

A Letter from Fr. Matta El-Meskeen to Fr. Pishoi Kamil

At the Holy Synod's session on June 9, 2022 held at St Pishoi's Monastery under the care of His Holiness Pope Tawadros II and with the participation of 120 members of the Holy Synod, our Coptic Orthodox Church officially proclaimed the sainthood of Hegumen Pishoi Kamil, the late priest of St. George the Martyr's Church in Sporting, Alexandria. On this occasion, we are pleased to present the last letter from Fr. Matthew the Poor written to Fr. Pishoi prior to his death.

April 8, 1977

Dear Beloved in the Lord, Father Pishoi Kamil:

Though I send you handwritten letters expressing the Lord's sufferings during Holy Week, I am confident that Christ will pass them on to you fully expounded to reflect my true feelings. They reflect the throbbing of a heart during Passion Week and the breeze that Christ inhaled in anticipation of Calvary. They smell of the sacrifice offered on high prior to the foundation of the world (cf Rev 13:8).



How glorious are the sufferings portrayed in this gospel!¹ They have become a message of forgiveness, redemption, love, covenant, and peace that the Father has extended to all people. They reflect His passion for redemption during this week. The Lord anticipated the cross as a groom awaits His wedding. The love of the Father moved His heart and tongue, which led Him to Calvary. He retreated from his disciples to examine in solitude the hill of Calvary. He was entranced by it and liked the place as if it were a new paradise.

He registered His name in Calvary: "I, Jesus, have come here and examined the place—the best place on earth where I can plant my love. I have ascended the hill on high and listened to the counsel of my Father beyond the earth and across the ages and found it identical with Mine."

"My sacrifice has become the pleasure I patiently anticipate. From Calvary I will

¹ I.e. the gospel readings of Passion Week in the Coptic church.

proclaim to the entire world the most precious gift I have been entrusted with by my Father to give to mankind the sufferings I have endured. They are the secret means of ascending to glory. Yes, I will make my cross accessible to all humanity. Anyone whose eyes can behold the mystery of my passion, who can perceive, examine, believe, and ultimately share in the sacrifice of my love, regardless the kind of their sufferings, will be initiated into my glory, which is the feast of my cross, of my broken body, to perceive my mystery and that of my Father—the mystery of love that brings together the dispersed. My glory is buried in my suffering and I have concealed it discretely and ingeniously so that no one can ever distinguish the one from the other or choose one and leave out the other. In fear of depriving anyone of my glory, I have decided to impart my passion to all humans who have suffered in my name.”

“The glory I offer is my cross: my disgrace and dishonor, gall mixed with vinegar, and my body mingled with my blood. Latent in my apparent sufferings is my ineffable glory. To anyone who courageously tastes them, they turn under his tongue into a living seed of never tiring praise and glorification. They can be suppressed by no fear, suffering, pain, or death. One cannot but glorify, praise, honor, and worship God forever.”

“It is I who planted that seed in the church. In composing the liturgy, the church has done a good job. So much so that whoever listens to her chants in the spirit, beholds Me and My glory, Who is the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world. He who joins this choir of singers feels as if his own flesh and bones radiates the chanting of Calvary.”

“I, Jesus, have offered my passion as a melody for the new creation. I will put this seed in every mouth that speaks in my name and bears testimony to my sufferings.”

Jesus, I love your cross so much! It is your cross that moves us to abundantly love you. Your Calvary has captivated us and everyone will individually go to sign their names below yours. We have passionately loved Your crucifixion that has turned into a fountain of tears and sweeter than is more desirable than all the glory of this world. We will go to Calvary and pitch our tent there and wait for You until You return as You promised.

I cried my eyes out until I was too weak to weep more.

“Hold your peace! Stop weeping.” These were the words I heard deep down. “There comes Christ from behind the empty tomb. He shall wipe away your tears.” Weeping still, I rushed to Him: “Did you see me Lord, when you were on the cross? I saw your sufferings and burst into tears. I counted on your love for me and not on my despair; never on my despair, oh Lord.”

“Lord, I love your cross, because I find both my sufferings and my name, the name You know so well as it is etched on this cross. It is You who changed my name when I was lost in the wilderness of this world. This name sealed with blood is etched on your

cross and impressed on your palm. Oh Lord, how then can I refrain from loving your cross. It is my *own* cross which bears my *own* name.”

“Finally! Your face was so pale when they removed You from the tree. Your sufferings ceased when your heart stopped beating. Sorrow and physical agony have bound me to your death forever and I vowed not to love anyone but you. My sufferings drew me to You and Your death brought me back to life, oh Lord! I love your death exceedingly as it has given me a new life and it is more fragrant than the cypress of Lebanon.”

I sat beside the empty grave gazing at Calvary. I saw the heavens open and a huge ladder binding heavenly creatures to the cross. A very large number climbed or rather flew over eagerly and joyfully. Each one of them bore their sufferings, injuries, and sorrows that were smeared with the blood of His sufferings. All of them rejoiced and their faces shone while they sang the hymn “*Golgotha in Hebrew...*”²

Best regards, brotherly love, and spiritual feelings that can only be expressed through the cross of Christ!

Fr. Matta El-Meskeen

² The concluding hymn chanted at the Twelfth Hour of Great and Holy Friday of Pascha during the reenactment of Christ’s burial.

“Epiphany” a one-day seminar to the memory of Anba Epiphanius

ON THE OCCASION of the fourth anniversary of the passage to the Kingdom of God of Bishop Anba Epiphanius, abbot of the Monastery of St Macarius, the “Alexandria School” organized on July 29, 2022 the first forum dedicated to his blessed memory. The one-day seminar—in which our monastery took part as well with the presence of two monks—was attended by nine speakers and about seventy guests, most of whom are disciples or spiritual children of Anba Epiphanius.

Father Seraphim al-Baramusi inaugurated the seminar’s works by depicting a human and spiritual picture of Anba Epiphanius.

The first paper was presented by a monk from the Monastery of St Macarius concerning the “Bustān al-Ruhbān” (The Monks’ Garden), one of the monastic texts that most interested Anba Epiphanius. The paper underlined the role of the abbot in showing the scientific value of the Bustān text.

H.G. Bishop Makari of Northern Shubra talked about hagiographic literature. He pointed out how hagiographic texts vary over the centuries and across languages and should be read in their cultural context.

Rafiq Adel spoke of the complex manuscript tradition of “The Apostolic Tradition,” an ancient Christian writing attributed to Hippolytus, considered as a precious source of information about Christian community life and liturgy of the third century.

Danial al-Qummus Yuaqim offered a comparison between the Jerusalem and Coptic traditions regarding the readings of the first three days of Pascha, with special reference to the ancient Armenian and Georgian tradition.

Dr. Basim Samir al-Sharqawi offered a learned treatment of Origen’s *Hexapla* by putting it in dialogue with the manuscripts of the psalms found at Qumran which diverge from both the Masoretic text and the Septuagint.

Mina Ayyad Yassa reflected on the famous homily entitled “The Virgin Theotokos” pronounced between 428 and 429 by Proclus of Constantinople. The researcher compared it with the fifth passage of the Wednesday Theotokia which begins with “Virginal feast.”

Hegumen Yuhanna Ata spoke of the Alexandrian philosopher John Philoponus (490–570) who was Aristotle’s first Christian commentator. The researcher dwelt on the use of Aristotelian categories to prove the one nature of Christ.

Finally, Dr. Butrus Karam’s paper concerned the development of the liturgical rite of the holy kiss, offering a broad overview of how this practice was born and changed over the centuries.

The organizers of this one-day seminar have promised to repeat this initiative every year and will soon start organizing the second forum next year through a call for papers. “Alexandria School” has also announced the uploading of the video recordings of the papers on Youtube, as well as the publication of the conference proceedings in a special volume at a later time.

