

## Sermon Sunday of Orthodoxy

CHRIST IS IN OUR MIDST !!!

Today is the Sunday of the Triumph of Orthodoxy. We celebrate the return of icons to the worship of Christ our God on earth. Today we commemorate the restoration in AD 843 of Icons. They went in procession to the Church of Theotokos ton Blakhernós, and restored the icons. For those interested, we will celebrate this at vespers this evening.

The scriptures we read were catechistic. They are pointing those who will be baptised at the end of Great Lent to what the beginning of the journey was for the disciples, and reminding them of the prophets of old that looked forward to the Kingdom and the coming of the Messiah but never saw it themselves. We celebrate the Incarnation of the Word of God Who took flesh for our sake. The indescribable deigned to become describable. As we will hear on Bright Monday: “No man has ever seen God; the only begotten Son Who Is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.”

He Who is the very radiance of the glory of God, the very Icon of His Person has shown Himself. As we sing in Matins: “God is the Lord and has revealed Himself unto us!”

Because He took flesh and dwelt among us, it is proper to depict Him in icons. For He Who is the very Icon of God has taken flesh that He Himself created in His Image, and joined the two together without confusion.

We venerate icons by kissing them as we would kiss a revered friend. We venerate them by bowing, again as to a revered friend. We also venerate them by censing them with incense. When we cense icons we are recognizing that the person depicted was created in God's Image and reflected His likeness.

But we also cense us – we humans. We are created in God's Image; by censing ourselves we honour that Image of God in ourselves.

So as we honour the Image of God in ourselves by censing we must ask ourselves: "Do we honour God's Image in us?" Is how we live a reflection of that Image of God in us? Do we seek God's will in our lives? Do we honour His image in ourselves? our family members? Our co-workers? The people we meet everyday? Do we see God's image in the Barista who makes our coffee drink? Do we see the Image of God in the homeless person whose path we cross? Do we see the Image of God in the person whose politics we despise? In the eyes of the refugee who asks for a safe place? Do we see God's Image in the face of those people we don't like?

For most of us, that likeness with God is broken and distorted. Are we working with God to restore that likeness? Are we treating His Image in others remembering that He said that how we treat the least of these is how we treat Him? By how we treat ourselves and others we often are guilty of being iconoclasts.

These are questions that this Sunday requires us to look at. While we are celebrating the Triumph this evening we must pause and take stock at where we are.

The older themes of this Sunday can help us. Before the restoration of Icons, this Sunday was dedicated to the prophets. If you read or sing the hymns of this Sunday you will notice that it bounces between Icons and the Prophets. If we were to do Complines tonight we would hear the older canon of the Prophets. The prophets called Israel and Judah to repentance. They called the people to treat the poor, the orphan, the widow, the foreigner with respect. They called the people to treat their children as precious gifts from God. They called the people back from and criticized the false images of their material greed, their love of power over love of people. Often the people did not repent and had to pay the cost in exile. We are encouraged during Lent to read the prophet Isaiah. No matter what age we live in, the book of Isaiah has some sobering criticism of our society. He sandwiches his prophecies of destruction with consolation, with the message: "It doesn't have to be that way; you can repent." By Chapter 40 it becomes clear that the people won't repent, and he prepares them for exile and return. I commend to you all the reading of Isaiah.

This is what the Church asks us to chew on as we journey towards Pascha. God calls us in this period to work with Him to restore His likeness in us. The prayers are all a part of that. The services are all a part of that. Fasting is all a part of that. Alms are all a part of that. The Triodion is part of that. The prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian is part of that. These are the tools we have been given. These tools must be applied with love or they will be useless to us.

God calls us today to restore His Likeness in us, just as the icons

were restored to the Churches.