

Christmas message

January 2014

The Tender Mercies of God

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace (Luke 1: 76 – 79).

Introduction

God's message for us today is: *"the tender mercies of God"*.

Before unfolding the dimensions of this message, I dare to say that this is not merely a message or talk related to a spiritual celebration, occasion or a specific day, but it is *a message for the generation!*

This difference between a message given for a certain situation or occasion and a message given to a generation certainly requires some clarification. To explain this, we need to go back to the biblical foundations. Let us look at Moses, the man of God, as an example.

Moses was one of the greatest men of God who learned to speak with God that it was written about him: *'whom the Lord knew face to face'* (Deuteronomy 34: 10). Therefore, he was called *'converser with God'*.

Moses spoke with God in various ways. At times he asked God about situations that he faced while ministering to the people of Israel and God used to answer him. An example for this is when Moses asked what if someone was not able to keep the Lord's Passover at its appointed time because he is defiled by a human corpse or is far away on a journey (Numbers 9: 9 – 14). Another example is when

Moses asked about what should be done with a person who blasphemes and curses the name of the Lord (Leviticus 24: 10 – 16). Another example is when he asked how the inheritance should be given if a man dies and has no sons but only daughters (the case of the daughters of Zelophehad) (Numbers 27). In such situations, Moses needed to ask God and the Lord answered him. In each situation we read: *'the Lord spoke to Moses saying...'*

Yet, the above is quite different from another scene where Moses was called to go up the mountain and remain there for 40 days after which he was given the words of God!

What does this mean? Is it possible that God was talking to Moses all the time throughout the 40 days? I do not think so. Moses needed first to be prepared for a distinct kind of fellowship with God and for receiving special words from the Lord. He had to go up the mountain; to be separate; to be away from the world and ascend upwards so that the world and all what is in it would become too small and nothing remains in the scene except God; and hence he enters into the clouds. In other words, he enters into the divine presence. The conversation does not start straight away but, in this cloud, Moses needs first to be cleansed and purified from earthly things. He needs to forget all what is down below and ascend with his mind and heart upwards. God cannot speak with him about special matters unless his mind and his inner being are emptied of all other things. A certain transformation should take place. In the cloud, his senses possibly stop functioning as normal as he is swallowed up in the glory of God and the glory of His presence; he is in a trance. At this point, Moses is transformed into a spiritual being; and hence God talks to him as a Spirit to a spirit, a heart to a heart, a Spiritual being to a spiritual being. It is only then that the mysteries of God's heart are released. Indeed, it is *transformation* and then *communication*!

At the top of the mountain, it is not a word related to a certain situation or an answer to a question, but the mystery of God's heart for a generation and many generations; he *'received the living oracles to give to us'* (Acts 7: 38b).

He was given the law and the commandments that remained for generations that when the Lord Himself was asked a question, He referred to the commandments saying: *'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: you shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets'* (Matthew 22: 37 - 40).

Moses was given a great mystery, God's mind and His commandments for His people. These commandments governed everything throughout many centuries until the coming of the Lord Himself. Not only this, but also Moses Himself was transformed. After this special kind of fellowship was repeated, the face of Moses started to shine to the extent that the children of Israel were not able to look at him. He had to put a veil on his face. While Moses remained unseen by the people, he remained constantly in the presence of God.

Throughout the generations, the same thing was repeated. There were men of God whom the Holy Spirit taught -through a journey that was neither short nor easy -to receive a word for their generation.

And now, let us unfold God's message for us today knowing that it is a message for a generation, our generation.

The message

My people are bent on backsliding from Me. Though they call to the Most High, none at all exalt Him. How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I set you like Zeboiim? My heart churns within Me; my sympathy is stirred. I will not execute the fierceness of My anger, I will not again destroy Ephraim. For I am God, and not man, the Holy One in your midst; and I will not come with terror (Hosea 11: 7 – 9).

Notice that God is talking here about His people not the nations who have not known Him yet: *'My people are bent on backsliding from Me.'* According to the Hebrew origin, the word 'bent on' means 'determined'. God has called them to Him in various ways: through the prophets, different circumstances, what they learned, and through every possible way. 'They call them to the Most High'; yet, the result is that *'none at all exalt Him'*. This is quite remarkable.

Some may wonder saying: 'why do you tell us this in your message? There are always those who pray, love the Lord, and serve Him. Isn't that enough?'

In response, let me ask you to ponder on the words: *'none at all exalt Him'*. The Lord does not want certain spiritual practices; these are only important for us to light our path and keep us in the right way. We so much need these spiritual practices for our own benefit, but the Lord searches for those who exalt Him, that is, those who see Him as He truly is: *'the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity'* (Isaiah 57: 15) and the Holy One who is higher than the heavens (Hebrews 7: 26).

Do we truly magnify God and give Him glory in every conduct and in all our days? Do we exalt Him and realise that this would be through being separate and holy as a people of the holy God? *"...but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, 'be holy, for I am holy'* (1Peter 1: 15, 16). Does the Church glorify her Lord; or does she offer Him worship and ministry at

times and then turns into a place that offers recreation, fun, and laughter?! Isn't it written: *'holiness adorns Your house O Lord, forever'* (Psalm 93: 5)?

Yet, what was God's response to His people who refused to exalt Him? Hosea writes: *'How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I set you like Zeboiim? (Admah and Zeboiim are names of cities in Sodom and Gomorrah) My heart churns within Me; my sympathy is stirred.'*

These words, especially in their Hebrew origin, reveal to us God's amazing response. He seems to be so perplexed to the extent of confusion [this is only to use human language to help us understand divine truths that are beyond our perception –because nothing would confuse or perplex God since He is 'in unapproachable light' (1Timothy 6: 16) and He 'is light and in Him is no darkness at all' (1John 1: 5).] So, it seems as though God is divided from within (this is again to use our human language to simplify the divine truths). God's feelings are a mystery beyond our comprehension; yet, we need to understand this matter for our benefit. There seems to be ambivalent and conflicting feelings inside God. In His holiness and righteousness, the situation of His people requires divine wrath. Yet, God's wrath can cause the people to perish. At the same time, His divine mercy overflows inside Him: *'my compassion is aroused'*. In the Hebrew origin, these words mean that His compassion became like a boiling caldron or boiler. Thus, His compassion surpassed to prevent His wrath. Yet, He feels as though His heart is divided and turns over within Him: *'My heart churns within Me; my sympathy is stirred'*.

What was the outcome of this? His wrath stopped, though the people had deserved it: *'I will not execute the fierceness of My anger'*. Notice the word 'fierceness' here highlighting that His wrath was also boiling inside Him. We thus realise the meaning of *'My heart churns within Me'*: the caldron of mercy is boiling inside Him and at the same time His wrath is boiling!

To illustrate this, imagine a father who loves his son so much and this son lives an evil life that gradually destroys him. This father gets angry and in the rage of his anger he thinks as though he can kill his son. As soon as this thought crosses the father's mind, he trembles and thinks to himself: 'what is this I am thinking of; my son's death means my death; he is part of me'. If we as humans understand this, how much more would it be on God's part?!

Therefore, God finally decides:

I will not again destroy Ephraim. For I am God, and not man, the Holy One in your midst; and I will not come with terror (verse 9).

If we think deeply of this situation we realise that it is very delicate and critical. It seems as if God is in a crisis regarding His divine economy. Will He leave the people to continue in their evil and destroy themselves and the earth which they are responsible for? This is of course not possible. Will He then disregard the evil as though He does not see it?! This again is not possible because He cannot deny Himself or His standards which He proclaimed.

Well, Lord, what will You do then?

After rebuking the people and revealing to them their transgressions (as a harlot against their God, Hosea 1: 2; 2:5; 4: 11; 9: 1), Hosea surprises us with the following words:

I will heal their backsliding; I will love them freely, for My anger has turned away from him. I will be like the dew to Israel; He shall grow like the lily, and strengthen his roots like Lebanon...Ephraim shall say, 'what have I to do anymore with idols? I have heard and observed him. I am like a green cypress tree; your fruit is found in Me' (Hosea 14: 4, 5, 8).

These words were said at the end of Hosea's prophetic journey, in the last chapter of his book.

This amazing concluding scene reveals the goodness of God, the height of His wisdom, and the greatness of His love towards a rebellious people infidel to their God.

However, doesn't this make us question how this can happen? Doesn't this seem like a sudden change in God's attitude?! Does He heal, love, and His anger stop without a corrective response on the part of the people? Wouldn't this be breaking God's principles and commandments? And, how is this relevant to us?

There is a great mystery here. God has found a solution that reconciles between anger caused by the backsliding of the people and abundant mercy that desires to love, heal and bless.

God found a man to stand in the gap and appear as if bearing the mistakes of the people. The wrath of God would fall upon this man, yet, he would be strengthened by the grace of God and His tender mercies because he was called for this. Hence, the scene would change.

So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one (Ezekiel 22: 30).

This man who stood in the gap on behalf of the people was Hosea, the prophet, himself. He was called to a certain painful experience:

When the Lord began to speak by Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea: 'Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry and children of harlotry, for the land has committed great harlotry by departing from the Lord' (Hosea 1: 2).

This was not what God had wanted for Hosea, but this is a matter related to the prophetic calling that has its special mysteries; this is a topic on its own that we will not discuss now.

Hosea went through this painful experience on the personal and family levels. He had to exercise divine love towards the harlot, his wife; and he did:

Then the Lord said to me, 'Go again, love a woman who is loved by a lover and is committing adultery, just like the love of the Lord for the children of Israel, who look to other gods and love the raisin cakes of the pagans (Hosea 3: 1).

The situation was then changed and God was able to find a solution for Himself and for His people through the mystery of 'the prophet who stood in the gap, the man of God who stood in the gap'.

Here, we may ask: how can this happen? Can a person bear all this? And, why; wouldn't that be some kind of injustice falling upon him? In order to answer these questions, we need a separate discussion; but we can briefly mention here that this prophetic mystical matter is based on 'the mystery of Christ' –a term revealed and is repeated in the New Testament: Ephesians 3: 3, 4; Colossians 1: 27; Colossians 2: 2; Colossians 4: 3. This mystery, the mystery of Christ as the Messiah sent for salvation, worked in all the prophets and the men of God who were called to stand in the gap on behalf of His people until Christ was incarnated and salvation was completed. This same mystery still works until now in all the men of God who are called for the same prophetic task. In carrying out this task, they rely on the grace of God that works in them; it is also a response to a special love that has been poured in their hearts creating in them zeal for God, making them cry out on behalf of their people asking for mercy. They were thus prepared and considered worthy for this kind of calling and the grace of God strengthened them to complete their mission and witness the salvation of God for their peoples.

This is what had actually happened in the days of the prophet Hosea. However, this people who constantly backslide and are determined on backsliding did not wake up by this sacrificial love of God and they continued in their fluctuation and backsliding.

This is apparent in the writings of the prophet Isaiah who started his ministry after the prophet Hosea. Hosea and Amos started their ministry at a very similar time where Hosea ministered to the north and Amos ministered to the south. Then, Isaiah came and ministered to the south and the work and impact of his ministry extended to the north as well.

This brings us to the next scene which completes the understanding and purpose of the Lord's message for us and which is also a message for our generation.

The scene of the Prophet Isaiah with his people

Look down from heaven, and see from Your habitation, holy and glorious. Where are Your zeal and Your strength, the yearning of Your heart and Your mercies toward me? Are they restrained? Doubtless You are our Father, though Abraham was ignorant of us, and Israel does not acknowledge us. You, O Lord, are our Father; our Redeemer from everlasting is Your name. O Lord, why have you made us stray from Your ways, and hardened our heart from Your fear? Return for Your servants' sake, the tribes of Your inheritance (Isaiah 63: 15 – 17).

Oh, that You would rend the heavens! That You would come down... (Isaiah 64: 1)

Do not be furious, O Lord, nor remember iniquity forever; indeed, please look –we all are Your people! Your holy cities are a wilderness; Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and beautiful temple, where our fathers praised You, is burned up with fire; and all our pleasant things are laid waste. Will You restrain Yourself because of these things, O Lord? Will You hold Your peace and afflict us severely? (Isaiah 64: 9 – 12)

The previous scene closed in the most pleasant way where the people came back to God and God was healing them; so, the people said: 'what have I to do anymore with idols?' The compassion of God that were stirred and boiling within Him triumphed over His wrath and changed everything. God had found a vessel that

can bear this mercy and compassion and release it with all its mystery, as explained above.

Why then does Isaiah surprise us with the scene mentioned in the above verses towards the end of his prophetic journey, in the final chapters of his book? It is true that at the very end of the book there is a joyful and blessed picture; yet, we still wonder and ask about what had happened in the time between the final scene in the book of Hosea and the above mentioned scene in Isaiah. Hosea had shown us God's compassion being stirred and boiling inside Him and His wrath stopped and everything changed. Yet, in the above scene, Isaiah cries out saying that the mercies of God are restrained and are shut off; even the heavens seem closed and so he cries out saying: *Oh, that You would rend the heavens!*

In fact, at the beginning of the ministry of Isaiah we clearly see that the people had quickly gone back to their own ways backsliding from God –despite the short period, since the ministry of Hosea and Isaiah almost overlap (Isaiah 1: 1; Hosea 1:1).

Therefore, at the beginning of the ministry of Isaiah, God is astonished by the response and attitude of the people whom He has just healed from their backsliding and loved freely. So, the prophet says:

The ox knows its owner and the donkey its master's crib; but Israel does not know, my people (He still calls them His people) do not consider (Isaiah 1: 3).

They have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked to anger the Holy One of Israel, they have turned away backward (Isaiah 1: 4b).

Therefore, He describes them by saying:

Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom; give ear to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah (Isaiah 1: 10). [Despite this, He calls upon them saying: 'Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord...' (Isaiah 1: 18).] Thus, we see Isaiah pouring out the woes on the people (Isaiah 1: 3, 4b; 5:8, 11, 18, 20, 21).

Then, the prophet surprisingly realises that he has become unclean like the people (Isaiah 6)!

What has happened?

Isaiah was called to stand in the gap. He went through the same painful experience of his people: having unclean lips; his whole life became unclean and he became estranged from God. He went through a lot of suffering. Historians tell us that he was slain by being sawn with the sword; there may be a reference to this in Hebrews 11: 37. He was able to stand in the gap and cry out the words that we have read in Isaiah 63: 15 – 17 and Isaiah 64: 1, 9 – 12. They are daring words, but they are transforming. Thus, at the end of his book we read the following words:

Before she was in labour, she gave birth; before her pain came, she delivered a male child. Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall the earth be made to give birth in one day? Or shall a nation be born at once? For as soon as Zion was in labour, she gave birth to her children. 'Shall I bring to the time of birth, and not cause delivery?' says the Lord. 'Shall I who cause delivery shut up the womb?' says your God. 'Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all you who love her, all you who mourn for her (referring to those who were standing in the gap with the prophet); that you may feed and be satisfied with the consolation of her bosom, that you may drink deeply and be delighted with the abundance of her glory.' For thus says the Lord: 'Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream. Then you shall feed; on her sides shall you be carried, and be dandled on her knees. As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; and you shall be comforted in Jerusalem (Isaiah 66: 7 – 13).

Let us now link the scenes together in order to get a better understanding of what has happened in the time between the end of the ministry of Hosea and the cries of Isaiah to God for the sake of his people.

The people were healed because there was someone to stand in the gap on their behalf. Yet, they soon backslid severely as we read in Isaiah 1. As the people continued in their evil and there was no one to release the mercies of God by standing in the gap, the Lord withdrew from among His people (as Ezekiel the prophet also saw Him). The Lord went back to His holy habitation, from where Isaiah called upon Him. Thus, the heavens were closed as a result of the excessive evil that the people were committing; and the tender mercies of God were hidden: 'Your mercies toward me are restrained'. Despite this, Isaiah says: *'the yearning of Your heart and Your mercies'* (*'the sounding of thy bowels and of thy mercies'*, KJV). According to the Hebrew origin, these words imply that the prophet seems as though he can hear the sound of God's heart that is stirred with mercy and compassion. God still desires to have mercy but there is no one to release His mercy and the people are not responding to the prophets. Thus, the heavens were closed and God's mercy was hidden.

Some expected questions

Question 1

Q: Why are all these negative words; God is kind and surely He will intervene and everything will be fine?

A: Let us not be deceived anymore by such words. Let us face our reality. We do not need deceitful words that numb our consciences and cause us to deviate from the true understanding and true path. Let us remind ourselves with some of the situations which we all know and hear happening in our country day after the other. Examples of these are:

+ A father who is the sole bread earner of his poor family dies suddenly in a car accident. We say: Oh, no, what a difficult situation; where is God; and where is His mercy; why did He allow this to happen; doesn't He know that this father is the sole bread earner?!

+ A little girl who has a lone mother to look after her; no father or any other family members. Suddenly, the mother suffers a serious illness and in few weeks she dies leaving the little girl alone. Again we exclaim saying: what a terrible situation; where is Your mercy, O Lord; why did You allow this to happen?!

Other terrible situations continue to happen: kidnapping, destroying and horrors.

After all this, are we still unable to discern that this is a strange situation? This is not God or His mercy.

Truly then: 'Your mercies towards me are restrained'!

Based on the above two scenes of the prophet Hosea and the prophet Isaiah, doesn't this also mean that mercies are not restrained and the heavens is not closed except if evil continues without anyone ready to stand in the gap?

As if the Lord is perplexed again and says: is there anyone who can understand?!

The Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek God (Psalm 14: 2).

Question 2

Q: As the people of God, are we called to evangelise and preach about the tender mercies of God or His saving grace?!

A: It is true that we should preach God's saving grace, but, let us search this matter more.

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age (Titus 2: 11, 12).

Indeed, the grace of God which is great, rich, mighty, and brings salvation from all sins and evil has appeared. We have witnessed that it transforms a person from

one state to a totally different image; it makes us born again; it makes everything new.

Yet, do we not see that this is not the case with our spiritual life?! We still have old sins that pop up every now and again and become recurrent as though they cannot be conquered. We have certain habits and manners that we ourselves hate but do not know how to be changed and de-skinned from them.

Why is this transformation not happening as before? Doesn't this mean that grace is scarce? But, why is it scarce?

The grace of God has appeared, but we did not realise its requirements; and these are: *'to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts; we should live soberly...'*

We have enjoyed evangelising about the grace of God, but we did not highlight its requirements; it only requests us to obey and then the grace itself establishes and perfects us:

But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. By Silvanus, our faithful brother as I consider him, I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God in which you stand (1Peter 5: 10 – 12).

We have dealt with grace as though it is cheap when it is indeed so precious (1Peter 1: 16 – 19); as a result, its great work and effect has become impaired and scarce; the heavens were closed and the tender mercies were withheld.

Do we not realise that God's mercy is the source and reason for the release of His grace; as it is written:

But God who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ, by grace you have been saved (Ephesians 2: 4, 5).

God who is rich in mercy has made us alive by grace and saved us by it.

When grace becomes scarce, let us go back to its source: mercy; and request it persistently; let us cry out with Isaiah asking God's mercy for our generation.

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This is God's word for our generation

This is His calling and our responsibility.

This is the commissioning that is offered awaiting whoever would accept it.

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An inevitable question

The natural question now would be: how can we minister this divine calling to our generation? How can we prepare our hearts to receive this divine commission so that His grace would come to us, leading us, changing our circumstances, and releasing us in the work?

We would then see God's hand working with us as it is written: *'the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs* (Mark 16: 20).

The work would also be accompanied by the help of angels and the cloud of witnesses that surrounds us (John 1: 51; Hebrew 12: 1).

Five practical points to help us prepare ourselves for this commission

1. Let me understand the confrontations of the Kingdom and the timings of God
2. Let my soul wake up and let me get out of my self-centeredness

3. Let me exercise a faith that rises up, stands firm, and carries my steps forward
4. Let me learn the truth of God and understand His ways
5. Let me restore my lost treasures and seek the Lord and His will

1. Let me understand the confrontations of the Kingdom and the timings of God

Correct understanding is half the way in the correct path towards the solution. Apostle Paul prays for his disciple Timothy saying: *'Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things'* (2Timothy 2: 7).

What are the confrontations of the Kingdom?

The bible tells us that there are two kingdoms in constant confrontation: the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light:

'...giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love' (Colossians 1: 12, 13).

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord... (Ephesians 5: 8)

You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness (1Thessalonians 5: 5).

In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest... (1John 3: 10)

Therefore, there are children of the devil who serve his purposes. We all know that the kingdom of the devil is called the kingdom of darkness. On His way to the cross, Jesus said: *'this is your hour and the power of darkness'* (Luke 22: 53). There are also the children of God who serve His purposes and His Kingdom. This means that they should spread this light since they are sons of light; especially as we are in the season of the Nativity, the feast of incarnation that is characterised

by light: the glory of God shone upon the shepherds and the wise men were led by a shining star.

Like any opposite and conflicting things, when one prevails, the other shrinks and is constrained. So, if darkness prevails, light diminishes and is constrained; while if light increases, it swallows up darkness and casts it away.

Apostle John, the theologian and evangelist realised this truth and he proclaimed it saying: *'And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth'* (John 1: 14).

Before this, the apostle highlighted the gift that the Son granted to humanity saying: *'In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend (overcome) it'* (John 1: 4, 5).

In these verses, the apostle is summing up the state of the earth before the Incarnation: it was in darkness and then light came to it. John regards Incarnation as the Light that came to a dark world. This implies that he had realised what the prophets had said about Israel –though at the days of John this was the case of all the peoples not only the people of Israel: *'The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined'* (Isaiah 9: 2).

This agrees with what other evangelist, like Luke for example, have revealed: *'...through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death...'* (Luke 1: 78, 79).

Apostle John understood this and so he said: *'That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world'* (John 1: 9).

Here we need to pause a little and clarify a very important truth. When darkness intensifies, a brighter light is released to counteract it; when darkness increases, light increases much more. This may confuse us a bit because we have mentioned

earlier that if darkness increases, the light diminishes and is constrained and now we are saying what may seem the opposite of this! In fact, it is not the opposite. The truth is that when darkness increases the amount of available light to humanity diminishes and is constrained. However, this moves the heart of God so He releases to His servants more light from His divine stores. But, this light may sometimes remain unreleased because of certain circumstances until it is completely released; and then the whole scene changes to the glory of God.

Doesn't the bible say: *'But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more'* (Romans 5: 20).

God watches and observes; if the darkness of the present time increases, He releases an abundance of light from the springs of His salvation. Yet, He waits for those who would receive it with seriousness and care; with holy zeal and readiness to be transformed.

This is the economy of the Kingdom of God. It is the economy of the Holy Spirit for God's people and His Kingdom.

The Lord's time

We cannot do anything about the release of God's light without realising God's times. The bible uses two different words to refer to time: 'chronos' refers to the normal chronological time; 'kairos' refers to a special time for a special work (the appointed time in the purpose of God). In this context, we remember the words of the Psalm: *'It is time for You to act, O Lord'* (Psalm 119: 126). When I discern God's time, I know that it is the time that God will release His hand to work with me and also release His resources that are stored for the Church, God's people.

Therefore, when we say that God is giving us a word to the generation, this certainly means that we are now in a special time of the Lord, a time to act, and that the hand of the Lord is released to work with us; His divine stores are open so that we can take our needs from them.

How does darkness creep in?

Having discerned the times and realised the significance of being given a word for our generation, we need to know:

- How does darkness creep in?
- How can light be received?

Darkness creeps into our souls due to the following:

- The deceitful plans of the enemy which start in the mind causing perplexity and confusion; this leads to despair and a sense of failure; hence, darkness prevails in the soul and in one's circumstances.
- Crookedness and lack of uprightness; and also lack of love and forgiveness
- Earthly lusts and uncleanness

All these things lead to being cut off the fellowship with God; as a result, man's soul darkens, his world (circumstances) darkens, and the earth around him darkens.

How can we receive the light?

- *The light comes to the soul* exposing her ways and corruption. If the soul responds by repenting and admitting the wrong instead of arguing and justifying herself, a light is received inside the soul.
- *The light comes to the mind* when the Word of God works inside me exposing and revealing '*the deceitful lusts*' (Ephesians 4: 22). Obeying the truth, continuous meditation on the Word of God, and the daily revision of my conduct and attitudes in the light of the bible, brings light to my mind and then it shines from the mind to the soul.

- *The light shines outwardly.* When the soul is filled with the light of God, her spiritual light shines outwardly causing spiritual attraction and testifying to the Kingdom of God. *'Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom'* (Psalm 51: 6).
- *The light also confronts the darkness of the enemy;* so, I learn the battles of the spirit in the heavenly places against the fortresses of the kingdom of darkness which hinder God's will for His Kingdom.

2. Let my soul wake up and let me get out of my self-centeredness

The Psalmist says: *'Awake, my glory! Awake, lute and harp! I will awaken the dawn'* (Psalm 57: 8).

According to the original Hebrew language, the phrase *'I will awaken the dawn'* has an amazing meaning.

The Psalmist is calling on his inner being, his soul and her stores of the grace of God, 'my glory'. The word 'my glory' may also refer to the soul. The Psalmist starts to worship God from the very early morning, even before dawn, and as though he calls upon the dawn to wake up. 'O sun, why are you late and still asleep? Wake up and light the globe; wake up and do your work early; I have woken up and I want to wake up all creation to get up and worship God with me.'

God has given us many spiritual gifts and graces. He spoke to us many times as if through a spiritual trumpet, yet we did not have listening ears nor understanding hearts –like the heart of virgin Mary who kept all things and pondered them in her heart (Luke 2: 19, 51). Therefore, we became more prone to withdraw within ourselves rather than get out from the circle of the self and from our own circumstances.

O Lord, bring me out of my self-centeredness, my ways and my thoughts;

Turn me towards You, towards Your ways and thoughts (Isaiah 55: 8);

Write Your will and plans on my heart as You did with Your servant David (1Chronicals 28: 12, 19) so that I may fulfil Your will and hear the voice 'My son in whom I am pleased'.

3. Let me exercise a faith that rises up, stands firm, and carries my steps forward

Let us wake up, understand, and realise that faith is a constant battle; it is the field of the enemy's warfare. Have we forgotten the Lord's warning to Peter before the Crucifixion: *'Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail'* (Luke 22: 31, 31).

There is a constant battle going on inside us, but we are not aware. The enemy directs his evil arrows against faith. Therefore, Apostle Paul says: *'above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one'* (Ephesians 6: 16).

I need to keep watch over my faith so that it would be built and its measure would rise to be consistent with and match God's will and mind.

I will not be apathetic, asleep, or fleeing like Jonah.

I will no more consider God's matters, His ministry and obedience, hard; nor feel helpless before them.

I will no more turn back to my old ways but I will move forward to all that is new.

So, my soul will be open wide; it will be filled with holy faith; and the spirit of faith will be poured on me anew (2Corinthians 4: 13).

I will get trained in the paths of faith and so there will be men of faith for the Lord in our generation.

The visions of faith will be released and we shall see miracles of faith!

As a result, when we cry out saying 'Lord have mercy', our cry will be a cry of faith; and hence the mercy of God is released for salvation!

4. Let me learn the truth of God and understand His ways

Let us consider some verses that help us understand this matter.

'For Your loving-kindness is before my eyes, and I have walked in Your truth'
(Psalm 26: 3)

'Lead me in Your truth and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation' (Psalm 25: 5)

'Good and upright is the Lord; therefore He teaches sinners in the way. The humble He guides in justice, and the humble He teaches His way. All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth...' (Psalm 25: 8 – 10)

'Mercy and truth have met together...' (Psalm 85: 10)

It is clear from the above verses that *mercy* should be accompanied by *truth*. In other words, mercy works on the bases of truth.

An example for this, which is closely linked to our discussion, can be highlighted through the following two references:

'Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the Lord is risen upon you'
(Isaiah 60: 1)

'You will rise and have mercy on Zion; for the time to favour her, Yes, the set time, has come' (Psalm 102: 13).

Is there any contradiction between these two verses? Is it the Lord's responsibility to rise and have mercy on Zion; or is it a promise which we should proclaim by faith (Isaiah 60: 1)?

Nowadays, we witness fluctuation between these two approaches. There are some who groan and passively wait for the Lord putting the whole responsibility on Him. They wonder where He is and they ask why He is not acting. There are others who say that these are God's promises that we should hold unto and proclaim; they talk as such carrying us away in spiritual dreams; and when nothing happens, faith is broken.

But, why is this fluctuation and different approaches? It is because we haven't learnt God's ways and we failed to understand that mercy works with truth. Therefore, if we want to understand God's promises that proclaim His mercy, we should also understand the truth of God and examine our ways and manners correcting them according to the truth of God. It is written: *'to him who orders his conduct aright I will show the salvation of God'* (Psalm 50: 23).

Therefore, if I order my conduct aright, through repentance, humbling myself, contrition, and clinging to God, I will acquire true daring faith (not fleshly enthusiasm). I will then proclaim God's promises which He desires to fulfil, yet they have their conditions and requirements. I can then proclaim prophetically and with faith His word on His people, His Church: *'Arise, shine'*. Thus, the light flows and is proclaimed!

Are we not aware; haven't we been praying and singing these words for years, yet darkness is increasing?! By His Spirit, God has given us words to sing and holy zeal in our hearts; we sang and prayed yet we did not repent or humble ourselves before Him. We did not live the truth of God which brings the mercies of God!

5. Let me restore my lost treasures and seek the Lord and His will

Many a time we have received in our spirits enlightening words, comforting phrases, rich grace poured on us from moving liturgical prayers and tunes that have been imprinted on our hearts and have caused our tears to flow. Yet, now, why has this richness been buried and we seem as if living in scarcity and poverty?! This should not be the case. We are called to be 'rich and heirs of the

Kingdom' (James 2: 5). It is also written: '*...as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things*' (2Corinthians 6: 10).

Let us awaken our buried treasures; let them come out of their graves, Let us draw from these treasures divine comfort, spiritual experiences and all what has been imprinted inside us.

O Lord, take out all that is foreign which have entered my heart causing the precious to be buried; the precious was lost and I was left beating the air.

O Lord, bring my hidden treasures out to the light; so that they may come like a flood of light and fire sweeping away the darkness and proclaiming the brightness of God's glory!

Let me also remember other treasures that were granted to me and I am not drawing from its effective power.

- I have the treasure of the covenant of my baptism; its authority and truth: denouncing the devil and affirming the faith. Doesn't my baptism mean burying the old man, crucifying the self, and releasing the power of life for the newness of life? Let me then denounce the devil daily and practically; let me leave my slumber that causes me to resemble the people of the world; let me live in holiness and separation from the spirit of the world and do so by keeping watch over my conscience and my days throughout my sojourning in this life.
- I also have the treasure of the fellowship of angels. The coming of Christ to our world has opened the heavens and released the ministry of the angels (John 1: 51); we see this clearly in the book of Acts where the angels served side by side with the apostles. Let us be watchful and attentive because if we lose the fellowship of angels and are negligent in our life and vigilance, the evil spirits will make a siege around us, we would feel helpless in our spiritual walk and hindered even in our human matters.

- Also, the Spirit of God is always ready to renew my life when I call upon Him; renew my longing for God; renew my watchfulness and my worship; renew my spiritual energy so that I do not lose heart or lose my zeal for God's matters and ministry; renew my understanding and my obedience so that I would obey with pleasure. This constant renewal is necessary so that my life may not turn into a deadly routine.

The Lord said to Moses: *'take your sandals off your feet for the place where you stand is holy ground'*. The fathers of the Church understood that this means: taking off death and the lifeless routine that sometimes come upon our life; by taking this off we may enter into renewed fellowship with the Holy Spirit; and hence enter the holy ground, where there is the reviving and satisfying fellowship with God and where His will unfolds with every stage and would always be *'good and acceptable and perfect'* (Romans 12: 2).

I am so much in need for all what has been granted to me in Jesus Christ so that I can fight my battle and serve the Kingdom of God in my age and my generation. I also need them to be able to cry out the true and effective cries of the spirit:

Lord, have mercy;

Have mercy on Your people and Your Church;

Have mercy on the whole world;

Amen

