

**SEVENTH SUNDAY OF PASCHA: (SUNDAY OF THE 318 HOLY FATHERS)
MAY 7/20, 2007**

ACTS 20: 16-18, 28-36

ST. JOHN 17: 1-13

Fr. Dr. Photios+ (W)

Gospel: *These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was. I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word. Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me. I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them. And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the Scripture might be fulfilled. And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves.*

The Fathers Are Glorified, The Heretics Are Anathematised And Deposed

St. Constantine the Great, Equal-to-the-Apostles, then the Emperor Constantine the Great, convened the First Ecumenical Council at Nicea to deal with the Arian heresy. Arius was formerly a priest in Alexandria:

Who blasphemed against the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, the true God. This wicked Arius declared Him a creature, not consubstantial with God the Father, and that there was a time when He was not. For this reason the holy council deposed and

anathematised him as an enemy of truth, together with those who were of one mind with him.¹

...

The holy council, then, put him to shame, anathematised and deposed him and all who shared his opinions. It confirmed and made fast the Orthodox faith; it proclaimed the Son to be of one essence with the Father, the Maker of all; not a creature, but true God; begotten of the Father before all ages, but not made; He is the Master and Lord, as confessed in the holy symbol of the Orthodox faith, which begins, 'I believe in one God, the Father Almighty,' and which the three hundred eighteen holy and God-bearing fathers set forth under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.²

The Church honours the holy and Orthodox fathers who fought for true spirituality and the Orthodox faith. The fathers' memories are glorified, but the heretics are anathematised and cut off:

And that heretics might know from the very words of the Master that they have alienated themselves from the Son of God, and that they have been separated, severed and expelled from the holy body of the Church of Christ, as being rotting and revolting members, these words of the Gospel are read today.³

If you are within a grouping today that espouses ecumenism, interfaith prayer meetings and/or liturgical concelebrations with the Roman heretics and others, please think about the paragraph immediately above. Then do something about it!

The Lord Prepares Them For His Passion

Jesus is about to go to His Passion. This is not a compulsory thing. He voluntarily accepts His Cross, as He asks us to do if we choose to follow Him. As He prepares for His Passion, He has spiritually counseled His beloved disciples in various ways. He tells them to be of good cheer, although they (we) will have trials in this world, He has overcome it:

Many other things also did He say to them; He encouraged them and prepared them for sufferings; He taught them to be brave, and to bear whatever would befall them with fortitude, and to have recourse to prayer after His teaching.⁴

His instructions to the disciples are also for us. In short, we are to turn to God and rely on Him completely. In today's Gospel, He carries on His instructions through His lifting of His eyes to heaven and declaring to His Father that His hour was nigh. This is a teaching for us. We are to seek "release and liberation from all evils" from heaven.⁵ His words to His Father are reciprocal in nature "glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son also may glorify Thee":

I shall be glorified in being recognised as Thy Son, and Thou shalt further be glorified being believed as My Father. Indeed, the Father's glory is that (men) believe in His Son, and the Son's glory is that His Father be known.⁶

“God the Son most glorious” doesn't seek glory from God the Father,

for He has one glory, one honour and one throne **together with the Father** (emphasis supplied); He ever possesses all that is the Father's and gives all things unto all; neither is He subject to times and hours, for He is the **Creator of the ages** (emphasis supplied), Who in His might set their years and seasons.⁷

By the hour he meant His proper time to suffer and by His Passion conquer death and by His Resurrection “give life to the dead”. Christ's glory is the Cross and His Resurrection. As Man, He was relieving the Apostles' grief and giving them solace as a man. His manly example which He conveys to the disciples, and we are also to benefit from, is to use the spiritual weapon of prayer to spiritually fight both our visible and invisible opponents.⁸ Like any Great Master (Teacher) He provides more effective encouragement to all because He doesn't just ‘talk the talk’, He ‘walks the walk’! He follows words with deeds:

For Christ came not only to manifest Himself, but also to teach us every virtue, and one who teaches ought to do so by deed as well as by word.⁹

The True God And Jesus Christ, The Son

He distinguishes true God from idols, falsely called gods by idol-worshippers, but which are “images of demons or wicked and evil men”.¹⁰..As Saint John Chrysostom explains ““The only true God,’ He says, by way of distinction from those who are not gods; for He was about to send them to the nations.”¹¹

Christ refers to His Father when he mentions the “true God”. But don't get the wrong idea. There aren't multiple gods:

In saying, The only true God, He refers to the Father; for no one acquires knowledge of God the Father except through the Son. True knowledge is faith with good works, and by means of true belief the knowledge of God (is acquired).¹²

...

Firstly, there is no eternal life in the confession of God the Father without Jesus Christ; and secondly, Christ is glorified in the Father. Eternal life is precisely this, to know the **only** (emphasis supplied) true God and Him, Whom He sent, even Jesus Christ.¹³

God has revealed Himself through the Son. His Son manifested His presence personally in the New Testament. There is one God in three hypostases (persons), but nevertheless one God. And, remember the Holy Spirit is equally God. We pray in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. If you do not believe in the Holy Trinity, you aren't a Christian.

Finished Work, Glorification Of His Human Nature, Manifestation Of The Father's Name

“And now, O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was”:

Wishing to show us the mystery of His **fleshly** (emphasis supplied) dispensation, Christ asks glory of God the Father; for His human nature was not yet glorified, in that it had not yet received incorruptibility, nor had it been made a sharer of the royal throne. After the Resurrection and the Ascension (His Body) received and was made a partaker of glory, incorruptibility and the royal throne, and all creation worships it.¹⁴

After the Lord's Resurrection, His Body will be governed by the divine spirit. It is spiritual, not a spirit, knows no coarseness and is incorruptible. He can enter doors that are shut and move effortlessly from one place to another.¹⁵ We shall have the same spiritual body after the General Resurrection:

(That body, however, which we shall have) after the Resurrection is called by Saint Paul spiritual; it is moved and governed by the Divine Spirit, not by its feelings, and in some **unknown and spiritual manner it becomes and remains incorruptible** (emphasis supplied).¹⁶

Christ has manifested the Father's Name unto men; that is, He has openly and fully revealed the Father and made Him known to all without limitation. He revealed Him to all and did not withhold the teaching from anyone. “If not all have believed, it is through no fault of Mine, but of their own free will.”¹⁷ Free will, notice the importance of this term. The Lord gave us free will, which He freely expects and allows us to exercise. Going with Him on the narrow road to salvation is our choice, ours and ours alone. Christ holds no grudges if we choose otherwise. He will not take it out on us vindictively. Christ is love, not vengeance. Vengeance is of this world, not His. But our rejection of His Way will have consequences:

I draw no man by force of compulsion. Those who come to Me of their own free will I do not drive away. Those who abide well in My commandments I do not cast off or abandon, but the evil and the wicked **I leave to walk after their own will** (emphasis supplied).¹⁸

Please notice that it is not the Lord's doing when we walk away from His invitation to come to Him. It is ours and ours **alone**.

The Father And The Son, The Holy Trinity And True Worshippers

Yet the Lord is speaking for the benefit of His disciples. He wants to strengthen them in their faith and demonstrate that they are members of his household, His spiritual 'team'. Who does He consider to be a member of His household?

He regards as members of His own household those who diligently adhere to Him, who rightly believe in Him and who fulfill His holy commandments, and the Father loves them, shows them mercy and takes care of them. All that belong to the Son belong **also** (emphasis supplied) to the Father, and all that belong to the Father belong also to the Son. The Son did not receive them only now; rather, the Father had them, and they belonged to the Son also.¹⁹

"I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which Thou hast given Me; for they are Thine. And all Mine are Thine, and Thine are Mine; and I am glorified in them." Here He reiterates His love for His disciples, but His comforting words go further than just the disciples. He speaks also of "all who believe in Him through the teaching of the disciples". His reference to "the world" means unbelievers. He is not talking about those wise in the ways of the world "but for them which Thou has given Me".²⁰

The Father and Son are unified in substance and of equal power:

That which one sees in the Father is seen also in the Son, not through a transfer (or succession) of substance, but according to (unity of) substance. Those of equal power are clearly equal in their activity, and Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.²¹

Although to this point the Holy Spirit does not figure directly in our Lord's comments, He does indirectly. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all equal in divinity. If the Father and Son are equal in unity of substance, then the Holy Spirit is also equal with Them. The Lord hasn't sent the Holy Spirit to the Apostles yet, but the Holy Spirit has existed evermore.

Our eternal life , the Divine Orthodox teachings as handed down by the Fathers, means that

we understand with our minds, and believe with our hearts, and confess with our lips our one true Lord Jesus Christ, through Whom we have come to know God the Father and the life-giving Holy Spirit has come to us. Holy Father, keep us through the name of Thy beloved Son Whom Thou hast given us, and through the grace of Thy most holy and life-giving Spirit. And may no one of us perish from (the number of) Thy **true worshippers** (emphasis supplied), O all-powerful Holy Trinity.²²

The true worshippers, who are they? They must worship the Father in spirit and truth. Bl. Theophylact explains:

By *true worshippers* the Lord means those who live according to His own law, who do not confine God to one place, as do the Samaritans, and who do not serve Him with a material, bodily worship, as do the Jews, but who worship Him in spirit and in truth, that is, *with their soul and with purity of mind [nous]* (emphasis supplied). Because God is spirit, that is, bodiless, He must be worshipped in a bodiless manner which is in accordance with the soul. This is what it means to worship *in spirit*, for the soul is both spirit and bodiless. But because there are many who appear to worship Him in accordance with the soul, but do not hold to the Orthodox doctrine concerning Him, such as the heretics, he also added the words, *and in truth*. For one must both worship God with the mind [nous], and hold to the true doctrine concerning Him.²³

True worshippers will not have any geographical limitation. They worship “in mind and soul” (in spirit) and not as the Jews with their “types and foreshadowings” because the latter are about to come to an end. God seeks worshippers who are “spiritual, because He is Spirit, and true, because He is Truth”.²⁴

The Son Of Perdition And Fulfillment Of Holy Scripture

Christ has preserved “Those that Thou gavest Me” and none was lost except the son of perdition. The son of perdition refers to Judas Iscariot. The Fathers also say that he meant “many others also will fall away to their perdition”. This will be due to their deviation from the right path, not the Lord’s ‘fault’. He doesn’t abandon anyone!²⁵

Saint John Chrysostom helps us out regarding what Holy Scripture might be fulfilled:

Of what Scripture does He speak? That which foretold many things concerning Him. Not that He perished on this account in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled.... But this is the manner of Scripture, which puts things which fall out in accordance with it, as though they were caused by it.²⁶

Christ speaks for His disciples’ spiritual benefit, for their consolation; however, we are to apply this “joy and gladness in ourselves”. Stand up to the demonic influences so prevalent in our world as the holy and God-bearing fathers did against the heretic Arius and his followers. We have a multitude of ‘Arians’ (so-to-speak) running amok today. In fact, it could be suggested that they pose an even greater danger to the Church!

Faithfully follow the true Orthodox teachings and reject blasphemy everywhere it is found. Protect and nurture our eternal life, believing within our hearts in the Lord and His teachings as carried forward by His Apostles and successors:

Delivered from the diabolical torments and onslaughts of the enemies that hate us, may we live unharmed, strengthened by Thee. Living thus, may we have Thy joy fulfilled in ourselves. Being fully filled therewith, may we cross the ocean of this stormy life without danger, and arrive at Thy tranquil harbour.²⁷

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

¹ Hieromonk German Ciuba (tr. from the Slavonic into English; tr. from the original Greek into Slavonic in the year 6851, A.D. 1343), *The Gospel Commentary*, Russian Orthodox Church of the Nativity of Christ (Old Rite), Erie, PA, 2002, p. 231.

² *ibid.*, p. 232.

³ *id.*

⁴ *id.*, p. 233.

⁵ *id.*

⁶ *id.*, p. 234.

⁷ *id.*, p. 233.

⁸ *id.*, pp. 233-234.

⁹ *id.*, p. 234.

¹⁰ *id.*, p. 235.

¹¹ [Hom. 80, P.G. 59:474 (col. 435).] cited in *The Orthodox New Testament The Holy Gospels Volume 1 (Second Edition, Revised and Enlarged)* October 2000, Holy Apostles Convent/Dormition Skete, Buena Vista, Colorado, *St. John*, Endnote # 313, p. 541.

¹² *The Gospel Commentary, op. cit.*, p. 235.

¹³ Saint Hilary. [*On the Trinity*, Bk. IX (42), in *Nicene*, 2nd Ser., IX: 169.] in *The Orthodox New Testament, St. John, op. cit.*, Endnote # 314, p. 542.

¹⁴ *The Gospel Commentary, op. cit.*, p. 236.

¹⁵ Bl. Theophylact's *Explanation of the Holy Gospel According to Saint Luke, Vol. III* in the series, Bl. Theophylact's *Explanation of the New Testament* (tr. from the original Greek by Fr. Christopher Stade), Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1997, p. 324.

¹⁶ *The Gospel Commentary, op. cit.*, p. 224. [and see my homily on *The Ascension of the Lord*]

¹⁷ *id.*, p. 236.

¹⁸ *id.*, p. 238.

¹⁹ *id.*, p. 236-237.

²⁰ *id.*, p. 237.

²¹ *id.*, p. 238.

²² *id.*, p. 239.

²³ Bl. Theophylact's *Explanation of the Holy Gospel According to Saint John* (in the process of being translated from the original Greek by Fr. Christopher Stade, expected publication date is 2007 by Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO); see this Scripture sample commentary at http://www.chrysostompress.org/explanation/pascha_5, p. 4 of 8.

²⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵ *The Gospel Commentary, op. cit.*, p. 238.

²⁶ [Hom. 81, P.G. 59: 480, 481 (col. 440).] in *The Orthodox New Testament, The Holy Gospels, St. John*, Endnote # 317, p. 542.

²⁷ *The Gospel Commentary, op. cit.*, pp. 239-240.