

A Cry from the Wound
By Metropolitan Saba (Isper)

The word *Church* comes originally from the Greek and, like the Hebrew before it, refers to the People of God. This People of God has diverse gifts and different ministries that must cooperate and complement each other in order to serve the one Body (1 Cor. 12). Among God's people are bishops, priests, monks, nuns, married and unmarried, young and old, women and men. All share in the royal priesthood, sealed in their baptism, and are called to be consecrated to God. It is to this whole community that I refer when I say "the Church" in this article.

There is no doubt that Christians today face real and serious challenges. In some parts of the world, like the Middle East, the challenge is about existence. In other places or cultures, it is about faith and values. Yet, whatever the circumstances, our failure to support one another as expected cannot be justified, no matter what excuses we might offer.

No one can deny the enormous changes globalization has brought to human life, to our inner and outer worlds, and how deeply it affects the modern person.

For example, people are much weaker in the face of hardship than in the past because of the lifestyle of modern city life and the ease created by new technologies. Among Christians, the choice to prefer quality of life over quantity of life has led to smaller families, a decline in numbers, a higher level of secular education, and a greater absorption by urban culture.

All of this has pushed them toward a search for comfort, which often goes hand in hand with a softer way of life typical of developed societies.

Add to this the decline in spiritual life and ascetical living, plus the tendency to settle for outward, social forms of religiosity, and it becomes easier to understand why people quickly grow weary when faced with tragedies around the world, why they lack the strength to endure, and why their spiritual resilience has weakened. We must also recognize that being constantly exposed to images of suffering has desensitized people.

These are only some of the reasons that show how serious and tragic today's challenges are. I mention them only to underline the urgent need for each believer – whatever his or her place, situation, or condition within the People of God – to respond faithfully.

So we ask: What is required of the People of God today? What is our deepest need at this very moment? How do we remove the pile of dirt of our sins and indifference upon the face of the Church, so that the face of her Lord may shine again – saving, embracing, and full of compassion? What must we, the faithful, do in these decisive times? What is the role of God's people – the Church of Jesus Christ, clergy and laity, men and women, together and individually?

I call us to reflect on the following:

That we make the Church one community working for the glory of God and the salvation of humanity.

That we reduce unnecessary administrative structures as much as possible, leaving more room for the Holy Spirit to work freely, inspiring new ways of serving today's world.

That we embrace evangelical simplicity as our way of life – recovering ascetic living, rejecting the consumerist society, and being content with the joy of Christ present among us.

That we welcome the gifts of all believers with joy, working together in complementarity, not competition, to build up God's house in accordance with the Gospel.

That we realize we all belong to the same Church, having been baptized into Christ and clothed in Him, sharing the same Spirit. The difference between us lies in the talents bestowed upon each of us, in the sincere effort each of us offers, and in the humility in each of us that allows Christian witness to shine without distortion.

That we cultivate the spirit of cooperation and collective prayer and deepen within ourselves the spirit of personal prayer and meditation. This way, our vision will be

made clear, leading toward a strategy to discern our priorities, set them into action, and direct all our available strength and resources toward their fulfillment.

That we embrace in a concrete, practical way those in sorrow – those whom Christ called “the least of my brothers” – not with mere words, but with real action. Do we not see how tired people are of speeches and poetry, and how desperately they need a living, tangible witness?

That we strengthen a culture of sharing and companionship, especially for those dying of loneliness, fear, and disappointment.

That we break the chains with which we have bound ourselves and our Church – chains that have prevented God from working freely among us.

That we implant our incarnational faith deeply in the world, the very world Christ came to save.

That we do not withdraw into the illusion that our beautiful rituals are themselves the Kingdom while Christ is left shivering outside in the cold. We must remember that the liturgy calls us to make the whole world a continuous Eucharist.

How much we need to remember the words of St. John Chrysostom that the Divine Liturgy begins when we walk out of the church. You leave the liturgy carrying spiritual nourishment, ready to enter the service the Gospel entrusts to you, moving from the “mystery of the Eucharist” to the “mystery of your brethren.”

How much we need, in this difficult time, to give priority to building the living temples of God, our brothers and sisters, rather than stone temples, no matter how great or beautiful. Now is the time to recognize the image of God in the faces of “the least of His brethren,” not only in icons and frescoes. Now is the time to build the requirements of active love, which embraces others fully, rather than clinging to outdated institutions.

Let us focus our efforts on illuminating the faces of God’s children with the warmth of His love shining through us, not merely with chandeliers and lamps.

Let us use our connections, friendships, and talents to make our Church a ray of the light of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Let us weave together a network of love, awakening compassion wherever it lies dormant, and channeling all things toward the service and salvation of humanity.

Let us teach one another how to “eat the bread of suffering and drink the wine of the feast” (Olivier Clément)¹ with the broken and poor around us, for we are among them as well.

Let us make the Church a workshop of love and service, never ceasing day or night. “For the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect” (Matt. 24:44).

¹ “The bread of the suffering” refers to asceticism that strips away all that is not God. “The wine of the feast” refers to Holy Communion and the mystical feast of the Kingdom of God.