2025-11-30: 3rd Sunday of Hathor - Requirements for Discipleship

Visual Aid

https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/5v9my17oldjg13i4ov999/The-Cost-of-Discipleship.pptx?rlkey=6dr54p3qamvi633iohcnezppd&dl=0

Introduction

Good morning dear beloved!

Wishing you all a blessed Advent Fast - we started fasting this week in preparation for the Nativity Feast. May the blessings of the Advent Fast be with us all.

Also today we are celebrating the monthly commemoration of the Virgin Mary the Theotokos. Every month on the 21st of the Month, we celebrate our mother and we chant the hymns like the long "Hail to you Mary" and Rejoice O Mary and some hymns in communion. May her blessings be with us along with the blessing of St Gregory the Wonderworker and the other saints of the day.

Today is the 3rd Sunday of the Blessed Month of Hathor. In the month of Hathor, the theme of the readings is the message of the Gospel.

So in the first two Sundays, we had the parable of the sower. And we asked the question of what kind of ground am I? Am I the good ground that is ready to hear the word of God, accept it and do it?

And now in the second two weeks of Hathor, we'll hear the message itself. And it's a very hard message. "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple."

To follow the Lord, and to be His disciple, has certain requirements and they are not easy.

Being a Christian is synonymous with being a disciple

The Difficult Gospel Message

”Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them” the hard Gospel Message. Any leader would be happy if he found people following him… and he would think to himself “how can I keep them?” - “How do I make them happy?” - “How do I appeal to them.” And the Lord turned and told them the difficult requirements of discipleship.

Nowadays we hear about the evangelicals who are preaching a false gospel - an easy gospel - “come as you are, the Lord loves you as you are, if you have any faults, God made you this way” etc. And it appeals to the masses. Mega churches filled with thousands and thousands of parishioners giving hundreds of thousands in donations… but it’s not the truth.

The message of discipleship is difficult. But the Lord didn’t shy away from it - even when there was a great multitude following Him.

In John 6, when the Lord spoke about the Eucharist and about the reality that salvation is only by eating His Flesh and drinking His Blood. It was a hard message. And many followers and disciples turned away and said “this is a hard message for us.” But He didn’t turn around and say to them “no no come back I’ll make it easier” or “no no come back, the bread and wine are just a symbol.” Actually, He looked at the 12 disciples and said “do you want to leave too?”

The message of the gospel is difficult. The gate is narrow.

Requirements for Discipleship

- Come to Me
  - Not only to hear His preaching - everyone hearing these words is hearing His preaching... there is a step to be taken after that to "Come to Me." **Come and be My disciple.**
    - Come and be disciplined by My teaching and by My example
    - The Lord taught the disciples in many different ways
      - By preaching (both publicly and privately)
      - By His example - they lived with Him and watched Him (when He forgave, when He prayed, His faith, His care, etc.)
      - By serving with Him - like shadowing. When they fed the multitude, He took their opinion, had them split the people, distribute the food, collect the fragments, etc.
      - By serving on their own and then giving Him a report (indirect supervision)
      - By retreat (He would take them away from the crowd for prayer, meditation, reflection, etc.)
  - Come and hear My Teaching
    - Sometimes we come to the liturgy and the sermon is in one ear and out the other... or worse, we come after the sermon.
    - Sometimes we come to Sunday School just so we can play basketball after... but the lesson... that's not important. Even sometimes someone might try to come after the lesson is over.

        - We have a Bible Study in the Church with Abouna every Wednesday evening, and for the MS and HS every Wednesday evening... what am I doing on Wednesday evening?
        - **Come to Me. Come and hear the teaching of the Lord.**
        - What do I watch and listen to at home? Is it all news and politics and the latest social drama? Let me turn on Anba Youssef's sermons. Or listen to an Orthodox sermon. Fr Daoud Lamei or one of the fathers the bishops.
        - **Come to Me. Come and hear the teaching of the Lord.**
    - Come and participate in My Service
        - Do I serve the Lord? Am I allowing God's grace to work in me and using my talents to serve the Lord and His Church? Many times we might ask in the various groups for help with something in the church - and many respond. But sometimes it's not that many... Let me ask myself, do I offer my time to help? Do I recognize that this is service offered to the Lord?
        - How about serving others? Am I serving my peers? How about to serve the other members of the congregation? Do I call someone to check on him? Do I ask about the one who is sick? Do I give comfort to the one who is grieving? Or I'm just expecting that someone else is taking care of it?
        - The Lord is saying to me "**Come to Me**"
        - **Come and Participate in My Service**
        - **Come and Serve My Children and My Flock**
        - **Come and Work With Me**

    - Come and be with Me
        - Let me take one or two days in the Abbey or in the Convent, or even in the Retreat Center. I can turn off my phone and take a book and my Bible and Agpeya and just spend some time with the Lord. Pray the Tasbeha. Pray the Liturgy. Pray the hours of the Agpeya. And just take a retreat to be with the Lord.
        - And how about my daily time with the Lord? Do I have a dedicated time to spend with the Lord every day?
        - The Lord is saying to me "**Come to Me**"
        - **Come and Be with Me and Spend Time with Me**
- Hate
    - This word troubles someone... how could the Lord (who is Love) use the word hate?
    - He doesn't mean hatred (opposite of love) but is using an exaggeration to stress the total commitment required of His followers
        - St Demiana is a real-life example from the Church History of this Commandment when she told her father "I would have rather heard that you died for the name of Christ than that you denied Christ and saved your earthly life." Because of this message, her father, Mark, repented, professed his faith and was martyred.
        - No earthly affection should ever come into competition with our love for God
    - **Examples of putting father, mother, spouse, etc. more than God**
        - Why didn't you come to liturgy today?

        - "Oh I had family in town..." - okay... bring your family to liturgy! Family is in town, we have to take them to the parks and the restaurants and everywhere except the Church
        - Why didn't you come to liturgy? Well Sunday is the only day everyone is home so we have breakfast together. Come and receive the Eucharist together, and then go for brunch...
        - My son had a soccer game or a basketball game... are we teaching our children that sports can take priority over God and over the Eucharist?
        - My wife was tired and I didn't want to come alone. My husband was tired and I didn't want to come alone.
        - We stayed out late with the family last night and we couldn't wake up
    - Why didn't you start fasting?
        - We are going on a cruise or going on vacation.
        - Why didn't you start fasting? Well my husband isn't fasting and I don't want to make two different meals
    - How come you didn't pray last night?
        - Well my wife was watching a show and I didn't want to leave her... we can watch 2 hours of Netflix together but to step aside for 10 minutes and pray is hard
    - Or we have a family Bible reading - that's very good. That's excellent. But if one member of the family isn't here or they're busy or they slept early... no one is reading the Bible today?
    - And many times we think we are doing these things in the name of love or hospitality or harmony or family.

    - **Examples of loving self more than God**
        - I want to sleep longer --> wake up and pray anyway
        - I want to scroll on my phone --> read the Scripture instead
        - I want revenge --> choose forgiveness
        - I want to be right, and I don't want my husband or wife to know that I was wrong --> it's okay, apologize. Admit you are wrong.
        - I'm tired, I'm busy, I'm stressed --> still, I will go and serve the Lord
        - I want to share some gossip --> I will stay silent
        - I want to watch a certain show or movie, but I know that it has some bad stuff in it --> die to myself. deny myself.
        - I want to save money and save for myself --> still, I will give to the Lord and give to others and be generous
    - The Lord is not asking us to be hostile to our family or to hate them, but to love them THROUGH our love for Him, and not INSTEAD of our love for Him

- Bear Your Cross
    - Some people think that if you're a Christian, your life will be void of hardships... this is not true.
    - Some people think that if they go to Church regularly and pray and read the Bible, then the Lord will take away from them any sickness, pain, suffering, etc... this is not true.

- We will be hated, persecuted, and walk a difficult path... but when compared to the eternal glory - it is NOTHING. That's why Christians, we bear our cross with joy - because we aren't looking at the hardship, but we are looking at the glory to come.
- Remember that the Lord is telling this to the disciples BEFORE His Crucifixion - when He says this to them, He hasn't died on the Cross yet. The Cross is not significant yet. The Cross is not yet something to glory in. The Cross is a torture and killing device. To them, bear your Cross meant a one-way journey. Those who took up their Cross, did not come back. To them, bearing a cross is shameful. It's painful. It's hard. That's why this message was so hard to hear.
- **Bear your cross means that you will have enemies - people who hate you - and in return, you will love them**
  - HH Pope Shenouda of the thrice blessed memory - there was a Muslim man who would come on TV almost every night and speak against HH Pope Shenouda. And he would speak against the Church. And HH never addressed it. Even though he has a televised sermon every Wednesday night that is listened to by millions. He never mentioned it. One day, this Muslim man was sick and he had to have a procedure done in England. HH picked up the phone and called him and wished him a speedy recovery and told him ""if there's anything I can do for you or anything you need while you're in England, please let me know." - He saw Pope Shenouda's love for his enemies. He saw a genuine love and caring. So when he came back and he was swarmed by the media he said "the only person I want to see right now is Pope Shenouda" and he never again spoke ill of HH or the Church. He saw the love of Christ.
  - God forbid someone speaks ill of me - I get angry and I want to wipe the floor with him and I go and speak ill of him and wish evil against him and curse him and hate him. No - **bearing your cross means you love your enemy.**
- **Bearing your cross means forgiveness. Bearing your cross means patience.**

Calculate the Cost

- To be a disciple, I must calculate the cost - what is in my life that I need to get rid of? What is hindering me from traveling the narrow path or entering the narrow door?
- I need to Calculate the Cost
  - The Lord gives two examples of calculating the Cost - building a tower, preparing for war
  - Building a tower is building up my Christian life - building up my heart with virtues, with a strong foundation, with a spiritual canon, etc.
  - Preparing for war is the Spiritual Warfare - the devil will not leave me. The more I build up my tower, the more he will try to attack it. Temptations, thoughts, lusts, etc.
- So let me calculate the cost
  - What possessions do I have that I need to release my attachment to them?
  - Who is bringing me down or not helping me to grow?
  - What habits do I need to replace?
  - What addictions do I need to overcome?
  - What is the cost of my discipleship?
    - The cost might be comfort

        - Waking up early to pray
        - Waking up early for liturgy
        - Standing in liturgy even when I'm tired
        - Fasting even if it's inconvenient
    - The cost might be my friendship circle
        - I have friends that are leading me to parties or bars or clubs or nightlife. Sin.
        - I have friends that gossip or complain or are negative
        - I have friends that mock the Church or speak ill of the Church or of the clergy
    - The cost might be entertainment
        - Shows or music that defile my heart and my senses
        - Social media that overtakes my life
        - Let me cut down my screen time
        - Let me remove apps or websites that lead me to temptation
    - The cost might be my pride
        - Apologize even if I think I'm right
        - Accept correction
        - Accept feedback
        - Let go of the need to win every argument
    - The cost might be my money or possessions
        - Giving before buying for myself luxuries
        - Giving faithfully even if my finances are tight

Conclusion

- Being a Christian means being a disciple
- The requirements for discipleship are not easy - it is a difficult path, but its difficulty does not compare with its eternal reward.
- The Lord gave us three requirements:
    - Come to Me
    - Hate - or we can say - don't love anyone more than Me
    - Bear your cross
- And He gave us a directive: Calculate the Cost
    - If the cost is comfort - I will pay it.
    - If the cost is relationships - I will pay it.
    - If the cost is entertainment or pride or money or possessions - I will pay it.
- If I become Christian in name only, and I am not a disciple, and I don't bear my cross, and I have other priorities before the Lord, then I become like Salt that has lots its flavor. Not even fit for the dunghill.

May the Lord grant us strength to be His disciples. To come to Him, to love Him more than everyone and more than ourselves, and to bear our Cross.

Glory be to our God, forever. Amen.

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