



ST MARK'S SANTAS GIVING PRESENTS ON CHRISTMAS DAY

St Mark Universal Copts Care



WINTER 2015

The Unseen Roots

By A St Mark Volunteer

Whether it is the root of a plant, the root of a problem or the root of a family tree; a 'root' is extremely important. Without a root, things can become unstable, unground and can certainly die. Because roots are often unseen, their importance is likewise often dismissed. But the invisible root plays a huge role in the appearance of the visible body that springs from it. A yellowing plant is often a sign of the roots lacking nutrients. Shallow roots are often associated with unstable plants that are easily plucked off the ground. Likewise the longevity of a building structure is dependent on the architect's skilled planning of a deep stable foundation, able to balance and support the planned growth. Therefore we

have established that roots are vital and need to be respected, for growth, stability and a future.

But what does it mean for us?

Our roots influence our views, cultures, traditions and ultimately have an impact on who we are and the way we live our lives. Roots have often caused a sense of pride to an individual or at other times have been the cause of a grudge between nations for centuries, for example the Cold War. So without knowing our roots we cannot be certain of our true identity.

Getting to the root of things therefore requires digging deeper to search our identity in history. This is often overlooked, as some



A room that accommodates a family of 4 in Meet Ghamr



A typical bathroom in Ezbet Francis, El Minia

do not see how the past impacts on their present. However it would be foolish to think that the past has not fashioned our day-to-day lives. A simple example

lies within how the development of ancient laws continues to govern our lives and society as a whole, even to this day. So if the past is important then we need to search our genealogy, our country's history and our culture to better understand our identity.

The Bible provides us with our genealogy from Adam, the first man, to Noah, the only other Father we can all be traced to. It then talks about the Tower of Babylon, where Noah's descendants were split into nations according to their spoken language. The bible is therefore vital to our understanding of creation, God Himself, and our human nature. The Old Testament discusses the struggle God has with us as a nation. Through this struggle, we understand God's never-ending patience, loving yet zealous character and our own weak human nature.

Without this *knowledge*, our present day-to-day relationship with God will be lacking knowledge, depth and history. Without this *knowledge*, we would not fully understand and appreciate the gift of Salvation and Grace, which is ours in Christ, and therefore we would not comprehend this awesome mystery! Without this *knowledge* we would be 'like the chaff which the wind drives away' as King David mentioned in his first psalm, comparing those firmly rooted and delighting in God's law, to others that lack roots and driven by unstable winds.

*'But his delight is in the law of the Lord,
And in His law he meditates day and night.
He shall be like a tree
Planted by the rivers of water,
That brings forth its fruit in its season,
Whose leaf also shall not wither;
And whatever he does shall prosper.
The ungodly are not so,
But are like the chaff which the wind drives away.'*
Psalm 1: 2-4

In St Paul's letter to the Colossians, he talks about being rooted in Christ as the base of our identity.

*'As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, **rooted** and built up in Him and **established** in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.'*
Colossians 2:6-7

Therefore St Paul places emphasis on living a life established and rooted in Christ and the solid teachings of the church. This not only means merely receiving the faith but understanding, through the help of the church fathers, the teachings that our Lord Jesus Christ gave us. St Paul goes on to say,

'Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the

Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.'
Colossians 2:8-10

We must therefore, be firmly rooted in Christ and increase our knowledge of our faith in order to know our identity and stand a chance against the empty philosophies that we will encounter on a daily basis. As strong, firm roots are able to withstand the forces of driving winds and rain; so should our identity in Christ stand firm through all the trials of the adversary. Our roots are strong enough to support our growth, and to provide our necessary nutrients, so let us reconnect and use them to flourish more in Him daily.

WHO HAVE WE HELPED THIS MONTH?

Charity Update

Some of the recent projects that have benefitted from SMUCC contributions include:

Monthly support

1. **Elbehera** (Healthcare & Social Development)
2. **Marakez Elsharkia** (Healthcare & Social Development)
3. **Old Egypt** (Healthcare & Social Development)
4. **Der Mawas** (Healthcare, Economic and Social Development)
5. **Aswan** (Healthcare Development)

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Coptic Partnership Fundraiser

and floor repairs, employment, and medical care. By God's grace, we pray that this project is a success and that we can work on many villages together over the years.



"On the first day of Christmas Jesus gave to me: Peace in my Heart..."



Visiting families in Salam City, Cairo

Healthcare projects

1. **Elberhera** (Hospital Refurbishment)
2. **Marakez Elsharkia** (Elkarma Healthcare centre project)
3. **Met Ghamr** (Healthcare Centre devolpment project)
4. **North Giza** (redesigning current Healthcare services & new hospital project)
5. **Beba** (Hospital refurbishment)
6. **Manfalout** (Hospital refurbishment)
7. **Suhag** (General Hospital project)
8. **Der Mawas** (Healthcare Centre Development)
9. **Aswan** (Ambulance project)

Education Projects

Om Dorman (Sudan) (nursery project)

Socio Economic project

Der Mawas (Bakery project)

DID YOU KNOW?

70%

Over the past three decades the proportion of people with access to drinking water has almost doubled – from 36 to nearly 70%!

St Mark's original name was John and his surname was Mark. His parents were called Aristopolos and Mary!

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Have a look at our website at:
www.stmarkuniversalcoptscares.org

Follow us on twitter:
[@StMarkUniversal](https://twitter.com/StMarkUniversal)

Or send us an email
Naser.fouad@stmarkuniversalcoptscares.org

In January 2014, St. Mark Universal Copts Care registered as a charity, and joined "Coptic Partnership for Relief and Development"; founded by His Grace Angaelos. The aim of the Partnership is for the seven charities under the Partnership with the same aim of relieving poverty to work together and combine resources. These charities are:

- 1) **St Mark Universal Copts Care,**
- 2) **St George Benevolent Funds,**
- 3) **The Forgotten angels,**
- 4) **Copts in Need,**
- 5) **Coptic Medical Society,**
- 6) **BLESS UK (The Bishopric of Public Ecumenical and Social Services),**
- 7) **Saint Kyrel Trust**

On 23rd November 2014, the Coptic Partnership held its annual fundraiser, selling paintings by artist Fadi Mikhail. The event was a success, and soon a website will be open with a brief description of the seven partnership charities with a hyperlink to their website. The website will be live within the next few months at www.copticpartnership.com

Our first project together uniting all seven charities is a project in a village called Sheikh Marzouk. The charities will be providing portable water connections, sewage disposal, roof construction, wall

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St Kaou - A Life of Dedication

By Daniel Tadross

Although the story of St Kaou is only briefly described in the Synaxarium, it is one that resonates with me. Perhaps a part of it is mere bias because he also came from El Fayyoun, but in what we know of his story he shows a raft of godly virtues, which are a shining example for us all.

Initially he lived 'in a home that he had built for himself outside of his city, where he worshipped God.' It seems an unspectacular beginning to his biography but we should always consider these details. The coenobitic lifestyle is a feat, whilst also both a physical and spiritual challenge. We can see from the start that St Kaou's heart is dedicated to God; he has severed all ties to the world to live in solitude, or more accurately, in the perfect company of Christ. As we see throughout his story, he cares little for the trivial matters of the world. St Arsanus once said:

"The Lord knows that I love you all, but I cannot speak with God and people at the same time."

St Kaou clearly considered this and prioritised the Lord. I find myself questioning everyday if I have prioritised people over my God. A whole day can go by in the company of colleagues or friends full of distractions, before realising the whole day has gone by without contemplating or thinking of God. The one resource which the devil can steal away from us which is not redeemable is our time, as it says in Ephesians 5:16:

"Redeeming the time,

because the days are evil."

The angel of the Lord appears to St Kaou in a vision telling him to go to El-Lahoon where he would be martyred by the Governor of Alexandria for his faith. What is his reaction? He rises from his sleep 'full of joy!' This is truly a man who has completely forsaken the world and even caring for his basic practical necessities. Without any hesitation he immediately departs as commanded. The trials of this world did not intimidate this saint, no matter how sincere they were. As the Lord said in Joshua 1:9:

"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

This is something St Kaou clearly took to heart. In fact, he rejoiced in carrying the cross of Christ and although this physically weakened him, it empowered him spiritually all the more. When we look upon things through worldly eyes we see weakness, we see people who are downtrodden yet the Lord sees people full of Himself, who serve endlessly, who carry the hope of Him in their hearts and so don't fear the world. The people this charity seeks to serve are in desperate poverty and live with a lack of the basic necessities, yet Jesus resides in them, and this is where they find their joy.

"The joy of the Lord is their (your) strength" - Nehemiah 8:10

Upon his arrival, a messenger shows St Kaou a carved idol. His reaction is quite simply priceless. **'St. Kaou took it in his hand and admired its wonderful workmanship. Then he cast it to the ground and smashed it.'** This is a complete rejection of sin; as so often in the Bible, the devil has tried to charm his way into



encouraging someone to sin. The beauty of the idol once again enraptures the human eye but those looking through the Spirit, informed by the Word, are not deceived.

"For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." - Hebrews 4:12

Just as in the Old Testament when the foreign nations had to be completely destroyed to prevent sin lingering, St Kaou smashes the idol so it cannot remain, much to the comical dismay of the messenger who gave it to him.

As a result of his rejection of the idols, St Kaou receives the crown of martyrdom. In what is in fact a shorter story of the Synaxarium there is still so much to gain. His unshakeable faith in God and absolute rejection of the world despite his physical frailty and old age was incredible.

The church commemorates the life of St Kaou on the 28th of the blessed month of Tubah, may his blessings be with us all.

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Brothers in Alms

By A St Mark Volunteer

Almsgiving

The word “alms” comes from the Old English word *ælmesse* and ultimately from the Greek word *eleos*, meaning “pity, mercy”, hence King Solomon tells in Proverbs 14:30 that “He who honours Him has mercy on the needy”. In its original sense, when giving alms, one is acting with mercy. By merely breaking down the meaning of the word, we see that there is so much depth to the act of almsgiving. Let us briefly delve into a journey of reflection into the true meaning of what it means to give.

Having never opened my eyes to poverty before, I was baffled at how and when poverty and privilege had become silent neighbours. Such exposure puts your circumstances into perspective. If we begin with something as basic as human rights, we would never spare a thought to thank God that He allowed us to live in a society which does not allow for degrading and inhumane treatment. Article 9 of The Human Rights Act 1998 gives us Freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

We met a woman who willingly lives in poverty, as she converted from Islam to Christianity. This woman, Marina had the success of material wealth, and was socially accepted and prestigious in her society. She gave up all of this in order to devote her soul God, and now lives in one room which includes a hole in the ground for a toilet, a bucket of water for a shower and a

basic deteriorating cooker for her and her two sons, which completely lacks privacy, sanitation and space. Truly, it can be said that Marina is a living example of what Christ has taught us in **Matthew 19:21** “If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” Meeting a living example of this cannot be expressed in words, except that it is the most humbling experience. How many times have we been out with friends, embarrassed to ask them not to swear in front of us? Or to admit that we are fasting, or promote and encourage edifying conversation? Is it that we place our priorities in deteriorating things such as reputation, and not in the heavenly treasure that awaits us? Let us all take an example from Marina – the bricks of her house may be falling through the cracks, the cooker that she possesses may be deteriorating but her heart is cleaner, gleaming and purer than ever. When she enters heaven, her beautiful soul will be lifted up in to heaven.

Upon meeting several families, it became apparent that the poverty that they suffer from is not in their opinion material poverty, but a poverty of the heart. So many of us subconsciously treat people in accordance with their status, wealth and income. The people living in these conditions do not have strangers who act with kindness. The poverty that they suffer from is far greater than that of materialistic wealth, and this was reflected in that upon visiting houses, families felt the need to paint a picture of their deteriorating health, as they were so immune to their living conditions and they desperately wanted us to care for them. They didn’t care about whether we turned up empty handed or whether or not we were there to help them, but they just wanted

someone to listen to their problems. Not to solve them, but because as we all know “a problem shared is a problem halved.”

We move here to the difference between tithe giving, and almsgiving. As we learn in Deuteronomy 26:12, we are called to firstly give of our tithe to the Levites (i.e. our priests), *then* to the stranger, the fatherless and the widow. The giving of tithe is the giving of one tenth of earnings, as our forefather Abraham gave to the first priest mentioned in the bible, Melchizedek (Genesis 14:20).

Tithing is the tip of the iceberg. It is often so easy for us to

GET INVOLVED!

Learn to Give, Learn to Live

“If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet; you also ought to wash one another’s feet”

John 13: 14

“Learn to Give, Learn to Live” is a programme for youth to serve our brothers and sisters in Egypt. Led by Coptic Orphans, you will travel to Egypt and teach English with various activities and courses in a predetermined 3-week period. This is an unmissable opportunity and you will serve with other youth from all around the globe either in July or December 2015. Truly this is a way in which we can try and fulfil this commandment Jesus has given us.

Please contact bishoy.dimitri@stmarkuniversalscoptsicare.org or call 07532333552 for more information

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give materialistic things away, as they allow our emotions to be safely detached so that we can remain consciously and complacently apathetic. Whilst we do love our money too much and often it is a struggle to give money to the poor, we often completely overlook the necessity of almsgiving that must compliment the giving of money. Almsgiving is continually defined in the book of Proverbs, the gospels, and in the deuterocanonical books of the Wisdom of Sirach and Tobit. Let us take a look at one of the definitions expressed in Proverbs 21:13 "Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be heard." The *cry* of the poor. Not the need, not the moaning and grumbling, but the deep rooted crying and aching of the soul. This is an absolute necessity, as people do not want to feel bought off with gifts of food and clothing.

On many occasions, representatives of the charity asked the poor if they wanted anything, to which their responses were that they have everything. (Many of these houses lacked bars of soap, let alone bed sheets, clothes and food). Can you imagine how much their hearts are starving just for somebody to love and care for them? When these people were painting the pictures of their lives, it was their *cry* for somebody to care for them. If these people who lack material necessities are so desperate for somebody to care, can you imagine how the very people who have such necessities in abundance are crying out for us? The next time somebody complains about something insignificant, remember that it is their *cry*, which God has called us never to neglect, but to love others as He has loved us.

The giving of tithes without almsgiving is something we do on a daily basis. We do this by continually avoiding people, and only contacting them when we need something from them. When we need to make this contact, we often don't bother to call the person or meet with them face to face, but we lazily contact them via text messaging, whatsapp or email to avoid the reality of conversation. Authenticity is lost the more informal forms of communication we use. We want time to calculate our responses, and we don't want to hear the *cry* of those who are poor in spirit. We close our emotions off and enjoy the comfort of being as detached as possible, because it is too painful and uncomfortable to listen to somebody's *cry* in their voice. Therefore, tithing is something which is legalistic and almsgiving is something which is merciful. Just as we obey the Law, this is merely not enough and we must love God through this obeying of the Law.

Mother Theresa expresses the poverty that we suffer from, when she tells us that "The greatest disease in the West today is not tuberculosis or leprosy; it is being unwanted, unloved, and uncared for. We can cure physical diseases with medicine, but the only cure for loneliness, despair, and hopelessness is love. There are many in the world who are dying for a piece of bread but there are many more dying for a little love. The poverty in the West is a different kind of poverty -- it is not only a poverty of loneliness but also of spirituality. There's a hunger for love, as there is a hunger for God." Upon visiting orphanages, something that will teach us how to pray and humbly think of others is that a little girl, around 12 years old at most prayed for us as we were leaving, and she asked God that we would return home safely. How many times when praying, do we ask to be healed from whatever painful experiences we are going through without thinking about what experiences are trying to teach us? Are they trying to soften our hearts? Are they teaching us to remember others in our prayers? Are they teaching us to submit to His will? Let us take an example from a girl who knows that as much as her biological parents love her, she was adopted by them and that her biological Father teaches her how to pray and remember to thank God for people who want to spend time with her. Although this girl misses two people who at her age are her life, she does not suffer from the poverty that Mother Theresa expresses so eloquently, but we who have this love in abundance are the ones who suffer of this poverty.

Let us take the example of Christ. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the Samaritan "saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine." Luke 10:33-34. Any medic would know that the basic procedure is to clean a wound with wine, and then seal it with oil. But the Good Samaritan (who represents Christ) was so moved with compassion that he soothed the wound with oil, until the man was ready to accept the pain of alcohol. In the same way, may we be moved with compassion and give the oil in our hearts the neglected before giving materialistic gifts. May we, like Christ who "*needed to go through Samaria*" (John 4:4) to meet with the Samaritan woman, *need to go through the Samaria that are our sibling's hearts*. Just as the journey to Samaria added 3 extra days to Christ's journey, may we wake this route in order to touch the lives of many.

The Fiery Sprit

By Hannah Saad

Every day we wake up blessed and we must thank God for his almighty presence in our lives. We are always told, constantly reminded that God is with us and that everything will be 'ok.'

"But the Lord is with me like a Mighty Warrior" Jeremiah 20:11

Reality is everything is more than okay. Everything is perfect because things are exactly the way God planned them to be. Again we return to this crazy concept that God has planned our lives. While this is completely true, not only did He plan our lives, He is part of our lives and He is in fact inside us. Now that's

quite something isn't it? God, The Lord, The Saviour is inside us! The Holy Spirit, that which saved our lives, planned our lives and died for us, lives inside us.

"You don't know what I am doing now, but you will understand later." John 13:7

Having come to terms with this we now must question what emotion are we feeling when we think we are lonely. For loneliness isn't the absence of humans, friends or family. We have never experienced true loneliness quite simply because the Holy Spirit is inside us, He works within us, cleansing our hearts so that it is a resting place fit for a King. This feeling of 'loneliness' is an indirect result of a gift called free will. It is due to our ability to control and change our lives, which means it's up to us to let the Holy Spirit work inside us. This may seem overwhelming but it's not! For we must do nothing except be willing and actively seek the Holy Spirit, so that we do not quench Him inside of us.

"Be still and know that I am God" Psalm 46:10

What an honour, to have the chance for Jesus Christ the King to live within us. We are truly blessed with His presence and what He has done for us. Aside from the Holy Spirit working, transforming and cleansing within us, the Holy Spirit also protects us! We are so honoured that we face the battles the world throws at us with God by our side. For how can any earthly problem defeat Him who created the earth? With Christ we are safe, we shall not be overcome by the trials of this world.

Without Him, we are weak, we are vulnerable and the Kingdom of Heaven seems out of reach. The choice seems easy but opening up your heart for the King is easier said than done. To those who have received The Holy Myron, embrace Him be grateful for Him, and continue to let Jesus shine through you.

And to the Holy Spirit, we thank You for your eternal protection and guidance and we pray that You accept our humble souls.

*We thank The Lord for his blessing,
He grants us the gift of perspective
For we learn it is not worth stressing
Life was meant to be this hectic*

*Although challenging at times it may seem
We are grateful for the life we are given
To live with Christ, to him have on our team
We shall not give in, through him we are driven*

*We pray the our lives do reflect
The glory of our saviour
From this path we shall not deflect
For Jesus shines through our behaviour*

*Loneliness is not something we know
For Jesus is with both you and me
He's love and compassion we will show
Just let God do his thing, how hard can it be?*



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