

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.