

5th Sunday after Pentecost, 2002
“This is eternal life”

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

What is eternal life? We should know this very well. The Lord came to the earth as a man in order to allow us to have eternal life, in order to make us capable of eternal life. Many people do not understand what eternal life is, what it is that the Lord wants us to be able to have. The Lord defines it in His high priestly prayer just before He was arrested to be crucified: **“And this is eternal life: that they may know Thee, the Only True God, and Jesus Christ Whom Thou didst send.”** To have eternal life is to know Christ.

But what is it to know Christ?

He says also in His high priestly prayer that “they have received the word.” The word that He received from His Father He faithfully transmitted to His apostles and disciples, and they received the word.

What is it to receive the word?

It means to do what He says! It means to live as He lived! It means to love the commandments as He loved them! It means to struggle for virtue! Receiving is not just believing. The devil believes! The devil knows more about Christ than we do. He knows the Scripture better than we know it. His intellect is far superior to ours. But he has not received the word because he does not want to follow it.

Many people, within the Church and outside of the Church, have not received the word. Yes, indeed, those in the Church too! Those tares, those weeds that grow up and at the end of the age will be gathered and made separate and burned, those people have not received the word. Receiving it is to obey. Receiving it is to know, and know intimately, our Lord Jesus Christ.

I’ve just been teaching about the Creed in the past few Saturdays, and this passage, more than any other in the Scriptures, shows the utter equality of Jesus Christ with His Father. He says, **“the hour is come; glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son might also glorify Thee: As Thou hast given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him.”** And then He goes on a little later and makes it very clear that He and the Father are One. He once said it in this way: **“I and the Father are One.”** He says, **“Glorify Thou Me with Thine Own Self, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was.”**

This should call to mind the beginning of the Symbol of Faith: “begotten of the Father before all ages; Light of Light, True God of True God; begotten, not made.” Our Lord was not made; our Lord proceeds from the Father eternally, and is Light of Light just as He is God and God the Father is God. And yet, with His glory which He had before the world, with all of His prerogatives and His magnificence, He obeyed His Father to come down, to be made a little lower than the angels, and to teach us – and most of the people that He taught did not want to hear; we hear this in another reading, with the Gergesene demoniac – and to die for us, and to make us capable of living.

In order to appropriate this eternal life, we must live as He has taught us, because otherwise we won’t know Him. People make great mistake when they define Christianity by things that they should do or not do, or membership, or the traditions they hold. Christianity is to be one as the Father and the Son are One.

Near the end of His prayer, He says, **“Father, keep through Thine Own Name those whom Thou hast give Me, that they may be one, even as We are.”** I was talking yesterday about how all dogma is

moral. All of that which we believe about God has moral significance, it is not just facts that we should be able to recite. The Holy Trinity is the quintessential perfect example of love, and of unity, and of cooperation, and of humility, and of all of the virtues. And our Lord Jesus Christ came down to earth in order to make us capable of being one, even as He is One with His Father.

Can we imagine the immensity of this statement? We can **only** become one as His is One with His Father if we live with virtue, with purity. Only the pure in heart shall see God. The Lord has made us capable! Eternal life is not just that you are going to go to heaven or that you are not going to go to hell; eternal life is to be one with God! We're just flesh, how can this be? No, we can never be in the Essence of God, but we will be sharing in all that He wishes to give.

And eternal life is joy, because the Lord says, ***“And now come I to Thee,”*** talking to His Father, ***“and these things I speak in the world, that they might have Me joy fulfilled in themselves.”*** Eternal life is joy, because it is perfect love, perfect obedience, perfect humility, perfect happiness. We're so far from perfection. So much that goes on every day is so temporal, and will go away. But the Lord came so that we could have permanence. The only way to achieve this permanence is to enter into the life of virtue, to struggle to follow the Lord's commandments.

This idea of unity – to be one with God – is the reason why we do such things as, as a Church, we fast **together**, we pray **together**, with the same kind of prayers all over the world. We have dogmas which it is imperative to believe -- else we are not Christians -- that are defined in our Symbol of Faith. And there are many other dogmas as well, that we must believe if we are to be one with God. For example, if we don't forgive our brother, we will not be forgiven. That is a dogma as well. There are many, many dogmas, and all of them have moral significance. If we believe in the Trinity and if we dare to call God our Father, then we had best be His sons and daughters in how we live!

Our Lord Jesus Christ could dare to call God His Father, because He is perfect, and He has said, be perfect, as your Heavenly Father is perfect. He has commanded us to become perfect. Nothing that the Lord said was false. Nothing was hyperbole. Perfection is possible for us. If He said and commanded it, then certainly it is possible. He will provide us with the ability. We must struggle in the path of virtue, and then we'll know Him. Eternal life is to know God.

I remember one time a person was talking to me who had fallen into serious sin, of fornication, and she was saying, “Well, I know it's wrong, but he just doesn't understand and we're going to be married in a year or two, and then God will forgive us.” And then, in another conversation on the same day, we were talking about the end times – I think some book by Hal Lindsey had just come out; and she said: “Well, I'm not worried about becoming deluded or anything, because it says that if anyone says ‘He is there,’ or ‘He is there,’ it's not the Christ. The Lord is going to come like a lightning flash, it's going to be instantaneous, and so if anybody is reporting that ‘Here is Christ, there is Christ,’ as the days go by, that obviously can't be Christ. I won't be deluded.” And I remember thinking, “How foolish you are. Perhaps the Lord will allow you to be preserved, but delusion can come upon all of us if we don't live a life of virtue.”

Eternal life is not just being able to know the dogmas. Eternal life is following the dogmas, so that we can have intimate knowledge of and participation with God, and His Grace. Eternal life is to know God intimately. You likely won't gain eternal life on your deathbed by saying you're sorry! It is possible for that to happen, but it is rare, very rare. And the reason it is rare is because at the time of death, a person who has not lived virtuously and struggled will be so taken up with the stuff of dying and the terror of it all that they won't be able to turn to God! It isn't that God would not receive them; it's that they can't turn to Him!

We read today, ***“The sheep follow Me because they know My voice.”*** The sheep know the voice of the shepherd because they are around the shepherd, and they listen to the shepherd, and when the shepherd speaks to them, they know that the shepherd is leading them to better pasture, to clear water, to good grass. They know by experience that every time the shepherd speaks, it is for their benefit – so they know his voice very well. But that’s from following the shepherd. If they don’t follow him, then they could get confused, they could hear another voice, and think it’s the shepherd, because they haven’t heard his voice in such a long time. They could be confused.

So this girl who thought that she could be able to discern things in the end was sadly mistaken. May the Lord preserve her and give her salvation, but she was in danger, because we can become deluded if we don’t follow the Lord in virtue every day. The idea that the Lord will forgive me for this sin later – later may not come for you! Salvation is the knowledge of God, and the knowledge of God in those who have become pure is joy, but those who have not purified themselves – or shall I say (I always want to be careful to be clear here, so people do not misunderstand), those who attempt, those who desire, those who struggle to purify themselves – they, when they see God, will be glad.

I didn’t say those who have become pure. The Lord will make you pure, in His time, according to His will. For the most part, the reason why we who desire to no longer sin keep falling into sin is so that we don’t fall into the greatest of sins, pride and vainglory, which will cast us down to the abyss as surely as Satan was cast down by his pride. That’s why we often just continue in our sins: because of our pride.

Eternal life is the knowledge of God. The knowledge of God can only be gained by following the example Jesus Christ gave to us, and the example of all the saints who followed after Him. And then eternal life is unity, unity with God. What an amazing thing! Flesh, which would burn in the Fire of Divinity, will instead be glad and be full of joy.

Follow the Lord, brothers and sisters, in everything you do. Listen carefully for His voice. You’ll hear it in everything that happens! There is nothing that occurs in your life that the Lord does not either allow or cause. Everything is in His Providence, and everything according to His will is for your benefit. But you must learn to see His will, and His will is found by listening to His voice, and His voice is understood by following Him. To some, this might seem to be a circular argument, but not to a Christian. You follow the voice of the Lord, and He will with His Grace enlighten you and illuminate you, so that you cannot be deluded, so that you’ll know Him in all things.

Don’t be like those people of the Gergesenes. We like to think that we’re not like those people. We’re not swine-herders; we wouldn’t disobey the Lord’s Law that terribly, right? Keeping swine was against the Law of Moses. Eating swine, keeping them, touching them was against the Law of Moses. And these were Jews that were keeping swine. Well, just as it is today, people flock to anything that is sinful. So they loved their swine. And when the Lord delivered one of their members from a terrible affliction which had been visited upon this man because of their sins, they lost their source of income because the swine went and were drowned. So what do they do? They go to the Lord and they ask Him to leave. They didn’t hear His voice, they didn’t see Him as the shepherd, they saw Him as a frightening person who has incredible power and was ruining their business!

Don’t think you’re not like these swine-herders, because when we judge our brother, this is much worse than keeping swine. When we allow ourselves lustful thoughts, when we are angry, this is much worse than keeping swine. And many times, when we ask the Lord to depart from us – yes, we ask Him to depart from us – this is much worse than what these people did, because should live within us as Christians. How do we ask Him to depart from us? By not receiving His word, by not wanting to follow to the letter what

He has told us to do.

Let's not be like these Gergesene swine-herders. Let's instead be like the saints. Let's be like the sheep, the rational sheep. Let's follow the Lord's voice. Let's equate what we believe with what we should do. St. James says, you show me a man's faith, and I'll show you his works. Faith without works is dead. Let our faith be alive, living, so that we will have joy, so that we will know the Lord intimately.

May God bless you and help you.

Priest Seraphim Holland

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