



PERFECTION OF LOVE

A B L E S S U S A N E W S L E T T E R Vol. 12 No. 5

God is Present

The group of BLESS USA servants who traveled Egypt in November 2008 had a number of surprises in store for them during their visit. They were surprised each time they visited a new village with a greater degree of poverty than the one before it. They were surprised at how far-reaching this abject poverty was, at how simple the needs of the Brethren of the Lord were and yet how out-of-reach these necessities seemed. What was most surprising, however, was the faith and hopefulness of the Brethren of the Lord who could often boast of nothing more than the shirts on their back. Indeed, it seemed that as the communities got progressively poorer, their residents were more faithful and gracious.

Moasest el Zaka, a village just outside of Cairo, was just this type of community. The servants who visited the village were instructed to park the van that transported them on its outskirts because its streets were too narrow and overlaid with garbage to allow them to park the car closer to the center of the village. The most obvious feature on arriving in Moasest el Zaka was the stench of the garbage that covered the streets and - more astounding - the sight of the barefoot children that played among the garbage.

The community consisted mostly of families hailing from towns such Al-Minya and Assiut in Upper Egypt who moved closer to Cairo in pursuit of better opportunities. BLESS esti-

mates that approximately 1000 Coptic families reside in the small village, many with between eight and ten children. The breadwinners are largely uneducated and support their families through manual jobs that they seek on a daily basis in the surrounding area. Their objective in moving to Moasest el Zaka was to make just enough money to purchase a small piece of land they could pass along to their children. However, the shortage and inconsistency of work has prevented most from being able to save enough for even a meager one-room home. Instead, the servants observed that many of these families inhabit roofless huts and designate segments of the bare floor for each family member to sleep. They are also continuously struggling with various illnesses and diseases caused by the unclean water that they drink and which often floods their homes, leaving them with no dry surface on which to sleep.

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Yet, despite the dismal surroundings, what each servant remarked was the faith and graciousness displayed by the village's residents. The Brethren of the Lord living in Moasest el Zaka seemed aware of the presence of God and His mercies in their life at every minute. Instead of despairing at their circumstances, the villagers appeared to see their challenges as a means of drawing closer to Our Lord Jesus Christ. This display of unflinching faith was the most important lesson the BLESS USA servants took back with them from their visit.

A Call of Love

We can all relate to the added demands that the holiday season places on us. The Brethren of the Lord are also placed under similar demands, such as providing food, clothing and gifts for their loved ones. Therefore, BLESS in Egypt doubles the contributions to the Brethren of the Lord during the Christmas season. We invite you to share in the blessings of giving a Christmas offering to the Brethren in Egypt, so that we all, as one body in Christ, may be able to enjoy this joyous feast.

Year End Reminder...

Please note that BLESS USA is required to process and report all contributions by the end of the year. Therefore, all your contributions need to be received at BLESS USA by **December 31, 2009** in order for them to be included in your **2009** contribution summary report. The summary will be mailed out by January 29, 2010. May the Lord remember your faithfulness and continue to grant you His blessings.

Spiritual Message

Reverend fathers, beloved brethren and friends of BLESS USA:

May the peace, love and blessing of our Lord Jesus Christ unite us all.

Beloved brethren, I would like to thank you for the abounding hearts with which you have made your offerings to your brothers and sisters, the Brethren of the Lord in Egypt.

We shall continue, my beloved brethren, our contemplations on

The Blessings of Mercy to the Merciful

The blessings of mercy in the lives of the merciful are, indeed, countless. We have contemplated upon twenty-seven of these blessings. We recently began, and continue to contemplate on, the twenty-eighth blessing this month:

“The Lord will strengthen him on his bed of illness. He will sustain him on his sickbed.”

This is one of the blessings of mercy which the merciful directly experience in their lives. Our teacher David the Psalmist chanted: “Blessed is he who considers the poor; the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble. The Lord will strengthen him on his bed of illness; You will sustain him on his sickbed.” (Psalm 41:1, 3)

We have previously discussed, my beloved brethren, examples of merciful people who experienced this blessing firsthand:

1. Our teacher David, the merciful prophet who recited this timeless psalm;
2. Tobit, the merciful and righteous; and
3. Our teacher, St. Paul the Apostle.

Our teacher, St. Paul the Apostle, was very merciful. We discussed, in our previous message, the great extent to which St. Paul carefully tended to the service of the less fortunate, even referring to the less fortunate as saints in several of his epistles. St Paul cared so deeply for the poor that on many occasions in his epistles, he commanded compassion, mercy and generosity in giving to the less fortunate.

We will continue to contemplate on the extent to which our teacher St. Paul the Apostle experienced this blessing throughout his lifetime and his ministry; first, in the city of Lystra, and second, in the city of Philippi.

The Divine inspiration tells us: *Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, “These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.” And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And he came out that very hour. But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities. And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, “These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe.” Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be*

beaten with rods. And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were loosed. And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, “Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.” Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” So they said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.” (Acts 16:16-31)

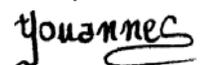
Consider, brethren, the experience that St. Paul and his fellow apostle, Silas, went through: how they were dragged out to the marketplace, how they were beaten with rods and how they were whipped repeatedly. Reflect particularly on the word “many.” How many stripes are “many?” Did the many stripes cause their bones to break or were they just superficial injuries? Consider, my beloved, what these saints experienced. How did they remain faithful?

Beloved, it was the compassionate hand of God that sustained St. Paul and his fellow minister, St. Silas. The Hand of God compensates and sustains the merciful in their times of weakness and pain. The divine scriptures mentions: *“But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.”* (Acts 16:25) Consider how God had given them enough strength, that their praise was heard by the other prisoners. Consider the depth of their prayers and praises, even the shackles that bound their hands and feet could not deter them. Reflect on the joy that they experienced when the hand of God shook the foundations of the prison, opened the doors to their cell and freed them from their shackles. Not only did God sustain and strengthen them while they were in pain, He also supported them emotionally and spiritually. Our teacher David the prophet proclaimed *“Blessed is he who considers the poor; the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble. The Lord will strengthen him on his bed of illness; You will sustain him on his sickbed.”* (Psalm 41:1, 3)

My beloved brethren, this is one of the blessings experienced by those who are merciful: the Lord will sustain and deliver them in their time of weakness and on their sickbed. We will continue to reflect on the ways in which our teacher St. Paul the apostle experienced this blessing throughout his ministry.

May our Lord compensate you with the incorruptible instead of the corruptible, the heavenly instead of the earthly and the eternal instead of the temporal.

Bishop Youannes



General Bishop and Secretary of H.H. Pope Shenouda III