Central Declaration on the Letter to Galatians - Fr. Herman Homily September 20, 2026

In the name of the Father, the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit>> Amen.
Glory to Jesus Christ >> Glory forever >>

This past Thursday, we finished our study on the book of Galatians, our eight week tour through the book. And also last Sunday we had a reading from the book of Galatians. And today our epistle reading was from the book of Galatians. And so it is from that book that I will be speaking this morning in this sermon.

Today the church hears the central declaration of the letter to the Galatians. Paul announces that he has been crucified with Christ and that it is no longer he who lives but Christ who lives in him. To hear these words correctly, they must be situated within the movement of the entire letter. Galatians begins with a rescue where Jesus Christ gave himself for our sins and delivers us from the present evil age. It concludes with the declaration that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything but only a new creation. Between that rescue and that creation stands the cross. The crisis in Galatia concerned the identity of the people of God. Who are they? Certain teachers claimed that faith in Christ was insufficient and that the mark of circumcision and the works of the law was required. If something must be added to the cross, however, then the cross is not sufficient. If righteousness comes through law, then Christ died to no purpose.

Today, the proclamation of Galatians follows three movements. **First**, the works of the law cannot establish the sinner as righteous before God. **Second**, the cross brings the old life under the law to its end. And **third**, the one crucified with Christ belongs to the new creation. The first movement, the works of the law cannot establish the sinner as righteous. Paul repeats a single fact three times in one verse. A man is not justified by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. The Greek verb means to become righteous, to be in right relationship with God. This language is the language of the courtroom where the judge renders his final decision. Paul's response to how can one be justified is clear. It is not by the works of the law. Now this does not suggest that there's anything wrong with the law. The law is not evil. The law was given by God himself. But the law serves as a guardian, a temporary custodian until Christ came. A guardian can identify the transgression, but a guardian cannot grant life.

Through the law, Paul died to the law that he might live to God. Something has occurred that the law was never intended to accomplish. The Galatians are therefore being asked to choose between two different claims. One proclaims that Christ has acted. The other claims that man must establish his own standing by what he or she does. Paul rejects the

second claim because the Gospel is the record of God's action. Christ gave himself for our sins. God sent his son in the fullness of time. Christ redeemed those under the curse. The action belongs to God from beginning to end. Our standing before God is never based upon religious achievement, ancestry, reputation or human observance. These can all become substitutes for the cross. The servant does not dictate the terms of the king's decree. We receive what God has accomplished through his Son. He is the subject and the human being is always the object in scripture. God is always the one who acts. The text of Galatians then moves from the inability of the law to justify to the reality that the person who sought life through that system has himself been put to death.

Which leads us to the **second** movement. The cross brings the old life to its end. Paul declares other men with Christ, “I have been crucified.” This is one of the most radical statements in the entire letter. Paul does not say that Christ improved his former life. He says that the former Paul is dead. Paul knew the old system from the inside. He had advanced in Judaism beyond his contemporaries and was zealous for the traditions of his followers. If anyone could boast in religious achievement, it was the Apostle Paul. But the cross brought that boast to an end, a violent end. In fact, Paul wrote, "If I build up again those things which I tore down, then I prove myself a transgressor.” (Gal 2:18). To return to the law as the basis of righteousness is to rebuild what the cross has already demolished. The Galatians were attempting to rebuild the prison from which they had been released. Against this, Paul places the cross. I have been crucified with Christ. The old claim to status is dead. The old boasting is dead. The old attempt to secure life through the flesh is dead. It is no longer Paul who lives, but Christ who lives in him. The cross is not another religious achievement in which we may boast. It is the destruction of all boasting. We stand before God not displaying what we have accomplished because we have done no good deed upon the earth but proclaiming what Christ has accomplished through the crucified Son.

This is why Paul will finally say, "Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ,” (Gal 6:14). Once the old world has been crucified, the text reveals what stands on the other side of the cross, which leads to the third movement of the passage. The crucified now belongs to the new creation. Life comes only through death. Only through the cross does life come. Paul wrote, "The life I now live in the flesh. I live by faith in the son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.” Paul still lives in the flesh, of course, but the authority over that life has changed. The old Paul lived according to zeal, ancestry, and standing under the law. The crucified Paul lives by faith in the son of God. **This is the goal of the entire letter to the Galatians**. For freedom, Christ has set us free. Paul writes, "This freedom is not for self-interest. However, the one released from slavery to the law is now free to bear the burdens of others and thus fulfill the law of Christ,” (Gal 6:2).

At the end of the letter, Paul gives the **final** rule we are to follow. Neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision but a new creation. Paul does not replace one category with another. He declares both categories powerless. The cross has brought the entire system of the old creation to an end. Galatians therefore moves from the present evil age to the new creation. Christ gave himself to rescue us from the one and through his cross God has established the other. We cannot rebuild the distinctions that the cross has rendered powerless and useless. The church is not measured by ancestry, status, achievement, or reputation. Paul gives another measure, faith, working through love, bearing one another's burdens, walking by the spirit, and boasting only in the cross of Jesus Christ. This brings us to the final sentence of today's epistle reading where the entire argument reaches its decisive point. Paul says, "I do not nullify the grace of God. For if justification were through the law, then Christ died to no purpose," (Gal 2:21). That is the dividing line. Either the cross is sufficient or it is not. Either God has acted through his Son or man must establish himself. Either the old world still determines identity or through the cross there is a new creation.

Today in this epistle which is read throughout the Orthodox Church, three things were heard. The works of the law cannot establish the sinner as righteous. The cross brings the old life under the law to its end. And the one who has been crucified with Christ belongs to the new creation. The book of Galatian begins with Christ giving himself to deliver us from the present evil age. At its center, Paul declares, "I have been crucified with Christ." And at the conclusion of the letter, he announces a new creation. The cross leaves nothing for human beings to add and nothing in which Human beings may boast. The old world is crucified and we should stop living in it. The prisoner is released. The slave has become an heir. Jew and Gentile are gathered together into one household. The only life that remains is the life Paul confesses today, "It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20).

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Glory to Jesus Christ. >> Glory forever.
Help us. Save us. Have mercy upon us and keep us, oh God, by thy grace

Link to Sermon - https://youtu.be/MnrnWDzgv-w?t=5464