

SERMON ON THE APOSTOLIC READING FOR THE SUNDAY
AFTER THE ELEVATION OF THE PRECIOUS CROSS 15/9/2019
(Galatians 2:16-20)

Today, on this Sunday after the Elevation of the Holy Cross, we are once again reminded of the blessings that our Lord's sacrifice on the Cross has given us. The Lord was crucified on Golgotha, and it was there that He took upon Himself the iniquity of sin, and all the personal sins of humanity. They were nailed to the Cross with Him, "killing" these sins and destroying them. Or, as the Prayer of 6th Hour says, our Lord Jesus Christ, "by His precious Cross destroyed the record of our sins, triumphing over the source and power of darkness"; Every person who believes in Christ when they are baptized is freed from their sins, and when they come out of the waters of Baptism, a new life in Christ begins. The record of their past sins is purged, and they start fresh. Indeed, in our baptism we participate in the death and burial of Christ. As St. Paul writes: "*Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin*" (Romans 6:6). "*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation*" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

The Holy Apostle Paul writes about the grace of Christ acting and living within him. He has placed himself in Christ's hands. Everything he does is as Our Lord wills. Whether it is deciding where to go or what to do, Christ is in control. St. John Chrysostom has commented on these words of St. Paul, saying: "Because Paul did everything according to the will of God, he did not say "living in Christ," but much more-- "Christ lives inside me." Because he had Christ within, he acted according to the Divine Will.

Because of this great blessing, St. Paul's life was completely transformed, as he was under the light of faith in Christ and inspired by it. The Apostle's life was much like anyone else's, in that he had to eat and work to earn a living. Inside him, however, was the powerful faith in Christ's love for sinners, in such a way that he felt that Christ was crucified for him alone! In his own words, he writes to the Galatians: "*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.*" (verse 20).

My brothers and sisters, when we see the great heights that St. Paul reached, how much he is glorified by men and angels, precisely because he conformed his will to the will of Christ, then we can understand the power of the Christian life. Whoever chooses to walk the path of Christ, doing God's will in word and action, will succeed in every respect. We see the proof, not only in the life of St. Paul, but in all the Saints throughout the ages, no matter their social position. We remember their holy lives and miraculous intercessions with admiration, asking for their prayers to help us.

But even as we do this, a conflict arises. While we can accept all of this theoretically, it becomes much more difficult when we think about our own daily struggles, being dragged from thoughts of God by our personal weaknesses and temptations from evil. We lose our focus on God, and hear voices that sow doubts. These voices attempt to discourage us by telling us that the Gospel cannot be applied today in our corrupt society, and that not everyone can be like St. Paul. It is impossible!

Of course, all of these are merely attempts to "excuse our sins," as the Psalm says (140/141:4). When we talk about imitating St. Paul, we do not mean ascending to the third heaven or doing miracles. What we can do, is imitate his faith, love, and obedience to Christ. In that way, MILLIONS of Christians have imitated him. We are not alone in this, as we have divine Grace as our helper. With Almighty God, nothing is impossible! It is enough for us to want to take Our Lord's hand and follow the path that Christ has set for us, with His example and His word. Amen.