

HOMILY ON ST. PHOTINI, THE SAMARITAN WOMAN
17.5.2020

This Sunday honors a remarkable missionary, someone who proved to be more than what society thought of her. It is St. Photini (the name means “Enlightened One”), who was the Samaritan woman Jesus met at Jacob’s well, as described in today’s Gospel reading. She was from Samaria, a people the Jews considered as heretics, shunning them and refusing to have any dealings with them. St. Photini’s old life had been a scandalous one, which was widely known in her community. In spite of all of that, she was a person who was spiritually searching. She had been with multiple men, but she was still unfulfilled, wanting something greater. What she was looking for was salvation. She wanted to find the Savior, the Messiah, and when she finally met Him, her life changed completely. She became Photini, and is forever commemorated and honored by the Church.

Compelled by the bright light that now illumined her soul, she rushed to share what had happened to her with others in the city of Sychar. She cleverly invited them in such a way as to make them curious: “*Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?*” (John 4:29). The goal was to urge them to meet Christ, the Light of the world. What happened next was amazing! The people of the city went out to meet Jesus, and as we hear in the Gospel, many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him, because of the testimony of the woman who declared that “*He told me all that I ever did*” (John 4:39). They then asked Christ to stay with them, to get to know Him better. For two days the Lord remained in their city and taught them, after which, “*many more believed because of His own word*” (John 4:41).

It is important to note that the Lord did not turn away from this woman living a sinful life, but He Himself initiated the conversation by Jacob’s Well. Even though Jesus knew all about this woman, it was to her that He first revealed that He is the Messiah, the One the world had been waiting for. His treatment of her is an example of the comfort that the Lord offers to every person, no matter what sins they have committed or bad reputation they may have. There is no need to hesitate in taking the first step towards Christ, as He is waiting for everyone, to offer them “the living water” to quench their thirst, and which will become within them “*a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life*” (John 4:14). It will not only be a fountain for that person only, but for all those around them, near and far. This is what happened with the Samaritan woman, who immediately went out and encouraged people to flock to Christ, the Fountain of Life. It bore fruit in her own home, inspiring faith and love for Christ in her five sisters and two sons. After they received baptism from the Holy Apostles on the day of Pentecost, they decided to devote their lives to missionary work. The names of St. Photini’s sisters are: Anatoli (“the East”), Photo (“Light”), Photida (“Light”), Paraskevi (“Preparation”) and Kyriaki (“Day of the Lord, or Sunday”); her sons’ names are Joses and Victor. They started from Palestine, fervently preaching the redemptive message of Christ. From there, they continued on to Phoenicia, Syria, Egypt, and Chalcedon, where they attracted many. They ultimately received the bright crowns of martyrdom in Rome, by order of the Emperor Nero. Because of her great missionary work, St. Photini received the title of *Isapostolos* (“Equal to the Apostles”).

One cannot help but be amazed, when faced with the astonishing events that surround these simple people. A woman from humble origins takes her five sisters and two sons away from home, to do missionary work in five countries! Showing complete disregard for the danger involved, and not deterred by the threat of torture and death, they pressed forward. In the end, they signed their

confession of faith in Christ with their own blood. This is how the Church spread all over the world, and those of us who are Christians today, owe a debt of gratitude to everyone who put into action the words of the Lord, to "*Go into the world and preach the Gospel to every creature*" (Mark 16:15).

My beloved brothers and sisters, as we listen to these things, we admire St. Photini and her family for all they did and suffered. However, this is not enough. "Honor paid to a martyr," says St. John Chrysostom, "means imitation of a martyr." We must imitate St. Photini, as much as possible. This means burning with zeal, for the joy of salvation that she found by getting close to Christ. It means conveying this joy to other people, starting with our families and then the people of our own communities. To carry this joy everywhere we may find ourselves, in humility and without the pretense of being experts or teachers. And when the time is right, our shining example can help us bring other people to Christ and His Church. As St. Paul wrote to his disciple St. Timothy: "*In doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you*" (1 Timothy 4:16). Amen.