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ORTHODOX EVANGELIST

“Do the work of an evangelist” - 2 Tim 4:5



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Why is there a need for Renewal in the Church?

by Joseph Abbate, President

One of the most lasting messages I learned from Father Eusebius is what he used to call “The Paradox of Orthodox Renewal.” First of all, he would point out the fact that the Orthodox Church is indeed the original Church of history.

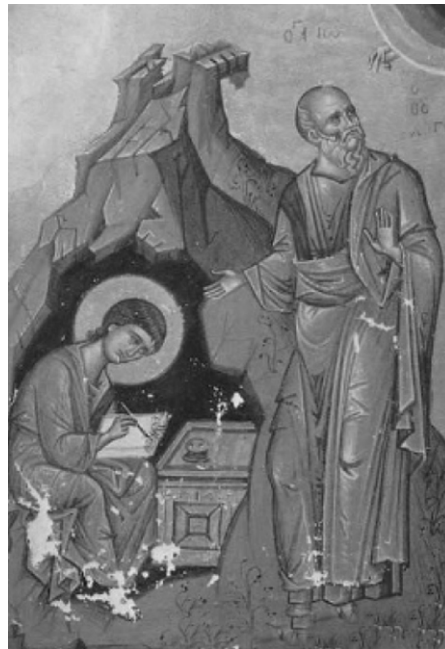
After 2000 years, the Church has an unbroken line of succession in the ranks of the clergy all the way back to the Apostles themselves. The Orthodox Church has also brought forth and defended correct doctrine throughout seven Ecumenical Councils which dispelled a series of heretical teachings.

What is Renewal?

First of all, let me point out that Renewal does not involve any doctrinal changes or new practices. It can be described as a refreshing of the Holy Spirit in the everyday life of the believer. It is also a restoration of the position that God had originally designed for every Christian man and woman. This happens namely when we get back to the basics of reading or hearing the word of God and allowing it to register in our hearts and minds, which then develops into a personal relationship with our Creator. Yes, it's that simple. Yet, this cannot be done on our effort alone, but only with the power of the Holy Spirit, or what is described as the “*Baptism of the Holy Spirit*” (Matt. 3:11).

Why is Renewal Needed?

The question remains, if the Church is the true Church of history founded by the Apostles and rooted in correct teaching, how then does it need a renewal? This is a great paradox! If we examine the scriptures, we can understand why.



In the book of Revelation, churches which just a few years earlier were founded by St. Paul and St John the Apostles, were addressed and

warned by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

To the Church of Ephesus, Christ exclaimed that “*you have left your first love*” (Rev. 2:4). To the Church of Sardis, “*you have a name that you live, but are dead*” (Rev. 3:1). To the Church of Laodicea He said that “*I will vomit you out of My mouth*” (Rev. 3:16). How can this be? These were Apostolic churches! Very few of the seven churches which were addressed were rebuked because of their beliefs. It was because of their actions, or rather inaction.

We often hold an unrealistic and rose colored view of the early Church as being a perfect model of example. However, people of any generation are never perfect. Just the very fact that Jesus was exposing their sin and disobedience demonstrates that Satan was working overtime to undermine the Church. If he could not wipe it out of existence through persecution then he would try to infiltrate it from within. This is what St. Paul described as “*The Mystery of Iniquity*” (2 Thess. 2:7). What made it such a profound mystery is the fact that Satan was working his way in the very Church established by Christ! **If it was in effect back then, how far has it come in 2000 years!** Some early figures in the Church such as St. Augustine did not wish to face the possibility of such an apostasy! He claimed that “he did not know what this scripture verse meant” though I believe that he indeed did, but did not wish to admit it. It was just too scary for anyone to contemplate.

As Father Eusebius had spoken about on a number of occasions is the very matter that **if we are truly the Apostolic Church, then we should**

first follow their tradition of evangelism. That is the most important tradition of all. However, evangelism is seen today as something which is not only missing from the Church, but seen as Protestant. Worse yet is the fact that even miracles are now even seen by many as demonic. This does not mean that there are not serious abuses in some of the different denominations today. There were also abuses during the Apostle Paul's day in regards of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Yet, he never said to get rid of these gifts, rather to *"do everything decently and in order."* **If we remain insensitive or indifferent to these matters then we will be Apostolic in name only.**

Examples of Renewal

Renewal, or what is named in the West as "Revival" should not be necessary at all in the Church. Yet, we see historical examples of it. In the history of Western Christianity we witnessed Renewal movements through such figures as John Calvin or John Knox. In the Eastern Church we had figures such as St. Symeon the New Theologian and St. Cosmas the Aetolian. Even the monastic movement was a major sign of Renewal. It was a movement of godly men and woman which were spiritually hungering for a deeper relationship with their Savior Jesus Christ. Yet, we should ask, why did they have to go outside the four walls of the Church to do this? The same question remains for us today. Why do people feel so spiritually barren even in their church parish? Are not

the doctrines sound? Are there not enough activities to do in church? Do we not hear the Holy Scriptures read every Sunday morning? Is this not a paradox in itself? Therefore, Renewal is a great paradox, yet the symptoms for Renewal remains.

Let me reiterate the fact that though Renewal does not involve a change in the doctrines and practices of the Orthodox Church, there has always been a Renewal needed on a personal level since the beginning of time. This is because people are indeed imperfect and need rejuvenation from time to time. St. Paul urged his own disciple Timothy to *"Stir up the gift which is in you"* (2 Tim. 1:6). St. Paul brought back to Timothy's mind that the gift of the Holy Spirit was already in him. This happened when he laid his hands on him and prayed for him. It can even be a reference that St. Paul had baptized him. Each baptized believer who has dedicated their life to Christ has the very same gift within themselves already. Think of it! It just needs to be stirred up! Paint which sits on a shelf still has all the ingredients to make a great color paint. But unless it is stirred, it can never work properly to its fullest effect.

We can go to church all we want, but unless the gift of the Holy Spirit is stirred up within us, it will make little difference. **The spirit filled life does not work by some state of osmoses, just as standing in a library does not make you absorb all the information in the books which surround you.** So we can properly confess that people are in need of a spiritual renewal. People who comprise the body of Christ, (the Church), who are filled with the Holy Spirit will let the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit spread throughout their denomination and thus will spread it to the world abroad in evangelism, through charities and to communities.

Seeking God for Personal Renewal

This will never happen without a spiritual hunger, and hunger follows when a person feels empty. Jesus said *"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled"*. He also said *"But seek first the Kingdom of Heaven and His righteousness and all these things will be given to you"* (Matt. 6:33). Let us also remember the words of St. Paul. *"The Kingdom of Heaven is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit"* (Rom. 14:17).

So when we seek the Lord with all our heart and strength, we will receive! Yet, it is not an ambient or vague request we make from the Lord. We should be specific in our prayer requests to the Lord in asking for the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. What is sought after and received personally for personal renewal will be manifested openly in a collective Renewal in the Church.

Can we hear the words of St. Symeon the New Theologian? "Let us be like those who knock patiently and to whom the Lord opens the doors of His kingdom, according to his promise, and like those who seek and are given the Holy Spirit. It is impossible for a man who seeks with all his soul not to find the Spirit and be enriched by His charisms" (gifts).

In the end, **Renewal** should rather be called a **Restoration**. But it can only be through a supernatural move of the Holy Spirit. It cannot be done by human effort, neither is it something that can be written into practice. Just as St. Paul exhorted Timothy, to *"stir up what was already in him"*, we Orthodox need to personally ask the Holy Spirit to activate that which is laying in a dormant state in our life, so we may in return be able to be the "light of the world", as Jesus commanded us to be. We can then revive those in our parishes to bring about Renewal in our Church and then proclaim the Gospel and be a powerful witness to the world.

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THE POWER OF THE CROSS

By the V. Rev. Fr. Timothy Cremeens, PhD
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To the Christian believers gathered in the Church at Corinth the Apostle Paul wrote, ***“For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”*** (1st Corinthians 2:2). He likewise writes to the Church at Galatia, ***“But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”*** (Galatians 6:14)

The Cross is the indispensable center of the Orthodox Christian Faith, without which there is no salvation. The New Testament writings, especially those of the holy Apostle Paul, emphasize the power of the Cross of Jesus Christ and what He accomplished for us upon that wood. Many times it has been said that the Orthodox East emphasizes the Resurrection of Jesus Christ to the neglect of the Cross, which of course is a misguided exaggeration. Without the Cross, and the suffering and death of our Lord Jesus Christ, there would have been no need for the Resurrection so they are inextricably linked together.

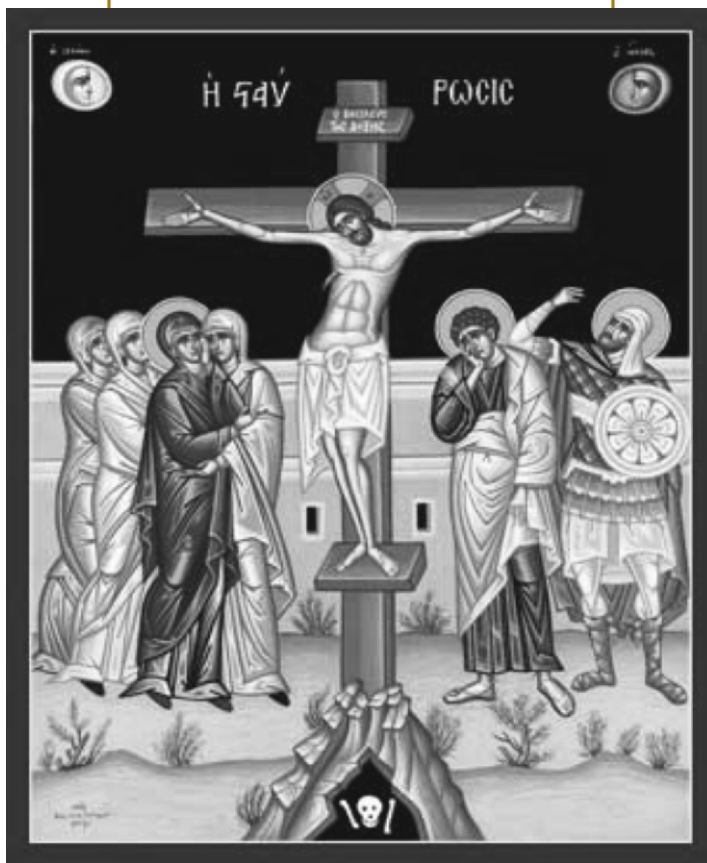
I entered the Orthodox Faith from Evangelicalism some 30 years ago. I was awed by the beauty of Orthodox Church buildings and especially the beautiful crosses I saw behind the altar tables and mosaics on the walls.

The priest's colorful vestments were emblazoned with crosses and the bishop's mitre was topped with a jeweled cross, and at the end of the Liturgy one was offered the hand-blessing cross to kiss. At each mention of the Holy Trinity; Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the faithful would make the sign of the cross upon themselves and at the Feast of the

is ever before us, and we Orthodox embrace this beautiful symbol, we sometimes gloss over the MESSAGE of the Cross.

St. Paul tells us, ***“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”*** (1st Corinthians 1:18). Here we can see that the message of the

Cross elicits two different responses. The first response is that the story and proclamation of the Cross is foolish. Why would the Cross engender this kind of response? The message of the Cross centers on self-sacrifice, human weakness and what appears at first to be defeat. Jesus Christ, who for some three and half years traveled throughout Palestine doing miracles; healing the blind, the cripple and maimed, even raising the dead to life. A simple carpenter walks on the water, feeds the five thousand with a few loaves and fish and seems to be the Master of the created order. Who casts out demons with a word and overcomes Satan and is



Exaltation of the Holy Cross, celebrated on September 14, and the on the third Sunday of Great Lent, a cross beautifully decorated with flowers was placed in the middle of the Church for veneration of the faithful. However, as beautiful as all this was to my senses I realized that while the symbol of the Cross

sought by the crowds in order to be made King, in the end is betrayed, forsaken by His followers, stripped naked, beaten bloody and hung upon a cross and dies in public shame. On face value the claim that this Cross, and what took place upon it, is anything but a study in a successful mission, rather it is

foolishness. By all initial outward appearances Jesus was a miserable failure. But we must see the Cross as God sees the Cross. We must allow the power of the Cross to invade our hearts and experience it's dynamic and transformative purpose.

We live in a day and time where arrogance and pride is encouraged. Our young people are expected to brag and boast about their "good works" on their college and work applications. Movie and television personalities, athletes, music stars and politicians in their pride, receive the adulation of their fans, never giving glory to God who gave them the talents and abilities which have made them famous. But, the Cross of Jesus Christ is the most profound icon of humility. St. Paul writes to the Church at Philippi, ***"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore, God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."*** Jesus was, and is, God from the beginning of all ages. Before He was incarnate in the womb of the Virgin Mary, He was present in the heavenlies as God the Son. In order to accomplish the Father's plan of salvation for humanity and of all creation, He freely chose to humble and abase Himself and become a man, taking

on our flesh and all the weaknesses associated there with. The ultimate manifestation of His humility and obedience to the Father's will was suffering at the hands of His own creation, mankind, and death upon His creation, the tree or the cross. The very hill of Golgotha, on which He was crucified had been created by the word of His mouth at the beginning of creation. The very wood of the tree of the cross had been fashioned by His divine word



at which it was created. He humbled Himself so spectacularly, that He allowed His life-giving life to be poured out on the cross.

When it is all said and done in order for the message of the Cross to have any power in our personal lives, we must embrace the Cross and everything that it means. We must, if we truly desire to be in reality His disciples, we must grip the Cross and be gripped by it. Jesus Himself said, ***"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up***

his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:24-26). Wearing a cross around our necks, or kissing the cross, or even making the sign of the cross upon ourselves will not take the place of embracing and bearing the Cross in our daily lives. We must, in imitation our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, be willing to humble ourselves before God Himself, confessing our sins and weaknesses, and by refusing to allow ourselves to become proud about our worldly accomplishments. Rather acknowledging that ***"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning."*** (James 1:17). We must trust in the power of Jesus' Cross instead of our bank accounts. We must embrace the wood of the Cross instead of looking to our social standing and ethnic origin to give us our identity. We must place ourselves beneath the Cross of Jesus and allow the water and the blood which flowed from His side to wash over us and cleanse us from pride, arrogance, vainglory, greed, materialism and lust. It is only then that we will be able to understand the power of the Cross of Jesus Christ. It is only then we will receive salvation which is in the Cross and Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. To Him be all glory, honor, worship and praise! Amen.