

GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MARK 8:34-9:1

And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

[35] For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it.

[36] For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?

[37] Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

[38] Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.

Mark.9 [1] And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power.

The Lord is teaching that whoever sincerely wishes to be a true Christian needs to deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Him. He emphasizes that He is not commanding us to do anything. We act only if, according to our free will, we desire to do so. But, in choosing to follow Christ, it is not enough to just talk about doing it. We are required to act.

The Savior is inviting us to journey with Him into an eternal blessed life. He explains that it is a journey through which love is expressed in action to God and one's neighbor. He warns that this kind of love is possible only if one is ready and willing to deny himself, his wants and desires. He must sacrifice himself on behalf of God and his neighbor. And one must persevere to the very end of his life. The image of such perseverance is a person picking up his cross and carrying it throughout life until death.

In this life, we are giving a choice of two life styles. The first choice, as it is called in the Gospel, is saving our life (verse 35). This is a life in which, because we cherish our personal life above all else, we diligently protect ourselves from all possible troubles, needs, and cares. We devote it to ourselves and our personal enjoyment. We are indifferent to the needs and troubles of our neighbors and avoid all situations that require us to exert ourselves on behalf of God or our neighbor. Making this choice, we may save ourselves in our earthly life, but at a cost of losing another kind of life, an eternal life of blessedness.

The second choice is a life in which we love God and our neighbor more than ourselves. This choice requires that when necessary, we deny ourselves, our wants, our personal "I". We are ready at all times to submit ourselves to the will of God, no matter what God is requiring, and to the service of our neighbor. No type of suffering can deter us. We accept without grumbling all

trials that befall us as the will of God and are never deaf to the needs of our neighbor. We may in this way lose our personal life, but we earn a much greater one, an eternal blessed life.

Choosing between the two is the life choice that each one of us as an Orthodox Christian must make. The Savior then encourages us to make the right choice by reminding us that no matter how happy and successful we can become in this life, it is only for a very short amount of time. And it will end with our losing everything. He asks if the price of losing our eternal soul in exchange for even the greatest temporary enjoyment is a price worth paying.

Therefore, as we stand before the cross listening to the salvific words of the Gospel, may our Savior bless us to complete our fasting period with great benefit. And through fasting, may God open our spiritual eyes to see clearly the path of the cross, travel on it with Him, and never waver from it until we are standing at the gates of Heaven, asking to be admitted.

With Love in Christ,
Archpriest Serge Kotar