

Christians

By Metropolitan Saba (Isper)

While praying before His passion, the Lord Jesus asked God the Father to preserve His people, saying, “I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one” (John 17:15). That is because, in His divinity, He knew that the world would fight His people. This was proven throughout history and continues to be proven today.

Why then does the world fight Christ’s disciples? In the Gospel of John, the Lord says in His prayer that this is because “they are not of this world” and because He has given them the word of the Father. This is why the world has hated them (John 17:14). Therefore, the world’s hatred towards Christians comes from its hatred towards their Lord. Thus, if we as Christians see that the world loves us, we realize that we might have betrayed our Lord because we have identified ourselves with the world and not with the Lord. When we reject the evil one and his works, the world will hate us.

The world, in the biblical language, is what opposes the Gospel, Christ and His teachings. It is the path that contradicts the Christian way and its virtues. From that premise, Christians always understood that, if they want to be followers of their Lord, they must make a clear distinction between Christ and the world in which they live. Our fidelity to our Lord requires that we change the world to what agrees with the Gospel of Christ and not vice versa.

This means that we must dwell in the heart of Christ, to be nourished by Him and remain faithful to Him. This is why He prayed to the Father for them saying: “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth” (John 17:17). The Christian Faith cannot coexist with absence of the truth. As a Christian, I must start by changing myself to what can be reconciled with the truth—that is, the word of God. This enables me to change the world and place it in the hand of God.

The topic of the relationship between Christians and the world invites us to contemplate in depth and stillness the words of the “Letter to Diognetus,” a second-century text whose author defends Christians against the pagan world that

was persecuting them. Among these most marvelous and deep words, the author writes:

Christians are no different than other human beings in citizenship and language, for they fulfill all their civic duties, they pay their taxes and participate in everything as citizens. And yet they endure everything that foreigners endure. They love everyone yet are persecuted. They are killed, yet through death they gain life. They are poor yet enrich many. They lack everything yet are blessed with everything. They do good but are punished as evildoers, and yet they remain joyful because they love.

As the soul is for the body, Christians are for the world. As the soul dwells in all the members of the body, so do Christians dwell in all the cities of the world. And as the soul dwells in the body yet is not of the body, so Christians dwell in the world, and yet they remain foreigners to it. Christians do not wrong the world, yet the world hates them because they resist its pleasures. The soul loves the body that hates it, and thus Christians love those who hate them. They live as foreigners among mortal things, anticipating immortality in heaven. And though they are persecuted, they multiply in numbers by the day. The responsibility that God bestowed upon them is of extreme importance, and therefore they are unable to abandon it.

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