

Egypt and baptism

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This

week's sermon is a reflection on the recent events in Egypt. I am struck by the witness to peace and interfaith respect that exists in the midst of great violence. I am convicted of my own cowardice and comparative faithlessness. And I am thrilled to see our Muslim neighbors standing as Christ in the world. The children of Abraham, Tamar, and Ishmael are a bold witness to God's Kingdom of Peace. You can read two articles ([1](#), [2](#)) about Christmas Mass.

The quotation is from St. Anthony of the Desert. You know, Anthony the Great or "Big Tony" as the guys from Thebes called him. Christianity in Egypt has its roots in the first century. Tradition holds that the first bishop of Alexandria was appointed by the Apostle Mark himself. Christianity is not new to Egypt. It is not a colonial imposition.

First Century: The Apostle Mark has oversight of the Egyptian Christian community.

Third Century: Cenobitic (and other) monastic communities arise under the leadership of people like Anthony and Pachomius. And let's not forget Mary of Egypt, the renowned solitary.

Fifth Century: The emperor in Constantinople sends troops to destroy the Pachomian Koinonia in the Thebaid after the Council of Chalcedon. The Copts did not agree with the theological statement of the humanity/divinity of Jesus that was affirmed at Chalcedon.

Sixth - Eleventh Centuries: The Christian community gradually recovers but by this time the Persian Caliphate holds political power in the region.

Thirteenth Century: Islamic fundamentalists destroy many of the remaining great basilicas in Upper Egypt.

Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries: European missionaries in their colonialist zeal are surprised to discover a deep rooted Christian community already in Egypt.

“You have shielded us and protected us God,” an exhausted looking Pope began a little after 10pm to the packed congregation.

Thus

is the identity of the Coptic Orthodox community. Surrounded by their neighbors, they stand...as a minority certainly, but this matters not at all. Their rich heritage upholds them. Humility in faith is what will save us all from the snares. Then the people of God will come. Muslim, Christian, "infidel" will stand. No reed will they break. They shall instead kneel and God will be seen throughout the world.

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