

Faith

I mentioned before that there are some spiritual foundations which I want to talk about as they are suitable and necessary for us at this stage; especially when we talk about these foundations in a new way. By this, I precisely mean, talking about them in a deep way not a superficial one.

To remind you, these foundations are: faith, prayer, watchfulness, and unity. Last time we spoke about prayer; and now is the time to talk about faith.

It is indeed suitable to talk about faith during the Nativity fast, the season of incarnation, because the divine incarnation is, in fact, the fruit of faith in the life of the men of God who realised their responsibility and obeyed God, despite the opposition and confrontations which they faced. It was thus possible to reach the fullness of time when incarnation took place.

Let us look at some references that will help us understand. Most of us are familiar with these references:

'But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons' (Galatians 4: 4, 5).

As an example of the men of God who persevered in exercising faith for a long time, I mention Simeon, the elder, and Anna, the prophetess.

As Simeon took the child Jesus up in his arms, he said:

'Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation' (Luke 2: 29, 30).

As for Anna, the prophetess, the gospel tells us that for about eighty-four years, she did not depart from the temple; but, served God with fasting and prayers –to prepare the way for the incarnation. In Luke 2: 38, we read: *'And coming in that*

instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem'.

However, let us not forget that these final scenes of the appearance of the Child Jesus, the incarnated God, came after a long journey of faith –which all those who believed the promises of salvation waited for. God declared these promises of salvation since the fall of Adam and Eve, when the Lord revealed to them that the seed of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent.

The promise of salvation extended throughout the generations as the men of faith carried it from generation to generation until Virgin Mary came and received the divine mystery in her womb. Then, the divine Child was born.

When this scene of faith and this long journey of faith is set before us in our days, it inevitably brings an important question and that is:

What about us, the children of this generation?

What can we do if we want to continue the walk of faith of the men of God?

Jesus has already come and accomplished redemption; what is left for us?

Is there any role or responsibility now that we can carry out by faith?

Yes, indeed, there is a lot to be done.

There is still the need to proclaim the gospel to all nations. There is also the need for a special preparation for the second coming of Christ, exactly as there were those who prepared for His first coming, like the Baptist. It was written about the Baptist: *'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You'* (Mark 1: 2).

Based on this, we will begin our message about faith, which I will highlight through the following main points:

1. What is faith?

2. What are the features of the true faith?
3. The men of faith and their responsibility in this generation.

1. First: What is faith?

In the New Testament, we read about various forms or aspects of faith which we can summarise as follows:

- **The faith of salvation**

'For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God' (Ephesians 2: 8).

This faith is a gift of God, according to the bible. It is given in order to open the eyes of the person who is far away from God and bring him to the salvation which the Lord Jesus has accomplished for us.

- **The faith of our daily walk**

'For we walk by faith, not by sight' (2 Corinthians 5: 7).

This is what the children of God should perceive and understand after they enter into the mystery of the salvation of Christ. They need to realise how to walk by faith day after day in order to fulfil and complete the obedience of faith, like Abraham, the man of God, and like all the Patriarchs, Prophets, and holy people.

This is the faith by which the purposes of God are fulfilled. God reveals these purposes when He finds men of God who have learned to walk by faith, relying on His word and His promises –as they believe them and live them out. This is because if we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself. In other words, He adheres to His word and His promises.

Yet, how can we learn the walk by faith that makes us men of faith?

I shall explain this clearly later, in the course of the discussion.

- **The mystery of faith**

*'Now faith is **the substance** of things hoped for, **the evidence** of things not seen'*
(Hebrews 11: 1).

This is a deep and mystical sentence.

In another reference, we read that faith is a mystery.

Apostle Paul writes about the deacons saying: *'holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience'* (1Timothy 3: 9).

When we start to perceive the truth of faith, we find that it is actually a *'mystery'*, in its practical meaning.

Let us now go back to the main reference that we mentioned:

*'Faith is **the substance** of things hoped for, **the evidence** of things not seen'.*

Let us look at the meaning of some words, according to the original language which sheds light on the meaning of this verse.

Let us specifically look at these two main words:

A. 'Substance' (of things hoped for)

B. 'Evidence' (of things not seen)

The verse in English reads:

*'Faith is **the substance** of things hoped for, **the evidence** of things not seen'.*

The two words in English are: *'substance'* and *'evidence'*.

A. 'Substance':

The direct meaning of the word, in English, is: *'realisation', 'ascertainment', 'assurance'*.

In the Greek language, it is: *'hypostasis'*.

According to Thayer dictionary (one of the most well-known dictionaries of the New Testament), '*hypostasis*' means: a thing that is put under another thing to fix it in place; it is like a foundation on which a building is built. This meaning reflects a substance or something that we can realise; and it gives us confidence and assurance.

B. 'Evidence':

The direct meaning of this word in English is '*proof*'.

In the Greek language, it is: ἔλεγχος which is pronounced *el-eng-khos*.

According to Thayer dictionary, it means '*proof*' and it also means '*conviction*'.

Here, we ask:

How can this practically happen? How can this be experienced in the life of the children of God, the believers?

To answer this question, I say the following:

The believer starts to pray for a specific matter that requires exercising faith. He continues to pray persistently, may be for days, weeks, or months until he starts to find that something is being formed inside him. Yes, it is a substance; but it is a '*spiritual substance*'. Despite this, it has a spiritual form or being that is felt and perceived in one's heart.

It is true that this may require time until one is trained in this matter. Yet when it happens, the believer would realise that there is a stir and a divine energy inside him, bearing assurance regarding the thing he is praying for –provided that he had first ascertained that this matter is according to God's will. '*Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us*' (1John 5: 14).

This divine energy bears within it *spiritual insight*, making the person see matters by the eyes of faith, despite not being seen in the practical reality –as

was written about Abraham who believed in God who *'calls those things which do not exist as though they did'* (Romans 4: 17).

Hence, the expression: *'evidence of things not seen'*.

If we contemplate on this phrase, we will find that it seems as though paradoxical, consisting of two parts that are contradictory. There is the word *'evidence'* which indicates *'proof and assurance'*, followed by the phrase *'things not seen'*.

How can there be evidence of things not seen?

This is the faith that produces *spiritual insight* which sees what is in the invisible dimension.

Through training, this spiritual eye or spiritual insight becomes stronger. Therefore, if this spiritual eye did not see the requested matter, it will realise that faith (the spiritual substance) has not been formed. At that time, the person would continue to pray and wait, expecting God to reveal an important thing or perfect/complete the prayer, crowning it with this substance and insight, the evidence and assurance.

Then, it would be known that this matter will happen in due time –even if it was delayed for some time as a result of the opposition of the evil one or due to the confrontations of faith, as we shall explain.

Yet, eventually the matter will surely happen because the spiritual eye has already seen it in the invisible spiritual spheres.

In this context, let us remember the words of the prophet Habakkuk (his prophecy is sometimes referred to as the prophecy of faith in the Old Testament):

'For the vision is yet for an appointed time; but at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry' (Habakkuk 2: 3).

This is the faith through which all God's purposes, that is, the visions of faith related to the Kingdom of God, are fulfilled –if there were men of faith who have learned this mystery of faith, this special form of faith.

- **The final form of faith: Faith as a gift of Holy Spirit**

The final form of faith is that which we read about in the first epistle to the Corinthians, chapter 12, where apostle Paul speaks about the gifts and manifestations of the Holy Spirit. In verse 9, he says: *'to another faith by the same Spirit'* (1 Corinthians 12: 9).

This kind of faith is not for everyone because it is one of the special gifts of the Holy Spirit which God gives as He wills, according to His wisdom, in various situations. An example of these situations is: moving the Mokattam Mountain –for which we fast 3 days at the beginning of the Nativity fast, according to the arrangement of the Coptic Church. During these days, we pray and ask for the gift of faith that suits each person, according to the will of God. Through this special gift of faith, the Mokattam mountain moved by the prayers and faith of Saint Simon, the tanner. This was in the days of the Patriarch, Abram the Syrian, towards the end of the 10th century.

2. Secondly: Features of the True Faith

Before we start talking about some of the most important features of faith, we need to remind ourselves of the clear and direct biblical truth which we read in Hebrews 11.

'But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him' (Hebrews 11: 6).

I say this because we are at a time that strongly requires the continuous exercise of faith; otherwise, both our human and spiritual steps can be hindered. I say this to those who want to understand and discern the times that we are in.

We also need to pay attention to some kinds of faith that exist in our current days.

We can say that there are the following kinds:

- Purity of faith
- Falsification of faith
- Rejection of faith

The pure faith is that which is established on a living life-experience with the prince of peace, the Lord Jesus Christ. We will come back to this kind of faith to highlight some other essential features of it.

The falsified faith is where faith has been mingled with the spirit of the world; and where there have been continuous attempts to reconcile between the spirit of the world and the Spirit of God; or, reconcile between the divine commandment and the desires and passions of the soul and where there is dominion of the spirit of the world over the believers. Yet, the bible clearly warns us that this reconciliation is wrong, and it is impossible to succeed: *'For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?'* (2 Corinthians 6: 14).

The third kind is when the person rejects all what is related to faith and even rejects the Person of God Himself. There are those who started well; and then, they turned their back to the way and totally rejected the faith.

Now, we go back to the pure faith to highlight some of its features:

- The Dynamic faith
- The Tests of faith
- The Confrontations of faith
- The Boldness of faith

- **The Dynamic Faith**

The true and living faith is *dynamic*. This is a very important point because the faith of many of the true believers, that is, those who are not superficial or nominal, has become static. It does not move them or stir them towards God's purposes. As a result, their spiritual life starts to shrink and come to a halt. They do not experience the living and alive fellowship with God –this fellowship which is full of spiritual excitement and continuous renewal no matter what unsettled circumstances may surround the person. While in this state, the Psalmist said:

'My soul thirsts for You; my flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water. So I have looked for You in the sanctuary, to see Your power and Your glory' (Psalm 63: 1, 2).

This dynamic faith has two directions towards which it moves. It pushes the person *forward* and *upward*. It pushes him *forward* in order to carry out and complete what he has been created for; and hence, sense the importance of his days. It also moves him *upwards* in order to continually remind him of the heavenly hometown and the eternal life.

- **The Tests of Faith**

This is sensed and experienced only by those who have the dynamic faith; while those who live in the static faith, are unaware of this matter.

The dynamic faith has to be tested.

The test of faith has its reasons and its fruits.

The enemy intensely brings charges and accusations against every new level of faith which the believer moves to by the work of the Holy Spirit. This is because the new level of faith is always accompanied by a *new anointing*, a *new authority*, and a *new dimension in the fellowship with God and the angels*.

God allows this testing for our good. On the one hand, this annuls the charges and accusations of the enemy when we stand firm in the test. And indeed, God strengthens us during the test. On the other hand, after the test, the faith is *approved*; this means that it becomes steadfast and its work starts to be manifested. Its work is what I have just referred to concerning the anointing, authority, and fellowship.

We all know the biblical examples of the testing of faith, the most famous of which is Abraham who, according to the language of the Scriptures, was tested. We read:

Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." Then He said, "Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you" (Genesis 22: 1, 2).

We all know the story and we also know the outcome.

We read:

And said: By Myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son— blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice" (Genesis 22: 16 – 18).

There is another example which had different outcomes due to stumbling in the test. This was when Moses sent out men to spy the Land of Promise which God wanted them to enter. When they returned, there were those who passed the test:

Joshua and Caleb, and they received the blessing of entering the land. Yet, there were those who stumbled and brought bad report causing the congregation to complain and be frightened; those died in the wilderness and did not enter the Land of Promise. We read this story in the book of Numbers, chapters 13 and 14.

We so much need to learn our lessons from the word of God which is very clear. We should not forget the book of Job, a whole book of Scripture that teaches us many of these truths.

Sometimes God allows the tests to wake up His people, as we read in the story of Jehoshaphat.

When the enemies came upon him from every direction, he said:

'For we have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon You' (2 Chronicles 20: 12).

The people of God sought the Lord and Jehoshaphat drew their attention saying: *'Believe in the Lord your God, and you shall be established'*.

Thus, they triumphed in the battle; they rejoiced; and gathered so much spoil (2 Chronicles 20: 20 – 30).

We read about the same matter in the book of Isaiah, when the king of Assyria besieged Jerusalem in the days of king Hezekiah. Then, king Hezekiah sent to Isaiah, the prophet, to pray for them, saying: *'This day is a day of trouble and rebuke and blasphemy; for the children have come to birth, but there is no strength to bring them forth'* (Isaiah 37: 3). These words indicate and refer to the state of spiritual weakness and lack of preparation.

When they turned to God with all their heart, the Lord sent His angel who killed one hundred and eighty-five thousand in the camp of the Assyrians in one day; and the siege around Jerusalem and the people of God was broken (refer to Isaiah 37: 36, 37).

We thus conclude that the tests of faith can be for approval, condemnation, or spiritual waking up.

- **The Confrontations of faith**

This is another aspect of the features of the true and pure faith.

The confrontations in relation to the visions of faith are almost inevitable. This is because the enemy does not bear to see the work of faith and what it accomplishes. For him, this represents a danger to his plans.

In the book of Nehemiah, we read about what Nehemiah faced regarding his work of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem and restoring the prayers according to God's plan. As soon as he started his work, the confrontations started. It took various forms including: mockery, frightening, and hindrance.

Yet, Nehemiah, the man of God, said: *'I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down'* (Nehemiah 6: 3). And when they tried to make him afraid so that he would flee, he also said: *'Should such a man as I flee?'* (Nehemiah 6: 11).

He encouraged those who worked with him to build with one hand and hold the weapon with the other hand. This is because every work of building in the Kingdom of God requires a spiritual battle related to the work. We read: *'with one hand they worked at construction, and with the other held a weapon'* (Nehemiah 4: 17).

At the same time, he continually put his trust in the Lord through constant prayer: *'Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands'* (Nehemiah 6: 9b).

He also gathered all the people to worship and listen to the word of God *'from morning until midday'* (Nehemiah 8: 3).

We conclude this point with the words written in the book of Zechariah, chapter 4. We see a great picture of the confrontations of faith when the people returned

from captivity. Yet, holding unto the faith, had led to great results. Therefore, we witness the prophet, Zechariah, saying the following words:

Who are you, O great mountain (the mountain of confrontations)? Before Zerubbabel (the coming Messiah) you shall become a plain! And he shall bring forth the capstone (a clear reference to Christ, the coming Messiah) with shouts of "Grace, grace to it!" (Zechariah 4: 7).

Let us not forget that the author of faith has presented to us the picture of victory through endurance and through seeing the joy that was set before Him.

In the epistle to the Hebrews, we read:

'Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility (confrontations) from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls' (Hebrews 12: 2, 3).

• **The Boldness of Faith**

This is what we so much need these days.

In the epistle to the Ephesians, Apostle Paul reminds us saying: *'in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him' (Ephesians 3: 12).*

We can acquire this boldness if we observe the following points:

- The state of the heart: having a repentant humble heart which is at peace.
- Being filled with the word of God; Jesus conquered the enemy by the sword of the word of God.
- Bearing suffering patiently and with endurance. It is written: *'let us run with endurance the race that is set before us'* (Hebrews 12: 1).

- Avoiding the words of lack of faith and avoiding giving in to the sense of failure or frustration. It is written: *'For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind'* (2Timothy 1: 7).

3. Thirdly: The Men of Faith and their Responsibility in this Generation

There is a difference between the walk by faith that is expected of the normal believer and that expected of the man of faith who realises the responsibility towards his generation and desires to be part of it. He is thus called by the Lord who searches the hearts and knows the sincerity of the intentions.

Through the training of the Holy Spirit, this person becomes prepared and qualified to receive the anointing of the men of faith who carried the torch of faith and became a linking chain between the generations for the sake of the Kingdom of God. They changed the face of history in their time.

We so much need to discern the purposes of the Kingdom of God in our days, both the near and the far ones; in other words, the immediate purposes as well as the ones that will come after some time which is known to God.

The near or immediate purposes are related to our generation and knowing the economy and plans of the evil one in it, the state of the souls, the state of the people of God, and the state of the nations.

The far purposes or those that are yet to come after a time that is known to God refer to the second coming of the Lord which we ought to prepare the way for –as the men of faith had done before the first coming of Christ.

But, how can that be done?

On the one hand, we should first learn how to be co-workers with God, as apostle Paul says: *'we then, as workers together with Him...'* (2 Corinthians 6: 1). The Lord alone is the One who can work in such situations.

On the other hand, after we know and specify the purposes, we need to learn the means that are used for their fulfilment.

The most important means are:

- **Intercession:**

This should be done regularly and with a burden in the heart, that is, bearing the responsibility.

- **Sacrifice:**

Sacrifice means accepting suffering and the confrontations of the evil one without fear or withdrawal. This is because the person would have been confirmed in the love of God and in trusting Him; and also, in the love of the souls and the desire to serve them.

Apostle Paul says:

'For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake' (2 Corinthians 4: 5).

- **The Living example:**

There is a need for models and examples who live the gospel and proclaim to those around them that this holy life, that is granted to us in Christ, is possible, because it is completely founded and based on the free grace of God which is given to whoever needs and desires; and it can never fail.

We read the following words in the Scriptures:

'Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need' (Hebrews 4: 16).

- **Teaching with a prophetic anointing**

This allows the word of God to be revealed, understood, and rooted in the souls; and hence save them.

It is written:

‘Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls’ (James 1: 21).

Yes, indeed, when the word of God is rooted and implanted in the human soul, it would certainly free the soul from any bonds or evil.

And now, what about the features of the men of faith?

After discussing the means that the men of faith use in order to carry out their mission, let us highlight some of their features.

Some features of the men of faith:

- **The heart of the man of faith:**

It is a heart that is fully consecrated to the Lord; a heart that is not preoccupied with any other thing. In other words, it is a heart that finds no true pleasure in any other matters apart from the fellowship with God and His will.

The foundation or basis of the consecration of this person’s heart is the love of God and obeying the commandment:

‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind...You shall love your neighbour as yourself’ (Matthew 22: 37 – 39).

- **The faith of the man of God**

He is rooted in the absolute trust in the Lord because he knows the Lord whom He worships, who has become his friend, and who has never forsaken him –as written in the Psalm:

'The Lord will perfect that which concerns me; Your mercy, O Lord, endures forever; do not forsake the works of Your hands' (Psalm 138: 8).

Not only this, but it is also a faith that discerns the promises and knows how to hold unto them in the heart.

He also discerns the times and he knows how to see God's view about them.

Don't we remember the words of Jesus to those who resisted Him when He said:

'Hypocrites! You can discern the face of the sky and of the earth, but how is it you do not discern this time?' (Luke 12: 56).

Therefore, when the man of faith discerns the times and knows the state of the people, he will know how to pray for them and serve them.

- **The man of God is enduring and tempted like his Master**

He learned to humbly endure and have long-suffering in the midst of the challenges. He learned to accept to be humiliated, despised, or rejected like his Master, knowing that by this he partakes in the Lord's suffering; and hence, partakes in the power of His resurrection.

It is written:

'That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death' (Philippians 3: 10).

The man of God, the man of faith, is sometimes called to partake in the suffering of his people or even in their sins in order to know how to be humble and patient with them, leading them to repentance and discovering the love of God and His great salvation.

Yet, this matter requires special discernment and special guidance.

We have some biblical examples for this:

Ezekiel, the prophet

He was allowed to partake in the abominations and iniquities of his people to some extent; and to eat the defiled bread –according to the law of the Jews.

He was also allowed to be put in an actual painful physical siege; and even to partake in hunger and thirst because of the circumstances of his people.

We read about this in chapter four of the book of Ezekiel.

Hosea, the prophet

He was allowed to go through a bitterly painful experience where his wife committed adultery and he was requested to forgive her and restore her.

He thus learned the mystery of love of the wounded heart of God and he became a prophet of the mystery of this wounded love.

We also have some examples in the New Testament:

The apostles were all men of faith who bore suffering to the point of death for the sake of the gospel. Yet, they were able to carry the message of the gospel to all the earth, in their time.

There are also other examples in the life of **the saints** who faced intense suffering; yet, they preserved the faith which was delivered to them, like **Saint Athanasius the Apostolic** and his diligence in preserving and protecting the faith at the time of the Arian Heresy.

There were numerous saints in the east and missionaries in the west who changed the face of history in their places and their times because they were men of faith who bore the holy torch of faith from generation to generation.

And, now:

Do we truly accept and choose to be men of faith for our generation?

Are our hearts truly filled with holy zeal that eats us up, as it was written about the Lord: 'zeal for Your house has eaten Me up' (John 2: 17b)?

Do we truly put our hands on the plough and never look back; and persevere and be patient to become entrusted and sent forth?

These remain to be God's questions for us and He waits for our reply and response, not in words, but in assurance.

Let us conclude with these verses:

'For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power' (1 Corinthians 4: 20).

'For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake' (1 Thessalonians 1: 5).

Amen