

5-19-19 Perseverance with Christ

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In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Christ is Risen. Indeed, He is risen.

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This morning, I would like to start by making sure you are all comfortable. Sit. Sit down. Lay down if you need to. We are in a recovery period right now. We ran the marathon of Lent and Holy Week and Pasca, and the church in its wisdom when we pay attention gives us an equal amount of time to recover, to look back on how we performed as spiritual athletes to in a time of rest and richness and nutrition look back and see what we can do better next time, but not from the state of anxiety or judgment of ourselves, but simply in humility really in the end reflecting on how we did, how gracious God is, what we'd like to accomplish next year.

Every year, I say this often, I think. Every year, there's a different core of people in every parish everywhere who commit to a degree that they had never committed to before. They experience something they've never experienced before and the reality of entering into the sacrifice of Christ's passion and his resurrection is more real, more tangible than ever before in their life. That core rotates from year to year, but every year, that core invigorates the rest of the community, whether we know that or not.

No man is an island, and when one of us does well spiritually, it benefits everyone else in the church. When one of us stumbles, it can also stumble to a degree our brothers and sisters as well, but we're in this time of purposefully intentionally relaxing a little bit, getting more nutrition, resting a little bit more than we did before. We don't want to drop our guard far enough that we become spiritually vulnerable, but we do want to drop it enough to experience the grace of God empowering us and protecting us in the rejoicing of his resurrection.

In the ancient tradition of the church, after the 40 days of fasting and the days of Holy Week and the days of Pasca itself, the church gave them the 50 days from Pasca to Pentecost to rest. Having accomplished the great 40 days, we enter into the great 50 days of celebrating, and this is a time where we look back in joy and gratitude to God for what he has accomplished through his death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead, his ascension into heaven, our salvation. We look back on it and we see how we did participating in the remembrance of it, the recollection, anamnesis of that event, and make a little bit of a plan as what we're going to do in the coming year.

On this Sunday when we look at the epistle reading and the Gospel reading, providentially the saint of the day as well, we see that there is so much action in the life of Christ, the life of his saints. We of course have entered into the action, the activity, the work of Jesus Christ in his resurrection. We see in the reading from the book of Acts, and if you are not, I would highly recommend that you are reading the book of Acts right now. We are looking at the reality, the fruit, the manifestation of the Holy Spirit after Christ's ministry in the book of Acts, what is supposed to happen after Christ is resurrected and the Holy Spirit comes.

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Read the book of Acts at this time. This morning, we heard the account of Peter traveling around. Some of us have had the blessing of being in Joppa, where Peter was in this reading, and having watched Christ in the action and the work, the energy of our savior, healing the sick and raising the dead, Peter himself having persevered through his own fears, his own running away, his own rejection threefold of Christ. He has endured, persevered as an apostle, and we find him healing the sick and raising the dead just like Christ.

Christ has done the unbelievable things. Christ in the Gospel reading we hear heals a man who is sick 38 years. Peter's sick person was only sick for eight years. Pretty amazing, still. Christ raises Lazarus after he has been in the tomb four days and he is stinking. Peter raises Tabitha from death a day or two dead, but is that not great enough? Is that not enough us as the servants of Christ imitating our master, our Lord and Savior? We see in the commemoration today of the Holy Prophet Job, who is not a mythical figure to us, he is real.

It is a real story. He is a real prophet. He is a man who spoke with God. If you read Job, you'll see that that conversation is long and detailed. It's a wonderful, wonderful story of his experience personally with God speaking to the logos, Christ before he was incarnate. Is Job not the example of perfect perseverance? Everything stripped away from him, and he allows it out of his love for God. Everything taken away from him, everything material, all of his children lost. For just a moment, put your mind into his place, all of your children dead, and he endures actively in his faith in Christ.

He doesn't know exactly what to do, that people around him are giving him bad advice, but he endures in his faith in God and is restored many, many, many fold. As tender and soft as we are these days, what's the term they use now? Snowflake, I think. Imagine being a person whose relationship with God was so strong, so steadfast that when everything is taken away from you, including your kids, you continue on in faith, and you rejoice when material blessings and new children are given to you. There's the little part of me that is a modern snowflake thinks, "Well, what about those other kids? I mean, shouldn't we go on lamenting that they are gone?"

Well, to a degree, of course, but if we trust in God, where are they? They're in heaven. That's better than being on earth. Saint Basil the Great says, "It is better to die honorably than to live dishonorably." Think about that attitude. If we met St Basil today, I mean, we would think he was a gladiator truly in his attitude. In all of this, Job, the man at the sheep's pool who has been sick for 38 years, did he not persevere? Peter in his own weaknesses and denying Christ, did he not persevere? Us in Lent to the best degree that we could, did we not persevere?

I want to add a different element to that word perseverance, especially in Lent or after Lent, at least for me, it takes on a little bit of not a negative connotation, but it's like I'm done with that for a while. Please, I persevered. Let's be on vacation for a while. What we find in perseverance, really, when we look at what does perseverance mean? When we look at Job, when we look at after the man at the sheep's pool, when we look at Christ himself in his ministry and passion, when we look at Peter, when we look at ourselves in Lent, what perseverance really is, and this becomes exciting.

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This is the Saint Basil, the gladiator, interpretation of perseverance. Perseverance is not gritting our teeth and holding on and going on even though life is so terrible. Perseverance is faith in action. Perseverance is active. Perseverance is most of the time joyful. Perseverance is trusting in God, in his providence working in our life. Perseverance is working actively and not caring that we have to labor. Father Michael Pomazansky in his book, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, he points out very clearly that when God made man, he made him to work. He didn't make him to labor. He made him to work.

One of the things that makes us like in the image of God is that God is always working. He's always active. He never labors. Nothing is hard for him, but he is never static. He is never sterile. He has never still. He is always active and always working. Before the fall, God says to Adam and Eve, "Have dominion over the earth. Subdue everything. Be the manager of everything. Till the ground. Expand the garden. When we read the saints carefully, we see that Adam and Eve's material level job was to expand the garden of Eden generation after generation, being individual creatures, being human beings that were not going to die until the entire earth was one single garden of Eden.

That was their job. They were going to be active and working for forever, but it wasn't going to be hard. Father Michael points out that when Adam and Eve fall, he doesn't say to Adam, "Oh man, now that you've sin, you're going to have to till the ground. Get that plow. You're going have to till." No, he's already planning on tilling. He probably already was tilling, but it wasn't hard to till. What came in afterwards was now, everywhere you till, these weeds are going to grow where you disturbed the ground right. Instead of beautiful flowers and plants and grass coming up, weeds are going to come up.

You're going to sweat. We didn't sweat in paradise. You're going to sweat and labor. It's going to hurt your muscles, and you're going to get hungry and tired, and you're going to collapse in the sun, and get dehydrated, and weeds are going to grow everywhere. That's the labor that comes into the action and the work. Even when he talks to Eve, he doesn't say to her, "Oh, you've sinned now, so now you're going to have to have kids." It seems like that would have been punishment enough. She's already been told, "Be fruitful and multiply." Procreation is a pre-fallen, not only condition and ability, but command.

It's now that when you're fruitful and multiply, when we look the world, we see the world's cure to that is just to not be fruitful and multiply. I'm not going to obey again. When you are fruitful and multiply, it's going to be painful. It's going to be difficult. You are going to labor in your child giving. What comes into the world which we experience in lent and we see in the Gospel, in the epistle today and the celebration of the Holy Prophet Job, that we must have an attitude that we are going to be a people who work, who are active all of the time in our prayer, in our fasting, in our doing good works, looking for the will of God, searching for the truth.

We are going to be active all of the time, and we are going to receive the labor that a company is now in this fallen state, our activity as the therapy that God has given us to be healed. In the orthodox tradition, Adam and Eve are not cursed by God, and now there's this painful punishment of labor that accompanies everything that we try and do. Adam and Eve put themselves into a cursed situation by disobeying God. They cursed themselves. The therapy, the

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healing that is going to be given to them is that now having done their own will, they're going to have to live with the ramifications of their own decisions, which makes everything hard, everything laborious.

As we are comfortable and relaxed, as we are eating rich foods, crying out, "Christ is risen," we want to be laying a plan for being particularly beginning with the feast of Pentecost, people who are energized and active, people who are always as an icon of God, an image of God being active and working and learning to completely ignore, completely accept or completely love the labor that comes along with all of that work that we're doing. When we are tired, we rest. When we have made it through lent, we celebrate the whole Pentecost period as a period of recovery.

As spiritual athletes, we have made an incredible effort in the marathon that we ran or the match that we wrestled or the arena that we entered into as spiritual gladiators. Now is the time when we recover and rejoice, but the next time we go into the arena, we want to do even better. In this time of recovery and rejoicing and rest and nutrition, we look at the spiritual performance of ourselves, and we make a plan for next year, not because it's going to come again and we have to persevere through it, but because it's a glorious time, a glorious championship round of the athleticism that we participate in all year long.

May God give us that strength and that love of activity and work and that ability to know that although there is labor involved, there will be a day in paradise where there is no labor anymore, but we will like God always be active and even participating in the energies and the the... not the nature, the energies and the activities of God as co-rulers really in the end, adopted sons and daughters reigning over the universe with him. In the name of the father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit, amen.

Christ is Risen!

Indeed, He is Risen!