



The Departure of St. Athanasius the Apostolic the 20th. Pope of Alexandria May 15th 2008

On this day of the year 89 A.M. (373 A.D.) the great Pope Anba Athanasius the apostolic, the 20th. Pope of Alexandria, departed. He was born to pagan parents about the year 295 - 298 A.D. It happened that when he was in school, he saw some Christian children acting the Christian rituals some as priests, some as deacons and one of them as a bishop. He asked their permission to participate with them, but they refused saying: 'You are pagan, and you are not allowed to mix with us.' He answered them: 'I am from now on a Christian.' They rejoiced with him, they made him a patriarch over them in the play, they enthroned him on a high place, and they offered him honor and respect. At that time pope Alexandros passed by, when he saw them, he said to those who were with him about Athanasius: 'This child would be in a great position one day.' When Athanasius' father died, his mother brought him to Pope Alexandros, who taught them the principles of the Christian faith and baptized them. They gave their money to the poor, and stayed with the Pope, who taught Athanasius the church subjects, and ordained him deacon and made him a personal secretary. The gifts of the Holy Spirit increased in him. He was chosen Patriarch on the 8th of Bashans of the year 44 A.M. (May 5th, 328 A.D.) after the departure of Pope Alexanderos. Pope Alexanderos had recommended Athanasius, his deacon, for the Papacy, who lived with St. Antonios the father of the monks and followed his example in asceticism. He manifested his brilliancy in exposing 'Arius' in the universal council, when Arius said about Christ that he was 'similar' in essence with the Father, St. Athanasius said: 'One in essence with the Father.' In this fashion he manifested his excellence. St. Athanasius hid himself in the mountains, after the departure of Pope Alexanderos for he believed of his unworthiness to this serious and important position. The people sought him until they found him, and brought him to the bishops, and was ordained Pope in 328 A.D. The historian Socrates testified about him saying: 'Athanasius fluency in speech and his outspokenness in the council of Nicea brought over him all the hardships that he encountered in his life.' After he became a Pope, he ordained for Ethiopia its first Metropolitan whose name was Anba 'Salama'. The church of Ethiopia have followed the church of Alexandria since that time. The spiritual and religious state in Ethiopia had established and settled since that time. St. Athanasius was exiled away from his Chair five times: 1. The First Exile: Arius, after he had been excommunicated, tried to return to Alexandria, by sending a misleading and flattering letter to Emperor Constantine, which touched him. The Emperor asked Pope Athanasius to take him back. Athanasius refused to accept him because that would be a contradiction to the decision of the Universal Council. The Arians accused Pope Athanasius with these charges: 1. That he supported Pope Philominus who rebelled against the government. 2. That he broke the communion cup of the priest Eskira, and destroyed his altar. 3. That he killed bishop Arsanius, and used his arms in sorcery. 4. That he also raped a nun. The Pope cleared himself from the first charge. A council was assembled in Tyre, most of the attendants were Arians, were against Athanasius to look into these charges. In the second charge, the Lord moved the priest Eskira's

heart, who had conspired with them to testify falsely against him, and he cleared the Pope from that charge. With regard of the third charge, Arsanius the bishop, who had agreed with them to accuse the Pope falsely for his murder, came to the council. Pope Athanasius kept him in an adjacent room. The Arians brought two arms of a dead person and claimed that they were the arms of Arsanius. Then Arsanius was brought in, and showed his arms to the council and declared his regrets. The Arians said that Athanasius was a sorcerer and he was able to make arms for him. They became violent against Arsanius who left the council and went to the Emperor. Then they looked in the matter of the rape, they brought a harlot who claimed that Athanasius raped her. One of the entourage of Pope Athanasius, a priest called Timothy said to her: 'How dare you to say that I came to your house, and overpowered your will?' She thought that the priest was Athanasius for she did not know him, and she said: 'You are'. At once the false claim was exposed. Athanasius could not meet the Emperor because of the interferences of the Arians, who accused him before the Emperor that he prevented the export of the wheat from Alexandria to the Emperor. The Emperor gave his order to exile Athanasius to Trefe (Treves) in France in February 5th, 335 A.D. where its bishop had met him with great honor. Arius died a horrible death as Socrates said: 'God made Arius to die in a public washroom, where his bowels poured out of his body, and the people regarded his death as a punishment from the Divine Justice.' When the Emperor heard about the death of Arius, he recognized the innocence of Athanasius, and recommended while he was on his deathbed, in the year 337 A.D. that Athanasius be returned to Alexandria. After the departure of Constantine, the Empire was divided, Constantine II over France, Egypt became under the rule of Constantius, and Constance over Italy. With the mediation of Constantine, the Pope returned in the year 338 A.D. The people of Alexandria received him with great joy. 2. The Second Exile: The Arians did not stop at that, but assembled a council, where they excommunicated Athanasius. They appointed instead someone called Gregory, and they sent their decision to Julius, Bishop of Rome. Pope Athanasius assembled a council in Alexandria in 340 A.D. where he protested against the Arians, then he wrote a letter to all the churches to declare his innocence. However, the Arians influenced Philogorius to help to install their appointed Patriarch Gregory to take over the churches of Alexandria, and they also influenced Emperor Constantius. The people of Alexandria were horrified, and decided to resist, but the Arians attacked the churches in Alexandria on Good Friday, raped and slain many worshipers. Pope Athanasius sought the help of all the churches in the world, left his Chair, and traveled to Rome. A council was assembled in Sardica, where they declared: a. The innocence of Pope Athanasius b. Confirmed the canons and the Creed of faith of the Council of Nicea. c. They excommunicated the Arian bishops. d. Deposed Gregory from his office. They delegated two bishops to meet Emperor Constans, the ruler of Italy, who agreed on what the council had decided, and threatened his brother Emperor Constantius with war if he did not return Athanasius to Alexandria. At the same time, some Egyptian radicals rose up and killed Gregory in 349 A.D. Athanasius returned for the second time to his Chair, and the people received him with joy. Gregory the Theologian, the writer of the liturgy, described this reception saying: 'The people came as the flood of the Nile,' and he also pointed out to the palm branches, the carpets, and the many clapping hands. 3. The Third Exile: The Arians did not like the return of Athanasius to Alexandria, and waited unwillingly until the death of Emperor Constans. The Arians accused Athanasius before Constantius that he collaborated with Magneutius who was the enemy of the Emperor. Constantius obtained a condemnation of Athanasius and his exile from a council assembled at Arles and another one at Milan. The soldiers went to the church of St. Mary, which was built by

Pope Theonas (The 16th. Patriarch). Athanasius was praying the Vespers service. The soldiers rushed inside the church to arrest him, but God blinded them from recognizing him from the rest of the people and the lamps were extinguished. Athanasius escaped and went to the desert, and remained for sometime with the monks. The Arians appointed George of Cappadocia, bishop on Alexandria, but the Orthodox refused to accept him and anathematized him. He took over all the churches and its properties. Nevertheless, the pagans whom he persecuted, killed him and burnt his body. 4. The Fourth Exile: After the death of Constantius, Julian his cousin became Emperor. He wanted to rally the people of Alexandria so he returned Athanasius. Athanasius assembled a council in 362 A.D., and provided conditions for the acceptance of the Arians that wish to return to the church. He also gave a special attention to the preaching among the pagans. This was not appreciated by Emperor Julian, who loved and supported the pagans. He ordered the arrest of Athanasius. Athanasius went out of Alexandria, and took a boat to Upper Egypt. The Governor followed him in another boat, and when he approached the boat of Athanasius, he asked about the boat of the Pope. They said to him that he was not too far away. The Governor went on his way in hurry but he did not find Athanasius, for he hid himself in another place. Those around the Pope were greatly saddened because of the much tribulations that befell him. Athanasius told them, that in times of persecution, he felt great inner peace and that God took care of him and embraced him with His grace more than any other time in his life. He also said: 'The persecution of Emperor Julian is like a summer cloud that will go away.' While they were in these conversation, the news came to them that Julian was killed in his war with the Persians, and that he was killed by St. Mercurius (Abu Sefain), and that he said just before his death: 'You have overcome me, O You son of Mary.' 5. The Fifth Exile: Jovian became Emperor after Julian had been killed, then Valens became Emperor and he was Arian. In 367 A.D. Valens ordered the exile of Athanasius again. Athanasius was forced to leave Alexandria and hid in the tomb of his father. Meanwhile, the Emperor killed 30 bishops who were pro-Athanasius. The Emperor saw the determination of the Copts, and decided to lift the persecution, and to return Athanasius to his Chair in 368 A.D. Although Athanasius reached the age of 72, he did not compromise in performing his duties. For his steadfastness and his firm stand for justice, the world described him by the saying: 'Athanasius against the world.' He wrote several books about the Arians, on the Incarnation, and other subjects. Abba Cosma (The 44th. Patriarch) praised these publications by saying: 'I ask anyone who would find the books of Athanasius to write them on paper, and for those who could not find paper, to write them on their clothes.' Athanasius was the first Pope to wear the monastic tunic from the hand of St. Antonios. He made it the uniform for bishops and patriarchs. He was the one who ordained St. Antonios a priest, and then Archpriest. He departed in peace after he had been on the Apostolic Throne for forty-five years. May his prayers be with us, and glory be to God forever. Amen.