

'Follow Me Gospel'

Matthew 4:18-23

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

Last Sunday, the Sunday of All the Saints, we heard in the Gospel the Lord Jesus Christ speak to us about how we must be ready to renounce ourselves, pick up our crosses, carry them, and follow Him into the Kingdom of Heaven. The Gospel we just heard read this morning is a continuation of this same theme.

Near the beginning of our Lord's public career, on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus saw Simon and Andrew fishing, and He said to them: "*Follow Me.*" And immediately they left their fishing nets and joined Him. A bit further on, Christ encountered James and John, also fishermen, and He called them to follow Him, too, and they did, even leaving their aged father, who was apparently not a believer. This was the beginning of the Lord's formation of His apostles and disciples.

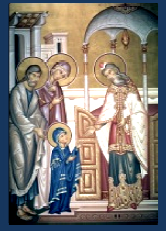


Brothers and sisters: the Lord's command to those men on that day so long ago—"Follow Me"—echoes down the centuries to us here this morning, for the Savior is *at this very moment* calling out to you and to me, "Follow Me", just as He called to Simon (later named Peter), Andrew, James and John on that morning by the lake.

But what does this mean, "Follow Me"?

Sunday Sermon

Fr Ambrose Young
Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple Skete



You might say that it means we should believe in Christ. And that's certainly true. You might also say that it means we should love Him. And *that's* true, too, of course. But the Lord Himself also said, "If you *love Me*, you will obey My commandments." And those commandments are several and they are very grave, very important, if we are to save our souls and live forever with Him in heaven after we die. How can we know what those commandments are? By reading the Bible, with particular attention to the four Gospels. Everything we need to know is there. The fact is, however, that most of us don't obey Christ about very much at all. And this means that we don't love Him, even though we may think we do. And it also means that we are not *following* Him—that we have not yet answered His call: "Follow Me."

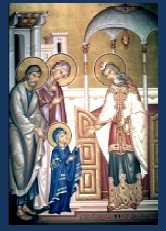
But *why not?* He is the one—and the only one, by the way!—who can lead us into the Kingdom of Heaven. He is leading, showing us the way as He bears in triumph and glory His own glorious Cross, and He is looking over His shoulder as He leads, to see if we are following Him, quietly bearing our own crosses—which are the trials and difficulties that come to us in our lives.

Brothers and sisters, as Orthodox Christians *this is not an option*—to "follow Christ". Indeed, we **MUST** follow the Master! But that means making certain changes in our lives, doesn't it? It means changing our minds and our attitudes about some things, and that leads to changing our behavior and even, for many of us, it may mean making a change in lifestyle, so as to make more room for our Lord Jesus Christ, and Him crucified and risen.

Every Gospel reading on every Sunday requires a response from us. The Gospel reading is not just something that we are to hear superficially during Liturgy and then move our attention on to something else as soon as the reading is finished. We are to *respond*; yes, respond deeply, in our hearts and in our minds.

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The Gospel this morning—I call it the “Follow Me” Gospel—requires that we ask ourselves the following question: What is it that the Lord wants me to leave in order to truly follow Him? And, have I actually ever abandoned or given up *anything* in order to follow Jesus?

These are big questions, heavy questions indeed. But if we don't ask them and answer them, then our spiritual life is stillborn and we are empty and we can be sure that we are not following the Lord as He so patiently leads us towards paradise. *This means also that we are not on our way to Heaven!* So think about this, this morning.

We must also remind ourselves that God has promised great and wonderful and good things to those who follow Him. Oh, not the rewards that this world offers—a good job, money, fame, and so forth--, but something infinitely more precious. If we obey Him, and serve Him, and follow Him, then we are walking in “the Lord's Way” rather than our own, and He will give us *His own strength* to deal with all of the hardships and disappointments that life might have in store for us.

So, hearing this, brothers and sisters, let us now strive to “follow Him” and keep His commandments. If we are lying deep in our sins—especially the soul-killing sin of spiritual laziness--\then let us repent and be converted; and if we are already standing in virtue and righteousness, as St. John Chrysostom says, “let us not grow lazy and lie down. Thus may we be delivered from evil, adversity, afflictions and the assaults of our enemies in this life, and be freed from wretched torments [in the next life], and be vouchsafed eternal good things; through the grace of our true God and Savior Jesus Christ, to Whom are due all glory, honor and worship, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

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