

Homily StSu DL - Pokrov - 5 Oct 2025

2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1 You are the temple of the living God

Luke 6:31-36 The Golden Rule

A long time ago, the very first Christian city was built, Constantinople. It was built by the Emperor Constantine when he decided to follow the Lord Jesus, to stop the Roman Empire from persecuting and killing Christians and to become a Christian himself. Of course, lots of cities at that time had lots of Christians in them, and many cities had churches in them, but almost all of them used to be pagan cities, with the most important places in the city being the pagan temples, shrines, and idols. Very often, when almost all of the people in the city became Christian, they would take those buildings down so there would be no more idol worship, no more giving honor and love to the gods who were really just demons. In their place they would build a church and start to worship the One True God in those places and purify it and cleanse it from the filth of the evil idol worship.

But Constantinople was built as a Christian city from the beginning. Before Emperor Constantine built Constantinople (you see, he named it after himself, he still had a lot to learn about being humble when you're a Christian), but before he built it, it was just a little town named Byzantium. It wasn't anything special, lots of goats were there, and it was mostly used for boats to stop when they were traveling between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. But Constantine wanted to make it into a great Christian city, the most important in the whole empire. He knew that if he could just build a good wall and have enough ships, it would be a city almost impossible to conquer.

So he built it with lots of churches, no pagan sites at all, and he tried to get as many relics from all around the empire to fill it up, so that people could pray to God and to the saints and honor the true God of the universe. He also knew he had to build big defensive walls around it.

He built these huge, massive, red and white walls that had 96 towers along it for defence, and a big moat in front so that attackers couldn't easily get close and climb over to attack the people in the city. The walls were 20 ft thick and very high.

But for the city of Constantinople to be safe, there had to be people in it to man the walls. I know it's hard to climb up a tall, tall ladder, when you are carrying a sword and a shield and wearing armor, and if someone is on the wall or in one of the towers, throwing rocks at you or shooting arrows at you, you probably couldn't make it to the top. Plus the defender could probably go and just push the ladder down and you would fall. But, if there was no one defending, you could probably make it all the way to the top and get into the city.

Also, the city of Constantinople had to have ships. It was a city right on the water, so if boats came and attacked, it would be vulnerable. It had to have ships in the water around to keep away and ships with tall ladders that could try and get in from the back side.

Well one time, the city didn't have either of these. This is many, many years after the Emperor Constantine, after many years of building more churches and monasteries and prayers and writing spiritual books inside the walls of Constantinople. This was later when Constantinople was the most famous Christian city in the world. There came a people who were not Christians, and they wanted to destroy this city and take it over, steal all the treasures, and use it to honor their gods. There was a war going back and forth and at one point, the Emperor Michael had to take his army men and his ships and go out to fight them far away. There were hardly any people to defend the city. And do you know what happened? Another group of attackers came to the city and started to attack it. They were called the Rus, and they eventually grow to be called the Russians.

Do you know the country of Russia? Which God do most of the Russians follow? Who do they worship? Right, they are Orthodox Christians and they worship God. Well, a long long time ago, they weren't Christians and they didn't worship God. They were pagans and had their own little gods they worshiped. They wanted to defeat the great big impressive Christian city because it would show, they thought, that their gods were better than Jesus.

And now, guess what? There was hardly anybody to defend the city! The emperor and his armies and the ships were gone to a far away place fighting a war! Sure, they had the great big walls that Constantinople built, but they didn't have enough people there to defend them.

These Rus were big and strong and fierce. St Photios, the patriarch, said that they came so quickly and so angrily that they were like a swarm of wasps and struck like a thunderbolt from heaven. They also brought with them 200 ships, sailing down the Golden Horn, getting ready to attack the sea walls. Constantinople had attackers on all sides now, there were big armies attacking the gates and walls in the front and many ships attacking the sea walls in the back! What were they going to do?

What do you think the patriarch Photios said to do? Well, it was evening and so he said they should start the evening vigil service and pray to God. Yup, he said to pray. Do you think a prayer is going to stop a big warrior with a sword in his hand? Do you think prayer is going to make all the ships start to sink? Do you think prayer is going to make the attackers forget how to attack? I don't think St Photios knew what prayer might do, but he did not that he should pray.

So they started to pray, and when they got to the part where we ask the Mother of God to ask her Son Jesus to pray for us. One man named Andrew dressed all in rags and with crazy hair, with drool dribbling down his face looked up and what he saw made his eyes open wide in amazement and wonder. He saw the dome of the church open up and the mother of God step

down from heaven into the church. She turned to her Son and God, Jesus and asked Him for help, and then she took her veil, the head covering she wore around her head and stretched it out like a big dome in the sky until it covered the whole city with her veil.

This is what we call the Pokrov, which is a word in Russian that means veil or cloth, but also means protection, like protection from the cold and the Sun. But I don't think anyone thought it could protect from arrows being shot or from swords being slashed or spears being thrust. Do you think a veil could be very good armor, very good protection against a sharp and deadly weapon?

Well, here is what happened. The Rus who were attacking, some of them, saw the same thing too. They saw this beautiful lady, clothed in light, with flying angels all around her, grow huge in the sky and spread this giant veil over the whole city and they became frightened. Some of them started to run away, then more ran, then those who saw their comrades run became scared because they were running and also ran away. They all ran and left until there was nobody attacking from the land anymore.

And suddenly, St Photios the patriarch had an idea. He ran to where they kept the relics that Constantine had collected many hundreds of years ago. He carefully picked up the cloth that the Theotokos, the Mother of God had worn in Jerusalem. See, Constantine had even gone that far and brought that great relic to his new city because he wanted his city to be filled with special holy objects. St Photios took this relic and went over to where the boats would tie up at the docks and ripped the cloth of the Mother of God in the sea. And then he stopped and listened, he started to hear a blowing, a rushing of wind. It grew louder and louder and he felt the strong push of the wind at his back. The wind was pushing all of the Rus ships off and away from the walls. It pushed them and pushed them and pushed them until the boats were smashed on the rocks on the

other side of the Horn. None of those Rus could attack the sea walls anymore because their ships were smashed to smithereens.

All of the Rus left and they brought this story back to their land and many of them started secretly following Jesus. About a hundred years after this sieger, the Grand Prince Vladimir became a Christian and helped to baptize all his people into the Faith. To this day, the Feast of the Pokrov is one of the most popular feasts by the Russian people, even though it celebrates their ancestors' defeat, because it showed them that there is only One True God, Jesus Christ, and that prayer to Him can work miracles.

So, my friends, remember, when things are hard, when you are scared, when you don't know what to do, pray. Ask God for help and He will help you. I don't know exactly how He will help you, but He will.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. Amen.