

Is Christ Truly Risen?

Holding back from God

A brother who was insulted by another brother came to Abba (Father) Sisoës, and said to him: I was hurt by my brother, and I want to avenge myself. The old man tried to console him and said: Don't do that, my child. Rather leave vengeance to God. But he said: I will not quit until I avenge myself. Then the old man said: Let us pray, brother; and standing up, he said: O God, we no longer need you to take care of us since we now avenge ourselves. Hearing these words, the brother fell at the feet of the old man and said: I am not going to fight with my brother any more. Forgive me, Abba.

The testing grounds of faith are the conflicts we have with others. If Christ is truly risen, such a miracle ought to have very practical manifestations such as belief that all things are under God's care. Madness grips the hearts of those who have lost faith in the living Christ. As St. Paul said, they (pagans) did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting." (Romans 1:28) It is unfitting for Christians to seek vengeance when clearly sin brings its own rewards in the lives of those who are given over to their passions.

Recently, sparked by a few Greek Orthodox Churches withholding their stewardship from the Archdiocese, there is discussion of whether or not this is fitting response to problems within the Church.

As your Pastor I care deeply for our well-being in the eyes of God. God's blessing upon this community bears witness to our faithfulness to Him. I believe that the teaching of the Church is that actions taken against the "Archdiocese" are the same as taking an action against Christ. Such an action can have devastating results in the lives of those who do so.

The one clear example is found in the Book of Acts. It was Ananias who decided to withhold funds from "men" but without realizing it, he withheld from God.

"But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land? . . . How is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and died. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. (Acts 5:3-5)

The Archdiocese is not a person but the Church - the Body of Christ. There is no dichotomy between the Institution and the Lord. The funds sent to the Archdiocese are vivifying the National Ministries of the Orthodox Church. The Diocese of San Francisco receives (\$246,085), the Theological School (\$1,300,000), Youth Ministry (\$420,000), Orthodoxy in the World: Ecumenical Patriarchate, Missions, Philanthropy, (\$905,000), Communication (\$655,000) & the Administrative Offices of the Archdiocese, (\$1,546,120).

Ananias was struck dead for keeping back a promise made to God. Do we not fear what might happen to us?

The season of Great Lent ought to lead us into reflection and repentance. Our enemy leads us astray by focusing upon the sins of others and thus failing to see our own. Once a brother committed a sin in a Scetis (Monastery), and the elders assembled and sent for Abba Moses. He, however, did not want to go. Then the priest sent a message to him, saying: Come, everybody is waiting for you. So he finally got up to go. And he took a worn-out basket with holes, filled it with sand, and carried it along. The people came to meet him said: What is this Father? Then the old man said: My sins are running out behind me, yet I do not see them. And today I have come to judge the sins of someone else. When they heard this, they said nothing to the brother, and pardoned him.

The Church instructs us that before singing Christ is Risen the precondition is forgiveness of one another.

"It is the day of Resurrection; let us make ourselves resplendent for the festival and embrace one another. Let us say, brethren, even to those who do not love us: "Let all be forgiven in the Resurrection and so exclaim: Christ is Risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and bestowing life on those in the tombs."

Great Lent is an opportunity to see our many sins as forgiven in Christ. Without forgiveness there is only judgment and factions. Only God judges in a just manner (Romans 2:2). We are full of sins that leave a trail behind us. For in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself . . . (Romans 2:1) Are we so pure that our sins are any less than another's? For if you punish a person who has committed smaller sins . . . How will God turn the tables on you and punish you have committed greater transgressions? (Chrysostom) There can be no experience of the joy of the Resurrection of Christ without His forgiveness reigning between all members of the church.

The Resurrection is to be an ever present joy in one's heart. Remember how Cleopas (the uncle of Joseph) and Luke the evangelist had sadness in their hearts prior to encountering the Risen Lord.

And he (The Lord) said to them, "What is this conversation which you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?". . . But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since this happened. (Luke 24:17-21,52,53)

Their state of sadness was the result of not believing in the Resurrection. A few moments later Jesus reveals himself to them and faith is born in their hearts. And they returned to Jerusalem with great joy and were continually in the temple blessing God (Lk 24:52-53).

The Risen King captures souls from the enemy who seek to destroy His Body - the Church. The Risen Shepherd is ever present in healing relationships that have been thrown into turmoil. The Risen High Priest is forever at the Altar sanctifying the faithful and saving our souls. May our Risen God turn our every sadness into joy. To whom is due all glory, honor and worship unto the ages of ages. Amen.

In Christ,
+ Father Andrew Barakos