

## Peace with Ourselves

(11.10.2020)

The source of peace, as we saw in our previous sermon, is Christ, who is the “Prince of Peace.” Because the faithful Christian is in communion with this inexhaustible source, they are rewarded with the peace of God continually flowing into their hearts. ***“Let the peace of God rule in your hearts”*** (Colossians 3:15).

But what does the Apostle Paul, and the Bible in general, mean by the word *heart*? Of course, they are not referring to the physical heart which is located in the body, but the spiritual heart, which expresses the hidden world of the soul. The spiritual heart is the center of the human personality, and of our very existence. It is where a person’s spiritual life develops, and where the believer chooses to meet their Creator, God.

Everyone wants peace to reign in their heart, and as we all know, the Lord came to earth to make that happen. His coming brought us this long-awaited peace. But every great treasure is in danger of being lost, and this includes the precious treasure of peace. The danger is not external, as even in the midst of terrible torture, the Holy Martyrs kept their peace. The threat comes from within. The Lord spoke of this, in that His peace cannot co-exist in the heart with the desires of sin, which are deadly. If we are careless and allow sin to enter our hearts, Christ’s Peace departs.

How does this happen? In the beginning, a temptation comes and knocks on the door of the heart. It can be a cunning thought, an illicit desire, or an impulse to commit a wrong act. The human conscience, which is the spiritual eye given to us by the Holy Spirit, discerns the danger and warns the heart to reject this temptation. If the heart hears this voice of the enlightened conscience, then it will be saved from danger. No matter how many times temptations come, peace will remain in the heart if this vigorous resistance is maintained. If the heart rejects the urgings of conscience, and accepts the entrance of sin, then the peace of God disappears.

But not all hope is lost. A person can turn away from this disturbance of the soul and internal battle, and move towards Christ. When this happens, peace can return to the heart. This is because Christ, who is the “Lord of Peace,” gives a repentant believer His grace, so that the passions of sin can be overcome. Fears of domination will melt away, and the person will have strength, patience and courage to face the difficult circumstances of life. This faith and belief in “the God of peace” is with us, and provides a powerful feeling of security and inner peace. The soul will calm down, along with the conscience, and self-reconciliation will occur. The repentant person will not grumble, or feel sorry for themselves and their “bad luck,” as some do. Their hearts will be filled with joy, and all other fruits of the Holy Spirit. The individual who has peace in their heart feels that the gates of Heaven are open to them; that their prayers are welcomed by God and that the merciful Lord will fulfill their requests, which are in accordance with the Divine Will. Those who have this peace of heart, receive a taste of the bliss of the heavenly Kingdom.

My dear brothers and sisters, since it is so vital to keep the peace of Christ in our hearts at all times, we need to be very careful not to allow any kind of evil to enter our hearts that will drive away this peace. Instead, let every thought, desire, and deed we seek be for the peace of Christ within us. That is why our supplications to the Holy Spirit often include a petition to receive this precious gift of His peace, the blessings of which are beyond comprehension, as St. Paul the Apostle writes: *“The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 4:7).

I would like to ask, that in the Divine Liturgy (and all other Holy Services) we pay particular attention to the prayers of the Priest, which refer to this peace. Instead of allowing them to pass

indifferently, let these requests for peace touch our hearts, each time focusing our minds with a warm faith. Also, when the Deacon or Priest calls us to “*again and again in peace let us pray to the Lord,*” may we hear this call and reject thoughts that cause turmoil or anxiety, and devote ourselves to what is happening during that holy time of worshipping God. And when the Priest blesses us with “*Peace be with you all,*” let us humbly bow down and accept it, as if from Christ Himself giving the blessing of peace. Every day, let our request in prayer be: “***O Lord our God, grant us peace***” (Isaiah 26:12). Amen.