

## 4-20-19 Choose Christ and Gain Immortality

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In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Other than the first reading at The Passion Gospels, that is the longest gospel reading a sign for a divine liturgy. Actually because the passion gospels are not divine liturgy that is the longest one. But what an incredible story how worthy of our attention and our patients to hear this incredible story. So much revealed in this one episode of Christ's ministry and his relationship with those he loved that it's impossible in one setting to look to explain it all or to notice at all. But I hope all of you have figured out that God does not want you to die. Have you figured that out yet? That death is not natural, that's why we don't like it. Some people fearing. It throughout the history of mankind, some honoring death, some trying to appease death, some even worshipping death, trying to figure out what their relationship was with death and why they feared it.

Was it a god itself? If it's natural and we all know that it's going to happen someday, why are we surprised when it does? What is that dilemma? We see that throughout the history of God's relationship with mankind, one of the things that mankind has really struggled with accepting is that man was not created to die and God wants to save us from death, and all we have to do is believe in him and keep his commandments. That's all.

In the Old Testament, if anyone, and it finally does occur in with the Theotokos, Mary, if anyone had kept the law, had fulfilled the law, the Messiah would come and save all the people. And it took about 1,500 years for that to happen.

In the New Testament, if we believe in Christ, if we love him, we want him in our heart, in our soul, in our mind, in our life, and we show our love for him by keeping his commandments, we not only are saved from death, but we are deified. We are made holy. The Holy Spirit comes and dwells within us and still we just can't really commit to it often, most of us. And there's this incredible dilemma on the inside because the big word is ontologically, like in our created being, we know the world would say subconsciously, we don't really believe in a subconscious, we just believe in deep spiritual denial.

But ontologically, in our being, we know that we were not created to die. We know we have the capacity for immortality and we feel it on the inside, we sense it in there. And so despite the fact that every single person that has come before us or is enough older than us, we see them die. Our relatives, our friends, our parents, everyone ultimately around us die. As we get into basically the second half of our life, we see our friends and family dying around us. We start having a sense of being alone because those people we have known the longest and the dearest are starting to disappear from our life, and we still have the expectation that we are not going to die ourselves.

I remember walking around the the driveway around our swimming pool with my dad when he could still walk and Father Simeon in his little electric scooter, and we were talking about mortality. And at that time my dad was starting to get ill, Father Simeon was on his little scooter, he had Parkinson's very badly, He had a feeding tube implanted in him, he could no longer eat because he couldn't swallow properly and had to be fed through a tube, and in the midst of the conversation, my dad turned to father Simeon and he said, "I mean, do you feel any closer to

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death than you ever have in your life?" And without hesitation he said, "Nope. I feel like I'm going to live forever."

And all of us young people are like, are you kidding? Right. But we're going to live forever because we were created to live forever. It's very hard actually in the end too, except that we aren't going to, it is contrary to nature for us to believe that we're going to die, even though the evidence is all around us, overwhelming and obvious.

And yet throughout the course of the Old Testament, we see people saved over and over again from death, Daniel in the lion's den, Israel crossing the Red Sea. We focused in the last week very clearly on the life of Joseph because Joseph is a type of Christ. He is an image of Christ. And when we look at him carefully, we see he is amazingly an icon, an image or a type of Christ.

Joseph had 12 brothers. Christ has 12 apostles. Joseph is betrayed and assumed to be dead. Christ also is betrayed by one of his brothers. Joseph is accused of a crime that he did not commit and is punished for it. Christ also is accused of crimes and punished for it. Joseph is put into a deep den in the earth, a cave deep, deep down below the surface of the earth, the assumption is that he is going to die there and Christ descends into the deepest depths of Hades and everyone is assuming that he is dead as well. But Joseph is resurrected, miraculously lives through that experience, and Christ rises from the dead.

Joseph says to his family, when they are afraid that he is going to punish them, you intended it for evil when you did what you did to me and God used it for good. And through me now, this is Joseph speaking, Many are going to be saved. And we have Christ crucified, betrayed, buried in the ground, Everyone assuming that they have triumphed over him, that their conspiracy and their hatred has triumphed over him, but he is going to reappear after being assumed to be dead and he is going to save everyone who turns towards him.

He has come to save us from death. Adam and Eve in the garden are told, you have everything here, everything is perfect. You are beautiful, you are powerful, you are intelligent, you are like me, you're going to be immortal. You can eat from everything in the tree, everything in the garden, from every tree including including the tree of life, immortality, and I have one rule for you.

We have 10 commandments from the Old Testament. The Pharisees developed a list of over 600 commandments had to be kept. When I printed recently, the Commandments of Christ there is about 53, Adam and Eve had one. See that tree, don't eat the fruit on it because if you do, you don't love me. If you do, you haven't kept my commandments. If you do eat of it, you're disobedient. Disobedience brings division between us. You, the mortal creature that has a beginning and me, the God who has no beginning and desires to grant you immortality. If you don't obey the result of your disobedience and sin will bring death into the world. You will be the creators of death

And yet in their longing to be like God, which is a natural desire to be like him, we are created in his image and likeness, we are supposed to be. To wanting to be omniscient, to know everything from the best to the worst, to know everything like God knows was a desire that was stronger in

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their heart than their desire not to die. And we have been struggling with that from then until today. And so today we have this wonderful, fun, enjoyable, a celebratory example of God triumphing over death on our behalf, showing us that it's not just an existential philosophical death that he is going to save us from, he is going to save us from physical death, from our soul being parted from our body, from our soul being trapped in Hades forever where every soul, good and bad, sinful and righteous were before the resurrection.

He brings his friend back to life. He says to his apostles, "I am glad that we were not there and that he has died." Christ is going to weep at the tomb. This is his dear friend who in his humanity he was going to mourn, has died. And yet he says to his apostles, "I am glad we weren't there for your sake." And they will realize then after the event occurs that he has power over death. He can command a soul to return to the body from Hades four days dead and stinking. He has complete control over death. And then of course in his resurrection we will see not only can he wield control over death, but that he can raise himself from the dead being God.

So often on this day we talk a lot about Lazarus and all of the details, but this year I felt like we needed to really realize what's going on. That we are in a spiritual struggle to realize that we have the power, we have been given the opportunity to have the power to choose to be immortal ourselves. To live forever. And the fact that we struggle with that choice is not new, it's been happening from Adam and Eve through the Old Testament and the New Testament until now. It is the human struggle to choose Christ and immortality.

The fathers of the Phillipian say, "We need to use purified self love." I love that, encountered out for the first time in my life, this lens, because it's always like, how do I long to advantage myself and not be self centered, right? But do you want to live forever? Yes, I do too. You want to die? No, I don't. Do I want to take care of myself? Do I want to be in a way self advantaging by following Christ, keeping his commandments, and living forever and going to heaven? Absolutely. But what is that, that we desire it in an unselfish way and the father's call it purified self love, true self love, loving yourself and your neighbor the way that God loves you and he wants you to be saved, that's why he came.

He tells Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life. I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, though he dies, will live and he who lives, if he believes, will never die." Death is not death anymore it is a passageway to life for us who love Jesus Christ. And we see that throughout the Old Testament and the life of Joseph, in the raising of Lazarus from the dead, and in the resurrection of Christ himself. So let us take those words, I am the resurrection and the life, if you believe in me, you will not die but live. And make that deep, deep, heartfelt desire that goes along with our love for God and propels us in the Christian life through the prayers of Saint Lazarus, who we remember today in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.