

## Sermon 5th week after Pentecost

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

CHRIST IS IN OUR MIDST !

Paul speaks of his fellow Jews not walking in the covenant of righteousness and thus being unenlightened and attempting to fashion a righteousness of their own.

The word must be on both our lips and in our hearts.

St. Paul is making a case for the Gospel. He is warning us, that our faith, our participation, our communion, can become a formula that we perform instead of that which is on our lips and heart. The zeal to “be right” (as if this is what righteousness is about) is a temptation that has been in the Church from the first century. It is the same reason that the Gospels feature Jesus often squaring off against the pharisees. It’s there because WE ARE LIKE THAT. The temptation to legalism has always been an issue for us.

And today this legalism can show up in a variety of ways. Legalism is a minimalist faith. And our culture contributes to this legalistic approach. Our culture doesn’t ask “what are the bounties of God that He has made available to us?” but rather, “what is the least that we have to do? – what is the minimum I have to do to get by?”

This can be just as much a problem for us today as it was for the Jews in the first century. And we can become just as blind to God as they were. On-line Orthodoxy is a particularly pernicious pit of those who distort the faith into an ideology

Archbishop Dmitri of Dallas (of blessed memory said in his commentary on today's epistle: God forbid that any Orthodox believer, in the name of piety and zeal, should ever persecute any one who is not in agreement with us, be they non-Christians, heretics, or simply non-believers! Unfortunately, there have been persecutions of Jews and heretics by those who thought they were doing God's service. In the life of the Church, there have been, and there still are, pious people and monks whose misguided zeal has moved them to condemn their "lax" brethren. They (in their zeal to be righter than right) condemn the clergy of the canonical Church for a variety of reasons. . . . These things have led to the formation of schismatic groups that claim to be the only "true" or "genuine" Orthodox Church."

We see people who think they are preserving the faith. But they are replacing it with a secular modernism that mistakes a particular and recent cultural approach for the faith once delivered to the saints. There are both laity and clergy who substitute their opinion of the cultural battles of the day for the faith of the apostles and of the fathers.

When we replace our hunger for God with our zeal for being right, we cease desiring God.

We have been given so great a gift of the Orthodox Christian faith. We can treat it like just another thing we do; or we can let that faith transform us into the likeness of God.

And St. Paul further instructs us of the importance of humility. For God became humble for our sake – the Word became flesh; Christ humbled Himself for our sake and took on our humanity. So we must also humble ourselves and avoid looking only to our narrow interests. We must humble ourselves and look to see how

we can serve others. For Jesus commanded us to Love one another.

Today we celebrate the passion bearers St. Tsar Nicholas, Tsaritsa Alexandra, and their children and their servants.

If you are looking for a villain in Tsar Nicholas, you will find evidence. If you are looking for an emperor that was concerned about his people and global problems, you will find that too. Whatever preconceptions you come to him with, you will find validation. St. Nicholas was a complicated man who does not fit into the black and white boxes that we might fashion for him. Nicholas was not prepared to be Tsar. His sister remarked that he was taught to be a soldier and not a statesman. His coronation went badly. Rumor was that there were not enough of the traditional gifts that a new emperor gave out. There was a stampede and 1282 people died. That left a bad taste in the mouths of many. Because the Japanese war had gone badly there were riots in Moscow. St. Elizabeth's husband was assassinated. This lead Tsar Nicholas to institute reforms. The conservatives mistrusted his reforms; The intelligentsia also mistrusted with reason; his grandfather reformed, his father tried to take the reforms back. The revolutionaries considered him to be a figure-head that they had to get rid of. Because the war was going badly, and food was becoming a problem, and, as St. John of Shanghai said, "Filthy slanders were spread beforehand against the Tsar and his family," some of the Russian people began to lose confidence in him.

Yet Tsar Nicholas saw well what was going on (and indeed is still going on) in the world. He said: I look out over the world; I study our civilization, and I do not find it good. I see nations all

engaged in seizing, or trying to seize all territory not yet occupied by European powers. For the native races, what does imperial expansion mean? Too often, opium, alcohol, and all manner of diseases, a great guilt between the governed and those who rule, and crushing taxation upon the natives for the blessings of this civilization. And for the nations who seize, what does it mean? A continual increase of suspicion, jealousy, and rivalry; the heaping up of fleets and armies in order to take part in a scramble with the world, with the result that the army and navy are swallowing up more and more millions that should be used for the welfare of the people and the advancement of the world.

As WW1 raged on, the Tsaritsa and her daughters volunteered as nurses.

The Tsar was forced to abdicate. He signed his abdication in pencil. This was not proper. The whole family was taken prisoner, first under house arrest at Alexander Palace, then held in Tobolsk in Siberia; (the Tsar shoveled snow there.) Eventually transported to Ekaterinsburg by the Red Army. They had been under arrest for a year and a half. They knew that it was the end for them. They spent their days reading the Prophets. They faced their fate with faith in God. At Ekaterinsburg they were treated as convicted criminals. As the White Army fought their way toward Ekaterinsburg, the Bolshevik Red Army, fearing that the White Army might free them, took the Tsar and his family and their servants to the basement of the house and killed them all. The Tsar and his family met their end with courage and faith. They shot the Tsar and Tsaritsa and bayoneted the rest. They were all given one bullet. There were enough soldiers to shoot everyone, but they all turned their bullets upon the Tsar and Tsaritsa. Their dead bodies were abused, burned and buried in a common

anonymous grave. Today, a “Church on the Blood” has been built where that house was. Underneath the Church, the basement is still there. It is now a Chapel of Golgotha

Through the prayers of the Royal Passion-bearers O Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us.