



My Beloved Ones,

This Sunday after the Feast of the Holy Cross, 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)*. This is a very strong commandment. Those great commandments of loving God & loving our neighbor bring us joyful & positive feelings, but taking up our cross suggests difficulty & pain, since we struggle with our personal pains & passions. Indeed, if a great part of man’s fallen nature tries to avoid this contact with the hurtful reality of our world, how can we truly call ourselves followers of Jesus?

Writing about the purpose of suffering in our lives, a modern monastic theologian, Monk Moses the Hagiorite, says that *“...before God sent us the cross we carry, He weighed it, [and] examined it carefully with His omniscient, love and justice... You think that it is heavier than you can lift, while you have unknown and undiscovered powers within you. Don't lose your courage... God, he knows very well what he is doing... Do not forget that Golgotha is always before the Empty Tomb. The Resurrection follows the Crucifixion.”* Indeed, as Christians

who believe in the Resurrection, these words are uplifting, but if the saying is true that “God does not give us more than we can handle”, the question which follows is: How do we discover these unknown powers in ourselves?

The answer, of course, is through prayer and repentance, which helps calm our minds and hearts from difficult or evil thoughts. Of course, strengthening these spiritual muscles happens thanks to the guidance of our spiritual hospital, the Church. Understanding the Church as a hospital for those in spiritual pain, this makes our Priests, spiritual doctors. These Doctors, Monk Moses says, *“...approach the sick to free them, to reorient them, to correct them through repentance. [Priests] participate as much as they can in pain in order to alleviate it and make crosses lighter. It is a great request of the sufferers when they understand the meaning of their cross.”*

This, my beloved, is a moving phrase: *“...the meaning of our Cross”*. Instead of asking God to take away our difficulties, praying for patience and perseverance can help us understand our sufferings, and these can help us to carry our Cross easier. Monk Moses writes that a person can see their pain as an opportunity to learn a more Christ-like patience, *“[H]e faces the problem very differently; if [pain] does not fill him with joy, it nevertheless fills him with hope. Divine Grace can lead the severely tested to this maturity. We will speak the good word, but the Grace of God will complete this work.”*

In this week’s Epistle, St. Paul speaks of this completion when he tells the Church of Galatia, *“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me; and 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 2:19-20)*. Though we may suffer, we have a model for suffering in the person of our Crucified and Resurrected Lord. As Monk Moses testifies, *“...welcome pain cleanses the soul. We demonstrate our love for Christ by enduring pain. Pain is a cross, on which we crucify our passions. Through this voluntary crucifixion, our reborn self will be resurrected.”* Though we will continue to struggle, now we struggle because we know that if we die to the world, we will live with Christ in eternity.

+ALEXIOS

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