

**1ST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (SUNDAY OF ALL SAINTS)
MAY 21/JUNE 3, 2007**

HEBREWS 11: 33 – 12: 2

ST. MATTHEW 10: 32-33, 37-38 & 19: 27-30

Fr. Dr. Photios+ (W)

Gospel: *Whosoever therefore shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father which is in heaven. He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after Me, is not worthy of Me. Then answered Peter and said unto Him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed Thee; what shall we have therefore? And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life. But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.*

He Demands Much More Than Private Witness

Christ demands a lot more from us than just holding Him silently in our hearts. We are to love Him more than all others in this world. If we do not do so, we have denied Him. The Lord makes us a deal! If we confess in Him to others, He will confess us before His Heavenly Father, Who is in heaven.

He is not asking us for a private witness; rather, he requires a confession even unto martyrdom. Belief within the soul is not enough, confession by tongue is necessary.¹ His words speak volumes here; for example, He says *Whosoever shall confess **in** (emphasis supplied) Me*. We are to believe in Christ's strength:

He did not say, 'Whosoever shall confess Me,' but 'in Me,' that is, in My strength. For he who confesses does so aided by the grace which is from above.²

Christ then turns His attention to the other side: one who chooses not to take up His Cross and follow Him. He uses a different choice of words "*But whosoever shall deny **Me** (emphasis supplied) before men, him will I also deny before My Father which is in heaven.*"³

He drops the “in” before “Me” to show that such a denier of Him does so because he did not have the gift of grace from above.⁴ St. John Chrysostom explains “But of him that denies, He said not, ‘in Me,’ but ‘Me’; for he having become destitute of the gift, his denial ensues.”⁵

But If We Confess in Him Publicly (to others), We Will Find Spiritual Relief

The Lord confirms His willingness to confess us before His Father which is in heaven. It’s really up to us whether He ends up doing so:

Therefore everyone who confesses that Christ is God will find Christ giving confession of him to the Father, that he is a true servant. But those who deny will hear the words ‘I do **not** (emphasis supplied) know you.’⁶

What If Others Hinder Us In Our Faith?

Sometimes our families and relatives may try to jeopardise our true faith. What should we do? Well, this is one of those rather infrequent times when good family relationships may not necessarily be good.⁷

Following God requires us to take some disagreeable steps in this world. We are to struggle and suffer. Our parents sometimes disapprove of our friends, but we cannot allow this infringement on the Lord if He is the friend they don’t like! We are to love God most even above our parents and children. However, we are not called to separate from them unless they “will not come with us, and especially when they hinder us in our faith”⁸

We Are called To Renounce *This* World

“*And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.*” Taking it up **and** following Him is important spiritual business, so much so that “Whoever, He says, does not renounce this present life and give himself over to shameful death, for this is what the cross signified to the ancients, is **not** worthy of Me.” He added “*and followeth after Me*” to require that those crucified were to live according to Christ’s Way (His laws). Crucified robbers and thieves are not to be considered as His followers.⁹ Unless, of course, they repented and accepted Him as did the thief being crucified along side Christ, who later understood He was the Christ and confessed Him as King saying *Remember me, Lord, in Thy kingdom* (St. Luke 23: 42).

A Simple Yet Spiritually Effective Confession In Him/Paradise

The thief’s confession is an example to us all. Originally, he had also accused the Lord, but he changed his mind. Brethren, take heed of the simplicity involved, all we need to do is change our mind and repent! It is never too late to do this whilst we are in this world. The thief recognised the divinity and goodness in the Lord’s words spoken to His crucifers *Father, forgive them*. His voice not only had compassion but “revealed great power”. The former blasphemer rebuked the other thief and pled to Jesus for Him to remember him in His kingdom.¹⁰

Christ promised him paradise: *Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise.* Paradise is “a place of spiritual rest” [not to be confused with the Roman Catholic concoction of

purgatory]. By his sincere repentance/confession in Him the thief was granted paradise by Christ, meaning he can be considered “en route” to the full spiritual benefits of the kingdom. He is in a similar position as the saints:

So too with the saints: although they do not yet enjoy their reward in full, nevertheless in the meanwhile they pass their time in places of light, of fragrance, of royalty, in short, in the tabernacles of the righteous, although they are not yet entitled to the full measure of the gifts of the kingdom. Therefore, the thief was in paradise, and yet did not enjoy completion, so that he *without us should not be made complete*. This, I think, is the truest understanding of all.¹¹

...

These saints, therefore, have not yet received the full promise, although they are in the kingdom and in paradise.¹²

...

By saving the thief, he also bound the devil, the vessel of evil, as the Lord foretold when he said that one must first bind the strong man and only then can he plunder the strong man’s goods (St. Matthew 12: 29).¹³

Paradise and the full spiritual benefits of the kingdom are available for those who seek Christ. Keep these Scriptures in mind daily:

*Keep on asking, and it **shall** (emphasis supplied) be given to you; keep on seeking, and ye **shall** (emphasis supplied) find; keep on knocking, and it **shall** (emphasis supplied) be opened to you. For everyone who asketh receiveth, and the **one** who seeketh findeth, and to the **one** who knocketh it **shall** (emphasis supplied) be opened. (St. Matthew 7: 7-8) -*

Christ Answers Peter And Then Expands It To Others

Peter wants to know what they will have after forsaking all and following Him. Besides being poor, Peter “had rejected every worldly pleasure, even natural affection for his parents. For these passions war against the poor as well as the rich. What then does the Lord answer?”¹⁴ He promises the disciples who have followed Him that they will sit on twelve thrones. He doesn’t mean actual seats. He means that they will have great honour. Judas will not be “seated” because he did not follow Christ to the end. There is a different interpretation that “God often promises good things to those who are worthy. But if they should change and become unworthy, as Judas did, those good things are denied.” Similarly, He sometimes doesn’t carry out His threats because we have repented. “Regeneration” in today’s Gospel means “the resurrection of the dead at the Last Judgment”.¹⁵

The Lord then broadens His promise to the disciples to include all people who have forsaken their blood relatives and/or spouses/children and land/possessions for Him. They will have “intimacy and brotherhood with God” instead of those relationships and things.. Substituting for their houses is the “heavenly Jerusalem,” for a mother, the “venerable mothers of the Church,” for a father, the “priests,” for a wife “all the faithful women, not in marriage... but in affection and spiritual relation and compassionate care for them”.¹⁶

God Loves The Family

One thing needs to be cleared up before proceeding. It is about the separation of families. The Lord loves families. After all, He established them. He doesn't ask us to turn our backs on our normal family relationships. The family and Christ should be together, a seamless entity so-to-speak. The Orthodox Christian family stands steadfast in Christ. The times in which the Lord “takes issue” with the natural family is when its love replaces love for Him or family members or spouses impede piety and worship of God. Love for God must come first.¹⁷

The First And Last Change Places

Those persecuted may seem to be at the bottom of the world's pecking order, but they will be first in God's eyes because of “their hope in God”. The persecuting Pharisees, who had been first, become last “while those who left all and followed Christ became first” (St. Mark 10: 31).¹⁸ One could say that the higher will be humbled, the lower exalted. Service is important. If one is to be first, he should serve others and be last of all.

But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your servant: and whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be the slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many. (St. Mark 10: 43-45)

To serve others is to attain true greatness in the image of Our Lord! Our task is to deny ourselves the secular pleasures of this world whilst seeking salvation. Eschew grasping for honours and striving to be No. 1. Don't lord it over anyone. Be humble in the way of Christ. If you wish to be ‘great,’ accept the trials of the Lord, serve everyone “for the mark of a great soul is to endure all things and to serve everyone”.¹⁹ Forsake this world to struggle for the next. Honour your father and mother, spouse and other relatives and only separate from them if they interfere with your following the True Faith.

In American society, the above is a tall order indeed. How does True Christianity ‘fit in’ with expensive cars and SUVs and jewelry, fancy clothes, four bedroom homes or so, up to, say, 12,000 sq. feet, for a married couple with no children in an elitist neighbourhood, trips to the Bahamas or other exotic places regularly, tanning salon and country club memberships, our kids playing in four or more sports a year with all the attendant expense incurred in these efforts? Can you imagine Christ wearing a \$1500 suit with ‘the latest’ in cufflinks on evangelistic television telling everyone **else** to sacrifice?

Let's start on the true path to salvation **now** and get our spiritual houses in order! "For he who becomes like the heavenly One has heaven within himself."²⁰

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

¹ Bl. Theophylact, *The Explanation of the Holy Gospel of St. Matthew, Volume I* (Bl. Theophylact's Explanation of the New Testament) (tr. from the original Greek by Fr. Christopher Stade), Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1997, p. 89.

² *ibid.*

³ *id.*

⁴ *id.*

⁵ [Hom. 34, P.G. 57: 392 (cols. 401, 402).] cited in *The Orthodox New Testament The Holy Gospels Volume I (Second Edition, Revised and Enlarged)* October 2000, Holy Apostles Convent/Dormition Skete, Buena Vista, Colorado, *St. Matthew*, Endnote # 98, p. 98. (Yes, the endnote and page number just happened to be the same.)

⁶ Bl. Theophylact, *St. Matthew, op. cit.*, p. 89.

⁷ *id.*

⁸ *id.*

⁹ *id.*, p. 90.

¹⁰ Bl. Theophylact, *The Explanation of the Holy Gospel of St. Luke, Volume III* (Bl. Theophylact's Explanation of the New Testament) (tr. from the original Greek by Fr. Christopher Stade), Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1997, pp. 309-310.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 311.

¹² *id.*, p. 312.

¹³ *id.*

¹⁴ Bl. Theophylact, *St. Matthew, op. cit.*, p. 167.

¹⁵ *id.*

¹⁶ *id.*, pp. 167-168.

¹⁷ *id.*, p. 168.

¹⁸ Bl. Theophylact, *The Explanation of the Holy Gospel of St. Mark, Volume II* (Bl. Theophylact's Explanation of the New Testament) (tr. from the original Greek by Fr. Christopher Stade), Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1997, pp. 88-89.

¹⁹ *id.*, p. 92.

²⁰ Bl. Theophylact, *St. Matthew, op. cit.*, p. 168.