



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

PARISH OF THE ANNUNCIATION OF OUR LADY, “EVANGELISMOS”

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“SALVATION THROUGH CHRIST”

EPISTLE: The Reading is from St Paul’s letter to the Galatians [6:11-18] See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand! As many as desire to make a good showing in the flesh, these would compel you to be circumcised, only that they may not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. For not even those who are circumcised keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God. From now on let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus. Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

EXPLANATION: Here, St Paul writes to those people in the Roman Province of Galatia, in Asia Minor, who have already fallen into the trap of the Jewish legalisers (Paul's opponents) who claim that Christians must also follow the laws of the Old Covenant and be circumcised. Paul's concern was that those who have accepted circumcision were now enticing and compelling their brethren to do likewise, not because for the **"sake of the Cross"** (that is, for Christ's sake), but because they wanted to **"boast in the flesh"** (that is, to look good in the eyes of others) and to gain "converts". Hence, Paul attempts to dissuade them from following the teachings of his opponents and tells them in his letter that such people do not actually care for the Galatians' well-being, but rather their sole interest is to boast that one can be saved only by following the Mosaic law which includes circumcision. But, even though they accept circumcision, they do not obey and keep all of the Law's commandments. This is evidence of their hypocrisy. **(6:11-13)** Paul then sets himself as a counter-example to **"those who are letting themselves be circumcised"**. In contradiction to them, he is not trying to win the Galatians over to "his side" for personal glory or boasting, since for him that lies only in the **"Cross of Our Lord, Jesus Christ"**. Because he has been crucified with Christ, he has died to the law which constituted his "world" before Christ. And in order to stress this reality Paul says crucifixion in his case works both ways – both he and the "world" have been crucified to each other. **(6:14)** Therefore, neither **circumcision** nor **uncircumcision** has any value. Circumcision has been replaced by a **"new creation"**, that is "a new Christian person", a new kind of reality that does not fit within the categories of the Old Law, a new way of life in Christ Jesus that now requires – regeneration through Baptism; the renewal of the complete person in Christ; the circumcision of the heart; obedience in Christ and growth in

perfection; being justified by grace, God's righteousness which becomes ours; freedom from the power of sin, and dependence on the Holy Spirit. All these lead to righteousness, not circumcision. **(6:15)** The **"Israel of God"**, refers to the Church, both Jews and Gentiles who have accepted Paul's gospel. **(6:16)** The **"marks of Jesus"** refer to the physical sufferings Paul endured during his Apostolic mission. His intention in this verse is to admonish the Galatians against **"troubling"** him by continuing to question the validity of His apostleship, as they had done repeatedly in the past, for merely looking at him, they can see that he bears sure evidence of his apostleship. **(6:17-18)**

GOSPEL: **The Reading is from St John [3:13-17]** **No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.**

EXPLANATION: St John records a conversation with Nicodemus who was one of the Pharisees who supported Jesus and came to him by night to hear his teachings. Jesus says to Nicodemus that if you do not believe the **"earthly things"** I am teaching you, then how is it possible to understand and believe in **"heavenly things"**. No one on earth has access to such knowledge, for **"no one has ascended into heaven"** from earth to visit there and return with such wisdom. Jesus alone is able to impart such wisdom, as the Son of Man – the Messiah, Who **"descended from heaven"** and is thus able to declare heavenly realities.

(3:13) And this descent from heaven was not simply to teach, but to give life to the world, even though offering His body in death. Using the Old Testament image of the life-giving **serpent that Moses lifted up in the wilderness** to cure the Israelites from the deadly bites of poisonous snakes, Christ declares a veiled prophecy of His own death, when He will be lifted up on the Cross, giving **eternal life to** all who believe in Him and look to Him with faith. The Jews thought that eternal life in the age to come would be bestowed on all Jews indiscriminately, simply because they were Jewish – the “chosen people of God”. But Christ says, on the contrary, eternal life is in Him; to reject Him is to forfeit their hope of eternal life. **(3:14-15)** God’s gift of His Son is the ultimate expression of His love for the **world**; that the whole world – Jew and Gentile, may be saved through Him. **(3:16)** The purpose of Christ’s coming is to save; but the result is also condemnation for those who will not believe. **(3:17)** In fact, John 3:16 has been called “the Gospel in miniature”. If we were to lose the entire New Testament, our loss would be tragic but we would still have the heart of the Gospel if we had this one verse. For in the few words of this verse, we have the whole message of Christianity – **“For God so loved the world that, He gave His only begotten Son”**. Everything He does is motivated by love. It was love that made God fashion man in His own image. It was love that prompted God to send His Son into the world that **“whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life”**. This is the essence of Christianity – the promise of salvation and eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ Our Saviour. To believe this verse is to find the heart of the Christian faith. It is to find the love of God. It is to find forgiveness, salvation, peace with God and eternal life.