

**HOMILY AT ST. MATTHEW ORTHODOX CHURCH  
SEPTEMBER 18, 2022**

**GALATIANS 2: 16-20**

**“JESUS LOVES ME”**

A famous theologian in the last century was asked to sum up in a sentence the essence of Christianity. He replied that he would do so by quoting the words of a song he had learned as a little child. The words were, “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” And that old song really does sum up the Christian gospel. The essence of Christianity is that Jesus loves us.

St. Paul, in today’s epistle lesson, wrote something similar in Galatians 2:20---“I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.” The Son of God loved Paul, and He loves us----and so gave His life for us on the cross.

This last Wednesday we celebrated the Holy Day of the Elevation of the Cross, one of our 12 great feast days. The decorated cross is still here out in front. On Wednesday we particularly remembered what Jesus Christ has done for us because of how much He loves us-----He died for us on the cross.

We often talk about how Christ loves every one and how He died for every one. All very true, of course. But sometimes it’s good to be more personal about it. As St. Paul wrote---“I live by faith in the Son of God who loved *me*, and gave Himself for *me*.”

Jesus didn’t just die for every one----He died for **me**. Jesus doesn’t just love every one---He loves *me*.

The Empire State Building in New York was for many years the tallest building in the world. It’s been now surpassed by several others, but it’s still one of the highest. On the 102<sup>nd</sup> floor there is an observation deck where visitors can look far into the distance or look straight down at the city below. Once a couple of people were visiting the observation deck and peering down 102 stories to the people walking on the sidewalks below. From so far up, the people below appeared to be tiny specks moving around. They looked like little ants scurrying on the sidewalks and streets. One of the persons watching said to the other---“The way those people look to us.....I bet that’s what we all look like to God when He looks down on the world. Just a bunch of little nameless ants.” (Father Anthony Coniaris, Eastern Orthodoxy: A Way of Life, Light & Life Publishing, pp. 6-7)

But to know how God *really* thinks about us when He looks down---don't go up on top of a tall building. Instead, go up the little hill called Calvary or Golgotha. There the Lord of all, the Son of God, went up on a cross and there He looked down at all of us. And there He voluntarily died for all of us. There He died for you and for me.

How should we respond to what Christ did for us? St. Paul says it in that same verse, Galatians 2:20----“*I live by faith* in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” Because the Apostle Paul knew that Christ gave Himself on the cross for him, he decided to “live by faith” in Him.

Jesus loves me. In return, I should love Him and I should live for Him. That means all out; lock, stock, and barrel. Not just a vague belief about Him.....Not just doing something religious once in a while.... Not just saying “I got baptized”. Not just having my name on the membership list of a church..... It means to live for Him all out. He died for us 100%. And so we should live for Him 100%.

If we don't? Maybe that means the fact of what He did for us on the cross has just never really sunk into our hearts and brains. We've probably heard about it all our lives. Maybe we've been to the Holy Week services and really heard about it! But perhaps it never sunk in.

If that's your case, what you need to do is really think it all through seriously and personally. A good way is to grab a Bible and read through the last few chapters of each of the 4 gospels---Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. In their last few chapters each gospel writer focuses on Holy Week---Christ's arrest, trial, crucifixion, and resurrection. Each one tells it a bit differently, but they all focus on it in their last chapters. Read how each writer tells it. Sit back and think about it---what does it mean to you? Pray about it, seeking guidance from God.

And then, finally, you have to decide. No one else can decide for you. The decision about what do to in your life with Christ is all yours.

Years ago there was penny candy. Candy stores would have a great variety of pieces of candy for the price of one cent each. (There are still candy stores but I doubt anything sells for a penny anymore!) There was a poor family who couldn't afford any treats for their little boy. But one day, the mother took him to the candy store and gave him one penny and told him to pick a piece for himself. He walked around the store very slowly, closely examining all his options, even asking the clerk about some of the varieties. It went on for a long time and finally his mother said, “Please hurry and decide!” He

replied, "But Mom----I only 1 penny, so I have to spend it very carefully!"  
("Our Daily Bread", 4/26/03)

You and I have only one life in this world. We need to each make a very careful decision about what to do with that life. St. Paul had to decide, too. And we have seen in Galatians what he decided----that because Jesus Christ loved Him and died for Him, that he would live fully for Jesus Christ.

Please, make the same decision as St. Paul did. If you, thank God, have already made that decision, then renew it and strengthen it.

And for all of us, we need to, after deciding, fully carry out the decision by a daily life for Christ. And for all of eternity, forever and ever, you will be very glad about the decision you made!