

Emmanuel,
which means
"GOD WITH US."

THIS IS HOW THE LORD, through the prophet Isaiah, communicated the new relationship that unites us with Himself. Christ is called Emmanuel, which alludes to the relationship that came into effect through Christ's birth, and brought to us not only God's message but also His presence. Through this new relationship God, in Christ, becomes our life and as Christ enters the very core of our lives, we are brought near to God.

If Christ has become the head and consummation of our faith, then through Him every one of us now lives and moves and has our being! The instant we accept Him as God and Savior and are ready to testify to that before all, even though it cost us our lives, the true Christian life begins, with Christ as its head and guarantor. As we resort to Christ before we speak, or talk, or work or make a decision, Christ truly lives in us, and we are not the ones who live. By this we enter into the sphere of the glorious power; tasting, seeing, and feeling God's glory: "The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them" (Jn 17:22). If a man stops feeling the warmth of God's glory that Christ granted him, then he may be sure that he has left the sphere of His presence. If he is honest then he will stop immediately and not move, speak, plan or walk. If he fails to do this, the Divine power that works through Christ's presence will cease to function. When this happens he will stumble through life like a blind man groping along: "And does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes" (1 Jn 2:11). "He who follows me will not walk in darkness" (Jn 8:12).

So we realize that Christ's name "Emmanuel" is in itself a proclamation of Christ's work in our lives as our guide and leader, and we must cling to Him as we cling to life itself. Life without Emmanuel, meaning without God and His work in us with all His power as guide and leader, ceases to be a Christian life in the Lord. It has lost its aim, even lost its way completely, like a ship without a pilot, driven along by the waves.

It is for this reason that Christ said: "I am the way, and the truth and the life" (Jn 14:6). Christ reveals Himself as the one who must always be in us. If He is not, there will be no way, no truth, and no life. He also says: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end" (Rev 1:8). He uses this name because He knows the importance of His existence in our lives. Without Him our days will have no beginning or end, but will be as flat as the floor, unregistered in the registry of life, like debris, unwritten by God's hand.

This is an alarming consequence and should cause us to review our lives on the basis of Christ's existence in us and evaluate them according to the extent of His work in us as guide, organizer, leader and teacher. How many times in the day do we turn to Him? How many times

at night do we seek His counsel? How many times do we cry out when we sense His absence¹? How many times do we weep because He took no notice of us?² How many times does the Lord keep silent and not answer us?³ As a consequence of this, how many times do we fast for the Lord to return to the house He prepared to live in through the Holy Spirit?

I was amazed, dear brethren, when I read the story of the Pakistani Gulshan Esther. When Christ appeared to her, among the words He said to her were, “I am Emmanuel” and “I am the way, and the truth and the life.” He says this that we might return from the errant life we live without Him, for there exists no other way in the world but Christ, no truth but Christ, no life but Christ! His gospel is our instruction every day and every night, and His name is our praise, our strength, and our refuge. A cry in the name of Jesus Christ will summon either His instant presence, an angel to stand and ward off the danger, or a cloud of angels to surround us.

Christ with us makes us stronger than a whole army. Whatever weapon the enemy may brandish against it will be powerless. Life with Christ is stronger than death, death with Christ is eternal life! If Emmanuel is with us, then who can stand against us!

All of this makes us strive to be worthy of the status of Emmanuel, the status of existing with Christ and Christ existing in us. We plan, keep vigil, pray, fast, and kneel before him day and night. If we gain Christ we will have gained life but if our souls have grown tired and no longer reach out for Him, then our lives will not be worth the food we eat.

If we have angered Christ by breaking His commandments, the only choice is bitter repentance, along with the confession of sins in supplication to God through persistent praying, self-abnegation and continuous mournful praise, till God, on His mountain, shows mercy and removes His anger. Christ is a competent intercessor and is able to bear our sins through His cross and his blood. No sin is too great for Him to bear, for He said that every sin and blasphemy is forgiven except blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

The golden rule in dealing with Christ and His Spirit is to strictly observe everything that has to do with His commandments. To break any commandment means we have turned our backs on Christ and have become dumb, not hallowing His name, resulting in the grieving of the Holy Spirit: “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit” (Eph 4:30). For the Holy Spirit will not work or answer cries or lamentations unless we purify ourselves through penitent worship, true repentance and patience. Those who have abandoned devotion for other activities, whatever they may be, will not savor Christ.

It is difficult for the Holy Spirit to inhabit an arrogant soul or for Christ to accept it. A return to the nature of a child, in purity, gentleness, and meekness prepares us for the Holy Spirit’s abidance and Christ’s coming to us. The nature of a child exists in every man, hidden in the innermost part of his soul, but covered over by other natures through their deceitfulness. If a man revives his childlike nature, it will live and flourish at the voice of Christ and the works of

¹ Maybe through a lie we uttered carelessly thinking it did not matter.

² Maybe due to anger, envy, spite, betrayal, or too much self-confidence that took hold of us because we considered it necessary to prove ourselves.

³ Because we continued to live on in terrible sin, the worst being impurity.

the Word. This was the basis for Christ's golden commandment: "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 18:3). This is the only nature in man's life that is appropriate to the Kingdom's glory and its Inhabitant. It is without treachery, lies, deceit, cunning, pride, blemish, rather, it is with love, simplicity, gentleness and meekness, confidence, hope and faith. If not for the fact that all of us have this nature dormant within us, Christ would not have persistently called us all, without exception, to return to this nature – one that is in accord with Christ and God. "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 19:14). "See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven" (Matt 18:10).

I was astonished when I read in Phoebe Abd El-Messih's account of meeting Christ, how Christ said to her: 'Look at Me... What do you see?' and she answered: 'A child's face.' I froze, and for the first time realized in faith and in fact that Divinity's greatness and glory is manifested in childhood. This is a wonder, a complete wonder! Isn't His name Wonderful! If the face of the Lord of the Kingdom had not been that of a child, then He would not have been able to restrict entry into the Kingdom to children.

The spirit of childhood is in us. Its innocence and purity is what qualifies us to have Christ come into our hearts and to have the presence of the Holy Spirit in us.

What a joy to mankind that on Christmas day Divinity should come to us in the form of a child. The childlike nature is established in our new creation as a divine living treasure, a qualification for Christ to enter in us. By it we will be worthy of our communion with the Father and Christ, in preparation for a permanent life with Christ and God the Father. In His Eternal Kingdom, in love, we will be saints without blame before the Father, praising the glory of the grace which He bestowed on us through His beloved! This is like an angelic chorus before me, as the stature of childhood is higher than that of angels.

Christ begged the Father for this to become reality, "I made known to them thy name, and I will make it known, that the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them" (Jn 17:26). Can the Father's love overflow in us unless we have the nature of a child by which we can cry out 'Abba, Father'? With this divine fatherly love working in us Christ gave us the commandment to love our enemies! Without the action of God's love in us it is impossible for us to love even our brothers, let alone our enemies! Love for one's enemies is the work of God alone. It is the love that filled the Father's heart toward the world, the object of God's wrath, when He sent His Son to be a sacrifice on the cross, "that whoever believes in him, should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). Christ, on the cross, became our connection with Divine love, and this seed, the seed of Divine love, enters the world through faith in Him who was crucified. Thus Christ's requirement was fulfilled, that the Father's love, with which the Father loved Christ the Son, should exist in us. Through this love we were made alive and were loved as the new creation and given the grace to freely love both those who love us and those who hate us.

How wonderful was the birth of the one who was named 'Wonderful'. This is what the Spirit named Him through Isaiah's words: "Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a

son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Is 7:14), and: “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; And his name will be called ‘Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace’” (Is 9:6). Today that which you have heard has been fulfilled!

Father Matta El-Meskeen
(The Eve of Christmas 7/1/2000).

St Macarius the Great

Overcome by Heavenly Desire

If love of carnal union separates from father, mother, brothers, and all that belong to these relations become outward in the husband’s mind, and if he loves them, he loves them with the outward part of his mind, while all his intention and wish is turned to his wife – because it is said, “for that, a person will abandon father and mother and will be attached to the wife and they will become both one flesh” – if then carnal love so much detaches from all love, how much more they who received the worthiness of that holy, heavenly and dear Spirit, to participate in the Spirit truly, will be detached from all worldly love, and everything to them will appear unnecessary, because they are defeated by heavenly desire and united with that desire. Their wish lies in that place, their mind, their life, their thoughts walk up there; it is there that the mind has its dwelling place, overcome by the godly and heavenly love and spiritual desire.

St Makarius, *Spiritual Homilies*, 4



The Monastery of St. Macarius

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