

5/17/20

Christ is Risen!

It has been brought to my attention that we as Americans are living at a very unique stage in the development of the Orthodox lifestyle in our country. For generations, our forefathers struggled to bring the Orthodox Faith to the “new world,” as they immigrated to America from the “old country,” whatever “old country” that may be.

In the beginning, as it is in all missionary activity, the struggle was merely to serve the Divine Liturgy, possibly in the native language, and hopefully build sanctified spaces within which to do so. However, now, after 200 years, or so, of Orthodoxy in America we have reached a place of having established the basic groundwork, but we still need to continue the mission.

At this point, let’s take a glimpse at two things from the life of Saint Photini, the Samaritan woman at the well, who we commemorate today. First, Saint Photini was of the Samaritans who were not Jews as they did not accept the fullness of the Jewish law, but rather only the five Books of Moses. Second, St. Photini had five men and was with her sixth when she met Jesus.

Now, I hope and pray that we all know that the commandments and the law are very important, but our God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is a God of Spirit and Truth and He freely operates outside the law in order to bring people to the truth. Thereby, it is not virtuous to have five “husbands,” but it can be a sign that she was not content with her darkness and was unsettled in her search for the true Bridegroom. Even though St. Photini was a sinner, God knew her heart was good. Likewise, the Samaritan people were working towards the truth, as they began to accept some of the Jewish law and they were looking for Christ. Many of the Jews, who on the contrary abode by the fullness of the law and acknowledged that a Christ would come, but they were not truly seeking the Bridegroom because a strict measure of the law had hardened their hearts.

In American Orthodoxy, we have developed a sense of security, but repentance is still a major facet of our faith. “The way it always has been” can only apply to the concrete 2000 year old traditions of our Orthodox Church. This statement cannot apply to our situations where we, an approximately 200 year old mission, have yet to reach our full Orthodox Christian potential. No positive growth will ever happen apart from simple repentance. The sole premise of our Faith is Jesus Christ’s Death and Resurrection. We cannot join Him in this most liberating experience unless we die and repent to some of our old ways. As St. Pophyrios of Kavsokalyvia once said of Elder Ephraim of Philotheou-Arizona, “The charisma of the Great Geronda is such that the missionary work for which God called upon him in America will receive the grace of early Christianity. This is a very high mission because America is under the illusion that it knows about the Church and is spiritually self-sufficient while Africa knows it’s ignorance.”

As we all know, St. Photini went on to become a powerful missionary saint, as she knew the positive development of a repentant life in Christ. May we too, as a young Orthodox Country, see our opportunities for repentance and continue to grow the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, in truth and faith, forever. Amen.

God bless,

Fr. Dean