

Homily-Reflection for the Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

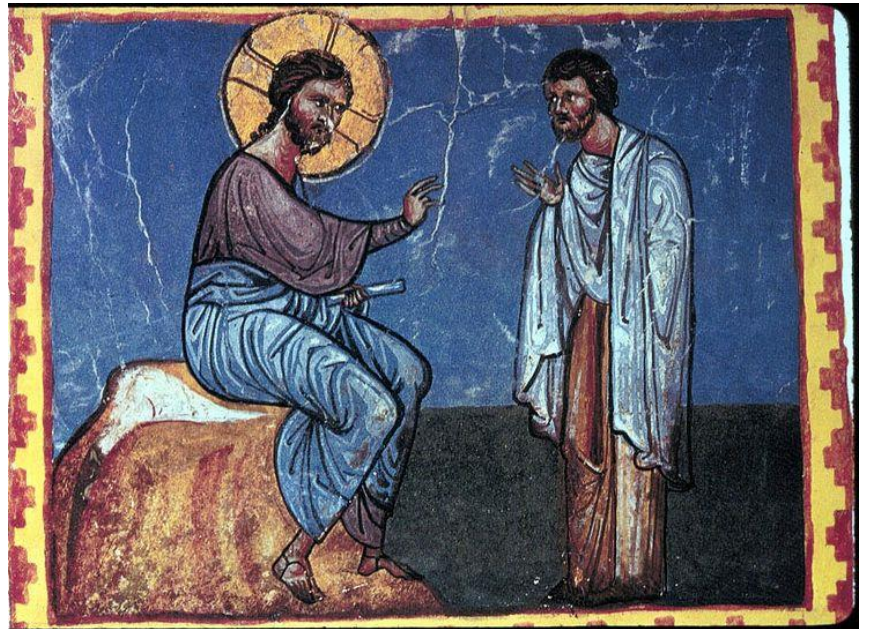
Dear Brothers and Sisters,
Fellow Lovers of Jesus Christ,
Fellow Believers in the All Holy Trinity:

Glory to Jesus Christ!

We're gathered here today as God's people (1) around His Divine Word to recall, to learn, & to be encouraged in our holy faith and (2) we are gathered for His Divine Eucharist to receive the grace and divine power we need to be faithful Sons and Daughters of the Most High.

Today's Scriptures relate to both of these themes: The holy faith we confess and the radical following of Jesus Christ ---as a result of this faith.

In St. Paul's 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, he reminds us that as Christians we must **"STAND FIRM"** on the truth of the Gospel. The Apostle talks about this faith which was "delivered" to us by the Apostles.



This is the meaning of the word "Tradition." It's a handing on of something. So when Catholics & Orthodox speak of holding to "Holy Tradition," this refers to God's truth as it's been handed down to us. St. Paul states in 2 Thess [2:15] the Apostles handed on this faith to us through (1) word of mouth (their oral teaching) and (2) through their writings (the New Testament). Another important way this faith has been handed on to us is through creeds.

In fact, St. Paul then recites what appears to be an ancient creed. He states, "For I delivered to you, first of all, that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures..." (15:3-4).

There are many ancient Church creeds. But the most important creed for us, as Byzantine Christians, is the Nicene Creed. Its real name is the "Nicene-Constantinopolitan Symbol of Faith" because it comes to us from the first two Ecumenical Councils: Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381).

It is called the "Symbol of Faith" because the word Symbolon in Greek means "bringing together." It's the exact opposite of the word "diabolos." As Patriarch Bartholomew stated, "The Devil (or diabolos), is the one who divides; this is the opposite of Symbolon -that which unites.

The Nicene Symbol is that which unites us in faith as fellow Christians. It's a summary (a bringing together) of the essential beliefs of our faith. Each week, it's our chance, to publicly stand and profess individually (notice we speak in the first person) that

we are Christians who hold to the true and orthodox faith of the Catholic Church.

We recite the Symbol before we partake of Holy Communion to show that our Communion with God and with each other... begins with our unity in faith. Anyone who cannot truthfully confess this faith as their own should refrain from approaching Communion until they can confess it truthfully.

Today's Gospel points us to the radical following of our Lord. St. Matthew tells us of the encounter of the rich young man with Christ. The Christian journey involves leaving whatever separates us from God and following Him. In this story it was his riches that separated the young man from Christ. For each of us it could be many things.

First the young man flatters our Lord, calling him "good teacher." But Jesus immediately corrects his flattery pointing out that no one is truly good but God.

In other words, many people then and now (like the young man) are willing to accept Jesus as a good person or good teacher. But they are not willing to accept Him as He truly is, the Only-begotten Son of God, "true God from true God." But it is only based on this truth that He can really help and save us.

Notice when the young man expresses his desire to follow Christ, our Lord immediately points him to the Commandments. Some people think that Jesus nullified the Commandments.

But Jesus came to fulfill the Commandments, not so that we don't have to, but in order to give us the strength to fulfill them too. In other words, Jesus give us the supernatural power to do things that we, as mere human beings, would not be able to do because of our fallen nature.

One example I think of personally is my marriage. We've been married 25 years and have nine children now (thanks be to God) and one in heaven, and people say to us, "I don't know how you do it and where you get the strength?"

We'll it's not b/c we are holy people. We're sinners working out our salvation with fear and trembling, just like other Christians.

It's God's supernatural grace that we received in the Holy Mystery of Matrimony Twenty-five years ago & renewed last month when Father blessed us with the Holy Crowns. We DON'T have the strength in ourselves to do it. So we depend on God. And when we mess up, we go to Confession and we make up... and start over again.

Why is it our Lord says it is so hard for a rich person to enter eternal life? Poor people are more open, their spirits are more docile, to dependence on God. They already know that everything have is from God and they depend on Him. The person who has been blessed to be wealthy or rich has to fight against the temptation of thinking he did is on his own. the temptation to think that by his own intelligence, his own abilities (which are gifts from God), rather than to trust in God (Who sustains him in all these things), he can trust primarily in himself.

So Jesus tells the rich young man to go sell what you have, give it to the poor and come follow Me, if you would be perfect. Jesus asks us to do really radical things for our salvation and for others.

For example, those who are called to the priesthood, basically sell everything they have. They give up their entire way of life & they go and they follow Christ. They go far places, away from their homes, away from their families. They give up the big bucks they could be making out in the world and the luxuries that come with that.

So we have to pray for our priests because they give up a lot to serve us. They need our prayers and our support... much more than they need our criticism.

Christ didn't come to take away our crosses. He didn't come so that we could live any way we want. He comes to give us His grace and energy to enable us to be able to bear our crosses and live the way He wants -the way He designed us: And this is the only way to find true happiness in life: by doing His will.

So in the first reading we have the importance of having & confessing the true faith and in the second we have the call to live out this faith through the power of God. May we all be encouraged to know, as our Lord said in today's Gospel, that what is impossible with men, is always possible with God.

Glory to Jesus Christ!

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