

SUNDAY THEOSIS #4-47

Sacramental Living By Michael Haldas

The Blessing of Brokenness

“Our Lord Jesus Christ came to heal us of this brokenness...”
(Metropolitan Philaret of New York)

Christ says something very curious in Luke 20:17-18. He quotes Psalms 117:22 LXX (Psalms 118) which says, “The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone,” and adds, “Whoever falls on that stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.” How should we understand His teaching here? St. John Chrysostom says that falling on the stone and being broken means we suffer the effects of our own sins in this life; whereas those on whom the stone falls are unrepentant people doomed to destruction in the final judgment. Yet, there is great hope for us in being broken by falling on the stone.

Christ the Cornerstone

A cornerstone is the first stone set in the construction of a masonry foundation. It is important since all other stones are set to it thus determining the position of the entire structure. Christ, who often spoke in metaphor



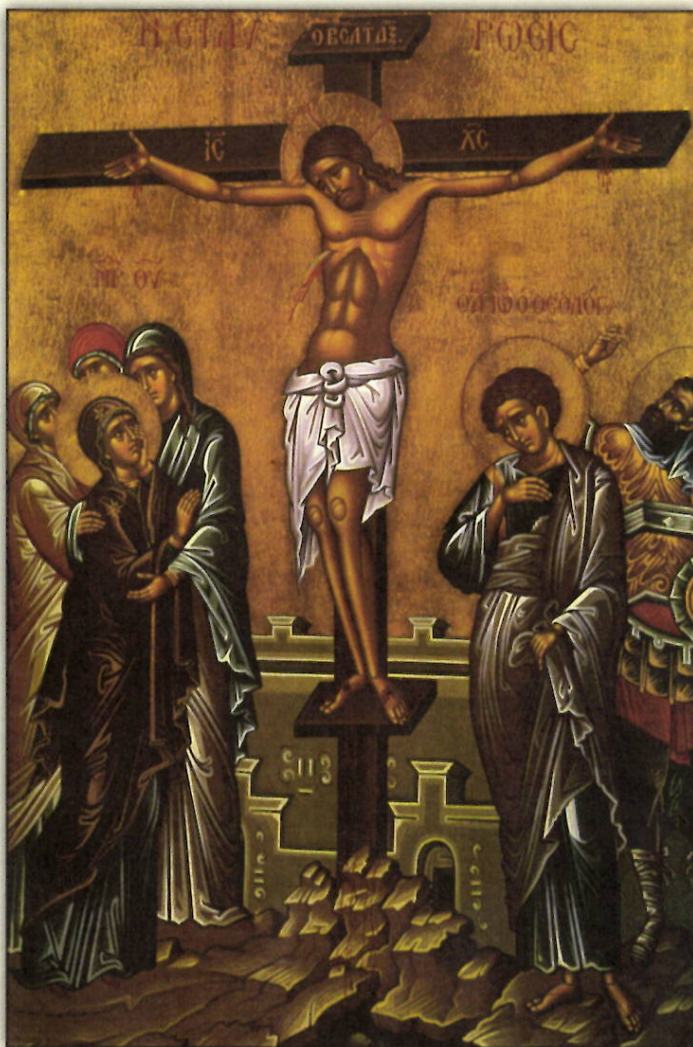
and symbol, is the cornerstone of our lives with whom we need to be set in reference. He reminds us in John 15:5 that He is the vine and we are the branches and apart from Him we can do nothing. He tells us in Matthew 12:30 that if we are not with Him, we are against Him. We like to overcomplicate things as human beings. Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 11:3 not to complicate the simplicity of Christ. The simple truth is our faith is a binary faith meaning that we are either with Christ or not with Christ at any given moment in our lives. There is no in between though we delude ourselves with nuance that does not exist. Christ does not want us to end up like the goats He describes in Matthew 25:31-46. Therefore, He

permits us to be broken due to our sins because it is in our brokenness that we have the opportunity to turn to Him. No one typically seeks God when life is good. But many turn to God when they suffer.

Understanding the Nature and Purpose of Brokenness

No normal person wants to suffer. No one wants to be broken. Many rail against God when they experience suffering and brokenness and blame Him for it. As difficult as it may be, we should praise God when it happens to us because God loves us enough to let it happen. More than our physical and mental health, what God cares about is our union with Him (theosis) and will do whatever it takes and will permit in our lives whatever we need for us to seek this union. The devil, Satan, goes around like a roaring lion looking to devour us (1 Peter 5:8). For as brilliant as the devil may be, he is blind to what he is doing, not knowing he is already defeated and that everything he does works to God's glory. He has already been defeated by the blood of Christ shed on the cross. Nothing he does can truly harm us if we choose Christ. Christ reminds us He and His words are life, and though we

may die physically we will live eternally (John 11:25). Every evil thing Satan does to inflict suffering on us, everything we bring on ourselves by our sinful choices, is an opportunity to turn to God. Christ meets us in our suffering, which He took upon Himself on the cross. He meets us in our sin because He took on the sins of the world on the cross. When we suffer brokenness all that we have to



do is make the choice to turn to God and continue in that choice. Nothing will snatch us out of His hand (John 10:28) no matter what we endure.

We see this clearly in the Book of Job. Satan inflicted evil upon Job. Yet everything he did worked to God's purpose for Job. At the end of the story, Job is completely restored and receives even more blessing that he had previously. Job never received answers as to why he suffered and never knew anything about what Satan was doing and why God permitted it. What he did receive was God Himself. This can be our story too depending on the choices we make in our brokenness. I do not write this lightly. This has been my experience and I know others who have suffered far worse things than me who are filled with the Holy Spirit because of the choice they made in their brokenness.

What is Brokenness and What Does It Look Like

Brokenness is nothing more than the death of self, or self-will, and our false sense of independence. It is choice of choosing God and recognizing our dependence on Him and others. It usually manifests in us through tears because it is painful. It's that time and place we come to when our suffering feels like it is beyond what we can endure. We feel like we have run out of options, we have no answers, and we don't know what to do. Then

the tears come in waves and spasms. In them we pour out the turmoil in us, the tempest in our soul, the rage, the feelings of helplessness. We come to the end of ourselves, a place of self-emptying. At last when we are completely empty, much like Elijah in the cave after he experienced the great wind, earthquake, and fire only to find God in the sound of the gentle breeze (3 Kingdoms 19:11-12 LXX or 1 Kings 19:11-12), when we have nothing left, we are finally able to begin to perceive Christ through our spirit and thus receive Him in our hearts.

Brokenness is coming to a place of self-forgiveness because Christ forgives us. This is not to be confused with a lack of accountability. It's the simple understanding that we are sinful. Therefore, we are supposed to mess up and should stop beating ourselves up when we do because we are under the delusion that we can be perfect by our own merits. This is nothing more than ego. Christ said to the healed paralytic in John 5:14 to "Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you." He did not say "sin no more or I will punish you." He held the man accountable but forgave Him and set Him on a new path of redemption. Christ will do the same for us when we turn to Him in our brokenness due to our own sinfulness.

Brokenness is coming to a place where we can distinguish the false

religion of modernity which tries to teach us nothing bad will ever happen to us if we have true faith, from real religion which teaches us bad things may happen regardless. Christ teaches this truth in John 16:33 when He said to His disciples, "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." He is Emanuel, God with us, and will bring us through our storms and we will know peace amidst the storm when we turn to Him (Mark 4:35- 40).

Brokenness is a place of experiencing humility without humiliation. Like Adam and Eve in the garden, we are ashamed of our naked selves. Not naked in the physical sense, but of revealing who we truly are and we hide behind personas and veneers. Father Stephen Freeman reminds us in his writings that each of the men featured in the Gospels of the Tri-odion Sundays leading up to Great Lent – Zacchaeus, the publican, the prodigal son – were willing to bear the shame openly and in humility and were received by God lovingly.

Brokenness Leads to the Joy of True Repentance

Brokenness is ultimately a place of true repentance and a radical trust in God's goodness. Job said in Job 13:15, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him." That is a place we all

need to get to and we need to trust in God's care, love and gentleness. I remember an experience of confession someone shared with me. The person confessing told me that they were so ashamed and embarrassed about what they were confessing that they were brought to painful tears. Yet when they were done the priest smiled and simply said, "is that all there is." They both then laughed. That person experienced the healing of emptying and repentance, followed by the joy of God's forgiving love. God bless that priest who was the embodiment of Christ in that moment. May we all have this experience.

"What then is this that is written: 'The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone.' Whoever falls on that stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder." (Luke 20:17-18)

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