

THE WORD OF THE CROSS - PART II

Taking up our Cross

September 20, 2020
Sunday after Exaltation of Cross
Revision G

GOSPEL: Mark 8:34-9:1
EPISTLE: Galatians 2:16-20

The Exaltation of the Cross is a feast day that is not celebrated much in the West. Some Protestants celebrate Holy Cross Sunday in mid-September, but this is not very common. Lutherans celebrate Reformation Day in November, often using today's Epistle lesson, where in both cases the ideas are expressed that the Cross has become more than just a piece of wood that the Lord died on.

Today's Gospel lesson is used frequently in the west, both from Mark (2nd Sunday of Lent), from Matthew 16 (17th Sunday after Trinity) and from Luke 9 (7th Sunday after Trinity). Today's Gospel lesson (from Mark) is also used in the Eastern lectionary for the 3rd Sunday in Lent; in the context of Lent, a different aspect of today's Gospel lesson is covered.

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What is the "Word of the Cross"? Review of 1 Corinthians 1:18-24

The "Word of the Cross" is a literal translation of 1 Corinthians 1:18, which is often mistranslated "the message of the Cross". In Greek the word *logos* is used, just as in John 1:14, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us". Other Greek words existed that mean message, such as *rhema*: a message or matter, and *Kerugma*: a message or proclamation. For example, while Peter was speaking to Cornelius, the text reads, "While Peter was still speaking this message (*rhema*), the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the Word (*logos*)". In another example, one can listen to a message (*rhema*) of this life (Acts 5:20) and not hear the Word, depending on the condition on one's heart.

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Thus, the Word of the Cross is not just a message; it is part of the fabric of Christianity. If one misses the Word, one misses God. If one misses the Word of the Cross, one misses God's ways.

In summary, the Word of the Cross is:

- Foolishness to those who are perishing. We put the entire hope for our life and being in the teachings of a crucified Jew. To the wisdom of this world, this is utter stupidity.
- To those who are being saved, however, it is the Power of God.

Why this is the case and the implications of it are the subject of the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross and the Sundays before and after. There is much depth to this also. It is the Wisdom of God in a mystery that was hidden before the Crucifixion. Had the rulers of this age (Satan and his legions) known this mystery, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory (1 Corinthians 2:7-8).

The Cross Was Planned, Not an Afterthought

Jesus approached the Cross as His glorification (John 12:23), not His humiliation (as the world saw it). The whole purpose of His incarnation focused on the Cross (John 12:27). The Cross was prophesied back in the Garden of Eden when Adam fell (Genesis 3:15). Others later gave more details; such men as Moses in instituting sacrificial worship, King David (Psalm 22:14-18), the Prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 53), the Prophet Jonah (Jonah 1:15-2:10), and others.

Finally, as the hour got closer, Jesus spoke of His followers needing to deny themselves, take up **their** cross and follow Him. He said this on at least four separate occasions:

Occasions When Jesus Spoke of Taking Up Our Cross

| Event | Date | Reference |
|---|--------------|-------------------------------------|
| At the Sending Out of the Twelve Two by Two | Fall AD 28 | Matthew 10:38 |
| A Week Before the Transfiguration (Today's Gospel) | Summer AD 29 | Matthew 16:24, Mark 8:34, Luke 9:23 |
| Traveling to Jerusalem for Crucifixion: On Counting the Costs of Discipleship | Winter AD 29 | Luke 14:27 |
| Advice to the Rich Young Ruler | Spring AD 30 | Mark 10:21 |

This must have seemed strange for Jesus to talk of His Cross and those of His followers when their concept of Messiah was the restoration of David's kingdom (Acts 1:6-7, Luke 17:20, 19:11). Following the Transfiguration, when they saw the Kingdom of God present with power (Matthew 16:28, Mark 9:1, Luke 9:27), they were sure that the restoration of David's Kingdom was imminent. It wasn't until a little later that they understood the Word of the Cross.

From this we can conclude that our crosses are integrally tied to Jesus' Cross. The same principle that applied to Him applies to us. And it was planned this way! It's not as if He tried the cross, found out it worked for Him and then decided to flow it down to His people. No! This was the plan all along.

What Are Our Crosses? Gospel: Mark 8:34-9:1

The emphasis of our crosses is in the denying of ourselves and of our own selfish interest. To this effect, we say in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:9-13, Luke 11:2-4).

Our Gospel lesson has some clarifying statements regarding the effects of our crosses:

- Whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the Gospel's will save it (Mark 8:35)
- What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul? (Mark 8:36)
- What will a man give in exchange for his soul? (Mark 8:37)
- Whoever is ashamed of (or embarrassed at) Me and My Words, of Him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in the Glory of His Father with the holy angels (Mark 8:38).

In understanding the Word of the Cross, we need to have a vision concerning what is truly valuable and worthwhile.

Cyril of Alexandria comments¹ on this, comparing the way we take up our Crosses to the way the Twelve Apostles took up theirs:

"Here, too, we must wonder at the love of Christ the Savior of us all towards the world; for He not only consented Himself to suffer and bear such great disgrace, humbling Himself even to the cross and death for our sakes, but also rouses His chosen followers to the same excellent desire. Especially those who were to be the instructors of men everywhere, and hold the post of commanders in chief over the people committed to their care! For those who were appointed to so great a ministry must in every deed be thoroughly brave and valiant, armed with an unshaken mind and invincible courage, so as to dread no difficulties, and even if death should befall, to deride its terrors, and think nothing of every fear. He who acts in this way, denies himself, since, so to speak, he resigns this temporal life and deems its concerns worthy of no regard, inasmuch as his choice is to suffer for the blessedness and love that is in Christ. In this way does a man follow Christ".

Sometimes the cross produces something better that was completely unexpected. Consider the Patriarch Joseph who was sold by his brothers as a slave to some Egyptians, was treated badly in prison, but by God's grace rose to be Pharaoh's second in command. Bishop Nikolai Velimirovic comments²:

"What harm did the wickedness of Joseph's brothers do to him? Was it rather his involuntary departure for Egypt the means of his rise to glory, the saving of his brothers from famine and the establishing of the conditions for all the wondrous works of God through Moses in Egypt and in the wilderness?"

¹ Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke, Homily 50, Chapter 9, Studion Publishers, Inc., 1983.

² Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue from Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, September 21.

Even if our crosses do not produce anything quantifiable in worldly terms, they do not go unnoticed by any means.

Just as Christ's Cross was instigated and organized by Satan, so are ours. This was vividly documented regarding the Patriarch Job. The Lord described Job as the epitome of a righteous man (Job 1:8, 2:3). Yet Satan challenged the Lord to allow him (Satan) to introduce hardship to Job's life (Job 1:9-19, 2:4-9) to prove Job wasn't as good as the Lord said he was. Satan did the same with the Apostle Peter, demanding to sift him like wheat (Luke 22:31), after which Peter denied the Lord three times (Luke 22:34, 54-62), before he repented (Luke 22:32, 24:34, Mark 16:7). Note that the Lord prayed for Peter that his faith should not fail and when he returned, that he should strengthen his brethren (Luke 22:32). To this day, the accuser of our brethren (Satan) continues to accuse us before God day and night (Revelation 12:10) and to demand to sift us like wheat, thus creating our crosses as he created Christ's.

Taking Up Our Cross Must Be Our Choice

Just as Christ went willingly to His Cross, so we must be willing to take up our Cross. His entire purpose in becoming Incarnate focused on the Cross (John 12:27); similarly, our lives must focus on a willingness to do likewise. John Chrysostom commented³ on this to say that we are not forced to do anything by God:

“I use no force, nor do I compel; but if any be willing to follow, him I call. You have need of many toils, many dangers, if you are to come after Me. For although it is in My power as Son of God to hinder you from having any trial at all of those hardships yet such is not My will for your sake, in order that you may yourself also contribute something and be more approved”.

Athanasius of Alexandria stated that the Arians of his day attempted to bring the world to their point of view by force, especially when they were badly put down by arguments and logic. This helped to show their true colors, and that they were not of God, because God does not do that.

“Other heresies⁴, when the Truth has refuted them on the clearest evidence, tend to be silent, being simply confounded by their conviction. But this modern and accursed heresy, when it is overthrown by argument, cast down and covered with shame by the Truth, endeavors to coerce by violence, stripes and imprisonment those whom it has been unable to persuade by argument, thereby acknowledging itself to be anything but godly. True godliness does not compel, but persuades. Thus, our Lord Himself, not as employing force, but as offering to their free choice, has said to all, ‘If any man will follow after Me’ (Matthew 16:24); and to His disciples, ‘Will you also go away?’ (John 6:67) This heresy, however, is altogether alien from godliness; and therefore how otherwise should it act, than contrary to Christ?”

“The Devil⁵, when he has no truth on his side, attacks and breaks down the doors of them that admit him with axes and hammers (Psalm 74:6). But Christ is so gentle that He teaches, ‘If any man wills to come after Me’, and, ‘Whoever wills

³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LV, 1.

⁴ Athanasius of Alexandria, History of the Arians, VIII, 67.

⁵ Athanasius of Alexandria, History of the Arians, IV, 33.

to be My disciple' (Matthew 16:24). Coming to each He does not force them, but knocks at the door and says, 'Open to Me, My sister, My spouse' (Song of Solomon 5:2). If they open to Him, He enters in, but if they delay and will not, He departs from them. For the truth is not preached with swords or with spears, nor by soldiers; but by persuasion and counsel”.

Ambrose of Milan stated⁶ that true blessedness is not just taking up our Crosses, but also despising pleasure and the fear of pain.

“Innocence, then, and knowledge make a man blessed. The blessedness of eternal life is the reward for good works. When the patronage of pleasure or the fear of pain is despised, then a blessed life can rise up in the midst of pain. This can easily be shown when we read, ‘blessed are you when men shall revile you and persecute you and shall say all manner of evil against you for righteousness’ sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven; for so they persecuted the prophets which were before you’ (Matthew 5:11-12). And again, ‘He that will come after Me, let him take up his cross and follow Me’” (Matthew 16:24).

John Chrysostom stated⁷ that we should imitate the Master and the Apostles in taking up our Crosses. If we don’t strive for the same things as they did, how can we claim that we are following Christ?

“For a great, a truly great consolation is both the sufferings of Christ, and those of the Apostles. For He knew so well that this is the better way of virtue, as even to go that way Himself, even though He did not need to. He knew so well that tribulation is expedient for us, and that it becomes rather a foundation for resting in God. For hear Him saying, ‘If a man does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me’ (Matthew 10:38). If you are a disciple, He means, imitate the Master; for this is to be a disciple. If He went by the path of affliction, while you go by the way of ease, you no longer tread the same path, but another. How then do you follow? This Paul also says, ‘We are weak, but you are strong; we are despised, but you are honored’ (1 Corinthians 4:10). How is it reasonable, he means, that we should be striving after opposite things, and yet that you should be disciples and we teachers?”

Taking Up Our Cross May Involve Abstinence

Taking up our Cross may involve giving up something else or abstaining from it. Jesus acknowledged what the Twelve gave up by saying, “Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life. But many *who are* first will be last, and the last first” (Matthew 19:29-30).

⁶ Ambrose of Milan, Three Books on the Duties of the Clergy, II, iii, 9

⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, XXVIII, 6.

Tertullian gave examples⁸ of things that we consider the “necessities of life”, but are often just excuses for not taking up our Crosses.

“In vain do we flatter ourselves as to the necessities of human maintenance, if we say, ‘I have no means to live’. The Lord gave examples taking away all excuse. For what is it you say? ‘I shall be in need’. But the Lord calls the needy happy (Luke 6:20). ‘I shall have no food’. But ‘think not’, says He, ‘about food’ (Matthew 6:25, 31; Luke 12:22-24); and as an example of clothing we have the lilies (Matthew 6:28-29, Luke 12:27-28). ‘My work was my subsistence’. No, but ‘all things are to be sold, and divided to the needy’ (Matthew 19:21, Luke 18:22). ‘But provision must be made for children and posterity’. ‘No one, putting his hand on the plow, and looking back, is fit for work’ (Luke 9:62). ‘But I was under contract’. ‘No one can serve two masters’ (Matthew 6:24, Luke 16:13). If you wish to be the Lord’s disciple, it is necessary that you ‘take your cross, and follow⁹ the Lord’. Your cross; that is, your own straits and tortures, or your body only, which is after the manner of a cross. Parents, wives, children, will have to be left behind¹⁰, for God’s sake. Do you hesitate about arts, trades, and about professions, for the sake of children and parents? Even there was it demonstrated to us that both handicrafts and trades are to be left behind for the Lord’s sake. James and John, called by the Lord, did leave behind both father and ship¹¹. Matthew was roused up from the tollbooth¹²; even burying a father was too tardy a business for faith (Luke 9:59-60). None of them, whom the Lord chose, said to Him, ‘I have no means to live’. Faith does not fear famine. It knows, likewise, that hunger is to be despised no less, for God’s sake, than every kind of death. If one does not fear for one’s own life; why should one be concerned about adequate food?”

Jerome stated¹³ that abstinence might also involve abstaining from the pleasures of this life. By abstaining from the things of this life, we put all our hope in the things of God.

“As soon as the Son of God set foot upon the earth, He formed for Himself a new household there; that is, as angels in heaven adored him, so angels might serve Him also on earth. Then James and John forsook father and net and ship and followed the Savior; neither kinship nor the world’s ties, nor the care of their home could hold them back. Then were the words heard, ‘Whoever will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me’ (Mark 8:34). For no soldier goes with a wife to battle! Even when a disciple would have buried his father, the Lord forbade him, and said, ‘Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head’ (Matthew 8:20). So, you must not complain if you have but scanty room in your house. In the same strain, the Apostle writes, ‘He that is unmarried cares for the things that belong to

⁸ Tertullian, *On Idolatry*, I, ii, 12.

⁹ See Matthew 16:24, Mark 8:34, Luke 9:23, 14:27.

¹⁰ See Matthew 19:27-30, Mark 10:29-30, Luke 14:26. For example, three of the Twelve were married and had young children when the Lord called them. In leaving everything for God’s sake, they didn’t abandon their wife and children, but just gave up the pleasures of the flesh, living as celibates.

¹¹ Matthew 4:21-22, Mark 1:19-20, Luke 5:10-11.

¹² Matthew 9:9, Mark 2:14, Luke 5:27-29.

¹³ Jerome, *Letters*, XXII, 21.

the Lord, how he may please the Lord, but he that is married cares for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife” (1 Corinthians 7:32-34).

We Condemn Ourselves by Refusing to Take Up Our Cross

Jesus had said, “Whoever does not bear his Cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:27). “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his Cross daily, and follow Me” (Luke 9:23). What about those who refuse to take up their Cross? In many cases, this implies a refusal to part with the things of this world. Gregory the Great compared¹⁴ the details and the results of those who refuse to take up their Cross, but concentrate on acquiring the things of this world. By not taking up our Cross and focusing on the things of this world, we condemn ourselves by being trapped in the snares set by the devil.

“Those that are intent on increasing money, let them hear what is written, ‘The covetous man is not filled with money; and he that loves riches shall not reap its fruit’ (Ecclesiastes 5:10). He could reap fruit from his riches, if he wanted to, not by loving them, but by dispersing them well. But whoever in his affection for riches retains them, shall surely leave them behind him, here in this life, without fruit. When people burn to be filled with all manner of wealth, let them hear what is written, ‘He that makes haste to be rich shall not be innocent’ (Proverbs 28:20); for certainly he who goes about to increase wealth is negligent in avoiding sin. Being caught after the manner of birds, while looking greedily at the bait of earthly things, he is not aware of the noose of sin in which he is being strangled. When people desire any gains of the present world, and are ignorant of the losses they will suffer in the world to come, let them hear what is written, ‘An inheritance to which haste is made in the beginning in the last end shall lack blessing’ (Proverbs 20:21). For we derive our beginning from this life, that we may come in the end to the lot of blessing. They that make haste to an inheritance in the beginning cut off from themselves the lot of blessing in the end. While they crave to be increased in goods here through the iniquity of avarice, they become disinherited there of their eternal inheritance. When they either solicit very much, or succeed in obtaining all that they have solicited, let them hear what is written. ‘What is a man profited, if he should gain the whole world, but lose his own soul’ (Matthew 16:26)? As if the Truth said plainly, ‘What is a man profited, though he gathers together all that is outside himself, if this thing which is himself he damns?’ If a hasty death has taken away suddenly all they have gathered together, they have not only left here what they had seized, but have carried with them to the judgment arraignments for seizure. Let them, therefore, be told of examples such as these, whom they would themselves condemn. After their words come back to their own heart, perhaps they may blush at imitating those whom they judge”.

John Cassian described¹⁵ what crucifixion with Christ means for us in our daily lives. We carry ourselves like someone who is attached to a cross: just as someone who is crucified has no self-interest any longer – his end is determined – so neither do we. Our thoughts carry us only to being with Christ; like a crucified victim thinks only of the next life.

¹⁴ Gregory the Great, *Book of Pastoral Rule*, III, 20.

¹⁵ John Cassian, *Institutes of the Coenobia*, IV, 34-35.

“Renunciation is nothing but the evidence of the cross and of dying to our self-interest. And so, you must know that today you are dead to this world, its deeds and desires, and that you are crucified to this world and this world to you (Galatians 6:14). Consider therefore the demands of the cross under the sign of which you ought to live in this life; because you no longer live but He lives in you who was crucified for you (Galatians 2:20). We must therefore pass our time in this life in that fashion and form in which He was crucified for us on the cross so that, as David says, piercing our flesh with the fear of the Lord (Psalm 119:120 LXX), we may have all our wishes and desires fastened to His dying and not subservient to our own lusts. For so shall we fulfill the command of the Lord which says, ‘He that does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me’ (Matthew 10:38). But perhaps you will say, ‘How can a man carry his cross continually?’ Or ‘how can anyone who is alive be crucified?’ Hear briefly how this is”.

“The fear of the Lord is our cross. As then one who is crucified no longer has the power of moving or turning his limbs in any direction as he pleases, so also we ought to affix our wishes and desires — not in accordance with what is pleasant and delightful to us now, but in accordance with the Law of the Lord, where it constrains us. He who is fastened to the wood of the cross no longer (1) considers things present, (2) thinks about his likings, (3) is perplexed by anxiety and care for tomorrow, (4) is disturbed by any desire of possession, (5) is inflamed by any pride, strife or rivalry. He does not grieve at present injuries, or remember past ones, and while he is still breathing in the body considers that he is dead to all earthly things, sending the thoughts of his heart on before to that place where he knows that he is shortly to come. So, we also, when crucified by the fear of the Lord ought to be dead to all these things; i.e. not only to carnal vices, but also to all earthly things, having the eye of our minds fixed there where we hope at each moment that we are soon to pass. For in this way we can have all our desires and carnal affections deadened”.

John Chrysostom stated that one’s purpose in life determines one’s reward. Of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-13), five were gentle and loving and cared for the Bridegroom, while the other five did not make His appearance their highest priority. All ten virgins were like each other in opportunity. By way of contrast, Chrysostom compared the Ninevites, who repented for Jonah, to the Jews who crucified Christ. The Jews were partakers of divine instruction and enjoyed prophetic teaching, while the Ninevites were barbarians. The Master taught the Jews, while the Ninevites responded to a servant. One would have thought that the Jews would be more likely to respond, but the contrary occurred. Demons or even fate have not become the cause of evil or of virtue. Instead fellow servants will judge fellow servants by how they responded. Chrysostom applied¹⁶ this reasoning to the illustration of the sheep and the goats (or kids).

“God places servants together in order that the one set may judge the other by their deeds, and that some being judged by the others may not be able for the future to accuse the Master of injustice. On this account, he said ‘The Son of Man will come in the glory of his Father, and will gather together all the nations’ (Matthew 16:27, 25:31). Terrible is the tribunal to the sinful, and the accountable. To those who are conscious of good works, it is desirable and mild. ‘And he will

¹⁶ John Chrysostom, Three Homilies Concerning the Power of Demons, III, 3.

place the sheep on his right hand, and the kids on his left' (Matthew 25:33). Both the sheep and kids are men, but there is a difference in their nature and their purpose. The kids, who did not show compassion, are animals that are unfruitful and are not able to contribute services, either by milk, or by progeny, or by their hair, to those who possess them, due to the immaturity of age. On this account he has called those who bear no fruit, by comparison, kids, but those on the right-hand sheep. For from the sheep the offering is great, both of their natural wool, their progeny, and their milk. Both the sheep and the kids were men, both received the same promises, and the same rewards were assigned to both on doing right. All things were alike to both".

"How then was the end not the same? Their purpose in life did not permit it, and this alone made the difference. On this account the one set went to the Kingdom (Matthew 25:46), but the other to Gehenna. If the Devil were the cause of their sins, the kids would not have been chastened; that is, when another sinned and drove them on. Do you see here both those who do good works, and those who sin? On seeing their fellow-servants, who did good works, they were silenced!"

John Chrysostom noted¹⁷ that taking up our Cross and keeping His Commandments are part of loving God. If we are unwilling to do this, we must ask ourselves whether we really love the Lord our God with our entire heart, soul, mind and strength (Matthew 22:37-40).

"It is not enough merely to have the Commandments, we need also an exact keeping of them. But why does He frequently say the same thing to them? 'If you love Me, you will keep My commandments' (John 14:15); and, 'He that has My commandments and keeps them' (John 14:21); and, 'If anyone hears My word and keeps it, he it is that loves Me — he that will not hear My words, does not love Me' (John 14:23-24). I think that He alluded to their despondency; for since He had uttered many wise sayings to them concerning death. 'He that hates his life in this world shall save it for eternal life' (John 12:25); and, 'Unless a man takes his cross and follow after Me, he is not worthy of Me' (Matthew 10:38). He is about to say other things besides. Rebuking them, He said, 'Do you think that you suffer sorrow from love? Not sorrowing would be a sign of love' (paraphrase John 16:6-24). He wished all along to establish this, as He went on He summed up His discourse in this same point. 'If you loved Me, you would have rejoiced, because I go to My Father' (John 14:28), but now you are in this state through cowardice. To be thus disposed towards death is not for those who remember My commandments; for you ought to be crucified, if you truly loved Me, for My word exhorts you not to be afraid of those that kill the body. Those that are such both the Father loves and I".

Accept Tribulation Only When Necessary

If we are willing to take up our Cross, we should do so with wisdom. The Lord is not asking us to rush headlong into martyrdom as soon as possible, but to be aware of the things of God as compared to the things of this world. John Chrysostom listed¹⁸ some cautions about taking

¹⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXV, 3.

¹⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, V, 7.

up our Cross, advising his people to accept tribulation only when necessary. His rule was the impact on godliness: if godliness is not harmed, do not volunteer for martyrdom.

“And even if there is no persecution, nor tribulation, yet there are other afflictions which we encounter every day. And if we do not bear these, we will not endure those. ‘There has no temptation taken you but such as is common to man’ (1 Corinthians 10:13). Let us then pray indeed to God that we may not come into temptation; but if we come into it, let us bear it nobly. For the prudent man does not throw himself upon danger”.

- (1) Let us not then lightly cast ourselves upon danger, for that is rashness.
- (2) If led into danger, and called by circumstances, let us not give in, for that is cowardice.
- (3) But if indeed the Gospel calls us, let us not refuse. But in a simple case, when there is no reason, need, nor necessity, which calls us in ‘the fear of God’, let us not rush in. For this is mere display, and useless ambition.
- (4) But should any of those things, which are injurious to the Faith, occur, then, though it is necessary to endure ten thousand deaths, let us refuse nothing.
- (5) Don’t challenge trials, when you find the things that concern godliness prosper, as you desire. Why draw down needless dangers, which bring no gain?

“These things I say, because I wish you to observe the laws of Christ, who commands us to ‘pray that we enter not into temptation’ (Matthew 26:41), and commands us to ‘take up the cross and follow’ Him (Matthew 16:24). For these things are not contradictory, they are rather exceedingly in harmony. Be prepared, as is a valiant soldier, continually in your armor; be sober, watchful, ever looking for the enemy. Do not breed wars, for this is not the act of a soldier but of a mover of sedition. But if on the other hand the trumpet of godliness calls you, go immediately, and make no account of your life, and enter with great eagerness into the contest. Break the phalanx of the adversaries, bruise the face of the devil, and set up your trophy. If, however godliness is in no wise harmed, and no one lay waste our doctrines, those I mean which relate to the soul, nor compel us to do anything displeasing to God, do not volunteer”.

Taking up our Cross

21st Sunday after Pentecost

Revision G

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Epistle: Galatians 2:16-20

Today's Epistle lesson is also used in the Orthodox Church in June or July for the 4th Sunday after Pentecost. In the West, this Epistle lesson is sometimes also used for the 4th Sunday after Pentecost. For a Study of other aspects of the Cross in our lives, see The Exaltation of the Cross (September 14th), the Sundays before and after the Exaltation, and the 3rd Sunday of Lent

The Gospel versus the Law in the 1st Century

The context of today's Epistle lesson is the conduct of the Apostle Peter in Antioch (Galatians 2:11-12) where he usually ate with the Antioch Gentiles, but withdrew and ate separately with Jews who came from Jerusalem. Paul referred to Peter, Barnabas and others of the Jews as hypocrites and as not being straightforward about the truth of the Gospel regarding Jewish dietary laws (Leviticus 11).

Paul's argument was that Peter, himself, had had a vision in c. 40 AD (Acts 10:10-16) which Peter rested heavily upon in his argument with the Jews at the Council of Jerusalem in 48 AD that the Gentiles are equal partakers of the Kingdom:

“So, God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them (the Gentiles) by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke (i.e. the Mosaic Law) on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they” (Acts 15:8-11).

The decree of the Council of Jerusalem was that the Gentile believers did not need to keep the Mosaic Law in all its rituals (Acts 15:19-29). The Epistle lesson is Paul's commentary on what Peter and the others did in Antioch a few years after the Council of Jerusalem. On this occasion, Peter had been hypocritical. When he was there by himself, he socialized and ate with the brethren there. But when a delegation of Jews came to visit from Bishop James in Jerusalem, he withdrew and separated himself according to the Jewish customs of avoiding defilement from contact with Gentiles (Galatians 2:11-13, John 18:28).

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Paul's reply to Peter is the subject of the Epistle lesson: Paul said, "If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?" (Galatians 2:14) This was not being straightforward about the truth of the Gospel, where a man is justified not by the works of the Law but by the faith of Jesus Christ (Galatians 2:14, 16 twice).

The Issues in Jerusalem, 48 AD

What were the real issues in Jerusalem that led to the confrontation between Paul and those who wanted to keep the Mosaic Law? In Jerusalem at that time was a small, but very vocal, group of zealots bent on expelling Roman rule. One of the Twelve Apostles, Simon the Zealot, was part of this group at one time, and Judas Iscariot may have been involved also. According to Josephus, the political party of the Zealots was ultimately responsible for the destruction of Jerusalem¹⁹ as a result of their scheming and conspiring to achieve their goals. To them, circumcision represented Jewish national identity. They didn't necessarily keep all the requirements of the Law, but they were very vocal about those aspects of the Law that spoke to their political agenda²⁰.

This ideology spilled over to the Christians. The conflict among the Christians²¹ was between a small minority of Jewish Christian Zealots, who were zealous about keeping the Law (Acts 21:20) and a large majority of Jewish Christians with a weak faith, who also kept the Law, but were not involved with the political agenda of the Zealots. They knew Christ after the flesh, as the Jewish Messiah, and were very sincere about that. If Paul (and James) handled this situation wrong and offended either group, many people might revert back to Judaism and be lost in the destruction coming to Jerusalem in a few years.

Tertullian stated²² that circumcision was the only issue involved when Paul wrote to the Galatians. To the Jews, "circumcision" had their national identity associated with it, since this was part of the Covenant God made with Abraham, and the Law required anyone who rejected circumcision to be cut off from Israel (Genesis 17:9-14). Paul's opponents still believed in God, but they perverted the Gospel by retaining an emphasis on the Law. If the Zealots had not brought in the spies to see what Paul was doing regarding Christian liberty, Paul may not have made it such an issue. For Paul, the major issue was the basis for his teaching; for his opponents, the major issue was Jewish national identity.

"When Paul said, that 'neither was Titus compelled to be circumcised' (Galatians 2:3), he for the first time shows us that circumcision was the only question connected with the maintenance of the Law, which had been agitated by those whom he called 'false brethren secretly brought in' (Galatians 2:4). While these persons went no further than to insist on a continuance of the Law, they retained unquestionably a sincere belief in God. They perverted the gospel in their teaching, not by tampering with the Scripture to eliminate Christ, but by retaining the emphasis on the Law. Therefore, he said, 'Because of false brethren secretly

¹⁹ See Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, IV, vi, 3.

²⁰ In a way, this is similar to the US today, where there are Christian zealots who have a very strong political agenda involving US national identity. Those aspects of Christianity that speak to their political agenda are very important to them. Yet out of kindness and mercy, we don't want to offend them and cause them to abandon the Faith.

²¹ See Roberts and Donaldson, ed., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume 3, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1995, Footnote 22, p. 433.

²² Tertullian, *The Five Books Against Marcion*, II, ii, 5, 3.

brought in, who came in secretly to spy out our liberty, which we have in Christ, that they might bring us into bondage, to whom we submitted not even for an hour' (Galatians 2:4-5). Let us only attend to the clear sense and to the reason for their actions, and the perversion of the Scripture will be apparent”.

“Paul first said that the Apostles did not compel Titus, a Greek, to be circumcised and added that false brethren were secretly brought in. He gives us an insight into his reason for acting in a clean contrary way, showing us why he did what he would neither have done nor shown to us, if the Zealots had not induced him to act as he did. But then would they have yielded to the subjection that the Zealots demanded, if these false brethren had not crept in to spy out their liberty? I apprehend not. They therefore gave way (in a partial concession), because there were persons whose weak faith required consideration. For their rudimentary belief, which was still in suspense about the observance of the Law, deserved this concessive treatment, when even the Apostle himself had some suspicion that he might have run, and be still running, in vain (Galatians 2:2). Accordingly, the false brethren, who were the spies of their Christian liberty, must be thwarted in their efforts to bring it under the yoke of their own Judaism. Paul needed (1) to discover whether his labor had been in vain; (2) those who preceded him in the Apostolate to have the opportunity to give him the right hand of fellowship; and (3) to have an understanding before he entered on the office of preaching to the Gentiles, according to the Apostles' arrangement with him (Galatians 2:9-10). He therefore made some concession, as was necessary, for a time; and this was the reason why he had Timothy circumcised (Acts 16:3), and the Nazirites introduced into the temple (Acts 21:23-26). Their truth may be inferred from their agreement with the apostle's own profession, how 'he became all things to all men, that he might gain all'”.

John Cassian stated²³ that Paul identified with those he wished to reach. “To the Jews, I became as a Jew that I might gain the Jews; to those who were under the Law as being under the Law, though not myself under the Law, that I might gain those who were under the Law; to those who were without law, I became as without law, though I was not without the Law of God but under the Law of Christ, that I might gain those who were without law; to the weak I became weak, that I might gain the weak: I became all things to all men, that I might save all” (1 Corinthians 9:19-22). The Apostles in Jerusalem recognized that there would be a change in the Law as a result of the Coming of Christ (Hebrews 7:12), and they worked with the Apostle Paul in this regard.

“The Apostle James, and all the chief princes of the primitive Church urged the Apostle Paul, in consequence of the weakness of feeble persons, to condescend to a fictitious arrangement and insisted on his purifying himself according to the requirements of the Law. By shaving his head and paying his vows (Acts 21:20-25), they thought that the present harm, which would come from this hypocrisy, was of no account, but had regard rather to the gain, which would result from his continued preaching. For the gain to the Apostle Paul from his strictness would not have counterbalanced the loss to all nations from his speedy death. And the whole

²³ John Cassian, The Second Conference of Abbot Joseph, II, xvii, 20.

Church would certainly have then incurred this unless this good and salutary hypocrisy had preserved him for the preaching of the Gospel”.

“Someone may ask how we can prove that Paul suited himself to all men in all things. When did he to the Jews become as a Jew? He had said, ‘Behold, I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing’ (Galatians 5:2). Yet by circumcising Timothy (Acts 16:3), he adopted a shadow as it were of Jewish superstition. And again, where did he become to those under the Law, as under the Law? James and all the Elders of the Church, fearing lest he might be attacked by the multitude of Jewish Christians, who had received the faith of Christ in such a way as still to be bound by the rites of legal ceremonies, came to his rescue in his difficulty with this counsel and advice” (Acts 21:20-24).

“And so, for the good of those who were under the Law, he trod under foot for a while the strict view which he had expressed. ‘I, through the Law, am dead to the Law, that I may live to God’ (Galatians 2:19). Contrary to this, he was driven to shave his head, and be purified according to the Law and pay his vows after the Mosaic rites in the Temple” (Acts 21:20-24).

“For the good of those who were utterly ignorant of the Law of God, Paul himself became as if without law? In Athens, where heathen wickedness was flourishing, he stated, ‘as I passed by, I saw your idols and an altar on which was written: To the unknown God’ (Acts 17:23). When he began speaking to them, as if he himself also had been without law, he introduced the faith of Christ, saying, ‘The One whom you worship ignorantly, Him I proclaim to you’ (Acts 17:23). And after a little, as if he had known nothing whatever of the Divine Law, he chose to bring forward a verse of a heathen poet rather than a saying of Moses or Christ, saying, ‘As some of your own poets have said; for we are also His offspring’ (Acts 17:28). And when he had thus approached them with their own authorities, which they could not reject, thus confirming the truth by things false, he added, ‘Since then we are the offspring of God we ought not to think that the Godhead is like gold or silver or stone sculptured by the art and device of man’” (Acts 17:29).

“In this way he fulfilled what he had commanded the Corinthians to do when he said, ‘be without offense to Jews and Greeks and the Church of Christ, as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but that of the many, that they may be saved’ (1 Corinthians 10:32-33, Romans 14:3-13, 2 Corinthians 11:29). For it had certainly been profitable at other times not to circumcise Timothy, not to shave his head, not to undergo Jewish purification, not to practice going barefoot, not to pay legal vows. But he did all these things because he did not seek his own profit but that of the many”.

The Result of Paul’s Actions

At the Council of Jerusalem in 48 AD, Paul sought (1) clarification of his interpretation of the Gospel and (2) agreement with the Apostles and elders in Jerusalem. This he received very clearly, and Paul was of one mind with the Apostles and elders. Later Church Councils were patterned after Paul’s agreement with the Apostles and elders in Jerusalem, and this agreement came to be referred to as “The mind of the Church”. While the Jewish Christian Zealots had to agree with the Council, because their disagreement would be an obvious gesture of countermanding God, they later opposed the decision of the Council. Paul ended up opposing

them for the rest of his life. A similar pattern emerged following most of the later Councils of the Church, where the heretics often accepted the decisions of the Council initially, but later opposed these decisions. In both cases, this showed the basic dishonesty of the heretics, and where their allegiance was really based.

John Chrysostom pointed out²⁴ that a change in the Law was foreseen in the Mosaic Law as it referred to Christ:

“The Law itself has taught me no longer to obey itself; and therefore, if I do so, I shall be transgressing even its teaching. How, and in what way has it so taught? Moses says, speaking of Christ, ‘The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet from your midst of your brethren, like me; to Him shall you listen’ (Deuteronomy 18:15). Therefore, those who do not obey Him transgress the Law”.

Chrysostom continued²⁵ to say that the impact of Peter’s conduct in Antioch was to marginalize the death of Christ. That is, one is not justified by circumcision or by Jewish rituals, but by faith. Because of the circumstances, Paul had to do something!

“Christ’s death is a plain proof of the inability of the Law to justify us; and if the Law does justify, then His death is superfluous. Yet how could it be reasonable to say Christ’s death has been done heedlessly and in vain, when it is so awesome, so surpassing human reason, a mystery so ineffable, with which Patriarchs travailed, which Prophets foretold, which angels gazed on with consternation, which all men confess as the summit of Divine tenderness? How utterly out of place it would be if they should say that so great and high a deed had been done superfluously, for this is what their conduct (i.e. the conduct of Peter and the Jews in Antioch) came to”.

At this point, some clarification is needed regarding “the Law”. The Lord referred to the Greatest Commandment, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37-39, Deuteronomy 6:5, Leviticus 19:18). On this, He said, hangs all the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 22:40); and this Greatest Commandment was part of a Creed²⁶ used in the 1st Century Synagogue worship. In addition, the Lord had said, “Assuredly I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one yod (smallest Hebrew letter) or one piece of a Hebrew letter will by no means pass from the Law till all²⁷ is fulfilled” (Matthew 5:18). He also said that those who worship the Father must worship Him in spirit and truth (John 4:24).

All this is not contradictory. All the details of the Mosaic Law regarding sacrifices, uncleanness, Feast Days, avoiding certain foods, etc., had a purpose in leading the Lord’s people toward holiness. Once Israel ceased to exist as a nation, these tenets of the Law changed. We no longer offer animal sacrifices, but we are urged to present our bodies as a living sacrifice (Romans

²⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Galatians, Chapter 2, v 19.

²⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Galatians, Chapter 2, v 21.

²⁶ Edersheim, Sketches of Jewish Social Life, p. 245, 101-104.

²⁷ For more details, see the Gospel lesson for the 15th Sunday after Pentecost.

12:1). We no longer follow the various washings prescribed by the Mosaic Law, but we are advised to avoid the defilement²⁸ from unclean spirits, which can be really foul.

The usefulness of the Law is as a tutor to get us started in the right direction (Galatians 3:24, 25). As we grow in the Faith and can distinguish the Holy Spirit speaking to us, we don't need the Law anymore, because it is written on our hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-34, Hebrews 10:16-17). John Chrysostom stated²⁹ that the Law and the Gospel work together:

“The Law is not the adversary but the fellow worker of Grace. But if when Grace is come, the Law continues to hold us down, it becomes an adversary. For if it confines those who ought to go forward to Grace, then it is the destruction of our salvation. If a candle which gave light by night kept us, when it became day, from the sun, it would not only cease to benefit us, but would injure us. And so does the Law if it stands between the greater benefits of Grace and us. Just so a tutor or *pedagogue* makes a youth ridiculous, by retaining him with himself, when time calls for his departure”.

Dead to the World

Paul stated, “For I through the Law died to the Law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:19-20). The point he is making is that if our hope is really in the Kingdom of God, the things of this world have very little meaning.

John Chrysostom stated³⁰ that it is our love for God that deadens us to the things of this world, such as glory and honor, as if we were the only person on earth and there was no glory to receive from others. By focusing on the invisible things of God, we begin to not notice the visible things of this world.

“If anyone is caught with the fire of Christ's love, he becomes like a man would who dwelt alone upon the earth, so utterly does he not care for either glory or disgrace. As for trials, he so despises them, both scourges and imprisonments, as though the body in which he suffers were another's and not his own, or as though he had a body made of adamant³¹. As for the sweet things of this life, he so laughs them to scorn, is so insensitive to them, as we are insensitive of dead bodies, being ourselves dead. He is as far from being taken captive by any passion, as the gold refined in the fire is free from alloy. For even as flies would not dart into the midst of a flame, but fly from it, so the passions dare not even to come near this man. Observe Paul, how he felt towards the whole world. ‘The world is crucified to me, and I to the world’ (Galatians 6:14). I am dead to the world, and the world is dead to me. And again: ‘it is no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me (Galatians 2:20). To show you that it was like he was in solitude, and so looked upon the things

²⁸ For more details regarding sacrifice, see the Epistle lesson for the 6th Sunday after Pentecost; for more details on uncleanness, see the Epistle lesson for the 17th Sunday after Pentecost.

²⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Galatians, Chapter 3, vv. 25-26.

³⁰ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, LII, Recapitulation.

³¹ Adamant was a very hard legendary material, possible associated with diamond.

present, hear him saying, ‘We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen’ (2 Corinthians 4:18). What he is saying is that he sees the invisible things, and the visible he doesn’t see. Such are the eyes, which are given by Christ; for these bodily eyes see the things that are seen, but things unseen they don’t see. Similarly, those heavenly eyes do the contrary. No one that beholds the invisible things, beholds the visible; no one beholding the things seen, beholds the invisible. When we turn our mind inwards, we think of the unseen things, and our views become raised above the things on earth. Let us despise glory; let us be willing to be laughed at rather than to be praised. For he who is laughed at is not hurt; but he who is praised is hurt much”.

John Cassian gave³² some specifics regarding how we can continually carry our Cross. If we were crucified, we would not be free to go where we want, and participate freely in the things of this world; we would be nailed in place. If our love for the Lord and the things of God are real, we will consider this effect in our life.

“Renunciation is nothing but the evidence of the cross and of dying to yourself. And so, you must know that today you are dead to this world and its deeds and desires, and that, as the Apostle says, you are crucified to this world and this world to you. Consider therefore the demands of the cross under the sign of which you ought to live in this life. We must therefore pass our time in this life in that fashion and form in which He was crucified for us on the cross. So that as David says, ‘piercing our flesh with the fear of the Lord’ (Psalm 119:120), we may have all our wishes and desires not subservient to our own lusts but fastened to His death. Thus, shall we fulfill the command of the Lord, which says, ‘He who does not take his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me’” (Matthew 10:38).

“But perhaps you will say, ‘How can a man carry his cross continually? Or how can anyone who is alive be crucified? Hear briefly how this is. The fear of the Lord is our cross. One who is crucified no longer has the power of moving or turning his limbs in any direction he pleases. So, we also ought to affix our wishes and desires, not in accordance with what is pleasant and delightful to us now, but in accordance with the Law of the Lord, where it constrains us. One who is fastened to the wood of the cross (1) no longer considers things present, (2) no longer thinks about his likings, (3) no longer is perplexed by anxiety and care for tomorrow, (4) no longer is disturbed by any desire of possession, nor inflamed by any pride, strife or rivalry, (5) does not grieve at present injuries, nor remember past ones, and (6) while he is still breathing in the body considers that he is dead to all earthly things, sending the thoughts of his heart on before to that place where he is shortly to come. So, we also, when crucified by the fear of the Lord ought to be dead to all these things. That is, not only to carnal vices but also to all earthly things, having the eye of our minds fixed there where we hope that we are soon to pass. For in this way, we can deaden all our desires and carnal affections”.

³² John Cassian, Twelve Books on the Institutes of the Coenobia, IV, 34-35.

Cassian continued³³ to say that taking up our Cross is easy if we take the right attitude. If we are actually strong when we appear to be weak, and if the things of this world don't bother us, life is easy.

“We can prove that our Lord's saying is true, if we approach the way of perfection properly and in accordance with Christ's will, deadening all our desires, and cutting off things we like that injure us. If we abandon this world's goods, our adversary won't find opportunities for destroying us. If we actually recognize that we are not our own masters, we can truly make our own the Apostle's words, 'it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me' (Galatians 2:20). For what can be burdensome to one who (1) has embraced with his whole heart the yoke of Christ, (2) is established in true humility and (3) always fixes his eye on the Lord's sufferings and rejoices in all the wrongs that are offered to him. 'Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong!' (2 Corinthians 12:10) By what loss of any common thing, I ask, will he be injured, who voluntarily rejects for Christ's sake all the pomp of this world, and considers all of its desires as dung, so that he may gain Christ, and by continual meditation on this command of the Gospel, scorns getting upset at every loss? 'For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?' (Matthew 16:26) For the loss of what will he be bothered, who recognizes that everything that can be taken away from others is not their own, and proclaims with unconquered valor, 'We brought nothing into this world; it is certain that we can carry nothing out?'" (1 Timothy 6:7)

John Chrysostom stated³⁴ that there is a balance in providing for the needs of our flesh. The point is to make our flesh healthy in a godly sense.

What does the Lord intimate in saying, 'Make no provision for the flesh, to *fulfill its* lusts?' (Romans 13:14). He does not forbid drinking, but drinking to excess, not marrying, but seeking luxurious self-enjoyment. He does not forbid making provision for the flesh either, but He does forbid doing so with a view 'to fulfill the lusts of the flesh', as for instance, by going beyond necessities. For that he does ask us to make provision for it, hear from what he says to Timothy, 'Use a little wine for your stomach's sake, and your frequent infirmities' (1 Timothy 5:23). So here too he is for taking care of it, but for health, and not luxurious self-enjoyment. This would cease to be making provision for it, when you were lighting up the flame, when you were making the furnace powerful. But that you may form a clearer notion what 'making provision' for it 'to fulfill its lusts' is, and may shun such a provision, just call to mind the drunken, the gluttonous, those that pride themselves in dress, those that are effeminate, those that live a soft and relaxed life, and you will see what is meant. For they do everything not that they may be healthy, but that they may seek pleasure and kindle desire. But you, who have put on Christ, prune away all those things, and seek for one thing only, to have your flesh healthy.

³³ John Cassian, Conference of Abbot Abraham, XXIV, 23.

³⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XXIV, v 14.

Examples of the Gospel and the Cross

Paul stated, “Those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit” (Galatians 5:24-25). Since the passions and desires of the flesh are the things that hinder us from a close walk with God, denying these is an integral part of our crosses. And our crosses will generally lead us to a point where we are better able to do this.

But we need to actually do something about it. “If we live in the Spirit, let us walk in the Spirit” (Galatians 5:25). This is a faith-works issue. From James 2:17-20, the English words to believe and to have faith are translations of the same Greek word (meaning to believe, to have faith, to trust). Similarly, “works” means labor or deeds. Demons believe and have faith (James 2:19), but they tremble and they have no deeds to show for their belief or faith. Similarly, for us: if we live in the Spirit, but don’t walk in the Spirit, our belief (or faith) is barren or dead. Unless we have both faith and works, we really have neither.

As an example, consider the Crosses of the Apostle Paul. All his difficulty did not cause him any permanent harm. Instead all this caused Paul to be one of the most admired of the Apostles.

“From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep (i.e. after shipwreck). In journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fasting often, in cold and nakedness — besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches” (2 Corinthians 11:24-27).

Similarly, with the Patriarch Job’s Crosses. In his day, Job was unsurpassed in righteousness (Job 1:8). Yet the Lord allowed Satan to take away all his wealth, his ten children, plus his health, leaving him sitting among the ashes scraping the pus and the worms off the boils on his skin with a piece of broken pottery (Job 1:13-22, 2:7-8). To add insult to injury, Job’s friends then began to inquire of him as to which of his secret sins had brought this calamity on him (Job 4:7-21, 8:1-6, 11:1-20). Reflecting on Job’s situation, John Chrysostom stated³⁵ that

“The reproaches of his friends appeared more grievous than the worms and the sores. There is nothing more intolerable to those in affliction than a word capable of stinging the soul!”

Job grew spiritually because of all the evil that he had to bear and he was rewarded both in this life and in the age to come (Job 42:10-17, James 5:11). Obviously, Job’s Crosses did him no permanent harm either.

John Chrysostom summarized³⁶ the effect of the Cross on the life of the Apostle Paul. Because his entire life, after his conversion, focused on the things of Christ, to the exclusion of the

³⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XII, 3.

³⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Philippians, III.

things of this world, he did not live the common life. He was above it; and for anyone to kill him, they simply ushered him into a better life.

“Since I have often escaped dangers, and have this to boast of to the unbelievers, do not think I am put to shame, if now I should face danger. ‘I am not ashamed of the Gospel!’ (Romans 1:16) This he did not say in ignorance, for he knew that he was not to die then, but sometime after; yet even now he prepares their soul”.

“For even in dying, he means, I shall not have died, for I have my life in myself; then would they truly have slain me, if they had power to cast faith out of my soul through fear. But as long as Christ is with me, even though death overtakes me, still I live, and in this present life, Christ is my life. Because of this, ‘that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith’; so in that state also, ‘I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me’ (Galatians 2:20). Such ought a Christian to be! I live not the common life, he says. How do you live then, Paul? Do you not see the sun; do you not breathe the common air? Are you not nourished with the same food as others? Do you not tread the earth as we? What do you mean by, ‘I live not?’”

“If facts witness to events, there is no boasting here. Let us learn how he lives not! ‘I have been crucified to the world, and the world to me’ (Galatians 6:14). He says, ‘I no longer live’, and, ‘to me to live is Christ’. The word ‘life’ is very significant, as also the word ‘death’. There is this life of the body and there is the life of sin (Romans 6:2). It is then possible to live the life of sin. There is the life everlasting and immortal; ‘for our citizenship is in heaven’ (Philippians 3:20). There is the life of the body, which he speaks of, ‘through Him we live and move and have our being’ (Acts 17:28). He does not deny that he lives the natural life; but he does deny that he lives the life of sin, which all men live”.

“He who desires not the present life, he who is hastening to another, he who despises death, he who desires nothing, how does he live this life? For as one made of adamant³⁷, though he were struck a thousand blows, would never be bothered by it; neither would Paul. And ‘I live, but no longer I’; that is, no longer the old man, as elsewhere, ‘Wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me out of the body of this death!’ (Romans 7:24). How does he live who does so not for the sake of food, clothing, nor for any of these present things? Such a one does not live the natural life: he who takes thought for none of the things which sustain life, doesn’t live. We live this life, when our every action regards it. But he didn’t live; he busied himself about nothing of the things here. Elsewhere he shows that he does not reject the natural life. ‘The life which I now live in the flesh, I live in the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me’ (Galatians 2:20). That is, a certain new life I live, an altered one”.

“Think not, he says, that I shall be deprived of anything in this life; for while alive I lived this life as Christ willed. For tell me, He who despises money, luxury, hunger, thirst, dangers, health, safety, does he live this life? He who has nothing here, and is often willing to cast life away, if need be, and does not cling to it, does he live this life?”

“This I must make clear to you by a kind of example. Let us imagine someone in great wealth, with many servants, and much gold, and who makes no

³⁷ Adamant was a very hard legendary material, possible associated with diamond.

use of all these things; is such a one rich for all his wealth? By no means! Let him watch his children dissipating his property, strolling idly about; let him feel no concern for them. When beaten, let him not even notice pain. Shall we call him a man of wealth? By no means, although his wealth is his own! ‘For me’, he says, ‘to live is Christ’; if you will inquire of my life, it is He. ‘And to die is gain’. Why? Because then I shall more clearly be present with Him; so that my death is rather a coming to life. They who kill me will work on me no dreadful thing; they will only send me onward to my proper life, and free me from that which is not mine”.

Athanasius of Alexandria stated³⁸ that we keep the Commandments when we offer ourselves to the Lord in thankfulness. This exhibits Christ living in us, even though we offer to Him only what He gave us. Wicked men, heretics and schismatics, on the other hand, cannot bring anything that God will accept, and thus cannot properly observe the Paschal Feast.

“Nature is not able, with material things, to return a recompense for His benefits; yet let us render Him thanks while we persevere in piety. And how can we more abide in piety than when we acknowledge God, Who in His love to mankind has bestowed on us such benefits? For thus we shall obediently keep the Law and observe its Commandments! Further, we shall not, as unthankful persons, be accounted transgressors of the Law, or do those things, which ought to be hated, for the Lord loves the thankful. We do this when we offer ourselves to the Lord, like the saints, when we subscribe ourselves entirely as living not to ourselves, but to the Lord, as also the blessed Paul did, when he said, ‘I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me’” (Galatians 2:20).

“Our life, my brethren, truly consists in our denying all bodily things, and continuing steadfast in those only of our Savior. Therefore, the present Paschal season requires of us, that we should not only utter such words, but should also imitate the deeds of the saints. We imitate them, when we acknowledge Him who died, and no longer live to ourselves. Also, when we render recompense to the Lord, though, by grace, we give nothing of our own. He bears witness to this when He says that My offerings are My own gifts (Numbers 28:2 LXX). That is, those things which you give Me are yours, as having received them from Me, but they are the gifts of God. And let us offer to the Lord every virtue, and that true holiness which is in Him, and in piety let us keep the feast to Him with those things which He has hallowed for us. Let us thus engage in the holy fasts, as having been prescribed by Him, and by means of which we find the way to God”.

“Although wicked men³⁹ press forward to keep the feast, and as at a feast praise God, and intrude into the Church of the saints, yet God says to the sinner, ‘why do you talk of My ordinances?’ And the gentle Spirit rebukes them, saying, ‘Praise is not becoming in the mouth of a sinner, for it was not sent to him by the Lord’ (Ecclesiasticus 15:9 LXX, Psalm 50:16). Neither has sin any place in common with the praise of God; for the sinner has a mouth speaking perverse things, as the Proverb says, ‘The mouth of the ungodly answers evil things’ (Proverbs 15:28 LXX). For what communion has righteousness with iniquity? Or what fellowship is there between light and darkness? (2 Corinthians 6:14) Thus, it

³⁸ Athanasius of Alexandria, Festal Letters, V, 3-4.

³⁹ Athanasius of Alexandria, Festal Letters, VII, 4.

is: sinners, and all those who are aliens from the Catholic Church, heretics, and schismatics, since they are excluded from glorifying God with the saints, cannot properly even continue observers of the feast. But the righteous man, although he appears dying to the world, uses boldness of speech, saying, ‘I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord’” (Psalm 118:17).

Taking Up Our Cross: Humility and Love

From the Gospel lesson from the Sunday before the Exaltation of the Cross, “For God so loved the world that He gave His Only Begotten Son” (John 3:16). The Cross, then, is the ultimate act of the love of God for man. “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (John 15:13). The Lord applies these same principles that He used to us: “This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12).

At the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke to the multitudes: “Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?” (Matthew 5:44-48). This is how the Lord treated His enemies; He took even their sins with Him to the Cross⁴⁰.

Contrasting life in the world around them, Jesus had said, “You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your deacon, and slave of all” (Mark 10:42-44). The Apostle Peter elaborated on this and compared the humility of Christ with how husbands and wives should treat one another with love, humility and obedience (1 Peter 2:21-3:9). Diadochos of Photiki commented⁴¹ on this:

“Obedience is the chief among the initiatory virtues; for first it displaces presumption and then it engenders humility within us. Thus, it becomes for those who are willing to embrace it, a door leading to the love of God”.

The Lord’s brother, James, wrote, “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord and He will lift you up” (James 4:10). Diadochos also commented⁴² on this as follows:

“When the intellect fully and consciously senses the illumination of God’s Grace, the soul possesses a humility which is, as it were, natural. Wholly filled with divine blessedness, it can no longer be puffed up with its own glory; for even if it carries out God’s commandments ceaselessly, it still considers itself humbler than all other souls because it shares His forbearance”.

John of Karpathos added⁴³, “If you always behave with humility before the Lord, you will never show arrogance toward anyone”.

⁴⁰ We will consider this in more detail in the Gospel lesson for the 2nd Sunday of Luke.

⁴¹ Diadochos of Photiki, On Spiritual Knowledge, Text 41.

⁴² Diadochos of Photiki, On Spiritual Knowledge, Text 95.

⁴³ John of Karpathos, Texts for the Monks of India, Text 12.

Gregory of Nyssa stated⁴⁴ that humility does not come easily, since the removal of pride is involved.

“But let no one imagine that humility can be achieved easily and without labor. The Lord removes pride, the root of evil, from our character by counseling us to imitate Him who became poor of His own will, Who is the truly Blessed One. For as it is said, ‘Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus: who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but emptied Himself taking the form of a servant’ (Philippians 2:5-7). The perfectly Pure accepts the filth of human nature”.

Just as our Lord was exalted and glorified because He humbled Himself to the point of death on His Cross (Philippians 2:5-10), so also, we will be exalted if we humble ourselves in taking up our crosses. Our crosses are not our enemies; our crosses are for our benefit. Referring to the reply of the Twelve to Jesus, “Behold we have left all we had and followed You; what therefore shall we have?” (Matthew 19:27, Mark 10:28, Luke 18:28). Gregory of Nyssa said⁴⁵,

“Would you like to know who it is that is poor in spirit? It is he who is given the riches of the soul in exchange for material wealth, who is poor for the sake of the spirit. He has shaken off earthly riches like a burden so that he might be lightly lifted into the air and be borne upwards”.

Paul spoke of Jesus enduring His Cross and despising the shame because of the joy that was set before Him (Hebrews 12:2). That joy for Him was us, as we faithfully endure our crosses. And like Him, any humiliation we suffer in the eyes of the world causes us no permanent harm and does not even compare to the rewards the Lord brings at His Second Coming.

Thus, the Cross, an instrument of death, actually brings life. As the Lord said: “He who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it (Matthew 10:38-39).

⁴⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, The Beatitudes, Sermon 1.

⁴⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, The Beatitudes, Sermon 1.