

HOMILY ABOUT PEACE

27.9.2020

The most beautiful hours in the life of the Orthodox Christian on earth, are during the Divine Liturgy, when they participate along with their brothers and sisters. The Church militant is united with the Church triumphant at the same time, and manifests itself as one Body. This unity with Christ as head is sealed with the divine Communion of His Holy Body and Blood. As the believer approaches the Sacred Chalice containing the Holy Gifts (held by the ministering clergy), they express their longing for this communion. It is this desire for union with the Bridegroom of their soul that inspires the relevant prayers to Him: Lord, it is my great longing to be united with You; I melted from your warm love, from your divine love, from the sacred desire to come and be enthroned in my heart.

This is the main purpose for which Holy Communion is offered, as the Lord did so during the Last Supper, and during the Divine Liturgy: We offer the Bread and Wine, and in the most sacred moment of the Divine Liturgy, at the invocation of the Priest (or Bishop), God the Father sends the Holy Spirit and transforms them into the Holy Body and Blood of Christ. After the Priest has communed, he offers the Holy Gifts to those present who are properly prepared to commune and unite with Him! The offering of the Sacrament of the Divine Eucharist, from the time of the Holy Apostles until today, is framed with Readings from the Bible and the Sermon; with timely hymns, prayers and petitions, with which we praise, and show gratitude to God for all of our spiritual and material needs. We pray not only for us, but for the whole world, and so the Divine Liturgy is the most complete prayer of the Body of the Church. It is this common prayer that strengthens the individual prayers of the faithful, in all times and all places. Whether they are at home or anywhere else, the Divine Liturgy continues to encourage and sanctify the lives of all Christians. This has been aptly described as “the Liturgy after the Liturgy.”

If we study the Divine Liturgy carefully, we will find that it is inspired by the entire Bible, both Old and New Testaments. Some sections, such as the Apostolic and Evangelical Readings, are read as they are, in sequence. In contrast, the Psalms of the Antiphons, the Prokeimen, and the Communion Hymn (which are selected verses from the Old Testament) are sung. The Petitions and Prayers of the Priest are also imbued with the spirit of the Holy Scriptures. Thus, the Church, during the Divine Liturgy, not only unites her children through prayer and the Divine Communion of the Holy Gifts with Christ (and the entire Holy Trinity) but also offers the sacred words of the Holy Bible to educate and inspire.

But the question arises: Are we attentive to this important reality and understand it? Given our circumstances, and the way in which most of us participate in the divine worship, it is very hard to give a positive answer. That is why we considered it necessary, from today, God willing, that the Sunday Sermons be dedicated to Biblical concepts that have been incorporated into the Divine Liturgy.

At the start of the Divine Liturgy, the first three requests addressed by the celebrant refer to the great theme of peace:

- “In peace let us pray to the Lord”
- “For the peace of God...let us pray”; the second; and the third
- “For the peace of the whole world...”

And after repeating the request for peace 18 more times, even to the last Prayer: "Grant peace to your world," the Divine Liturgy ends with the exhortation of the Deacon: "Let us depart in peace." From the beginning of the Divine Liturgy to the end, the idea of peace dominates.

From this alone we can all understand, I suppose, how important our Church considers the issue of peace, for the life of the believer and of the universe. This is because the concept of peace is especially prominent in the Bible, even to the books of the New Testament. Let us remember the hymn of the Angels on the night of the Nativity of Jesus: "Glory be to the Most High God and to peace ..." Or after His Resurrection, the Lord, in His first appearance to His Disciples, began with: "**Peace** be with you" (John 20:19).

What is the deeper meaning of peace? How does it benefit humanity? How can we find it? These and other questions about peace arise within us. The answer to these (due to lack of time today) we will try (guided by the divinely inspired Bible) to give in future Sermons.

In order to give us a better understanding of how important peace is in our lives, we will only recall the righteous command: "Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14). Peace is associated with holiness, and without it, no one can see the Face of the Lord and enter His Kingdom! Let us never forget that!