

## Five Steps to Becoming a Better You

Today, the distinction between a preacher of the Gospel of Christ and the latest self-help guru is difficult to see. The distinction is an important one in that what is "preached" has eternal consequences. All preaching is shown its value when measured against the gospel of Christ. The way in which we live life is examined for authenticity when it is brought before the Gospel of Christ.

St. Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians outlines for us five steps for becoming new creations in Christ. He first lays the sacramental foundation that changes us and invites us to become a new creation in Christ. Our human nature (subject to physical and spiritual death) is given the possibility through the mysteries of baptism, chrismation and the eucharist of becoming immortal by grace- this is a new humanity given only in Christ. St. Paul aware of this essential change reminds the members of the Church that God has fashioned us to live eternally with Him in His kingdom. "For we know that if our earthly house of the tabernacle should be dissolved, we have a building from God, a house made without hands, eternal in the heavens (II Cor. 5:1)." After the decision to clothe oneself in Christ there is still the possibility that we may be found unclothed. Even if our parents made the decision on our behalf when we were children, as adults one must personally affirm a new life in Christ.

This means that "putting on Christ" is a continual decision and process. It requires a daily effort and is realized through great efforts and much toil. "For also in this we groan, longing to have put on over ourselves our habitation which is from heaven, if it be indeed that after we clothe ourselves we shall not be found naked. For also we who are in the tabernacle groan, being burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed, but to be clothed upon, in order that what is mortal might be swallowed up by that which is life. (II Cor. 5:2-4)." On mount Tabor Christ reveals the truly awesome change that lies ahead for His disciples as the "likeness" of God is made manifest before their very eyes. A light brighter than the Sun, radiating God's love and beauty calls upon humanity to realize the "likeness" of God. So powerful is the vision that Peter, James, John are found face down, struck with the fear and at the same time, desiring to stay for ever in His presence. How does one go about in realizing this Light, of being the "likeness" of God? St. Paul provides five factors that make it possible.

### 1.) Renouncing One's Life

Our God created destiny is the Kingdom of Heaven and the Holy Spirit is given to guide us home. "Now the One Who created us for this same thing is God, Who also gave us the earnest of the Spirit (2 Cor. 5:5)." Perhaps the most challenging reality of the Gospel of Christ is that the first step in realizing it is to renounce our lives, this world and to pledge ourselves to God's Kingdom. To renounce one's life essentially means that it is impossible to join ourselves to Christ while all of our focus and attention is on us. We renounce our life only to cleave to Christ and discover true life. This is dying to oneself.

Every day decisions made either affirm or deny a life in Christ. What do I find myself thinking about most of the time? The answer reveals the heart's treasure. One purpose of worship is that it aids us in renouncing our life by allowing participation in the Kingdom to come. In worship, God's kingdom is manifest through the grace of the Holy Spirit. Inspired by this experience, the desire for this world weakens and change occurs in souls.

## 2.) The Holy Spirit grants us courage to be walking by faith in His Kingdom

"Therefore always being of good courage and knowing that dwelling at home in the body we are abroad (in a foreign country) from the Lord- for we walk by faith, not by what is seen- ( II. Cor. 5:6)." The gift of the Holy Spirit received in Chrismation clothes us with Gods' power, love and a sound mind. "For which cause I remind thee to rekindle the gracious gift of God which is in you by the laying on of my hands; for God gave us not a spirit of cowardice, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind (2 Tim. 1:6,7)." St. John of the ladder says: "A proud soul is a slave of cowardice; it vainly trusts in itself and is afraid..." Walking by faith means that every action has as its purpose and final meaning-- God's Kingdom. Many times we walk by faith in ourselves and obviously blind to God's providence in our lives. When it comes to understanding finances in the life of the Church, it has been the testimony of God's graciousness over the past twelve years at Assumption that every time our community has given, God responds in providing more. God blesses hearts that do His will with everything needed. It is an act of pride to think, any good that happens in a church was the result of our efforts.

## 3.) Our purpose in life is to be well pleasing to the Lord

"Wherefore, we also endeavor earnestly, whether dwelling at home or abroad, to be well-pleasing to Him (II Cor. 5:9)." It is all too common that we fear the judgments of one another and lack a fear of God's assessment of our actions. We go to great length to please one another out of fear of losing one another's affections while at the same time show no effort to please our Lord. Endeavoring earnestly to be well pleasing to God means that a great deal of attention is required to what we do and how we do it. This applies on a personal level and as a Church community. Most difficult to understand is that there is no shame in making changes that result in God being pleased with us. It requires the humility to admit our wrongs and the courage to change. The beauty of God's love is that the moment we make the decision to change what we are doing and how we are doing it, in order to reflect more the spirit of Gospel than the spirit of the world - God sends His transforming Grace and renews our spirits within us.

## 4.) An account before the judgment seat of Christ awaits us all

"For we must all be made manifest before the judgment seat of the Christ, in order that each one might receive for oneself the things done through the agency of the body, according to what one did, whether good or bad. (II. Cor. 5:10)." God has built into the

consequences of bad choices a taste of hell. Vices bring with them torments that are described as works of the flesh. "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatry, use of drugs, potions or spells, enmities, strifes, jealousies, fits of anger, intrigues, divisions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkennesses, revellings, and things like to these of which I tell you beforehand, even as I also said previously, that they who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal 5:19-21)." We shall be judged upon the commandment to love one another as Christ has loved us. "For the whole law is fulfilled in one utterance, in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself (Gal 5:14)."

5.) Knowing the fear of the Lord, our deeds are not hidden before God and must not be hidden from ourselves as well

"Knowing, therefore, the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade men; but we have been made manifest to God, and I hope also to have been made manifest in your consciences (II Cor. 5:11)." Perhaps the greatest gift of God to pray for is to learn the fear of the Lord. "Come, O sons, listen to me, I will teach you the fear of the LORD (Psalm 34:11)." Indeed, if a soul genuinely desires this lesson God teaches it. It is a powerful remedy for a multitude of weaknesses and a constant companion of those who are seeking His Kingdom. "Is not your fear of God your confidence, and the integrity of your ways your hope? (Job 4:6)." The fear of the Lord can be identified when a change occurs that results in a hatred for evil. "The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil (Proverb 8:13)." This is perhaps the most important virtue. "The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, that one may avoid the snares of death (Proverbs 14:27)."

The fear of the Lord opens the conscience. Imagine being able to come before a mirror that would reveal the condition of our soul. It would show every vice as well as every virtue that existed within. Our Lord has given us such a mirror and it is called the conscience. The conscience is an operation of the soul that can be either in the "on" or "off" modes depending what we desire. Desiring to live by the Gospel of Christ automatically turns it on, while living to please one another and ourselves turns it off. As the words of Christ are read with a sincere desire to see one's faults, the Holy Spirit speaks to the conscience and reveals our weaknesses. Living prayerfully allows us to constantly be aware of the consequences of our actions.

Anyone In Christ, Is a New Creation

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old things passed away; behold, all things have become new (II Cor 5:16-17)." Once we allow the Holy Spirit to work in us the fruit produced is divine virtue. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control; against such things there is no law. But they who are of the Christ crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be walking by the Spirit. Let us not become vainglorious, provoking one another, envying one another (Gal. 5:22-26)."

These virtues come from Christ, they are in fact, Christ in us once we have allowed ourselves to take these necessary steps towards God's Kingdom. 1. Renouncing one's life; 2.) Walking By Faith; 3.) Seeking to please God; 4.) Awareness of judgment; and 5.) Learning the Fear of God. Saint Chrysostom said: "If any have believed in Him, he has come to another creation; for he has been born again by the Spirit....For we ought to live unto Him....Paul urges for a life of virtue....And showing how it is a 'new creation,' he adds, 'The old things passed away; behold all things have become new.' What old things...sins and impieties..."

+Fr. Andrew