

Lesson No. (34)

Saint Mark and Saint Athanasius

References :

Coptic Orthodox Book of Saints, Samir Kirolos, St. George and St. Joseph COC, Montreal, Quebec, Canada

Notes for Servants :

Objectives :

General: Witnessing to Christ in the world against all the powers of evil.

- Specific:**
1. You also, can be an instrument to protect the orthodox faith.
 2. We must preach our faith to the world surrounding us.
 3. We should encourage more to come and discover our church.

Instructions:

Review last week's lesson.

Give a brief description about the church occasion(s) for the coming week.

Bible Verse:

*AHolding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught,
that he may be able by sound doctrine
both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.@
(Titus 1:9)*

Lesson :

Saint Mark and Saint Athanasius

Both Saint Mark and Saint Athanasius were instrumental in delivering the true Christian faith to our Coptic Church. Saint Mark was the founder of the Church of Alexandria. He established it from scratch and planted the first seeds of faith. Saint Athanasius single-handedly defended its Orthodoxy against the Arian heresy and preserved the faith.

Saint Mark:

Saint Mark is one of the seventy Apostles appointed by Jesus and one of the four evangelists. Born in Pentapolis (in the North-African coast West of Egypt) of a Jewish descent, he lived in Cyrenia until they were attacked by Barbarians. His family moved to Jerusalem. He had a good education and was well versed in Greek and Latin in addition to Hebrew. He is the cousin of St. Barnabas and his father is the cousin of St. Peter. His mother, Mary, was very religious and had close ties with the Lord Christ. The Upper Room of her house was the first Church where Jesus established the

Eucharist. There also Jesus appeared to the Disciples after His Resurrection and there did the Holy Spirit descend on the Apostles on the day of Pentecost. Saint Mark was closely associated with the Lord Christ. He was present in the wedding of Cana of Galilee. He was the man carrying the jar when the two Disciples went to prepare for the Passover. He was the man who fled naked when Jesus was arrested before His Crucifixion. Thus, we call him *Api Theorimos*®, the ABeholder of the Lord@.

Saint Mark preached the Gospel with Saint Peter in Jerusalem and Judea. He accompanied Saint Paul and Saint Barnabas to Antioch, Cyprus and Asia Minor, then to Rome. His real labor was in Africa. In 61 A.D., he left Rome to Pentapolis then to Alexandria where he converted Anianus the cobbler and later ordained him Bishop. He left again to Rome and witnessed the Martyrdom of Saint Peter and Saint Paul, then came back to Pentapolis and Alexandria. He was martyred on Easter of 68 A.D. when it fell on the same day as the pagan Serapis feast. The pagan mob attacked the Bocalis Church and dragged Saint Mark with a rope tied to a horse around the city till his head was separated from his body.

Saint Athanasius:

If Saint Athanasius had not opposed the Arian heresy, Christianity would have not been the same today. The Creed he wrote is recited by all Christian churches around the world. He was born in 297 A.D. in Upper Egypt and lived in Alexandria until he became a disciple of Pope Alexandrius. He diligently copied his Pope=s virtues as well as those of Saint Anthony when he spent three years in his monastery.

Arius, a priest native from Lybia who was in charge of the Bocalis Church in Alexandria, could not conceive the concept of the Triune God with his theological rationalism. His heresy claims that the Father created Christ, who in turn created the Holy Spirit and that Christ is less god than the Father and the Holy Spirit is less god than both. Emperor Constantine called the first Ecumenical Council at Nicea and the Creed written by Saint Athanasius was approved by all the 318 bishops and was adopted as the true formula of Orthodox faith.

In 328 A.D., after the departure of Pope Alexandrius, Saint Athanasius was ordained as the 20th of Alexandria. He took the helm of the Church for 46 years of which 17 were spent in 5 exiles for his opposition to Arianism. The Emperors (Constantine, Constantine Junior, Constantius, Julian, Jovian and Valens) took turns at deposing him and restoring him. He accepted no compromise and none of these hardships deterred him from defending the Orthodox faith. When he was told AThe world is against Athanasius!®, he simply replied AAnd Athanasius is against the world!®. In his exile in Europe, he wrote AThe Life of Anthony® and introduced monasticism to the Western churches in Europe for the first time. He departed in the Lord on May 15, 373 A.D. in Alexandria among his people.

Comparison:

These two Saints were the most prominent Popes of the uninterrupted Apostolic succession of the Church of Alexandria. They taught the people (against paganism or heresies) and stood firm in the faith. They both traveled a lot and gained many souls. They both witnessed boldly to Christ.

Conclusion:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.