

Homily on Matthew 4:12-17. The Sunday after Theophany

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In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Today on the Sunday after Theophany, we listened to the Gospel reading of Saint Matthew.

Just over a week ago we celebrated, how God, Who revealed Himself as the Holy Trinity, when Christ was baptised by Saint John the Forerunner in the Jordan for our salvation.

Jesus Christ our Lord submitted to baptism by Saint John in a river full of water. When Christ emerges from the water, the voice of God the Father identified Him as His Beloved Son.

The Holy Spirit descended upon Him in the form of a dove. God enters into creation, instead of escaping or rescuing it.

Christ was not baptised as a sign of His own repentance, because He was free of sin. By entering the water He makes it holy, and restores creation to its right relationship with God.

All of us are part of that creation, both as individuals and in relation to one another.

Returning to today's Gospel passage, it says that the inhabitants of Zebulon and Naphtali were a people who sat in darkness. We too also sit in darkness.

If the light of Christ has dawned, why do we sit in darkness? It is because we turned away from the light—just as Judas walked out of the light of the Upper Room into the darkness of the night (John 13:30).

Blessed Theophylact writes that the life of the Gentiles, therefore, was both dark and broad, for they were walking not the narrow way, but the broad way leading to destruction.

We are also confronted with this darkness as soon as we turn away from the true source of our being—God Himself—and try to find meaning elsewhere.

St. John Chrysostom wrote the following, *"It is the simplest thing in the world to shut out the sun, just close your eyelids! Light is all about you, but you have chosen to shut it out. You choose to live in darkness."*

The light cannot illumine us, nor remain in us as long as we are living in sin.

In Chapter 3 of Saint John's Gospel we can read: "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.

But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."(John 3:18-21)

We humans have a great fear of this light because it exposes our sins. Therefore, sin must go if the light is to come and remain.

And this is not an easy thing. The modern secular world we live in is shrouded in darkness. Why? Because, we now live in a world where everybody has to be an individual.

A world where everybody is encouraged to achieve anything, even when they lack talent or intelligence, and where they can and must do what they like in order to achieve their objectives and desires.

There are no more limits. Everything is allowed, and there are no more taboos. More often than not this leads to sinful actions and behaviour. And we only have to watch television or look all around us to see that our modern society encourages us to sin.

Our search for personal success and wealth in this way is very damaging for us, because, this is what keeps us in darkness.

And, this is not just a darkness, in and of the world; it is also a darkness of the soul. A soul riddled with sin is dark and black.

And this soul will become darker and darker if we do not act on it. The only way we can lift this darkness is to live an Orthodox Christian life. We have to let that great light in.

That great light is not the light of the sun, but it is a Person. That great light is the God-Man, Jesus Christ, Our Lord and Saviour.

This Light exceeds all the prophets before Him, who were lights of the Holy Spirit.

Now, God the Word by Whom God the Father has made everything that exists, the visible world and the invisible one, represents the Great Light which shines not only in the life of every human who comes to live in the world, but in the entire universe.

Every Sunday during the Creed, we say: "Light of Light, Very God of Very God". It is there, for all to see, but we have to be willing to let the light in. But how?

At the end of today's Gospel reading, we hear the words of Jesus Christ as he began preaching: "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" ...

This is how we can let that Light in.

The return on the path to salvation from the way to perdition is accomplished through repentance. Repentance is not a simple emotional regret, a going through the motions, but a change in the way we think, speak and act, a change of life.

The sins that we commit after Holy Baptism can only be forgiven through the baptism of tears, through the sacrament of Repentance and of Confession.

We must confess our sins and beg for forgiveness. Baptism is the basis of salvation, but repentance must be repeated as many times as possible in our lives, and definitely after a sin has been committed.

This work of repentance is so necessary and those who live a life of repentance, prayer, fasting and good merciful deeds will become closer to God.

Repentance is the continuation of Baptism, the permanent renewal of our relation of love with God. We separate from God through sin and renew our union with God through repentance.

This is why, in the Orthodox Church we repent, confess and read many prayers of repentance before communicating with the Body and Blood of the Lord.

"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

This kingdom of heaven is Christ; it is also the life of virtue. When someone lives on earth as an angel, is he not heavenly? So also the kingdom of heaven is within each one of us when we live as angels.

Following the festivities of the Nativity and Theophany, we need to slow down and come to a halt. Now is the time to start preparing ourselves and to start looking inward into our soul, as in less than 5 weeks we will begin Great Lent.

This is the time when we should especially start heeding the words of today's Gospel reading: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. "

Amen