

**HOMILY AT ST. MATTHEW ORTHODOX CHURCH
SUNDAY, JULY 9, 2023**

ROMANS 10: 1-10

“BELIEVE AND CONFESS THAT JESUS IS LORD”

Our epistle lesson this morning is part of the 10th chapter of the Holy Apostle Paul’s Epistle to the Romans. In particular, we will look at one verse in this passage, verse 9---“if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe with your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ in your heart and express that belief with your lips---and you will be saved.

But it doesn’t have to stop there. For if you confess with your lips, that can lead to other people’s salvation as well. Perhaps to the salvation of many! For just a little after today’s assigned epistle reading, St. Paul writes in verse 13---“every one who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.” It can happen like this: You believe in your heart. Then you speak about it with your lips. Your words lead to others believing in their hearts.... They speak about it....that can lead to others believing in their hearts....and on and on it can go. The Lord’s salvation can come to many folks in a sequence like that!

So speak about your love for Christ...and perhaps a soul will be saved. Patience is required, for it might take a long time for a seed you plant with your words to grow in the other person’s heart. Imagine a scenario like this..... You and a co-worker are pretty good friends and speak to each other a lot. Sometimes you talk to him about your faith in God. He is not a believer and it doesn’t appear your words are having any effect at all. Some time goes past and your death takes place---thank God, you go to be with the Lord. Later, your co-worker ends up in the new life above as well---and you see each other. You are amazed because he had no belief in Christ at all. You express your joyful surprise to him and say, “What happened? You didn’t believe!” He replies, “It’s true I did not believe in the Lord at all....but years later after you died, those things you had sometimes said to me came back to my memory. And when I went through some tough times, I decided to finally do what you had encourage me to do---I came to God and now here I am!” You planted the seeds, and long afterwards, the plant of faith grew.

To plant a seed like that doesn’t mean at all being pushy or preachy.

“Kind and friendly” works best. And, extremely important, you have to live out your own faith in Christ every day. Words are not enough—you really have to live it! If you don’t, the words won’t help.

Imagine another work scenario. You and a co-worker, who is not a believer in God, have had quite a few conversations over the years where you have spoken to him about your faith. He’s happy to talk about it but never budesges one inch away from his atheism. Finally, one day at lunch, your frustration about this comes out and you say, “What is really keeping you from believing? Is what I say not making any sense?” He replies, “What you say is fine. The problem is that what you do keeps me from believing. You say you have strong faith---but you complain all the time, you gossip about our fellow-workers, you don’t work hard at all, and you lose your temper frequently. Sorry, your words are fine---however, your actions speak louder than your words!” Words are not enough; what we do speaks very loudly.

Once people know you are a believer in Christ, they will be watching you---to see if you are serious or not. There are simple ways to let people know who we are-----wear a cross, if at lunch with other people simply lower your head and silently pray before you eat, perhaps an icon in your work place if that’s possible. Any thing like that is a simple way of announcing in a non-pushy way that you live for Jesus Christ. And once people know that.....they will watch you to see how genuine you are! And what they see when they watch your life could either draw them to the Lord....or repel them.

A real story this time, not one of my imaginary scenarios! For years, a woman rode the same commuter train to work every day. Then, later on, sometime after she retired, a man came up to her in a restaurant and said, “Hello! I don’t know if you remember me, but I wanted to say “Hi” to you and especially say “thank you”.” The woman replied, “Yes, I didn’t know you well, but I remember you---you were the ticket-taker on my commuter train all the years I rode it. But why do you want to thank me? We hardly even knew each other!” The man answered, “As I took your ticket every day you always seemed friendly and kind and very peaceful. I was a quite unhappy and ornery fellow and wanted to be more like you. Then I noticed that you always carried a Bible on to the train....and on the ride downtown you read your Bible. After a while it occurred to me---I wonder if her Bible has something to do with why she is so nice?” So I bought my own Bible. I had no religious background and knew nothing about it, but I read it a lot. And then I came to belief in Christ---and it has been great! So.....thank you for being nice and for reading your Bible on the train.” (“Ambo”, St.

Theodosius Cathedral, 10/12/03) Sharing Christ with others can be sometimes as simple as that!

By both your words and actions, others can come to God. That's one big benefit! Another big benefit is that it may help you to be a better disciple of Christ, because thinking about how others are watching you and maybe even making decisions about faith based on how *you* act and speak---that could motivate you to be a more faithful disciple of our Lord.

I will close with one more story—another true one! There was a Greek priest, Father Nicholas Planos, who served God in Greece in the late 20th century. Out of affection for him, his people called him “Papa Nicholas”. He was a celibate priest and some of his parishioners lived in a big apartment complex in Athens. Most days, they had him come over to have lunch with them. At that apartment complex there was a courtyard where there were various shops. One of the shops was owned by a cobbler, a shoe repair man. This fellow was well known in the neighborhood as he was the leader of the Communists in the area. He was a vehement fellow---he hated religion, all churches, and especially had a deep hatred for priests. At Communist rallies, he would say to the crowd---“When we take over Greece, the first thing we will do is shoot all the priests!”

Someone mentioned to Papa Nicholas who that man was---and starting then, Papa Nicholas would always be sure to walk through that part of the courtyard where the cobbler worked, and to greet him with a simple, “Hello, how are you?” The cobbler would not reply—after all, he hated priests too much to talk to them at all. But Papa Nicholas persisted---just a smile and a word of greeting. After a while, the cobbler started to greet him back in a very simple way. Then the simple greetings started turning into real conversations. And at a Communist meeting, when there was talk about someday shooting all the priests, the cobbler said, “Except maybe we won't shoot Papa Nicholas—he is very nice.”

Soon, the cobbler would ask the priest's advice on problems he was facing. Then the cobbler went through a period of illness---Papa Nicholas helped him in many ways while he was down and out. And after some time, the Communist cobbler left behind his Communist thinking, and became a believer in Christ.

Before his death he had become a strong Orthodox Christian---and it all started out by Papa Nicholas one day saying “hello” to him. (Papa-Nicholas Planos, Nun Martha, Holy Transfiguration Monastery Press, 2001, pp. 48-49)

It can happen! Think of people you know, especially those in need of

Christ. Pray for them. Be kind to them. Talk to them and grab on to opportunities to say something about your own faith and life. And live in a holy way, as a good example of what Christians should be.

And who knows? That acquaintance of yours who has no interest at all in God? Maybe you will meet him in heaven one day!