

Date: July 8, 2024

Subject: 2nd Sunday after Pentecost

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

We have been blessed this year with a very short Apostles' Fast. It will end on Friday of this week, on the day we remember the two greatest apostles, Peter and Paul.

MATTHEW 9: 36-10:8

But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.

Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few;

Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labour. And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease.

Now the names of the twelve apostles are these; The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother;

Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the publican; James the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus;

Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him.

These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not:

But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give.

This past Sunday, we heard the Gospel reading describing how the Lord chose His first four apostles. The Gospel reading scheduled for Monday describes how the Savior added eight additional men to bring the total to twelve. He then instructed them, gave them great power to do miracles, and sent them out to preach.

In that Sunday's Gospel reading, we saw Jesus walking by the Sea of Galilee. He came across His future apostles, who were fishermen casting out their net into the waters of the sea to catch fish. He called out to them and said: "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men". What was the Savior saying? By the use of an image that was familiar to them, He was actually calling them to apostolic service. He was calling them to catch souls instead of fish, for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. And for this work, they would need to use a different kind of net. Instead of a net made up of physical materials and earthly values, they would need to use spiritual nets composed of such elements as divine love, humility, prayer, fasting, and repentance.

At the same time, they would be competing with the devil, who would continually seek to lure people away into his treacherous spiritual nets, made up of such elements as pride, hatred, deceptive prayer, gluttony, and arrogant self-love. Knowing how powerfully the demonic message entrapped people, the Savior, wanting to aid the apostles in their success, gave them the power to perform great miracles: to *Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils*. Upon hearing the call, the apostles *immediately left their nets* and followed Him.

We might be surprised to see whom Jesus chose to be His apostles for His most significant mission. He chose men who were socially insignificant and, for the most part, poorly educated. Why did He do this? Because it was not their social status that was important. Being the all-knowing God, He saw their great

inner spiritual potential, which would enable them to use His grace to spread the Gospel's message across the world.

Here is another thing that might surprise us in Monday's Gospel reading. Since Jesus came to save all people, why did He restrict the apostles from preaching to the Gentiles and the Samaritans? He did this because He knew of the degraded spiritual condition of the people of His chosen nation. The Jewish people rejected all non-Jews, considering them to be inferior and unclean. They would not accept Him as the Messiah if He would have also sent His apostles to preach to non-Jews. Being all-merciful, He did not want them to perish. Therefore, He delayed the start of the mission to those outside the chosen people, knowing full well that despite the delay, it would be the much more successful one.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, in these two Gospel readings it is vital to understand that Jesus was not calling only the apostles for apostolic work. As the Church fathers reveal, the last words of His call, *freely ye have received, freely give*, are directed to all Orthodox Christians. We have received from our Savior the greatest gift possible. And we have received it freely. This gift is our entry into the Church. It is our access to divine Grace, which has the power to save us for an eternal and blessed life in the Kingdom of Heaven. We are all, therefore, called to be apostles. Is it not, therefore, an absolute requirement that we freely share this gift with those who have not as yet received it? The Lord expects this of us and will close the door to Heaven for us if we do not.

How do we share this gift? By being an example to all outside of the Church through the way that we live. How must we live? According to the commandments that the Savior has given us, the commandments of divine love. As Jesus said, "By this, all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

The way that we love demonstrates who we are. Divine Love contains the transformational power of the Cross by which **the Savior saved us**. Therefore, let us freely and immediately answer the Savior's call. The apostles did, and look at what they were able to accomplish! Using grace, we can strive and also accomplish whatever the Lord wills us to accomplish. If we manage to bring even one person to Christ and salvation, our efforts will be greatly rewarded by our loving God.

With Much Love in Christ,
Archpriest Serge Kotar