

Papal Message
Feast of Nativity
January 2010

My beloved children in the lands of Immigration, both clergy and laity,

I send to you my sincere love to each one of you, wishing you a joyous life in the lands of immigration. May the Lord keep you without fault, loving one another with true love, that each you be careful to edify his brother, without offence.

I would like to congratulate you all with the start of the New Year, and the Glorious Feast of Nativity. May it be a blessed and happy year, carrying to you what the birth of the Lord carries from inspirations to the soul and also deep spiritual memories.

The Lord Christ came as a Savior to the world, as the angel said to the shepherds: “For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” (Luke 2:11) And the Lord has said concerning Himself that He came “to seek and to save that which was lost.” (Luke 19:10)

In addition to all of this, He had an important message in teaching, and in leading the people to the knowledge of God, having said to the Father: “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” (John 17:3)

He also said to Him: “And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare *it*, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.” (John 17:26)

Did all of these people not know God, till Christ came to tell them about Him? Of course not, for without doubt they knew His Hebrew name: Elohim, Jehovah, Adonai, that is, the One who is and is to be, God and Lord. But this mere knowledge of the mind is not enough.

They knew that the One God is the Creator of heaven and earth and the only One who works wonders. But they did not have a relationship of the heart with Him, even in their prayers! Therefore God said concerning them: “...these people draw near with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me.” (Isaiah 29:13)

They had an outward worship only, without spirit! Prayer without a connection!! For this reason God rejected their prayer. He said to these people: “When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood.” (Isaiah 1:15)

God desired the pure heart that is full of love towards God and people. Thus the Lord Christ said to God the Father: “And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare *it*, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.” (John 17:26)

The Lord Christ came teaching people about love, through His life and words; so that they will know that God is Love (1 John 4:16); and that every virtue void of love is not accepted before

God... Thus He said to His disciples: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.” (John 13:34) He also said to them: “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:35) It was said about Him that He “loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.” (John 13:1)

He taught them to love everyone, even the enemies, saying: “But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you...” (Matthew 5:44) He explained this by saying: “For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?” (Matthew 5:46)

As long as God is Love, then anyone who is far from love is far from God...

With this we understand the meaning of prayer. It is not merely talking with God, or merely a duty that we perform, instead, prayer is a desire for God, as the psalmist says in the Psalm: “As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God.” (Psalm 42:1)

The prayer that is distinguished by the love from the heart to God is a spiritual enjoyment, during which the heart enjoys the company of God. The sign of this is that when a person starts prayer, they do not want to finish it, desiring to continue in the enjoyment of talking with God. The ending of the prayer to this person is like snatching the suckling infant from his mothers' breast...

The Lord Christ offered God to people with a lovely name of heavenly Father. He taught us to call Him saying: “Our Father Who art in heaven...” He is the Father who is full of beauty and compassion, and He is the source of all goodness...

We love God Who gives to us without us asking, and above what we ask. We love Him for He is the Good Shepherd, who makes us lie in green pastures and leads us beside the still waters (Psalm 23). He is the true Shepherd who said about Himself: “I will feed My flock, and I will make them lie down ... I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick...” (Ezekiel 34:15, 16) With all of this the Lord Christ came as a Good Shepherd, giving Himself for the sheep (John 10:11, 15). He gives His sheep eternal life, and they will not perish forever (John 10:28).

Blessed is the Lord in His incarnation, in His love to us, in His care which is sacrificial and redeeming. We thank Him for all of this, and glorify His Name from now and forevermore, Amen.

A blessed season to you all.

January 2010

(Signed)

His Holiness Pope Shenouda III