

Date: August 13, 2022

Subject: 9th Sunday After Pentecost

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

On Sunday we begin the Dormition Fast. Although it is a short fast, only two weeks, it is a strict one, equal in strictness to Great Lent.

#### **MATTHEW 14: 22-34**

*And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away.*

*And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone.*

*But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary.*

*And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea.*

*And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear.*

*But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.*

*And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.*

*And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus.*

*But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.*

*And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?*

*And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased.*

*Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.*

*And when they were gone over, they came into the land of Gennesaret.*

This Sunday is August 1, according to the Julian Calendar, when the Church celebrates two great miracles, both associated with Christ's Cross and the blessings of Holy Water. The details of these holidays are presented below.

#### **FIRST MIRACLE:**

This miracle took place in the twelfth century, and what was truly amazing, it occurred simultaneously in two Orthodox countries. The first country was Russia, the grand prince of which at that time was St. Andrey Bogolyubsky. The second place where the miracle occurred was in Constantinople, ruled then by Emperor Manuel. These two men were friends and had to wage war at the same time against different enemies of Christianity. The emperor had to fight off the Moslems while the grand prince had to battle with pagan Mongols.

The grand prince, despite being a peace-loving man, had to go to war on numerous occasions. He never trusted in his own abilities in warfare but always put his total trust in God. Therefore, each time he had to go to battle, he always earnestly prayed beforehand to God and His heavenly Mother and received Holy Communion. He encouraged his warriors to follow his example, which they did with great fervor out of their love for him.

Before this battle in question, the grand prince followed his usual practice with his warriors. Then, placing an icon of the Mother of God and an image of Christ's life-saving Cross at the head of his army, he

proceeded to face the enemy. Receiving powerful help from above, he successfully put the enemy forces to flight and returned to his military camp. This is when the great miracle occurred. Both icons began to give off a powerful light. Seeing this, the grand prince understood this to be a message from God. It inspired him to pursue the routed enemy. He annihilated them, burned their lands, and forced them to pay tribute to Rus.

At the completion of the war, he notified his friend, the emperor, of his victory and about the miracle that preceded it. To his amazement, the emperor confirmed to him that the very same kind of miracle had happened to his army, resulting in his crushing his Moslem adversaries. Both leaders consulted with high church authorities, and with their blessings, the day of the miracle was designated as a Church holiday. The Russian Church has retained the celebration of this miracle. Surprisingly, it appears that the Greek Church has not.

#### SECOND MIRACLE:

The second miracle occurred several centuries before the first one, in the city of Constantinople. During an epidemic, the Church brought a Cross with a relic of the True Cross from the imperial palace into the altar of St. Sophia Cathedral for prayer. A blessing of water was served, after which a procession carried the Cross to all corners of the city for prayers and sprinkling with Holy Water. God heard these prayers, and the epidemic subsided.

In memory of this miracle, this day is remembered as a holiday by the Orthodox Church. A simple blessing of water is added to the regular services of the day. The blessing service can be done at a nearby body of water with a Cross Procession to these waters.

The Greek Church in Constantinople established the following annual holiday period on the day of the miracle. The Precious Cross was carried while being censed, from the imperial palace to St. Sophia Cathedral. A Blessing of Waters was served, after which the Cross was placed on the Altar Table. Then the Cross was accompanied by many priests and deacons censing it as they walked around the whole city. This was done to purify the air and protect the people from epidemics. The procession continued for fourteen days and ended on the holiday of the Dormition of the Mother of God. On that day, the Cross was returned back to the imperial place.

If we go back in history and examine the condition of both of these countries, Rus ( what the Russian land was originally called) and the Byzantine Empire, we will see that they were in the same troubled condition that our country is in today. The Byzantine Empire decayed due to profound corruption and falling away from God. Rus, or ancient Russia, was in a condition of internal constant warfare that was waged by the different princes wanting to conquer the lands of one another. Incredible hatred and bloodshed tarnished the moral nature of the people.

Don't we see that our country is in a very similar condition today? America has been the dominant power in the world in the same way that the Byzantine Empire dominated the world of its time. Arrogant pride, deep corruption, and total moral decay led to the fall of that empire. We may be seeing the same end to the dominant power that our country has enjoyed for these same reasons. God for the most part has been removed from our civil life. Moral evils such as abortions, sexually deviant lifestyles, hurting children with gender changing poisons, just to name a few, are legal, while people attempting to live according to God's law are being mocked and persecuted.

Rus, or ancient Russian, was being torn apart by constant warfare between the princes attempting to rip away lands and power from each other. Brothers hated and killed each other. How similar are the

divisions and hatreds that plague our country today because of Covid, political ideology, corruption in government and the courts, and racism?

But God wants the salvation of all people. He is very patient and tries to wake the people up to the mortal danger that their lifestyles place them in. He will even use severe methods if people don't repond to Him. Wars, famines, epidemics, and natural disasters are some examples of His attempts to reach people. The wars that were threatening the two Orthodox countries then were God's call to them.

The miracles described above, however, show God's incredible patience and mercy. The great piety of the two leaders and their prayers to God reveal to us a wonderful truth. God is extremely merciful. He is willing to forgive and even spare people, in a miraculous way, when God-pleasing people pray to Him. At the same time, the people receiving this help must repent and change the way that they are living. If they don't, a worse calamity awaits them.

These miracles vividly show us how our country can be saved and restored to her former glory. We need deep, repentant prayer to God and a profound change in the way that we live. Because we don't have the kind of leadership that will convince God to spare us, we need to do it ourselves. As Russia showed in the last century, the prayers of even a most holy ruling family, Saint Tsar Nicholas and his family, could not save the country because the people remained in their evil and refused to change.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, we are Orthodox Christians. As such, we have the ability to reach the Heart of God and convince Him to save our nation. But to do that, we must first save ourselves through profound repentance and a truly Orthodox way of life. If we do this, we can become beacons of change that will return the hearts of all people back to God. If God is allowed back into our country, it will be saved. What better time to start this than on Sunday, the first day of the Dormition Fast?

With Much Love in Christ,  
Archpriest Serge Kotar