

29/09/2020

His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America Homily on the First Sunday of Saint Luke



September 27, 2020

Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church

Bridgeport, Connecticut

My Beloved Christians of this wonderful Holy Trinity Parish,

I am so very glad to join with you today in the worship of the Holy Trinity, for Whom your parish is named and by Whom we are all saved. We gather in spirit and in body today at this Divine Liturgy, for the First Sunday of Saint Luke, in the cycle of Readings from the Holy Gospel.

One of the most remarkable things about this reading is that it speaks of a teaching – indeed a sermon – of the Lord, of which it records not one word! You would think that if there were a teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Evangelist would make sure the message was recorded. But this is not the case here. All it says is that the Lord asked Simon Peter for the temporary use of one of his fishing boats, so that He could speak to the crowds that had followed Him to the shoreline of the Sea of

Galilee. What the Lord said on that day is passed over in silence. This might seem odd, and it is indeed a rare event in Scripture. But there is a deeper purpose at work here.

The real teaching is not in the words that we do not hear, but in the Lord's challenge to take action – to move from mere consideration of words to a genuine response to the meaning of those words. Not much different from our experience right here, right now.

It is one thing to listen to the teachings of our Lord: His commandment to love one another, to even love our enemies, to do good to everyone, to lend and be generous, to forgive without being asked. It is another thing altogether, to put those words into practice.

In today's Gospel, when the Lord had finished speaking and was still in Saint Peter's boat, he said to him: "Put out into the deep, and let out your nets for a catch."[*] This must have caught Peter completely off guard. He and his partners had been working throughout the night and had caught not a single fish.

And yet Peter, who had been invited to follow Christ by his own brother, Saint Andrew the First-Called Disciple – whose Apostolic See is the Ecumenical Patriarchate – said immediately:

"Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at Your word I will let down the nets."[†]

The word, "Master" – Ἐπιστάτης – is unique to the Gospel of Saint Luke. It literally means "someone who stands over another." It is a word that conveys obedience and confidence in the one so addressed. Thus, Peter, true to his word, set out for the deep and lets out the nets that were previously empty.

You already heard the end of the story. The nets were so full that even the second boat, once laden, began to sink along with the first. The deeper message, though, is held not in the number of fish, but in the transformation of Peter's heart. First, he obeys the Lord because he recognizes in Him the authority of Heaven. But when the unexpected catch becomes a reality, he comes to a realization about himself, and if you know the life of Apostle Peter – the Chief of the Apostles – you know that his was a lifelong quest to become the person that God was calling him to be.

My beloved brothers and sisters: So it is with us.

We come to Church. We hear the Message – the Word of God – the exhortations, commandments, encouragements and all the teachings.

But we often feel like Peter with his empty nets. We’ve worked hard to live a spiritual life. We’ve tried and tried so many times, seemingly to no avail.

And then the moment comes! Our nets are empty, even our souls feel empty. But the Word of the Lord comes to our heart, and against all hope and expectation we act! We step out in faith. Peter not only set his ships into the deep, but, later on, he walked over its waves at the calling of his Ἐπιστάτη.

My friends,

God does not expect us to remember every word, every detail of our faith. He asks us to act in faith; to love, when there seems to be only hate; to give, when we feel depleted; to forgive, when we have been hurt by cruelty; to cast our nets into the sea of life, into the deep places of the world, where we cannot see even an inch below the surface.

And it is there, in the darkness, that the light begins to shine,

That confidence overcomes doubt,

That forgiveness vanquishes hurt,

That generosity fills the nets,

And love conquers hate.

My beloved Christians,

Let us listen well to the words of the Lord that come into our hearing, and let us strive to obey the Word of the Lord that pierces the depths of our heart.

May it always be so, through the prayers of the Holy Apostle Peter and all the Saints.

Amen.

[*] Luke 5:4.

[†] Luke 5:5.

goarch.org