

Excerpts from “The One Thing Needful,” Sermons of Archbishop Andrei (Rymarenko, 1893-1978)

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About the Author.

(excerpts from the Address of Archbishop Andrei on the day of his ordination as Bishop, February 19, 1968)

I grew up in a pious family. I was surrounded by that Orthodox way of life which for generations had been created by Holy Russia. In our family, life proceeded according to the Church calendar, according to the yearly Church cycle. Feast days were as if the signposts of life. At home there were constant Divine services, and not only moliebens, but all-night vigils also.

A strong impression was made on me by the early morning Divine services, to which our mother took us and to which we went no matter what the weather, fall and winter. After these Divine services one always felt a kind of extraordinary inspiration, a kind of quiet joy.

Our family was wealthy. And the religious outlook with which our life was penetrated was naturally reflected in deeds as well: we participated in the building of churches, set out tables with food for poor people, sent donations to prisons, hospitals, work-houses.

Of course, there were also sorrows and illnesses and deaths. But they also were accepted in the light of Christ. The awareness that "Christ is risen, and the life of man will be in the Resurrection of Christ" helped us to bear our misfortunes and reverses. Everything was experienced lightly and joyfully, without the strains so characteristic of many people.

This feeling of joy, this Christian way of life, were characteristic not only of our family, but also of the society which surrounded us.

After the Revolution of 1905, in place of the hopes and agitations there came disillusionment and desolation. People became, as it were, closed in on themselves. They were occupied with empty things, with little egoistic interests, visits, concerts, the theater. In human relations dryness and officialness reigned.

And I (attending the St. Petersburg Polytechnical Institute), coming up against this cold alienation, this desolation, for the first time experienced a feeling close, if not to despair, then to despondency, and my soul cried out: "I cannot." Why did my soul cry out? Why did this cry burst out — "I cannot"?

I felt that I could not live as people around me were living. I felt that I was lacking that life, that Orthodox WAY OF LIFE, which had surrounded me in my childhood and youth, that lightness of heart which I felt. I had the impression that I had been deprived of the air which I had breathed.

I had to have life. And I began to seek.

(The lectures on Dostoyevsky of a certain professor) revealed sides of life which I had somehow not recognized earlier. I became acquainted with a Christian student group. But this group did not satisfy me. It was interconfessional. But I, raised from childhood in the conditions of the Orthodox way of life, needed precisely the confessional way; I needed the Sacraments, the feeling of sanctification, prayer.

All this was given to me by Archpriest John Egorov.... He became the leader of a group of students who had left the Christian student group. I spent five years in his “school,” where there were 25 of us students, and for me there was opened up the elemental reality of the life of Christ’s Church, by which Holy Russia lived. I understood that the Divine services are not merely a ritual, but that in them are revealed the dogmas of faith. They are the foundations of man’s reception of Divinity.

Then, the examination and study of the works of the Fathers of the Church and the Patristic writings revealed to me the paths of life.

When I had gone through the whole course taught by Fr. John, I had literally come back to life. I sensed the elemental power of Orthodoxy, I sensed that breath of life which it gave. I understood in what this life consisted. I came to know that freedom of conscience which we receive through the Sacrament of Repentance.

After this preparation I came, in fact, upon an elder — Fr. Nectarius, disciple of the great elder Ambrose of Optina. Elder Nectarius showed me my path, the path of pastoral service, and prepared me for it with the help of his disciple, Fr. Vincent.

He taught me that the confession of faith must be in godliness. The Divine must enter into every side of our life - personal, family, and public. And so in 1921 my pastoral activity began in my native Romny.

I was soon deprived of my flock and sent to Kiev under surveillance. There it was very difficult for me at first, but then I became close to a group of outstanding Kiev pastor-ascetics, who became my instructors and friends. Their activity and battle for human souls took place during the frightful time of the reveling of the atheists, against a background of demonic carnivals, in the heat of persecutions against the Church and believers, of massive arrests and executions. And all of them gave up their lives for what was already in my heart — for the quiet which I had experienced in childhood, for inward life, for strengthening oneself in faith, for the Orthodox way of life, for Holy Russia.

God had mercy on me then and delivered me from prison. On my shoulders lay the heavy responsibility to continue the work of the martyred ascetics.

The Germans came to Kiev. Churches were opened.

The Lord helped us to re-establish the Protection Hospital Convent, in the church of which I became priest. Again one had to help people, feed them. We managed to re-establish the hospital, a home for the crippled and aged. But the famine was not only bodily, but spiritual as well. People who had been starved for the Church, for the Orthodox way of life, streamed into the churches. One had to quench their hunger. Then, after two years under the German occupation, we had to throw everything over and be evacuated. The Soviets came.

Together with a group of people close to me, I ended up in Berlin. I was appointed head priest of the Berlin cathedral. For the course of nearly two years, under ceaseless bombings, Divine services were celebrated every day in the cathedral. The Lord helped us to preserve the Divine gift of the Eucharist of Christ so as to strengthen and confirm in faith the souls of our Russian people who had fled from communism or had been brought by force to Germany. The church was constantly filled with Russian youth, who for the most part knew neither their homeland nor God nor the Orthodox way of life, but now instinctively were drawn to the Church, to Christ. One had to help them, caress them, teach them, instruct them.

But the war was approaching its end. Again one had to be evacuated — this time to Württemberg, to the small town of Wendlingen. There, in the difficult period which set in after the capitulation of Germany, being in constant fear of repatriation, our small group, under my

guidance, erected a church and immediately instituted the great Sacrament of the Divine Eucharist. And we began again to create a quiet order of life, to create the Orthodox way of life. The Divine services were celebrated daily, life proceeded in godliness from Sunday to Sunday, from feast to feast. All around there blustered passions, animosity, an animal-like battle for survival. Many began to look on us as naive people who were not living in accordance with the times. But we lived, lived in God. Little by little the attitude towards us changed. Pilgrimages began. People who had gone to the depths of despair found peace of soul and a quiet joy with us and went away enlightened and calmed.

And then a new move — to America. And again one had to begin everything from the beginning. In the autumn of 1949 Archbishop Vitaly (of Jordanville) and Archbishop Nikon entrusted to me the establishment of a women's monastery wherein to gather together nuns scattered in various countries of the Diaspora, and to establish for them the quietness of Christ and the Orthodox way of life. This assignment seemed beyond our powers. But the idea of establishing here, in America, a little corner of the Orthodox way of life, saturated in that elemental power of spirit by which I had lived and breathed since childhood, took hold of me and I agreed, trusting in the help of God. And the Lord did not abandon us.

Nuns were gathered together. About a thousand D.P/s were brought over from Europe, of whom a significant number settled around the monastery and formed, so to speak, a large Orthodox family. Most important, the Lord helped to create in Novo-Diveevo that which had filled my soul from childhood. In the conditions of emigration, when the Russian people, confused in the midst of foreign conditions of life and non-Orthodoxy, were caught in the whirlpool of fate, the Lord helped us to establish in Novo-Diveevo the Orthodox way of life, a church atmosphere of the quietness of Christ and of godliness; to establish Holy Russia in a foreign land.

But it is not yet enough to establish the monastic life; one must preserve it. For there is always the danger that life can be converted into a hothouse, a greenhouse, where it will be supported by artificial warmth, and as soon as the source of warmth ceases to operate, life will perish.

Therefore, there must be a constant source of life. Just as the earth and its vital juices constantly nourish vegetation, so our life also must be ceaselessly nourished by that elemental power which the Church of Christ gives, which is incarnate in the Orthodox way of life, in the Divine services, in fasts, in prayers, in vigils, in all that which embodies our Holy Russia. This is the elemental power which places in the mouth of the man who is leaving his earthly existence the last words, "Into Thy hands I commend my spirit," and gives him the possibility of departing into eternal existence with the name of Christ.

1. Sundays before Lent.

Zacchaeus.

Zacchaeus was a tax-collector and a very rich man. He was successful in life. At that time among the Jewish people, he had become what we would call a V.I.P. He possessed much and was a powerful man. All his worldly calculations turned out to be correct. But one thing he miscalculated: time is unyielding. Life and years go by and old age sets in. And he saw that every-

thing he had gathered was for nothing. He couldn't make use of his riches — he lacked both strength and health.

And at the same time the life he was living, the life of a tax-collector, left in his heart a kind of anguish: he had offended a widow, he had treated an orphan unfairly, he had grieved a weak person — he was a “taker”! He was possessive, powerful and strong. Here the Lord had endowed him with many years, and he didn't need this wealth. And conscience? A bad conscience tormented him, and there was no way he could free himself from this conscience.

Then he heard that a prophet was passing by. At that time he didn't yet understand that Christ was the Son of God, but he knew that this was a rabbi, a teacher. So he decided to try this, as a last resort. And he went to meet Him. But here he saw that there was such a crowd that it would be impossible for him to meet Christ. But there happened to be a fig tree along the roadside, and he climbed up into this tree. There he was in the tree. Now don't miss this moment.

What would happen here in America if some important official, a congressman, a governor, the mayor of a city, or some millionaire, in his wish to look at a new preacher, before the eyes of the public, on one of the main streets, climbed the first available tree? What would you think of him? How this could harm his social position, the coming election! And yet the very same thing was happening in Jewish society. What mockery, what malice surrounded him! And he? He wasn't afraid of humiliation, he didn't need anything. He was suffering. He had to have help. And here he saw that, indeed, Christ was that prophet who could somehow help him. What was this crowd to him, this mockery?

And suddenly, Christ was unexpectedly before him. “Come down; for today I must abide at thy house” (Lk. 19:5). And here this miracle took place. Christ stayed at Zacchaeus' house. But maybe many people will ask, was this really a miracle? In the Gospel there are much greater miracles, real miracles. But here it was just a visit; there was nothing supernatural. Here was something more than supernatural. Look at what happened. The full strength of conscience was revealed to Zacchaeus. He as if gave over his conscience to Christ and Christ sanctified his heart. And out of joy that his heart was freed from this stone of sin, from everything that he had done, Zacchaeus said: “Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold” (Lk. 19:8).

The Sunday before last told us: “Repent: for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” And this Sunday shows us repentance in action: Zacchaeus, the fig tree, the sensation of a sick conscience. And we must bring ourselves to such a state that our heart will be penetrated by this fear of God, with weeping. Also we are shown what this “Kingdom of Heaven” is: this is Zacchaeus after repentance, when his heart was made so expansive that he was ready to embrace everyone, was ready to give everything away, to make everyone rich. Here is the spirit of Eternal Life which must visit us.

May the Lord help us, brothers and sisters, to begin the work of fasting. We are still in the forefeast of Lent, but the foment is approaching for us to cross the threshold into this time.

The Publican and Pharisee.

“The publican, standing afar off, would not lift so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast saying, God be merciful to me a sinner!” (Lk. 18:13).

And involuntarily one turns to last week's Gospel. There it also told about a publican — Zacchaeus. We saw how the Lord overturned his whole soul. We saw how, after all his sinful life, he repented; and how he was ready to give half his possessions to the poor, and everyone he had defrauded, he would repay fourfold. And undoubtedly he did this. Involuntarily, Zacchaeus

the Publican and the publican in today's Gospel blend into one image, into one person. After all, both of them were publicans, sinful men, and both repented. If we accept that today's Gospel is the continuation of last Sunday's Gospel, that today's publican, beating himself on the breast, is really Zacchaeus, at least psychologically, then a great science will be revealed to us, a great lesson in the life of one who repents. You see we must all repent.

All the injustice which Zacchaeus did, he did for gain, to be dominant. And here, when this dominance came and he considered himself to be a man of power — at this very moment came the Truth of God. The Truth of God tells us that if a person is in his mother's womb for nine months, then he abides in the womb of the earth if strong eighty years, and after this begin suffering and sickness (Psalm 89:10 (90:10 King James Version)). And finally, through death man passes into the womb of eternal life for ever.

Zacchaeus saw all this now: he understood all his foolishness, his wrong way of life. And then he began to search for a way out. He was in such a state of mind when he saw Christ walking by. For him this was a rabbi. He couldn't just go up to Him, and he didn't want to. First he wanted to find out what kind of rabbi He was. Here we see the fig tree, then we see him in the fig tree, this man who was virtually a dignitary of the Jewish people. And then the crowd. Imagine what this proud man was going through. But Christ approached and said: Today we will be together, I will be in your home. And when Christ was in his home, then He revealed to him that power which immediately filled his heart. Here Zacchaeus said: I will give away everything, and whomever I have cheated I will repay fourfold (Lk. 19:1-10). And so he did all this.

But what is the matter now? Now he is standing and beating himself on the breast, saying: "God be merciful to me a sinner!" And here, right next to him stands someone else, maybe his peer in society — a Pharisee. He stands there and, on the contrary, in complete satisfaction says: I have done everything, I did this and this, I. .1. Why didn't the publican say: I also did this. I gave away half of my possessions. To that one I paid back fourfold. Why didn't he say this? But on the contrary, he said: "Merciful God, be merciful to me a sinner!"

The point is that the Lord endowed him with a gift — He expanded his heart. But as active life resumed, then a tragedy resulted: habit...habit. His inner man was the slave of habit; and this habit was a terrible force. Involuntarily, there appeared thoughts of avarice and the thirst for more and more gain. His looks were already in temptation which came through thought. The heart which had been liberated by Christ suddenly became dirty again. And he felt all this. "Lord God, be merciful to me a sinner!" What to do?

Today the Holy Church brings us the full strength of this psychological moment, the full strength of this question: what are we to do? And with similar force, she gives us the answer to this question through the teachings of the Holy Fathers. In fact our Holy Fathers show us precisely what was going on in the soul of the publican. Because his conscience was now free, liberated by Christ, his heart was expansive, there was peace in his heart. His will was also free, and the freedom was in God. But the distance between the heart and God is sin. And here it happened to the publican that shadows started to appear in his heart, and he began to cry to the Lord for help.

How do these shadows come about? As Bishop Theophan the Recluse explains in one of his letters, they come about like this. Thought — it comes, and only if it does not captivate the feeling of the heart, then this is still not sin. It comes and, as today's snow melts tomorrow, so it will not exist, and the heart remains clean. Even if the thought captures the heart, enters the heart — even this is not yet a misfortune; there is still a moment in which it is possible to cry, "Lord have mercy!" and the heart will be clean. But when the thought has already entered the heart, and

when you have already said, “I desire,” this is when shadow appears. The mere fact that a shadow has entered, then here sympathy has already taken place, an action. Then, as the Bishop says, a fall has resulted. Sin has become action, and a fall has occurred. And as soon as one has fallen spiritually, sin has entered the heart, a deed has been accomplished, the person has departed from God and has begun to suffer, just as with a man who has fallen physically. We know what a tragedy spiritual sufferings represent. Pride, greed, ambition, all kinds of lust gnaw at a man, and he is tormented. The heart of such a man becomes like stone.

As we see from the Gospel reading, this is what happened after Zacchaeus the Publican recognized his sin and repented. Christ absolved him of his sin. His conscience became free. But now he had to act; and when he started to act, then thoughts arose, and from thoughts came feelings. What to do? Here he cried: “God be merciful to me a sinner; don’t let this happen.” And the Lord gives the Grace to prevent it from happening and saves the sinner. What must we do in order to receive this Grace? An active exertion of the will is needed. And next Sunday the Holy Church will teach us how this is acquired.

The Prodigal Son.

“Repent: for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand” (Mt. 4:17). So the Holy Church called to us three weeks ago. But today the call is the same. The whole question is how do we relate to it. As to words alone? Or as to the great call of Christ’s Church, our Mother, who knows what is awaiting us, and therefore appeals to us, “Repent!”

In other words, look at yourself carefully because a special time is coming. As in physical nature, the bright sun will soon shine and will reveal its warm rays. This will be the action of the Creator of the universe. In the same way, from the Creator of the universe spiritual rays will pour through our souls and will warm us with spiritual warmth. And this warmth and joy will abide with us, if we will be those slaves of the Lord who strive for His Heavenly Kingdom. And these are not just words. During the course of these three weeks, the Church has been convincing us that we must examine ourselves. And she even gives us patterns for examining ourselves.

If you will remember three weeks ago, on Sunday, the Holy Church gave us the Gospel reading about Zacchaeus, about his state of mind as a rich Jew, a tax-collector, who had reached the age when everything he had accumulated through unjust ways, all this proved to be futile because by now his old age refused to use, to take pleasure from what had been amassed through unjust means. By now his old age did not need what he had piled up. There were riches, but the man could not use them anymore because he was physically weak. He no longer needed these riches, but needed the rest required by an old man who is shaking all over, who does not need the kind of life which the human race is living. And the Church gave us the image of this publican so that we would check ourselves: are we not attached to the circumstances in which we live, and are we awaiting that which each human being should await? If so, then we must somehow settle the question by the kind of life we lead. And so, the Holy Church gave us the image of Zacchaeus the Publican three weeks ago.

Then last Sunday, she even more strongly forced us to feel, when she revealed to us the moment of prayer of the Pharisee and the publican who was beating his breast and saying: “God be merciful to me a sinner!” (Lk.18:13). This was as if a continuation of what was told about the publican Zacchaeus. Here helplessness was revealed. As the Gospel said, Zacchaeus repented. Christ had come to him, as it were healed him; but habit of will, a careless and sinful life, was already so enrooted in his consciousness that he did not know what to do, so that from this moment on, his life would not be sinful. And he reached such a state of despair that he stood and

said: God, be merciful to me a sinner. I can do nothing. Thou art the Only One Who by Thy divine strength and Thy Grace can help me get out of this difficult situation of a suffering conscience.

And today? Today the Holy Church reveals to us in still more detail the state of society in which we now live. This Sunday we call “The Sunday of the Prodigal Son” (Lk. 15:11-32). It is a brief history. We have heard it and know it. A father had two sons. And the younger son was so insolent in relation to his father that he demanded what he had no right to demand, because it belonged to the father. He came to his father and said, “Give me what belongs to me.” What belonged to him? Nothing belonged to him! But his father was a father: “You want it — here, take it!” In the same way, we are often given when we ask: “Here, take it.” And as Christ relates in the parable, he didn’t stay very long in the place where his father lived. Because he was bored. The riches his father gave him — he needed them only for dissipating his life, for passions, so that he could lose himself in the whirlwind of life.

And he went away, he went far away. Here we must pay attention to each word. In Christ’s sayings each word has its meaning. He went far away. And when he had spent everything that he had received on harlots and riotous living, further on it says, at this time a famine arose. It always happens this way. One thing after another. And here, when the famine arose, this unfortunate one, having used up everything he had received from his father, began to starve. And he went to those with whom he had spent his life. They received him, but only sent him into the field to tend a herd of pigs. And looking at the pigs, he himself wanted to eat what the pigs were eating — husks. But even this they didn’t give him.

And here, “He came to himself (Lk. 15:17). Pay attention to these words. The Gospel says, “He came to himself.” And when he had come to himself then he saw himself. He saw what kind of man he was, and he saw his Father, remembered his homeland. He remembered the conditions of life of his Father, and there arose in his heart a terrible sorrow. He understood that he had hurt his Parent. And in this anguish he was ready to go through anything, any unpleasantness, just to be close to him who had earlier kept him, had given him warmth, caresses. He wanted his Father. But how could he go to him when he had offended him? Now he was ready to accept anything: to be not even a son, but to be like a stranger, just to be near his Father. And so he went.

The parable says that he went far away from his Father. This means that returning was not easy: without money, without provisions, to walk on the scorching sand of the desert. He lived through all this in the hope that his Father would accept him, at least as a kind of hireling, as a man under punishment. But what happened? He was still far from home, but his Father already went out to meet him, opened His arms to embrace him. And here took place that scene which even now stirs many people so much that tears involuntarily fall from their eyes. Here is revealed what a Father can be for his son.

The Holy Church gives us here a brief history of the fall and resurrection of a life. For what purpose? In order to tell us about this incident? No, brothers. But in order to speak to our conscience, to you and me, to each of us, to all our hearts, in whatever state we may find ourselves. In what state are we in relation to our Father, to the Father Who gave us life? Let us look at this dissolute son. Maybe we still haven’t spent the riches which the Father gave us. Let us remember what happened to that son. Does our conscience still not speak to us in anguish? Are we still living it up with the inheritance from our Father’s riches? Let us remember that we won’t be in this state for long — a moment of hunger will come. The property from our Father’s inheritance will be used up. Darkness will invade our heart. Our conscience will begin to torment

us. Or have we already reached that state where we are ready to feed on “husks,” where we are crying in anguish that life is spent, that our life is crippled? And what about our family life? Maybe we have already lost those who were close to us. Maybe even our children are in such a state that torments our conscience.

Here the Holy Church gives us today’s parable: let us look at the prodigal son and examine our conscience. Let us look at all the states of this son who lived it up in riches, suffered in poverty, came to a state of despair, and finally reached the state where he came to himself. And he was not mistaken. Because our Father, the Creator, is a good Father. He will forgive everything, will accept us. The only thing we have to do is go to Him. This is it: Go to Him. It is here that we do not have enough strength, because we will have to go back. And we have gone far, far away. We will have to go through the harsh wilderness, with the constant feeling of fear that we will not be accepted.

Through this parable the Holy Church gives us direction: the great days of Christian spring are approaching — Great Lent — the days in which the Church makes it possible for us to open ourselves up, to recognize our sinful condition, to cleanse ourselves with the help of the Sacrament which the Lord will give us in the Tree of Life, in the Body and Blood of Christ, which is given to us in order to enliven us. This Sunday of the Prodigal Son, the Holy Church once again gives us a lesson for our conscience in order to resurrect us so that we come closer to the Father, in order to heal our heart so that we might come to that moment when the Lord will call us, and we will be able to say in the last moment: “Into Thy hands I commend my spirit” (Lk. 23:46).

Last Judgment.

Now we have come to the Gospel about the Last Judgment. It determines everything, for everyone and forever. “And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal” (Mt. 25:46). Here everything is summed up; everything is clear, unchangeable, eternal. Here God’s Truth meets with God’s Mercy, and God’s Love with the Wisdom of God.

We walked away from Christ’s manger from which we received the spirit of adoption (sonship). On the Day of the Lord’s Circumcision, our New Year, we consciously dedicated ourselves to the service of the Lord in the coming year. On the day of the Lord’s Baptism, we received the special Grace to do God’s will. But on the very first steps of our new life we did not stand fast, but yielded to temptation and sinned. It is not without reason that the very first Sunday after the Baptism called to us: “Repent: for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand” (Mt. 4:17). And with all the subsequent Gospels the Holy Church has been teaching us how to repent. She has given us wonderful images of repentance: Zacchaeus changed his whole life. The Publican was justified by his prayer: “God be merciful to me a sinner” (Lk. 18:13). And the Prodigal Son returned to his Father. All this is true, all this happened, and it has been repeated thousands of times throughout the history of Christ’s Church. And all of this exists right now; all this is possible for both you and me.

And the picture of the Last Judgment, which might startle us, does not disrupt our cycle of Gospel readings. It gives them meaning, makes them more exact, sums up for us all that was before in the Church and all that will be further on. After all, to be placed at the right side of the King and to hear His voice: “Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom” (Mt. 25:34) — this is the purpose of our life. But we rarely think about this and often forget it.

The great Sophia Cathedral in Kiev is not dedicated to the Martyr Sophia. The word “sophia” in Greek means “wisdom,” and this Cathedral is dedicated to the Wisdom of God. The

Cathedral's feast day is celebrated on the Nativity of the Most Holy Mother of God. On the day of the Nativity of the Most Holy Mother of God begins the plan of the Wisdom of God which alone can save sinners, which means all of us. The Most Holy Virgin was raised at the temple to become the Mother of God. She experienced the day of the Annunciation. Then came the days of the Nativity of Christ, the flight into Egypt, the hard life in Nazareth, and finally they led her Godly Son to Crucifixion. They led Him away! The Mother of God was at the Cross. Her Son was dying on the Cross.

Here is how the Wisdom of God accomplishes our salvation; and how the Truth of God is satisfied. In fact, another similar sacrifice could not even have been conceived. This is the Pure Lamb of God, Who takes upon Himself the sin of the world. Why, there is not a single person in existence who could become the sacrifice for the sins of the world. After all, there is no man without sin. And if anyone suffers, then this is for his own sins. Only Christ could accomplish this, because He alone was without sin. He is the Only One, the Irreplaceable One... "It is finished" (Jn. 19:30).

On the western wall of the Kiev cathedral of St. Vladimir, remarkable for its murals, right over the entrance to the church is a wonderful representation of the Last Judgment. First of all, we are struck by the mass of people, their faces, eyes. And you have the vivid awareness that you are among them. Involuntarily, you try to find yourself, to determine your place according to your spiritual state. And within you occurs, as it were, a private judgment upon yourself. There are faces expressing terrible sorrow, a totally perished life trembles in them. There are others, full of malice, hatred, murmuring, envy, insatiable desires. They have passed on, but something is gnawing at them and will eternally gnaw at them.

But here, rays of light start to break their way through the enormous clouds, and they show us other faces: quiet, calm, joyful, happy. This is life! And the closer they are to the Throne, the more clear these faces are. And over the Throne shines the Cross. On the Throne is seated the Lord Savior of the world Himself, and around Him, John the Baptist, the Apostles, all the Saints are praying, triumphing. Here is harmonious rejoicing. Only one cry, one wail disturbs it. The Mother of God has fallen on the shoulder of Christ, and she alone is pleading for the salvation of sinners, for mercy for all those without hope. She alone has been given the power to intercede to the end before the Mercy of God.

Dear brothers and sisters! Wherever you may be in this terrible picture, do not despair. You have not yet perished! There is our Mother. She is whispering for you, and it is doubtful that even the Almighty God can refuse her. She is the "finder of those who are lost." Just believe in this and warmth will begin to fill your heart, and a new hope will light up in it. Then love of the Wisdom of God will begin to reveal itself to you!

Forgiveness Sunday.

This is the very beginning of Great Lent. For whatever we begin in life, we always compose some kind of plan of action, a program of what we have to accomplish and in what order. But here we don't have to do this; today's Gospel gives us this program. Earlier, the Holy Church was more often teaching us, but now she is requiring actions from us. Just let us examine the present Gospel attentively, and we will see how simple, how accessible for each of us, and at the same time, how comprehensive these rules are.

"For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Mt. 6:14-15). Therefore, what is the real purpose of Great Lent? Here it is: so that our Heavenly Father

will forgive us our sins. And how do we achieve this? Forgive people their sins. Let us start here with this. This is the very first thing.

Secondly, “moreover, when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance; for they disfigure their faces that they may appear unto men to fast.... But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret” (Mt. 6:16-18). And so let us fast, but not for the sake of people, but before God, and not despondently, but in spiritual happiness.

And thirdly, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth.. .but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven” (Mt. 6:19-20). This determines all our activities, gives direction to our whole life.

And finally, the last thing: “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Mt. 6:21). Here is the purpose of our life! That our heart be in God, filled with God, so that God will become our treasure. But to learn this is possible only in the Church. And this is so important for us that it is worth the labor, and the fasting, and standing longer in church, and praying more at home. For only then will we be able to cry out with joy: “Christ is Risen!” and to answer those greeting us: “In Truth He is Risen!”

The Rite of Forgiveness.

Brothers and sisters! What the Holy Church asks us to perform right now is no longer a thought or a feeling, but an action, a deed. Thoughts and feelings have been cultivated in us for the past weeks. In fact this is the way it always happens: thought gives birth to feeling, and feeling gives birth to action. And this action is of special importance. Listen: “If ye forgive not men...neither will your [Heavenly] Father forgive you” (Mt. 6:15). This means that our fasting and going to church and prostrations, in fact all our devotions, will be in vain.

That’s how important this first step is. But it is not easy. To do it in words only, just for the sake of decency, for the sake of formality, might not be difficult. But what is the good of that? However, really to make this step, to recognize that we are worse than others, worse than everyone, truly guilty before everyone (and after all, this is how it is: each of us is guilty before everyone, in everything, and for everything), to come to this realization is very, very difficult. And to consider the guilt of another before us as nothing, as if it did not exist, and maybe was even provoked by us — this is still more difficult. Even in the Lives of the Saints we read examples of how great strivers and confessors were not able to do this, and thereby ruined everything.

And even more for us sinners is the special help of God needed to forgive and to ask forgiveness sincerely, from our whole heart, to draw out of it our self-love, our self-justifying “I.” But we have to do this, the Lord requires it of us, the Lord is waiting. Without this effort within ourselves we cannot begin Lent. So let us ask for forgiveness and forgive from our whole heart. And here, as the first one, I ask you: Forgive me!

2. Lent.

Sunday of Orthodoxy.

“The day following, Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow Me” (Jn. 1:43). So the Holy Gospel begins this Sunday, recounting the calling of the

Holy Apostles. Centuries have passed, and the same call is audible today, but now refers directly to us, "Follow Me." And we ask the Lord, "Where?" And the Church answers us by the very name of this Sunday, "into Orthodoxy!"

Just be attentive. Tonight, when this week comes to a close and a new week of Great Lent begins, the Holy Church will say for our edification: "Lord, Thou hast given abundant gifts to those who fear Thee!" And we cannot say that we did not receive these gifts. We received the Sacrament of Confession, the Sacrament of the Eucharist — the Body and Blood of Christ, the Tree of Life. Yes, we undoubtedly received them. But do we have the state of mind which is expressed in the second part of the prayer: "Lord, Thou hast given abundant gifts to those who fear Thee." The gifts have been given, but are we those who fear God? Yet the fear of God is not an ordinary fear as before someone or something. No. This is the fear of losing what the Lord has given to our heart.

And at the same time, the Holy Church, while telling us that we have received the Grace and Gifts of God, reveals to us through the Apostle reading the states of mind we should possess. These are the states which should be possessed by those who have achieved everything which Christ gives. We know what these achievers have gone through: sufferings, beatings, bonds, prison; they were stoned, sawn asunder, exiled, died by the sword, wandered in the mountains. Those of whom the whole world was not worthy hid in ravines, in caves — they all bore witness to their faith, but they did not receive what had been promised. And this is because God provided for them something better, something worthy of them (Heb. 11:37-40).

Yes, as we see, God calls: "Follow Me! I will give you everything." But at the same time, such sufferings, such experiences, such horrible things! Look around you, at our walls which are painted with the pictures of saints. All of them are now in the heavenly dwellings, and yet all of them experienced, as every one of us experiences, the way of our earthly existence. Look, among them were archbishops, bishops, priests, monks; there were farmers, nobles and princes, workers of all kinds; there were laborers, people of simple background; there were great scholars, there were illiterate people. And all of them experienced on earth every kind of suffering, grief, and horror. But they kept that which the Church requires. When the Church says through the words of Christ, "Follow Me," she is showing us where to go: into Orthodoxy. In the Russian language, Orthodoxy means the Right Word, that word which is true, which we should not betray; the word which we too have given and are again giving every year.

After the Nativity of Christ (on the day of Circumcision), when the circumcision of our heart is accomplished, then we say, "We belong to Christ, we are Christian. Our will is His Will. Christ is our Life; Christ is our Goal; Christ is our Way." And this way leads us into the Church. Bishop Theophan the Recluse shows us what to do in order to go the way of the Church. He addressed his flock (this was in the 1870's) with the following words: "We know what technology teaches us, what mechanics teaches us, law, economics. But the Church teaches us about the movement of our heart. Learn and keep in your heart everything the Holy Church teaches, and receiving Godly forces through the sacraments, and quickening them through the holy services and prayers of the Church, go unswervingly the Way of Christ's commandments under the guidance of lawful shepherds, and you will undoubtedly reach the Kingdom of Heaven and will be saved."

And so, being zealous for salvation, all our attention should be directed to our heart, to inscribe on it Christian feelings and dispositions. Bishop Theophan reveals to us that the most important thing is in our heart, dispositions, those feelings which appear in the heart. External things are needed, but only in so far as they bear the spirit which spiritualizes them. And social

life will become true life only if into social relationships you bring spirit, which means heart, the heart of a true Christian. And family life will be true family life only if into all traditions of the external temporal family life we bring those relationships of the heart which God gives us in His Beatitudes: poverty of spirit, mourning, meekness, peaceableness — out of this will come real family life. And this way, and only this way, into all phases of our life will come the Triumph of Orthodoxy.

Second Sunday of Lent, St. Gregory Palamas.

Brothers and sisters, we have lived this week in the light of last Sunday — the Triumph of Orthodoxy. A wonderful feature was pointed out to us in the Gospel which was then read:

Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found Him, of Whom Moses in the law, and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? (Jn. 1:45-46).

Both of them, Philip and Nathanael, wanted to believe in the right way, praise God rightly, that is, to be Orthodox. But for them it meant first of all to determine who was the true Messiah. With such an intention they approached Christ. Seeing Nathanael, Christ said, “Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile. Nathanael saith unto Him, whence knowest Thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee” (Jn. 1:47-48).

What happened under the fig tree we do not know. But we do know that Christ hit on just the right point, got right to the heart of this man. Here is Nathanael’s answer: “Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God” (Jn. 1:49). Nathanael truly and rightly praised Christ, and in this way he became the first Orthodox man. And all because Christ touched his heart, touched something intimate lying deep, deep within Nathanael’s heart.

The triumph of Orthodoxy always starts in a person’s heart, and only afterwards is it expressed externally. True, sometimes there are cases when the external attracts the heart, as if waking it up. But for this to happen, there must be something in the heart which makes such an awakening possible. God demands our heart. To serve God without heart, Orthodoxy without heart — this is the same as a man without heart.

And here today’s Gospel speaks about the same thing. A paralytic was brought to the Lord, carried by four people. Unable to get near Christ because of the multitude, they removed the roof of the house, broke through and lowered the bed on which the paralytic was lying. See how difficult it all was. This is the fulfillment of the commandment of love in external life. Yes, such is life in the triumph of Orthodoxy.

But where is its source? Let’s listen further: “When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee” (Mk. 2:5). These four had faith in their hearts, and this faith impelled them to make every effort to help; and seeing this faith, Jesus helped. The external happened as a result of the internal. God did not say at once to the paralytic: “Arise, take up thy bed,” but said, “Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.” See, not the external first, but the internal. After all, sin was in the heart. A heart paralyzed by sin could not sense God in Christ and could not rightly praise Him. And here Christ healed this heart, made it Orthodox. And then followed the external: “I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed and go thy way into thine house” (Mk. 2:11).

But what would have happened if the Lord had started with the second thing, with the external healing? The paralytic would have gotten up in the same way, would have taken his bed and gone, but only with a heart which was dead from sin. This would have been a living corpse. Here is what the Pharisees could not understand. ‘Whether is it easier?’ said Christ to them, “to say to the paralytic, Thy sins be forgiven thee, or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (He saith to the paralytic) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed and go thy way into thine house” (Mk. 2:9-11). To this paralytic the Lord gave both the internal and the external. And he walked home and brought there with him the quiet feeling of the triumph of Orthodoxy.

And here, St. Gregory Palamas, to whom this Sunday of Great Lent is dedicated, shows us so clearly by his whole life that Christian life, Orthodox life, always begins in our heart, and only then expresses itself in feats of asceticism.

Third Sunday: Veneration of the Cross.

Before us is the Cross. This is the Cross of Christ. But on Golgotha there were two more crosses: Christ in the middle and on either side of Him were crucified two thieves. Christ on the Cross performed the sacrifice of redemption for the whole world. But what brought those crucified with Him to these crosses? Their crimes — after all, they were thieves.

What made them thieves? There was a time when they were innocent children and maybe even played together. This was the bright time of childhood. And later, they felt, as each of us does, two opposing forces influencing them: a good one and a bad one. And their will had to yield to either one or the other side. In the beginning they wavered, but later on, because the evil appeared more alluring, they began more and more often to consent to the evil. At first, conscience reproached them, but later it became hardened and stopped tormenting them. And then, without a backward glance, they completely took the side of evil. First, in the realm of will and feelings, and later they fell into open crimes which brought them to these crosses, to death sentences. And here they were both dying. Not only their hours, but even their minutes were numbered. And between them the Lord was dying on His Cross. One of the hanging criminals reviled Him. But the other, on the contrary, silenced the abusive one and said to Jesus, “Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise” (Lk. 23:42-43).

Christ died first and then the two thieves. On the face of the one who reviled the Lord was imprinted the grimace of blasphemy, and only the laugh of Mephistopheles rent the air above his cross. This laughter was terrible and triumphant. Yes, this was the final victory of the power of evil over this soul. But above the cross of the repentant thief was a triumphant peace and a kind of joyous radiance. And at this time, his soul, bright and pure, washed by sufferings and repentance, entered Paradise. With joy and wonder the orders of angels looked on this first soul entering Paradise, this soul of the first saint of the New Testament, washed with the Blood of Christ — the soul of a thief.

Now we are gathered together here in church before the Cross of Christ. In the eyes of human judgment we are not law-breakers or criminals. But are we as well-off before the Judgment of God? No. All of us have broken and are breaking the commandments of God. And if this is so, it means we are law-breakers. If until now we have not committed visible crimes, this is only because the Grace of God and our Guardian Angels have not let us. But if we were left to ourselves, God alone and our conscience know what might happen to us. And what still may happen if God abandons us. Let us honestly examine our conscience; let us ask it, and it will an-

swer that according to the Judgment of God, we are no better than the thief, and maybe even worse. His sufferings on the cross alone could redeem so much. And we, with what can we redeem ourselves? He was a wise thief, but we... we live carelessly and think that we are going to live on and on. But our years, months, weeks, and maybe days and even hours are numbered. And also, will we have in the last moment that repentance which he had? What if suddenly another state of mind arises, opposite to it? May the Lord keep us from this!

Right now, as we approach and kiss the Cross, let us say with the wise thief, "Lord, remember me in Thy kingdom!" We may not have another minute. So let us use this minute which the Lord gives us: "Thy Cross, O Lord, we venerate and Thy Holy Resurrection we glorify."

Fourth Sunday: St. John of the Ladder.

Two Gospels were read today. The first was about the healing of the one possessed. The disciples of Christ asked Him when they were alone: "Why could we not cast him out?" And the Lord said to them, "This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting" (Mk. 9:28,29). This is as if a reminder that now is the time for prayer and fasting — Great Lent.

During the three weeks before Great Lent, we were shown the ways of repentance of a Christian who returns to his Father. And when Great Lent approached, with its hymns and prayers which were given to us during the Church readings of these past four weeks, we should have studied and understood ourselves. And when we understood ourselves, then involuntarily we should have come to a feeling of humility: "But Lord, what am I going to do? Lord, Thou seest how feeble and weak my will is. I constantly yield to the will of the prince of this world. Help me!" And I begin to weep.

This is why the second Gospel, about the Beatitudes, was read. These commandments show us what to do: step by step, as if rung by rung. This is why the Church this Sunday commemorates St. John of the Ladder, who wrote his spiritual work called "The Ladder," which shows us what to do, how one virtue leads to another, like rungs on a ladder. In a spiritual sense, these steps are the Beatitudes. He who abides in spiritual poverty will surely weep because of his infirmity, and he who weeps because of his infirmity is already meek. In relation to his brother he will be indulgent and will always strive for mercy, for help in order to create peace which the Lord requires in our hearts. And he will not be afraid of persecution and will not think of how to take vengeance on those who harm him. No, he will always have this feeling: "Lord, I am weak, help me!"

This is why, after the Church gave us at the end of the first week of Lent the direction where we must go (into Orthodoxy), during the second week of Lent, the Sunday following the Sunday of Orthodoxy, she revealed to us the feeling of a man who already enters into spiritual endeavors; and he has before him the new principle of a man such as Gregory Palamas, who was renewed not only spiritually, but also physically.

And after showing us Gregory Palamas, the Church brought us to Golgotha. She showed us the Lord's Cross, which we have venerated for the whole week. Those who were in church, and even those not in church, saw mentally before them Golgotha. We saw the wise thief and the thief who reviled Christ; and we saw Christ Himself Who pronounced His last words: "Into Thy hands I commend My spirit!" (Lk. 23:46).

This mood of Golgotha has remained with us. And we, who saw the reviling thief and the wise thief, should have determined: What are we to do? And seeing the long-suffering thief, we accepted in our hearts: "Lord, I will be long-suffering. But how am I to do this?" Live according to the Beatitudes. There is no other way. And this long-suffering, of whatever kind it may be,

will cause us to suffer, but at the same time will give us blessedness not only in eternity, but even here, in the midst of our suffering, while we endure. To be poor in spirit, humble, to weep for our sins, meekly to endure offense, to wish peace to everyone, to wish everything good, to endure persecutions for Christ — all this is difficult. But at the same time it is also joyful. This is the only way to true happiness; and this is the shortest way.

So what is the matter? Let us make this step right now, this very moment. Everyone these days fights for happiness. But we don't even have to fight (unless with ourselves) and we will be blessed. May God bless you to this step.

Fifth Sunday: St. Mary of Egypt.

“This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting (Mk. 9:29). So if you will remember, last Sunday, the fourth Sunday of Great Lent, the Gospel proclaimed to us: “This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.” What is “this kind”? If you will remember, brothers and sisters, we were told there about a youth who was possessed and sometimes fell into fire and sometimes into water, as his father said when he brought him to Christ. And Christ said, “This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.” This is what kind. The kind which possessed the youth and was casting him down. This unfortunate youth not only knew no rest, but not even life itself. And Christ said, “can come forth/” This means that it was something separate. Now do we understand this or not?

Brothers, if you just open a newspaper, you will at once understand what “this kind” means. See how many people who, in a state of despair, jump into water in order to end their lives, thinking there is no eternal life. And into fire. Here you find so many who again, out of despair, throw themselves into fire, become human torches in order to burn themselves. It is the same thing: a state of insanity or despondency, or on the contrary, a state of mind which almost reaches madness — human pride. And how many people become victims of those terrible excesses of sex. How many terrible mental conditions there are in which a person commits robbery, murder, which are connected with the terrible greed for money, for power. What is this? It is precisely “this kind.” We seem not to participate in it. Oh, if only we would not participate!

Now we are in the period of life which we call spiritual spring. If a farmer is late in sowing, then there will be no harvest and, therefore, no bread. Likewise, if a person is late in acquiring sobriety, attention to his inner man, his heart, then he will be left without spiritual nourishment, in spiritual hunger. And if there is some kind of passion in his heart and he realizes it, then he will also understand that no one can drive out this passion except He Who created man. But for this to happen, preparation is needed. And this preparation is fasting and prayer.

We should have remained with such feelings during the past week. And if we possessed the state of mind which a Christian should possess, then during this fifth week, when the Church was crying: “O Lord, before I perish to the end, save me,” when the Canon of St. Andrew of Crete was being read, which exposes and overturns our heart and reveals to us such passions; it would be possible for us to approach God and say: “O God, forgive me, heal me, give me Thine everlasting light; give me Life, because maybe I have only one year left to live, and maybe not even that; I might be going to Thee right now.”

We are all going there into eternity; and the Church gives us this time for preparation, in order to look at ourselves, so that we might acquire the forces necessary for entering eternal existence.

The Church said to us in the last Gospel that this kind is driven out by fasting and prayer. We think that fasting is when we have vegetable oil on the table. Yes, certainly limitation in food

is also fasting. But fasting does not consist of this alone; this is only part of fasting. Fasting is when a person opens his heart in such a way that he sees what is unneeded and rejects it, keeping only what is needed in order to preserve his heart. And prayer? Prayer > the state in which our soul, sensing Divine peace, unceasingly calls to the Lord; “Help me; don’t let it happen. Don’t allow the murder of the most important feeling within me — conscience.”

And here at the end of this week, I don’t know about you, but I still have a feeling of being unworthy. And for me today is a great comfort. In what sense? Here before us, before our spiritual eyes, stands Mary of Egypt. This was a sinner who became a classic type, a classic image of a Christian woman. She was an outrageous courtesan of Alexandria in Egypt. She was a harlot; she was a prostitute; she was a beauty; and her depravity knew no limits.

Once she chanced to see a crowd of people boarding a ship. And she, not in order to go to Palestine, but in order to be active in her profession among the pilgrims, she also boarded this ship. And so she sailed to Jerusalem. She went with the crowd to worship the Cross of the Lord. Why not? The whole crowd was going and so she went too. And here, when the crowd had entered the vestibule of the church; then here, no matter what Mary did, she could not enter the church. By now almost everyone had entered, but she was somehow nailed to the floor. It was as if a gust of wind or a wave threw her out and drove her away. No matter how she trembled, no matter how eager she was to enter, she could not; something would not let her. Finally, she understood that some kind of terrible force would not let her in. And here she looked up: before her was a face; it was the icon ‘of the Mother of God with the Child. Immediately the curtain which covered up her conscience was opened. She had heard about Christ and she had heard that Christ called to chastity. And here her conscience revealed to her all her sin, and she fell before the Heavenly Queen with this cry: “Forgive me, help!”

And then she herself did not see or understand what happened. All at once, as if lifted by wind, she was brought into the church and she fell down before the Cross of the Lord. And here a miracle happened to her: there appeared in her the thirst for purity, for chastity. She wanted to feel the lightness of a clean conscience. And when she felt forgiveness, without looking around and without any provisions, she rushed to the Jordan, walked through it, and then disappeared into the desert.

And so for seventeen years she lived in a state of sobriety; and as she said later, she had to bite the ground in order to destroy lustful feelings, carnal longings, the demonic bodily movements of “this kind.” And later on, for seventeen more years she praised God’s Grace. She was like an angel.

Therefore, I say that for us this day which the Church puts before us is a comfort. There is no sinner whom the Lord would not forgive. Brothers and sisters, without doubt every one of us will be covered by the lid of a coffin. Every one of us will disappear into the grave. And the soul will pass over into eternity. What will be there ? Do we ever think about what will be there? The Church is calling and calling us to repentance. But how do we start? Now pay attention to this: Mary could not enter the Church; somebody was not letting her in. Look at yourself, at your conscience. The same happens to you; somebody is not allowing you to surrender fully to Christ. Stop this. But how? In the same way Mary did — rush to the Mother of God.

This is what I am asking you to do. This is the greatest joy. And rush to the Lord and say, “Lord, help me to be Christian. Help me, so that the motion of my heart beats out just one feeling: surrender to the Lord, fulfillment of His commandments. Then a clear, bright spring will come. And approaching Easter we will hear the words of Christ, “Peace be unto you!” (Lk. 24:36). May this peace rest in you.

Lazarus Saturday.

“In the same way we cry to Thee, O Conqueror of death: Hosanna in the highest, blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord” (Troparion (hymn) sung on Lazarus Saturday).

Great is this Holy Day, brothers and sisters! Just think of it, “Conqueror of death”! There have been many conquerors in the history of humanity: many gifted doctors have conquered many sicknesses, many military leaders have conquered tremendous armies, even entire countries. There have been conquerors of space such as the inventors of automobiles, airplanes; conquerors of distance — the inventors of the telephone, telegraph, and so on. But “Conqueror of death” — the whole world does not know of anyone else but Jesus Christ. He alone. Even the so-called “unbelieving world” cannot mention another name. No one among the most prominent people would ever even attempt to make such a claim. But He is, was, and will be — our Savior and our Lord.

During His historical evangelistic life He proved this in three instances: the resurrection of the daughter of Jairus, the resurrection of the son of the widow of Nain, and here in today’s Gospel, the resurrection of Lazarus.

The death of the daughter of Jairus was a recent one. She died while Christ and her father were going to her. Even Christ called it slumber; but the people “laughed Him to scorn, knowing that she was dead. And He put them all out, and took her by the hand, and called, saying, Maid, arise! And her spirit came again, and she arose straightway: and He commanded to give her meat” (Lk. 8:53-55).

In the case of the son of the widow of Nain, death, seemingly stronger, came into its own: the dead man had already been laid on the funeral bier. They had carried him not only from the house, but already through the city gates. In order to touch the bier, the Lord had to stop the carriers. And only then did He say, “Young man, I say unto thee, Arise! And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And He delivered him to his mother” (Lk. 7:14-15).

And now Lazarus. The victory of death here was final, one hundred percent. Lazarus had been in the tomb four days already. There was weeping, but no one had any hope of an instantaneous resurrection. Even one of the dead man’s sisters said to the Lord: “I know he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” Even the Lord Himself, when He “saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, He groaned in the spirit, and was troubled,” and He wept. Finally He said, “Take ye away the stone.” Here, even the sister of the dead man could not contain herself and said to Him: “Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days.” So the stone was removed from the tomb where the dead man was lying, and Christ cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come forth! And he that was dead came forth bound hand and foot with grave clothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go” (Jn. 11:17-44).

Besides physical death, there is mental death. Physical death is visible to everyone, but mental death is usually not noticeable to people. It is felt only by the dead person himself. Bishop Theophan the Recluse said much about this. Sometimes it happens that a sinful thought darts into your mind and awakens a sinful feeling, but the soul catches itself and calls to the Lord in repentance. And the Lord, as with the daughter of Jairus, will as if stretch out His hand and say, “Soul, arise!” And life will return to its joyous flow. But sometimes it happens that we do not catch ourselves in time and sin enters more deeply into our soul (like going out from the house) and the result will be full acceptance of the sin, and turmoil. But also here, by the prayers of our Mother, the Church of Christ, who cries before the Lord for her children, we can be

alerted; and the Lord will tell us as He did the son of the widow of Nain: “Soul, I say unto thee, Arise!” This is salvation.

But what shall we do if sin completely enslaves our soul, as if covering it with a tombstone; and so day after day goes by and passions start to exude their sinful stench, just as with Lazarus? What should we do then? Well, then we need confession, the sacrament which Christ established after His Resurrection, when He said to His disciples, “Receive ye the Holy Spirit: Whosoever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven” (Jn. 20:22-23). See how all this is reflected in the resurrection of Lazarus. Lazarus, on his own, could not go out from the tomb because it was blocked by a stone. He couldn’t even walk, because he was bound hand and foot with funeral bandages. And here Christ said to His disciples, “Loose him.” In application to us, this means that the Lord orders our clergy, who have received in the Sacrament of the Priesthood the gift of the Holy Spirit, to loose our sins. What joy!

And more: death is not the cause but only the result, the consequence of sin. And Christ is, first of all, the Conqueror of sin, and then along with it, the Conqueror of death. So let us triumph: “Hosanna in the highest!”

Palm Sunday.

Brothers and sisters! So the Holy Church indicates for us spiritual spring. Winter is over. Ended is the state in which our heart was like ice, as if dead in languor, thirsting for Grace. And now, during the past six weeks the sun has been warming us more and more, and nature has gradually started to come back to life. And so our heart too should have come back to life.

Last night during the evening service, we sang, “Children were bearing the sign of Victory...” What sign? Pussy willows, branches which had already budded, indicating that spring was coming, as if saying to us: Look here, joy is already beginning, happiness. So through the pussy willows, the Church has been saying to us: This is the beginning for you too; just be Christians, and think it over, and you will begin to see a sign. A sign of what? - that Christ is Risen.

And we, brothers and sisters, we close our eyes like an ostrich who puts his head under his wing. We don’t want to think that a limit will come, just as it comes to old people: hands stop working, eyes stop seeing, ears stop hearing — a limit. The end will come. And it seems that in these moments, when we begin to recognize the approach of old age, we involuntarily compare it with winter, with snow. Yes, but after winter comes spring. And in a spiritual understanding: after our eyes close, then comes Eternal Life, the joy of Life with Christ. This is what last night’s pussy willows were telling us about, “bearing the sign.” Abide not in grief; turn to joy. And now comes the moment when the Lord, by a special mystery, through Passion Week which we are approaching, will give us the feeling of this joy of Eternal Life.

Now we worry about a piece of bread, about a roof over our heads, about our social conditions. And it seems to us that the meaning of life consists of this. But the Church says, Look at the pussy willows: leaves will sprout and later flowers and fruit. So it is even in a Christian soul. Everything we are busying ourselves with, all this will remain here. But with us there will go another stream of — spiritual life. You should think about this. But is it so? Maybe it’s not. Brothers, it is so! Today the Holy Church speaks to us through the Apostle. What does the Church say? She says: “Rejoice in the Lord always” (Phil. 4:4). Today, at the conclusion of Great Lent, she says to us, rejoice! Do you have this joy? If this is joy about Eternal Life, then yes, you will have this joy, because Christ is Risen. And all our sicknesses, our old age, our expectancy of death — all of this will dissolve. In what? In Christ. And when the moment of our departure comes (this is how we believe and what the Church says), God Almighty, the Giver of Life, will

come to us and will perform for us the mystery of releasing our bonds, and we will enter eternal existence.

“Rejoice” says the Apostle, “and again I say, Rejoice” (Phil. 4:4). See how the Apostle is exhorting us. But what is this? There is a condition: “Let all men know your meekness” (The Russian text reads “meekness” instead of “forbearance” or “moderation” which appear in the English versions), continues the Apostle. Look here, spring has come to nature. But it will not stop here, it will go further; it will change into summer. And so it is with us — life goes on. “Let all men know your meekness.” This means that our life should move in such a way that pride will depart. It should dissolve in Christ’s patience, in Christ’s meekness. The Apostle says: May your meekness be of the Lord. And further, “Have no anxiety about anything,” but be always in prayer. Hear what promises the Lord gives. “Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your wishes (The Russian text reads “wishes” instead of “requests” which appears in the English version) be made known to God” (Phil. 4:6). What daring is given to us!

But what kind of wishes should our prayers express? If they are the wishes which people experience in sitting rooms, theaters, worldly amusements — then of course, brothers, the Lord desires something else for us, because all of this will remain here. This senselessness, this commotion, this quarreling, this adversity, this rage, all this will remain here. And only joy will depart with us. This is joy: if you wish for meekness, humility, prosperity, brotherly love, Christian living, quiet — then pray! The Lord will be with you. Rejoice! The Holy Day is approaching. Tomorrow there will come great moments when the Sacrament is being performed. And so in our hearts will be revealed this joy: Christ is Risen! May this joy abide with us in a joyous feeling of Eternal Life.

Good Friday: Sermon before the Shroud.

“Say ye, His disciples...stole Him away.” So said the high priests to the soldiers when they notified them of what had happened in the tomb. Starting in verse 12 of the 28th chapter of Matthew, it says: “And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole Him away while we slept. And if this come to the governor’s ears, we will persuade him, and secure you. So they took the money and did as they were taught; and this story has been spread [and is being spread] among the Jews to this day” ... to this day ... to this day. And over Jewish life fell darkness, malice, deviousness — darkness.

And Christ? Christ in the meantime, while the soldiers were spreading these lies, Christ appeared to the myrrhbearers. But how, under what circumstances did He appear? The myrrhbearers came, despite their feminine nature, not thinking about what would happen. They knew that a tombstone blocked the entrance to the tomb, and that guards stood guarding the tomb. But they didn’t think about this; they had to fulfill what was required by the law of Moses: perform the anointing at burial. And here, when they had performed this, Christ appeared to them.

And again: Mary Magdalene, from whom the Lord had cast out seven devils. After the terrible suffering of being possessed, how well she knew this state of joyous peace. And when she saw what happened on Golgotha and she herself participated, along with Joseph of Arimathea, in the burial of Christ, and when she came and did not find Christ — try to understand her state of mind — she who had received her life from Christ, she who in the name of Christ was ready to do anything. And here Christ appeared to her!

And again: two disciples, Luke and Cleopas, were walking after Golgotha. They had seen everything, or more exactly, they had heard everything. Imagine what grief filled their hearts! And here, close by approached a wanderer. He began to explain the Word of God and their hearts were trembling, but they didn't understand Who was with them. And only then, when they had fulfilled the commandment of Christ — love — Christ appeared to them.

And again: the doors were locked for fear of the Jews. Try to understand their state of mind! We immigrants know what persecution means. We know what we went through when in church during the service we heard the police walking around. So here the apostles were gathered together for fear of the Jews. And Christ appeared to them while they were suffering, seeking Him, because they had already heard from the myrrhbearers that Christ had risen. They were trembling, they were waiting, they had no other concern but this: Christ is risen. Where? How? And then He appeared.

And again: the Apostle Paul, while still Saul. He, as a Pharisee, understood that for the position of the Jewish nation, what was going on in Damascus (where groups of Christians were already preaching openly about the risen Christ), all this was very dangerous. The Messiah, as it seemed to the Jews, could come at any moment or maybe had already come. And this is how it was, because Christ had come. But they did not know that this was Christ; they were waiting for their own messiah, a king. And here the Apostle Paul (Saul) wanted to help preserve this peace which at that time existed between the Jews and Romans, and wanted to crush this group which was preaching its Messiah. Then after His Ascension, Christ appeared to him. He saw Christ. And from Saul, Christ converted him into the great Paul.

And then the Apostle Peter. And further, and further. Look, there were entire ages: the age of martyrdom, when multitudes of martyrs shed their blood in coliseums, on crosses, in prisons, because Christ appeared to them, was with them. Or better to say, because they were with Christ.

But it was necessary to understand correctly what we believe in. And here again appeared an entire age — the age of the Church Fathers, which formulated: “I believe, Lord, and I confess ... I believe in one God, Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth” (From the Nicene Creed — “The Symbol of Faith”).

And also the mysterious appearance of the Apostle Paul when he whispered in the ear of John Chrysostom. How many similar appearances we know of from the lives Of the saints, when Christ was speaking.

And further: saintliness — when everything had become clear, blood had been shed, the teaching of Christian morals and Christian dogmatics had been established, life went on. Then came the time of saintliness.

And there? There, where they believed the lie that He had been stolen — there was darkness. Wars were going on, fierce nations were fighting. Rome against the Greeks, and later against the Germans. These barbarian nations overwhelmed the Roman state, deviousness, horror. And in the midst of this fear, there was a quiet joy. The Christian spiritual strivers who were giving peace to the heart.

And here again comes a new age. For a moment, it would seem to be the triumph of Christianity. Yes, there was a triumph. Multi-ton bells were ringing; everything was washed in sunlight, golden. There were church services. And amid this? Amid this the Inquisition took place and some other circumstances which disturbed the real, true Christianity. And therefore it seemed that Christ was hiding Himself.

But no. Christ was there all the time: He was also among our Russian people, in our Motherland. If you were to come into a village at dawn when they were ringing for matins, you

would see with what trembling the people came, repenting. If you had looked on the roads filled with pilgrims (from Kursk to Kiev); these people were walking with the feeling of repentance: "Lord have mercy!"

And then the horror of communism, sufferings. We do not know how many tears Christ wiped from the eyes of those who were in concentration camps and of those unfortunate wives and children who were left at home. Christ was comforting; Christ was helping. And Christ brought us here in order to preserve what we should preserve, what has been passed on to us. And what was passed on to us? This is the Tree of Life, the Divine Eucharist. But the Divine Eucharist may be performed only after a certain rite, which is the preparation for the Divine Eucharist. And so the Lord has sent us this period of life. We are living in this period.

Did you not feel Christ when He took from you the stone which covered your heart, the stone of sin? And when our spiritual father said, "Our Lord and God...by His Grace and mercy and love toward mankind, forgives thee, Child, all thy sins/" did we not weep for joy when suddenly our heart received wings.

And when we understand all this and feel that the object of our life is godliness (keeping what is God's in honor), then we will understand also that all the evil, the stormy sea of deviousness, this very deviousness, and the lie which came from the high priests who said to tell people He was stolen; all this is still going on and divides the world in two.

Those who accepted this lie are hustling about. Even now they will find, lose, and seek again Him Who was "stolen." But we, brothers and sisters, who did not accept this lie, we don't have to seek anyone. We know where our Savior is and where our Life is, our Joy and our Hope. We are here in order to go there, but to go there by way of those steps which will bring us to the Divine Eucharist, to His Body and Blood, to the Tree of Life which He renews for us.

3. Paschal Period.

The Monday of Easter Week.

Have you noticed, brothers and sisters, how the Holy Church concluded for us the great time which we call the Lenten Triodion. During the entire Lenten Triodion the Holy Church was waking up our heart, was revealing to us all the states of emotion connected with our heart. We had, as it were, to look at what is within us. And when this was manifested in us, then we approached the Cross and the Book of the Gospels and received the promise which the Lord has given to us: "Receive ye the Holy Spirit," said the Lord to His disciples; "Whose so ever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose so ever sins ye retain, they are retained" (Jn. 20:22-23). And trusting in this daring of the Church, we received, in the Sacrament of Confession, forgiveness.

But after receiving the sanctification of our soul, of our heart, we must continue our way. Here is what the Holy Church gives us: after Golgotha, after the carrying out of the Shroud, after that great moment when we heard, or rather, performed the burial of the Savior, the way on which the Holy Church was leading us seems to change. Up to this moment, we were instructed by readings from Holy Scripture, from the writings of the Holy Fathers. The purpose of all this was to make it possible for us to go more deeply within ourselves.

And now begins, as it were, a different method: the Church gives us symbols. Here, during Holy Night we are given a symbol: in a darkened church we hear the angelic singing, telling us about the Resurrection of Christ. And we begin our way. Before us is elevated the Cross. High, before our eyes — the images of the Saints, the Heavenly Queen, who have become our fellow-travelers into heavenly life. We walk around the church, and this path we are walking on is uneven: there are bumps, stones, and sand. At the same time it is dark. We stumble, we walk unevenly, weaving. We're on the point of falling, and yet we go on. Before us are signs — the Cross and the holy images. At the same time in church, it is beginning to get light, we see it through the windows. And we know we have to enter this Church. But will we enter? Will we not remain in this darkness forever? Will we not fall? Or will we enter just the same?

And here the Holy Church shows us this way. We are walking around the church. And at the same time, what is going on? The choir is singing. With the angels we are singing and glorifying our Creator. So the Holy Church represents in symbols the way we must go through this year. Maybe the Lord will take us, or maybe once more we will visibly enter the church where the Resurrected Christ will be glorified; and the Grace of Resurrection will enter into communion with our soul.

So yesterday should have gone by under the impression of this symbol. At the end of this day the Church gives us a bright, festive service, where in the Gospel reading, the gift of the Resurrected Lord is given to us. "Peace be unto you" (Lk. 24:36). And we should keep this peace. With this feeling we should have performed today's first festal Liturgy in daylight. Now it is pointed out to us what we still have to do. And this is what. Back there we were walking in night; we did not see what was around us. But now we are already in the Lord. Peace has rested in our heart. And now we will also walk with the sign of the Cross, with the sign of the Saints; but now we will walk in the light of the sun which, in a spiritual sense, is the result of the Lord's plan of salvation for us. The Lord has shown us His light and Resurrection. Now we too must walk, but not silently; everywhere we are glorifying the Risen Lord. The Gospel itself orders us: Go and preach to all the nations (Mt. 28:19; Mk. 16:15; Lk. 24:47). Listen, brothers and sisters, to all the nations. About what? — that Christ is risen!

Therefore, do not think that what we are now performing is something of the past. No. It is necessary for our Christian psychology. The purpose is so that yesterday and today will be deeply inscribed on our heart, on our whole life, and will determine all the remaining moments of our life. Because now, not symbolically, but in our experience it will be necessary for us to meet each other, to decide different questions, family and social. At such moments we must remember that, of course, there will be bumps; there will be sand and stones. But all this will not be tragic if we only look upon the Cross of the Lord and the Risen Christ, Who gives us the light of understanding that our life is not here; but that there is eternal life and eternal existence.

May the Lord help us to feel and experience this!

Second Sunday of Easter: Thomas's Sunday.

"But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe (Jn. 20:24-25).

What does this mean, his "I will not believe"? Is it possible he could not believe the other eleven Apostles, his brothers? Is it possible they could lie to him? The whole evangelical life of Christ, all His miracles, Golgotha, the death on the Cross, they had experienced together. And

now this joy which they all had experienced they wanted to share with him. No, this was not a lie.

But He, Whom they had seen, was He really the same Christ? Was this not a vision or some other Christ? Was this not a mistake? And Thomas was afraid to lose what he had. And what did he have? This is what: during the years of fellowship with Christ, he had absorbed His teaching, the entire makeup of His life; and by now he was incapable of living any other way. It was painful for him not to have personal fellowship anymore with Christ; but by this time he understood that Christ came to earth in order to teach us the main commandment of God: love for God and neighbor, to perform it Himself, and to give us the strength to fulfill it.

In Paradise the first man fulfilled the commandment of God. The strength to fulfill this commandment of God he drew from eating the fruits of the Tree of Life. But then came the Fall. Paradise was lost, the Tree of Life was lost, and together with it, the strength for a godly life. And Christ came in order to give us the New Testament Tree of Life — His Body and Blood. “This do in remembrance of Me,” He said at the Last Supper (Lk. 22:19).

Thomas knew the commandments of Christ, and he knew where to draw the strength to fulfill them. He lived this. Although he lived without the human presence of Christ, he lived in Christ. He was afraid to make a mistake. What if another Christ had appeared to the disciples, not the One in Whom he lived and continued to live? This is what his “I will not believe” meant. And on the eighth day after His Resurrection, the Lord again appeared to His disciples, while Thomas was also in the house, and allowed him to touch His wounds. And here resounded Thomas’s triumphant cry, which even now stirs our hearts: “My Lord and my God!” (Jn. 20:28).

And here are the words of Christ which relate to you and me, opening a new era of faith which will remain until the end of the world: “Because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed. Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed... But these are written,” adds the Apostle John the Divine, “that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name” (Jn. 20:29, 31).

Third Sunday of Easter: Myrrhbearing Women.

“And when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint Him. And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulcher at the rising of the sun. And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulcher?” (Mk. 16:1-3).

Brothers and sisters! Can you imagine the state of mind these Myrrhbearing women were in? For those who lived through Soviet times in Russia and through the persecution of the Church, it is so understandable. In some churches, as in the outskirts of Kiev, this service (the Burial of the Savior) was performed at night. People made their way to such a church through dark streets. Anything could happen, you had to be careful of everything. Neighbors might hear that you went somewhere at night; and you could be stopped on the street. And the service itself in church and the carrying of the Shroud around the church could be interrupted by the authorities. One did not know if tomorrow, on Holy Saturday, this already semi-Easter Liturgy would be performed, because the priest might be arrested.

The Myrrbearers were in such a state of mind. They themselves were in danger of being arrested at any moment. Even in their homes they locked the doors from inside; they were afraid of any knock, any little sound. Two days before, Peter had denied that he too was with Jesus,

meaning that he was one of His disciples. And before whom? Before a servant girl, and only because she might report him.

Such was the situation. Their Teacher had been condemned and sentenced to the most terrible death, had been executed. And now it was their turn: as the disciples of the executed Teacher they were outside the law. More than that — they were probably being sought already. The most sensible thing would have been to flee somewhere, to hide. But instead of that, they decided to go while it was still night to the sepulcher which was not far from the place of execution. They knew well that the entrance to the sepulcher was blocked by a stone, which as the Gospel says, was “very great” (Mk. 16:4), that it bore a seal, that Roman guards were guarding the tomb, and that these guards were armed and especially vigilant because they had been warned that the disciples might steal His body.

Actually, in terms of reason, what these weak women wanted to do was not only impossible, but was just a mad risk. And yet they went anyway. How? Why? What powerful force was drawing them? This force was the Word of God expressed in the Law of Moses. And fulfilling what was for them a holy law, they bought perfumes and went to anoint Him. This required their conscience. And this strength of faith in the Word of God, strength of love toward their tortured Teacher, and strength of hope that God would help — proved to be stronger than fear, stronger than reason, stronger than everything else.

And what happened? When they arrived, the guards had run away in fear. And when they entered the tomb, they saw a youth sitting on the right side, clad in white clothes; and they were terrified. But he said: “Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified; He is risen; He is not here: behold the place where they laid Him” (Mk. 16:6).

Doesn't the same thing happen in our life? The Myrrhbearers, fulfilling the Old Testament Law, the Law of Moses, bought perfumes and went to anoint His body, the body of Christ. And we, fulfilling the Law of the New Testament, the Law of Christ, must also acquire spiritual perfumes — His commandments: humility, meekness, peace loving — and we must anoint His body with spiritual oil (that is, with love and mercy). And His Body is the Church of Christ. This is all our brothers and sisters in Christ; and more — this is even our enemies. How often in doing this, we subject ourselves to discomfort, losses, mockery, and sometimes even dangers. And what insurmountable obstacles are raised by our cold mind, our egotism! Not infrequently we yield, we retreat, we are afraid to express ourselves loudly and openly as His disciples.

But if we throw off this shameful fear and only begin to fulfill His teaching, only begin to follow in His footsteps, the same will happen to us that happened to the Myrrhbearers: the obstacles will disperse of themselves, will fall away, like the stone from the door of the tomb. All those who would disturb us will run away; we will not even find them. Before us will be one thing — the illuminated sepulcher of Christ. And there will be such a clearness that all doubts will vanish. We will know what to do, how to act; and that which seemed impossible will become possible.

Let us from this day imitate the Myrrhbearers and not fear to fulfill the will of Christ, not fear to be His disciples. Christ always conquered, always conquers, and always will conquer.

Fourth Sunday of Easter: the Paralytic.

Today's Gospel reading confirms us more and more strongly in the divinity of our Risen Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The Gospels for the last two Sundays told us about the appearances of the Risen One. They were as if filled with the light of Christ's Resurrection: the wonderful appearances to the

disciples, to Thomas, to the myrrhbearers. But today's Gospel starts with a dismal, horrible picture: there is no brightness, no light. At the Sheep Gate there was a pool which had five porches. "In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered.... For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had. And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years" (Jn. 5:2-5).

Just picture this: thirty-eight years in such a terrible condition, in pain and suffering, without a doctor, without care, without medicine, and maybe even often without food. And this unfortunate man bore all this because he wanted to be well. He tried to enter the water after it was troubled, but he had no one to help him, was late, and did not receive healing. And so passed thirty-eight years. Why this is a human lifetime!

Suddenly everything changed. Jesus came up to him and said: "Rise, take up thy bed and walk..." and he walked (Jn. 5:8,9).

What happened? What took place? What happened is that the reason for his sickness was removed. Christ revealed this reason when He met this man in the temple and said to him: "Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee" (Jn. 5:14). Here is the reason — sin. Sin is the reason for all evil, for all our sufferings, for all our sicknesses. Yes, sin...sin alone. And Christ is the only one who can destroy it, who can forgive. But this is under one condition: "Sin no more."

We have lived through the Passion days, we have lived through the very death of Christ, the death of the Lamb of God, Who takes upon Himself the sin of the world. This means our sin, too. He, the Only Sinless One, has become the sacrifice for us before our Heavenly Father. And now we are walking in the Easter joy of the Risen Christ. And so week after week. But still we stumble, fall, sin. But let us not despond; let us turn to Him.

The pool at the Sheep Gate was only a shadow of what Christ performed and is performing. He alone is the source of healing and forgiveness. He alone, as God, can forgive sins. Let us turn to Him, and He will say to us the same words He said to the paralytic: "Rise, take up thy bed and walk."

And we will rise and walk again in the light of His Resurrection. But let us remember His words to the paralytic, "Sin no more!" And let us not sin, because Christ is Risen!

Fifth Sunday: the Samaritan Woman.

"Jesus therefore, being wearied with His journey, sat thus on the well: and it was about the sixth hour. There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink" (Jn. 4:6-7). The Samaritan woman became filled with confusion and doubt of a purely worldly nature: How could He, a Jew, ask to drink from her, a Samaritan? The Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans. And even more, He said that if she knew Who He was, then she herself would ask drink from Him, and He would give her Living Water. How could He give her something to drink? Why, He didn't even have anything to draw water with, and the well was deep.

In worldly terms this was impossible. And what kind of "Living Water" was this? Christ was speaking about heavenly, spiritual things; but she understood in earthly, worldly terms. And she said to Christ: "Sir, Thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast Thou that living water? ...Jesus answered and said unto her: Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst;

but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life”(Jn. 4:11,13-14).

Still more confusing. But one thing was clear. He was offering a completely unusual kind of water. He who drank of it would never thirst. What a convenience. She would never have to come to this well and bend down to draw water. What a work and time saver. Although this offer seemed incredible, it was just too tempting and profitable to pass up; it paid to try it at least. “Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw” (Jn. 4:15), said the Samaritan woman in absolute frankness, explaining the practical point of view she had in mind. And now she stood, in full anticipation of a material, worldly gift. And Christ, now using her attention, suddenly changed the topic of conversation: “Go, call thy husband and come hither. The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus said unto her, Thou hast well said, I have no husband, for thou hast had five husbands: and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly” (Jn. 4:16-18).

Terror and joy seized the Samaritan woman. This was the secret of her life, which tormented her sick conscience. How much she wanted to free herself from these pangs of Conscience, to repent. But until this time no one could help her. But now, before her stood the One Who knew the secret of her heart. This was an unusual man. He could save her, teach her to repent, to pray. But where to pray? The woman said to Him: “Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet. Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me...the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth” (Jn. 4:19-21, 23-24). The heart of the Samaritan woman accepted this Divine revelation with trembling, but still she was living by what she knew in worldly terms: “I know [she said] that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things. Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am He”(Jn. 4:25-26). This was all. All earthly understandings were overturned. She became a new person. She believed.

Is it not the same with us, brothers and sisters? So often we ask God for earthly goods which to us seem so necessary, and God does not give them to us. Yet our prayer is never in vain. So it was with the Samaritan woman. She asked Christ for water. And He gave her water, but not the one she was asking for, but another one — His water, which became a “well of water springing up into everlasting life.” He gave her Eternal Life. But in order to receive this water of Christ, she had to repent.

Let us do the same. Then He will reveal Himself to us and say, “I that speak unto thee am He/” And we will have such joy that we will not be able to contain it within ourselves. No. Without noticing it ourselves, we will start to preach Christ. And not in words only, but in our whole life. And those around us will say: “Now we believe, not because of thy saying,” but seeing thy life which thou hast dedicated to Him, we “know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world!” (Jn. 4:42).

Sixth Sunday: the Blind Man.

Last Sunday, the Sunday of the Samaritan woman, the Holy Church told us how Christ raises a person from an earthly, carnal state of mind to the state in which a human being thirsts to worship God and pray to Him. You see, the Samaritan woman came to the well for physical water which satisfies only earthly thirst. But when Christ revealed her sins to her, and she ran to

Him in repentance, then in her awakened spiritual thirst, the thirst for Living Water springing up into everlasting life, the thirst for communion with God, her first question was about prayer: where one should worship God, how to pray. Now today's Gospel gives us a model for prayer.

“As Jesus passed by, He saw a man which was blind from his birth” (Jn. 9:1). Being blind from birth he had never seen anyone. He could not imagine to himself the form of a man. He had never even seen Christ. He only knew that Christ was passing close by, that He was a miracle-worker and could give him sight. And he began to cry out, to call to Christ: “Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me!” (Mk. 10:47; Lk. 18:38). The people tried to quiet him; he was interfering with their listening to Christ's preaching, he was disturbing the peace. Christ was walking, surrounded by His disciples, and they asked: “Master, who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.... When He had thus spoken, He spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay. And said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (Jn. 9:2-3, 6-8).

Let us imagine to ourselves the mental state of this blind from birth. He cried out, called. They pushed him, maybe even forced him to be silent, but he still cried out, begged. Speaking in our terms, he was praying. Finally, that Miracle-Worker Who was invisible to him approached. But He did not perform an immediate miracle. On the contrary. He did something which according to human understanding might appear humiliating, unpleasant. He spat and made clay from the saliva and earth, and smeared the eyes of the blind man. But this wasn't enough; He sent him with this clay on his eyes to go wash in the pool of Siloam (which means “sent”)- But the blind man didn't object, he went feeling his way, stumbling, exposed to the mockery of the passersby. Finally he reached the pool and washed. And here, fulfilling all this, enduring all this, he finally recovered his sight and returned seeing.

This is a model of prayer for you and me. After all, we too are spiritually blind and cannot see the Lord. But we know that He exists. Let us call to Him, cry out to Him, begging for help. And let us not despond if this help is not immediately given to us. Maybe we still have to go a long way, not an easy way, like the way for the blind man to the pool of Siloam. On this path we might meet unpleasant things, humiliations, like the clay for the blind man. Let us endure everything. Let us be obedient. Let us do what He orders us to do; let us go the way He showed us, like the blind man's way to the pool of Siloam. And here, when we have fulfilled all this, then the Lord will answer our prayer, and if it pleases Him, will fulfill it. And the same will happen to us that happened to the blind man. When, through the circumstances of our life, the Lord asks us, “Dost Thou believe on the Son of God?” (Jn. 9:35), we will answer: We believe Lord! and we will worship Him.

Only let us avoid all images during the time of prayer. We must not imagine anything to ourselves; but like the blind man, let us just know that the Lord is near and that He can do anything. And if things seem to turn out opposite to our prayers, let us not despond. But let us hope, hope against hope. And He will do what is beneficial for us. Let us keep the state of mind of the blind man — this is the best form of prayer.

Ascension of the Lord.

“While He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy”...with great joy ... “and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God” (Lk. 24:51-3).

If, during the course of six weeks, the Holy Church has been teaching us to preserve this peace which Christ granted on the first day of His Resurrection, saying: “Peace be unto you” (Jn. 20:19), then now this feeling of peace should fill our hearts. You see, this feeling of peace appears in all of us as an expectation of joy. People search for some kind of rest, some kind of comfort. For this they travel from place to place in order to find peace. And yet this peace is within them, only in an unrevealed state. Peace is that gift which the Lord gave to us, that peace which keeps a person in a kind of unearthly state of joy. This is what the Holy Church has been teaching us during the six weeks of Easter: to be close to Christ, to preserve this peace, protect ourselves from those things which, entering our heart, might disturb this peace.

You see, our heart is the place in which peace abides.

And this peace abides in the heart as long as nothing burning approaches the heart. But as soon as something Burning (some kind of passion) approaches the heart — then at once peace leaves and a storm begins. This storm thrashes all our hearts. This storm is the element of the enemy of the human race, troubling all of humanity. May this storm pass by those who are in the shelters of Christ.

And what are these shelters of Christ? these refuges for human souls from the storms of life? This is what they are. On the evening of the first day of His Resurrection, when the doors of the house where His disciples were gathered were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them: “Peace be unto you!” This is His first gift, as it were, the first shelter, which through His disciples He gave to all of us Christians.

“And when He had so said, He showed unto them His hands [and feet] and His side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord. Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you. And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Spirit: Whose so ever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven; and whose so ever sins ye retain, they are retained” (Jn. 20:20-23). Here is the second gift, the second shelter. And now, when Christ ascends, He leaves us the Grace of the Holy Spirit which He promised on the very first day of His Resurrection. He leaves two gifts for us. The first gift is the peace which all people search for — true happiness. And the second gift, as if protecting and preserving this peace, is the Sacrament of Repentance, the gift of the Holy Spirit given to His disciples — the gift of the remission of sins.

And here today, while parting from the disciples and ascending into heaven, He blessed them. And what happened? There was a parting. Now parting always brings sadness, but they left in joy. Why? Well, because before them were revealed the ways of life, which were no longer self-reliant, but were with the Grace of God. They knew that they too would go into eternity to Christ. And while living in this earthly life, which is so bound up with the storms of life, the path they were going would be quiet and peaceful for them, because the Grace of the Holy Spirit is breathed into the priesthood, forgiving and absolving.

And what does the Apostle say in this regard? Here is what he says: “For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, Who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory. Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness.. .covetousness, which is idolatry” (Col. 3:3-5). In other words, you proceed and around you pass all these waves: impurity, anger, fury, slander. Your heart is tossed from one side to the other. Yet you are joyful. Around you is the Hand of the Lord, the Grace of the Holy Spirit which guides and comforts you, giving light, freeing you from darkness and anguish.

This is joy. The joy is that we are liberated. We have that inner joy which only a Christian can have, who has the Hand of God, the hand of Grace, absolving us of our sins. And we know that finding ourselves on this path of Grace, we go enlightened into Eternal Existence.

Seventh Sunday: the Holy Fathers.

Today, we Orthodox Christians are still on the Mount of Olives. The after-feast of the Ascension is going on; but these are already the last days. In another two or three days we will have to descend the Mount of Olives. And today, Sunday, a question arises for us Orthodox Christians: to where?

As if in answer to this question, the Holy Church at the same time opens the doors for us and says: The Tree of Life of Paradise is already restored — the Eucharist, the Body and Blood of Christ. For each of us the doors are open: come and see, take and receive. Here is that great dogma which was revealed by the Lord in the restoration of that great thing which was lost by Adam — the Tree of Life. “Whoso eateth My Flesh, and drinketh My Blood hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day” (Jn. 6:54). He who eats the Flesh and drinks the Blood of Christ has life eternal, but...

Here the Holy Church defines this “but” for us. What is this “but”? The doors are open. The Eucharist is prepared. The Holy Church is prepared to receive each of us in the Divine Liturgy. But for this, it is necessary for us to be prepared. What does this “preparation” consist of? This day, the day we call the Sunday of the Holy Fathers, gives us the answer. Here begins the establishment of rules which a Christian must follow in order to receive the New Testament Tree of Life — the Body and Blood of Christ — which will give life to man.

And how does one receive this great Sacrament? The Holy Church answers us with this day. She presents the First Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D., at which the Holy Fathers gathered in order to destroy the heresy which was created by Arius. What kind of heresy was it? Does it concern us? Not only does it concern us, brothers, but if we do not fulfill the testaments of the Church, and if we do not understand the disturbance made by Arius, we will not be Orthodox Christians.

What is this “but” of Arianism? The Apostle Paul, while walking around Athens, found a sacrificial altar to the unknown God. And while preaching in the Areopagus, as related in the Acts of the Apostles, he announced that this Unknown God is Christ. And the Athenians willingly accepted it; they began worshipping the true God in the same way the Apostle Paul preached to them. To worship God and recognize His greatness, this they could do. But live according to God, they did not want to do. They did not want to live the way the Gospel required. First of all, there was a disturbance in their family life — they practiced polygamy. In public life, they were having a terrible political battle — slavery. A human being was not a human being in relation to his Creator. Relations between people were terrible, based on slavery. And here this desire to live in a pagan way became so strong among the Athenians, that it started to speak up even in the Church of Christ. And Arius became the ideologist for it.

What did he say? When the Council gathered and began to expose Arius, he said: “You Fathers say, Christ is God-Man. His Divinity and His Manhood are unchangeable and indivisible; one is in the other, so that it is impossible to tell what is in what. There is no separation between God and Man. Therefore, you make the conclusion that a Christian must always and everywhere be a Christian — in his family life and in his social life — always and everywhere be a Christian.

“But I say,” said Arius, “that Christ is God and Man. His Divinity and His Manhood are divisible in Him. And this gives us the right also to separate our life: in regard to religion to be Christians, to worship Christ; but in our private and civic life to live the way we want, as we lived before, in a pagan way.”

To this the Holy Fathers said to Arius: “Then you, Anus, and your followers cannot be Christians. You do not understand the meaning of Christ’s coming down to earth. Christ was incarnate, not only to reveal to us the true teaching about God, but also to live according to God. He came on earth to fulfill the commandment of love for God and neighbor. And He requires fulfillment of this commandment from us. Those who do not fulfill this commandment will remain pagans and will receive the same thing that pagans receive/’

This is how the Holy Fathers answered Arius. And this is what the Holy Church says to us even now. Look around us and you will see in action all those horrors and sights about which the Holy Fathers spoke: modern-day wars with their bombs, forgotten old age, and the madness which is now going on among the young generation. Horrors!

In order to avoid these horrible things we have to be Orthodox Christians. And a Christian cannot be a Christian and a citizen. Rather, in citizenship he must be a Christian, which means always to be just a Christian. Only then will we be able to partake of Eternal Life with divine joy in Christ.

Holy Trinity Sunday or Pentecost.

Brothers and sisters! See how the Holy Church teaches our conscience. The flowers today represent our conscience. Because when all of nature was still dead, when the time of our yearly cycle was approaching, the Holy Church revealed to us a great mystery: the mystery of our redemption. She then opened before us the cave of Bethlehem and the Lord Who had just been born. And we were told through the reading from the Epistle to the Galatians that this cave is our entrance in to a new yearly cycle, that at the manger of Christ our soul is renewed, and that in this renewal of spirit we receive the spirit of adoption (sonship), which unites us into the one family of Christ (Gal. 4:4-7).

And these are not just words. The Holy Church convinces us of this, comparing our spiritual life with what goes on in nature: the death of nature in winter, its revival in the beauty of spring and summer, and the yielding of fruit in fall. It is the same with the soul of a human being. After the sluggishness of spiritual slumber, a person receives the spirit of adoption in order to unite in one family and to receive what the Lord gives in His plan of salvation — His Body and Blood, the Mystery of the Tree of Life, which Adam lost in Paradise.

And as nature blooms, so blooms our life; if we would just make use of the Grace which the Lord gives us through His sufferings, which He endured for the sake of our redemption, in order to make our soul fruitful with good works, what the Lord called the Beatitudes (Mt. 5:3-12): Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are the meek, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, blessed are the merciful, blessed are the peacemakers. Blessed!

And this, our surrendering to the Lord is repeated on the eighth day after the Nativity of Christ, on the day when the Holy Church celebrates the Lord’s Circumcision. Then we too as if circumcise our own heart and confess: We are Christians; we form one family, whose Father is God.

After we have experienced all this and have given our promise, the Lord brings us to the manifestation of God (the Lord’s Baptism), to the moment when Christ shows us the way to per-

fection. Yet we did not fulfill all this. We proved to be unworthy. And instead of the revelation of God, we transformed our life into a manifestation of worldliness, because we were living in worldly interests, forgetting the main thing.

And here, coming to our help, the Holy Church gave us Great Lent for repentance, so that we would study our heart and turn again to the Golgotha of the Lord; so that we would come to the Cross of Christ, kiss His wounds, see again His sufferings, and thus approach the great day of Easter.

And on this day, a day of joy and Resurrection of the New Testamental Life, the Lord breathed and said: "Peace be unto you!" (Lk. 24:36). Yes, we received peace in our heart, but we have lost it again and again. Enmity, malice, any kind of impurity have forced it out of our heart; but mainly, the conviction that our life is on earth and in earthly things. The earth offers us earthly goods and we fight for them. But suddenly death comes, the body rots in the earth, and the spirit goes into eternity.

Then why all this fight for earthly goods? What for? -For nothing! It was all in vain. May we never be in such a state that would hide us from Christ, and Christ from us.

But the merciful Lord, seeing the state of our conscience, by way of teaching us, gives us these flowers as a pattern for real life. What beauty! What jewels! Such work could be done only by the Creator Himself.

And He says to us: Such work will I do on your heart as well! Now during Vespers, we will hear three great prayers (Three penitential prayers read during "Kneeling Vespers" which follow Divine Liturgy on Holy Trinity Sunday (Pentecost)). Let us pray that, where we could do nothing, the Grace of the Holy Spirit will accomplish that which will bring us to salvation.

Day of the Holy Spirit (Monday after Pentecost).

Have you noticed, brothers, that today's Gospel has in a way intervened in the order the Holy Church has been showing us? The whole time we have been reading the Gospel of St. John the Divine and his teaching on salvation: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (Jn. 1:1). And suddenly today among these Gospel readings enters the Gospel of Matthew (18:10-20). Here is what this Gospel says: "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven."

We are as if shown here what value each person has in the eyes of our Lord Jesus Christ and in the eyes of His Church. There is no such thing as a non-person; everyone is a person; and everyone has a guardian angel who beholds the face of the Heavenly Father. And we have no right to despise anyone, because through his guardian angel he is standing in awe before the Lord. "For the Son of Man is come to save that which was lost," the Gospel says further; because whoever he is, he belongs to Christ. Even if he were the greatest sinner, a man fallen beyond repair, as you see, the Gospel says it was just such a man that Christ came to save. "How think ye? if a man have a hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray?" Yes, the Holy Church gives us the daring to call, to beg, to pray and cry out that the soul of such a person might find mercy.

But mercy not only on earth. Here is a state of mind against which we so often have to fight, in others and even in ourselves. Christ came on earth, but He did not come with the purpose of saving the earthly goals of humanity. Christ gave us the earth as a means; so that by this

means our heart will be disciplined and ready to receive the Lord and Eternal Life. God is the Almighty and the Provider, the Judge and the Rewarder — eternal, not temporary.

The Gospel continues: “And if so be that he find it [this lost sheep], verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth over it... So It is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.” This is how the Grace of God is revealed. “If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone.”

And further it says how we should confront him, how finally to bring this confrontation up to the Church; how carefully, how tenderly we should act and with what love.

And then: “Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven.” Here the Grace of the Holy Spirit, acting within us, is revealed in absolute clarity. This passage of the Gospel teaches us about today, about the joy which the Lord grants us through the Third Person of the Holy Trinity — God the Holy Spirit. And becoming tangible for us, He saves us from everything that tempts us, that leads us to destruction, because ‘Whatsoever ye shall loose ... shall be loosed.’ And he who “looses” is a sharer in the Apostles’ mystery, God’s shepherd who has received upon himself the Grace to bind and to loose.

See what today’s Gospel reveals to us. Why should we engage in discussions of how the understandings about God change in humanity? The only thing we need is the understanding of our salvation, the understanding of this Grace of God which looses us from sin and gives us Eternal Life with Christ — our Life.

4. Sundays after Pentecost.

Sunday of all the Saints.

Brothers and sisters! Last week the Holy Church placed flowers in our hands, as if saying to us: See how soulless nature is obedient to its Creator. Starting with the days of Christmas, the earth has been turning toward the sun, which began to bestow upon the earth its life-giving warmth. And nature does not prove itself ungrateful toward its Creator. In answer to His caress, she has produced this glorious beauty, these flowers, and further on, will produce fruits. And what about us? In answer to the spiritual warmth of God’s Grace, so abundantly poured out on us, do we bring to our Creator spiritual beauty, flowers, fruits of virtues? After all, He became Man for our sake, died for us, rose for us, ascended into Heaven in order to send down to us His Holy Spirit. And what about us? Is not this beauty of nature around us a reproach to our conscience? Let us answer honestly. Yes, it is. But more than this, we want to justify our negligence, our ingratitude. The commandments of Christ are wonderful, we say; and if people would begin to fulfill them, then the whole earth would be transformed into a wonderful divine garden. But is this possible for weak human strength? And here this Sunday, the Sunday of All the Saints, answers this question loudly so that the whole world hears: Yes, it is possible.

All the saints being remembered today followed the example of Christ. And all of them in their time, in their circumstances of life, fulfilled God’s commandment of love of God and neighbor. Occasionally their times were difficult, maybe more difficult than ours; and not infrequently their circumstances in life were more dangerous in spiritual terms, and often in worldly terms were worse than ours. But they still proceeded, struggled, and reached the abodes on high where they now triumph.

Just look at the murals of our church and you will see them: martyrs, confessors, ascetics, fools for Christ, educated people, simple people, rich, poor, bishops, monastics, lay people. This is the Heavenly Church. She is all-embracing, and she is filled up by the earthly, Militant Church. There is room for each of us there. This is what today's Apostle reading tells us: "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb.12:1-2). Just think: all of these saints were live people like us. And like us, all of them were different people; and their paths were different. But all of them, absolutely all, had three qualities which they all possessed identically. These qualities are pointed out to us in today's Gospel. They are obligatory for everyone, and this means for us, too; we cannot escape them. Here they are: 'Whosoever therefore shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father, which is in heaven' (Mt. 10:32). This is the first thing. Don't you feel, brothers, how important this is for us modern-day people? Why, the whole world around us as if asks us: "Are you Christian or one of ours?" We cannot leave this question unanswered. In our speech, our actions, our thoughts and feelings (for our feelings are somehow passed on to the others), we must answer loud and firm: "Yes, I am a Christian!"

Here is the second: "He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me, is not worthy of Me" (Mt. 10:37). Here and now, the Lord demands from you and me this all-consuming love — to love Him more than everyone and everything. And only through this love for Him will we really be able to love our relatives, strangers, and even our enemies.

Finally the third: "And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after Me, is not worthy of Me" (Mt.10:38). This instance does not even require explanation. Each of us has his own sorrows and difficulties in life; they are personal for each of us. It is difficult, burdensome, but such is our life; and this means, such is the Will of God for us.

Let us thank the Lord even for this cross! Without it we cannot be saved. And the Lord wants all of us to be saved, and to be united into one Triumph with all the Saints, whom we are glorifying today.

Sunday of all Saints of Russia.

Brothers and sisters, today the Holy Church opens before us our native heaven — all the Saints who shone in Russia. They shine as bright stars before us. And the first among them is St. Vladimir. He was a gifted military leader, statesman, a man of penetrating mind and strong will. The political situation among the Russian Slavs required just such a man. Many Slavic tribes were living at that time on the shores of the Dnieper River, and all of them had already been influenced by the Christian message — the dawn of a new life was approaching. Only our forefathers remained pagans. But by that time they too had lost faith in the pagan gods and actually had no religion at all. And the thirst for the One, True, Almighty God more and more strongly took possession of their souls. Vladimir himself was experiencing the same thing: his great soul was tired of the lie and, as a bird from its cage, was straining towards Truth, towards Light.

The same was required in the political situation as well; enlightenment and culture were in Christianity. Paganism was dying out and Christianity was becoming the new, all-powerful movement in contemporary culture and life. The acceptance of Christianity became a necessity,

something which could not be put off if the Russian nation wanted to keep in step with other nations.

Vladimir began to act: he sent out his messengers to various countries to find out which faith was the best one. When they returned, they testified that the Orthodox religion of the Greeks was the best, the most full, and was truly the Apostolic Church. Vladimir made his decision. But he was too proud to go bowing to the Greeks and ask for baptism and guidance. He decided, as he always did in his life, to use the power of the sword, to conquer Christianity by force. He went to war with the Greeks, defeated them, and required of them two things: one was the Christian faith and baptism, and the second was the hand of the Greek Princess Anne, famous for her beauty and virtuous life. The Greeks, having no choice, agreed to both.

Vladimir was in the height of his glory. He had achieved everything he wanted, everything a man could achieve: the Christian religion, the beautiful Anne, the triumph of victory and with it incalculable riches, the glory of a victor and statesman, and the power of a dictator. Yes, it seemed he had everything.

The preparation for Holy Baptism was still going on, which to him might have seemed just a religious formality. Strictly speaking, he already had everything and was master of everything. But suddenly something terrible happened — he went blind. At that time there was no medical science. To go blind meant to lose sight for one's entire life. And so, all at once everything was finished, everything came to an abrupt end. He could never again be a military leader, use his sword, lead his army into battle. Without sight not only was he unable to rule his country, but he could not even take care of himself: he had to be led around and fed. By now the forthcoming marriage had no meaning. Vladimir suddenly became completely alone. This loneliness was terrible for him. And only the Greek missionaries did not forget him. On the contrary, they surrounded him now and revealed to him the depths of Christianity, life of the spirit, life of the heart. And with blind eyes he now saw a completely new life, hitherto unknown to him.

And suddenly, as with this blindness, so will come death. Everything will pass away, will die, and his spirit alone will remain, which has grown attached to this earthly existence, to worldly interests; and it will suffer and languish in this new unearthly, already eternal life.

His state advisors were silent, his sword lay useless and rusted, and the spirit within him was in turmoil, in the pangs of birth upon entering a new life — an eternal, spiritual life. So he approached baptism as a humble, helpless man, who had only one hope, one new eternal goal — communion with God. And here, in the baptismal font a miracle happened: he recovered his sight. He saw again the light of God, this wonderful world, the Dnieper River, fields, forests. Everything was as before. But by now he was a different person; he had already experienced a new life. As a blind man he saw a different light: "Glad light of the holy glory of the immortal, heavenly, holy and blessed Father, Jesus Christ" (Beginning of the vesper song to the Son of God). He entered the font as a pagan: proud, lustful, egotistical, pleasure-loving; and he came out as a humble slave of Jesus Christ, as Vladimir the Saint.

At his call the people of Kiev gathered on the shores of the Dnieper to be baptized. Vladimir began to speak: he called his nation to holiness, to godliness. He urged them all to break off at last from paganism, from the pagan way of life, and to start a new way of life, a Christian way, where everything pertaining to God would be kept in honor — an Orthodox way of life. He said that real life was only in Christ, and this temporary life was just a means, a preparation for true, eternal life.

From this moment Russia became holy and began to bear fruits of holiness. One after another, Russian saints began appearing, until they filled up this entire heaven of the Saints who

shone in Russia, who as bright stars shine before us now and call us to themselves. Here is Prince Boris, who was killed while Matins was being performed in his cell; and Prince Gleb, who also was killed during prayer; and Prince Isyaslav, who before dawn went in his carriage to Lavra to get advice and blessing on his state matters from the startsi of Pechersk” (Startsi; starets (sing.) — monks distinguished by their great piety, long experience of spiritual life, and gift for guiding other souls. Pechersk — monastery located in caves on the shore of the Dnieper River on the outskirts of Kiev). And only then, after standing through the early Liturgy, would he go to his state meeting and make decisions. So Holy Russia grew and became stronger.

Times have now changed, but the Church is unchangeable and immutable. And in our time, even in a foreign land, we can still draw from her the same Orthodox way of life. Yes, our life is strained, our jobs are intense, our tempo is mad. And maybe we cannot fulfill everything physically, as our forefathers did. But psychologically we can and we should participate in the flow of Church life. Look attentively around: even some non-Orthodox are coming and accepting our faith and its way of life. By this are they not reproaching our lukewarmness?

May this Sunday of the Saints who shone in Russia serve as the beginning of our new life, which will bring us to Eternal Life!

Third Sunday after Pentecost.

“Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Mt.6:33).

Everything necessary for our earthly existence will be added: food, drink, clothing. But not just added; there is one condition: “Seek ye first the Kingdom of God.”

What does “seek” mean? It means that the Lord requires from us actions, an effort of our will. Remember the Gospel readings for the last two weeks (“The Week of All the Saints” and “The Week of All Saints Who Shone in Russia”) and also what was said in today’s Gospel. These are like steps by which all the saints ascended to the heavenly dwellings, and by which we too must all ascend. Indeed, there is no other way. The way to the Lord is the same for everyone. And it is this: Confess Christ before people, love Him more than everyone and everything else, and take up our cross and follow Him, in the same way the Apostles followed Him, leaving everything behind: their families, nets and boats. And not care about what we eat or drink or about what to wear, because our Heavenly Father knows that we need all these things. The Gospel gives us wonderful examples: “Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap ... yet your Heavenly Father feedeth them.... And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these” (Mt. 6:26, 28-29).

This is what it means to seek the Kingdom of God. But what is the center of such seeking? What is required of us for this? What is the beginning? Here it is: “The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be clean (The Russian text reads “clean” or “pure,” instead of “single” or “sound,” which appear in the English versions), thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness” (Mt. 6:22-23).

Which eye is meant here? This eye is our conscience, and the body is our entire being. This means that if our conscience is clean, then our entire being will be full of light. But for our conscience to be clean, an effort on our part is needed. We must keep vigilant watch over our thoughts and every movement of our heart. It is for this purpose that we are given this inner eye.

May the Lord help us to strain all our forces to keep it clean. And then all the commandments of God will become joyous and possible for us, because we will befall of light.

“O Christ, the true Light, Who enlightens every man who comes into the world, may the light of Thy Countenance be signed upon us, and may we behold in it the unapproachable Light!” (Prayer after the First Hour, at the end of the evening vesper service).

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost: the Roman Centurion.

“Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Mt. 6:33). This is what last Sunday’s Gospel left with us.

On the day of Pentecost the Lord sent down upon His Church the Holy Spirit. Just as all of nature which, after it had been warmed up by the sun, began to grow flowers, plants, and fruits — so the Holy Church, upon receiving the Holy Spirit, the Giver of Life, began to grow spiritual flowers — her wonderful Saints.

All the Gospel readings since the coming down of the Holy Spirit have been telling us what we must do to obtain the Kingdom of Heaven; what all the Saints did, how they sought and how they found “the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.” We were given the commandments of the Lord. But today we are not given commandments, or a teaching. No, but rather life itself, a living example. And as an example for us, the Gospel reading gives us a Roman centurion, a pagan. This is an example of the most profound humility. This example shows us how a master, out of love for his neighbor, becomes a slave. After all, according to his civic position, this Centurion was master not only over the hundred soldiers which he commanded, but also over all Jews, which meant even over Christ; because the Jews were enslaved by the Romans.

This Centurion had a servant. And this servant fell sick and was suffering terribly. And here the Centurion was told that among the Jews who were subject to him there was a remarkable man who had the supernatural power of healing. Now the Centurion was a pagan. He did not know Holy Scripture, he knew nothing about the Messianic expectations of the Jews. For him Christ was without doubt a great man, but nevertheless just a man, and subject to him besides. He could have sent for Him, summoned Him. But humility blots out all boundaries. His servant was in danger, and this man could help him.

The Centurion himself went to Christ. He went and asked: not for his wife, not for his son, not for his daughter, father or mother, but for a servant. And he asked a Jew, enslaved by Rome; a Roman citizen asked for mercy, as a slave would ask his master. And he said: “Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented” (Mt. 8:6). He said nothing more. In these words trembled all his sorrow. And he brought his sorrow to Christ. Now he stood humbly and with bowed head waited for an answer. “I will come and heal him” (Mt. 8:7), Christ quickly answered. How very simple. But look what happened here, to what incredible height the Centurion’s faith and humility rose. He stopped Christ: “Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof (Mt. 8:8). Listen... “I am not worthy.” Now this is repentance. This is the same as if he had said: I am a sinner and you are a righteous man. “But speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed” (Mt. 8:8). Only a word. Even the Lord was surprised at such faith. “I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel” (Mt. 8:10). And indeed the Centurion’s faith was so simple, so very humble. “I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me; and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth, and to another, Come, and he cometh” (Mt. 8:9). What do these words express? This is what: Thou art Lord over sickness and health, over life and death. Only say the word! One word!

And Christ said this word: “Go thy way, and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour” (Mt. 8:13).

What a reward for humility! This is what humility can do! May the Lord grant us this humility of the Centurion.

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost: the Two Demoniacs.

The Gospel reading for last Sunday taught us a lesson on the deep humility of the Roman Centurion, who came to ask Christ for the healing of his servant. But today's Gospel does not give us a lesson of what we should do, but rather shows us what we should avoid, what we should not do. This shows us the striking reality of the existence of the power of evil. In our time such a reality doesn't even require proof. Every day, every newspaper tells about a whole list of crimes which simply cannot be explained without recognizing that the person is possessed by an external, evil power.

Today's Gospel draws a terrible picture for us: two demoniacs came out from the tombs, "exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way" (Mt. 8:28). Christ permitted the demons to enter into a huge herd of swine. The possessed ones were healed, but the whole herd of swine jumped from the precipice into the sea. What a terrible force! A real, overt force of evil!

But here is the last verse of the Gospel: "And, behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus" (Mt. 8:34). And now you expect to find something gladdening: the whole town has united in order to meet the Lord. You want to think that it was faith that united them, that they, as once did the Samaritans, would ask the Lord to remain with them, would thank Him for His healing, for the salvation of two of their townspeople, and also for freeing them from the danger present when passing that way. And what happened? Yes, they asked the Lord, but not to stay with them, but rather to "depart out of their coasts!" (Mt. 8:34).

Here is the most terrible passage in this Gospel. First the demons were in two possessed men. Later, we saw them in an entire herd of swine. And then, a whole town - possessed. With what? With the passion for profit. According to Jewish law, raising pigs was unlawful, sinful. But it made money, and huge amounts of money. And here an entire herd perished. And the people seemed to be saying to the Lord: "You have only set foot on our land and have caused us such a terrible loss. What will happen next if you stay here any longer? You will ruin us completely! We see, we understand your greatness: even the devils are obedient to you! But what does that do for us? What do the two healed men matter to us? We don't need your miracles. We need thousands, millions of dollars. You are not for us. Go away, go away at once."

Brothers and sisters, let us examine our soul. Doesn't the same thing happen with us? Some kind of passion takes possession of us, but Christ becomes an obstacle. And in our soul, we whisper the same terrible words: "Go away from us." May the Lord keep us from this! May our words directed to Him always be: "Come to us and never leave us."

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost: the Paralytic.

The Gospel reading of last Sunday told us how the Gadarenes went out to meet Jesus and how they asked Him to "depart out of their coasts." And this happened because all of them were infected with one sin, the passion for profit, the love of money. This was an insatiable thirst for wealth, more and more of it. And wealth came to them through large herds of swine which were grazing in their pastures. But according to Jewish Law, they had no right to keep them. In this was their sin, and they lived in sin, to satisfy only this passion, this idol of getting rich. And this passion seemed to unite them all. See how the Gospel says: "And, behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus and...besought Him that He would depart out of their coasts" (Mt. 8:34).

Yet not all inhabitants of this town were bad people. Undoubtedly, among them were those who wanted to see Jesus, who wanted to listen to His teaching, and maybe were ready to believe in Him. Salvation was so close, so very close. But this idol, this passion for profit enslaved them; and instead of asking the Lord to remain in their town, they asked Him to go away. They were already deprived of their freedom of will; through sin they were enslaved, a spiritual paralysis possessed them. The Gospel continues, “And He entered into a ship, and passed over, and came into His own city. And, behold, they brought to Him a paralytic, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the paralytic; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee” (Mt. 9:1-2).

There is physical paralysis, but there is also spiritual paralysis. Being paralyzed physically we want to do something, but either our hand or our foot does not move. But being spiritually paralyzed even to think is difficult, and we don't want to do anything — we lose heart. There is a desire to fulfill a commandment of Christ, and yet we cannot; something is interfering, something is holding us back. And instead of Christ abiding in our heart — there is a storm, and Christ goes away.

What motivated the Gadarenes to ask Christ to leave their land? Sin — the passion for profit. And this sin brought them into spiritual paralysis, and they did not have enough spiritual fortitude to detain Christ with them.

So it happens to us. The only reason is sin. And sin is not only love of money. There is a whole variety of rays from this “black diamond.” This means laziness, pride, vain talking, lying, condemnation, gluttony, anger, irritability, cruelty, any kind of impurity, despondency and still more and more. And we all suffer from these sins: whoever has any of these, this is sin. And this is what brings us to spiritual weakness, to spiritual paralysis. Let us look within ourselves and let us honestly recognize that, like the Gadarenes, we all live in spiritual weakness, in spiritual paralysis.

But let us not despond. The Gospel today gives us great comfort. With what words does Christ heal the paralytic? “Thy sins be forgiven thee.” This means that in bodily paralysis, also, the reason is often sin. And in spiritual paralysis, sin is always the reason. All you have to do is find this sin, this passion which stands between us and Christ; take it to the Lord and say: “Lord, heal me!” Then the Lord will tell us as He did the paralytic: “Thy sins be forgiven thee.... Arise, take up thy bed and go unto thine house” (Mt. 9:5-6).

And the storm will calm down, will go away from the heart, and Christ will fill it with quiet joy. The weakness will disappear and a new energy will appear in us, a new life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Seventh Sunday: Healing the Blind and Dumb.

The first Sunday readings after Pentecost showed us the Commandments of God according to which all the saints of the universal Church and our Russian Church lived. These commandments were like steps into the Kingdom of Heaven. And the Kingdom of Heaven the Merciful God has prepared for all. This means that these steps are leading there; these commandments of God are a must for every one of us. So with such a purpose the Holy Church presented them to us.

But now for the last several weeks the Holy Church has begun to show us not what we should cultivate in ourselves, but things which we should avoid, against which we should fight. These readings told about the power of evil, about being possessed by it, about passions, sins,

slavery to sin, bodily paralysis which is the result of sin; and this pointed out to us our spiritual paralysis, which is always the result of sin.

In the same way, today's Gospel tells us: "When Jesus departed thence, two blind men followed Him.... As they went out, behold, they brought to him a dumb man possessed with a devil" (Mt. 9:27,32). And Christ healed all of them. Yes, there is physical blindness, but there is also spiritual blindness. This is our unbelief, our stoniness of heart. Such a state may be temporary, as a storm cloud rushes in and goes away, with God's help. This is a terrible feeling of being forsaken by God, a horrible loneliness. And there is another condition: this is when we can talk about anything, but not about spiritual things, Godly things. Or when before us a brother is suffering, is living through some terrible grief, and we don't have even one word of comfort. Or again, a state of mind when we cannot even pray. Are these not states of spiritual dumbness? And Christ alone can heal us, heal our blind and dumb soul. But how does it happen?

Well, in order to answer this question I would like to relate one example, one experience from my personal life. Here it is: I will tell just how this experience was inscribed on my heart. This was a very difficult period of my life. It seemed there was no way out. My church in the town of Romni was closed, I was exiled from Romni, my family was left to the mercy of fate. To be registered in any church in Kiev was impossible. I had to live from day to day, hiding out with friends, knowing that by doing this I could harm them. At church services I could only be present secretly, hiding somewhere in a corner of the altar. And not even in every church would they let in an unregistered priest. Before me there seemed to be impenetrable darkness. I was losing heart. I felt both blind and dumb, in a spiritual sense.

Then came a bright thought: go to Lavra, to the cave Church of St. Anthony, to the early Liturgy. I wanted to believe that maybe there at the relics of the saints the veil would fall from my eyes and I would be able to see the Providence of God for me. I stopped for the night in Lavra and stayed with a close friend of mine. At three in the morning the gong was struck. We dressed quickly and went out. It was absolutely dark. But from all sides stretched lines of little lights; these were monks with lanterns going to the service in the caves. Everything was quiet, reverent, mysterious. And the two of us proceeded. Now we started to go down into the cave. And as we descended I grew more and more oppressed. The Liturgy started. I saw how everyone was praying. And I.. I could not pray. Something terrible was happening to me; the ceiling of the cave pressed down on me. I was suffocating. And not so much physically, as spiritually. Anguish was simply tearing my chest apart. If I could have run away, I would have. But with an unbelievable effort of will I forced myself, at least outwardly, to remain at the service, which came over to me only automatically. I was both blind and dumb. Minutes seemed like hours. I felt that I was perishing, and as one who was dumb, without words. I cried out in my heart: "Lord have mercy!" not even understanding the meaning of these words. If the service had lasted for one more minute, I could not have stood it. But here was the end. I simply ran out onto the surface of the ground.

And then a miracle happened to me. The sun was high already, the grass, the leaves, the trees, covered with morning dew, seemed to be strewn with diamonds. In the distance I could see the blue Dnieper River, and this blue was broken up by the bright reflection of the rising sun. This reflection was like gold which had fallen from heaven; and beyond the Dnieper were fields, forests — the world of God! I breathed deeply. Before me was hope. God had taken the stone away from my heart. I had been blind, but suddenly I recovered my sight: all these earthly beauties were now just symbols for me — symbols of unearthly beauty and Eternal Life. I wanted to live for eternity, and I wanted to share this joy with those around me. The dumbness passed and I

began talking to people again who were all now near and dear to me. See how God heals our spiritual blindness and dumbness!

So let us go in His Way. Let us endure. Let us imitate the blind men. After all, they did not see Christ. And what is more, they had never seen the image of a human being; but they knew that Christ was there, nearby, and believed that He could heal them. This is the classic image of prayer. The Orthodox Faith never forms any images, but only knows that Christ is, and He is near and can do anything.

But let us be attentive, because He will ask us too: “Believe ye that I am able to do this?” (Mt. 10:28). Then let our answer to Him be: “Yes, Lord! We believe.”

Eighth Sunday: Feeding the Five Thousand.

“Give ye them to eat!” said Christ to His disciples. And He said this to them as if answering their advice: “This is a desert place, and the time is now past; send the multitude away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves victuals.” But Christ insisted, “Give ye them to eat!” Then the disciples said to Him, “[Teacher], we have here but five loaves, and two fishes” (Mt. 14:15-17).

Let us put ourselves in their position: a tremendous crowd — the men alone were about five thousand, not counting women and children. With the approach of darkness, the places where bread was sold would be closed. So this crowd of many thousands faced a hungry night in the wilderness. With them were little children. While Christ spoke, all physical needs were silent; but now He fell silent and the people were already beginning to feel hungry. What would happen next? People would become weak, children would cry from hunger, and no one would be able to fall asleep. The result would be despondency, disillusionment, and maybe even murmuring. We believed Thee; we came in search of the Kingdom of God and its Truth. That’s why we came to Thee here. Thou didst promise that everything else would be added to us. But here Thy promise has not been fulfilled. We don’t even have the food necessary for our children; and night is approaching, a dark southern night.

Yes, it’s possible to understand the attitude of the disciples. Even their love for their Teacher may have prompted them to warn Him. And He, when they mentioned the inadequacy of their food supply — five loaves of bread and two fish — He commanded the people to sit down on the grass in groups, and taking the five loaves and the two fish, looked upon heaven, blessed and broke the loaves, gave them to His disciples, and His disciples to the people. And they all ate and were filled and gathered the remaining pieces into twelve full baskets (Mt. 14:18-20). A great, unprecedented miracle. And this miracle is historic!

But the power hidden in these five words of Christ, “Give ye them to eat!” many times exceeds both the physical filling of the crowd of many thousands and the two thousand years which separate us from that time.

“Give ye them to eat!” Did this mean physical food only? No. It meant everything that the God-Man has brought to earth: salvation of the human race, spiritual food, all the sacraments which were established by the Lord, the entire Church of Christ, Catholic and Apostolic. But the Apostles were mortal and the Church is eternal. The Apostles would need successors: deacons, priests, bishops. In such a way the Church will exist eternally and feed believers. She will give them that which no one and nothing on earth can give. With the words: “Give ye them to eat!” Christ makes His Church Apostolic. And at that moment, when Christ commanded the people to sit down on the grass in groups — this is the great moment of the organization of the Church.

Remember Holy Russia. It consisted of separate groups — parishes — and they all merged into one great whole — the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.

In this way the Church of Christ now exists and will exist until the end of the ages.

Let us always strive for Her. And if for some reason we cannot always abide in Her physically, then let us always live psychologically within the Church cycle. And we will find food which leads us into Eternal Life. Only in the Church do we find the greatest Sacrament of Christ, the Sacrament of His Body and Blood which contains Life Eternal.

Ninth Sunday: the Storm.

Last Sunday's Gospel reading told us of a great miracle: the feeding of an enormous crowd of many thousands with five loaves and two fish. The disciples of Christ themselves, through whose hands this miracle was performed, were dumbfounded. And as the Gospel says, Christ at once compelled them to enter a boat and go before Him to the other shore while He dismissed the crowd. "And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, He was there alone. But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea" (Mt. 14:22-25).

A wonderful image of the Church of Christ is drawn for us here. The boat, as it were, represents the Church: its sides are the rules and canons of the Church; the disciples are all of us Christians; and the stormy sea is the sea of our life. And now too Christ has ascended a mountain, which means He is sitting at the right hand of the Father. He sees our Church boat and directs it. The Gospel says that the disciples went to the other side, not of their own will, but "straightway Jesus constrained His disciples to get into a ship and go before Him unto the other side" (Mt. 14: 22). This means they were doing it out of obedience to Christ. And when they found themselves in danger, He walked to them on the water.

"And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying... It is I; be not afraid. And Peter answered Him and said, Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water. And He said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus" (Mt. 14:26-29).

Notice this moment: Christ did not call Peter, but only permitted Peter. Here obedience changed to boldness, this came from Peter himself. He felt such a surge of faith, such elation, that everything seemed possible to him. But here something happened. A wave, a high wave for a second hid Christ from Peter. He found himself alone. At once cold reason set to work. It was as if he came to himself and thought, what was he doing? Foolishness. Reason took from him the lightness of faith in which he walked, and he started to drown. A desperate cry rang out: "Lord, save me." And immediately Christ stretched forth His hand to him (Mt. 14:30-31).

What happened to Peter? Well, what happened to him can happen to each of us: he became frightened, his faith was shaken. And this happened because he stepped over the side of the boat. What a profound lesson is hidden for us here: in Christian living there should be evenness, there should be quiet. And for this to be so, we must never step over the side of the Church boat. We must keep the statutes of the Church, must live the life of the Church. And then, even if we find ourselves amid the stormy sea of life, we will be able to cry out, "Lord, save me." And He, the Merciful One, will stretch out His saving hand to us, too, as He did to Peter, and we will find ourselves in the boat of the Church, and a great calm will come.

Tenth Sunday: Healing the Possessed Youth.

As last Sunday's Gospel told us about a storm on the Tiberian Sea, in the same way today's Gospel also tells us about a storm, only about a storm which is even more terrible. Back then, there were waves on the sea, but here.. .listen to what the father of the youth said to Christ: "Lord, have mercy on my son: for he is lunatic, and sore vexed: for of times he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water" (Mt. 17:15). There, Peter got out of the boat in which the other Apostles were sailing. Notice that Christ did not send him as He sent all the disciples across the sea. But Peter himself, filled with the rapture of faith at seeing Christ walking upon the waves, asked for permission to do the same. And what happened? He doubted and started to drown. And Christ said to him, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" (Mt. 14:31).

And what about today's Gospel? In today's Gospel, the father of the possessed son brought him first to the disciples of Christ. The power to cast out devils and to heal sicknesses had been given to them; this seemed to go along with their obedience. And yet they could not heal him. And when the father in deep grief related this to the Lord, Christ in anger exclaimed: "O faithless and perverse generation.. .how long shall I suffer you? bring him hither to me. And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him.... Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could we not cast him out? And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, if ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. However this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting" (Mt. 17:17-21).

This is what faith means! But where do we find this faith? Only in the Church. The Apostles, sailing in the boat in obedience to Christ, despite the storm, did not doubt. Their boat had sides which protected them from the pressure of the waves; it had a bottom which separated them from the water; it had a rudder which guided it. In the same way the ship of the Church has everything which is needed to sail over the sea of life, through its storms, to the other shore of Eternal Life. As in the boat the bottom is its foundation, so in the ship of the Church, the foundation is the teaching of Christ which points out the way to life through the Beatitudes (Mt. 5:3-11). Poverty of spirit, weeping for sins (that is, repentance), meekness, hunger and thirst for righteousness, mercifulness, purity of heart, peacemaking, suffering for the truth — this is the foundation of the Church ship. And its sides are the Apostolic rules. This is everything which Christ has passed on to His Apostles, which for the most part is again based on Holy Scripture, and partially is kept in the treasury of Church Tradition.

And what treasure is being carried by the ship of the Church? These are the seven Sacraments of the Church which all have their foundation in Holy Scripture. The Book of the Acts of the Apostles relates to us about the ordination of priests and deacons from which comes our Sacrament of the Priesthood (Acts 6:3, 5-7). In His first appearance after the Resurrection, Christ breathed on the Apostles and said, "Receive ye the Holy Spirit: whose so ever sins ye remit, they are remitted" (Jn.20: 22-23). Here is the foundation of the Sacrament of Confession. The words of Christ at the Last Supper, "Do this in remembrance of Me" (Lk. 22:19); and all the chapters from John where it speaks about the Bread of Life — this is the establishment of the Sacrament of Communion (Jn. 6:32-58). The teaching of the Apostle Paul about the relationship between husband and wife speaks of the holiness of the Sacrament of Marriage (I Cor. 7:2-17; Eph. 5:22-33). In the Epistle of James instructions are given about the anointing of the sick one with oil and about the prayer of faith for him (James 5:14-15). And so with all the sacraments. And still more: all Church establishments come from the Lord Himself. Here in today's Gospel it tells about the

necessity of fasting and prayer. And this is Christ Who says it to His disciples. In the Orthodox Church there is nothing invented by man or added; but neither is there anything subtracted, abbreviated from the teaching of Christ and His Apostles.

“I believe in one, holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. “* Another Catholic and Apostolic Church does not exist on earth.

So let us treasure our Church-ship. Let us never abandon it. It has everything for us. It also has this wonderful faith which even moves mountains, and with such faith nothing will be impossible. It will lead us through the storms of life and will bring us to the shore of Life Eternal.

Eleventh Sunday: Forgiveness of Debts.

A terrible picture is drawn for us by this Sunday’s Gospel. It begins with the folio wing words: “Therefore the Kingdom of Heaven is likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants” (Mt. 18:23). Among those servants was one who was indebted to the lord for a great amount. This amount was so great that in spite of his desire, he could never repay it. There was only one way out: the lord could sell him, his wife, his children, and everything he had. “The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt” (Mt. 18:26-27). Listen, he did not postpone payment of the debt, he did not reduce the amount, but he forgave everything, completely, forever. It was as if nothing had happened, everything remained as before. A new, quiet life as before began. And even better: now this servant knew his master. He saw in him a loving father, and to work for such a father is bliss.

Suddenly something terrible happened: that servant walked out and met one of his fellow servants who owed him an utterly insignificant amount; and grabbing him, started to choke him, saying, Give back everything you owe me. Learning of this, his lord was angry and gave him over to the torturers until he had paid the whole debt.

And so it is with us. We have received everything from the Lord but have proved to be unpaid debtors. And we have asked for forgiveness and have received it. And God has accepted us into His family, the Church of Christ, and in her we can sail over this stormy sea of life as in a safe ship. A ship has everything necessary to protect those sailing in it from the water: it has a strong foundation, a bottom, sides, sails, oars, a rudder. In the same way, the Church of Christ has a rudder by which it is guided by her Godly Pilot, our Lord Jesus Christ; also has sails, oars — these are the godly sacraments; also has a strong foundation — the commandments of Christ of which the main one is love. And if we keep this His main commandment, love, then we will be in His family, that is in the Church, and will rejoice. How much the Lord spoke about it in His farewell talk with His disciples: “This is My commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you” (Jn.15:12). “These things I command you, that ye love one another” (Jn.15: 17). Yes, it is impossible to be in the Church and not to abide in His love. To be in the Church of Christ is possible only by keeping His main commandment, that commandment which has become the foundation of His entire Church, which is the fragrance of Christ — and this commandment is LOVE!

And so that unfortunate servant lost everything: the forgiveness of God, release from the whole debt, and the return to freedom of himself, his wife and his children. Everything that he had received, he lost in one moment, in that terrible moment when he did not forgive his debtor. And so we too can lose everything: forgiveness which we have received in the Sacrament of

Confession, and the Grace which we have received in the Sacrament of Holy Communion — in one moment — in that moment when we will not forgive our debtors.

God grant that such a moment never come to us. And therefore, for the sake of our own salvation, our own well-being and the well-being of those close to us, let us wholeheartedly forgive our debtors. And let us rejoice that we have such debtors, because only by forgiving them their debts, can we prove to the Lord how much we value His forgiveness. And let us also rejoice, because our Lord forgives us enormous things, and all that we can forgive is so small and insignificant. Let us rejoice every time when we say in the Lord's Prayer: "and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors."

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost: the Rich Young Man.

"Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures: and that He was seen of Cephas [that is, Peter], then of the twelve: after that, He was seen of above five hundred brethren at once.... After that, He was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all, He was seen of me also, as to one born out of due time," said the Apostle Paul. "For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am" (I Cor. 15:1-11).

See what kind of reading from the Apostle Paul the Holy Church has selected for us today, in order to strengthen us in a definite state of mind. Along with the Sunday Gospel reading, which serves as a support, it strengthens in us the understanding that we live here temporarily. However, we fight against such an understanding; we don't even want to think about it. But it's a fact. Yes, our life is seventy years, and if by reason of strength, eighty years; but beyond this is hardship and disease. And how many tragic cases there are when God cuts off our earthly life in the years of youth, and even in childhood.

What have the Sunday Gospel readings been saying to us during the last few weeks? They have been saying that we must be perfect, that we must be Christians, because at any time the moment may come when Christ will call us and say: "Follow Me!" (Mt. 19:21). But how are we going to follow Him if we are spiritually paralyzed, if we are spiritually blind and do not see His abodes on high?

Christ saves us from these dispositions. He gives us His Church. And the Orthodox Church is always reminding us of what the Bible says: how the world of God was created, how the first people lived, how the Fall occurred. Adam did not want to go from strength to strength, from grace to grace in communion with God, but wanted to have this strength within himself. And he went away, went away into the byways of human life, and therefore lost the Tree of Life. But God the Merciful One, God the Father gives us His Son Who was incarnate of the Most Holy Virgin, Who lived the Good News of the Gospel and showed us how to fulfill the commandment: Love for God and neighbor.

In today's Epistle the Apostle Paul shows us the true Risen Christ, Who brings us to Eternal Life. Paul himself, while still Saul, was also wandering in search of truth. He too in the beginning was searching for the earthly Christ who would free the Jews from the power of Rome. But when he was on the way to persecute the Church of God, he met Christ Himself, al-

ready after the Ascension; and here Saul became Paul. And as we heard in today's reading, he became the preacher of the Risen Christ. He became a New Testament man, who (if one can say so) brought about a great revolution in the world and transformed the whole world into the search for Christ and the striving for Life in Christ. With the name of the Apostle Paul is connected all the preaching of Christ in the entire world.

So when the Holy Church has strengthened us in the understanding that we are going toward Eternal Existence through our earthly wandering to Christ, then the Holy Church addresses us and points out: do not be mistaken. A certain lawyer came to Christ and asked: What shall I do in order to inherit the Kingdom of God? (Today's Gospel). And Christ said, Fulfill the commandments. And when this lawyer said, From my childhood I have fulfilled the commandments, Christ saw his lack of understanding of the truth and said: Then give away everything that you have and follow Me (Mt. 19:16-21). But this man had much and trusted in this "much." Everything around him was real to him, and this reality gave him security in life. And this, what Christ was saying about future life, was not real to him. Therefore, when Christ said to him, Follow me and give away everything; he thought: how do I give it away? What will I have then? And what did he want to have? Power, strength, to be a possessor of earthly things.

The Apostle says today: what is earth? Christ leads us into Eternal Life. He saves us in an earthly way. God gives people abilities and knowledge; these are the various ways in which people pass their earthly life. But laid before them as a foundation are the Beatitudes: blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who weep, blessed are the meek, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, blessed are the peacemakers, those who are persecuted (Mt. 5:3-11). See, these are all the heavenly ways. This is what the Holy Church sets before us. Speaking to us about life beyond the grave, about resurrection (not as an idea, but as real life), about the Apostle Paul and all our saints, she shows us the truth and shows us that mirage which appears to be real. But if we start to live for this reality in order to acquire earthly goods, we will find ourselves in an abyss, and everything we possess will remain here. There will be nothing that belongs to Christ.

So let us arise, brothers, answering the calls of the Holy Church today: do not abandon prayer, do not abandon fasting which gives us concentration and attention, do not neglect also your good heart which will obtain for you a revelation from God and the joy of spiritual spring which will strengthen you in Eternal Life.

Thirteenth Sunday: the Vineyard Workers.

"It will be hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven," said Christ to His disciples. If you recall, last Sunday these same words appeared at the end of the Gospel reading. A young man approached Christ and asked, What should I do in order to inherit the Kingdom of Heaven? Then the Lord answered him: Fulfill the commandments. And when the young man said that he had already done this, then the Lord, seeing his heart, said: Give away whatever you have. But the young man was rich, and for him his riches were the power that gave him status in society, and therefore he bent his head and walked away. Here Christ said to His disciples: "Truly I say unto you, it will be hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven" (Mt. 19:16-23).

How is this? Why? If you take today's Gospel reading, then you will see why. The parable for today tells us how the Lord planted a vineyard and sent his slaves to work in this vineyard (Mt. 21:33-42). And he gave them everything needed for their lives. But the slaves enjoyed

living and laboring in this vineyard so much that they began to feel that the place belonged to them. More and more they began to consider as their own all the prosperity which they were able to get from the grapes which grew so abundantly in the vineyard that did not belong to them; and they gradually began to forget the owner of the vineyard. The Lord gave them everything necessary for their maintenance, for their life, but they began to take it for granted. They had a different understanding: they had the opportunity to use the vineyard and all the beauty of these earthly goods which God gives to man. This captivated them so much, that they completely forgot, or better to say, they did not give a thought to the fact that all this was temporary; and that years would pass, and the hour would come when they would have to leave; and everything in the vineyard would remain here, but they would depart. You see, something different was required of them: while cultivating the vineyard, they should have cultivated also that which was given to man.

And what was actually given to man? A human being has a body which requires food, drink, motion, rest — the things that we call the life of the body. But man also has a spirit which always strives for the ideal. And no matter how good our earthly life might be — and it can be so good that it couldn't be better, as if nothing else existed — in a human heart will always stir that which cannot be satisfied by things surrounding us. And sadness will appear, and the conscience will say that he did not do the right thing, because the image of God is in every human being, in his spirit; and the spirit also requires life.

Bodily, the vineyard workers were all right, but the spiritual life they twisted and lived according to the flesh. And through this the conscience was suppressed. The conscience did exist but it was covered up. And here is proven what was said to the young man: it is hard for someone who trusts in riches to enter the kingdom of Heaven. Eyes are closed, conscience is darkened. Outwardly, he appears to be in a good state, but inwardly conscience is tormenting and tormenting. No hopes, no comfort. And so the human being tries everything. He says to himself: I will go to a resort, will go traveling, will create for myself all comforts. I will arrange my family life, will have children. I will enjoy myself. But here, at best, old age will come; but at worst — sickness. When these critical days come, nothing can appease. No matter how much earthly beauty or how many earthly goods we have — conscience will torment us. This is what today's parable expresses. The slaves even killed the heir so as not to give up the enjoyment of the vineyard. But banishment from the vineyard still occurred. How? This is what we call suffering of conscience which nothing can appease. Anguish — anguish with no way out.

So today's Gospel in a way supplements last week's Gospel and says to us: Brothers, take care that this doesn't happen to you, that the earthly beauty in which we live does not change into this vineyard of the parable! What do we need this vineyard for, these villas, automobiles, if our heart is being torn apart? Let us start to live according to the Beatitudes, and then our heart will be filled with peace, love, the breath of paradise. And with this fullness of heart, we will pass over into Eternal Life. But if we do not understand ourselves, we will be like the Jews. The Jews awaited the messiah who, according to the understanding of the Talmud, must be the ruler of the world and conquer everyone under the yoke of the Jews. And they waited for such a messiah. And when Christ appeared — Who had all the powers: He calmed the sea, He filled five thousand people with five loaves of bread, and healed sicknesses — in their understanding of that time it would have been impossible to find a better commander for the Jewish army. There would be no need for a commissary, food stocks, first aid stations, or hospitals. Christ could do everything. And they waited.. .to see what would happen next.

And Christ ascended a mountain and for the first time started to speak publicly: Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who weep, blessed are the meek, those who are persecuted (Mt. 5:3-11). The Jews expected power, might; but Christ spoke about poverty, meekness, sufferings. Of course, the Jews had to turn away. Christ was speaking about something quite different from what they were expecting — not about dominion. What if one followed in His footsteps? What would happen? They were bewildered.

What will happen will be exactly what we need: there will be peace of heart with which it is easy to go through this life and not fear to enter Eternal Life.

Fourteenth Sunday: the Wedding Feast.

“So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: and he saith unto him, Friend, how earnest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Mt. 22:10-13).

Such a Gospel the Holy Church offers today for our attention: the Gospel about the wedding feast. And here is the section which refers to both the good and the evil ones who gathered at the meal. And when the lord entered, he found one man who was not dressed in a wedding garment. And just for this, that he was not wearing a wedding garment, such a terrible punishment followed. He was thrown out, bound, and was cast into a place of fire. For us this may even be incomprehensible. What is this actually? God is merciful, compassionate, and suddenly such a terrible punishment. Here is something we must understand. Let us look at it. If you remember, brothers, the Gospel which was read Sunday before last, you will recall also the pious young man who approached the Lord and asked Him what to do in order to enter the Kingdom of God. The Lord said, Fulfill the commandments. He said that he had fulfilled them. But seeing his heart, the Lord said: Give away everything you possess and follow me (Mt. 19:16-21).

The Lord called the young man to follow Him, but this young man was rich. And he trusted in these earthly riches, in the things that surround us. He somehow didn't understand that this very night his soul might be taken away and pass into eternal life. And what did he go away with? The Lord called him for renewal, to remove from his heart all the scabs, which are human passions. The Lord called. But he had riches which made him think that this earth is ours and is the purpose of our life. This is all we have: our houses, our villas, our cars, our relationships with each other. And we don't notice that one after another we depart. So this means that the Gospel of the Sunday before last is pointing out: do not trust, do not persist in your strivings for possession of earthly things, because this very night eternity may open for us. The earth is given to us only as a means of receiving those things which should be in a man's soul. And our soul should be suffused, as if saturated with the Beatitudes.

And this past Sunday. In the Gospel reading it told about the vineyard workers. The lord created the vineyard, gave them livelihood for their work. This livelihood consisted of everything that was needed for their life. But they, like the young man, accepted in their heart that this vineyard was their riches, that it belonged to them. This very vineyard, which was serving only as a means of acquiring goodness of heart, became for them an object of temptation. They decided to use it as their own. And therefore, they drove off all symptoms that were telling them that, after all, this was not theirs, that it belonged to the Lord; and you have to do what the Lord

requires of you: cultivate the vineyard. Then you will receive in your heart that goodness with which you can depart from this vineyard and go to something much better and greater, to something which God has prepared for you. But they did not pay attention to these symptoms. The vineyard became for them such a temptation, as the earth is for us, in which we seem to have everything we need. On it we build our villas, and close by are lying Lazaruses — beggars, widows, unfortunate children who have to be raised. But we do not concern ourselves with them. We are busy with our fine clothes, our meals, with such matters that will remain here. And the person departs into eternal life hungry, without good deeds.

Now that we have analyzed these two Gospels, we ask: Why did the Lord tell this parable, and why does the Holy Church offer it today for our attention? Everyone who knows the Gospel knows also that, in addition to the Evangelist Matthew whose Gospel was read today, the Evangelist Luke also refers to this parable in some detail (Lk. 14:15-24). It tells there how Christ was invited to the meal of Simon the Pharisee. At this meal Christ saw what the Jews did who accepted the law of Moses, how they changed the law of Moses into a means of their own greatness and pride. And Christ, seeing this and feeling sorry for Simon who had invited Him, started to teach him. This was heard by all who were present at the meal. And they were supposedly right-believing Jews, Pharisees of Pharisees. And when Christ began to speak, He was for them...who was He? Just a rabbi. Here one of the Jews could not contain himself. And when Christ said that people will receive for their good deeds the Kingdom of God, he exclaimed, "Blessed is He that shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God!" (Lk.14:15). Blessed! Because this blessedness belongs to the children of Abraham; what you are talking about belongs to us. Why bother with good deeds? The promise which was given to Moses is ours and we are using it — we, the Jews. This is our kingdom.

Then Christ, answering about this "kingdom," gave them this parable. Here He pointed out that the Jews were called by God for such a long time to receive blessedness, were called to a pure life; but they did not come. They were busy in the same way as that young man, as the workers in the vineyard — with earthly things. Apparently they were building for themselves palaces, buying unfortunate slaves, living in comfort, and they had no concern for anything else. And therefore, why bother with a king's feast? So their response to this feast was such that almost everyone refused to come. Then the Lord called his soldiers and through the soldiers called everyone, both evil and good, without discrimination: everyone had to come.

In the East when a feast was given, not only was food presented but also raiment. In this way, when garments were given to those who came — harlots, tax collectors, and other sinners — everyone was given an equal garment. But among them was also a Pharisee who entered. What he saw seemed horrible to him. Among those who were invited were great sinners, harlots, and tax collectors. He did not want to be on a level with them. His own garment, as it appeared to him, was much better. And he remained in it. The king entered to look at the guests and said to him: "Friend, how earnest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless" (Mt. 22:12). But in his soul one could imagine that he was rebelling. Rebelling, because those present at the wedding feast were all sinners. And he, as it seemed a righteous man, a son of Abraham, here he had to sit together with them. And the most degrading thing of all was that they wanted him to exchange his rich garment for the garment in which all the sinners were dressed, for this wedding garment. No.. .never.

So what happened — happened! The Lord ordered him to be bound for disrupting unity. What unity? The unity of the Church of Christ.

See, brothers and sisters, how important this unity is, how precious the Church of Christ is in the eyes of the Lord.

So let us obey the voice of the Church; let us fulfill with our whole soul whatever she requires of us; let us keep the garment which she has given us. And may it never happen to us what happened to him, who was not wearing a wedding garment.

Fifteenth Sunday: the Great Commandment.

“Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked Him a question, tempting Him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law?” (Mt. 22:35).

If you were attentive to how the Holy Church, revealing to us the mystery of our salvation, gradually shows us in the Sunday Gospel readings the way of resurrection for the human soul, then you also noticed that starting from Easter until today there were several cycles. One of these cycles convinced us that the Lord is our Savior, our Savior from sin, and that He is All-powerful. And further we were shown the dispositions, the states of mind which should be in the soul of every Christian, in order to perceive that power which the Lord has given to us, establishing our salvation in the plan of eternal life. These Gospel readings opened to us the feeling of humility and devotion to God, in understanding the Word of God as acting in our life. And then these cycles changed into others, and we came to a cycle which revealed that all this which God gives us can be accomplished, but only within the limits of the Church. Like the boat in which the Apostles were sailing, it preserved the Apostles. And this boat was like the laws in which lived and lives the Church, which protects those who are in the boat from all the troubles that occur outside of it.

But this is possible only if, on our part, we are obedient to the Lord. And such obedience is connected with certain experiences, in the same way the Apostles experienced them: storm and fear. But if we presume upon the power of God, then we lose obedience and, instead of obedience, we receive boldness. And the same could happen to us which happened to the Apostle Peter, who in a transport of delight and daring, asked Christ for permission to walk to Him on the waves. And Christ in a way answered him: walk, if you want to. This was no longer obedience; this was not the will of Christ, but the will of Peter. And then Peter found himself alone in the water; the waves were so high that Christ was not even visible. Here Peter came to his senses: the law of nature took hold of him; he became frightened and started to drown. And only a strong faith in the Lord and the constant trust in the Almighty saved him (Mt. 14:24-31).

And further: in the Gospel about the filling of five thousand people with five loaves of bread, again the Lord seemed to be talking in a mysterious way about the Church. “Give ye them to eat!” He said to the Apostles, declining their attempt to let the people go into the neighboring villages to buy food (Mt. 14:16). Does this not mean that He entrusted them, the Apostles and their successors, with feeding people the true food, His Body and Blood, in the Sacrament of the Divine Eucharist? And when He ordered the people to sit in groups, does it not symbolize the organization of the Church?

The Sunday Gospel readings were convincing us more and more that Christian life is possible only within the Church, under the definite laws of the Church, along with the Divine Eucharist, which is the Tree of Life of the New Testament. So after having brought us to this understanding, the Church begins to show us, explains to us what the life is which surrounds us.

If you will remember, the Gospel before last told us about a certain young man who approached Christ (Mt. 19:16-23). And this young man asked Christ: what shall I do to receive the Kingdom of Heaven? He was like a materialist. He fulfilled accurately everything prescribed by

the Law. He himself said, I have fulfilled the commandments. But he fulfilled them as a tradition, as an obligation. And the Lord saw this and said: Then reject everything that you have. In other words, reject the hope you have put in your riches. The young man froze. He could not understand how it is possible to reject this power, the power of the world. Why, through riches we can have everything we want. In such a way the enemy of the human race tempted man and perverted our understanding.

Following that, the last Gospel reading spoke about the workers in the vineyard (Mt. 21:33-42). This vineyard represents in a parable our whole world. The Lord owns this vineyard. And the workers in the vineyard are only servants, who receive everything necessary for their maintenance. And in the end, everything which the vineyard produces must be given back to their Lord. But the vineyard workers saw the beauty of the vineyard, the comfort of life, and decided that in this consists the whole meaning of life, is life itself. They would live. And therefore, when the Heir came, they killed Him. They said to themselves: What do we need Him for? The vineyard is ours. This is ours.

This is exactly what we are doing now. We say of the world and worldly goods: This is ours. And we cannot conceive leaving here. How are we going to part with all our comforts of life? How are we going to reject all our houses, our airplanes, all the inventions which seek to know the world and its mysteries, technology, everything that we are using? How are we going to leave?

And now today the Holy Church points out: we have to fulfill the commandments, and we have to participate in the life around us. Why? Well, because God has sent us here so that through these circumstances, as a means, we would obtain that which is needed. But what is needed? At the creation of man, God gave him the commandments: love for God and neighbor. And these commandments we must fulfill. The Lord, Who came on earth, came to save man. But how? By fulfilling the commandments of love for God and neighbor, and by giving strength to fulfill these commandments. And in fulfilling these commandments, we receive blessedness.

During His whole evangelistic life Christ was tempted by Satan. In the beginning it was in the wilderness: the temptation was by bread, by miracle, and by kingdom. Rejecting all these temptations, Christ fulfilled the commandment of love for God. After that, the enemy did not approach Christ openly, but only through the hearts of men, hoping to stir up in Christ hatred towards neighbor. But Christ never became angry at a man, but only at the power of the enemy, by saying: "Get thee behind me, Satan" (Mk. 8:33). In such a way the Lord Himself fulfilled this great commandment, and in His Sacraments gives even to us the forces to fulfill it.

So let us fulfill it!

"Which is the great commandment?" asked the lawyer. And the Lord answered: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Mt. 22:36-40).

Sixteenth Sunday: Parable About the Talents.

"We then, as workers together with Him, beseech you also that ye accept not the grace of God in vain. (For He saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succored thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation)" (II Cor. 6:1-2).

So says the Apostle this day. And the Gospel tells us that a lord gave talents to his servants: “Unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every one according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey.... After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them” (Mt. 25:14-19).

So says the parable. How does it apply to us? To us the Lord has also given talents. And essentially the talent is one. What is it? This is what it is. As we heard last Sunday, the entire law and the prophets are concentrated into one commandment: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind....[and] Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself (Mt. 22:37, 39). God came to earth in order to fulfill this commandment. And He fulfilled it in His whole evangelistic life and taught us how to fulfill it. But above all — in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, in receiving His Body and Blood — He gave us the strength to fulfill this commandment. This is what talent means. The talent is the strength given to us by Christ in His Holy Sacrament to fulfill the main commandment of God: love for God and neighbor.

See what a great gift is hidden in this talent given to us by God. In the parable, one servant buried his talent, but all the other servants applied it to their life. This is what depends on us: whether to bury the God-given talent or to apply it to life. The sacrifice of Golgotha was offered once and forever, for the whole world. It depends on us to accept it or to reject it. And to accept it means to live according to the Gospel. According to the words of the parable, this would be to “trade” with our talent and acquire for it that which God gives. And then, when the day of reckoning comes, God will say: “Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord” (Mt. 25:23).

Not to accept the sacrifice of Golgotha, to reject this Tree of Life of the New Testament, and as the Gospel says, to bury the talent in the ground — this means to tell the Lord: I do not want it; “There thou hast that is thine” (Mt. 25:25). Then the Lord will also say to us, “Thou wicked and slothful servant...” and will tell His attendants: Cast him into the outer darkness. “There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Mt. 25:26-30).

Brothers and sisters! The Lord has done everything for us, has given to each of us a talent. The choice is ours. Let us choose “the good part” (Lk. 10:42). Then we too will exclaim with the Apostle: “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation!”

Seventeenth Sunday: the Canaanite Woman.

So last Sunday’s Gospel told us that the talent is that strength which the Lord gives us to fulfill His commandments of love for God and neighbor.

In today’s Gospel the Holy Church shows us the application of this talent in deeds, in life. A talent is given to us to fulfill the commandments, but sin prevents us from fulfilling the commandment. A struggle ensues, in which we acquire the qualities of Christ. Today’s Gospel shows us one of these qualities. This is the most profound humility of the Canaanite woman.

A mother was begging for the healing of her daughter. She cried after the Lord: “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a demon” (Mt. 15:22). Now see how the Lord tested her. At first, He did not answer her a word. Even His disciples could not bear it. Approaching Him, they asked Him: “Send her away, for she crieth after us” (Mt. 15:23). But here, the Lord not only continued not to pay any attention to her, but simply pushed her away. “I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Mt. 15:24).

Doesn't the same happen to us? At first, the Lord seems not to hear our prayer, and then through the circumstances of our life, seemingly pushes us away. And how many of us stop our prayer at this point. But not the Canaanite woman. Approaching, she bowed to Him and said: "Lord, help me" (Mt. 15:25). And the Lord? He compared her straight-out with a dog: "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs" (Mt. 15:26). It is impossible to put a human being lower. And she agreed. "Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table" (Mt. 15:27).

Here is accomplished the victory of humility; here crumbles the illusory wall between the Lord and the Canaanite woman. "O woman, great is thy faith: be it done unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour" (Mt. 15:28).

"Yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." These words of the woman have passed through all the centuries, reaching us this day; and they give hope to all those who are completely without hope. It is up to us to profit from them or neglect them. Can we humble ourselves as that woman humbled herself? The talent is given to us; and if so, that means — yes, we can! The only thing is that we must want to accept such a measure of humility.

Brothers and sisters! Let us accept it! Then we will hear the answer of the Lord: "Be it done unto thee even as thou wilt!"

Eighteenth Sunday: the Miraculous Catch of Fish.

The Sunday before last the Holy Church offered for our attention the parable about the talents. A talent is that strength which God gives to us for the fulfillment of His commandments of love for God and neighbor. Last Sunday showed us the application of this talent to our life. A mother had a possessed daughter. The mother rushed to Christ: "Help me!" (Mt. 15:25). But Christ was silent. Then the Apostles started to speak to Christ, pointing out this Canaanite woman. Christ answered them: But I have come to the children. "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs" (Mt. 15:26). The Canaanite woman cried: "Yet the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from their masters' table," (Mt. 15:27). At this moment her consciousness was completely filled with humility; and in answer to this most profound humility, the Lord took pity on her and said: "O woman, great is thy faith: be it done unto thee even as thou wilt" (Mt. 15:28).

And here, today's Gospel about the miraculous catch of fish shows us how that same talent (according to the Gospel's expression, used in "trade" (Mt. 25:16), which means applied to life) is manifested in absolute obedience and trust in the word of the Lord and produces the fruit of faith. But what is faith? What does the process of faith consist of? We are given the answer to this in today's Gospel (Lk. 5:1-11).

Christ was preaching on the lake of Gennesaret. Now the sermon has finished. There were two boats at the shore, and Christ had been preaching from one of them. Here He addressed the Apostle Peter and said: "Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets." Peter answered: "Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing" (Lk. 5:4-5). And the Apostles were experienced fishermen; they knew the laws of the sea. If at night-time no fish were caught, then during the day a catch was out of the question. And Peter said this to Christ. But he added: "Nevertheless at Thy word I will let down the nets" (Lk. 5:5). And they let them down. And a miracle happened. The boats were so filled with fish that they started to sink. Then the Apostle Peter fell at the feet of the Savior and said: "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Lk. 5:8).

This is the process of faith. The Apostle knew that fish could not be caught. But he accepted the word of Christ within himself, within his will; and this will, which by now was Christ's, he fulfilled. And what happened? A miracle? Yes, a miracle. But the main miracle was not in the abundance of fish, although this catch was a miracle. The main miracle was the change of soul which occurred in Peter. He saw himself, he saw his essence. "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" Here is the process of faith: to accept in your heart the word of Christ, to fulfill it. And then to us will be revealed the thing which is most important for our salvation, for our inner life.

People say: I do not believe. What do these words mean? They mean that you are not fulfilling the teaching of Christ. Because if you would only attempt to fulfill the word of Christ, at least one commandment of Christ, then the essence of your life would be revealed to you, too. But you don't want to do this, and therefore you say: I have no faith. But how does one make an attempt? Well, the same way the Apostle Peter did. In spite of all his experience as a fisherman, he listened to Christ and let down the nets. Listen to the word of Christ. But where do we find this word? In the Gospel — that is where. If we know the Gospel and apply it to our life, then our life in Christ will be revealed to us. And His Resurrection will become for us more real than the physical world surrounding us. And He will fill our heart with an unspeakable joy, with the joy of Eternal Life; and this joy will have no end.

Only take the Gospel in your hands, only try to apply it in your life. Take everything which the Holy Church gives us. Then a miracle will happen to you, too — ^greater miracle than the wonderful catch. Christ Himself will be revealed to you as He was revealed to Peter. Then you too will say deep in your heart: "I am a sinful man, O Lord!" And if you are a sinner, it means that you are sick and need a physician. And if a physician, then who is the Physician of the heart? Christ alone!

O Lord, Thou seest the infirmities and the wounds of sin in our heart, which prevent us from fulfilling Thy teaching, Thy Word. Heal us and help us to start a New Life!

Nineteenth Sunday: "Love ye your Enemies."

Starting with the Sunday about "the talents," the Sunday readings have been showing us how a talent (the strength given to each of us by God to fulfill His commandments of love for God and neighbor) was manifested in various Christian qualities of the human soul. On the Sunday about "the Canaanite woman" — in deep humility; on the Sunday about "the miraculous catch of fish" — in obedience to the word of God, in unshakable faith. And here in the Apostle and Gospel readings for this Sunday — in great patience in sorrows, in great spiritual comfort, and especially in the unspeakable joy which is hidden in mercy and love for one's enemies. The last one, by human standards, appears to be unnatural; but because of the strength of the Lord's talent, it is possible, joyous, wonderful.

This is what the Apostle says today: "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed for ever, knoweth that I lie not" (II Cor. 11:31). What is this? What is the Apostle going to say further if he makes such a beginning in which he affirms, "I lie not"? Further on, he reveals what happened to him in Damascus: "In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me: and through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands" (II Cor. 11:32-33). As you can see, a terrible epoch of martyrdom was opening up, which the first Christians lived through after the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ, at the beginning of the preaching.

The Apostle Paul was going to Damascus to persecute the Christians. But on the way, the Lord Himself appeared to him in a vision and said: “Saul, why persecutest thou Me?” (Acts 9:4). And here the truth was revealed to the Apostle Paul. The Messiah, the true Messiah appeared to him on the road to Damascus. And when he arrived in Damascus, instead of persecuting the Christians, he himself started to preach Christ. Knowing his past, they did not believe him at first. But later, when they did believe, they began to consider him a traitor, an enemy of the Jews. This is why the Apostle Paul begins this passage with the words: “I lie not.” Because in order to preach Christ as the Messiah Who had come, strength was required; and a special grace of God was needed, that talent which God gives to his servants, to strengthen such a preacher. And here the same talent which strengthened the Apostle earlier in Damascus, when he was almost caught to be martyred (and only a miracle delivered him from their hands); this same talent supported and encouraged him even now.

And further on in this Epistle, the Apostle Paul shows us in more detail what actually strengthened his spirit in such a difficult struggle. “I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven” (II Cor. 12:2). A mysterious revelation. There, Christ appeared on the road, and here, Christ revealed to him a great mercy. He revealed the state in which the soul perceived “the third heaven,” a state of spirit, a peace of heart which is ineffable.

So in giving us this reading today, the Holy Church shows us that there was something in the martyrdom of the first Christians which supplied them with that strength in which appeared an unearthly force, which is this same godly talent, the gift of God. This was a peace of soul which covered all suffering, covered all earthly sorrows, which was completely above everything. Here is the state of spiritual strength which is presented to us today for our edification. We must follow the Lord. But how do we start on this way? Today’s Gospel shows us the beginning, the first steps which a Christian must make in order to walk. If you remember, the Gospel said: “And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise. If ye love them which love you, what thank have ye?” (Lk. 6:31-32). And further, “If ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? ...But love ye your enemies, and do good [to those who hate you], and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest* (Lk. 6:34-35).

“Love ye your enemies/9 This is the first step which today’s Gospel reading offers us, so that we may receive that strength which the Apostle Paul also received in a vision of the third heaven, as did all the martyrs. If we will fulfill what the Holy Church gives us in the words of the Gospel, then let us only start to do so; let us step on this new way. And we will receive that revelation which will help us in those terrible moments when grief invades our soul, when sorrows surround us. The grief and sorrows will go away. Yes, they will leave us, because in that moment these points of grace, this godly light of Christ, will be revealed to us and will give us strength to bear the burdens of our earthly life, so that we may be comforted in Eternal Life with Christ.

Twentieth Sunday: Resurrection of the Son of the Widow.

Christ, surrounded by His Apostles and a multitude of people, moved toward the gates of the town of Nain. And at that time, from the town of Nain appeared a funeral procession. A young man was being carried out, the only son of a widow from Nain. Imagine the suffering of the mother: the only one, the favorite, the hope of her old age.

What was the mother going through? But at this time, Christ, with a multitude of people and His Apostles, approached this procession on the road. He came closer and closer. He was walking on the same road on which the deceased was being carried. He saw the suffering of the mother, came up to her and said, “Weep not” (Lk. 7:13). Who could, who had the right to say these words to a mother at the coffin of her son? He alone, because He conquered death. The bearers stopped. Christ took the young man by the hand and said: “Arise!” (Lk. 7:14). And He returned him to his mother.

Can you imagine what the mother was experiencing? The peace which a mother could have before the death of her son, that peace was not only renewed, but it revived her whole life. Besides her son, she saw the power of resurrection. And all this happened because the way of Christ coincided with the way of the funeral procession. The way of Christ — the deceased had to move along this way of Christ, and on the way of Christ there can be no grief. This is how it happened. In saying “Weep not,” Christ renewed the inner strength which had already been put to rest. Years might pass, and this young man would depart in the same way. But this is not the point. The point is that peace appeared in the heart, strengthening the person in external existence.

Maybe I am mistaken. Maybe my way of thinking is wrong. All right, then open to the Apostle’s reading for today, and you will see that I am telling the truth. What does today’s reading from the Apostle say? It tells us about the Apostle Paul, while he was still Saul. Here is what it says: A new gospel I am giving to you; “the gospel which was preached of me is not after man....but by the revelation of Jesus Christ” (Gal. 1:11-12). How was this revealed? It was revealed in this way: Paul (Saul) was a true Pharisee and he awaited the Messiah. But what kind of Messiah were the Jews expecting at that time? The Jews were under the domination of Rome, and a certain balance had been established between Rome and the Jewish lawmakers and princes. And the Jewish nation was waiting for the coming of the Messiah; and they thought of the Messiah as a king who should free them from the power of Rome and make them head of the world — king. The Pharisee Saul thought in the same way. He believed it would be thus: that the Jewish Messiah would come and would give them, the Jews, worldwide dominion. And everything he did, he did sincerely. He sincerely awaited the Messiah, and because he awaited the Messiah with such sincerity, and did not know or understand that Christ was the Messiah; at the moment he was going to persecute what seemed to him a sect of Nazarenes, at that moment Christ appeared to him, because he was seeking the Christ. And here, in a moment, Saul changed into Paul -a Christian. The Gospel was revealed to him. And here it is again: the way of the Messiah. On this way of the Messiah stood Paul. And because of this sincere motion toward salvation, the Truth was revealed to him.

So it is for us, brothers. We too should know what way we are standing on. The way of a Christian is the element in which the Way of Christ is revealed. And the Way of Christ is the Church. In her is the Grace which exists in all the sacraments, in all activities of the Church, in all the prayers, in everything which is given to us for sanctification. And this Grace which is in the Church is with us. It is expressed in every activity, in the rites, and in a special way, in the Divine Eucharist, in this Tree of Life which is given to us for the renewal of our nature, for our deification.

Here is the way on which we must go. If we are on this way, then, believe me, there will not be such tragedy in our life as there is now. If the Lord said to the widow of Nain: “Weep not!” so that same voice whispers to us today, “Weep not!” Only do not abandon this way of true Christianity. Abide in prayer, behave yourself in life as the Holy Church requires, remembering

the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the mystery of death and the mystery of life. See how life goes on: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday — Sunday [the day of Resurrection] (The word for Sunday in Russian (voskresenia) means resurrection). The end of everything is the Resurrection.

Live in the Grace of God, and the Lord will not forsake you.

Twenty-First Sunday: the Sower.

Brothers and sisters! Did you know that there exists a psychological law by which under the influence of thought, a feeling, a desire is kindled; and from desire comes action. This law was discovered back in the first centuries by the Fathers of the Church, and then it passed on into secular life. In any sphere of life, there isn't a single action which is not provoked by feeling and desire. And in their turn, feeling and desire are kindled by thought; just as any flammable substance will catch fire if, for a sufficient length of time, one holds over it a magnifying glass through which a ray of sun is concentrated. And so: thought — feeling — action.

Both readings for this Sunday, the Apostle and the Gospel, are in a wonderful way connected with this law. Even more: without this law we wouldn't even be able to understand them in all their depth. The Gospel tells us about the Sower, the seed, and the ground. Different kinds of ground are mentioned: the ground by the wayside, the stony ground, the ground overgrown with weeds, and finally, good ground.

The Sower is the Lord, the seed is the Word of God, and the ground is the listener — you and our hearts. And this parable ends with the words: “But that on the good ground are they which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience” (Lk. 8:15). This means that the purpose is such: we must accept the Word of God with all our being, with all our mind, with a good and pure heart. And it is impossible to express this good, pure heart in stronger words than in the words of the Apostle Paul in today's reading: “For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, Who loved me, and gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2:19-20). This is what we should strive for; here is the purpose of our life.

But who among us can honestly repeat these words of the Apostle: “Nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me”? And if we do not feel what the Apostle felt, it means that our life is not fully Christian, and we are not bearing those fruits which the Lord expects from us. What is the matter? The Word of God is as powerful today as in the days when the Savior Himself was preaching it; and yet our lives do not reflect this His Word. For if our deeds would conform to the teaching of Christ, then the whole world would turn to Christ, because our lives would be more eloquent, more strong than any sermon.

But alas, they are not like this. Our deeds are not like this because our feelings are not the feelings of Christ; they have not yet died to the law of earthly life — futile, temporary — in order to live for God, as the Apostle says. And our feelings are not like this because our thoughts are busy with unnecessary things. Only rarely are they directed toward Christ, Who loved us and gave Himself for us. Are they not wandering more often on the highways of our futile earthly life? Do they not bring our hearts into a state of stoniness, absorbed only with the cares of our temporary, materialistic welfare? Do they not get stuck between our sinful desires, as between weeds?

Let us examine ourselves. And if this is so, let us bring about a revolution within ourselves. And let us start with our thoughts; because every sin passes through thought into our feeling, and through feeling into action. This means that our main struggle with sin goes on in the thoughts. This is where we have to destroy it; then it will not even touch our heart and will not pass into action.

Yes, but our thought is already infected by sin. What are we to do? From a thought, as from a hole in the ground, little snakes are constantly darting out — sinful thoughts — and they bite and poison our feelings. But this is what we must do: run to Christ with repentance. He is our Savior from sin. In His first appearance after His Resurrection, He said to His disciples: “Receive ye the Holy Spirit. Whosoever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven” (Jn. 20: 22-23). Let us start with this. Let us take our sinful thoughts to confession, and we will receive absolution. And then new thoughts and new deeds will begin. A new life.

This is when we too will be able to say together with the Apostle: “Nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, Who loved me, and gave Himself for me.” Then too the seed, the Word of God, will fall on good ground, and we will be able to keep it in a pure heart and bring forth fruit in patience. And in this “keeping” we will find a new life and a new joy.

Twenty-Second Sunday: the Rich Man and Lazarus.

Brothers and sisters, have you noticed how the Holy Church for a long time now has been telling us about the Word of God? With His Word Christ calmed the storm, healed the servant of the centurion and the daughter of the Canaanite woman, raised the son of the widow of Nain, and filled five thousand people with five loaves of bread. By His Word, the miraculous catch of fish was accomplished. And even today’s Gospel reading speaks about the Word of God. “There was a certain rich man,” relates the Gospel, “which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: and there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores” (Lk. 16:19-21).

And further it reveals to us what is beyond the grave. Eternity: The rich man — in hell, in torments; and Lazarus — in the bosom of Abraham. This Gospel ends with the words: and Abraham said to the rich man, “If they hear not Moses and the prophets [that is, the Word of God] neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead” (Lk. 16:31). See how important the Word of God is: our eternal fate depends on our attitude towards it. Although the rich man did nothing evil, he did not live according to the Word of God, and he perished. But Lazarus did live according to the Word of God, and was saved. The Word of God has the wonderful power to renew the soul of a sinner. I will not explain to you how this happens, but will simply tell you something that happened in St. Petersburg. Here it is:

There lived a family — a grandmother and grandson. The grandson was an Imperial Guardsman. His parents had died when he was still young, and his grandmother took their place. They were magnates, incalculably rich, millionaires. Vladimir, as this officer was called, while still a young man became satiated with everything that only the life of wealthy Russians could provide at that time. Like the life of the rich man in today’s parable, his life was spent in gaiety and carousing. He had a good heart and his friends loved him as a person from whom they could always get anything they wanted. The word “no” did not exist for him.

But once his grandmother called Vladimir and said: “Vladimir, after my death, you will have no one. Your friends will strip you of everything, and you will perish a lonely, unfortunate man. Get married.”

Vladimir answered, “All right, Grandmother, I will get married.”

The grandmother found a fiancée for him — a princess from an impoverished family. Vladimir danced with her two or three times at parties and proposed to her. And then, because the wedding was set for only after the Christmas season, and Vladimir’s life went on in its routine way — in a fog of merry-making and revelry — he wouldn’t even have been able to remember her name right away. And if he had met her on the street, he probably wouldn’t have recognized her.

Yet the closer the wedding day approached, the more troubled his soul became. And finally came the second day after the Baptism of Christ. He had to go to his army office in order to get his salary and his vacation for the honeymoon. This was the first time he had gone out in St. Petersburg at such an early hour and, moreover, in a sober state. Usually, when he was traveling in Petersburg at this hour or still earlier, it was after a night spent in extreme debauchery, and then he was usually dozing off, oblivious to his surroundings. But today, as if for the first time, he saw Petersburg during working hours. On everything lay the impression of the businesslike seriousness of a morning in a metropolitan city. And upon his soul there lay, like a heavy stone, something unusually businesslike and serious: marriage, family life, obligations which he never had, never knew.

Upon arrival at his office, he received his papers and money — his large purse was filled with gold coins. When he went out, he wanted to be alone and walk. He ordered the driver to follow him on the roadway, and he himself walked on foot. Without noticing it, he reached the cathedral of the Kazan Icon of the Mother of God. Just at that moment the bell rang. And for the first time, he felt drawn to enter church. Of course, he had been to church services, *moliebens* and *pannihidas*, but only because this was required by his social standing. But now, an inner need manifested itself. The cathedral was plunged in a cozy half-darkness. The Miraculous Icon was simply shining in brilliance. In spite of the winter season there were white lilies. The reading of the Akathist (*Molieben* — a petitionary service. *Pannihida* — a requiem service for the dead. *Akathist* — a service in honor and praise of Jesus Christ, the Mother of God, or one of the saints.) was still going on. There was a deep prayerful singing, a multitude of candles and devotion lamps, and more and more people — praying, weeping. Vladimir froze. He had not prayed for a long, longtime. All he could say was: “O Mother of God! I am coming to a turning point in my life. If it has to be so, help me. But if all this is not necessary, stop it.” And here, he himself thought that this was no way to pray, that he didn’t even know how to pray.

Suddenly someone tenderly touched his sleeve. It was a beggar woman with a child in her arms. “Sir, help me,” she whispered.

He thrust his hand into his pocket, pulled out his large purse, and put it in her hand. Because of the weight of the purse, she almost dropped it.

“Sir,” she exclaimed, “I cannot take it. People will say I have stolen it.”

“Don’t be afraid, my card is in the purse. Say that I gave it to you.”

“Sir, and what about you? You are giving away everything...and yourself?”

“Don’t you understand, I have everything, I don’t need anything.”

“All right, I will take it. But know this: you are saving two lives — mine and my child’s. How can I repay your kindness?”

“You know what? Yes, you can help me. I don’t know how to pray; but I am in need of prayer, right now, for my soul. Otherwise I will perish.” She looked at him with a long, compassionate look. She bowed and disappeared into the crowd.

But then he saw her again. She approached the Miraculous Icon, put her baby on one of the steps before the Icon, and started praying and making prostrations. Tears were streaming down her pale face. A shiver ran down his spine. He understood. This was a prayer for him. He quickly walked out of the church, went one block until he reached Great Konushenna Street. After the semi-darkness of the cathedral, the bright sun on the white snow blinded him. He felt a sharp, sudden pain in his eyes, then in his head, and he lost consciousness.

When he recovered, he sensed that he was lying on a table in his full Guard’s uniform. He had fallen into a lethargic sleep (Lethargic sleep — a comatose condition in which all bodily functions become undetectable and the person appears to be dead), and now he was starting to wake up. He still couldn’t move, couldn’t open his eyes, but he heard everything. Only he thought that he had died, and everything he heard he accepted as if he were dead. And everyone around him was sure that he was dead, and they prepared him for burial.

And now he understood the reverse side of life. He heard two voices — male and female. The man’s voice said: “At least for the sake of decency, put your handkerchief to your eyes. After all, he was your fiancé.”

And the female voice said: “Papa, you know how I hated and despised him. Only your debts made me agree to this marriage. I cannot continue this comedy.”

And then his friends approached. All of them were in debt to him. “How wonderful that Vladimir died, and I don’t have to pay back what he, good man that he was, loaned to me.”

And so more and more all the hypocrisy of the life he had been living was revealed to him. The tears of only one person were sincere. His nurse, who had taken the place of his father and mother, was sobbing.

Then they started to read the Psalter. Before, he had not understood them; but now, each word of the Psalms excited his awakening soul. All the depth of God’s Mercy was revealed to him. God’s Truth was revealed against the background of human lies. And then he heard a movement. He understood, the clergy had come and they were starting to serve the pannihida. And when they began to sing: “With the Saints give rest...,” and when they lifted his body to put it in the coffin, he caught his breath, recovered consciousness and began to move. Out of fear, the bearers dropped the coffin and ran out of the room. Vladimir remained alone. But by now he was not the same. In the middle of the empty room stood the renewed Vladimir.

When everything had calmed down, he divided all his property. Half he gave to his fiancée and all the rest to the poor. And he forgave all the debts. Soon afterwards, he became a monk and finished his ascetic life as archimandrite of the Kostroma Monastery.

This is how the Word of God renews a man!

Twenty-Third Sunday: the Possessed Gadarene.

“Now the man out of whom the demons were departed besought Him that he might be with Him: but Jesus sent him away, saying, Return to thine own house, and tell what great things God hath done unto thee. And he went his way, and published throughout the whole city how great things Jesus had done unto him” (Lk. 8:38-39).

So, brothers and sisters, ends today’s Gospel reading where, as you heard, the Lord tells the healed man to reveal the mystery of his healing before all the Gadarene people. And this is

what he did. The Gospel does not tell us how he related what had happened to him; but according to the meaning of the Gospel narrative, we can fully imagine what he must have said and what he most likely did say. Here is what he must have said:

You Gadarenes have known me from my childhood. I was born among you and grew up among you, in your Gadarene land, a land of transgression. You have seen what happened. You lived not according to the Law which God revealed to you, but according to your lawlessness. In your desire for riches and comfort you engaged in a sinful trade, a trade which was not blessed by God. You raised pigs. You had whole herds of them, and yet according to the Law, they are unclean animals. God punished you and gave you over to the power of the devil.

And by the incomprehensible Providence of God, all this demonic power lodged in me alone — I bore your punishment. I was changed from a human being into a beast. I couldn't live in houses — I lived in a desert place, in a cave where the dead were buried. You bound me with chains, and I broke them. There wasn't just one devil within me but a whole legion of devils; as you saw in reality when He Who healed me permitted the demons to enter your herd of pigs, which threw itself from the precipice into the lake and drowned. Yes, now you can truly imagine why I caused so much evil and trouble. There was a terrible power in me. The devils took possession of all my human passions and brought them to a monstrous state. That is why I hated you so savagely, why I wanted to torment you, destroy you.

And now this force has left me. I am asking you to forgive me. I love you now as a brother — I want to become your fellow citizen. And how grateful I am to Him Who freed me - He is my Savior — He is my God! And I am calling all of you to Him. Everything you are looking for: peace, happiness, joy — everything you will find in Heaven. All of you who weep, go to Him. He will wipe away your tears. He will give you what no earthly riches can give.

This is what the formerly possessed man told the Gadarenes. He could also say the same to us. And we would not be surprised, because the very same thing is going on right now. All our newspapers tell us about such horrors which cannot be explained without the participation of the power of evil. And against the background of this nightmare we seem to hear the voice of this man healed by Christ: "I have peace and quiet in my soul. This was given to me by Christ. He will give it to you, too. Hasten to Him. My heart is filled with sweet compunction."

But our skeptical mind will ask: Is this so? And even if it is so, how long will this sweet compunction last? Here we are given an answer in today's reading from the Apostle: "But God, Who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the GIFT OF GOD" (Eph. 2:4-5, 8). In these words of the Apostle we have a whole revelation. We have heard about the sufferings of the possessed one and how the Grace of God delivered him from them. This same Grace can do the very same for us. But Grace is given through faith. What is faith? In answer to this question I will tell you one incident from my student life.

I studied at the Polytechnic Institute. At the same time I was a member of a Christian student society. Once, we students decided to invite to our meeting our teacher, Father John Egorov, a famous professor of theology. He would have to travel to Lesnoye, a suburb of St. Petersburg, where our polytechnic institute was located.

We asked him to come visit us, but he answered: "I have never been there, and I don't know how to go."

Our friend who had come to invite him said: "Father, it is very simple. First, go to the railroad station, and there you will find the street car. Wait until number 20 comes and take it.

Without asking anyone, go to the very end. The conductor will say: ‘Polytechnic Institute — last stop.’ Walk out, stand with your back to the street car and before you will be a lane. Here, look for number 6 and before you will be a courtyard, and in the courtyard a house. Go up to the second floor, and you will find us there.”

Father John said: “A week passed and Sunday came. I took my notebook, looked at what I had written, and knew at once what I had to do. I remembered everything that your friend told me, and accepted it within myself as if I had already done it. I did all this in reality, and here I am with you.”

This is what faith means: to accept within oneself what was said, and put what was said into action.

Here in the Holy Gospel promises are given to us, and also instructions of what we must do to receive these promises. Let us accept them with faith. Let us perform everything that we are instructed to do in our lives, and we will receive the same Grace, the same peace, the same joy. We will receive everything that was received by the possessed man healed by Christ. Then the words of Christ will also refer to us. “Return to thine own house, and tell what great things God hath done unto thee.”

Twenty-Fourth Sunday: Resurrection of Jairus’ Daughter.

Last Sunday’s reading from the Apostle told us that we are saved by Grace, and that Grace is received through faith, and this is the gift of God. And we were shown what faith is in a striking example.

And here, even today’s Gospel speaks about faith. To some degree we all possess it. But because it is imperfect, our faith is often subject to temptations. And the most terrible, the strongest of such temptations, is the death of a person near and dear to us. I think that the majority of those present here have already lived through, or are now living through, this incurable grief. But if not, it is something which will inevitably come. Today’s Gospel gives us a classic example of how, in spite of all the difficulty of such an experience, it is possible to endure it. And at the same time it shows us again how much we need faith. For only through faith does God give us and will give us His power of Grace not to fall spiritually in such a terrible moment.

Jairus approached Christ; his daughter was near death. He fell at the feet of Jesus and asked Him to enter his house. Christ agreed, but the people were crowding Him. On the way, the woman with an issue of blood was healed. The whole time there were delays. Christ moved slowly, very slowly. Imagine what Jairus was going through. Here he had asked Christ to hurry. After all, this was a matter of life and death for his daughter. If Christ were one minute late, it might be too late — his daughter could die. And this is exactly what happened. Someone came from the house of the ruler of the synagogue and said to him: “Thy daughter is dead; trouble not the Master” (Lk. 8:49).

Yes, according to human understanding it was all over. Why trouble the Master? Anything is possible to mend, but not death. Death alone is irreparable. Before it even the Teacher is powerless. Yes, this is so according to human understanding, but not according to God’s understanding. And Jesus, after He heard this, said to Jairus: “Fear not: Believe only, and she shall be made whole” (Lk. 8:50). And in this moment Jairus rejected human understanding and accepted God’s understanding. Now before him stood not just a Teacher, but the Savior of the world, the Son of God — God Himself. Because God alone has power over life and death.

Jairus accepted within himself His words: “Fear not: believe only!” From this very moment he lived only by these words and continued following after Christ. They entered the house.

And again two sides: the human side — "All wept and bewailed her." And Christ said, "She is not dead, but sleepeth." And again the human. "And they laughed Him to scorn, knowing that she was dead." But in the soul of Jairus there was an unspeakable calm. He had faith. And faith conquered. "Maid, arise!" exclaimed Christ, and her spirit returned into her and she immediately got up and was united with her father (Lk. 8:52-55).

Yes, but you may say this is a miracle of resurrection, and such miracles do not happen now. True. But the same miracle has been promised to all of us. Every day in our Confession of Faith we read, "I look for the resurrection of the dead." And this will happen, it will! Not as soon as it happened for Jairus, but it will happen! Pay attention to the following moment. Jairus already knew that his daughter was dead, but all the same he followed Christ, believing His words. How long this walk in faith lasted is not important; but what is important is that it took place.

Let us also believe in the words of the Gospel that the dead will rise; and like Jairus, let us follow Christ in faith. Mystically, this walk of Jairus after Christ did not end and will never end. It goes on even now, and we can all participate in it. Let us hasten to join Jairus. Then the words of Christ, "Fear not: Believe only, and she shall be made whole," will refer also to us. But for this to happen, like Jairus, we must hold fast to the robe of Christ and endure everything that God sends to us on the road of our life. The way of Jairus was comparatively short. Ours might be long, very long. It will go to the end of our life. But let us believe that there will be the resurrection of the dead and that we will be united with those dear to us who are already with the Lord.

May God grant us the faith and the patience of Jairus!

Twenty-Fifth Sunday: the Merciful Samaritan.

"And, behold, a certain lawyer... tempted Him [Christ], saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself (Lk. 10:25-27).

Remember, brothers and sisters, how the Holy Church brought us to this passage in the Gospel narrative. Remember last Sunday how Jairus, a Jewish prince, came to Christ. His daughter was dying and he could find help nowhere. She was dying. And so he ran to Christ, fell at His feet and asked for help. She was dying — his only daughter. Christ went with him and Jairus walked with Christ. Maybe this was not long, but in the mind of Jairus it was the way of his whole life. He should be close by his dying daughter...but he hoped. He hoped because he believed that Christ could perform something great, could perform a healing which no one else could do. And this is like away of life.

It is the same with us. A certain moment comes and we are made aware that there will be a departure, there will be a grave, a person will die. I will, and after me, you. Each of us has to expect this moment. But if you hope in God and, like Jairus, hold onto the robe of Christ and do not fall away from Him in spite of all the temptations, then you will undoubtedly arrive... arrive where? Well, today's Gospel tells us where in the question of the lawyer: "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" This is where — into Eternal Life.

It is this moment which reveals today's Gospel to us. How do we walk? How do we hold onto the robe of Christ? How do we not let go of this robe during the whole way? And this way is long, very long. This is our life. This may mean years, and for some of us many years. Eighty years for some, ninety for others, and still longer. How many dangers there are on this long road that can tear us away from the robe of Christ! The storm of temptation is raging all around. Look

at our family life. Influenced by some mental blindness a husband abandons his family. From constant nervous tension in the family, a wife cannot bear it any longer and makes life intolerable, and so on. And in our public life, all the political crises; and in our civic life, the terrible crimes. O God, where can we go? All we have to do is, like Jairus, cling to Christ, hold onto His robe. The main thing is not to let go. We must be steadfast.

And today's Gospel gives us the secret of how to be steadfast. Be a Merciful Samaritan everywhere, always, and to everyone. Let us examine ourselves. Are we really like this? There were children around us — did we teach them good things? Or a man came to us who was on the verge of moral destruction. Did we support him in his fight against sin? Did we help him to get out of this swamp which was sucking him down? Maybe all we had to do was stretch out not even a hand, but just a finger, and he would have been saved. How many there were who needed just one word of encouragement, some attention. And we could have given all this. But did we give it, like the Merciful Samaritan? If to all these questions our conscience answers, no, we did not help — then, yes, we are in danger of being torn away from the robe of Christ. Let us hasten to mend this. Mercy alone can keep us with Christ.

Our children have so-called “baby-teeth” which fall out by themselves, and in their place other teeth grow — real ones. In the same way we have a heart. But this is a coarse, carnal heart — a selfish one. With such a heart you cannot enter Eternal Life. And it will not fall out by itself. We have to cast it out and replace it with a new heart — not ours, but Christ's. And any time we help our neighbor and make an effort, we are as if tearing off a piece of our heart and giving it away to our neighbor. And in place of this piece of carnal, sinful heart, the Lord puts in us a similar piece of His heart — Christ's heart.

So during our life we are changing our heart into a new one, a real one, into the heart of Christ. And only then will Eternal Life open for us. Then no one will be able to tear us away from the robe of Christ; and we will receive what the lawyer was asking Christ about — Eternal Life.

Twenty-Sixth Sunday: the Rich Man.

The Gospel for last Sunday related to us the parable about the Merciful Samaritan and finished with these words: “Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise” (Lk. 10:37). And today's Gospel — how does it end? “But God said unto him... This night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God” (Lk. 12:20)

Here are two different ways. They both bring us to our last moment — to death. But there is no death, but rather eternal life. This means that these different paths bring us to the mysterious passage, to the meeting with eternity. All of us have to meet this “mysterious something.” And this meeting will prove to be the most important moment of our entire life on earth, basically what we have lived for. There aren't even words in our language to express it; but today's Gospel and also last Sunday's Gospel give us some indications of this moment, this meeting. At the end of one way will thunder the terrible word, “Fool!” (Lk. 12:20). At the end of the other way, the Gospel does not even give us the word which we will hear, but says only: “Go, and do thou likewise!” This means, only do the same, act in the same way! And you will receive what no words can express.

What determines these two paths? The entire attitude of our life. And this attitude is expressed in our every step, in every action, in every breath. And how strange! Attitude seems to be something unimportant to people, something incidental. But it is not so in God's eyes. This atti-

tude is just what defines that great mystery which you and I will meet then, at the moment of departure; and that which will determine our lot for ever.

The Merciful Samaritan lived in love for God and neighbor. And every human being was his neighbor. He was as if living in one great family of the Heavenly Father. For him everyone was a brother or sister, and he was a brother to everyone. And the one who fell among robbers was dear to him — he could not pass him by. He stopped, although he too was probably hurrying on some business, like those who did pass by. He helped him, put him on his donkey, brought him to an inn, and entrusted his further care to the innkeeper. He paid for him, and should the innkeeper spend more, he promised to reimburse him when he returned. From all this, it is not difficult for us to determine the attitude of this man's life: he loved God with all his heart, with all his soul, with all his strength, with all his mind; and his neighbor as himself (Lk. 10:27).

What was the life attitude of the rich man in today's Gospel? As a manager he apparently was a good one; and as a man he was sensible and practical. See how he reasoned: "I will pull down my barns, and build greater: and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods" (Lk. 12:18). Listen to what he says: my fruits, my goods, not even mentioning God; and yet the harvest came from God! And further: "I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry" (Lk. 12:19). And where was love for neighbor? There was none. Not even a thought for his neighbor. All care was for himself alone: rest, food, drink, merriment — only for himself. Selfishness -- this was the attitude of his life.

Brothers and sisters, what is the spirit of our life, what is its attitude? I think if we honestly answer this question, then we will see in ourselves some of both. We have in us mercy, but not a little egotism. And if this is so, let us think about these words: "This night thy soul shall be required of thee." Indeed, this is so, this is true. "This night" means for us any night, any day or hour; but it will definitely be taken. And then, what will our soul hear? What the rich man, the egotist, heard, "Fool!" or will we see that light which appeared to the Merciful Samaritan? Yes, this will be a sentence for all eternity, and this sentence depends on the whole attitude of our life, its spirit.

Before it is too late, let us choose this wonderful attitude of the Merciful Samaritan and let us fight our selfishness as our enemy. Let us fight until death. And let us always remember, "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy" (Mt. 5:7).

Twenty-Seventh Sunday: the Holy Forefathers.

Last week's Gospel about the rich man who had a good harvest was like the finale to the cycle of the Gospel readings of Pentecost. It portrayed a man who had devoted all his concern to one thing: to the care of his temporary, earthly welfare. In order to keep his good harvest he destroyed the old barns, built new, larger ones, and said: "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee" (Lk. 12:19-20).

What's the matter? Why such a sentence? The answer to this question is given in the Gospel reading for this Sunday. It tells how the Lord prepared a feast and invited many people, in other words, everyone. And this rich man was one of those invited to the feast of God. However, he was so preoccupied with his living arrangements that he forgot about this "calling," about the feast to which he was invited. Never did he expect that his "calling" would be fulfilled that night. This is why God said he was a fool.

Today's parable ends with the words: "For many are called, but few are chosen" (Mt. 22:14). Who are the called ones? Everyone — God calls everyone, everyone without exception. And who are the chosen ones? The chosen ones are those who open their heart to receive the Grace of God. This is the only effort you have to make (and anyone can do it), and you will become a chosen one. To become a chosen one depends on us. We have to choose the Grace of God; and it will accomplish everything.

And so everyone was invited. But then, one after the other, they began refusing: one got married, another bought land, a third one bought oxen. Family, land owning, our social activity — all this is necessary, all this is blessed by God. But only if all of this is on the "Way" which leads to the Feast of the Lord. All reasons which were used by those invited in refusing to come were lawful, and in themselves had nothing sinful in them. But the fact that people converted these ways of life, temporary ways which should be used by us to get to the Feast of the Lord of Eternal Life, converted them into the purpose of life and forgot about the Lord's Feast — in this is foolishness and sin.

The parable for today is the Lord's answer to the words of one of the Pharisees who was sitting with Him: "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God!" (Lk. 14:15). This Pharisee had in mind the Jewish nation as the chosen of God and not our willful effort to love God and our neighbor.

Here Christ answered: No, it is not sufficient to belong to the Jewish nation or to any other nation. Rather, it is necessary to fulfill God's commandments of love for God and neighbor, and to pray that God help us to live in such a way. Then God will send us His Grace which will bring us to the Lord's Feast.

From this Sunday of the Holy Forefathers begins a new cycle of preparation for the Birth of Christ. This is the beginning of a new life. From the manger, the light of Christ will shine on us. And in this light will be the warmth of our adoption by God. At the manger we will feel like one family.

It is the same in nature. During the whole winter there was light, but no warmth. But from the moment of Christmas, our earth will turn toward the sun and will begin to experience the life-giving warmth which in the spring will produce greenery, flowers, and fruit. So it is in our spiritual nature. Something wonderful happens every year at the manger of Christ. We all begin to feel like brothers and sisters, children of one Father. And these are not just words, but reality. Love becomes manifest. There is a desire to gladden one another, to help, and to love.

And again this year, from the manger of Christ our new ways will begin: family, monastic, social, domestic, business. But all of them will guide us to one goal — to the Kingdom of God, to communion with God, to the Lord's Feast.

So let us not forget our dignity, our calling, that we are invited to the Lord's Feast. And let us spend our temporary life as pilgrims, proceeding on the paths that will bring us to the Heavenly Jerusalem, where there will be "the ceaseless sound of those keeping festival."

And then we will become not only those who are called, but those who are chosen.

Twenty-Eighth Sunday: the Holy Fathers.

"Adam...where art thou?" (Gen. 3:9). This is the voice of God which resounded in Adam's conscience after the Fall and tormented him. As long as Adam was in obedience to God — cultivated and kept Paradise, receiving strength for this by eating the fruits of the Tree of Life — he was in ceaseless communion with God. In his heart there was continuous quiet and joy.

But after tasting of the forbidden fruits of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, the thread of communion with God was broken in Adam's heart. Sin stood as a wall between God and man.

From this very time began a new history of man's life on earth. Man now lived under a curse and in the sweat of his face obtained his bread. But in spite of all his labors, he did not obtain a joyful heart. His life went on in sin. This sin was washed away by the Flood, but sin continued to possess man; and the confusion of Babel filled the whole world. But in this darkness, in this inconsolable anguish, we find a man who sought spiritual joy. This is Abraham. To him was given the law of life, and as a promise, the coming to earth of the Savior of the world, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity.

Centuries went by; people impatiently awaited the promised Messiah. People longed to be freed from sin, but without the Tree of Life, the promised Messiah, this was impossible. And finally the fulfillment of times is accomplished. The Savior of the world from sin comes to earth. He fulfills the commandment, given to man, of love for God and neighbor. But above all, He restores that Tree of Life which was in Paradise, which helped Adam to be in communion with God. Here are the words with which the Lord Himself announced this New Testamental communion with God: "He that eateth My flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in Me, and I in him" (Jn. 6:56).

Today the holy Church in the Gospel reading lists the names of those men who were the righteous ones and prepared for the appearance of the Savior. We call them the Fathers. By their lives they also give us the hope of receiving that joy of Paradise and peace of heart which Adam possessed in Paradise. And this is why we so reverently and prayerfully ask them today to help us to be partakers of this worldwide joy, the Nativity of Christ.

"Adam...where art thou?" So even now this eternal question resounds in our conscience. Of course, not in a geographical sense: God knows where each of us is. But in relation to Him — to God. O, let us not leave this question unanswered! Let us be able to say: I am here, Lord, at Thy manger, in Thy Church, before Thy Chalice — "I believe, O Lord, and I confess that Thou art truly the Christ, the Son of the Living God, Who came into the world to save sinners.

The 30th Sunday after Pentecost.

The Apostle Paul in his Epistle to the Ephesians says: "unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.... And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:7, 11-13). And the Gospel reading for this Sunday ends with these words: "From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, Repent: for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" (Mt. 4:17).

At Christmas we received the gift of adoption; on the Day of the Lord's Circumcision we received the beginning of a new year; on the Day of the Lord's Baptism we were shown the goal of our whole life and were given Grace, helping us to proceed toward this goal: "And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is My Beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased" (Mt. 3:17). And the Apostle summarizes all this: "unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ... for the edifying of the Body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ/' The Apostle also shows us where we should search for support and strengthening — in the

Church of Christ. “And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets... and some, pastors and teachers.”

“This truth,” says Bishop Theophan the Recluse, “is known by those who selflessly go the way of the Lord and, without pitying themselves, fight the enemies of salvation. In their pastors they will always find help and good advice, while looking from the outside you wouldn’t even expect it; because they do not come to men, but to the Lord, Who through these men is always ready to guide and advise all those who sincerely and with faith are seeking from Him help for themselves. The final radiant goal ‘is the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.’”

Look here how much we are given. And what is expected from us? Only one effort of our will — Repent! But even in this the Holy Church will help us, starting with the preparatory weeks for Great Lent. Let us be attentive and apply our will.

5. Fixed Feasts.

The Nativity of Christ.

“Prepare, O Bethlehem ... for the Tree of Life will blossom forth from the Virgin in the cave. Her womb appeared as a spiritual paradise, in which was the divine garden. Eating of it, we will live... Christ shall be born to raise the image that fell of old” (Troparion (hymn) of Preparation for the Nativity of Christ). This is how the Holy Church prepares us for the Feast of the Nativity. Here, brothers and sisters, while we were dashing in cars from one store to another, when we were preparing a feast in our homes, the Holy Church, still in a whisper, was revealing the mystery: “Prepare, O Bethlehem...”

How did Bethlehem prepare? With a cave — with the kind of cave into which cattle were driven. “Prepare, O Bethlehem...” and Bethlehem prepared. What did it prepare for? What was happening there in Bethlehem? In Bethlehem, in a stable for cattle, a great world-wide mystery was being performed. Here, as the Holy Church has told us, in this cave appeared a paradise in which grew the New Testament Tree of Life. Adam had life, because in paradise stood the Tree of Life, the Old Testament one from which he was nourished. And from the strength given in this nourishment, Adam had communion with God. This was an unspeakable joy which Adam lost when the gates of paradise were closed and the Tree of Life was lost. But God the Creator, pitying Adam, granted a prophecy that the Tree of Life would be restored. And this Tree is restored.

As I was saying, the Holy Church whispers, “Prepare, O Bethlehem...” Here our attention is not directed towards whether there will be palaces, whether everything will be flooded with electric lights, or draped in velvet or silk. Bethlehem, the cave, a cow’s manger, the elderly Joseph, and at the same time the shepherds who were carrying out such a sincere watch; they were true Jews who awaited the True Messiah. And for them the heavens opened and in their ears resounded the angelic singing, “Glory to God in the highest, Glory to God, Glory to God in the highest!” (Lk. 2:14). And after them came the true searchers for Truth — the Magi following the Star. They were searching and searching. The Star led them on. They knew from the constellation that something great, something worldwide had happened. They proceeded. And here the Holy Church says to us: Look, who was the cave of Bethlehem calling? The shepherds, truly searching; and the Magi, truly searching.

And so it is with you, brothers and sisters. We are calling you to the Truth. But to what Truth? To what Tree of Life? What kind of Tree grew in the cave in Bethlehem? Christ reveals to us this understanding of the Tree of Life. He says, "I am that bread of life...I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eats of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is My Flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (Jn. 6:48,51).

Don't you see, Christ is the Tree of Life, that Bread which we eat. And He says here definitely in the sixth chapter of John: "Whoso eateth My Flesh, and drinketh My Blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him at the last day. For My Flesh is food indeed, and My Blood is drink indeed. He that eateth My Flesh, and drinketh My Blood, dwelleth in Me, and I in him" (Jn. 6:54-56). This is what kind of Tree.

And this is the kind of Holy Day to which the Church has been calling us, whispering to us during the whole week this Troparion: "Prepare, O Bethlehem, for Eden has been opened for all. Ephratha show thy beauty, because the Tree of Life is coming — is coming to give us Life."

But there is a first step toward this life. I say this every year, otherwise it wouldn't be so convincing. What is happening in nature? Right now the earth is turning toward the sun and life-giving force is flowing into the earth. And in a little while our earth will begin to show its beauty; there will be flowers, followed by fruits. This happens every year.

So it happens in spiritual life. Just now, when you and I are making the first step toward the cave of Bethlehem, the Holy Church says to us through the Apostle's reading to the Galatians (Gal. 4:4-5): When the time of Christ's coming approached, the spirit of adoption (sonship) is poured into our soul. And this happens regardless. The same as in nature: regardless of whether or not the earth wants it, the life-giving force will be poured into it anyway. Only where there are weeds, there will be an offensive odor, decay. But where everything is ready to receive the seed, there will be joy and fragrance.

It is the same with us. Where our soul has prepared itself to receive the cave of Bethlehem, there will be adoption. What does this mean? This means that, inexplicably, as in nature, into our soul will be poured the power of Divine Grace, which will make us sense our nearness to the Creator, as to a Father. In this way, you have, he has, I have — we all have the same feeling toward one Father. In other words, one family is created. Brothers, if such a family is going to exist (and it will exist, it does exist already — such is the will of God), then in this family will be performed this mystery of Christ — the Tree of Life. In this Christian family the Mystical Supper, the Divine Eucharist, can be performed. In it the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ will be performed, the Sacrament of the Tree of Life, which is beyond all explanation.

People do not understand. Maybe they don't even think about it, and maybe they don't want to express it; but just the same, it expresses itself in spite of them. Look at the people of other confessions. In their desire to meet Christ, you also sense their desire to do something good to each other. It is expressed in trifles: ties, stockings, flowers, a watch, and so on. Everyone wants to give something to one another, not understanding the main thing that must be given. It is necessary to give something which will make a person feel that he is a son of our Lord Jesus Christ, to make him feel part of a family. In order to do this, we have to look into a person's heart, we have to be patient and maybe sometimes, lowering our head, just say: "God be merciful to me a sinner, because I have nothing more to give." And so it is for each of us.

Let this Holy Day become the Holy Day of the consecration of our heart, of the acceptance of adoption, in order to perform for us this spiritual endeavor: the beginning of that which Christ gives. "Prepare, O Bethlehem...Christ shall be born to raise the image that fell of old."

The Week after Nativity.

“And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying: Abba, Father!” (Gal. 4:6). So, brothers, those who were here at the Christmas Liturgy heard that on this great day, when we all gathered together at the manger in the cave of Bethlehem, God also in this year performed for us the mystery of renewing the spirit of adoption (sonship) in our hearts. Christ our Lord said: when you pray, say in such a way: “Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name...” (Mt. 6:9). This mystery of renewing our adoption to God was performed on the day of the Nativity of Christ.

Now there is nothing accidental in the Church. And it is not without reason that just on the day of the Nativity of Christ, the Church tells us through the mouth of the Apostle Paul: But when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth His Son... that we might receive the adoption of sons (Gal. 4:4-5). It is in this that the mystery consists, the mystery which singles out these days of the Christmas Season from all other days of the year. In these great days the Family of Christ will be formed, and we are becoming members of this family, brothers and sisters of each other, children of one Heavenly Father. And only in such a great family can the restoration of the Tree of Life be performed, the Eucharist, the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ.

This is what the day of Christmas should have given us. And when we relived the angelic praise: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace” (Lk. 2:14), then involuntarily we turned to the Mother of God and said to her, “More honorable than the Cherubim and incomparably more glorious than the Seraphim...” (From the hymn to the Mother of God, “It is meet...”). For this reason, the Holy Church dedicated to her the second day of Christmas, calling it “The Gathering in Honor of the Most Holy Mother of God,” that is, the day of the meeting of believers to glorify the Mother of God.

And the Gospel for this Sunday, “the Sunday after Nativity,” relates to us again what the Mother of God experienced after the Nativity of Christ, stressing her greatness in her sufferings and her participation in our salvation. She became the ladder which united Heaven and earth. She became the high point of the Old Testament through whom was incarnate the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. Like a white lily, she will never cease to captivate human hearts with her unearthly beauty. And the human race will never forget her, will never stop to wing before her dove-like purity and her infinite holiness. Read today’s Gospel carefully; actually, it is like the first page of the book of her life, her sufferings. Look, Christ had just been born and her mother’s heart already began to suffer*. Herod was scheming, there was weeping, fighting, the murder of the babes — fourteen thousand of them. The flight into Egypt — emigration. We have all experienced emigration. Except our emigration occurred under the conditions of modern technology. And back then?

As Tradition tells us: there was a donkey, the Mother of God with the Babe, the eighty-year old Joseph, and the son of Joseph, James, in the wilderness, into Egypt. And then in Egypt. There was heat, worry about food. No place, no shelter. The old Joseph was a carpenter. What kind of earnings could he have in a foreign country? What kind of comfort? Then again a revelation: they must return. But again the Mother of God had to hide, because at this time Herod the Younger was ruling. Again fear that Christ would be found. Nazareth. The labors of the elderly Joseph and his death. And Christ grew up. The preaching began. Here the Mother of God saw malice in those around Him. The Pharisees and Sadducees were troubled. It seemed to them that the preaching of Christ might disturb the apparent balance which resulted from the Jewish leadership making all concessions required by Roman law. The Mother of God saw all this. And fur-

ther on, the betrayal of Christ, the judgment by Pilate, the malice of the Pharisees. Crucifixion. The Mother of God at the Cross. The death of Christ This shows us the life of the Mother of God.

And at the same time, in these two thousand years, it is she who has become the Mother of all generations. Just think about it. Millions of people walked through our Cathedral of the Assumption in Moscow, bowing down before her first-painted image, which we call the Vladimir icon. And the Iverskaya Chapel and our Lavra (Lavra — Ancient monastery in the caves on the shore of the Dnieper River in Kiev) in Kiev where our forefathers, grandfathers, fathers, and grandchildren passed through. When their heart was breaking from loneliness, from despair, they all sensed and felt a wonderful consolation when their lips whispered, “Save me.” Whoever sat in prison, he knows that in the moments when his last name was being shouted through the little window, in his inner feeling he was calling to the Mother. This is that Mother. She is before us today. The Church gives her to us as a model for our Christian living.

But there is another step still before us. This is the first of January — the Circumcision of Christ. And for us this should be the day of confessing our feeling: “Yes, I am a Christian; and in the spirit of my life I will strive so that the Beatitudes given to us by the Lord will become, as it were, the beating of my heart.” And then, with such a resolve, for us it will become a New Year indeed.

New Year’s Eve.

(Molieben at New Year’s Eve — a service of thanksgiving for the past year and prayer for blessing of the coming year).

A new year! These first minutes of the coming New Year, tonight’s Molieben which we have just performed — these are really sacred minutes.

But also every night at twelve o’clock the Holy Church puts before us a cloud of light. This is the midnight service. At this service the 17th Kathisma (17th Kathisma — a Kathisma is one of the 20 divisions of the Psalter. The 17th Kathisma is comprised solely of Psalm 118 (Psalm 119 in the King James Version), the longest psalm in the Psalter) is read, which reveals to us the condition of our heart, and like a magnet draws out of it everything passionate and sinful which prevents us from approaching the Lord. In fact, it is our desire to approach, to come closer to the Lord that makes up the mystery of this moment through which you and I are now living.

And tonight, it is not a Kathisma which is put before us; rather the Holy Church gives us a special rite of the New Year Molieben, namely: “for those who are in night.” This night’s prayer reveals to us the sinful state of our unworthiness. But the Lord, merciful as a father, will accept us and embrace us. And in the moments when we have grief, the grief will pass. And when joy comes, the Lord will caress us with this joy.

Congratulations on this mercy of God of which we, along with the entire Holy Church, partake today in the New Year. May the Lord keep you!

The First of January, Circumcision of the Lord.

It is not by chance that New Year’s day and the Feast of the Lord’s Circumcision coincide. It has a deep symbolic meaning. And this meaning consists in the fact that the whole cycle of our inner life really starts with these days. And this is not just my own understanding, as a pastor in my position, but it is the understanding of our entire Russian Church, which in the year 1700 changed over to the calculation of time from the Birth of Christ, and by doing this, united everything from the beginning of our Christian life, united everything in which our life consists.

If people understood this, then our Church would be as crowded today as it was on Easter or Christmas. Listen carefully to what was said by our great teacher of the Church, Theophan the Recluse, one of the confessors for the Church of Christ. What did he say? “Just as the New Year is the beginning of the days of the year, so on this day we must gather into our soul the kinds of thoughts, feelings, and dispositions which could direct all activities during the year in a way worthy of a Christian.” See what Theophan the Recluse has in mind: “On this day the Church as it reveals to us the Divine Grace for understanding, feeling, reasoning, and for exciting our spirit.”

See how this great teacher of the Church views this day: “A New Year! Until 1700, time was calculated from the creation of the world, from the month of September. But from the year 1700, the calculation of time was reunited with what must take place in the soul of a Christian.” Starting from 1700 the Christian New Year began from Christmas, with our leaving the cave of Bethlehem, on the Day of the Lord’s Circumcision, when He was given the name of Jesus.”

And therefore, it turns out that the New Year, as it were, strengthens that which should be in the soul of a human being. This is like the beginning of our renewed life. Note how Bishop Theophan continues: “This we will find at once, as soon as we accept in our thoughts that there is a New Year in spiritual life. And there is a New Year in spiritual life when a person who was living in negligence starts to be zealous for salvation and a God-pleasing life.”

There are moments in life, there is something which gnaws at our heart, something in our heart which disturbs it. And at the same time, we are slaves to this disturbance in the heart. So this first day of January, the day when we perform the circumcision of our heart, becomes a necessary day for us. On this day we confess ourselves to be Christians before the Lord, Who was born for the sake of our salvation and Who renews our yearly cycle. And as you can see, this is the beginning. “Because when a person makes a decision to do this (that is, to change his life),” continues Bishop Theophan, “then everything inside of him is being rebuilt anew, on new foundations. The old things are past and everything becomes new.”

And it is the same with us today. Let us walk out of church, and let us feel in our heart this beginning. O Lord, from this day on I want to be Thy slave, not the slave of Egypt where against my will I laid bricks and worked for the prince of this world. O Lord, I want to be Thine! “If you have this — renew it; if you don’t have it, create it, and you will have a New Year.” So concludes Bishop Theophan. And this is why with such hope in God’s mercy we perform this first Molieben, which is a very unusual one and begins with the words: “Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever and to the ages of ages, Amen.”

Baptism of the Lord.

Have you noticed, brothers and sisters, how the Holy Church continually connects our life with events from the life of Christ? During the days of Christmas, while worshipping at the manger of Christ, we received the “spirit of adoption/” On the day of the Lord’s Circumcision, we gave our heart to Christ and began our spiritual New Year. And here, for these past days, the Holy Church has been calling us to the shores of the Jordan, and today, on the day of the Baptism of the Lord, she reveals to us a great mystery — the Manifestation of God.

Placed before us is the purpose of our whole life, and this is Communion with God. And we are given Grace, divine help for this kind of life. This help, this Grace comes to us from the One God worshipped in Trinity, Who is revealed to us in today’s Gospel reading. And as material proof, as a symbol of this Grace, we are given this Baptismal water, the blessing of which we will now perform. It is tangible. So often, through something tangible the Holy Church unites us with the intangible, with the Grace of God.

Be attentive to what the Holy Church says to us today through the Apostle's reading: "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:11-13).

Today we are given not only knowledge, but also renewal. While present at our church service, perhaps we haven't heard everything or understood everything; but at the same time, just as it happens in God's world, when you walk out — it is spring and there is the breath of a kind of mysterious power. Maybe this is incomprehensible to us, intangible. But today, for all of those who were expecting this power of Grace, it must visit us and prepare us for our future way of life which will be bound up with our will.

Therefore, following these days begins the week after Baptism, where it will be said: "Repent: for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!" (Mt. 4:17). And so begins a whole academy, the great Lenten Triodion (Lenten Triodion — a liturgical book which contains the cycle of services for Great Lent and the four weeks that precede it, dealing especially with the Passion of Jesus Christ), which will reveal to us the laws of life and the laws of our heart which we need so much. It may happen that even this year we will join our fathers and forefathers who are already in eternal life. For this reason, let us strive to fill our hearts with everything the Holy Church now gives us.