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#brothersandsisters

Act 18: Brothers and Sisters

by His Eminence Archbishop Angelos, Coptic Orthodox Archbishop of London

If the church is a family, we have a lot of brothers and sisters living in desperate need of our help. Persecution is real, and the stories are alarming. It can feel like there's no way to help, or that these are people beyond hope. But with a God who is powerful, we have access to the most effective, destiny-making help we could bring: contending in prayer.

"We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed – always

carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body."

(2 Corinthians 4:8–10 NKJV)

As Christians, we sometimes struggle to grasp and feel the joy that we intellectually know we are promised by our Lord Jesus Christ in John 16:22: 'your joy no one will take from you'. This is especially the case for many of us when we focus our attention on the struggles of our brothers and sisters in the Middle East and beyond, who often pay the ultimate price for their faith in the same Lord who promises us unchallenged joy. Suffering, however, is certainly not the end of the story, and the joy promised by our God is not mutually exclusive with the reality of struggle.

In looking at the birth, life, death and resurrection of our Lord, we see that challenges and struggles were ever-present throughout, and yet formed only part of the journey. The pain of the cross was ultimately a vehicle to the joy of the glorious resurrection, and a promise to us all of life after death. We also hear Saint Paul resolutely convicted of the glory of the cross, in Galatians 6:14: "But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ". Coptic Orthodox Christians in Egypt will often proclaim their faith in a similarly bold and courageous way, viewing martyrdom as something that is of course painful and yet, in the end, something to be immensely proud of, through which they come to a greater comprehension and appreciation of the strength of their faith and witness.

So, what can we do in witnessing the persecution and suffering of others? Firstly, we do all we can to alleviate their immediate suffering and need, and become their advocates. We then pray for God's will, and his hand to be upon all suffering tribulation, victims of persecution, and even perpetrators, so that their hearts and minds are changed. Lastly, we learn from that faithful witness that, even if we undergo trial and tribulation, we are by no means defeated by it, for the promise of resurrection is real to all who believe it.



His Eminence Archbishop Angaelos was enthroned as the first Coptic Orthodox Archbishop of London on 18th November 2017, having served as General Bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Church in the UK since 1999. He is recognised for his extensive advocacy work, and was conferred the honour of OBE for services to international religious freedom. He was conferred the Lambeth Cross for Ecumenism by the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Coventry Cross of Nails for Reconciliation. Archbishop Angaelos also specialises in national and international youth ministry.

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GREEN OPTION:

Read some stories from the persecuted church. Look up Open Doors or Release International – their websites are full of stories that will motivate you to pray.



YELLOW OPTION:

Come up with a plan for how you'll pray for the persecuted, daily, for the next few months.



**RED
OPTION:**

Look into taking a mission trip with a persecuted church charity.

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