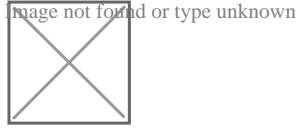


Saint Luke the Surgeon: What distinguishes the way of Christ from other ways of living (Ephraim, Abbot of the Vatopaidi Monastery)

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Saint Luke associated sorrows with the personal Cross which we have to shoulder in our life and which distinguishes the way of Christ from other ways of living. He says, typically, in one of his sermons: 'Our life, the life of each person, is sorrow and pain. All these sorrows in our social and family life are our Cross. A failed marriage, an unfortunate choice of profession, don't they bring us pain and sorrow? Shouldn't people who've suffered these calamities have to bear them bravely? Serious illnesses, contempt, dishonour, loss of personal wealth, jealousy between spouses, slander and, in general, all the wickedness that people do to us, aren't they all our Cross? That's exactly what our Cross is, the Cross of the vast majority of people. These are the sorrows that afflict people and we have to bear them, even though most people don't want to. But even people who hate Christ and refuse to follow His way, they, too, have to shoulder their own Cross of pain. What's the difference between them and Christians? The difference is that Christians shoulder the Cross with patience and don't complain against God. Humbly, with eyes cast down, they bear it to the end of their lives, following the Lord Jesus Christ. They do it for Christ and His Gospel, they do it for fervent love of Him, but the whole of their thought is caught up in the Gospel teaching.



In order to put Gospel teaching into practice, to follow the path of Christ, people have to shoulder their Cross humbly and tirelessly. They mustn't curse it but must bless it. Only then are they observing Christ's commandment, because they'll have renounced their self, will have taken up the Cross and followed Christ. They'll have followed Him on a long road about which the Lord said that the way to the kingdom of Heaven is full of sorrows and that the gate where it begins is narrow. We would like our path through life to be broad, without pot-holes, stones, thorns or mud. We'd like it to be strewn with flowers. But the Lord shows us another way, the path of pain. What we need to know is that, on this path, however difficult it might be, if we turn to Christ with all our heart, then, in a miraculous and inexplicable way, He will help us. When we fall, He supports us. He strengthens and comforts us. Then we understand the words of Saint Paul, when he says: "For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison" [10]. Then the sorrows of this transient life will be very light for us' [11].

He saw in sorrows the Cross that leads to the Resurrection. He would say: 'We have to sacrifice our passions, desires and wishes to God and to other people. And as the Lord ascended the terrible Cross on Golgotha, so, when we shoulder our Cross, we must remember that we're following the path of service to God and other people and that this is the only way which will bring us, through Golgotha, to the Resurrection [12].

Saint Luke loved Christ with all his being, as he did the other people he served with total self-denial. He loved the Church of Christ. He understood the role and purpose

of the Church very well. He used to say: 'The heavenly blessing springs from the Church and through the Church and its success is obvious in all human works and skills' [13].

But the administration of the Church at the time he lived and under the adverse conditions of the persecution was a great trial for him. In the summer of 1956, he wrote to his son: 'It's becoming increasingly difficult to run Church affairs. Churches are closing one after another there aren't any priests and numbers are going down... In some places the reaction has become a revolt against my episcopal authority' [14]. In 1960, writing to his son again, he said: 'It's a great trial for me to run Church affairs. The representative of the state, the enemy of the Church of Christ, is increasingly misappropriating my episcopal rights and intervening in Church matters. ... The battle against an exceptionally bad priest lasted more than two months. The rebellion against episcopal authority in Dzhankoy has been going on for two years now and is being encouraged by people from the KGB. They've got lots of reasons to shorten my life [15].

Joy and peace of the soul are to be found with the extinction of the 'body of sin' [16] and embarkation on the path of Christ. The Christian life isn't one of comfort. It's a joust against the sorrows and hardships of the world, which give the Cross its comprehensive meaning. Unless we get rid of the body of sin, which binds people to the sinful world, the fruit of the Spirit can never ripen. When people accept pain and sorrows with faith and patience, they find that Christ is walking along with them. Then they see the true light; they undergo the 'change for the better' and taste that joy and peace which cannot be taken away from them. It's the joy and peace which Christ brought into the world as a human person: before the Cross, on the Cross and after the Cross and His Resurrection. It's the joy and peace of His impregnable Kingdom.

Despite the mockery to which He was subjected on Golgotha, Christ was, in fact, peaceful, because He was 'ascending to His Father and our Father'. Despite the pain and dishonour He suffered on the Cross, Christ, the radiance of the glory of the Father, was peaceful, because He was reconciling the human race with God and becoming the sole Saviour of the world.

We see the same in the case of Saint Luke of the Crimea. He bore his sorrows, his own Cross and reached the Resurrection. He became the perfect disciple of Christ, the reconciler, the intermediary between people and God. The perfect disciples of Christ are people who patiently bear sorrows and temptations, which of, course, arise through no fault of their own but for the sake of the love of Christ. Christ

Himself confesses: 'You are those who have stood by me in my trials. And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones... [17]. In other words, it's clear how Christ will reward those who, for His sake, have patiently borne sorrows, persecutions and temptations. And, of course, He emphasizes this in the last Beatitude: 'Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you' [18]. This Beatitude, we believe, was fully confirmed in Saint Luke of the Crimea.

Saint Luke became the perfect disciple of Christ, his heart was enlarged through sorrows, as the Psalm says [19], so that there was room for the whole of Christ and all people, those in pain and sorrow. He became a wonder-working saint all over the length and breadth of the world, wherever his name is invoked. Not only in Russia and the Crimea, but here in Greece, too, and especially here in Veria with the presence of his grace-giving relics, as well as his beautiful new church, built on the initiative of His Eminence Panteleïmon, Metropolitan of Veria, Naousa and Kampania. Saint Luke's presence is tangible and the miracles he's worked are infinite (as our beloved Archimandrite Chrysostomos Papadakis, of the Ecumenical Throne, mentioned in his address). Let us call upon him in faith and love to give us strength with the Cross we're shouldering and in the unexpected sorrows and persecutions of our lives. Amen

[11] Saint Luke, Archbishop of Simferopol and the Crimea, Talks and Speeches.

[12] *ibid.*

[13] Antonopoulos, *op. cit.*

[14] *ibid.* p. 360.

[15] *ibid.*

[16] See Rom. 6, 6.

[17] Lk. 22, 28-30.

[18] Matth. 5, 11.

[19] Ps.4, 2.