

HOMILY FOR SUNDAY DEC 14, 2014

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Glory Be To Jesus Christ! Glory Forever!

Last Sunday, we were counseled by the Holy Apostle Paul in his Epistle to the Ephesians to wake up from the slumber of spiritual laziness and actively seek to be filled with the Grace of the Holy Spirit. We were advised to make most of the time at hand, and avoid being involved with spiritually destructive or counterproductive activities. He specifically said, don't spend your time in drunkenness and revelry, and activities that are on the dark side, but rather come to the light, and allow the Holy Spirit to come into our lives. He challenged us to become intoxicated if you will with the Holy Spirit, so that we can have a more fulfilling, grace-filled and peaceful life.

Today, as we enter into the third week of the Nativity Fast or Advent, we again were offered some wise counsel from St. Paul. Today, St Paul compares the spiritual life to a battle. This is really a terrific analogy. And it is a great time for us to hear this message, since we are now in a fasting season, and are trying to be more spiritually minded. As we well know, Advent is a hard fast to keep, because it is a very busy and stressful time, in the so called secular world. There is much to prepare for Christmas, there are many social activities on our calendar and family gatherings, and with that comes tension, especially at times due to various family dynamics. Plus the Church teaches us to eat less and to avoid rich foods and goodies, and yet we are in the most

festive time of year with all kinds of tempting goodies, especially those delicious Christmas cookies and desserts right in front of our eyes.

We might even wonder why the Church is so cruel as to expect us to fast during this time. We might reason, somewhat correctly, because there are no special Advent services that the spirit of Advent is much more joyful and less penitential than Great Lent that fasting is not necessary. So why does the Church expect us to fast?

Lets keep in mind the image of the spiritual life being a battle for a moment. It was the practice in all ancient cultures that before going into battle soldiers would fast from food, so their bodies would be lightened and they would be on heightened alert. If they were overstuffed with food and hung-over from too much partying, how would they be able to properly fight the battle? They wouldn't

The Church asks us to fast before Great feast days for a reason. She wants us to be on our game for the actual celebration, physically and spiritually. The Feast of our Lord's Nativity is awesome, it is amazing, it is holy, it is incredible. When we come to Church on Christmas without having fasted or worse yet having eaten and drunk to excess the night before or for an entire Advent Season, we are not properly prepared and we miss out on the incredible spiritual dimensions of the Feast. We may be happy in the earthly sense, our passions have been satisfied and we've received the gifts we want, but do we truly experience the joy of Christmas, the wonder of the birth of the Saviour? If we are not properly prepared to receive Holy Communion on Christmas, we are not able to experience the inner essence and spiritual joy of this feast.

Last week I spoke about Advent as being the cure to the holiday blues, especially for those who are suffering from physical pain or emotional or spiritual pain due to the loss of a loved one, or other struggles. When we enter into the Spirit of Advent and distance ourselves, to an extent, from the hustle and bustle of the season, we open ourselves up to receive the Holy Spirit, which will fill those holes in our heart. It is therapeutic. But like most therapies, it takes work, especially at the beginning until we start to see the results.

So going back to this morning's Epistle reading, St Paul describes the path that we need to take during this season, and the mindset we need to put on.

He first reminds us to be strong in the Lord. By this he means as when fighting a military battle we need a strong leader, a general who will lead us into victory, so too during Advent we need a strong leader to lead us to victory in the spiritual warfare. And this leader is none other than Christ. So during this fasting season, get behind our Lord and don't be afraid. Don't try to be the hero yourself, don't try to go alone, this is where we fail miserably in the spiritual life.

St Paul then tells us when we follow our Lord in battle, we must be properly outfitted, we have to have the correct battle gear and implements. We need to put on spiritual body armor so that the devil and his armies can't pierce our bodies with his poison darts. This, of course, is the sacraments of the Church, especially the Holy Eucharist. St. Paul reminds us that we are up against a formidable, and crafty and invisible enemy in Satan

and his armies. He tells us the only way we can beat the devil is to be properly armed with shields, and belts and proper shoes, and a sharp sword. St. Paul tells us in this battle, our weapons are truth and goodness and righteousness. In other words, there is no better way to drive back Satan than by fighting his evil with Good, by being filled with light which chases away the darkness of sin. Our ultimate sword or weapon of defeating Satan is the Gospel of Christ. That is, by knowing and living the Holy Scriptures, we become living icons of the Word of God, Jesus Christ.

So you see, what President George W Bush said shortly after 911 about the War on Terror, is very applicable to the battle against Satan, He told the nation that we are fighting a different type of battle, one that is mostly unseen, one that is extremely evil. And as President Bush pointed out, this type of battle is fought unconventionally. Isn't this true of the spiritual life. The teachings of Our Lord are really unconventional, and even radical in our day and age. Doesn't our Lord's teaching to fight evil with good seem counter-productive? Doesn't it make more sense to fight evil with evil – to give our aggressors a taste of their own medicine? Do you remember the movie the wizard of Oz and the wicked witch of the west? How did Dorothy kill her? She didn't take a sword to her, or burn her, she merely poured a bucket of water on her and she melted away right? The same is true of evil when we heap the water of the Spirit, the Grace of the Holy Spirit and its fruits, goodness, meekness and righteousness, on Satan and his evil soldiers - they melt away in horror. This is the power of prayer and fasting, this is why we fast during Advent – to chase away the evil forces of Satan, so they will not cloud our vision of the beauty and truth and power of the Nativity of our Lord. This is what we need

most this Christmas, not the gifts, not the food, nor the worldly excitement that just causes us to collapse with exhaustion or even exasperation on Christmas Day. How many temper tantrums are there on Christmas and meltdowns by kids and adults too, who are simply mentally and physically exhausted after weeks of endless stress and movement.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, Let's not have ourselves a Merry Little Currier and Ives Christmas this year. . Let us instead have a holy and truly joy-filled Christmas, that lifts us up, and energizes and does not exhaust us. We can do it. There is still time to enter into this season of the Fast, and take up the full armor of God. Start today, begin the fast, eat less, stay away from the holiday goodies. Slow down your schedule a bit, plan your big gatherings on or after our festal celebration of Christmas. Take a little time out of your day and pick up the beautiful Orthodox Study bible that so many of you bought a few years ago and read the Gospel of Matthew, which contains the most complete narrative of the Nativity. Read 1 or 2 chapters a day and you will finish it by Christmas. Do something kind and nice for those in need. Give generously to our Church so we can fulfill our ministry commitments and continue to serve this community until the second coming of Christ! Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might – trusting in His help and mercy and you will find much joy and peace during this Holy Season and be victorious in the spiritual battle that leads to the never-ending day of the Kingdom. Always, now and ever and unto ages of Ages. Amen.

Christ Is In Our Midst! He Is And Ever Shall Be!

Epistle Reading: Ephesians 6:10-17

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace;

above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.

And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;

Gospel Reading: Luke 18:18-27

Now a certain ruler asked Him, saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

So Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God.

"You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not bear false witness,' 'Honor your father and your mother.' "

And he said, "All these I have kept from my youth."

So when Jesus heard these things, He said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

But when he heard this, he became very sorrowful, for he was very rich.

And when Jesus saw that he became very sorrowful, He said, " How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!

"For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

And those who heard it said, "Who then can be saved?"

But He said, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God."