

1] According to the second century Greek travel writer, Pausanias (Παυσανίας) on the forecourt of the temple of Apollo at Delphi, were inscribed the words, γνῶθι σεαυτόν: *know Yourself*. It is one of the great themes of all Philosophy; no less a figure than Socrates taught that the unexamined life is not worthy living.

2] How easy it is merely to drift through this life, anaesthetised perhaps by all kinds of busyness, involvement and occupation, fearful of any pause, any inclination to take the journey *inward*. Yet that maxim, to know yourself, invites each human being to escape the outside world; to make an exodus within, in order to discover who we really are before we die.

3] In fact the ancient Greeks had 147 maxims inscribed at Delphi, wise sayings recorded over time from the lip of their great sages. And they are, indeed, worthy of consideration:

*Know your opportunity; Think as a mortal; Honour the (family) hearth; Control yourself; Help your friends; Control anger; Exercise prudence; Honour providence; Love friendship; Praise virtue; Practice what is just; Be kind to friends; Watch out for your enemies; Exercise nobility of character; Shun evil; Be impartial; Guard what is yours; Shun what belongs to others; Listen to everyone; Cling to discipline; Pursue honour; Long for wisdom.*

4] It is all good advice. In that world *before Christ*, in that wisdom *without Christ*, these maxims set out what might be called '*the Good Life*'. These aphorisms serve to help someone examine his life in the way that Socrates demands. But I have a question for these philosophers. When they direct us to know ourselves, is it in that particularly modern, psychological sense; the *me, me, me*, of identity politics, or are they thinking of what it means to be human in general; the species, homo sapiens, *thinking like a mortal*, as the maxim has it?

5] In fact, we Christian people must approach this question of the Good Life from a very different understanding, a very different

experience. The Anglican clergyman, William Ralph Inge, Dean of St Pauls, once said that the gospel is Good News, it is *not* good advice. Our calling, in other words, the call to follow Christ, has little to do with just getting through this world with a least bother possible. Once again I shall quote my favourite maxim of St Isaac the Syrian: *'The way of Christ is a daily cross; no one got to heaven through an easy life.'* It is not that an easy life is, by its own nature, an evil life; it is rather, that an easy life lulls a person into a false sense of security; it acts like an opiate on the soul. Remember the rich fool in the gospel parable!

6] And what is it that makes us so different from those ancient Greek philosophers if, indeed, we do know ourselves? St Paul met them in the Areopagos at Athens, you will recall, and he told them of the encounter that changed what he was: *"Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands."* [Acts 17:24] In other words, it was his knowledge of Christ that changed everything.

7] Two weeks ago in the gospel, Philip told Nathanael how he had found the promised Messiah—Jesus of Nazareth. And when Nathanael asks whether anything good can come from Nazareth, Philip said, *come and see.*

8] We do that, do we not? We invite people here to come and see. Awesome, indeed, is the Orthodox Liturgy: the splendour, the colour, the sacred rites, the movements, the music, the lights, the holy scriptures, even the smell! How these symbols manifest on earth the very mystery of the kingdom of heaven itself, in which we can share and move and have our being, whilst yet still in this age. Like those emissaries of St Vladimir of Kiev, who attending the Liturgy at Agia Sophia in Constantinople, knew not whether they were in heaven or on earth but knew only that God was among them.

9] But let us be very careful! Come and see what? Mere spectacle? Intriguing ethnic diversity and culture? No, it is not about *us*; we have no part with narcissism and exhibitionism. We say come and see Christ among us, the real Christ, the Orthodox -Catholic

Christ; the Christ of the Ecumenical Councils, of the gospels, of the Church. And what we receive from Him is far beyond the maxims of the Delphic Greeks. Not advice for a good and easy life but what He commands us today in the gospel. Is it to know yourself? No, He doesn't command you to *know* yourself: He says, '*Deny yourself!*' This is truly shocking; this is a scandal to Jews and folly to Greeks. And moreover he adds, 'Take up your cross and follow Him.'

10] He too has given His maxims, commands indeed, for the crucified life; not the easy life; not the good life, but life along the narrow way. He says, *Do to others as you would have them do to you; forgive those who offend against you; Let your light shine before men; Love your enemies; turn the other cheek; Cut out what causes you to sin; pray in secret; lay up treasure in heaven; Do not judge; love your neighbour as yourself; serve one another; Repent, be humble, proclaim the gospel, teach, baptise and share in the Liturgy.*

11] In William Shakespeare's play, *Hamlet*, Polonius tells his wayward and prodigal son, Laertes, '*This above all: to thine own self be true.*' Polonius is talking here of something quite different from the modern idea of self-knowledge and self-authentication that most might imagine now. He is warning his son that his life of self-indulgence is a false life. His better interests lie in reforming how he lives.

12] So it is with us, we who are called Christian people, Orthodox Christian people, indeed, are called by today's liturgy to deny ourselves and, once more, take up the cross. We *already* know what we are: fallen children of God, made in His image and likeness. But through repentance and baptism, by hidden fasting, by prayer inwardly, by giving in secret, we are uncovering, bringing forth and openly proclaiming the True Life, the end of all our endeavours; the restoration of what it means to be human, and true to our own selves as created by God.

13] According to the law of unforeseen consequences, worldly wisdom tells us to be wary of what we wish for. At the end of this liturgy we are invited to come and venerate the Holy Cross. If you approach, be fully aware, fully informed, of what that means. If our

actions and devotion are to be free of hypocrisy we cannot just go through the motions. To embrace the Cross is to be true to what we have become in Christ. For whoever is ashamed of Christ and His words in this generation, of him the Christ will be ashamed, when He comes in glory. As St Paul in his epistle tells St Timothy, *If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us. If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.* [2 Tm.2:12-13] In taking up the Cross we can deny our fallen nature, in order to find ourselves once again, recreated in the image of the New Adam, the very icon of Christ in whom we were created and who, coming in glory for judgement, can never be denied.