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The Apostle

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Become holy as He is holy



Do you think that having a goal in life is a good idea? Some people are content to wander through life, making the best of it, but without a well-defined goal. We all have dreams about what we may be able to achieve but getting down to making them real requires sacrifice and commitment and that is often far from easy. The way of Christ was not and indeed is not an easy path. Those who follow Jesus are bidden to take up their cross and

follow him. The ability to sacrifice one's own comfort, gratification and self-will only comes from individuals who put God and others first in their lives.

In the gospels our Lord Jesus Christ so often had to watch in sadness as those who were not able to make this kind of commitment walked away from the opportunity of becoming a disciple. Very little has changed in

the last 2000 or more years. As for us Christians, we must be going about doing God's work, entirely dependent upon His grace and guidance.

The particular goal of a Christian varies from person to person according to the vocation of each. For a refuse collector it will be about diligence in keeping the environment clean and tidy. For a surgeon it will be about mending our physical brokenness. For an artist it will be about inspiring the best in all that is human. For a truck driver it will be about delivering goods in a timely fashion and driving with respect and consideration on the road. However, no matter how diverse these vocational paths in life are, all from a Christian point of view contribute to one ultimate goal - the acquisition of holiness.

This month of June sees us celebrate the feast of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came down upon the apostles, and indeed others, to energise and guide them in the saving of souls. However, lest they be disqualified in this great and godly task by an unregenerate mind and heart, the Lord had sifted and tried them in the furnace of grief and suffering to make them

worthy of such a calling. The same path, behind us and ahead of us, is the narrow and demanding walk of all the saints towards the fullness of Christ.

The Spirit of mission is indeed the Spirit of holiness. If people are to see and know God through our witness, then our primary goal must always be to become saints. To be a saint is to be empty of oneself and full of God, a heart and mind imbued with extreme humility, born out of repentance. Let us all then, with fresh fervour in this time of Pentecost, seek to be purified by the Holy Spirit in pursuance of this one goal, to become a saint, that through us others also might be saved.

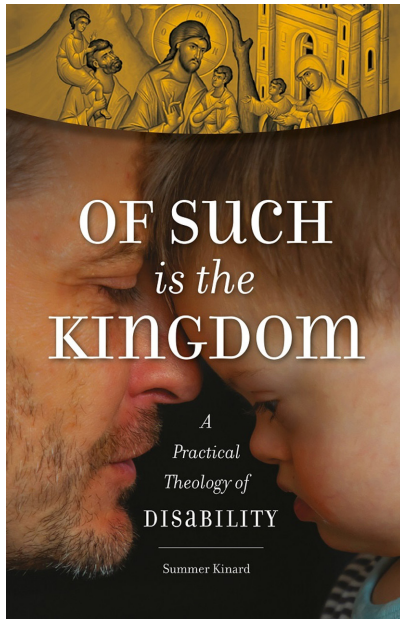
- Fr Gregory



Book Review: Of Such Is the Kingdom

A Practical Theology of Disability By Summer Kinard

(Ancient Faith Publishing, 2019)



This unusual book by an autistic mother rearing five autistic children in the Orthodox faith explains how “disability is not a boundary to holiness, because God is with us. But it can sometimes be an obstacle to full participation in the life of the Church, simply because many do not understand what is needed to help people with disabilities overcome any physical, mental or interpersonal challenges they may face in church and in leading an Orthodox Christian life” [quotation from back cover].

The author explains how as a child “everything I read about God stuck to the forefront of my understanding of the world, and I embarrassed people by seeming to think God was right there with us.... I was encouraged by the love and patient teaching of my two grandmothers and two great-grandmothers, who prayed for children and took extra time to tell me how to behave and what things meant” [p. 7]. Now as a mother, she seeks in this book and on her website (<https://summerkinard.com/>) “to welcome everyone into the Orthodox Church” [p. 14].

This practical theology of disability aims to “give thanks for everything God has brought into our lives [so that we can] know what God is like not only in our heads, but in our daily lives and in the real, sacred, disabled bodies God has given us in the Church for our salvation” [p. 15].

The book is “centered around four parts of the Christian life that are in reality all interwoven at all times.... First, I will talk about Kairos [that is, discerning the critical moment for action or change, in the context of] how we can know the meaning of

our bodies by taking a view from God's time... We will look at Christ as our model in this section and see how our baptisms change the way we experience suffering from disabilities.... When we step into the Divine Liturgy, time is watered through with eternity. Christ is with us, and suddenly we know His presence more fully than at any other time in our lives.... When God acts, we learn that disability of body does not hinder grace entering the soul" [pp. 16, 23-72].

Second, I talk about [theosis, that is] "the process of becoming like God through participation in the sacraments, prayers and virtues. God became human so that we might become like Him and so that we might encounter Him through our senses [pp. 16, 73-176]." Chapter 7, "Becoming Like God in Weakness," sets out that "God became human so that we might become like God. Becoming like God, or theosis, is what we Orthodox mean when we talk about salvation. But how do we become like God? In a general sense, we become like God by imitating God and drawing near to Him so that we may be illumined by His grace and start to take on some of His characteristics.... God has already accomplished most of this work by drawing near to us all in the

Incarnation. God has already made communion with Him possible and continues to be with us and will bring us all fully into his presence so that God is all in all" [pp. 75-76].

Then [third] I consider kenosis [self-emptying, pouring out of grace on and from Orthodox Christians] "how virtues—ways we imitate Christ—make us like God and show how we can minister to each other. We will see what grace looks like when it's poured out on and from Orthodox Christians with disabilities. Not only do we exercise virtue through serving our disabled fellow Christians, but we also experience the grace of their ministries to others. The highest virtue is the greatest gift of the Holy Spirit, love [pp. 17, 177-219].... Virtue is an embodied, community experience, and it is guided by mutual humility and love between members of the community of the Body of Christ. We serve our fellow Christians with disabilities, and they serve us.... In the sacraments, God acts. In prayers, we meet and commune with God. In virtues, we follow God. This imitation of Christ requires that we believe and that we exercise our free will, because virtues train our wills to seek God" [p. 180].

[Fourth,] "the final part of this book is called "The Iconic

Community” [fellowship with God and other believers and how this] “reflects on how the community of the Church is an icon of God’s love that bears one another’s burdens. A community that acts like God lives with[in] them will welcome families with special needs” [pp. 17, 223-257].... In the icon called ‘The Holy Trinity’ or ‘The Hospitality of Abraham,’ we observe the three angels who visited Abraham around a table laid for four. The person viewing the icon is at the fourth side of the table, invited to join the other three holy guests. The angels remind us also of the Holy Trinity, for two of the angels bow toward the third to remind us that the Son is the only-begotten of the Father and that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father.... [This] is an icon of grandeur and love, of humility and invitation to enter into fellowship with God. It reminds us that hospitality is a key element of the Church, which is an icon of love of God in Christ” [p. 224].

A brief conclusion to this impressive book is grounded in 2 Corinthians 3:18: “We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into His likeness from one degree of glory to another, for this comes from the Lord who is the [Holy] Spirit....” [A key idea here is that]

mercy means making space and saving a place for those who need help or extra room to join the Body [of Christ].... Often when considering the welcome of families with disabilities, we have let our desire for piety overcome the need for compassion toward fellow members of Christ’s Body. We would prefer to deal with some people once they’re already healed in the Resurrection, and we have not considered that they are already holy in God’s time. We have not considered that we have all entered the suffering of Christ in baptism, and we need not fear to embrace our fellow members of His Body who suffer. It is only through perfect communion with one another in Christ, through shared sacraments, prayer, humility and love that we also will experience salvation....” Summer Kinard also reminds us that 20% of people have some form of mental or physical disability which may or may not be immediately visible. [pp. 259-262].

The final sentences of the conclusion offer a powerful reminder of the title of this book: “We are all members of Christ’s Body, and Christ is our Head. Look at Him. Copy Him. Love as He loves, for of such is the Kingdom of God” [p. 263].

- Father Emmanuel

Holiness in Action - the Practical Aspects

I have received a number of requests from parishioners, both catechumens and established members, that we make a provision for understanding what we do in church and how that connects with our spiritual life. Since we are taking a little break now from our Bible Study until September an opportunity presents itself to use our Tuesday night Zoom sessions for this very purpose. Anyone can join, just message me if you would like to attend and are not already on our Tuesday evening mailing. All sessions start at 7.30pm and will run for 30 minutes although we may extend that if there is enough demand to do so.

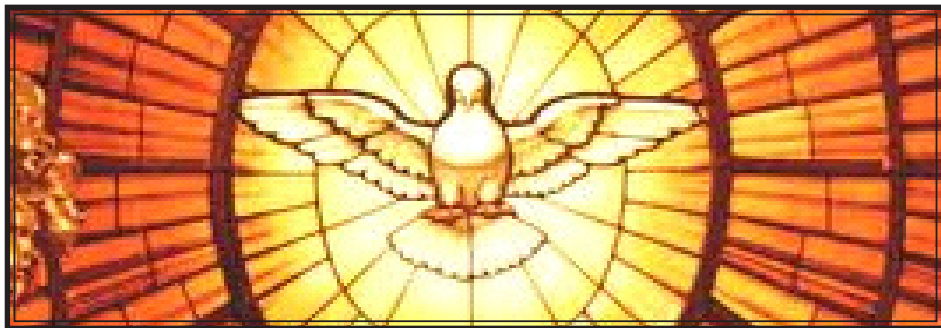
Here is the schedule:

Tuesday 1st July	Holy Persons: Saints and their veneration
Tuesday 8th July	Holy Things: The meaning of consecration and blessing
Tuesday 15th July	Holy Prayers: Prayer in church and at home
Tuesday 22nd July	Holy Actions: How we use our bodies in worship



Pentecost

In 1968 Patriarch Ignatius IV of Antioch, when he was Metropolitan of Latakia, gave an address at the Assembly of the World Council of Churches. In it he spoke of the Holy Spirit in a striking and memorable way:



**Without the Holy Spirit God is far away.
Christ stays in the past,
The Gospel is simply an organisation,
Authority is a matter of propaganda,
The Liturgy is no more than an evocation,
Christian loving a slave mentality.**

But in the Holy Spirit

**The cosmos is resurrected and grows with the
birth pangs of the kingdom.
The Risen Christ is there,
The Gospel is the power of life,
The Church shows forth the life of the Trinity,
Authority is a liberating science,
Mission is a Pentecost,
The Liturgy is both renewal and anticipation,
Human action is deified.**

Prayer by George Herbert (1593-1633)



Prayer the church's banquet, angel's age,
God's breath in man returning to his birth,
The soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage,
The Christian plummet sounding heaven and earth
Engine against the Almighty, sinner's tower,
Reversed thunder, Christ-side-piercing spear,
The six-days world transposing in an hour,
A kind of tune, which all things hear and fear;
Softness, and peace, and joy, and love, and bliss,
Exalted manna, gladness of the best,
Heaven in ordinary, man well dressed,
The milky way, the bird of Paradise,
Church-bells beyond the stars heard, the soul's blood,
The land of spices; something understood.

More Than a Vision



Detractors of Paul argue that his encounter with Christ was merely a “vision,” unlike the lived experiences of the other apostles. According to this view, a vision lacks the substance of direct, personal contact, making it less credible and suggesting that Paul’s apostleship is secondary. However, powerful affirmations from Paul himself and early Church Fathers defend the authenticity of his encounter as a genuine, authoritative revelation of the risen Lord.

In 1 Corinthians 15:3-8, Paul recounts his encounter with the risen Christ alongside appearances to Peter, James, and the other apostles: “Last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.” Paul does not imply his experience was lesser; rather, he

claims equal authority, aligning himself with those who witnessed the resurrected Jesus.

In Galatians 1:18 and 2:1-10, Paul explains how he met Peter and James three years after his conversion, followed later by a visit to Jerusalem with Barnabas and Titus. During this visit, Paul presented his

gospel to the Gentiles to ensure it aligned with the apostles’ teaching. He writes that they “gave [him] the right hand of fellowship” (Gal. 2:9), affirming his calling and ministry as legitimate. This acceptance by Peter, James, and John validated Paul’s apostleship and the authenticity of his encounter.

The early Church Fathers provide valuable insights into how Paul’s encounter was defended as genuine. Irenaeus (c. 130–202), in *Against Heresies*, affirms that Paul’s apostleship came directly from Christ: “For even Paul himself, after the Lord had spoken to him from heaven, and had placed him among the apostles, whom he himself had been persecuting, did afterwards write, that he had received not from men, but from Christ Himself, the

gospel which he preached” (Book III, Chapter 13). Here, Irenaeus emphasizes that Paul’s witness shares the same divine authority as the other apostles.

John Chrysostom (c. 347–407) similarly upheld Paul’s experience as a revelation of Christ’s glory. In Homilies on the Epistle to the Galatians, he writes: “The Lord’s appearance to Paul is a great proof of His resurrection. As Paul stated, ‘And last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared also to me’ (1 Cor. 15:8). This was no mental vision but a true sight of His glory, befitting an apostle.” Chrysostom’s perspective confirms that Paul’s calling was accepted as real and divinely sanctioned as the experiences of Peter, James, and

John.

In conclusion, Paul’s writings affirm that his encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus was as genuine and authoritative as those of the apostles who saw Jesus in His resurrected body. His visits to Jerusalem further reveal that the original apostles accepted his calling, endorsing his ministry among the Gentiles. Additionally, Church Fathers, such as Irenaeus and John Chrysostom, confirm Paul’s encounter as a full, authentic calling—a true revelation of Christ’s glory, equal to the witness of those who walked with Jesus during His earthly ministry.

- Daniel Polson



Christ Alone by Daniel Polson

Christ alone, He brings light,
Drives away darkness, the demons take flight,
No more lies from oracles and stones,
Since the Saviour came, lies are unknown.

In times gone by, the oracles would speak,
Delphi, Dordona, their wisdom so weak,
Men would marvel, they would bow to the ground,
But Christ was revealed and broke it all down.
The madness has ended, no more disguise,
No voices remain to deceive with cunning lies,
For the Word of the Father has come to our land,
With the sign of the Cross, we now take a stand.

Christ alone, He brings light,
Drives away darkness, the demons take flight,
No more lies from oracles and stones,
Since the Saviour came, lies are unknown.

Demons would hide in the rivers and trees,
Tricking the simple with shadows as they pleased,
But now that the Word has appeared in our time,
Their fraud has been shattered by power divine.

Those idols of men, Zeus, Apollo, and more,
Exposed as mere mortals, their reign is no more,
For the Saviour has shown who is truly the King,
Christ, the true God, let all creation sing.

Oh, wisdom of Greece, where have you gone?
Philosopher's noise now a fading song,
Your magic has vanished, your power undone,
By the Truth of the Word, by the light of the Son.
Look past this world, see the things that endure,
In Christ, find the peace, in His love, be sure.

Christ alone, He brings light,
Drives away darkness, the demons take flight,
No more lies from oracles and stones,
Since the Saviour came, lies are unknown.

From Egypt to Chaldea, all magic must fall,
The Word has come in flesh, He is Lord of all.
Not the things of this earth, not glory or pride,
But the love of the Saviour, in Him we abide.
Take heed of His teachings, take heed of His call,
In Christ alone, we all stand tall.

Christ alone, He brings light,
Drives away darkness, the demons take flight,
No more lies from oracles and stones,
Since the Saviour came, lies are unknown.

Christ alone... Christ alone...
His love is our home.