

July 15, 2012

Sunday Sermon

Fr Ambrose Young
Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple Skete



Sunday of the Holy Fathers, July 15, 2012

Gospel: Matthew 5:14-19

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

As you probably know, whenever Olympic Games are scheduled somewhere in the world this event is preceded by a torch being carried from Greece across countries and cities in a kind of symbolic secular ritual to the place where the Games are to be held. This reminds me very much of the opening verse of this morning's Gospel reading: "You are the light of the world"—a verse that tells us explicitly that *we* are to be torchbearers for Christ.

Normally when we think of light in the world we think of the sun, which reveals objects to us. But in the Gospels the term "light" usually refers to religious teachers, such as Jesus Christ Himself who, we are told, is the Light that came into the world. So, just as the sun in the heavens gives us natural light, the Jesus Christ provides us with spiritual and moral light by which to live. And so, by extension, those who follow Christ are also "lights of the world," for we are supposed to "show forth" the Savior to others.

The next verse of this Gospel is as follows: "A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden." One might at first wonder what that has to do with the preceding verse about light, but there is a connection. In the Holy Land at the time of Christ, many of its cities and towns—such as Jerusalem itself—are located on the summits or sides of hills and can be seen at some distance. The Lord therefore made reference to "a city set on a hill" in order to remind us that we are to be like such cities and towns—in other words: seen from afar, our lives are not hidden, and *because* we are not hidden, we must be holy and pure, and our conversation must be uplifting and positive, avoiding criticism of others and gossip.

The Lord then brings this whole metaphor together when He says:

"Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."



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In other words, just as when we turn on an electric lamp or light a candle we don't hide it away but allow it to illuminate the area around it, so must it be with us and our faith. Our faith must not be hidden, but must show itself in appropriate ways so as to bring light to others. When I was a boy there was a saying—almost never heard now—: “Better to light one candle than to curse the darkness.”

But we don't do this just in order to be seen by others or be admired or respected, or pointed out as special or “holy”. We don't do it in order to be admired. Rather, we must let our light shine in order to glorify God, who gave us the Light. This is the difference between being a Pharisee and being a follower of Jesus.

So, from just these few verses in today's Gospel we learn that our religious faith must not, and cannot, be concealed, *if it is authentic*. We learn, further, that if we don't “show it forth” in our life, then that means it doesn't exist and we have no real faith after all. This is one of the ways in which we can evaluate the worth or true value of those who claim to teach us about Christ: their *lives*—not just their words--must give clear evidence that they have received the Light. And so must it be with us, too.

Nor may we minimize our “light” and insist that it's too feeble to be of help to others. This is a kind of inverse pride or false humility. *Whatever* light we have, it is still light, and therefore it has immense value. A holy Elder in Moscow at the time of the Revolution was questioned by his spiritual daughter who said that her prayers were so ineffective. And his reply to her was: “In the eyes of God, even the wings of a fly have weight!”

If you've ever lit a single candle in an intensely dark room, you know how far the beams of that one candle can shine and how much can be illuminated! And so it is with our own feeble little candles.

Therefore, brothers and sisters, let us keep our own little candles lit and shining, and not hide them, but put them on a candlestick or hold them high, so that our Lord and God, Jesus Christ, might be honored and magnified, for ever and ever. Amen.

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