

Sixth Sunday of the Holy Cross – The Gospel

*Delivered by Rev. Fr. Ghevond Ajamian
St. Sarkis Armenian Church. Carrollton, TX
October 16, 2016
Gospel Reading: Luke 4:14-23*

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Yesterday, the Armenian Church celebrated the Feast of the Four Evangelist: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, the very saints who wrote the Holy Gospels. We use the word “gospel” many times, but what is the gospel? When we ask, “*What is the gospel?*” many words come to mind: salvation, truth, life, good news, spiritual food, and message, just to name a few. These are all correct answers, but the question is incorrect. The question should not be, “*what is the gospel*” but “***who** is the gospel*”. And the answer is Jesus Christ. Christ is the gospel and He is also salvation, truth, life, good news, spiritual food and message.

In the past, there were many gospels, and we hear this in St. Paul’s writings. Even today there are other gospels, and we learned about one of them a couple of weeks ago, called the Prosperity Gospel. Today, in the New Testament, there are four gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The first three (Matthew, Mark and Luke), collectively are called the Synoptic Gospels, because they more or less follow the same outline of events, have the same miracles and record the same teachings of Christ. The fourth gospel, John’s, is very different from the first three. It is unique and full of theology.

We often have the wrong understanding about the gospels, thinking they are historical biographies of Jesus and we get frustrated when events or teachings do not correspond with one another. The gospels are not biographies, but letters written to different groups of people. Each evangelist writes differently. Matthew addresses his gospel to Jews, this is why his gospel is full of quotations from the Old Testament and prophecy, because that is very important for the Jews. Mark, on the other hand, is writing to Gentiles (pagan, non-Jews). His gospel, with one exception, is completely void of Old Testament prophecies because Jewish prophecy is not important to them. Luke writes to Hellenized Jews, Jews who have been fully integrated into Greek culture. He too refers to Old Testament prophecy, but he is also a doctor, by profession, thus there are many healing miracles in his gospel. And John addresses his gospel to the entire world. This is why he uses the word, “world” 79 times in his gospel.

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In the books of Ezekiel and Revelation, there is a vision of the throne of God being surrounded and held up by four creatures, each with a different face; a man/angel, a lion, an ox and an eagle. The early Church Fathers ascribed these four creatures to the four evangelists because of what they emphasized in their gospels. Matthew is associated with the man/angel, because he emphasized Christ's humanity. Mark is associated with the lion, because he emphasized Christ's royalty. Luke is associated with the ox, because the ox is a symbol of service and sacrifice and he emphasized Christ's servitude and sacrifice. John is associated with the eagle, because as the eagle ascends to the heavens, John emphasized Christ's divinity. The gospels are not histories or biographies, but messages addressed to different peoples with different emphases.

So how do we preach the gospel?

There was once a parish priest who went to an abbot of a monastery for advice. The priest said, "I am so frustrated with my parishioners. They have no idea what the Gospel is. I have tried everything to make them learn. I have gone to school for years and studied the gospels. I do bible studies every day. I give sermons three times a week. I read and have memorized the gospels by heart. I post teachings about the gospels on Facebook and the church website every day. I don't know what else I can do to get these people to understand and learn the Gospel." Then the abbot, after hearing all that the parish priest had to say, said, "You are right, you are well educated, know the gospels and are excellent at teaching and preaching; now go and *live* the gospel."

As Christians we are called not to just know the Gospel and recite facts at people, quoting Christ's teachings, but we are called to live the Gospel. That is to say, we are to live Christ. We do this through participating in the sacraments, following Christ's commandments, praying and fasting. But most importantly, we must allow Christ to dwell in us. For when we allow the light of the world to live and work through us, then people will be attracted to us and will truly learn the Gospel.

So let us be evangelists, like Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, who did not rattle off facts or list rules or even just tell a story of good news, but actually lived the good news of Christ for all people to see, learn and live.

Amen.