

HOLY APOSTLE AND EVANGELIST MATTHEW 29 November 2020

Christ is in our midst He is and ever shall be!

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen!

TWO GOSPEL PASSAGES:

2nd Gospel: Matthew 9:9-13

As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, "Follow Me." So he arose and followed Him. Now it happened, as Jesus sat at the table in the house, that behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to His disciples, "Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" When Jesus heard that, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

THE CALLING OF MATTHEW!

Gospel Theme: Healing and redemption. Matthew, also called Levi, was among those compelled by the Romans to serve as tax collectors. (Levi means "joined in harmony"). Tradition asserts that Matthew was in the service of the Roman government at Capernaum. As collaborators with the Roman occupation tax collectors like Matthew were shunned and hated but when Jesus says to him "Follow me!". Matthew follows and becomes one of the Twelve Apostles, his entire life transformed! Through grace, Matthew begins his journey from sinner to apostle and evangelist! His transformation recalls the parable of the Publican – the tax collector – and the Pharisee in the temple! "Lord have mercy on me a sinner!" From living in darkness as an exploiter of the people, Matthew emerges into light as a servant of God and servant of the people! Through Christ his entire life is turned around as he changes from sinner to saint and the first of the four Gospels bears his name.

In this Gospel passage we read that the Pharisees are scandalized to see Jesus and His disciples sitting and dining with Matthew. They ask a perfectly logical question: "Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" Jesus answers correctly that it is not those who are well who need physicians but those who are sick! The Lord Jesus addresses the reality of human frailty and human error in terms of mercy not judgment. "I did not come to call the righteous", He says, "but sinners, to repentance". This is a

message for all of humanity and it is a message for the Church. We are to care for one another – to show compassion and concern for one another; to show forgiveness and to offer mercy, not judgment and condemnation. It is the love of Christ which offers healing and new life to us, not a check list of our mistakes! It is following this example of concern for others that works toward the fulfillment of the two Great Commandments – LOVE GOD! LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR!

In the Orthodox Church, sin is understood and defined as a spiritual sickness, not a state of guilt. “Sin” defines a spiritual illness which distorts human nature and the Image of God which is inherent but which may be hidden within our human nature. Sin is an illness which diminishes the divine likeness within us and which distorts our ability to see the world as it truly is! Sin prevents us from fulfilling our natural potential to become deified in communion with God.”

GOSPEL: Luke 10:25-37

And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?” So he answered and said, “‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,’ and ‘your neighbor as yourself.’” And He said to him, “You have answered rightly; do this and you will live.” But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” Then Jesus answered and said: “A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, ‘Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.’ So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?” And he said, “He who showed mercy on him.” Then Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

THE GOOD SAMARITAN (Contrast and similarity in each of us!)

In today's passage from Luke's Gospel, fulfillment of the two Great Commandments is the foundation for the well known story of the Good Samaritan. It clarifies the basic message of today's passage from Matthew's Gospel. A lawyer asks Jesus "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus answers the lawyer by asking him "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?" The lawyer answers correctly by citing the two Great Commandments – to love God and to love our neighbour. The lawyer then asks "Who is my neighbour?" Jesus then tells the story of the Good Samaritan, a parallel to this morning's passage about tax collectors and sinners. Like them, Samaritans were despised, looked down upon, shunned, vilified, regarded as unclean and to be avoided as if they were diseased. A man is robbed and left for dead. Two individuals – a priest and a Levite - see him, but pass by, ignoring him. They are supposed to be good people but they do nothing. Then a Samaritan – despised, rejected – sees the wounded man. Jesus tells the lawyer that the Samaritan, seeing the injured man, had compassion for him. The Samaritan helps the injured man, bandages his wounds, cleaning them with oil and wine. The victim of a brutal robbery is then taken to an inn where the Samaritan cares for him and later pays the innkeeper to continue to look after him. Who then was the one who loved his neighbour? The lawyer states the obvious – it was the Samaritan, the rejected one, the outcast, the pariah, the sinner who showed mercy and who showed love, to his neighbour! Jesus replies in four brief words, "Go and do likewise!"

Importance of this passage: We are given choices in this world. To live only for the self is the way to perdition. To help and to serve others – this is a basic teaching, a basic component and reality of our faith, of our lives, of our witness as followers of our blessed Lord Jesus! Words are not enough! Faith requires action just as the Samaritan acted when he rescued and saved the man who had fallen among thieves while others passed by, ignoring his plight! Let us take to heart the words of wisdom of the Lord Jesus in Matthew's Gospel, Chapter 7, Verse 21: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord', shall enter the kingdom of heaven but he who does the will of My Father in heaven." This is true wisdom! We are invited to do the will of God through action! We are to respond with joy to the four words of the Lord Jesus: "GO AND DO LIKEWISE!"

CHRIST IS IN OUR MIDST! HE IS AND EVER SHALL BE!!

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen!