

## THE FOUR SEASONS OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS-CHRIST

I believe that the Church, like nature itself, goes through four seasons. Like with nature, we have Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter, so we have also four seasons for the Church. However not all the seasons have the same duration, in fact, in some countries and in some societies, this lesson was not understood and consequently great losses have been suffered.

### **FIRST SEASON: SPRING**

This is the season for Evangelism, that is, the time to sow. The seed is the Word of God, it is sown by all the conventional means: mass evangelism, healing campaigns, personal testimonies, movies, giving out literature, Christian theatre, etc.... I believe enough has been taught on this subject, so as to not require more development on my part.

### **SECOND SEASON: SUMMER**

This is the time for discipleship. In these last years, the Church has started to understand that to make converts and make disciples are not synonymous. We have to teach all nations and make disciples, -that is students of all the ones we bring to Christ. Conversion is only the beginning of spiritual growth. We have to teach the believers to OBSERVE all things that Christ taught.

However, preaching and public teaching have their limitations. In public teaching the teacher is not closely related with the disciple, he does not notice what are his errors and mistakes. He is not always able to diagnose correctly. In a group meeting he has difficulty to apply the teachings to the existing needs.

Another inconvenience of the public or crowd meeting is that in general, we are receptive to the things that we agree with. Some people having emotional problems and feelings of guilt, have the habit to take all the corrections for themselves and by so doing, place more condemnation upon their own heads. Others who fear rejection, or have a very poor self-esteem, cannot bear applying the truth to their situation.

Public preaching, including the style of Bible School or conventional academic teaching, have the tendency to create an abyss between theory and practice. The people taught with this method believe some truths and think that if they believe correctly, they are freed of any other obligations.

Another difficulty is that few of us will be sufficiently honest to judge ourselves correctly. Much of what we hear we apply to others. Jesus got it right with his evaluation of the human nature when he said: "first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye."

Jesus' method.

I do not believe that we can improve the system used by Jesus, and it is that of a personal discipleship, living shoulder to shoulder with his disciples, teaching them with his word, with parables and by means of his example.

The ones who teach but are not examples themselves invalidate the Word that is taught, and produce resentment and frustration in the disciples. Paul could say: *"follow me as I follow Jesus"*. He could say to Timothy: *"But you have fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, long-suffering, charity, patience, persecutions, afflictions..."* A disciple can not fully know the every day behaviour of the teacher without having an intimate contact with him. The teacher should not isolate himself from the disciples.

In order to assist the disciple to obtain the results he desires he can be taught in a controlled environment, in situations that oblige him to obey. I do not suggest that the situation should be forced but the disciple should understand that he is under an authority and that he is expected to obey his teachers, leaders and pastors in the Lord. He who is only in obedience when he desires to be so is doing whatsoever he, himself, wants. We cannot learn to be good soldiers of Jesus Christ and suffer hardships unless we are under an authority.

Community living benefits those who live according to this life style in that are obliged to learn discipline and correct Christian habits more quickly. It is especially useful for those who do not come from healthy Christian homes.

Jesus taught his disciples in a natural life setting, not in hall or classroom of a church building.

There are three basic precepts that the Lord wants to teach us while we are in flesh.

1° HOW TO RESPOND TO GOD

- a) The Father, we submit to Him and we believe in Him.
- b) The Son, we honour Him and recognise Him as the Lord.
- c) The Holy Spirit, we learn to follow Him and to be taught by Him.

2° HOW TO REACT TO THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF LIFE,

to adverse, difficult situations that demand a lot. The Lord wants to teach us how to react to suffering and pain; how to react when we are criticised and talked badly about; how to react when confronted by disillusionment and human sadness; how to react to sorrow and praise. Life is a great school of the Spirit and God has eternal purposes to fulfil.

3° HOW TO RELATE TO OTHERS

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God starts with the ones in our own family: our parents, brothers and sisters, our spouse. He wants for us to learn our role from his Word and to live accordingly. Then we have to learn to relate in the context of the Church, with our sisters and brothers in Christ, with the ones that are in authority above us in the Lord, with our equals, with the ones that are under our care, etc. You will find out that all the precepts that we are learning will fit into these three categories.

### TAUGHT BY EXAMPLE

Jesus taught humility by his life. He said: *"Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest unto your souls."* The rest in soul is the result of humility and meek spirit. He taught his disciples a great and visible lesson that they would never forget, when he laid aside his garments, took a towel, girded himself and washed their feet.

Example is the most eloquent lesson we can learn from. We learn humility, the mother of all virtues, from the attitude of our teachers. You do not learn humility by being subjugated or crushed but from those who have the Spirit of Christ and communicate it. We are exhorted: *"Be imitators of God like dear children"* I think the Lord is more interested in guiding and teaching us than pleasing us. All children have to be disciplined and corrected, He rebukes and chastens: *"all that He receives as children."* If we learn in the classroom of life through godly teachers we can save ourselves a lot of pain and suffering that we should have to face as the discipline of God.

We have to teach our disciples the right attitude. Facts and doctrines are important but the most important is the right attitude of heart. This attitude is communicated by a godly teacher and a spiritual father.

We need to teach faith, not just the biblical doctrine but how to live and to be motivated by faith. *"The just lives by faith"* is a fundamental teaching of the Bible. We understand clearly that we are justified by faith, but few have learned to apply this faith to their daily discipline. The important thing is living by faith. We either live by the principle of faith or by the one of fear.

The first lessons Jesus taught to the disciples He sent out were about faith. He sent them out without financial resources, and when they came back He asked: *"Did you lack anything?"* Many try to skip this first lesson and later they will have problems in their ministries. Without having learned this lesson they will be tempted to use unorthodox and non-ethical methods to finance their projects.

The disciples that have been correctly taught, are the ones that are available for the work of the ministry. They have learned that their lives do not belong to themselves, they have learned to be faithful in the natural before the spiritual: faithful in small things before giving them bigger things; faithful in things that are not theirs before giving them things that are truly theirs. They should learn the faithfulness in unjust

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riches before real riches will be given to them. Faithfulness in the relationships with people they live with before giving them a congregation.

They need to learn to be under an authority until the leader thinks the disciple is prepared to exercise authority on a small scale. Do they show interest, love, compassion, grace? Are they seeking to serve or to be served? Do they have a meek spirit or a brusque and proud spirit? (The interesting thing about pride is that it destroys its own good works.) Are they faithful in tithes, in giving their time, in spending their money and in giving freely their energy to the others and to the Lord.

How have they responded to the obligation of natural work? I have observed that the reaction of a person before physical work is very important to diagnose his character and motives. The ones that have come to the ministry failing in the tests of faithfulness in physical work, normally have also failed later in their ministries and probably many more have been hurt by their behaviour and their lack of diligence.

The Christian doctrine needs to be applied to daily situations. Most people do not know how to do this, dedicating themselves merely to hear sermons and to listen to the teaching. We learn by observing, by example, but especially we learn by doing, by trying and by being corrected when we fail and by being applauded when we succeed.

A disciple always needs to be aware of the fact that he is a steward of his time, of his money and of his words. He is a steward that has to keep account to God of his life, his reactions and his relations. We have to be aware that there will be a final judgement when we all will render account of our deeds in the flesh, the good and the bad ones. And not just of the deeds done and the work accomplished but also the motives behind them. Have we worked for love or for a desire for recognition and personal benefits? A disciple that is under a spiritual authority can be valued in a certain situation before more responsibility is given to him, in this way avoiding scandals and failures that would affect many.

St. Paul praised the Thessalonians believers for the work of their faith, the labour of their love and the constancy of their doing good. Let our labour be a labour of love; let our work be inspired by faith and may our patience rest upon our blessed and eternal hope.

The disciples, who understand the lordship of Christ in their lives, who have learned to apply the doctrine in their personal circumstances and who live by faith, are the ones who can be used in the third season of the church.

### **THIRD SEASON: AUTUMN**

The third season of the church is the time to get involved with social ministries. Some have tried to do this, being motivated by the example of other churches or by reading the Word and they have failed miserably, mainly for the lack of disciplined and dedicated Christians. They have tried to jump directly from the spring of evangelism into the autumn of social work, and they have found out that they did not have the

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strength, capacity and dedication to minister the necessary love, discipline and compassion. The soldier needs to be trained and physically equipped for the war, otherwise he will become a casualty.

The experience of coming down from the mountain of warm relationship with Christ into the valley of human needs can be traumatic, unless we are prepared. Faith is necessary and it comes through the tests and temptations we endure. In Matthew 17 we can read how the disciples came down from the mountain where the people were. We need to come down from the mountain of our religious meetings (so far from the real needs) and we will find a lot of unrelieved suffering, a lot of oppression that we had not paid any attention to and many wounds that need to be healed. We cannot heal the wounds that we do not feel. Like the disciples we can see confused and anxious parents with fears; desperate, broken hearted and hurt parents; children that are trapped by the enemy; youngsters that are enslaved by drugs, alcohol, bad habits and false philosophies. It is good to stay on top of the mountain but the needs are waiting for us in the valley.

For too long the church has been more interested in getting people converted and having economical settlement than dedicating herself to human needs. In some countries the state has taken the responsibility for many of the social needs and so the church has failed to take her personal responsibility. The spiritual and moral qualities of the church do not exist in governmental institutions. They can not supply the needs of love, compassion and Christian interest. By meeting just the physical needs we do not cover the needs of the soul. In other words, a problem is an unmet need. The church around the world has failed to meet the needs that surround her and will be judged accordingly. The biggest motivation to get involved in the human needs are the words of Jesus concerning the final judgement: " *...I was hungry and you gave me to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me to drink, I was a stranger and you took me in: naked, and you clothed me: I was sick and you visited me: I was in prison and you came unto me.*" (Matt.25:35-36)

The soul of love is the love for souls. If we love Jesus we will love the things He does and we will find our pleasure in doing the things that He would do. We are His body, His hands, His heart and His eyes to see the suffering and the human needs. As a fact we will be judged eternally according to the way we react to the needs around us. St. John says: "He who has goods of this world and sees his brother in need and shuts his bowels of compassion from him, how can the love of God dwell in him?"(1.John 3:17) "The value of the human race is measured by how humanly people treat each other." (Francis Schaefer)

Mother Theresa of Calcutta said: "In these twenty years of working amongst the people I have become more and more aware of the fact that not being wanted is the worst disease a human being can ever experience."

Jesus talked about "*the least of these my brethren*". What about the non-born aborted baby that was called embryonic tissue? What about the mentally retarded? What about the invalids, abused children, the non- loved, the not wanted, the mistake ones? What about the abused wives, the alcoholic husbands, the trapped drug addicts, the elderly, the sick? What about the third world countries where the people are less

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fortunate but not less important? Maybe they do not earn as much but certainly they are as worthy in the eyes of God.

Jesus identified himself with human needs: the sick, the marginal, the prostitutes, the oppressed. Those who have been disciplined and have learned to hear the voice of the Master are the ones who will get involved in this third season of the church: the one of social needs and reform.

James says to us in chapter 2:26, "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." What gives life to a body? The spirit! What gives life to faith? Correspondent works that indicate our faith as well as our love for Christ. We can not escape the plain conclusion that the way we live is an infallible indication of what we believe. The Church, not the state, is the salt of the earth. Let us be on our guard that we do not become tasteless and therefore useless for preserving our world of its moral and spiritual corruption. Jesus said we are the salt of the earth. Our identity indicates our task.

In the story of the multiplication of the fish and bread we can clearly see the three alternatives of how we can face the need and human suffering. The disciples said to Jesus when they faced the hungry multitude: "*Send them away, that they may go to into the country round about and into the villages, and buy themselves bread.*" (Mark 6:36). Matthew 14:14 says: "*And Jesus went forth and saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick.*" And in Matthew 15:32 we have the words of Jesus: "*I have compassion on the multitude because they have been here with me now for three days and have nothing to eat; and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way.*" In his spiritual ministry Jesus faced the reality of natural circumstances such as hunger, weakness, lack of natural resources. His compassion motivated him to preach to them and to teach them, to heal their sick and to liberate them of chains, to cover their physical needs by giving them fish and bread.

Let us be clear about the three alternatives we as a Church have:

The first is the reaction of the disciples: "*Send them away...*" In our actual situation we can send them to the state or governmental institutions, old people homes, orphanages, hospitals, rehabilitation centres, charity organisations or unemployment offices.

The second is also the disciples' reaction: "*Let them go and buy bread.*" It is another perfectly natural reaction. 'Till the moment the money has been our means of exchange. We exchange money for food, clothes, services, money for housing, transport, heating, etc. We have been mentally conditioned to think that money gets what we want. For some gaining riches is an obsession. It gives security and a sensation of power and value, etc. But Jesus said: "*You cannot serve God and money.*" He gave money a personality of an idol that people will adore and he contrasted serving money to serving God.

Until now money has been the necessary evil, and we have tried to possess it without it possessing us. But suppose that money fails or loses its purchasing value. Suppose inflation continues to rise like it has

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risen during the recent years in the whole world. Or suppose we are just about to enter in a new monetary system, and that digital system will replace the monetary system we are used to. Suppose as well that the Antichrist will take control of that monetary system and controls the world bank,...and it would be imperative to be part of that system or else not have permission to buy or to sell. Then what? What alternatives do we have as Christians?

The book of Revelation of John says in 13:16-18 that the beast *"Causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand or in their foreheads: And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him that has understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man: and his number is six hundred and sixty six."* So, what can we expect to happen? It is not my desire to make predictions of dates and times, it is enough to say that the day gets closer quickly and that the signs of the end are upon us. Paul says to us in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians 2:3-4: *"Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, until there will be a falling away first, and that man of sin will be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped; so that he as God sits in the temple of God, pretending that he is God."* This means clearly that we cannot expect Christ to come back until the system of Antichrist is established on earth. We as a Church should offer the believers an alternative life style in case this catastrophe would occur in the proximate years. This introduces us to:

### **FOURTH SEASON: WINTER**

This is a season of SELF SUPPLY. What should our strategy of crisis be like? To be prepared is not lack of faith, *"By faith...moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house, by the which he condemned the world,"* (Heb.11:7) It is not panic or anxiety that moves me but faith in the predictions, in the prophecies of the Word of God and in the spiritual revelation of this Word in to my spirit.

I would like to suggest the following steps. First, try to get rid of your debts. Reject a level of life that would require more than you earn. Do not borrow from the future when the future is so insecure. Then refuse to exchange liberty for security. By all possible means try to depend less and less on the governmental help, social security and unemployment benefit. The liberty and the security came only from God. The subventions and state supports demand a price that often is not seen until it is too late.

As well, investigate the alternatives to working the conventional way of nine to five.

Let us seek the Lord for Him to give us direction and light as to how to form co-operatives and small businesses. Entering into this season of winter we should learn to supply ourselves.

This is something we could call: "Total independence of the state and foreign missionary support." The Church should become self supporting providing for her own needs. Paul said to the Corinthians: *"I robbed other churches, taking wages of them to do you service."* It is done, Paul did it; but it is not recommendable. Today the missionary work functions on this basis. But in the case of a communist coup of

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state or something worse, the Church is not prepared to be able to grow, supply itself and continue its ministry.

The wise man said: *"Go to the ant, you sluggard, consider her ways and be wise: Which having no guide, overseer or ruler provides her meat in the summer and gathers her food in the harvest."* (Prov.6:6-8) Consider the nature, consider the ants, the bees and other animals how they prepare for the winter. The cats and dogs and other domestic animals would die if they did not receive help from people. They are used to living from people. They have forgotten their natural instincts. They have lost them. So if they are left alone or abandoned by the roadside they easily starve or become victims of traffic accidents. It is a sad to see these animals that have lost their ability to survive, to see them suffer and die because of the insensibility of man. But this is exactly what the civilisation and modern technology have done to man. The social and cultural system have left mankind invalid. Without buying from the supermarket he cannot live very long. We are victims of the electric light, tap water, the supermarkets, gas stations and public transport. The governmental power that controls these commodities controls humanity totally.

Man is loosing his identity as an individual because of the huge urban populations. He is registered, controlled and given a number. Everything is being prepared for a world governor, for his final taking over of humanity. The Christians as well as the non-Christians depend on the state and on others to give them a job, unemployment benefit, medical care, etc. The supermarkets give them food. Money is their only resource. A strike paralyzes all communication. Having to face a national crisis the Christians would be as helpless as anybody.

Before this time comes we have to be very aware of our common objective and goal: *"But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he has denied his faith and is worse than an infidel."* ( 1<sup>st</sup> Tim.5:8) Of course the context of this verse is that the head of the family would provide for his wife, children and close relatives. I do not deny that. But still in a wider context the Church should provide for the needs of the ones who have put their trust in Christ and expect direction and advice from the Church. The early Church was directly involved with the orphanages, the well- being of minors, the slaves, the elderly and the poor. In the Acts of the Apostles we can see how the Church took the responsibility for the widows. We should not fail in covering the needs of the Church, neither the ones of today nor the ones of the future.

### GOING BACK TO THE EARTH

I would suggest that we went back to the earth. This is our long term plan. I suggest the formation of small federations so that we can buy land. From the land comes water, vegetables, fruit, meat, milk, cheese and other sources of life. Remember, the Church has always been limited by its lack of economical resources. Jesus was limited for the hunger and weakness of his followers. He gave us the secret.

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The secret is multiplication. He refused to turn the stones into bread. He did take what was available and freely given to cover the physical needs of thousands of people. Multiplication is the law of the universe. He said: *"Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."* (Gen.1:28) God has put this law in every seed, in the animal and the vegetal as well. When Noah entered into the ark he did not store food, except for what he needed for the animals, but he brought a male and a female of all the species of animals and fowls.

We can supply the needs of the Church from the earth, not just the ones of the future but the ones of TODAY. From this moment on we can start to train the ones we have helped in our social ministry, that is to say the fruit of the third season.

We need to prepare them a significant and useful employment. They need rehabilitation in all the senses. They have been victims just as the man who fell in the hands of the robbers when he was on his way to Jericho...losing his money and his dignity and human value...despised and rejected by the society and the religion.

Vocational training is needed. Then, to provide working places, we train some Christians to form small businesses and to manage them on their own. We teach others how to form co-operatives in the construction and food industries and any other services we can offer to the world in order to surpass the world in our capacity to run a business, in our honesty, integrity and moral responsibility.

Let us use "the unjust riches" that are available today, to develop the work of the Lord, to establish these industries and to buy land and to make it produce fruit while we still have time and it is day.

This fourth season of the Church, instead of stopping our evangelistic expansion, gives to the world a very practical demonstration of our faith and draws its attention. People can see our works and give glory to our Father who is in heaven. We can expect the blessing of God upon us. We can claim the blessing of the God of Abraham over our land, our cattle and over our businesses. We can start every day with a prayer and praise, giving ourselves to the Lord while we live together. This way we can show our disciples how to work for the Lord and not for the love of money... to serve one another, to have a vision that goes beyond covering our own personal needs, to become less selfish and more full of love.

United, having our goods in common we can have endlessly more than we could have alone. With the same vision and the same goal, we, inspired by each other, can prepare for the future and be a living testimony to the world. Both the social work and the establishing of businesses run by Christians are a visible testimony of our faith and our trust in God.

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Since unemployment and hunger are continually becoming a more tragic and intense a problem, we can win many souls for Christ providing for their basic, natural needs. Their gratitude will open up their hearts to receive the Lord whom we love and serve.

Now it is the end of the season of autumn for our work in Spain. We need to prepare for the winter, not with fear or anxiety but motivated by faith and trust. He that sees and takes care of the birds will sustain and take care of us. Let us not be anxious about tomorrow, but, yes, let us get prepared. Fear comes when we are not prepared.

In Ezekiel 7:15-17 we read: "*The sword is without, and the pestilence and the famine within: he that is in the field shall die with the sword; and he that is in the city, famine and pestilence shall devour him. But they that escape of them shall escape, and shall be on the mountains like the doves of the valleys, all of them mourning, every one for his iniquity. All hands shall be feeble, and all knees shall be weak as water. They shall also gird themselves with sackcloth, and horror shall cover them; and shame shall be upon all faces, and baldness upon all their heads. They shall cast all their silver on the streets, and their gold shall be removed: their silver and their gold shall not be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the Lord: they shall not satisfy their souls, neither fill their bowels: because it is the stumbling block of their iniquity.*" This is clearly a picture of the last times. Here we see the judgement of God in the fundamental areas:

- 1.- War and terrorism ("the sword").
- 2.- Sickness and incurable diseases ("the pestilence").
- 3.- Hunger and a lack of basic things.
- 4.- Inflation and money without value.

Let us not be caught sleeping or unprepared. May God give us ears to hear and hearts ready to obey the clear sound of the trumpet of the Holy Spirit in these last days. Amen.

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