

The Victory of Suffering Love “He loved them unto the end”

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ, Light-Wrought children of the Church:

The “Gospel,” the joyous and Good News of our salvation in Christ, as we all know, commences with joy: “Fear not,” said the Angel to the blessed shepherds, “for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy”;¹ yet it also ends with joy: “And they [the Holy Apostles] worshipped him [our Lord at the Ascension], and returned to Jerusalem with great joy.”²



Our Holy Orthodox Church, which is, quite literally, the Church of Joyousness, is not only a herald of this great joy, but has become and is—through the Holy Resurrection—the everlasting fountain and the unique bearer of true and quintessential joy.

The Orthodox ethos of our Church, noble and compassionate, holy and blessed, is imbued with the presence of the Risen Christ; the Resurrection of our Savior, as an historical event, but also as a “continuous nowness” in the Church, permeates the being of the world, giving meaning to its existence and meaning to man’s life.

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¹ St. Luke 2:10.

² St. Luke 24:52.

My Christ-loving Brothers and Sisters:

The joy of the Resurrection dawned forth from the sorrow of the Cross. The Crucifixion of our Lord was, to be sure, not a defeat or a failure, but a voluntary self-oblation, a redemptive sacrifice, offered out of tender love, and as a final token: “having loved,” says the Holy Apostle John prior to the Passion, “. . .having loved his own, which were in the world, he [the Lord] loved them unto the end.”³

Only through a love which endures “unto the end,”⁴ that is, to the sorrow of the Cross, is it possible for our salvation, our victory over Satan, sin, and death, to be accomplished.

The poignant cry of our Savior upon the Cross, “It is finished,”⁵ was essentially a cry of victory. Deliverance is achieved and fulfilled. The victory is henceforth a certainty, having been confirmed by the “work” which the Father entrusted to the Son: “Father, I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do”; “all things have now been accomplished.”⁶

The sorrow of our Lord “unto death,”⁷ unto extreme weakness, for our sake did not come about so that we might be freed from sorrow and the afflictions of this world, but in order that His sorrow might become our own, and thus our afflictions for the sake of His love and for our brother might be transformed into sorrows of travail, into pangs that will give birth to our personal resurrection and the resurrection of the world.

My Brothers and Sisters who bear the name of Christ:

A love which—on account of Christ and by His mystical power—undergoes travail is a victory of suffering love;⁸ this love has overcome and will overcome the world, since it is omnipotent.

Evil and disorder at a personal and collective level cannot be over-

³ St. John 13:1.

⁴ See note 3.

⁵ St. John 19:30.

⁶ St. John 17:4; 19:28.

⁷ St. Matthew 26:38; St. Mark 14:34.

⁸ Archimandrite Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way* (London: Mowbrays, 1979), p. 107.

come by force, compulsion, or an authoritarian imposition of good and order.

Dostoevsky's Staretz Zosima expresses the Orthodox ethos on this matter:

“Always decide: ‘I will combat it by humble love.’ If you resolve on that once and for all, you can conquer the whole world. Loving humility is a fearsome force: it is the strongest of all things, and there is nothing else like it.”⁹

The love that suffers is the love that the Incarnate, Crucified, and Resurrected God-Man has bequeathed to us. The victory of suffering love, a victory won through the Cross and Resurrection, ought to become our unceasing personal way of life, if we wish to be true Christians and worthy of the love of Him Who “laid down his life for the sheep”¹⁰ and Who, through His “self-emptying,”¹¹ His self-abasement and perfect infirmity, has filled us with great joy.

May this great joy, which flows from the victory of suffering love, steadfastly typify our character, through the intercessions of the most blessed Theotokos and the inestimable prayers of our Elder and guide, Metropolitan Cyprian, who bears the seal of Christ, to the glory of the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Christ is Risen! Indeed, He is Risen!

Holy Resurrection of our Savior Jesus Christ, 2010

Your humble supplicant
before our Risen Lord,
† Bishop Cyprian of Oreoi,
Acting President
of the Holy Synod in Resistance

N.B.: The Reverend Parish Priests are asked to read the present Encyclical immediately after the Holy Gospel at the Divine Liturgy of Pascha.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

¹⁰ *Cf.* St. John 10:15.

¹¹ *Cf.* Philippians 2:7: “[h]e emptied himself, and took upon him the form of a servant.”