**Answers to Disagreements with the Coptic Orthodox Church**

**By: Very Rev. Fr. Tadros El-Bakhoumi**

**Mass**
*regarding the phrase: “long drawn out repetition of the same exact words every time”.*

*Answer:*

Do you mean repeating the same Mass permanently or repeating the same words in the one Mass? According to my deep knowledge of the Mass, there is no repetition for one paragraph in the one Mass. The only word that repeats a few times is ‘peace be with you’, which we all need and ‘Lord have mercy’, which all of us are desperate for God’s mercy with us.

If the question is repeating the same mass continuously, I believe that everything in our life is repeated and we do a lot of things continuously. We eat every day, we shower everyday and also the Mass is a spiritual food that we need everyday but the majority of the congregation practice the Mass only once a week and if lucky they are regular, so I do not see that this is a valid point of complain. Those people who pray the Mass continuously, always feel that every time it is something new to them and enjoy it when their heart is in it.

Concerning the verses of Matthew 5:6-7, the Lord meant that our personal prayers be in secret but He also encouraged us to share in the public prayer with the congregation in the Church. It was mentioned about Him that He used to go to the synagogue every Saturday, while He being Lord does not need it but to teach us the importance of going to the Church (Luke 4:16) and when the Lord mentioned about vain repetition, He did not mean to cut our prayers short but He meant it for those who do it in a hypocritical showing off manner, but the same Lord asked us to pray always without ceasing.

**Holy Communion**

We strongly believe that the prayer of the Mass converts the bread and the wine to the real Body and Blood of our Lord and we actually commune His Body and Blood in reality but under the form of bread and wine, according to our Human ability. There are 10’s of stories over the history of the Church, which proves clearly that this is the real Body and Blood of our Lord in the form of bread and wine. It is not symbolic but it is real as the Lord Himself said “for My Flesh is Food indeed and My Blood is drink indeed (John 6:53-58) and then the rest of the chapter until verse 71 confirms the same thing as in it, it is clear that many of His disciples found it hard to accept eating the Body and Blood of the Lord and walked with the Lord no more. Then the Lord directed the question to the 12 private disciples asking “do you also want to go” and Peter confirmed saying “to whom shall we go and You have the Words of life”.

About not allowing a woman in her menstrual cycle to receive the Body and Blood of Christ; yes our Church clearly teaches us that it is not logic for the woman to receive that Holy Sacrament inside her body when shortly after she discharges it in her bleeding. Also the Law of Moses made it very clear that being in this state is counted to be impurity for the woman at that time.

**Idolatry**

We touch the paintings of our Lord and the saints; not any icon but the ones that are anointed with the Holy chrism and consecrated with prayers. In simple faith, when we touch the icon believing that we will get blessings from it, it happens so and a biblical reference for this is in Mark 5: 25-34 when the woman who was with a flow of blood for 12 years, believed in her heart that by just touching the hem of our Lord’s garment will heal her and it happened so.

**The Lord’s Prayer**

Yes we know that in the Bible, the Lord’s Prayer ends saying ”for yours is the Kingdom the power ...” without mentioning “through Jesus Christ our Lord” and our Church added it this phrase. This is Biblical as the Lord taught us saying, “without Me you cannot do anything” (John 15:5). Also the angel when strengthening the Lord in the garden of Gethsemane said the same thing to the Lord.

**Priest’s status**

The Bible in all its text from the book of Genesis to the end of the book of Revelation highlights the honour of the priesthood and the importance of the priesthood in the Church of God and this in itself needs research in a lot of pages to prove it over the whole Bible. Let me say here that we never see our priests as heroes in the Church or treated like a god. Also the priest does not perform magic on the bread and wine to transform them but the One Who does this is the Lord Himself. The priest only prays the prayer according to the rituals through which the Holy Spirit comes and converts the bread and wine. Also the priest in confession does not cleanse the person from sins but he only prays the ritual prayers through which the Holy Spirit works in the sacrament for forgiveness.

**Confession**

Concerning what was mentioned that all the believers are priests according to the reference (1Peter 12:5-9) and Rev 1:6. In Rev He said that He made us kings and priests, does this mean that every one of us are kings? even children? that’s impossible! He means that we are a royal nation to the Lord when we are His true people and we are able to reign over our own desires and lusts as mentioned in proverbs “he who reigns over himself is stronger than he who reigns over a whole city”. In the letter of St. Peter, He means we are Christians of a royal priesthood, which means we have the new priesthood of the New Testament of our Lord the King of kings, which is a great gift for the services we need at Church but it does not mean that everyone is a priest even children and little girls. In the reference in Hebrews about the boldness to approach God’s throne and about our Lord being the Only Mediator, in this St. Paul was dedicating it in a complete 4 chapters to explain to the Hebrew Jews that the priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ replaced the old priesthood, according to the Law of Moses taking its power from the salvation that our Lord completed for us on the Cross but it does not mean that we are entitled to the throne of God regardless you have sins or not. About the reference of 1 Tim that St. Paul motioned elders, deacons, bishops and no priests, this is a mistake in translation as the origin Greeks and Coptic Bibles show it to be priests but the protestant Church who are the authors of this translation, changed it to elders because they don’t have priesthood in their church as they are not an apostolic Church.

About the main benefit of confession that the sinner is embarrassed to admit to a human and to think twice before sinning again, you claimed that it was a brilliant idea and based on that, the priest should not deny anyone from having Holy Communion even if they have not confessed their sins. While according to human nature, this concept of embarrassment is good for humans to make them stop the sin but this never had been the main benefit or main issue about confession. There are a lot of benefits about confession but the main ground here is that the priest presents the Holy Communion to the person and the priest is responsible for the worthiness of that person. Could you imagine a judge in a court who is handling a case of a series of offences; can he set his judgment without hearing the witnesses and the criminal? The same thing how can the priest judge the worthiness of the person for Holy Communion without hearing the case. About the other benefits of confession there are a lot of talks which talk about this.

I’ll only mention here the benefit of the person and how he/she feels relieved from the big burdens he/she was carrying and after confession, this was expressed to me personally hundreds of times from young men and women from all different nationalities. I here quote only 1 statement from one of the Australian girls I baptised claiming “this sacrament of confession is an amazing, wonderful thing to find someone teaching us in love the spiritual way and in privacy about our mistakes and how to stop them in our weak human nature”.

**Saint Mary**

Saint Mary is the mother of our God; God waited 5,500 years after the sin of Adam to find Saint Mary whom He found suitable to be His mother and to carry Him in her womb. It is beyond human understanding to realise the power and the depth of a human being carrying God inside her womb, while God Himself said in the Old Testament that He ”is a consuming fire”. We can write books about the honour of Saint Mary and there are 100’s of sayings from the early church fathers about her but I will here only answer the claims in the question. Saint Mary was not mentioned in the Bible 3 times only but was also mentioned in the birth of Christ many times, the angel was highlighting her honour in the gospel of Luke when archangel Gabriel came to her and started greeting her saying “Hail to you o you full of grace”. She was also mentioned at the end of the Gospel of Luke that she was with the apostles in the upper room after returning from the mount of ascension and also mentioned in the book of Acts chapter 1 when she was awaiting with the apostles for the Holy Spirit to come upon the disciples and also she was at the cross of our Lord; this was mentioned in the Gospels and the Lord Himself cared for her to deliver her to John the beloved to be in his care after he finished the salvation for us and many other things but this is enough as a proof.

At the Resurrection of the Lord and how she went to the tomb with the other Mary’s but she wasn’t mentioned ; this was because she was targeted by the fanatic Jews to be killed, knowing that she was the mother of our Lord. In the Holy Mass we do not mention her endlessly. If we look from the offertory, we only mention her in the intercessions after the prayer of thanksgiving and in the response of acts only in the normal years but not in the different occasions which are a lot in the Coptic calendar and then she is mentioned after the prayer of reconciliation as she is the mother of God from whom the Lord incarnated to save and reconcile us with God the father. Elsewhere in the Mass there is no mention of Saint Mary.

**Fasting**

Fasting is the very first commandment given to mankind by the Lord God directly as when He put Adam and Eve in the garden, He said to them you eat of all the trees but not from the tree in the middle - this is a type of fasting. All generations from Adam to Noah used to only eat vegetarian food until sin multiplied on the earth and after the flood, then God allowed eating the meat of animals. Not eating meat and dairy foods is specifically mentioned in the Bible in the books of Ezekiel and Daniel and St. David the prophet mentioned a lot about his fasting in the Psalms. In the Holy Bible over the generations, whenever there was any problem or difficult time, people used to fast and pray and God solved the problem for example in the book of Esther and the book of Jonah.

There is a lot to be said about fasting; there have been a few topics in English about fasting, I can refer them to you or send them to you. Even medically, in many of diseases, doctors put the person on a fasting diet. The Bible asked us to fast privately without showing it off but also we cannot lie to say we are not fasting while we are fasting; it is meant not to show off but also not to lie about it. We are also requested to be witnesses to our Lord and try to make people do the right thing. All the sayings of the early fathers and the Church showed the great benefit of fasting in lifting up the spiritual life of the person and in helping to fight the devil and stop sinning.

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