

## Sunday of the Veneration of the Holy and Precious Cross

The cross tells us that Jesus Christ is born our infirmities and will heal us. We must bring our infirmities to him

Great Lent, 3/11/2018 ns

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In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen<sup>1</sup>.

I read the letter of Divine Ascent every Great Lent. It's a book by St. John Climacus – we commemorate him next week. I recommend it to everybody, except perhaps some of chapter 5 for some of you. It's really a remarkable book. It has things like this in it, that remind me very much about the cross.

**“Let us who are weak and passionate have the courage to offer our infirmity and natural weakness to Christ with unhesitating faith and confess it to Him; and we shall be certain to obtain His help, even beyond our merit, if only we unceasingly go right down to the depth of humility.”<sup>2</sup>**

I was thinking about what he said, and how little we do this. Yes, we say things like “Lord have mercy”, and we say our prayers, but do we really from the depth of our heart say to God:

“I'm weak, I can't get it done.”

“I don't love my neighbor and my enemy.”

“I don't know how to always have good thoughts in my head.”

“I don't know how to stop doing this and start doing that.”

“I'm kind of a mess.”

That's what this teaching by St. John reminds me of, that we should have this idea in our heart that: “I can't do it” and offer our infirmity to God. This is what today's feast is about.

It's not about this idea that people have that there was some sort of sacrifice that Jesus made to his Father (that was necessitated by God's nature). The reason that our Lord was on the cross was in order to cleanse us and heal us. It was to drive a stake – the Canon talks about that – into Hades, to break it. The reason that He did this is because He fully feels our infirmities.

I'm not even sure we really feel her for infirmities. Actually, I'm positive that we don't. A lot of what we feel such as unhappiness or dissatisfaction – is really our own brokenness, the fact that we have these infirmities that only God can heal. And He is the high priest that knows our infirmities. The Epistle of today talks about that. He “was in all points tempted like as we are”<sup>3</sup>, except that He was without sin. He knows what it's like to be human being that is corrupt and incomplete. He took that corrupt human flesh and made it incorrupt. He understands, He remembers. Therefore, He is someone we can go to and say: “I'm broken”. You can say things to Jesus Christ that you wouldn't dare say to another person. You have to learn to be able to say those things to Jesus Christ, because He identifies with your infirmities.

The cross is always associated with the resurrection. We don't speak of the cross without speaking of the resurrection. In fact, every Sunday matins has a canon that is entitled "To the Cross and Resurrection". So, when you look upon the cross, it is no longer an instrument of death but an instrument of victory. It was God's way, after He became man, to have His human flesh die (which is what happens to human flesh including His) and go down into Hades and break that connection between sin and death. He died just as human flesh died but He did not have any sin, so there was no hook – the father's talk about a hook – there was no hook to Christ, so the devil could not hold onto Him, because there was no sin, whereas we die and we have sin and the devil can have a hold on us.

Christ died to break that hold, and yet we see evidence of that hold in our life. We see brokenness in our life.

I hope you see brokenness in your life, and not in a way that is destructive. So much of our feelings about our brokenness are destructive – addiction, depression, bad self-esteem, anxiety - all that sort of stuff – all these afflictions that seem to be everywhere in our modern society, which does not seem to know how to live. You should feel broken but not broken in that way, because that's just destructive. Instead, you should say to the Lord: "I have these infirmities and I know You bore my infirmities, You can help me – You're the only one Who can."

I hope that, over time, your prayer much more intimate, where it's not just a recitation of things, but at your heart saying: "God help me, You're my life, there is no life without Thee".

That's what the cross is saying to me, every day. We should wear it upon our breast and make the sign of the cross when we do things, because without the cross there would not have been His death. Without the death of Christ, He would not have gone down in the Hades and He would not have broken that connection between sin and death. And He would not have given us the capability to defeat sin and to defeat death.

And yet, we are broken, and we have infirmities. So, we must go to the One who bore our infirmities. He was in all points tempted like us yet without sin.

Paul goes on to say: "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."<sup>4</sup> That's also what St. John's advice is: "Let us who are weak and passionate have the courage to offer our infirmity and natural weakness to Christ with unhesitating faith". They are the same exact idea, one from the apostle, and the other one from one who followed the Apostle, perhaps something like 700 years later.

Bring your infirmities before God. We are accustomed to hiding our infirmities, because we don't look too bad, but if we should go to God and say:

"I'm broken, I can't really figure out how to love this person, and how not to have bad thoughts about him."

"I can't really figure out how to stop having these unclean thoughts."

"I can't really figure how to stop being irritable and making people mad at me."

"I really can't figure out how to stop being lazy and say my prayers."

"I can't really figure out much of anything."

You bring that before God, and He knows what that's like because He bore the infirmities of the human race - all of them. He did not have them, for instance, He didn't have infirmity of being lazy, but He did bear our infirmities, and He knows and understands every single problem you have. This is because He is a human being. Now, He changed His humanity to be perfected, which is where our humanity is going. That's what the cross saying.

After liturgy we are going out to our "Old Rugged Cross", as long as it's not raining, and prostrate before it as we normally do. And we will sing this hymn:

**"Before thy Cross, we bow down and worship O master, and Thy Holy Resurrection we glorify."**

The Most of the time when you make a prostration it is because of penitence. A prostration is because we are unworthy; it is because we say: "Lord help me", like we do for the prayer of St Ephrem. There is always this echo of penitence, because it's built on our memory – that is, if you do enough prostrations it's built in your memory – if you hardly ever do prostrations, you might not understand this. But if you do prostrations a lot, there's a certain sense of unworthiness, and also boldness.

Today, these prostrations are not because of penitence, it is remembering our infirmity and remember that He bore our infirmities, and we are going to get up! Sometimes some of us have a little trouble getting up but we are all going to get up. The Lord will get us up. There is the resurrection. We can experience it to different degrees in this life - some of us a lot some of us learned little. Some of us have just too many troubles.

I hear so many troubles. I heard from somebody who has a lot of troubles last night. Those troubles are Not going to go away for a long time, but this person is approaching them in the right way and putting their infirmities before God. Fortunately, there some resources that this person knows about and that I've also put them in contact with, and it's a long hard road, but God knows that road – He walked that road. That's what the epistle says and this advice from St. John Climacus says. That's what the cross says, that you, the person who is messed up, can be healed completely.

That's what I hope is in your heart when you do these prostrations at the end of liturgy. The resurrection is coming, and it is also happening. There is a future resurrection, when there is no sickness or sorrow or sighing anymore, and there is the resurrection working itself into us – now. There is still sickness, and sorrow, and sighing; there are still long days and long weeks and long years, and difficulties that might never ever get rectified completely. But there is the resurrection happening in you now. I hope you have some consolation and you feel that resurrection in the midst of your infirmities, and you feel God helping you, and you feel confident that He will help you even though you are unworthy.

Just try, besides rattling off your prayers – try sometimes just saying to God: I'm broken, and I know that You know what being broken is like, and You can fix it". That's what I say to God when I prostrate before the cross. And every day, my days are mixture of contrasts. There are wonderful, beautiful and holy things that happen, and in the midst of it there I am and I am not wonderful or beautiful or holy. So, this this sort of cognitive dissonance that occurs all the time and yet somehow things happen. I hope that is happening with you too; I hope that you are seeing things happen in your life. I hope that no matter how dark it seems that you know that there is light.

There's no substitute really for work, you must do the work, but besides the work there is grace, there is God grace helping you. That's what the cross is telling you today. I hope it is telling you this, that's what I'm telling you that you should be hearing, because I hear that resounding. Just try this. When you prostrate before the cross today just think a little bit, see if you can break the Pres. and remember the sermon. We don't remember things;

it's hard to remember what somebody said five minutes after they said it. But let there be this sort of engram in your heart that says: "I'm broken and God knows what it's like to be broken, and He can fix me". So, I'm going down saying "I'm broken", but I'm getting up because God can make me stand<sup>5</sup>. That's what the cross means. God bless you and help you.

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<sup>1</sup> A homily given by Priest Seraphim Holland ([seraphim@orthodox.net](mailto:seraphim@orthodox.net)), during Liturgy for the Veneration of the Precious Cross, Great Lent, 2018. You may quote for this, as long as you give attribution, and the URL.

<sup>2</sup> The Ladder of Divine Ascent, Step 8.8

<sup>3</sup> Hebrews 4: 15 "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."

<sup>4</sup> Hebrews 14: 16

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Romans 14:4 Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.