

The sun is setting, will we shine?!

Easter message, 2013

“Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the Lord is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; but the Lord will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you. The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.”

Isaiah 60: 1 – 3

“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.”

Philippians 3: 20, 21

Introduction

It is not difficult for the children of God, who are watchful on their spiritual life and who are preoccupied with the matters of the Kingdom of God, to discern and realise that the current phase is a difficult and very crucial one. This is not only due to the current circumstances of our country, Egypt. It is also because of the spiritual battles that we all experience during this phase. The battles are different from what we have experienced before; they are more severe and intense to the extent that it sometimes seems difficult to overcome them.

If we were following the news of the Kingdom of God in different places around the world, since we are members in the one body of Christ, we would surely realise that we have entered an “important phase” that has specific features. It is our duty, or rather our responsibility and need, to know these features and learn how to face them appropriately. Christ died and was risen to complete all things in our salvation leaving us unending and unlimited divine and spiritual abilities and potentials from which we should draw what we need. Remember that it was written: *“My grace is sufficient for you; for my strength is made perfect in weakness.”* **2Corinthians 12: 9b**

Thus, there are inevitable challenges. In the radiance and shine of resurrection, we find sufficient light that can expose and uncover these challenges. The resurrection shines forth divine lights that reveal to us the plans of darkness and its authority as Christ has exposed them on the day of His crucifixion when He said: *“But this is your hour, and the power of darkness.”* **Luke 22: 53b**

Not only does it expose, but it also reveals to us the manifold rich grace of resurrection which is sufficient and capable to fortify us and enable us to triumph in

the constant and successive battles. In His victory, Christ “*disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it* (in His cross)” **Colossians 2: 15**

After this introduction, we can say that for this year’s message, we have two words:

- Challenges, to be uncovered
- Revelations, to be unveiled and revealed

First: the challenges

1. Challenges of faith
2. Challenges of deceit

1. Challenges of faith

*Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart, saying: “There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. Now there was a widow in that city, and she came to him, saying, ‘Get justice for me from my adversary.’ “And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, ‘Though I do not fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.’” Then the Lord said, “Hear what the unjust judge said. And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?” **Luke 18: 1 - 8***

The battles of faith are serious. Before His crucifixion, Christ warned His disciples through the words He said to Peter: “*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, 32**

Therefore, the battles of faith that the enemy wages against the children of God are not casual or superficial, they do not merely aim to make the children of God doubt; they actually aim to let the faith fail!

Let us link these thoughts with the words of Christ in the passage in Luke 18: 1 – 8 where He says: *Nevertheless when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?*”

This is indeed an important issue. The evil one wants to wipe away the faith from the earth before the return of the Lord so that he may be able to subdue the earth and reign over it.

Therefore, we need to learn to interpret our battles correctly so that we do not get defeated. If we focus only on ourselves and remain self-centred, our battles will increase and we will seem as though defeated. Yet, if we understand the nature of the battles, while remaining filled with trust in the goodness and wisdom of God, the plan and economy behind these wars will be revealed to us. There is a specific economy behind each battle. Therefore, if we focus only on the battle, it increases and we are defeated. Yet, if we discover the economy behind the battle, we triumph and become strengthened.

Let us meditate on the parable that Jesus said in Luke 18: 1 – 8. Let us think carefully of these words: *“And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them?”*

Thus, God allows the battle; He also allows bearing long in answering our crying out to Him. Meanwhile, we stumble in Him and become filled with frustration saying: ‘Oh, Lord, we have prayed many times and have cried out to you to deliver us from this recurring sin, from these difficult circumstances, from this repeated temptation, from the prolonged injustice,...why don’t you hear us, Lord? Why do you seem far and our prayers do not seem to reach you? The situation is so difficult, Lord. Why, Lord?!!!’

There is an important mystery that we need to understand here. God actually hears and listens and even suffers because of our suffering: *“In all their affliction He was afflicted”* **Isaiah 63: 9**. Yet, He has a completely different purpose. It is so important to perceive this purpose.

What is this divine purpose?

God sees that faith is fading away and is setting down as the sunsets. At the same time, darkness is coming and intensifying. This is because faith is a light; *“faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen”* **Hebrews 11: 1**. It was also written that Moses *“forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible”* **Hebrews 11: 27**.

The above verses show that faith is like a lamp that lights and shines amid the darkness; and hence we are able to see things that are not seen and Him who is invisible. We are also able to realise and be confident of special things (the confidence of things not seen).

Apostle Paul draws our attention that this age is an age of spiritual darkness when he says: *“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities,*

against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” **Ephesians 6: 12**

The world lies under the sway of the wicked one (**1John 5: 19**); the kingdom of the wicked one is a kingdom of darkness. The thing that can prevent us from stumbling in the darkness of this age is acquiring the lamp of faith!

The enemy wants and plans to turn off the lamps of faith totally so that darkness may prevail. As a result, the earth would be prepared for his reign. Seeing this, God allows us to go through a specific kind of trials during which it seems as though He does not answer and is bearing long! Yet, by so doing, He wants to achieve another purpose. He wants to establish in us a special power of faith beyond all what we have known so that we may stand firm and be protected from the temptation of the enemy and his attacks on the faith. Therefore, while it seems that God is not listening to those crying out to Him, in actual fact, He would be working by His Spirit in our inner man to establish in us the necessary and suitable power of faith to face the severe temptations and trials of these days.

And now, will we understand, realise, and side with God’s plan? Or, will we focus on ourselves and remain self-centred and hence fall into the nets of the enemy? The darkness would thus come; and where there is darkness there is paralyses (no movement) and confusion (no vision or understanding); no one would be able to discern anything; there would rather be confusion; everyone would be asking: what should I do?

Remember the story of the three young men and the burning fiery furnace in Daniel chapter 3. Temptations and the wars of the enemy come like a burning fiery furnace that surrounds us. As a result, we feel a sense of distress, the fire of the evil one, the dismay and terror of darkness; and we cry out: what’s happening, where am I?!

Should we not learn to attract “*the Fourth*” who appeared with the three young men in the fiery furnace? He indeed desires to be a companion to those in the burning fiery furnace!

Let us learn the secret from the three young men:

*If this is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up. **Daniel 3: 17, 18***

They accepted the sentence of a very painful death (being burnt) without hesitation, conditions, or even expectations from God according to the desire of their hearts. Instead, they had full surrender based on absolute trust in the goodness and wisdom of God.

We are usually able to answer the challenges of the enemy using the first half of the verse only. Quite often we cannot continue the verse and say *“but if not”*. Therefore, “the invisible” Nebuchadnezzar (that is, the devil, according to the expression used by the early fathers of the church) threatens us, terrifies us, degrades us, and humiliates us.

The early fathers of the church have chosen to put this part of the Scripture about the three young men in the daily Psalmody (the third Cantic: the praise/story of the 3 young men). They did so because they understood that this would always be the experience of all the children of God in their sojourning. That is, the children of God would inevitably face a similar situation in their sojourning.

Thus, we need to understand that there is a special aim behind the burning fiery furnace, that is, the trials and the wars of the enemy that intensify, together with God bearing long in answering our cry out to Him. The aim is to test our faith and strengthen it so that it may be kept and may not fail; and thus we are transformed into steadfast men of faith.

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.” **1Corinthians 15: 58**

Again we say that these challenges, the challenges of faith, can either lift us upwards on the heights of faith or we may descend downwards towards the paths of frustration and complaint. If we do the latter, this would cause us to lose faith, make God absent and our life dims and darkens; and hence the enemy finds us an easy prey.

The heights of faith are before us;

Yet, we will never be able to ascend them except from inside the burning fiery furnace!

Can we say with Caleb and Joshua: *“Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it”* **Numbers 13: 30?!**

Finally, to conclude this point, let us listen to the words of the prophet Isaiah as he draws our attention to how to honour the Lord in our days:

“...And shall honour Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words (the words of frustration and complaint), then you shall delight yourself in the Lord; and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the Lord has spoken” **Isaiah 58: 13, 14**

When facing the challenges of faith, our fathers: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob learned how to ascend the high hills of the earth (*I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father*). Their life stories are a witness to this!

Thus, God was delighted to fulfil His great purposes through them and to associate His Name with them: “The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob”.

May it be for us as it was for them!

2. Challenges of deceit and falsehood

We need to pay attention to the following observation.

Notice that in His final prophetic talks with the disciples when they were asking Him about the signs of the end times (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21), Jesus repeatedly used the word “*deceive/deceit*”:

“...and will deceive many...” **Matthew 24: 5**

“Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.” **Matthew 24: 11**

For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, the elect. **Matthew 24: 24**

“Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign when all these things will be fulfilled? And Jesus, answering them, began to say: ‘Take heed that no one deceives you.’” **Mark 13: 4, 5.**

“For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.” **Mark 13: 22**

“...Take heed that you not be deceived...” **Luke 21: 8**

It is quite remarkable that in all these talks, Jesus draws the attention to two things for overcoming the deceit:

- Prayer and watchfulness
- Patience and endurance

[Refer to Matthew 24: 13, 42; Mark 13: 13; Mark 13: 33 – 37; Luke 21: 19, 36; and also Revelation 13: 10; Revelation 14: 12].

Also, Apostle John writes (in the second half of the first century) warning all the people of God saying:

*“...And this is the spirit of the Anti-christ, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world. You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears from them. We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error (falsehood, in NIV).” **1John 4: 3 – 6***

Here there is another matter of important significance. The above words indicate that there will be teachers and ministers who speak as of the world (by the spirit of the world) and the world will listen to them and would be pleased by them. In the meantime, those who speak as of God will be rejected and will not be heard. This is a very sad and painful delusion!

Let us also listen to what Apostle Paul, the teacher of the Church, says in the epistle that is known to be related to the end times, the epistle to the Thessalonians:

*And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness. **2Thessalonians 2: 11, 12***

How painful this is! When the truth is rejected and is not believed, this opens the door for deceit and delusion to work and prevail.

But, why; and, how?

The Apostle explains this in the same chapter where he says that there is “a certain power” (in the kingdom of darkness) which has “a special task”. Its work is to spread deceit and make discerning it very difficult. This is “the lawless”.

*“And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains [the children of God who are filled by the Holy Spirit are those who restrain, that is, the holy church of Christ that lives by the power of the Holy Spirit] will do so until He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.” **2Thessalonians 2: 6 – 8***

Before this passage, the Apostle writes that this “lawless”

“...sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God...”
2Thessalonians 2: 4

Here we ask in astonishment: how can this happen?! What and who would allow him to enter into the temple of God?! How did no one discern him and cast him out immediately?!

It is the deceit, the darkness, the absence of discerning!!

My beloved brothers and sisters, we so much need to watch and be careful; we need to be diligent and examine ourselves so that the mystery of lawlessness does not enter in us nor the lawless one dominate us. It is written:

“Do not be haughty, but fear.” **Romans 11: 20**

“Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.”
2Corinthians 13: 5

Forms and pictures of the thoughts of deceit

It is important to clarify some of the forms and pictures of deceit:

- + They usually come as spiritual “waves” that are full of dimness, darkness, and distress; these waves come on the mind and the soul.
- + They come filled with a sense of failure, frustration, paralysis, and divided spiritual energy (many distracting thoughts) aiming to deplete and exploit the spiritual power in deceitful matters.
- + With these waves, thoughts of division, bias, tension, and rejection come. More important, with these waves, there comes a tendency towards being self-centred and being imprisoned in deceitful convictions. These deceitful convictions imprison the person in himself and cut him off the fellowship with God and others.
- + They also come as deceitful thoughts (bait in the hook of the enemy); we thus get deceived by them and we accept them; and hence they imprison us. This is the real prison of which we quite often groan. We usually complain that we feel as though imprisoned. It is “the prison of thoughts” that deceive us and which we accept; they get knitted around us and become a prison that we have formed from our own ideas. The enemy only puts the outer fence of this prison!

Therefore, the sign of true change and transformation is complete “de-skinning” of the old mind (the mind of the old Adam, the fallen Adam). We need to discern this old mind; then we need to continue to reject it patiently and with perseverance until we are released from its authority. It is strongly implanted in our fallen nature and it so much dominates our mind set to the extent that it is sometimes difficult to discern it; or, sometimes we discern it, but are unable to reject it.

Let us remember that the sufferings that God allows are a means and a medication that break these walls and uncover the prison of thoughts; especially when we accept suffering with thanksgiving, surrender, and trust in God. These sufferings are then turned into a fellowship in the suffering of Christ and through them we receive

the grace of resurrection. With the grace of resurrection we are granted victory and the mind of the new man; *“the mind of Christ”* (**1Corinthians 2: 16**).

“...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death...” **Philippians 3: 10**

[Refer also to Hebrews 12: 6 – 11]

An important question remains in this respect:

Where do these deceitful thoughts come from? Are they all really from the enemy? What have I to do with this, then?

We have mentioned earlier that they actually come from the knitting of one's thoughts, the mind of the old Adam.

But, how was this old mind formed in the fallen Adam?

This matter is full of mystery and revelation. Let us go back to the story of “the Garden of Eden” and the trees in it! [Refer to Genesis 2: 7 – 10; 15 – 17].

Adam was placed in the Garden and was given a special commission which is to “tend and keep the land”.

As we explained in the Christmas message this year, God's original economy was that Adam and the angel were to work together in the Garden, according to God's plan, to serve His Kingdom. We knew the commission of Adam, but we did not know the commission of the angel who was to be with Adam because this angel fell and was cast out of the Garden by the time Adam was created. However, it is easy to perceive the commission of the angel as it is expected that it would be similar to the commission of Adam, but in accordance to the nature of the angel.

Before we clarify this further, let us ask: was all the commission and work of Adam related only to “the trees of the Garden”?

We may not be aware of the research of scholars regarding the origin of the Hebrew word for “Eden”. It actually means “a place of worship” (like the temple)! Also the Hebrew word for “tend” that was said to Adam is the same Hebrew word that was said to Aaron about serving in the tabernacle!!

Thus, in the origin of his creation, Adam was a worshipper and a priest to God! He was created to praise God and fill the whole creation with the presence of God!

“...whom I have created for My glory; I have formed him, yes, I have made him.”
Isaiah 43: 7

“This people I have formed for Myself; they shall declare My praise.” **Isaiah 43: 21**

It is true that there were trees to tend, but they were not merely trees for the physical life of the flesh (Genesis 1: 29), but they were as the “manna” was for the old Israel nourishing the whole being because it was the food of heaven (“angels’ food” Psalm 78: 25).

What happened after that?

The devil was cast out of the Garden and he became full of malice toward Adam; he planned to make Adam fall so that Adam may also be cast out of the Garden. But, how did he do this? The enemy usually copies God’s methods after twisting them in accordance to his evil nature.

Wasn’t Adam commissioned to plant the trees and tend them? The evil enemy thus thought: ‘why won’t I use the same truth but in my own manner to serve my purposes’! [We all know from the stories in Genesis 3 and Job 1 that the devil was able to enter the Garden as when he went to Eve to tempt her and even to enter into God’s presence to accuse His creation.]

The enemy planned to plant a “tree” that bears his evil and his nature; and also to serve his purposes. So, he planted “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil”.

If not so, we would have wondered from where this tree came, who would have put it in the Garden, and what its source was. God can never be the source of any evil as the bible says *“God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.”*

James 1: 13

Since he has planted this tree himself and since it is under his authority, the devil used the poisonous fruit of this tree which bears his character (attractive, deceitful, and leads to delusion like the devil). One of the titles of the devil and his principalities is “a deceiver”.

“For many deceivers have gone out into the world...This is a deceiver and an antichrist.” **2John 1: 7**

As a result, deceit entered into our world and in our ancestors, Adam and Eve, from the very beginning. *Deceit remained a hidden weapon in the hands of the enemy against Adam and all his descendants.*

Yet, praise God who in His foreknowledge realised the plans of the enemy against His beloved humanity. God thus prepared the counter economy to nullify the economy of the devil. We need to perceive and enter into the economy of our salvation granted to us by the Lover of mankind. God’s economy was that a “tree of life” would be there; the fruit of which would be for healing and salvation from the poison of the old serpent. Thus, He planned that the Son, the Word, would be incarnated. Being in the same image of man, He would have the same economy of

man: “planting the tree”. So, the tree of life was found in the Garden as a mystical foretaste proclaiming God’s eternal salvation for man.

“He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.”

Hebrews 9: 12

Let us also remember the words of the Scriptures about Christ *“a sower went out to sow.”* **Matthew 13: 3**

And now, do we not witness the act of resurrection by which He completed Man’s salvation?!

To complete the scene, let us highlight some of the symptoms of eating from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Symptoms of eating from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil

+ They are poisonous fruits that poison the mind and darken it. These are numerous and wide spread these days especially after the widespread of the media.

Of the symptoms of this spiritual poisoning:

- The heaviness of the spirit; being slow in spiritual reception and correct understanding of spiritual matters.
- The darkness of the spirit and its spiritual blockage; and losing the spiritual sensitivity.
- Getting easily confused and being stubborn; holding tight unto personal views and being fortified within them through deceitful convictions.
- Sensual and unholy passions increase and become so active due to the absence of the power of crucifixion and resurrection. As a result, we lack the renewed fellowship with the Holy Spirit which unveils the deceit of the enemy, lights the darkness of the mind, and protects us from the evil of deceit. [*“...the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts...”* **Ephesians 4: 22**].

+ Unfortunately, the economy of the evil one extends even to the ministers. So, they once eat from the tree of life (through worship, the fellowship with God, studying the word of God, and the means of grace). Then, they get deceived and hence eat also from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (the media, the spirit of the world, soulish and fleshly desires that are not crucified). Hence, they receive a “spiritual energy” and then they lose it. This goes on and on and it then becomes difficult to discern the matter. We may hear attractive words of ministry but void of Spirit and Life.

Second: the revelations

The revelations of the glorious resurrection:

1. From an empty tomb to “a place of glory”
2. The radiance and shine of resurrection, and its work
3. Our new nationality by the resurrection
4. Our responsibility and the mission of resurrection

1. From an empty tomb to “a place of glory”

What a mystery!

May God grant us to understand and pay attention to this important mystery!

The plan of the enemy is that death would prevail everywhere so that he may reign on earth.

But, how does he achieve this plan?

He does so by unleashing evils so that people may be drawn away and trapped; and hence death is brought forth. In this respect, Apostle James writes:

“But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.” **James 1: 14, 15**

This is the plan of the devil and he works on it very actively so that death may prevail.

Let us ask frankly:

Is what we see and hear happening in Egypt and other countries, including killing, brutality, rape, looting, and daring violence, human?!

In fact, the things that are happening are things that the human nature cannot commit unless it has become a dwelling place for Satan! Didn't the bible say that Judas became a devil? Judas allowed the devil to enter him and dwell in him turning him away from his human nature; Jesus Himself said *“one of you is a devil”* **John 6: 70.**

And now, how can this generation be served after reaching this state and this image? Will it be served by preaching and counselling alone after it has become a blind and deaf generation?!

It is a generation that lives in atmospheres of death. The enemy is still opening his mouth to devour, not only individuals but much more! Apostle Peter wrote: “...*your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour*” **1Peter 5: 8**. Also, prophet Jeremiah says: “*I will punish Bel [referring to the devil] in Babylon, and I will bring out of his mouth what he has swallowed*” **Jeremiah 51: 44**.

Thus, the devil actually swallows. Yet, praise be to God that there is a possibility to restore what the devil has swallowed. However, this requires ministers who are filled with the power of life so that they would be like “pumps of life” proclaiming: “*O Death, where is your sting? O hades, where is your victory?*” **2Corinthians 15: 55**

We may say that this situation concerns the non-believers. We may thus wonder: what do believers have to do with this scene? In fact, the war of the enemy is harsh and brutal particularly against the children of God because they are the ones who stand in his way preventing the prevalence of death in the world:

“For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way.” **2Thesalonians 2: 7**

Who is restraining the mystery of lawlessness now? The children of God who bear the power of life are those who restrain. There is an important question here through which God wants to reveal to us the plan of the enemy: how does the enemy make those children of God ineffective? [The reference here is to children of God who restrain the mystery of lawlessness, hinder the plan of the lawless, and annul the economy of the evil enemy.]

The evil one cannot annul the life that the children of God had received and he cannot take it from them! It is written: “...*but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*” **Romans 6: 23**. It is also written: “...*for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable*” **Romans 11: 29**.

What does the evil one do, then?

His plan is actually very cunning. He is terrified to come near the children of God; yet, he does not cease to call upon his principalities and reveal to them his plan saying “let us do with them as we did before”!

What does this mean?

Let us think what the enemy did in response to the resurrection of Christ which bestows life on the believers:

The empty tomb of Christ was so disturbing and terrifying to the devil. So, he decided to fill and pile the empty tomb so that it would be covered and not seen as being empty! He put in the heart of the Jews to fill the tomb and pile more hills of sand on it so that it may completely disappear and then be totally forgotten. [This is well known in the tradition of the old churches.]

Note: We know from history that the piling up was on the crosses (the cross of Christ and the other two crosses of the two thieves) until the time of Queen Helena. She discovered the place and at that time the cross of Christ was revealed through a special sign: raising a dead person. Yet, the place of the crosses is in fact the same place of the empty tomb, as the Gospel of John mentions.

“Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. So there they laid Jesus...for the tomb was nearby.” **John 19: 41, 42**

Tradition also informs us that the place where the cross of Christ was found is situated at the bottom of the old quarry where the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is.

The enemy uses the same plan and informs his principalities that this is his plan against the children of God who have received the power of life. He says “let us pile up and fill up over them and turn them into tombs”!

The picture from outside thus looks like “tombs” and we, the children of God, appear as though we are “the dead of the tombs”!

But NO and NO...our relationship with death has completely ended; Christ has made us alive and raised us up with Him; He bestowed unto us eternal life...how can we be dead?!

This is a deceit and falsehood!

These are the debris and rubble that make us look like tombs; yet, the tombs are “empty tombs”; they are void of death!

This is the Good News of resurrection to us. Let us believe it. Let us then be strengthened and with holy stubbornness and perseverance and with the patient endurance of the saints shake off the pile. This will be a continuous battle because every time we shake it off, the enemy will throw it on us again and again to make us believe that there is no alternative but to accept the state of death. But, NO and NO; we shall persevere and finally we shall triumph.

Here, we need to remember the words of the Lord describing the scribes and Pharisees saying that they are “like whitewashed tombs” (Matthew 23: 27). In fact,

the fallen nature has become like a tomb because death dominated it by the fall. The words of the Scripture imply that there are 3 different kinds of tombs:

- a. The tombs of the dead: that is, the people of the world, the unbelievers; they are the captives of the enemy.
- b. Whitewashed tombs: that is, the ministers who have the form of godliness but deny its power.
- c. Empty tombs: that is, the children of God when the enemy surrounds them with the pile up and filling up.

What is even more is that the Scriptures call the tomb of Christ “*a glorious place*”? “*...And His resting place shall be glorious...*” **Isaiah 11: 10!**

[In the Coptic translation, one of the oldest translations, this phrase reads: “his tomb shall be glorious”!]

Therefore, it will not only be that the pile is shaken off, but after we complete the battle of this shaking off and insist on completing it, we will find that the empty tomb will be transformed into “a place of glory”.

How?

Christ will come, according to His promise, and dwell in us with His glory (John 14: 21, 23). Thus, as the tomb of Christ in Jerusalem became the church of the Holy Sepulchre that many people visited and as a result their lives were blessed and transformed, we will also be a place of glory; everyone who comes across us and gets in touch with our lives, his life will also be transformed. Yes, Amen!

When we live like this, our lives will become “banners and candles” (as we see in the rituals of resurrection); the “banners of resurrection” guide and lead towards the Risen Christ; and the “candles of resurrection” light the darkness of this world. So, while the sun of the world sets (because of the darkness and economy of the enemy), the children of God shine by the Good News of resurrection.

“Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever.” **Daniel 12: 3**

2. The radiance and shine of resurrection and its work

With courage, endurance, and drawing strength from the grace of resurrection and the renewed proclamation of its Good News, the children of God complete their battle. After the battle is completed, the divine radiance and shine of resurrection, bearing the effective work of resurrection, comes to them. These radiance and shine of resurrection leads to the following:

+ Exposes the deceit and falsehood, as explained above.

+ Renews the hope: *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”* **1Peter 1: 3**

This living hope annuls and casts out the despair and frustration which is the plague of this generation. Statistics in America show that every 15 minutes, one person commits suicide amounting to 38,000 every year. The Living hope awakens the heart, by the grace of resurrection, drawing its attention to not accept the spirit of despair but to turn towards the Risen Christ in humility and trust in order to triumph in the battles of despair. This heart would thus know that despair and frustration do not please God but rather sadden the Spirit of God: *“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.”* **2Timothy 1: 7**

+ Restores and corrects the heart so that the curse of the end times would be annulled. Prophet Malachi says: *“And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.”* **Malachi 4: 6**

Isn't it very apparent that from generation to the next, we move far away from the spirit of the fathers and grandfathers? The fathers and grandfathers lived in the fear of God; they lived in faithfulness and obedience of the holy commandment; they endured suffering with patience and trust in the goodness of God and accepted them with thanksgiving; they lived a holy life that testified to their generation and witnessed to the love of God and His goodness and salvation for humanity.

Where do we stand today from all this? There is a lot of philosophical talk about freedom that eventually leads to dissoluteness; this inevitably leads to “the curse of the earth”. We can see that the scene is so prepared for the curse, but rather the curse is almost present in our generation. The resurrection keeps us in divine immunity and protection from this curse that is starting to prevail on earth causing lack of blessing in everything.

The question now would be:

How can we attain this holy radiance and shine of resurrection?

This requires:

- Worship with commitment, especially the liturgical Patristic worship according to what was handed down by the early church. This should be accompanied by obedience of the commandment and the continuous reading of and chewing on the word of God.

- The Living Hope and endurance in the battles against the deceit and shaking off the pile up of the empty tombs.
- Keeping oneself unspotted from the world (James 1: 27).
- Correcting the image of humanity through the work of redemption and resurrection. Thus, the broken manhood would be restored to commitment, responsibility, and chastity. Similarly, the distorted womanhood would be resorted and would thus no longer be exploited through the traps of the devil but rather serve God's purposes through its rich and distinct gift of giving.

3. Our new nationality by the resurrection

“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.” **Philippians 3: 20, 21**

If I have an Egyptian nationality, this means that I am certainly an Egyptian. And, if I have an American nationality, I am an American. What if the bible tells me that I have the heavenly nationality, according to the above reference?!

It thus means that I am certainly a heavenly person!!

This is the biblical revelation. Do we realise this? Do we live as such? In other words, do we live as travellers and sojourners, not attached to the earth and earthly matters, but rather passers-by to accomplish a commission and go back to our heavenly home?!

“So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.”

2Corinthians 5: 6 – 8

Woe to us, we have made our home on earth; we hold tight unto earthly ties and preoccupations; we became estranged from the Lord and from our heavenly home.

We need to remind ourselves that we only live physically on earth; yet, we have another place in the heavens: *“...and raised us up together, and made us alive together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus”* **Ephesians 2: 6.**

If I live as a sojourner and a traveller, I will realise that I will soon return home. I am only an ambassador on earth. Therefore, I shall complete my mission on earth while my heart is up there, even if my flesh was on earth. I should live, think, and behave as a heavenly being. The grace is with me and it enables me to do so because God never asks us to do something unless He had first granted us the grace and the

ability to do it. I do not wish to be imprisoned in earthly matters; I desire to be heavenly. My hometown constantly remains before my eyes attracting me upwards until I enter my home and dwell with the Lord!

Let us live a continuous paschal. We have gone through the paschal and it has made us cross over to a new point in the walk of life and the Kingdom; it has brought us to the release from the flesh and death to the life and the resurrection. [The Good News of the gospel is not only the forgiveness of sins, but also conquering death!] Bit by bit, the inner man is transfigured and the glory of Christ is seen in us!!

Let us listen to the words of Apostle Paul in this respect:

“If then we were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” **Colossians 3: 1 – 4**

4. Our responsibility and the mission of resurrection

On the night of the resurrection day, the risen Christ appeared to His disciples and told them “...*‘Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.’ And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’*” **John 20: 21, 22**

This is the breath of the resurrection, the breath of life that cannot be silenced nor remain barren without fruit.

Sometimes the words of the prophet Hosea to the old Israel apply to us: *“Israel empties his vine; he brings forth fruit for himself.”* **Hosea 10: 1**

+ Our vine is barren; it does not bring forth fruit; people cannot find a fruit in our vine which they can eat and live!

O Lord, visit Your vine! Dig around it, put fertilizers, and do not cut it down (refer to Luke 13: 6 – 9).

+ Our generation is in great need for those who would feed them the fruit of a vine that brings life and revives. Jesus said *“I am the vine, you are the branches”* **John 15: 5**. He seeks the fruits of the branches so that they would be offered to the world for healing and life.

+ There are many souls that are held captive by the evil one. These are souls that have inside them precious jewels and diamonds of God's gifts. The enemy fears them and hence he has surrounded them with death so that they may not find life and the precious jewels of the glory of God may not appear.

Who can proclaim to them the Good News of the resurrection saying "return to the stronghold, you prisoners of hope"? Who has taken you captive and slaves? Why did you not find the stronghold to be protected in it? That is enough, enough of the years of captivity and imprisonment. Today is a feast day. The Good News of the resurrection is for you for freedom and life.]

"Return to the stronghold, you prisoners of hope Even today I declare that I will restore double to you." **Zechariah 9: 12**

Isn't this the same cry of the prophet Isaiah?

"Get up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, you who bring good tidings, lift up your voice with strength, lift it up, be not afraid; say to the cities of Judah, 'Behold your God!' [Your God is risen; yes, He is risen!] Behold the Lord God shall come with a strong hand, and his arm shall rule for Him; Behold, His reward is with Him, and His work before Him. He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young."
Isaiah 40: 9 – 11

+ There is a lot that we can do even if it seems that there are no opportunities or doors for ministry (as the enemy sometimes suggests to us; this is actually one of his deceptions).

- The news of resurrection cannot be buried; the empty tomb of resurrection cannot remain piled up and filled up with earth.

- This generation is in great need to see living examples more than their need for words and preaching. Let us live the resurrection so that it may be incarnated and manifested in us!

- The battle is not only for our sake, but it is also for the sake of our generation. Let us therefore complete it with patience so that it may be accounted for us and for the generation.

God is declaring the same cry of His heart that was recorded by the prophet Ezekiel:

"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

Will we stand in the gap?!

*Will we build the walls (by the worship we learned, the mystical liturgical worship
whose effect extends to the heavens)?!*

Will the branches of our vine bear the fruits of life?!

*Will we become like candles that light in the darkness and annul the evil plans of the
enemy?!*

+

Let us shine by the grace of resurrection!

*If the sun is setting by the work of the enemy, we can shine by the work of Him who
was risen for us and in us.*

Christ is risen...Truly, He is risen.

Christos Anesti...Alithos Anesti.

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