

The Spiritual Family (2)

Edifying one another

Readings

'Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing' (1Thessalonians 5: 11).

'Therefore comfort one another with these words' (1Thessalonians 4: 18).

'Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching' (Hebrews 10: 24).

The bible tells us that this is our responsibility towards one another: to edify one another; to comfort one another; to consider one another; and to exhort one another.

When we carry out our responsibility towards one another, we will find that we are receiving more of the gifts of God through the various channels. For example, *in one's home*, one will find that the Holy Spirit is closer and more present while praying on his own; *in Church*, we will find that every time we receive Holy Communion, we receive spiritual nourishment and are revived more than before; *in the spiritual meetings and small retreats*, we will find that more of the divine power and grace are being released. This is due to the fact that we are being prepared and are carrying out our responsibility; and so, we are given more grace: *'The generous soul will be*

made rich, and he who waters will also be watered himself (Proverbs 11: 25).

Some practical comments that can help us carry out this role of edifying one another:

In spiritual circles/families in general, when people are at a certain stage in the spiritual growth, what often happens is that people sometimes edify one another while at other times they hinder one another; at times encourage but at other times discourage or frustrate. This often happens in an unintentional or unplanned way; things happen by chance.

For example, one meets his brother who is in a state of despair or frustration and on that day the other brother is encouraged and lifted up; and so, he helps and edifies his brother. Yet, on another day, they meet together and they are both frustrated and they exchange their frustration and despair, saying things like: *'yes, you are right; I do not know why things are so distressing; why the leaders of the meetings are not paying attention or helping us; yes, you are right; I feel so discouraged and distressed.'* As a result, they both discourage one another.

When people are close to each other, they can continue like this: at times lifting up one another while at other times discouraging one another, like a wave that goes up and down.

Therefore, we need to be awake and watchful in this matter: *'that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him'* (1Thessalonians 5: 10).

How can we carry out this role towards one another? How can we edify one another?

It is important not only to know the principles, but also to be handed down the practical steps to live in accordance to the principles. We know that we should edify one another and so we try to apply this principle, but if we are not handed down the practical steps of walking in accordance to this principle, we may go back to our old ways.

What are the practical steps that we need to know and be vigilant on so that we can carry out this role and do it steadily –not do it at times and revert to its contrary at other times?

There are 3 important practical points in this respect:

We need to know that we are human vessels that are different from each other.

- A. We are different in our entrances, that is, the door or key to our inner being.
- B. We are different in how we are affected by things and in our receptions and responses.
- C. We are different in how we are used by God.

One should be aware of this when he talks to his brothers/sisters, listens to them, and looks at them.

As a spiritual family, like any physical family, it is healthy to *consider one another*. In any family, it is natural to know if a member of the family is ill, healthy, tired, or upset. However, considering one another or observing the state of one another can sometimes edify and at other times can be negative or non-constructive –if we do not do this in the right way.

Sometimes, I look at the one sitting next to me in the meeting and I find that he is so touched by what he is hearing and praying fervently while I feel

cold and indifferent; so I wonder what is wrong and why I am indifferent, not feeling anything. I may wonder if the problem is in me or in the one next to me. As a result, my soul may shut off to the message. If I look around me in such a way, I may actually close the gate/door of my soul.

As we know, the soul has certain gates that can open and shut. These gates and entrances of the soul should be controlled by the Holy Spirit.

St Gregory of Nazianzus, once said: *'Yesterday I resorted to silence as I was immersed in my contemplations; yet, today I am unable to be silent because the Spirit of God is playing tunes on my violin and I desire to proclaim them.'* He then continues to say: *'whether in silence or in words, the Spirit of God controls my lips; He opens or closes them according to His will.'*

The lips are the natural door of the mouth. When the Holy Spirit controls the opening and closing of this door, things will be different. One may feel that he does not want to speak or see people; he wants to be on his own; he even does not want to pray with his lips; he wants to pray silently in his heart.

As there are doors for the mouth, there are also doors for the heart as it is written: *'Behold, I stand at the door and knock'* (Revelation 3: 20).

It is also written: *'Open for me, my sister, my love, My dove, my perfect one'* (Song of Songs 5: 2). This clearly shows that the soul has gates or doors. It also means that the soul can shut its doors.

We should also learn that one should not mould himself in accordance to the form of his brothers and sisters. The most difficult lesson, yet the most important one in a spiritual family like ours, is that when we consider one another in order to encourage and edify one another, we should not

compare ourselves with each other nor judge each another. Do not look at your brother or sister and say why I am not like them because God edifies us in different ways. God may be edifying one person, starting from the head to the feet; while with another person, God can start from the feet to the head. So while God may be working on the area of the mind in one person, He may be working on the area of the feet of another, and on a different area in a third; and so on -building up and sanctifying these different areas.

The soul is like a house that is being built or a field that is being ploughed and cultivated (1 Corinthians 3:9). This refers to the inner spiritual building.

Because the Holy Spirit works in each person in an area different from the other at a given time, each one will react differently to people and situations and to the spiritual messages we hear. So, for example, we can have a talk about helping the poor and sick people; one can be touched and moved immensely and the other may feel nothing at all. This latter person may then think that he suffers from lack of love towards others; but in fact this is not true. We are different and the Holy Spirit works in each person in an area different from the other; and so we react and respond differently.

The point is that we are human vessels with different patterns and forms. The true work of the Holy Spirit also has different ways and stages.

Therefore, when Peter and John were looking at each other and Peter said: *'what about this man'*, Jesus replied: *'what is that to you? You follow Me'* (John 21: 22). This means that if you will look at your brother to be encouraged, then, this is good. But if you will look at him and get confused,

then turn your eyes to Me, to Jesus whom you follow. Are your eyes on God whom you follow or on your fellow brother?!

Again I want to highlight that we are different in the entrance to our being; in the way we are affected and influenced; and in the way we are being used by God.

Practically this manifests as follows:

We may be in a spiritual meeting and a certain message is delivered. At that time, the Holy Spirit would be working on the mind of some; they may not necessarily be intelligent people but maybe they have a problem in the area of the mind, maybe God will use them through their mind, or maybe they have certain circumstances that adversely affected their minds.

For some people, their entrance is through the mind; they are influenced and they react and respond by their minds. They can easily get confused, perplexed and may have many questions. Yet when this area is sanctified by the work of the Holy Spirit, their mind gets illuminated and when these people speak, others around them receive light and things become clear.

At the same time, there are others whose entrance is the emotions and the Holy Spirit starts to work on the area of their emotions. When you speak to these people, they spiritually stir your heart.

Those of the mind do not stir your emotions, but when they speak, the listeners find light and things become clear. So, there are words that illuminate and words that stir; words that are like a lamp and words that are like music or like a heater that brings warmth.

Because everyone has a different door or entrance to his/her being, after hearing the message in the meeting, each one responds differently.

One will hear the message and it will make their feet move in the will of God. Another will feel that he needs to repent deeply and have compassion towards others. Another will receive light and start to understand, things become clear and are put in place after having been mixed and confused. We will all be hearing each other praying and each one will be responding differently: one is repenting, one is weeping, and one is thanking and praising the Lord; and so on.

If we are not aware of this matter that we are different in how we are influenced and how we respond, we can be confused or we can even judge the prayers of our brothers and sisters. Also because we are different in how we are influenced and in our reception and perception of things, each one will hear the prayer and perceive or respond to it differently. Therefore, we need to understand this important matter and not judge one another.

However, it is still important to learn to discern the spiritual atmosphere of the meeting and the prayers, but without being judgmental. One may be praying fervently because at this particular point he is being edified and built in his viscera and emotions and this is suitable for him and is edifying him and helping him to grow.

Judging can hinder me and hinder those around me.

The Holy Spirit is the perfect builder and the perfect architect. He is the One who knows my talents and He is the One who knows the areas that are messed up in my inner being and which need restoration.

Therefore, the *second* important point is to know that we are different in our *perception and responses*.

Thirdly, we are different in how we are being used by God. Some of us can speak in the meetings while others may not speak much nor even pray out loud in the meeting. Those who are quiet or who do not speak may be judged negatively by others or they themselves may think negatively of themselves. This quiet person may think that he was not responsive to the message, for example, and so he could not pray; or that he was unable to share in the discussion. This is the negative thinking and judging¹.

However, the reality is that God is using one to speak; another to summarise the ideas; a third to connect things; and so on. Each has a role and is being used differently by God. So, there is no problem in the one who is quiet; the Holy Spirit is not working in the area of speaking at that particular time. This person has something else, another gift that the Holy Spirit is working on and is using and which is parallel and not inferior to what his brothers and sisters have².

The Holy Spirit shows no favouritism or partiality (Romans 2: 11); He distributes gifts to all. So, you have a gift, which may not be to speak in the meeting; may be you have another gift which is *'learning'* and you may have a watchful *observing eye*; an eye that looks not to criticise, but looks with the approach that *'this is my family'*: the shame of one is the shame of all and the blessing of one is the blessing of all³. Based on this approach and understanding, this person will look with love and care, observing those who speak and those who listen. He then writes down notes and prays; and then, he can go and share these observations with his brothers and sisters.

¹ Romans 14:4

² 1 Corinthians 12:4,18

³ 1 Corinthians 12:26

So, one can be speaking and praying; yet the blessing of his speech and prayers comes from the prayers of his other brother who is silent while praying from within.

However, if this person looks and criticises, saying why not do this or do that; or, I do not like this or that, this will have negative results. By this, the person will have come out of the family and is judging and complaining. This actually hinders one's fellowship with his brothers and sisters and with the Holy Spirit. It also hinders his edification and the edification of his brothers and sisters because we are all being built together as one unit.

The building and edification of the individual adds to the rest of the family and the edification and building of the family reflects on the individual person. This is because we are all members in one body and are connected together⁴.

To sum up, we are different in: our entrances; the way we respond and are affected by things, and the way we are being used by God. Therefore, it is not correct to look at each other and criticise or judge one another. But we should encourage one another and rejoice in the variety among us⁵.

Each one is unique; yet, we are united together. We are one unit with variety and uniqueness. This is the mystery of God: three Persons who are united; and we are created on this image, the image of God.

Practically, if we are in a meeting or in a ministry together, we should know that one can be edified in an unseen way and that one can be praying out loud while the other is also responding but praying in his heart because he feels that if he speaks out loud he can be distracted by the people listening.

⁴ 1 Corinthians 12:12

⁵ 1 Thessalonians 5:11

We should also know that the Holy Spirit is working in different areas in each person. So, today one can be observing with his eyes and not saying anything; yet, tomorrow he is the one who will be speaking and the one who used to speak will be the one who prays silently in his heart for the ministry.

We will continue like this until we grow and are built together and our image is completed into the image of Christ: *'My little children, for whom I labour in birth again until Christ is formed in you'* (Galatians 4: 19).

Here, the apostle is labouring in birth for the sake of a Christian Church. He is not in labour pain for the sake of unbelievers to be born in Christ. This is another kind of labour.

There are different kinds of labour. *'For as soon as Zion was in labour, she gave birth to her children'* (Isaiah 66: 8). Here, Zion is in labour to bring unbelievers to the real faith as people of God.

So, there are 2 kinds of labour: for the unbelievers to be born in the Church and the faith in Christ; and for the believers so that Christ may be formed in them.

When we grow more in the spirit, we will understand each other more and will be balanced in our reactions, understanding that each one responds differently because the Holy Spirit works in different areas in each person at a given time.

To conclude this talk, I want to highlight that our responsibility and role is to edify one another. Yet we need to understand this role in the right way and understand that we are different human vessels and not allow the

enemy to enter through making each one compare himself with others or making one feel that he is bad or there is something wrong in him.

We are different and this is our glory; we have manifold gifts and variety. We have great uniqueness; yet we are united and in harmony in one Spirit and one Kingdom work.

Some final remarks:

Because we are different vessels/patterns in our form, entrances and responses as we have just explained, when we start the Kingdom work together, one can feel more comfortable with some people more than others because their form and pattern are closer to his. Also, the Holy Spirit will be working on different areas; so with some the work will be on the mind, others on the viscera and emotions or compassions, others on the feet or the area of moving. As a result, one will also feel more comfortable with some people than others; for example, an active person versus a quite person.

If there is an inner spiritual work and continuous spiritual growth and one spiritual vision, this means that all sectarianism dissolves.

It is better to be close and in oneness with 2 or 3 people than to be on my own. If one is on his own, he can easily be lost or broken and no one will even be aware. So, it is not wrong for 2 or 3 to be standing together and be linked together spiritually⁶. Yet, they need to have a correct vision of this matter and that this is only a transitory stage or an interim which should lead to an all-inclusive unity with the whole family which has the manifold

⁶ Ecclesiastes 4:9,10

variety. They should not settle into being comfortable with each other and leave it at this stage.

Certain things may be easy for one person but difficult for others; so if it is easy for one, he should not look and criticise others for not moving with the same pace. One's comfort should not be at the expense of his brothers and sisters. Also we should move in these steps gradually and slowly but steadily.