



*The Things
which are Not Seen*

HIS HOLINESS POPE SHENOUDA III

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Transcribed and translated by
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The Things Which are Not Seen

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, One God, Amen.

I would like to speak to you today, on the occasion of Lent, about the last verse of chapter four of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians: “...*while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal*” (2Cor.4:18).

When fasting, man rises above the level of matter, of food, of eating... all of which are “*things which are seen*”; they are all visible things. All the things that are subject to the senses are temporary, and after a while, they will end. The whole world will end after a time; Christ said, “*Heaven and earth will pass away*” (Matthew 24:35), and John said in the Revelation, “*Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away*” (Revelation 21:1). All things shall end- this earth and this heaven shall all end- all “*the things which are seen*”. By “*the things which are seen*”, the Apostle means the things which are seen by the senses, by the physical eyes, by the body- these are temporary things which will end. So among the things which are seen are the world and the body itself, because the body will end.

When we shall rise in the resurrection on the Last Day, we shall rise with spiritual bodies, not seen by the eye, and not with physical bodies. So the body, the world and matter are all the things which are seen and which will end; they are all temporary things, whereas the things which are not seen are eternal.

The Wise Outlook

It is not wise to be concerned for that which is temporary and in so doing lose that which is eternal—whatever that concern may be. It is for this reason that the Lord says, “*For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?*” (Matthew 16:26), and the whole world is of “*the things which are seen*”. When the Holy Bible speaks about the things which war against a man, causing him to fall into the love of the world, it says that they are, “*the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life*” (1 John 2:16), and “*the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life*”, are all “*things which are seen*”, they are all temporary things.

He who is in the image and likeness of God is a spiritual man, who walks not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Romans 8:1). Therefore, he is not concerned with the things which are seen, because they are temporary matters. He is not governed by these things which are seen; they have no domination over him; he does not give them of his time, nor of his heart, neither of his love or affection—nor does he dwell on them—they do not take up his time, for he does “*not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal*”.

The Monks

This outlook is that which brought forth the ascetics and the monks, the hermits and the anchorites. They looked at all “*the things which are seen*” and saw that they were futile things that would come to an end, and were not worthy of their concern. So they rose above the level of the world. They rose above the level of lusts and

desires, not looking to *“the things which are seen”*. Such did Saint Abba Anthony, the father of monks, and so did all the monks in every generation. They lived in the realm of the *“things which are not seen”*: in contemplation, in the joyful eternity, whilst still on earth.

Adam and Eve

Look for example at the most famous sin of which the Holy Bible speaks, and you will find it of this kind. The first sin, the sin of Adam and Eve, was that they ate of the forbidden tree, they looked at *“the things which are seen”*, for they saw that it was *“good for food”* meaning that it looked good, and that it was *“pleasant to the eyes”*, meaning that it looked good (Genesis 3:6); and so they forfeited their souls over *“the things which are seen”*. At that moment, our parents looked not to God but only to the tree. In every sin, man looks to *“the things which are seen”* and not to *“the things which are not seen”*.

Joseph

When sin was presented to Joseph the Righteous, what did he say? *“We do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen”*. How? *“I do not look at this or to the flesh, but I look to God before whom I stand.”* Hence he said, *“How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?”* (Genesis 39:9). God who was not seen was before him. As for the things which were seen, he looked not to them, saying, *“...we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen”*.

Lot and Abraham

Take, for example, the situation between Lot and Abraham. What was Lot's problem? His problem was that he chose Sodom. And what was the problem in choosing Sodom? The problem in choosing Sodom was that he looked at "*the things which are seen*", for the land was "*well watered everywhere... like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt*" (Genesis 13:10)- a land good for tending flocks and for herding, the things which were seen. As for Abram, he looked to God alone, and Abram chose the land that was arid and barren desert in which he saw nothing good, because he looked to the things which were not seen.

The Unseen Homeland

Therefore our saintly fathers lived as strangers upon the earth. They lived on earth, but to them the earth was a foreign place because they had a heavenly homeland. This heavenly homeland was not seen, but they looked to this homeland which was not seen. They did not attain the promises but saw them from afar and believed them. What does this mean? These promises were things which were not seen because they were matters in the future, and the future is not seen, but they saw by faith "*the things which are not seen*", that is why they believed it and lived as strangers on the earth. They were those who knew the reality of life and the futility of "*the things which are seen*".

Solomon the Sage

A man who presented us with his experience of "*the things which are seen*" is Solomon the Sage. He gave himself of all the things which were seen: houses, fields, men singers, women singers, women, concubines, wine

and all the pleasures of the world of which he summed up in a single phrase, “*Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them*” (Ecclesiastes 2:10). “*Whatever my eyes desired*” means “*the things which are seen*”. As a king, all things were within his reach, but at the end he said, “*Then I looked... there was no profit under the sun*” (Ecclesiastes 2:11); there was no profit at all from these things which were seen. Therefore the saints took a lesson from this, not looking to “*the things which are seen*”.

What does “*do not look*” mean? Not looking means you give it neither value nor weight nor importance, as Saint Paul said, “*Those who use this world as not misusing it*” (1Corinthians 7:21). There is a difference between you possessing things, and things possessing you. There is a difference between possessing money, and money possessing you, and hence we find rich saints who possessed money but money did not possess them. They did not look to “*the things which are seen*” but to “*the things which are not seen*”.

The Martyrs and Confessors

Those who had this outlook besides the ascetics and the monks, were the martyrs and confessors. The martyrs saw before them sufferings, tools of torture, ruthless tortures, prisons and persecutions, yet they did not look to all these things which were seen, because their minds were fixed on God who is not seen. They looked to the crowns and halos which are not seen, and they rejoiced in this outlook. Therefore, you can say that the things “*which are seen*” are the things of this present life, and the things “*which are not seen*”, are of the life to come. They are different. And you, in your life, do you look to your life on earth or to your life in

eternity? Your eternity is *“the things which are not seen”*. In all the events of the Holy Bible, we find this truth and find that faith is with the things *“which are not seen”* because how are the things *“which are not seen”*, seen? They are seen by faith.

The Feeding of the Five Thousand

For example, in the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand men with the five loaves and the two fish, if you look to *“the things which are seen”*, you will find that it is impossible to suffice the thousands. But if you look to *“the things which are not seen”*, what are they? God’s blessing is that which *“is not seen”*, and so you will live joyful. The disciples looked at the five loaves and the two fish and said, *“What are they among so many?”* (John 6:9); *“What are these going to do for all these people?”* But Christ, who looked to *“the things which are not seen”*, said, *“Make them sit down...”* (Luke 9:14), *“We will feed them from these”*.

This is also what we say about the tithes and about God’s right in your money. You look at the money and say, *“This will not be enough. How can it be not enough and I pay tithes from it?”*, because you do not see that which is not seen, which is the blessing God will give you when you pay the tithes. So you do not look at the money you pay, but at the blessing you. The money you pay is of *“the things which are seen”*, and the blessing you receive is of *“the things which are not seen”*.

The Temptation on the Mount

During Lent, we remember Christ’s temptation on the mount. On the mount, Christ was sitting with the Father, in that which is not seen. Satan wanted to bring Him down from the things *“which are not seen”* to the

things “*which are seen*”, to bring Him down in level, so he spoke to Him about loaves, about food, about stones. What loaves, what food, and what stones? All these are “*the things which are seen*”. And will Christ descend to the level of “*the things which are seen*”? Was that possible?

Satan tried bringing Christ down to the level of “*the things which are seen*”, and Christ raised him to “*the things which are not seen*”: “*not ... by bread alone*”, not by the things “*which are seen*”, “*but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God*” (Matthew 4:4), so taking him to the things “*which are not seen*”. Then Satan tried to bring Him down to the level of the kingdom. What is the kingdom? It is of “*the things which are seen*”. But Christ was looking to “*the things which are not seen*”.

When they wanted to take Christ and make Him a king when He entered into Jerusalem, He rejected this because the kingdom is of “*the things which are seen*”. What is it then that You desire, O Lord? “*My kingdom is not of this world*” (John 18:36), that is, “*which [is] not seen*”. Christ wants to attract people to that which is not seen. He said to them, “*I go to prepare a place for you*” (John 14:2). Where? In that “*which is not seen*”, and “*I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself*” (John 12:32). And you too, your thoughts and desires are lifted up in that which is not seen. Why? Because “*where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*” (Matthew 6:21). If all your hopes are in the things which are not seen, then your heart and your affections will be there. People are forfeiting their souls in the things which are seen, in the desires of the world which do not satisfy. For this reason the Holy Bible says, “*Do not love the world or the things in the world... the world is passing away, and the lust of it*” (1 John 2: 15,17), they

are all things which are seen and are temporary.

The Samaritan Woman

Behold Christ with the Samaritan woman, and you will find the same thing. The Samaritan woman talks about this water and about Jacob's well and Christ speaks about the living water. The water of Jacob's well is of the things which are seen. So Christ says to the Samaritan woman, "I want to lead you out of the love of the things which are seen, from that which is sensed-physical water- from Jacob's well which is seen, to the Living Water of which all who drink of it shall never thirst because it is Living Water." Why is it living? It is living because it is not seen. It is a transfer from the things which are seen to those which are not seen.

The Cross

When Christ spoke of the Cross, the minds of the disciples were focused on the things which were seen, and the minds of the Jews also. They said to Him, "We want You to be a king, to sit on a throne, to deliver the Jews, to form a kingdom, something grand which we can see with our eyes- the crown, the throne, the splendour". Christ, by the Cross, wanted to take them to salvation, to redemption, to the eternal kingdom, but all these things are not seen, they were things that could not be grasped at all by the minds of the Jews or the minds of the disciples.

When Christ said to them that the Son of Man "*will be delivered to the Gentiles and will be mocked and insulted and spit upon. They will scourge Him and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again*" (Luke 18:32), Peter the Apostle replied, "Don't, Lord! Far be it from You! All our hopes will be lost". So our Lord said to him, "*Get behind*

Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me” (Matthew 16:23). Satan? Why “Satan!”? Why? Because he looked to “*the things which are seen*”, and not to “*the things which are not seen*”. The cross lifts you up from the love of the things which are seen to the love of the things which are not seen. And when we carry the cross, all our hopes are in the life which is not seen. When Christ says, “*come, take up the cross, and follow Me*” (Mark 10:21), He means, “Leave behind the love of the world which is seen and come, follow Me, I will lead you to that which is not seen”.

This is what we need to keep in mind during these forty days when we carry the cross, toil and suffer for the sake of the Lord. Hence, prior to this verse, what did Paul the Apostle say? He said, “*For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*” (2 Corinthians 4:17), meaning that this worldly affliction is very light and the eternal glory is that which carries all the weight because that is what is not seen, that is what we shall live in. Therefore “*we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal*”.

Moses the Prophet

Moses the Prophet had the palace of Pharaoh, all the riches of Egypt, the title of Prince and leader and all the greatness of this present world. What did Moses the Prophet do? Moses did not look to “*the things which were seen*”; he did not look to the palace, to the title of prince, to all the riches of Pharaoh, and left it, “*choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin*” (Hebrews 11:24), and he went

in pursuit of “*the things which are not seen*”. If you say to him, “You have lost your life, Moses”, he would answer, saying, “Christ says, ‘*whoever loses his life for My sake will find it*’ (Matthew 16:25) I do not look to the things which are seen, for they are temporary, but I look to the things which are not seen because they are eternal”.

This is the difference between the saints and sinners. The saints look always to that which is not seen whereas sinners look always to that which is seen. And from here sprang the philosophies of materialism and existentialism, all of which are of “*the things which are seen*”. In spiritual matters, man looks to “*the things which are not seen*” because they are eternal. He who endures the slap on the cheek for the sake of God looks to the things which are not seen; he who forgives his brother and endures, looks to the things which are not seen; he who sells all he has and follows Christ, looks to the things which are not seen; he who rises above the level of matter looks to the things which are not seen.

The Unseen in Your Life

The first of the unseen is God: “*No one has seen God at any time*” (1 John 4:12), so all your thoughts are in God whom you do not see by the eye, but whom you see by faith, this is your primary preoccupation. By faith you see Him. David said, “*I have set the LORD always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved*” (Psalm 16:8); “I see God before me”. And Elijah said, “*the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand*” (1 Kings 17:1), placing himself before God who is not seen. God, His kingdom, His heaven and His angels are all not seen. And also of the things that are not seen are paradise and the eternal reward, because Paul the

Apostle says, “*Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him*” (1 Corinthians 2:9), and “*eye has not seen*”, means the things which are not seen, and “*nor ear heard*” means the things which are not seen. So may all your thoughts be on these.

I would like to ask you a question, for you to answer between you and yourself: in each day of your life, what portion do the things that are not seen, have? What portion? He who lives in all the amusements and entertainments lives in what is seen, enjoying the sights and sounds and the present world.

If you live in prayer, then you are in that which is not seen because you speak with God whom you do not see in the flesh but whom you see by the spirit. Contemplation is that you live in that which is not seen. The friendship of the saints and the angels, and contemplation on the heavenly Jerusalem are all “*things which are not seen*”. The virtues, holiness and principles and values are all things “*which are not seen*”. Your contemplation on the life of righteousness, on truth and on virtue, are all things “*which are not seen*”.

For these things which are not seen, there are open spiritual eyes that can see them, about which Christ said, “*blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear*” (Matthew 13:6). What do they see? They see that which is not seen. You live in eternity from now. You taste the happiness of being with God from now, and by this you live in that which is not seen. This is the most important matter in which we wish to live in the period of the Great Lent, that the things “*which are not seen*” have a portion in our lives and a portion in our time, and to our God be the glory for ever. Amen.