

A way of a life-time

Holding fast to

positives

regardless

of negatives



Bishop Youannes
The General Bishop

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



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General Bishop
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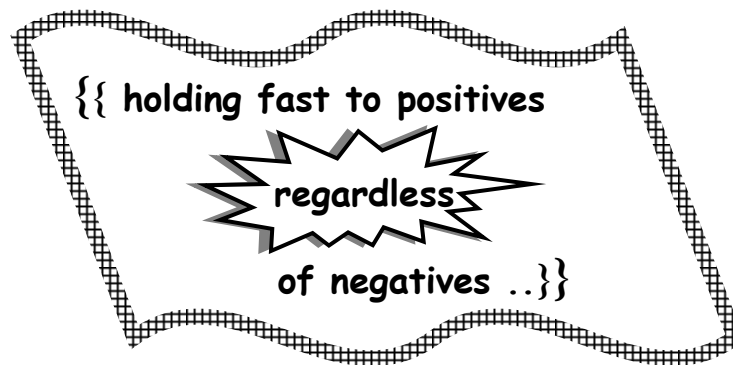
Introduction

❖ My beloved, throughout our spiritual journey, we find both positive as well as negative aspects in our lives; forward and backward steps. I do not suppose, under any circumstances that there exists an individual in this world who doesn't have shortcomings and doesn't encounter obstacles. However, there are those in whom the spirit of hope and patience abides, who persevere in the positives no matter what the negatives in their lives are. And, there are those who fall under the siege of despair and refrain from positive practices because of the negatives in their lives ..

❖ And despair is considered one of the devil's strongest tools, used by the enemy of good to hinder the children of God on their path to the Heavenly Kingdom. Saint Seraphim Sarafesky (a saint of the Russian Church) says: "For the devil's true pleasure is not only to entice us to sin, but also to drag us into the pit of despair afterwards".

❖ And this book, my beloved, imparts to us the golden rule of spiritual struggle: **to persist doing the positives regardless of negatives**; not with the spirit of carelessness and negligence, as though these negatives never happened, but with the spirit of repentance, hope, and patience, that there may be no room for despair in our hearts, no matter what our shortcomings are ..

❖ It was my father of confession who repeated this golden rule to me on every visit, until it became a way of a life-time engraved in my heart. It truly is a way of a life-time, lived and practiced by our saintly forefathers. We also must follow it, as they did:



What are the positives?

The spiritual life entails many spiritual means and numerous “positives”. Our discussion in this book will focus on three essential spiritual positives:

1. Speaking with God (through prayer).


The simplest and deepest understanding of prayer is to comprehend that we actually address God and talk to Him. We may spend a long time in prayer while our thoughts travel east and west, but it is only when we collect our thoughts and pray from the depths of our hearts that we become completely aware that we speak to God. This prayer brings forth true communion with God, evident in the life of Moses the prophet when *“the Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend”* (Exodus 33:11).



2. Hearing God (reading the Holy Bible).

Likewise, the simplest and deepest definition of reading the Holy Bible is that we listen to our Lord speak. At times we read the Holy Bible as if it were just a habit,

no different than the reading of any ordinary book .. However, when we read the Bible with the spirit of prayer and faith, we deeply feel that we are listening to the captivating voice of God filling our souls and entities. Truly, *“the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart”* (Hebrews 4:12).

 **3. Eating the body of God (receiving the Holy communion)**.. Finally, the simplest and deepest meaning of the Holy Communion is that we eat the Body of our Lord and become united with Him. How many times do we receive the Holy Communion without contemplating this reality, that we eat His Body and drink His pure Blood. If, however, we partake of these Divine Sacraments with sincere repentance and deep faith, we will be fully aware; that we eat the Body of the Holy One, in front of whom the angelic powers tremble, and we drink His Blood, by which we have life. As our Lord Himself said, *“he who feeds on Me will live because of Me”* (John 6:57) and *“unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.”* (John 6:53).



These are the essential spiritual means, the essential positives: that we speak to God, hear God, and eat God's Body ... regardless of negatives ..

What are the negatives?

The negatives in our lives are also numerous and varied. These shortcomings and obstacles are grouped into five categories:

1- Sin

* Who amongst us is without sin? In every stage of our life, we are fought by various sins. And perhaps we struggle with certain ones our entire life. Other sins are linked to places or periods of time; but which one amongst us is without any sin?

* We know, and feel, that these sins create a barrier in our hearts separating us from our Holy God, as the scripture says, "*your iniquities have separated you from your God*" (Isaiah 59:2). However, repentance dissolves this barrier that sin had set up.

*** Our task, my dear brethren, is to persist doing the positives no matter what the negatives, and no matter what our sins are. As mentioned in the introduction, it does not mean carelessness and negligence as if nothing has happened, but it means a repentance full of hope and that despair can't find its way to our hearts.. repentance is a continuous process in our life.. Whenever we sin, we repent.. and whenever we fall we rise again.**

*** The devil's goal is to plague us with despair after the fall, and inhibit any will we might have to rise again as Saint Seraphim Sarafesky said: "for the devil's true pleasure is not only to entice us to sin, but also to drag us into the pit of despair afterwards" However, my dear friends, "*we are not ignorant of his devices*" (2 Corinthians 2:11), and whenever we fall we rise again as we cheer with all resolve, with Micah the Prophet: "*Do not rejoice over me, my enemy; When I fall, I will arise*" (Micah7:8) remembering always that "a righteous man may fall seven times and rise again" (Proverbs 24:16). Therefore, **the positives must continue regardless of negatives..****

*** I recall one of His Holiness Pope Shenouda's spiritual meeting when an individual asked him, "I am completely in despair, because every time I rise, I fall**

again.. and when I rise I fall again.. What should I do?" His Holiness replied, "Why don't you say, every time I fall, I rise again.. fall and rise again?".. In the same day, two people may fall and rise three times from the same sin. One may be filled with despair saying in bitterness: each time I rise, I fall again. The other may be filled with hope saying with resolve: each time I fall, I rise again. Therefore, we should always be filled with hope and strength, rising after every fall.

✱ One of our saintly fathers once said: God in the judgment day, shall not ask us why we sinned, but why we didn't repent?.

✱ We read in "The Paradise of the Holy Fathers" the story of a man who lived under the yoke of sin and then repented and took up monasticism. The devil fought him, saying, "Have you forgotten who you are? Have you forgotten your sins, and the years that you spent in sin? It would be better for you to leave this place and this path, because I will not leave you. Every day, I will remind you of your past life and images of sin." That monk replied with tranquility and strength, "*I have been taught very well, that we must persevere in practicing the positives no matter what the negatives are. So regardless of what sins you fight me with, I will continue with strength and persistence in all*

the positives. If my previous sins are your weapons, then hope and God's mercy will be my weapons." Then the devil left him, after finding him steadfast in hope.. and *"hope does not disappoint..."* (Romans 5:5).

*** Let us live a life of hope, my dear brethren, not allowing any room for despair in our hearts, no matter what our sins may be. I remember, more than twenty years ago, when I lived in one of Upper Egypt's blessed cities, that we used to pray the midnight prayers and praises every night during our summer vacation.**

On one Saturday night, one blessed youth who was in attendance came to me and said, "I will not be coming to the Liturgy tomorrow morning." I asked why, and he replied, "There's a TV show that comes on every Sunday, and it always has images that make me stumble. I know for sure that I'll end up watching it tomorrow and that I'll fall into sin. How can I then pray the Liturgy and take Communion in the morning, knowing that I'm going to sin on the same day?? So, I will not come and sorry for the way of life that you always speak of: **Holding fast to positives no matter what negatives are..**" Then I asked him, "Are you one hundred percent sure that you will watch the show tomorrow and fall into sin, or just ninety

percent sure?" After a pause, he replied, "I'm ninety-five percent sure !" Then I said, "So there's a five percent chance that you will not fall. Let us then **persist in positives, regardless of negatives.** Though your chances of falling are ninety-five percent, I have hope in the five percent." After keeping silent for a short while, this young man finally agreed, and promised me that we would pray the Liturgy together on Sunday morning. After our long conversation, we prayed the midnight praises, and I prayed fervently afterwards that God would support this blessed young man and not allow him to fall into sin and despair.

The next morning, we prayed the Liturgy together, which was remarkably uplifting. As we were walking back to our homes, this young man's father met us on the way and asked him to run a few errands in a nearby village where they owned a small farm. When he came to the church for the midnight praises and prayers that evening, he appeared exhausted but had a beautiful smile on his face. After we finished the praises, I discovered that he had been at the farm all day and hadn't even returned home yet. Seeing that he missed the show, which he had spoken about .. I said to him with a smile: Do you remember our conversation of last night? Your words were full of despair and the

devil almost succeeded to deviate you from holding fast to positives.. but as you see, you did not fall into sin.

And this is the hope that I had set on the five percent according to your words. So then, don't ever forget this day, and promise me that you will live by the principle of **perseverance in all positives regardless of any negatives.**" And then he said: " I promise " .. and so it was .. By God's grace, this man is now a blessed monk.

✳ It is a way of life lived by our Saintly foregatherers.. we also should follow it as they did .. **Holding fast to positives regardless of negatives.**.. This brings me to a question that some of you may want to ask. "Should I partake of the Holy Communion regardless of my sins? Where is the reverence? What about the words of St. Paul?".. "*Therefore whoever eats this bread and drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the Body and Blood of the Lord...For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body*" (1st Corinthians 11:27-29).. meaning that only the worthy people are allowed to approach the Holy Communion.. Yes, my beloved ones.. but what is the meaning of worthiness and preparation for the Holy Communion?

Meaning of worthiness and Preparedness For the Holy Communion

- One time, the great Saint Macarius of Alexandria prayed continuously for four days before receiving the Holy Communion, so that he may be purified and made worthy. Then, he heard a voice from heaven saying that even if you stood and prayed for 40 years, you would still not be worthy!!

- My beloved, do we comprehend the glory and the magnitude of this great sacrament? It is the Body and Blood of the Holy, who “heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain” (1 Kings 8:27), but rather “the heavens are not pure in His sight” (Job 15:15).. and as heaven said so to the great Saint Macarius of Alexandria who was still unworthy of the Body and Blood of our Lord after four days of ceaseless prayer, then what about us the inners? Who of us could be worthy?

- As for the “**worthiness**” spoken of in 1 Corinthians 11:27-29, it mostly refers to “**preparedness**”.. Preparedness for the Holy Communion through repentance and confession.. according to what our teacher St. Paul says, “*But let a man examine himself,*

and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup” (1 Corinthians 11:28).

- Therefore, my dear brethren, we may say that with **repentance** we could approach the Holy Communion. Moreover, when we repent, we do not become infallible, but may commit the same sin few months later, or perhaps one day later, or even on the same day! But with the same spirit of repentance, hope and struggle, we rise again and repent, saying, “Do not rejoice over me, my enemy; when I fall, I will arise.”

- Let repentance be a continuous spiritual endeavor in our lives regardless of our sins! We repent from our sins and then receive the Holy Communion for the forgiveness of those sins. When our Lord instituted this great Sacrament, he said to his saintly disciples, “take, eat all of you for this is my body, which is broken for you and for many.. drink all of you for this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sin.” (Matthew 26:28).. thus, our Lord’s Body and Blood is for sinners who need forgiveness, and those who are without sin have no need of this great Sacrament.

And even when the priest cries out at the end of the Divine liturgy saying: “**The Holies for the Holy**”, it means that the Holy Sacrament (The Divine Body and

Blood) are for the Saints to approach and receive... Then, the congregation replies as if they say: No .. No .. our beloved priest, you know that we are sinners and completely unworthy as “one is the Holy Father, one is the Holy Son, one is the Holy Spirit, Amen”.. Then the priest responds: “peace be with you – let peace fill your hearts.. Then, the congregation replays him in calmness “and for your spirit as well”.

- I hope that the meaning of “**worthiness**” and “**preparedness**” for receiving the Holy Communion is now clear, because the enemy of good often uses the expression “light and fire” to prevent us from partaking of the Divine Sacraments for the forgiveness of our sins.

- Before we leave my beloved the subject “**preparedness for the Holy Communion**”, we pose a last question: Is there anything, which can stop us from receiving the Divine Sacrament even if we are in a state of repentance?? The answer is yes, there are two situations which could stop us:

The first: if we commit a new sin or a repeated sin with a higher level.. in this case repentance alone is not enough, but we must confess this sin as the Holy Bible teaches us: “*If we confess our sins, He is faithful*

and just to forgive us” (1 John 1:9).. Doing this before the priest, this is how our Lord of glory instituted this Sacrament by breathing into His Sainly disciples’ faces saying: “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them” (John 20:22)..

For example: an individual who works as a treasurer may be tempted several times to steal, and may confess this sin to his confession father on a regular basis while receiving communion once or twice a week. But if it happens that he ever does steal something from the treasury, he cannot receive the Holy Communion until he has confessed his sin and taken an absolution from his father of confession..

Another example: a person who is always fought to commit adultery, and many times he sins with his eyes, and may be more than that.. and confesses his sins before the priest once every month or two months as he continues to receive the Holy Communion twice a week .. But if it happens one day that he actually committed and adultery or fell in his repetitive sin at a higher level, he can’t approach the Holy Communion until he has confessed his sin, and been offered an absolution from his father of confession.

The second: a situation that prevents us from receiving the Holy Communion is enmity as we remain unforgiving.. Our Lord Jesus speaks clearly, *“If you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift”* (Matthew 5:23-24). Then, my beloved ones, with repentance, confession and forgiveness – there is no impediment for us to receive the Holy Communion.



My dear brethren, once again we say, which one of us is without sin??. Nevertheless our Holy Christ is the Christ of sinners.. Our Lord Jesus – glory be to Him – said, *“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick... I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance”* (Matthew 9:12-13). He is the one who “stands behind our wall; He is looking through the windows; Gazing through the lattice.. Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.” (Song of Solomon 2:9-10). He invites us tenderly, saying: Come .. eat of My broken body, and drink of My blood shed every day on the altars.. for the forgiveness of sins.

Let us respond my beloved ones to His warm voice, and let us rise every time we fall, persevering the positives no matter how much our sins are... and no matter our negatives are.



2- Problems and hardships

* Who doesn't face problems? In fact, before one problem ends in our lives, another one has already begun.. And in every stage of life, we face different kinds of problems. Perhaps one person's problems may differ from another's in magnitude, type, or consequence.. but as long as we live in this world we will encounter difficulties, as our Lord said, "*In the world you will have tribulation*" (John 16:33).

* Nevertheless, the way people address their problems and face their hardships sets them into two main groups: Some place God in between them and their problems, while others place their problems in between them and God. I recall, more than thirty years ago, being in the sanctuary of the ancient church in El-Moharraq Monastery an elderly Metropolitan was preparing the altar for a Liturgy. It was during the

Great Lent, and a relatively young monk approached this blessed Metropolitan with a sad and troubled look asking for prayers because he was in the middle of severe tribulations. The blessed Metropolitan replied: beloved Father:

if you place God between yourself and your trials, you will live in hope;

but **if** you place your trials between yourself and God, you will live in despair.

So don't look so sad, but be filled with hope, peace, and submission.

*** This, my beloved, is how we should face our difficulties and problems, which beset our lives.. Placing God between us and the problems.. meaning that: -**

Ⓐ When we find ourselves confronted by a problem, and our thoughts roam from east to west, let us lift up our hearts and place every matter, and our entire lives into the hands of God with complete submission..

Ⓑ Search out and examine our ways, (Lam 3:40) thoroughly, because our problems may be the result of our sins..

Ⓒ Take the initiative and do everything within our power to solve the problems..

Ⓓ Persevere in the positives regardless of these problems..

Ⓔ Wait patiently for God to manage our lives as He sees appropriate. Leave the matter to God, who can manage our lives until the problems and hardships pass away..

Then, our beloved we will find God's peace filling our hearts and guarding our thoughts (Philippians 4:7) as long as the problems and hardships exist.. Moreover, we may begin to savor God's comfort during those times of trouble. This is what our father David the prophet described, saying, "*In the multitude of my anxieties within me, Your comforts delight my soul!*" (Psalms 94:19)..

Please my brethren, let us contemplate on those words, **anxiety and delight..**

This is what it means to place God between our problems and ourselves and persevere in the positives regardless of our problems and hardships..

*** However, those who place the problems in between themselves and God leave themselves prey to those problems, which occupy their hearts and minds, and perhaps their entire existence. It is a sad situation for those people: When they speak, they can only speak of their problems. When they are silent, they can only think of those problems. Before they fall asleep, and as soon as they wake up, their thoughts roam back and forth. They become engulfed and being separated from God by a thick wall. They no longer pray nor read the Holy Bible nor go to Church or receive the Holy Communion, but are separated from God because of their problems.**

*** Let us reason the matter carefully, my beloved, and not leave ourselves be thrown back and forth by the currents and waves of the problems and hardships of this mortal world, which may pull us into a deep pit of hopelessness and heartache.. But let us live always in hope.. putting God between us and the problems .. **Holding fast to positives no matter what the problems and hardships are..****

*** We have the example of Saint Hannah, the mother of Samuel .. “The Lord had closed her womb” and she had no children. Her rival, Peninnah, “provoked her severely, to make her miserable” (1 Samuel 1:6). And**

so we read that Hannah *“prayed to the Lord and wept in anguish. Then she made a vow.. And it happened as she continued praying before the Lord .. that Eli thought she was drunk .. she answered and said: I have poured out my soul before the Lord .. so it came to pass in the process of time that Hannah conceived and bore a son, and called his name Samuel”* (1 Samuel 1:9-20).

✱ Likewise, the Shunammite woman, who had been barren for tens of years, was given a son by God after her husband had grown old (2 Kings 4:14,17).. And it happened that her only son died at her knees, then she went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God [Elisha, the Prophet].. And then she called to her husband and said: *“Please send me one of the young boys and a donkey, so I may run to the man of God .. “then he said why are you going to him today? .. And she said: “It is well”.* And it happened that the Lord arose him from death by His prophet Elisha (2 Kings 4:20-23).

✱ Similarly the life of Saint Paul was, who said, *“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?”* (Romans 8:35).. So, nothing may separate us from *“the love of Christ that constrains us”* (2 Cor. 5:14).

* My beloved, let us always live in hope and not let any thing separates us from the love of Christ.. But place our Lord between us and any problem or hardship we encounter.. And persist in positives regardless of the problems and hardships..



3- Preoccupying worldly affairs

* It may seem that preoccupying worldly affairs have less impact on our lives than sin and tribulations. However, Nowadays preoccupying worldly affairs have become significant hindrance for many people **to hold fast to positives**. Here, some may say that we have to work hard to secure our future and the future of our children .. We say to them: ‘yes’, the bible says: *“If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat”* (2 Thessalonians 3:10).. Nevertheless, there is a big difference between those who work diligently and those

how are drowning in their preoccupations, hence not holding fast to positives.. And when we miss their absence, we often hear them saying: We are extremely busy!! .. our duties are numerous!! .. our schedule is so tight.. as if they do not know or had forgotten the words of our Lord: *“For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?”* (Mark 8:36).. Can you comprehend my beloved that one person wins the whole world.. not merely some billions.. but the whole world.. and yet he loses his own soul.. what will he gain ..

***** Our father Solomon experienced this well, and said, *“I made my works great, I built myself houses, and planted myself vineyards. I made myself gardens and orchards... I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the special treasures of kings and of provinces... Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them... For my heart rejoiced in all my labor; And this was my reward from all my labor. 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 2:4-11).

* In a poem by H.H. Pope Shenouda III entitled “Lost in a Strange Land”, he writes:

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, exhausted
Lying in a few feet of soil

* Therefore my beloved, we ought to be wise, knowing that our very short lifetime will draw a precise picture of our very long eternity. So let us persevere in positives regardless of our worldly duties and responsibilities.. requiring a delicate spiritual balance to put limits to our worldly affairs that would not exceed..

* We have the great example of our teacher David the Prophet, who was a king and the leader of an army, and a lord of a large household. Nevertheless, he was steadfast in practicing the positives in spite of his many responsibilities. He persevered in prayer, saying, “*At midnight I will rise to give thanks to you, because of your righteous judgments*” (Psalms 119:62).. “*Oh, how I love your law! it is my meditation all the day*” (Psalms 119:97) ...“*Seven times a day I praise you, because of*

your righteous judgments” (Psalms 119:164) ... He also was regularly reading the Holy Bible .. Not only this, but also taking pleasure in reading it, saying: “Your testimonies also are my delight and my counselors” (Psalms 119:24) ... “The law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of coins of gold and silver” (Psalms 119:72) ... “I rejoice at your word as one who finds great treasure” (Psalms 119:162).. Furthermore, he was accustomed to being in the House of God regularly, saying, “How lovely is your tabernacle, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the Lord ... For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand ” (Psalms 84:1-2, 10).

*** Likewise my dear brethren: Let us always hold fast to positives regardless of our responsibilities.. remembering what our Lord said to Martha when she got distracted with serving? He said to her, “*Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her*” (Luke 10:41-42). However, if we become negligent and let ourselves get wrapped up in the matters of this passing world, not preserving in the positives, the words of our Lord shall then apply to**

us while He is standing in his Holy Sanctuary with His Holy body and blood laid on the altar saying: *“See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding.” But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, and another to his business”?* (Matthew 22:4-5)



4- Laziness and Laxity

* The fourth category of negatives that cripples many and prevents them from practicing the positives is laziness. Laziness can take hold of the heart and leave its victim sluggish in his prayers and spiritual practices, and when we look for such person, we find him saying: I have no desire for praying..

* Laziness and laxity are also acts of the body, as our Lord rebuked His disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, saying, *“What! Could you not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is*

weak” (Matthew 26:40-41). And when look for such persons, we find them saying in Laxity: we were asleep.. exhausted.. we could not wake up.

***** However, the true children of God discipline themselves, remembering the words of our Lord, “*The kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force*” (Matthew 11:12).

***** This is how our saintly forefathers lived, knowing that the beginning of the road to virtue is struggle and self-coercion. We read about the great Saint Bishoy, that in his desire to keep vigil the whole night, toiling in prayer, he tied his hair to the ceiling. Whenever he was about to fall asleep, the rope would pull on his hair and keep him awake. This is how our saintly fathers filled the night with prayer, praises, and tears.

***** Not only our saintly fathers.. I recall more than thirty years ago, a friend and I were sitting with His Grace our father of confession in El-Moharraq Monastery when he asked us to promise Him that we would continue to attend the Divine Liturgy regularly, no matter what the circumstances. So we promised him, and years later, my friend settled down in the United States. I was delighted when I received a letter from him, stating that he was still

keeping this promise thirty years later, although the nearest Coptic Church was about 200 kilometers away from where he lived! Till this day, he drives 400 kilometers every Sunday morning to pray the Liturgy in that church.

✱ My beloved, let us persevere in positives with enthusiasm, “not lagging in diligence” (Romans 12:11). Listen to this very moving story about one of the elder monks in El-Moharraq Monastery who departed in 2002. In 1985, at the age of 77, he became ill and suffered acute cardiovascular failure such that his blood pressure dropped to 60/40. When he started losing consciousness and calling out the names of the saints in his sleep, it appeared as though he was nearing the time of his departure. However, his health started improving days later, and his blood pressure rose to 90/65 (still far below normal). The young monk who was residing with him to serve him recalls that once, he heard a voice in the middle of the night, and so he asked his elder, “Do you need anything my father?” The blessed man replied no, but the sound got louder and louder. So the young monk got up to check on his elder father, only to find him struggling to get up from bed. Using a cane in one hand and leaning on a chair with the other, he hardly managed to stand up and rest

against the wall, praying contritely from the depths of his heart, “Arise, O children of the Light, let us praise the Lord of hosts...” till the end of the midnight prayer. This young monk could do nothing but stand in awe, his eyes filling with tears, watching his elder father refuse to pray in bed after having just barely regained some strength.

So, my dear brethren, let us also persevere with enthusiasm and fervor, not allowing laziness and laziness to possess our hearts ..



5- Spiritual Coldness

* Often, we hear people saying that they pray without really feeling that they’re speaking to God. At times, they read the Holy Bible but feel as if they had been reading any ordinary book. They may attend the Divine Liturgy only to leave the church feeling the same way they did walking in, as if they hadn’t gone in the first place. This is the state of spiritual coldness, which our Lord mentioned in his saying to the angel of

the Church of the Laodiceans, “*you are neither cold nor hot*” (Revelations 3:15). The enemy of good takes advantage of this state to discourage the children of God from practicing the positives. How often do we hear people say, “How can I pray when I don’t feel anything!”

✱ The wise children of God, however, know the enemy’s misleading schemes well. They persist in the positives regardless of their degree of spiritual fervor, knowing that fervor fluctuates due to various factors and circumstances, and that all of us sometimes experience a drop in our spiritual fervor reaching periods of coldness and dryness.

✱ Let us persist my beloved in positives regardless of our spiritual fervor.. a sick person may not have an appetite, and may not enjoy the taste of food. Nevertheless, he is nourished and strengthened by the food he eats. Similarly, many of us may not feel the profit of Holy Communion because of spiritual coldness. But the sacrament penetrates our depths, reviving us, being branches abiding in the Divine vine (John 15:5).

✱ So my beloved, let us persist in positives regardless of the degree of fervor we feel, because our perseverance and steadfastness

will bring back that fervor. But if, on the other hand, we stop practicing the positives, the state of spiritual coldness and dryness will only worsen..



My Beloved

* Throughout our sojourning in the world, we will surely encounter some of these obstacles that have been mentioned – if not all - on our way to the heavenly kingdom.. We are not angels, but are humans, and weak. But we must persist in the positives, no matter.. no matter.. what the negatives

* Inasmuch as we persevere with love and depth, we will grow in our spiritual life in patience and steadfastness, and the negatives will .gradually fade. I recall in my youth, during sessions with His Grace my father of confession, that he would listen silently without making many comments as I confessed my sins, but would delve into every detail and investigate extensively any shortcomings I confessed in practicing the positives. He would always remind me that with the positives, we will be victorious over the negatives.

*** We must also recognize that the positives are on one ladder while the negatives are on another, and that our ascent on the ladder of positives will be quicker than our descent on the ladder of negatives. We will grow faster in the positives, than we will grow out of our sins and shortcomings. This is what many people encounter throughout their struggle, becoming despondent because their sins are the same despite their efforts in the positives. However, the truth is, there will always be a degree of change for the better, but perhaps at a rate which is unnoticeable.**

*** My dear brethren, I wish that the words of this golden rule – to persist in positives regardless of negatives – would become for us a way of a life-time. I wish that we would persevere with strength and boldness, as our teacher Saint Paul says, “*be brave, be strong*” (1 Corinthians 16:13).**

*** I remember, almost twenty years ago in my church in Upper Egypt, the graduation of 48 deacons who I had served. They were all very similar in their spirituality, social conditions and also in their weaknesses. Years later, I met one of my peers in the service in that church, and I asked him about those deacons whom we had served together. He told me that by the grace of God, seven had become priests and**

monks, and ten had become fruitful servants. As for the rest, they got drifted away in the world. Here, I would like to quote that blessed servant, when he said, “Do you remember how similar they were in their problems and in their weaknesses? But they weren’t similar in their perseverance and strength in practicing the positives.” My beloved, we all have weaknesses and shortcomings, but the question is, do we belong to the group of people who live with the spirit of hope and bravery, or do we belong to the group of people who live with the spirit of despair and weakness. This is what determines the outcome of our journey in this world.

*** My beloved, let us press on towards our goal.. let us by positives steer our life forwards, not letting negatives pull it backwards.. cheering with St. Paul: “forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead” (Philippians 3:13-14).**

*** To close my brethren, may I ask you after you have finished reading this book, to stand with contrition and humility in front of our loving God and give pledge to Him with your whole heart, to persevere in positives regardless of negatives;**

To pray to Him every day [even if for a few moments]
Hear Him every day [even a few verses]
And partake of His Body [at least once a week]
Speaking with God every day [even for minutes]
Hearing God every day [even through few verses]
And Eating the Body of God [at least once a week]

No Matter Our sins
No Matter Our problems and hardships
No Matter Our preoccupying worldly affairs
No Matter Our laziness and laxity
No Matter Our degree of spiritual fervor.. are



**May God be with us all,
and bless us with all
spiritual blessings, to Him
be the glory forever
and ever, Amen.**

Table of Contents

Introduction	5
What are the positives	7
What are the negatives:	
1- Sin	9
2- Problems & hardships	20
3- Preoccupying Worldly Affairs	25
4- Laziness and laxity	29
5- Spiritual Coldness	32
Conclusion	34