

As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing

God's presence is a joyful presence; and as the priest is a God bearer who puts on the Lord Jesus Christ, his presence must be a joyful one. There is no sorrow in heavens. Therefore, a priest, who is the heaven's ambassador can be nothing but joyful. The priest's joy is his own precious treasure. A constantly rejoicing priest inspires an atmosphere of grace in all those who surround him, and is a powerful source to recharge the spiritual and psychological energies of whoever deals with him. But if the priest becomes gloomy and frowning, then this must be a sign of a certain spiritual dysfunction. Rejoicing is a biblical commandment that must be obeyed by everybody including priests, "*Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say, rejoice*" (Philippians 4:4).

Characteristics of a priest's joy

- (1) It is the joy of Christ Himself, "*That they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves*" (John 17:13).
- (2) It is a fruit of being filled with the Holy Spirit, "*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace*" (Galatians 5:22), "*With joy of the Holy Spirit*" (1 Thessalonians 1:6).
- (3) It is the source of his strength, "*For the joy of the Lord is your strength*" (Nehemiah 8:10).
- (4) It is a steadfast joy, "*And your joy no one will take from you*" (John 16:22), "*These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you*" (John 15:11).
- (5) It is an inexpressible and full of glory joy, "*You rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory*" (1 Peter 1:8).
- (6) It is a full joy, "*That your joy may be full*" (John 16:24).
- (7) It is a contagious joy, "*You also be glad and rejoice with me*" (Philippians 2:18).

Sources of joy for a priest

- (1) The Lord Himself, "*Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord*" (John 20:20), "*But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly*" (Philippians 4:10).
- (2) God's word, "*I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies, as much as in all riches*" (Psalms 119:14), "*rejoice at Your word as one who finds great treasure*" (Psalms 119:162).
- (3) The salvation, "*I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness*" (Isaiah 61:10).
- (4) The heavenly reward, "*Rejoice in that day and leap for joy. For indeed your reward is great in heaven*" (Luke 6:23), "*But rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven*" (Luke 10:20).
- (5) The abundant harvest for the sake of the kingdom, "*And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together*" (John 4:36).
- (6) The acceptance of prayers in the name of Jesus, "*Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full*" (John 16:24).

(7) Persecutions, sufferings, and humiliations for the name of the Lord, *“So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name”* (Acts 5:41), *“I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church”* (Colossians 1:24).

(8) The sinner’s repentance, *“Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost”* (Luke 15:6).

(9) God’s mighty works and wonders in the ministry, *“The whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works they had seen”* (Luke 19:37), *“And all the multitude rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by Him”* (Luke 13:17).

(10) The truth, *“Does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth”* (1 Corinthians 13:6), *“I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth”* (3 John 4).

(11) Obedience of the served people, *“For your obedience has become known to all. Therefore, I am glad on your behalf”* (Romans 16:19).

(12) Unity, *“Fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind”* (Philippians 2:2).

(13) Others’ joy, *“Rejoice with those who rejoice”* (Romans 12:15), *“If one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it”* (1 Corinthians 12:26).

(14) The served people themselves, *“For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and joy”* (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20).

(15) Honest fulfilling of ministry, *“So that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God”* (Acts 20:14), *“Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord”* (Matthew 25:21).

Now, can a priest remain gloomy and sorrowful while the Holy Spirit, who is the treasury of good things, has granted him all these sources of joy?!!

The End of the Days and the Second Coming

Jesus Christ on the Clouds

In the context of the signs of His coming, the Lord says, *“Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory”* (Matthew 24:30; Mark 13:26; Luke 21: 27).

As much as the Lord’s coming is a source of joy, consolation and glory for his followers, *“for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.’... ‘And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”* (Revelation 7:17; 21:4); it is also a source of fear and dread to those who had disdained and rejected Him ending up crucifying Him and harming His followers. *“Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the*

earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:30).

They will be the ones described in the Holy Book of Revelation, *“and said to the mountains and rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?’”* (Revelation 6:16-17).

Along with the King of kings and Lord of lords there will come myriads of angels (Revelation 17:14, 19:16). *“Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.³¹ And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other ”* (Matthew 24:30-31; Mark 13:27); and the process of judgment will start.

The Alive and the Dead on the Day of the Lord

On this subject St. Paul writes to the Greek churches (1 Corinthians 15:42-49,51-52). *“For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words”* (1 Thessalonians 4:14-18).

Concerning this sudden rapture distinguishing between those who will be glorified and those who will be ashamed, the Lord said, *“Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left”* (Matthew 24:40-41; Luke 17:34 -36). Thus the Lord’s parable about the kingdom of Heaven, pictured as a net thrown in the sea having gathered fishes of all kinds, when dragged to the shore (at the second coming) the good ones will be kept while the bad ones will be thrown out. This separating process is in preparation for standing before the judge. *“’Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.’ ”* (Matthew 13:47-50). *“and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation”* (John 5:29). *“Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear”* (Matthew 13:43).

The Final Salvation

The Lord's promised second coming and the subsequent admission of the righteous people unto eternal life and the evil ones unto eternal judgment constitutes the announcement of the last part of the salvation process the first part being belief in Jesus Christ, baptism and resultant manifestation of our salvation through longsuffering, lovingkindness, righteousness, worship, penitence, service, giving, patience in pain and sufferings, sickness and death while being supported by the Holy Spirit. With the resurrection and ushering into eternal life we will have accomplished our salvation in Jesus Christ, *“And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake. But*

he who endures to the end will be saved” (Matthew 10:22, 24:13; Mark 13:13) *“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself”* (Philippians 3:20-21). *“so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation”* (Hebrews 9:28). *“who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time”* (1 Peter 1:5). In His second coming, Jesus Christ is coming as the judge “without sin”, which he had already trodden over with his cross, and will change our bodies’ lowly nature (which had previously been subjected to death because of sin) to become in the likeness of the glory of His body. In this way, Jesus Christ will have sealed his salvation that extends from his incarnation passing by His cross and resurrection till the end of the ages.

The Final Judgment

“but after this the judgment” (Hebrews 9:27). After having spoken about the signs of the second coming, the Lord clarified the confusion concerning his sitting on the throne of His glory. All human beings, either alive or reposed will, after sometime rise in bodies ready either for eternal life or eternal perdition and those who were His will be carried on the clouds. Thus the final verdict is declared, *“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’ ...Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’ ...And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life”* (Matthew 25:31-34,41,46).

According to Jesus Christ’s teachings, whoever listens to His words and believe in them, *“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life”* (John 5:24). The Lord announces to whoever believes in him that from now *“has passed from death into life”* and that *“shall not come into judgment”* but *“has everlasting life”*. Therefore, the sentencing will not come as a surprise, but the joy will be generated based on the steadfast truth of the promise that has sealed pain and afflictions with these words, *“and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us”* (Romans 8:17-18; 2 Corinthians 4:17). St. Paul adds to the same concept saying, *“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus,¹ who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit”* (Romans 8:1).

People who ignore the inevitability of their destiny have to examine themselves whether they are “in the true faith”. *“Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified”* (2 Corinthians 13:5). They might be in need of revising their stance from God, and of correcting their attitude in order to save themselves. God has warned that, *“For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you”* (Matthew 6:14).

Serious Christians accomplish their salvation every day, hold on to everlasting life, refuse to give in to defeat or failure. *“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling”* (Philippians 2:12). Through repentance, they guard sanctity, reject evil and the evil. Through God’s grace, support, and protection they remain faithful to the end. *“And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.”* (1 John 2:2).

Works Follow

“Their works follow them” (Revelation 14:13). Before believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, we were in darkness without having anything to offer. God has made faith the means of salvation, rescue from judgment, and cross over from death to life. Now we are before God’s invitation to accept and receive salvation. *“not of works, lest anyone should boast”* (Ephesians 2:9). *“who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began”* (2 Timothy 1:9). *“But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit”* (Titus 3:4-5).

On the last day, when He raises His beloved ones and places them on His right hand, He will not mention their faith but their works *“and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation”* (John 5:29). *“Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.’...And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.’”* (Matthew 25:34-36,40).

Here, the Lord refers to the proof of proactive faith and its subsequent productive works being connected to God, *“done unto me”*. Thus, the good works of unbelievers will be rewarded on earth only because those people are not connected to the Lord Jesus Christ. All achievements related to eternal life are those related to faith in Jesus Christ. Accomplishments are one side of the coin, the other being faith. *“But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works”* (James 2:18). *“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love”* (Galatians 5:6). Faith with words only is like love with words only; both mean nothing without truth *“My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth”* (1 John 3:18). Just as the body without spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead *“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also”* (James 2:26). Faith is not mere confession or belief, but a life of commitment, pursuit, love and following the command, righteousness, worship, service to Jesus Christ and proclamation of His salvation, bearing suffering for His sake with gratitude and caution against the love of the world and all that is in it. *“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life”* (John 5:24). All these works are the fruits of the new life, the life of salvation received by faith (the works of faith in Jesus Christ) ignited in us by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us generated by faith in Jesus Christ. We are the instrument

and the free obedient will. God in us makes us will and do. *“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them”* (Ephesians 2:10). *“for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure”* (Philippians 2:13).

Therefore, we can by no means boast of our works or bargain with them because they are attributed to God more than to us. *“For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God”* (Romans 4:2). Our works are not to be offered to God to receive praise for our faith. For God is not in need of a manifest proof to do so. *“And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account”* (Hebrews 4:13). Our works are a spontaneous outcome of the genuineness and liveliness of our faith and natural byproduct of an obedient soul. Such works are required as witness and testimony for the glory of God *“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven”* (Matthew 5:16).

God warns us not to credit our works to our account nor consider ourselves independent from the One who works in us. For, as St. Paul says *“For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, you are God’s building”* (1 Corinthians 3:9). *“So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.’”* (Luke 17:10).

Among us there are those who confound us with their humility, feeling of unworthiness and shortcomings waking in the middle of the night supplicating for their salvation saying, *“just as in the old days you had granted the sinful woman springs of tears grant me O Lord the same springs with which to water your feet that have liberated me from the lost ways so that I may offer you pure perfume. Procure for me a new pure life of repentance so that I may hear that joyful voice saying, ‘your faith has saved you’.* These words prove that there is no salvation with works alone.

God Wills Our Salvation

Since God’s will is our salvation, let us strive and be vigilant. For, God love us with eternal love and perpetual mercy, *“The Lord has appeared of old to me, saying: ‘Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you.’”* (Jeremiah 31:3). He suffered death for us so that we may live. *“Say to them: ‘As I live,’ says the Lord God, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?’”* (Ezekiel 33:11). *“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance...Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?...You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen”* (2 Peter 3:9,11-12,17-18). *“For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth”* (1 Timothy 2:3-4).

God is our partner and not opponent and has prepared a city for us, *“But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them”* (Hebrews 11:16). Therefore, as believers, our desire is to be with Him *“For we walk by faith, not by sight”* (2 Corinthians 5:7). Let us remain vigilant and prepare ourselves for that hour according to the Holy word. *“Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming... Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect... ‘Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.’”* (Matthew 24:42,44; 25:13). *“Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is... Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning—lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!”* (Mark 13:33,35-37). *“Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man”* (Luke 21:36). *“Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober”* (1 Thessalonians 5:6). *“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded... Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up”* (James 4: 8,10). The judge will come quickly and His reward with him to repay each one according to his works *“‘And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.’”* (Revelation 22:12). Those who are ready will enter with him to the wedding for an extended everlasting life and after that the door will be closed.

Articles on the Christian History

The Fifth Century

The Findings of the Council at Ephesus

After all the Synod meetings, the bishops were surprised by the coming of the deputy of the Emperor Theodosius II, Prince John, (the cashier of the emperor) carrying a personal message from the Emperor enclosing an order for the excommunication, arrest and jail of both St. Cyril and Bishop Memnon. It turned out that all the bishops' messages previously sent to the Emperor were curtailed in favor of Nestorius as well as forged messages with forged signatures were sent to the Emperor. Thus it became obvious that Nestorius friends namely Candidianus and Irenaeus within the Emperor's household blocked the way before the genuine messages sent by the bishops from Ephesus to Constantinople.

Consequently, the bishops sent a special message to the Emperor asking to meet with him to explain and clarify the council events and decisions of the seven meetings. Upon the Emperor's acceptance, the bishops sent representatives to meet with the emperor.

In trying to calm the situation, Prince John asked each side to write down a message to the Emperor explaining their faith. However, the prince was not successful and turmoil increased replacing peace and tranquility.

After a lot of letters exchange and delegates from both sides, Emperor Theodosius II met with a delegation from the bishops of Ephesus and from Antioch in a small town called Chalcedon not too far from Constantinople. He accepted the articles of the Ephesus Council as well as the twelve anathemas issued by St. Cyril. In addition, he ordered the liberation of St. Cyril and Bishop Memnon from jail and the arrest and exile of Nestorius in the desert of upper Egypt where he remained till he died (till present day near the monastery of St. Shenouda the Archimandrite there

exists a small hill named Nestorius Hill where he is believed to have been exiled). The Emperor called a delegation from Ephesus and they ordained, one of St. Cyril's disciples, Maximian, a pious monk, as the new bishop for Constantinople.

The Remaining Days of Pope Cyril the great (412-444 AD)

Advice with the See of Antioch

John, the patriarch of Antioch and his eight bishops continued their antagonistic assaults against Pope Cyril of Alexandria for almost one year. He was very much against Emperor Theodosius II who was deluded into thinking that problems had stopped with the exile of Nestorius. Emperor Theodosius II sent Aristolaus, one of his religious friends, to St. Cyril in Alexandria asking for his counseling in that matter. In turn, St. Cyril advised the Emperor to write to John, the patriarch of Antioch explaining the faith of the Council of Ephesus before he could be accepted back in the community of the church.

Other events and the final days

After returning from Ephesus, Pope Cyril spent the rest of His days trying to anchor the true doctrine in his people and the nearing nations. Consequently, his name became very famous and associated with the virtue of zeal over faith and its defense to the extent that his name became known as "Pope Cyril, the Pillar of Faith".

During his last days, Pope Cyril wrote two books, "The Twelve Anathemas" and "Five Tomes Against Nestorius". He also revised and added to the Holy Liturgy left to him by St. Mark the apostle in the first century. Thus this liturgy became known as "the liturgy of St Cyril" and often prayed during the Holy Great Fast. This holy pope kept the annual custom (initiated during the Nicene council) of sending to all the churches the date of the feast of the Resurrection along with a festal message. This great pope reposed on the third of Epep 3, 160 AM (June 27, 444 AD) after having striven greatly to preserve the faith.