2022-09-09: Life of Martyrdom

Objective:

Martyrdom in our Daily Life

Key Verse:

"He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it" (Matthew 10:39)

Visual Aid:

Attached to this page.

Introduction:

- This week we will be celebrating the Feast of Nayrouz which is the Feast of the Martyrs... and these martyrs lived a drastically different life than we do
- In our modern day, we want fame and status and comfort…
  - If we had a convention and we said “sorry but everyone is gonna have to sleep on the floor for one night," we would hear complaints and no one would register and parents would call Abouna or Sayedna and it would be chaos.
  - We have spiritual days and people complain about the food.
  - We want to plan a monastery trip and someone says "they don't have wifi there" - anywhere I go, if I can't get the wifi password, I'm upset
  - I come to the Liturgy and say "the pew is uncomfortable" or complain that the Church is not giving me a meal afterwards
- We are so attuned to being comfortable. We don’t want to feel uncomfortable.
- We want to gain status and fame and ranks and we wouldn’t give them up for anything.
- But in these things, there is no fellowship with God.
  - When was the Lord Jesus Christ concerned about His status? It’s the opposite – He emptied Himself and took the form of man, despite being God. He left His throne and His chariots of Cherubim and was born in a manger – a feeding trough for animals in a barn.
  - When was the Lord Jesus Christ concerned about being famous? It’s the opposite – He would flee from the large crowds.
  - When was the Lord Jesus Christ concerned about comfort? Was it when He had “no place to rest His head”? Was it when He allowed Himself to be arrested and beaten and spat on? Was it on the Cross?
- Fellowship with God can come from a variety of ways (Prayer, Scripture, Service, etc.) but in all of these there is a common denominator – Suffering.
  - Fellowship with God means to suffer. Means to leave your comfort zone. Means to offer yourself and your body as a sacrifice to God.
  - It means that I stand for prayer even if my legs hurt, or my voice hurts, or I'm tired

    - It means that I read the Scripture even if I don't have time, or if I don't understand it
    - It means that I stand in prayerful silence during the Liturgy even if I don't know this hymn
    - It means that I go and do my service even if it means I will be driving out of my way, or going to a bad area in the city, etc.
- Take the examples of the saints
    - The Martyrs who suffered with physical death for the sake of the Lord Jesus
        - St Rebekah who had to first endure watching her children get beheaded and then she was beheaded, herself
        - St Abanoub who endured many kinds of physical torture
        - Sts Cosmas and Damian who after studying medicine and surgery, offered their services for free and then were tortured and killed by Diocletian
        - Millions of martyrs who suffered for the sake of Christ

    - The Ascetics who inflicted on themselves suffering for many years in the desert without food or water, in the heat, in prayers and fasting
        - St Anthony
        - St Paul
        - St Macarius
        - Etc.

    - The Bishops and the Patriarch who take upon themselves the responsibility of all of the people and their problems and their issues

- Martyrs
    - The first of the saints are these Martyrs - those who gave their life to the Lord Jesus Christ and received for it an additional crown in heaven
    - That's why whenever we have hymns in the Church, we always start with worshipping God and then venerating St Mary and the angels, and then the martyrs are first line. Followed by the Confessors, and the rest of the Saints.
    - What lessons can we learn from the martyrs? How can we experience a hint of martyrdom in our daily life?

Body:

- Martyrdom in our Service
    - "But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry." (2 Timothy 4:5)
    - Here we can consider the example of our Shepherd HG Bishop Youssef.
        - If you look at his schedule for the year you will see that every month he is visiting Texas, Tennessee, Florida and Georgia. In the 52 weeks of the year, he is trying to visit as many churches as he can, and minister to them.
        - If you look at his schedule for the week that he visits a church
            - Thursday night he does visitations
            - Friday night and Saturday morning he visits a community in the same area or a few hours driving. He gives a Bible Study and a Sermon.

        - Saturday night and Sunday morning he visits the Church and He gives Bible Study and then a Sermon (different from the ones he already gave)
        - Saturday after his Bible Study, he would love to attend the tasbeha, but he sits in the office and meets with the congregation one by one and listens to all the people's problems
        - Sunday night to Tuesday night he goes on visitations and by Wednesday he flies to the next state to do it all over again.
    - And he still makes time in the middle of the week to go to the Monastery in Texas and hear the confessions of the fathers the monks, and to go to the Convent in Georgia. When he has a long drive or a long flight, he is answering the countless emails and texts that he gets. And despite all of this, every day he prays all the hours of the Agpeya and every night he prays the Tasbeha and every morning the Morning Praises. He doesn't always have a place to lay his head. He is doing interviews for TV and answering questions for a whole diocese. He's managing 50 churches and 75 priests and several monks and nuns. He is called to serve on Clerical Councils... and all of this he does for the sake of the service. For you and me and the rest of the diocese. All of this he dies to himself for the Lord.
    - HG Bishop Gregory told a story one time that in the days of HH Pope Shenouda's departure, HG Bishop Youssef was in Egypt for a lot of the time just trying to figure out how they're going to pick the next Pope... and one day he called the monastery and said "I am coming to take confessions" and he got there very late around midnight, he sat with each monk one by one and took their confessions and the next morning he was back on a flight to Egypt.

- HG will be visiting us next week for the Feast of St Rebekah and I hope that you will make as much time as you can to spend with him, to sit at his feet, to listen to the words of the Holy Spirit by his mouth, to ask for his wisdom, to tell him your name and ask him to pray for you

- Martyrdom in our Daily Life
    - Scripture:
        - "Yet for Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter" (Psalm 44:22, Romans 8:36)
        - "But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24)
        - "always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body" (2 Cor 4:10)
        - "as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and yet not killed;" (2 Cor 6:9)
        - "Are they ministers of Christ? - I speak as a fool - I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often." (2 Cor 11:23)
    - Practical:
        - Wake up early to stand in prayer and to read the Scripture

        - Even though I'm in High School now and I have to be up at 6 - let me die to myself and my desire for sleep and wake up at 5:45 so that I can stand for prayer
        - Even though I have a ton of homework in the evenings, let me die to myself a little bit and read the Scriptures first
    - Fasting
        - Wednesday and Friday are fasting days - I can die to my desires on those days by fasting, abstaining from food in the morning even if I'm hungry, and then eating a vegan diet even if my friends or my school are not. Even if it's my favorite food at school.
        - At Lockheed Martin, we have Sushi day in the cafeteria on Wednesday. I've had it one time which was during the Holy Fifty Days - for me it is one of the ways I die to my desires especially when I see all my coworkers and friends at work having sushi.
        - Schools throw Pizza Parties and they're always on Fridays, or during Christmas time or before Spring Break (Lent) - can I die to myself on that one day?
    - When there's a line to eat a meal (e.g. at a convention, family gathering, school lunch, etc.) - I may be tempted to try and be first in line to get the freshest food. Let me die to myself every once in a while and resist that temptation, and instead be last and get the leftovers or get the food after it has sat for a little while.
    - When I enter a room and I see that there are many comfortable chairs and some uncomfortable chairs - let me sit in the uncomfortable one first, so that others may have the chance to be comfortable. And if everyone comes and there is space on the comfortable, then maybe I can take it.
    - I'm in Liturgy and my friends go to the Bathroom. Let me die to myself and my desire to socialize (which is a natural desire that is given to us by God) so that I can instead spend time with the Lord and honor His House
    - Let me die to myself and my desire (sometimes addiction) to have my phone at all times. And let me just have time with the Lord, or with my family, or with myself in silence without those distractions.
    - Let me die to myself and my desire to have the most expensive shoes and clothing and stuff, when I know there are others without clothes or shoes. Instead of 200 dollars on shoes, I can spend 100 on two pairs and donate one of them. Or 50 on four pairs and donate three of them. Or do I only give from the bottom of the barrel to those in need? Do I only give the things that are ripped and used, after I've gotten all the use out of them? No, let me die to myself.
    - When I am rebuked or challenged, let me deny my desire to fight back. Whether it's my parents, or someone at school, or my SS Servant, or my friend.
    - When I have an idea and I share it, or I give someone advice, and they ignore it or disregard it, or ridicule it, let me deny my anger.
    - Dying to yourself is more than just avoiding sin, but it's denying yourself pleasures and desires in order that you may better serve God and serve others.

- Blessings and Rewards
  - The Lord has promised us many blessings and many rewards - some on earth, and some in heaven.
  - Fear God and not man
    - We might wonder how in the world these martyrs were not scared to give up their life... where did their fear go? If I was in their place, I would be terrified.
    - The fear of God casts out the fear of men.
      - "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts our fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love" (1 John 4:18)
    - They contemplated on the heavenly and the glory of the heavenly, so their hearts clung to those things, and the worldly becomes valueless.

  - Genuine faith is tested
    - "that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:7)

  - Crown of Life
    - "Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life." (Revelation 2:10)

Conclusion:

- Living a life of suffering or a life of martyrdom is difficult. It can't happen overnight
- We should slowly find desires and passions and temptations in our life to die to, in order that we can grow in fellowship with the Lord
- And we will receive the Crown of Life

Application:

- Each person should decide in what way they can die to their desires this week and document it in their Bible Passport
- Honor the martyrs by attending the Nayrouz Vespers and Feast on Saturday and Sunday

Contemplation:

Lord, we have too often forgotten Your suffering on our behalf on the Cross, Your humility in emptying Yourself and taking our form, Your life of service, and all that You do for us on a daily basis. Even when we give thanks to You in our prayers, and utter words of gratitude, we find ourselves not living a true life modeled after Yours. Let us, O Lord, live a life of suffering. Let us leave behind our comforts - let us remember Your discomfort on the Cross when we have a minor inconvenience. Let us pray for those who persecute us and hurt us. Let us love them. Let us strive to serve You, even (and especially) at our inconvenience. Let us suffer for the sake of others - accept less for the sake of someone else receiving more. Lord, we can only strive to be like You,

but through a life of suffering, and fellowship with You, we can know You. And may we, according to Your will, receive the reward that our fathers and mothers the martyrs received - those who truly lived in fellowship with You.

Resources:

- Legacy Curriculum: https://suscopts.org/ssc/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Grade11.pdf
- Elements

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