

5/23/20

Christ is Risen!

In today's Gospel, who was truly blind? Was it the blind man? Or was it the Pharisees? If it was the Pharisees, then what would we name the characteristic that kept them blind?

I would name it stubbornness.

The same as all passions and sins, stubbornness is something quite unnatural to the human soul. We develop stubbornness in order to defend our insecurities. Every human soul is inherently good and passionless. This is why passions cause us pain, because they are unnatural to the soul. Yet, all of us acquire passions. Some passions are inherited, some passions are acquired through inattentiveness, other passions are developed in vain to hide our insecurities. The chief among our insecurities is our inability to be natural in the sight of the Lord, meaning to possess the most natural state of soul, one of purity before we acquired the passions. Of course these are just a few classifications of how we acquire passions, but I would say stubbornness definitely falls into the latter category. Passions, like stubbornness, become physically apparent because the physical expression of the person, the person's character, is really the revelation of the person's soul, which is a spirit. Unfortunately we have somehow, along with other passions, learned to graft stubbornness into our souls. So why am I focusing so heavily on stubbornness this Sunday?

Well, I believe stubbornness is something very similar to the "blindness" we see in this Sunday's Gospel, not in the blind man, but rather in the Pharisees who insisted on their way. God, Whom the Pharisees had worshiped for centuries, came and walked among them, but His actual presence made them so insecure that they stubbornly clung to the law. For example, they were so keen on keeping the rules of the sabbath that they could not see that God was using this holy day to heal people.

Let's reflect on how familiar this situation is for us. So often we say that we love and worship God. However, when we actually encounter the Presence of Jesus Christ, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, sometimes His True Presence makes us very insecure. Then in our insecurity we become stubborn and cling to the "things we have always done." We all have these "things." Then we call those "things we have always done" our (little "g") gods. While in actuality the truth is that we are stubbornly turning away from the True Presence of God because, in His True Presence, we become insecure as we may realize that we do not actually know Him. Without repentance we become stubborn, like an irrational donkey that won't turn around on the road. Stubborn willfulness keeps us blind to the truth and blocks the will of God, Who wants us to come to the Light.

Here is the crux of the issue. Our God is a God of repentance. He wants us to repent and grow until our last breath so that we may enter the boundless love and joy of His Heavenly Kingdom.

In the Gospel reading from today there was the blind man who was blind, admitted his blindness, repented, and was willing to be healed. The Pharisees, who although they could physically see, were in greater blindness than the blind man because they were stubborn and would not repent in the Presence of the True God. Rather they clung “to the things they have always done.” St Ephraim the Syrian says, “The only sins which cannot be forgiven are those which are not repented of.”

How do we cure stubbornness? One way is confession and Communion. Another way is prayer, Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner. Say this over and over until our hearts are soft as jello and we will find there is plenty of room for repentance.

The blind man submitted himself to the will of God and gained sight. The Pharisees had physical sight, but remained “blind” because they stubbornly blocked the will of God, that being, to accept Jesus Christ.

Think of how many times throughout the Gospels that people, other than the Pharisees, experienced miracles and healings because they were willing to repent. The Pharisees were the chosen people, the ones who Jesus Christ came to redeem. Now that we are baptized and Chrismated Orthodox Christians we are “the chosen people.” Will other people repent and enter the Kingdom of God before us, because we are stubbornly clinging to “things” that prohibit us from truly meeting Jesus Christ face to face? Are we scared to face our insecurities and deal with the passions that keep us from truly knowing God? Will we remain blind like the Pharisees, while people born into true blindness see the Light before us? Or will we repent, beg God for mercy, come to the Light, Jesus Christ, cast aside our stubbornness, and begin to face our insecurities in a spirit of repentance?

Insecurity is an unnatural response to God. The soul is naturally inclined towards God and would gladly repent and change for Him. However our bad habits, sins and passions make us insecure and stubborn if we don't repent. Now that God Himself has taken on flesh and walked among men, the whole world has to change. There are two options people either admit their blindness and God gives them sight to see, or they stubbornly and willfully reject the will of God because His presence has made them insecure and they remain blind.

The revelation of our soul, our character, can either be stubborn or repentant. There is plenty of room for Jesus Christ's love and Resurrection in all of our lives, and let us remember, “the only sins which cannot be forgiven are those which are not repented of.”

God bless,

Fr. Dean