**July 7th 2024 Sixth Sunday after Trinity**

**Text: Mark 8:34-38** 0728

**Theme: What Does it Profit?**

May the God of all grace grant you courage and steadfastness in the face of all trials and tribulations for the sake of Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen. Dear members of Christ’s Church: Very often a word or phrase can be used so much that it can begin to lose some of its meaning, becoming commonplace to hear it, and we pass over the word without much thought about what it means. Often these words are spoken and our thoughts have been directed in one way for so long that we cannot think of the word in a different way, in the way that was originally intended. One such word, I believe, is the word: crucify. It has become synonymous with Christianity, and our Lord Jesus Christ’s death, so much so, that we lose the thought of what it actually entails. The word crucify is a word derived from the Latin, meaning to inflict pain, intense pain, pain unlike anything else that a body can endure. From the word crucify is derived another word we use often in our English language, the word excruciating. This is a word we use to describe the worst sort of pain that can be endured. It would not be used to describe minor cuts and scrapes, nor even for many of the injuries that men can endure, but it is reserved for the worst sort of bodily pain imaginable, like that endured in cancer patients, or heart attack victims. Yet for something to be truly excruciating there must also be an element of emotional and even spiritual pain, pain which cannot be cured with any medicine, pain which inflicts our very souls. Often leaving us in near despair of hope and help. This describes perfectly what sort of pain was imagined and carried to fruition by the Romans when they would crucify someone. It was not just meant to be bodily pain, but pain which pierced to the soul, emotionally brutal, spiritually devastating, in a word: excruciating.

Because we have lost sight of the words crucify and excruciating, we also do not rightly comprehend and understand wherein the life of a Christian consists. It is often a surprise to many that the life of a Christian is not, earthly speaking, easy and carefree. Paul says: *“They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.” (Gal. 5:24)* Comprehending the word crucify, it puts the life of a Christian into new perspective for us. To crucify our flesh necessarily means that we undergo a certain amount of excruciating pain. As we confess, we are by nature sinful and unclean, it is in our very nature to satisfy the affections and lusts of our wicked hearts, and a Christian, in conversion, has his flesh sent to the cross to slay it. It is mortified in crucifixion. Not only this, but the crucifying of our flesh is an ongoing ordeal that must continue our whole lives through. Several years ago there was a movie released entitled: *“God’s Not Dead.”* Two of the characters in the movie are an elderly mother and her middle aged son. The mother is a devout Christian enduring Alzheimer’s disease, wherein she can barely communicate at all, is often confused, and even in a certain amount of pain. Her son, an atheist, is wealthy beyond imagination, fulfilling every desire of his heart, never lacking anything. At one point in the movie the son is visiting his mother, and thinking that she cannot understand him, asks her why, if there is a God, she suffers in the way that she does being a Christian, while an atheist such as himself lacks no good thing. In a moment of clarity the mother answers that the devil will let those he owns live comfortably so that they do not desire to turn from their wicked lives, while Christians are given crosses to bear to keep them from falling away from the faith. Their flesh is being crucified with Christ as Paul says in another place. And often, in an earthly sense, this pain is excruciating, and we must deny ourselves, we must deny our flesh the things which it desires the most. And thus a question is posed by all who are Christians or unbelievers: What does it profit? And this question is asked by both those in unbelief and those in the faith about both the life of a Christian and the life of an unbeliever. It will be our purpose today then to answer this question in both directions. We will do so according to our text for today which is found in the eighth chapter of the Gospel according to Mark beginning at verse thirty four.

**Quote text here.**

Let us pray, O most glorious Lord God, Thou who didst endure the shame of the cross for us sinners, we implore Thee to give unto us hearts of service toward our fellow man, but most especially to our fellow Christians. Give us such a measure of Thy Spirit that we deny ourselves, take up the cross, and follow Thee. Show us that the profit which we see with our eyes on this earth, is only loss. It is only temporary advantage and gain, but the life which Thou dost offer is truly gain, true profit. Help us to remember this always, that when temptations, afflictions, and trials come upon us we may not despair over the loss of our earthly goods, our possessions, our family and friends, or even our own lives. Give us courage and steadfastness in the face of all danger that we not sell our souls for a mere morsel of temporary happiness, but give up our temporary happiness in this life, for the hope of a better life to come. Help us to confess Thy name always, not only with our lips, but our deeds, even our hearts and souls. Be not ashamed of us, O Lord, and our wicked hearts, but receive us into life eternal for Thine own sake, confessing us before Thy Father. Be gracious unto us, forgive our sin, and save our souls, for in Thee do we trust. Amen.

Hear now the Word of the Spirit of God, learning first, in answer to the question: what does it profit?:

1. **To save our life.** We read verses thirty five through thirty eight of our text: **read verses here.** Jesus here is speaking to a large crowd of people, including His own disciples. All would have called themselves His followers, even His disciples, But Jesus shows unto them the true cost of discipleship, speaking to those would save their earthly lives. Now Jesus is not saying that all those who do not go into death for Him will not have salvation. Rather, He is saying that if a man, in order to save his own earthly life, denies Christ, his faith, or walks away from following Him will lose his eternal life. Jesus is here not only speaking of the actual act of losing one’s earthly life, but in denying the lusts and affections of the heart. One may say, until he is blue in the face, that he is a disciple of Jesus Christ, and that he follows Christ, but if his flesh is not being crucified and drowned daily then that person is unknown to Christ and will not see life. You see each and every willful and deliberate sin is a denial of Christ, is being ashamed of Him and of His words. Christ is here giving a warning to Christians and unbelievers alike. Both are in danger of sacrificing their eternal life for the temporal life here on earth. More often than not this is the very reason why men fall away from the faith. Think on the three primary examples in Scripture. David the king of Israel, sold his own soul to taste of the delights of a woman who was not his wife. Peter fearing bodily death denied His Lord three times. Judas, lusting after wealth and with greed in his heart sold his Lord and his own sold for thirty pieces of silver. It is often said that the life of a Christian person is too restrictive, that too many sacrifices must be made according to earthly happiness and many in following after their own lust have denied the Lord that bought them and brought upon themselves swift destruction. If one were to ponder just why men reject the true Christian faith he would find that it is due, in every case, to the desire to save his own life.

The evolutionist, though he will never admit it, rejects Christianity and espouses evolution for the simple fact that the bonds placed on his flesh are loosed and he is free to indulge every desire of his heart. The same goes for the atheist. The Roman Catholic, according to his flesh, loves to merit his own salvation; the Muslim lusts to make war and murder in the name of allah. The list goes on and on, and in every case one finds the flesh standing in the way. For this reason Satan told God when requesting to harm Job: *“Yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face.” (Job 2:4-5)* It is here that Jesus asks the question, what shall a man profit if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Is there anything in this world worth the price of your soul? Is there any pleasure in this life worth spending eternity in damnation? Is there any wickedness not worth enduring? What is the price that would induce us to sell our souls? Is it a beautiful woman? Fear of losing our earthly life to an excruciating death? Is it thirty pieces of silver? The old saying goes: every man has his price. In truth if left to ourselves each of us would sell our soul for far less than these things, often men do it for the smallest of trifling things, like a bowl full of pottage, as Esau did, and we would be no different without the help of almighty God and His Spirit dwelling within us, crucifying and mortifying the deeds of our flesh, yea our flesh itself. Thus let us hear secondly in answer to the question: what does it profit?:

1. **To deny ourselves.** We read verses thirty four and thirty five of our text: **Read verses here.** The Christian life is often fraught with sacrifices, at least in as far as the world is concerned. There are sufferings, persecutions, trials, and tribulations. Jesus says that a disciple denies himself, takes up his cross and follows Jesus. We have already seen what the cross entails. It is excruciating, for our flesh desires more than anything to indulge itself in every whim and lust which arises. But a Christian, by the power of the Holy Spirit, is denied these things, to live without these desired things. We are to look away from the beautiful woman bathing on the roof, to confess the name of Christ and go into our own death, to reject the thirty pieces of silver. Often this is easier said than done. There is an example of this in my own life which I share not to glorify myself, but to give an example of what is often asked of a Christian and performed by the Holy Spirit within us. Truly without the grace of God I would not have done what I did, and all the glory and praise for it is due to Him alone. About ten years ago, at convention, a sermon was preached which tugged at my heart, the Holy Ghost prompting me to go to seminary. About a month later I had made the decision that I and my family would move to Indiana where I would begin training for the ministry. Slowly the time to do that very thing approached, and I had become more and more convicted and sure that God willed that I should go. I truly had never been more certain about a decision that I had made in my entire life. That is until about a month before we were due to move. In Denver I was working a very good painting job, and seeing as I was due to leave in about a month I went into the office to meet with the owner and tell him that I would be leaving the company and moving to Indiana. The job paid well enough, but I had determined that I would leave it and move anyway. After I had broken the news to him, he sat there for a moment, and then broke the silence by saying he was disappointed because he had planned on promoting me to foreman of the whole company with a substantial raise in pay. In that moment my flesh, greed, and lust began to get the better of me, attempting to silence the will of God, and sell it and possibly even my own soul for money. It was only due to the strength of God, and His grace that I turned down that promotion and went anyway. Over the next six years my mind wandered often to the life that could have been, as I and my family struggled mightily to pay the bills, buy groceries and the like. In a sense it was excruciating, it was a cross placed on our family which seemed would never end, and at all times there was that thirty pieces of silver dangling there and which my flesh continued to lust after. Again, I do not pretend that it was by my own strength or faith that has brought me to this place today, but only God’s. Only He can give us the strength to will and to do of His good pleasure.

Dear Christians, do not be enamored with the things of this life, for they are deceptive and temporary. The Holy Spirit often leads us to lose our life, and in so doing we find it. We are led to lose our family, our friends, our lusts and desires, and in so doing are led to eternal life. Therefore, in answer to our question: what does it profit to save our life? The answer is that it may profit some things in this life, and we may have certain desires and lusts, even comforts, but these things lead only to death and destruction, and so it does not profit us at all. But in answer to the question: what does it profit to deny ourselves? We find that, indeed we might lose many of the good things of this life, even those things which our flesh desires more than anything, but we are led to eternal life, and so it profits us more than we can even know. I would not trade the experience and rich teaching of Christ and His Word which were given unto me during those years of seminary for all the money or promotions in the world. It was the greatest years of my life which have continued to this day, while at the same time being the hardest years of my earthly life. These types of things serve to strengthen our faith, to teach us to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him. This is the life of a Christian, and in spite of it all, it is a most blessed life here in time and hereafter in eternity. Amen.