

Gratitude

On April 23rd at least 250 million Christians will be celebrating the largest event in world history, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We should ask ourselves why did He die? Was it to show how powerful He was? Or was it to reveal the immense evil that there is in the world? We need to answer NO to both of these questions because Christ came as God not for Himself, nor for evil but for us. He came as the Lamb led to the slaughter (Isaiah 53:7) so that death would not be an end in itself but rather death would lead to life. All sin ultimately ends in death, either quickly for example by taking a gun to your head and you cease to breath, or slowly by eating too many boxes of chocolates which can lead to your arteries clogging and heart failure. In the Old Testament the Jewish people would offer animal sacrifices to God in order to avoid their own death which was brought on by sin. (Lev. 14:13, 25) Christ as the Lamb of God (John 1:29) fulfilled that Old Testament ritual and annulled the need for any further blood sacrifices. Christ also showed us clearly what type of death transforms into life. It is an altruistic death whose only agenda is to aid the suffering. To have life we must avoid self-indulgence and do what is best for the salvation of others which might require our own physical death. This is what Christ has done for us and this is what we will celebrate on April 23rd at 12:00 AM in the morning. This is the light that arises out of our Lord's death to give life to all, and if we truly realize this in our lives, our every breath, our every thought should be filled in thanksgiving. April 23rd should be in huge bold print on our calendar, with sparkling colors. Every Sunday in gratitude we should look toward the Divine Liturgy to remember and celebrate that glorious event. We should rush to every Wednesday night Presanctified service during Great Lent in order to partake in the *Eucharist* (which means thanksgiving) God's flesh and blood which gives us the opportunity for Him to dwell in us. Also partaking of communion gives us the strength to do what we need to do in order to overcome our self-centeredness. And this same spirit of gratitude should permeate our lives so that everything we do reflects our thankfulness. The question now is how do we concretely translate this sense of appreciation to our everyday living?

Ultimately our grateful actions need to be pointed to those around us especially those in need. The Lord said when we act upon the least we are acting upon Him. (Matt. 25:45) Are we listening to our friends when they are in distress and need support or are we distracted by the "NPR" broadcast on the latest breaking news? Are we present for our coworker who might have a legitimate concern about us or are we more concerned about Lattes from Starbucks? Do we spend quality time with our children and spouses or is every spare moment filled with personal hobbies such as jogging, hunting or watching the football game? If we are truly grateful we will make sure our lives are not so filled with so many things that we neglect those around us. And this is equally important with God Himself. Do we hear Him? Do we take a step out of our own needs and focus on talking with Him? Or are we filled with so much ego and self-centeredness that our entire lives are solely fueled by our own desires, successes, and sense of accomplishments, whether it be running a marathon, killing a bull elk, or having the most beautiful house. This is why God through the Church has provided this time of Lent, so that in gratitude we focus ourselves on Him. This is why we eat less and quiet our lives

so that we have space for Him and do not crowd out His voice. This is why we pray more so to have our eyes open and see the blessing God has given us. This is why we run to confession so to decrease our chances of self-delusion and self-pitying which prevents us from realizing the gifts we have been given. This all points us to the pinnacle of gratitude which is the Eucharistic event where God's flesh and blood is offered for all of us in the sacred Passover, the Pascha, Holy Easter. Let us all in thanksgiving prepare to receive God, every moment in prayer, every day in charity, every week in communing in His Son in the Divine service, so that on April 23rd the light of God shines inside of us all.