



Sunday of the Samaritan Woman

When we stand in church or at home before the holy icons, make the sign of the cross, bow our heads or prostrate ourselves, say the words of prayer, make charitable contributions to the church, abstain from non-Lenten food, i.e. keep the fast, etc., – then we are externally serving and worshipping God. However, such worship is not yet the worship “in spirit and in truth” that was mentioned in today’s Gospel, it is not yet genuine prayer, but only its outward manifestation.

Today’s Gospel reading tells us of how Jesus Christ in His conversation with the Samaritan woman teaches us, too, how to pray and how to worship God.

We have just celebrated the great feast of Christ’s Resurrection, the celebration of which continues until the end of the paschal period. And throughout this period of time, every Sunday the Church brings to our attention Gospel readings from St. John the Theologian, whose Gospel is distinguished from the others by its lofty spiritual style, and which most frequently deals with dogmatic teaching and speaks of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, as the Messiah.

The Holy Church, preparing us throughout the entire year for the feast of Pascha, now offers us supreme truths in these Gospel readings.

Often in prayer our soul is distracted by various earthly thoughts, even against our will. Often we ourselves do not know what we are saying, since our lips say one thing, while the heart deals with another. How can we expect God to hear our prayer when we ourselves often do not hear it? Rarely are we able to pray sincerely, sometimes not at all, and there is little benefit from automatic prayer. What should we do? Should we stop praying?

No, dear brethren! The Lord answers us through the Samaritan woman.

The Lord met this woman at the well, and during His conversation with her He made her aware of her sinful life. This revelation set her on the path to salvation – she was the first among the Samaritans to acknowledge Christ as Messiah. Without even having had time to do any penance, she asks this Stranger about spiritual life, and He explains it to her. He does not reject her, though she is a sinner, but discourses with her on the same level as with His listeners in the synagogues.

The Lord knows what is in everyone’s heart, He knew what was in the Samaritan woman’s heart, and He also knows our own hearts and our weaknesses. He knows us well and can help us, only we must not fall prey to despondency. Tradition holds it that the Samaritan woman, who was called Photinia, was persecuted during Nero’s reign in approximately 66 A.D. for spreading Christianity, and died a martyric death by being thrown into a well.

Despite leading a sinful life, the Samaritan Photinia had a sincere desire to know the true faith, and the Lord did not overlook her desire. In other words, she was not lukewarm in faith as is, unfortunately, the overwhelming majority of contemporary mankind. The Lord accepted the sinful Samaritan woman, but did not approve of the scribes and the Pharisees, despite the fact that outwardly their life may have appeared more righteous.

Thus external actions alone, without internal coordination, are of lesser value to us than making sure our inner spiritual state is better and purer. At this point we come upon the most important aspect of our life: **the inner life**.

Today's Gospel reading teaches us to approach all spiritual issues in our life **from within**: to pay scant attention to externals, for the internal has more value than the external. And whenever we are faced with the question of whether we are acting correctly in such-and-such a case, we should look upon it **from within the heart**: if the answer is "yes" – then thanks be to God, and if the answer is "no" – then we must try to change ourselves.

Thus for a long time now, for almost two thousand years, the time has been ripe to worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for God seeks such worshippers; and may He grant that we be among them. Amen.

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