

Today is the Sunday after Theophany and today's Gospel reading is about what happened after Theophany, after the baptism of the Lord in the Jordan. But I would also like to quote here the Gospel reading from the Saturday after Theophany. In it we read about the temptations that came after baptism and how Christ responds to them. He answers by quoting the Scriptures, that is, He looks to the Church for his answer, in his case; the Sacred Scriptures of the Jewish Tradition. Because what happens after baptism? Then come the temptations. The Holy Baptism, and not only baptism but all the sacraments, they bring the Divine Light that shines in our soul and as always when light shines, only then can you see what is there. The light shines into our soul and shows what lives there, the beautiful things and the bad things. In the words of Saint Nektarios; temptations come so that the hidden passions are revealed. Our response to that must be like Christ's response, the Church's response, "Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner." It is that humility that brings deliverance from a life in darkness. Ignoring that darkness does not bring salvation but ultimately brings despair.

Today's gospel reading is about repenting: repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Jesus thus continues the proclamation of St. John the Forerunner. But what is that repentance? It's not just an emotion, it's not just a feeling of regret, although that's certainly part of it. Repentance is a turning from a life in darkness to a life in the Light of Christ. It is turning from a life of caring for yourself and perhaps caring for your immediate environment, your family or your circle of friends, to a life of self-sacrifice. From selfishness to self-sacrifice. That is not a gloomy, depressing state of mind, but a new joy, an unearthly joy. The joy of the Resurrection. The joy of knowing you are with Christ. If we truly repent and truly turn to God then we are in His Grace and the joy is infinite. That repentance also brings us the fruits of the Holy Spirit, the most important of which are; love for God and love for fellow man. That is the Kingdom of Heaven, the Kingdom of God, where His will is law and is indeed done; and that law is; love God and love your fellow man.

Well the truth of course is that sometimes we do regret things that have gone wrong, through our own fault, or because we got carried away by others, and we can mention those things in confession, but true repentance is of a different order; it is the deep sadness and aversion to how we go through life, when we know we don't have to live that way. Christ was baptized to save us from that darkness. The Church, Christ Himself, gives us the Grace on the condition that we fight, that we are sincere enough in our regrets, that we fight against the darkness within ourselves, against the way we ignore, deny, even oppose God. It is that struggle that God sees, not so much the result.

Deep repentance is the key and the beginning of our salvation, the salvation from a life without God.

To conclude, a story from the life of the Hl. Sisoies, the desert father, known for his strict fasting and his detachment from the things of this world. The grace of God spoke through his words and he led many to God. As his death drew near, his disciples and brothers surrounded his bed and they saw his lips move. So they asked, 'To whom are you speaking, father'. And he replied, 'Behold, the angels have come to fetch me, and I have asked them for more time so that I may repent. His disciples exclaimed; 'Must you still repent more?' The old man replied; "I don't think I've even begun to repent". If we could have that attitude, then the Kingdom of Heaven is indeed near, if not already here.