

## **Homily on Matthew 4:12-17. The Sunday after Theophany**

**Father Filip Lommaert**

**Sunday, January 8, 2023**

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, one God. Amen.

Today, on the Sunday following Theophany, we listened to the Gospel reading of Saint Matthew.

Last Thursday we celebrated, how God revealed Himself as the Holy Trinity when Christ was baptised by Saint John the Forerunner in the Jordan for our salvation.

Jesus Christ our Lord submitted to baptism by Saint John in a river. When Christ emerged from the water, the voice of God the Father identified Him as His Beloved Son.

The Holy Spirit descended upon Christ in the form of a dove. God enters into creation, instead of Him escaping or rescuing creation.

Jesus Christ was not baptised by Saint John as a sign of His own repentance, because there was no need for this: He was free of sin. By entering the water He makes this water holy and restores creation to its right relationship with God. All of us are part of that creation, both as individuals and in relation to one another.

Returning to today's Gospel passage, it says that the inhabitants of Zebulon and Naphtali were people who sat in darkness. We too also sit in darkness. And this darkness is looming darker than ever.

We must ask ourselves: "If the light of Christ has dawned, why do we sit in darkness?" We sit in darkness because we have turned our backs on the light.

We have turned our backs to the light just like Judas who walked out of the light of the Upper Room into the darkness of the night (John 13:30).

Blessed Theophylact writes that the life of the Gentiles, therefore, was both dark and broad, for they were walking not the narrow way, but the broad way leading to destruction.

We are also confronted with this darkness as soon as we turn away from the true source of our being—God Himself—and try to find meaning somewhere else.

St. John Chrysostom, whose Divine Liturgy we are now celebrating, wrote the following: *“It is the simplest thing in the world to shut out the sun, just close your eyelids! Light is all about you, but you have chosen to shut it out. You choose to live in darkness.”*

The light cannot illumine us, nor remain in us as long as we are living in sin. In Chapter 3 of Saint John’s Gospel, we can read: “He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.

For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.

But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”(John 3:18-21)

We, humans, have a great fear of this light because it exposes our sins. So, in order for the light to come to us and remain with us and within us, sin must be removed.

And we all know that this is not an easy thing. The modern secular world we live in is shrouded in an ever-increasing darkness. Why is that so? Because we now live in a world where everybody needs to be an individual.

We live in a world where everybody is encouraged to achieve anything, even when they lack talent or intelligence. We live in a world where everybody can and must do whatever they like to achieve their egoistic objectives and desires.

We live in a world where there are no more limits. Everything is allowed, and there are no more taboos. Where does this lead us? More often than not, this will lead us to sinful actions and disgraceful behaviour. It is oh so easy to fall for this way of life. We only have to switch on the television, go online, or just look around us to see that our modern society does its utmost to encourage us to sin.

Our search for personal success and wealth in this way is very damaging for us, because, this is what keeps us in darkness.

And, this is not just a darkness, in and of the world; it is also a darkness of the soul. A soul riddled with sin is dark and black, just like tar.

And this soul will become darker and darker if we do not act on it. The only way we can lift this darkness is to live an Orthodox Christian life. Living an Orthodox Christian life is the way to let that great light in.

That great light is not a physical light. It is not the light of the sun, or from a lightbulb. That great light is a Person. That great light is the God-Man, Jesus Christ, Our Lord and Saviour.

This Great Light exceeds all the prophets that came before Him. Those prophets were all lights of the Holy Spirit.

Now, God the Word by Whom God the Father has made everything that exists, the visible world and the invisible one, represents the Great Light which shines not only in the life of every human who comes to live in the world, but it also shines in the entire universe.

Every Sunday morning, during the Creed, we sing: "Light of Light, Very God of Very God". It is there, for all to see, but we must be willing to let the Light in.

Yes, of course. But how do we go about letting that Light in?

At the end of today's Gospel reading, we hear the words of Jesus Christ as he began preaching: "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" ...

This is how we can let that Light in.

The way for us to return on the path to salvation away from the way to perdition is accomplished through repentance. Repentance is not a simple emotional regret, it is not a going through the motions, but a change in the way we think, speak and act, a change of the life we want to lead.

The sins that we commit after Holy Baptism can only be forgiven through the baptism of tears, through the sacrament of Repentance, and Confession.

We must confess our sins and beg for forgiveness. Baptism is the basis of salvation, but repentance must be repeated as many times as possible in our lives, and definitely after a sin has been committed.

This work of repentance is so necessary and those who live a life of repentance, prayer, fasting, and good merciful deeds will become closer to God.

Repentance is the continuation of Baptism, the permanent renewal of our relationship of love with God. We separate from God through sin and renew our union with God through repentance.

This is why, in the Orthodox Church we repent, confess and read the prayers of repentance before becoming worthy enough of communicating with the Body and Blood of the Lord.

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

This kingdom of heaven is Christ; it is also the life of virtue we must lead. When someone lives on earth as an angel, is he not heavenly? So also the kingdom of heaven is within each one of us when we live as angels.

We have celebrated the festivities of the Nativity and Theophany of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and we now need to start doing the following. We must start to slow and gradually come to a halt. From today onward we should start preparing ourselves. From today onward we should start looking inward into our soul because 7 weeks from now, we will all start on the great journey of Great Lent.

Now is the time when we should be still and reflect on the words of today’s Gospel reading: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Amen.