

Do we live in shallowness or depth?

Do we live our spiritual life in shallowness or depth, on a superficial level or on a deep level?

I wanted to talk about some important foundations which I believe are very necessary for the children of God, in general, these days. These foundations are:

- Faith
- Unity
- Prayer
- Watchfulness

Some may wonder and ask:

What is new in this? Don't we all know that these are well-known basis and foundations of the spiritual life?

Yes, that is true. Yet, what we may not know quite well is that the spiritual life is not the scholastic knowledge that we are used to. *It is a mystical life!*

Therefore, when we talk about faith or prayer, for example, as an essential foundation of the spiritual life, we may not be aware that each of these words has different dimensions and different features as we move from one stage to the other.

These dimensions or features differ and vary based on the following:

- The spiritual stature of the person.
- The person's general perception of spiritual matters.

- The events that take place around us and their significance; and the appropriate response required and expected of the children of God towards these events.
- Our discernment of the responsibility required from each one of the children of God in the work of the Kingdom of God.

And more and more features.

However, we have, unfortunately, set or specified a meaning or a certain understanding for each of these foundations and have stopped at that level or limit. This is the scholastic approach.

For example, we may think that faith means that we trust God, memorise the creed, or attend church regularly. Similarly, we may say that prayer is the fellowship with God, praying the Psalms (the Agpia prayer hours), or attending the church liturgies. And, we do the same with the rest of the spiritual foundations.

In fact, this causes the whole spiritual life to be superficial and shallow, without any depth; and hence, without discernment of what happens around us or the responsibilities related to the Kingdom of God.

We act as though all what is related to these matters is the work of the men of religion, the priests and those with them; but, is not related to the children of God in general.

This way of thinking and this understanding is totally estranged from what we read in the bible, what the apostles teach us through their writings, and what the Church fathers have left for us as a holy inheritance.

Therefore, there is an important matter related to understanding the spiritual foundations –which I would like to start my talk with before

talking about the foundations themselves; and that is: ***the superficiality and shallowness of thinking of the children of God, in general.***

Some may marvel at this on the pretext that this can be a gift of some whom we call '*thinkers*'; while, not every person is necessarily a thinker.

This is true on one hand. However, on the other hand, there is something else related to the Christian life as a whole which we have forgotten; and that is: the Christian life grants the believers a divine light which is not of this age and which is not a mere intellectual gift; but, is much more than that.

Let us listen to the words of the gospel telling us the following words about Jesus:

'In Him was life, and the life was the light of men' (John 1: 4).

Also, Jesus said:

'I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life' (John 8: 12).

Therefore, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus also taught us saying:

'You are the light of the world...Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven' (Matthew 5: 14, 16).

We also hear Jesus saying:

'While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light' (John 12: 36).

Also, Apostle Paul tells us:

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

All this leads us to reflect, to think and understand an important matter:

God has created man with a special distinction. He distinguished him with the mind, unlike all the other creatures. Sociology defines man as '*a thinking being*'.

However, the fall has caused man's thinking to darken and become filled with evil. As a result, man's thinking has become superficial, especially those who live for the world and the passions and are estranged from God, the source of all light.

Yet, the grace of the Holy Spirit corrects, illumines, deepens, and even transforms the Christian person into a '*thinker*'; but, not a thinker according to the general meaning that refers to this word as a human gift – which is limited in understanding the divine matters. Since it is human, it does not go beyond the limits of earthly matters.

But, the children of God –who have been illumined and enlightened by the divine truth and have perceived their responsibility towards their generation –become filled by the divine light which gradually increases in them, revealing to them divine mysteries. They, then, realise their great responsibility towards the world, whether through praying, ministering, doing mercy deeds, or anything else.

This is not the prayer that we know nor is it the ministry according to our view; but, a prayer and a ministry that bears a divine energy and authority which transforms people and situations.

These are the features of the Christian thinker, the believer who realises that he has been granted a source of light which is from above; he can progressively take from this source in order to understand God's purpose for his life and understand his responsibility towards the world that he lives in and the generation that waits for someone to visit them by God's mercy.

What are we going to choose? Are we going to live a superficial life and shallow thinking or the inspired and illumined life that grows in knowledge, according to God and its responsibility towards the Kingdom of God?

These days, we, unfortunately, see pictures of this superficiality and shallowness in the life of the Children of God, the ministers, and the pastors. This illumination is available for us and we should receive it through prayer and living a life of repentance. Yet, we often resort to human ways or techniques to try to compensate for the lack of illumination, like: using crafty words, being argumentative, talking a lot, debating and disputing, etc. All these conducts are the product of the fallen and the puffed-up ego.

However, Jesus has left us an example where we see that He never spoke unnecessarily. Even before the governor, at the time of the Crucifixion, we read that *'He answered him not one word, so that the governor marvelled greatly'* (Matthew 27: 11 – 14).

It was also written about Him:

'He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth' (Isaiah 53: 7).

Ah, how often we waste our human energy and how often we seem superficial and darkened in mind, in a shameful way! While Jesus is calling upon us saying:

'You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house' (Matthew 5: 14, 15).

Have we perceived the meaning of these words?

It is the call of Jesus to all His children. He wants us to be a city that is set on a hill; this is the place of the Church of Christ. On the individual level, He wants us to be a lamp that is lit and lifted up on a lampstand to give light to all those around us.

The question, that challenges us and is posed to our conscience now, is:

Does each one of us see himself/herself as a lamp that is lifted up in order to give light to others?

The Holy Spirit puts many people around each one of us; these people are longing for a lamp that would give them light –whether we perceive this or not.

If this spiritual light is found in any one of us, the Holy Spirit will immediately lift that person on a lampstand so that his light would shine for others; otherwise, we will remain under a basket, darkened and those around us will also be darkened.

Based on this, I go back to my talk about the foundations and say that there are many of these foundations that are meant for living a deep spiritual life, not a superficial one; they are effective and fruitful. Let us not forget the words of Jesus to His disciples when He said:

'You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you' (John 15: 16).

'By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples' (John 15: 8).

Jesus has disciples in every generation. If we, the believers in His name, desire to live a serious, deep, and fruitful life, we will become His disciples; and He would expect the fruit, that He is referring to, from us.

I mentioned that there are many spiritual foundations, but I want to focus on some of these foundations that are very important in our days; especially if we start to understand how to view each of the foundations in their different dimensions.

If we now start to talk about faith, prayer, or watchfulness, we will not mention the superficial points that we all know quite well (after all these years of walking with the Lord); but, we will rather refer to the required depth of each of these spiritual foundations and which suit our need in our days. So that, as Apostle Paul said, we would no longer be *'children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ'* (Ephesians 4: 14, 15).

In this verse, there are two levels: *the children* and the *spiritually mature* who are accounted as men of God in their generation.

The Lord Jesus is searching for the men who have received the light of the Spirit, have matured, and realised their responsibility. He can thus entrust them and give them His divine commission, together with His grace and

anointing which enable them to carry out the fruitful work of the Kingdom of God.

This was not an introduction, but it is the *general basis* that we need to perceive and establish in our life, if we want to be able to follow the explanation that I will give regarding the spiritual foundations.

Yet, this basis, the divine illumination, is very essential and crucial. If we do not give it enough attention and spiritual practice, that is, apply it in our life, we will not be able to benefit anything from what I will mention in the coming times.

What I want to focus on now is:

How can we enter into a new depth in the divine illumination which would grant us to be men of God, thinkers, and bearers of a responsibility towards our generation?

Here are some practical points towards achieving this purpose:

1. A Righteous life

A life of righteousness does not mean that we have become saints, haughty towards those around us. But, according to the bible, righteousness is the basis for everything. It is the work of Christ for us, the sinners, who were made righteous by His blood and the work of His redemption which He finished for our sake.

However, this righteousness would lose its effectiveness if we do not repent and live a repentant life daily and truly, not by mere words that we say in order to repent.

The true and deep sign of repentance which releases the work of Christ's righteousness in us is: *the spiritual hunger that never ceases or rests.*

Therefore, whenever we feel sufficiency and lack of spiritual hunger, let us remember that a foreign thing must have crept deep within us and closed our inner depth, making us remain on the surface.

Let us then search and review ourselves in order to bring out anything that defiles our soul and makes it ill, not hungering for the Lord and for righteousness.

Let us remember the words of Jesus:

'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled' (Matthew 5: 6).

Daily repentance by quietly and calmly reviewing ourselves at the end of each day helps us in this.

2. A Life in the light

Let us start by listening to the words of the Scriptures in the epistle to the Ephesians:

'And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. Therefore He says: "Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light"' (Ephesians 5: 11 – 14).

It is not befitting the children of God who desire to live a deep spiritual life to look at evil scenes on the internet or even listen to inappropriate words.

In the book of proverbs, it is written:

'An evildoer gives heed to false lips; a liar listens eagerly to a spiteful tongue'
(Proverbs 17: 4 –NKJV).

'An evildoer listens to wicked lips, and a liar gives ear to a mischievous tongue' (Proverbs 17: 4 –ESV).

It is not befitting the children of God to hide corrupt and dark matters within them; but, let us get them out to the light in repentance; so that, darkness may be cast out and the light of the Lord may replace it.

It is not befitting the children of God to say inappropriate words because these words open the door for the evil one to bring the darkness in us.

It is not befitting the children of God to store hatred, resentment, anger, or lack of forgiveness towards anyone because all these things fill the soul with darkness.

If we truly desire to be filled with the light; let us count the cost and be watchful of every dark thing and bring it out.

There are other things related to the powers of darkness which may require prayer so that God may reveal and expose them and bring them out.

Let us persevere in seeking the light and exposing the darkness so that we may be truly the children of the light.

Apostle Paul draws our attention in the epistle to the Thessalonians saying:

'You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of

faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation’ (1Thessalonians 5: 5 – 8).

Here we notice that we are in dire need for the light, especially in the end times; otherwise, we will not be able to be prepared for the coming of the Bridegroom. We will not discern the time of His coming because of the darkness which is inside our life. How truly serious this matter is!

3. The desire and longing for spiritual knowledge and growing in it

Let us also remind ourselves with the words of Apostle Paul to us in this context:

‘And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God’ (Philippians 1: 9 – 11).

Also in the epistle to the Colossians, the Apostle writes:

‘For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy’ (Colossians 1: 9 – 11).

You may notice that most of my words in this message focus on the words of the Scriptures. We are in great need to enter into a new depth in reading the word of God. This helps us, as we have read, to have spiritual

discernment and be fruitful in our life. Both are very important matters and we need them greatly.

The Spiritual readings, including the word of God, the writings of the early fathers, and the spiritual books in general help us a lot to deepen our thinking and discern matters, learning to compare the situations that happen in our life and learn spiritual lessons from them so that we do not repeat the same mistakes, as apostle Paul said: *'comparing spiritual things with spiritual'* (1Corinthians 2: 13).

And finally let us listen to the following words to conclude with them:

'Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. For "who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ.'

(1Corinthians 2: 12 – 16)

Amen