

My dear friends,

Yesterday was a very difficult day for the whole of Egypt.

“Ya Rab, Ya Rab”...“O Lord, O Lord” was the thunderous shout of ten thousand Christians gathered at St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Cathedral in Cairo for the funeral of 24 Christians who died last Sunday the 9<sup>th</sup> of October in Cairo. These cries shook my heart and all the bishops who were standing beside me at the funeral. I found myself crying with the crowds the same words, “O Lord, O Lord.”

The cry of “O Lord” was not just a word or a cry, but it contained many other unsaid words and meanings. It was as if the crowd who cried out wanted to say:

“O Lord” Look at our pain and suffering.

“O Lord” Look at this bloodshed.

“O Lord” Look at our restricted freedom.

“O Lord” Look at the burning of churches.

“O Lord” Look how we are unjustly charged while we are the victims.

“O Lord” Come and rescue us!

Today the Christians in Egypt started a fast for three days as a response to the Coptic Orthodox House of Bishops which met after the bloody incident of last Sunday.

It is now clear that the demonstrations started by the Christians were peaceful. Some Muslims joined the demonstrations in support of the rights of the Christians. But, unidentified persons were able to infiltrate the demonstrations aiming to make these demonstrations violent. This gave a false impression that Christians were violent and they were the ones who attacked the army soldiers. In response, the army fired against the demonstrators and used their tanks to run over some of them. The price was the death of 24 Christians and the injury of over 318 Christians and Muslims.

These demonstrations happened as a reaction to the burning of the newly built church of Mari Nab near Aswan. Muslim fundamentalists burned the church after Friday prayers. The security police and local authorities did not move to guard the church which had been built according to an official building license from the Province of Aswan.

These incidents have been repeated since the beginning of the year when the bombing in Alexandria resulted in killing 24 Christian worshippers on New Year’s Eve. This was followed by the demolishing and burning of other churches. Four months ago, the government promised to pass a new law for building churches in stead of the current one which severely restricts the building of churches. But, we are still waiting.

In the shadow of all these painful incidents, the House of the Family (Beit el Aila) met under the chairmanship of the Grand Imam of Al Azhar, Dr. Ahmed el Tayyib. Heads of Christian denominations as well as Muslim leaders and thinkers attended the meeting. We made several recommendations including:

- The necessity to deal with the original causes of these sectarian incidents, not just to seek superficial and temporary reconciliations. Such temporary reconciliations are behind the repetition of these incidents.
- The importance of issuing a new law for building churches that can be applied firmly to avoid such bloody incidents in the future. For years, the government has promised to produce such a law.
- It is important for the government to investigate thoroughly these incidents and bring to justice those the criminals who were involved directly and indirectly. The delay of such investigations will only result in the repetition of such incidents.

In the midst of this painful time, it is encouraging to see many Muslims who have denounced the use of violence against the demonstrators and who fully support the need to treat Christians without discrimination as full citizens of Egypt.

We here in the Episcopal / Anglican Diocese of Egypt have decided to fast for three days with the Coptic Orthodox. We are also holding a special prayer service every day at midday at All Saints Cathedral so that the Lord may intervene with a mighty hand to protect His Church in this difficult time.

I do appreciate your prayers for

- all the people of Egypt: Christians and Muslims
- for the government to take seriously the recommendations of the House of the Family and work on them
- For the investigations of this incident to be fair and just

May the Lord bless you!

Acts 4:24-31

+ Mouneer Egypt

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