



45

**CHALLENGE**



**CHALLENGE**



## CHALLENGE 40

### „Path to Resurrection“

*“Oh, to know your Resurrection power,  
To participate in your suffering.  
To go through death like you, Lord,  
And to live with you forever. “*

The verses of the well-known poem “All that is dear to my heart” speak of the deep desire of the heart that longs to go with its Lord, both the best (life with God forever) and the hardest (suffering, death). For the next 40 days, we want to turn our hearts toward Christ, study His life, but also at the same time, re-examine ours. As we reflect on Jesus’ journey to Resurrection and contemplate on His life, we will go through the following four sections:

- 1. Incarnation** - Through the Word we will see Jesus as God, but also as a man, and how Christ manifests himself in us today.
- 2. Temptation** - Jesus goes to the wilderness, is tempted, and thus prepares for the ministry ahead of him; on the other hand in our daily lives, we are tempted and struggle with our “humanity”.
- 3. Ministry** - To what does Christ call his disciples to in the ministry? How can we serve today?

**4. Suffering** - We are reminded of Christ, who suffered in his last days because of us, but we are also aware of what He did in light of our own suffering.

So in the next 40 days, let us direct our focus on Christ, walk with Him, and be ready to face new challenges!

***“Beyond all question,  
the mystery from which true godliness  
springs is great:  
He appeared in the flesh,  
was vindicated by the Spirit,  
was seen by angels,  
was preached among the nations,  
was believed on in the world,  
was taken up in glory.”  
1 Timothy 3:16***

# 1

## A REFLECTION OF THE INVISIBLE GOD

*Bible verses: Colosians 1:15-17*

A picture is worth a thousand words. And when we don't have any words to say, a picture can communicate. When we want to explain something in a nicer, deeper, or richer way, having an image usually allows that to happen. And it is precisely this idea that would maybe allow us to have a better understanding of God. However, this image is not accessible because none of us has seen God. Not just that, but no one can even accurately describe Him for that same reason. From the beginning of time until now, this has been one of mankind's challenges. However, the invisible God remains unknown only if one does not consider the important fact that He revealed Himself very clearly in His day and made His image known. Firstborn of every creature, Jesus Christ, came into this world not as an envoy of God, but as God Himself dwelling among men. Thus, through him, our God can be known. The same Jesus who lived in a known time and space, who was visible and in the flesh, who came in the form of man, - He is the true image of God in the best resolution.

Would you like to truly know God? Fix your eyes on Jesus.

### **Challenge**

*These are some of the attributes Bible ascribes to our God: Ex 34:6; Isa 6:3; Ps 117:2; Rev 19:6; Deut 32:4; Ps 95:3*

*Although we cannot see Him, if you'd like a clearer image of the invisible God, the challenge for you is to skim through the gospels and check out what is He like and how does it show. Here's a little help: Lk 2:51-52; Mark 1:21-22 Lk 39-40; Matt 4:23; Lk 5:13; Lk 6:3-5; Lk 7:36-37; Matt 12:48-50; Mark 9:7; Lk 11:1; Lk 15:2; Mark 10:13-14, Lk 19:41-42.45-46; Matt 22:18-21*

# 2

## FULLNESS OF MERCY AND TRUTH

*Bible verses: John 1:16-18*

Oftentimes we have the opportunity to hear speeches of politicians in which they talk about the need to return to the values of the society. A statesman found himself in this position while giving a similar message to the student leaders of the world's top universities. After he finished his speech there was silence and then a Harvard student asked a question that was troubling the entire gathering. "What is the foundation of the values which you are talking about?" The speaker looked down and then answered he doesn't know of such a foundation. In other words, he told them not to steal money from the company register and at the same time failed to provide one reason why they shouldn't.

This anecdote points to the current situation in today's society. People want to live according to values but what they lack is the foundation for such values. This is exactly how the apostle Paul describes the Son of God, as the one "full of grace and truth". Jesus didn't come to inspire us with ideas. According to the testimony of John the apostle, He took on flesh and made his dwelling among us. The words point to the events described in the book of Exodus where God made his dwelling among his people in the tabernacle. In the same way Christ came in the flesh and declared the final stronghold of salvation—and also of the values by which we can live. The reason for such living is Christ, God among us.

### Challenge

*Jesus has embodied and revealed himself as a human, coming to dwell among people. Think about the society you live in, of Croatia or some smaller scope. Write down the values of that society, the values of an average Croat, for instance. Also, think about and write down some of your priority values. Underline those you find to be anchored in Jesus, and compare the number of underlined values to the complete number of values you find your most important ones.*

# 3

## ONE WITH GOD

*Bible verses: John 10:30-38*

This paragraph is Jesus' conclusion to the discussion on the Good Shepherd, but it is only one of the many warnings to formal believers (in Jesus' day – 'the Jews') in John 5:1-12;50, that their 'knowledge has been terribly perverted' (R. Bultmann). This means that their idea of God and the divine – which they call 'true faith' – prevents them from hearing the God who is speaking from among them. Formally, of course, they are right. For a man to declare himself God is punishable by death. But when people call and judge God as blasphemer, then the people who reject his word have chosen perdition for themselves. There is no salvation for them. Throughout the Gospel, John has already claimed that formal and superficial believers only have one goal: to display their own glory to others, and expect others to give them glory (5:39-44). That is blasphemy. It is necessary to think deeply about the many expressions of idolatry which easily accommodates themselves in a person's heart. The outward things, which are often mentioned – (such as worship of cars, video games, one's house or children and the like) are not the core, but merely symptoms of the disease. The real problem is in the superficial, comfort seeking, self-confident heart which wants its independence from God, and wants to be worshipped by other people as God.

On the other hand, there are the true worshippers of God, who 'remain' in Christ (Jn 15:1-11). They listen to God's word and the fruit they bring is visible for everyone. Through their deep obedience of God, they are conformed with Christ – they become 'one with God.'

### **Challenge**

*A challenge for you today is to write down two columns – one where you'll write all that makes you like Christ, and the other where you'll write all that is symptomatic of a heart superficial, comfortable, smug and unsubmitting to God, which strives for its independence and others' esteem instead of conforming to Christ. Which of the two columns is longer?*

# 4

## GOD'S FULLNESS

*Bible verses: Colossians 2:9-10*

It can often be heard that the optimist sees the glass as half full, while a pessimist sees the glass as half empty. Similarly, when we want to taste some drink, we usually pour in only a “little bit”, while if we really enjoy some drink, we ask for our glass to be “filled to the brim”.

Here the writer of Colossians talks about how God's presence is filled in Christ's body “to the brim”. Jesus Christ is not some superhero – semi-God and semi-human. The incarnation took place without reserve and remainder. God did not spare (Himself) when sending His Son. Also, we are not to forget Christ decided to live within the same body which is given to you and me nowadays. In other words, the idea that God became human is not a matter of perspective or mind, of pessimism or optimism – it is a reality. But a fantastic one!

There is something else. God's fullness in Christ means He is above everything and everyone. No matter how oppressed we may feel by our boss, or bullied by ill-disposed colleagues, no matter how much injustice, corruption and deception there is in our society at the moment, and how this world seems insane today – nothing (other than Christ) has the ultimate authority over us. So, let us prayerfully ask Christ to show us how to live in fullness, “full to the brim”!

### **Challenge**

*Today's challenge is very simple, it consists of a short prayer. Read the text from Col 2:9-10 again, take a few moments to think in silence about the fullness of deity in Jesus Christ, who is above every dominion and authority. Likewise, think about the fact that you are a fulfilled person in him. Then pray and ask that the fullness of deity revealed in Christ would be the fullness by which His Spirit dwells in you. Ask Jesus to show you how to live fully and filled to the top.*

# 5

## TRUE LIGHT

*Bible verses: John 1:9-11*

On summer evenings, I love watching fireflies. As they fly, these little creatures light up the dark. And by the “now you see me, now you don’t” system, they avoid being caught by larger insects. When their light is not visible for a moment, this does not mean that they are not present or nearby. In reflecting on the verses of John 1: 9-12, I draw a parallel between the fireflies and Jesus. Of course, the size of His “light” cannot be compared with the small firefly. We see that Jesus came into the world as True Light. He was among His own, walked with them, lived with them ... and yet they did not recognize nor accept him. It was as if He was invisible to them. It is unusual because man has been searching for truth throughout history. For those of us who wear glasses, when we take them off; our vision is blurred, unclear, and we only see outlines of things in the distance... And it is hard to describe what we do not see clearly. So this is how one; can be spiritually blind to the Truth. Even today. But it doesn’t have to be that way. The WORD has dwelt among us so that we can see and live.

Jesus enlightens us, and the Spirit directs us in Truth. This is the prescription for spiritual blindness. The word also says, “And to all who received him he gave them the right to become children of God.”

Isn’t this such a privilege and guarantee of life with God, now and for eternity ?!

### **Challenge**

*How does Jesus enlighten you? How does he do it daily? Think of at least five things in your life that Jesus has shined his light upon, things about you or others, or the world around, that Jesus brought to light and now you see them better, as possible and different.*

# 6

## CHRIST IN ME

*Bible verses: Romans 8:9-11*

I love to be close to my Creator! I love that His spirit dwells in me! To be in the presence of the One who knows every part of my being for me is such joy! Something priceless! When I open all my senses, I see Christ in myself and all around me in many ways. Just like the lyrics of the song: "The light from the summer sky pours on you, God shines around you. (From "Finding God," by A. B. Šimić)

And yet, it happens that everyday life goes in the wrong direction! Opening all our senses towards Christ becomes tough. Cares, the hustle and bustle, wrong priorities, employment, fatigue, bad decisions and many more things interfere with our relationship with Christ. The challenge to calm down, to stop, -- Oh! it seems so big! Time passes by so fast. The enemy attacks with accusations and lies and another day passes without us stopping or calming down. Christ in me is a daily challenge, a challenge to surrender. Jesus, I want to stop now. Work in me and through me. I want to hear you, I want to see you and sense your aroma. Make my senses alive and open to you!

### **Challenge**

*Remember the last time when it was obvious and clear that the Spirit of God indwells you. Maybe someone took notice, maybe you've felt it, or maybe something that happened as a result proved it. New day is ahead of you: 1. Be aware that the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you. 2. Let at least one person notice that in the next five days. The challenge is not to let the Spirit in you to sleep, may at least one person think that you have the Spirit of God in you. How? Pray about it and write down what you've discovered.*

# 7

## NO LONGER I

*Bible verses: Galatians 2:20*

In these days in which we live, it is tough to live not for ourselves but for Christ in us and through us. Our hectic everyday life, obligations, challenges, relationships, work and situations that often take all our attention, turn our focus away from Christ. During the day, our needs, feelings and desires in various situations do not reflect the gifts of life, grace and love that we have received. But God, through this verse, reminds us of these precious gifts that He has bestowed upon us and invites us to a life of faith.

Our life of faith with the Lord is a conscious decision and a response to the gift of life that we have received. We are called to breathe in the life of Christ in our daily lives. Christ did not promise us that it would be easy, but He promised that He would always be with us. So, let us try to remember precisely that promise when we find ourselves in situations in which we are to let Christ be visible in us. When we find ourselves in situations where it's hard for us to accept and love a person, we need to put Christ first.

When we need to make important decisions and we are not sure how, let us breathe in the faith that we have in God's own Son. When we see suffering and the powerlessness of those close to us, let us surrender like Christ surrendered for us. The lives that we live by allowing Christ to live through us, are the most beautiful gifts that we can give to those whom we meet.

### **Challenge**

*At the end of this day go back to your notes and write down in how many situations was it evident that Christ lives in you, and in how many you took over control. To make it easier, take some time in the morning, the afternoon and the evening, even just 10 minutes, and just be in the presence of God. Be with him to know he lives in you.*

# 8

## ROOTED IN LOVE

*Bible verses: Ephesians 3:17-20*

In this passage, Paul prays that the Ephesians are rooted and established in love. Being rooted and established is very much an agricultural term. As a tree or plant grows, it sends out roots that will both anchor it to the ground, and provide water and nourishment for the rest of the tree or plant. Being rooted AND established is necessary for long term health.

If I plant some rose bushes then a month later tried to pick them out of the ground, it would take barely any effort as they would not yet have established a good root system. But if I tried to pull out a rose bush that was already established in the ground it would require significant work and tools. Paul's prayer is that, like those kinds of rose bushes firmly set in the soil, so we should be rooted and established in Christ's love, unshakable and unmovable. If that is so in our lives and we display that love, especially between fellow Christians, we are witnessing to others about how strong our faith is and how strong our relationship with God is. What do you need to do today to grow deeper and stronger in your relationship with God?

### **Challenge**

*The challenge today is actually a gift for you. A gift of knowledge of how much you are loved. Spend time trying to understand what is the Length, Width, Height and Depth, how you are rooted and found on God's love. Take your Bible and discover!*

# 9

## NOTHING WITHOUT HIM

*Bible verses: John 15: 5-6*

Sprout... shoot, twig or leaf. When we plant it in the ground, it extends its roots without fail and draws in water, minerals and everything it needs. As a result, we look at the beautiful green leaves that rises and when the right moment comes, the bud sprouts and turns into a beautiful fruit. As I look at this picture I am thinking, what a perfect harmony. I often find myself being like an upside down sprout; I stretch upward desiring to bear good fruit and with my predispositions I achieve a “good goal” (fruit). But is this really what the Lord wants from me? Reading these verses, I was deeply moved by the image that all these “good fruits” that had accumulated, and did not come from the vine, would be burned, because in a spiritual sense they were never worth anything. The real fruit is when I am with the Lord in a secret chamber and here I am rooting. He is the one who knows where my bud is and directs me towards him to grow beautiful, as he initially imagined.

### **Challenge**

*Therefore I put this challenge before you: come to God from the quiet of your secret place. Let go of your every effort, plan, obligation and a must – just be in His presence and take root.*

# 10

## HOPE OF GLORY

*Bible verses: Colossians 1:27*

To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Hope is important for every person's life. It drives us and gives us the strength that we can ultimately expect a positive outcome in all life's situations. It helps us to find a way to reach a specific goal. Many people today are hopeful in good education, business careers, health, children, political authority, money, real estate or cars. However, it is necessary to understand that a person's life involves much more than material things that can quickly disappear. How often does it happen to us that we build our hope on all the wrong things and when they disappear, it brings sorrow, fear and despair? Like when we become a business surplus in the workplace where we've given everything of ourselves. When we realize that whoever comes to power does not bring any positive changes in society. Or when a perfectly healthy child, until yesterday, becomes severely ill. At the same moment, it becomes clear to us that we need a new hope to continue living. As much as we experience difficult things through this life, it is necessary to recall that the only lasting hope for today and eternity is brought by Jesus Christ. It is a glorious secret that, despite all other hopes that are short-lived in this world, remains forever. We in Christ, and Christ in us.

### **Challenge**

*Christ in you – the hope of glory. This is a challenge for you, to try to remove every hope but the one in Christ. Part of the challenge today is to be honest with yourself and write down everything you put your hope in. The matter of existence – what do you hope for? The matter of career, love, family, goals, future – what do you hope for? Take all of this before God and trust in the only hope that doesn't fail or disappoint, the eternal hope offered by Jesus, the hope that brings joy and glory instead of disappointment. How able are you to do that?*

# 11

## MORE THAN BREAD

*Bible verses: Matthew 4:1-4*

The Holy Grail of the modern man seems to be fortune. In a recent large poll, most of the 70,000 respondents said they were chronically unfortunate. The Oprah Show survey leader explained that the majority, as many as 62 percent of the respondents, were not satisfied or happy with their lives. In the list of chronic shortcomings, placed just after happiness was money, which 20 percent of respondent desire. Interestingly, most people who are short on money believe that large amounts of money in their accounts would solve all their problems.

Similar to today's survey, at the beginning of his work Jesus was "interviewed" by his enemy. Matthew calls him "the tempter." With cunningness, the tempter offers hungry Jesus some bread. Jesus did not deny his hunger but refused to dialogue with the tempter. Instead of competing with words, Jesus in his response reminds us that even though he is hungry, he is even more hungry for God's Word and its power. He rejects the logic of this world - offered by the tempter - to be driven only by his primary needs in order to lose the hunger for the truth, the beautiful, the good, and ultimately for the Father's love by which everything was created. At the beginning of our journey, Jesus reminds us that with the logic of this world it is difficult to win the battle of words. Trusting in the Father and His word is what our journey begins and ends with. Amen.

### **Challenge**

*Decide to fast today! If you can't make it through the whole day without food, then skip at least one meal. Jesus made it for 40 days. During the time without food, pray that instead of being hungry just for bodily food, you'd become more hungry for spiritual food, the Word of God and its power.*

# 12

## TO BOW DOWN

*Bible verses: Matthew 4:8-11*

As children, we often competed in games. Who's stronger? There were games in which it was necessary to clearly see who was "the Chief". The stronger were victorious and asked the weaker to "surrender"... Sound familiar?

It is similar to the moment when we come to the situation when we bow before someone.

To bow before someone is an act of recognition, submission, surrender and respect that arises from understanding who we stand in front of.

Jesus knows the Father well. Jesus knows who God is and everything He describes. In Matthew 3, before His baptism, Jesus says to John the Baptist; "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." By becoming a man, Jesus accepts human destiny, the devil knows it and tries to thwart God's plan in all ways. Before, He was unreachable, now He was within reach. Jesus the man responds to the temptation that the devil is offering by refusing to bow to him and refusing the autonomy that the enemy offers Him. His clear decision was to remain obedient to God's will that is revealed in the first commandment given to Moses; "... Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only"

How will we please God? Living in accordance with His will is our call today. That way we will always be bowing to Him (our life decisions) to recognize that He is our Lord and God!

To bow to God is to win!

### **Challenge**

*Do you live according to His will? Do you profess Him as your Lord and God? Fall on your knees and bow before the King of kings and Lord of lords. While praying on your knees think about whether you bow only to your Lord God and serve Him only.*

# 13

## TEMPTED IN EVERYTHING

*Bible verses: Hebrews 4:15-16*

Temptation, a very old term, is often very fashionable and sophisticated, suited to the moment of time when we encounter temptation personally. It is always up to date, comes in different forms, and the tried and tested temptation comes tailored to each one of us. Within us there is an inner conflict of desire and morality. From our earliest childhood when we were unable to realistically view our circumstances and events, our parents sought to point us to the good and the bad, the consequence of our actions or our decisions. When we encounter Christ, our inner desires and needs change and we approach the love of Christ. In tempting situations we compare our desire with our system of values in order to make the right decision. When we realize that we have made a mistake, that what we have done is not the will of Christ, we feel guilty. This leads us to repentance, which contributes to the development of our personality, forcing us to learn from situations in which we have yielded to temptation. In repentance we cannot change the past, but freed from the burden of sin, we strive for new behaviour in similar temptations. Jesus Christ, by all accounts is similar to man, except by sin. He was tempted by Satan but He did not relent. His complete compliance with the Father gave Him the strength to resist temptation. How is our internal alignment with Christ? Is it the source of our resisting temptation or are we relying on our moral attitudes and what we've learned as commonly accepted patterns?

Let us come with confidence to the throne of Grace for help in moments of need. By arriving we receive mercy and Grace, not condemnation.

### **Challenge**

*Read Heb 4:15-16 once more. Take a piece of paper and make a contract with yourself that the next time you're being tested, the first thing you'll do is to come before the throne of grace with boldness and completely surrender in trust. Make the above verses a part of the contract and have this contract at hand as a reminder whenever you're being tested.*

# 14

## WHY I CAME

*Bible verses: John 12:27-28*

Still on His way to Jerusalem and when He entered the city, Jesus is focused on the cross, he is aware that his time has come. His turmoil reveals to us a natural and human reaction before death. The words Jesus says here are more about talking to Himself than praying to the Father. His desire to follow God's will is not in question. Jesus opens up in the presence of the Father, to express his thoughts and distress, which is contrary to the firmness and unwavering decision of the heart for someone obedient to the Father. So in the Garden of Gethsemane he concludes his prayer: "But not what I want, but what You want!" Jesus, on your way to Golgotha, you did not stop, because you and the Father are one, and your love for man brought Heaven down to earth. At the same time Jesus, you readily took the form of man and identified with me, felt my distress, my struggles, my fear of death, and all my other fears.

Thank you for coming and saving me!

### **Challenge**

*Spend this day in thanksgiving for Jesus' coming to earth and saving you. Give thanks to the Lord for another day of grace before you, for another week before you, on your way to work/class/school, be grateful for the people around you, your family, friends, your boss, your professor...*

*Whenever it gets hard during the day, remember why Jesus came and thank him!*

# 15

## WINNER

*Bible verses: John 16:33*

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” John 16:33

“The world loves winners...” are the words of one song. Yes, the world loves winners, but what about those who are weak, sick, poor, or without family... Christ knew the world and the hearts of men. In John 16:33, Christ tells us of the suffering in the world, but quickly reminds us that he has already conquered the world. He cares for all of those non-winners, and especially those who remain faithful to Him in times of trouble and suffering. When we look at the world, we know that it does not love Christ, because if the world loved Him, the world would not condemn Him to death on the cross. Despite what the world thinks, Christ came out victorious. That is why as Christians we need to separate ourselves from evil and live like Christ, a winner and victorious. In order to do that, He sent us a defender to help us find peace in the midst of this suffering world. When we talk about this peace, it can only be found in Christ. When we look to Him, we will then be able to understand what peace truly looks like. Trust in God and know that Christ left this world as the victor.

### **Challenge**

*Think of the people around you, those people that don't seem victorious but may be weak, ill, recently laid off, or suffering family tragedy... Take time to visit the person who first came to mind. Let Jesus use you to encourage her just as he encouraged you. If you feel weak or ill, invite a person you trust to pray together for the peace of Christ.*

# 16

## FEAR

*Bible verses: Mark 4:37-41*

Eleanor Roosevelt was one of the controversial figures of her time. In a time when people had no voice, she fought for them. She advocated for the rights of African Americans, Asian-Americans, World War II refugees, and women. In a time where she should have feared, she stood her ground. Recently I came upon a quote from her that said, "You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You are able to say to yourself, 'I have lived through this horror. I can take the next thing that comes along.'"

I remember the disciples as they are on this boat. The disciples have been with Jesus for some time now and have seen Him perform different miracles. When the storm came, their immediate response was to doubt and fear. They feared what would become of them and immediately forgot who was with them on the boat and what He is capable of. We see that Christ even rebuked them for not having faith after all they have seen Him do. This is the same as in our daily lives. We see God do many things, but the moment another hardship comes, we doubt and fear. We need to change that! Through every experience, we should get better at looking at fear. We can hold on to the One who can and will hold on to us. What fear are you facing right now? Take time to remember where God has brought you to, to this day. Face your fear.

### **Challenge**

*This challenge will last four days. Take a sheet of paper (A4) to write down your everyday trials during all four days. Divide the sheet in four parts.*

*Today's topic is fear. Think about the fears you have at the moment. Think about your biggest fear and write it down on the first quarter. That's it for today.*

# 17

## PRIDE

*Bible verses: Romans 12: 3-5*

Music often prompts me to worship God, but much more so does the anatomy atlas. I've always been fascinated by the way human body works – so complexly, yet so harmoniously. Every cell in the body is a universe in itself, the perfect expression of physical laws. However, this “universe” can implode in a blink of an eye unless it shares, communicates and lives with other members – as with neighboring cells of the same tissue, so with far away parts of different function and composition. When Paul uses the body metaphor to envision the Church, he invites us to a balanced view: to be aware of who we are and what we're like, to know our unique roles and capabilities, but knowing we can attain nothing of it as “lone rangers”. There's no room for false modesty that undervalues what we have been given: the body needs its every part to work in full capacity, to fulfill the role no other part can. But while pride says: “I don't need you”, the body says: “You'd better connect or you'll die.” I have yet to meet a person who balances her individuality and interdependence with others perfectly. As for me, I often feel like a pendulum that swings from self-sufficiency to unhealthy dependency. But I believe these are the frustrations that help clear the narrow path of the healthy middle: to know who I am and what I bring to the table, but that I also need you, just as you are - in Christ, as our head, who makes this miracle possible.

### **Challenge**

*Think of the times when you were going solo. Think of the times when you cared more about yourself and when you have put yourself before the Body as a whole. Write those events down on the second quarter of the paper...*

# 18

## LUST

*Bible verses: 2 Timothy 2:22*

If Christ was tempted, who are we to ignore this?

When Christ was on earth, He was tempted and showed us what a life and passion of man should look like. He was tempted in regards to his allegiance to the Father. He was offered bread, pleasure, glory, and power. The same things are offered to us today in exchange for our loyalty, our time, and our heart. It is sometimes difficult, and sometimes so clear and easy to identify temptations which usually comes faster than the speed of my thoughts and decisions. I identify these temptations into those easily noticeable and those too late to notice. The latter are the ones we must learn to run from. Passions that naturally flow into our daily life. Lust is a feeling that our hearts gladly embrace as soon as we allow it to enter our lives: the perverted passions and the desire to find maximum pleasure from all our senses that draws its power from sex, fame, money, power, acceptance

...

As long as we are only concerned about our outward appearance, none of us will be exempted from the temptation of lust. But everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, whether physically or spiritually. May the Lord help us in times of weakness to hold on to Him who is our salvation, so that our hearts would be ready to show by example who our Saviour Jesus Christ is.

### **Challenge**

*On te third quarter, write down your passions and things of the flesh that drive you away from God.*

# 19

## INTEGRITY

*Bible verses: Psalm 119:36*

One pastor said: “Jesus warns people far more often about greed than about sex, yet almost no one thinks they are guilty of it.” As a result, we listen with approval to messages like: “You deserve more/better.” – like today’s society does. I’m aware that I often smuggle desires of my own heart under the name of basic needs – more money, success, food, clothes, plaudits of others etc. Unfortunately, those kinds of things are our basic needs when our heart isn’t inclined to Christ through the Word of God. And then our Christian integrity and testimony that we daily give to ourselves and to other around us suffers.

However, there is good news. Our integrity doesn’t depend on our sublime morality, perfectness or fairness. Our integrity is in the person of Jesus Christ as our personal Savior and Lord, and in the fruits of the Spirit that He produces in every one of us while the Word of God integrates in us. Christian integrity is a life, not according to one’s feelings, but according to the Word of God, His path, way and truth. It’s a day-to-day testimony that the Word of God, piece by piece, integrates more and more into our daily life and lives through us. Here lies the Christian integrity – integrity that can resist every temptation. And so today, we can pray just like psalmist did:

*I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, And in His word I do hope.*

*My soul waits for the Lord More than those who watch for the morning*

*– Yes, more than those who watch for the morning. (Ps 130:5-6)*

### Challenge

*This is the last day of the four-part challenge. Think hard of the times when your heart isn’t inclined to Christ, and, in the last quarter, write down your wants and needs (more money, success, food...).*

*Now that you’ve noted your everyday trials, take this paper and destroy it. You can cut it to pieces, burn it in the fireplace or just crumple it and throw it away... (please be careful). Give your fears, your trials, lustful thoughts, problems, your pride to Christ in prayer, just as you got rid of them by destroying the paper.*

# 20

## ON THE GO WITH THE SPIRIT

*Bible verses: Galatians 5:16-18*

“I solved it on the go!” A sentence we wish we could say whenever we encounter a problem, dilemma, obstacle, or temptation. In today’s world, we love to solve things right away. We quickly solve problems, get rid of stress, the pressures of everyday life, and the relationships that burden us.

Most translations of the Bible in the Croatian language use the term ‘live by the Spirit’, but the Greek word *peripateite*, can be also translated as “walk in the Spirit.” Paul uses this phrase as a solution to our internal struggles. The complexity of the human mind is reflected through our inner turmoil (see Romans 7:14-24): the Spirit against the body, the struggle that takes place inside us, but is also reflected on the outside, our relationship to ourselves, to humans, to nature, and to God. Often we determine for ourselves what we do not want to do, both to ourselves or others, but more often than not, we still do it.

“Walking in the Spirit” has several meanings: first - the Holy Spirit lives in me, second - I am open and sensitive to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, and third - I shape my life under the influence of the Holy Spirit. If we are facing a problem, temptation, or dilemma, and the solution is not in sight, let’s connect more with the Holy Spirit and “solve it on the go” - “On the go with the Spirit!”

### **Challenge**

*Go out for some fresh air and take a walk with the Spirit. Through the walk, think about the questions concerning the role of the Spirit in your life, whether he lives in you, whether you’re sensitive to his prompting and how does your life form under his influence.*

# 21

## SINNERS, NOT RIGHTEOUS

*Bible verses: Luke 5:29-32*

Often, commuting to work is frustrating with the way people around me drive. One morning, I was in a hurry to work, the car in front of me stopped abruptly in an orange light. The braking was without effect as it was morning and road was icy. My car was slipping, -- the impact was not strong and we came to agreement quickly, but the lesson remained. If I were to look at this situation from the outside, I would probably think “you had it coming when you are rushing like that!”. Maybe we sometimes look at the “sinners” around us in a similar way. Maybe in our lives sometimes the person who thinks “God thank you that I am not like this man ...” is shaping up unconsciously. One wonders, “how much am I really different from these Pharisees then” to whom Jesus did not even bother to explain that they were the greatest sinners. The sevenfold woe, the “hardest” words of Jesus were uttered precisely to them, to the Pharisees and to the “scholars of Holy Word”, and not to some “grave” sinners.

Jesus promised paradise to the “gravest” sinner, the one crucified on Calvary with him, because in the last moments of his sin-filled life he showed sincere humility and remorse.

### **Challenge**

*Think about the people around you who you live, work, study, or meet daily. If there is a person among them who you consider to be the “greatest” sinner, try to prepare a “great feast” for her. Maybe it’s a word of encouragement, maybe to go grab coffee, maybe go on a walk. Do it!*

# 22

## REJECTED

*Bible verses: Mark 1:40-45*

Have you noticed that around some people in our society somehow spontaneously, without words or gestures, without any arrangements or plans, silently but undoubtedly there appears an empty space? It surrounds them like an invisible belt, in which, maybe by confusion or by mistake, others do not enter. And if someone happens to set foot in it, they abandon it as soon as possible. And in the midst of the biggest crowds, entertaining, dynamic, playful or dignified and serious social events, these people still remain alone. Rejected.

Such people protrude in each of our societies with their unusual appearance, clothing and different behaviour. They are incompatible with most of us through their speech, material status, education level, interests... as if, wishing to reach us, to know us, to touch us with their life story, questions and desires. Like intruders, they are uninvited to our "comfort zone".

"Let go of me!" "How dare you?!" "What's wrong with you?!" – we usually don't say these things, but we might think them. We are so reluctant to touch them, to connect with them, to take the risk of being able to know them. With words or without them, we nicely and efficiently send these people back to where they came from. Outside of my/our circle of course. And if nothing works, we just pretend we don't notice them. We don't actually reject them, no, surely not? That's not what Jesus did, no. He would look, recognize, approach, reach out His hand, touch and heal.

Mercifully.

And we hope to receive mercy, not rejection, don't we?

### **Challenge**

*Do you know anyone you are associated with or is in your neighborhood that is alone and rejected? Have coffee with him and get a chance to know him.*

# 23

## GOD LOVES THE WHOLE WORLD

*Bible verses: John 3:16-18*

Whole world? *Kosmos!* This word appears 3 times and in the Greek-Croatian dictionary of the New Testament, it has several meanings: a decoration, jewelry, world, universe, cosmos, earth, or the inhabitants of the earth.

Jesus did not come to judge the world, but to offer salvation to man. God sent His Son to save the world. God wants every human saved, not just one privileged part of humanity. This is not just about God and the individual soul or just about the religious issues of small circles or groups – everyone is included. The New Testament announces salvation on a global scale - it reaches all of humanity. Jesus Christ stands before us as the Savior of mankind, ushering in a new age for the world, and whose coming back brings the world to an end. At the core of everything is God's love for humanity. The Greek word for "loved" refers to a specific act of God's love for the world. This love is not some abstract term; God showed His love in a historical act by delivering His Son to death. It's an irrefutably historic fact. The purpose of this act of love is to bring man out of ruin, and for them to gain eternal life.

In this one sentence (3:16), the evangelist John presents the whole message of Christian salvation. That is why it is one of the most beloved verses of Scripture, which many have memorized by heart from a young age. Also called "everyone's verse or a verse for everyone". Everything comes from God. He took the initiative for us to obtain salvation.

### **Challenge**

*With this knowledge, that Jesus' gift of salvation is for the whole world, list 5 people who are part of your circles of influence and have not placed their faith in Jesus. Pray for them and take the opportunity to introduce them to the Savior of the world.*

# 24

## KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

*Bible verses: Matthew 13:44-46*

One of the best life investments I have done was to travel to Israel, but the most expensive investment was a new mobile phone – it was a precious pearl. That same pearl was ripped from my hands and stolen shortly after. Although I invested a lot and wanted to sell everything to buy it, that joy did not last long. But two years ago, I realized that I had actually found the most precious pearl, and I didn't need to sell anything because I got it for free! That pearl is a decision to faithfully follow Jesus and his way, the way of the Kingdom of God. The one who reigns and is central to this Kingdom is Jesus. It is Jesus who came to serve and not to rule, and thus the values of this kingdom are reversed from those we perceive. This Kingdom is incomprehensible, yet so attractive. How do you seek the Kingdom of Heaven? Although its value is greater than anything you currently have, it is something you can get because the King wants us to be there. You can enter the Kingdom that is of the most value if you give up the ways of this world and go towards the way of Jesus, that is the path of the Kingdom of God. Find Him!

### Challenge

*Think about what or who is your most valuable pearl? Is it your house, apartment, car, spouse, job, hobby, sport, stocks, grandchildren,...? Can you honestly say that Jesus is more valuable to you than all the pearls in your life?*

# 25

## HIGHLIGHT OF JESUS'S MINISTRY

*Bible verses: Mark 8:31-33*

Jesus' disciples have just experienced a shock. When Jesus asked, 'Who am I?' Peter declared "You are the Messiah - Christ!" What followed is just as shocking: the Messiah must suffer! Two shocks in a short time represent already serious trauma. The disciples heard what every Israeli ear dreamed of hearing for centuries, and then, they heard what no one wanted to hear. Jesus is the Messiah who needs to end His life in suffering so that He can win through resurrection. Whoever wants to prevent him from doing so does a favor to the devil. In human minds the climax is always some sort of final ascent and ultimate success; Jesus says on the contrary, I must go down, be humiliated, suffer, and be killed. Why does Jesus always have to go beyond what human heads and hearts think is good? Because Jesus is always doing the right thing. On the other hand because of sinful nature, people rather chose to dance with the devil. What we do not want to hear from God is often exactly what we need to progress in following Christ. The Messiah must suffer because this is the only path in the fallen world. As Christ's followers, are we ready to accept suffering in our path? If we are not, our thoughts are worldly. And the path to glory that Christ promises to share with his followers is paved with many sufferings. Through suffering, we are best taught to be like Him.

### **Challenge**

*Do you fantasize about achieving results in school, college, work, or relationships without working hard for it, or investing time in someone? Such results are weak at its best. To grow in following Christ, suffering is sometimes an integral part. If you are currently in suffering, share it with Jesus, who also went through suffering, and trust a loved one to carry it through with you in prayer.*

# 26

## SERVING THE LEAST OF THESE

*Bible verses: Matthew 25:37-40*

I was walking along one of Zagreb's main streets when I saw a man. At first glance, he seemed drunk and disoriented. I walked past him and the entire tram station but somehow I didn't have peace with the assumption that he was "another one of those." With a heavy heart and legs, I turned around and approached the man. I then found out that he was just released from the hospital and there was no one who was accompanying him home nor helping him carry his things. When I heard his story, with hidden tears and shame, I said to God, "Thank you for bringing me here." Serving the least of these – what is it that we need to do? Actually not much – open your eyes, open your heart, look around you, stop when you don't want to, change your direction and walk over, approach that person and ask... Simple, isn't it? But in reality it is harder than it looks. We come up with many excuses or look for certain conditions before we would begin to help. And it usually takes time for us to open our hearts and see the needs of those around us, especially to those that people tend to ignore. Lord, we pray for a willingness to serve today, wherever it may be, and with this in mind: "How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world." (Anne Frank)

### **Challenge**

*Keep your eyes open this week for people you encounter. Stop by at least one person, talk to them, and if possible, help practically (for example, help carry their things to their apartment).*

# 27

## HEART IN THE RIGHT PLACE

*Bible verses: Luke 12:33-34*

Jesus in this section talks about wealth and yet He starts by calling his hearers to sell all that they own. If He stopped there it would still make sense to talk about wealth because by selling their possessions, land, livestock they would still have the money they received for it. However, Jesus goes on to tell them they should give that money to the poor. All further talk about wealth seems ridiculous. What wealth are we talking about if we have just sold everything and given it away? If we would find ourselves in situations in which we have little or nothing, we would have a better chance of understanding just how much we have in Jesus Christ. A Dutchwoman Corrie ten Boom, who together with her family hid and protected Jews during the II. World War, and because of it later ended up herself in a Nazi prison said “You will never completely understand that Jesus is all you need until Jesus is all you have”. Perhaps the most powerful testimonies about the sufficiency of Jesus and His grace come from the damp cells of concentration camps from which you can hear worship songs, dark trenches above which bullets fly but also loud prayers, cold walls of run down houses from which you can hear thankful words for the little food that is on the table. Unfortunately, often what we own actually owns us. Let’s not devote our hearts to the wealth and tangible shiny things of this world but to the real treasure that we have in Jesus Christ.

### **Challenge**

*Go through your room, home, and closet. Choose 5 things to give to the people around you that you know will benefit them. Don’t ask for anything in return.*

# 28

## LOVE ONE ANOTHER

*Bible verses: 1 John 4:7-10*

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails! How often do we love someone with such love? How often on a daily basis do we miss something mentioned above and fail in loving another, our neighbor, someone in need. In today's world the word "love" has a completely different definition, where most of it is based on feelings and physical pleasure, and when that vanishes, the love we swore we will have for one another also vanishes. But this radical love by which the world should recognize us, starts exactly where the superficial love stops. Such love is truly refreshing. At the same time, it is dying to self and putting someone else before us. Isn't that the example Jesus left us when He loved us first, when He stretched his hand of reconciliation towards us.

Jesus' love is just that, a radical love that invites the change of our entire life, our character, our being. Are we prepared to accept this calling and be the change that is so needed in this world? Are we prepared to be different than this world, like our Lord Jesus, and love with a radical love?

### Challenge

*Love is a word we hear on a daily basis. Think about the specific acts and aspects of love that you want or need to work on these days. Maybe it is more patience with a colleague at school who is annoying you, maybe love a friend who you envy because they just got a promotion at work, or be happy for your friend when they tell you that they are going to New York in 2 weeks, and this is something that you've been fantasizing about for years. Write down the concrete steps on a piece of paper and hand over to God in prayer.*

# 29

## RECOGNIZING THE KINGDOM OF GOD AMONG US

*Bible verses: Luke 17:20-21*

When I think about God's kingdom, there are two questions that arise in my mind:

1. Am I a good ambassador of God's kingdom here on Earth? Thinking about my kids, I was wondering how they represent our family, name, values and beliefs when they are away from us in school, with their friends or talking with other adults. The idea that they represent our values and beliefs even when they are away from us, filled my heart with joy. When the good Lord observes how we represent His kingdom here on Earth, does He feel the same? People will recognize God's kingdom when they see our values and beliefs in action: gentleness, mercy, humility, clean heart, clean speech, peacemaking... Are we representing God's values in our world?

2. While having different plans in my life, do I have a plan of how to actively prepare for God's kingdom that will be eternal?

We all like to plan things in our lives. For the big things, sometimes we plan several months ahead to have a successful event. Since I also love to plan, I asked myself if I also plan passionately and heartily for my eternal life in God's kingdom?!

I choose a simple plan: choosing a good part that will not be taken away from me, sitting next to His feet listening to His Word.

### **Challenge**

*Take a pen and notebook and write down what are the values of the kingdom of God that you want to convey to this world. Then go through the written down values and think about whether you really live them out or if they are just values on paper.*

# 30

## TO DENY YOURSELF

*Bible verses: Matthew 16:24 -26*

As I read these words Jesus-said to his disciples, a line stands out: “Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses it for my life will find it.” I used to think that was literally the case and there was nothing to add, but over time I realized that it can be viewed from another perspective. In one period of my life, I worked with people who suffered from severe illnesses to the heart. Fear, pain and uncertainty were often their faithful-companions. While I was helping treat them I tried to encourage them by talking, and sometimes just a smile. It was somehow in me and I did it spontaneously with my work. One day a senior doctor approached me and said, “You’ll be wasted before your time.” I never thought about spending and exhausting myself because I didn’t feel it.

And after many years not only am I not spent, but I see that my strength is constantly in the Lord I realized that a man could lose his life in different ways, not just literally. When you give your life To God , then you find it, save it, and renew it. On the other hand, the more you strive to preserve it, in fact you lose it because you lose yourself, unaware of the joy and blessings that life with the Lord brings.

### **Challenge**

*Take 5-10 minutes, think and write down what thing in your life that you hold tightly to and are not ready to lose it. Give it up for Christ’s sake. Share this with a loved one and pray together that Jesus will help you in this endeavor.*

# 31

## DEATH STRUGGLE

*Bible verses: Luke 22:39-46*

Have you ever found yourself in a situation that you know you have to do something because it's for the best, but at the same time you know it's going to hurt really bad and you ask is there an easier way? Maybe it was an operation, a breakup, a move into the unknown, leaving an important position at work, giving up university or forgiving a person who wronged you. This kind of situation throws us to our knees and makes us cry to our Lord to provide some easier way. But His answer is often this: "No, this is the best way. Believe me and do it." So we do it, and it hurts. It hurts unbearably. The night before Jesus was crucified, He was in the Garden of Gethsemane and struggling with His impending death. He fell to His knees before His father, His soul anxious and sorrowful to death. He fervently begged Him to provide an easy path, but He sought the Father's will, not His own. Jesus then did what was the Father's will and it hurt Him indescribably, but in that pain God "hid" the precious treasure for His people — salvation and eternal life.

As Jesus prayed fervently, God sent him an angel of encouragement. When we find ourselves in a painful situation, like Jesus we pray passionately! I believe that our Father will encourage us in His own way so that we can experience the precious treasure that He "hides" in our pain.

### Challenge

*What painful situation are you currently struggling with? What do you need courage for today? Find a peaceful and solitary place, kneel down and pray for these situations. Give Him all your worries, all your fears, and all your doubts. Tell him your wishes, but ask for His will for your life. Encourage yourself and let yourself believe that God has you best in mind.*

# 32

## VERDICT OF THE CROWD

*Bible verses: Luke 23:20-25*

When I think of Jesus' suffering, the physical agony of the cross first comes to mind, but suffering also takes many less obvious forms. We see in this scene the suffering of personal injustice. The crowd got it wrong, Pilate made the wrong choice, Barabbas the criminal was freed - the whole scene is so unfair! Personal injustice, like being slandered, or misunderstood or rejected is so hard to bear. My first impulse when faced with personal injustice is to think only of myself. I want to set the record straight, to defend my reputation, to show how I am right and my accuser is wrong. But Jesus didn't react as I would, to save himself. Instead he acted in line with God's will, to save us all. He prayed for his persecutors, saying "Father forgive them, they don't know what they are doing."

In this season, as I reflect on how I can identify more with Christ in suffering, I realize that if I am to emulate Christ, I must love people more than my desire to be "right". As Romans 12 says, I must bless those who persecute me; bless and not curse them.

### **Challenge**

*Put on paper the names of three people who have done wrong to you and placed pain in your life. Instead of thinking about how great this injustice is and how painful the consequences of their actions are, instead of blaming them for it, try to see them through God's eyes. God created them in his own image, and they are His creatures and His children. He loves them equally and wishes them well. Look at them through God's eyes and bless them. Take the time today to pray for God's blessing in their lives.*

# 33

## BECAUSE OF OUR TRANSGRESSIONS

*Bible verses: Isaiah 53:4-7*

In the modern society suffering is a taboo. We are surrounded by the commercials which present the ideal picture of life, without pain, and even if there is some pain, we can always take some kind of painkillers. The pain is the offence in human life and very often the less lucky individuals among us become invisible to others and everybody keeps away from them as if they had some kind of a contagious disease. Despite that, it is a fact that pain is a part of our lives and it changes us. The idea of God's Son who suffers is even more scandalous. Isn't God almighty? What should he suffer for? We, as people, often suffer because of our own or because of other people's sins. The son of God has never committed a sin, and still he suffered more than any of us. People misunderstood his suffering and they thought that God was punishing him, but the real truth was that he suffered for the sake of all of us, because of our sins.

The picture of God who loves me so much that he gave himself to save me brought me to the point of surrendering my life to him. Until the moment I met Jesus Christ I felt unworthy and unloved, and despite that I was so precious to him and he did all it takes for me – he sacrificed his life so that I may live. And right now, his love has a question for you: do you want to receive me?

### **Challenge**

*Do you still accept God's love today? Do you know that your debt has been erased, that your transgressions have been forgiven and corrected? Do you feel that peace, relief, and freedom? Start the day with a humble and grateful heart because Jesus suffered for your transgressions and paid the price with His life that you may have eternal life.*

# 34

## TRIAL

*Bible verses: Matthew 26:64-67*

As I read the passage on Jesus' final moments, I imagine it to be a dramatic film. It is in the interrogation that we reach the climax of the film, the most intense part that keeps me on the edge of my seat. But what annoys me the most was the fact that it actually happened. I begin to have feelings of intolerance and aggression towards Jesus' accusers, and question why they are so blinded to the Promised Messiah. Contrary to my frustration, Jesus stands before the priests and remains silent. He was silent because of love – a love for his own accusers. I very quickly condemned the priests, while the disciples were portrayed as the “good guys” in the film. I then wondered who are the good, the bad, or the evil. They all played the same role – disciples and priests, while Jesus remained silent. He was ready to die and knew what awaited Him. It is easy to see ourselves as just the audience to this film when we are in fact the same as the disciples and priests as we live our daily lives. We spit in his face when we shyly follow him and hide amongst the crowd. We strike a punch when we misrepresent Him. We mock Him when we let other say all kinds of evil against Him. We need to understand our involvement in this scenario and that we are all guilty of this. Jesus accepted the price of salvation and did not say a word because of His love for us. Let us be reminded of that love and let that scene be one that drives us to change and be closer to God.

### **Challenge**

*Think about your actions that may have caused you to spit on Jesus in the face, punching him with your fists, slapping him in the face, or anything that mocks him. What is it that you have to change in your life in order not to be like the people who condemned Jesus to death. Write those acts and those habits on paper. When you write down everything that distracts you from God right now, tear that piece of paper up, and throw it away. This is what Jesus' sacrifice does for you every day. Accept this unconditional love and allow it to change and bring you closer to God.*

# 35

## DEATH OF THE SON OF GOD

*Bible verses: Mark 15:33-39*

On that day, there was darkness for three hours. In those moments, God the Father suffered with the Son. His plan for the salvation of man had to be fulfilled. Jesus was a man who never sinned, who lived a perfect life, and didn't deserve the abuse, the suffering, and death. But in following the Father's plan for salvation, He was obedient to death. On the cross and carrying the weight of all the sins of the world, Jesus cried out, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me." This is the image of what hardship Jesus had to go through to save men from death. In the final moments of His mission, Jesus was scared. Usually in those times, it seems that "God is quiet." But God took it upon Himself through the Son to be the atonement for men, in order that we can be citizens of His Kingdom, adopted to His Name, and called His beloved children. Upon His death, the curtain was torn in two, opening a way for us to the Kingdom of Heaven. God's plan for salvation was complete and His death was sufficient. God's great love and mercy of us was displayed in this way; that He sacrificed His Own Son. And victory is found in His Resurrection. Jesus is the only one who died, resurrected, and is alive to this day! How can we show love to our Saviour? How can we be like the Roman centurion, who upon witnessing Christ's death realized and said, "Indeed, this man is truly the Son of God".

### **Challenge**

*Show love to your Savior by glorifying him! Admit that he is the Son of God through your acts of worship. You can celebrate it with a song, a dance, playing an instrument, or perhaps through creative expressions. Take your time and praise Him for the grace and love that was shown to us when He sacrificed His Own Son.*

# 36

## WORTH MORE THAN GOLD

*Bible verses: 1 Peter 1:6-7*

Each of us at some point in our lives has experienced loss or tragedy that comes in different shapes and sizes. It has probably changed the life we have had up until then. Sometimes it affects us, and sometimes the people we love.

The last few years have been the most turbulent period for our family. It was a period where we just wished we didn't have to go through another day because the feeling of helplessness was destroying everything we had been building up to then. It was a period where we suffered and felt much sadness, fear, and anger, and it brought a lot of unanswered questions. Questions like: why does the God who loves us so much allow this to happen? Why is He giving us so much and now taking it away?

Such moments require us to make a decision. Are we going to lose hope and give up or will we move a millimeter? That millimeter, no matter how small, when made in faith becomes huge. It empowers us and makes our knees no longer kneel so hard. Then suffering, despite the difficult circumstances we are still in, turns to joy. That joy brings us reassurance and hope that God will continue to provide for our needs and will bless us.

To have faith in such moments is worth more than gold.

### **Challenge**

*Move that millimeter! Believe that God is in control of everything and does everything in love. Do not despair in spirit, but surrender to him in prayer and allow him to empower you, encourage you, and turn your suffering into joy. Write a prayer of surrender in your diary.*

# 37

## CLAY POTS

*Bible verses: 2 Corinthians 4:7-9*

In almost every archeological site, from the Middle East to Croatia, there are clay artifacts that can be found that help us understand the spiritual heritage of a nation. Clay has been a popular material for making artifacts. They are solid, durable, can be used for various purposes, and can be easily painted, but can be easily broken and cracked.

In the letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul uses a clay pot to compare to our physical bodies. After all, we are made of clay (Gen. 2: 7), shaped into the image of God. Like a clay pot, we are fragile vessels. We are daily exposed to the suffering, the fighting, the crying and laughing, the falling and rising, the wear and tear, and at times, we collect the fragments of our broken dreams, or the constant disappointments. Paul also writes that in all things he was pressed, persecuted, and brought down, but not forsaken. How? Where does his strength come from? The answer: we have this treasure in jars of clay (4:7). God has entrusted us with this priceless, eternal treasure – the light of the glory of Christ which is the image of God (4:4). Here is a new perspective: an un-sightly vessel becomes precious because of the treasure it carries – the death and resurrection of Christ. It has the power to make our clay vessel shine, change us, and guide others along the way. Although pressed, we will endure and not break. God deliberately chose something so fragile to show His glory and power. And yes, an empty container may not be heavy, but its value is determined by the treasure it carries. Share it!

### **Challenge**

*How can you share your treasures with others today or this week? What specific part of yourself can you give to others and thus witness the glory of God that fills your jar? Do it!*

# 38

## TO EXPERIENCE STRENGTH

*Bible verses: Philippians 3:10-11*

How do we know the power of His resurrection? Can the fallen, human mind grasp that? Do we experience it in the miracles? In testimonies of healing, rising from the dead? Can theology help us?

In a world of broken souls and suffering, in a world of injustice and death, decay...knowing Christ's resurrection is the only thing that makes sense. Participation in His sufferings is not very appealing, but what if we thought of it as a calling for deliverance? The whole world needs it. These days I feel particularly burdened by the suffering in this world, those cries that never come to light and no one ever hears...He does. He went to the cross because of them, to break the power of evil; He rose from the dead so we can hug, with our prayers, those out of reach. Jesus will bring the power of His resurrection to the deepest of wounds and darkest of hours. He will bring justice for eternity. He cares for every person suffering, whether they belong to a church, and even whether or not they read the Bible. With our prayers we can bring anyone before Him and trust that He is there and that He brings justice, peace and salvation. Then we will experience the strength of the living Jesus Christ, who is not limited by space, time, suffering and sin. He brings victory! So let us pray for those unreachable to human justice, love and embrace, because He is able to do anything!

### **Challenge**

*What suffering in this world is burdening your heart? What are those cries in your heart that do not come to the light of day, cries that no one experiences or hears, but echoes loudly in your ears? Pray for them and bring them before our almighty Father!*

# 39

## CHRIST MUST RULE

*Bible verses: 1. Corinthians 15:20-26*

“Resurrection means that the worst thing is never the last thing.” Theologian and poet Frederick Buechner used these words to describe resurrection. In the beginning of creation, the man Adam, instead of beauty and the fullness of life, foolishly chose his independence from the Giver of life. When the dust of his decision settled a painful reality appeared – death became our inevitable opponent in life’s race. Unfortunately for us, in this race death will always be faster than us. Death doesn’t play fair, respects no one, doesn’t choose timing, doesn’t differ between age, sex, nationality, skin color, status, doesn’t respect expectations and desires and leaves behind a trail of pain, grief, suffering and emptiness. Death is man’s great fear, the definition of his finality, his reality and the worst thing! Still, the worst thing truly isn’t the last thing! Just as Adam, choosing disobedience to the Giver of life, summoned death, so Christ in complete obedience to God chose death and defeated it bringing eternal life to all who rely on Him. If we are called Christ’s disciples and followers and we know that neither death nor life can separate us from Him than we can follow Him with complete confidence and without fear knowing that the path to resurrection leads through the valley of death. In the race of our life there will come a day when death will catch up and pull us by the hand. Let us be in confidence knowing that we follow the One who truly rose from the dead and for whom even death is forced to bend its knees.

### **Challenge**

*Think about where God is calling you today to follow Him? Is there anything you know God is putting on your heart that you are afraid to take a step in? Encourage yourself with the truth that even death cannot separate you from God and that there is nothing that can overcome His power and strength. Take that step and follow Him!*

# 40

## ALL THE OLD THINGS HAVE PASSED AWAY

*Revelation 21:1-4*

Unlike believing that the world was created by chance and that after death we cease to exist, the Bible says that the Creator created us, that after death our lives continue and that the world as we know it today will someday be transformed.

In the last book of the Bible, Revelation, the images of past, present and future blend together. This gave the first century Christians the strength to face the persecutions and torments that they experienced. It revealed to them the glorified Christ, His ultimate victory and the reality above their circumstances.

Try to spend today watching the disappearing world. Look at the current news, think about power structures, things that people aspire to... and you will become aware that you are looking at the “first heaven and earth” that will no longer exist in the future. Try to imagine what your family, business, city would look like... that there would be no injustice, no greed, no tears and no pain. Isn't that a beautiful picture? The first Earth and the sky are already disappearing to where Christ reigns now. Let this revelation change your thoughts and plans. Ask the Holy Spirit to work through you so that the people you encounter today feel a tangible piece of the Kingdom of God.



## THIS IS NOT THE END OF THE ROAD

Holy Week is coming this week, which takes us one step closer to Easter celebration, but in a special way, this highlights the pain, struggle, and suffering that must happen to bring glory. This is precisely what reminds us that we ourselves, have much more to go, to endure, to work on, or to be patient.

Even though we know that victory has already been won, and even though we can already experience the joy of living with the Risen, we are still here on earth and our struggle continues. We are still on our way to the resurrection, wrapped in our humanity, exposed to various temptations, and subject to daily suffering. Only when we fully allow Christ to dwell and reign in us will we be able to cope with temptations. Only when we crucify our humanity and our weaknesses with Christ, then will we be useful in His ministry. It is not something that is accomplished in 40 steps, in 40 days, nor does it depend on our strength. It is a lifelong process that seeks perseverance and eyes fixed on Christ's perfect example:

*“Make your own attitude that of Christ Jesus, who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be used for His own advantage. Instead He emptied Himself by assuming the form of a slave, taking on the likeness of men. And when He had come as a man in His external form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death— even to death on a cross. For this reason God highly exalted Him and gave Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow— of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth— and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Phillipians 2:5-11*





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