**Sermon for Orthodox Sunday**

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

Entrance of the Theotokos to the Temple

Today is the Sunday of Orthodoxy, the first Sunday of the Great Lenten Season.  The Fathers of the Church placed this Sunday here for two reasons. First, to mark an important historical date in Orthodox history and theology, and second, in order to remind us of the richness and the truth of our holy Faith.  This is not the Sunday of Hellenism, or Slavophilism, or Americanism—in which we celebrate our own ethnic heritage and culture--rather it is the Sunday of *Orthodoxy*, on which we are reminded of who and what we are, *beyond* our ethnic distinctions.

Historically this Feast arose as a result of the triumph of the icons and the Eastern Orthodox “theology of the image” over the iconoclasts or icon-haters in the 8th and 9th centuries of the Christian era.  But since then the Feast has come to represent much more—that is, the victory of the True Faith over error.  It reminds us that although there are many who think that all Christian Churches are basically the same, this is not the view of traditional Orthodoxy and the Holy Fathers of the Church, who taught that Orthodox Christianity and *only* Orthodox Christianity is the historic Church found by our Lord Jesus Christ. Icons are one of the signs of the victory of this God-delivered Faith.

In this specific context, I want to resume my series of talks on the Ten Commandments, considering today the commandments, “Thou shalt not kill,” and “Thou shalt not commit adultery.”  In an unexpected way these two commandments are related, as I will show a bit later in this sermon.

The tradition of the Hebrew Bible and the early Fathers of the Church reveals that the verb “kill”, here, means specifically murder or intentional killing of another human being.  It does not apply, therefore, to deaths that occur in self defense or in a *just* war nor the right of the State to take a life through execution if it deems necessary.  We might have our own personal, private, opinions about war and civil execution, and that’s fine, but our Church does not oppose either, though she encourages us to think very, very seriously about waging war and whether it is actually necessary or “just” in this day and age. Nor does this commandment apply to the killing of animals for our food—clearly God gave to the first-created men the right to kill and eat animals after they were expelled from the Garden--although my own private opinion is that one might be able to make a case against unnecessary animal experimentation.  Traditionally, monastics do not eat warm blooded animals, but not because of this commandment, but as an ascetic practice. We must remember also that that the Lord ate meat—partaking of the Passover Lamb.

This commandment also applies to the judgmental thoughts we sometimes have about others. This is called “spiritual murder.”

Next we have the commandment which reads, "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Ex. 20:14).  This Commandment instructs us to avoid *any* act leading to the dishonor of the fidelity of marriage and the family.  This is about more than just sex. *But clearly any sexual activity outside of marriage* is forbidden by this commandment.  That’s pretty straightforward, but this also precludes a husband or wife from even forming a strong emotional attachment to someone outside of their spouse or children.

How is this related to the commandment not to kill?  It’s obvious, really.  When either physical or emotional adultery takes place in a marriage, this has the potential of killing the marriage relationship. The marriage relationship begins to die, just as surely as when we unjustly kill another human being.

Thus we begin to see how Orthodoxy Christianity is a complete civilization and culture, replete with liturgical richness, sacred art and hymnography, its own history and theology, clear boundaries that show us how to live safely and happily, and a holy map that shows us the sure and certain way to the Kingdom of Heaven.  I can think of nothing more tragic than those Orthodox Christians who have chosen to think of the Church as a great chuck wagon or smorgasbord, where one can just “dip” into what one likes and live the rest untouched.  Such people, frankly, are spiritually and culturally malnourished.  They are quite literally starving their souls to death.

Feasts like the Sunday of Orthodoxy, and the commentaries of the Holy Fathers on the Ten Commandments are but one part of the whole banquet of Orthodox Christianity.  Why should anyone be satisfied with just dessert or water, when the whole banquet is spread before us and we are invited by the Lord to partake in the whole feast?

Yet there are those who do not partake.

The Sunday of Orthodoxy reminds us that there is much, much more to our Faith that going to church on Sunday.  Divine Liturgy, while important, is only one of the courses in this banquet, and we must have a complete and balanced diet in order to be spiritually nourished.  This spiritual nourishment is not limited just to the soul: it will spill over to our minds and emotions and also to our bodies, and the totality of who and what we are will be lifted, elevated very high.

Therefore, brothers and sisters, let us enter, this Lent, more deeply into the sacred treasure of our Holy and God-establish and revealed Faith—through attendance at the special Lenten services, of course, and through fasting and prayer, but also through reading and study.

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

