

Jan. 25, 2014

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

The Gospel reading for this Sunday, the first Sunday after Theophany when we celebrated the baptism of our Savior performed by St. John the Baptist, talks about the Savior beginning His Mission. Our Lord did not begin His teaching immediately after His Baptism, but waited until St. John finished his mission as the forerunner to prepare people for Christ's arrival. St. John's work was vital to the success of Jesus, because by this time in history, the spiritual level of humanity had fallen to such a low level that people would not have been able to understand the divine message of Our Savior. Therefore, Jesus waited until St. John's work was done.

St. John's mission ended when he was arrested by King Herod for openly condemning the king for his immoral behavior. Upon hearing the news of St. John's arrest, Jesus left Judea for Galilee. Because the Savior never did anything that did not have a purpose through which He was giving us an important teaching, a church father explains that by leaving Judea, the Savior was teaching us that we should never put ourselves into an unnecessarily dangerous situation. The Savior by this time had already made a name for Himself through His actions, amazing miracles and healing of the sick. Therefore, if St. John's spiritual teachings were viewed as a threat to the authorities, how more more of a threat would they view the more profound teachings of the Savior?

Arriving in Nazareth, the town in which He grew up, Jesus encountered major resistance by the town folk. They could not comprehend how the boy they watched grow up could become the Savior. Having heard about the miracles that He had already done, they demanded that He perform an incredible miracle in front of them in order to convince them of His divine calling. However, Jesus, understanding that miracles done for show were a very ineffective way of building firm faith, refused their demand. By doing that, the Savior was teaching a very important moral lesson of how important it was to show proper reverence and respect for things that are holy, as stipulated by the third of the Ten Commandments. His refusal was met with rage, forcing Him to depart.

Leaving Nazareth, Jesus went to and settled in Capernaum, which, from that point on, was considered to be His home as He spent a great deal of time teaching there. In Judea, He had already revealed who He was, that He was the Savior. Now He begins in earnest His mission to teach what one must do in order inherit the Kingdom of God and Salvation. He begins His Mission with the same words that St. John began his: "REPENT, for the Kingdom of God is at hand."

What does it mean to repent, and why was repentance the gateway into the Kingdom of God? To repent means to feel such regret and contrition over one's sins that the repentant person decides to make a firm commitment to change himself. It is a rejection of how one was living up to now, followed by a firm desire to change. Only through repentance is it possible to establish a relationship with God that will allow a person to achieve Salvation. Our sins, no matter how small, are repulsive to God and separate us

from Him. It is only when we come to God asking Him for forgiveness, that He strengthen us with His divine Grace which enables us to change. Only when we use this Grace to accomplish the change in our moral behavior are we able to reconcile our lives with our God and open the door into the Kingdom of God. This was the reason both St. John and the Savior began their mission with the call to repentance. And their call was not just to the people of their time. It is an eternal call that applies to all of us, even Orthodox Christians today. All people sin and without repentance cannot achieve salvation.

In conclusion, I would like to remind you about the importance of having your home blessed with the holy water of Theophany. Our sins affect not only us. They also pollute our home. We free ourselves from our sins by repentance. We also need to purify our home from the effects of our sins through these house blessings. Therefore, if you have not yet done so, I very much encourage you to call a priest and have this very short but important service done in your home.

With Love in Christ,
Archpriest Serge Kotar