

**SUNDAY OF PENTECOST
MAY 14/27, 2007**

ACTS 2: 1-11

ST. JOHN 7: 37-52; 8: 12

Fr. Dr. Photios+ (W)

Gospel: In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.) Many of the people therefore, when they heard this saying, said, Of a truth this is the Prophet. Others said, This is the Christ. But some said, Shall Christ come out of Galilee? Hath not the Scripture said, That Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was? So there was a division among the people because of Him. And some of them would have taken Him; but no man laid hands on Him. Then came the officers to the chief priests and Pharisees; and they said unto them, Why have ye not brought Him? The officers answered, Never man spake like this Man. Then answered them the Pharisees, Are ye also deceived? Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on Him? But this people who knoweth not the law are cursed. Nicodemus saith unto them, (he that came to Jesus by night, being one of them,) Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth? They answered and said unto Him, Art thou also of Galilee? Search, and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet. Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

Calling The Spiritually Thirsty

There were two reasons Our Lord joined in the Temple celebrations for Jewish feasts (1) He did not wish to appear opposed to the law, since He gave it, and (2) by being there many might become interested in His signs and teachings.¹

Christ rose and cried out an invitation to come to Him, not to drink of the world's water but the spiritual water of the Lord! He calls the spiritually thirst to drink

the drink Which pours life, the great and true and ever-running River, Jesus, our God most sweet. From Him flow forth all rivers, all sweet seas, all fountains, lakes and wells. Let us taste (thereof),

then, brethren, let us taste and see and know that the Lord is good; He is an **inexhaustible abyss of goodness and immortality**; He is living, fresh, flowing water, which is abundantly poured forth and overflowing. Whosoever drinketh of **this** water shall never thirst (emphases supplied).²

His call is to those who want to come to Him, those who have a burning need for Him, those who have a thirst for God. But if we come to Him, we must come voluntarily, of our own free will. There is no pressure involved from the River of Fire (Christ):

Christ draws no man by force or compulsion, but calls anyone who has a great and burning desire, and offers to give him drink; the unwilling man Christ neither constrains nor coerces. If any man **thirst**, let him come unto Me, and drink. He is the Wisdom and Power of God, Who fills His goblet with His wine and bids those drink who **desire**. He is the **eternal and ever-existent Word of the Father, Who stands now as then and calls the thirsty to drink** (emphases supplied).³

Notice that He wants those who desire to come to Him. Those who are lukewarm about it perhaps need to think and feel about it longer. Maybe the lukewarm person needs to experience a defining moment in order to be willing and thus ready for Christ's spiritual living water. But if one is thirsty and willingly and eagerly takes up Christ's Cup, he will be comforted, and those who hear the Scripture, if they "receive them thirstily," they won't stop until they have drunk them in completely:

As (Christ) aid, Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst (after righteousness), for they shall be filled. He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. By belly here He indicates the heart; that is to say, the understanding, the rational soul; just as in another place it says, Thy law is in the midst of my bowels. Rightly has Scripture said that out of the belly of a believer shall flow living water, says Christ, referring to spiritual instruction which waters the souls of those **who listen to it** (emphasis supplied).⁴

Blessed Theophylact explains:

'The *one* who believeth in Me, even as the Scripture said.' Herein, we must punctuate with a mark, followed by the beginning of the reading: 'Rivers of living water shall flow out of his belly.' Since many were believing from the signs, He shows that it is needful not to be believing thus from the signs, as from the Scriptures (for the correct faith is from the Scriptures) on which account He says, 'The one who believeth in Me, even as the Scripture said,' that is (to believe), 'Concerning every testimony in the Scripture of me, that I am the Son of God, that I am the Creator, that I am the Lord

of all, that I am the Saviour of the world.’ For many think that they believe, but not as the Scripture says; and thus these follow after heresies, **and all such are heretics** (emphasis supplied).⁵

The Grace Of The Holy Spirit

The grace of the Holy Spirit is called living water, but also, fire; and the Spirit gives different gifts to various people.⁶ The Apostles received the Spirit three times, “in a very indefinite way” before the Crucifixion, “more clearly” after His Resurrection when he breathed upon them; and then after His Ascension “He sent Him substantially; or rather, the Holy Spirit Himself descended, completely enlightening and sanctifying them”.⁷

Before the Crucifixion, though Christ did not give His disciples the Spirit, He gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease. After His Crucifixion and Resurrection, however, He bestowed the Holy Spirit upon them, not so much for raising the dead or doing other such wonders, as for the remission of sins. As it is written, He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Spirit: whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained. Since we had sinned and rebelled against God, we were His enemies; but the grace of the Holy Spirit is a gift, and gifts are (only) given to friends. Therefore, it was necessary first to offer a sacrifice for the sake of our reconciliation and the end of enmity – this was the immolation of the rational lamb, the Death of Christ; and only afterwards (was it fitting) to confer grace. Then, after the Ascension, the grace of the Holy Spirit was poured forth in abundance. We believe that believers, who are purified by (Christ’s) commandments, do not simply have some spiritual illumination and enlightenment, but that the **Holy Spirit Himself abides in them; as it is written, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and, The kingdom of God is within you. The glory of the Holy Spirit is called the kingdom of heaven, and the Holy Spirit makes His dwelling in us through faith** (emphasis supplied).⁸

Saint Gregory the Great explains about the gifts of the Holy Spirit:

Why was the Holy Spirit first given to the disciples on earth, and later sent from heaven? Because there are two precepts of love, that is, **love of God and of neighbour** (emphasis supplied). The gift of the Spirit on earth was to bring about love of neighbour, and the gift from heaven was to bring about love of God. Just as there is one love and two precepts, so there is one Spirit and two gifts. The first gift was made by the Lord when He was abiding on earth and the second from heaven, because in love of our neighbour we learn how we are to arrive at the love of God. Indeed, the same

Holy Spirit was present in the hearts of the disciples earlier to give them faith, but was not yet given by a clear bestowal until after the Resurrection. So it is written: ‘*The Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified [Jn. 7: 39].*’ We must be sure that those who already had the Holy Spirit... received Him openly after the Lord’s Resurrection, so that they could be of assistance not just to a few but to many.⁹

The People were Divided

There were a myriad of opinions about Him. Some thought He was a prophet like Moses. Others said he was God, which was true, but they didn’t believe it in the sense of its truth. They still thought of Him as a mere man. Some wondered “Shall Christ come out of Galilee? He was born in Bethlehem, not Galilee. He was born in Bethlehem, raised in Nazareth but spent time as a “regular resident” in Capernaum. The scribes and Pharisees said “in ill will” that He was born in Nazareth in order that He not be considered to be from Bethlehem, which would confirm the prophecy of Micah:

But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. (Micah 5: 2)

Some would have taken Christ, but no one laid a hand on Him because of Christ’s will. He did not yet wish to be betrayed.¹⁰

The Officers and Pharisees

The officers had been sent by the “chief priests and scribes and Pharisees” to capture Christ. However, this plan backfired on them because the officers stunned them when “they told the **very truth** (emphasis supplied) and proclaimed Christ’s wisdom and power”. Although His persecutors had not only heard the Lord many times, seen a lot of his miracles, read Scripture’s prophecies about Him, and were believed to be quite wise, they “understood nothing, darkened as they were by envy and malice”. The Pharisees didn’t conduct a legitimate inquiry find out what he had said, their “envy, madness and cunning” prevailed. They asked “Are ye also deceived”? They insincerely posed as mild men, “fearing lest they should be completely won over to Christ.”¹¹ The Pharisees had no answer for the officers’ “Never spake like this Man.”

Belief and Nicodemus

The common people, rural folk, must stand in some special relationship to Christianity because they have always found it easy to believe. Here, they believed in Christ, but their rulers did not. The Law required adherence to it. The rulers, not the common people, “were cursed for breaking the Law, while the people kept the Law by believing in Christ; for the Law **commands** (emphasis supplied) belief in God”. They contended that none of their kind believed in Him, but this was not true. Nicodemus was one of the rulers, and he believed. He demonstrates their legal exposure “obliquely and gently”. He did not assert the legal point that a man is not judged without some form of hearing him and inquiring into and understanding his case. Rather, he

stated it as a question “Doth our Law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth?” So, the rulers had already broken the Law by their condemnation of Him without such a process.¹²

They questioned Nicodemus, wanting to know if he was from where Christ was; was this the reason he supported Him? It wouldn't dawn on them that he supported Him because He was the Truth! They challenged him to “search and look” – no prophets came from Galilee. They were mocking him - that he didn't know the Scriptures. Nicodemus must have known the Holy Writ; otherwise, he couldn't have “exposed them as transgressors of the law”. Unfortunately, if evil men are rebuked they hate you! Yet, a wise man will love you for it.¹³

The Master of the World

Jesus Our Lord clearly and emphatically set the record straight about Himself for those both high and low Jews who took Him for an Galilean and referred to Him as a prophet. He is the Master of the world:

... He was not one of the prophets, as they thought, but Master of the whole world. I am the light of the world, He said; not the light of Judaea or Galilee alone, but the light of all the world. Christ calls Himself the Light of the world, indicating the light of the divine glory; He shines with the radiance of the understanding upon those who are spiritually purified, and He enlightens those who are held in the darkness of ignorance. Christ is **the** (emphasis supplied) Light, because He is the illuminator of souls which are being purified in word and life.¹⁴

“He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”

This means that a follower will not live in error and sin, nor walk in darkness; rather, he will walk “in the light of life, of truth and justice”. Christ's follower will be “pious, who lives righteously, reverently and respectably, walking as in the day”.¹⁵

According to Saint John Chrysostom:

‘But he shall have the light of the life’. The words ‘light’ and ‘darkness’ in a noetic sense mean ‘not abiding in error.’... He also speaks in a riddle hinting at those who secretly devise treacheries, both in the darkness and in error, but they compass not the light. He reminded Nicodemus of those words which He uttered before: ‘Everyone who practiseth mean things hateth the light, and doth not come to the light, in order that his works might not be revealed [cf. Jn. 3: 20].’¹⁶

On this day of Pentecost in which “the Most Holy Spirit has been revealed in fiery tongues,” we should have learned how precious our Lord’s, (the Master of the world) words are and that we should have recourse first to the Divine Scriptures, which are the word of God. The words of the Lord are purity *per se*:

The words of the Lord are pure words, more to be desired than gold and much precious stone, and sweeter than honey and the honeycomb. Let us all learn from the Divine Scriptures, brethren: (let) the unmerciful (learn) mercy; the immoderate, restraint; the incontinent, chastity; those prone to anger, meekness; the faint-hearted, long-suffering; the avaricious, contempt for possessions; the haughty, humility; from the Divine Scriptures let us learn all things which are for our profit and for the salvation of our souls.¹⁷

Believing in Him is critical. Perhaps today’s spiritual message could fittingly end with:

For God so loved the world that He gave His Only-begotten Son, that everyone who believeth in Him should not perish, but may have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son forth into the world in order that He might condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. The *one* who believeth in Him is not judged, but the one who believeth **not** (emphasis supplied) hath already been judged, because he hath not believed in the name of the Only-begotten Son of God.

(St. John 3: 16-18)

Believe! Believe! Believe!

+ 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. 242.

² *ibid.*, pp. 242-243.

³ *id.*, p. 242.

⁴ *id.*, p. 243.

⁵ Blessed Theophylact, [P.G. 123:611AB (col. 1341).] 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 # 168, p. 509.

⁶ *The Gospel Commentary, op. cit.*, p. 244.

⁷ *id.*, p. 246.

⁸ *id.*, pp. 247-248.

⁹ *The Orthodox New Testament The Holy Gospels Volume I, St. John, op. cit.*, Endnote # 367, p. 553.

¹⁰ *The Gospel Commentary, op. cit.*, p. 249.

¹¹ *id.*, pp. 249-250.

¹² *id.*, pp. 250-251.

¹³ *id.*, p. 252.

¹⁴ *id.*

¹⁵ *id.*, p. 253.

¹⁶ Saint John Chrysostom, [Hom. 52, P.G. 59: 306 (col. 289).] cited in *The Orthodox New Testament The Holy Gospels Volume I, St. John, op. cit.*, Endnote # 184, p. 511.

¹⁷ *The Gospel Commentary, op. cit.*, pp. 254-255.