

Homily on Global Climate Change
for the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul

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The Cross of Climate Change

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In the apocryphal “Acts of Peter,” we read that during the reign of the Roman Emperor Nero, a great fire swept across Rome. Nero blamed the emerging Christian community and a bloody persecution ensued.

The oral tradition reports that Saint Peter departed Rome and would escape this persecution. As he traveled down the Appian Way he mingled with the merchants on the road as well as those fleeing the bloody persecutions. Then he had a vision of Jesus Christ.

Peter realized that by running away from persecution, he was once again denying Christ. His Lord Jesus Christ had called him to stand steadfast in Him and the truth that Christ represents, for in all things He is “the Way, the Truth and the Life.” Peter would know that it was not enough to speak truth; as an Apostle and servant of the Lord, he also had to strive to become the truth.

Recalling the self-sacrificial example of his Lord, Peter turned around and returned to Rome. According to written commentaries from Clement of Rome, Irenaeus of Lyons, the historian Eusebius and Origen of Alexandria, Peter was crucified head downwards by his own request because he considered himself unworthy to die in the same manner as Jesus.

In this story we are given an example of fidelity to Jesus Christ. Today an Egyptian obelisk stands in the middle of St. Peter's Square marking

the precise place of Peter's upside-down crucifixion. It is revered as a "witness" to Peter's faithful discipleship.

Today it is easy to disregard Saint Peter's example on the Appian Way. Many disciples, even clergy, prefer to mingle in the crowd and avoid the crucial issues and moral tests of our day. The Orthodox bishops have declared (SCOBA declaration, May 23, 2007) that the most serious issue that the world now faces is global climate change. It is easier to turn down modern versions of the Appian Way and lose one's self in the crowd. There are always reasons to rationalize denial of the measurable fact of global climate change: it will cost money; the money changers and pharisees of our day may not approve; or business leaders will remove support from the Church community.

Nevertheless the Orthodox Church (in harmony with virtually every other major church) has repeatedly declared global climate change as an urgent issue. His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has called climate change "a sin against God" (Letter to COP-17, Durban, 2011) and "a crime against humanity." Nevertheless some clergy still prefer to walk the modern Appian Way and remain silent in the face of this monstrous offense against a stable world.

The example of Saint Peter tells us that fidelity to Jesus Christ is more than lip service. Our actions must reflect the truth in ways that fit our times and circumstances.

The Orthodox Bishops in a statement by the Standing Committee of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in America (SCOBA) have bluntly declared that climate change is the challenge of the present generation:

"...the conditions that we observe now are only early alterations to our climate. Much larger and far more disruptive changes will result unless we reduce the forces causing climate change.

"It should be clear... that immediate measures must be taken to reduce the impact of these changes to the world's climate. If we fail to act

now, the changes ... already underway will intensify and create catastrophic conditions. A contributing root cause of these changes is a lifestyle that contains unintended, but nevertheless destructive side effects. It may be that no person intends to harm the environment, but the excessive use of fossil fuels is degrading and destroying the life of creation....

“Therefore, we wish to emphasize the seriousness and the urgency of the situation. To persist in a path of excess and waste, at the expense of our neighbors and beyond the capability of the planet to support the lifestyle directly responsible for these changes, is not only folly; it jeopardizes the survival of God’s creation.... In the end, not only is it sinful; it is no less than suicidal” (SCOBA Declaration, May 23, 2007).

When Saint Peter denied his Lord at the time of the crucifixion, he wept bitterly. After the Resurrection, he declared his love and fidelity to Jesus Christ. Thus, when he found himself responding in a worldly manner when he fled Rome to avoid persecution, he was able to catch himself and make a correction in his behavior, even though it cost him his life.

So it should be with all of us who have responded in a casual and worldly manner to the problem of global climate change. Like Saint Peter, we too must “catch ourselves” and make a correction in our words and behavior, as this is our reasonable service to our Lord Jesus Christ whose world is under attack by the rising levels of human generated carbon dioxide causing climate change.

As disciples of Jesus Christ, we must tell the whole truth to friends and family, to our congregations and the whole world, that we cannot continue to pollute and damage God’s world. From the beginning of the Bible until the end, we are commissioned by God to serve, protect and replenish the earth (Genesis 1-2).

What further reminder do we need to obey our Lord and our God?