

HOMILY ON ST. JEROME-15 June

(For the Sunday 28/6/2020)

On June 15th the Church remembers St. Jerome, a commemoration highlighting the bond between East and West that existed before the Great Schism (1054). He was born in the Roman province of Dalmatia (which includes today's city of Grahovo Polje, Slovenia) in the year 347. His parents were wealthy Christians, who sent their son to Rome for an education under the best teachers. He studied Latin and Greek Literature, as well as Philosophy and Rhetoric. After that, the Saint studied Theology in Trier (the Celtic city of Trevorum, which is on the border between France and Germany), Aquileia (the ancient Roman city on the gulf of the Adriatic Sea) and in Antioch of Syria. In Constantinople, he studied under St. Gregory the Theologian (329-390) and in Alexandria under Didymus the Blind (c. 313-398). From this valuable experience came a thorough education and fluency in five languages, which prompted Pope Damasus (366-384) of Rome to invite St. Jerome to become his personal secretary and advisor in 382. Despite such a high position, St. Jerome felt called to the Holy Land. After a long time in the Nitrian Desert (in northwestern Egypt, between Alexandria and Cairo), engaged in spiritual exercises in the midst of great holy ascetics, he made Bethlehem his permanent home in 386. While there he founded two monasteries, one for men (where he was the Abbot), and one for women. He was the spiritual father for both communities, and in addition to their monastic obligations, they engaged in studying and writing.

St. Jerome is one of the most prolific Church writers of all time. One of his greatest contributions is his translation of the Holy Bible into Latin, a work that Pope Damasus had commissioned and which became the standard of the whole Western Church. Another significant work, and the first of its kind is a collected volume of works and biographies of 135 Church figures, from St. Peter to St. Jerome's era. St. Cassian the Roman (c. 360-435) had this to say about his work: "Jerome is truly for the Orthodox people a Professor, whose writings are shining, lit and shedding light like divine candles, like the sun shining from East to West [Ammianus Marcellinus '(c. 330-c.391) *Res Gestae* chronicle]. St. Jerome reposed in Bethlehem on June 15th in the year 420. The Western Church honors him among the great teacher Saints like Ambrose, Augustine and Pope Gregory the Great.

In teaching about our salvation, St. Jerome stresses two points:

First, **freedom of will** (*autexousion*). What this means is that a person has to be interested in and engaged in their struggle for salvation. Secondly, **God's grace**, which springs from Christ's sacrifice on the Cross and is found in the Sacraments of the Church. Baptism, Chrismation, the Holy Eucharist, Confession and other acts of the Church are the means in which a person can be saved. This is why St. Jerome used to stress that "Outside of the Church there is no salvation" (*Extra Ecclesia nulla salus*. Letter XV, *To Damasus 2*, PL 22:335).

My beloved brothers and sisters, the eternal truths which St. Jerome taught in his life and work are still affirmed by the Orthodox Church today. Let us look in particular at St. Jerome's maxim: "**Outside of the Church there is no salvation.**" Sadly, there are baptized people today who have cut themselves off from the Church. They contend that because they have received Holy Baptism and claim belief in Christ, that they do not need the Church. Their lack of desire and denial demonstrate their ignorance of who Christ is, and what the Church is. This is because they are actually One and the same. As St. Paul says repeatedly (for some examples see 1 Corinthians 10:16, 12:12, 12:27; Ephesians 1:23-24), "*the Church is the Body of Christ.*" Every Christian who is part of the Church is a member of the Body of Christ, and to be part of the Body of Christ is to be part of

the Church. There is no separation. St. Augustine clearly makes this point when he declares that the Church is Christ, and that He is with us throughout the ages. In short, anyone who is in the Church is with Christ, and those who remain separated from the Church are not. Anyone who believes otherwise is deceived. Remember also, that the Church is Mother. Just as a mother feeds and gives life to her children with her milk, so too does the Church feed her children with the Precious Body and Blood of Christ. The Lord said, "*Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you*" (John 6:53). Those who refuse Holy Communion reject life, and embrace death. For our own spiritual health, let us grow in our understanding of the teachings of the Holy Fathers of the Church, and not be swayed by false doctrines or ideologies. May we instead be guided by their wisdom throughout our lives.