

ST. SAVA SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH AUGUST 2008 ANNOUNCEMENTS / NEWS – ОБЈАВЕ / НОВОСТИ

From His Grace Bishop Maxim's presentation at Serbian Days,
July 26, 2008



“Receive One Another”

"Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God." (Romans 15:7)

These words of St. Paul, the Apostle, which we hear in the Church (or – sometimes [as Orthodox] – read in the Bible), my brethren, are so deep in their meaning that it is worthwhile to pay attention to them, so we can see what meaning they have for our own lives. St. Paul addressed these words to *the members of the Church*, so they are meant for us to guide us in life (Rom. 15:1-7). He starts the reading with an exhortation towards all the members of the Church, towards the faithful and mainly towards those who are stronger in faith and in the spiritual life, and he tells them: "***We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak.***" You that feel stronger in the spiritual life, you should bear the infirmities of the weak. You must take upon yourselves the weaknesses of the weak. "**And not to please ourselves.**" Do not please yourselves, **do not be self-regarding or self-satisfied**, you, yourselves, have progressed in the spiritual life. Other people must seek you and **you must satisfy more the needs of your brothers** "for even Christ pleased not Himself."

From there he carries on to a really moving reference from a scriptural passage of the prophets, where the prophet addresses God and says: *'The reproaches of them that reproached Thee fell on me.'* The insults of all of those who insulted you have fallen on me. And **Christ takes it upon Himself** and St. Paul understands that the Prophet's words refer to Christ. With this way he wants to show a dimension, which we often forget in the spiritual life, **the dimension of our neighbor**. We are interested in having good relations with God, as individuals, but we forget our brother, or even worse, we look at the other person in order to judge him, to criticize him, to *examine* him. Do you agree? There are Christians who devote all their life to (judgmentally) examining other people. And St. Paul does not simply say that we must not judge or criticize or examine but he goes on one step further that **we should bear other people's sins**. It is so hard! Why should I bear the sins of others? Why should I regard myself as equal as or more sinful than others?

The reasons, my brethren, are many but I shall mention only three:

One, is the Lord Himself did exactly that. Not only did He simply bear man's infirmities but also **He took on the responsibility for all these**. He took the responsibility **on the Cross** exactly because He was the one who was paying for the sins of others. He did not simply bear the infirmities of others but **He paid for them**. And, what is valid for Christ is valid for all of us, my brethren. This isn't what **the Protestant, our fellow Christians**, maintain that is that Christ paid for us and we have nothing else to do but to praise God for this; for them, there is nothing else left but the recognition of Christ's offering. For us, the Orthodox, **what Christ did - also applies to us**; and **we must do exactly what He, Himself did**. That is why the spiritual life is difficult because **we must take on Christ's Cross**. It is this cross that St. Paul recommends to us, when he presents Christ as the prototype, because He takes on the infirmities and the sins of others.

One other reason is that the **Saints of the Church** and especially the Fathers of the desert **did nothing else but take upon themselves the sins of others**. They did this *not with words*, but with all their being **they blamed themselves**. What we forget is that instead of reproaching our neighbor, **we too must**

take on this responsibility, as Christ did, and as the Saints do for their sins, and **accept the way of the Cross**.

And a third reason is that **we think that we are strong**. We forget that once we were weak. But what do I say? We are always weak however much we have progressed in relation to others; **in the spiritual life we are vulnerable to falling again**. We are not as strong as we think.

a) Even, when we see others as weak and ourselves strong, we must not forget this truth.

b) The man (as the world, too) is contingent and contains in itself no guarantee of survival except in so far as it is in *personal* (not natural) communion with someone who is not simply 'nature'.

And St. Paul continues, my brethren, even further. He does not simply say that you must not judge and criticize your brother but **take on his sins**, as it is mentioned at the end of the reading, but to receive your brother. '*Receive one another.*' **What does it mean to receive our brother?** Simply to tolerate him? Because this is the point where many times we stop. We tolerate him. This is not the meaning of '**receiving.**'

Receiving means **I receive him within me and I become one with him**. Like receiving food and what happens when we receive food? One element of the nature becomes part of our body. It is assimilated by our body, transformed and becomes one body with us.

This is the deeper and bigger mystery that happens in the case of the Church. The members of the Church receive one another, because Christ received them and made them part of his Body. The faithful can no longer exist without Christ, neither Christ without the faithful. He is the Head of the Body and the body cannot exist without a head, but neither head without body. And so Christ having received all the people and especially those with their willingness, who want to be received, the faithful, by receiving them He makes them one body, His own Body.

That is how the reception takes place, as St. Paul says, for edification. *Edification* is a word that is misunderstood many times, as though it meant progress in the spiritual life of every man. Edification is an image, which St. Paul borrows from the building of a house. **It is not about the progress of one person, it is about the building, the House of God, the House of the Holy Spirit that is the Church**. And, therefore, by receiving each other, all together we construct the body of Christ, the Church, and it is only in this way that we can be saved. We can only be saved within the Church. But this happens only when we receive each other and become united in one body. Only thus we shall be saved.

My brethren, we are called by Christ Himself to receive Holy Communion, His body and blood. I wonder if we are conscious of what this means? Perhaps we are conscious of what it means regarding our relationship with God? Perhaps we approach with fear. Perhaps we are approaching prepared - with fasting and perhaps with confession. Perhaps with all that one needs to approach this great mystery. But I wonder are we conscious at that moment that **we are not only united with God but also with our brothers?** Are we conscious that at that moment Christ receives us and we receive Him, but simultaneously He receives our brothers and we too receive our brothers? It is a view, a dimension of this big mystery of the Holy Communion, which we many times forget.

St. Paul comes to emphasize exactly this. '*Receive one another as Christ receives us.*' And he adds to the Glory of God, because **the Glory of God is exactly the reception of all the people in the body of Christ**, and in this manner, with this reception, with this body of Christ, God is glorified in the world. He is not glorified with our mere words; He is not glorified even with our individual virtue. He is glorified with the body of Christ that is the Church. And there exactly St. Paul places today the emphasis by telling all of us: '*Receive one another as Christ received us to the glory of God.*'

Whatever, my brethren, takes place during the Divine Liturgy, it must not stop within the Divine Liturgy, it must continue into our daily life. And it is truly difficult. Spiritual life is not easy. It is a struggle. It is difficult for anybody to accept and receive his brother or sister, to receive him or her and take on his/her sins.

Conclusion

We live in an age of individualism.

Everyone thinks only of himself, and he is not alone in this, in the surroundings of our so-called civilization, but this attitude is also present among Christians.

Individualism has crept in and each one of us tries to be reconciled with God by himself, on his own. He forgets his brother or looks at him as a subject for his criticism and blame and forgets that the meaning of the spiritual life, the fulfillment of our salvation, exists in this receiving of our brother.

When you step outside the vicinity of the Church today, what are some ways you think you could better receive your brother or sister?

My brethren, let this be the criterion for our daily life, for our actions, for our behavior and so the mercy of the Lord will strengthen all of us, so that whatever seems impossible for us may become possible for us through God. Amen.



STEWARDSHIP: It is difficult for a family to plan for its prosperity if it doesn't understand under what basis it can accomplish its goals. To live day by day leads to a lot of uncertainty and stress. If our Church were to function that way, it would be impossible to plan anything, whether it is short term or long term goals. One of the ways that this planning can occur is by having an understanding of expectations. We all like to have a place to come and pray and socialize as well as have the priest available for all our spiritual needs such as baptisms, weddings, funerals, home blessings, slavas, etc. It is not appropriate to reap the benefits from other people's sacrifices. Please search your conscience and make a commitment to ensure that our Church continues to meet your spiritual needs. This is usually done by filling out a stewardship card. A stewardship card was included in last month's bulletin. Please consider being a part of St. Sava's present and future. (74 stewards to date.)

Старатељство: Свакој породици би било тешко да планира свој напредак када чланови не би разумели основе на којима ће остварити своје циљеве. Живећи од данас до сутра доноси многе несигурности и бриге. Када би наша Црква тако поступала било би немогуће планирати било шта, како краткорочне тако и дугорочне циљеве. Да би се могло планирати морају се прво разумети очекивања. Сви ми би желели да имамо где да дођемо да се помолимо и дружимо, као и да нам свештеник буде доступан за наше духовне потребе, као што су крштење, венчања, сахране, благосиљанња куће, славе, итд. Није примерено користећи се плодовима туђег одрицања. Молимо вас да испитате своју савест и да се обавезете да осигурамо да наша Црква може и убудуће да задовољава ваше духовне потребе. Ово се најбоље ради попуњавањем старатељске карте. Старатељска карта је била приложена уз прошломесечни билтен, а може се и добити од чланова управног одбора парохије. Молимо вас да озбиљно размотрите како да будете део садашњости и будућности парохије Св. Саве.

CIRCLE OF SERBIAN SISTERS: The Sisters will celebrate their Slava – St. Mary Magdalene on August 10. Everyone is welcome!

Коло Српских Сестара: Сестре ће да славе своју славу – Св. Марије Магдалена 10. августа. Свих сте добро дошли!

AUGUST CALENDAR: There will be no Vespers August 2 and 30 and no Divine Liturgy August 3 and 31. On the first weekend we are invited to celebrate St. Stephen Church's Slava in Portland. Bishop Maxim will be present. On the last weekend Fr. Ilija will be on vacation.

All-Savior Monastery on Vashon Island is having a pilgrimage on August 16 starting at 9:40 a.m. For more information visit their website: <http://vashonmonks.com/index.php> Everyone is welcome!

JULY PRAYERS AND BLESSINGS: Pre-nuptial prayers = 1; Slavas = 3; Baptisms = 2; Marriages = 3; Burial Prayers = 1.

