

## **Radiating The Glory Of God**

Fr. Andrew discusses how the current culture tends to accept sin as a natural occurrence and instead of learning salvation through suffering, seeks to minimize sin through denial. Instead Fr. offers a different more Christian approach.

Abba John said that a spiritual elder became a recluse and became well-known in the city and had much glory. He was told one day that one of the brothers was dying and that he should go visit him before he fell asleep. He decided not to go during the day time because he dreaded encountering the people running after him and honoring him with their words and losing his peace. So he decided to go at night in order to avoid the crowds. So he went out in the darkness of the night; however, God sent angels with lamps to enlighten his way as he went. The whole city came out to see his glory as he went through the streets. The more he sought to avoid any glory the more he was glorified. As our Lord said, “And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be humbled; and whosoever shall humble himself shall be exalted.” [Mt. 23:12]

We are living in a unique time with social media having become an influential source of what shapes opinions and worldview. One of the most antithetical perspectives to Christianity today is the glorification of the person as the only source of truth and right or wrong. One of the most concerning Christian teachings being eroded is seeing “afflictions” (physical, emotional, spiritual) as not something to be taken-up and borne for the glory of God but as part of human nature. God made me this way therefore it must be okay. The whole, ‘I’m okay; you’re okay’ approach to dealing with our inherited passions. Our Lord taught that the only way of being His disciple is to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him – there is no other path which leads to Heaven. Christ teaches that humans are not okay but through our struggle with sin we can find needed healing; through death we find life.

In the liturgy we pray, “For our deliverance from affliction, wrath, danger and distress.” The Church Fathers see afflictions as medicine that can produce the fruit of virtue and character. “And not only so, but we boast in afflictions also, knowing that the affliction works out patience; and patience, a tested character; and a tested character, hope.” [Rom. 5:3,4]. We are asking God to not allow our afflictions to overcome us but that we may remain faithful to Him so that His grace may assist us and produce fruit. How a person deals with their crosses are an important diagnostic tool that reveals the most about one’s inner life in Christ.

The first step in healing is admitting a problem. On one hand, it was indeed courageous for Bruce Jenner to admit his affliction but once it was disclosed, instead of seeking healing he accepted it as who he was – God simply made a mistake with one of the greatest athletes who ever lived. What are the underlying issues of this decision and for us Christians; what does it tell us about how we ought to deal with the things we suffer every day?

Dr. Paul R. McHugh, the former psychiatrist-in-chief for Johns Hopkins Hospital (<http://cnsnews.com/news/article/michael-w-chapman/johns-hopkins-psychiatrist-transgender-mental-disorder-sex-change>) has found that being transgender is a mental disorder and that sex change is biologically impossible. Johns Hopkins hospital has ceased to offer gender “re-assignment” surgeries noting a 20 times higher suicide rate among transgendered patients. The Church teaches everyone born is afflicted, in need of salvation and healing. Scientists listen to their data, and just because they have the ability to perform a “re-assignment” surgery does not mean it is the best remedy to an inner problem.

It is easy for us today to become blind to truth and right or wrong. One of the most dramatic of confrontations took place between Christ and the blinded religious leaders of His day. This blindness was so pronounced that after seeing Christ perform a healing in front of their own eyes they accused Him of having a demon. Embracing inner illnesses darkens the ability to discern the Spirit of God and Truth. As Christians, we are called to “take up our cross” for the sake of embracing the glory of the Kingdom of God. Inner wounds allow us to admit our weaknesses and to turn to God for His grace and power and not despair.

At the end of the liturgy the priest says: “Be exalted O God above the heavens and let Your glory be over all the earth.” (Ps 108:5) At first glance, this verse is proclaiming and stating something distinctly about God and His glory, however, it can also be seen as a missionary message to us the faithful. “This biblical verse, which is recited at the end of the Divine Liturgy, is in fact a missionary message for the community of the faithful who will soon be dispersing to their daily lives...Those who have been blessed to receive the glory of God, consequently, have an obligation to become vessels radiating the divine light, giving to others, ‘the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ’ (2 Cor. 4:6) (Arch, Anastasios, Mission in Christ’s Way, pg. 163-4).”

Nicholas Samaras (an Orthodox poet and essayist) noted in a talk, “Attention makes worship.” In other words, whatever we pay attention to most in our lives is what we worship. The ultimate gift (which is often the most neglected and ignored) which reveals the truth about human beings, inner weaknesses, humility and glory is Orthodox worship! It is in worship that we become the ones who bear the “light of knowledge...in the face of Christ!” The reason the Doxology is the final prayer before the Divine Liturgy is because we cannot receive the glory of God in Communion without first giving Glory to God. It is like after having endured our personal battle with sin throughout the week there is nothing left to do other than cry out to God and praise Him. This is healing.

There is no other road which leads to the glory of God other than that which is revealed in His Son’s sacrificial love which He poured out upon all creation on the Cross! He bore our weaknesses for us. This is the “lamp” sent by God to illumine our Way home.

Fr. Andrew