

Sometimes we forget that work has only become a dirty word in our lazy and entitlement demanding society. Work was present in the first Creation. God's command to Adam and Eve was to till the garden and keep it—that is to work it. In Genesis we read:

Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it. (Gen. 2:15)

The privilege of working in the Garden of God was part of the very essence of Adam before his fall into sin. Only after the fall did work become difficult and a burden for Adam. So in the new creation, as followers of the second Adam, our very essence includes work in the kingdom of God. We cannot follow Christ and expect to be pulled along on a sled. Christians are *not* “along just for the ride.” Followers of Christ, work. They are busy. They are active in the garden of God, in the Church. And the work goes on. Because it is a privilege and a joy to work in the Church, there is rest but no retirement. Working in the church is part of who we are as Christians. The specific work might change, but we should always be doing something.

So again we ask ourselves these questions: what work are we doing in the church? Are we busy as followers of Christ or are we only along for the free ride? There is no end to the work that is needed in the Church. We need people who can build, organize, cook, landscape, administrate, comfort, provide hospitality, visit the sick and those in prison, study the Bible and Theology, teach, pray, preach, evangelize, write letters or cards to shut-ins, clean, paint, do maintenance work, write icons, garden, decorate, and more. The work is there, it is just waiting for true followers of Christ to step up and say “here am I, Lord, put me to work.”

Conclusion

The disciples in our text heard the call of Jesus and gave up their nets, their livelihood, their worldly security, even their father and the family business to follow Jesus. Then they went to work fishing the universe, preaching the gospel to all nations. What have we given up to follow Christ—what have we sacrificed? And how are we participating in the work of the Church today? To be a follower of Christ even today takes sacrifice and work. Like the little boy whose mother spoke to him, we need to hear our Lord speak to us: “If you are going to follow me you must *give up and get to work!*”

Amen!

Following Jesus



“What have we given up to follow Christ? What have we sacrificed? And how are we participating in the work of the Church today? To be a follower of Christ, even today, takes sacrifice and work.”

Homily given at All Saints Orthodox Church on the 2nd Sunday after Pentecost, 2010
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At that time, as Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. And He said to them, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Immediately they left their nets and followed Him. And going on from there He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and He called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him. And He went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the Kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people.

Introduction

In our Gospel text Peter and Andrew were actually throwing their nets, they were fishing, when Jesus called them. The text says that they immediately left their nets and followed Him. In the case of James and John who were mending their nets, when Jesus called them, they not only left the boat, and their nets, but also their father Zebedee to follow Christ. When the Rubix Cube puzzle first came out many children were fascinated by it and tried to solve. The story is told of one such child who in his room worked for hours trying to solve the puzzle. His mother came in to the room and asked her son if he would clean his room. The son obediently told his mother that he would clean his room, and she left him alone. However, instead of going to work cleaning, the boy returned to trying to solve the Rubix Cube. He wanted to be an obedient son and clean his room as his mother had asked but just couldn't give up trying to solve the puzzle. Finally after several hours, his mother came back into his room and looking around issued this stern command: “Will you please give up and get to work!”

Jesus basically told his disciples to do the same. Now this morning we need to hear our Lord calling to us: “Follow me, give up and get to work”

Giving Up—Sacrificing

If we call ourselves Christian and we do, then we are confessing by that very title that we are followers of Christ, just like the disciples in our text. The disciples gave up much to be followers of Christ. Some gave up father and mother, some gave up jobs, others gave up houses and homes, financial security, status, and worldly authority. All the holy martyrs even sacrificed their lives to follow Christ.

Similarly today some Christians—have given up jobs, money, security, pensions, houses, the joys of marriage and family (such as the monastics, celibate priests, and bishops)—all for the privilege of following Jesus Christ.

Sacrifice has always been a basic requirement of being a Christian. Jesus said many times “If you want to follow me, deny yourself and take up your cross.” Without the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and our participation in that sacrifice there is no salvation. Christianity without sacrifice—a “**Christianity light**”—is simply not Christianity. We cannot legitimately claim to be followers of Christ if we reject the cross of sacrifice.

So we ask ourselves these questions: what have we given up for Christ? What have we sacrificed to follow Christ? What have we sacrificed to be a member of His Church? Has being a Christian or a member of the Church cost us anything of significance?

We need to be ready and willing to give up anything for the sake of Christ. As St. Paul wrote to the Christians in Philippi:

But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. (Phil. 3:7-11)

We may not have to give up almost everything to follow Christ as did the Apostle Paul and the disciples in our text, but we must give up some things. At the very least we should be giving up some of our time and some of our financial resources, but in order for either the amounts of our time or of our finances to be true sacrifices, they must be significant and not easy.

Getting to Work—Actively Participating

Once the disciples had given up their nets and their business of commercial fishing, then they were put to work by our Lord. He made them fishers of men. In the troparion for Pentecost we sing:

Blessed art Thou, O Christ our God, Who hast revealed the fishermen as most wise, having sent upon them the Holy Spirit, and through them Thou hast fished the universe, O Lover of mankind, glory to Thee.

Christ was working through the work of his disciples and apostles. They followed Christ by giving up and by **getting to work**. In their case, the work was mission work, the work of planting the church, of making disciples of all nations, the work of baptizing and teaching. They understood that being followers of Christ meant work and hard work at that.