

WOUNDED BY LOVE



The Father, who is eternally the Source of the Son and the Holy Spirit, creates all things and redeems them through the Son; he sanctifies and perfects them through the Holy Spirit. The entire creation is thus governed by the Triune God. (Fr. Dr. V.C. Samuel)



THE DIVINE ECONOMY

The liturgical Calendar Year of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church is divided into six periods:

1. From Koodos Etho Sunday to Yeldo
2. From Yeldo (Birth) to Kothine
3. From Kothine (water made into wine) to Kymtha
4. From Kymtha (Resurrection) Sunday to Pentecost
5. From Pentecost to Sleeba
6. From Sleeba (Feast of the Cross) to Koodos Etho

As a remembrance and a means of union with Christ, the liturgical year becomes a source of grace¹. With its succession of feasts and fasts it commemorates on the one hand events in the life of our Lord, His Mother, St. John the Baptist and also all those men, women and children who have achieved sanctity. Each feast brings into focus a special aspect and meaning of the divine order. The feasts of the saints, beginning with those of the Theotokos and ending with those of the most recently glorified members of the Church “celebrate a special grace that flows from Christ, for their sanctity is but an aspect, a shining ray of the holiness of Christ” (Fr. Lev Gillet). The festal calendar is a result of continuous development. Begun in Christian antiquity, it is *always* “in progress.” Each age adds to it its own significant ecclesiastical events and its own martyrs and witnesses of the faith, who in the purity of their hearts have seen the invisible God as in a mirror, and through whom divine grace has richly flowed to us.

As Father Lev Gillet has written, “***In the liturgical year we are called to relive the whole life of Christ:*** from Christmas to Pascha, from Pascha to Pentecost, we are exhorted to unite ourselves to Christ in his birth and in his growth, to Christ suffering, to Christ dying, to Christ in triumph and to Christ inspiring His Church. ***The liturgical year forms Christ in us,*** from His birth to full stature of the perfect man.”

We have entered the second period of the Liturgical calendar year; from Yeldo to Kothine.

Yeldo perunal can also be understood through the words of Mar Philexenos of Mabbug, as— “God who made Adam in the beginning outside his personality, has now recreated nature of man in himself. This is a mystery which we confess by faith, and not by reason.” ‘Yeldo perunal’ as known in the Indian Orthodox Church is (in the words of St. Gregory of Nazianzus), the celebration of coming of God to man that we might go forth, or rather (for this is the more proper expression) that we might go back to God -that putting off the old man, we might put on the New; and that as we died in Adam, so we might live in Christ, being born with Christ and crucified with Him and buried with Him and rising with Him.”.



But, for the world Christmas is celebrated on December 25 and is both a sacred religious holiday and a worldwide cultural and commercial phenomenon. For two millennia, people around the world have been observing it with traditions and practices that are both religious and secular in nature. Christians celebrate Christmas Day as the anniversary of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, a spiritual leader whose teachings form the basis of their religion. Popular customs include exchanging gifts, decorating Christmas trees, attending church, sharing meals with family and friends and, of course, waiting for Santa Claus to arrive.

Sadly, this kind of practice is seen in many of our Orthodox Christian households too. On the day of Christmas, we get up early in the morning and attend the church. We come back from the liturgy and have delicacy food with our family and friends because for us it a great day, a joyful occasion; to get together with our near and dear ones and have the best time and hoard up great memories rather than commemorating the day to heal our soul. The Church observes a 25 day fast before Christmas (the Nativity Fast) which has become an option for many in today’s times. Rather than observing the fast *to practice in progression* to rid ourselves of the earthly needs and wants and through prayer and charity renew our faith and relationship to God and others, we chose to spend these days like any other day running behind wants and desires that never satiate. In the midst of such occupations and celebrations we fail to understand the spiritual reality that God became man, so that we become like God. We forget the actual reason

¹ Liturgical Calendar, Ahmedabad Diocese

for the season. To such a celebration, St. Gregory of Nazianzus counsels,

“Therefore let us keep the Feast, *not* after the manner of a heathen festival, but after a godly sort; not after the way of the world, but in a fashion above the world; not as our own, but as belonging to Him Who is ours, or rather as our Master's; not as of weakness, but as of *healing*; not as of creation, but of *re-creation*.

And how shall this be? Let us not adorn our porches; nor arrange dances, nor decorate the streets; let us not feast the eye, not enchant the ear with music, nor enervate the nostrils with perfume, not prostitute the taste, nor indulge the touch, those roads that are so prone to evil and entrances for sin; let us not be effeminate in clothing soft and flowing, whose beauty consists in its uselessness, nor with the glittering of gems or the sheen of gold or the tricks of color, belying the beauty of nature, and invented to do despite unto the image of God. Not in rioting and drunkenness, with which are mingled, I know well, chambering and wantonness, since the lessons which evil teachers give are evil.

Let us not appraise the bouquet of wines, the kickshaws of cooks, the great expense of unguents; and let us not strive to outdo each other in temperance, *and this while others are hungry and in want, who are made of the same clay and in the same manner*.

Let us leave all these to the Greeks² and to the pomp and festivals of the Greeks. But we, the object of whose adoration is the Word, if we must in some way have luxury, *let us seek it* in word, and in the Divine Law, and in histories; especially such as are the origin of this Feast; that our luxury may be akin to and not far remove from Him Who has called us together. Or do you desire (for today I am your entertainer) that I should set before you, my good guests, the story of these things as abundantly and as nobly as I can, that you may know how a foreigner can feed the natives of the land, and a rustic the people of the town, and one who cares not for luxury those who delight in it,

and one who is poor and homeless those who are eminent for wealth?

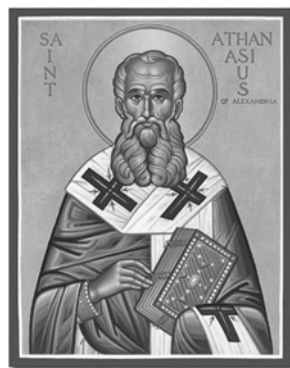
*We will begin from this point; and let me ask of you who delight in such matters to **cleanse your mind and your ears and your thoughts**, since our discourse is to be of God and Divine; that when you depart, you may fade not away. And this same discourse shall be at once both very full and very concise, that you may neither be displeased at its deficiencies, nor find it unpleasant through wearisomeness.”.*

So true to the words of St. Gregory which was said centuries ago is very relevant even today in the 21st century. The reason for the season is forgotten and we spend our life having a good time.

The reason for this season is the *Word's becoming Man and His divine Appearing in our midst; **the Incarnation***.

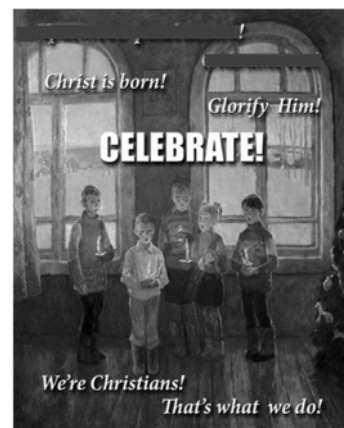
God made all things out of nothing, and He reserved especial mercy to the race of man.

St. Athanasius³ quotes,



*“He bestowed a grace which other creatures lacked—namely the impress of His own Image, a share in the reasonable being of the very Word (The Second Person in the Trinity) Himself, so that, **reflecting Him and themselves becoming reasonable and expressing the Mind of God** even as He does, though in limited degree they might continue for ever in the blessed and only true life of the saints in paradise”.*

Referring to Ephesians 4:11-16⁴, the above quote means that, what we are all expected to do is to *be* true in love, so that all grow towards him and in him; for he, **Christ is the Head**. *It is from Him as controlling element that the whole body is coordinated and linked together in harmony, through the mutual connecting joints provided in the body, and through **each part fulfilling the function***



² Greeks or referring to pagans

³ On the Incarnation, St. Athanasius (Source: Copticchurch)

⁴ The Kingdom of Diakonia- Dr. Paulose Mar Gregorios

assigned to it. The same Head ensures that the whole body grows and builds itself through love.

Further referring to Mathew 4:19, Christ says "Come, follow me.". St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:1 says, "Follow my example, **as I follow the example of Christ**". And in 1 Corinthians 4:16 says, "Therefore I urge you to **imitate me**".

He secured this grace to man by making it 'conditional' from the first with two things—a law and a place.

"If they guarded the grace and retained the loveliness of their original innocence, then the life of paradise should be



theirs, without sorrow, pain or care, and after it the assurance of immortality in heaven. But *if they went astray and became vile*, throwing away their birthright of beauty, then they *would* come under the natural law of death and live no longer in paradise, but, dying outside of it, continue in death and in corruption. This is

what Holy Scripture tells us, proclaiming the command of God, "Of every tree that is in the garden thou shalt surely eat, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil ye shall not eat, but in the day that ye do eat, ye shall surely die.". "Ye shall surely die"—not just die only, but remain in the state of death and of corruption."

Through our (man's) own devising's, we chose to turn to evil and set ourselves to the law of death. We lost our existence by turning away from God, Who alone Exists and Who alone is all good. We *were called* to 'being', but we *chose* to return to 'non-being' by choosing evil which is the *negation* and antithesis of good. We were creatures brought out of nothing, but bore the Likeness of God, and

"and if man preserves that Likeness through constant contemplation, then his nature is deprived of its power and he remains incorrupt."

Keeping of the law was the assurance of man being incorrupt. But man,

"turning from eternal things to things corruptible, by counsel of the devil, they had become the cause of their own corruption in death; for, as I said before, though they were by nature subject to corruption, **the grace of their union with the Word (The Second Person in the Trinity) made them capable of escaping from the natural law, provided that they retained the beauty of innocence with which they were created.** That is to say, the presence of the Word (The Second Person in the Trinity) with them

shielded them even from natural corruption, as also Wisdom says: God created man for incorruption and as an image of His own eternity; but by envy of the devil death entered into the world."

"When this happened, men began to die, and corruption ran riot among them and held sway over them to an even more than natural degree, because it was the penalty of which God had forewarned them for transgressing the commandment. Indeed, they had in their sinning

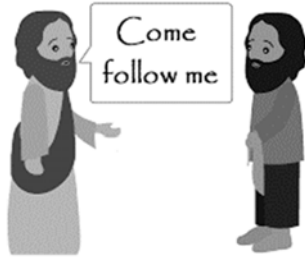


surpassed all limits; for, having invented wickedness in the beginning and so involved themselves in death and corruption, they had gone on gradually from bad to worse, not stopping at any one kind of evil, but continually, as with insatiable appetite, *devising new kinds of sins*. Adulteries and thefts were everywhere, murder and rapine filled the earth, law was disregarded in corruption and injustice, all kinds of iniquities were perpetrated by all, both singly and in common. Cities were warring with cities, nations were rising against nations, and the whole earth was rent with factions and battles, while each strove to outdo the other in wickedness. Even crimes contrary to nature were not unknown, but as the martyr-apostle of Christ says: "Their women changed the natural use into that which is against nature; and the men also, leaving the natural use of the woman, flamed out in lust towards each other, perpetrating shameless acts with their own sex, and receiving in their own persons the due recompense of their pervertedness."

"The thing that was happening *was* in truth both *monstrous* and *unfitting*. It would, of course, have been unthinkable that God should go back upon His word and that man, having transgressed, should not die; but it was equally monstrous that beings which once had shared the nature of the Word (The Second Person in the Trinity) should perish and turn back again into non-existence through corruption"

"As, then, the creatures whom He had created reasonable, like the Word, were in fact perishing, and such noble works were on the road to ruin, what then was God, being Good, to do? Was He to let corruption and death have their way with them? In that case, what was the use of having made them in the beginning?"

“What—or rather Who was it that was needed for such grace and such recall as we required?”



The Word of God (The Second Person in the Trinity) Himself, Who also in the beginning had made all things out of nothing? His part it was, and His alone, both

to bring again the corruptible to incorruption and to maintain for the Father His consistency of character with all. For He alone, being Word of the Father and above all, was in consequence both able to recreate all, and worthy to suffer on behalf of all and to be an ambassador for all with the Father.”

Thus, for this reason the incorporeal and incorruptible and immaterial Word of God (the Second person of the Trinity) entered our world. He was never far away from us, and filled everything while still abiding in union with the Father (refer Creed).

“But now He entered the world in a new way, stooping to our level in His love and Self-revealing to us.”

To explain the above quote further— **The Incarnation of God the Word is a great grace given by God to the humanity.** This is the primary affirmation of Bar Ebraya⁵ regarding his faith in the Incarnation. According to him, ***the purpose of Incarnation is the salvation of the world.*** God could have accomplished it by any other means. It pleased Him, however to work it out in and through human life, because, it appeared to Him, the appropriate way for the accomplishment of the purpose of Economy (mdabronuto). Bar Ebraya says: “It is by birth of God according to the flesh, by His voluntary suffering according to the flesh, and His death according to the flesh, that you have been saved.”

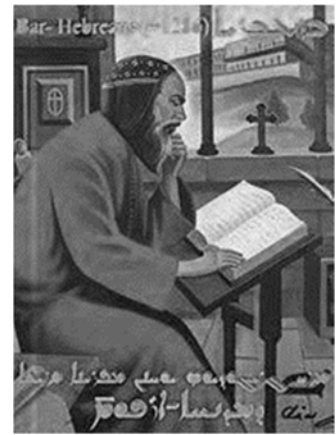
Therefore God the Son the second person of the Trinity became man. God the Son accepted an incarnated state as a dispensation for the salvation of the world. This dispensation is God’s action in which the Son accepted a birth from a human mother. However, God the Son incarnate does not mean that the universe was deprived of His divine care during his lifetime on earth. In order to

become incarnate God the Son accepted on Himself a self-limitation.

But why only the second person of the Holy Trinity became incarnate in Virgin Mary, rather than first or third?

According to Bar Ebraya, each one of the hypostases has the power to do every possible thing. But it is the hypostasis⁶ of the Word that the union is convenient.

“He took our body, and not only so, but He took it directly from a spotless, stainless virgin, without the agency of human father—a pure body, untainted by intercourse with man. He, the Mighty One, the Artificer of all, Himself prepared this body in the virgin as a temple for Himself, and took it for His very own, as the instrument through which He was known and in which He dwelt. Thus, taking a body like our own, because all our bodies were liable to the corruption of death, He surrendered His body to death instead of all, and offered it to the Father. This He did out of sheer love for us.....”



The above quote means God the word is one hypostasis. He united Himself hypostatically to the flesh endowed with a rational and intelligent soul, which was assumed from Mary. The natures, therefore, which came in to union were hypostases ***although manhood received its hypostatic status only in the union.*** The one from two is one person. Jesus Christ as a person has been formed of a union of Godhead and manhood. Thus He is one double nature (united nature) and one composite hypostasis. The concern of Bar Ebraya here is not to explain away either of the natures but to affirm the real unity.

⁵ The Christology of Bar Ebraya by H.G. Dr. Yuhanon Mar Diascoros

⁶ In the words of H.G Dr. Geevarghese Mar Osthathios, “Trinity means ‘one in three and three in one’. God is one and three in the same time. One ousia and three hypostases is difficult, but simple we can say one family with father, mother and a child. This relativity is to make supra-natural sharing of love, which is

the very sharing of God. The number three is not ultimate in nuclear families. 360° of a circle remains the same in bigger circles also. Therefore, ultimately whether children are one, two or many, the unity of family remains.”

Hypostases can mean ‘in particular’. This meaning is given for the understanding of all but there is theological depth to it.

In brief, God the Son became man. Though the Virgin was the mother of manhood alone, because manhood had come into being, and existed, only in union with God the Son, she gave birth to God incarnate, and therefore she was the Theotokos. The confession is not to minimize the reality and perfection of Christ's manhood, but to insist to the unity of Christ.

"This great work was, indeed, supremely worthy of the goodness of God. A king who has founded a city, so far from neglecting it when through the carelessness of the inhabitants it is attacked by robbers, avenges it and saves it from destruction, having regard rather to his own honor than to the people's neglect. Much more, then, the Word of the All-good Father was not unmindful of the human race that He had called to be; but rather, **by the offering of His own body He abolished the death which they had incurred, and corrected their neglect by His own teaching.** Thus by His own power **He restored the whole nature of man.**"



"For by the sacrifice of His own body He did two things:

1. He put an end to the law of death which barred our way;
2. And He made a new beginning of life for us, by giving us the hope of resurrection.

By man death has gained its power over men; by the *Word made Man* death has been destroyed and life raised up anew. That is what Paul says, that true servant of Christ: For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. Just as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive," and so forth. Now, therefore, when we die we no longer do so as men condemned to death, but as those who are even now in process of rising **we await** the general resurrection of all, "which in its own times He shall show," even God Who wrought it and bestowed it on us. This, then, is the first cause of the Savior's becoming Man.

Thus, "it was our sorry case that caused the Word to come down, our transgression that called out His love for us, so that He made haste to help us and to appear among us. It is we who were *the cause* of His taking human form, and for our salvation that in His great love He was both born and manifested in a human body."

To summarise, Man, as we already noted, is a creature of God endowed with creaturely freedom. As a creature he has a beginning and the possibility of an end. Yet, unlike

other creatures, he/she is created to attain the eternal life, which God grants him. To gain this goal man is called upon to live his life in communion with Creator and follow his way, using his creaturely autonomy. However, man took advantage of his personal freedom to follow his own plan in life. This led to his fall from the Source of eternal life, to which he had to be restored. The restoration required an absolute self-surrender to God on the part of man, which was possible only by God himself helping man to do it. Therefore, the coming together of God the Son and man into union (Incarnation) was necessary, and God accomplished it in Jesus Christ. This is the Divine Economy⁷.



Witnessing the Triune God in Kenosis

"Incarnation⁸ is the Latin word for John 1:14,

"And the Word became flesh and lived among us, we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son full of grace and truth", which is the completion of John 1:1-3, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him...." Similarly, the empty tomb is clear in the Gospel. Mary Magdalene saw only the clothes of Jesus in the tomb. This means that the physical body of Jesus changed in to a spiritual body in the resurrection (cf. 1 Cor. 15).

Quoting, 'Only through God can God be known'. This is the essence of the doctrine of Incarnation as stated by the Holy Fathers of the Church. The meaning is that the infinite God had to become finite human for self disclosure. **Infinite and absolute God had to reveal himself in Christ.** The whole humanity has a unique role model. This is *for converting* our corrupt minds (with the counsel of the devil, as thoughts) *into* the love of God. The Divinity of Christ was not only his own claim but attested by many. Pilate and others confessed it. Devil also proclaimed it.

In John 17:22, 'The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one as we are one'. God

⁷ An Orthodox Catechism on the Faith and Life of the Church, Dr. V. C. Samuel

⁸ God of Agape leads us to Justice and Peace, Dr. Geevarghese Mar Osthathios

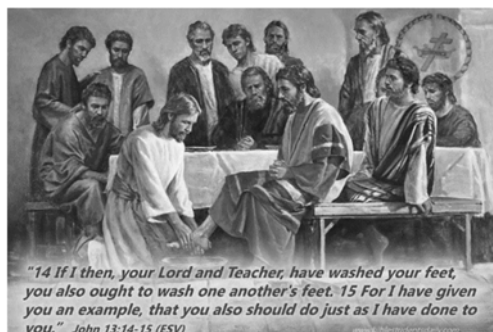
is not faith or hope but love. We as one share in this love, rooted in Christ, who is the head of the church.

Colossians 1:15-20 is called Cosmic Christology. All things in heaven and earth are created in and for Him. The Church is to grow upto the fullness of Christ. Christ is the head of the Church means that all commandments from Christ the head and all movements of the body are controlled by the head. Satan has no power over the life of Christians. The resurrection of Christ trampled the head of Satan. Prosperity gospel and its modes are absent in the Pauline prayer,

“For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by His poverty, you might become rich” [2 Cor 8:9].

It was not about physical wealth and prosperity, but to show the depths of *kenosis (self-emptying) and the love of God. Self-emptying for others is the call of each and every Christian* “(H.G. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Osthathios).

H.G Dr. Geevarghese Mar Osthathios says, “The Orthodox churches believe in salvation by grace and not by work



alone. **The grace is agape or the self giving love or the essence of God revealed through incarnation.**

1 Cor 13:13 is a central verse of the New Testament “faith, hope and love last forever, but greatest of these is love”. Faith, hope and works are personal virtues of humanity, but love is universal. God judges humanity not on faith or hope, but on the question; whether you loved your brother or not?

Trinitarian benediction in 2 Cor 13:13 “the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all” and the Baptismal formula in Mathew 28:19 all point to the perfect sharing in the Triune God.

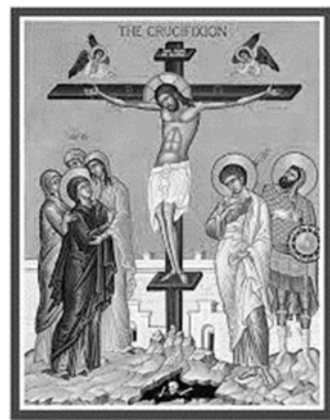
In singularity, love is impossible. In duality love is possible but imperfect because there is only giving and receiving and no sharing to the third person. Perfect love is possible in Atraita (Trinity—'one in three and three in one') because there is giving, receiving and sharing. Selfishness is the

opposite of love and so demonic. Salvation is divinization which means sharing.”

We shall see how we can apply this in our Orthopraxy life. As individuals living in/among a community of individuals (universal) **our goal is Witnessing the Triune God in our words and deeds.** Our goal is to *live* the Orthodox way, not to speak or write the Orthodox way. We have to *live* the faith which Christ taught us.

Saint Paisios says,

“The sublime joy comes from sacrifice. Only when one sacrifices himself is he related to Christ, for Christ is sacrifice.”



In his spiritual counsels the Saint says, “Nowadays people don’t savour this joy of sacrifice and this is why they are tormented. They have no ideals in them; they are too bored to live. A generous heart and self-denial are what drive us. Without this force, we are tormented. People seem to have lost control. The sense of sacrifice is gone. I have often told you how it was with me then with the hernia⁹..... When someone rang the bell on the door, I would go and open the door, even in the snow. If someone had a serious problem, then I would not even feel my own pain, even though I had previously been sick enough for bed. I would also offer them some treat, holding the treat with one hand and hernia with the other. Throughout our conversation, even though the pain was severe, I would not lean on anything so as not to reveal my discomfort. When the visitor left, I would again collapse from the pain. It was not that before my own pain had passed or that I had been miraculously cured, but in feeling the other person’s pain, I forget my own. The miracle happens when someone can be compassionate and feel the other’s pain. The whole idea here is to be able to see the other person as a brother and feel his pain. It is this very pain that moves God and brings about the miracle. For there is nothing else that moves God as much as a noble and sacrificial spirit. But now in our time, this kind of nobility is rare, because self-love and self-interest have entered the picture. Seldom does someone say, “Let me give my turn, my place, to someone else, and it’s alright if I am delayed.” Few are those blessed souls who think of others. Even among the

⁹ An abnormal condition in the abdomen etc. which causes acute pain.

spiritual people, there is a contrary spirit, a spirit of indifference."

"The good is good only when the one who does it sacrifices something from himself, some sleep, some rest and so on. That is why Christ said, But she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had (cf. Lk 21:4; Mk 12:44).

When I am at ease and do some good, it does not have the same value. But when I am tired and someone asks me, let's say directions and I do it, then it has value. Or, when I had plenty of sleep and stay up all night with someone who needs help, this does not have great value. And if I'm fond of conversation, I may do this in order to enjoy the company and be entertained a little. Whereas, when I am tired and make a sacrifice to help someone, then I experience a heavenly joy. It is then I am bombarded with the blessing of God!"

"Whoever has faith in God and a sacrificial spirit does not consider himself. When someone does not cultivate the spirit of sacrifice, he thinks only of himself and wants everybody else to sacrifice themselves from him. But whoever thinks only of himself is isolated from others as well as from God—a double isolation—in which case he cannot receive divine Grace."

"Someone is tested through the trials of life. It is there that you see if he has real love, a true spirit of sacrifice. And when we say that someone has the spirit of sacrifice, we mean that at the time of danger he does not consider himself but thinks of the others. You see that even the popular proverb affirms this, A friend in need is a friend indeed. God forbid, but if bombs were to fall now, it would reveal who is thinking of others and who is thinking of



himself. But someone who is used to thinking only of himself will at a time of danger also think of himself and God will not think of him. **When even now someone does not think of himself but is thoughtful and considerate of others, he will do the same at a time of danger.** It is then that it becomes clear who are truly the people with a sacrificial spirit and who are the selfish ones.

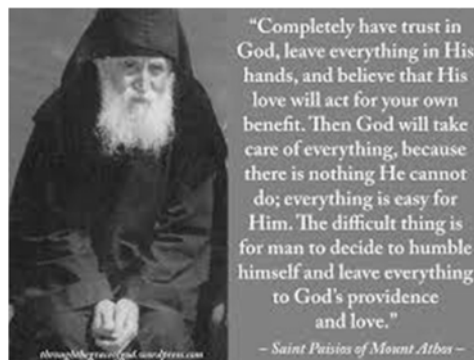


If one does not start sacrificing something now, like giving up some desire or selfishness, how will he ever be able to sacrifice his life at a difficult time? If, even now, he thinks of labour and tries to avoid working a little harder than the next person, how will he ever attain the state of risking his own life to save another's? If now he thinks only of himself in small matters, how can he think of others when his own life is in danger? For e.g. during a war, a soldier had a stone slab to protect his head. In the meantime, he had to move over and he set the slab down. Immediately the soldier next to him took it, saying, "Here's my chance to take it for myself now." At that moment, a mortar fell on him and killed him. He saw the incoming fire and took the slab for himself without thinking of the other soldier who would return. He thought of himself and justified his action. "Since the other soldier moved over a little, I can now take his slab for myself." Yes, he left, but it was his protective slab. If difficult times come and a selfish person sees a neighbor, for e.g., sick with fever collapsing in the street, he will leave him there and go away saying, "I must go and lie down to rest lest, I, too, become sick."

Take your own self out of your activities. When someone goes beyond himself, he goes beyond the earth. He moves in another atmosphere. As long as he remains in the self, he cannot become a heavenly person. **There is no spiritual life without sacrifice.** Once in a while, remember death. Since we are to die, let's not be attentive to ourselves. *I don't mean be careless and allow harm to come, but don't worship ease and comfort.* Nor am I saying throw yourself into danger, but at least have some heroism, you know? Look at the heroes and the bravery with which they faced death in battle."

How is it that one can keep self out of our activities?

Saint Paisios says, "You like to have everything ready-



made. What does it mean to take self out? When do I take my self out? How are we to take our self **out** of our love? How are we to brighten up

our love? *The less I consider myself*, the more I remove my self. And **when we cut our will, our weakness, our ease and comfort, then we take our self out, too. And a lot of things vanish from ourself through obedience and silence.** And when our love is *not* selfish and self-involved, again,

we take our self out, but our love must also be sacrificial. Do you understand this?

Let us suppose, for example, that one of the nuns wants to go and see the Abbess and sees another sister who also wants to go. If she immediately relinquishes her turn to the other while knowing that the other does not have serious matters to discuss, then she is truly obedient, sacrificial and so on. And when with her whole heart she gives up her turn and does not speak with the Abbess, well, then, it will be Christ Himself Who will speak with her. But she must take this to be a necessity, her heart must be in it, and she must not do it merely because the Holy Fathers say so. This way she can achieve a double portion of the Grace of God. In this case one nun will be helped spiritually in human terms, while the other will be helped in divine terms, directly by Christ.

We see lay people who demonstrate a degree of sacrifice that even monastics don't have. In the world—and I'm impressed by this say's the Saint—even though people may not believe, may have weaknesses, their passions (/sins), God provides for them to have a gentle and kind heart. They see someone is in need, even a total stranger, and they go and help him. Many who do not even believe in Paradise, if they see danger, they run to prevent some evil from happening, they will endanger themselves to save others, to save property, and so on.

Many years ago, a worker in a factory was in danger of getting caught in the gears of a large machine, and while there were many men around, it was actually a woman who ran to save him. The men who were supposed to be brave stood there watching..... Finally the woman saved the man, but her own skirts got caught in the machine and she was killed. A martyr indeed!

Such people don't take their own self into consideration; they throw the self out. **And when the self is thrown out, that's when Christ is thrown in!**

One must **acquire a spiritual state** to be able to get through things at a difficult time. If one is not in this spiritual state, he may falter because of self-love. He may even deny and betray Christ. You must be prepared to die. We as Christians believe nothing is lost and our sacrifice has meaning, because of the resurrection in Jesus Christ. We have to cultivate the spirit of sacrifice. **We start out to die for the love of Christ; we have no obligations and well, if we have no sense of sacrifice, what are we doing then?** Even the ants will laugh at us! Have you seen ants making fun of humans? They make fun of the lazy ones."

"The goal is for people to observe God's commandments", says Saint Paisios. "We must be

concerned how to be near Christ. We must realize that today we are alive and tomorrow we may be gone. Those who have realized the vanity of this life have received the greatest gift. We must take best possible spiritual measures to be saved. The will of the person and motives of the person is extremely important in this.



St. John Chrysostom says, *All depends upon being willing or unwilling.* People can easily be influenced both for good or ill. They are more readily influenced towards evil, because it is the devil who is prompting them. God is Benevolent and he desires our good. But it is essential that we, too, be willing, because God does not interfere in human freedom. The will exists in all people in varying degrees. It is upto us to be heedful and not give in to the deceit/prompting of the devil, struggle and progress and bear fruits (cf. Luke 3:9). When man has the will, and God is also willing, he is spiritually nourished and rejoices angelically."

"The motives of the person can be easily recognized. **When the motives are not pure** the soul does not find peace. In such a case one should detect the problem and purify the motive. For e.g., When someone has a wherewithal to give charity, you can't be sure whether he has love or not, for he may not be giving out of love, but just to get rid of certain things. When someone does not have much and yet does offer charity, then his love is evident. Let us suppose that I believe I have love; God, in order to test my love sends me a poor person. For example, I have two watches a good one and a slightly damaged one, then I give the inferior watch to the poor man, that indicates my love is of secondary quality. If I have real love, I will give the poor man my good watch. However faulty thinking overtakes us and we say, "Why should I give my good watch to someone who has none? For him even the old broken watch will be good enough." But when you give the old watch, then the old self still lives in you; but if you give the new watch, then you are renewed, a reborn man, according to the Gospel. It is a damnable state when you keep both watches and give neither away."

How can someone get out of that state?

"He should think, "If it were Christ Himself, what would I give? Certainly the better watch." This is how we can see which love is the real love. He will then make a decisive choice and the next time give the better object. At first it may be a little difficult, *but if he keeps on trying like this,*

he will eventually get to the point of giving both the old and the new in order to help others. He *may not* have a watch, but he *will have* Christ in his heart and *will hear* the sweet beat of his heart rejoicing with divine joy.”

“If they take away your coat and you also give away your shirt (cf. Luke 6:29), then you will be clothed by Christ. If you feel sorry for some unfortunate soul and help him, think, if he were Christ Himself, what sacrifice you would make! This is how we can be put to test. The person of faith sees Christ in the person next to him. Christ himself has said, *Whatever you did to one of the least of my brethren, you did it to me* (cf. Mt 25:40). The honour, ofcourse, is given to each person accordingly (cf. Rom 13:7), but love is the same for all. In his heart, both the highest-ranking official and the poor man hold the same place; the general and the soldier.”

“This way we work to correct ourselves and look more intently towards our “inner” activity rather than our external, giving



precedence to divine help. The progress in the “inner activity” by *emptying ourselves each day*, by giving preference to the *will of God rather than our will* and *when our mind is with Christ*, our heart is purified and Christ comes to dwell in it, we can in turn be of greater and more positive help to

others. We will also achieve inner serenity, that will quietly help the souls of the people we encounter, because spiritual serenity reflects the virtue of the soul and transforms others souls. When someone applies himself to external activity before having polished his spiritual inner state, he may struggle spiritually, but he will be fraught with worry, anxiety, lack of confidence in God and frequent loss of serenity. If he does not improve himself, he cannot say that his interest for the common good is pure. When he *is liberated* from the old self and all things worldly, then he will receive divine Grace and be not only at peace with himself, but also able to bring peace to everyone else. But if he has not received the Grace of God, then he can neither govern himself nor help others in order to bring about divine effect. He must first be immersed in divine Grace and then utilize his resulting sanctified powers for the salvation of others.”

The mission of Metropolitan Dr. Geevarghese Mar Osthathois of blessed memory in the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church was also to reach out to others around him; to care for the orphan, the widow and the destitute. His vision was towards a cosmic dimension (universal/whole); a ‘religion of love’, genuinely rooted in Christ and his incarnate mission. He says, “**Let us pray**, for a gospel (cf. Lk 4:18,19) of priority for love and only the second place for faith and hope. Love is the essence of God; love is sharing. ‘God is love’ is *the greatest revelation* and the duty of the Church is *to proclaim* the sharing of divine love both in words and deeds. Jesus Christ is the Way, the Life and the Truth. He is God of Jews and Gentiles alike. “There is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28,29). Jesus came to give abundant life to creation (Jn 10:10)



To conclude, In the words of Metropolitan Dr. Geevarghese Mar Osthathois of blessed memory in the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, “**God’s essence is love, which in the New Testament is agape.** **Agapic**

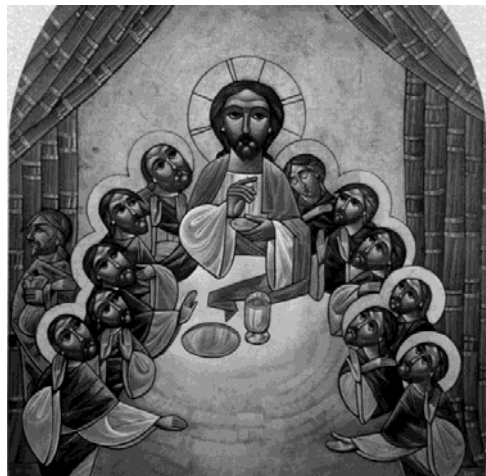
love is what St. John says, “I must decrease while he must increase” (Jn 3:30). This is the meaning of the cross. Christ died on the cross so that others may not die but rise again. Life and resurrection are spiritual meanings of human trichotomy. Sub human species are merely Dichotomous, with only life and body, but the breath of life is given only to human beings. God created humanity in His Image and Likeness (Gen 1:27).

Revelations 21 begins by stating about the end of the old heaven and earth, and creation of a new heaven and earth. In vs. 4 we see that ‘Death will be no more.’ This is about the immortality of the resurrected life. Mortality of Satan is stated in vs. 8 as follows, “but for the cowardly, the faithless and polluted, the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters and all liars, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and Sulphur, which is the second death.” This eschatology of the Holy Bible teaches that Satan, will come to an end, because he is the uncreated darkness¹⁰ and should disappear in the second coming of the sun of righteousness. There are few Christian theologians who teach the existence of eternal

¹⁰ Cf 1 Timothy 4:4; Genesis 1:31

hell, which Mar Osthathios considers as illogical because God is love and there is reward for goodness. Each and every person has a little goodness. This is more so since we know only partially (1 Cor 13:12). Only God is omniscient.

Jesus Christ commanded us to 'love your enemies,' to give food to them if they are hungry, share our cloth with the naked ones and give water to all who are thirsty (cf. Mt 25:42-45). This is a part of discipleship which is important. The disciples were first called Christians (Acts 11:26). This is very important because we are all disciples of Jesus



Christ. ***The criterion to follow, to be the disciple of Jesus is self giving love or agape.*** If we follow Him there will be no more war in the world.

Personal ambitions are against the

preaching of agape. Personal ambitions are the root cause of exploitation and greed.

We are exploiting the environment to fulfil our ambitions. Use of hazardous pesticides and fertilizers is to get maximum crop. These fertilizers and other chemicals are gradually decreasing the natural equilibrium and finally will wash away the fertility of the earth. In the Holy Bible, there is justice for peace. Similarly grace comes before faith. Injustice leads to war; personal ambition is the cause of injustice. 'Thy Kingdom come', not 'my kingdom,' is the prayer of a Christian. Capitalism is selfish ambition leading to competition and wide gulf between rich and poor. Socialism with class war is also selfishness. The ruling class is not aware of the poor habitation and illiteracy of the slum dwellers. Present day Communism has also forgotten the priority of social justice with many billionaires in Russia and China.

If the God of love is the *focus* of creed of all people, Justice will surely come. The fruit of the Holy Spirit is love, and the nine fruits are spoken as one. The New Testament of the Holy Bible gives priority to the Love of God, sharing of justice and co-operation instead of competition. Sharing of love brings peace and this peace is what Jesus promised "peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you, I do not give to you as the world gives" (Jn 14:27). At the time of Jesus' birth the angels praised God "Glory to God in the

highest heaven and on earth peace among those whom he favors" (Lk 2 :14).

The creed is one which people believe, as God created human with freedom and in His image and likeness. Every person has the right to be a theist or atheist, a secular man or a spiritual man, a good man or a bad man. Only humans have creed, animals don't. According to Christian creed, the whole universe was created for humanity, to be the cradle which if destroyed an individual cannot exist. If God would have created humanity without any freedom then we would have been slaves, but we are the children of the heavenly Father. Jesus Christ is God; He manifested Himself as the love of God through His life, teachings, death and resurrection. ***Centrality of agape is the only way for salvation.*** My humble request to all, is to share the divine love by *obeying God's commandments.*"

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