

"Our Very Short Earthly Lives

Draw a Precise Picture of

Our Very Long Eternal Lives"

H.G. Bishop Youannes
The General Bishop

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Draw a Precise Picture of
Our Very Long Eternal Lives}}

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**H.H. Pope Shenouda III, 117th
Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria
& the See of St. Mark**



**His Grace Bishop Youannes
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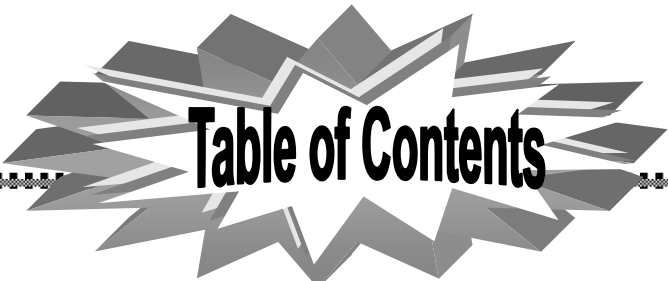
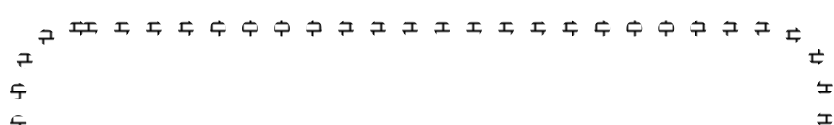


Table of Contents

Introduction	Page 6
1- Our Very Short Earthly Lives...	Page 10
2- Our Very Long Eternal Lives...	Page 17
3- Our Very Short Earthly Lives Draw a Precise Picture of our Very Long Eternal Lives	Page 22
4- Let it be for us a Lifelong Tenet... That Our Very Short Earthly Lives, Draw a Precise Picture of Our Very Long Eternal Lives	Page 36
Conclusion	Page 44



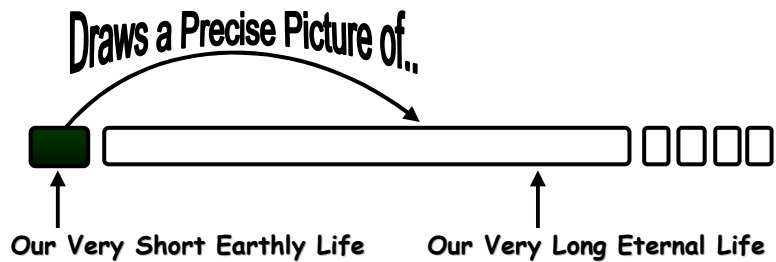


**That Our Very Short Earthly Lives
draw a precise picture
of Our Very Long Eternal Lives**

Introduction

* My beloved, our Lord created us in His image and in His likeness (Genesis 1:26, 27), and granted us the gifts of existence, life, and eternity. He designed the first part of our existence, our years here on earth, to be numbered and very short. And according to our deeds (Matthew 16:27) in these very short-lived years, the second part of our existence (the very long eternity) shall be determined. For if we liken our lives to a

straight line, one meter long (100 cm), then our earthly lives would take up less than half a centimeter, while our eternity would take up more than 99.5 centimeters. And our very short earthly lives would draw a precise picture of our very long eternal lives, which are never-ending.



* This matter, my beloved, may very well be the most significant fact in our lives. But how many of us conceive this very important reality and meditate upon it... How many of us pray and sing with Moses the Prophet, “*So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom*” (Psalms 90:12). That is, teach us O Lord to number our days, and to recognize how very short they are – these days, which precisely dictate our very long eternity. Subsequently, we become wise, according to the Divine inspiration, “*that we may gain a heart of wisdom*”. How many of us my beloved, have this heart of wisdom, always numbering our days and contemplating our eternity.

* My beloved, every one of us travels the way of the earth (1 Kings 2:2), heading to his eternal home (Ecclesiastes 12:5), as His Holiness Pope Shenouda III writes in a poem entitled “Lost in a Strange Land”:

All of us travel on the road to death
In a marathon, some of us in the footsteps of others
Our lives are as vapor, vanishing in an instant
As the lightning which comes and goes in a flash
Then be whatever you want, my friend
Run to the horizon, from east to west
Satisfy your dreams with titles
Or satisfy them with riches and honors
In the end, you will wither away, exhausted
Lying in a few feet of soil



“For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come” (Hebrews 13:14). We seek the Heavenly Jerusalem, “*the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God*” (Hebrews 11:10).

* **My dear sisters and brothers:** How lovely and how deep is the subject of our very short earthly lives, and our very long eternal lives! That eternity for which our hearts yearn. That eternity which God placed in

our hearts when He created us, as the Divine inspiration says, *“He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts”* (Ecclesiastes 3:11). That eternity of which the Holy Bible speaks of so much.

As for our discussion in this booklet, it will cover only four points:

First: Our Very Short Earthly Lives ...

Second: Our Very Long Eternal Lives ...

Third: Our Very Short Earthly Lives
<< Draw a Precise Picture >> of
our Very Long Eternal Lives ...

Fourth: Let it be for us a Lifelong Tenet ...
That our Very Short Earthly Lives
Draw a Precise Picture of our Very
Long Eternal Lives ...



First: **Our Very Short Earthly Lives...**

❖ My beloved, no matter how long the earthly life lasts, it is very short when measured against the never-ending eternity. Our father Jacob described the 130 years of his life as being short, as Divine inspiration states, “*And Jacob said to Pharaoh, ‘The days of the years of my pilgrimage are one hundred and thirty years; **Few** and evil’*” (Genesis 47:9). And if 130 years are few, then what about 80... and 70... and 60?? Definitely, they are very short. Hence, Divine inspiration spoke with utmost clarity through the mouth of the righteous Job, who lived more than 140 years (Job 42:16), saying “*Man who is born of woman is of **few days***” (Job 14:1).

❖ Divine inspiration uses many analogies to engrave in our minds the brevity and shortness of this earthly life:

(1)The analogy of a story:

Our days on earth are as short as a story, beginning and coming to an end swiftly. Concerning this, Moses the prophet says “*We finish our years like a sigh. The days of*



our lives are seventy years; And if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only and sorrow; For it is soon cut off, and we fly away.” (Psalms 90:9, 10)

(2)The analogy of a weaver's shuttle:

The righteous Job illustrates, “*My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle*” (Job 7:6).

(3)The analogy of runner:

And also, the righteous Job states, “*Now my days are swifter than a runner. They flee away, they see no good*” (Job 9:25).

(4)The analogy of a breath:

My beloved, our days on earth are also likened to a breath, which ends ever so quickly. The righteous Job says, “*For my days are but a breath*” (Job 7:16), and our teacher David the prophet states, “*Certainly every man at his best state is but vapor*” (Psalms 39:5). “*Man is like a breath*” (Psalms 144:4).

(5) The analogy of a shadow:

A shadow can change instantly; it moves about and doesn't stay still. And the righteous Job says, “*Because our days on earth are a shadow*” (Job 8:9) and also, “*Man who is born of woman is of few days... he flees like a shadow and does not continue*” (Job 14:1, 2).

And our teacher David the prophet says, “ *My days are like a shadow that lengthens* ” (Psalms 102:11) and also, “*Man ... his days are like a passing shadow* ” (Psalms 144:4).

(6) The analogy of a handbreadths:

I marvel that Divine inspiration likens our life-times to mere handbreadths, not even meters. Our teacher David the prophet states, “*Indeed, You have made my days as handbreadths, and my age is as nothing before You* ” (Psalms 39:5).

(7) The analogy of a phantom:

For man, born of woman, is of few days; here one day, gone the next. As if he were a phantom, like our teacher David the prophet elaborates, “ *Surely, every man walks about like a phantom* ” (Psalms 39:6).

(8) The analogy of a sojourner:

Like the stranger who lodges at an inn for a few days, as our teacher David the prophet sings, “*For I am a stranger with You; A sojourner, as all my fathers were* ” (Psalms 39:12). Furthermore, our teacher St. Paul the Apostle says, “*These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth* ” (Hebrews 11:13).

(9) The analogy of the herbs:

Divine inspiration relates that Isaiah the prophet heard a voice from heaven saying “Cry out!”, and he said, “What shall I cry?” And he was told to cry out and tell the people who were drowning in their sleep that “*all flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field... The grass withers, the flower fades - but the word of our God stands forever*” (Isaiah 40:6-8). For the herbs remain in the field for a few months then wither away, and the flowers endure for a few days then fade. Likewise, the flesh and its beauty. Therefore, our teacher David the prophet sang, “*And I wither away like grass*” (Psalms 102:11). And our teacher St. Peter reiterates that which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, emphasizing, “All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the Lord endures forever” (1 Peter 1:24).

(10) The analogy of vapor:

Our teacher St. James the Apostle states, “*For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away*” (James 4:14). Not only did Divine inspiration liken our earthly lives to vapor, but to vapor that appears for **a little** while then vanishes.



My dear sisters and brothers:

I wish that we would contemplate these numerous analogies frequently, for the Spirit uses them to engrave in our minds and hearts the reality that our days on this earth are very short.

Truly, our days are numbered and few. Saint Augustine likens them to a station stop, saying, “This world of ours is a station stop; we arrived not long ago from our mothers’ wombs, and shortly we shall depart to our eternal land”.

Saint Sarah spoke to the nuns concerning this, saying, “I do not place my foot on the step of a ladder, without imagining that I may die before I so much as lift it up again, that I may not be enticed by the devil to hope for a long life”.



Not only are our earthly lives short and limited, but they may end abruptly too. How often do we hear about car accidents, train derailments, plane crashes, earthquakes, storms, floods, etc...? We can greet a strong man one day, and find him dead the next. We can see our friends in absolute health today, and receive news of their death tomorrow.

☐ So then, my beloved, our days may end abruptly, as the wise King Solomon writes in the Book of Ecclesiastes, “*For man also does not know his time: Like fish taken in a cruel net, like birds caught in a snare, so the sons of men are snared in an evil time, when it falls **suddenly** upon them*” (Ecclesiastes 9:12).

☐ Moreover, the Lord of Glory also says:

■ “*Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming – in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning – lest coming **suddenly**, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!*” (Mark 13:35-36).

■ “*But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you **unexpectedly***” (Luke 21:34).

☐ And St. Paul the Apostle teaches us, “*For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, ‘Peace and safety!’ then sudden **destruction** comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape*” (1 Thessalonians 5:2-3).



☐ And the Lord of Glory also warned us that our days on earth may end abruptly, with the parable of the foolish rich man, saying, “*The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?’ So he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.’*” But God said to him, “***Fool! This night** your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’*” (Luke 12:16-20).

☐ My beloved, I recall being in Lebanon one time, to attend a conference for the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC). I was accompanying one of my dear friends in his car, and as we traveled on a road in the mountainside, I took note of a sign that read, “To the Bride of Graves”. I asked my friend about this “Bride of Graves”, and he told me this story: Many years prior, a bizarre incident took place in a community on this mountainside of Lebanon. A bride and her husband had a very simple home, and on the night of their wedding, a strong wind arose at daybreak causing a large rock to fall from the mountain

onto the wooden roof of this very simple house, and a part of the roof, along with this large rock, fell on the bride and killed her instantly. Her husband was left unharmed. She was a very blessed young woman, and the people of this community were moved by her death. They buried her in a special grave and wrote on it, “The Bride of Graves”.

▣ **My beloved**, our earthly lives are truly very short, as the Spirit says, “*Man who is born of woman is of few days*” (Job 14:1). Moreover, our days on this earth may end suddenly, at any time.

As for our eternity, my beloved, it is very very long... and never-ending.



♣ And my beloved, before we contemplate the meaning of the very long eternity, we must first say that the expression “**very long eternity**” is an inaccurate one, because eternity cannot be measured; it is never-ending. However, we often forget this truth, and rarely



do we contemplate and internalize the meaning of the word, “ eternity ”.

♣ By definition, eternity is never-ending; though time is gauged in years, months or days, eternity cannot be gauged. One of the philosophers said, “He who claims to quantify eternity is like he who claims that an ant can quantify the oceans of the entire earth!” Indeed, our eternity is very very long... and never-ending.

♣ I recall, my beloved, a beautiful spiritual dream that I dreamt more than 25 years ago, and which I named: **“The dream of eternity”**. I dreamt that after my life on earth had ended, and I had departed from this temporal world, that I found myself in a very spacious, joyous, and beautiful place filled with radiant angels. Captivated with immense spiritual joy, I spent some time admiring the beauty of this place, until an angel invited me to join him on what looked like a spiritual train:

▪ So I rode on the train with the angel, and it started to move forward, faster and faster. I couldn’t tell exactly how fast it was moving, but I realized that much time had passed. Then, the train stopped. I asked the angel, “Where are we now?...” He replied, “This is the 100-year station. We’ve been in

Heaven now for 100 years.” So I turned around to view the years I had spent on earth, and though I remembered a few things, I had forgotten most of it.

▪ Then the angel said to me, “Get ready, for the train is set to resume its course.” And the train began moving forward once again, but this time we traveled much longer than before. Once again, I couldn’t tell exactly how fast we were moving, but I could tell that much time had passed. Then the train stopped a second time, and I asked the angel, “Where are we now?” He replied, “This is the 1000-year station. We’ve been in Heaven now for 1000 years.” When I turned around to look at the very few years I had spent on earth, I could hardly remember anything, with the exception of a few highlights. With difficulty, I recalled that I had lived approximately 70 years on the earth.

▪ Then the train resumed its course, and we traveled further and further, stopping occasionally at a few stations until we reached a very distinct and glorious one. So I asked the angel, “Where are we now?” and he replied, “This is the 1 million-year station. We have been in Heaven now for one million years.” So I turned to glance at my very short life on earth, and I couldn’t see anything, or remember anything.

At this point, I recalled the saying of the Lord our God through the mouth of Isaiah the prophet, “*For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind*” (Isaiah 65:17).

▪ Then the angel invited me to step off the train, so I did, and found myself in a place far more beautiful and glorious than the place I was in when we embarked on our journey. And as I beheld and admired the beauty of this place full of bliss, I reflected on the fact that I had been in Heaven for a million years. Then I heard a breathtaking, lovely, and all-encompassing voice from behind me, saying:

These million years are but the first moment of eternity !!

▪ Then I woke ...

And it was the middle of the night in El-Moharraq Monastery. So I walked out to the garden of the monastery, meditating a lot on how long the eternity must be, if a million years are just the first moment ?! And I thought much about how my short life on earth, only a few decades long, would **draw a precise picture** of that never –

ending eternity, of which a million years are but the first moment. And I wondered, do people comprehend this reality? They must not, because if they did, they wouldn't have lived their lives the way they do.

▪ It was a very blessed night, and a very joyful dream, that dream of our never-ending eternity.

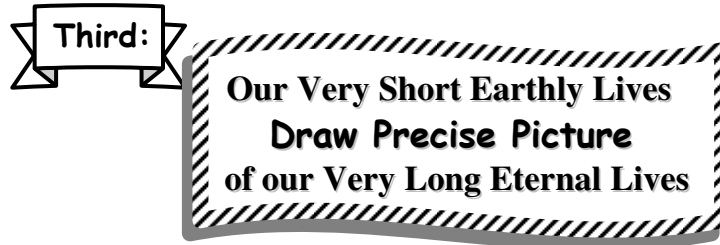


❖ My beloved, this age is nothing more than a cloud floating in the sky of eternity. This age which seems like a giant that swallows up days and years, arrogantly consuming the dreams of millions of people, will vanish in the face of eternity just like a small summer cloud that eventually fades from the sky.

▪ This age, my beloved, is nothing more than a handful of water in the ocean of eternity. The son of Sirach says, “The number of a man’s days at the most are a hundred years; As a drop of water unto the sea, and a gravestone in comparison of the sand; so are a thousand years to the day of eternity” [Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) 18:9-10]. And this age, vast as it may seem, will soon dissolve in the ocean of

eternity along with its joys and its sorrows.

▪ This age, my beloved, is nothing but a few words on one page of the eternity. And when it fades away, the eternal man will face his uncompromising fate, because this age is a preparation for eternity, and our very short earthly lives draw a precise picture of our very long eternal lives.



♣ My beloved, the fate of our never-ending eternal life is determined by our deeds throughout this short earthly life. And just as there are many many levels for the righteous in the eternal Kingdom, there are also many many levels for the wicked in eternal torment. That's why we say that our very short earthly lives **draw a precise picture** of our very long eternal lives.

♣ Divine inspiration uses many analogies and expressions to engrave in our minds the reality that there are many levels for the righteous in the eternal Kingdom. They include:

① The analogy of the “brightness of the firmament and the stars”: Regarding the general resurrection and judgment, Daniel the prophet says, “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever.” (Daniel 12:2-3). Those who understood that the form of this world is passing away (1 Corinthians 7:31) and that their very short earthly lives would draw a precise picture of their very long eternal lives, lived their days in the fear of God. Their brightness in the eternal Kingdom shall be like that of the firmament. As for those who labored and toiled in the service of God’s harvest, and brought many to righteousness, their level of brightness in the eternal Kingdom shall be like that of the stars. And this vast difference in the level of brightness will last for all of eternity.

② The expression of “rewards in heaven”:

- The Spirit spoke often about “rewards in heaven”, meaning that we will be rewarded according to our deeds, implying levels in heaven. Our Lord spoke clearly about this, saying, “*And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work*” (Revelation 22:12).

- At this point, my beloved, we call to mind three instances where the Spirit spoke clearly about the heavenly reward:

- i) In the Sermon on the Mount, our Lord teaches, “Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (Matthew 5:11-12). How will there be a **great reward?** It is a great

rank in Heaven, for every one who was reviled and persecuted for the Lord's sake.

ii) The Lord of glory also says, “*And whoever gives one of these little ones **only** a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward” (Matthew 10:42). My beloved, how remarkable is this saying?! Even just one cup of cold water will grant an imperishable reward! That being the case, what about the merciful who give freely? What about those who donate all their money? What about those who give out of poverty, perhaps their whole livelihood (Mark 12:44)? Every one of those will receive his/her reward, according to his deeds and charitable works, determining his rank in Heaven.*

iii) Our teacher St. Paul the apostle says, “*Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor*” (1 Corinthians 3:8). We will be rewarded according to the extent of our toil in God’s harvest, determining our levels in Heaven.

3 The expression of the “least, great, and greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven”:

• The Lord of glory says in the Sermon on the Mount that “*whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called **least** in the Kingdom of Heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called **great** in the Kingdom of Heaven*” (Matthew 5:19).

• At a different occasion, “*the disciples came to Jesus saying, ‘Who then is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?’ Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set the*

*midst of them, and said, ‘... Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the **greatest** in the Kingdom of Heaven’ (Matthew 18:1-2, 4).*

- Then reflect, my beloved, on how there will be the least... the lesser... the great... and the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. And I presume that the distinction between these ranks will be vast.

- And our state in Heaven will be in proportion to our spiritual struggle, and the extent to which we kept or broke the least of the commandments. For he who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. (Matthew 5:19).

- And according to the level of our deeds, and our effort and labor in teaching (1 Timothy 5:17), so shall our level be in Heaven. For whoever does and teaches, he shall be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven. (Matthew 5:19).

- And according to the level of our humility, so shall our level be in Heaven. For he who reaches the

humility of a child in his earthly life, shall be the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 18:4).

④ The analogy of the “good fruit”:

- In the parable of the sower, our Lord says, “*But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit: some thirty fold, some sixty, and some a hundred*” (Mark 4:20). So my beloved, according to the level of the fruits of the spirit in our lives on earth [thirtyfold, sixty, or a hundred], so shall our level in the Kingdom of Heaven be.

⑤ The expression of the “mansions in the Father's house”:



- Our Lord says, “*In My Father's house are many mansions*” (John 14 : 2). Surely, these many “mansions” are not all the same, but are an illustration of the many ranks of the righteous in the eternal Kingdom.

6 The expression of the “eternal weight of glory”:

• Our teacher St. Paul the apostle says, “*For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*” (2 Corinthians 4:17), implying that in our struggle to keep the commandments, we will encounter temporary afflictions. For example, when we coerce ourselves as our Lord said, “*the Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force*” (Matthew 11:12); whether to be consistent in prayer, or in bearing with others, we may experience temporary hardships.

Or for instance, when we discipline our bodies and bring them into subjection (1 Corinthians 9:27), we may experience temporary affliction.

However, this temporary affliction is considered light, when compared to the weight of eternal glory that awaits us in Heaven. St. Paul’s expression, “far more exceeding” implies that the more we exert ourselves to live by the commandments, the more we gain eternal glory.

And each one of us, my beloved, will inherit a weight of eternal glory according to the  **measure**  of his effort and faithfulness.

⑦ The analogy of the “brightness and glory of the stars”:

With regards to this, our teacher St. Paul the apostle says, *“for one star differs from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead”* (1Corinthians 15:41–42). And my beloved, astronomers claim that:

- The stars are of the same makeup as the sun, varying only in their distance. For the sun is 93 million miles away from the earth, while the closest star is about 25 trillion miles away.

- However, stars differ in size, and therefore also in their warmth and brightness. And there are approximately 100,000 stars that are similar to the sun in size and degree of heat. But there is an even greater number which are larger and brighter than the sun, as

well as thousands and thousands of stars that are smaller and less radiant. And astronomers say that some stars are thousands of times brighter than the sun, and that for every one star which is brighter than the sun, there are 15 stars less bright.

• My beloved, let's take for example a simple comparison between the size of the sun and other stars:

A tiny star occupies about	4000 cubic miles
The sun occupies about	864,000 cubic miles
A huge star occupies about	18,000,000 cubic miles
A gigantic star occupies about	400,000,000 cubic miles

• Then let us contemplate, my beloved, on this world of stars and how each star, among thousands and thousands, differs from another in glory. In this way also shall the millions and millions of the righteous differ from each other in eternal glory.



❖ And just as the righteous shall have different levels in the eternal kingdom, so shall the wicked also have various levels in eternal torment. And our Lord spoke to His disciples saying, *“But whatever city you enter, and they do not receive you, go out into its streets and say, ‘The very dust of your city which clings to us we wipe off against you.’ But I say to you that it will be more tolerable in that Day for Sodom than for that city. Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you”* (Luke 10:10-14).

Here, our Lord clearly asserts that Sodom, in eternal torment, will be in a better state than the city which does not accept the Kingdom of God and the teachings of the holy apostles, and that Tyre and Sidon will be in a better state than the cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida, which did not repent despite the many works that were done in them. Therefore, my beloved, we know that there will be many levels for the wicked in eternal torment.

❖ It suffices to meditate on the saying of our Lord, that *“for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment”* (Matthew 12:36), implying that even a single idle word will set one evil man on a different level than another, in the Day of Judgment.



☐ **My dear sisters and brothers:**

Christ our Lord “will come in the glory of His Father and His angels, and then He will reward each according to his work” (Matthew 16:27), whether good or evil (Ecclesiastes 12:14). The reward shall be very precise, and according to each one’s works, so shall his/her level be in the eternal Kingdom (or eternal torment). And our teacher St. Paul the holy apostle speaks plainly, “in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order” (1 Corinthians 15:22, 23).

☐ **My beloved,** The human race can be divided into three groups in this world:



The first group:

Are the righteous, who live and run along the path of righteousness and the eternal Kingdom, their existence marked by the voice of our teacher St. Paul the holy apostle, *“Run in such a way that you may obtain it”* (1 Corinthians 9:24).

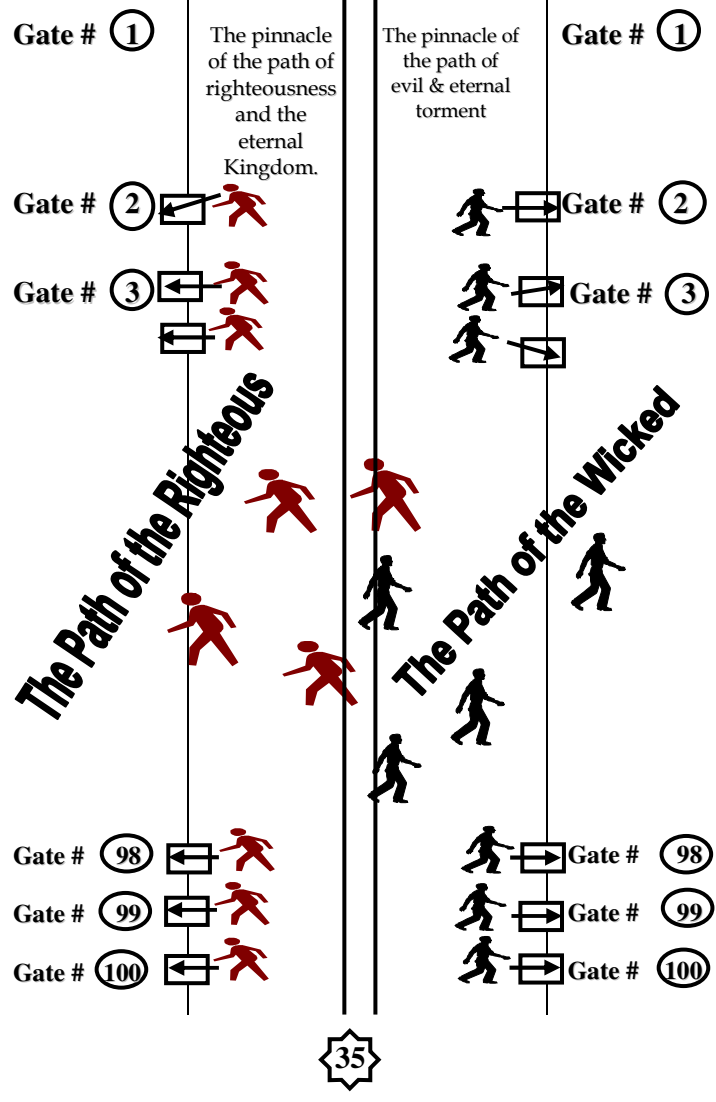
The second group:

Are the wicked, who live and conceivably run also in the path of evil and eternal torment.

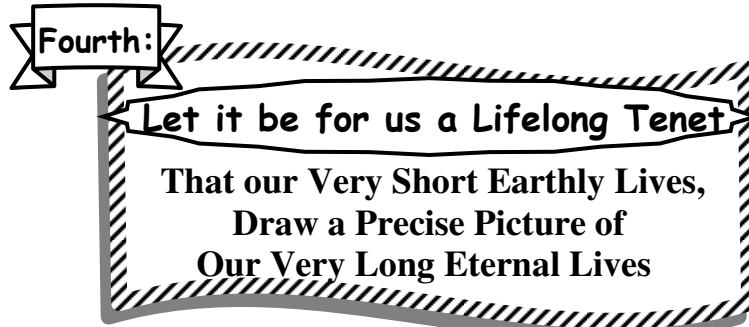
As for the third group:

They are those who sway between the two paths.

☐ **And I imagine dear beloved,** that there are many gates alongside these paths, linking between this vain world and the never-ending eternal life... And every day, death seizes thousands. And when every man's short earthly life comes to an end, he will exit the path on which he was traveling, at the gate he had reached. If he had reached the pinnacle, or the end of that path, he will exit this temporal world from gate number 1, and his rank in the eternal Kingdom (or torment) will be the first. And if he was just short of reaching the end of the path, he will exit this temporal world from gate number 2, and his rank will be second. etc... etc...



☐ **My beloved, let us meditate** frequently on this matter. Let us meditate and reflect with depth, on how thousands and thousands of our sisters and brothers depart from this vain world every day, to our never-ending eternal life – yet, each from different gates, and toward different ranks. And for each, it was his/her deeds throughout this short earthly life that determined, with precision and accuracy, the state of his very long eternal life.



❖ It is the most important tenet in our lives, my beloved-one that dictates the state and form of our eternal life.

❖ Our eternal life, dear beloved, is also the matter which concerns our Holy Lord, who placed eternal life in our hearts when He created us, as the Spirit says, *“He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He*

has put eternity in their hearts” (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Moreover, the Spirit continues by saying that without it, “no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end” (Ecclesiastes 3:11), implying that our concern to our Lord, such that all His work is for the sake of it. And through this “vision of eternity”, we comprehend why our Lord does what He does; why He permits this, but does not permit that. This is the saying of the Spirit, that without “this eternity” which was set in man’s heart, “no one can find out the work that God does from the beginning to end ” (Ecclesiastes 3:11). So then my beloved, if this is the extent of our Lord’s concern for our eternity, should we not also be concerned, making it a lifelong tenet that our very short earthly lives draw a precise picture of our very long eternal lives !!

❖ And I imagine, dear beloved, that when it comes to applying this golden principle, that everyone falls into one of four categories:

First: Those who merely know that they have an eternal life.

Second: Those who understand the meaning of eternal life.

Third: Those who work for their eternal life.

Fourth: Those who clutch to their eternal life.



First: Those who merely know that they have an eternal life

These are the ones who only know that an eternal life awaits them, but - unfortunately - do not understand how their days are numbered and few, and that their lives could end unexpectedly. They do not really understand the meaning of the word “eternity” - how long it is; that it is never-ending. They merely know that their lives will come to an end, and that an eternal life awaits them. Yet, we say again, that unfortunately they don’t understand.

Second: Those who understand the meaning of eternal life

✦ These are the ones who know and understand that an eternal afterlife awaits them. They understand how short their lives are, and they understand the meaning of their eternal life which is never-ending.

+ **They understand** that their days on earth are very few, and when they look back on all their deeds and their toil, they cry out with Solomon, the wise, *“Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done and on the labor in which I had toiled; and indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun”* (Ecclesiastes 2:11), because they’ve taken to heart that death is the end of every man, as Divine inspiration says, *“For [death] is the end of all men; and the living will take it to heart”* (Ecclesiastes 7:2).

+ **They understand** that *“God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil”* (Ecclesiastes 12:14), declaring with the wise Solomon, *“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all”* (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

+ **They understand** that *“ what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”* (Matthew 16:26).

+ **They understand** that they have no everlasting city here, but sing with St. Paul the apostle, *“For here we have no*

continuing city, but we seek the one to come” (Hebrews 13:14).

+ **They who understand** are those about whom the Spirit says, “Those who seek the Lord understand all” (Proverbs 28:5). For not all people have a spiritual understanding. That is why St. Paul the apostle prayed for his disciple St. Timothy saying “may the Lord give you understanding in all things” (2 Timothy 2:7).

+ **They understand** the meaning of the words “eternal life”. How good it is for us to understand this, dear beloved! Nevertheless, it isn’t enough for us to merely understand, but we must act and work for our eternal life.



Third:

**Those who work for their
eternal life**

+ These are the ones who not only know and understand that an eternal afterlife awaits them, but work and toil for that eternal life also. As the Lord of Glory teaches us, “Do not **labor** for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to **everlasting life**” (John 6:27).

+ Those who work for their eternal life ...
like those about whom our Lord said, *“The Kingdom of Heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it”* (Matthew 13:44-46).

+ Those who work for their eternal life ...
are like the five wise virgins who took oil in their vessels with their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom (Matthew 25:4). The oil here represents their good deeds in their life on earth, which will light their lamps at their meeting with the bridegroom in his second coming, awesome and full of glory.

+ Those who work for their eternal life ...
do not store up treasures for themselves on this earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal (Matthew 6:19), but they lay up treasures for themselves in heaven (Matthew 6:20), storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come (1 Timothy 6:19), there in the “eternal bank” – because they feed the hungry, clothe the naked, shelter the strangers, care for the sick, care for the widows and orphans, build churches, etc...

+ **Those who work for their eternal life ...**
have “*confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth*” (Hebrews 11:13), cheering with St. Paul the apostle, “*the time is short, so that from now on even those who buy [should be] as though they did not possess, and those who use this world as not misusing it. For the form of this world is passing away*” (1 Corinthians 7:29-31).

+ **Those who work for their eternal life ...**
“*do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal*” (2 Corinthians 4:18)... As Saint Isaac the Syrian says, “*Every day, remember the Kingdom of Heaven, so that you may be enticed with desire for It* ”, which is a daily hymn in our Church, “*we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the coming age, Amen* ”.

+ **Those who work for their eternal life ...**
are blessed indeed; But how much more blessed are those who clutch to their eternal life!



**Fourth: Those who clutch to their
eternal life**

+ These are the ones who not only work for the sake of their eternal life, but cling to it. This is what our teacher

St. Paul the apostle commanded his disciple St. Timothy, the young Bishop, saying “*Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life* , to which you were also called ” (1 Timothy 6:12).

✦ Let us contemplate together, dear beloved, on the phrase “**lay hold on eternal life**”, like he who holds onto a dear cross, for example. I recall, during the enthronement ceremony of my brother H.G. Bishop Ghobrial as Bishop of Beni Suef and its surroundings in July of 2001, that I gave a speech and said: A few months ago, we were in this same church parting a venerable elder, H.G. Metropolitan Athanasius the departed. And the day will come when we will say farewell to your grace also. So I ask of your grace, my dear brother, that as you hold onto the cross, “*lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called* ” (1 Timothy 6:12). And after the ceremony, one of my beloved reproached me saying, “On the day of a Bishop’s enthronement, you say ‘the day will come when we will say farewell to you also?!’ ” So I answered, “I said this from the depths of my love for his grace, my beloved brother, because our days are numbered... and the Biblical commandment for every Bishop is clear, to ‘**lay hold on eternal life.**’ ”

✦ Our teacher St. Paul the apostle did not stop at commanding his disciple St. Timothy to **lay hold on eternal life**, but also said, “*Command those who are rich in this present age ... let them do good, that they may be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life*” (1 Timothy 6: 17-19). He didn’t command them to simply work for the sake of their eternal life, but to lay hold on it. In such a way, the bride of the Song of Songs sang, “When I found the one I love, I held him and would not let him go” (Song of Songs 3:4).



In conclusion, my beloved ...

Our very short earthly lives draw a precise picture of our very long eternal lives...

Do we place these words in our hearts and the pupils of our eyes, and take them as a lifelong tenet?

Are we the ones **who merely know** about the eternal life?

Or are we those **who understand** the meaning of eternal life?

Or are we the ones **who work** for our eternal life?

Or are we the ones **who clutch** to the eternal life?

+ **Dear beloved, I wish that we would fight the good fight of faith and lay hold on eternal life, to which we were also called (1 Timothy 6:12).**

+ **Dear beloved, I wish that we would sprint on the road to the Kingdom, as our father David the prophet said, “I will run the course of your commandments” (Psalms 119:32), and as our teacher St. Paul the apostle entrusted us, “Run in such a way that you may obtain it” (1 Corinthians 9:24). Let us run (with deep repentance, deep and abundant prayers, fasting, and good works) so that we may obtain a better rank, redeeming the time, because the days are evil (Ephesians 5:16). For our short earthly**

earthly lives fly by ever so quickly, heading towards the end of our days in this world, or rather, the beginning of our eternal life.

+ Dear beloved, I wish that we would utilize every one of our numbered days, each one that is left in this vain world, to press on and move forward on the road to the Kingdom. And let none of us say that we're satisfied just with entering the Kingdom, for even though entering the Kingdom is something remarkable, yet there will be the least, the lesser, the great, and the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 5:19, 18:4). And perhaps amongst three brothers, one may be the least, the second the great, and the third the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. For each one's deeds throughout this short earthly life, will precisely dictate his rank in the never-ending eternity.



My beloved and Holy God

You who
an eternal
the Foundation
(Matthew 25:34),
in Your image
likeness
abide in this
world for few
days that would
our rank in the
O beloved and
I beseech You



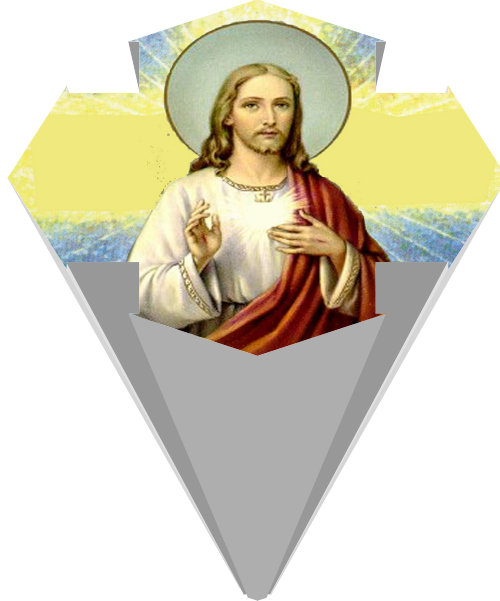
prepared for us
Kingdom from
of the World
and created us
and in Your
(Genesis 1:26) to
vain and temporal
and numbered
precisely dictate
eternal Kingdom...
Holy Lord,
and pray:

* “Lord, make me to know my end, and what is the measure of my days, that I may know how frail I am” (Psalms 39:4).

* “Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalms 139:23).

*** Lead me along the path of Your eternal Kingdom, and grant me to understand and work for eternal life, indeed lay hold of it, so that I may run with strength on the path, and obtain a better rank in that eternal Kingdom, for which we groan, earnestly desiring (2 Corinthians 5:2).**

**For Thine is the Kingdom, the Power,
and the Glory, Forever Amen.**





❖ **This age, my beloved, is a preparation for eternity. It is nothing more than a cloud, floating in the sky of eternity.**

❖ **This giant age will vanish from the face of eternity, as a summer cloud that eventually fades from the sky.**

❖ **And when this age fades away, every man will face his uncompromising fate, and according to man's deeds in his short days on earth, so shall his rank be in the very long eternity, in Heaven.**

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