



# THE NEW SHOFAR

**Epiphany: a manifestation or appearance – *an invitation to Christians to be the epiphany of God***

***January 15***

***We have one task – love God and in loving God, love all others***

It can be difficult at times to differentiate in the Bible between being a servant and being a slave (especially in the Greek and the Hebrew). Both words include the idea of a person belonging to another, that they serve another with a totality of the self. Of greater importance is the way authors used them in speaking of humble self-designation. Whatever of our status in the wider society, we are called to be “slaves” of God and serve the will of Yahweh.

The righteous man and woman were self-aware enough to understand the importance of humility in all things, particularly in their standing before God. This is the point being made when they speak of being servants or slaves of God. Making that statement is nothing more than an acknowledgement of the difference in status between human being and God. We are servants, slaves of the Almighty and while some might want to reject the designation “slave”, that is exactly how the writers of our Sacred Scriptures saw us. All that we have that may give us status, comes to us as a gift from God, a gift freely given and not something we earned. We cannot stand before God as equals. This was the sin of Adam and Eve - the presumption that we can turn ourselves into gods.

***God claims us as his slaves that we might serve the divine plan***

The real point of reflection is not the status but the action of ***serv<sup>ing</sup>***. Being a child of God means doing *God-ordained* activities. Jesus made this clear when he insisted how *the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve...* That is the model of discipleship – doing God’s stuff by collaborating with the Reigning Christ in the world. What does that mean? Serving God in the same way Jesus did. Not half-heartedly, not just when convenient, not without passion but with *all our heart, all our mind, all our strength and all our soul*. We live for God.

***Renewing the Church through living for God***

Thus genuine renewal in the Church will not come through careless or indifferent hearts – persons who hold the name of the Christian, but do not love the living God and strive for His Truth. Renewal comes through those who ***intentionally*** live out, daily, the commitments of their baptism. They pray “constantly”, immerse themselves in the scriptures in order to hear what it is God is saying to them in every aspect of life.

Core to this is their drawing closer to God in prayer. We need to grow to love God as He deserves, to discover and embrace His calling us to follow Him. Meditating on the prayer He gave us, the Our Father, can teach us to pray and can lead us into a more faithful living.

## **The Journey to Holiness – modern encouragement from older traditions**

Persons grow, develop and mature in holiness according to the traditional spiritual understanding called the “three ways”, or three stages of the interior life of the soul. This path is a path to God in Jesus Christ, sought and found by the saints – and these are our teachers in the spiritual life.

These “three stages” of the spiritual journey have remained unchanged for centuries:

**1. Scripture.** The first disciples of Jesus grew into spiritual maturity in three stages.

*In the first stage*, when they were following Jesus in His time on earth, they were far from what Jesus called them to be! They did not fully understand the great event of the Incarnation; they struggled against their own unbelief and fear.

*In the second stage*, after the resurrection, they came to know Jesus in a completely different, deeper way. He was revealed to them now as “My Lord and my God!” He came through closed doors, He showed them His crucified body; He was greater than death! Yet still they were weighted down with fear: still they hid behind closed doors. Jesus ordered them to wait: they were yet to be clothed with power.

*In the third stage*, they came into the life of witnesses, as was their vocation from the beginning. Following Pentecost, filled with the Holy Spirit, they lived the full life of a Christian, making Christ known by their every word and deed.

**2. The saints.** These three stages have been understood by saints of the Church from several different perspectives.

St. Bernard, for example, recognized stages of love for God. *In the first stage*, a person discovers that God is his greatest benefactor, and he loves God for all that God can do for him.

*In the second stage*, he discovers that this God is good and wonderful in Himself, beyond the good that He can do for us humans. The person of faith begins to love God as God, and not merely for what God can do for them.

*In the third stage*, the great and infinite goodness and glory of God are seen, overwhelming fear and concern for self. The person begins to love others, and even himself, only in God. God is all. Only by loving God can they then love others.

### ***Our Church in 2023 is no different***

From the beginning, Jesus told the disciples that He would make them into something different: *Come, follow me...and I will make you fishers of men* (**Matthew 4:19**) was the way He expressed His vision. Their occupation of catching fish changed into a mission of fishing for people. Each step along the way, Jesus taught them to share with others, connect people to God, and minister to those who were in need. It is “the other” who is at the heart of discipleship, of being a Christian. The first “Other” is God and the second are the peoples among whom we live and move. Discipleship is about serving the “other” whoever they may

be, without distinction, without limitations. When a disciple matures into a spiritual adult, the Holy Spirit brings them through a *heart change*: They move from self-centred to others-centred. They become God-centred in what motivates them and they grow in their desire to serve and lead.