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His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros Homily for the Second Sunday of Matthew



June 21, 2020

Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Church

Middletown, New York

Beloved Faithful,

Today I rejoice to be with this wonderful community of the Holy Cross here in Middletown. I had truly wished to visit every community in the Direct Archdiocese District before one year passed since my enthronement as your Archbishop, and I have to say that I came very close.

Celebrating with you today, on the eve of that important milestone in my life, I am particularly moved to be with you on the traditional “Fathers’ Day,” an opportunity to fulfill that Fifth Commandment given to Moses, to “honor father and mother.” And for those of us whose earthly fathers have passed, this is an opportunity to give thanks for their presence in our lives, and to remember all our spiritual fathers who have shown us kindness and true mentorship throughout our lives.

I am also moved by today’s Gospel reading, for it speaks to me as the spiritual

father of the Holy Archdiocese of America, a vocation that commenced for me almost one year ago to the day. It is the vocation of us all to follow our Lord, but the call that we heard today echoes with the Lord's mother tongue – first He says to the fishermen:

Δεῦτε ὀπίσω Μου... – “Come after Me...”[1]

In Hebrew, this call, *lech aharai*, literally means “walk after me,” and this was the common call of the itinerant teacher of the Torah. These three words reveal that our Lord Jesus Christ presented Himself to His disciples as a teacher, a rabbi. But the next words reveal the purpose of His invitation:

... καὶ ποιήσω ὑμᾶς ἁλιεῖς ἀνθρώπων...

... and I will make you fishers of men.[2]

Here we see the uniqueness and the transformative quality of the call of the Lord. Yes, come after Me and learn, but not just for yourselves! Up to now, you have been fishing for a living, and a meager one at that. Your prize eludes you under the dark waters of the Sea of Tiberias.

But I am telling you that the prize is all around you; in the face of every person that you meet. They are the real catch, the one that counts for eternity. There may be no earthly reward for your efforts, but an eternal reward awaits you in the Kingdom of Heaven.

This is how the Lord invited the Disciples to follow Him. The delight of this call never fails to bring a smile to my face, for it demonstrates how our Lord uses the talents of each of us to give purpose and meaning to our lives. He transformed simple “fishermen” into apostolic “fishers of men.” He takes what He finds in each of us, no matter how small or insignificant we may feel that it is, and he transforms it into a *diakonia* that serves our fellow human beings and glorifies God. And all this, because despite our sins and personal failings, God sees us as His perfect children. He recognizes in each and every one of us His own Image, and the perfect Image of God is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. As the Apostle Paul says in his letter to the Colossians:

He is the Image of the invisible God, the First-Born of all creation.[3]

If this is true, my beloved Christians, how much more should we see the image of God in every human being? Can you imagine a world where every person encounters every other person as the living icon of God? No more war, hatred,

envy, greed, prejudice, and the whole host of human failings. But were it true, we would have all entered into the Kingdom of God, fulfilling the words of the Lord's prayer: "on earth as it is in Heaven."

Therefore, the calling of the fishermen – of Simon Peter, and Andrew his brother, and James and John the sons of Zebedee – is our calling as well. We may not think of ourselves as Apostles, but we are all Disciples.

For me, as your Archbishop, on the anniversary tomorrow of one year as your archpastor, I hear this calling every day, and every day I try to respond to the voice of the Lord by seeing every person as the icon and image of God.

I pray that you will have this spiritual vision as well, and that through this window into eternity, you may attain a life on earth ... as it is in Heaven.

Amen.

[1] Matthew 4:19.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Colossians 1:15.

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