

St. Joseph the All Comely Orthodox Texas Prison Ministry Newsletter

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In Memory of the Servant of God + Paul (10/08/2020, ns)

Table of Contents

Contact Info.....	1
Sinful Martyr Monks.....	1
A word from Fr David	2
On Suffering	2
Prison ministry news	3
A Word from Fr. Seraphim	3
In Memory of the Servant of God + Paul (10/08/2020, ns)	3
Why the Pandemic?	5
What is “repentance”?.....	5
A Primer for the Christian Beginning to Lead a Spiritual Life.....	6
The Sign of the Cross.....	6
Psalm 2 A Psalm of David.....	6

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Note: With God helping us we will send many newsletters to all of those that we minister to in prison. Our aim is to send a newsletter in the first and the 15th of each month. This is the 3rd, sent to 63 souls. Those who wish to contribute to our material needs in our ministry to Orthodox Christians may help us with donations at:

<http://www.orthodox.net/ministries/orthodox-prison-ministry.html>

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NOTE: Fr. David manages our ministry's distribution of Orthodox books, church calendars, icons, and service texts. Contact him if you have a need along these lines.

Sinful Martyr Monks

In Russia before the revolution was a monastery of ill repute. It was said its monks were all idlers and drunkards. During the civil war the Bolsheviks arrived in the town nearby, assembled the villagers, and then dragged the monks out in a convoy.

The commissar shouted to the people, pointing to the men in black: “Citizens! Townsfolk! You know these drunkards, gluttons, and idlers better than I do! Now their power has come to an end. But so that you will understand exactly how these rascals fooled the workers and peasants for centuries, we will throw their cross and their Scriptures onto the ground before them. Now you will see with your own eyes how each of them will stomp on these tools of deceit and enslavement of the people! And then we will let them go...!”

The crowd roared. But up walked the abbot, a stout man with a nose red from drinking. And he said to his fellow monks: “Well, my brothers! We have lived like pigs. But at least let us die like Christians!” And not a single monk gave in. That very day all their heads were chopped off by the sabers of the Bolsheviks. From Hieromonk [Aidan Keller](#), and Reader Joshua Gonzalez



On Suffering

Regarding the proper Christian outlook on suffering. I think that Elder Arsenie of Romania, who himself suffered many things for Christ with joy and hope, provides profound insight in a video interview he once gave, of which I transcribe a relevant portion:

"Our salvation is solely on the cross! The most beautiful crowns in God's Kingdom are for those who suffer willingly. ["Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven"... Matthew 5:12a] ... The purpose of suffering is not reached if it is prescribed as mere therapy, so to speak, if we do not benefit from it. ... As the Apostle Paul says, the suffering of this world is so negligible compared to the glory that will be revealed in us! ... God, through any means, through suffering - it is through suffering that a man is able to get through to himself more effectively than in any other way, to know himself, to compare himself to others, to understand that this is a divine commandment ["take up your cross and follow me"] that we cannot avoid and which applies to each and every one of us. Suffering brings us the opportunity to purify ourselves at all costs. We get to know ourselves so that we can overcome ourselves, which is the greatest triumph!"



(Speaking about his torturous imprisonment and harsh life in the wilderness):
"Although it was terrible, I thank God for the suffering! It was a great blessing from God! Nothing was more useful to me than the suffering, the cross! Suffering prompted me to know myself and draw near the ultimate Divine Power, and it enabled me to see that God is the one Who is in every moment of our journey. ... Where there is longing for eternity, for

the great and eternal values, there must also be heroism, and a desire for sacrifice; because nothing is possible without sacrifice. ...

The Lord did not save the world through the great miracles that He did, but through His sacrifice on the Cross! The Savior was on the Cross, and Satan was wailing, at sacrifice! Our Holy Fathers, Theodore the Studite especially, tell us that he who runs away from sacrifice, runs away from God. ...

We have to always prepare ourselves, to know how to sacrifice ourselves; you cannot have an identity if you don't know how to sacrifice yourself. You should always be a hero, not a beggar! You should not ask, 'God, give me!' endlessly, but you should always be a hero!"

There are hundreds of opportunities each day to be a hero and suffer for the Lord; to be a selfless, self-sacrificing warrior for Christ, who denies himself and gives up his own will in order to follow God's will for his salvation. For example, when we want to eat some trifle, but do not need to: there is a measure of suffering we experience in foregoing the fulfillment of our craving, but a far greater consolation (peace of mind, a clear conscience) attends this decision when done for Christ's sake: "As you fasted, Lord, help me to fast!" Or suppose a man is mocked and ridiculed, and although his anger flares and he desires to retort with his own word, he shuts his mouth tight and bears the insult, feeling the red-hot sting of cruelty: he accepts this suffering as something he deserves to bear for the sake of Christ, Who bore all suffering for us; and with a prayer for his enemy, God's grace visits him, quenching the fire of anger and healing the wound.

In both cases, something wonderful happens: a man comes to know himself - the nature and strength of his human passions and weaknesses - and he overcomes himself by God's grace, which is stronger than our passions. He is now a truly free man, not one in bondage to his passions and self-will. Only the path of suffering - that is, of the cross - can truly purify and perfect us, after the example of the Lord Jesus spoken of by St. Paul in Hebrews 5:

8 Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; 9 And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him;

When I read this, I reflect on the Truth proclaimed in and by the person of Christ our Savior, whom we strive to imitate and follow: all that He ever did and taught would have been rendered imperfect and incomplete had He not, at the last, mounted the Cross for our salvation and risen from the dead; if He, Who preached the Beatitudes, had not forgiven His enemies and bore their every cruelty and slander without anger or vengeance. Rather, He who said, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends", in His turn laid down His own life, and loved His own unto the end.

Not without suffering, nor without fear and trembling did He accomplish this great Sacrifice, but with sweat like

drops of blood, praying in the Garden of Gethsemane that the cup of suffering might pass from Him and yet drinking it to the dregs in His humble love for mankind and in obedience to the all-good will of God His Father. Suffering revealed Christ for Who He truly is: the very Son of God, and not a well-spoken fraud.

In comparison, the overbearing fear of death, and a desire to avoid the suffering that such a death would entail, revealed the Apostle Peter to be inconstant and imperfect in his earlier promise to die for the Lord Jesus, for when tested he denied Him thrice. When faced with suffering, St. Peter came to know himself; he then overcame himself by thrice avowing his love for the risen Lord and faithfully serving and enduring martyrdom for Him, strengthened in all by the Holy Spirit! Suffering and death are not obstacles on the journey to heaven, but the very doors which open wide to the Kingdom. This perspective is alien to the world, which sees suffering and death as the greatest evils to be avoided at all costs- for it gives no thought to eternal suffering and eternal death, which may God save us from!

When we come to recognize that by our patient endurance of suffering with hope in the Lord, and by the humble offering of our own suffering to Him as a living sacrifice, we thereby advance from temporal suffering towards eternal consolation and glory with Christ-- then, we come to gratitude and appreciation for suffering, and we run willingly to the invitation to sacrifice ourselves for God and neighbor. This is something the rich young ruler could not understand or accept when he was asked to suffer total loss of his earthly goods for the sake of Christ (cf. Luke 18), and in sorrow he turned away from the Lord who had said to him:

"Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me."

In II Corinthians 2, St. Paul speaks about how the struggle to live as a Christian is in fact a sort of life-bearing death:

8 We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;9 Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; 10 Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. 11 For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.

In order for Christ's life to be made manifest in us, we must bear in our bodies (not only in our minds) the dying of the Lord Jesus. This we do by death to the world and separation from its passions and pleasures, as St. Paul discusses in 2 Cor. 6, which precedes this admonition in 2 Cor. 7:1:

1 Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

May the Lord bless your desired cross-bearing and bring you into His Holy Church and heavenly Kingdom!

Prison ministry news



Paul Koujmian, a former prisoner, and a fellow laborer in our prison ministry reposed in the Lord 10/8/2020. This is a hard blow for prison ministry as Paul took care of many details for us including being a kind of surrogate alms-giver for many prisoners. This loss is particularly personal for Fr Seraphim, and he will comment on it in his "word".

In Memory of the Servant of God + Paul (10/08/2020, ns)

Paul is a very dear friend of mine. I am in the habit of speaking in the present about those whom I love who have departed.

After all they are not dead! God is the God of the living and not of the dead. Although Paul's body is dead, his soul is alive. His personality is alive. And he had such a fine and robust and sweet personality! To the end of my days, I will pray for him with love, every day.

I met Paul when I was going to the Hughes unit twice a month, and he would amble in with his cane, and sit in the

A Word from Fr. Seraphim

back. He was baptized in the Armenian confession, although he did not understand it well. He insisted that he already was baptized and didn't understand why he could not have communion. That was not a problem with us, because we liked each other right off the bat. In prison, he was sometimes quite talkative, always friendly, and full of good humor. He could sometimes laugh and talk so loud that he made me jump!

I later found out after he got out of prison on parole (Jan 5, 2016) that the cane was merely a subterfuge. Unfortunately for him, "karma" hit him a little bit. He pretended to be a cripple in order to get, as he said, a little bit

of an easier time in prison because people don't mess with a cripple, and he had back trouble out in the free world. He always said this with good humor.



Paul never pretended to be anything that he was not. He did not put on airs. In our personal relationship he was always flagrantly honest. He tended towards being a little bit mischievous and knowing how to game the prison system, so I won't say that he was flagrantly honest in all things, but in personal relationships, he was as solid as they come.

His bride, Kaye told me that as she was picking him up from the prison, a guard leaned over and said regarding Paul: "this is one of the most manipulative prisoners I've ever seen". I can see how he might've thought that. Paul was merciless upon the merciless. He knew how to game the prison system, and he did it for many people. He did not just benefit himself. There are dozens of people, if not a hundred, who benefited from his help in prison, and out.

When will Paul get parole, which is a story in itself, I thought he would be like most people whom I know in prison and disappear out of prison. But that was not to be the case! Paul and I kept up contact, and he started coming to services even though he was living in the LaRue Texas, about 1.5 hours away. He insisted on coming to Nativity services, just two days after he got out of prison.

I don't remember exactly how it happened, but Paul became convinced that I was right – he had not been baptized in the church, and he asked for baptism. I catechized them and baptized him. I also catechized his fiancée Kaye, and baptized her with the name of Sarah. I believe all this happened in the same weekend.

I have worked closely with Paul in prison ministry. I joke with many people that my secretary is terrible. I want to fire my secretary but I can't get rid of him because he's in the family. Paul helped with some of these tasks especially with tasks which are necessary for those in prison but which I wish to remain private because this is the public newspaper.

Paul's prison nickname was "Boston" and it followed him into the free world. When he gave a belly laugh, it would shake the windows. I always thought of his voice when he got excited as like a Boston foghorn. He was loud! He laughed easily and freely. He came mostly to our weekday services, and endeared himself to everyone there. One time he came to a service and I was going to take care of one of my grandsons after the service, and he came home with me to have coffee and played like a child with Noah. Noah loved him.

All of what I said above is just historical data. Let me tell you about the man Paul, whom I loved. I'm known a lot of people in and out of prison. Too often, the way a person presents themselves in prison is not even close to what happens out of prison.

Many of you might think that prison is the hardest thing you've ever done, but I'm here to tell you that the hardest thing you will ever do is get out of prison *and keep your soul*.

Some people lose their souls in prison, and it is obvious if not to them, then to everyone else. Other people in prison actually behave better – they no longer use drugs, and they start obeying authority because they see that when they don't obey authority, they lose privilege that they really want, and when they do, life is much easier for them. I've seen people who have come to the Orthodox faith in prison lose it all when they go out. It's easier to be an Orthodox Christian in prison, because, one can tell oneself that it's impossible to fully fast, and the only services are perhaps an hour and hour and ½ every two weeks. When a person gets out of prison, there is a hamburger place on every corner, and there's nobody telling them what to do, and the services are longer and even on Saturday and Sunday! If they have not worked on their passions, they will revert to them.

You may think that there is not a lot to do in prison, and that you are just marking time, and actually your time in prison must be a time of living in a spiritual way so that you are ready. In prison, there is a sort of horrible mantra that is in the air, that a person must "do what they can" to survive. This is an anti-Christ dogma. We actually must do what we can to live, that is, to have the Holy Spirit abiding in us.

Paul lived a great life outside of prison. He had great compassion and empathy for people in prison and he continued to have these character traits outside of prison. Yet a great sense of ethics, and cared deeply for those who are suffering, because he had suffered. I will not pretend that Paul didn't sometimes rub people the wrong way. His was a powerful personality, and he was very clever. He did not suffer fools gladly. Therefore, fools who were not very clever did not like him very much.

I've always loved his honesty with me. He wasn't exactly the greatest faster in the world, but he was always honest with me. He never pretended to be something that he was not. One time I was on the road talking to him. I was driving to another prison, and I was near his house but I wasn't able to stop. He told to me he was putting some steaks on the grill, and invited me to come, and I said to him: "Paul! It's Wednesday!" He told me he had completely forgotten, and I believe him. He never tried to hide stuff like that from me. And over time, he got better with fasting.

Of your charity, if you pray for the dead, (if you don't, you really have not been listening to the things Fr David and I

have been saying), please remember servant of God +Paul in your daily prayers.

Why the Pandemic?

The following is a transcription of the subtitles from an excellent video (<https://youtu.be/Wyo9PTp3FKI>) by Uncreated Light Press. This is their description of it: "Father Cyril of Vatopedi in this video discusses the current Coronavirus pandemic and why God has allowed it take place. He goes on to say that over the years humans have strayed further and further away from God, and that through this pandemic God knows that He can bring people back to Him through repentance and humility."

They (people) would waste so much time with these things. And they would waste the time that was given to them by God for their salvation. But you should know that this ordeal that has come upon us, and God did allowed it so that He could wake us up from the stupor we were in. God somehow, without us understanding how...

There is a saying that an Athonite Father once said, "God put His foot on the breaks, because mankind was marching on too quickly into the abyss." And God put His foot on the breaks; He tried somehow to stop us from this path which was going in the wrong direction. In this way; with a virus that is smaller than a micron. A very small virus, which brought a situation for man to humble himself.

You should know that the great lesson God wants to teach us is the following... God wants to teach us that by moving away from Him, we actually are deprived of all that is good. God now wants to show us who we are, and where we have arrived by moving away from Him.

And this is not so that we may fall into hopelessness, but God shows us this so that we can return before it is not too late.

And now you all have to understand... There is a saying of Saint Paisios the Athonite; he says that, "The repentance of people changes the plan of God." So, what we have to try to do now is to return back to God. Because if this occurs... There is another saying: "A little repentance, brings mercy to many people".

What is "repentance"?

The word "**repentance**" many times has been misunderstood.

If someone becomes a protestant (in Romanian the word "repentant" is used to refer to a "protestant") it is said that this act requires repentance. This is not repentance, rather it is the falling into heresy; it is a heresy. It is completely something else.

Repentance means our effort to reconcile ourselves with God; our returning to God.

The corresponding word for repentance, in the Greek language, is *μετάνοια* (metania). Metania means the changing of one's mind.

The changing of one's mind *from a way of worldly thinking, a way of thinking that is centered around yourself, egotistical thinking in which we seek the things that are pleasing to us, and not what is good for others* as the Gospel tells us to.

That is why for someone to be able to repent, they must read what is written in the Holy Scripture. So, make time for yourselves to at least read once a week the Holy Scripture, especially the New Testament. But read the New Testament with the thought of translating what is written there into your own lives.

It is written in Romanian (in English) but it must be further translated into our own lives. Meaning the things that are written there are written so that we may try to do them at least a little bit and apply them to our own lives.

And there is another thing. You have to know that the fact that a person believes in God is not solely thanks to themselves. It is my desire to believe in God. But to my own desire a grace is also added; a grace which God pours over us and which resides in the heart of the person.

If someone believes in God, it means that a certain grace has resided in his heart. But you should know that despite this grace being almighty, at the same time it is also soft and fragile, meaning it is easily lost if we don't do the things which are pleasing to God. Because if a person does certain sins, that grace shrinks. And if the person continues to sin, that grace withdraws itself. And the person remains in a state of inner emptiness.

Petre Țuțea (a Romanian philosopher) at one point would talk about that emptiness which is called the "metaphysical emptiness". Meaning the state of a person who departs from God, and remains empty. And he would say that this "metaphysical emptiness" can only be filled by God.

That is why you have to understand that this pandemic is not as big a problem as the fact that people strayed away from God. And this situation was made possible because people strayed away from God.

We know from the Holy Scripture that God is love: Love that remains unchanged no matter what people may do. And therefore, if God is love the following question is placed: "If God is love why did He allow these things to happen?"

This is a question we must all ask ourselves. If God, Who is love, allowed these things, it means that He knew and He knows that this thing will bring us a great benefit. This means that more people will return to Him by being afflicted with this current situation, than if it were not to have happened at all. This means that this situation has occurred because we were in need of it, and we needed it to revisit our attitude towards God.

And also, because people, as a whole, got caught by this trap of materialism. The passions became like a sort of clay that completely glued the minds of people to matter (to materialism). And God wants us to separate ourselves from this matter, so that we can also search for the things of the soul. Man's soul cannot be fulfilled until he knows God; until he is reconciled with God.

Because if you understand that these things are God's way of bringing us back to Him, then these things no longer are as frightful.

This text is courtesy of "Uncreated Light Press". They sent a nice note to Fr. Seraphim when he requested the text.: "I'm so glad to hear you do a monthly newsletter to men in prison; that's an important ministry that we Orthodox Christians often forget and overlook. Part 2 for this video is coming out soon, I can send you the text for that as well when it is ready (if you'd like). Thank you for your support and interest in our channel. Uncreated Light Press"

There is a renowned doctor of ours in Switzerland, who has had a lot of work to do during this pandemic with all sorts of people who suffered panic attacks. And his most serious conclusion was the following... The virus of fear is more dangerous than the Coronavirus. Because that fear that takes hold of a person, can cause more damage than the actual virus.

That is why to be able to get rid of this fear, you must understand that fear is like a blanket that comes over the mind of a person, and if the person is not careful this fear darkens his mind and descends into his heart.

It causes confusion in his heart, and then the person's actions become instinctive and very selfish; meaning he tries to save his own skin.

If we want to escape this situation, we must keep in mind God's commandment; what God wants.

Know that we can always succeed together easier. That is why in the Gospel it says, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20).

A Primer for the Christian Beginning to Lead a Spiritual Life

From "A Primer for the Christian Beginning to Lead a Spiritual Life", Hieroconfessor Alexander (Orlov) Of Omsk, who fell asleep in 1977 at the age of 99, translated by Protopresbyter Thomas Marretta. These gems of spiritual wisdom are sent in email messages from my good friend, Fr Demetrios Carellas. We will investigate getting copies of this book, to send to many of you. (Priest Seraphim)

1. As soon as you wake, cross yourself. Try to think about God, before anything else.

2. Do not begin your daily tasks without having said your rule of prayer.

The Sign of the Cross

"O Christian, begin no work until you have blessed yourself with the sign of the holy Cross. When you set off on a journey, when you begin work, when you go to learn to read and write, when you are alone and when you are with people—seal your forehead, your body, your chest, your heart, your mouth, your eyes, and your ears with the holy Cross, and let everything be sealed with the sign of Christ's

victory over hell. Then you will no longer fear witchcraft, hexes, and spells, for they melt at the power of the Cross, like wax before a fire, like dust in the face of the wind."¹

Archimandrite Cleopa (Ilie) *Translated by Jesse Dominick Pravoslavie.ru*
9/27/2020

¹ Cf. St. Ephraim the Syrian, *Homily 107: On the Weapons of a Monk*; St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Instructions* 13.36.

The Psalter.

Psalm 2 A Psalm of David.

2:1 Why have the heathen raged, and the peoples meditated empty things? 2:2 The kings of the earth were aroused, and the rulers were assembled together, against the Lord, and against His Christ. 2:3 Let us break their bonds asunder, and let us cast away their yoke from us. 2:4 He that dwelleth in the heavens shall laugh them to scorn, and the Lord shall deride them. 2:5 Then shall He speak unto them in His wrath, and in His anger shall He trouble them. 2:6 But as for Me, I was established as king by Him, upon Sion His holy mountain, proclaiming the commandment of the Lord. 2:7 The Lord said unto Me: Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee. 2:8 Ask of Me, and I will give Thee the nations for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession. 2:9 Thou shalt herd them with a rod of iron; Thou shalt shatter them like a potter's vessels. 2:10

And now, O ye kings, understand; be instructed, all ye that judge the earth. 2:11 Serve ye the Lord with fear, and rejoice in Him with trembling. 2:12 Lay hold of instruction, lest at any time the Lord be angry, and ye perish from the righteous way. When quickly His wrath be kindled, blessed are all that have put their trust in Him.

Psalm 2 is a Messianic Psalm. Certainly, David in the spirit, is describing the trial of Christ: *“Why have the heathen raged in the peoples meditated empty things?”* There are two groups described. The heathen perhaps have some excuse because they know nothing about the true God, but the “people” are without excuse.

Remember that I’ve told you: *you must personalize the Psalter*. You are not heathen, but what kind of one of the “people” are you? The people are the believers, and in the time of Christ, the Jewish people, now in our time, the church.

What are we meditating upon? Before we answer this question, let us ask: what is meditating? In our society we have this idea that meditating is sitting around and thinking about something. Of course, that can be meditation, but meditating is *acting according to what our inner beliefs are*. How we act is *what* we are meditating upon. If you want to understand how a Christian meditates, then read and apply Psalm 118, the longest Psalm of the Bible, which is all about the law of God. We do not just think about the law of God or the Christian law of virtue; we attempt to live according to this way of life. That is the most important “meditating” we can do.

If we look closely at our lives, we will see that much of what we do is empty it is *“meditating empty things”*. It is reading things that make no difference in our life or even are toxic to our souls. It is wasting time. It is laying around or watching TV or finding everything to do except say our morning prayers. It is doing sinful things and having sinful thoughts. We might be doing things that are productive in the world, but if they are not for the sake of Christ, they are certainly “empty things”.

Are you a student of the Psalms? It really doesn’t matter if you can understand deep matters of scholarship of the Psalms, and point to the many Messianic references in them. It only matters for your soul if the words of the Psalms resonate in your heart and energize you to live in a spiritual way.

The second verse is referring to the occupying Roman authority which was *“aroused”*, and, of whom it is said: *“the rulers were assembled together, against the Lord, and against His Christ”*. The apostles prayed this Psalm when they were being persecuted by the Jews, Acts 4. We should take a cue from them and turn to God whenever we are being persecuted. And just as this psalm speaks of judgment, but also of the inner life that we must live, let our prayer be not only to be delivered from our oppressors, but also be changed to the good in our souls. Anyone who lives in prison

has a daily opportunity pray for deliverance *and* for personal repentance and change.

This messianic reference is one of the easier ones to see in the Psalms, however the most important application of this historical act of human concupiscence is found in what David has them saying in the third verse: *“Let us break their bonds asunder, and let us cast away their yoke from us”*.

Which one of us can read the words of these killers of Christ and not shudder a little because we know that often we cast away the easy and good yoke of Christ because of our passions? Christ said concerning this yoke, which is so easily thrown away by not only by unbelievers but also by those who believe -that is – us, -for frivolous reasons:

“Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (29) Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. (30) For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” Matthew 11:28-30 KJV

The yoke of Christ is unlike any worldly yoke. When people strain against the worldly yoke of oppression, or slavery, or for that matter, imprisonment, the yoke does not disappear unless there are great painful struggles. Some yokes never disappear because they are too strong for us. The yoke of Christ is not like this. If we strain against it, He allows us to cast it off. This is because everything we do in relation to God is voluntary, however if we cast off the yoke of Christ, we *always* put another yoke on ourselves, the yoke of sin, and this yoke will oppress us, whether we struggle against it or follow it, because: *“Whosoever committeth sin is the slave of sin.”* (John 8:34)

The inevitable result of the casting off of the yoke of Christ is disaster for the soul. Why are we unhappy? Why are we listless? Why do we struggle to find meaning in our life? Why are we despondent? Why can we not seem to start things that we know we should start and stop things that we know we should stop? It is because our passions are basically saying what the rulers said regarding the yoke of Christ: *“let us cast away their yoke from us”*. Remember this the next time that your soul is out of sorts in any way. This is because in some way, your passions are ruling you.

In the 3rd and 4th verses, David describes in violent terms this process of the annihilation of the soul when it casts off the yoke of Christ. *“He that dwelleth in the heavens shall laugh them to scorn, and the Lord shall deride them. 2:5 Then shall He speak unto them in His wrath, and in His anger shall He trouble them”*. We must understand these verses

spiritually. There is no happiness in the man who does not wholly submit himself to God. Look past the violence of these words and see their spiritual meaning. A man's soul is undone when it does not follow Christ. This is not because of Christ's punishment, but because we turn away from life. And what is there other than life? Only death.

David has described so far the judgment of Christ, and the disastrous consequences for those who judge Christ, and if you take his words personally, the disaster for your soul you if you do not live in a spiritual way. He then starts to describe Jesus Christ, the son of God: "2:6 *But as for Me, I was established as king by Him, upon Zion His holy mountain, proclaiming the commandment of the Lord.* 2:7 *The Lord said unto Me: Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee.* 2:8 *Ask of Me, and I will give Thee the nations for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession.*"

What is our personal application to these words? Everything in this world has an end, except *who we become*. Jesus Christ will be our champion, and no matter who rages against us in this world, in this one and the next we will have an advocate.

Those who have been sure of these words have been willing to die for them. Are we willing to die for them? Let's not be dramatic and speak about spilling our blood, but rather are we willing to, as St. Paul said, "*die daily*" because these words are true? Are we willing to allow our ego to die, and anger, and cursing, and laziness and disobedience? How much do we really believe that Jesus Christ in whom we are baptized, is indeed the son of God, only begotten of the Father, and that without Him there is no salvation? The answer to this question is not found in what we say, but how we live.

The words: "*Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee*" are used often in our services. There are those who misunderstand them, such as the arch-heretic Arius who believed that Jesus Christ was created by the Father. This is a rank heresy; it is not what these words mean. One must read much scripture, and learn to live according to it to understand how Scripture often says things in a poetic

way. These words are teaching that Jesus Christ is eternally begotten of the Father. How do we know this? We know this because the church knows it and lives it.

The rest of the psalm is a description of Christ's ministry and His eventual victory, and what our reaction should be: "2:8 *Ask of Me, and I will give Thee the nations for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession.* 2:9 *Thou shalt herd them with a rod of iron; Thou shalt shatter them like a potter's vessels.* 2:10 *And now, O ye kings, understand; be instructed, all ye that judge the earth.* 2:11 *Serve ye the Lord with fear, and rejoice in Him with trembling.*"

Certainly, in the final judgment, all the nations will be subject to God, to the uttermost parts of the earth. Those who resist God will indeed feel His presence with a rod of iron should be shattered like an empty vessel.

Let's apply these words to ourselves. We do not want to be shattered! Jesus Christ tells us, regarding Himself: "... The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: ... (44) And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder." Matthew 21:42,44)

The Christian life is to fall upon Christ, and indeed, we will be broken! It is a painful process to cast off our passions. One can consider it to be like being hit with a rod of iron. However, we will not be shattered! Our empty vessel will be filled with the Holy Spirit, Who will abide in us, but only if we fall upon Christ and are willing to be broken. Are you willing to be broken? Many people speak of Christ but are not willing to be broken.

As we read the Psalms and other scriptures that speak about the judgment of unbelievers and those who resist God, let us remember that we will also be judged with them unless we "*Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice in Him with trembling. ...and lay hold of instruction*", and if we struggle to do this certainly the ending words of the song will be heard by us after the last trump: "*Blessed are all that have put their trust in Him*".