

Sunday of the Gospel of the Good Samaritan (November 15, 2020) - Luke 10:25-37

Christ is among us!

There is a quote attributed to both Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh, of blessed memory, and to St Sofrony the Athonite to the effect that if all the copies of the gospel were lost it should be possible to re-write them from the lives of Christians. In the past week we commemorated three saints who actually lived this gospel. The main difference being that each of them were high priests, bishops, who unlike the priest in the gospel story today saw those in need and did not walk past. The three are St Martin of Tours, or the Merciful, St John the Merciful or Compassionate and St John Chrysostom, the golden mouthed because of his eloquent sermons. Each of them, as bishops, was noted for his humility, his lack of pretentiousness, his humble life style and his direct contact with, and care for, the poor and the needy.

In the middle ages St Martin was in competition only with St Lawrence the deacon for the number of churches dedicated to him. A few years ago the European Commission authorized a new history book for schools which omitted any reference to Christianity in the history of Europe. Of course anyone who has been in Europe will not have seen any churches or vast medieval cathedrals or the huge monasteries! Despite the removal of Christianity from the history books when the Commission wanted someone to symbolize Europe they chose Martin of Tours. Not least as his influence spread across several European countries.

I won't say much here about St John the Merciful as Fr Nicolaie spoke eloquently about him on Wednesday evening after the vesperal liturgy except to say this. It is his example that is the foundation of this community trying to live today's gospel.

In today's gospel there is a not very thinly veiled condemnation of the religious establishment in the persons of the priest and the Levite. All three saints this week were definitely part of the religious establishment but challenged the accepted form it took. Of the three St John Chrysostom epitomizes the conflict between accepting the norm of church life and living the gospel. A brief summary of his career as a bishop and patriarch is as follows:

- Enthroned
- Deposed
- Enthroned
- Deposed
- Enthroned
- Exiled
- Died
- Enthroned again!

Each time he was restored it was by the will of the people and only reluctantly accepted by both the church and imperial authorities.

"The Poor our Masters" said St John the Merciful – it's on his fresco in the narthex. St John the Golden-mouthed certainly was a teacher but he was also a learner. A Greek priest in the USA wrote an interesting paper on how John learned and who taught him. Based on his teaching on marriage the priest showed how John began with a strict and rigid position based on his wide experience of marriage as a monk! As a bishop he showed that he not only had a golden mouth but also golden ears. He listened to the poor and enlarged his heart with the compassion for them that St Paul today tells us God has for us.

Martin, John and John by their examples tell us that we should not be surprised when difficulties come nor should we be surprised when the difficulties come from within the church itself. The final blessing is given by the priest with a hand blessing cross. It is not a cheery wave of the hand wishing us a "nice day" but the cross traced over us.

This is a strange sermon for the Sunday of the Good Samaritan that so far has managed to omit any mention of Samaritans. If this community were to be a template for a re-write of this gospel where would the Good Samaritan appear? There have over the last 34 years been many who would be regarded as being outside of the church, even rejected by the church, as the Samaritans were, who have supported the work of this Mission. In this pandemic year there have been many examples of "Samaritans" and others whose support has kept the doors open so that the beggars can be welcomed as they were by Martin of Tours; where the Poor can continue to be our Masters and our teachers; and where the liturgy of John Chrysostom can be served at the Table of the Lord before the Table of the Poor.

Amen