

PRECAUTION IN LIFE



Fr. Joshi Kochukudiyattil V C.

‘For no one can anticipate the time of disaster. Like fish taken in a cruel net, and like birds caught in a snare, so mortals are snared at a time of calamity, when it suddenly falls upon them.’ (Ecclesiastes 9:12). We face this sort of a situation, when the foundation of our life is not laid in God. This will reflect in us in many different ways. We see many people around us who try their best to trust in the Lord, but lose their peace of mind due to the problems they face in life; there are some haunted constantly due to guilt conscience, there are those who find it difficult to come out of the wounds inflicted on their minds, there are those who give up hope etc. Once a couple brought their son, straight to the retreat center, after being discharged from the hospital where he was admitted after an attempt to commit suicide. Enquiry revealed that his colleagues in office constantly hurt him with their words. Recently the report that appeared in the newspapers sent shock waves – a student of fourth standard ended his life because he had scored less marks in examination. We come across many cases of people who end their lives due to financial burden, parents who are extremely upset about their children and so on. As we think about this, what we should try to seek and find is – where, what and in who have we laid the foundation of our lives. “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock.” (Mat 7:24-25). Why are we not able to place our foundation like this in God?

GOD’S WILL IS THE FOUNDATION OF OUR LIFE:

“But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Let everyone who calls on the name of the Lord turn away from wickedness." (2 Tim 2:19). The foundation that God lay lasts for ever. What is this foundation? "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of

my Father in heaven.” (Mat 7:21). This is the foundation God has placed for our lives. If the will of God is the foundation of our lives, no problem can shake it. That is why Jesus said to his disciples, “I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me.” (Jn. 6:38). There are certain requirements to fulfill the will of God. First and foremost, when others ask us to fulfill their will, and persuade us to do so, we should have the courage to reply as Jesus said to his disciples that ‘my life is to fulfill the will of God’ and we should act accordingly. If what others demand from us is in accordance with the will of God, we should fulfill it; if not we should be bold enough to dismiss it. “Am I now seeking human approval, or God's approval? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still pleasing people, I would not be a servant of Christ.” (Gal 1:10). Secondly, even if everyone and everything turns against us, and our life is facing a cross, we should have the courage to speak to our heavenly Father. In the midst of all these we should be able to tell our Father, that ‘I wish to do your will.’ “Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed,⁴² "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done." (Lk 22:41-42). We should establish such a relationship with the Father that we should be able to spend time with him personally, staying away from others and we should feel at home to open our minds to Him. Generally we have a tendency to run away from him when we are in the midst of crosses. But even in such circumstances, if we tell him that we want to fulfill his will, it helps us to enhance our self-confidence.

WORK FOR JESUS, KEEPING AWAY YOUR OWN WORK:

When does our foundation in God become weak? “All who call on the name of the Lord must avoid evil.’ We dislike fulfilling the will of God, when oppressed by sin. Then we lose sight of goodness around us, and our hearts will be set on things that are evil. We must wait earnestly for the will of God and fulfill it. The thought that my wish and my will are most desirable for my life has to be changed first. It has to be replaced by the thought that it is the will of God that is the best for my life and wait for it to be fulfilled. “And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand.” (Mat 7:26). This is the sign of a person who runs after foolishness. “All of them are seeking their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.” (Phil 2:21). ‘Go to this people and say, You will indeed listen, but never understand, and you will indeed look, but never perceive.’ (Acts 28:26). “If someone holds himself aloof from these faults I speak of, he will be held in honour, dedicated and fit for master, ready for any good work.”

IF THE FOUNDATION IS LAID ON STUPIDITY:

I recollect what one person shared with me, “I boarded a train to this city with just Rs. 50 with me. I had only one thought at that time in my mind, to be rich somehow. I have amassed more than 5 crores in place of that Rs. 50. But I am left with nothing; even my family abandoned me!’ This is another portrait of a foundation that is laid on foolishness instead of laying it in the will of God. This man also desired to ‘take things easy, eat, drink and have a good time, after storing up all his grains in bigger barn, by pulling down the existing one’, was called a foolish man by the Lord, (Lk 12:18-19) because he laid his foundation on foolishness _ in his own comfort - not in his Provider or in His will. For some others, life on this world is the only reality and will approach God only with that intention. Once a lady said, “Jesus takes a long time to answer our

prayers; that is why I had to seek other sources. For me the most important thing is to get my wish granted.” Here we conveniently forget one thing, the truth that “the world and its desire are passing away, but those who do the will of God live forever.” (1 Jn 2:17).

FOUNDATION IN THE PROVIDER, NOT IN HIS GIFTS:

Some others lay their foundation in leading a busy life and in achieving success. We wish to conveniently forget that the reward is from the Lord and that it comes at a time when he desires. “So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.” (1 Cor 3:7). This growth is a process. We are being moulded in the hands of a skilful sculptor; the work of art becomes magnificent when it achieves perfection in the hands of sculptor. When it is broken repeatedly, the intention of the sculptor is pure. He aims at perfection. Therefore, “whatever happens to you, accept it, and in the uncertainties of your humble state, be patient. Since gold is tested in the fire, and the chosen in the furnace of humiliation.” (ecclesiasticus 2:4-5). If this doesn’t happen, the other side of it will work within us. “As for what fell among the thorns, these are the ones who hear the word of God; but as they go on their way, they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life and their lives do not produce fruits.” (Lk 8:14). All these then will lead us to the temptations of flesh. “To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law-- indeed it cannot, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.” (Rom 8:6-10). Therefore, let us seek the will of God in order to be built on the foundation of Christ, according to the call and the will. “For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw-- the work of each builder will become visible, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done. If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward.” (1 Cor 3:11-14).

CHRISTMAS IS A SIGN.



FR. ANTONY.

Christmas brings me fond memories of a crib made in our church in my childhood. There was a wall on which lamp posts were fixed. Inside the wall there were mountain ranges with long stretches of lush green grass. The crib was set in the middle of this beautiful scenery. There were twinkling stars; glowing Christmas trees, a well with clear water, green meadows and flock of sheep. All of these were pointing towards one place. That was the place where Jesus lay. “I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” (Lk 2:10-12).

LET THE OPINIONS AND SIGNS SPEAK:

There were loads of opinion and evaluation about the crib. Some said, “how can this be called a crib? It is made of hay!” Others said, “It is not at all good.” Yet others opined that it was made because they had nothing better to do. Still some others said, “It’s just okay, not so good and so on.” The fact that the crib on which baby Jesus was lying was being commented upon was painful because that was something which was not to be evaluated. It was a symbol and sign of the truth that is priceless. Not just this crib; all cribs in the world are signs, pointers and harbingers.

The crib is a sign of the birth of the king of peace, the saviour of families and of the entire world. There is a great secret that a crib whispers in everyone’s ears – that is – Today is the birth of Jesus – prepare a place in your heart for Jesus to be born. Prepare your heart so that you will be a witness for this golden moment in which heaven touches the earth. For Jesus to be born in me, I need a penitent and pure heart.

DON’T MISINTERPRET THE SIGNS:

Christmas comes every year. However today, as per the papers and magazines, Christmas is associated with the dubious distinction, as the day of the maximum sale of liquor. It seems

Keralites consume liquor worth 50 crores on this day. Unfortunately we are living in such malicious time that people misinterpret and misunderstand the signs. Jesus is moving amidst us with a tearful face, because our hearts are not opened for him.

JESUS AMONG THE ONES WHO WAIT OUTSIDE:

I remember the crib that was built in the sit-out of my house. That reflected our attitude. Today every house has a sit out – which means a place where least important people – beggars, servants, lame ones etc and even some relatives are made to sit. Here is the place where the crib is made, which means that we tell Jesus, ‘Jesus, you sit out.’ It would be surprising if Jesus didn’t weep. Those who leave Jesus in the sit out are the ones who do not find time even to go for confession, those who do not go for mass due to busy schedule, those who refuse to come to good terms with others at least during Christmas, and even those who ignore poor. They are reluctant in allowing Jesus to come inside.

WHAT IS CHRISTMAS?

As some think, Christmas is not a day for consuming liquor; it is a day one should abstain from taking drinks. It is a day on which your enemies have to be forgiven; they have to be treated well. It is a day when one should have made a good confession with a penitent heart in order to receive Communion; it is a day to call back Jesus who went away from us. A day when people come together and destroy the liquor bottles that are stored.

Christmas is as sign – a sign that the Father has sent his only son 2000 years ago as an answer to all the problems.

LEARN FROM THE SIGNS:

Unfortunately today we do not comprehend the meaning of signs that happen in our life or the signs are allowed to be manifested into symbolism. I shall explain this more vividly through the following example. There is a convent in Srirampur in Maharashtra where only 4 sisters reside. Once someone entered the convent and stole the rice and wheat and this continued for many days. The nuns were terrified and they couldn’t sleep due to fear. Initially they thought of lodging a complaint with the police. Subsequently they thought it was better to inform the vicar of the parish. The vicar heard everything patiently and responded thus, “Don’t complain to police. You have become nuns as per the will of God not the police, so tell this to God. I don’t think they are real thieves. They may be people in utter poverty. Since we did not give them anything they would have taken it to satiate their hunger. Have you heard of thieves who steal wheat? Anyway wait for a week. Keep a prayerful vigil and try to nab the thief.” The vicar had comprehended the sign and therefore able to advise accordingly. The nuns started keeping vigil at night, praying through out the night. Apart from community prayers, they also intensified their personal prayer and also prayed in groups. More time was spent in prayer. Then they extended it to one hour adoration, fasting and intercessory prayer – a great light radiated from that convent due to intensified prayer. The robbery was mere signs God had given them a) to trust God completely b) for his people who forgot God and fellow beings due to their busy schedule. As

soon as the prayers began there were no more thefts besides the nuns even chalked out some plans to help the poor as well. Thankfully the Vicar interpreted the sign meaningfully.

ARE WE WITHOUT ROOTS?

Let us come back to the crib. Well-lit Christmas trees that appear only on the day of Christmas indicate today's trend. These trees dry faster even though they are decorated with beautiful bulbs, balloons, festoons and so on. It withers quickly because it doesn't have roots. Those who go to church only on the day of Christmas, those who dismiss the message of Christmas immediately after the Christmas day are without roots. Perfect Christmas tree never withers. What we require is also the spirit of Christmas that never fades.

Which is your Bethzatha?



-Rev. Fr. Mathew Elavungal V.C.

We read in the fifth chapter of John's Gospel, about the pitiful fate of a sick person who had been lying by the pool of Bethzatha for thirty eight long years awaiting healing. There is a historical background for the miracles that were said to be taking place here. This was a place of Worship of Gentiles dedicated to Esculapius, the God of Health. They had spread rumours that many miracles take place at this place which is forbidden to true believers, where this alien God is worshipped. According to the faith of gentiles, it is their God Esculapius who stirred up the water of the pool and thus provided healing to sick .

The disastrous outcome of superstition

As per the faith of Jews, this place, where an alien God is worshipped is forbidden to Jews. Ironically ,this sick person, who is a Jew; had been lying there for 38 years awaiting healing and this truly is a disaster that stems out of superstition. To justify this great error, some Jews attributed an explanation that an angel from heaven comes down and stirs up the water. This Jew, who belonged to their group, had been lying by the pool of Bethzatha for 38 years to be healed.

Close your complaint box; open the doors of your heart

Why did Jesus go to the pool of Bethzatha? He went there to perform a miracle which will convey the salvific message not only to the people of that era but for all the people to come till the end of times.

Jesus asked him, "Do you want to get well?" Instead of replying in a single word, he expressed his grievances. " Sir, I have no one here to put me in the pool when the water is stirred up; while I am trying to get in , somebody else gets there" (**John 5:7**). Jesus still continues to ask this question to all of us. Perhaps, instead of permitting Jesus to perform a miracle in us, sometimes we too **express our grievances**, blaming others and **cursing** ourselves. We too might have been under some bondage for years. At this moment Jesus wants us to open the doors of our heart to say "I too want to get well Jesus – in my soul, mind and body." "I was ready to answer my

people's prayers, but they did not pray. I was ready to be found by them, but they did not even try. The nation did not pray to me even though I was always ready to answer. Here I am, I will help you". (**Isaiah 65:1**)

Do not repeat you sins.

Jesus said to that sick man, "Get up, pick up your mat and walk" (**John 5:8**) Though he tried to spoil the golden opportunity given to him to be healed by Jesus, by opening up his complaints, Jesus fulfilled his divine mission in him. "Immediately the man got well; he picked up his mat and started walking." (**John 5:9**) Later we read thus in verse 14 : "Afterwards Jesus found him in the temple and said, 'Listen, you are well now; so stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.'" (**John 5:14**) This man was under bondage for 38 long years because he left the Temple of Jerusalem, which God had given the believers for praying and worshipping, but he had gone to Bethzatha – a place of worship of gentiles- to obtain temporary gains and healing. Many believers followed these rituals which originated from a superstition in order to acquire their own worldly gains, giving it a spiritual outfit. When the believers who lacked wisdom, accepted these sinful, satanic and absurd areas and followed it under the guise of spiritual rites and rituals giving it a spiritual outfit, Satan, the deceitful, took full advantage of it. The healing obtained at Bethzatha when the water is stirred up was not truly from God. It was from Satan. Even Satan can offer healing; he can predict future, he can provide us with material gains and achievements. But the spiritual life of those who accept these above mentioned benefits from Satan will be ruined. The shine and glow of these temporary and worldly gains will disappear after some time. Besides, their day to day life too will be adversely affected. As their souls have already been infected, apart from spiritual ruin their life too will be in danger. Any gain whichever be its source, from whomever it comes from, if it is not from God, be rest assured that it is a gift from Satan, because Satan never approaches us in the form of vice, or with the sign of ruin or with the message of darkness; in fact he will present it in the garb of goodness and virtue. He will approach us with the promise of gifts which will appear to be very attractive at the outset.

Evil that comes in the form of goodness

Satan, did not approach Adam and Eve promising them damnation, or calamity or evil. What he offered was tantalizing promises in the form of goodness. Eve was carried away by that ;as a result she developed doubt and lack of faith in the Word of God and in turn, she put her trust and faith in the word of Satan. That is why Eve desired, accepted and shared with Adam what God had forbidden. What we read in the **Book of Genesis Chapter 3:1-24** is this Great Calamity that struck our first parents by accepting evil which came in the garb of goodness.

Satan's goal is our ruin

While Paul and Silas were preaching the Good News under the instruction of the Holy Spirit, in the city of Philippi in Macedonia, a slave girl who had evil spirit in her that enabled her to predict the future, shouted thus, "These men are the servants of the most High God! They announce to you how you can be saved!" (**Acts 16:17**) This was repeated not just once, but many times. This upset Paul as it was from Satan, though the message appeared to be pleasant and

divine on hearing. Paul filled with the power of the Holy Spirit turned around and said to the spirit in her “In the name of Jesus Christ I order you to come out of her.” At that very moment she lost the power to predict the future. This incident teaches us a great lesson. Satan is tactful and he desires the damnation of man. In order to win over man, he might adopt ways and means which will appear to be good and divine.

We, as humans, if we do not see through the evil tactics of Satan, using the Gift of Discernment given to us by the Holy Spirit to recognize the spirits, we too will be lying helpless for years **under** the dominion of Satan like the sick man at the Bethzatha.

Do not follow them

God says thus to those who follow the people who give messages, interpret dreams, predict future and show signs and miracles by the power of satan ., “A prophet or an interpreter of dreams may promise a miracle or a wonder, in order to lead you to worship or serve gods that you have not worshipped before; even if what he promises comes true do not pay any attribute to him. The Lord your God is using him to test you, to see if you love the Lord your God with all your heart (**Deut 13:1-3**)

In **Deuteronomy 18:9-13** God gives strict warning to the believers. “When you come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you, don’t follow the disgusting practices of the nations that are there. Don’t sacrifice their children in the fires on your altars; and don’t let your people practice divination or look for omens or use spells or charms, and don’t let them consult the spirits of the dead. The lord Your God hates people who do these disgusting things, and that is why he is driving those nations out of the land as you advance. Be completely faithful to the Lord.” “Do not go for advice to people who consult the spirits of the dead. If you do, you will be virtually unclean. I am the Lord Your God.” (**Lev 19:31**)

They are like bits of straw

The Bible teaches us about the calamities that will befall upon those who go after the people, gifts and areas that are not from God. “Keep all your magic spells and charms; you have used them since you were young. Perhaps they will be of some help to you; perhaps you can frighten your enemies. You are powerless in spite of the advice you get. Let your astrologers come forward and save you- those people who study the stars, who map out the zones of the heavens and tell you from month to month what is going to happen to you. They will be like bits of straw, and fire will burn them up! They will not even be able to save themselves- the flames will be too hot for them, not a cosy fire to warm themselves by. That is all the good they will do to you- those astrologers you have consulted all your life. They all will leave you and go their own way, and none will be left to save you.” (**Isaiah 47:12-15**)

Lord Jesus wanted to save the man at Bethzatha from eternal damnation which is why he healed him with the Word of God. ‘He healed him with his command and saved him from the grave’ (**Psalms 107:20**). Later on Jesus gave him a warning while in the temple, “ Listen, you are well now; so stop sinning or something worse may happen to you” (**John 5:14**), which means he

should not go back to the same pool where Satan had chained him, or to such rites and rituals or to such people who indulge in these things.

Which is our Bethzatha? What is it?

It may not necessarily be the same type of superstition or absence of faith. Any sin or bad habit or vice which puts us under bondage can turn into our Bethzatha. Jesus teaches that we should make constant efforts to be out of such things, to abandon it completely and never to go back to it.

LET US BE HUMBLE



-Fr. Augustine padinjarekkuttu..... V.C.

Our Lord has not revealed clearly as to who He is and what He is. But he has indicated some qualities he possessed. There are two such virtues – gentleness and humility. “Learn from me, as I am gentle and humble” (Matt 11:29). Jesus has never asked us to preach as **he** preached, or perform miracles as he did, or pray as he prayed. What he asked us to imbibe and learn from Him are these two virtues – gentleness and humility.

Be humble

To be human means to be humble. The greatest truth about man is that he is nothing. All of us are God’s creation. As His creation, all of us depend upon Him. All that we have is received from the Lord as free gifts. Nothing belongs to us, and if we have anything as our own it is only our sins. Therefore there is no reason for us to be proud or arrogant or to boast about any thing. Why should we be proud as we have nothing of our own? The Lord asks, “Who made you so important? What have you got that was not given to you? And if it was given to you, why are you boasting as though it were your own?”(1Cor 4:7). Although we are nothing and we have no merit of our won; we continue to live as if we are something. What the spiritual writer Raniero, Kanthallamessa says is that we lead two types of lives. One is the real life and another one is an imaginary one. The Real life is the life of emptiness and impoverishment, where as the imaginary one is a life based on our own perceptions and on the opinions of others. Many of us lead this imaginary life and while leading this, we become very arrogant, assuming we are someone. But Jesus reminds us that we are in a fool’s paradise and with that we are deceiving ourselves. “If someone thinks he is somebody, when really he is nobody, he is only deceiving himself.” (Gal 6:3) Therefore we who are created and also saved should realize our nothingness and become humble. It is not enough to be humble but we have to be filled with goodness; because God who is good to everyone has made us rich with his innumerable blessings. Let us remember that expressing gratitude is also another aspect of humility.

Humility of humility

The special feature of this virtue ,humility is that the person who practices it,is never conscious of the fact that he or she possesses this virtue. He will be conscious only of his littleness and nothingness. God is the one who sees this virtue in him. Let us take the example of Mother Mary. She said, “He has looked upon the humiliation of His servants” (Lk 1:48). Here what Mother Mary meant by humiliation was not the virtue of humility but her nothingness and emptiness. Mary considered herself as unworthy. But God noticed the virtue of humility in her and was pleased with her.

Humility is knowing oneself

A person who realizes who he really is, will never be proud or arrogant, however high he rises in life. He will not budge even slightly from the consciousness that he is nothing. When Mary was raised to the position of the Mother of God,she did not become proud thinking she is somebody and she did not clamour for any authority or recognition. Mary did not accompany Jesus wherever he went; she did not sit in front ,to listen to his preaching; she did not watch proudly and happily the miracles her son had been performing. She kept away from all these ,with the realization that she is nobody. Once she went to meet him, but she had to wait for a longtime!. This mother had never moved away ,but stayed in the line of humble people. That is her humility. Only the one who knows himself or herself clearly can remain humble like this.

Humility is not easy to practise

To practice humility of this sort, first of all what we have to do is to accept all humiliations cheerfully. It is very easy to practise humility in words, but it is quite difficult to practise it in real life. We may confess in God’s presence that we are great sinners but the moment our brothers notice our faults and point them out to us we will be displeased!. Therefore the best way to practise humility is to accept the criticism, snide remarks ,accusations and corrections from our brethren with an attitude of forgiveness. It is not possible to practise humility without receiving humiliations from others. Trying to practise humility on our own is cherishing a false hope. The thinker Kanthellamessa says, ‘a person who tries to practice humility on his own,is like a patient who tries to conduct a surgery on himself in order to remove the tumour from his brain.

Realization is humility

We shrink to nothing when we stand before the infinite goodness, beauty, grace and holiness of God. When Simon peter witnessed the divine grace of Jesus by the Lake of Gannesaret, he realized his own sinfulness and nothingness which made him fall at his knees to request Jesus to leave him as he was a sinful man (Lk5:8). It was when Mary stood in the presence of the Lord that she became conscious of her humility. The angels and saints who are in the presence of God in heaven do not stand there casting their glances down thinking of their sins; but with their heads are bowed before the great and glorious God. They do not have to think for a moment to be conscious of their helplessness and nothingness. Jesus tells each one of us “Do not be proud, but accept humble duties” (Rom 12:16).
