

Sunday after Elevation of the Cross 2006: A Study of Galatians

A sermon by the Rev. Fr. David G. Subu
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On the Sunday after the day of Holy Cross (Sept. 14) in the Orthodox churches we hear the Apostle Paul say, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20) Elsewhere we hear, "²⁷For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." (3:27) And similarly, "¹⁴But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. (6:14)" We are told that in Christ there is "a new creation" (6:15). So how can we as Christians experience this? How should we live in such a way that Christ lives within us? The Lord says in the Gospel, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." This daily act of taking up the Cross is the path of which Paul could boast, the way of Jesus Christ, and this way forms the core of his message to the Galatians.

This path of the Cross is also the path of the Spirit. One cannot be truly spiritual in this world without being crucified to the world with Christ. St. Paul explains in Gal. 5: "¹⁶I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh... ²⁴And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." To walk in the Spirit is the same as living the life of the Cross, calling us to crucify the flesh "with its passions and desires." How many ways the flesh wages war against the Spirit! So if in our own life we cannot say confidently with Paul that Christ "lives in me," then chances are that in one or more areas we have not crucified the flesh. St. Paul gives us a means to identify how: "¹⁹Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness,

lewdness, ²⁰idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, ²¹envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like...”

When we prepare for Holy Confession it is good to look at a list such as this to see in what areas of our life we are suffering. It may be one we don't easily recognize. We might be in outright denial of our sin or we do not realize its full impact. Perhaps the hurts of others left their mark on us early in life—and even though we did not commit the sin we carry its burden, for as children we often take the blame for that which is not our own. Most certainly we suffer the consequences. This is not only true of cases such as abuse or addiction, but with any passion. Every sin leaves its mark. A petty, jealous, envious, divisive, or ambitious parent can spiritually scar a child just as seriously as an adulterer or alcoholic. All of our experiences of sin can and should be identified that we might walk in liberty. St. Paul also says, “¹Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled *again* with a yoke of bondage.” How easy it is to become entangled again and again if we are unable or unwilling to see the full depth of our sin and its complex relationship to our life.

After this some of us may still sense emptiness in the life of our spirit. For some reason we have grown distant from Christ who wishes to dwell in us. Perhaps because being free from passions is only the start: we have to be filled with the Holy Spirit in return. How do we know if we are? If the works of the flesh are evident, even more so are the fruits of the Spirit: “²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, self-control.” When we ask the Lord to have mercy on us we are not only asking Him to preserve us from the works of the enemy but also that he grant us the riches of His grace—these spiritual fruits.

We may try very hard to rekindle the Spirit, wandering from one spiritual adventure to the next. We may begin to doubt our faith because we are not “getting anything” out of our worship. Like those who today seek a miracle diet or pill, we hope that somehow God will give us a quick fix, without us having to really take up the Cross and enter into a new way of life. A superficial change in our spiritual life will do nothing for us, but rather as St. Paul says, “*faith working through love,*” because “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.” Christian faith working through love, the same kind of self-emptying love that Christ has for us, is the only true cure for our spiritual illnesses, and the only way to take up the Cross effectively and meaningfully.