to heaven always taking their children above with them. They are bridges transferring others from the worldly shore to the heavenly shore, from the present age to eternity. They are the voice of God to people, not human voices; they are mouths through which God speaks.

The spiritual minister is a heavenly gift, sent from heaven to earth, and is one of the visits of grace, sent by God to the people, offering them the taste of heaven and of real life.

The Spiritual minister is a living Bible or a moving Church:

They are the picture of God in front of their children, an ideal example or model to follow and a means of explaining all virtues. They always feel the presence of God. The ministry to them is just like a holy altar, their work or service smells like incense. The aim of the spiritual minister is to let God enter their service saying with David *“Unless the Lord builds the house, they labour in vain who build it” (Ps 126:1).*

The Spiritual Minister always feels humble and unworthy:

They feel it is an honour to have the responsibility to prepare saints, *“to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:17).* They know quite well that the salvation of human souls is higher than their abilities, it is the work of God. They are not worthy of sharing this holy work with the Lord and the Holy Spirit. At the same time, they do not leave the ministry. In fact, the feeling of humility and unworthiness pushes them to pray more always saying to the Lord:

“O Lord, this ministry is your work and not mine, I know that you will work with or without me, I am just a by-stander *“who stands and hears....and rejoices greatly” (John 3:29).* It is true that *“neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase” (1 Cor 3:7).* Do your work, Oh Lord, let the hearts of your children rejoice. Do not prevent the grace of Your Holy Spirit from dwelling inside them because of my weakness and sins.”

Being insistent in their prayers, God will grant them His Grace, and when their ministry succeeds, they give glory to the Lord Who did all the work.

The Spiritual Minister is always a person of Prayer:

Through prayers, they serve their children and solve the problems of the service. Prayers to them is like breathing in and out, as the Fathers said:

The Spiritual minister is a flame of fire:

He has holy zeal for the salvation of souls, saying with David the Prophet, *"Surely I will not go into the chamber of my house, Or go up to the comfort of my bed; I will not give sleep to my eyes Or slumber to my eyelids, Until I find a place for the LORD..."* (Ps 132:3-5). This applies to the hearts of everyone.

The Spiritual Minister is the fragrance of Christ (2 Cor 2:15):

People smell in them the sweet aroma of Christ because they are the message of God read by everyone. They are a burnt offering pleasing to the Lord (Lev :1). In them, the divine fire becomes its flame, that can never be extinguished.

The Spiritual Minister continuously moves towards the Lord:

Moving inside God's heart, because the lord is inside their hearts. All their works are directed to the comfort of others in order to transfer every person to God's heart. They are candles melting with love in order to give light to others, fulfilling the Lord's words: *"You are the light of the world"* (Matt 5:14).

The Spiritual Minister is always struggling with God:

Struggling with the Holy Trinity, for their own sakes and for the sake of their children, making promises for them, *“that they may prosper”* (3 John 1:2), and be accepted before the Lord.

The Spiritual Minister is a soul, not only a mind:

They are not just teachers, but great souls united with the Lord and experiencing life with Him. They have tasted the sweetness of the Lord, and want to transfer this life to others. They do this by expressing their feelings, being good examples and praying for others. They don't just give lessons, they **are** the lesson. These servants prepare themselves before preparing the lesson, remembering the words of the Lord *“And for their sake I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth.”* (John 17:19), and St. Paul's words to his disciple Timothy the Bishop *“Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.”* (1 Tim 4:16).

The children of the spiritual minister do not need visiting:

Their children always want to attend the lesson. When they see their servants at Church, they feel that they have found a great treasure. They learn lessons just from their look and manner with others. Through love, they tie their children to the Church and the Lord. As a result, the children eagerly wait for the lesson.

Spiritual ministers love their children and the salvation of their souls:

The love of these children is part of the servants love to God. The servants love their children as Christ loved His disciples, it

was said about Him, *“having loved His own, who were in the world, He loved them to the end”* (John 13:1). Spiritual servants love God from all their heart, and want all their children to be the same.

The children of Spiritual servants are spiritual like them:

Their servant brings them up spiritually. Similarly, a social minister will bring up social children, the scientists concentrate on the scientific aspect of life, so their children will be just like books with much information and little spirituality. How beautiful are the words of Genesis, when talking about the creation of the plants on the earth *“Then God said, “Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb that yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed is in itself, on the earth ”; and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, the herb that yields seed according to its kind, and the tree that yields fruit, whose seed is in itself according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ”* (Gen 1:11). If this is the case, then we must be very careful as to how we reveal God to them, because our children will be the same.

Spiritual ministers feel that the children are their own God given talent and responsibility:

Each servant will give an account for each child God gave them *“to give them their portion of food in due season?”* (Luke 12:42). This is why each servant should always work in the fear of God, feeling his great responsibility.

Servants Should Ask Themselves Three Questions:

- 1. The spirituality of their ministry**
- 2. The spirituality of their life**

3. The spirituality of their children:

The spirituality of the servant's life is for the sake of their own salvation. As for the ministry, it must be spiritual in order to have a positive, fruitful influence in bringing up a spiritual generation. The spirituality of children needs patience and long suffering - letting God do all the divine work in them.

The spiritual ministers should be patient:

Thus gaining fruits from their children. Servants should not give up quickly, but work as hard as possible until their plants (children) give fruits and give a chance for the Lord to work in their lives. Here, we must remember St. Paul's words "*We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak.....*" (Rom 15:1). Some souls will not bear fruits straight away since they cannot give up their faults quickly. Both parties need patience until they are saved. God's goodness and long suffering working in His servants will lead both to repentance. (Rom 2:4). St. John Chrysostom said "If the embryo in the body needs many months to be complete before it comes out, let us also be patient until the spiritual embryo develops properly and not prematurely".

Spiritual ministers strongly attract their children:

Whoever comes into contact with them is attracted to their spirituality, and consequently, attracts people to the fatherhood of God and the motherhood of the Church. This is done in all love, kindness and care. They also become very attached to the loving God and are nourished with the teachings of the Church.

The spiritual minister should have “the living and powerful word of God” (Heb 4:12):

This word influences the listeners, it shall not return void (Is 55:11), they shine on others, enlightening whoever deal with them, to gain something divine. They are a blessing poured out on everyone, not only in Church, but also at home, work and everywhere. They serve everyone they meet and deal with.

They only care about the salvation of their children’s souls:

They forget all about themselves and concentrate only on their children, repeating with St. Paul the Apostle *“For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh....”* (Rom 9:3).

Spiritual ministers are honest people doing all their best to serve others:

They apply the verse *“Cursed is he who does the work of the LORD deceitfully”* (Jer 48:10). They work hard and deserve the work of God with them, that the Lord might consider their humility and effort, and help them accordingly.

Spiritual ministers do not depend on their own power, but on the gifts of the Holy Spirit working in them:

They are just instruments led by the Holy Spirit, living in continuous unity with God. The Holy Spirit works in them through them and with them. They are people filled with the Holy Spirit, if they talk, it is not them, but *“the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.”* (Matt 10:20).

The Spiritual servant no longer practices the life of repentance but the life of perfection:

No matter how much they grow, they always feel more humble and that they have a long way to go. All the time, needing God to accompany them on their journey.

Spiritual ministers do not feel that they are giving to the ministry:

Whenever they start serving, they feel that they are gaining something new from God, and that the ministry is giving them more than what they are giving it.

The spiritual minister lives as a student:

They are still learning and experiencing new things. They are people who lived with God and experienced the way leading to God. They do not keep this wisdom to themselves but share it with others, urging them to follow this same way with all its blessings despite its milestones and difficulties.

Spiritual ministers are examples and blessings in the service, all their lives:

The minister is not just words, but “*spirit and life*” (John 6:63). They are a blessing to those they live with, as well as those they encounter from day to day. The Lord said to Abraam, “*I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; And you shall be a blessing.*” (Gen 12:2). Elijah was a blessing in the house of the widow. Also, Joseph in the land of Egypt. Noah was a blessing for the whole world and more than that, life in the world was preserved through him. Are we the same wherever we go? Is our ministry a blessing to others? We must constantly ask ourselves

whether the Lord is blessing our ministry, making it successful and blessing all those whom we serve. Our presence must always remind them of the presence of God such that we become “men of God” as people used to call Elijah.

The Spiritual Minister Works All The Time:

God is always working and we should do the same, as Christ says “My Father has been working until now, and I have been working”, thus giving us a good example of continuous work, He used to work all day until sunset. In the miracle of the five loaves of bread and two fish (Luke 9:12), He also worked at night. When He met Nicodemus (John 3:2), and when He came to His disciples in the fourth watch of the night (Matt 14:25). The Lord Jesus used to work everywhere even while walking along the path (Luke 19:1-5). He brought Zacchaeus to repentance by calling him down from the tree and also led the Samaritan woman to salvation by speaking to her while resting near the well of Jacob (John 4: 6-7). With the three disciples in Gethsemane (Matt 26:36), and while walking on the water, He saved Peter from drowning (Matt 14:28-31). He threw His seeds everywhere, and the good land yielded fruits 30, 60 and 100 fold, some seeds also fell among thorns and hard soil. The apostle Paul said about Jesus that He “*went about doing good*” (Acts 10:38). Even while Jesus was on the cross, He was working. Not only the work of salvation (which was His main work), but also many other works including asking forgiveness for those who crucified Him (Luke 23:34), asking John to look after St. Mary (John 19:26, 27) and giving the thief on the right the blessing of entering into the Paradise of Joy (Luke 23:43).

God always works in silence, without us asking Him to do so. He fights for those falling under injustice, protects the children, He saved the three young men from the burning furnace (Dan 3), Daniel from the lions' den (Dan 6), Peter while in prison (Acts 12), He revealed to St. John things that he never asked to see, took St. Paul up to the third heaven, and much, much more.

Since God works continuously, His angels must do the same:

Those angels about whom David the Prophet speaks “*you His angels who excel in strength, who do His word*” (Ps 103:20), also St. Paul says “*Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation*” (Heb 1:14). They are working by announcing good news, transferring God's orders to people. They reward people by either saving or punishing them. The Bible says “*The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them*” (Ps 34:7).

God Wants People To Work, Our Work Can Be:

1. **Inner Work:** This is the work inside one's soul with itself. Debating, reproaching and fixing up its weaknesses. The other work inside the soul is with God - a work of love, meditation, feelings and thoughts dwelling on His commandments day and night.
2. **The work of reconciliation:** This is a spiritual work, aiming at reconciling people to God. St. Paul the Apostle said about this “*For we are God's fellow workers*” (1Cor. 3:9).

The Holy Spirit of God shares the work with us, thus, we become partners with the Holy Spirit. The Lord said to two of His disciples *“Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men”* (Matt 4:19). How can we follow Him and still be made fishermen. God’s will for us is that we throw the net, and He will call the fish to enter. So we do not do the work alone, but it is God working with us. He will then reward us, as He says to the Bishop of the Church of Ephesus, *“I know your works, your labour, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil ... and you have persevered and have patience, and have laboured for My name's sake and have not become weary.”* (Rev 2:2).

This is why the Apostle says *“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”* (1 Cor 15:58).

“For God is not unjust to forget your work and labour of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.” (Heb 6:10).

“And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward.” (Mat 10:42).

Even the person who comes to the Lord at the eleventh hour of the day to serve the Lord in His vineyard, will receive his wages exactly like the others. There is a dangerous warning by St. James concerning this work *“Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.”* (James 4:17).

So, sin is not only doing evil, but neglecting good deeds, hiding the talent in the ground is sinful (Matt 25:24).

A person may excuse himself and say “I don’t know how to serve”:

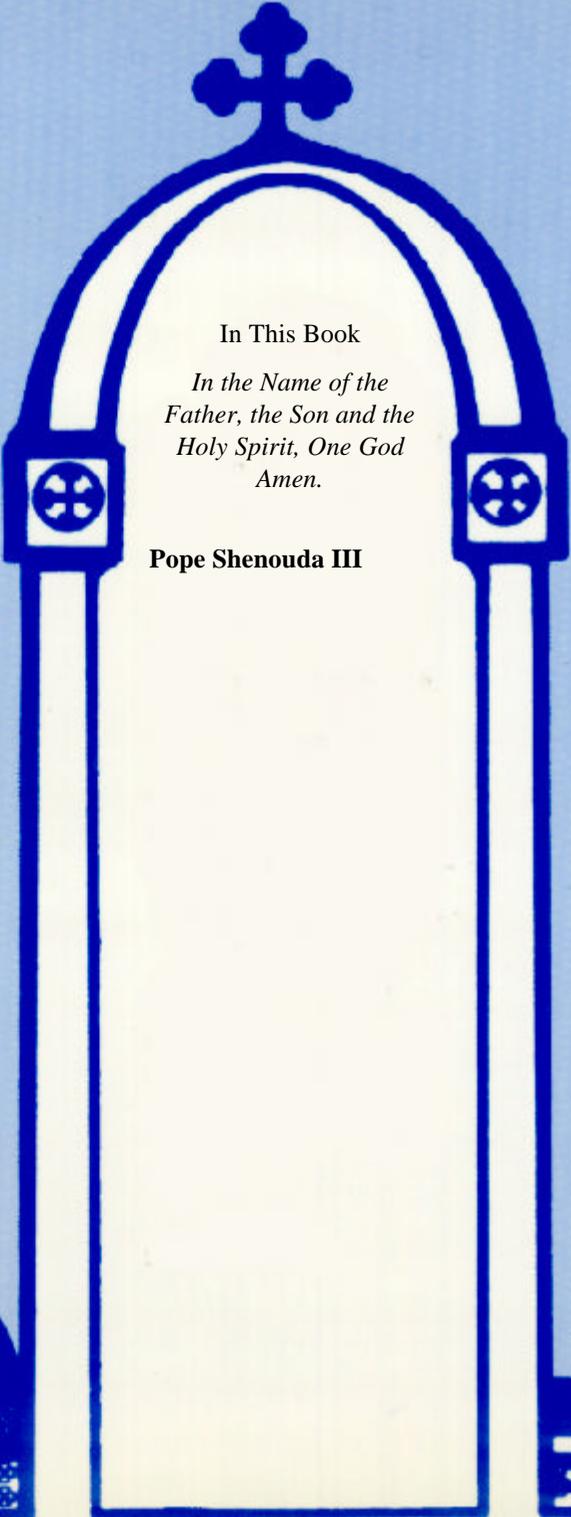
This person reminds me of Jeremiah the Prophet, who said to the Lord “...*I cannot speak, for I am a youth.*” (Jer 1:6). But the Lord rebuked him saying “*Do not say, 'I am a youth,' For you shall go to all to whom I send you, And whatever I command you, you shall speak.*” (Jer 1:7). This initial refusal to serve is also like Moses who said to God “*Then Moses said to the LORD, 'O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.'*” (Ex 4:10), and again “*....Behold, I am of uncircumcised lips, and how shall Pharaoh heed me?*” (Ex 6:30). In spite of this, God did not accept all these excuses. God knows all the gifts He has given us, He knows us mentally. Therefore, we have no grounds to stand on when denying our ability to serve the Lord. We will have to give an account for every gift given to us including those we did not use to serve the Lord. The Lord Himself says “*For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.*” (Luke 12:48). If we say “we have no gifts”, He will tell you, work according to whatever gifts you have. As much as you are able, give one, two or five talents (Matt 25). Do not just stand there doing nothing. Think about your life and what you can offer - God created you for a purpose, to be a member of His Body. Just as every member in our body is constantly working, so every member in Christ’s body should be working.

So, we have to work, even if we have poor gifts, it is said by our Lord “*.....you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord.*”

(*Mat 25:21*). God doesn't care about how much we are doing, He only cares about our honesty in working with what we have.

Let your ministry be full of hope, even if the fruits appear much later, never give up or think we are not gifted but "*Cast your bread upon the waters, For you will find it after many days.*" (*Eccl 11:1*).

✦✦✦ MAY GOD BLESS YOUR SERVICE ✦✦✦



In This Book

*In the Name of the
Father, the Son and the
Holy Spirit, One God
Amen.*

Pope Shenouda III

