



Experiences of The Next Life

WONDROUS PROCESSIONS



Edited by
Dr. John Gabriel
Salwa Wahba

Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty

Translated by
Mary Hany Dawood
Hala Bolos

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FR. TADROS Y. MALATY



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Queen Mary & Prince Tadros
Coptic Orthodox Church
Pope Shenouda III Center
283 DAVIDSON'S MILL ROAD
SOUTH BRUNSWICK, NJ 08831

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WONDROUS PROCESSIONS

MOURNING AND YET REJOICING

Whenever I share in prayer for a beloved who has departed, I experience mixed feelings. I see before me the procession of the family of the deceased, along with his friends, colleagues, and neighbors with expressions of grief on their faces reflecting the pain of separation. There, I long for my tears to fall just like “Jesus wept” (John 11:35) when He saw Mary and Martha, along with the other women, crying over Lazarus who had died.

At the same time, I encounter other feelings as well; such as sharing in the joy and acclamation of the angels for the passing of a virtuous soul to join the rows of the victorious in Paradise to meet with the heavenly Groom on the day of the eternal bridal. St. John said, “Then, I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Revelation 21:2).

These are the **two wondrous parades**; one visual here on earth in which we ought to share in the sorrow like the apostle who said, “weep with those who weep” (Epistle to Romans 12:15), and another which is in heaven proclaiming the joy of the salvation of every man and his peaceful passing from the world to live as a partner with the glories of Christ, the Lord.

A GREAT ARMY

A **third procession** is the one witnessed by the prophet Ezekiel, the priest son of a priest, who had never practiced his priesthood for he had lived all his life in captivity (Babylon) until the day of his final rest. Ezekiel’s tears never ceased to fall as he heard about the destruction of Jerusalem, the city of God, and of the holy Temple. Every



now and then he saw the procession of the Babylonians marching the streets of the captivated Judah proclaiming victory of Baal over the God of Israel, and the power of Babylon and the fall of Israel and Judah!

The prophet Ezekiel had looked sorrowfully upon Jerusalem, all of Israel, and Judah with the eyes of his heart beholding the killed Jews as dry bones (Ezekiel 37:1-2). But, by the words of God, there was rattling among the bones, and they came together, were covered with flesh and skin, “and breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army” (Ezekiel 37:10).

- ❖ Death, for those who understand it, is immortality; but for the fools who don’t understand it, it is mere death. We shall not fear this death; rather we should fear the death of the soul, which is not getting to know God. This is what truly terrifies the soul!
- ❖ It is impossible for us to escape death by any means. As the smart people truly know that, they live in virtue thinking about the love of God, facing death without any moans or fear or tears. They believe that although on the one hand death is inevitable, on the other hand it frees us from the diseases from which we suffer through our lives.”

St. Anthony the Great

WELCOME TO YOUR HOME!

St. John Chrysostom spoke to us about a **fourth procession**. He believed that when a believer passes away, God sends one or more angels as representatives of heaven to escort him in his journey to Paradise and to welcome his arrival. They walk him through heaven and introduce him to the heavenly hosts and show him the divine throne so he would enjoy these indescribable things. He shares in what was spoken of by the apostle Paul, whose soul ascended to



the third heaven, seeing what the “eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Truly, not only the heavenly hosts, but also the entire victorious Church rejoices over and over again over the arrival of those who have fulfilled their struggle, in order to join them in waiting for God’s great day.

One of the ladies of Alexandria, who is very simple, prays all the daily prayers and loves going to church. She used to attend all the daily masses (liturgies) prayed by Pope Kyrillos the Sixth when he was in Alexandria. After his passing, he used to appear to her once a month supporting and consoling her. One day she knelt before God and asked Him to reveal to her what has happened to the Pope when his soul separated from his body. The deceased Pope appeared to her and told her: “When I left the body, I joyfully set forth to Paradise, and there I found groups of popes, bishops, and saints coming to welcome me. They accompanied me applauding cheerfully till I went with them!”

My beloved, every time I participate in praying for any of the deceased, I behold these four processions that fill my heart with desire to enjoy the gift of death. My soul cries within me: “My sojourn dwelled too long.”

Along with the **family’s procession** I feel for everyone’s tears and moaning heart! Along with the **heavenly procession** I await the moment when my soul would set forth so that the heavenly hosts would rejoice its arrival and rest for I have found salvation and am enjoying the eternal glory.

With Ezekiel I see the great army; the divine grace that makes my dry bones, scattered about, transformed to a great army. I feel my insides becoming “lovely as



Jerusalem, awesome as an army with banners” (Song of Songs 6:4), for the Holy Spirit grants me the raised life that is victorious over the kingdom of darkness and even over death itself. I rejoice crying: “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?” (1 Corinthians 15:55). With the spirit of resurrection I shall fear no sin, nor time with all its events, nor Satan with all his hoaxes, nor death with all its might; rather, I shall sing with the prophet: “Let the weak say, “I am strong” (Joel 3:10).

As for **the procession of the guiding angel**, who rejoices my departure, along with all my fathers and brothers who preceded me, I find myself moaning: “When will I meet them and enjoy realizing their deep love for my weakness?! Indeed, heaven and paradise with all their residents and with all the saints do love me!”

ACCEPT THE TEARS OF MY HEART

- My Lord, my tears are falling heavily within me... the tears of grief.
How could my brother moan without my heart moaning with him? “Who is weak, and I am not weak?” (2 Corinthians 11:29).
Accept my love offering for my brethrens, for You are the ultimate Love!
- Open my eyes so I could see the soul of the departed in the heavenly procession; so I would rejoice with the rejoicing of the heavenly hosts for mankind.
With every glory acquired by a soul, every heavenly being counts himself glorified!
Indeed, I shall join these hosts in their joy.
Grant me to join them in their wondrous love to mankind.
- My Lord, may Your Holy Spirit dwell in my heart for it is a place filled with scattered, dry bones.
I believe that You would grant them life and would raise



them into an exceedingly great army.

Cry within me: “Oh my people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves” (Ezekiel 37:12).

Call unto my gifts, my emotions, my senses, my thoughts and my energies for they have died and reek. They became dry bones!

But You are the resurrection; and it is Your joy to raise from the dry bones a great army.

- Master, who am I for You to assign an angel to come down to earth to carry my soul and guide it through its journey to Paradise, showing me the marital house that Your divine hands have prepared for me, welcoming my soul saying: Welcome to your home!
- You are wondrous, O Resurrection!
You have transformed death into sweetness to my soul; through it I behold heaven and earth rejoicing Your work. Yours is the glory, O Lover of mankind!

❖ **My Lord, You have created us directed towards You, for that matter our heart will not find rest but in You.**

St. Augustine

DEATH BY A KISS

At the end of the Book of Deuteronomy it was said that during the passing away of the prophet Moses from this world, God asked him to climb up mount Nebo to die at its peak. Although Moses was about 120 years old at that time, he neither asked his wife (if she was still alive back then) or any of his children or relatives to climb up with him so that they may take care of his funeral and to bury his body. He didn't even ask his nephew, the high priest at that time, to join him to have a funeral ceremony, nor did he bother to prepare a tomb for his body. Rather, he climbed up carried



by the spirit of joy, for in a few minutes he would behold the Promised Land, Canaan; then cross over to what is even greater, the Granter of Canaan Himself!

It was a unique funeral that was attended only by God and His angels; and it was a wondrous burial, for it was written, “And He buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth Peor; but no one knows his grave to this day” (Deuteronomy 34:6). God Himself had buried him... maybe by His angels, who gave him a funeral ceremony. God took care of Moses’ body, for the death of the saints is precious to Him: “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints” (Psalms 116:15). He didn’t bury him with his fathers, rather in the land of Moab - in a place not known to any man. God cares even for our bodies, but we shall not be preoccupied with the place of our burial. Indeed, the Jews call Moses’ death “The death by a kiss,” for God embraced him and took his soul and set off with it! Indeed, “Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my end be like his!” (Numbers 23:10). O Lord, when will You embrace me and take my soul with You to rest in Your bosom?

THE BRIDAL GOWN

When Caesarius, a successful doctor who was perceived as successful by the men of state and in the imperial palace, died, his younger brother, St. Gregory, awaited his mother’s reaction. He noticed that she entered her room and put on festive clothing – all the while bearing a smile on her face. Her joy was due to the fact that her son had gone to heaven – this fact overcame any bitter feeling of the separation! St. Gregory did not wonder about his mother’s behavior, for he has always known her to be a witness to the heavenly life. She changed her husband’s heart and carried him with the Holy Spirit of God as to heaven to behold his soul’s eternal Groom!



In her last days, Mrs. Fawzeyya, Dr. Onsy Sorial's wife, told me in one of my visits with her: "I would like to tell you my will." She then called her husband and said to him, "Look Onsy, when I die, please don't tell any of your family, or mine. I would like the funeral to be in the church cemetery and to be attended only by the priest, you, our children and a deacon and no one else. Also, I would like you to wear your wedding suite that you wore on our wedding day." Tears began to fall from her husband's eyes, but she was very surprised and said to me: "It's my wedding, my day of joy to meet my soul's Groom; and look, my husband weeps!"

When the governor sentenced him to death by cutting off his head, St. Besada, the Bishop, went to put on the white alter gown. A deacon met him and asked him why he was wearing these clothes outside the church. He answered, "My son, I am going to my wedding party, and I have lived so many years yearning for this meeting."

When Ariana, the governor of Ansena, entered the city of Oseem, Abifam stood up to pray wearing his finest clothes and put on a golden girdle. He then rode a horse and said: "This is my true wedding day... This is the day of my joy and happiness for I will meet my King and Lord, Jesus Christ." As he testified for Christ, governor Ariana ordered that he be tied behind the horse and be dragged through the town. When his mother, Susana, held him she started crying, but he told her, "Don't cry mother, and don't grieve; you should rather rejoice - for this is my wedding day to become a friend of the Heavenly Groom, and to share His glory and kingdom. This is the hour, in which there will be purifying of the faith from the corruption of doubt. This is the hour, in which our bodies will be presented as an acceptable offering before God."



- ❖ After Christ has come and died for the life of the whole world, death is no longer called death, rather sleep and rest.

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ He, who loves the earthly things and its lusts, would not think about being with Christ after his death. He cannot say: “A stranger I am on earth,” for he cares for what is on earth. But he, who says: “Don’t hide your commandments from me,” is a saint. For that, the prophet asks God to reveal to him the greatness of his commandments for the heavenly life.

Origen

- ❖ Surely, he who is not born from water and Spirit would fear death until he is delivered to the fires of Hades.

Afraid of death is he, who did not experience Christ’s cross and His suffering.

Afraid of death is he, who awaits another death after death.

Afraid of death is he, who awaits the eternal fires and the infinite punishment.

Afraid of death is he, who finds it beneficial to delay his death in order to delay his moans and sighs.

St. Cyprian, the Martyr

WHEN WILL I CROSS OVER TO SEIZE YOU, MY SOUL’S FATE?!

- You are my fate, says my soul; You are my life, my joy and my saturation. You are everything to me! When will I cross over to seize You, my soul’s fate?!
- Thank You for not making me put my hope in this world; rather, I cross over so I can behold You, live with You, and throw myself in Your bosom.
- When will the day of my departure come, the day of my wedding, my heart’s joy? When will I put on Your



righteousness, my wedding gown? All the heavenly hosts are in wonder, for You have accepted me as a bride, and as a heavenly queen. You passed by me and saw me as an infant child, cast on the side of the road and polluted in my own blood (Ezekiel 16:6). Nobody cared; nobody would hold me unto him. You passed by me and looked upon me saying: “Your time was the time of love” (Ezekiel 16:8). You lifted me in Your arms, washed me with the water of Baptism, anointed me with the Myron oil of the Holy Spirit and dressed me with Your righteousness, the wedding gown. You gave me Your Body and Blood and poured Your beauty unto me till I became beautiful in Your eyes and fit to become a queen.

- Indeed, I long to cross over to my wedding day, so I may put my hand in Yours and lead my ultimate bridal heavenly procession; so You would carry me to the midst of the heavenly fractions and into Your throne that I would sit on Your right hand. Your love is so wondrous that You have made a queen out of me! Hurry and carry my soul to You, O true King.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT DEATH?

“Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my end be like his!” [Numbers 23:10].

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me” [Psalms 23:4].

“But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and there shall no torment touch them” (Wisdom of Solomon 3:1).

“Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death” (John 8:51).



“Blessed is the man You choose, and cause to approach You, that he may dwell in Your courts” (Psalms 65:4).

“I am the Resurrection and the Life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die” (John 11:25, 26).

“O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?” (1st Corinthians 15:55).

Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, “Write: ‘Blessed *are* the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them” (Revelation 14:13).

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