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“What does fullness of life (full salvation) mean in the 21st century?”

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I am delighted to our leaders for this wonderful opportunity to speak on the fullness of life (full salvation) in the context of the 21st century. The 21st century is a time of great discoveries. Huge progress has been made in the field of the sciences especially in the field of curative medicines and other lifesaving drugs. Man has gone to the moon and returned successfully, Voyager 1 and 2 which were launched in the 1970s have, during the course of this year, reached the very edge of our solar system and have gone beyond, into deep space. These are wonderful times in which we live. So many new discoveries have been made in information technology that we can now communicate with each other from any part of the world immediately, rendering distances quite irrelevant. We have broken down the strands of human DNA and claimed to have deciphered the very code of life itself and what makes us who we are. In some countries scientists have begun to grow artificial limbs and body parts to replace parts that are needed by us.

In some cases we are so preoccupied with the idea of prolonging life and doing away with illnesses that we are attempting to play God the Creator of all life. The reality is that in spite of the great advances in science and other disciplines, man cannot create life and although we are made in the image of God, we cannot pretend to be God nor can we ascribe to ourselves the qualities that only belong to God. Indeed, we may ignore God or even make his very existence irrelevant in our lives, but we cannot ignore God and the fullness of life which he alone can bestow.

So what is it about Holiness and fullness of life that is so important in the 21st century, so much so that it still remains at the very crux of our belief and bedrock of our moral, spiritual and physical fibre? For this we have to turn to our Doctrines and in particular Doctrine 10:

“We believe that it is the privilege of all believers to be wholly sanctified and that their whole body and soul and spirit may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”

Therefore the Salvationist is a person saved by grace but at the same in the process of sanctified holiness until he or she enters into the glory of heaven. Till that day we who are already sanctified but not yet made perfect may be cast in the same mould as the followers of Christ in Rome and Corinthians who Paul referred to as “you who are called to be saints”. Indeed as someone has said, we are in the process of becoming perfectly holy, however till that day we are “work in progress” and God has not finished working with us. We are a peculiar people, a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation; in the world yet not consumed by the degenerative desires of the world but called to be separate and yet commanded to preach the saving Gospel to every creature.

This then is our lot as Salvationists; we are wholly sanctified in body, soul and spirit, living in a community of saints but at the same time reaching out to the unsaved and to those in need. We cannot live holy lives just to ourselves and for our own benefit, but we must show that we are holy through our interaction with others .Therefore it is self-evident that in order to grow into saints we have work to do and getting saved and redeemed from all sins is but a start to a lifelong journey of discovery, selfless dedication and sacrifice.

We, who have been sanctified by saving grace have a responsibility to all those around us. Therefore the story found in Luke 10: 28-37 comes to mind. A lawyer asked Jesus what he should do to inherit eternal life .Jesus replied by asking the lawyer: ‘What does the law say?’ The lawyer recited the law saying “Thou shalt love the Lord with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy strength and thy neighbour as thyself.” He then continued to ask Jesus “who is my neighbour?”

In reply Jesus narrated the beautiful, but poignant, parable of a man who, while travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho, was robbed and left dying by the wayside. A priest passed by and ignored the dying man, then a Levite appeared and he, perhaps out of curiosity, looked at him and he too passed by. Then a Samaritan came, stopped, bound up the wounds and poured oil and wine and took him to an inn. He paid the inn keeper for hosting the injured traveller promised to pay more

if any extra was needed on his return. Jesus then asked the lawyer who “among the three was a neighbour to the injured traveller” and the lawyer replied “he that showed mercy” and Jesus said “go and do thou likewise.” Holiness leads us to become involved in society at a direct level with people in their needs both spiritual and practical, advocacy for social justice and human rights, a global sharing of resources and a willingness to work towards this end. Taking responsibility for the weak and poor, the vulnerable and marginalised thus putting into practice the sanctification received by us and in the process growing gradually into saints.

Let me, for a moment, talk about my home town Aizawl. The plot of land where our THQ in India Eastern Territory now stands was, at one time, the site of DHQ. Located in a rowdy part of town, host to many social evils, every third house or so was a liquor den and every tenth house made home brewed liquor for a living. People from all parts of town came there to get drunk and generally make a nuisance of themselves. It was notorious for all kinds of evils that are naturally endemic to such places. Respectable people generally shunned the area and as far as was practicable skirted the place. People seeking work who gave that area as their home address found it difficult to find good jobs because the fame and notoriety of that area preceded them.

The pioneering Salvation Army officers at that time felt a burden for the souls of those residing in the vicinity of their headquarters. Although most of the officers never actually resided in that area after conversion they were convicted by the Holy Spirit to roll up their sleeves, get their hands dirty and do something to change the lives of those in the tight grip of alcohol. Therefore as a first move they went from house-to-house, making converts along the way. Their work was not easy, prospective converts were respectful and receptive but found it difficult to welcome officers while plying their trade. The enterprising officers soon found an ingenious way to visit the unconverted. They engaged a crier, whose job was to go ahead of the officer and cry out that the officer was visiting them so please be prepared. People then had time to put away the alcohol before the officers arrived!

God works in mysterious ways and soon there were enough people to form a small corps. The problem of alcoholism gradually was replaced by a spirit and desire to make an honest living. A second corps was soon opened in that area and the second corps also took on the social problems head on with encouraging results. The Army opened a third corps in that area where membership soon swelled to more than 2,000 soldiers. As Corps Number 3 grew in size and

influence a fourth corps was needed to minister to the increasing number of those who wanted to enlist as soldiers. In January 2013, Corps Number 4 was opened with 400 soldiers.

This is the story of the Army's work in a neighbourhood hopelessly damaged by alcoholism corrupted by all kinds of attendant social evils, home to the dregs of society. Fullness of Salvation means that the free gift of salvation leads us to a deeper commitment to Jesus who exemplified spiritually and physically the goals expected of us. Since our journey will ultimately lead us to be more Christ like in all spheres of our life, the Holy Spirit will guide and lead us in that direction. So it was with the pioneering officers of India Eastern Territory. Today the area around the THQ is no longer a shunned area. Many respectable people are proud to call it their home and the area is marked by the absence of liquor dens or homemade breweries. All it takes to repair a damaged neighbourhood is to take to heart and obey the command of Jesus "Go thou and do likewise".

In Philippians 2:12-14 Paul tells us to:

"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do his good pleasure. Do all things without murmurings and disputing's." (KJV)

Here Paul tells us to work out our salvation which is quite different from working for our salvation. Our salvation is not an object yet to be reached or a benefit yet to be inherited. It is already possessed by us, but remains to be explored and developed. So while our salvation has been possessed in full, we need to work it out day by day. In particular we need to work out the path along which we will walk. Each person has a different calling. For some people it may well be along the lines of ministry to the poor, for another – healing, and perhaps a third person may be called to assist in times of disasters and calamities. Whatever it is; it is our task to discover our potential and use it for God's service.

In Mizoram we have a very unique feature that recurs about every 50 years when all the bamboos in the forest begin to flower. The bamboo seeds fall to the ground and are consumed by rats which in turn multiply in alarming proportions. The increasing population of rats have to eat so they consume all the paddy in farmers' fields and homes leading to starvation and even death. When this phenomenon last occurred, there was large scale resentment against the government for not giving adequate help. One thing led to another and soon in 1996 this exploded into a secessionist movement. This led to 20 years of misery, deaths of hundreds of

people and everybody had to live under a cloud of suspicion fearing both the government authorities and the rebels.

However in 2008 the next round of famine was due but the Army was prepared. An application was submitted by us to the International Emergency Services team at International Headquarters. Soon territories in the USA and elsewhere contributed and in no time our territory received enough funds to meet the food requirements of desperate citizens. We purchased rice and lentils in bulk and distributed them to villagers in the most needy areas. We roped in the assistance of other volunteer groups and soon we had a team which moved from village to village meeting human need wherever required.

Coming back to the letter to the Philippians, Paul's message to them to work out their own salvation is a message for us too. Once we are saved from sin, it is our responsibility to step out in his name and work out our salvation, not in isolation and without help, because it is God who works in us to help us accomplish the fullness of salvation in our lives. In this way we can also fulfil the mission of the Army "to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to meet human needs in his name without discrimination".