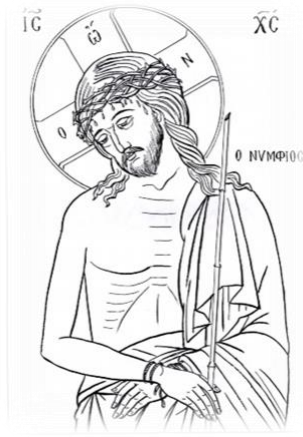


NEW LIFE THROUGH REPENTANCE



In reading the Gospels, we often note the all-too-human responses of the disciples to Jesus and to the situations in which they find themselves. For example, they failed understand His parables (Luke 8:9); they lost faith in His power, as when they were caught in the storm on lake (Luke 8:24); they often failed to grasp that He indeed was the Messiah (Luke 9:18-20). Particularly during the events of Holy Week we see clearly the human weaknesses of the Apostles. At the Last Supper they argued over who among them is to be regarded as the greatest (Luke 22:24). When Jesus asked them to keep prayerful watch with Him in Gethsemane, they fell asleep twice (Luke 22:40-46)! When the soldiers arrested Jesus, Peter struck out in fear and anger, while Jesus responded in divine love to those who sought to hurt Him and healed the ear which Peter severed from the slave (Luke 22:50-51). Finally, Saint Peter denied his Lord three times in fear of his life and safety.

To catalogue these examples of human failure in the Apostles is not to belittle or disparage them. On the contrary, we must always read the Scriptures asking "Who does this mean to me personally and how can I apply this to my life?" Then we will be able to identify with the shortcomings of the Apostles and of all human beings in a spirit of repentance.

With this attitude of repentance, the Holy Spirit will guide us when we see sin or weakness in another person's life to then turn inwardly in honest self-examination. He will then convict us of our own sins so that we may turn to our Father asking and receiving forgiveness. Thus we may be freed from our burdens one by one and slowly become the perfect children He wills us to be.

In this spirit, then, we will see the Apostles sleeping in Gethsemane and recognize how we too are often spiritually asleep. Does Christ not long for our fellowship, patiently knocking at the door while we are preoccupied with other concerns, quite unaware of His presence? Isn't it true that we, too, are frequently unavailable to God, spiritually asleep?

"Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner."

Everyone can understand Peter's emotional reaction when he woke up to find Jesus under arrest and struck out wildly. And Jesus rebuked him. Do we not frequently respond to situations harshly, a slave to our passions, rather than imitating Jesus' love? We indulge ourselves in the losing of temper and in the holding of grudges. Often we even work for a good cause but in the wrong spirit. We sacrifice our time and energy for Philoptochos or Parish Council, all the while resenting those who choose not to participate. Our emotions are not evil, but they must be employed in a spirit of love.

"Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner."

The story of Peter's denial of association with Christ is very well-known. But are we aware of how often we deny Him ourselves in our everyday life? Many people deny Him His proper place in their work, in their homes, in their lives. Those of us who accept Him as Lord of our lives still deny Him when we make decisions without considering His will; when we don't forgive those who have hurt us; when we don't make time for fellowship with Him every day. We deny His power when we don't believe He can change our particular problems ... We deny His love when we don't believe His will. Peter only denied his Lord when his safety was threatened. Often we deny Him without any such threat. Peter at least recognized with horror what he had done and "he went out and wept bitterly" (Luke 22:62). We, too, should recognize our sin and repent.

"Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner."

Finally, we look at Judas. We would be "copping out" if we were simply to label him the evil villain in the betrayal and to leave it at that. The hard truth is that we can also identify ourselves with Judas' behaviour. The tragedy of his sin is twofold: not only did he betray Christ, but afterwards when he realized what he had done, he chose not to turn to God for forgiveness but, rather, took his own life. What does Judas' betrayal mean? Is it not that Judas decided to reject Christ as his Lord? Certainly he didn't simply want the thirty pieces of silver. He chose to live

according to his own will rather than according to God's. He placed himself on the throne of his heart thus usurping God's position in his life. Are we innocent of this sin?

Although most people might consider Judas' crime unforgiveable, our Lord would have lovingly erased his sin if only Judas had turned to Him for forgiveness. Why is It so difficult to ask forgiveness? Perhaps because it requires humility, a quality which has never come easily to man, and which is certainly not valued in today's self-centred ethic. To ask God's forgiveness means to accept Him as judge of our behaviour and as the moral standard which we have fallen short. It means we must trust and believe that He loves us and wants to forgive us. It is human pride which broke man's fellowship with God in the Garden of Eden and It is that same pride which continues to prevent us, like Judas, from enjoying communion with Christ our Lord.

"Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner.

A meditation on our need for repentance would be incomplete were it to end here. For if the Apostles were left to their own human resources after the Resurrection, we probably would not be Christians today. But God promised us that if only we die with Him to our sinful nature, that we too would be resurrected with Him to new life. And He promised us His Comforter, who would guide us into all truth (John 16:13). Again, we can turn to the example of the Apostles, to see the life-changing power of the Holy Spirit. For on the day of Pentecost the Apostles were transformed into the most dynamic and powerful witnesses the world has ever known. So, just as we can identify with the weakness of their human nature during Holy Week, let us also identify with their zeal, their faith, and their love after the Resurrection, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

"Through our Lord Jesus Christ we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice In our hope of sharing the glory of God" (Romans 5:2).

—Carolyn C. Los, *Lenten Reflections*