

Spiritual Portion DAMI Zoom ZURICH - May 2021

Dear District Apostles and District Apostle Helpers,

Jesus Christ established His church and sent His Apostles in order to make full salvation accessible to mankind. We know that the whole purpose for the existence of the church and the apostolate is to impart salvation. For this reason it is imperative for us to properly understand what comprises this salvation.

The term 'salvation' incorporates some very different aspects. This is evidenced by the rich vocabulary that the Bible uses to give us an idea of what salvation really means. Both the Old and New Testaments speak of liberation, deliverance, preservation, forgiveness, victory, and even redemption. These different facets of salvation are also evident in the course of history, namely in the way in which Christians—including those in our Church—have understood salvation. Depending on the time and place in which they lived, they emphasised that aspect of salvation that best suited their expectations—for example, preservation, deliverance, or forgiveness. The same phenomenon is also evident today. Depending on their situation, our brothers and sisters primarily see salvation as deliverance from suffering, a means to escape a threat, or an opportunity to see a loved one again.

All of these perspectives are quite justifiable and understandable. However, in order that the Apostles and their co-workers may fulfil the mission entrusted to them by the Lord, our brethren must have a clear overall image of salvation, and must never lose sight of what is essential, namely the will and the activity of Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Redeemer.

Salvation: deliverance and preservation

By definition, salvation comes from God. God intervened in the history of the people of Israel in order to deliver them from the yoke of the Egyptians and enable them to pass through the Red Sea. The Son of God came to the earth in order to deliver us from bondage to sin and to open up access to God.

In our Church there were times when the return of the Lord was predominantly seen as an act of deliverance and preservation:

- the Lord is coming again in order to deliver us from suffering;
- He will preserve and protect us from the great tribulation, that time of affliction in which evil will reach its zenith on this earth.
- those who partake in the first resurrection will not have to appear before God at the Last Judgement.

In order to be accepted by Christ at His return, the believers were admonished to receive the sacraments and remain faithful to the apostolate.

This knowledge is still valid. It is, however, recommendable to put it into the broader context of the gospel as a whole. Focusing on deliverance and preservation as the only aspects of salvation harbours certain risks:

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- believers might be tempted to close themselves off from the outside world—they might feel that the most important thing is to remain faithful so that they can be preserved from suffering and escape the catastrophe that has been foretold. The fate of their fellow human beings thus fades into the background;
- missionary efforts might no longer be exclusively motivated by love for our neighbour, but rather by the desire to escape earthly sufferings as quickly as possible (“...the Lord will come when the last soul is sealed...”);
- the sacraments might well be misunderstood as ends unto themselves—receiving them guarantees salvation;
- life on earth might be portrayed negatively—the earth is nothing but a place of suffering, from which one must escape as quickly as possible.

Salvation signifies eternal life and fellowship with God

When Jesus Christ spoke about salvation, He often used the term ‘eternal life’. Eternal life is much more than immortality. The Lord did not merely say that those who believe in Him would live on. He promised them that they would partake in divine life and enter into the fellowship of God in His kingdom. The New Testament uses the image of the bride and the bridegroom and speaks of the marriage feast in order to describe this fellowship.

‘Divine life’ and ‘fellowship with God’ are terms that reference the essence of God Himself. God is the fellowship of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit always exist and work together. The three divine persons are distinct from one another, are one, and exist in continual relationship to one another.

God, the Father, God, the Son, and God, the Holy Spirit has created man in His own image (Genesis 1: 26) and grants him access to fellowship with Himself. Through the fall into sin, man was excluded from this fellowship. The aim of God’s activity of salvation is to enable man to take His place in the presence of God once again. The eternal life promised by Jesus consists of sharing in the fellowship of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, or—to put it into the words of Jesus—being in God as the Father is in the Son and the Son is in the Father (John 17: 21–23). To be in fellowship with God does not imply being “God”. In the kingdom of God, the redeemed will remain creations of God, and God will always stand above everything and everyone. Nevertheless, they will live eternally and in perfect harmony with Him. They will worship and praise Him into all eternity and continually discover new aspects of God’s glory without ceasing.

The Lord has made clear the conditions we must fulfil in order to have access to eternal life: we must believe in Jesus Christ, be born again out of water and the Spirit, and receive the body and blood of Christ. These prerequisites are necessary, but not sufficient. Receiving the sacraments gives us the possibility of entering into eternal fellowship with God, but does not guarantee us ultimate access. We must also prepare ourselves intensively for the return of Jesus, and we must do so in the time of grace allotted to us. This preparation consists of sanctifying ourselves—or more precisely, allowing ourselves to be sanctified by God. If we allow the Holy Spirit to work within us, He will cleanse us, give us the strength to resist sin, and

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teach us to renounce all things that separate us from God (for example, erroneous opinions or bad character traits).

New Apostolic Christians do not wait for the return of the Lord only to escape from this earth. They do not necessarily see their earthly existence as a vale of tears in which they are doomed to walk, and their faith as the only possible means of escaping it. What they want is to live with God eternally. Their life on earth is a time of grace which God grants them so that they can prepare themselves for eternal fellowship with Him in both joy and sorrow. For them the first resurrection is much more than an escape—it is completion!

Fellowship with God and fellowship with man

The triune God is love. God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit loves all human beings and desires to save them. To be in fellowship with God is to be filled with God's life and to fully abide by His will. The essence of divine life is love. If we want to be one with Jesus Christ as He is one with the Father, we must have the life of Christ in us (Philippians 2: 5).

The New Testament makes it clear that divine life is inextricably linked with love for our neighbour. Jesus attaches just as much importance to the love we bear our neighbour as to the love we have for God (Matthew 22: 37–39). He prays for the oneness of His own. He urges the disciples to love and serve one another. In Romans 12: 4–5, Apostle Paul uses the image of the body of Christ, whose members are closely connected to Christ and show solidarity with one another.

Preparing ourselves to live in eternal fellowship with God also means preparing ourselves to live in fellowship with others. On their own, human beings are incapable of living in harmony with one another. They must first become a new creation in Christ, filled with the love of God and guided by the Holy Spirit. Perfect fellowship among human beings will only be possible in the kingdom of God when all are freed from sin and human imperfection. However, we must learn to live in fellowship with one another today in particular!

We cannot prepare ourselves for eternal life on our own. It only makes sense within the community of those who are striving for eternal fellowship with God.

The divine service: personal and communal preparation for the return of Jesus

The divine services have a particularly important place in the believer's preparation for the return of the Lord.

By participating in the divine service, the believer prepares himself primarily as an individual. He strengthens his personal relationship with God. He makes the effort to detach himself physically and mentally from his daily life in order to encounter God. The sermon inspired by the Holy Spirit strengthens His faith in the imminent return of Jesus Christ. By joining in the Lord's Prayer, the believer expresses His desire to be in fellowship with God: "Your kingdom come. Your will be done." The absolution frees him from the burden of his sins. Partaking

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worthily in Holy Communion strengthens his hope and nourishes the divine life he has received in the rebirth.

Participating in the divine service also prepares the believer to live in the community of the saints in the kingdom of God. By coming to the divine service, the believer demonstrates the importance he attaches to his relationship with God: he now desires to gather with people whom he has not chosen, in order to be with God. His desire to praise and worship God, his need to commune with God and be near him, is so strong that he finds himself gathering with people with whom he would otherwise never have associated.

Beyond that, his encounter with our brothers and sisters gives him the opportunity to take an interest in others, to share in their joys and sorrows. And since no one is perfect, congregational life enables the believers to learn to forgive one another, reconcile with one another, and learn to overcome their differences.

When the believer comes into the congregation, he perceives that God speaks the same message to all present—God thus makes use of the same message in order to strengthen the believers in completely different situations. This simple observation gives an idea of the power and effectiveness of the preaching of the gospel. By praying the words aloud together: “Forgive us our debts”, the believers publicly profess that they are all—without exception—in need of grace.

Receiving the sacrament of Holy Communion is an essential component of our preparation for the return of the Lord. The salvation-bringing effect of the sacrament does not come into being by merely receiving the consecrated wafer, but through the celebration of Holy Communion as a whole. Holy Communion is also an express meal of fellowship, namely the fellowship of Christ with the believers, but also the fellowship of the believers with one another. Holy Communion produces all of these effects when the believer receives the duly consecrated wafer from the hands of an Apostle, or a minister commissioned by him, in the presence of the congregation.

At the institution of Holy Communion, the Lord broke the bread and gave it to the Apostles. He then gave them a cup filled with wine and asked them to share it with one another (Luke 22: 17). Today it is a priestly minister who dispenses the consecrated wafer to the believers. However, when we celebrate the Lord’s Supper together, each one of us can see that the Lord welcomes everyone else in the same manner, shows them the same love, and gives them exactly the same thing He gives us. This experience is a wonderful preparation for the marriage feast of the Lamb.

Finally, it should be noted that the celebration of a divine service usually requires a number of believers to work together, for example, the officiant, the ministers who serve along, the choir members, the musicians, those responsible for ushering, the altar decorations, the cleaning, etc. This collaboration is also an excellent way to learn how to live together.

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Summary

At His return the Lord will take us unto Himself. Delivered from sin and its consequences, we will live in perfect fellowship with God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We will also be in perfect fellowship with one another.

Today we must prepare ourselves for the return of Jesus. This preparation consists of cultivating fellowship with God and with one another. Participating in divine services is of special importance in this preparation.

During the pandemic, it was not possible to celebrate the divine services as usual. We had to find new ways to allow the believers to hear the sermon and receive the absolution. Virtual divine services were a great help in this difficult period. It is undeniable that they offer many advantages, but they do not have the same salvation-bringing effect as a divine service attended in person. The experience of fellowship is an essential component of the preparation of the bride.

Likewise, receiving a consecrated wafer in the absence of the priestly minister and the congregation cannot have the same salvation-bringing effect as the celebration of Holy Communion in the congregation.

One of the duties that comprise the “authority of the keys” inherent in the service of the Chief Apostle is to guarantee the purity of the doctrine (CNAC 7.6.6). Therefore I see it as my responsibility to solemnly remind all New Apostolic believers that participating in the divine services is an essential component of our preparation for the return of Jesus. To consciously and regularly abstain from attending divine services—when it is indeed possible to come to church—can be detrimental to our salvation.