

18TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (THE SUNDAY AFTER THE EXALTATION OF THE CROSS)

SEPTEMBER 17/30, 2007

Fr. Dr. Photios+ (W)

Gospel...And when He had called the people unto Him with his disciples also, He said unto them, Whosoever will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for My sake and the Gospel's, the same shall save it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of Me and of My words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when He cometh in the glory of His Father with the holy angels. And He said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power.

The Lord Sets Peter (and others) Straight: By Losing Our Lives For Him, We Actually Save Our Souls!

The Lord had just called Peter “Satan” because in not wanting the Saviour to suffer Peter was aligning himself with the Evil One, “who does not want Christ to suffer and thus save mankind”. Christ is rebuking Peter for thinking in the manner of this world not of His.¹ No one will be saved unless that person takes up the cross and by doing so voluntarily accepts “the most shameful of deaths”:

Blessed Theophylact: “He did not say, ‘Whosoever is unwilling, let him die,’ but ‘Whosoever **is willing** (emphasis supplied).’ ‘For,’ says He, ‘I force no one. For I call him to good things, and not bad things that I should even compel him.’”²

Christ does not force anyone to die against that person’s will. This is a purely volunteer spiritual army. If one doesn’t want to do His good, he or she, of course, doesn’t deserve to find life; in order to find it, we must lose it in the Saviour.³

If We Compromise With This World, We Lose Everything!

If we try to save our lives in this world by some form of compromise against the principles of Christ, we have not found life. On the contrary, we have lost it ourselves. Saving our lives means nothing to the Lord. If we ‘save’ our lives by failing to stand fast and upright for Christ during our times of testing, we do not profit even if it could be said we have gained the whole world. What world? That of the prince of darkness, the Evil One. Not Christ’s!⁴

The early 20th century spiritual failings of the so-called Metropolitan Sergius in his kowtowing to the Orthodox killers, the Bolsheviks, and those of similar ilk who went along with him, as well as those in charge of the current Moscow Patriarchate who refuse to repent for such actions and even have the blasphemy to consider putting up this Sergius for glorification, result in the irrevocable loss of their souls.

Money Can’t Buy Us Out Of Where We Put Ourselves

If we have lost our souls and are burning in hell, no money can buy our spiritual freedom:

But at that time and in that place no such trade can be made. And here let us shut the mouths of those who, following Origen, say that all the souls in hell will be restored [and reunited with those in heaven] after they have been punished in accordance with their sins. Let them hear that there is **no** (emphasis supplied) exchange that can be made there for one’s soul. No one is kept in hell as a punishment. Rather, it is the **weight of his own sins** (emphasis supplied) which holds him there.⁵

When the Lord appears at His Second Coming, we don’t want to miss the shining countenance of Him and the other righteous. We want to be able to say that we never were ashamed to be True Orthodox Christians, living for Christ Jesus. If we are out to dinner and the family father is giving the prayer, don’t lower your voices unduly when you say “Amen”. On the other hand, don’t make a big spectacle of yourselves. This wouldn’t be humble. But we are not ashamed that we are True Orthodox Christians. We are proud in a humble way about this fact. We rejoice to think that others might find in our spiritual example the courage to come to Holy Orthodoxy. But we concentrate on our inner selves first. We are quietly confident that His way is the true and only one to salvation. We must have faith and confess Him as our Saviour and back up our words with deeds: truly the Orthodox Way!

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

¹ Blessed Theophylact, *Explanations of the Holy Gospel of St. Mark, Vol. II*, (translated from the original Greek by Fr. Christopher Stade) Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1997, Chapter 8, discussion of the meaning of 31-33, p. 69.

² [P.G. 123:213CD (col. 576.)], cited in *The Orthodox New Testament Holy Gospel, Volume 1 (Second Edition, Revised and Enlarged)* October 2000, Holy Apostles Convent/Dormition Skete, Buena Vista, Colorado, *St. Mark*, Endnote # 63., 8: 34, p. 195.

³ Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ *id.*, pp. 70-71.