

Mesore

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2021-08-29: 4th Sunday of Mesore - Watch

Introduction

End of Calendar Year

- We are coming up on the end of the Coptic Calendar Year now
- For those who don't know, the Coptic Calendar is 12 months that are 30 days each starting with Thout and ending with Mesra. And then there is a small month that is 5-6 days (depending on leap year).
- So the last full month is Mesra which is the month we are in now.
- And the Sunday Lectionary is based around these months. So every Sunday, the readings are all pointing to a theme... And the four Sundays of every month come together to give us the theme of the month.

Theme of Mesra - Be Ready

- As you heard in the gospel reading today and last night, the Church arranged for us to read about the end times as we approach the end of the year. And next week, God willing, will be the Sunday of Little Month and we'll read about the Second Coming of Christ.
- So the Church is giving us a theme during these last days which is to BE READY. The theme of the month of Mesra is to BE READY.
- Be ready for what? We heard it today in the gospel...
 - Wars
 - Nation will rise against nation
 - Kingdom against kingdom
 - Earthquakes
 - Famines
 - Troubles
 - Etc.
- Sometimes we read these passages and other similar passages and we want to know the details:
 - When will this happen?
 - Will it be during my lifetime?
 - I see a plague or a pandemic... Is this what Christ was talking about?
 - I see a war... Are we in the end times?

- And we're so curious about these things, pouring through the Book of Revelation and Daniel and Thessalonians and trying to figure it out.
- But the Lord was very clear... That's not what he wants from us. When the Pharisees asked him last night in the Vespers Gospel "when will the Kingdom of God come?" He told them "The Kingdom of God does not come with observation" but "the Kingdom of God is within you."

Theme of 4th Sunday Mesra

- So what is He saying? Don't worry about the end of the world! Worry about yourself. Worry about the end of your life which could come at any moment! We come to the end of the year and the Church is reminding us "don't forget the end of your life"
- St Athanasius: "In the end of all is the end of each, and in the end of each is the end of all... For who, if they knew the day of the end would not disregard the interval? But if ignorant, would they not be ready day by day?"
- The message from today's Gospel is not about the signs but rather it comes to us from the very important passage at the end of today's Gospel reading:
 - "it is like a man going to a far country... Watch!"
 - Today's message is to WATCH
 - You don't need to know when He is coming, you just have to know THAT He is coming. And since He is coming... Watch. Watch.
- What does it mean to watch? How do I watch? What do I watch?
 - We'll discuss three points

1 - Spiritual Growth

Watch Lest You Become Stagnant

- In the Spiritual Life there is no concept of idleness or stagnation. There is only growing or falling. And if you're not growing, you're falling!
- Am I better today than I was yesterday? For example maybe yesterday I did not pray but today I prayed.
- Am I better this year than I was last year? Maybe this year I started to fast on Wednesdays and Fridays.
- Am I better this week than I was last week? This week I decided I would start attending the Midnight Praises, and I attended!
- The Church gives us many resources for spiritual growth:
 - Prayer via the Agpeya
 - Praises and the Psalmody
 - Reading the Scripture
 - Learning and chanting the hymns of the Church
 - Fasting on Wednesday, Friday and all the fasts of the church

- Attend Spiritual Meetings (Youth Meeting, Graduates Meeting, Servants Meeting, Elders Meeting, Sunday School)
- Reading Spiritual Books
- Reading the Lives of the Saints
- Etc.
- This is the beginning of Spiritual Growth. Doing.

Watch Lest Your Growth not be Spiritual

- Of course, it's not enough to just DO with the body, but I must also do with the Spirit - that's why it's called Spiritual Growth
- I might open the Agpeya every day and read through it but my mind is somewhere else... My spirit is not present with me.
- I might read the Scripture every day, but my attitude towards it is Lukewarm. In one ear and out the other. I don't let it penetrate my spirit. I don't let it change me.
- I might fast and eat vegan food, but I am treating others poorly - my wife or kids or coworkers or even strangers.
- I could be in Liturgy every single week, but I am not participating at all. Or I am participating but my spirit is absent.
- Watch Lest your Growth be not spiritual. Remember that the Kingdom of God is within you.
- See what St Paul wrote to the Thessalonians in today's Pauline Epistle reading:
 - "For this reason we also thank God... Christ Jesus."
 - The Thessalonians were so concerned about the end times and why hasn't Christ come back yet, and what about our friends who died before Christ returned, and other sorts of panicking and questions. But St Paul wrote to them, thankful to God that they accepted the Gospel he handed to them as the word of God, and that it works in them effectively and that they imitated the Church. And he exhorts them to continue in Spiritual growth.

2 - Spiritual Warfare

Watch Lest you fall into Temptation

- Satan is crafty. He can come at you in many different ways and with many different methods.
- The good news is... We are not ignorant of his devices. We are not unaware. We know his tricks.
- He might come at me with pride. Convince me that I am better than those around me - I fast more, I pray more, I know more, I read the Bible more, etc.
- He might come at me with old sins - elementary or beginner sins. Sins that I repented of many years ago. And tempt me to fall into sin.

- He may attack me with laziness or complacency. I may forget that sometimes doing nothing is sin too.
- I have to be watchful of Spiritual Warfare and the tricks of Satan.
- Of course, the Spiritual Growth we just finished talking about gives us weapons and defenses against the temptation of the devil - fasting, prayer, Bible, etc.

Watch Your Participation in the Sacraments

- But what if I fall? I must repent of course.
- Watch that you repent with an open heart, confess with honesty, and receive the Eucharist worthily.
- This is what St James teaches us in the Catholic Epistle today:
 - "Therefore submit... Lift you up."
 - Repentance is the remedy to Spiritual Warfare.

3 - Talents

All have talents

- One of my favorite things about Nashville and coming to visit here is all of the talents. The people of Nashville are a wonderful congregation with so many talents
 - Cooking and Baking
 - Speaking
 - Singing
 - Art and Poetry and composition of songs
 - Learning and memorizing
 - Construction and Building
 - Designing
 - Fixing cars
 - Doing hair styles
 - Repairing appliances
 - Administrative work
- Every single one of us has talents given by God without exception.

Watch Lest You Use the Talents for Your Own Glory

- Am I using my talents for the glory of God?
- Am I using my talents to serve God, to serve the Church, to serve others - my neighbors and my friends, strangers, even those who hate me?
- God gave us our talents to serve one another

- "As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another" (1 Peter 4:10)

Watch Lest You Ignore or Reject your Talent

- Sometimes the devil might convince me that my talent is not good. Or it's not as good as another talent. I might envy someone else's talent. I may completely reject my own talent or ignore it.
- Watch Lest you Ignore or Reject your Talent
- Watch Lest you hate or disdain your talent out of jealousy

Conclusion

Review

- We said today that the theme of the month of Mesra is BE READY
- And the focus during the fourth week (today) is WATCH
- And we took three examples of what to WATCH for:
 - Watch for Your Spiritual Growth Lest you become stagnant, lest your growth be not spiritual
 - Watch for Spiritual Warfare lest you fall into Temptation, lest you ignore the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession
 - Watch for your talents lest you use them for your own glory, lest you reject or ignore them, lest you hate or disdain them

Application

- I hope that we can go home today and WATCH! Not watch TV or Netflix but WATCH myself. Examine myself in these areas.
- Let us enter the new year having a plan for spiritual growth, a plan for repentance and confession, and a plan for how we will use our talents for God's glory to serve one another.

Concluding Prayer

- May the Lord grant clarity to our Spiritual Eyes to examine ourselves and to WATCH so that we can BE READY for Christ who was and who is and who is to come.

Glory be to God forever. Amen.

2025-08-10: 1st Sunday of Mesore - Stewardship

Visual Aid

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/errr849iohyvaoo4do91l/Stewardship.pptx?rlkey=74vvntrmijvdl3ssurzf13y4h&dl=0>

Background

Today is the 1st Sunday of the Coptic Month of Mesore and the Church arranges the readings of the first three Sundays of this month to speak about how the Lord cares for His Church.

Introduction

Today the Gospel Reading according to St Luke showed us one of the very important parables that the Lord preached: The Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers. The Lord said this parable near the end of His ministry in Jerusalem and its meaning was very clear to the Pharisees and Chief Priests and Scribes - so much so that they sought to lay hands on Him after hearing it.

A vinedresser planted a vineyard. Then he leased it to some vinedressers, and went away for a long time.

When it was vintage-time, when it was time for the vineyard to produce fruits, the man sent his servant to go and get some of that fruit. The vinedressers beat the servant and sent him away. So he sent another servant... again, they beat him and sent him away empty. Then he sent a third... again, they wounded him and cast him out.

So the man sends his son, and the gospel says specifically: "his beloved son" - but when the vinedressers saw him, they cast him out of the vineyard and killed him. And the Lord tells them "Therefore what will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and destroy those vinedressers and give the vineyard to others."

And the chief priests and scribes UNDERSTOOD the Parable, so they said "Certainly not!"

They understood that:

- The man refers to God
- The vineyard refers to Israel
- The vinedressers refer to them, the keepers of Israel in that day
- The servants refer to the prophets
- The son refers to the Lord Jesus Christ

The message of the parable was that God had entrusted them with a vineyard, a promised land, a nation, a people. And when God sent His servants, the prophets, they persecuted them and cast them out and rejected them. And that now God sends His Son - His beloved Son - and He is rejected, and He will be killed. And God will destroy them and give the vineyard to someone else.

And the Lord drives home the idea by referring to the prophecy of Psalm 118 - "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone."

This is the prophetic meaning of this parable. The Lord prophesies His death at the hands of the Jewish people, and the giving of the Heavenly Kingdom to others; to Gentiles. We, the Christian people. The New Israel.

There is also a spiritual meaning. These wicked vinedressers were evil stewards. The owner of the vineyard leased it to them - he made them stewards. He entrusted them the care of his vineyard, the responsibility of it, and they were evil in their stewardship. What about us? Are we good stewards? What does it mean to be a steward? What are we stewards of?

The Concept of Stewardship

A steward is someone who is entrusted with responsibility over something... a business, a piece of land, a vineyard. The steward is not the owner, but the owner entrusts him with the stewardship.

St John Chrysostom says: "A steward's part is to administer well the things committed to his charge: not to say that his master's things are his own; but, on the contrary, that his own are his master's."

So the key word in stewardship is "I am not the owner"

We are not the owners of:

- Our life
- Our money
- Our health
- Our intellect
- Our children - "behold children are the inheritance of the Lord"

Sometimes we conduct our lives as if we are the owners, not as stewards. We are stewards for God. God is the owner. We are born with nothing on our backs, nothing in our hands... and when we leave this world, we will take nothing with us... whatever we have here is given to us from God as a stewardship.

Today we will discuss three principles of stewardship.

1 - What God Gave Us is Good

The vineyard that the Lord planted was not just a basic vineyard.

"There was a certain landowner who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country" (Matthew 21:33)

The Lord gave these stewards something that is good and something that can bear fruit. If the man hadn't set a hedge around it, it would be exposed to thieves or wild animals. If he hadn't dug a winepress, there wouldn't be anywhere to gather the harvest. If he hadn't built a tower, there wouldn't be a place for watchmen to guard against danger. The man prepared everything perfectly so that the vineyard could flourish. And THEN he gave it in a stewardship.

The Lord has made me steward over many things, and equipped me with much to be fruitful. But my job is to bring those fruits for God's glory.

The Lord when He created the heavens and the earth, at the end of each of the six days, He looked and "saw that it was good" (Genesis 1)

"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights" (James 1:17)

What am I a steward of?

- My body
 - "Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? Therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." (1 Cor 6:19-20)
 - The Lord gave me a body and I am leasing it for my time on earth, for my sojourn.
- Money
 - "Honor the Lord with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase" (Proverbs 3:9)
 - The money in my account and the possessions in my house are not mine. I'm not the owner of them. They belong to the Lord and he gave me stewardship.
 - You might say - what do you mean it's not mine? I worked hard for it... who gave you energy to work hard? Who gave you the job in the first place? Who gave you the mental capacity to work and to make decisions? Who gave you the breath of life and woke you up in the morning for work?
 - It's not mine. I'm not the owner. But I'm entrusted with it to use for God's glory.
- Talents
 - "As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." (1 Peter 4:10)
- Intellect
 - "For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding" (Proverbs 2:6)
- Time
 - "See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Ephesians 5:15-16)

- Every moment I have, every second I am alive, every day that I wake up - is another opportunity the Lord is giving me.
- If I am a parent, I am a steward of my children
 - "Behold, children are the inheritance of the Lord, the reward of the fruit of the womb" (Psalm 126)
- If I am a servant in Sunday School, I am also a steward of the children in my class
 - St Paul today talks about his ministry of preaching the gospel as a stewardship. He says...
- If I am a manager at work, I am also a steward of the employees that are under me
- If I am a leader in a club at school or on a sports team, this is a stewardship

The Lord has given me a good vineyard. He entrusted me with many things to be steward of them.

2 - Faithful and Wise Stewards

What does the Lord expect me to do with my stewardship? "Who then is that faithful and wise steward" (Luke 12:42)

Faithfulness and Wisdom

"It is required in stewards that one be found faithful." (1 Corinthians 4:2)

An owner of a business who wants to hire a manager will look for someone who is faithful and wise.

- Wise means he will make good decisions and turn a profit.
- Faithful means he won't steal that profit.

If he is wise but unfaithful, then he will make good profits and then steal it for himself. If he is faithful but not wise, then he will honor you and support you and be loyal, but he will not make a profit. He won't bring fruit. But you want someone who is faithful and wise.

The faithful and wise steward of God will use his gifts to make a profit and render that profit to the Lord - to give glory to God.

- A steward that is not wise will not know how to use his gifts.
- A steward that is not faithful will use his gifts for his own interests, and not for God's glory.

"Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." (1 Corinthians 10:31)

This is what the Lord expects from us. We are stewards of our body, our time, our money, our talents, our intellect, our health, our jobs, our educations, our children - but we must be faithful and wise.

- Money
 - Someone is entrusted with money.

- If he isn't wise with money, he will throw it all away. Maybe he will gamble it all away. Maybe he will spend every dollar that he earns without saving anything. Maybe he buys things he doesn't need. He uses money based on his desires or how he feels in the moment... without any thought or planning. So his money is fruitless. Lacking wisdom.
 - On the other hand, someone who is wise with money but is not faithful - he will use that wisdom to multiply his wealth for selfish gain. He ignores the needs of others. He ignores the purposes of God. He seeks only to build up his own wealth and possessions and a bigger house and a nicer car and a fancy watch and the newest phone. Not faithful.
 - The faithful and wise steward realizes that money is a tool entrusted to his stewardship by God. It is not the end, but it is a means. He spends it carefully. He saves it. He gives generously. He invests it in things that further God's kingdom, and not in businesses that promote evil. The faithful and wise steward honors the Lord with his possessions and with his money.
- Intellect
 - Someone is entrusted with intellect.
 - If he is not wise, then he will be misled. There are people who in High School or College started to learn Philosophy, and were misled. Or who got deep into the sciences and Evolution and Cosmology - but because they lacked wisdom and discernment, they were misled. Or as St Peter says, they follow after cunningly devised fables... they heard a video on TikTok or Instagram about some strange doctrine... but it sounds legit. Maybe it is supported by Bible verses (as all heresies are)... So they follow it. And they are not able to bring fruit from their intellect. Lacking wisdom.
 - If he is not faithful, then his intellect becomes self-serving. To put many degrees and certificates on the wall. To have many books and academic papers in my name. To make a name for myself. The intellect and the education becomes the end, not the means. Not faithful.
 - The faithful and wise steward realizes that intellect is a tool entrusted to his stewardship by God. It is not the end, but a means by which to glorify God. It's a way to learn more about the Lord and to engulf myself in His word. To learn apologetics and how to defend the faith. To serve those who have intellectual blocks to the faith - lost sheep who are struggling with atheism and they need someone who can give them intellectual arguments. To evangelize and bring people to the knowledge of the Truth. To start businesses that support the community. To invent new products and ideas that can help the needy. The faithful and wise steward will use his intellect for God's glory.
 - Health
 - Someone is entrusted with health.
 - If he is not wise, he will neglect his health and his body. Overworking himself, ignoring rest, eating and drinking unhealthy. He will not see fruits.
 - If he is not faithful, then the health becomes self-serving. Again, it becomes an end. Take care of my body, exercise, eat well, rest - but it is vanity. It's so I can take

pictures for instagram. So I can glory in my own appearance. Or it takes over my life - I can't make time for God, but I can make time for the gym.

- The faithful and wise steward realizes that his health and his body are entrusted to his stewardship by God. They are not an end, but they are a means to glorify God. They use their health to serve others - to ask about people, to visit the brethren, to serve the sick, the perform acts of mercy in the community.
- Time
 - We are all entrusted with time.
 - If we are not wise, we procrastinate. Or we overcommit. Or we waste hours on distractions - scrolling through reels/shorts. Hours and hours on video games. Hours on watching movies and TV Shows. Hours and hours on watching sports. Excessively sleeping. Lacking wisdom.
 - If we are not faithful, then we will use our time for personal ambition. I am extremely productive in planning, scheduling, accomplishing many things... I don't stop and I don't waste a second... but it's all for my own ambition. Or for my own comfort. Or for worldly gain.
 - The faithful and wise steward understands that "the days are evil" and "redeeming the time." He invests his time in spiritual matters. He has a time for work and a time for rest. He has a time for his spiritual canon. He has time for his family. He has time for his friends. He has time for God. The faithful and wise steward redeems the time.
- The same goes for my talents, my job, my education, my children. All of these gifts that I am entrusted with, I must be faithful and wise.

Why? What is the result?

3 - Stewards Are Accountable

Stewards are accountable. "Give an account of your stewardship"

If we know that God will ask us "How did you spend your time?" we will be careful to spend our time in a way that glorifies God.

If we know that God will ask us "What did you do with your money?" we will be careful to use our money to glorify God.

If we know that God will ask us "What did you do with your children?" we will be careful in raising our children to be well-balanced in their spiritual life, in their education, in their social life.

If we know that God will ask us "How did you deal with your employees?" we will be careful to treat our employees with respect and honor them and give them a fair wage and serve them.

The Lord will ask us - "I gave you money, children, family, intelligence, health, career, talents, time... what did you do with these gifts? Did you waste them? Did you bury them? Or did you produce fruits glorifying God? Give an account of your stewardship."

If the Lord asked me right now, "how did you use your time last week?" - What would I say?

If the Lord asked me right now, "what did you do with your children this summer?" - How would I respond?

Let me put these questions at the front of my mind, knowing that I am a steward and that stewards are accountable. It's a good exercise at the end of each day, and at the end of each week, and at the end of each quarter and year to give account of my stewardship. To look at all that the Lord has entrusted to me and ask myself these questions.

Conclusion

In today's parable, the Lord warned the wicked vinedressers because they failed in their stewardship. They received a good vineyard that was protected and provisioned and able to produce fruits. But they were not faithful. They were not wise. And instead of rendering fruit for the owner, they kept it for themselves.

We also are entrusted with a vineyard - a good vineyard that is prepared for us. Our life, our time, our money, our talents, our intellect, our health, our relationships, our children, our jobs, our employees. These are not our own - they are God's, and He gave them to us for stewardship... to tend them and to return the fruit.

One day, the Lord will ask each one of us: "Give an account of your stewardship." God forbid that we show up before Him empty-handed. But if we are faithful and wise in our stewardship, we will hear those fateful words, the reward of faithful stewardship: "Well done good and faithful servant, you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord."

May the Lord grant all of us to hear those words, and may He give us faithfulness and wisdom in dealing with our stewardship, lest we become like those evil vinedressers.

2025-08-17: 2nd Sunday of Mesore - Follow Me

Visual Aid

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/kb3sihtftcl4c2oaq5uyu/Follow-Me.pptx?rlkey=cc4r5g3l8vqfh02x3zsyxkrkm&dl=0>

Background

Good morning, dear beloved

We are coming to the end of the Coptic year now - today is the 2nd Sunday of the Blessed Month of Mesore.

And the Church arranged for us today the Gospel Reading of the Calling of Matthew the Apostle. Matthew was a tax-collector named Levi working in a tax office and the Lord passed by him and said two words: "Follow Me." The Gospels don't mention to us that they had any interaction before that. They don't mention that Levi saw a miracle or heard a teaching. It was two words - Follow Me.

I think to better understand this story, we have to understand a little bit of the culture in the time of the Lord Jesus Christ - 1st Century Judaism.

Follow Me

In those days, education was very structured for Jewish males.

A boy, from age 5-10 would go to the Synagogue and learn Torah, Hebrew Language, memorization, chanting, etc. Sort of like Elementary School. Then from age 10-14, those who excelled would go to school to learn the Oral Law and the Prophetic books. And this is like Middle School.

At 13 or 14 years old, there would be a split. Those students that were not the top of their class or were not so exceptional in their schooling, would go back to their family business or find a different trade to work in. They were respectable, but they were ordinary. What about the exceptional ones?

They would seek out Rabbis and ask to become their disciple. The Rabbi would examine him - quiz him on his knowledge of the Torah, test his memory, see how he applies Scripture to situations, assess his reputation. And if he doesn't pass the exam, the Rabbi would reject him. He might tell him to go back to his family and their trade, or tell him you don't have what it takes, or just you cannot be my disciple.

So if he passes the Rabbi's test - if he is the best of the best, top of the class in his village or town, memorizing the whole Torah, having a good reputation, then the Rabbi would look at him and say: "Follow me." And he would follow him.

The Lord Jesus comes to Levi today and says "Follow Me." No test, no memorization, no reputation... even though Levi had a terrible reputation. He's a tax collector - he's taking money from Jews and giving it to Romans, he's supporting the enemy! That didn't matter - "Follow Me." So it's no wonder that Levi left all, rose up, and followed Him. And the same goes for all of the disciples. The Lord chose His disciples from the rejected - those who were filtered out by the system already. Those who weren't the most knowledgeable in Torah. Those who didn't have advanced training in the Oral Law. Those who weren't experts in the prophets. Those who didn't have the best reputations. So the Lord, goes to THEM and says the words that they all wished to hear in their youth - "Follow Me."

What does it mean to "Follow Him?"

St Matthew - again, Levi is St Matthew - he did five things today. And we'll take them as five points for our benefit.

"And He said to him, 'Follow Me.' So he left all, rose up, and followed Him. Then Levi gave Him a great feast in his own house." (Luke 5:28-29)

1 - Hear His Voice

The first thing Levi did is he heard the voice of the Lord Jesus. And he wasn't in a private conversation, he wasn't in the Synagogue, he was sitting at the tax office. In the hustle and bustle of people paying their taxes and bartering and arguing, he heard the voice of the Lord.

Are we listening to the voice of the Lord?

The Lord is telling us to Follow Him... but can we hear Him?

There are other voices:

- The biggest commodity in today's digital world is my attention. Everyone wants my attention. Everyone wants me to hear their message. Every game on my phone gives me notifications "hey you earned coins, come back and play!" Every news site sends me notifications. YouTube videos are paid by retention - the longer I have you hooked on my video, the more money I make. How many ads can I put in this video or on this page. These are voices! And they are distracting!
- The voice of others around me, my friends and family, peer pressure. The friend who tells me "come ride the car with me, let's skip Sunday School." The friend who offers me drugs, vapes, alcohol, gambling. The coworker who wants me to lie or cheat to get ahead. These are voices. And they are distracting.

- Also, the voice of the devil, trying to tempt us and deceive us. The devil who deceives you with sin "just do it, you can confess after." The devil who deceives you "Don't confess, Abouna will judge you." This is the voice of the devil. And it is distracting.

But can we set those aside and hear the voice of the Lord?

The Lord Jesus didn't call Levi in silence, but in the middle of all these distractions.

If my ears are not tuned to the frequency of His voice, then I won't hear Him. If I can't hear Him, then I can't Follow Him.

"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me." (John 10:27)

How do I tune my ears to His voice?

- By engulfing myself in the Scripture
- By listening to the Sunday School lessons, Youth Meeting topics and the Sermons
- By reading spiritual books - the books of HH Pope Shenouda, books about the saints, books about virtues, books about the Fathers, books about the liturgy and the rituals.
- Prayer - like Samuel who prayed: "Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears." and then was able to discern the Lord's voice
- Spiritual guidance - from my Father of Confession or Spiritual Father, from my servants, from someone older who I know is faithful and filled with God's wisdom

The more I engulf myself in God's voice, the more I will be able to hear Him.

Let me ask myself at the end of every day - whose voice filled most of my day? Was it God's voice or was it something else?

2 - He Left All

When the Lord Jesus said to Levi: "Follow Me," Levi left all. No excuses. No hesitation. No looking back.

Let me leave behind the evil things, the things that are causing me to sin, the people that are causing me to sin.

Today in the Catholic Epistle, we read from 1 John: "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life - is not of the Father but is of the world."

All that is in the world. Any evil thing or any sin can be categorized under these three categories: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life.

The gospel tells us that St Matthew "Left all." He didn't say "okay I'll follow you and I'll work as a tax-collector part-time." Or "I'll follow you on Saturday and Sunday but I have work during the week." No, he left all.

"Whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple." (Luke 14:33)

We can't have the old life and the new life at the same time.

It seems radical to leave all... and it is! The Gospel is radical. Being a disciple is radical. If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. Radical. Leave all - even my eye? Yes, even your eye. How?

- If your social media causes you to sin, deactivate it.
- If your phone causes you to sin, replace it with a dumb phone.
- If your computer or your internet causes you to sin, cut it off. Move it to the living room where everyone can see what you're doing. Or go use the internet at Starbucks or at the Public Library.
- If your friend causes you to sin, he's not your friend - walk away. Get another friend. Why do you need someone who is causing you to sin? Someone who offers you drugs, or vaping, or alcohol, or gambling, or skipping school, or or or. Why?

"For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:26)

Following the Lord requires us to leave all.

Let me ask myself: What is one thing I am clinging to that is preventing me from following Him?

3 - Rose Up

Levi left all and then he rose up. He took action. Imagine if he said "Okay I'm following you, Jesus" but he doesn't get up from his chair... we do that sometimes.

- Okay Lord, today I'm going to pray as soon as I wake up! And then I set my alarm for 10 minutes before work.
- Okay Lord, today I'm going to read the Bible before I sleep! And then I turn on a movie.
- Okay Lord, this year I'm going to fast the whole Great Lent! And then I book a cruise for the first week of it.

Saying it is easy. Doing it is the hard part.

St James says: "Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works." (James 2:18)

Levi rose up - he took an action. He made a decision in the moment.

Abouna Reweis shared with us last night the story of St Paesa and her repentance. And in her story, the Lord revealed to St John the short that St Paesa's repentance was accepted the moment she left the house of sin. When she took action.

Abouna also shared an example of a hurricane - if the weatherman says a hurricane is coming, believing him is not enough. I need to board up my windows, bring in my trash bins, gather

supplies... only then will I be ready.

Following the Lord requires action. Levi rose up!

What actions can I take to follow Him? To become an active disciple?

- Set a time for prayer
- Read the Scripture
- Repent and Confess
- Receive the Eucharist
- Fasting

We all know the answers... we know what we need to do... we know what is good for us. But do we do it? The important part is taking action. Intentionality.

- Set a time for prayer
 - There's a big difference between saying "I will pray in the morning" and setting an alarm clock for prayer.
- Read a passage from the Scripture and meditate on it
 - Don't just say "I will read the Bible today." - but make a plan. Pick a passage, set a time and prepare an explanation to read
- Repent and sit for confession with Abouna
 - The one who says "I will confess when Abouna is not busy" will never confess. Send Abouna a message and say "I need to set a time for confession." Arrange a time and then be there.
- Receive the Eucharist
 - Be prepared. I know I have liturgy on Sunday, so I will make sure I am reconciled with my brother, and I have confessed what I need to confess, BEFORE then. Be intentional!
- Fasting
 - Several days before the fast begins, prepare your refrigerator. Finish the non-fasting food - the meat, the dairy. Buy some fasting food. Be intentional about your fast. Take action!

Let me ask myself - what is an action that I will take today to rise up like Levi and follow the Lord?

4 - Followed Him

So he left all, rose up, and followed Him.

Following a Rabbi was not just "come walk behind me" - it meant to leave your home and your family and your village and your trade and travel with him full time. It meant to learn his teaching. It meant to imitate his life - his speech, his actions, his mannerisms.

This is exactly what Levi did with the Lord Jesus Christ. He spent time with Him, he heard His teachings, and He imitated His life.

St Paul teaches us: "Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also loved us" (Ephesians 5:1)

Following the Lord is about imitating His virtues in every relationship, in every role, in every aspect of my life: DAILY.

- At home
 - Speaking with love to my parents, my siblings, my children.
 - Helping without complaining
- At school or work
 - Being honest even if no one is watching
 - Helping someone who is struggling, to overcome their struggle
 - Shutting my ears to gossip and harmful speech
- With friends
 - Offering encouragement instead of criticism
 - Fostering good habits with each other

St Paul reminds us in today's epistle:

- Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.
- Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord
- Bondservants [Employees], be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling
- Masters [Employers], do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven

Following the Lord is about imitating His virtues and striving to become like Him in all aspects of my life.

What is one specific way that I can imitate Christ today? In my words, actions or relationships

5 - Great Feast in His Own House

Finally, Levi celebrated His discipleship by inviting the Lord to his house and making a gathering of all of those around him to share the Lord with them.

Following the Lord is not just something personal, but it means that we share His love and His mercy and His truth with others.

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 5:16)

- When I show love to someone, they will see my good work and glorify my Father in heaven.
- When I show mercy to someone, they will see my good work and glorify my Father in heaven.

With my actions, I can share the faith. There's a saying: "Preach the gospel, and if necessary use words." I can spread the message of the gospel simply with my actions, my behaviors and my speech. That which I imitate in Christ.

At the end of the liturgy today, Abouna will say "Go in peace, the peace of the Lord be with you all." - This peace that we receive from the Liturgy is meant to go out with us into the world. Do we take into the world? Or even into our neighborhood? Or even into our own homes?

Is my house a house of prayer, a house of purity and a house of blessing? Is my house a house of peace? Is my house a house of forgiveness and compassion and love and mercy? Is the Lord invited to my house? Or is my house a place of arguing and complaining? Is it a place of gossip?

What do I share with my coworkers and my classmates and my friends? Is it rumors and stories? Is it just jokes and memes? Or do I share the Lord Jesus Christ? Do I share a verse that resonated with me? Do I share a story of a saint that I liked? Do I share a positive word, a word of encouragement? Do I share a smile? Do I share good deeds? Do I share love and mercy?

Am I a light to the world and salt of the earth?

This is what Levi did today - he invited all of the tax-collectors and sinners to his house to meet the Lord. This was his response to discipleship. This is how he followed the Lord.

Conclusion

The Lord said to Levi - Follow Me, and Levi became His disciple. We, too, are disciples of the Lord. The word Christian means "disciple of Christ." What does it mean to be a disciple? What does it mean to follow Him?

There's a flavor of Evangelical Protestantism in the world now that is "seeker-sensitive" or "seeker-friendly." They love to say "Come as you are." And "The Lord loves you just the way you are." In Orthodoxy, our message is a little different. Yes, come as you are... but be ready to follow Him. And following Him means radical change:

- Leaving behind the sins, distractions and attachments of the world. Maybe even how I dress, how I speak, or my lifestyle.
- Following Him means rising up and making a commitment to be active in my discipleship; intentional in my spiritual life
- Following Him means listening, learning and imitating the life of Christ
- Sharing His love, mercy and truth with those around us

May the Lord grant all of us to take the example of our beloved St Matthew - to hear the Lord's voice, to leave all, to rise up, to follow Him and to share Him with the world.

Glory be to God, forever. Amen.

2025-08-31: 4th Sunday of Mesore - Watch

Visual Aid

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/ly0exceudvgqlen61qfnm/Watch.pptx?rlkey=lpbszfs8zplevdmae42kggz5e&dl=0>

Background

Good morning, dear beloved

We are coming to the end of the Coptic year now - the Coptic Calendar has twelve full months. Each month is 30 days... so that gives us 360 days. So there are 5-6 days leftover which we call the Little Month.

So today we're in the fourth Sunday of Mesore. And next Sunday, God willing, will be the Sunday of the Epagomenal Days and this is called Sunday of the Little Month. After that, on September 11th, God willing, we will celebrate the Nayrouz which is the new Coptic Year.

So that means this Sunday and next Sunday are the last Sundays of the year. And the theme of these two Sundays is the same. Watch. Be Ready.

The Church reminds us at the end of the year with the end of life. Actually, the Church gives us this reminder at the end of each day, at the end of each week and at the end of the year.

Every evening in Vespers, no matter which day of the week, no matter if it is a Feast or a regular day, we pray the Litany of the Departed. End of day - end of life. Also on Saturday morning in Matins, which is the last day of the week, we pray the Litany of the Departed. End of the week - end of life.

Also in our Agpeya prayers. At the 12th hour, which is the end of the day, we pray "Behold, I am about to stand before the just judge, terrified and trembling because of my many sins." - it's a reminder about the end of life. And also "If life were everlasting and this world ever-existing, you would have an excuse O my soul" - if this world lasted forever, and there was no death and no judgment, then you would have an excuse to live according to your flesh,,, but there is a judgment day. There is death. "If your wicked deeds and ugly evils were exposed before the Just Judge what answer would you give?"

So the same thing with today's Gospel and next Sunday's Gospel

The theme is to be ready. We heard in the Gospel today about:

- Wars
- Nation will rise against nation
- Kingdom against kingdom
- Earthquakes
- Famines
- Troubles
- The Sun will be darkened
- The moon will not give its light
- The stars will fall from heaven

When we read these passages, our first instinct is we want to know "WHEN" will this happen? Will it be during my lifetime? If I see an earthquake or a pandemic like COVID or a plague.. is this what Christ was talking about? If I see a war, are we in the end times? Many people are so curious about these things, pouring through Revelation and Daniel and monitoring the news trying to figure it out.

Watch

But the Lord is very clear... that's NOT what he wants from us. Last night in the Vespers Gospel, the Pharisees asked Him: "When will the Kingdom of God come?" The Lord answered them and said "The Kingdom of God does not come with observation" but "The Kingdom of God is within you."

The Lord is telling them - don't worry about the end of the world. Don't worry about the signs. Worry about yourself. Worry about the end of your life which could come at any moment!

- St Athanasius: "In the end of all is the end of each, and in the end of each is the end of all... For who, if they knew the day of the end would not disregard the interval? But if ignorant, would they not be ready day by day?"

The message from today's Gospel is not about the signs but actually it comes to us from the very important passage at the end of today's Gospel reading:

"It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming - in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning - lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!"

What does it mean to watch? How do I watch? What do I watch?

We'll see the answer in three points

Spiritual Growth

"The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon." (Psalm 92:12)

Watch Lest You Become Stagnant

In the Spiritual Life there is no concept of idleness or stagnation. There is only growing or falling. And if you're not growing, you're falling!

Watch lest you become stagnant and fall

Remember the Israelites. After God delivered them from Egypt, many of them still lived in fear. Many of them were disobedient to God's commandment. They even refused to enter the Promised Land! After everything God had showed them - the plagues of Egypt, the pillar of fire, the cloud, the Red Sea, the Manna from Heaven, the Water from a Rock... but because they were stagnant, and they had no desire to increase, they fell. And they wandered 40 years until they had all died and the next generation entered the Promised Land.

The Church gives us many resources for spiritual growth:

- Prayer via the Agpeya
- Praises and the Psalmody
- Reading the Scripture
- Learning and chanting the hymns of the Church
- Fasting on Wednesday, Friday and all the fasts of the church
- Reading Spiritual Books
- Reading the Lives of the Saints
- Attend Spiritual Meetings (Sunday School, Youth Meeting, BRAVE Men, Virtuous Women, St Joseph Meeting) - all of the ages are covered!
- Etc.

Let me ask myself...

- Am I better today than I was yesterday? Maybe yesterday, I did not pray... but today I prayed.
- Am I better this week than I was last week? This week I decided I would start attending the Midnight Praises, and I attended!
- Am I better this year than I was last year? Maybe this year I started to fast on Wednesdays and Fridays when I didn't before.
- Or did I go down? Maybe I didn't have a plan for spiritual growth, so I thought I would stay the same, but really I went down.

Watch lest you become stagnant and fall.

Watch Lest Your Growth not be Spiritual

There's also another danger in Spiritual Growth - that I think I am growing, but I am not.

Watch Lest your Growth be not spiritual

If we take the example of King Saul - King Saul calls himself a Benjamite of the smallest of the tribes of Israel, and from the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin... and then he became King of Israel! That is Growth! If we read Deuteronomy 17 we see that God laid down some

principles for kings through Moses - the king is a spiritual leader. He is meant to write for himself a copy of God's Law, keep it with him, read it all the days of his life, fear the Lord, be careful of all the Lord's statutes. But this is not what King Saul did. Because King Saul's growth was not spiritual. His heart did not grow with God.

- The clearest example of this, I think, is in fasting. I eat vegan food, but I am treating others poorly - my wife or kids or coworkers or even strangers.
- I might open the Agpeya every day and read through it but my mind is somewhere else... My spirit is not present with me.
- I might read the Scripture every day, but my attitude towards it is Lukewarm. In one ear and out the other. I don't let it penetrate my spirit. I don't let it change me.
- I could be in Liturgy every single week, but I am not participating at all. Or I am participating with my mouth, but my spirit is absent.

Watch Lest your Growth be not spiritual

Spiritual Growth

In today's Pauline Epistle, St Paul writes to the Thessalonians and he thanks God for their spiritual growth.

- "For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe. For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus." (1 Thessalonians 2:13)
- So they received the word of God, they welcomed it as the word of God and not just words of men, they allowed the word of God to work in them, and they became imitators of the churches in Judea.

This is real spiritual growth. To let the word of God penetrate my heart, influence my thoughts and my actions, that I imitate the Lord.

Spiritual Warfare

Watch Lest You Fall into Temptation

Even if I am growing, the enemy is not idle. Satan is crafty. He can come at you in many different ways and with many different methods.

Think of King David - the man after God's own heart. And then he was tempted - and he committed adultery, and then murder to cover up his adultery.

The good news is... We are not ignorant of Satan's devices. We know his tricks.

- He might come at me with pride. Convince me that I am better than those around me - I fast more, I pray more, I know more, I read the Bible more, etc.
- He might come at me with old sins - elementary or beginner sins. Sins that I repented of many years ago. And tempt me to fall into sin.
- He may attack me with laziness or complacency. I may forget that sometimes doing nothing is sin too.

I have to be watchful of Spiritual Warfare and the tricks of Satan. Of course, the Spiritual Growth we just finished talking about gives us weapons and defenses against the temptation of the devil - fasting, prayer, Bible, etc.

Watch Lest You Do Not Repent

If I am tempted, and I fall, then what? I must repent of course.

Repentance is the remedy to Spiritual Warfare.

- Watch that you repent with an open heart, confess with honesty, and receive the Eucharist worthily.
- This is what St James teaches us in the Catholic Epistle today:
 - "Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up." (James 4:7-8)

Let me ask myself...

- How many times this year did I confess?
- When I confessed, how many times did I hide one of my sins? Or is there a sin I have been hiding from my Father of Confession for a long time? What sins, or relationships, or habits am I keeping to myself, or trying to justify them, or trying to say they are not a sin?
- Cleanse your hands, purify your hearts, lament and mourn and weep. **Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord and He will lift you up.**

To overcome Spiritual Warfare, I must repent.

Talents

"As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Peter 4:10)

Watch Lest You Ignore or Reject Your Talent

- Sometimes the devil might convince me that my talent is not good. Or it's not as good as another talent. I might envy someone else's talent. I may completely reject my own talent or ignore it.

- Watch Lest you Ignore or Reject your Talent

Cain was jealous of Abel because God accepted Abel's offering but not his. Instead of improving his offering, or using his gifts correctly, he rejected them. He submitted to anger and killed his brother.

Every one of us has talents, given to us by God, without exception. Sometimes we reject our talents because we would rather have other talents. We have seen youth who are so talented in reading and writing and speaking and memorizing and learning... but those aren't the "cool talents." The cool talent is playing basketball... so they forsake all that they have - leave behind their talents and spend all of their energy pursuing some other talent.

- Watch Lest you hate or disdain your talent out of jealousy

Watch Lest You Use Your Talents for Your Own Glory

And if I am using my talents, let me ask myself - Am I using my talents for the glory of God? Or for my own glory?

- Am I using my talents to serve God, to serve the Church, to serve others - my neighbors and my friends, strangers, even those who hate me?
- God gave us our talents to serve one another
- "As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another" (1 Peter 4:10)

The Pharisees had a gift. They were knowledgeable in the Scripture and they could memorize the Oral Law, They knew the religious duties. But they did the religious acts to be seen and praised by men. They did not care about honoring God. They only cared for what people saw.

Using my talents for God's Glory

Acts:

- "They traveled as far as Pheonicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word"
- "When Barnabas came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord."
- "Agabus stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar."
- "Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea."

Throughout the Book of Acts, we see how the apostles are using their talents for God's glory. In this passage we see that many disciples traveled to Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, preaching the word. They have the gift of preaching, they use it. Then we see that Barnabas came down and encouraged them all. That's one of his talents, and he used it for God's glory. Then, Agabus prophesied about a famine in the world - this is a spiritual gift. And finally we sum it all up with the last verse of the chapter - "Then the disciples each according to his ability, determined to send relief" - each one according to his ability. According to his gift, his talent, his stewardship.

Watch lest you don't use your talents, or you use them for your own glory instead of God's glory

Conclusion

- Today is the fourth Sunday of the Blessed Month of Mesore and as we close the year, the Church is orienting our thoughts to the theme of WATCH.
- And we took several examples of what to WATCH for:
 - Lest you become stagnant
 - Lest your growth be not spiritual
 - Lest you fall into Temptation
 - Lest you ignore the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession
 - Lest you ignore your talents
 - Lest you use them for your own glory

May the Lord grant us to conclude this year with Him, to examine ourselves, to WATCH and to BE READY and to always remember that there is no guarantee for my life. At any time, I can find myself in Judgment Day.

Glory be to our God, forever. Amen.

2026-08-09: 1st Sunday of Mesore - The Stone Which the Builders Rejected

Visual Aid

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/jvgr52xhaijwwl4lt72wq/The-Stone-Which-the-Builders-Rejected.pptx?rlkey=4pzujsajpir0vsthfnobjv5jr&dl=0>

Background

Today is the 1st Sunday of the Coptic Month of Mesore and the Church arranges the readings of the first three Sundays of this month to speak about how the Lord cares for His Church.

Introduction

Today the Gospel Reading according to St Luke showed us one of the very important parables that the Lord preached: The Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers. The Lord said this parable near the end of His ministry in Jerusalem and its meaning was very clear to the Pharisees and Chief Priests and Scribes - so much so that they sought to lay hands on Him after hearing it.

A vinedresser planted a vineyard. Then he leased it to some vinedressers, and went away for a long time.

When it was vintage-time, when it was time for the vineyard to produce fruits, the man sent his servant to go and get some of that fruit. The vinedressers beat the servant and sent him away. So he sent another servant... again, they beat him and sent him away empty. Then he sent a third... again, they wounded him and cast him out.

So the man sends his son, and the gospel says specifically: "his beloved son" - but when the vinedressers saw him, they cast him out of the vineyard and killed him. And the Lord tells them "Therefore what will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and destroy those vinedressers and give the vineyard to others."

And the chief priests and scribes UNDERSTOOD the Parable, so they said "Certainly not!"

They understood that:

- The man refers to God
- The vineyard refers to Israel

- The vinedressers refer to them, the keepers of Israel in that day
- The servants refer to the prophets
- The son refers to the Lord Jesus Christ

The message of the parable was that God had entrusted them with a vineyard, a promised land, a nation, a people. And when God sent His servants, the prophets, they persecuted them and cast them out and rejected them. And they understood that now God sends His Son - His beloved Son - and He is rejected, and He will be killed. And God will destroy them and give the vineyard to someone else. The Gentiles... the Christians.

And the Lord drives home the idea by referring to the prophecy of Psalm 118 - "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone."

This is the prophetic meaning of this parable. The Lord prophesies His death at the hands of the Jewish people, and the giving of the Heavenly Kingdom to others; to Gentiles. We, the Christian people. The New Israel.

There is also a spiritual meaning. These wicked vinedressers were evil stewards. The owner of the vineyard leased it to them - he made them stewards. He entrusted them the care of his vineyard, the responsibility of it, and they were evil in their stewardship. They rejected the chief cornerstone... they rejected Christ.

Let me examine myself, as a steward of God's vineyard, do I reject Him? What does rejection of Christ look like? We will talk about three types of rejection.

1 - Reject Christ in Doctrine

It is like saying: *"I will not believe what You teach"*

- "He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son." (2 John 1:9)
- This was the first way that the Pharisees rejected Christ. They did not believe what He taught. They did not believe that He is God, the Son of God. They did not believe that He came to save them and the rest of the world. They did not believe that He would rise on the third day.
- Someone might ask - does it really matter if I don't have the right belief or the right theology, or if I get something wrong... Of course it does!
- The Doctrine given to us by Christ is so clear because He usually gives it in the positive AND the negative.
 - "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed." (John 6:53-55)
 - "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." (Mark 16:16)
 - "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." (John 3:5)

- Just as the Jews rejected the Doctrine of Christ in His day, and the Lord quoted for them this verse, so also those in our day who reject the Doctrine of Christ - His Salvation, His Grace, His Church, His Sacraments - reject Him.

2 - Reject Christ in Morality

It is like saying: *"I will not obey what You command"*

- Another form of rejecting Christ is rejecting Him in morality. Being lukewarm in my moral behavior.
- The Pharisees did this too. Although they knew God's command very well, they were more interested in the outward appearance of God's command. And the Lord rebuked them for it - "You also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness." (Matthew 23:28)
- I may think of myself as someone who understands the doctrine of the Church and even the commandment of God... but if I don't do it, then I understand nothing! Then I reject Him!
- "If you love Me, keep My commandments." (John 14:15)
- Moral behavior could be something I am doing - I am acting immorally. Read the end of Romans 1: "Unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful." (Romans 1:29-31)
- Moral behavior could be something I am supporting or approving: "who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them." (Romans 1:32)
- Moral behavior could be that I cause someone else to stumble - my brother is standing next to me, trying to hold himself from sin. And I sin in front of him. And God forbid I even tell him "just because you're weak that's not my problem." You reject Christ. You reject the Chief Cornerstone.
 - We heard from Fr Reweis last night about St Paesa and the impact that friends can have when causing each other to stumble. In the beginning of her story, she was amazing - giving alms, opening a house for the poor, spiritual canon. But when, because of evil friends causing her to stumble, she started to do evil, St John the Short said to her "Why do you belittle the Lord Christ and do this evil deed?" Why do you reject the chief cornerstone?
- Moral behavior could be something I am lukewarm - I am not approving or disapproving, I am just letting it go and going with the flow. "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth." (Revelation 3:16-17)

3 - Reject Christ in Priority

It is like saying: *"I will not give my life to You"*

- This is the most difficult form of rejecting Christ, because we all do it every day. Even if we believe in the teaching of Christ and the Church. Even if we understand the

commandment of God and strive to do it regularly. But still sometimes, the hardest thing is to prioritize the Lord in my daily life.

- It is hard to keep my spiritual canon consistent.
- It is hard to use PTO to attend a feast or a convention or a service day
- It is hard to reject friends who are not edifying me, in favor of Christ
- It is hard to put spiritual growth in the forefront when I'm concerned about academic growth, physical growth, relationships, etc.
- It is hard to put aside my own will and what I want for my life, and check first what God wants in my life.
- But the Lord tells us...
 - "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." (Matthew 6:33)
 - Seek Me first, and all those other things you're worried about, all those things that you WANT to prioritize, I will give those to you as well.

Conclusion

The Scribes and Pharisees heard these words today, and heard the Lord quoting Psalm 118: "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone." But when they heard this, and understood the parable was about Him, they sought to lay hands on him. They did not turn in repentance. They did not examine themselves.

How about me?

Today I hear the same verse - "the stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone." Will I go and examine myself? Will I turn in repentance?

Let me examine myself to see if I reject the Lord in His Doctrine, or in His Commandments or in Prioritizing Him in my life. The Lord is always ready and waiting for our repentance.

Glory be to God, forever. Amen.