

## *Notes From Spiritual Discussions*

### **Friday, December 21<sup>st</sup>, 2007 – Emptying (Gr. *kenosis*)**

- “Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled (more accurately: EMPTIED) Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross... Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.” (*Phil 2: 1-2, 5-8, 12-13.*) -St. Paul says to imitate me because I (St Paul) imitate Christ. Try to follow St Paul as a leader of ministry and service.

-How can we imitate Him?

-First step is to empty ourselves.

-What does it mean to empty ourselves?

-How did Christ empty Himself?

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He Who is full of glory took our weak human form; the Creator took the form of His creation; the Master became a slave; the Unlimited became limited; He Who is without time became subject to time; the Unchangeable became a Human that changes.

· He took the form of a human (emptied himself) as a sacrifice to save our sins.

· Although there is no comparison to what our Lord did, we too must empty ourselves from worldly pride, desires, philosophies, etc...

This emptying occurs through sacrifice. This is the secret of any successful relationship. We are supposed to have a relationship with God. Our salvation is two-sided. It isn't just God Who emptied Himself and sacrificed Himself for us, we are all supposed to do the same.

-Example of a Box: No analogy is perfect, but this will at least give some perspective on this. Some people enter a relationship looking for what they can get out of it. However, with this mentality, after a while there is nothing more to get out. It is like a box. The box can only have so many things in it. If you continue to take out of it, it will eventually become empty. But if the relationship is one of sacrifice, both sides are continuously putting in the box. Therefore, the box is always full and never lacking.

In our relationship with God, if all we are doing is seeking what we can get out of that relationship without putting something in, then I will be lacking. Why? Because I didn't empty myself to be filled with Him. If the cup is already full, there is no room for anything else. “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble”.

-What sacrifices could we offer to Him so that we may be emptied?

· Our time, will, effort, future, body, repentance, obedience, love, service...

-Also by serving others. “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”  
(Gal 6: 2)

· You cannot serve people without making sacrifices yourself. And in so doing, we fulfill the law of Christ, since He emptied Himself for us to bear our burdens. We similarly must empty ourselves to serve other people in order to bear their burdens. But in the end, Christ is carrying all our burdens.

-And in so doing, we will find rest for our souls:

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. *Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart [the only two things that Christ asked us to learn from Him], and you will find rest for your souls.* For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matt. 11:28-30).

-Burning out can be very easy when trying to serve others, especially the groups that are dealt with in Urban Mission. It is important to regularly offer ourselves to Christ so that He can fill us with His grace, rather than relying on our limited minds.

-How can we empty ourselves?

· Feel God’s presence through personal retreat and prayer.

· Remember our own sins. This is purifying. There is a story in the Paradise of the Desert Fathers about monks who came to an elder monk and told him of one of the fathers that saw angels. The reply of the elder was that it would be better for a person to see his sins before him continually. The interpretation of this is that if one sees his sins continuously, he should repent. And through repentance his heart will become pure. And if the heart is pure, he will see God Himself: “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God”.

· Realize how much God loves us: “Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God LEADS YOU TO REPENTANCE?” (Rom. 2:4). (Example, repentance, confession, meditation, soul searching.)

-In the service, it is important to also realize our weakness: “Without Me you can do NOTHING”. You need experience to grow stronger.

-Without experience, you can’t put yourself to the test. It is these tests that allow you to grow and gain more experience: “And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope” (Rom. 5:3-4).

-It is important to put the trials before God through prayer so that He may reveal to us the lessons.

-If I rely on myself only during the trials, I will not stand. But if I ask God to help, by emptying myself, and being filled with Him, then I will be able to continue through the lessons.

-We should also understand that Christ went through much more trials than we will ever, so it is OK to give Christ our worries so that He may fix them: “For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted” (Heb. 2:18).

-By emptying ourselves, we are able to treat all people with the dignity and respect they all deserve, because we are humbling ourselves before the Lord as well as before others.

## **Saturday, December 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2007—Being Filled**

(Read same passage from Phil. 2 as above).

-After talking about emptying ourselves, we need to be filled with the Holy Spirit and have a personal relationship with the Lord.

-If you don't know how to get somewhere, you can't tell others how to get there. So it is important to first be filled with the Holy Spirit, in order to have something to offer to others.

“Take heed to YOURSELF and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this YOU WILL SAVE BOTH YOURSELF AND THOSE WHO HEAR YOU” (1Tim. 4:16).

-I must first be filled for the sake of my salvation and in order to be able to present that salvation to others in the right way: “For what shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and lose his own soul?” (Matt 16:26)

-We must have personal relationship with God.

· During the Eve Of Paschal Monday of Holy Week, the story in the gospels about Christ with His disciples in Caesarea Philippi is repeated more than once. This passage tells the story of when Jesus asks his disciples who they think He is. The first question He asked them was what people say about Who He is. The second question was concerning what their personal belief in Him was. This shows that what Christ wanted was the personal relationship with Him in spite of what everyone said. What did we gain if we try to pull others to Christ, when we ourselves aren't able to have a personal relationship with Him?

· In the Divine Liturgy and some hymns like “Thine is the power, the glory, the blessing...” that we say in Holy Week, sometimes we say “We believe” when referring to more than one person, but the stress is really on a personal belief by saying “I believe” or saying “MY Lord Jesus Christ, My Good Savior. The Lord Who is Holy is MY strength, MY praise, and has become MY salvation”.

· What profit is it to me if the whole world is saved, and I am not? He must become my personal Savior.

## **Sunday, December 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2007—What to Present to Others**

“You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier. And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. The hardworking farmer must be first to partake of the crops. Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things.” (2<sup>nd</sup> Tim 2: 1-7).

-St. Paul is writing to St. Timothy about how Christianity is to be delivered: basically Christianity is TRADITION and DISCIPLESHIP. Tradition is delivered by discipleship. What is Tradition? Just details of doctrine and faith? No, it is all of Christianity together. The disciples when living with Christ for three years did not just learn matters of faith, but also His behavior, speech, from His miracles, His dealing with different situations, His teaching and guidance to them after they would come back to Him from an experience that they had (for example the casting out of demons after being sent out or when they could not cast out the demon one time). They were in the greatest theological

school that ever existed with God Himself teaching and learning by being with Him day and night for three years continuously.

This is the Holy Tradition that is to be delivered to everyone in service: the Christian way of life that includes matters of doctrine and faith. They are one and the same.

-The way to teach people the right faith is to show them the right way of life, just as our Lord Jesus showed and instructed His disciples.

-The analogies help us see what we need to strive to be.

#### 1. Good Soldier of Jesus Christ

- Obedient to his master
- Shows loyalty to what his master says
- Knows how to use his weapon the right way (example prayer)
- Represents the army of God (Fights for what is right)
- Is always committed (If you are not committed 100%, you will not be able to see the fruits of your labor. What one reaps depend on what is sown. Remember in the parable of the talents, the one who received five and the other who received two produced 100%, five and two, respectively. We must use all that God has given us for His glory. We must continue what we started even after the weekend (Trip) is over.)

#### 2. Athlete

- Has endurance
- Works hard during training
- Learns how to deal with setbacks and doubts.
- Puts all his trust in his or her coach, just as we should put all our trust in the Lord and strive for nothing less than the Gold (Heavenly Treasure).

· Keeps his eyes on the Prize. Story from the Paradise of the Fathers: A fox is chasing a rabbit; he can only eat it if he catches it. Other foxes may start to run after the fox that is chasing the rabbit, but they can't see the rabbit, they will eventually stop because they can't see the same prize the first fox can see.

· Every one came with different intentions and perceptions, but we must all leave with set goals.

#### 3. Hardworking Farmer

- Patience and learns from his failures

-Wakes up early to plant, sometimes doesn't see the fruits of his labor right away.

-Sweats to learn. We also at times need to be in uncomfortable situations in order to learn and grow spiritually.

-Example, St Peter took all sorts of criticism, got right back up and learnt something good from them.

We try to separate all this out into different categories and virtues. But this discussion of Christianity, this Holy Tradition, is really one big picture that is just seen at different angles. It is like a gem that when looked at from different views appears slightly different, but it is the same gem.

