



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

PARISH OF THE ANNUNCIATION OF OUR LADY, “EVANGELISMOS”

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“THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP”

EPISTLE The Reading is from St Paul’s Letter to the Galatians
[2:16-20]

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified. But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not. For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ, it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

EXPLANATION: This is the only New Testament letter which St Paul addressed to the group of Churches in Galatia, in an attempt to make them understand that man is justified (that is, made righteous), not merely by works of the Law, but through faith in Jesus Christ. It is the faith of Christ – His belief, His trust, His obedience that justifies us, not the Law or simply

doing good works. The view of the Jews was that one becomes righteous by fulfilling the requirements of the Law. St Paul tells them to be justified they must imitate Christ's faith which is seen in His entire life on earth, and not just in His more spectacular good works. God introduced the works of the Law to protect mankind until the time when our union with the Son of God became possible. The purpose of divine sonship is for us to become like God and to enter heaven. Whereas Israel was under the Old Covenant, wherein righteousness and salvation came through faith as revealed in Law, the Christian Church is under a New Covenant. That is, salvation comes through faith in Christ Who fulfils the law, and we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us through Baptism, and leads us to the knowledge of God the Father. Today, the Protestants of the Reformation period experienced a rediscovery of "faith in Christ". Their slogan of salvation became "solafides" (Latin) meaning justification was by "faith alone". That is, salvation depended on accepting Christ as your Saviour and human works of merit, and not upon the mercy of God. Orthodoxy emphasizes that it is first God's mercy, not our faith, which saves us. Through God's mercy we are justified by faith and empowered by God for good works of righteousness which bring glory to Him. For Orthodox Christians, faith is living, dynamic, continuous – never static or merely point in time. Faith is not something a Christian exercises only at one critical moment, expecting it to cover all the rest of his life. True faith is not just a decision, it's a way of life. This is why the modern evangelical Protestant question, "Are you saved?" gives pause to an Orthodox believer. For him the answer can only be – "I have been saved, being joined to Christ in Baptism; I am being saved, growing in Christ through the sacramental life of the Church; I will be saved by the mercy of God at the Last Judgment. Nowhere does the Bible say that we are justified by faith "alone". On the contrary, "faith by itself, if it does not have works is dead". (James 2:17) **(2:16)** St Paul

explains that once the Jew is **“in Christ”**, he discovers that such faith is not only necessary, but also sufficient for righteousness. He then sees that the Law is, after all, not necessary at all. But Paul foresees that the Jews will say that **“in seeking to be made righteous in Christ, we will become lawless like the **“Gentile sinners”** who do not have the Judaic Law and Christ will have a defacto function for us as an agent of sin. But Paul says, **“by no means”**, for in Christ you are all sons of God through faith. It was the absolute authority of the Law that was **“torn down”** in Christ. It was our guardian until Christ, but now that faith has come, we no longer need it. For if Paul were to attempt now to restore the law, he would prove himself a **“transgressor”**. That is, having destroyed the **“works of the law”** (that is, proving their ineffectiveness for salvation), he would be a transgressor if he tries to reinstate the Jewish Law. (2:17-18) There is no contradiction between law and Christ’s gospel. The Law is holy and good, but it is now obsolete because it is fulfilled in the gospel in Christ Himself. We voluntarily **“die to the law”** and become alive to the law of the Spirit, through Baptism and union with Christ. (2:19) To be **“crucified with Christ”** means to mortify our sinful passions and desires. Then one begins a new life in Christ and no longer lives under the dominion of sinful passions. **“Christ lives in him”** and man achieves the aim of Christian life – union with Christ. (2:20)**

GOSPEL The Reading is from St Mark [8:34-38, 9:1]

When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, **“Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his**

soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.” And He said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power.”

EXPLANATION:

Since Peter had rebuked Him for wanting to be crucified, the Lord called the people together and taught them the cost of discipleship – self-denial; **carrying one’s Cross** (a symbol of suffering), and obedience to Christ. To **“deny oneself and take-up his cross”**, Jesus means that His followers should separate themselves from their sins and from the inclination of their hearts towards evil, crucifying the flesh with its passions and desires. **(8:34)** To **“save one’s life”** means to base one’s earthly life on self. This is the opposite of self-denial, and ultimately leads to loss of eternal life. To **“lose one’s life”** is to accept suffering and sacrifice for the sake of Christ and His Kingdom, which ultimately brings salvation. Discipleship is costly; it requires giving up all claim to everything the world holds dear. **(8:35)** All the money in the world cannot buy eternal life. Nothing is more valuable than our soul – our spiritual being, our life. **(8:36-37)** Intellectual faith does not suffice, but confession of faith with one’s mouth is required as well. Therefore, if one is ashamed to confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, of him also shall Jesus be ashamed to confess him before His Father in heaven. **(8:38)** Since He speaks of His own glory, wishing to show that He is not vainly boasting, He says that, **“there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the Kingdom of God present with power”**. That is, Peter, James and John, who shall not die until I have shown them at the Transfiguration the glory with which I shall appear at the Second Coming. **(9:1)**