

The Mystery of the Cross: the mystery of being lifted upwards

'And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself'

(John 12: 32)

The Great Lent

- **John 12: 20 - 36**

Now there were certain Greeks among those who came up to worship at the feast. Then they came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him, saying, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip came and told Andrew, and in turn Andrew and Philip told Jesus. But Jesus answered them, saying, "The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honour. "Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name." Then a voice came from heaven, saying, "I have both glorified it and will glorify it again." Therefore the people who stood by and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, "An angel has spoken to Him." Jesus answered and said, "This voice did not come because of Me, but for your sake. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself." This He said, signifying by what death He would die. The people answered Him, "We have heard from the law that the Christ remains forever; and how can You say, 'The Son of Man must be lifted up'? Who is this Son of Man?" Then Jesus said to them, "A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light."

As we are now coming towards the end of Lent and approaching the Passion Week, I want to speak about the Cross¹.

We have already heard a lot about the Cross and have understood many truths related to it. Yet, had we perceived all what we heard about the Cross deep within us, we surely would have been different and at a different spiritual point.

Why are we not at this point?

It is because we are missing an important point regarding the Cross. Today, I want to focus on this point.

I will focus on a verse which highlights the main point we want to focus on this year in relation to the Cross and that is: *'And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.'*

We all know that the Cross is death; it is freedom; it is forgiveness; and many other things. Yet, we may have never realised that the Cross has the power of drawing us upwards.

Why was Jesus crucified on a Cross? Why did He choose this particular way of dying?

Couldn't He have died like the martyrs and His blood would still be shed? Isn't He a sacrifice? The sacrifice could have been offered through various means. He could have been tortured, whipped, and then finally slain by the sword. He could have been treated like criminals and is beheaded in a public place. In this case He would have been in a position of reproach and shame (to bear our reproach); His blood would have been shed; and He would have suffered and endured many pains and passions.

Yet, He chose to be lifted up on the Cross and even the Cross itself was put on a high place, in Golgotha. Why is that?

¹ This talk was delivered to a group of beginner believers; hence, you may find some repetition in the course of the talk, the purpose of this was to help the listeners understand and absorb the truths presented.

It is because this is a divine economy that comprises a special mystery which we so much need to understand.

It is the same economy that made Moses lift up the serpent in the wilderness. When the people were bitten by the serpents, Moses made a bronze serpent and put it on a pole (Numbers 21: 9). Moses could have put the bronze serpent in front of the people, but he had actually lifted it up; he put it on a pole and told them to look at it; and whoever looked at it was healed.

The bronze serpent that healed the people who looked at it is a reference to the Cross.

So, why was Jesus lifted up?

Jesus Himself says: *'And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.'* Apostle John clarifies: *'this He said, signifying by what death He would die'*. This clearly shows that Jesus was here referring to being lifted up on the Cross. This means that Jesus is saying: *And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.*

This signifies that the Cross bears a special mystery of great importance and that is: the mystery of being lifted upwards, the mystery of being drawn and attracted to heaven; the mystery of being released from the ties and bondages of the earth and from the slavery of the earth.

Why do we often go to and fro in spiritual matters? Why do we take decisions regarding our spiritual life; yet, we soon lose them or fail to follow them? Why do we sometimes understand certain spiritual matters; yet, shortly after, we find that as though they were stolen from our minds and understanding?

The reason is that we have many ties to the earth. We are so much tied and bound to the earth. If we see ourselves in the spirit, we will find that each part of us is tied to the earth. This includes: our minds, feelings, will, skills, aptitudes, personalities, the way we see ourselves and accept ourselves, the way we see others and accept them, the way we view our ministry; every part of our soul is tied to the earth. As a result, it becomes very easy for the enemy to hook us.

Why was Jesus lifted up on the Cross? Why did He intend this method? Why did Moses lift up the bronze serpent?

It is because the people were bitten by the serpents. As the serpents crawl on the ground, they bite. It is as though Jesus is saying: *'As My people of the New Testament, your place is to be lifted up from the earth. In the visible realm, your feet are walking on the earth; but in the spirit, your spiritual feet should be lifted up. As a result, when the serpents come to bite, they will not be able to do so because you are lifted up'*.

Jesus was lifted up on the Cross to grant us the power of being drawn and lifted upwards; so that our spiritual feet would be lifted from the earth. Therefore, when the unseen serpents that bite try to come near our feet to bite them, they would fail to do so because our feet are not on the earth; they are lifted up.

The Cross comprises the mystery of being lifted up from the earth; the mystery of being drawn upwards.

Yet, this happens when we learn to bind ourselves to the Cross.

In Psalm 35: 4, we read: *'they looked to Him and were radiant, and their faces were not ashamed'*.

The Cross is lifted up; yet in our relationship with the cross, we look up once and look down away from the Cross another time; we continue to look up and down. Therefore, the serpents are constantly biting us. Yet, we do not realise that our eyes have dropped downwards to the earth until we notice the symptoms of the poison working in us. When one is bitten by a serpent and the poison goes into this person's blood, the person starts to develop symptoms like headache, vomiting, low blood pressure, and he may enter into a coma.

Similarly, when we fix our eyes on Him, we find that we live as strangers and sojourners in the world; we are watchful in the spirit; we are lifted up above earthly and material things; and we are putting everything on the altar of our obedience to God. This is because our eyes are fixed upon Him. The more our eyes are fixed on Him, our faces will not be ashamed; we will not be ashamed of our enemies as they will have nothing in us. However, what often happens is that our eyes do not remain upwards; they actually

drop downwards again. This happens while we are unaware; we often do not notice that our eyes have dropped downwards. But we suddenly notice some symptoms: vomiting, headache and coma –in the spiritual sense, of course. What is this? What is happening? These are the symptoms of spiritual toxicity; the poison that has entered. I was bitten again. Why is that? What has happened? My eyes looked downwards and when my eyes dropped, my feet dropped as well and touched the earth again; and so the serpents were able to reach me and I went back to my vomiting: *‘but it has happened to them according to the true proverb: “A dog returns to his own vomit,” and, “a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire”* (2Peter 2: 22).

We do not move on away from the things that hinder us; we do not move on in our spiritual life in accordance with the decisions we take; we go to and fro and falter in our spiritual walk. If we were to take one simple decision in our spiritual life and stick to it without regression; if we were to take a step and never go back in it; things would have been different. But, in fact we take many decisions every day, every week, and after every sermon; yet, we do not stick to them; we have not yet learned to watch over our decisions so that they may become not only a decision, but a conduct and a life. We have not learned to take the step in our path of following Christ and stand firm in it before taking the following step.

We cannot receive the power of upward attraction and lifting up of the Cross unless we first allow the Cross to do its work in the ties and bonds that we have.

We learn that the Cross is the altar on which Jesus was the Sacrifice and in the meantime He is the Priest serving His Sacrifice for our sake.

The Cross is an altar.

Have we learned to put all the matters that entangle us on the altar and never take them back?

Have we learned to put all our human and spiritual abilities on the altar; or, do we keep looking at them again and again?

Sometimes we like to look at our skills and abilities, whether the human or the spiritual; and we give them different designations like: spiritual desires and preoccupations or even human abilities for the sake of God's work and ministry.

Are we able to die to all these things?

Are we able to offer all as a sacrifice and see ourselves united with the Crucified one?

The more we do so, the more we will be released and unbound from all ties; everything will then be easy and we will be lifted upwards.

Have we put the stumbling block, i.e. the activity of the carnal mind, on the Cross, on the altar? This includes our human wisdom, the way we view things, our personal convictions, our human calculations and even our spiritual calculations.

Have we put the human wisdom on the altar? If we do so, we will be drawn upwards and we will receive the wisdom of the Spirit; we will be lifted up from the earth.

Man was born with the fallen nature. After receiving the mystery of life, the life in Christ, man will still have the fallen nature. If we give a chance to the new life, it will extend in us and the old corrupted nature will shrink: *'mortality will be swallowed up by life'* (2Corinthians 5: 4). But if we leave both natures to conflict, we will suffer a lot.

To clarify, let me explain this in a different way. I am a person who was born in this world. I am walking on earth; beneath me is the dust and above me is heaven. Beneath me is the earth that pulls me downwards, even lower than the dust; desiring to bring me to the grave, to hades, to darkness, to death. Above me is heaven that looks upon me and attracts me upwards to the light, to purity, to holiness, to freedom.

Do I truly long to be drawn upwards; or, will I just try to transform heavenly matters into spiritual aims, desires, and ministry purposes?

It should not be as such, according to the true conviction of the early fathers. Heaven should be a holy desire and longing inside me.

Do you know how the early fathers viewed ministry?

They viewed it as a natural process of giving, a stream of life that flows between my heart and heaven. The impact and reflection of this stream is one's ministry. The more abundant this stream is, the more the water one sprinkles around. The more the grace increases, the brighter is the shine that radiates on others. At the same time, the person offers the ministry as a sacrifice so that it would not have any authority over him or over his work; and for the sake of the people so that all relationships would be only in the love of the spirit. All would then be for His glory and all would be in peace.

Man is naturally in this conflict where the earth wants to pull him downwards while Christ wants to lift him upwards.

Christ came down to lift us up. He died to resurrect us. If I am not being lifted up, this means that I am restricting Christ's essential work for my sake.

At times, I may find that I am released; yet I get released for some time and then bound again. I get lifted up for some time and then I go down again. I take a step but I regress. Why is that? It is the earth and its ties that pull me downwards.

The solution is in the sacrifice, the mystery of the sacrifice in the Cross.

The Cross has numerous mysteries. One of them is the mystery of sacrifice.

There is also the mystery of being lifted up and drawn upwards.

However, I cannot be drawn upwards and experience this mystery unless I allow the Cross first to work in me the mystery of sacrifice, to cut off and slay the ties, the passions and desires, and all that binds me to the earth.

If I do not allow these ties to be cut off, I will suffer a lot because of them.

The earth will pull me downwards and this in turn will cause me to suffer much. This is because the earth has nothing but death, darkness, slavery, and the rottenness of the grave.

Also, as long as I am walking on the earth, whether I intend **it** or not, I will find myself looking at those around me who are also walking on the earth. The nature of the earth is not only that it pulls downwards, but it also pulls me towards the people around me. I

will find that I am looking at people wondering who is taller; who is bigger; who is greater; who is better; and so on. As a result, even the spiritual life becomes the subject of hidden and covered competition. If this happens, every grace will fade away because in this case my heart will not be seeking the grace for the glory of God, but I will also be seeking it for my own sake; my spiritual status; and spiritual competition.

On the other hand, if I am lifted up by the power of the Cross and if I have cut off all the ties that bind me to the earth, I will find that I am lifted above all these matters; they do not affect me; and so, I will find it very easy to take my place at the feet of everyone and be a servant for all because deep within me I am not competing with anyone. I am not seeking honour from anyone. I am not seeking a position or status in relation to anyone. I am a stranger; I am not from this earth; I am free from it and not bound to it. I am heavenly.

When Christ was risen, He *'raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus'* (Ephesians 2: 6). We became a heavenly people. As a result, I have no relation with the earth; there is no competition. I am a stranger in a way that makes me close in the spirit to everyone. I am a stranger to myself and to my soul with all its fluctuations. This makes me close to all people in the love of the spirit because I do not await or expect anything from anyone; I only offer love and peace. I offer peace and receive peace; I offer grace and receive grace; I lift up a prayer and receive the strength of prayer. I am a sojourner. I have no business with anyone nor do I want to benefit from anyone. I am free, I have freedom deep within me; I am unbound; my ties are cut off.

Apostle Paul calls the Cross: *'a stumbling block'*.

'But we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness' (1Corinthians 1: 23).

It is true; the Cross is *'foolishness'* for some people, as the Apostle says. If we try to explain the Cross, some may use their wisdom and say: *'but, why salvation should be done in such a way?'* It is *'foolishness'* for the wise. It is also true that the Cross is a stumbling block for the natural mind.

The Cross is '*a stumbling block*' and '*foolishness*'; but whoever receives this foolishness, will experience the grace in it; whoever accepts and receives this stumbling block, will be protected from the stumbling blocks that hinder the feet of many in following the Crucified one. Those who receive this will run and leap.

What hinders man in his spiritual walk?

The stumbling blocks in the way hinder him. In fact, the word '*stumbling block*' means '*the thing that hinders walking*'. If I accept the stumbling block of the Cross, no stumbling block will come my way because the Cross will make me a stranger to people and to myself. Being a stranger does not mean not wanting to talk to people, but it is an estrangement from human conflicts and this in turn makes my heart open with infinite love to everyone. No stumbling block can come my way because I am lifted up from the earth; the earth has no gravity or attraction for me.

What are the things that hinder a person in his spiritual walk?

The earthly passions and desires are the things that hinder.

What are the passions and lusts?

They are the serpents: there is a serpent of uncleanness, another of anger, another of pride, another of cunningness, another of excessive energy, another of laziness and being lax, and so on. These serpents await me on the way. I may be coming out of a spiritual meeting having fervency and fire in my spirit and a desire to pray as soon as I arrive home. Yet, because I am still walking on the earth and the Cross has not done its work in me, I find that on my way home, the serpent of laziness bites me. So, before reaching my home, I feel I am sleepy and I have a sense of dullness and lack of fervency. On another occasion, I am coming out of the spiritual meeting full of peace and comfort; and then the serpent of anger draws near me. As a result, I find that while I was still in the churchyard I spoke with anger to someone and lost the grace I had. On another instance, I can again be coming out of a spiritual gathering and the serpent of uncleanness passes by. As a result, I start to wonder what is happening to me; I want to be pure; I was coming from a totally different atmosphere; I was in heaven; why is this

happening to me; why are all these unclean thoughts? The problem is that I have chosen to walk on the dust, on the earth.

The Crucified One is groaning and calling upon us from Golgotha, from the high place of Golgotha saying: *'And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself'*.

He is stretching out His Hands to us saying: *'Stretch your hands towards me. I desire to lift you up from the dust. I am the true bronze serpent that takes away the poison that has come into humanity. I desire to grant you true immunity.'*

After that, the serpents will try to put their poison and the poison will not be effective. The serpents will look at one another with astonishment wondering why this person is not affected by their poison.

Yet, if I am not lifted up and am still walking on the earth, I would be the subject of ridicule by the serpents. I can be praying the Psalms, for example, and a serpent would come and find me praying; it would say: 'I will wait, only half an hour or so and he will finish prayer, and then I will attack him'. I finish prayer and the serpent comes and bites me; and so I feel heavy and lazy. Maybe I had wanted to study because I had exams; yet, I would feel unable to do anything. At this moment, another serpent may come and bite me and so I feel a sense of despair and think that there is no hope of passing the exams this year. Then I would start to say: 'Why is God forsaking me?' Another time, I may be praying the Psalms and another cunning serpent comes and says: 'Does he think he is good and clever and is praying?' It then bites me and I find that many negative thoughts are attacking me in prayer. So I get surprised and say: 'Why is this happening even when I am praying?' I may then say: 'Never mind; it is always said that one can be attacked while praying.' However, the problem is that my eyes are not fixed on the Crucified One while I am praying. He is the One who lifts upwards; yet, I am praying while my eyes are looking at the dust which pulls downwards.

The Crucified One is stretching out His hands truly desiring to lift us upwards.

Enough of the spiritual walk that is on the earth; it is not for the redeemed; it is not for those who have been washed by the blood of the Crucified Christ; it is not for those who have been baptised and washed deep within and have become a holy people.

This should be the subject of our spiritual diligence. We need to take it seriously with all our hearts knowing that there is this conflict between heaven with its heavenly desires and the earth with its ties and gravity. Yet, will I fix my eyes on Him or am I going to look at Him for an instance and drop it downwards for another instance?

If my eyes look downwards, the serpents will bite me. However, if my eyes are fixed on Him, the serpents can still blow their poison; but, the poison will not affect me. The serpents will look at one another in astonishment saying that this person is blunt and that he is not affected by anything. This will be because life is overflowing in me; the immunity from the true bronze serpent is in me. Therefore, when the serpents blow their poison, its effect is immediately annulled. When Paul was bitten by the serpent (Acts 28), he shook it off into the fire and suffered no harm to the extent that the natives said that he was a god. It was actually the work of Paul's God.

We are called to live as heavenly people preoccupied with the things above: *'If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God'* (Colossians 3: 1).

What is the state of our hearts? Do we have the desire to live as heavenly people, looking upwards, fixing our eyes on heavenly matters, and having holy desires?

It is very easy to cut off the things that tie us to the earth. It is very easy to put them on the altar. It is easy to fix our desires upwards. It is not a difficult matter; it is within our reach. God never puts impossible things before us.

Yet, the deep question is: What is our attitude towards the ties?

God had surely spoken to us about these ties several times. The Holy Spirit had surely drawn our attention to them several times whether in prayer, while reading the word of God, or in a sermon. Despite this we do not want to leave them and cut them off completely. Though we have often experienced that this pulling down of the earth brings us nothing but trouble, destruction, conflict, and humiliation, we still keep going to and fro in taking the step of letting go of the ties and allowing them to be cut off. We often long for these ties and have nostalgia towards them.

Jesus says: 'And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.'

The Cross comprises pain, suffering, bleeding and being slain; yet, all these are for the sake of being lifted upwards; having fellowship in His glory; being able to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt us. It is for the sake of receiving true victory over the world. Jesus said: *'Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world'* (John 16: 33). In 1John 5: 19, we read that *'the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one'*. Therefore, as long as I am tied to its earth, it will always pull me towards wickedness –since it lies under the sway of the wicked one. Yet, if I am cut off its ties, I will overcome the world. Jesus completed this victory for our sake so that we can overcome the world: *'In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world'* (John 16: 33).

These matters are truly very simple, but the decisions are very fine/delicate/precise.

Am I willing to go deep within myself and find out what is hindering me?

What is it that is so valuable to me? Is it my status, my passions, my wisdom, my relationships, my emotions, my skills, my personality?

Am I not able to put them on the altar?

In fact, our understanding of the altar is incomplete and confused. We think that putting these matters on the altar is the most difficult thing to do; it is so gloomy like a funeral; we need someone to console us and strengthen us telling us that this will turn out for our benefit. This is a wrong understanding of the altar.

In fact, the altar is a divine bank.

This divine bank is actually what has granted me the abilities I have, whether human or spiritual.

I can have feelings, passions, affections or emotions towards others, towards other servants of the Lord, or towards those I minister to; but, I give them different designations like: brotherly love, tenderness, compassion, and so on. However, wrong fine lines can enter into all these kinds of emotions through which I try to fill my needs one way or another.

God was the One who has given me my abilities, my emotions, my wisdom, and so on.

Why did He give me these things?

Did He give them to me so that one day He would meet me at the altar and take them from me?

Could this be God? Could this be the Loving and Good Lord, the Lover of mankind?

How come we allow the enemy to confuse the spiritual steps we take and fill them with bitterness? Why do we allow that? It is not befitting the Lord to take a spiritual step with bitterness; it should be taken with pleasure.

Let us listen to the words of the bride in the book of Song of Songs:

'I have taken off my robe; how can I put it on again? I have washed my feet; how can I defile them? My beloved put his hand by the latch of the door, and my heart yearned for him. I arose to open for my beloved, and my hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with liquid myrrh, on the handles of the lock. I opened for my beloved, but my beloved had turned away and was gone. My heart leaped up when he spoke' (Song of Songs 5: 3 – 6).

Similarly, Jesus would come to me and say:

'My son, do you want to follow me? I know that at the moment you want me and at the same time you want your passions. You want My matters and your matters. I want to show you My hands that were crucified for your sake. Can you see the nails? Can you see the blood? What are you going to do towards this? Enough, my son, I am stretching out My hands to you. I am not showing you My suffering to break your heart; not at all; I am only stretching out My hands to hold you. Yet, My hands always have the nails; this is its distinctive feature. Do you wish to put your hands in Mine?'

I would then reply:

'I will try, Lord. It is very difficult. Help me; I will try.'

But, as in the case of the bride in the Song of Songs, I open, but *'my hands drip with myrrh'*.

When Jesus sees this, He would say:

'No, my son, I cannot burden you; my compassion would not bear it'.

And so, He would turn away and leave:

'I opened for my beloved, but my beloved had turned away and was gone'.

After He leaves, I will go through the same thing that the bride of the Song of songs went through:

'My heart leaped up when he spoke' [NKJV].

'My heart sank when he turned away' [LEB].

'What have I done? I am sorry, Lord. Am I opening with bitterness! Actually, going with Him is my freedom, my dignity, my security, and my lifting upwards. This is His Hand that is stretched out to me to lift me up. Am I putting my hands in His hands with bitterness, with myrrh? Why am I doing so? Do I like the bitterness of the earth and dislike the sweetness of His hands?!

Jesus is not ready to put His hands in the hands of anyone who is doing so with bitterness.

Because of this, we stretch our hands a lot; we cry out a lot; and we lift up a lot of prayers; but we do not step forward because bitterness precedes our prayers and the stretching of our hands.

God gave me my skills and abilities, my mind and emotions, my human and spiritual personality, my relationships, my talents, and all these things. Why did He give them to me? He granted them to me even before I was created. It is written: *'My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skilfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written'* (Psalm 139: 15, 16).

He knows me and sees me even when I was in the lowest parts of the earth.

He gave me all this because this will be a source of joy for me, for Him, and for others.

I may now say: 'Well, let Him leave these things for me; I want to enjoy them.'

The problem is that at the moment all these things are mingled with corruption; and so, if I use them and minister with them, they will spring bitterness for me and for others. As a result, the heart of Jesus will agonise.

So, what can I do?

Jesus would say:

'Can you put these things in my Hands? I will wash them for you. I will restore them all to you and even add more to them. These are the first-fruits that you are offering; you will receive blessing. Will you give them to Me? You should do this with your full free will. Will you put them on the altar?'

Mystery of God's Altar

In fact, His altar does not steal or rob anything; it does not turn these things into ashes because they are actually from Him and contain His nature. His altar only eats up the impurities; it purifies. His altar takes my emotions with their conflicts, my thoughts with their anxieties, my selfishness, my status, my skills and abilities, and my relationships. He takes all these things and He corrects, purifies, realigns; and washes them, adding to them a supernatural dimension.

He then tells me:

'My son, for everything that you had, there was a divine supernatural parallel that I wanted to grant you; but, it was not possible to grant you the supernatural while you were in your earthly corruption. However, when My mystery works in you and purifies you; when My light illuminates you deep within; and when My Spirit sanctifies your impurities, it is then that I can make every natural gift you have become supernatural.'

As a result, instead of the human wisdom, the spiritual wisdom will settle and dwell in the vessel of the human wisdom and the intellect. Instead of the human emotions and conflicts, I will have overflowing love that flows to others; it will be pure, true, and sacrificial. Instead of my human plans and entanglements, I will desire His will at any cost because there is nothing better or sweeter than His will. Whatever the approach or

the road or the cost to it, my heart has become inclined to it. Instead of my abilities that are so limited, the divine and supernatural will come upon them and astound me.

Think of the men of God of the 20th century, in the history of our church, who have left a deep imprint on our current history. What qualifications and certificates did they have? Some were simple people; but, they received the divine and supernatural gifts from above.

Think of Fr. Youstos, for example; think of the monastery of St. Anthony where he stayed; there were surely many monks in this monastery who had higher degrees, but unfortunately their names died with them.

Fr Youstos learned to put everything on the altar; and so, all was restored to him with a divine and supernatural dimension. When he gave advice to people, they were deeply touched and transformed. He sometimes appeared simple and even a fool; yet, this foolishness had transformed and delivered many; it made wonders that shook the whole being of those who met him and made many experience the divine mercy and nearness of God. After one sees these wondrous works, he would know straightaway that these are not human abilities; and so he would be moved from deep within him towards God.

On the other hand, there are other ministers who have great human wisdom. They can give advice and direction to someone and say very wise and good words; but after a short time, the person forgets all the advice given. Isn't this representative of the personal human wisdom which we clothe with a spiritual robe?

Yet, there were those who were considered fools; they received the divine and the supernatural; they traded with the talents granted to them and brought multiple fruits.

Despite this, we still like the human wisdom, the lusts and the passions and we still do not want to be cut off these earthly things! We still go to and fro 100 times in every spiritual step or decision that we should take; and even after all this hesitation and fluctuation, we take it only partially; we give ourselves the option of going back in the decision! We worry about losing a handful of dust!

And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.

Are we able to put all on the altar and feel secure? Shall we decide to do so?

Believe me, the things that we are worried to put on the altar are the cause of our humiliation and bitterness. If we put them on the altar, we will become free; all will then be restored to us and more shall be added to it.

Why are we holding tight unto these things? Is it to use these skills in ministry? Is this really true or are we fooling ourselves?

In fact, what He will give us will be much more than what we will leave and lay on the altar. What He will give us is truly astounding. Our God is rich and wondrous and He reveals to us His wondrous works so that we may declare them (Psalm 71: 17). This phrase: *'declare Your wondrous works'*, is repeated numerous times in the book of Psalms. This highlights that the people of God are requested to give God a chance to do wondrous works so that they can declare them.

What kind of wondrous works are we going to proclaim?

We limit ourselves to experiences like: 'I was standing at the bus stop and in only 5 minutes the bus that I needed arrived. Oh, God is Great and wondrous!'

However, the people of God, the children of Israel would say: 'We were standing in front of the Red Sea and our wondrous God divided it, made land, and we were able to cross; and those who tried to cross the Red Sea after us drowned in it.'

Which is a greater and more wondrous experience, crossing the Red Sea or the bus stop experience?!

We consider ourselves clever ministers who want to minister to the youth and deliver them from their problems. However, we do not want to admit that we also have problems like those we minister to; the only difference is that our problems are of a different kind.

We actually have many conflicts and problems because we choose to follow the Crucified One without being crucified. We choose to follow the Prince of Life without leaving behind/letting go of the death that is inside us: *'He trampled death by death'*.

Alas of this kind of following!

The problem of those who live in the world is easy because they are not following anything; they are just following their passions and what is in their mind. But there is a real problem for those who want to follow God and the world together, those who want to gain/secure both God and the world. Then they justify their actions and give them different designations to make them seem correct and to justify the things they do.

However, there are some who have set their hearts on the way and nothing can hinder or stop them. They put on the altar everything that hinders them. Even the things that may seem hindering, they still put on the altar and get them out of their way. If they have put on the altar something that is good and not hindering, it will be restored to them in a multiplied way. Yet, if the thing was truly hindering, it would be removed from their way; and so, they would be released and no longer hindered by anything.

The Cross is the altar which can help us to get rid of all hindrances and it also discerns and separates the genuine from the false. I do not need to use my wisdom or calculations; the altar does this discerning for me. Let me leave and put on the altar. If what I put on the altar is death, I will rid of it; and if it is good, it will be purified, washed, and restored to me and more will be added to it.

If I have an undivided heart, I will walk without staggering, full of trust in the Lord.

Let us have this heart and this steadfast face: *'I have set My face like a flint, and I know that I will not be ashamed'* (Isaiah 50: 7).

The Cross is the altar on which we need to put all our matters; so that we may be unbound of them and be released; and then, whatever we need shall be restored to us and more shall be added to it. This is the work of the Cross. *And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.* It is the Cross that helps me get rid of my struggles and conflicts which are false.

I was talking about the wondrous works. I am not referring here to the wondrous works on the personal level, as was the case with some of the men of God –as mentioned earlier; but I am referring to the wondrous works on the corporate level.

If we give God a chance to do even a small wondrous work, what do you think the response or the result would be?

Thousands will come to God, not few (as we see in our ministry at the moment).

What happened when the people crossed the Red Sea?

The nations of the earth went to them after 40 years and told them: *'since the day we heard that you crossed the Red Sea, our hearts melted within us; and over the past 40 years we have been so terrified'* (Joshua 2 : 10,11).