

SUNDAY OF THE BLIND MAN

"My soul, my soul arise, why are you sleeping? The end is drawing near..." (Kontakion of the Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete)

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Christ is Risen!

Today is called the Sunday of the Blind Man because of the Gospel which we have just heard in this morning's Liturgy. But, brothers and sisters, there is more than one way to be blind. There is physical blindness, such as this Gospel speaks of. There is intellectual blindness, when people shut their minds and no longer want to learn, to study, to grow, and, worst of all, there is spiritual blindness, and it is about this—spiritual blindness—that I wish to speak this morning, remembering that Helen Keller (whom hardly anyone except among the older generations remembers or knows about any more), once said, "There are none so blind as those who will not see."

Interestingly, the Lord once said: "For false Christ's and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect." (Matt. 24:24) We have just witnessed the appearance and downfall of a false prophet. He is only one of many that have appeared in the last generation and are still to appear.

In the Gospel of St. John (14:21-3), our Lord Jesus Christ says: "In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, *I will come again and receive you to Myself*; that where I am, there you may be also." And where is He? Of course He is in heaven, sitting at the right hand of His Father. And He wishes to bring us there, too.

This is His promise: He will return to this earth and, when He comes, He will gather us to Himself. And since we know that Christ is not a liar, we can be sure that He will keep this promise and return. When will this happen? Forget about the modern false prophets and their predictions. Jesus Himself said that even *He* doesn't know; only His Father knows the day. But, he said, in the Last Times "you will hear of wars and rumors of wars...but the end is still to come." (Matt. 24:6)

Just in the last week there have been news reports about the state of constant war in which this poor old world or ours now exists, something unimaginable in world history. Yes, constant, unending, spreading, growing, and threats of more wars yet to come. In all of human history there has never been such a time. "But," our Savior said, "The end is still to come."

He also said, "There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains." (Matt. 24:7-8) By "birth pains" He meant the "beginning of the end," the birthing of the New Jerusalem and the World to come. The global famines—food shortages—are already under way, though very little coverage is given to this in our nation media. Eventually, however, it will hit us here, and when it does it will hit us hard.

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Sunday Sermon

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Entrance of the Theotokos Skete



We are living through a time of unparalleled natural disasters—earthquakes somewhere in the world almost every day and seemingly getting worse. Volcanoes—both old and new erupting. To this we add the catastrophic tsunamis caused by earthquakes. Then there are the tornadoes, and the hurricanes, and the floods. We see sights on our televisions that are enough to bring tears. It is as though Mother Nature herself is sick of us and is rebelling against us.

But the Lord says that this is all still just *"the beginning"* of the end. In other words more—and worse—is to come. That's clear. For one thing, there is some kind of creature or being—a human monster, actually—that will arrive on the scene. In his first Epistle, St. John put it this way: "Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour." (I John 2:18) Who are these "little antichrists"? According to the Fathers and saints of the Church all those who aspire to world rule are types of antichrist. In the time of St. John that would have been the Roman Emperors. More recently it would be figures like Napoleon, Hitler, and others. Today we have a huge movement toward one-world government, which is another foreshadowing of antichrist.

Well, what else did Christ say about this subject? The Gospel of St. Luke records this prophecy: "There will be signs in the sun, moon, and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken."

I have difficulty believing that there is anyone today who isn't aware of all the strange, new, and amazing things unfolding in the heavens. Even the media in this country is careful to document and cover this. There are things happening today in the skies above and around us that men have never witnessed before and which are too numerous to list here. Just pay attention and it continues to unfold.

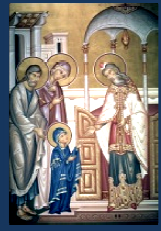
The continuous, constant, and frantic search for peace in our very troubled world was also predicted. St. Paul said, "For you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, 'Peace and safety,' destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape." (I Thessalonians 5:2-3)

Now let's speak about the moral condition of mankind in the Last Days. According to the Scriptures: "There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power. *Have nothing to do with them*" St. Paul concludes forcefully! (II Timothy 3:1-5)

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Almost four hundred years ago, in the year 1651 one of our Holy Fathers, St. Nilus the Myrrhstreamer of Mount Athos made this prediction: "Beginning in the 20th century, the people of that time will become unrecognizable. When the time of the advent of the antichrist approaches, people's minds will grow cloudy from carnal passions, and dishonor and lawlessness will grow stronger. Then the world will grow unrecognizable.

"People's appearances will change, and it will be impossible to distinguish men from women due to their shamelessness in dress and style of hair. These people will be cruel and will be like wild. After the year 1900, toward the middle of the 20th temptations of the antichrist (will arise).

"There will be no respect for parents and elders, love will disappear, and CHRISTIAN PASTORS, BISHOPS, AND PRIESTS WILL BECOME VILE MEN, COMPLETELY FAILING TO DISTINGUISH THE RIGHT-HAND WAY FROM THE LEFT.

"At that time the morals and traditions of Christians and of the Church will change. People will abandon modesty, and dissipation will reign. Falsehood and greed will attain great proportions, and woe to those who pile up treasures. Lust, adultery, homosexuality, secret deeds, and murder will rule in society.

"At that future time, due to the power of such great crimes and licentiousness, people will be deprived of the grace of the Holy Spirit, which they received in Holy Baptism, and equally of remorse. THE CHURCHES OF GOD WILL BE DEPRIVED OF GOD-FEARING AND PIOUS PASTORS, and woe to the Christians remaining in the world at that time; they will completely lose their faith because they will lack the opportunity of seeing the light of knowledge from anyone at all. They will separate themselves out of the world in holy refuges in search of a lightening of their spiritual sufferings, but everywhere they will meet obstacles and constraints.

"And this will result from the fact that the antichrist wants to be lord over everything and become the ruler of the whole universe, and he will produce miracles and fantastic signs. He will also give depraved wisdom to an unhappy man so that he will discover a way by which one man can carry on a conversation from one end of the earth to the other. At that time, men will also fly through the air like birds and descend to the bottom of the sea like fishes. And when they have achieved all this, these unhappy people will spend their lives in comfort without knowing, poor souls, that it is the deceit of antichrist. And the impious one! -- he will so complete science with vanity, that it will go off the right path and lead people to lose faith in the existence of God.

"Then God will see the downfall of the human race and will shorten the days for the sake of

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those few who are being saved, because the enemy wants to lead even the chosen into temptation, if that is possible ... then the sword of chastisement will suddenly appear to kill the perverter (that is, the Antichrist)."

But our Lord, our Church, the Fathers and Saints, while cautioning us not to be spiritual blind and to avoid all false prophets, reminding us that we cannot know the time of the end but we can know the "signs" that the end is coming, offer us very sage and sane advice. Here is what one of the greatest Fathers, St. John Chrysostom said (in his commentary on the Book of Genesis):

"If God wished to destroy the world, He could do this very easily. There is nothing easier for the Creator Who created all things by a word alone than to turn the world in an instant back into nothingness, out of which the world was formed. But in His exceeding concern for our salvation, God has told us beforehand of the punishment, which He is prepared to send upon us---in order that He might not send it. He tells us precisely in order that we should know about it, that we might be filled with fear before the face of His wrath, that we should turn away from sin and that there should remain no doubt as to His sentence.

"Thus, for example, did He act towards the great city of Ninevah, whose iniquities surpassed all measure. He sent the prophet Jonah to tell the people, 'Another forty days and Ninevah will be destroyed!' The Ninevites, however, on hearing this, did not lose hope. Trusting in God, they appointed a strict fast both for the people and for the animals, and repented in sackcloth and ashes. And God, seeing their repentance, had mercy on them, and the punishment which they were to have suffered was averted.

"Similarly, before the Flood the earth became filled with the iniquitous deeds of the people, and God decided to destroy them. He did not, however, do this at once, but informed the people 120 years in advance. Then He commanded Noah to build the ark, and for 100 years Noah labored on it, so that the people, seeing this, would come to their senses and return to the true path. It was only after God saw that in spite of all the warnings they were given the people still did not turn aside from evil, that He destroyed them by means of the Flood.'

In other words, if we and all Christians repent and return to God, He will forestall the punishment and dread things that may come. It is not yet hopeless.

A modern Father of the Church, the Serbian, St. Nikolai Velimirovich, wrote the following:

"Some misguided men think more about the end of the world than the end of their lives even though it is obvious that for him to whom the end of his life comes the end of the world has come. A brother standing before St. Seraphim of Sarov continually kept in his mind how he was going to ask the saint about the end of the world. St. Seraphim discerned his thought and said to him: 'My joy! You think highly of the wretched Seraphim. How could I know when the end of the world will be and that great day when the Lord will judge the living and the dead

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and render to each one according to his deeds will be? No, no, this is impossible for me to know!’

“And when the saints did not know, how will the sinners know? Why should we know that which the Savior Himself did not find beneficial to reveal to us? It is much better to think that our death will come sooner than the end of the world rather than the end of the world before our death.”

So, while wisely discerning the signs of the times, we must keep our minds, our hearts, and our souls in the present, being content in each day and what it brings, remember that it is in each day that the Lord awaits us on our path through life. In this way, and in this way only, we avoid spiritual blindness.

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

Christ is risen!