

The Christian message

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The Christian Message

Why is it that so many of us are against religion or anything that speaks of God? Probably because they attach importance to what some churches say about us in their condemnation of what we are whilst they forget to understand what Christ's message means. So often have the Master's words been twisted that we should not wonder at being officially frowned upon and depicted as the black sheep of society. I myself used to think that I would have no right to approach the Master's table and that even the scraps would be refused to me. But Christmas came! I knew within me that it would be a different day, a day which would bring light and sunshine to my lonely heart, that from this day on I would not have to fear anything or anybody and that the great healer Jesus whose birth we were celebrating once more, would also give me his healing hand.

It was ten years ago, far away in the Far East. War was raging. The dark clouds of uncertainty and fear were gathering more and more on the horizon and the city where I was living had already wrapped itself in a garment of death and desolation. Oh, how cold it was in my room and how long those hours during the weekend appeared to be when I could not go out and when I had to kill time by all sorts of foolish means. I fought loneliness by keeping my room spick-and-span, cleaning every corner of it, brushing my shabby carpet as if it were a marvel from Persia, then dusting all the souvenirs and pictures displayed on the different shelves. When everything was finished I tried to read again whatever pre-war books I possessed for it was impossible to receive anything new from abroad. My tiny radio-set was out of order so that the short broadcast of music twice a day which brought heavenly chimes to my music-starved ears could no longer be heard. I made good use of my rocking chair, it made me understand why monkeys do likewise in their cage... I had also placed a large mirror on one wall so that I felt less lonely...

Before the outbreak of hostilities, a missionary friend of mine had given me a small edition of the New Testament written in present-day English, or, to quote my friend's very words, in modern American. I had thanked him for it, but in my heart, I had felt that another book would have been more welcome. And now, on that Christmas morning, when everything looked so desperate in and around me, an unseen hand led me to the shelf where the New Testament was hiding and caused me to open some of its golden pages. A new world was slowly unfolded before my eyes. The story of the child's birth in Bethlehem was but a wonderful prelude to what was to follow! Oh, how grateful I was that my eyes were beginning to see and my ears to hear... (Matth. 13:16/17).

Nothing was there but words of courage, hope and love. The basis of Christian living starts with the angel's words: «fear not» which have been repeated on so many occasions by the Master himself. «Come to me, all of you who toil and are burdened, and I will let you rest.» (Matth. 11:28.) «I am not going to leave you friendless.» (John 14:37.) «I will never refuse anyone who comes to me.» (John 6:37) those were the senten-

ces I had missed hearing in the past and which, as a Christmas gift, suddenly shone before my eyes as a source of strength and consolation for the still darker months to follow.

Somebody has said that the words of the Bible have a therapeutic value . . . If some people laugh at such an utterance, I do not. The more I learn of the tragedies of so many of our friends, the more I feel convinced that they would find new courage for their daily fight if only they were ready to accept the Master's teaching. On that Christmas day I had also come across the fifth chapter in James's letter and had retained the 16th verse «Pray for one another. An upright man can do a great deal by prayer when he tries . . . »

Years later I made the acquaintance of someone who was to become a dear friend. He was much younger than I was. His parents though must have been aware of my nature for they warned him against people of our kind. My poor friend became desperate, his cheerfulness vanished, fear took hold of him and he tried to cheat himself by believing that «he was not like that» and that the best remedy would be to keep away from me. I exercised patience all the time and prayed for him. I laid fear calmly aside, as it was so beautifully told in my New Testament. I waited. Would he come with me to Sunday morning service, I wondered, where we would be sitting together in order to listen to the encouraging message of the Christ? I dared not hope, and yet I felt that James' words had also been written for me. On Sunday morning I was not disappointed. My friend was waiting for me . . .

There is something we should always remember: that a friendship bound together by the Master's words is like a rock. We complain so often that some friends are not friends at all, that they are selfish, heartless, unkind . . . But once we have read the «Book of Books», we cannot treat the friend as heretofore. We love him from then on unselfishly, we have patience with him, we pray for him, we bless him . . .

It was a treasure that I found hidden in that small book many years ago. How I wish, on this Christmas day, that many of my fellow-friends would make the same discovery. Afterwards love will have a different meaning. It will become deeper and we shall appreciate friendship with one another in a different light when we have applied to ourselves what Paul wrote to the Corinthians about love (1. Cor. 13:4/8):

«Love is patient and kind.
Love is not envious or boastful,
It does not put on airs.
It is not rude.
It does not insist on its rights.
It does not become angry.
It is not resentful.
It is not happy over injustice,
It is only happy with truth.
It will bear anything, believe anything,
Hope for anything, endure anything.
Love will never die out.»

Reno.