

The Joy of the Cross

All Who Have Suffered Will be Rewarded

a paschal sermon by St. John Chrysostom

If any man be devout and love God, let him enjoy this fair and radiant triumphal feast. If any man be a wise servant, let him enter rejoicing into the joy of his Lord. If any have labored long in fasting, let him now receive his recompense. If any have wrought from the first hour, let him today receive his just reward. If any have come at the third hour, let him with thankfulness keep the feast. If any have arrived at the sixth hour, let him have no misgivings, because he shall in no wise be deprived. If any have delayed until the ninth hour, let him draw near, fearing nothing. If any have tarried even until the eleventh hour, let him also be not alarmed at his tardiness; for the Lord, who is jealous of his honor, will accept the last even as the first; he gives rest unto him who comes at the eleventh hour, even as unto him who has worked from the first hour. And He shows mercy upon the last, and cares for the first; and to the one he gives, and upon the other he bestows gifts. And he both accepts the deeds, and welcomes the intention, and honors the acts and praises the offering. Wherefore, enter ye all into the joy of your Lord, and receive your reward, both the first and likewise the second. You rich and poor together, hold high festival. You sober and you heedless, honor the day. Rejoice today, both you who have fasted and you who have disregarded the fast. The table is fully laden; feast sumptuously. The calf is fatted; let no one go hungry away. Enjoy the feast of faith; receive all the riches of loving-kindness. Let no one bewail his poverty, for the universal kingdom has been revealed. Let no one weep for his iniquities, for pardon has shone forth from the grave. Let no one fear death, for the Savior's death has set us free: he that was held prisoner of it has annihilated it.

By descending into hell, he made hell captive. He embittered it when it tasted of his flesh. And Isaiah, foretelling this, cried: "Hell was embittered when it encountered thee in the lower regions." It was embittered, for it was abolished. It was embittered, for it was mocked. It was embittered, for it was slain. It was embittered, for it was overthrown. It was embittered, for it was fettered in chains. It took a body, and met God face to face. It took earth, and encountered heaven. It took that which was seen, and fell upon the unseen.

O Death, where is your sting? O Hell, where is your victory? Christ is risen, and you are overthrown. Christ is risen, and the demons are fallen. Christ is risen, and the angels rejoice. Christ is risen, and life reigns. Christ is risen, and not one dead remains in the grave. For Christ, being risen from the dead, is become the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

In Christ, We Enjoy Freedom

"Sin has reigned over us and the inventor and father of sin has lorded it over all who dwell under the sky, provoking the transgression of the divine laws. But in Christ we see human nature, enjoying freedom of access to God." ~ *St. Cyril of Alexandria* **The Cross is Our Hope in Times of Despair**

from "Meditations on the Cross" by His Grace Bishop Youssef

...in time of despair , when Satan tries to poison our hearts with feelings of despair instigating such negative emotions of being rejected and forsaken by God, the best remedy is to look up to the Cross. This is because when I look to the cross, it reveals to me the greater love of our Lord. The Lord hates sin, but loves sinners, so much that He came personally to save them. When our Lord stretched His arms on the Cross, He sent a message to each one of us that if we return to Him, there is always a place for each one of us between His arms, and in His heart.

Those Who Endure Shall Receive the Crown of Life

from a homily on “Carrying Your Cross” by Bishop Ignatius (Brianchaninov)

Taking up our cross means obediently and humbly submitting ourselves to those temporary sorrows and afflictions that Divine Providence sees fit to allow against us for the cleansing away of our sins. Then the cross will serve us as a ladder from earth to heaven. The thief in the Gospels who ascended this ladder ascended from out of terrible crimes into most radiant heavenly habitations. From his cross he pronounced words filled with humility of wisdom; in humility of wisdom he entered into the knowledge of God, and through the knowledge of God, he acquired heaven. *We receive the due reward of our deeds*, he said. *Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom* (Lk. 23:41–42). When sorrows encompass us, let us also, beloved brothers and sisters, repeat the words of the good thief—words that can purchase paradise! Or like Job, let us bless the Lord who punishes us, Who is just yet merciful. *Shall we receive good at the hand of God*, said this sufferer, *and shall we not receive evil? As it hath pleased the Lord so is it done; blessed be the name of the Lord* (Job 2:10; 1:21). May God’s promise, which is true, be fulfilled in us: *Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.* (Js. 1:12).

Everything is Filled with Joy and Gladness

from the writings of St. Athanasius the Apostolic

“The Lord reigns, let the earth rejoice” (Ps. 97:1). For when death reigned, “sitting down by the rivers of Babylon, we wept” (Ps. 137:1), and mourned, because we felt the bitterness of captivity; but now that death and the kingdom of the devil is abolished, everything is entirely filled with joy and gladness.

The Reasons Why We Lack Joy

from St. John Chrysostom’s first homily on St. Paul’s second epistle to St. Timothy

So it is with sorrow, each thinks his own present grief the most severe. For of this he judges by his own experience. He that is childless considers nothing so sad as to be without children; he that is poor, and has many children, complains of the extreme evils of a large family. He who has but one, looks upon this as the greatest misery, because that one, being set too much store by, and never corrected, becomes willful, and brings grief upon his father. He who has a beautiful wife, thinks nothing so bad as having a beautiful wife, because it is the occasion of jealousy and intrigue. He who has an ugly one, thinks nothing worse than having a plain wife, because it is constantly disagreeable. The private man thinks nothing more mean, more useless, than his mode of life. The soldier declares that nothing is more toilsome, more perilous, than warfare; that it would be better to live

on bread and water than endure such hardships. He that is in power thinks there can be no greater burden than to attend to the necessities of others. He that is subject to that power, thinks nothing more servile than living at the beck of others. The married man considers nothing worse than a wife, and the cares of marriage. The unmarried declares there is nothing so wretched as being unmarried, and wanting the repose of a home. The merchant thinks the husbandman happy in his security. The husbandman thinks the merchant so in his wealth. In short, all mankind are somehow hard to please, and discontented and impatient.

After Our Suffering, God Calls Us By Name Into Life

from the hymn "Lazarus Come Forth" chanted on Lazarus Saturday

** This has been edited for the purposes of meditation. Insert your name in the blanks.*

The evil soldiers who bound [me]
In the bondage of the lowest Hades
Say who is this who speaks

Saying _____ come forth.

Who is this whose voice
Has broken the fetters of those in bondage
And called unto [me] without fear

Saying _____ come forth.

Rise up so we may leave him and escape,
For this is He who gives life to the dead.
He announced with His voice and commanded [me]

Saying _____ come forth.

So [I] immediately came out,
Tied with covers,
When God called [me]

Saying _____ come forth.

What then is after death [By the Cross] and burial? Resurrection!

from "The Crucified Jesus" by Fr. Manasseh Youhanna

The believer does not only die to sin but also lives to righteousness, for Christ Who died for our sins, rose for our justification (Rom 4:25). I the sinner who was crucified on Golgotha, when I throw myself onto this cross and consider myself dead, then I will enter the life of the risen Christ and will become in Him alive for righteousness, and in Him I will be strengthened to continue in the new life, "we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life," (Rom 5:10). "Just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life, Rom 6:4. Just as Christ rose and lives a new life other than the one before, so too we must rise spiritually and live a new life different to the old one where we were enslaved by the passions of the body.

The apostle asserts, "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," (Gal 2:20). My death with Christ in one aspect does not preclude life in another, for that to which I die is different to that for

which I live. Death is to sin and life is for righteousness, “Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be indeed dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord,” (Rom 6:11). “Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness,” (1 Pet 2:24).

Death is not able to hold Christ and is not able to hold us if we are in Christ. What then is after death and burial? Resurrection, “I am He who lives, and was dead,” (Rev 1:18). When we are buried with Christ, not only will our sins be forgiven, but the power of God will come upon us, “according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead,” (Eph 1:19-20) and with this power we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us (Phil 4:13). We can reject the world and walk in the newness of life. Someone once said, “I desire to die that I may live. I desire to die to all temporal earthly affections in order to live for the eternal love of Jesus Christ.”

Excerpt From the Hymn “My God, My God” Which is Chanted On Bright Saturday

This hymn is compilation of select parts of the psalms that relate to Christ’s death and resurrection

+ But You O my God have brought me up from the den of sorrow and the mud of hardship. The Lord heard and had mercy upon me. You have turned my mourning into joy for me.

+ Then our mouths were filled with joy and our tongue with happiness. Then they shall say in the nations, “The Lord has done great things with them,” the Lord has done great things for us, so we became joyful.