



Sunday after Theophany

"...they could not drink the waters of Marah for they were bitter. That is why the place was called Marah. So the people murmured against Moses, saying, "What will we drink?" He called upon the Lord, who showed him a tree. When he cast it into the water, it became sweet. (Ex 15:22-27 Theophany Vespers)

We see Christ today being baptized by John in the waters of Jordan. We recollect from the garden us being ashamed and naked. Today God is naked in the Jordan not being ashamed of our sins. He takes them upon Himself. We can meet God today, who encounters humankind, because our sins are taken upon by Him. Our eyes can see the Holy Spirit descending like a dove because our eyes have been cleansed, we can touch the Body of Christ because our hands were strengthened to give up on violence, we can hear the voice of the Father who loves His Son because our ears do not listen to the lies that poison the soul. We hear as He talks to His Son and we hear His voice within our own hearts as we are adopted, through the obedience of the Son, by the Father who never left us orphans. The waters are sanctified as Christ is entering the Jordan. The sinless One does not keep for Himself the holiness of God but changes the essence of our life. We are touched by His humility as we care for the Body of Christ. The waters are the sap of life that we have within ourselves. Today life becomes sweet because we see the humility of the Christ incarnate who reveals to us the Holy Trinity. God wakes us up from the nightmare of death by revealing to us the incomprehensible love of the Holy Trinity that embraces the whole creation and forgives man who is made in His image.

Today, the waters of our time are bitter like in Exodus. Life is bitter because of the multitude of our sins. We defiled the spring of life through our own sins, so much so that people find no delight in life today. Life became a bitter burden for young and for old. It has been wasted and diluted. Life is without joy today and without hope. It does not inspire the youth as it does not make the elderly wiser. It does not give life to the body to do the acts of mercy and care and nurture for the innocents and for the sinners. With such a "witness," we should not be surprised that people are losing the desire to live.

We pray today at Theophany that God would sweeten our life. That's how we'll know that we have been sanctified, we have been justified, we have been illumined by the Holy Spirit. We pray for ourselves, and we pray especially for those who tasted from this bitterness that spread from an early age. We pray for those who were given to drink only vinegar for their thirst and gall for the food (Ps 69: 21) so they can be sweetened today by a new life in Christ. We pray to God that for their sake we'll discover together the freshness of life and drink together without resistance from what is new, creative and without barriers when it comes to kindness and love for the Truth.

By entering the Jordan, Christ sanctifies our life, and we are moved to touch and care for his body. To nurture the innocence that is revealed to us with the sweetness we just rediscovered within ourselves. This is what was given to us to witness, the reality of the presence of God within a time that asks for justification in order not to give up on human life completely. Today we trust this sweetness of life that leads us to encounter the bitterness of the waters. We enter with this sweetness within the fear of the waters (Ps 77:16). We are afraid now only of the good things and new life ahead of us and not of what was left behind, the bitterness of death that has been stripped down of his power.

Unity Of Vasilopita – resuming celebration in 2023 after being postponed for some time because of various reasons

“... when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee ... of the Gentiles, the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.” (Today’s gospel - Matthew 4:12-1)

It does not come easily and naturally for us to look for genuine unity around Christ when it was forcefully and artificially imposed on us by today’s values that spread ideologies that present themselves as victorious when making victims. Communism claimed unity among its members to a point where any form of freedom was suppressed. We see the same today in the culture of self-determination that tries to bring people together in order to assist in ending an inconvenient life. Nationalism, on the other hand, claims its own rights to unity, surrounding its victims with fences of barbed wire or sending them to war in order to keep on the outside those who do not belong to the group, those who have a different skin colour or who speak a different language or eat a different food. There was an imposed “unity” among the people in concentration camps as it was in the gulags, or in Romania’s re-education jail programs. Genuine unity is difficult to attain but we should never give up on the desire to attain it because that’s where the dove we see today brings us. The real unity is around Christ and it is achieved in perfect freedom. St John Chrysostom said that it rarely happens for two or three people to be gathered together in the name of Christ.

What we celebrate today is not a mirage. The unity among us is not perfect but it is genuinely desired. To explain this better, we see today in the gospel that Jesus, when hearing about John being imprisoned by the authority who was in power, leaves for the country of the gentiles, to meet those of the margins who lived in darkness. Jesus does not hide from the authority but looking for the encounter with those who were cast out by a powerful system. The light calls to unity those who were harmed by the bitterness and violence of darkness. Those who were the most vulnerable and powerless in living with their brokenness and their despair. There is real harm in the darkness that waits for the light to heal it. Within this darkness, there is a desire for unity, that is expressed by the longing for communion of those who do not experience the kindness of the church, of a community where Christ shows us how to take care of the widows and the orphans. This is what brings about unity. This longing precedes the receiving of light that brings people around Christ. Within the community today, people who partake of the bread are not perfect people with a strong ideology and morals. But rather people who did not give up on desiring and doing what is good. At the mission, there is great value in the expression of trying “to keep it together” when things are falling apart around you and in your own life. It has value for Christ who brings the light in order to heal this desire for unity and to teach us the Truth not one by one but as a community of the saints that has genuine crumbs of love for Christ. As scattered or broken as we might be, today we came together because Christ is in our midst and always has been.

The darkness of our time is the place where the innocence and humility of the Son of man brings about the good news for those who were taught to live without hope. It is the place that is changed by light and speaks forgiveness to those who have the power to judge, crucify or to release the innocents. This is the place for us to look to repent as a community and to receive mercy. **“... for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”** (today’s gospel)

January 9 - 15

Tuesday	8:30 am 7:30pm	Morning Prayer Psalms Study – via Zoom	Wednesday	8:30 am 12:30 pm 4:00 pm 6:30 pm	Morning Prayer Noon Hours Vespers/Dinner Bridges 8pm Compline
Thursday	8:30 am 12:30 pm 2:00 pm	Morning Prayer Noon Hours Jesus Prayer	Friday Strict Fast	7:00 am 12:30 pm 2pm	Orthros Noon Hours Jesus Prayer
Saturday	9:00 am	Morning Prayer	Sunday	7:00 am 8:30 am	Orthros Divine Liturgy



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We are an apostolate of the ecumenical patriarchate “Mother Church of Christ’s poor”
under the Omophorion of Metropolitan Gregory of Nyssa