

HOLY CROSS ORTHODOX CHURCH

THROUGH THE CROSS JOY HAS COME INTO ALL THE WORLD

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SAVED IN WEAKNESS – REDUX

Fr. Stephen Freeman

We are not saved by our talents and gifts nor by our excellence – we are saved by our weakness and our failure. I have made this point many times over the years – and the question comes up – but what does that look like? How do I live like that? The question can be urgent for some because the message is so utterly contrary to cultural assumptions that have been drilled into our minds. We are consumers and producers in the modern world. If I am not producing then I am being consumed – and so we rush to find a way to produce whatever is demanded. Just tell me the demand so that I can produce it!

It is frustrating to be told that weakness and failure are the fulcrum point of salvation. For though we are all experienced in failure and weakness (who is not?), we have learned both to downplay those deficits (even to hide them) and to get on with our success no matter what. Frequently, people find their failures and weaknesses to have overwhelmed their lives. We often watch those overwhelmed with their failures from a distance as they pass into a dependent stage of life, and quietly thank God that our own lives are not like theirs. We may have deep compassion for them – but we absolutely do not care to share their lot.

It is absolutely essential, however, that we understand that Christ *voluntarily* chose to share their lot and announced it as the very pathway to salvation. The Cross is not a transaction that takes place apart from our lives. It is not a moment between Christ and the Father, the settling of an account that was owed by us: it is something

that also takes place within our lives and in the most intimate and profound manner. Uncomfortably, we must say that Christ Crucified is only effective when He is crucified *within* us and when we are ourselves are crucified with Him. If Christ is not crucified in you and you in Him, then there is no salvation.

So what does this look like in our daily lives?



It begins within the Church with Holy Baptism. In Baptism we are united with Christ in His death. This is the heart of repentance. Acknowledging and confessing our sins is the recognition of death in our lives. A man/woman confesses their brokenness, their failures to live by the commandments, even their lack of desire to live by the commandments. This is sealed in Baptism and becomes the pattern by which we live. Repentance (confession and absolution) is called a “second Baptism” by the Fathers.

How do we confess? I include here a remarkable passage from *The Way of A Pilgrim* that describes a good sense of saving confession and repentance:

THE CONFESSION OF AN INTERIOR MAN LEADING TO HUMILITY

Turning my gaze at myself and attentively observing the course of my interior life I am convinced, through experience, that I love neither God nor my neighbor, that I have no faith, and that I am full of pride and sensuality. This realization is the result of careful examination of my feelings and actions.

1. I do not love God. For if I loved Him, then I would be constantly thinking of Him with heartfelt satisfaction;

every thought of God would fill me with joy and delight. On the contrary, I think more and with greater eagerness about worldly things, while thoughts of God present difficulty and aridity. If I loved Him, then my prayerful communion with Him would nourish, delight, and lead me to uninterrupted union with Him. But on the contrary, not only do I not find my delight in prayer but I find it difficult to pray; I struggle unwillingly, I am weakened by slothfulness and am most willing to do anything insignificant only to shorten or end my prayer. In useless occupations I pay no attention to time; but when I am thinking about God, when I place myself in His presence, every hour seems like a year. When a person loves another, he spends the entire day unceasingly thinking about his beloved, imagining being with him, and worrying about him; no matter what he is occupied with, the beloved does not leave his thoughts. And I in the course of the day barely take one hour to immerse myself deeply in meditation about God and enkindle within myself love for Him, but for twenty-three hours with eagerness I bring fervent sacrifices to the idols of my passions! I greatly enjoy conversations about vain subjects which degrade the spirit, but in conversations about God I am dry, bored, and lazy. And if unwillingly I am drawn into a conversation about spiritual matters, I quickly change the subject to something which flatters my passions. I have avid curiosity about secular news and political events; I seek satisfaction for my love of knowledge in worldly studies, in science, art, and methods of acquiring possessions. But the study of the law of the Lord, knowledge of God, and religion does not impress me, does not nourish my soul. I judge this to be an unessential activity of a Christian, a rather supplementary subject with which I should occupy myself in my leisure time. In short, if love of God can be recognized by the keeping of His commandments—"If anyone loves me he will keep my word," says the Lord Jesus Christ (John 14:23), and I not only do not keep His commandments but I make no attempt to do so—then in very truth I should conclude that I do not love God. St. Basil the Great confirms this when he says, "The evidence that man does not love God and His Christ is that he does not keep His commandments."



2. I do not love my neighbor. Not only because I am not ready to lay down my life for the good of my neighbor, according to the Gospel, but I will not even sacrifice my peace and my happiness for his good. If I loved my neighbor as myself, as the Gospel commands, then his misfortune would grieve me also and his prosperity would bring me great joy. But, on the contrary, I listen with curiosity to accounts of my neighbor's misfortune and I am not grieved but indifferent to them and, what is more, I seem to find satisfaction in them. I do not sympathize with the failings of my brother but I judge them and publicize them. My neighbor's welfare, honor, and happiness do not delight me as my own; I am either completely indifferent to them or I am jealous or envious.

3. I do not have faith in spiritual realities. I believe neither in immortality nor in the Gospel. If I were firmly convinced and believed without a doubt in eternal life and in the consequences for our earthly actions, then I would be constantly thinking about this; the very thought of immortality would inspire me with wonder and awe and I would live my life as an alien who is getting ready to enter his native land. On the contrary, I don't even think of eternity and I consider the end of this life as the limit of my existence. I nurture a secret thought within and wonder, "Who knows what will happen after death?" Even when I say that I believe in immortality, it is only from natural reasoning, for down deep in my heart I am not convinced of it and my actions and pre-occupations with earthly cares prove this. If I accepted the Holy Gospel with faith into my heart as the word of God, then I would be constantly occupied with it; I would study it, would delight in it, and with deep reverence would immerse myself in it. Wisdom, mercy, and love hidden within it would lead me to ecstasy, and day and night I would delight in the lessons contained in the law of God. They would be my daily spiritual bread and I would earnestly strive to fulfill them; nothing on earth would be strong enough to keep me from this. But on the contrary, even if I sometimes read or listen to the word of God, it is either out of necessity or curiosity; I do not delve deeply into it but feel dryness and indifference to it and I receive no greater benefit from it than I do from secular reading. Further, I am eager to give it up promptly and go to worldly reading, in which I have

greater interest and from which I get more satisfaction. I am full of pride and self-love. All my actions confirm this. When I see something good in myself, then I wish to display it or brag about it to others, or interiorly I am full of self-love even when outwardly I feign humility. I ascribe everything to my own ability and I consider myself more perfect than others, or at least not worse. If I notice a vice in myself, then I try to excuse it or justify it; I pretend to be innocent or I claim that I couldn't help it. I am impatient with those who do not show me respect and I consider them incapable of judging character. I am vain about my talents and cannot accept any failure in my actions. I grumble and I am glad to see the misfortune of my enemies, and my intention in doing anything good is either praise, self-interest, or earthly comfort. In a word, I continuously make an idol out of myself, to whom I give unceasing service as I seek sensual delights and try to nourish my carnal desires.

This is a 19th century Russian expression of such a confession, but represents the character of our self-examination and repentance. It is an acknowledgement on a deep level of our weakness and failure.

When we come to such a realization – in a deep manner – our instinct is shame. It is an appropriate instinct. We feel vulnerable and we want to run from such an admission as soon as possible. We want to know what we can do to change – and change quickly. Worse yet, we may want to excuse ourselves and make explanations for why we are as we are. But our weakness has to begin with our own patient acceptance of what is true of ourselves.

And it is at that point of truth, the point of our failure, that we “bear a little shame,” in the words of the Elder Sophrony. If we will accept that *little shame*, we will meet the Crucified Christ at that very point, for it is He who bears our shame. It is not in our strengths and wonderful qualities that we meet Christ. Our egos are so impregnable at those points that such a union is impossible.

But the vulnerable point of shame is the place where the ego can give way and break and where it can admit the presence of another. This, too, is difficult because the instinct of shame is to cover itself and hide. Thus, we are

asked to “bear a little.”

Shame is the ego's deepest instinct (and the first recorded reaction of man after the Fall). It is the fear of being seen for who we truly are rather than who we want to be or pretend to be. But there is a self that is deeper than shame – and it can be found if we are patient and dare to stay put for a time. This is *hesychia* and *nepsis*, stillness and sobriety.

This self is also described as the “place of the heart,” and in some places as the “deep heart.” In that place we cease to judge, to critique, to measure, to compare. We become aware and observe but in a manner that doesn't separate the self from other people or other things. It is a place where we will find union with God and the ability to pray. It is also the place where the tears of repentance can be shed.

All of this is the patient inner journey of repentance and the gateway into the Kingdom of God. The bearing of a little

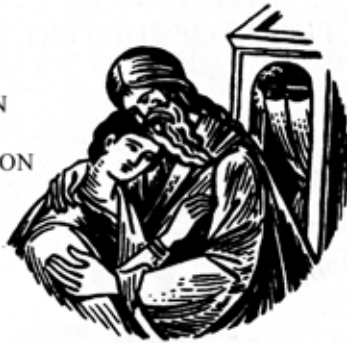
shame is our own crucifixion. It unites us with Christ's bearing of the whole Adam's shame (the shame of the whole of humanity), which is His crucifixion.

I encourage anyone who undertakes such repentance to be moderate in their approach (a “little shame” is enough at any time). It is good to do this before an icon of Christ and His Cross. This helps us to hold ourselves together with Him rather than be consumed in our ego. If you “fail,” then don't despair. Use *that* failure and its “little shame” instead.

All of this is better undertaken with the encouragement and help of a good spiritual father. A requirement in this way of things is *safety*. If you do not feel safe sharing such shame with your spiritual father, then it shouldn't be pushed. I will add a note of caution to priests who hear confessions. It is incumbent upon priests to be a reliable place of safety. There is no call for berating or controlling or causing shame in a penitent. Generally, such behaviors in a priest constitute spiritual abuse.

I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; For You alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety. (Psa 4:8)

Hesychia requires a measure of safety.



THE RETURN
OF THE
PRODIGAL SON

The practice of such regular repentance strengthens us for spiritual warfare, for it teaches us a way of life that is deeper than the ego and promotes true humility. In time, we become “unassailable” by the hostile powers. The “find no place in us.” I pray these thoughts will be found useful.

Additional note (September 2018)

Recent debates and actions surrounding the Church in Ukraine will likely be coming into public view in the coming weeks. There is even the possibility for the rupture of communion for a time (this happened regarding the Church in Estonia in an earlier decade). The situation has weighed on my heart of late and been a matter of prayer. I believe it is important to remember that the whole Church is saved by its weakness and not by its strength (or excellence). The Church is the Cross through history. It will be incumbent upon Orthodox Christians during a trying time, to bear a little shame, to refrain from bitterness and accusation, and to embrace the weakness that dwells within our ecclesiastical life. Orthodoxy is intentionally a way of life that works only by love. When love is strained (which is often), then, by the grace of God it is made manifest so that we, and all the world, can see it. This is for our salvation.

From: <https://blogs.ancientfaith.com/glory2godforallthings/2018/09/05/saved-in-weakness-redux/>



FROM THE ALL-AMERICAN COUNCIL Philip Keller

This summer, I had the privilege of traveling with Father Chris to All American Council (AAC) in St. Louis, to serve as the lay delegate from Holy Cross. I'm grateful for the opportunity to do so.

Personally, the AAC helped me see Holy Cross Orthodox Church in the context of the entire North American church, and to better understand the structure and organization of the OCA. I could concretely see the different elements of the church working together. The deans of all three North American OCA seminaries presented, the abbot of St. Tikhon's Monastery spoke on behalf of the monastic communities, several chaplains explained their work, the leaders of the different departments spoke (including Department of Evangelization and Education),

and each Diocese had a video presentation chronicling their past three years.

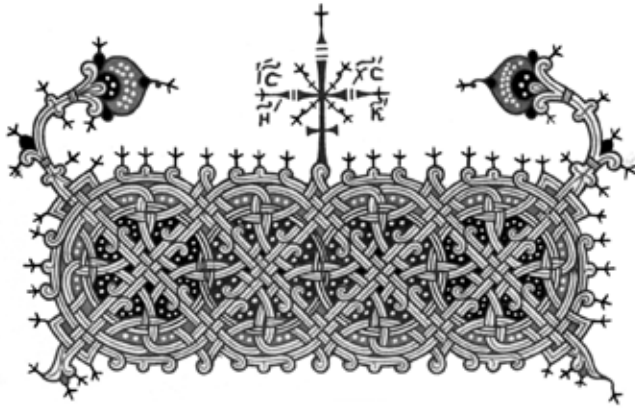
Before the AAC, I had never even seen an OCA bishop, but after hearing Metropolitan Tikhon address the council, and going to a “break-out session” on the Spiritual Life with our own Bishop Alexander, I sincerely feel that we are in good hands. I also was able to worship in a hierarchical liturgy (with all the Bishops!) and hear the prayers offered through akathists in front of several wonder-working icons. Our worship at Holy Cross in High Point is Orthodox, but so is the Akathist to the Sitka Icon with prayers in indigenous Alaskan languages. The Council gave me a chance to experience this fullness and diversity.

Administratively, the lay delegates, priests, and bishops voted on resolutions during Plenary Sessions. Seven amendments were debated and vote on. The most relevant for us at Holy Cross concerned the periodicity of the AAC, specifically if it should continue to convene every 4 years, or begin a 3 year cycle. After some debate, the AAC will continue to occur every 4 years.

Also, of importance to the national church was debate on how to encourage the transition to proportional giving. This refers to the percentage that each Diocese gives to the national church to support their work. At this point, the Diocese of the South gives 34% of the “net operating” budget, and after the resolution, we will continue to do so. Most other Dioceses give a much higher percentage, and Holy Synod of Bishops is working to bring that down to a “common contribution rate for territorial diocese.” In addition to the voting, during these sessions, the council participants heard presentation and speeches. One remarkable event occurred after two teenagers presented about their experience in general as orthodox youth, and specifically about the programming for them at the AAC. Priests, parishioners, and the Metropolitan were so moved by the presentation that they began lining up at the microphones to publicly pledge money, both personal and from their parishes, to begin a Youth Department with a full-time leader at the national church level. On the spot, over \$80,000 was raised for this effort! Praise God!

Thank you again for the opportunity to see and be a part of the ongoing work of the Orthodox Church in America.





ANNOUNCEMENTS

Moleben on our property: We will continue serving a weekly short prayer service on our property in Kernersville. This is a service of supplication (Molieben) that Archbishop Dimitri of blessed memory blessed for the use of parishes in the diocese. Fr. Christopher will be serving it on Friday mornings at 10 AM except where noted in the calendar. Our property is located at 1320 Masten Drive in Kernersville.

Sisterhood of the Holy Myrrhbearers: The Sisterhood will meet at 6:30 PM on Tuesday, September 18.

Men's Group: There will not be a Men's Group meeting this month.

Order Gift Cards Through Holy Cross! Scrip cards are available from hundreds of retailers and don't cost any more than the face value of the gift card. It's a "free" fundraiser to benefit the Holy Cross building fund! Contact Karen Brudnak-Slate.



FINANCIAL SUMMARY

August	Actual	Budgeted
Income	\$17,468.79	\$12,515.00
Expense	\$10,033.30	\$10, 531.68
YTD	Actual	Budgeted
Income	\$100,576	\$100,128

Thank you for your generous support!

My child, if you want to live amongst people, you must watch the following: Do not criticize anyone at all; do not ridicule anyone; do not become angry; do not despise anyone. Be very careful not to say 'so-and-so lives virtuously,' or 'so-and-so lives immorally,' because this is exactly what 'judge not' means. Look at everyone in the same way, with the same disposition, the same thought, with a simple heart. Accept them as you would accept Christ. Don't open your ears to a person who judges.

Stories, Sermons and Prayers of
St. Nephon: An Ascetic Bishop.



HOLY CROSS ORTHODOX CHURCH



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						1 6 PM Great Vespers
2 9:40AM Hours 10AM Divine Liturgy	3	4	5 7:30PM Choir Rehearsal	6	7 10AM Prayers at the Property 6:30PM Great Vespers	8 NATIVITY of the Most-Holy Theotokos 9AM Divine Liturgy 6 PM Great Vespers
9 9:40AM Hours 10AM Divine Liturgy	10	11	12	13 6:30PM Vigil for the Holy Cross	14 EXALTATION of the Holy Cross 8AM Divine Liturgy	15 6 PM Great Vespers
16 9:40AM Hours 9:30AM Chrismations 10AM Divine Liturgy 12PM Annual Church Picnic	17	18 6:30 Sisterhood	19	20 6PM Parish Council	21 10AM Prayers at the Property	22 6 PM Great Vespers
23 9:00 AM Church School 9:40AM Hours 10AM Divine Liturgy	24	25	26 6:30PM Inquirers' Class	27	28 10AM Prayers at the Property 5PM Open Door	29 6 PM Great Vespers
30 9:00 AM Church School 9:40AM Hours 10AM Divine Liturgy 6:30 PM OCAT home meeting						



GENERAL VIEW OF VALAAM MONASTERY