

2025-09-07: Sunday of the Little Month - Abomination of Desolation

Visual Aid

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Background

Good morning, dear beloved

As we mentioned last Sunday, 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 Sunday of the Little Month. The last Sunday of the Coptic Calendar. On Thursday, God willing, we will celebrate the Feast of Nayrouz and the New Coptic Year. Then next Sunday will be the 1st Sunday of Thout.

Like we said last week, the theme of these last two Sundays of the year is the end of the world, the end of life. The Gospel today is almost the same as last week. Last week we read the words of the Lord from Mark 13. In Vespers last night, we read the same words from Luke 21. And in the Liturgy today from Matthew 24. Last week we took a message: Watch. Be Ready.

Today, we will look at some of the verses from this gospel that we read in all three readings:

"Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (whoever reads, let him understand), "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes." (Matthew 24:15-18)

Abomination of Desolation Standing in the Holy Place

In the Gospel of St Mark last week it says "the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not" and in the Gospel of St Matthew, "the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place."

It's the same meaning.

What is desolation?

- Desolation means a state of complete destruction

What is an abomination?

- Abomination refers to something that the Lord hates
- Something defiled to God, something impure to God
- We read in the scripture about several different sins that are called abominations
 - Idolatry and False Worship (Deut 7:25)
 - Sexual Immorality - homosexuality, transgenderism, fornication, relations outside of marriage (Lev 18:22, Deut 22:5, Ezekiel 22:11)
 - Ritual Immorality - offering blemished sacrifices, bringing the wages of sin into the temple (Deut 23:18, Deut 17:1)
 - Immoral Practices - cheating, lying, plotting evil, sowing discord (Prov 6:16-19)

So what is the meaning of abomination of desolation?

When you see an abomination - something unholy - standing in a holy place - then the desolation will come. When that which is unholy replaces that which is holy, then the destruction or the desolation will come.

When the Lord uses this term "abomination of desolation," He is referring to Daniel 9:27

"And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate,
Even until the consummation, which is determined,
Is poured out on the desolate."

The Fathers see here that this prophecy, and the words of the Lord, have three levels of interpretation; three dimensions of meaning at the same time.

- Historical
- Prophetic
- Spiritual

And we can discern them by asking "what is the holy place?"

What is the Holy Place? The Holy Place is the place where God dwells. So it is either:

- The Jewish Temple - and this will give us the historical meaning
- The Church of God - and this will give us the prophetic meaning
- My Body - since I am the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in me (1 Cor 6:19-20) - and this will give us the spiritual meaning.

Historical Meaning

- Titus, the Roman Commander, entered with horses and soldiers into the Holy of the Holies.
- The Holy of Holies was very sacred - only the high priest could enter, and only once a year in the Day of Atonement.
- When Titus, the Roman Commander, entered the Holy of Holies with his horse and his Roman soldiers, this was considered to be an abomination. Gentiles, riding on unclean animals, in the place where even the high priest could only enter once a year... this is an abomination standing in the holy place, where it ought not... and the desolation came after.
- The Temple was destroyed in 70 AD, and the Jews were driven out of Jerusalem, and it was left desolate.
- And since 70 AD until today, the Temple was not rebuilt - even though they tried several times to build it.
- This is the historical meaning of the abomination of desolation

Prophetic Meaning

- The prophetic meaning is about the end of times.
- We read it in the Pauline Epistle today:
 - "Let no one deceive you by any means; for *that Day will not come* unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God." (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4)
 - The son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself - this is the antichrist.
- When the antichrist, who is unholy, sits as God in the Church of God, showing himself that he is God - then this is an abomination in the holy place. Desolation will follow. Destruction will happen.
- Side-note:
 - We see in history that the downfall of every great nation and kingdom was preceded by a period of moral decay
 - We saw it with kingdoms of Israel and Judah in the Scripture - as they delved into idolatry and sexual immorality and immoral practices, they strayed further and further from God. And then they were taken captive by Assyria and Babylon.
 - It happens in history with the Greek Empire
 - It happens in history with the Roman Empire - the greatest empire in the world.
 - And now we see in our modern world, a great nation like the United States, which is called the "leader of the free world" - which was built on Christian principles by Christians, which even in the pledge of allegiance is called "One Nation under God" - yet, it is starting to give in to moral decay. Sexual immorality is becoming the norm in the world, everyone is living in luxury, sins are becoming normalized - like cheating, gambling, destroying the body with drugs, alcohol, vaping, tattoos and piercings, etc. Everything is an idol!
 - Because of the cunningness of the devil, we see that many of these things have even become normalized in the world - and even inside some churches (not the Orthodox Church, God forbid). For example when something that is an abomination is supported in the name of love... God is love! Love is holy - how can something

unholy stand in the place of that which is holy?! This is the abomination of desolation.

- May God have mercy on us

Spiritual Meaning

- So the historical meaning is where the Holy Place refers to the Temple of the Lord. And in 70 AD, it was desecrated by the unholy and what followed was its destruction and the desolation of Jerusalem.
- The prophetic meaning refers to the antichrist, who will come and will deceive many, and will be exalted in place of God.
- What about the Spiritual Meaning?
- "Or 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?" (1 Corinthians 6:19)
- So if my body or my heart is a Holy Place, why do I allow that which is unholy to enter and defile it? Why do I let other things become my gods? Many times we make for ourselves other gods - of course, we don't call them gods. No one will say "I worship other gods" - but we make gods for ourselves and we worship them. We prioritize them. We set them as #1. We give them time. We give them effort and energy.
 - Maybe it's money or possessions - my main focus is to make money. It doesn't matter what comes in the way of that... if I need to cheat, I will cheat. If it's at the expense of going to Church or even of receiving the sacraments, so be it. It's the first thing on my mind in the morning, and the last thing on my mind at night. It becomes my god. This god is called Materialism.
 - Maybe it's pleasure or entertainment - my main focus is to have fun. It doesn't matter what comes in the way of that... if it's sin, then it's sin. I want to work so hard to retire early so that I can sit at home and do nothing - just watch sports, watch movies, take trips, eat and drink and be merry. I wake up thinking only about what I'm going to eat, what I'm going to watch, where I'm going to go. Pleasure consumes me. It becomes my god. This god is called Hedonism.
 - Maybe it's my ego - my main focus is to have a good reputation, to have fame, to be well known. It doesn't matter what comes in the way of that... if it means putting others down, so be it. If it means doing what's "cool" and not what is "right" - then that's what it has to be. I need to look good, make sure my social media looks good, newest iPhone, nicest car, biggest house - everyone needs to know who I am. And ego becomes my god. This god is called Egoism.
- We can categorize all of these things into three categories:
 - ◦ Materialism - Love of money
 - Hedonism - Love of pleasure
 - Egoism - Love of self
- If there is another god in my heart, when I make something else to be my god, this is an abomination in the holy place. If I don't clean my heart from the love of money, love of

pleasure and love of self, then desolation will happen - the destruction of the person.
Abomination of Desolation.

Remedy

The Lord gives us in the gospel today, three remedies to the abomination of desolation.

Sacramental Life

- **"Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains"**
- Judea represents lying on self-righteousness. The scribes and the Pharisees and the priests and high priests were self-righteous. They relied on their self-righteousness to be justified before God.
- "God, I thank You that I am not like the other men - extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess." (Prayer of the Pharisee in the Parable of the Pharisee and Tax Collector - Luke 18:11-12)
- His self-righteousness appeared in judging others and taking pride in himself
- The Law of the Old Testament was based on everyone's own righteousness. And no one was able to fulfill the Law by himself. Until the Lord Jesus came, took our human body, fulfilled all righteousness of the Law, and then gave us this righteousness to us as a free gift in Baptism. We put on the righteousness of Christ. And if we defiled this righteousness, then through the Sacraments of Confession and Repentance, and Communion, we restore the righteousness of Christ.
- So Judea is the self-righteousness that we saw in the Law, and the Mountains is the Church, to the relationship with God, the place of help.
 - "I lifted up my eyes to the mountains from where my help will come."
- Flee from Judea to the Mountains
- Don't rely on self-righteousness to fight these three gods (money, pleasure, self).
- But come to the Church. Ask God for His grace and for His righteousness.

Spiritual Life

- **"Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house."**
- Don't be distracted
- Housetop is where people used to go to pray
- "The next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour." (Acts 10)
- Don't be distracted by the duties of the day, to take away from your spiritual life - or to put it differently, do all the duties of the day for the glory of God.
 - "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." (1 Cor 10:31)
 - My relationship with God is not just on Sunday morning, but I need to be in constant connection with God.
 - I cannot let the worries, pleasures and riches of the world distract me
- But to fight these three gods - money, pleasure, self - I need to be in the housetop.
- "Pray without ceasing"

Life of Struggle

- **"And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes."**
- Working in the field is hard work. Take your garment is to be laid back, lazy.
- Fight the good fight. Run the race. Struggle.
- We are missing this point in our life today - struggle. Sometimes I am just coasting...
 - I attend liturgy sometimes... but if I'm tired, it's okay. God is merciful, right?
 - I fast in the Great Fast and in Pascha... but Wednesdays and Fridays is too much. God will forgive me, right?
 - If I have time to pray in the morning, I will... but I have work and school and a long drive and lots of responsibilities... God will understand, right?
- What we see today is the victim mentality - I will do nothing, and then I'm not bearing fruit because xyz. I blame him and her and the church and the president and the oppression, etc.
- Where is the struggle? Where is the try? Am I working in the field? Or am I being lazy, being laid back?
- Where is the dying daily like St Paul says? Like Abouna mentioned in the sermon last night?
- Where are the talents that God gave me? How am I using the health and the energy that He gave me? Am I being a witness to others? Is my light shining in the world?
- Am I producing fruit?
- Each of us is entrusted with talents and we need to trade them for the glory of God. My children, my health, my intelligence, my money, my witness to the people with me at work.
- I need to struggle with my children in order to produce fruit. I need to labor with my health and my intelligence and my money, in order to produce fruit. I need to use my talents for God's glory, to produce fruit.
- Life is not meant to be easy, but like St Paul says - "I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race."

Conclusion

- Our focus today was on these 4 verses from the Gospel
- We saw that the Lord is speaking at three levels of meaning:
 - Historical about the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD
 - Prophetic about the antichrist
 - Spiritual about my own heart
- Then, focusing on the Spiritual Meaning, the Lord gave us three remedies for what might be in our heart:
 - I need to run to the Church to receive the grace of God in the sacraments.
 - I need the life of prayer, to be on the housetop in constant connection with God.
 - I need to struggle, to fight the good fight, to run the race.
- In this way, I will put out from my heart the love of money, the love of pleasure, and the love of self.

May the Lord grant us to be circumspect at the end of this year, to really examine our hearts and see if there's any abomination where it ought not to be... and may He give us His grace to eradicate the abominations, lest we fall into desolation and destruction.

Glory be to God forever. Amen.

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