



My Beloved Ones,

In this week's Epistle to the Galatians, the Apostle Paul wishes to emphasize the importance of Christ's Crucifixion to our salvation. So often, in a simplistic understanding of the Christian faith, the role of struggle and pain is minimized when people speak of how to achieve reunion with God in His Kingdom. May believe that Heaven is simply a reward. However, As St. Paul explains, *"...we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law."* (Galatians 2:16) This week's readings demonstrate that it is not simply about doing good, but living through pain and temptation.

Though the central event in our Faith is Christ's Resurrection, there can be no victory without struggle.

It is for this reason that our Lord tells His Disciples, *"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me"* (Mark 8:34). Just as Baptism does not cleanse us from sin for all time, our journey toward salvation is a constant process of crucifying our passions in this fallen world.

Indeed, St. Paul acknowledges this also when he says, *"...if I build up again the very things that I once tore down, then I demonstrate that I am a transgressor."* (Galatians 2:18) This spirit of correcting our transgressions was the very purpose of Moses's Law, as St. Paul simply writes, *"For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God."* (Galatians 2:19) Though the Law was provided to help the Israelites walk in God's ways, we now live in a time when the God-Man walked with us in true perfection. As Christians who venerate the Cross, we know what means to say, *"I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me."* (Galatians 2:19-20) While we are still in the world, we are indeed transformed people. Though we may be subject to the temptations of our time and place, by keeping our eyes on our Lord's Cross, we have a model for how to withstand suffering. Even more, we know that our Lord understands what it means to suffer pain, and that He remains with us, helping us to bear our Crosses, as Simon of Cyrene helped him to carry His Cross.

As St. Paul speaks so movingly of all Christians *"...the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."* (Galatians 2:20) Though we shall all struggle with our weaknesses, we do so now in the understanding that we are children of God, whose faith can be a source of inspiration in times of struggle, as we continue to seek true communion with Him who created us and saved us.

+ALEXIOS

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