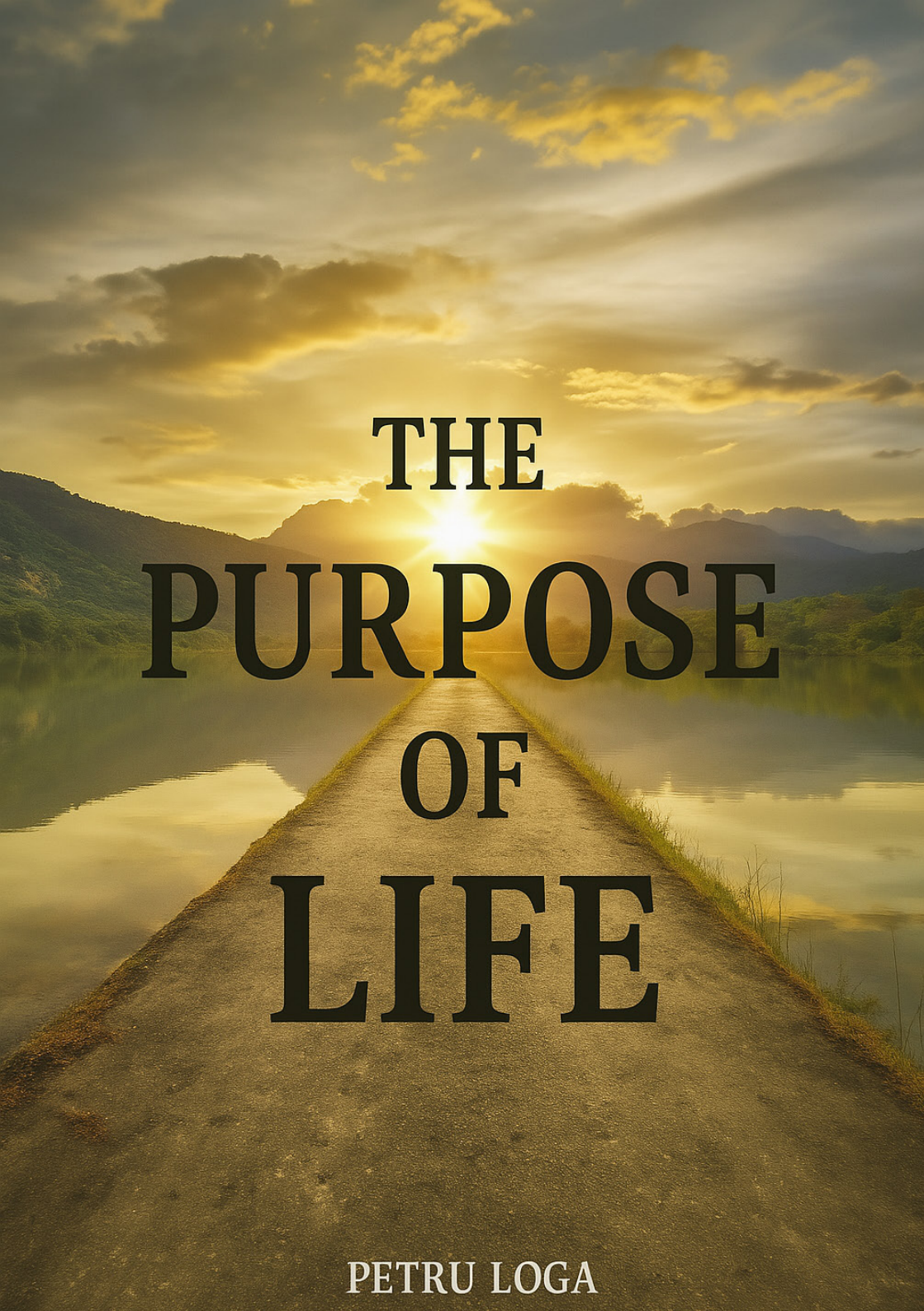

THE
PURPOSE
OF
LIFE
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For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. (Romans 8:29)

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. (Matthew 5:48)

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Introduction

We come into the world, we prepare ourselves for life, we work, we have children and grandchildren, we enjoy life more or less, but in the end everything ends at the grave.

Many people see "the purpose of life" as living in the present, pursuing the best possible standard of living. A deeper look at the mindset that prevails worldwide shows that man concentrates on immediate experiences, pushing into the background any thoughts about what might lie beyond death.

If we stop to reflect truly, we find that the moments when we ask ourselves essential questions about the meaning of this fleeting existence are rare. Why do we grow old? Why do we fall ill and die? Are we merely consumers of time?

Many questions revolve around the meaning of our existence: What is the point of being born and living 70-80 years, only for everything to end at the grave? What is the purpose of this short life lived on earth? What is the point of enjoying life if, in the end, we will die and be forgotten? What is the origin of death, and who laid down these rules of life?

What purpose did God have when He created man? Was it His intention that man should exist for a limited period, then die and be forgotten? What happens to man's soul after death? Is death a step towards another form of existence, a transition to something else?

If eternal life exists, why must we experience death in order to reach that new life? Did God create this meaningless cycle?

We also ask ourselves who this God is who is said to have created us. What can we learn about Him and about His nature? Where does He live? Is this heavenly land free of thieves and liars, where all the inhabitants are of perfect morality, or does it resemble our world? Why is there such a gap between a world of absolute moral purity and one in which every man has lied at least once?

We can see that from childhood we are taught the idea that, in order to reach our goals, it is acceptable to use any means, on the principle that "the end justifies the means."

From an early age we begin with lying and with copying at school, and we progress to more sophisticated tactics in adult life, such as cunning, theft, bribery, anger and other similar behaviours.

We can say without fear of being wrong that there is no man who has not used a lie at least once. Lying is a tool commonly used in a multitude of situations: being late for work, coming home late, when applying for a job or in trade. Giving up lying often means making life more complicated.

In order to keep up a decent standard of living, many give in to the offers of the evil one. He tempts us with things that are much desired but out of reach, and in order

to obtain them he asks us in exchange to make moral compromises, to let ourselves be led by untruth, theft, corruption and cunning.

We notice that when we are asked about what comes after this life, and whether we must carry out certain actions in order to live in God's presence, most people are in a state of ignorance.

Most have no clear answer or do not think about life after death, living only in the immediate concerns of everyday life, without searching out whether God has a higher purpose for us and whether there are requirements for reaching His presence.

Many others want to reach the Kingdom of God, but its spiritual values are ignored or are seen as incompatible with their way of life.

Rarely does anyone stop to ask what the true purpose of this fleeting life is. Yet each of us needs to seek answers to these existential questions in order to understand the true purpose of life. It seems that very few realize that, in order to reach the Kingdom of God, we must know and accept God's purpose concerning us.

We believe that, in this short life we are living, it is vital for each of us to understand in depth God's purpose for mankind and to know the plan He had in mind when He created man. It is important to ask ourselves whether, according to this divine plan, there is a specific standard we must reach.

Furthermore, we may ask whether God has set a selection criterion for admission into eternal life and, if so, how we can discover it. Could there be a guide or a training manual to help us in this process? It is also vital to understand what our active role is in meeting this standard.

We need to understand that God created man with the intention that he should live eternally in communion with Him. In this context, He forms us and guides us so that we reach the divine purpose for which we were created.

This divine undertaking aims at our transformation into beings that reflect the qualities of the inhabitants of this heavenly land. The aim, therefore, is that we become, spiritually, citizens with full rights of this territory, having moral and spiritual qualities similar to theirs.

In the pages that follow, we set out to offer you some answers to the many existential questions you may have. We hope that these answers will inspire you and awaken in you the curiosity to understand what the purpose of this life is.

We will explore in detail God's plan, about which, if we are honest, we must admit that most of us know very little.

To ground our study, we will rely exclusively on texts from the Holy Scripture, which we consider an essential training manual and a truly trustworthy source.

The Purpose of Life

On closer study, the Holy Scripture reveals to us the divine plan, which provided for the creation of a being higher than the angels, made in the image and likeness of God. This is stated in Genesis 1:26-27, where God declares: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." This idea is reinforced in Romans 8:28-29, which suggests that God decided before creation that men should have His nature.

According to the Holy Scripture, the purpose for which man was created was to live eternally, in purity and in deep communion with God. This communion is meant to give man happiness, inner peace, joy and the state of rest in which God Himself is.

According to the biblical account in Genesis 3:10, man's fall from Paradise marked the loss of his original state of purity and of perfect harmony with God. This led to the experience of a deep sense of lack and unfulfilment.

The episode in the garden of Eden describes how Adam, after his fall through disobedience, expresses his fear and his wish to hide: "I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." This significant moment highlights the appearance of fears and of a sense of vulnerability, marking the opposite of the state of inner peace and rest of soul that man had before.

Since the moment of the fall from Paradise, man has been engaged in a continual search to regain the happiness and rest of soul for which he was originally created. He tries to find the state of happiness again by various means and in different places. Yet he often meets with failure, managing only to taste temporary fragments of the happiness and joy he is looking for.

In our daily life, it is easy to see from the wishes we so often hear that man's fundamental aspiration is to reach happiness. Many look forward to the holidays, such as Easter and Christmas, because they bring a drop of happiness. We wish one another things like "Happy holidays!" and "Many happy returns!".

Yet the passing things of the material world cannot give the happiness that comes from a deep state of rest of soul. Rest of soul is essential for reaching the state of well-being and contentment that was intended in the original creation of man.

Just as a car reaches its peak performance when it is used for the purpose for which it was designed, man likewise reaches a state of complete contentment and fulfilment when he reaches the purpose for which he was created.

Just as the body is fully satisfied when it is well fed, clean and rested, so too the soul of man has its own needs which, once they are met, bring complete fulfilment and contentment.

The soul of man reaches fulfilment when rest, peace and joy become normal and constant states, which can be achieved by adopting and cultivating the values set forth in the Kingdom of God, such as purity, justice, longsuffering, love, goodness, mercy and meekness.

At Adam's fall, man suffered a spiritual separation from God, thus losing access to the sources of complete fulfilment. This spiritual rupture meant a separation from the values and principles established in the heavenly Kingdom.

In this context, man's need for fulfilment was exploited by Satan, who deceived man by bringing in alternatives to the divine values, luring mankind with fleeting promises and pleasures. These, however attractive, are unable to give the state of genuine fulfilment and contentment for which man was created.

So man finds himself in a ceaseless and unsatisfying search, pursuing these alternatives of Satan, and in this way moving further and further away from the path and the original purpose established by God.

In his search he turns to the things offered by the material world, such as money, fame or "the pleasures of sin for a season," and others like them, but he finds neither happiness nor rest in them.

This situation can be compared to a car that does not run well when it is used for purposes other than those for which it was made, or to a human body that, when it is ill, tired, hungry or thirsty, can no longer reach a state of well-being.

With the fall into sin, mankind lost the elements needed for the fulfilment of the soul, which shows the need to reconnect with the divine values in order to regain this state of fulfilment. That is why it is so important to return to the original values of the Kingdom of God and to reject the temptations and illusions promoted by Satan, in order to regain the state of spiritual fulfilment.

With the fall into sin, mankind lost the elements needed for the fulfilment of the soul.

To find rest and spiritual fulfilment, it is essential to direct our search towards our Creator, because He holds the key to inner peace, happiness and joy. This is described in Scripture, in Luke 19:42, where it says: "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes."

A genuine relationship with God is the only way to reach rest of soul. This truth is supported by the words of the Gospel according to Matthew 11:28, where the Lord Jesus says: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." and in John 14:27, where He declares: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

This aim is illustrated especially in the Epistle to the Hebrews 4:10, which states that God wants man to experience the same rest of soul that He Himself has. The text says: "For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. ... Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest."

It is fundamental to understand that genuine and deep happiness cannot be achieved without a state of quietness and inner peace. Just as the need of the body for physical rest shows that our body needs repose in order to be revived and satisfied, so our soul needs rest in order to reach happiness. The source of happiness does not lie in "pleasures for a season" but in the state of peace and rest of soul, which shows itself in a lasting joy.

This implies a close and personal relationship with the Creator, in which man discovers the true meaning of existence and a deep happiness that does not depend on the circumstances of earthly life. It includes inner peace, harmony and rest of soul, which are within reach only when man lives in accordance with the values and the original purposes established by God.

God takes the initiative and desires to work together with the man who realizes that the solution lies only with the Creator. In this process, He intervenes to bring man back to his original state of harmony and fulfilment. Through divine intervention, man is not only restored but also enters a process of transformation, in order to reach a level of spiritual growth similar to that of the inhabitants of the heavenly Kingdom. This not only gives him a complete state of fulfilment, rest and joy, but also grants him the privilege of dwelling for eternity in the Kingdom of God.

It is clear that without this complete rest of soul we could not live in perfect, eternal harmony. Sadness, dread, fear or despair would disturb this rest. The Paradise promised by God gives first of all rest to the soul, a place where tears and suffering will be no more, as Revelation 21:4 says, "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." This is also expressed in Psalm 23:2, "He leadeth me beside the still waters."

Led Astray

Satan has made considerable efforts to lead mankind astray, promoting the idea that life comes down only to what can be achieved in this short life on Earth. In this way he has managed to divert the attention of man, who thirsts for the happiness for which he was created, towards material and passing satisfactions. Although these pleasures seem to give happiness, they are far from being its true source.

In this continual bustle for survival, we have lost sight of truly reflecting on

the deep meaning of rest, which ought to include not only the rest of the body, but also that of the soul.

For example, we look forward to our days of leave or to weekends in order to rest, and evenings are awaited as times for relaxation and physical recovery, but we show no similar interest in reaching rest of soul.

As a result, the idea of spiritual rest has largely been handed over to the religious sphere and managed by its representatives. Rest of soul therefore seems out of reach in this life and is put off until "the world to come," which explains why we use the expression "Rest in peace" as a farewell to those who have left this world.

The relationship with God, which ought to lead us to rest of soul, has come to be reduced to a few outward rituals. In this way, the importance of a personal and active involvement alongside God in the process of the inner transformation of our character is ignored.

This leads to the assumption that God will change our sinful nature by a mysterious method, which He will apply after the physical death of the individual. This completely false idea has been adopted by most people, who have thus also imposed on others the steps considered necessary for reaching eternal rest.

So many of us, not by our own choice but because of the place where we were born, were brought into a certain religious denomination. For example, we found ourselves Catholics if we were born in Italy, or Orthodox in Romania.

Without realizing it, we were fitted with glasses tinted by the specific doctrine of the religious denomination into which we were born. These glasses shape the way we see and understand the world, often leading us to accept the prevailing norms and beliefs as absolute truth, without submitting them to any real examination, on the assumption that "the crowd sets the rules."

These widespread convictions, which are not based on the Holy Scripture, suggest to us that during the time man spends on earth, God is not concerned to restore and transform the being He created to the level required by His eternal Kingdom, or is unable to do so. In this context the conviction has formed that God remains a distant Entity, without any deep involvement in the everyday life of the believer.

So we have been taught that finding rest and entering the eternal Kingdom does not also depend on personal efforts to transform our character in cooperation with God, but rests solely on divine mercy, which in the end gives us eternal rest through the forgiveness of sins.

Yet this view contradicts the deep teachings of the Scriptures, which stress the vital importance of the transformation of human character. This is essential for reaching the stature for which we were created and for obtaining, already in the present life, the peace and rest that are absolutely necessary for living together in eternity.

It becomes clear that a person who accepts a teaching that justifies living by the

values of the world will remain anchored in a superficial doctrine of the forgiveness of sins. This doctrine assumes that the transformation of character is a mysterious process which God will accomplish either at the moment of death or at the final resurrection.

Because of a lack of knowledge or understanding, we see many people today influenced by various theories that claim to explain how rest in God's Paradise can be reached. These various theories can lead to confusion and to an incomplete or mistaken understanding of the nature of salvation and of the role of personal transformation in this process.

A relevant example is the theory of purgatory, characteristic of those born into Catholicism. According to this theory, purgatory is seen as a place of cleansing for the sins committed during life, a temporary place where the souls of the dead are purified before entering eternal rest.

This process is considered essential for souls to be freed from their faults and to be prepared for eternal life. In their view, purgatory is seen as an intermediate place of punishment, a place of transition between earthly life and eternal life.

Purgatory is seen as an intermediate place of punishment, a place of transition.

In the Catholic tradition, both the punishment and the time spent in purgatory can be reduced by obtaining indulgences, bought from priests. Believers can obtain indulgences not only for themselves but also for the souls of departed loved ones who are presumed to be in purgatory, thus helping to shorten their period of purification.

In many other traditions it is believed that believers can win divine favour through acts of generosity, or can pay for the forgiveness of their sins and so obtain eternal rest.

Multitudes of people hold the mistaken understanding that, by admiring God for what He has done for us, confessing their sins, spending money for their forgiveness, praying for the rest of the departed or believing in the sacrifice on the cross (where His Son paid for them), they will gain access to Paradise and the much-desired eternal rest that we find in the farewell words at funeral ceremonies.

It is easy to see that a lack of knowledge of the Scriptures is one of the things that keep man in this ignorance. This is made clear in Matthew 22:29, where it is written: "Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God."

The Kingdom of God

The Holy Scripture describes the eternal Paradise where God dwells as being of an impressive beauty that surpasses anything earthly that can be imagined. This kingdom is a place of absolute perfection, which far exceeds everything that exists in the material world.

The images in Scripture, especially those in the book of Revelation, reveal the existence of a heavenly land of unusual beauty. It is described as having streets paved with gold, walls adorned with precious stones and gates made of pearls.

Revelation 21:18 says that "the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. ... And the twelve gates were twelve pearls."

These descriptions are meant to show a world of unequalled perfection and beauty, where divine splendour and glory are shown in every aspect of existence.

But the Kingdom of God is not only a physical place of matchless beauty; it is also a deeply spiritual kingdom. This can be seen in the divine laws, and in the justice and peace that prevail in that world. Thus the Kingdom of God is a harmonious blend of physical beauty and a spiritual world, where the heavenly laws govern in a setting of peace and absolute justice.

The Purity of the Kingdom

What distinguishes the Kingdom of God is the harmony and moral order that define it. This territory is a place where spiritual purity is absolute, where sin and evil have no place. Its citizens have all their actions, thoughts and intentions attuned to the will of God. In this Kingdom, the expressions of sin - such as lying, cunning, bribery and others - are completely absent, reflecting a state of holiness and unshakeable moral integrity.

The citizens of the Kingdom of God show a firm aversion to iniquity, rejecting every form of lying and avoiding every occasion of sin. They openly condemn the practice of corruption and bribery, in keeping with the biblical principle that "he that hateth gifts shall live." (Proverbs 15:27). Scripture clearly stresses the moral damage that a bribe causes, stating that "a gift destroyeth the heart." (Ecclesiastes 7:7).

They do not take part in undeclared work and tax evasion, fulfilling the obligations that fall to them. They covet nothing that does not belong to them, in keeping with the biblical principle "Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's" (Matthew 22:21), which stresses the importance of respecting the tax laws.

This spiritual community founds its values on integrity, transparency and justice, reflecting the divine teachings in every aspect of life.

In this eternal country, institutions such as courts, prisons, police, gendarmerie or army are absent, because they are not needed. Here one does not

meet breakers of the divine law, such as thieves, liars, robbers, tax evaders... In contrast to the material world, where temptations and negative influences are part of human experience, the Kingdom of God is a place where these challenges do not exist.

The Peace of the Kingdom

One of the treasures of the Kingdom of God is the peace and rest of soul that characterize this territory. The definition of peace, as the dictionary describes it, stresses the complete absence of unrest, conflicts or enmities. It is associated with harmony, reconciliation and mutual understanding. Peace also refers to an inner state of calm, of quietness of soul, giving a state of tranquillity and balance.

In this Kingdom every form of conflict, whatever its scale, is non-existent. This guarantees that all the citizens of the Kingdom, from the greatest to the least, enjoy perfect peace and rest, where anger, opposition, disagreements, power struggles and violence are completely eliminated. It is a place where, among its inhabitants, harmony and peaceful coexistence are the rule, with no reason for discord or dispute.

The peace of the eternal Kingdom is not limited to the relationships between its inhabitants; it also includes the inner peace of the heart. This shows itself in a state of balance of soul, where feelings of unrest, condemnation, pangs of conscience, regret or anguish of soul are absent.

Rest of soul and inner peace are the direct results of living in an environment in which sin has no place. Isaiah 32:17 tells us: "And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever. And my people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting places." This passage stresses the direct link between a life lived in purity and the state of rest of the soul.

The Perfection of the Kingdom

Perfection is the central pillar that defines the Kingdom of God, and it is found in all its aspects. The citizens of this land are distinguished by the integrity and perfection of their character, thus underlining the standard of perfection. This norm applies not only to the conduct of the citizens but extends to His ways and to His Law which governs this land, ensuring order for eternity.

This idea is reinforced by the biblical teachings of the verse in Matthew 5:48, which shows us the perfection of God: "your Father which is in heaven is perfect." Psalm 19:7 likewise states: "The law of the LORD is perfect," and Psalm 18:30 confirms: "As for God, his way is perfect."

Therefore sinful man, in his natural state of imperfection and sin, cannot dwell eternally with God in this Kingdom. This shows the necessity of reaching the perfection of our character according to the standard of the Kingdom of God, as the requirement of Matthew 5:48 stresses, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your

Father which is in heaven is perfect."

The Joy of the Kingdom

The inhabitants of the Kingdom of God enjoy a continual and deep happiness that does not depend on material conditions. Their joy, unlike the fleeting and changing joy found in the material world, is a constant state of contentment, rest and fulfilment. In this Kingdom, spiritual happiness, which springs from the depth of one's being, is not affected by outward circumstances such as money, social status or health.

This state of joy is nourished by a life aligned with the divine standards of purity and by an unshakeable inner peace, and it is founded on a deep relationship with God. This relationship goes together with sharing and living out the divine values and ethical principles, which bring true joy and fulfilment. This truth is expressed in the verse in Romans 14:17, which says: "the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."

Genuine joy, springing from the Holy Spirit, is the joy we will find to be the rule in the eternal Kingdom, where it will endure for ever, as described in Isaiah 35:10: "with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." Joy, therefore, is not a passing emotion but a sign of living in harmony with the Word of Scripture, and it is one of the most precious things of this heavenly territory.

The Eternity of the Kingdom

The heavenly Kingdom is described as being beyond what time means, an eternal realm where the concept of an end does not exist. Time, as we understand it in the physical world, no longer has any measure. The Kingdom of God goes beyond the ordinary temporal notions of past, present and future, belonging to a timeless existence.

The eternity of the Kingdom of God stands in sharp contrast to the fleeting nature of earthly life. Eternity is not only an infinite duration, but also a quality of existence that is free from the limitations and sufferings that go with the short life on earth.

In the Kingdom of God, eternity gives stability and security, as opposed to the constant change and inevitable decay of the material world. This eternal realm is the final place of rest and fulfilment for souls, a refuge where the relationship with God is unbroken and everlasting.

In conclusion, the aspects that define the Kingdom of God are not only a promise of what eternal life could be, but also an ideal of how a society and human existence could be shaped, founded on heavenly principles of peace and harmony.

The Possibility of Restoring the Human Being

On careful examination, we see that the secular world we live in has a standard totally different from that of the Kingdom of God. The Holy Scripture

shows us some of the values of the world that are incompatible with the heavenly Paradise: selfishness, the love of money, boasting, pride, ingratitude, evil-speaking, lack of self-control, insolence... (2 Timothy 3:2).

The first man was created innocent and with the potential to reach perfection. The fulfilment of this destiny depended on his choices and on his openness to the relationship with God. In this situation, the original sin, represented by Adam's decision to turn aside from the divine will, means not only the loss of the original innocence, but also the halting of the process by which mankind was to be brought to perfection.

Because of Adam's fall, man, at his natural birth, enters the sinful world and is spiritually dead, without the right of citizenship in the Kingdom of God. Ephesians 2:12 illustrates this, reminding us "that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, ... having no hope".

The difference between the values of mankind, marked by sin, and the principles of the heavenly Kingdom is profound, equal to the distance between heaven and earth. Isaiah 55:8 underlines this contrast: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." These words show the clear distance between limited human perception and the vast wisdom of God.

Recovering the course that Adam lost is possible through the work of restoration and redemption accomplished by Christ. This opens the way for mankind to return to its original purpose and to communion with God.

Through His sacrifice, Christ opened the way for all who are willing to return to the state of original purity, as it was at the beginning of creation. Colossians 1:13 confirms this extraordinary gift: "who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins".

This possibility of reconciliation and spiritual restoration is the essence of the divine offer of salvation, inviting mankind into a deep relationship with God through the forgiveness of sins and the embrace of a new beginning of life.

The Son of God came to earth as an **ambassador** of the heavenly Kingdom, with the mission of bringing the principles of this **"Holy Territory"** into the hearts of men. Coming directly from the heavenly Father, He offered them to those willing to adopt these divine values, teachings and principles and to live by them. The main aim of these teachings is the transformation of our lives and their alignment with the divine ideal.

It is essential to understand that the divine laws must take first place in our life, being of far greater importance than human laws. This superiority can be illustrated by the analogy with the legislation of the European Union, which

prevails over and has authority over the national legislation of the member states. Only those who choose to adopt these spiritual laws and to devote themselves to living in accordance with them will qualify to receive citizenship in the heavenly Kingdom.

The Restoration of His Image in Man

So the coming of the Son of God to earth had the purpose of giving man the possibility of being spiritually reborn, so that he could return to the life for which he was originally created. This also included the return to the state of inner peace and rest of soul, treasures lost as a result of man's fall into sin.

> ***God said:***
> ***"Let us make man in our image, after our likeness."***

According to the divine standards of the heavenly Kingdom, as they are described in the Scriptures, there is a plan meant for the **transformation of human character**, with the aim of bringing it into harmony with that of the inhabitants of this Kingdom. This process of transformation begins with the spiritual rebirth of the sinful person and develops until it reaches the spiritual stature of the inhabitants of the Kingdom.

Studying the Holy Scripture carefully, we can see that God's plan was not limited to creating beings higher than the angels; He intended to create a being that would have His image and likeness. According to Genesis 1:26-27, God said: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness."

We have a soul and a spirit; we have been endowed with the ability to think, to reason, to believe, to make decisions, to admire, to love and to make choices. This is due to the divine plan, according to which man was designed to be like Him. God created us and endowed us with these abilities so that we would use them, and it is our responsibility to use them and to work together with Him in order to reach the stature of the citizens of the Kingdom.

God's plan is not limited to a cheap restoration consisting only of the forgiveness of sins; it provides for the **restoration of God's image** in us and for bringing us to the height of the stature of His Son, as it is written in Ephesians 4:11-13: "And he gave some, ... prophets; ... and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, ... till we all come ... unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

To give us the possibility of learning to live as the inhabitants of this Kingdom live, God must begin this process and give us a spiritual new birth, as it is mentioned in Scripture, in John 3:3, where the Lord Jesus declares: "Except a man

be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Spiritual rebirth is thus an essential threshold in the life of every man, marking the beginning of a new existence in which we gain citizenship of the Kingdom of God and set out on a road of drawing near to His Son and being conformed to His example.

This is explained in 2 Corinthians 5:17-18, where it is written that through Christ man becomes a new creature, a deep transformation that has its origin in God. This new birth is from God Himself, according to John 1:11, "He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, ... which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

This new birth is distinguished by the fact that it is not the result of natural origins or of human will — it does not come from genetic inheritance, personal will or the decision of other people, but directly from the will and action of God.

The analogy between natural birth and spiritual birth is significant. Just as natural birth rests on a human seed for life to appear, so spiritual birth requires a divine seed, as 1 John 3:9 says: "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; **for his seed remaineth in him**: and he cannot sin, because he is **born of God**."

Just as the human seed determines the characteristics of the future human being, so "the seed of God," from which man must be born, carries the spiritual "genetic code" from which a new spiritual being develops, one that contains the characteristics of God.

If we know what this "divine seed" contains, we can begin to understand how the new life shows itself. Just as a biological seed contains the fundamental elements of the life it comes from, "the seed of God" contains the elements needed for the spiritual development of the new man.

In the process of the birth of a human being, the embryo contains all the cells needed to form the whole organism - the heart, the eyes, the brain, all on a microscopic scale and perfectly organized. By analogy, we can see that the same is true of the seed of God, which contains all the components, or primary cells, of the Image of God.

The first chapter of the Gospel according to John makes a clear identification between God and His Word, stating that "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). This identification is also extended to His Son, described as the Word made flesh and in unity with the Father (John 1:14; John 10:30).

If God and His Son are identified as the Word, then the spiritual seed from which man must be born is also the Word. This is supported by Luke 8:11, which states that "The seed is the word of God."

If the Lord Jesus, recognized as the Word, is born of God and is called in the Scriptures the Firstborn, then we too, in order to be counted spiritual brothers

of Christ, must be born of the same "divine seed," that is, of the Word, which is identified as God Himself.

Just as the human seed contains the basic cells needed for the development of the various organs, but these cells are not yet fully formed and functioning organs, so "the seed of God" contains the essential elements for the development of the spiritual traits, but these traits are not present in complete form from the beginning.

At spiritual rebirth, the character traits of God are not acquired automatically; it is a process of spiritual development and maturing, similar to the biological growth and development of an organism.

In the embryonic stage of the divine seed we do not directly find traits such as love, longsuffering or goodness. Instead, we find in it the Word, which contains the teachings and principles of Christ, which, throughout the spiritual process of growth and maturing, will develop these traits in man until he reaches "the stature of the fulness of Christ". The traits of Christ develop gradually, much as the cells in a seed grow and mature to form a complete organism.

The seed of God is the basis on which the divine characteristics are formed in a person, leading to a spiritual maturity that reflects the nature and values of Christ. This seed contains the spiritual genetic information, or the Laws of the Kingdom - in essence, the teachings of Christ, each of them representing a part of the Image of God, as 2 Corinthians 4:3 illustrates.

Through this divine seed, God "rewrites" His genetic configuration in our hearts, according to the promise in Hebrews 10:16, planting His Laws in our hearts and minds. So, by receiving and understanding the Word of Christ, we are gradually transformed in conformity with the divine image and nature.

On deeper examination, we see that the spiritual process of salvation, from the new birth to reaching the stature of a perfect man in Christ, reflects aspects similar to the stages through which a man passes from natural birth to maturity.

At the new birth everything must begin from zero!

An infant, as far as stored information goes, starts from zero. He begins his life without any prior knowledge, absorbing and taking in everything he observes and experiences from his surroundings. This initial state of not knowing offers fertile ground for growth, in which everything is new and undiscovered.

In the spiritual new birth too, it is of first importance that everything begins from zero, as with a newborn, as Scripture stresses in 2 Corinthians 5:17. Here it says: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

God begins the process of restoring the image of Christ in man with the

new birth, and He has all the power needed to raise us to the level of the stature of Christ, as it is written in Philippians 1:6, "being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it ..."

The divine plan is designed so that every person becomes a spiritual "brother" of the Son of God, taking on character traits similar to His. If we ignore this plan and lead a life guided by our human impulses, using up our existence without aspiring to change, we show that we have not understood the essence of the divine intervention in the life of mankind. This way of living confines us to the alternative offered by Satan: a superficial salvation, which is limited to the forgiveness of sins.

Many believe that this standard is too high for us, but this is God's design for man. God urges us to rise up out of the routine of this world and to work at the transformation of our character, so that we take on the image of Christ. Only in this way will we be able to dwell with Him in eternity.

The Work of Perfecting Man's Character

There are some important questions which may seem hidden to an inattentive observer: Why, when God created man, did He not place him immediately in His presence, as He did with the angels? Why did He place him in a place where he was constantly exposed to the attack of the devil and of the fallen angels?

Why did God choose to exile (cast) Satan to the earth and not somewhere else? Why did He allow Satan to confront man? Why was man, in his original state of innocence, left so vulnerable to the temptations of the devil, ending up in the difficult situation in which billions of people find themselves today?

To carry out His plan with the beings He created, God created the heavens and the earth, as it is written in Isaiah 45:18: "the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited". God decided that man's dwelling should be on the earth, unlike the angels, who were placed in Heaven.

God's plan was designed so that man, who had lost his original state of purity and innocence, would be restored and would grow until he reached perfection. According to this plan, the Earth, together with everything it contains, offers all the conditions needed to help man grow towards the level of perfection required by the heavenly standards.

Scripture states in Deuteronomy 32:4: **"He is the Rock, his work is perfect"**. Therefore His plan for man, which is included in "his work", is also perfect and without error, and He is now carrying it out.

Man, created as the crowning point of His creation, made in His image and likeness, was placed in this visible world, in direct confrontation with Satan. This

placing was not a mistake or an unforeseen event; it was part of His works, which are perfect.

These confrontations with Satan are allowed in order to help man learn to reject and overcome evil, as Romans 12:21 says: "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."

God created this visible universe with the specific purpose of raising mankind to a spiritual level comparable to that of His Son. The divine intention is that God, together with His Son, should live in communion with the beings created by Him, marked by character traits similar to His own.

This remarkable vision is highlighted in the biblical text of Romans 8:29, "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren."

In human life, if we take an example such as music, we see that no one is born perfect; perfection is obtained through hard, persevering work and by following those who teach us. As an example, we can look at the path of a pianist, who reaches perfection in his art through intense practice.

In no practical field can perfection be reached by theoretical study alone, without practice. In the same way, the **perfection of character** required by the status of a son of God cannot be reached merely by a mental, passive faith, which Scripture compares in James 2:19, 20 to the faith of the demons (Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?).

You cannot become a perfect pianist merely through the theoretical study of musical scores, without devoting much time to practice and without imitating your teacher. In the same way, the faith that we can be like Him is made perfect only through practice, through the works of faith, as James 2:22 states: "Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?"

In spiritual things, **in order to perfect your character**, in order to become perfect as the heavenly Father also is perfect, it is of first importance to believe that this is possible. Then you must devote yourself to the work and seek to follow the Teacher in every respect and devote your time to living out His teachings in practice, in the smallest details.

Like a pianist who works for hours on end every day in order to reach perfection, we too must persevere in our efforts. **The perfection of our character** is likewise achieved through effort; it is not an inborn gift or something granted to us automatically after death.

To reach the stature of Christ, as well as the peace and rest in which He lived, a constant effort of discipleship is needed, following the Teacher. This is the only way by which inner peace and rest of soul can be reached, as well as the level of perfection required by the standard of the Kingdom of God.

The perfection He requires is not measured in artistic or supernatural abilities; it is **perfection in longsuffering**, goodness, meekness, love... These qualities are acquired only by following His teachings and His example.

The perfection of our character is not obtained by buying indulgences, by giving alms or by simple faith in the sacrifice on the cross; it requires conscious effort and an active fight against temptations. These temptations are allowed by God in order to help us reach the stature of Christ.

In this process of transformation we are not alone. God, in His faithfulness, will not let us be tried beyond our abilities. As 1 Corinthians 10:13 states, "but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."

This gives us the hope and assurance that, whatever the challenges, God is with us, giving us the support and resources we need to overcome obstacles and to draw ever closer to the character of Christ.

The perfection of our character is not achieved only through faith in the sacrifice of the cross and through the forgiveness of sins, but also through effort and real struggle in the face of the confrontations God allows for our spiritual growth.

By sending His Son, God made this process of transformation possible. The Lord Jesus not only obtained for us the forgiveness of sins through His sacrifice, but also showed us how we must live. Through His teachings, His life and His example, the Lord Jesus described to us the characteristics and the conduct we should follow in order to become like Him.

It is a continual process, in which we are urged to shape our life, our thoughts and our actions after the character of Christ, to grow in justice, love, longsuffering, goodness, humility and in all the other qualities that reflect His character. These qualities must be acquired through the work of God, in which man too must take part.

The Stage Before the New Beginning

To understand how God intervenes in the life of man, so that he is persuaded to choose His offer instead of Satan's offer and, in this way, can be transformed from a sinful state into one aligned with the values of His Kingdom, we will use an analogy from everyday life.

In everyday life we can see that in an election campaign for choosing a candidate, those who promote him present him in the most attractive light possible in order to persuade the voters to choose him.

This is done by various means, such as advertising. The candidate builds his speeches around persuasive offers, meant to attract as many supporters as possible. No candidate will resort to threats to win votes, because that would not produce

appreciation and support.

This approach rests on the fact that we were created with the capacity for discernment and for making choices. When something or someone impresses us deeply, the desire to act, to make decisions, is born in us.

If we are drawn by the offers of a persuasive candidate and believe in the sincerity of his promises, we will respond positively, appreciating him and choosing him over other candidates.

Moreover, if a candidate, besides his offers, also shows an admirable way of life, even without urging others to copy his way of life, there will be people who, out of admiration, will want to follow his example. This influence is often more persuasive than the promises of the election campaign.

We are endowed with the capacity to admire, and when this admiration becomes deep, the desire is born in us to become like that person. This is often seen in young people, who frequently express the wish to imitate stars of music or film, taking on their way of dressing and even ways of speaking similar to those of their idols.

In spiritual things the process is similar. God opens to us the way to a new beginning by presenting to us His Kingdom, its inhabitants and the laws that govern it.

He sends His messengers to reveal to us both the splendour of the eternal Kingdom and the beauty of the character of the Lord Jesus, as well as His way of life, in order to awaken in us admiration for Him and attraction to Him, as John 12:32 says, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."

Unlike a candidate who promises advantages without asking that his way of life be followed, the Lord's aim is not that we should appreciate Him for what He offers us, but that we should be drawn by the beauty of His character, so as to shape our life after His example and reach the perfection of His character.

Even so, many focus exclusively on the promise of the heavenly paradise, ignoring God's real purpose, which consists in the transformation of character and in obtaining rest of soul. This is stressed in Matthew 11:28, where it says: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." and in John 14:27, where His Son declares: "my peace I give unto you".

It goes without saying that if we admire Him only out of interest in the promise of an eternal Kingdom or in being saved from hell, these motives are not enough to spark admiration and the desire to follow His example.

He reveals to us His shining beauty, so that we are overwhelmed with admiration and attraction. This is illustrated in Psalm 50:1-2, where it says: "Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined."

This attraction to the beauty of His character and His ways is essential if we are to love Him truly with all our heart and with all our mind. Only this can move

us to aspire to and to desire the beauty that He has.

Out of love for His creation, God has sent messengers into all the world to speak about the Lord Jesus, to set forth the character traits of His heart and the deep peace and rest in which He lived. This is essential, because no one can be drawn by the beauty of the Lord without having heard of Him and without coming to know the traits of His heart. As the Scripture says: "and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Romans 10:14). It is also written: "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him" (John 6:44).

Only if we are deeply drawn by the perfection of His character will we admire Him and love Him with all our heart; only then will the desire be awakened in us to have the same character traits as His. This is expressed in the verse "I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, until he please" (Song of Solomon 8:4).

This is the process by which true love and the desire to follow Him are born in our heart. If we have been taught to follow certain rituals in order to avoid hell and to aspire to the golden streets of Paradise, without being shown the deep beauty of His character traits, we have received a mistaken and incomplete teaching. Moreover, if it was not explained to us that the true purpose of keeping the divine teachings is to align our character with that of the Creator, then we have certainly been misdirected.

Those who brought us this message were not sent by God. If we have accepted such information, we have been deceived by Satan and have not truly known the source that can give rest to the soul. It is essential to recognize honestly what "truth" has been presented to us.

God will reveal to us all the beauty of His heart, as Exodus 33:19 says, "I will make all my goodness pass before thee". King David, full of passion, expressed his fervent desire to dwell all his life in the house of the Lord, to contemplate His beauty, as Psalm 27:4 says, "One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD".

If we draw near to God out of fear of hell, it means that we have not been enlightened by the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, as the Scripture says in 2 Corinthians 4:3-4: "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."

Every commandment has hidden in it a trait of the Lord!

His commandments should be a source of delight to us, because they represent Him Himself. As it says in Psalm 119:47, "And I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved."

Every teaching or commandment of His Son reveals a trait of His character, reflecting His perfect beauty. When we look at His ways and His commandments, we are in reality admiring the beauty of Christ, who is the image of God.

That is why the Lord Jesus declares: "If ye love me, keep my commandments ..." (John 14:15). This means that whoever loves Me also loves My commandments and finds his delight in them, because My commandments express My character, showing who I am.

No one will be able to admire Him and love Him with all his heart out of fear of the punishment of eternal hell. True admiration and love are born only when we are drawn by the brightness of His Word. This is the way by which the burning desire to be like Him is born, thus reaching the purpose for which we were created: to be like the inhabitants of the Kingdom.

When we are deeply drawn by the beauty of the Lord's heart, this attraction moves us to follow Him and to aspire to have a heart like His.

To live in accordance with the teachings of the Lord Jesus means to adopt a way of life marked by peace, rest and holiness, similar to the life He lived, thus showing the beauty of a life devoted to God. This is the essence of genuine transformation, which begins with the attraction of our heart to His character traits.

If we did not start from deep attraction and admiration, if we are not captivated by the beauty of His heart, if His commandments and His ways are not a source of joy to us, if we have valued Him only for His promises, then we have had only an interest, and our spiritual transformation has not really begun, as John 6:44 says, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him".

Genuine spiritual transformation begins with deep admiration for and attraction to the beauty of the Lord's heart. This process leads us to the essential question: What ways of exploring and understanding do we have at hand for knowing and appreciating the divine beauty?

The Beauty of the Divine Character

Our way of knowing people rests on two fundamental approaches: the first has to do with their physical appearance, and the second, of a spiritual nature, focuses on character and morality. As far as physical perception goes, we judge people on the basis of their observable features. When it comes to character, on the other hand, we rely on their actions and decisions.

For example, a person who chooses to follow strong ethical and moral principles

can be considered to have a noble character. On the other hand, someone who shows immoral and harmful behaviour can be seen as having a bad character.

When we want to know God, we have only one perspective. He cannot be known by physical or observable features, because man has no physical form of Him at hand that he can perceive directly. To know God, it is essential to identify His Ways, His way of being, and His attributes or traits, as they are described in the Holy Scripture.

According to the divine plan, established before man appeared, the coming of the Son of God to earth was foreseen. He was sent to reveal to us the beauty of the character and the perfect ways of the inhabitants of the Kingdom, as expressed in Psalm 25:8 - "Good and upright is the LORD: therefore will he teach sinners in the way" and in Psalm 18:30 - "As for God, his way is perfect."

By the beauty of His character He draws us to Himself, awakening in us the desire to appreciate and love these divine qualities, with a view to our transformation, so that we become like Him. This idea is expressed in John 12:32, where the Lord Jesus declares: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me," referring to the deep attraction of His character, not to a physical one.

God is longsuffering, merciful, full of goodness, righteous and pure!
God is love!

The character of the Lord Jesus, as described in the Holy Scripture, faithfully reflects the traits of the heavenly Father. In Colossians 1:15 we are shown that He is "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature." This shows that His traits reflect those of the Father.

The traits of the Lord's heart are revealed to us in various biblical passages. Exodus 34:6 reveals to us that God is **full of compassion and merciful, slow to anger, full of goodness and faithful.** Psalm 145:8 highlights **His longsuffering,** and Deuteronomy 32:4 stresses that He is **faithful** and without injustice, **righteous and pure,** thus underlining the righteous and spotless nature of God.

We can also see that the Lord Jesus showed a deep state of rest of soul and inner peace during His life on earth. These qualities are visible on careful examination of His life, reflecting how a life lived in these virtues can lead to a deep state of quietness and inner harmony.

In addition, **two other essential traits** of the Lord Jesus, which are mentioned in Matthew 11:29, are **meekness and humility.** Here the Lord Jesus Himself says: "learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." This message not only encourages us to follow His example, but also assures us that by adopting meekness and humility we can reach the rest and inner peace that marked Him.

Another trait that defines God is His **holiness**, which we too are required to

have, in 1 Peter 1:16: "Be ye holy; for I am holy." He is further described in Hebrews 7:1, 2, first as **"King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace."**

In 1 John 4:16, Scripture adds a deep dimension to our understanding of the nature of God, stating that "**God is love**". This statement not only defines the essence of God, but also stresses that love is the foundation that enriches and unites all the other divine traits. In the divine context, love is not seen merely as a feeling, but as a deep and transforming force that lies at the root of all the actions and of the whole character of God.

To make these divine qualities our own, it is essential to turn our attention to the conduct that marked the life of the Lord Jesus on earth, in His relationship with the heavenly Father. This pattern of conduct is fundamental for our spiritual progress and for the transformation of our character.

A fundamental attitude shown by the Lord Jesus was "the renunciation of His Self", a principle that defined His whole existence on earth and that is within reach of every believer. God has endowed us with the ability to embrace this attitude, and His example can often be recognized in our own life experiences.

Much as when we start primary school, where we have to set our preconceptions aside in order to take in new knowledge, so, spiritually, we are called to give up our own limited perspective. Just as no pupil allows himself to change the rules of addition or to redefine the meanings of the letters as he pleases, neither can we change the rules God has laid down for our growth.

In His relationship with God, defined by perfection, the Lord Jesus adopted an attitude of deep humility. He took the position of an obedient bondservant, showing total submission to the will of the Father and unconditional love for Him.

As the Son of God, He showed a deep and sacred reverence towards His Father, known as **"the fear of the Lord,"** which refers to a deep respect and veneration, as Isaiah 11:3 underlines when it says: "And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD".

It is vital to know this divine conduct in order to make it our own, as Colossians 2:2 stresses: "to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

The true Jesus, described in the Holy Scripture, followed a perfect road, without turning aside to the right hand or to the left, a narrow and perfect way which He urges us too to follow, as Matthew 16:24 says, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."

He lived at the highest level of spiritual and moral integrity, conforming to the divine will and laws and strictly following the moral and spiritual principles established by God, which are perfect and eternal. By this He showed that no one - and this includes Him as His Son - can add anything to, or take anything away

from, what God has laid down as law.

The true Jesus, as He is presented in the Scriptures, is our Model of life, character and conduct. We are called to follow Him, to shape our lives after His example and to follow the way He walked, since it is the only way that leads to the transformation of our character and to eternal life.

We Must Live by the Example of Our Model

Many of us have been taught to admire everything the Lord Jesus did and His way of being. But at the same time we have been wrongly led to believe that His traits - namely righteousness, longsuffering, meekness, goodness, mercy and love - are out of our reach. This mistaken idea comes from Satan's intention to turn us away from the true purpose of creation, which is to become like the citizens of the Kingdom.

It is a widespread idea that the Lord Jesus lived on a divine level that is unattainable for men, and that, because of this, it is impossible for us to follow Him, so that we are allowed to remain in our human weaknesses. This view leads to a passive acceptance of human imperfections, ignoring the need for spiritual growth and transformation.

Often, when the life of the Lord Jesus is discussed, special emphasis is put on the miracles He performed, things that seem out of reach for the ordinary man. There is a temptation, magnified by the deceptions of Satan and of his servants, to believe that a life of full obedience to God such as He had seems impossible in this life, as if it were meant exclusively for "the life to come."

Scripture urges us to live as the Lord Jesus lived!

Many appreciate Him for His miracles, but few are interested in knowing and living according to **the way He lived in His relationship with His Father.** This situation comes from the teaching that, in order to reach the heavenly paradise, the forgiveness of sins is enough. Thus self-renunciation, humility, godliness and the other character traits of the Lord are today ignored and despised by most people.

Yet Scripture clearly urges us to follow the pattern of life of the Lord Jesus. As 1 John 2:6 says, "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked." This is a call to action, stressing that, although we cannot perform the physical miracles of Christ, we can aspire to live as He did.

The Lord Jesus does not call us to perform miracles; He calls us to follow the way of renouncing our self and of humility, thus living as He lived in His relationship with His Father - a simple approach, binding on every person. This is

a call to a way of life that anyone can adopt, whatever his personal conditions or circumstances.

In our undertaking to align ourselves with the pattern of Christ, much as when we start primary school, we step with zero initial knowledge into a spiritual "factory" where the standard is divine perfection. In this place, all the parts, beginning with Him as the **Model,** then the tools used in the "technological process", and up to the One who directs the whole manufacturing process - are in a state of perfection.

In this deep spiritual setting, Christ stands at the centre of our process of transformation, He being **the perfect Model** after whom we are shaped. We, as spiritual newborns, are continually worked on and formed in order to reach the standard of perfection of the prototype, established by God.

This process is of divine origin, and in it every component and stage is meticulously aligned with the absolute ideal of perfection. To understand better the steps we must follow, we will take a practical example from everyday life.

To reach high performance in a specific field, such as computer-assisted heart surgery, we must begin by giving up our own opinions about how an operation on the heart might be carried out and accept the knowledge of a specialist in the field.

The relationship between us and the specialist surgeon should be built on mutual respect and trust, like the bond between a disciple and his teacher, where **the disciple devotes himself entirely to the teachings of his mentor.**

This relationship must be like the situation in which someone is completely devoted and submitted to the guidance of a higher authority, giving up his own will and freedom of decision. It therefore implies strict adherence to the mentor's guidance, even when we cannot fully appreciate it or understand it in its full depth.

As we progress and become more and more like the one who teaches us, when we are invited to take part in an operation alongside the surgeon, it is absolutely necessary **to follow all the instructions strictly.** Any deviation, even a minor one, can have serious consequences, endangering the patient's life. Accuracy and attention to detail are therefore of vital importance at the end of this process.

In the same way, in our process of transformation, the Lord Jesus can be regarded as a perfect guide who knows every stage of this process in detail. As the forerunner and the supreme example, in His deep relationship with the heavenly Father, He went through these stages personally and left us **an example** to follow. The true transformation of our character can take place only by following this conduct of His.

As in the complex field of computer-assisted heart surgery, where old knowledge must be abandoned in order to embrace the new technology, in the divine process of spiritual transformation **a new beginning requires giving up personal opinions.** Another step we must take in this divine "workshop" is to show

deep humility towards God. This means submission and sincere obedience to the instructions that are vital for the transformation of our character.

Then we are called **to submit our will,** following the pattern of Jesus Christ, who showed this total submission by His life. In His subordination to the Father, the Lord Jesus was the perfect example of renouncing Himself, of humility and of devotion, like an obedient bondservant in all things.

The conduct of Christ, such as self-renunciation, humility and strict obedience, may seem to contradict the values promoted by modern society, which often glorifies holding on to personal opinions and pride.

These qualities are visible on careful examination of His life, reflecting how living in these virtues can lead to a deep state of quietness and inner harmony. By adopting these attitudes, the Lord Jesus showed that it is possible to live in rest and inner peace, even in the face of the greatest challenges and sufferings.

It is vital to understand that only by adopting these traits will we progress in our spiritual growth until we reach the stature of Christ. This call is reinforced by the promise that submission will guide us towards likeness to Christ, as Psalm 25:9 says: "The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way."

To understand our spiritual road, we will look carefully at this conduct which, though misunderstood by most, marked the life of our **Model**. In this process of spiritual transformation, the first step is giving up our own ideas. This stage is the fundamental starting point, marking a separation from the dark past in order to follow a way guided by the Lord Jesus.

Renouncing Our Self

Renouncing our self is a deep spiritual concept, defined by the dictionary as "giving up one's personal opinions and ideas."

This process of giving up our own knowledge is similar to the path of development from the starting level, in a field unknown to us and without any specific knowledge, up to reaching the status of an expert. To learn and to become like the expert, it is basic that we lay aside our own opinions and accept his methods and teachings.

A concrete example was mentioned earlier in the context of computer-assisted heart surgery, a field about which many of us have no prior knowledge. In this situation it is essential to rely on the guidance and expertise of a professional who understands this surgical process in depth. It is important to recognize the limits of our knowledge in the face of such advanced things, which are strictly necessary to us in practising heart surgery.

In our spiritual context, we are called to give up our own opinions and ideas

in order to make our own the guidance of the One who guides and shapes our spiritual path, recognizing that He has the perfect plan for shaping us.

To teach us to give up our ideas and opinions, the Son of God serves as the perfect example for us. He renounced His Self in a remarkable way in His relationship with the heavenly Father, thus recognizing the perfection of God.

He showed us that He did nothing of Himself and that all His actions were in accordance with the will of the Father, who acts perfectly in all that He does. This is clearly expressed in John 5:19, where the Lord Jesus says: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise."

This renouncing of His own ideas is shown in a profound way in Philippians 2:6-8, "who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant".

This attitude, which shows His nature, radiates a light of perfect beauty. It stands like a shining beacon, inspiring anyone who observes it, and offers us an ideal pattern to follow in our own spiritual journey. The Lord Jesus, though He was the Son of God, did not live by His own ideas, but aligned His will entirely with that of God.

Because the **"Model"** after which we must be transformed is perfect and surpasses human understanding, it becomes binding on us to adopt this attitude of renouncing our self. This means abandoning our personal opinions and ideas, following with devotion and loyalty the guidance of the One who is perfect. By this we recognize that His wisdom is perfect and His plan is superior to all human reasoning.

We are called to live as He lived, renouncing ourselves as He renounced Himself. Self-denial is the starting point of the new life to which we have been called, being the first condition the Lord Jesus requires of those who want to begin this new life.

The Lord Jesus gave us a perfect picture of renouncing His Self towards the will of the Father!

The Lord Jesus gave us a perfect picture of **"self-denial"** towards the will of the Father, a basic principle in God's **"factory"**, and asks us to follow the same road in the process of being perfected.

The Lord Jesus, our Model, showed us by His personal example that a new beginning is not possible without self-denial. We find this fundamental principle in Luke 9:23: "If any man will come after me, let him **deny himself,** and take up his cross daily, and follow me." This verse points us explicitly to the way we must take.

Self-denial is essential and works like a key that opens to us the way to a complete transformation in Christ, enabling us to adopt all His values and principles, which are perfect.

If we deeply admire the Lord Jesus for the way He lived, we too will make self-denial our own and will want to practise it exactly as He did. This admiration and the desire to follow His example will guide us in adopting this essential trait in this process.

We see that in today's world, giving up one's own opinions and what one has learned before is often looked down on or ignored. This fact brings us face to face with an essential question: Are we truly aware of the importance of self-denial in this process of transformation into the image of Christ?

Do we truly want to live in the same self-denial that He showed? It is important to examine ourselves: In our relationship with God, do we truly have the desire to deny ourselves and to give up our limited human values?

Are we truly ready to devote ourselves completely to the teachings of Christ? Are we open to letting ourselves be wholly transformed into new beings? This radical transformation is described in 2 Corinthians 5:17, which states: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

"Self-denial" is a central pillar in the divine plan of salvation and is essential for our transformation in conformity with the image of Christ. To follow the Lord Jesus' example of "self-denial" is a challenge, but also a vital step in our spiritual growth and in being conformed to the character of Christ.

Unless we live with self-denial towards God's instructions, which are perfect, and unless we give up our own opinions, the process of transformation does not begin.

Humility

Humility, defined by the dictionary as an attitude of lowliness, **submission** and respect, is another central trait in the character of the Lord Jesus, shining with a beauty all its own, as we find written in Matthew 11:29, "learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." This is not only an admirable quality, but also a binding pattern for us to take up in our process of spiritual transformation.

When we face the difficult task of assembling a complex piece of equipment, such as an industrial robot, without any prior knowledge, we are obliged **to give up our own opinions** and to follow **with submission** the instructions of an expert in the field. He guides us step by step through the whole assembly process, giving us all the information we need. We all understand that it is essential to follow these instructions exactly for a correct assembly.

Following **with submission** the steps set out by the expert ensures that every component is fitted correctly and in the set order. Any departure from these

instructions can lead to errors in the assembly, which may be hard to detect and correct afterwards. This can compromise not only the successful completion of the assembly, but also the correct and safe working of the robot.

This analogy with the assembly of a complex piece of equipment helps us understand the process of spiritual growth and transformation. In a spiritual context, the Son of God is seen as the most complex "equipment," in the sense that He represents the supreme model and the perfect complexity of the divine, which we are called to know in order to be transformed after Him in every respect.

The verse in Colossians 2:3 speaks of the depth of the mystery of God, represented by Christ, in whom "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." This idea stresses that all spiritual wisdom and knowledge are found in Christ, and therefore a deep knowledge of Him is essential for spiritual growth.

Just as an industrial robot, in order to be assembled correctly, requires detailed instructions and submission to the expert's instructions, so making the traits of Christ our own requires deep submission and the following of His guidance, in order to understand fully the mystery and the wisdom hidden in His teachings.

This is not a blind submission, but a conscious and deliberate recognition of the authority and wisdom of Christ, who guides and shapes our spiritual path.

The process of growth and transformation in Christ involves a continual journey of deepening our knowledge of divine wisdom, in which **renouncing our self and submission** play a central role. This is a difficult call, which requires an honest recognition of our limitations.

To teach us genuine submission, the Lord Jesus serves as the perfect example for us. He showed a renunciation of His Self and an absolute submission in His relationship with the Father, as illustrated in Acts 8:33: "In his humiliation his judgment was taken away". This shows that all the actions and judgments of the Lord Jesus were not moved by His personal ideas, but by complete obedience and unshakeable alignment with the will of God, which is perfect.

This underlines a deep truth: real and genuine transformation is possible only when we **give up our own will** in order to follow the divine plan with **devotion and submission**.

Real transformation is possible when we follow His instructions with submission!

By His example of total submission, the Lord Jesus thus set forth the perfection of God, asking us to follow the same road in our process of spiritual perfection.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, before He was seized in order to be condemned to death, the Lord Jesus prayed: "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matthew 26:39). This moment

shows deeply His submission to the will of the Father, even in the face of suffering and death.

This attitude not only shows the deep humility of the Lord Jesus, but also reflects an unshakeable trust in the justice and sovereignty of God. In the face of challenges, He chose to remain unshaken in submission, thus giving us an example of steadfastness and spiritual dignity, even in the most difficult circumstances.

By adopting this attitude, the Lord Jesus showed that it is possible to live in rest and inner peace, even in the face of the greatest challenges and sufferings.

In this attitude towards the heavenly Father we find the highest example of submission, calling us to follow the same road of submission and total trust in the divine will and plan, in order to reach the stature of our model.

Examining ourselves honestly, we can ask whether we appreciate this Jesus, who renounced Himself in His relationship with His Father. Do we admire this Jesus, who submitted entirely to the will of the Father in every aspect of His life?

We should ask ourselves whether we appreciate this character trait of the Lord Jesus and whether we sincerely want to live as He lived; whether we want to live in humility and lowliness.

Are we drawn by submission so much that we long to be humble like Him, to live after His pattern? Let us remember that God shows the way they must follow only to the humble, as Psalm 25:9 says, "The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way."

It is important to examine ourselves: Do we live in humility in our relationship with God? Do we show complete submission to God in every aspect of our life, as the Lord Jesus did? To follow the Lord Jesus' example of humility is a challenge, but also an essential step in our spiritual growth and in being conformed to the character of Christ. Unless we work in submission to God's perfect instructions, we cannot reach the spiritual stature of our supreme example, the Lord Jesus.

He Offered Himself as a Bondservant

To offer yourself as someone's "bondservant" is defined in the dictionary as the act of submitting your own will completely and servilely to the will of another.

The Son of God is the prototype after whom we must be shaped. He chose to live on earth in the total lowliness of a bondservant, devoting Himself completely to the will of the heavenly Father, as Philippians 2:5,7 urges us: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant".

When we contemplate His life as that of a bondservant or slave, we see that He lived in a willing, total obedience to the will of the Father, which is perfect.

It is striking to reflect on the fact that Someone so great chose of His own free will to submit His will to His Father.

In all His actions, the Son of God never followed His own initiative, but was always guided by the perfect commandments of the Father, in complete obedience. This attitude of total submission, characteristic of a bondservant, was the principle that guided Him, and He asks us to adopt it too.

Although He had a divine nature, He did not consider equality with God a fitting thing, but humbled Himself, choosing to live as a bondservant, submitting to the heavenly Father unto death on the cross. This is the supreme essence of lowliness and submission, a pattern we are called to follow in our spiritual journey. By adopting this attitude, the Son showed that only in this way is it possible to live in rest and inner peace.

Our process of spiritual transformation, which consists in being shaped after Christ, begins with our decision to give up our own opinions and to let ourselves be shaped. This leads by implication to the voluntary submission of our will and the acceptance of the status of a bondservant towards God. Fulfilling the commandments in this status is vital for the transformation of our character after that of Christ.

He calls us to follow His example, to submit our will in obedience, as He Himself did. Only if we take on the role of devoted bondservants in our relationship with God will we gradually progress towards the perfecting of our character, drawing inspiration from the example of the Lord Jesus.

This pattern of a servant-master relationship is vital for this process!

This pattern of a servant-master relationship is vital in the process of transformation. The process of being shaped after Christ is so perfect that it is essential to devote ourselves completely, in order to reach His spiritual stature.

This is the only road, the only way that leads us to likeness to Christ in every aspect of our life. A genuine new beginning in order to be like Christ cannot be reached except through the submission of the will, as it is written in Romans 6:22: "But now being made free from sin, and **become servants** to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life."

When we voluntarily submit to the will of God, we enter into a relationship of deep submission and devotion. We do not see ourselves as partners or co-workers, but as beings who admire and appreciate the One who guides them so much that they give themselves up completely to the divine will. This act of devoting yourself as a bondservant to Christ reflects an absolute love and devotion towards God, marking the beginning of a deep spiritual journey towards transformation and sanctification.

This works like a key that opens to us the way to a thorough and complete transformation in Christ, enabling us to adopt all His perfect values and principles down to the smallest details.

He who discovers in the Lord Jesus the embodiment of perfection and of perfect beauty, like a pearl of great price, will have a deep admiration for Him. This deep admiration will move us to aspire to be like Him, to renounce our self, to submit and to offer ourselves as bondservants.

Total and unconditional love is the only thing that leads us to offer ourselves as bondservants willingly, without compulsion. This submission of the will, together with the other three essential traits (self-denial, humility, godliness), is the only option that will help us adjust our traits, building the image of the Lord in us in every detail.

Only those who are captivated by the character traits of the Lord Jesus and submit their will willingly will come to know peace and holiness and, in the end, eternal life.

It is vital to understand that all the Lord's commandments are a faithful reflection of His character, showing us the way He lived and His ways. Every teaching of His hides a trait of the Lord, much as the physical traits of a man are hidden in his embryo (The seed is the word of God. Luke 8:11).

If we truly want to have the character traits of the Lord Jesus, then His commandments must be a delight to us. We will love these commandments and fulfil them with joy, as an obedient bondservant, and so we will come to be like Him (Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold. Psalm 119:127).

So it is important to examine ourselves: Do we consider His teachings essential in the process of transformation? Do we want to keep His commandments as a bondservant, and to have a relationship of obedience towards Him, as He had towards His Father?

Godliness

Godliness, defined in the dictionary as **an attitude of admiration, deep respect and strict obedience,** is a remarkable and especially beautiful trait in the character of the Lord Jesus. He was the highest example of genuine godliness, shown in complete obedience to the heavenly Father, as is highlighted in John 5:19, where it is stated: "The Son can do nothing of himself, **but what he seeth the Father do:** for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise."

By His coming to earth, the Lord Jesus left us essential teachings meant to guide us towards this stage in which we have a deep godliness towards God. This godliness implies not only a deep admiration, but also a strict keeping of His

teachings, and it is a necessary stage in our process of transformation, which brings peace and rest to the soul.

A time must come in our life when the perfect disciple is like his Teacher, as Luke 6:40 says, "The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master." It is a stage when we have reached the stature of no longer doing anything of ourselves, but only what we see the Lord Jesus did, as 2 Corinthians 10:5 says, "bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."

Just as a resident doctor in computer-assisted heart surgery begins his career by performing basic procedures, at first putting less emphasis on extreme precision, so in our spiritual process of being conformed to the image of Christ we too begin as little children, with more general and less rigorous actions. As we draw near to the stature of a perfect man, the importance of complete obedience according to the Scriptures - bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ - becomes more and more pressing.

In the course of our spiritual development, as with a resident's growth in complexity and precision, the need to be more precise in following the example of Christ increases. In the early phases, like spiritual infancy or childhood, our conformity to the image of the Lord cannot be detailed or exact, as 1 Corinthians 13:11 says - "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things."

The final goal is to reflect His character as faithfully as possible!

But as we progress and mature in faith and understanding, it becomes essential to improve our precision in following the teachings and the example of Christ. The final goal is to develop to the point where we reflect His character and His actions as faithfully as possible, resembling Him not only in the great actions but also in the smallest details of our life.

To reach the height of the stature of Christ, it is vital to reach this stage in which we fulfil the teachings of our Lord strictly. Through rigorous keeping, we prepare ourselves for the completion of our spiritual journey, where no deviation is allowed. Along this road it is binding on us to learn strict keeping, which becomes essential in the final phase, because we are ever closer to reaching the stature of Christ.

According to Scripture, it is a way that leads us to godliness, and therefore it is binding on us to follow this road. The passage in 1 Timothy 6:3-4 stresses the importance of godliness, or strict obedience. The text says: "If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus

Christ, and to **the doctrine which is according to godliness;** he is proud, knowing nothing".

Our aim must be alignment with the pattern of godliness of the Son of God, which implies total and sincere obedience to the divine commandments and teachings. Only such a commitment to God's plan will bring us ever closer to the character and the example of the Lord.

We must realize that through a single act of disobedience Adam experienced spiritual death and was exiled from the Garden of Eden. Therefore going beyond the stature of the first Adam, who was not distinguished by strict obedience, is fundamental for our own spiritual transformation.

According to what is written in 1 Timothy 4:8, "For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come," it is stressed that strict keeping is beneficial not only in the present life, but also in the life to come.

It is not enough to be content with a superficial godliness, believing that mere admiration or acknowledgement of God will secure us a place in His Kingdom. The text of 2 Timothy 3:2-5 warns us of the danger of having only an outward form of godliness, without its genuine power. This reminds us that true godliness involves much more than admiration or religious rituals.

It is therefore essential to examine ourselves with deep honesty. Let us ask ourselves: Do we admire, and draw inspiration from, His Son's obedience and strict keeping of the commandments at so deep a level that we desire the same measure of genuine keeping? Such an approach does not come down merely to words and rituals, but requires a deep inner change and total devotion.

Conclusion:

To come to understand the peace and rest of soul that mark existence in this kingdom, similar to what the Lord Jesus experienced, it is essential to consider one of His defining qualities: **"longsuffering."** We must make this fundamental trait our own in order to live genuinely the peace and inner rest in which the Lord Jesus also lived.

In the Kingdom of God, the idea of conflict, whether inner or outward, does not exist. This points to a state of absolute peace and rest for all the inhabitants of the kingdom, whatever their status, ruling out every form of opposition, disagreement, power struggle and act of violence. Longsuffering is the distinctive characteristic of all the inhabitants of the Kingdom.

Longsuffering is the rule that shows itself in the relationships between its inhabitants, where each one keeps the state of rest of soul, which does not allow the loss of patience that would bring disturbance. Thus longsuffering not only makes harmony and inner peace easier, but is also the cornerstone of peaceful living together in the Kingdom of God.

This trait has its roots in the teachings of Christ and is closely linked to the practice of self-denial, humility, strict obedience as a bondservant and godliness. Longsuffering does not come down to a simple passive tolerance; it is rather an active quality, which shows itself in the ability to respond to challenges and difficulties while keeping peace and rest of soul.

It is based on a deep understanding and acceptance of the will of God, thus reflecting a firm commitment to the principles of Christ and an unshakeable trust in the divine plan.

We can easily see that often, from a tender age, we are urged to defend ourselves and to demand our rights in the face of oppression or injustice. This mindset is reflected in the creation of government institutions that protect individual rights, as well as in the existence of emergency services and law-enforcement bodies, to which we can turn in order to defend ourselves and to resist those who do us harm.

In contrast to these secular teachings, Christ gives us entirely opposite teachings and directs us to a completely different way. To reach His stature and to acquire His longsuffering and His goodness, it is vital to submit to His teachings and to adopt the attitude He had towards His oppressors.

The first step in this process of passing from impatience, anger and agitation to longsuffering is giving up our own human ideas and opinions about how patience can be reached.

The next step is to accept with joy the words of Scripture concerning this virtue. An essential teaching of the Lord Jesus, which brings patience into our hearts, is the principle of non-resistance, as it is expressed in Matthew 5:40-41: "And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain."

Although often misinterpreted and considered a sign of weakness or a lack of firmness, non-resistance is in fact a remarkable strength and a profound method of cultivating patience, peace and inner wisdom. To put it into practice effectively, it is essential to submit to and follow the teachings of our Mentor. We see today that relatively few choose to accept and practise this teaching set forth by the Lord Jesus.

In the face of situations that test our commitment to the principle of non-resistance, whether we are confronted with injustice at the workplace, such as being asked to work overtime without our consent, or with tensions in the family sphere, such as disagreements with our husband or wife, or other similar situations, it is vital to show our dedication in the way a loyal servant carries out his duties towards his master.

This strategy involves an intentional and conscious application of non-resistance, not as an obligation, but starting from a deep appreciation of its importance and effectiveness in personal transformation and in reaching inner peace.

The school of patience is an essential transforming process for each of us, because patience is vital in perfecting our character, as James 1:2-4 stresses, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."

As we grow spiritually, God tests us with ever greater challenges, helping us to become more and more like Christ. **Through the practice of godliness,** that is, strict and devoted fulfilment, we will perfect longsuffering down to the smallest details.

Just as we have illustrated this essential trait, we will have to make our own every trait of the Lord Jesus, such as faithfulness, meekness, peace of heart, goodness, love... living with self-denial, humility and godliness towards all His teachings. Every teaching of His Son opens to us a view of His nature, reflecting His divine perfection.

The School of Christ

To give us the possibility of learning to live as His Son lived and of growing up to the height of the stature of His fulness, God instituted the Church, which is also called the Body of Christ.

Scripture describes the Church of Christ as a spiritual family made up of infants, children and spiritual fathers, who live together in fellowship and grow together in order to become like the Lord. This is stressed in Ephesians 4:11, where it is stated that He placed in the Church apostles, prophets, pastors and teachers, to contribute to the perfecting of the saints, so that all may reach spiritual maturity, the stature of Christ.

In the Church we learn self-denial, humility and godliness, to offer ourselves as bondservants to Christ and to live in righteousness, as He lived. Self-denial, humility and godliness (strict obedience) are essential so that His character traits - longsuffering, goodness, meekness, love... - may be imprinted in us, and this is achieved effectively in the setting of the Church, seen as the workshop of Christ.

On deeper examination, we see that the spiritual process of salvation, from the new birth to reaching the stature of a perfect man in Christ, reflects aspects similar to the stages of our earthly life.

When we come into the world, we witness the birth of a child, a process that has many similarities with the new birth into the Kingdom of God, as 1 Corinthians 4:15-16 says: "For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me."

Just as a child does not choose the family into which he is born, so

the spiritually reborn person is brought into a spiritual family - the Church - where he receives spiritual food and growth. In this new life everything begins from zero. Like an infant, the one who is reborn learns and takes in everything from his spiritual fathers, as 1 Corinthians 3:1 says, "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat".

Within this spiritual family, the spiritual child receives guidance, comfort and teaching from his spiritual fathers. This is reflected in 1 Thessalonians 2:11, where it says: "as ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children".

This parallel between natural birth and spiritual birth shows us the wonderful way in which God has provided for every believer to grow and develop in a family of faith, much as a child grows and develops in his family.

Just as a child enrols at school and goes through the educational process, including graduation, in order to practise a profession in a field such as medicine, something similar happens in the spiritual world with the development of the spiritual child. It is not possible to reach the stature of Christ without being a disciple in His school, as it is written in Acts 19:9, "he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school ..."

The aim of the school of disciples is that each one should become like their Teacher!

We are part of His school, where we find ourselves alongside other spiritual children, some younger, others older, together with spiritual fathers and teachers. This structure is meant to help us grow according to the standards of His Kingdom, as Ephesians 4:16 says: "from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, ... maketh increase of the body".

The main aim of the school of disciples is that each of us should become like the Teacher and know inner peace and rest of soul. We must all go through this school, whose end is reaching the height of the stature of the Teacher, as Luke 6:40 says: "The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master."

The Son of God was sent to earth by the heavenly Father to found the Church, which is the Body of Christ, as Matthew 16:18 says, "I will build my church."

He is the founder of this school of disciples - the Church - which He cares for with love, as it is stated in Ephesians 5:29, "For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church". The Church is the workshop where every believer can grow and learn to live as the Son of God lived, in a continual process of spiritual formation and maturing.

A remarkable example is the apostle Paul, who devoted his whole life to serving the Church of Christ, forming disciples in order to present them perfect in Christ before God, as Colossians 1:28,29 states - "warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working ..."

Only in the school of Christ can the relationships between disciples be properly adjusted, so that they can reach maturity and complete unity in every respect. This unity will also be reflected in His eternal Kingdom. This is stressed in John 17:21, where Christ prays: "that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us".

Just as God has set the members in the human body with their specific functions, so He sets them in the Body of Christ.

Each member of the body is interdependent and cannot grow or survive apart from the rest of the body. For example, the kidneys fulfil their function only within the body to which they belong. In the same way, the members of the body of Christ cannot grow in isolation; they are interconnected and depend on one another in order to function properly and grow together.

Through various trials, man is shaped so as to make the traits of the Lord his own, thus preparing himself to live alongside God and all those who have graduated from the school of discipleship of Christ and have made His character traits their own in their life.

This school is essential for the spiritual growth and maturing of every believer, teaching us to live in the rest of Christ and to become like Him in every respect.

Even though God's plan is explicit, the Church, recognized as the Body of Christ, often remains a mystery to many, as is mentioned in Ephesians 5:32, "This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church." and it is seen only as a place of worship.

In the religious organizations of today, the concept of discipleship does not exist!

Today we can see how Satan has managed to distort the understanding of the role of the family and of the Body of Christ.

The false teaching that "salvation comes down only to the forgiveness of sins" has led to the mistaken idea that discipleship, that is, the school of discipleship, is not necessary. In many religious organizations today, the concept of discipleship to Christ does not exist, and few believe in the need to live as disciples in order to reach the stature of His fulness.

This mistaken teaching has led to a perception that "the Church of Christ" comes down to mere buildings for worship and religious education, so that the

essence of true discipleship and of spiritual growth in the Body of Christ is lost.

Almost everywhere, Satan has managed to replace the role of the spiritual fathers and shepherds, who are responsible for the spiritual growth of the children in the faith, with priests, pastors and leaders focused more on organizing and conducting religious services and on keeping the scattered flock.

This situation is like what is described in John 10:12, where it says: "the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep." This metaphor stresses the danger of being led by those who are not truly devoted to the good of the flock.

So the Church has become more a centre for holding religious services than a place of spiritual growth and perfecting, losing its essential role, as Ephesians 3:10-11 says, "to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God ..."

This false approach is found in many denominations, from Catholicism and Orthodoxy to Lutheranism and the many neo-Protestant movements. These organizations focus on buildings specially constructed for worship and preaching activities, neglecting the deep aspect of the personal relationship of discipleship.

In this context, someone who seeks a genuine relationship of discipleship, like the relationship between a child and a parent, faces the lack of spiritual fathers. This is a significant challenge in the modern religious world, where religious formalism hinders the development of a genuine and deep relationship of discipleship.

It is essential to distinguish between the education received through preaching and growth under the authority of a spiritual father. The teaching received in a sermon can give knowledge, but not the guidance and the formation of character traits that come from a parental relationship.

Comparing an orphan child with one who has parents, we see that both can receive an education, but the child with parents also benefits from the formation of character, encouragement in good things and correction when he does wrong. An orphan child, without this parental guidance, has great difficulty in recognizing and correcting his faults.

We advise the reader not to wish to be in an institutionalized church that practises only worship and preaching, to be solitary, like an orphan child, and so to avoid the Body of Christ, which is fitly joined together and compacted.

Let us flee from the organization that does not practise caring (discipleship), that has no spiritual fathers. There is the work of Satan with which he has deceived the religious world; there is not the Body of Christ. Let us seek to be part of a body where the Word of Christ can be fulfilled in its entirety, where every member contributes to our spiritual growth and formation, so that our character is transformed after that of Christ.

Questions for Self-Examination

It is essential for each of us to examine himself in the light of the Word of God, asking himself about the **purpose** of his **life**. This undertaking involves a few key questions:

Your present position: Are you honest with yourself about your present spiritual condition? This will affect your eternity.

Seeking the Kingdom of God: Do you devote yourself to seeking the Kingdom of righteousness, peace and love as a precious treasure?

Attraction to the character of Christ: Are you drawn by the beauty of the traits of Christ? Do you strive consciously to change your character after His?

The covenant of discipleship: Have you made a real covenant of discipleship and full obedience to Christ? Do you consider His teachings essential in the process of transformation? Do you live in righteousness (in justice) and aim to reach the stature of Christ?

Your role in the Body of Christ: Are you truly part of the Body of Christ, where every member is a real disciple of Christ? In your process of spiritual development, within His "workshop", do you have a spiritual father who is devoted to your growth?

The kind of congregation: Are you involved in a congregation with superficial religious services, in which man is a mere consumer of programmes, or in one where spiritual growth and perfection are the priority?

The commitment to change: If you have not yet actively sought righteousness (justice, purity...), begin now. Learn from the Lord Jesus traits such as renouncing your self, humility, godliness, righteousness, longsuffering, meekness and love.

It is essential to examine yourself seriously, because what is at stake is the place where you will spend eternity.

If you are in an organization that does not promote genuine discipleship in Christ, look for a congregation with spiritual fathers devoted to the spiritual growth and perfecting of its members, as 2 Timothy 2:22 says, "follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart."

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De o analiză mai atentă observăm că aproape nimeni nu se oprește să se întrebe care este adevăratul rost al acestei vieți limitate. De ce îmbătrânim? De ce ne îmbolnăvim și murim? Care este originea morții și cine a stabilit această regulă de viață?

Multe mecanisme se învârt în jurul nostru și ne afectează neștiute. De ce să ne naștem, să trăim 70-80 de ani, doar pentru ca totul să se sfârșească la mormânt? Care este scopul acestei scurte vieți trăite pe pământ? Suntem doar consumatori ai timpului? Ce sens are să ne bucurăm de viață, dacă, în cele din urmă, vom muri și vom fi uitați?

A fost această scopul lui Dumnezeu când a creat omul, să trăiască doar pentru a muri și a fi uitat? Ce se întâmplă cu sufletul omului după moarte? Este mormântul un pas către o altă formă de existență, o trecere spre altceva? Dacă există viață veșnică, de ce trebuie să experimentăm moartea pentru a ajunge la acea nouă viață? A creat Dumnezeu ceva ce nu are sens?

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