

### 17<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost

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

Glory to Jesus Christ!

The Gospel reading today spoke to us of the earliest days in the Lord's public ministry, at a time when Christ first began to preach and to teach.

Now even though the Evangelist Luke does not record the content of the Lord's preaching to the crowds as He taught that day on the Sea of Galilee, we do have an idea of what the Lord's message was from the Evangelists Matthew and Mark.

Both of these Evangelists tell us that when the Lord began His preaching, His first message was "Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" and "Repent, and believe in the Gospel!"

Now, repentance, as we know, is a key theme in the Lord's preaching and therefore a key component in our spiritual life. However, what it means to repent is understood differently by different people, and this is often times a result of whether or not we are talking about repentance in the Old or New Testaments.

In Biblical Hebrew, in the Old Testament, there were two words for repentance; one meant "to return" and the other "to feel sorrow" – to return to God and to feel sorrow for one's sins.

While in New Testament Greek, there is only one word for repentance and it is *metanoia*, which simply means a change of mind, or to think different, or if you will to arrive at a higher state of awareness.

Now it's interesting that when the Evangelists recorded the Lord's message in their Gospels they chose to use the word *metanoia*, meaning change of mind, rather than the words for "to return" or "to feel sorrow."

And why was this? Why did the Evangelists use the Greek word for repentance which meant "change of mind" rather than the Hebrew words meaning "to return" or "to feel sorrow"?

Was it because the Lord Himself was preaching in Greek? No, probably not, since the Lord taught primarily in Hebrew and Aramaic, the languages which the Jews in that area were speaking. Well then, was it because the Gospels themselves were written in Greek? Well, no it wasn't for this reason either, because the Evangelists could easily have used the Greek words meaning "to return" or "to feel sorrow" if this is what the Lord meant when He said, "Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!"

No, the Evangelists chose the word *metanoia*, meaning "to change one's mind" because this is what the Lord's message was all about. The Lord was preaching a new way of

thinking, a new way of understanding one's relationship to God, to the world, and to one's neighbor. What the Lord was doing was educating His people, instructing them in the spiritual life and opening their eyes to the ways of God.

Often times we hear the expression, "Wow, that was a real eye opener!" And this of course means, "Wow, I just learned something I didn't know before!" There is a certain level of excitement that comes from knowledge, a certain sense of joy which comes from understanding.

This is what the Lord's message meant for His disciples, their eyes were being opened and they were excited about it. They were coming to understanding things differently, in a better way.

They had the kind of feeling that a student gets when he finally understands what he's being taught, when things click, when the light bulb comes on. If we think about this on a level of academic pursuit. It's like when a student of science comes to understand how gravity works, or when someone studying economics finally grasps how the stock market works, or when a pre-med student realizes how a certain type of medicine can help save a life.

This is what was happening with the disciples, except of course on a spiritual level. The Lord was revealing to them the mysteries of the spiritual life. He was teaching them how to live their lives in communion with God, how to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

And as the Lord taught, the disciples hung on His every word, they had ears to hear and eyes to see and they were using them. And the more they listened to the Lord's words, the more their minds were being changed, they were coming to understand everything about life in a new and better way. And since their minds were being changed, repentance was already happening, and the Kingdom was already being opened to them.

This is the marvelous mystery of the Lord's message. The Lord was not simply calling people to turn to God and sorrow over their sins – they had heard that before, and it rarely worked – instead He was opening their minds and expanding their horizons, by imparting to them new knowledge, spiritual wisdom which had been hidden since the foundation of the world.

What was the Lord teaching? Well He was teaching them about their true value, about their eternal worth, about their infinite value in the eyes of God.

And He was teaching them not to seek only the things of the earth, those things which are perishing and fading away. He was teaching them to seek after those things which are eternal, those things which they could keep forever, the virtues: compassion, mercy, righteousness, and love.

And the Lord made them a promise, He told that that if they would seek the Kingdom of heaven and it's righteousness first then everything else that they needed would be freely

given to them. They wouldn't have to worry any longer about food, clothing, or shelter – those three main requirements for life – because God would provide for them.

The Lord said, "Consider the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap, yet God provides for and feeds them." "Consider the flowers of the field, for they neither toil nor spin and yet God clothes them in glory even greater than that of Solomon."

"And do not seek what you shall eat, nor what you shall drink, and stop being so anxious. For all these things the nations of the world seek after, and your Father knows that you have need of these things. But rather seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you."

This was the Lord's eye-opening teaching in His Sermon on the Mount, and most likely, this was the Lord's teaching that day on the Sea of Galilee – have trust in God and seek Him above all else and God will provide everything else that is needed.

And of course, how timely this teaching was. Remember that just that night, Peter, Andrew, James, and John had been out fishing and had caught nothing. And they were cleaning their nets by the side of the sea when our Lord came to them asking them to put out from the bank so that He could teach the crowds.

Well, little did these simple fishermen know that the Lord's message that day would be primarily for them. For He would teach them the benefits of trusting God and seeking His kingdom first. Remember Peter, Andrew, James and John were probably a little frustrated and tired, and perhaps even a little irritable since they didn't catch anything the night before. Yet, they didn't say to the Lord, "Hey we're trying to make a living here, we don't have time for your message."

Instead they trusted the Lord and put out their boat from the land so He could teach. Now, as He taught about not worrying about where their next meal would come from, they probably became a little nervous, and with their stomachs groaning perhaps a little hesitant to accept the message. After all, it's a great philosophy to put God first and seek the things of heaven, but they were men of flesh and blood, they had families to provide for, they needed to be realistic.

Yet, what does the Lord do? After preaching that if one trusts in God and seeks His kingdom first that everything else would be granted, the Lord immediately tells these flesh and blood fishermen to put out into the deep and put down their nets for a catch. And when the disciples follow the Lord's instruction, the catch of fish is so great that their nets started to break and their ships started to sink.

How powerful this experience must have been for the disciples. Their minds had been opened to a new way of thinking through the Lord's teaching, and then they witnessed the benefits of this new way of thinking almost immediately with their own eyes and in their own lives. And in this one miraculous day, the disciples, without even knowing it, had already undergone a great *metanoia*, a great repentance, a great change of mind. They were beginning to see the world differently, and by virtue of this new knowledge,

this new understanding, they were seeing the Lord's action in their lives, and they were beginning to desire something more for themselves, they were beginning to desire the Kingdom of Heaven.

And then what does the Gospel say? It says that, "when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed Him." They left their fishing nets, they left their livelihood, and they followed Christ.

Brothers and sisters, what is the message of today's Gospel? Is it to quit our jobs and never work again? Of course not! The message is that if we seek the Lord first and labor for His Kingdom, then God Himself will look out for us, He will take us under His wing and care for us.

There were two groups of people who heard the Lord's message that day on the Sea of Galilee. There were the disciples and there were the crowds on the shore. The disciples took the message to heart and they acted upon the new understanding they had received, while the crowds returned home to their daily lives – to ordinary living. This is the choice that is before each of us every single day – the Lord offers to us a new way of thinking, a new way of living, but it is for us to decide whether or not we are willing to adopt it.

The student learns about gravity, the stock market, and medicine but this knowledge doesn't force him to become a scientist, a stock broker, or a doctor. What makes this happen is putting what has been learned into practice, by making use of the knowledge which has been acquired.

This is what the disciples did when they acted upon their faith, and for this the Lord rewarded them, not so much by the catch of fish because after all they left the fish behind together with their boats and everything else. The Lord rewarded them by solidifying them in the knowledge that God would provide for them, if only they placed all their trust in Him.

Let us make the same choice as the disciples, let seek first the Kingdom of Heaven. Let us allow the Lord to set us free from excess worldly cares by breaking the nets of anxiety in our lives as He broke the nets of the fishermen with the miraculous catch.

And let us do this by opening our ears to the Lord's teaching, opening our eyes to His action in our lives, and changing our minds about what is important in life, for only in this way can we experience that true repentance which leads to the eternal Kingdom.

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

Glory to Jesus Christ!