

# Crucifying My Flesh

## **The Struggle Between the Spirit and the Flesh**

*from "On the Struggle Between the Flesh and Spirit Which Occurs in a Christian" by Bishop Tikhon of Zadonsk*

"For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish." Galatians 5:17 But a Christian, as one who has been renewed, must live not according to the flesh but according to the spirit, and submit the flesh to the spirit, according to the exhortation of the Apostle: "Walk in the spirit and do not do the works of the flesh". This is what it is "to crucify the flesh with the passions and desires" (Gal 5:16,24); "do not care for the flesh in order to fulfill its desires" (Rom. 13:14); "abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul" (1 Pet. 2:11); "we should walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4) , not allow sin to rule over us, live for Christ, Who died for us and rose from the dead.

Beloved Christians! Let us take account: do we engage in such a struggle? are we in the midst of this fight for salvation? do we walk in the newness of life? do we oppose the tendencies and desires of the flesh? do we not permit sin to rule and have mastery over us? But those alone are of Christ, who have "crucified the flesh with the passions and desires" (Gal 5:24).

What is the use of being called a Christian, but not actually being one? It is not the name of Christian which shows forth a true Christian, but the struggle against the flesh and every sin.

One ought not to permit the flesh all that it demands: it demands food, it demands drink, it demands clothing, it demands rest, and so on. What it needs, we will give it, but when it wants that which is opposed to the will of God and His law, we will not permit it, so that we may be Christians not only in name but in reality.

## **True Christians Crucify the Flesh**

*from the writings of St. Theophan the Recluse*

The holy Apostle Paul writes: "...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" [Philippians 2:12]. "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" [2 Cor. 7:1]. By all means strive that "...your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" [1 Thess. 5:23]. If you want to be a true Christian, imitate those who are of Christ, for they have "...crucified the flesh with the passions and desires" [Gal. 5:24].

## **The Flesh of Sin was Crucified with Christ along with its Carnal Appetites**

*from the writings of St. Cyril the Great*

We must closely examine what is our old man, what is the body of sin that is done away with, and how it was crucified with Christ (Rom 6:6) ...How was it crucified with Christ? The Only Son became man and acquired the body made of dust, that was condemned to death, ...and became as if in labor, due to its ingrained appetites having an overwhelming tendency to sin. But the law of sin was incompatible with Christ's totally holy body. We

do not say at all that anything due to the human passions stirred within Him except that for which there is no blame, such as hunger, thirst, fatigue, and every thing the law of nature creates in us without fault. Although the law of sin did not stir whatsoever in Christ due to His superiority through the power and strength of the Logos in Him; yet we find nature's body in itself, even when we consider it in Christ, no different to ours.

We were crucified with Him when His body, with all our nature in Him, was crucified, like that which happened in Adam when he was cursed; all nature suffered the curse. It is thus said that we were also raised with Christ and were made to sit with Him in the heavens, because although Emmanuel is above us as God, but in that He became like us, He is considered one of us raised and seated with God the Father. In the same way the old man was crucified with Him and through His resurrection the power of the old curse was broken "that the body of sin might be done away with" (Rom 6:6). I do not mean the body unrestrictedly, but the ingrained carnal appetites within it, that always disturbed the mind with shameful matters, casting it in the mud and mire of the delights of dust.

As for these matters that were fulfilled in Christ to the benefit of human nature, how can anyone doubt it when St. Paul clearly declares: "For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh. God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom 8:3)

Do you see then how the flesh of sin was done away with? The thorn of sin was condemned in the flesh and first died in Christ, then through Him and by Him this grace was also transferred to us."

### **The Passions are Nothing but Mere Illusions**

*from "My Life in Christ", the diary of Fr. John of Kronstadt*

"Bring your Issac, your heart, with its many passions, as a sacrifice to God, stab it of your own free will, crucify the flesh with its passions and lusts. As you have received everything from God, be ready to give back everything to God, so that, having been faithful in small things you may afterwards be made ruler over many things. Look upon all passions as upon illusions, as I have found out a thousand times."

### **The Spirit Gains Victory Over the Flesh While Fasting**

*from the papal message of Pope Cyril VI to his children that had emigrated to other countries on the occasion of holy Lent. It was written shortly before his departure on 9th March 1971.*

Fasting must be accompanied by repentance, compunction and confession of sins. When the Ninevites fasted, they put on sackcloth and they turned, every one, from his evil ways and from the violence that was in their hands. And they cried mightily unto God. And God saw their repentance and showed mercy unto them. The importance of repentance to accompany fasting is expounded for us fully in the Book of Joel, where the Lord exhorts us, "Turn ye even to me with all your heart and with fasting and with weeping and with mourning....sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly." (Joel 2:12-15).

In the same manner did Daniel the Prophet fast, "And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplication, with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. And I prayed unto the Lord my God and made my confession." (Da 9:3,4). In the like manner did

Nehemiah, Ezra and David fast. God desires this repentance while fasting, when the spirit has victory over the flesh, when we subdue the flesh and crucify it with all its affections. (Gal 5:24).

So, make your fast, my children, pure and holy, that it may be acceptable before God like the fasts of the saints. Preserve your purity in the land of your sojourn. Live the life of repentance that is pleasing to God. Let this season be a season for confession of sins and communion of the holy Mysteries, that ye may abide in the Lord and He abides in you, even as the living branches that bear fruit abide in the True Vine. And the God of all mercies preserve, confirm and strengthen you.

### **The Spirit Can Take Control of the Flesh When It is Prepared to Submit to Its Crucifixion**

*from a homily on "Carrying Your Cross" by Bishop Ignatius (Brianchaninov)*

Taking up our cross means willingly and eagerly submitting ourselves to deprivations and ascetic labors, by which the irrational strivings of our flesh are held in check. The Apostle Paul had recourse to such a crucifixion of his flesh. He says, *But I keep under* [in Slavonic: "deaden," or "mortify"] *my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway* (1 Cor. 9:27). *They that are in the flesh*, that is, those who do not restrain their flesh, but allow it to overcome the spirit, *cannot please God* (Rom. 8:8). Therefore, though we live in the flesh, we should not live for the flesh! *For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die* (Rom. 8:12) an eternal death; *but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live* (Rom. 8:13) an eternal, blessed life. The flesh is essentially restrained by the spirit; but the spirit can only take control of the flesh and rule it when it is prepared to submit to its crucifixion. The flesh is crucified by fasting, vigil, kneeling in prayer, and other bodily labors placed upon it wisely and within measure. A bodily labor that is wise and within measure frees the body from heaviness and corpulence, refines its strength, keeps it ever light and capable of activity. *They that are Christ's*, says the Apostle, *have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts*.

### **It is of Little Use Expressing Our Beliefs Without Having Crucified the Flesh**

*from "The Scandal of the Cross" by His Eminence Metropolitan Seraphim of the British Orthodox Church, canonically part of the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria.*

From an object of destruction and shame, the cross has become the emblem of pride and respect. We raise it high over our churches; we decorate our most sacred objects with it whether they are buildings, or fabrics; we suspend it around our necks; in the Coptic tradition it is tattooed on the wrists and hands of infants; in the Oriental Orthodox churches the priests and bishops always carry a handcross to confer blessings; we begin our prayers with it; we use it to bless our food; it is to be found in all services and sacraments of the church and in the benediction of parents to their children. It is an ubiquitous and potent symbol. In itself it is a means of grace. Saint Macarios of Egypt declares, *"After the sign of the cross, grace immediately thus operates and composes all the members and the heart, so that the soul from its abounding gladness seems as a youth that knows not evil."* Indeed it drives away evil. Saint Antony the Great speaks of defending himself by faith and the sign of the cross and Saint Athanasios the Apostolic says, *"By the sign of the cross all magic ceases; all incantations are powerless; every idol is abandoned and deserted; all irrational voluptuousness is quelled, and each one*

*looks up from earth to heaven.*” Many Coptic Christians proudly bear the name *Salib*, which means *cross*.

However, it is of little use expressing such beliefs without them manifesting their fruits in practical expression. The Apostle Paul tells the Galatians (5: 24) that “*those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*” This imposes an obligation of strict discipleship on the Christian: the restraint of our senses, the reining in of our tongues, the control of our thoughts, the checking of our appetites. We remember also our sins, which the Lord has borne on the cross so that we might be stirred to deeper repentance. Like the penitent thief we desire to make a good confession and beseech the Saviour, “Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom.”

### **The Struggle with The Passions**

*from “How the Spiritual Life Proceeds” by St. Theophan the Recluse*

When a man is given over to the passions, he does not see them in himself and does not fight against them, because he lives in them and by them. But when the grace of God becomes active in him, he begins to discern the passionate and sinful in himself, acknowledge them, and to repent and decide to guard against them. A struggle begins. At first, the struggle begins with deeds, but when is released from shameful deeds, then the struggle begins with shameful thoughts and feelings. And here the struggle encounters many steps ... The struggle continues. The passions increasingly are torn out of the heart. It even happens that they are entirely torn out ... The sign that the passions are torn out of the heart is that the soul begins to feel repulsion and hatred for the passions.

### **Cutting Off the Causes of Our Passions**

*from the homilies of St. Mark the Ascetic*

A man who hates the passion cuts off their causes. But a man who remains among their causes experiences even against his will the conflict from the passions. It is not possible to be mentally inclined toward a passion if one does not love its cause. For who, disdainful of shame, is given to vainglory? Or who, loving lowliness, is bothered by dishonor? Who, having a broken and humble heart, accepts fleshly sweetness? Or who, believing in Christ, is concerned about temporal things, or argues about them?

### **The Cross is The Antidote for Evil Passions**

*from “The Life of Moses” by St. Gregory of Nyssa*

There is one antidote for evil passions: the purification of our souls which takes place through the mystery of godliness. The chief act of faith in this mystery is to look to Him who suffered the passion for us. The cross is the passion, so that whoever looks to it? is not harmed by the poison of desire. To look to the cross means to render one's whole life dead and crucified to the world.

### **The Thought of God Uproots the Passions**

*from the homilies of St. Issac the Syrian*

The passions are uprooted and turned to flight by constant occupation of the mind with God. This is a sword that puts them to death... Whoever always thinks about God drives the demons away from himself and pulls up the seeds of their malice.

## **The Memory of the Cross Destroys the Lairs of the Wild Beasts Within Us**

*from the writings of St. John Cassian*

All the corners of our heart must... be examined thoroughly and the marks of all that rise up into them must be investigated with the utmost wisdom. And all this must be done in case some beast of mind, some lion or serpent, has passed through and has left its dangerous hidden marks there, marks by which, as a result of the way we neglect our thoughts, a way into the sanctuary of our heart may be made available to others. Every hour and every moment working over the earth of our heart with the plough of Scripture, that is, with the memory of the Lord's cross, we shall manage to destroy the lairs of the wild beasts within us and the hiding places of the venomous serpents.

## **An Excerpt From the Lenten Adam Psalm on the Third Hoos**

The instinct of sin, uproot from my heart O Lord, and also its ignorant thoughts.

## **An Excerpt From the Annual Fraction to the Son**

...My sins, O my God, are the thorns that pierce your holy head; I, who have saddened Your heart by my rejoicing in the vain pleasures of the world.

What is this, O Redeemer? What has caused You to consent to this? Shall the Great One be despised? Shall the Glorified One be afflicted? Shall the Exalted One be humbled?

Oh! The greatness of Your love. Yes, it is Your great love that made You accept with endurance all these sufferings for my sake. I give thanks to You, O my God, and Your angels, with all Your creation, give thanks to You on my behalf, for I am unable to present Your praise as befits Your love. Have we ever seen a greater love?

So be sorrowful, O my soul, for your sins that caused these sufferings to Your compassionate Redeemer. Portray His wound before you, and hope in Him when the enemy rages against you.

Grant me, O my Savior, to consider Your suffering my treasure, the crown of thorns my glory, Your sorrows my joy, Your bitterness my sweetness, Your blood my life, and Your love my pride and my thanksgiving.

O my Lord Jesus Christ, who was wounded on account of our sins, and by Your bruises we were healed, wound me by the spear of Your healing divine love. And by the blood of your Cross, purify me from my sins. Cheer me also by Your love, O You who accepted death for my sake, that You may redeem me and give me life.

O my Lord Jesus, my beloved, if You see me as a withered organ, soften me with the oil of Your grace, and confirm me in You as a living branch, O true Vine.

## **An Excerpt From the Litany of the Second Prostration Prayer Prayed on Pentecost**

I ask you to open my lips, I the sinner. Teach me how to supplicate to you for all our needs because you alone know the multitude of my sins.

But your lovingkindness overcomes my unawareness. For behold, I stand in fear before the multitude of your mercies and cast myself beneath them. Design my life, O Designer of all creation with your unutterable power and wisdom. O Harbor of peace for those who are suffering in the storm, show us the way in which we should walk.

Send the Spirit of Your wisdom upon my thoughts and give my ignorance understanding from Your Holy Spirit. May your fearful Spirit overshadow my works. May you renew your upright Spirit within me. May your mighty Spirit straighten my thoughts and prevent them from perversion. May your Good Spirit direct me to the right path, that I may be worthy to do your commandments and remember at all times your coming to judge everyone according to their deeds. Do not reject me, I who am defiled by the uncleanness and the wounds of this world. But strengthen me that I may find mercy before you. You said “Whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you”