

# Egypt's Remarkable Prayer Gathering

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An estimated 70,000 Egyptian Christians gathered on November 11, 2011 for praise, worship and prayer at St. Simon Church in Cairo while millions around the globe followed the event live on TV channels and the Internet. This was a significant event on multiple levels: it was the largest Christian gathering in the modern history of Egypt; it brought together for the first time all Christian denominations: Coptic Orthodox, Catholics and all branches of Protestant and Evangelical Christians. The prayer meeting that started at 6:00 PM continued uninterrupted till 6:00 AM the following day! The focal point of the gathering was repentance and forgiveness. The leaders of all churches came together in unprecedented unity to lead thousands of people in worship and prayer for Egypt: “We are here to rend our hearts before the Lord and repent for all our sins” said one priest as he reflected on Joel chapter 2. Before leading the people in prayers of repentance he reminded all church leaders, “*Let the priests, who minister before the LORD, weep between the porch and the altar. Let them say, “Spare your people, LORD. Do not make your inheritance an object of scorn, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, ‘Where is their God?’”* Joel 2:17 Another priest prayed for the healing of the land and for God’s intervention to save the country from a disastrous famine as the Nile is drying up at alarming rate. The powerful time of praise and worship focused on God’s glory being declared once again over the land of Egypt with several songs on the theme of “Blessing Egypt”. One of the highlights of the event was a prayer of dedication, wherein the country and its people were covenanted to the Lord to live a consecrated life.

This historic day of prayer took place at a momentous juncture considering the current situation in Egypt. Nine months to the date, on February, 11, 2011 the former President of Egypt, Hosni Mubarak was forced out of office. The January 25<sup>th</sup> leaderless revolution, that surprised the world, seemed to have succeeded in putting an end to decades of oppression and corruption. However, the following nine months saw nothing but chaos, brutality and frustration. More than 12,000 people have been detained and tortured by military tribunals mainly for speaking up against the injustices and lack of freedom. Hundreds of people have lost their lives due to the lack of security. Tourism and the economy in general are on a free fall since the revolution. A

sense of despair and frustration is gripping the people, especially the younger generation, who stood up against the escalating injustices and paid with their lives demanding freedom and basic human rights. The culmination of this sense of despair reached an unprecedented level on October 9, 2011 when the army brutally massacred 27 Christians and injured more than 300 in down town Cairo. The peaceful demonstrators, both Christians and Muslims, were demanding basic human rights of respecting the establishment of places of worship (churches) that were previously destroyed by the government. They took their frustration to the streets in peaceful demonstrations after repeated attacks on churches, Christians, homes and businesses owned by Christians. The demonstrators were run over by military tanks that literally crushed them. These barbaric acts that were seen around the globe were condemned by international governments and human rights' groups, however, no word of apology was offered by Egyptian officials.

Between November 28, 2011 and March 24, 2012, Egyptians will go to the polls to elect the next house of parliament. The coming parliament is entrusted with the task of drafting a new constitution and establishing a new government. Ironically, the election process follows one of the most complicated systems than was ever devised on the planet. Currently there are 25 parties competing over the 498 seats in the parliament. They vary from the far right to the far left, from extreme Islamic fundamentalists, several Muslim Brotherhood parties to liberals and Marxists. People will be using both electoral as well as poll systems of voting simultaneously as they choose their representatives! The landscape in Egypt is changing for the worst; the earlier scenes of Christians and Muslims united together during the revolution, praying together in Tahrir Square and standing together for a common future for their country have been replaced by Islamic fanaticism that is excluding Christians and moderate Muslims from their political program. The current developments are worrying Christians and Muslims alike, their hopes and aspirations for a free, democratic Egypt that respects the freedom of religion and citizenship for all are being evaporated as an Islamic state system is looming on the horizon.

The 70,000 Christians who gathered in St. Simon Church (also known as the Cave church, at the foothill of the Mokattam Mountain overlooking the city of Cairo) have a different way of looking to the future. They are very aware of the fact that they were praying at the exact location where one thousand years ago God answered the prayers of Egyptian Christians and miraculously intervened to spare their lives against the aggressions of the Caliph of the time. The prayer movement that started several years ago in churches like Kasr El-Dobara Church (which is located in Tahrir Square the birthplace of January 25, 2011 revolution) and many others, is now spreading to churches across Egypt. The spark that was lit by the prayer movement cannot be quenched. During the last month or so Egyptian Christians came to realize that no government in the world, even those who claim to be the champions of democracy, nor the United Nations and its commissions, truly care about their plight. Their hope and trust is not in earthly powers and systems but in the power of the resurrected Christ who is given all power and authority on heaven and on earth. Whatever the future holds for the Christians of Egypt, they know that they are heirs of one of the richest history of the Christian faith. Egyptian Christians who gave to World Christianity the first organized theological school in Alexandria, the deepest sense of spirituality in the monastic movement and above all one of the largest number of Christian martyrs will continue to be a blessing to the nations through their lives of dedicated prayers, humility and service. However one might interpret the text of Isaiah 19:25, Egyptian Christians are fervently praying that, *“The LORD Almighty will bless them, saying, “Blessed be Egypt my people....”*