

“What a life - receive and rejoice!” Philippians 2:5-11

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Today for our meditation we have this uplifting fragment from apostle Paul’s letter to Philippians, chapter 2. This letter is famous among the writings of the New Testament at least with two things.

First, with these verses which we just head read. I’ll read them once more. Actually, and this is what many the New Testament scholars believe, these verses contain very ancient Christian hymn, well known and sung for the glory of Jesus already before apostle Paul wrote this letter. Paul just used this hymn which, as we’ll see, grasps the very essence of what the Gospel is all about.

And when I say very ancient, then, please, think about it. Apostle Paul wrote this letter to Philippians around year 55th or 60th. That is approximately 25 years after Jesus death and resurrection. Already by that time there existed this well-known hymn praising Jesus as true God. Listen to it once more [... ...]

Sometimes a little hymn can be much more eloquent than long essays. This hymn helps us to answer two essential questions. First, what is the Gospel? Second, what does it means to be a Christian? These will be two questions for our meditation today. What is the Gospel, and what does it mean to be a Christian?

Let’s begin with the Gospel. It may seem to be quite a simple question. What is the Gospel? Forgiveness of all our sins? Yes. Justification before the Ultimate Judge of our lives? Yes. Giving us good conscience and peace of mind? Yes.

Reconciliation with the holy God? True. God accepting us, sinners, undeservedly, purifying us, rescuing us from eternal death... and we could continue this list.

These all are correct answers. All these things God has done and is doing for you, and we as the Church are called to proclaim, to share them with all peoples.

This ancient hymn gives us another perspective on what is the Gospel. “Christ Jesus ... though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

So brief, but so saturated exclamation. Let’s take it step by step. What does it tell us? We have been talking again and again about the unique identity of true God in the Old Testament. What was it, do you remember? True God was identified as the Creator.

It is not easy to understand the gravity of these words. The Creator. What does it mean? We say it every time in our Creeds, but, really, these words are too big to comprehend them fully.

Imagine, looking at skies at night. Even looking at skies with the most powerful telescopes. We can’t even see the end of the Universe. But ‘in the beginning...’ He created it all, and He still maintains the order in this Universe, continually.

In words of psalmist: “I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place.” (Ps. 8:3) You determine the number of the stars; You give to all of them their names.” (Ps.147:4)]

All these images help us to meditate on words – God the Creator. “He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” (Col 1:17) “All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made, that was made.” (John 1:3)

We have this unique picture of the Earth taken from the distance of more than 6 billion kilometers from spacecraft Voyager 1, after it had travel away from the Earth for 12 years with the speed of more than 60, 000 km per/ hour. This famous picture is called ‘Pale blue dot’. Our planet is this ‘pale blue dot’. A dot in the Universe. A little speck.

When we think about these majestic images, we can cry out together with psalmist: “What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for

him?” (Ps. 8:3-4) But, whatever surprising it may be, He is mindful of us, we are so important to our God!

He ‘emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.’ It is such a mystery - the Creator, the Holy One becoming creature. The infinite One assuming finite flesh. The timeless One coming into time. God becoming man.

But this is not all. “Being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” Jesus obedience and sacrificial humility are too great for our minds to grasp them.

One thing, and we’ll never understand it, is for the Creator to become a creature. But another is for Almighty God to empty Himself in such a way that He completely denies Himself and pours out everything for us.

Jesus power, even when He was a man, was amazing. Over everything, over storm, over death. In the night when Jesus was betrayed, when couple hundred armed solders came to arrest Him, Jesus stood before them and simply said: “I am He.” ‘When Jesus said to them, “I am he” they drew back and fell to the ground.” (John 18:6) In awe. He could do whatever He wanted.

And He did. Exactly what He wanted. He showed His love to us in the most persuasive way. He withhold all His power, He didn’t use it for His own benefit, but for ours.

Patiently bearing our mocking and ridicule. “If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross!” He was strong enough not to listen to us. He came and destroyed our ultimate masters and enemies, sin and death, without destroying us.

This is the Gospel. God the Creator of the Universe, of all things seen and unseen, become man, and gave up His life in the most painful and humiliating death, so that by doing it He could rescue us from jaws of sin and death. To rescue each of us, you and me.

He triumphed over death and rouse again for a new, imperishable life, as the first among many. “Therefore God highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name

that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow ... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord!”

This is the Gospel. Shocking and incomprehensible in its greatness. If you do not have goose bumps when you hear it, you should. God the Creator revealing His love and affection to you in the most amazing way. Serving you with all He has, even with His life. How precious you must be in His eyes?!

Here we come to our *second question*. What does it mean to be a Christian? Apostle Paul put it very simple, just before this wonderful hymn.

“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.” (Phi 2:1-5) Live as Jesus lived, humbling yourself for the sake of others.

Sounds simple? Right? Don’t be deceived. That is so hard, so hard. ‘Do nothing for selfish ambition, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.’ I’ll tell you a story.

It is about a friend of mine, very nice guy. He is having some issues with his marriage, as so many these days, and also some problems at work. After a good conversation he decided that he will do his best, regardless of how others act, he will try to serve others counting them more significant than himself. Exactly as Paul said, exactly as Jesus did.

He tried it for a couple weeks. We really need to give him a credit for his honesty. Then he came back and said. ‘How can one do this? It doesn’t work.’ And he related his experience. Two things struck him as he tried to do his best, as well as he could.

First, he changed his opinion on others. As soon as he tried to live this way, he realized that others don’t do it. People usually don’t live this way. It was so upsetting. ‘I pour out my heart, but they’... I won’t quote this part... ‘they don’t do anything. They are so selfish!’

Second thing that happen, he changed his opinion about himself. 'I can't do this. I get upset about others, I judge them all the time, my wife, my children, my colleagues, and they, of course, they deserve it, but I'm also all the time so stressed that I can't treat them as I was hoping.' It is so hard...

I guess, some of these experiences can be familiar to you. These are two things that often happen when we want to follow Jesus example. First, we may begin to look down to others, for we realize that we are doing better, or at least have better intentions than they. We can become proud and begin to think about ourselves as better people. Beware of this, especially if you are doing well.

Second, when we try really hard, especially trying to love those, who don't love us and don't deserve our love, we sooner or later fail. We realize that we can't keep doing it, that our inner being screams and fights against it. That we know what is right thing to do, but we can't deliver. So we are stuck between these two ditches.

On one hand, if we succeed in being good, we boast. On the other hand, if we fail, then we can be in despair, for we are good for nothing. How could then we live as Jesus lived for us? The answer is given in this verse: "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus." Which is yours in Christ Jesus.

You see that's the key. Be honest, we can't live as Jesus lived on our own. No way. But we can do it in Christ. That is the power of the Gospel. It's not just information. When we hear the Gospel, how incredible is God's humility, how sacrificial and humble was Jesus ministry to us, how much He loves us, that changes us.

That fill us with His love. For these are not just words. The Holy Spirit Himself delivers them to us and remains then with us. Then we are able to serve others without boasting and without falling into despair.

For when we hear the Gospel we understand that, on the one hand, we are such a sinners that Jesus had to die for us, so no boasting. On the other hand, yes, He rouse again and is helping us with the Holy Spirit, so - no reason for despair.

That's the most important spiritual principle. We can't give unless we have received first. That's what happened with my friend. He didn't receive. He didn't have this deep well of living water, Jesus. And we can't expect to receive enough

from people around us. They can't give us as much as Jesus. For we all are selfish. That's a definition of sin.

But we can receive from God Creator and Redeemer. He came to open this tap of grace and love. When we look at the cross of Jesus, when we hear what He has done and is doing for us, we are filled with God's love.

The more we listen to Him, the more we hear His words "I love you, my dear child" the more we are filled and strengthen. And the more we are filled with His love, the more we can love others, considering them more significant than ourselves.

This is what it means to be a Christian. To receive God's love, revealed and given us in Jesus Christ. To be immersed in His words of love, listening to them, reading them, being healed and restored by this love divine, which has no equals in its prodigal generosity. That's such a wonderful thing... be a Christian, to keep receiving these priceless gift. I wish we could share this joy with all the people.

Last thing. Remember, in the beginning I said that there are at least two things this letter to Philippians is famous with. The first was this wonderful hymn about Christ, the Son of God and what He has done. About the Gospel.

The second is one phrase which appears again and again in this letter. *Hairete!* Rejoice! *Hairete en Kirioj!* Rejoice in the Lord! Rejoice in the Lord, indeed! Rejoice for God has revealed Himself to you. He has done unbelievable things for you! Rejoice for He has humbled and emptied Himself so that you can be filled with His love and joy! Rejoice for filled with Jesus love you can serve others!

Rejoice, for God has promised for you a new heaven and new earth. Rejoice, for you already have receive His Spirit, as the seal for God's promises. Rejoice, for if He is with you now, you will be with Him forever! Rejoice!

Amen.