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METROPOLITAN'S MESSAGE



My Dearly Beloved,

Christ is risen, and the angels rejoice. Christ is risen, and life reigns. Christ is risen, and not one dead remains in the grave. "For Christ, being risen from the dead, is become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep." - St. John Chrysostom - Paschal Sermon

We live in a time where science and technology has advanced like never before. This scientific and technological advancement has made life so much easier. Any kind of information and knowledge is available at the tip of our fingers. From navigation systems to auto-pilots and self-driving cars; from 3D printers to artificial organs - there is hardly anything that now remains, where we human beings have not left our marks on. I sometimes even wonder, if we need to leave our marks on everything we see.

Despite all this, I continuously keep seeing that our human race is still struggling to find meaning and purpose to life. When life is devoid of meaning, purpose and beauty - misery takes over. Despite all these achievements that we can boast about, we are somehow still miserable. Hope - is something that I find a lot of people are missing in their lives. We lose hope at the smallest of failures. We lose inner strength at the smallest storms of life that comes our way. We have become or are becoming so used to a life of ease, that we have forgotten the art of standing strong in the midst of life's dark nights and rough storms.

It is here, amidst all our achievements and misery that the Cross of Christ and His glorious Resurrection makes perfect sense, and imparts its sense to everything else as well. It is in the suffering and death of Christ that we can find meaning and beauty to our suffering, pain and failures. It is in the Resurrection of Christ our Lord, that we find the ultimate beauty and hope for our lives. I also dare to say that, outside the Cross and the Empty Tomb there is nothing much that gives hope to the world.

We cannot talk about a glorious Sunday of victory and rejoicing without contemplating on the Friday of agony, suffering, humiliation and death. In fact, the lesson of discipleship begins with the willingness to carry the burden of the Cross (Matt. 16:24). When we are willing to bear our own cross, then bearing the weakness of another becomes less burdensome.

This sort of an idea is a big blow for us, who are almost asleep or dead in a life of pleasure-hunting. The joy of Pascha or the Feast of the Resurrection is celebrated at the empty tomb. The tomb which was once considered as the end of existence, has now become the medicine for all the emptiness we feel in our lives.

The empty tomb of the glorious Resurrection of Christ is a marvelous place which reveals to us that the image/icon of God cannot be shut in a tomb. Sufferings of a Friday makes perfect sense in the light of the Great Sunday of Life. So, my beloved ones in Christ, if you are going through a Friday of suffering in your life, remember that there is Sunday of victory and rejoicing that awaits us. This assurance is given to us by none other, but the Author of Life Himself. May Christ our Lord bring us to a life of victory and joy which comes to us after we have walked the wilderness of suffering, pain and death. May we find strength while we gaze at the Cross and may we find our hope, when we gaze at the empty tomb.

All glory to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, One True God. Now and always forever.

Amen.



Metropolitan Alexios Mar Eusebius

“

Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."

~ Matthew 16:24

St. George: Chowkidhar of Chicks or Hero of Liberation?

Rev. Fr. Joshi Varghese, Bhilai

St. George is one of the most 'popular' saints in Christendom. (I surely know that *popular* is not the apt adjective to refer to a Saint. But here it is used only to mean that the Saint is venerated by many people across the world). He is equally venerated by the Orthodox, Catholic and the Anglican Churches. St. George is the patron Saint of "Aragon, Catalonia, England, Ethiopia, Georgia, Greece, Lithuania, Palestine, Portugal and Russia, as well as the cities of Amersfoort, Beirut, Fakiha, Bteghrine, Cáceres (Spain), Ferrara, Freiburg, Genoa, Ljubljana, Gozo, Milan, Pomorie, Preston, Qormi, Lod, Barcelona and Moscow" and also that of many organizations including the Scouting movement. "His cross forms the national flag of England, and features within the Union Flag of the United Kingdom, and other national flags containing the Union Flag, such as those of Australia and New Zealand" (courtesy internet).

Who is St. George?

He is believed to have been born into a noble Christian family in the late third century (c. 280 AD) in Cappadocia, an area which is now in Turkey. He followed his father's profession of soldier and became part of the retinue of the Emperor Diocletian. The emperor ordered the systematic persecution of Christians and George refused to take part. In 303 A.D., he was tortured and executed in Palestine, becoming an early Christian martyr.

One of the best known stories about St. George is his slaying of a dragon. The legends about St George spread far and wide and it was claimed that near the town of Silene in Libya, a dragon dwelt, who had to be fed with sheep by the terrified people. Later they had to provide human beings to satiate the dragon and finally it was the turn of the Princess of the land to become the dragon's prey. The story then relates how "St. George rode up on his white horse, dismounted and fought the monster on foot; until it eventually succumbed. He then dragged the dying monster into the city, using the girdle of the Princess and slew the dragon in front of the people. St. George was greeted as their savior and the King offered him a bag of gold as a reward for saving his daughter. This he refused and asked that it be given to the poor".

Chowkidhar of chicks!

The Syrian Christians place St. George along with or next to Mar Gregorios of Parumala, on the rungs of popular piety, after St. Mary who is known as the Crown of Saints. Starting from the last week of April to the second week of May, the feast of St. George is celebrated by lakhs of people with much fervor in our churches. Do these celebrations help us to deepen our faith in Christ and participate in the divine nature (Theosis - which is the ultimate aim of Christian life) of God? It won't be an exaggeration that for many of us, St. George is a Superman, wrapped in religious embellishments. Like Superman or other Superheroes, he also successfully fought with a monster which threatened the peaceful living of common man. Similar to a kid glued to TV/Computer screens airing the super heroic activities, we are happy to get immersed in the outward celebrations and to tread into a fantasy world where we are always protected by our Superman from all sorts of sufferings.

In other words, we are guilty of trivializing St. George, or for that matter any other Saint. In childhood, I've witnessed my grandmother (and our neighbours too!) seeking the intercession of Geevarghese Sahada (St. George). These intercessions, unfortunately, were not made to strengthen their Faith-Journey, rather to protect the newly hatched out chicken. As they would be busy with their daily chores, they needed a Chowkidhar for their chicks and found a good one in *Sahada*. (I have no idea why St. George's is seen as the protector of chicks. It might have started from the spear that he used to kill the dragon! In real life which other saint can be more handy to protect the chicks from its enemies than a saint who carries a spear with him? Hats off to our forefathers for their practical wisdom!!). We need to have a better appreciation of the qualities of this inspiring saint.

Firm Faith

As in every other Saint, overwhelming faith in Christ, is the most remarkable feature we see in St. George. He was in an unenviable position when he was asked to choose between Christ, whom he believed in, and the Emperor, whose patronage had helped him to jump-start his career in the royal army. Without a tinge of hesitation he chose to be with Christ. He said, "I love my country and my Emperor, but I love Christ more than anything else". It was this affirmation of faith that led to his martyrdom.

Till a few years back the stories of persecution and martyrdom that occurred to Christians in the early centuries were almost unrelated to us. We felt safe and couldn't 'feel' the plight of the persecuted and we couldn't understand what happens when we are threatened for our Faith. The martyrdom of Egyptian Orthodox Christians and 30 Ethiopian Orthodox Christians in recent times declares that we are also living in a situation similar to that faced by St. George. In our nation the echoes of hatred and vilification associated with *gharwapsi* raises serious concerns about the right to follow and proclaim ones' faith.

There are other occasions when we are forced to 'hide' our Faith. This is an everyday situation, especially where we are the only ones to share our Faith or are in a minority. We tend to be diplomatic and compromise on Christian values just to keep those around us - our friends, colleagues, neighbors, happy. We either follow their unchristian practices or become mute spectators. These are occasions to become a silent-martyr as described in St. Mt. 5:11-12, "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you". We are rather happy to stifle and murder our faith. What happens when we are faced with the temptation to compromise on our Faith to safeguard or advance in our career/life? Are we happy to make 'adjustments' or to be 'practical' at the cost of the values that Christ expects from us? Do we use these situations to affirm and firm up our faith? The martyrdom of St. George is a challenge to 'walk the talk', to live our faith every day, every moment without being ashamed or terrified of being a Christian.

Hero of Liberation

The episode of confronting and killing the dragon by St. George is sometimes described in super heroic terms and we fail to see the liberative perspective. Dragon is the symbol of Evil. It represents the force of exploitation, oppression, darkness and death. Dragon can be considered as the any dark force that threatens the peaceful life of individual or society. In the present world all that threatens the *Abundant Life*, as promised by Jesus Christ, like communalism, corruption, economic & political exploitation.

We often carry the wrong idea that Saints kept themselves away from other people or were always locked in the four walls of the church for prayer. It's very much true that they incessantly prayed but also cared for the people around them. In simple words they fulfilled the twain commandments of Jesus to "Love your God" and to "Love your neighbor". St. George, a true Christian that he was, couldn't keep a blind eye on the suffering of people around him. Risking his own life he confronted the dragon for the sake of the people. Another interesting aspect to be noted is that the dragon was not creating any trouble where St. George lived. He came to know about the menace of the dragon as he was traveling to another place and he put his life in danger for some strangers. This is what makes St. George, **a Saint in Action**.

As Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff state about Liberative interpretation of Bible in their 'Introducing Liberation Theology', we shall seek to discover and activate the *transforming energy* from the life of St. George. That shall lead to individual change (conversion experience) and positive transformation in social system.

We, as individuals and as Church need to get inspired by the life of this valiant saint who was a man of Faith and Hero of Liberation.

DS-WA MGOCSM Council Weekend 2017 - Urshlem Diocesan Center

The MGOCSM Council of the South-West American Diocese met on January 13th to January 15th to constitute the ministry of MGOCSM. The meeting was presided by His Grace Alexios Mar Eusebius the Metropolitan and President of MGOCSM of the Diocese of South-West American. Additionally, the Diocese MGOCSM Director, Rev. Fr. James Cheriyan, the Diocese MGOCSM General Secretary, Ms. Lijin Raju, the Diocese MGOCSM Joint Secretary, Ms. Christina Varghese, the Diocese MGOCSM Treasurer Ms. Sophy Cherian, and the Council Representatives were also present at the meeting. The meeting began with James Achen expressing to the newly formed Council members the importance of MGOCSM, and the need to prioritize this organization in order, for everything to flow smoothly. Lijin Raju added to the opening remarks by explaining the expectations of the Council members to be respectful, professional, and to make effective decisions that ultimately bring Glory to God. The first topic of discussion was MGOCSM Day, an initiative to raise awareness of MGOCSM, and to inspire the next generation. It was decided that the theme of this year will be a "Month of Prayer" for the month of October. The reinstatement of International and Domestic Missions was also discussed. His Grace suggested that DS-WA MGOCSM collaborate with the Interchurch

relations for a trip to Ethiopia and Egypt to visit the life of the church there as well as incorporate mission work. Our Council Members presented and discussed various ministry projects for the upcoming 2017 year. Amongst the topics discussed were the Urshlem Summer Camps, Domestic Service, Campus Ministry, and Public Relations. Domestic Service for the new year will encourage that each area chooses a local organization and remain with them to do service projects for each quarter. This will help build positive relationships within the community. The Council has recognized the need to find more effective methods to communicate the activities of DS-WA MGOCSM. The proposed solution decided was to create an Instagram and Snapchat account. Each Council Member summarized their respective areas and provided strengths and weaknesses. Feedback was provided for each member from fellow council members, Ms. Lijin Raju, and Rev. Fr. James Cheriyan. The meeting concluded with a reminder from His Grace that our mission in our area is to make sure each, and every child in your age group is involved in church. It was encouraged to reach out to those who are not involved and to create a solution. Council members should reach out to their Vicars, friends, and families. MGOCSM should not just be an organization that is fueled by creating successful events, but rather our goal should also be to identify with those that are suffering and aim to help them. The Council hopes that all MGOCSM units in the diocese will continue to support initiatives taken by this ministry. Please keep these newly appointed Council Members and all current and future endeavors of this organization in your daily thoughts and prayers. Without your support and divine guidance from God, this ministry would not be possible. Let us all do our parts to keep the MGOCSM one of the most progressive and powerful organizations in our church!

Diocese of South-West America
2017 Urshlem Men's Summer Camp

"Teach me to do your WILL, for you are my GOD."
Psalm 142:10

Sunday Sunday
9-16 Pursuing God's Heart
 JULY Speaker: TBD

Who: 11th Grade to College Undergrads
 Where: Urshlem Diocesan Center - Beasley, TX
<https://goo.gl/forms/nNRCpCI7UEwiZiGq2>

Diocese of South-West America
2017 Urshlem Women's Summer Camp

"Teach me to do your WILL, for you are my GOD."
Psalm 142:10

July
 Sun. 16 - Speaker: Mrs. Ceena Varghese
 Weds. 19 Who: 11th Grade - College Undergrads
 Where: Urshlem Diocesan Center - Beasley, TX
<https://goo.gl/forms/SI8Kk1Ct8jxEfh432>

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"Remember God in every thing. Let no one grieve because of you. Never let go of an opportunity to do something good. Only those things will remain with you till the end."

- Parumala Thirumeni

MMVS

REGIONAL CONFERENCES



Dallas-Oklahoma Regional Meeting
St Gregorios Orthodox Church, Dallas



Chicago Regional Meeting
St Thomas Orthodox Church, Chicago



Detroit Regional Meeting
St Gregorios Orthodox Church, Rochester Hills

Indian Orthodox Church extends condolences to Coptic Orthodox Church

We express our solidarity with the Coptic Orthodox Church who suffered the loss of life of their faithful during Palm Sunday Services at the St. George's Church in Tanta, Egypt and St. Mark's Cathedral in Alexandria, which is the Coptic Patriarch's Cathedral Church.

As we celebrated the joy of Christ's entry into Jerusalem, we are saddened that people with malice in their hearts would corrupt this joyous day by killing innocent lives. We must pray for our brothers and sisters of the Coptic Orthodox Church and all Christians suffering around the world because of war and persecution. At the same time, we must pray for those who hate us, and hate the church, and hate the Faith that our Lord Jesus Christ has given to us. As the Lord has taught us, "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, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven..." (St. Matthew 5:44-45).



SYNERGIA: A Family Lesson on Water and Energy Conservation

Rev. Fr. P.A.Philip, Catholicate Aramana, Kottayam

The year 2017 is observed as the Year of Water and Energy Conservation Year by the Malankara Orthodox Church. The title of the project is **SYNERGIA**. The word Synergia, derived from the Greek word *synergos* has different layers of meaning in Christian theology. However, in this context we consider only the literal and pragmatic meaning of the word. It can mean *working together, united or combined action*. Thus SYNERGIA simply means the united and combined efforts of families to conserve water and energy. Let us all join hands to conserve water and energy and keep our planet green and livable.

Water and its importance in Christian Faith

The North African Christian author, Tertullian (160-225 C.E.), writing in a sermon on Jesus' baptism, said, "Christ is never without water." Water is the Earth's blood, its vitality, and becomes literally part of our blood flowing through our bodies and most of other life.

Water is the means of cleansing, spiritual and physical. We bathe or shower in water. We swim in water. We play in water. Water not only purifies objects for ritual use in many religions, but can make a person clean, externally or spiritually, ready to come into the presence of God. Almost all Christians use water for the sacrament of baptism where we die into Christ with the hope of being resurrected with Christ.

Water is a human right issue; more than a billion people have no access to clean water. Frank Turner, a Jesuit priest, developed four themes for water eco-justice: water as life and death, water as a human right, water as a common good, and water as a scarce resource related to conflict. Both documents highlight how important water is to life. Water justice can become a study focus for church groups, along with water imagery in the Bible. There are numerous references related to water especially, in St. John's Gospel. This can be part of a spiritual practice for study and prayer for Lent.

The feast of Epiphany (Danaha Perunal) and blessing of water

The feast of Epiphany (Danaha Perunal) is pregnant with meaning. The focal point of the service on the day is the blessing of water. The bottle of water which is used for the service stands for all the water bodies in the world. The prayers in the service pertain to all the water sources on earth. In some Orthodox churches the celebrant and the congregation go out of the church and bless the waters in the ponds, wells and rivers in the vicinity. In our Malankara Orthodox Church too there is a tradition to put some drops of blessed water in our wells on the day of Danaha reminding us the importance of keeping our water resources clean and uncontaminated. It is the faith of Christians that since the Son of God has taken human flesh and has been immersed in the streams of the Jordan, all matter is sanctified and made pure in Him, purged of its death-dealing qualities inherited from the devil and the wickedness of men. In the Lord's epiphany all creation becomes good again, indeed "very good," the way that God Himself made it and proclaimed it to be in the beginning when "the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters" (Gen 1.2) and when the "Breath of Life" was breathing in man and in everything that God made (Gen 1.30; 2.7).

The world and everything in it is indeed "very good" (Gen 1.31) and when it becomes polluted, corrupted and dead, God saves it once more by effecting the "new creation" in Christ, his divine Son and our Lord by the grace of the Holy Spirit (Gal 6.15). This is what is celebrated on Epiphany, particularly in the Great Blessing of Water. The consecration of the waters on this feast places the entire world – through its "prime element" of watering the perspective of the cosmic creation, sanctification and glorification of the Kingdom of God – in Christ and the Spirit. It tells us that man and the world were indeed created and saved in order to be "filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph 3.19), the "fullness of him who fills all in all" (Eph 1.22). It tells us that, Christ, in Who "the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily," is and shall be truly "all, and in all" (Col 2.9, 3.11). It tells us as well that, the "new heavens and the new earth" which God has promised through His prophets and apostles (Is 66.2; 2 Peter 3.13; Rev 21.1) are truly "with us" already now in the mystery of Christ and His Church.

The Solemn Blessing of Water, in commemoration of Christ's Baptism in the Jordan, is the main feature of the Feast of Epiphany. St. Gregory the

Wonderworker commented: "The Lord, Who has come upon the Jordan River, through its streams transmitted sanctification to all streams (of water)." And precisely, in our liturgical books, the blessing of water is referred to as The Blessing of Jordan, since it is considered as the re-enactment of Christ's baptism. By His baptism in the Jordan, Our Savior imparted upon water a mystical power of sanctification, a "sign of heavenly streams" of divine grace.

St. Basil the Great (died 379) affirms that the blessing of water came to us as a "mystical tradition" (of. On the Holy Spirit, XXVII, 66) and that water, through the prayer and blessing of the priest, receives a "quickening power of the Holy Spirit" (Ibid, XV, 35). St. Ambrose (died 397) also taught that it was the Holy Spirit Who "consecrated the waters through the prayer of the minister." (cf. On the Holy Spirit, L. I. c. VII, 88) Consequently, in the prayer for the blessing of the water we always find the *epiklesis* – the invocation of the Holy Spirit.

Edward Echlin, an English eco-theologian, draws an insight from the baptism of Jesus. "When Jesus enters the Jordan, the waters and creatures dependent upon water, are sanctified by the presence of God's word made flesh. All waters are connected – water is like the blood of the earth. All waters are cosmic Jordan. All waters are Jordanized, sanctified, recreated, when the Spirit again moves of the waters at the Jordan at Jesus' baptism."

The cosmic Christ is ever connected to water. When we realize that Christ is in every drop of water that falls to the Earth, waters the soil for plants and sustains animal life, and that our bodies contain 65%-70% water, it is easy to envision how Jesus speaks of "living water" to the Samaritan woman at the well. We understand Jesus' metaphor of the living water as God's unconditional love and grace of eternal life.

God gives Jesus to the world as the water of life, and Jesus offers himself to the world as the living water. This living water figuratively represents an unconditional blessing that reproduces itself, and, like a spring, it is never exhausted. Christ in the people suffering from water poverty is still begging for something to drink for water and for the living water. Are we willing to share a cup of living water? In this season of Lent, as we deny ourselves comforts in order to feel the pain of others, may we come up with practical ways of standing in solidarity with the many who are still crying give us water ... the living waters! We might practice a little further personal restraint in our over consumption of water. We over consume and often waste that which we use.

Water was scarce in Jesus' day, yet was as much a necessity for life then as it is today. Half of the world's population today lives in arid regions where water is not readily available, nor clean water accessible. Just as the physical body needs water to continue living, so does humanity and all life need the water of the Spirit.

This Lent can we engage in spiritual water practices, envisioning that each drop of water contains the cosmic Christ? Water conservation can be used as a spiritual practice this Lent to come closer to Christ. Here are some suggestions to stimulate your imagination and your practice.

Spiritual Water Practice of the Church

We can do some simple things to conserve water as a church. In many of our churches we have a good church building. The rain water falls on the roof can be easily collected used for many purposes especially the water for toilets, lawns and gardens. Secondly, by replacing our urinals with Eco-blue computerized mechanisms that reduce the number of flushes (providing significant savings) and use natural bacteria to remove odors.

Further, we need to teach our children about the value of each drop of water and make them understand that wasting and over using water and energy are a sin against God and men. The Sunday school curriculum should include such things too. The children should be shown some video presentations on the theme.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS LIFE

Jasmine Thomas

The purpose of this life is to know God and to worship him.

In one of the sermons that Saju Schemachen gave at our church - St. Gregoriose Orthodox Church of San Francisco - he compared the duration of this life to the preface in the Bible and the duration of the next life to the rest of the Bible. That is 8 pages to this life and 2198 pages to the next life.

That got me thinking, if we look back and think about where we came from, i.e our mother's womb, we spent 9 months (on average) there and then if we are so lucky we spend about 90 years in this life (again on average). Could it be that the next life is 900 years... oh my, that is a really long time... a really long time to be miserable.

The next thing that went through my mind were how we are always admonished to prepare for the next life. When we were in our mother's womb, it was between our mother and God

“*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.*

~ Galatians 5:22-23

to help ensure we were created healthy and born into a sound family and raised well. Our mother managed her health and happiness and through prayer and petition to our God ensured a healthy

life for us in this world. We got all the senses, our five senses - sight, smell, touch, taste and hearing - to survive and thrive in this world.

The next question then is, what are the senses we need to acquire to survive and thrive in the next world? The Bible gives us these clues... Galatians 5:22 & 23 tells us about the Fruit of the Spirit - love, peace, joy, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control - now in this world it is up to us to prepare ourselves for the next world. It is our personal responsibility, through unceasing prayer and petition and fasting to ready ourselves for the next world.

Here is a 3 step process that you can adopt that will support your efforts to develop these qualities, Chip Ingram in his book called "The Real God" describes these in detail.

1. **Be** in the word of God. Read the word of God daily.
2. **In** community. Worship and participate in your believers community at least once a week, if possible do it more than that. We are blessed to have our churches where we get to go participate in the Sunday service every week.
3. **Observe** the fasts prescribed to us per our Orthodox faith. Prayer and fasting heal and strengthen the soul. Also be **On** mission, always be on mission. Be alert, involved and helping where possible, bringing your best to all of it.

BIO is the easy short form way to remember it.

May God almighty help us and bless our efforts abundantly!

POEM

Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened to you". ~ St. Mathew 7:7

Jonathan Varghese

I wait and I wait
In my darkest hour
Hopeless, Scared
Feeling like I have no power

No one will help me,
No one will care
They all walk past
Minding their own affairs

I have made my mistakes
But people won't forgive me
And though I regret much
I know this is where I deserve to be

I feel so lonely
For who will watch over me?
No human for sure
They all seem too busy

But I know one person
Who will always be there
My Lord, My God
He is the only one who cares

I can ask for His help
Knowing He will reply
He will forgive my wrong doings,
Teach what's wrong and what's right

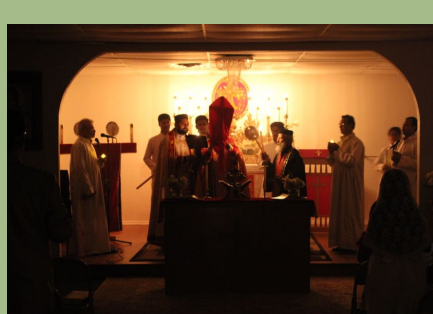
God will be there
In all your struggles
You just need to ask
And He will sooth your troubles

"Oh God! Help me" I cry
"I have been waiting so long!"
"I plead for your Mercy!"
"I am weak and you are strong!"

"Son, do not worry", He says
"Do not cry anymore"
"For you have knocked"
"And I will always answer the door"

Christ Is Risen. Indeed, He is Risen !

Blessed Easter Wishes



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