

13th Sunday after Pentecost 2006: Leadership in the Cross

A sermon by Rev. Fr. David G. Subu
Delivered on September 10, 2006

GOSPEL: John 3:13-17, Matthew 21:33-42

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen. Christ is among us!

Today as the Church prepares itself for the Universal Exaltation of the Precious and Life-Giving Cross, we are reminded of the great sacrifice which has brought us to come here today and worship the Lord, and to seek after everlasting life. We have the knowledge of the Cross available to us because through out the centuries, God has lifted up leaders for His Holy Church who took up their own crosses and followed the Lord. These leaders were simple men and women from all walks of life such as the humble and holy Apostles Apelles, Lucius, and Clement of the seventy commemorated today, such as the three virgin martyrs Menodora, Metrodora, and Nymphodora, also commemorated today, as well as individuals like the Holy right-believing Empress Pulcheria that is remembered today who helped to bring resolution to the problems of her day through advising the calling of both the third and fourth Ecumenical councils. In each day and age the Holy Spirit indwells those whom God has called to lead the Church. And in every case, from apostle, to martyr, to ruler, the message of the Cross is the guiding principle. Therefore, today as we consider the sixth of the gifts of the Holy Spirit for the building up of the Church listed in Romans 12, we find that leadership with diligence means leadership with the Cross.

He who leads, with diligence,--Romans 12. The term diligence in Romans 12 means with energy, with forwardness, with earnest care yet also with haste. We might at first think that to be diligent is to be methodical, painstakingly careful, even slow. This is not what the word means,

biblically. Gen. David Petraeus of the 101st Airborne division during Operation Iraqi Freedom was quoted as saying “the bold move is usually the right move, unless it’s the wrong move.” Whatever pundits and politicians might say today, history will tell whether today’s bold moves were the right moves or not. To lead as a Christian leader, with faith, very often means being bold, where others might balk.

Another bold move that turned out to be the right move forms part of the basis of the feast of the Exaltation or Elevation of the Cross. We have the new icon in the back of the Church to the right of the door depicting part of the story in which the holy Patriarch Macarius was able to determine which pieces of wood belonged to the True Cross by their miraculous healing powers. Later, he would lift up the Cross so that all the multitudes might see it and be healed, just as Moses long ago lifted up the foreshadowing figure of the bronze serpent in the wilderness so that all who would see it were healed from the snake bites by which they were being plagued. Now we who reverently lift up the Cross and look up to it are healed by the bites and stings of temptation and sin, because He who was lifted up on the Cross took our sins and destroyed their power. Both the acts of Moses and Macarius were bold acts of faith. But this is not the bold act to which I was referring.

The bold move belongs to the Holy Emperor Constantine the great. He was the ruler of the Western Empire, seated in Britain. The Emperor of the East, seated in Rome, was the wicked persecutor Maxentius, who was making a move to seize power over the whole Empire, with ruthlessness and corruption. Constantine was obliged to come forth with his army, but was faced with difficult odds, outnumbered, approaching an ensconced enemy. He prayed that he might have some sign or some aid, and at that moment the Cross appeared in the sky formed of stars shining more brightly than the sun. “By this sign conquer” was inscribed upon it. The whole

army saw it, and marveled. Many feared and doubted, since of course the Cross was the sign of punishment and shame, of crucifixion and defeat. Even Constantine struggled to believe, and that night the Lord appeared to him and revealed that he should carry before him the sign of the Cross and not only Maxentus but the all other enemies would be vanquished. The next day he did so, having his smiths craft a great processional cross of gold and jewels such as the one he had seen, and he had his soldiers paint the sign of the Cross on their shields, helmets, and weapons.

When Maxentus heard that Constantine had entered Italy he led out a great host to smash his rival. Constantine, with diligence, led his army forward with the Cross before them. The rest is history. The bold move turned out to be the right move. Not only in that battle but in later battles the Lord proved steadfast in His promise. Once ruler of all the Empire, Constantine repealed the ban on Christianity in the Edict of Milan, ending what had been the bloodiest period of persecution the Church had known until the 20th century. The Holy Emperor was himself eventually baptized, and is now numbered among the saints.

To lead as a Christian means to be bold, even to the point of appearing foolish. ¹⁸“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (1 Cor. 1:18). To lead for Christ one must become like Christ, knowing that He is “the stone which the builders rejected [that] has become the chief cornerstone. This was the LORD’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.” (Matt 21:42). To lead means to face doubt, ridicule, rejection by the world, and even by our friends and families, and ourselves. As a cynical saying of the world goes: “No good deed goes unpunished...” so too the Christian leader will know some suffering for their boldness in this life. But as the Lord said, “In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

Brothers and sisters in Christ, let us be bold. If we are called to lead, let us do so with energy, for we have the Cross as our support; with haste, for the days are short and evil; with

courage, for we have nothing to fear. Thus we shall know what diligence means, and we shall be guided by a sign that is the nothing less than the power of God, the sign of the precious and life-giving Cross. Through its power, Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on us and save us, amen.