

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

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, what must we *do* to inherit eternal life? This question is central to our Faith since Orthodoxy is not centred exclusively on what we think, what we believe, but also on what we do about our Faith. What must I do to inherit eternal life?

Before we can answer this question we should clarify what we mean: *what* is eternal life? Is it perhaps existing forever? Or playing harps on clouds? These, although portrayed in popular culture, are not our beliefs; we turn, as we always should, to the Lord to discover the answer.

Father, the hour has come. Glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee, as thou hast given him authority over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. And *this is eternal life*, that they may know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.

So we have eternal life as meeting God in ever greater depths, communing with him. God desires that we, in our freedom, come to *know* him. This is how the Church is able to teach us that we can experience the future age, the age of the Kingdom, now. *Today* in this age, my dear brothers and sisters, the Lord offers to us what he will offer to all those numbered among the righteous in the age to come: his very self. To *know* God, in the biblical understanding, is not to “know *about*” God – to recite facts about him – but to come into contact with him and experience him. Eternal life is to allow ourselves to be enveloped within his love. And when we have entered into this love, we are assured,

[N]either death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Having then addressed the meaning of eternal life – to live within the love of God – what, my dear brothers and sisters, must we do to inherit eternal life? Yes, we come into contact with the divine through the mysteries of the Church, in particular Communion, but how do we make *present* Christ within the rest of our lives? The Lord gives us the first part of the answer in today’s Gospel.

Do we, my dear brothers and sisters, seek answers to our questions in our prayers, in the services, in the Bible, in advice from priests? Do we listen for an answer? Do we go to different sources to find different answers until we find one which suits us? Are we preparing ourselves for eternal life?

What is given to us in today's Gospel? We hear that Christ waited until the Baptist, John the Forerunner, had been arrested before he began his public ministry. He waited for the right moment, neither too *soon* nor too *late*, to give the *answer*. We should learn from this, we should bring our trials and concerns before the Lord but not hurry his response since our *waiting* in anticipation can be unto salvation. The Lord will answer, but he will answer in his own time. He waited until after the arrest of John so that there could be no division of the people between the two of them and he started with the exact same word as the Forerunner, "Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand!" Christ's is not a *new* ministry to mankind but a *continuation* of the ministry of the prophets.

Repent! In other words, my brothers and sisters in Christ, change your mind! Put not your trust in your own opinion, nor the opinions of men, but shape your mind in accordance with the Word of God in whom there is salvation. Listen for his answer.

St Anthony the Great lived in the desert of Egypt in the third and fourth centuries and we will celebrate his feast on Thursday. We have some of his sayings which are, along with the sayings of other desert fathers, a great treasure for us in our lives. They teach us how to apply the Gospel message in our daily lives and are a word to us from God. "Someone asked Abba Anthony, saying, What must we keep in order to be pleasing to God?" In other words, "what must we do to inherit eternal life?"

And the elder answered, saying, Keep what I tell you. Whoever you may be, always keep God before your eyes. And whatever you do, do it from the witness of the Holy Scriptures. And in whatever place you live, do not leave quickly. Keep these three things, and you will be saved.

The word given to us from the Lord, "Repent," is interpreted for us by the saints even down to our time. Listen to them, read them, make Scripture a part of your life, make the saints central to our understanding of how to accomplish this so that we may enjoy now the experience of eternal life and our journey into the kingdom will be full of joy. The word of St Anthony bears repeating as it is short yet full of meaning.

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We have then the means by which we may inherit eternal life, repentance, and a map for how to get there: always keep God always before our eyes, do all things according to Scripture and do not easily leave the place we are. This commandment from the Lord, interpreted by the saints, is for us a *path* to eternal life. But it is not the entire revelation to us. The Lord answers us but does so according to his time; we are told more fully by the Apostle Peter the message:

Repent, and let every one of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

We repent, we put on Christ in baptism and we receive the Holy Spirit. And this is available to us to renew in confession which reactivates our one baptism. When we do this, when we follow the word of Christ which is unto eternal life, then he can make use of us as we heard from the Apostle Paul today,

[G]race was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift ... that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.

Yes, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, when we repent and follow the Lord, we give ourselves to the Lord but not all in the same way - some to be clergy, some to be singers, some to be servers, some to be mothers and fathers, some to be cleaners, some to be accountants, some to be administrators, some to be teachers, some to be builders, some to be caterers - all these and many more for the glory of God and that we may come to know - not know about, *know* - the Son of God.

Repent! Listen to the word of God though St Anthony, the other saints, the clergy, the Bible and discern your own ministry in the Church. What gifts do we have and can offer to God's Church? How do we give back to God who has given us many blessings? How do we honour God within our lives? Prepare yourself now for eternal life that when we fall asleep in the Lord we may rise to see Christ whom we love and on whose behalf we serve.

That we may come to know, through him and the all-holy Spirit, the one God and Father and glorify with the saints the triune God, Amen.