

"CHRIST HIMSELF IS OUR PEACE"

(Ephesians 2:14)

October 4, 2020

The concept of peace is emphasized often during the Divine Liturgy. "*Peace be with you all*" is the declaration of the Priest (or Bishop) to the faithful before every important part of the Divine Liturgy. At other times he urges the faithful to pray in peace: "*In peace let us pray to the Lord.*" Or asks "*for the peace of God,*" and "*for peace in the whole world.*" But the question arises: what does the Church mean by peace?

Before being led to His crucifixion and sacrifice, the Lord left this final pledge to His Disciples: "*Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you*" (John 14:27). We see here that the Lord speaks of His own peace, and He contrasts this peace with the "peace" of the world. As the God-fearing Fathers explain, the peace of Christ is an inner state of the soul, and is unaffected by anything on the outside. It is a peace that results from union with God the Father, who is "*the God of peace*" (Philippians 4:9). When Jesus said these words to His Disciples, He knew that He would soon be arrested, sentenced to death on the cross, and suffer the horrible Passion that we know. But none of this disturbed His peace, and He gave this peace to His Disciples as well. He also gave them courage: "*Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid*" (John 14:27). As we read in the lives of the Holy Apostles, this gift of peace from the Lord would remain undisturbed in their souls, even under persecution and martyrdom. This same peace of Christ would also be reflected in the faces of the later Christian martyrs, resulting in many pagans (even the martyrs' executioners) being moved to believe in Christ.

This peace of Christ was proclaimed by the Angels on the Holy Night of His Birth with the words: "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace*" (Luke 2:14). Peace is coming to the world. As the Prophet foretold: "*For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given*" Who "*will bring peace*" (Isaiah 9: 5-6). This is what the Apostle Paul emphasizes: "*He -the Christ- Himself is our peace*" (Ephesians 2:14). This peace that the Lord has given to us is three-dimensional, in that it reconciles us with God, ourselves, and those around us. Let us try to look more deeply at the first: Our peace with God.

As we know, humanity's relationship with God was disrupted by the blatant violation of God's command by Adam and Eve. They disobeyed God, and in doing so obeyed the devil, who hates God. By following him, the human race became an enemy of God. Christ brought us out of this tragic situation, in that from love He came to us, and with His crucifixion and sacrifice reconciled us to God the Father. This is what the Apostle Paul says: "*when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son*" (Romans 5:10).

The wonderful thing here is that our Lord Jesus Christ not only reconciled us with the Heavenly Father once (with the Sacrament of Baptism), but He constantly reconciles us to Him, as He never leaves us. No matter how many times we sin and break our relationship with God, we can repent, with our compassionate Lord restoring us to peace with God through the Sacrament of Repentance. This is why the believer always awaits peace as a gift from God, because they know that in "*God's peace there is no end*" (Isaiah 9:6). And it is for this reason of needing the peace of Christ that the Church (through her Priests or Bishops) often blesses the faithful with this prayer of

peace; *"Peace be with you all."* The Apostle Paul, in his Epistles used to offer a similar blessing and wish, that Christians would have the grace and peace of the Lord Jesus Christ (see Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:3, etc.). In every Divine Liturgy (as well as in all of the Holy Sacraments and daily Holy Services) our first request is: *"For the peace of God."* We beg the Lord to give us His own peace from above, the true and lasting peace. This is the peace that St. Paul writes about which *"surpasses all understanding, (and this peace) will safeguard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus"* (Philippians 4:7). People cannot comprehend how great and valuable this blessing is, the peace of Christ!

This is why, my brothers and sisters, from the depth of our souls, let us beg the Lord to give us His precious peace. Every time the Priest or the Bishop blesses us, he wishes: *Peace be with you all."* It is for us to accept this with deep gratitude, and to reciprocate with: *"and with your spirit."* May we carefully live our lives with openness to our Lord Jesus Christ, so that His peace can continually come into our hearts. Amen.