

The responsibility of enlistment in the Church

Such a fatal separation of man from the Church should not leave the pastor indifferent, who ought, with repeated counsels, to try to bring back the deceived one to the sheepfold of salvation. The boundary of the two efforts, which the Apostle poses, obviously should be taken literally. The conversion of Saint Augustine certainly was not the fruit of two counsels of Saint Monica. And the Jewish doctor of Basil the Great did not become a Christian with only two efforts of the Saint. Paul doesn't simply want to stress that the experienced pastor has the discretion to understand when henceforth he must stop the attempts to "reintroduce to the synagogue" the deceived or the fallen person, so that he is not "beating the air" according to the sacred Chrysostom. Then, of course, he who insists in his delusion becomes self condemned, because he no longer has the justification that no one advised him.

Consequently, everything other than a handbook of morality is today's Epistle Reading, since it reminds us that the purpose of the incarnation of Christ is not simply our moral improvement, but our embodiment in his one Church, in other words, the theosis by grace and our eternal salvation, for which we are absolutely responsible

Archim. B. L.

SUNDAY, JULY 14, 2019 SUNDAY OF THE HOLY FATHERS OF THE 4TH ECUMENICAL COUNCIL *Aquila the Apostle among the 70, Our Holy Father Joseph the Confessor, Archbishop of Thessalonica, Nicodemus the Righteous of Mount Athos, Justus the Martyr, Peter the New Hieromartyr and the four New Martyrs of Melissourgeio Kissamos.*

TONE OF THE WEEK : *Second Third*

EOTHINON : *Fourth Orthros Gospel*

EPISTLE READING: *St. Paul's Letter to Titus 3:8-15*

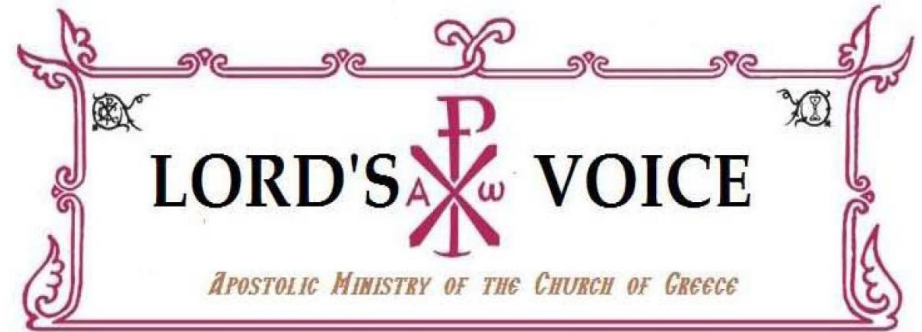
GOSPEL READING: *Matthew 5:14-19*

NEXT, SUNDAY, JULY 21, 2019 5TH SUNDAY OF

MATTHEW, John and Symeon the Fool for Christ, Parthenios, Bishop of Arta

EPISTLE READING: *St. Paul's Letter to Romans 10; 1-10*

GOSPEL READING: *Matthew 8:28-34*



67TH YEAR JULY 14 2019 PAMPHLET #28 (3450)

THEOLOGY OF EVENTS

A superficial reading of today's Epistle Reading gives the impression of a dry moral speech. Twice the Apostle repeats the exhortation that the believers learn to preside in good works, considering them as a sign of spiritual fruitfulness. And once he urges them to avoid the heretics "after a first and second admonishment".

True or only useful?

A question aptly arises which is often posed by many people: "For what reason should I be a Christian, and furthermore an Orthodox, who must avoid the heretics, since I am able, without my enlistment in the Church, to be a very good person? Maybe aren't there heterodox, people of other religions and atheists, who have a rich fruitfulness in good works?" Obviously, whoever makes such a question, it's as if he is saying: "It doesn't interest me if Christianity is the truth or not. The only thing that interests me is how much it helps me to be a good person. My criterion is not its truth, but its usefulness". However Christianity's value does not lie only in that it is useful. The Christian faith is not simply a system of morality. The chief Orthodox theologian Fr. George Florovsky stresses: "The Orthodox faith is a theology of events". It is a witness of events. If the events, for which Christianity gives a

THE GOSPEL ST. PAUL'S LETTER TO TITUS 3:8-15

Titus, my son, the saying is sure. I desire you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to apply themselves to good deeds; these are excellent and profitable to men. But avoid stupid controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels over the law, for they are unprofitable and futile. As for a man who is factious, after admonishing him once or twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is perverted and sinful; he is self-condemned.

When I send Artemas or Tychicos to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there. Do your best to speed Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way; see that they lack nothing. And let our people learn to apply themselves to good deeds, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not to be unfruitful.

All who are with me send greeting to you. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all. Amen

witness, are myths, then no sincere person ought to want to believe it, no matter how useful it were to him.

And when the Apostle Paul, in today's passage, urges Titus to speak to the believers with certainty and validity about the things he wrote to him in the just previous portion of the epistle, he does not refer to moral commands, but to the event of salvation in Christ. In other words, in the fact that in a historical time and place, the Divine and human nature in the Person of Christ were united unconfusedly and inseparably. Christ, without ever ceasing to be a perfect God, also became a perfect man "without sin". Thus it became possible not simply for us to become better people, but to be renewed, for us to become new people and to inherit eternal life. The holy Fathers who comprised the 4th Ecumenical Synod in Chalcedon proclaimed this saving truth. Today we are celebrating their memory. In sixteen meetings, in October of 451 A.D. they concluded in unanimous decisions, after fruitful discussions.

Heresy: separation from God

These discussions, of course, had no relationship to the foolish discussions, which the Apostle Paul urges Titus to avoid. These are "foolish matters" (Tit. 3:9), which concluded in vain arguments and disputes about matters of the Jewish law. Judaizing Christians caused them, being attached to the letter of the law, who insisted on keeping in use this imperfect and forerunning law, in the age of the perfect gospel law and the revelation of salvation in Christ. This, naturally, led –if not to the invalidation –at least to the alteration of the ecclesiastical life. It led, in the end, to heresy.

Consequently "heresy" for the Apostle Paul and for the Fathers of the Church is not simply a theoretical dispute. It is a wrong way of life. Even if externally it may be a morally impeccable life, it is a false life, because it is cut off from the saving truth and the unity of One Church. Many of the heretics lived a very strict and morally blameless life. Christ however, said that on the Day of Judgment people, who not only lived a moral life, but also were granted "in his name" both to prophesy, and to cast out demons, and to do many miracles will hear the "I do not know you" (Mt. 7:22-23).

Abba Agathon, of the Sayings of the Desert Fathers, had these things in mind, who – while he accepted without protest, the accusations that he is a "fornicator, proud, a gossip and slanderer" – when they called him a "heretic", he reacted and said: "I am not a heretic". And when they asked him "why did you do not bear this word?" he answered them: "the first things, I indebted to myself and they cause benefit to my soul, while the *heretic* is separation from God. And I don't want to be separated from God". For Abba Agathon "separation from God" is not separation from a subjective viewpoint concerning God, but from the saving truth of the One Church, that is separation from real life.