2026-02-08: 1st Sunday of Amshir

Introduction

Good morning, dear beloved!

Last month, in the month of Tobe, the readings were focused on baptism. We celebrated the Theophany Feast on Tobe 11, so the readings for the whole month were related to baptism. Now, the month of Amshir comes after and the readings are focused on the Eucharist!

1st Sunday - Do not labor for the food that perishes

2nd Sunday - The miracle of the feeding of the multitude

3rd Sunday - The Bread of Life

This year, because the Great Fast is coming so early in the year, so we are only going to read the 1st Sunday. And then next week we will actually celebrate the Feast of the Lord's Entry into the Temple (it's coming on Sunday). And after that we start the Great Fast. So we won't have a chance to read the other readings of the month of Amshir.

Background

Today's Gospel reading takes place AFTER the Lord had fed the multitude.

After He had fed the 5000 with five loaves and two fish, and there were twelve baskets of remaining fragments, So the people of course saw the sign and marveled and said "This must be the new Moses." Then we read in the Gospel today that the Lord Jesus perceived that they were going to come and take Him by force and make Him king, so He went alone to the mountain. That night, the Lord came to the disciples on the boat, walking on the water.

The next day, the multitude realized that the Lord and the disciples had gone away. So they got into their boats and they also went to Capernaum to look for Him. And they found Him and said "Rabbi, when did You come here?"

So He says to them our key verse today: "Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate the loaves and were filled. Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him"

"You seek me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate the loaves and were filled."

The question that we have to ask ourselves today - do we seek the Lord? Or are we just following the loaves. To put it a different way - Why do I come to Church? Why do I come to the Liturgy every Sunday? Why do I come to Vespers and Matins and the praises? Do I come for the food that perishes? Or do I come for the food that endures to everlasting life?

The Food that Perishes

1. Social Life
    - Sometimes, I may find myself coming to the Church in order to feed my social life. My friendships, my family, my relationships.
    - Of course, the Church is a place of fellowship - and actually even since the early Church, the Aghapy Meal is an important part of the Church Life.
    - But what happens if the social life is my reason? What happens if I'm here for the fellowship and the people?
    - Social Life is food that perishes... at any point I may find myself in a conflict, or a disagreement, or a strife. And then what? I lose my Church? I lose my relationship with God?
    - When Social Life is my main reason for coming to the Church, then I am choosing a relationship with others OVER a relationship with God

2. My Image
    - Sometimes, I may find myself coming to the Church in order to preserve my image or my reputation.
    - I need to be known as a church-goer. I want to be active in the Church. I even want to be serving and have the title of a "servant" or a "deacon" - but I am just feeding my own ego. When I am coming to the age of marriage and my potential spouse will ask about me, I want them to hear good things about me.
    - I may even compare myself to others and say "I am better than him or her because I go to Church and they don't."
    - DEFINITELY, my reputation is important. In the Book of Acts, one of the requirements for the deacons was that they are "men of good reputation."
    - But what happens if my reputation is the reason I come to Church? What happens if I'm here simply to preserve my reputation?
    - Reputation is the food that perishes... at any point I may find my reputation ruined. Maybe because I fell in sin and it became known. Maybe even because of a false accusation. Maybe because of association with someone else whose reputation was ruined. Then what? I lose my Church? I lose my relationship with god?
    - When My Image or reputation is the main reason for coming to the Church, then I am choosing myself OVER God.

3. Emotional Comfort
    - Sometimes, I come to Church to feel better
    - When I come to Church, my guilt is soothed. I feel that I've made up for my sins. Sometimes, even, I will sit in confession and I have NO intention of changing my ways or giving up on my sins, but the sit-down makes me feel better. Admitting my sins makes me feel like they are forgiven.

- And I may even say "oh when I feel better, I feel peaceful - this is from God because God is the King of Peace."
- I am fooling myself. The devil is tricking me.
- Feelings and emotional comfort are the food that perishes.
- What happens when all of a sudden I don't have those feelings anymore? What happens when prayer feels dry? What happens when confession feels heavy? What happens when the Church no longer "moves me" emotionally?

4. Transactional Faith
    - I may come to Church in the hopes of receiving blessings, protection, or success. I say if I come to Church, then God will bless my business or my studies. God will protect me. God will bless my life.
    - I am treating the Church like car insurance
    - What happens when I face tribulation? My faith will be shattered.
    - What happens when I lose my job? Or my business fails? I will lose all my faith.
    - This is food that perishes!

5. Habit
    - I may come to Church out of habit. This is what my family does, this is what our tradition is, this is my cultural identity.
    - I come to Church out of routine - but a routine without love becomes empty.

Food Which Endures to Everlasting Life

"Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate the loaves and were filled. Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him"

What is the Food that Endures to Everlasting Life? The Eucharist.

The Eucharist is the center of our Orthodox Worship. It is the center of our Church Life. It is the crown of the Sacraments. Every service in the Church should lead to the Eucharist.

If I have a Youth Meeting and it is filled to the brim with hundreds of youth. And they are all consistent in attending the youth meeting, but they don't participate in the sacrament of Confession or attend the Liturgy or receive the Eucharist... then the meeting profits nothing!

If I have a Sunday School program and I am teaching all the children about God and they are attending regularly and doing all their homework, but they don't Confess, attend the Liturgy and receive the Eucharist... then it profits nothing!

What did the Lord say about the Eucharist?

The Eucharist is NOT a Symbol

How does the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ? It’s a Mystery! The Apostles, the Early Church Fathers, and our Orthodox Church do not make any attempt to describe or

expound on how the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ. What we know is what we have received – after the Liturgical Prayers, the bread and wine have become the Body and Blood; the Mystical Real Presence of Christ.

“I believe, I believe, I believe, and confess to the last breath that this is the life-giving Flesh that You took, O Christ my God, from the Lady of us all, the holy Theotokos, Saint Mary. You made It one with Your divinity without mingling, without confusion, and without alteration… You gave it up for us upon the holy wood of the Cross, of Your own will, for us all.” – Liturgy of St Gregory (Confession)

At the end of the Divine Liturgy, the priest prays the Confession and says that “this” (the Holy Mysteries in his hand) is the same Flesh taken from Saint Mary, that is united with the Divinity, and that was given up on the wood of the Cross for us all.

For 1500 years, the Church and all Christians understood Christ's words here. Then when Protestantism started in the 16th Century, they started to teach that the Eucharist is a symbol or a "spiritual presence." But these ideas are foreign to the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ, the preaching of the Apostles or the practice of the Church Fathers.

In John 6, the Lord declares: “Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life… for My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed.” Many disciples “went back and walked with Him no more,” finding it “a hard saying,” yet He offers no correction, leaving the teaching unmistakably literal – not symbolic.

St Cyril of Jerusalem (4th Century): “When the Master, Himself, has explicitly said of the bread, ‘This is My Body,’ will anyone still dare to doubt? When He is, Himself, our warranty, saying, ‘This is My Blood,’ who will ever waver and say it is not His Blood?” – Mystagogical Lectures

St Gregory of Nyssa (4th Century): “Rightly then, do we believe that the bread consecrated by the word of God has been made over into the Body of God the Word. For that Body was, as to its potency, bread; but it has been consecrated by the lodging there of the Word, who pitched His tent in the flesh.” – The Great Catechism

St Cyril of Alexandria (4th Century): “That you know that it is through the might of God the Pantocrator which surpasses all description, the oblations were changed in truth into Christ’s Body and Blood.” – On the Gospel of Matthew

St Irenaeus of Lyons (2nd Century): “The bread, which is produced from the earth, when it receives the invocation of God, is no longer common bread, but the Eucharist.” – Against Heresies

St Athanasius (4th Century): “So long as the prayers of supplication and entreaties have not been made, there is only bread and wine. But after the great and wonderful prayers have been completed, then the bread is become the Body, and the wine the Blood, of our Lord Jesus Christ.” – Sermon to the Newly Baptized

The Eucharist is Salvation, Remission of Sins and Eternal Life

"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." (John 6:53-54)

"Given for salvation, remission of sins, and eternal life to those who shall partake of It" – Liturgy of St Basil (Confession)

St Augustine (4th Century) contrasts ordinary food with the Eucharist. With ordinary food, if you don't eat it, you will die; eat it, and you will still die – old age, disease, or some other casualty. With Christ's Body and Blood, there is a guarantee on both sides. Don't eat It, you will die; eat It, and you will live eternally. (Tractate 26 on the Gospel of John)

If the Eucharist is LIFE and Salvation - why would I ever deprive myself?

The Eucharist is Communion

"This cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread." (1 Corinthians 10:16-17).

Communion with God

"He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him." (John 6:56)

St John Chrysostom (4th Century): "We become one Body, and 'members of His flesh and of His bones.' (Ephesians 5:30). In order then that we may become this not by love only, but in very deed, let us be blended into that flesh… On this account He has mixed up Himself with us; He has kneaded up His body with ours, that we might be a certain One Thing, like a body joined to a head."

When we abide in Him and He in us, His will, word, teachings, mannerisms, and goals become our own. This union enables a life of obedience to His commandments, purity, and sanctification. The natural result of abiding in Christ is the bearing of the Fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Communion with Others

"So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another."

"If you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you… first be reconciled."

- Not based on emotions, not based on business, not based on shared interest
- Based on a shared identity: Members of the Body of Christ
- This is why when we come to a fasting period, we need to be fasting to receive the Eucharist. If the Church is fasting and I am not, so that means I am separating myself from the Church - the Body of Christ. So how can I take communion if I am not in communion?

- Someone may hear this and say "okay so if I'm not fasting, I won't take communion." - NO! If you are not fasting, sit with Abouna and decide on your canon for fasting so that you can take communion! The Eucharist is LIFE! I cannot deprive myself

The Eucharist Needs Preparation

"Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks *this* cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body. For this reason many *are* weak and sick among you, and many sleep." (1 Cor 11:27)

None of us are worthy or could ever be worthy of the Eucharist. But the Lord in His mercy gives us His Body and Blood. But we have to be prepared. This is why only those who are baptized and Chrismated in the Orthodox Church can receive. This is why I need to have sat with my Father of Confession.

Preparing for the Eucharist means growing in love, purity of heart. It means struggling to overcome sin. It means striving to acquire virtue.

Again, someone may hear this and say "okay so if I am not prepared, I won't take communion." - NO! If you are not prepared, sit with Abouna and become prepared so that you can take communion. The Eucharist is LIFE! I cannot deprive myself.

Conclusion

We all want a peace that cannot be shaken. We all want love. We all want patience. We want to be good. We want to be faithful. But we get so hung up on the things of this world - the things that perish. I labor so hard to maintain my relationships, my reputation, my success in the world, my finances, my emotions - but I am putting 0 effort in maintaining my spirit. In growing in love and in purity of heart. In overcoming sin. In acquiring virtue.

The Lord said to us today "Do not labor for the food which perishes but for the food which endures to everlasting life." - The Eucharist.

The Eucharist is salvation, remission of sins and eternal life to those who eat of It. The Eucharist is communion with God and communion with the rest of the believers. The Eucharist is the Body and Blood of Christ in a Mystery ineffable. And the Eucharist needs preparation - growing in love and in virtue, overcoming sin by repentance.

May the Lord grant all of us to receive Him and to abide in Him through the Eucharist. May He grant us to come to Him for the right reasons - for communion with Him and salvation.

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