

GLG 2024

Christ's Unconditional

Session Two by Fr. Robert Holet for Participants

O Lord Almighty, God of hosts and of all flesh, dwelling in the highest, you care for the humble. You search searching the will and the human heart, and clearly know the hidden things of us all - O God who is without beginning and ever-existing Light, we pray that O immortal King You accept our prayers which we offer to Thee at this present time in the course of this project, that our hearts might reflect your love and care for all humankind.

Have a Heart!

We say, 'Have a heart!' when we want to encourage someone to care and get involved. The word 'care' is actually a very rich word - based on an Old English word, which means to be 'grieved deeply'. When we care, we grieve, and grief (at the suffering of others or even our own) is one of the hardest emotions to allow ourselves to express, especially in public. But to have a heart, to be compassionate, is to focus on the pain of someone and truly care about their situation, suffering and try to alleviate it.

Christians are characterized by 'care-fullness' - an attitude of caring about others (and ourselves) and valuing them because of who they and we are in the sight of God. Hence St. Paul exhorts Titus, " *And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good.* " Titus 3:8.

To be careful - is to be literally 'full of care'. Likewise we are encouraged not to 'lose heart', to give up or quit! St. Paul exhorts us, " *Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.* "

Likewise we are called to 'guard our heart'. What does this mean? Proverbs 4:23 reminds us *to "Above all, guard your heart."* A care-ful person is aware that there are many forces at work that can distract us or move our hearts away from what's really important.

Likewise, a caring person is not half-hearted'. When a person does something half-heartedly, he or she is doing it just to go through the motions, to pass some minimal test or satisfy someone's requirement, but doesn't really put themselves wholly into it. To try to do something in charity, half-heartedly, is a real insult because it says the person we are supposedly trying to help is not worth our full hearted effort!

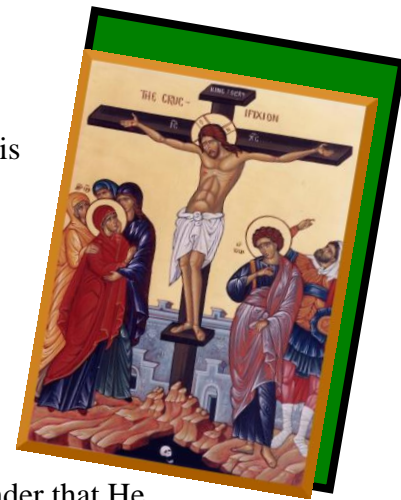


So what do we make of all of this? Caring is all about our heart - what we can do whole-heartedly, with compassion, and sensitivity. If we don't 'feel like it', our heart is disengaged, we are disinterested, and our minds are 'somewhere else'.

The Gospel

Christianity is based upon the simple truth, that God *cares* for us, and that He loves us. He cared enough to send His Only Begotten Son into the world, to help us find our way to the Father and Eternal life. One of the signs that the flame of the gospel is alive in us is whether or not we *care*. Christian conversion often means moving from "I don't care!" to "Yes, I do care!"

The remembrance of the Death of Jesus on the Cross in Holy Week is a reminder that He cared so much for us, that He would die for us. This is a sign that His love was without reserve, or conditions. He loves us as we are. He rose from the dead at Holy Pascha to show us that He cared so much for us that He would not allow us to be dead - in sin, and lying in the grave after our death, but He died and rose so that we could be raised up by Him in His divine love and care into Paradise.



A Story - Some Things Count



One young man confided in me this poignant story, in tears. He was, by all counts, successful in high school and at graduation received many honors and awards. He was proud of his accomplishments and thought he was ready to move on to conquer new worlds. But at graduation, he became increasingly uneasy about himself. What would happen now, in a whole new place with new people? Even worse, as he looked at his classmates on graduation day, they were all radiant and enjoying the day. They embraced each other and joyfully looked forward to their new endeavors, and staying in touch.

But the young man was uneasy. He felt isolated from the joy of his friends. Finally he realized that his whole senior year had been about what he wanted to do and be about. He had checked out of school long ago and his focus was on himself. He realized that his fellow students who graduated with him that day were fine, bright, kind and had been generous toward him. But, he had never really cared much about them, or who they were, or what their life was about or where they were going. He had spent years with them - but knew very little about any of them personally even though he had 'hung out' with them so as to remain 'cool' in their circle. It had not mattered much at all, really, that he had been a part of their life, because he had not really cared about them. He had said as much - he was focused on His Future. Yes he had been 'successful' in his quest for good grades and achievements, but had not shared his heart with anyone. He didn't know them -nor did they know him.

The young man went on from that day saddened, but resolved that next year would be different. He would begin to try to care more about his classmates, not just himself or his interests or future. And later when he shared his story with me about his first year in college he was a changed, and much, much happier young man. He had found real friends because he had really learned how to care about them. And his faith had come alive too - because he had begun to discover that "I can care - and that some things count in life - especially other people."

FOCUS - Caring for Others in Need

When we care, we do all sorts of things that we wouldn't otherwise. We exercise care toward others by simply meeting them, talking to them, looking at them, and opening our hearts. Sometimes we're able to show caring in practical ways, like extending ourselves to raise funds for people in need. We will never serve others until we care about them.

By your Great Lent Giveaway efforts, you can show other young people that, unlike the young man in the story above, you do care! And we realize too that those we try to help or serve often have bigger hearts than we do - and they can teach us a lot about the kind of caring that is good for the soul - by having a heart for others.

Have a Heart-O-Meter

Have a Heart Quiz

Honestly assess much *you* care about the following. Note- this is not an exercise to make you feel bad - rather just to see what is important to you right now.

Scale - 3 = Care-full 2 = Half- hearted 1 Heart Lost

1. I care deeply about my friends. _____
2. I love my family (parents, siblings, other family members) _____
3. My school is important to me. _____
4. My school *work* is important to me. _____
5. I value my home - where I live. _____
6. Our Church services are a key part of my weekly. _____
7. When I am confronted with the suffering of others, like the homeless - I feel their pain. _____
8. When I see a TV ad about suffering animals, it makes me want to cry or help the creature. _____
9. My special hobbies and activities are important to me. _____
10. I don't care whether I care or not! _____

Sometimes we pretend to care, when we really don't. This is 'faking it' - going along making it look like we're interested but not really thinking it's important.

- Have you ever done that?
- Do you do it a lot?
- If so, why?

