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MOMENTS OF REFLECTION AND MEDITATION

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Scripture: Philippians 1:27 "Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ".

At first sight this quotation seems rather exclusivist; because the term "gospel of Christ" has become a slogan for certain ideologies, religions, or philisophies. It has even become a battle cry in some segments of human history. Even today, should I invite someone to this occasion citing the gospel of Christ as the content of what is happening during this half hour, it might deter many people.

That is because of two things:

The first: the gospel of Christ is easily associated with some church or educational experience, or even with a person who played an important role, positive or negative, in someone's life. With the past, before the days of freedom of conscience.

The second: because of a lack of understanding and insight in the real meaning and content of the gospel.

To illustrate and counteract the first:

The apostle Paul, while he was the pastor of the church in Philippi, was thrown in jail! Imagine the people gathering at the church entrance for the regular Sunday service, and the verger announcing: there will be now service today, the pastor is in jail. Imagine the congregants turning away dejectedly, departing for home, disturbed and troubled about the future: the gospel would not be the same without Paul! Who will tell us about it, who will teach us and guide us to, "conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ".

Then a small, sickly man enters their presence. He is the deacon Epaphroditus, who was sent to look after Pastor Paul in jail by the congregation. Now he is back! Why are you back, you are supposed to care for Paul. He sent me back. With a letter addressed to you. Read the letter.

The letter says: forget about me! Whatever may happen to me, life or death, forget about me. Because the gospel of Christ is in you! We should know that, because the ancient sacrament of holy communion conveys exactly that message: inside of you live a set of values, a foundation of love and compassion that is not dependant upon the presence or proclamations of some learned or holy man. Forget about me, listen to your conscience! Call it the spirit that lives within you, whatever; but you, if you pause, reflect, meditate, you will recognise the true eternal, cosmic and unveral values which love give birth to. inside yourself.

Secondly: what are the values of the gospel? Well, I cannot prescribe to you what your conscience or the spirit should convey to you. I can only tell you, as an example of what happened in my life, about a single aspect of it.

My daughter Suna visited, amongst others, the city of Gaza during the fiercest battles with Israel. She stood with the people amongst te ruins of their houses, hospitals and schools: and she saw the children.

Oh, the children! She sat and spoke with them. She carried the babies. She accepted glasses of tea from charred and dismembered hands....and she became a rebel! She rebelled against all and every political, ideological and historical system that disregarded and harmed the children of the world. Because she loved the children. In Lybia, Egypt, Siria, South Africa... it eventually cost her her life. Which I struggled to understand. Until one day:

I attended an international academic conference about the topic of poverty; especially the religious aspects to the alleviation of poverty; virtually: what the gospel teaches us about poverty. Paper after boring and inconsequential paper was read, for days. We all that something important was missing. Something emotional! Something profound. The very last paper was to be read by a young scholar from Pretoria. She stood there with a pile of sheets in front of her, and we thought: o no, not another one.

Then she started talking. She repeated the same fraze in 67 languages! At first we did not understand. Mamo jestem glodny! Mor jeg er sulten! Mae estou com fome! Mama ngilambile! Italian gave a clue: Madre, ho fame! German even more: mutter, ich habe hunger! And then: Mamma, ek is honger! Mama, I am hungry!

When we walked out of the conference centre, we were confronted by a huge printed invitation: Buffet dinner! Each as much as you like for R150. All we remembered, was: mama, I am hungry!

That is Paul's message: You have the gospel of love in you. You are the light for the world and you are the salt for the earth.

The gospel is a value system compiled of universal and cosmic principles under the fundamental value of love; not a