

St. Sarkis Sermon – 06-11-17 Sunday of Elijah

1 Kings 18:29-46

2 Kings 2:1-15

James 5:16-20

Luke 4:25-30

Յանուն Հօր եւ Որդոյ եւ Հոգւոյն Սրբոյ. ամէն:

Անցեալ կիրակի, Հոգեգալստեան տօնը տօնախմբեցինք, այսինքն՝ Սուրբ Հոգիին գալուստը առաքեալներուն վրայ, իրենց տալով մասնաւոր շնորհք որպէսզի կարենային աւետարանը տարածել աշխարհի ուրիշ երկիրներուն, իւրաքանչիւր երկրին յատուկ լեզուովը: Այս կիրակի կը կոչուի Առաջին Կիրակի զկնի Հոգեգալստեան եւ կը շարունակենք այդպէս թիւով անուանակոչել բոլոր կիրակիները մինչեւ յաջորդ տաղաւար տօնը: Ուրեմն գալ շաբաթ կ'ըլլայ երկրորդ կիրակի զկնի Հոգեգալստեան, եւ այլն: Այս թիւերը կը յիշեցնեն մեզի որ ամէն կիրակի մինչեւ Վարդավառ Հոգեգալուստը կը տօնենք:

Այսօր նաեւ կը կոչուի Յիշատակը Եղիայի Մարգարէին: Բայց ինչպէս ըսի, պէտք է յիշենք թէ այս եղանակին ամէն կիրակի Հոգեգալուստը կը տօնենք: Ուրեմն, ի՞նչ կապ կայ Եղիա Մարգարէին եւ Հոգեգալստեան միջեւ:

Մեր նախահայրերը հասկցան որ ինչպես Սուրբ Հոգին եկաւ առաքեալներուն վրայ որպէսզի կարենային աւետարանը քարոզել, նոյնպէս Սուրբ Հոգին եկաւ մարգարէներուն վրայ որպէսզի կարենային Աստուծոյ խօսքը քարոզել:

Առաքեալներուն եւ մարգարէներուն պատգամը նոյն է՝ Աստուած մեզի հետ է: Աստուած մեզ կը սիրէ առանց ոեւէ վերապահութեան: Եւ Աստուած մեզի պիտի փրկէ, եւ արդէն փրկած է, ամէն վտանքներէ, նոյնիսկ մահէն: Այդ պատգամն է որ Աստուած մեզի հաղորդած է թէ՛ մարգարէութեամբ եւ թէ՛ Սուրբ Հոգիով: **Այդ պատգամն է** կապը Հոգեգալստեան եւ Մարգարէութեան միջեւ:

Առաքեալներուն եւ մարգարէներուն պէս, Սուրբ Հոգին նաեւ մեր վրայ եկաւ երբ մկրտուեցանք: Նոյն շնորհքը որով առաքեալները եւ մարգարէները Աստուծոյ պատգամը քարոզեցին, այդ նոյն շնորհքը մենք ստացանք երբ Սուրբ Միւռոնը իջած էր աւազանին մէջ եւ այդ միւռոնովը կնքուեցանք:

Ուրեմն հարցումը այն կըլլայ թե, ինչպե՞ս կը քարոզենք մենք Աստուծոյ պատգամը մեր մկրտութեան շնորքովը: Մարգարէութիւն եւ առաքելութիւն միայն անցեալին չեն: Այսօր, ներկայիս, մենք ամէնքս կոչուած ենք մարգարէներ եւ առաքեալներ ըլլալու: Մեր կեանքը լեցուն է պարգեւներով: Մենք որպէս քրիստոնէաներ կը հասկնանք որ այդ պարգեւները Աստուծոյ շնորհքէն կու գան: Եւ ամէն անգամ երբ որ քարոզենք ուրիշներուն թէ՛ ամէն բարի տուր եւ ամէն պարգեւ կատարեալ վերուստէն եկած են Աստուծմէ, մենք կը մարգարէանանք Աստուծոյ խօսքը: Նոյն ձեւով, ամէն անգամ որ մենք մեր կեանքը կը նուիրենք ուրիշներու համար, մեր խաչը շակեցնելով եւ մեր Տիրոջ Քրիստոսի հետեւելով, մենք կը քարոզենք Քրիստոսի աւետարանը:

Քրիստոնէութիւն ասոր մէջ է: Իսկական քրիստոնէական կեանքը մարգարէութիւն եւ առաքելութիւն է : Այսօր, կաղօթեմ որ մենք ալ կարենանք մարգարէներ եւ առաքեալներ հանդիսանալ, Քրիստոսի աւետարանը քարոզելով միշտ:

“Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” (Mt. 7:7)

This verse from the Gospel according to Matthew is a very well-known and beloved saying of Jesus Christ. There’s something that just draws you in when you hear it. It’s so simple and yet there’s so much meaning packed within it.

“Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” This verse offers much hope to us as Christians. It puts Christianity within our reach. It shows us the real opportunity open to all of us to find the love and redemption and beauty of a life in Jesus Christ.

But there’s a caveat to this verse. It’s subtle but it’s where I think most of us fall away from truly being transformed by the good news of Jesus Christ. While anyone who seeks will most certainly find, this verse indirectly implies that if you do *not* seek, you will *not* find.

Blaise Pascal, a famous French philosopher, shares a fascinating reflection on this verse in one of his *Pensées*. He says: “God gives us just enough light so that those who really want to find him can, but not so much light that those who don’t really want to find him don’t have to.” This is both the beauty of and trouble with Christianity. God loves us so incredibly much that, along with that love, must also come complete freedom. Love that is forced is not love at all: it’s control or force or manipulation. True love must come from a place of absolute freedom. It must be completely voluntary by both parties involved. And so, God, who loves us unconditionally and with the whole of his being, has revealed himself fully to the world through his Son Jesus Christ. But he has revealed himself in a way that both allows those who are looking for him to find him, and allows those who want to deny him to avoid him.

We see this unfold in a stark way in today's reading from the Gospel according to Luke. Jesus has just returned to his hometown of Nazareth. He goes to the synagogue on the Sabbath and reads a prophecy from Isaiah. He shares that the passage is about himself and the people sitting in the synagogue become outraged that Jesus is claiming to be the Son of God. Jesus responds by saying: "Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his own country. But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when there came a great famine over all the land; and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian." (pause) Jesus brings up the examples of Elijah and Elisha, the two major prophets of the Old Testament, and how many of their miracles were performed. These miracles were performed not to the Jews, the chosen people of God, but to non-Jews. Jesus shows that, even though the Jews were indeed the chosen people, in times when they did not seek God, they did not find him.

The Jews of Nazareth, although they knew Christ better than anyone, they, like the Jews from the stories of Elijah and Elisha, could not find. Even though the Jesus spent most his life in Nazareth, the Jews living their were unable to accept him as the Messiah, not because they didn't have enough evidence, but because they did not *want* to accept the reality before them.

As Orthodox Christian, we tend to fall into the same trap as the Jews from Jesus' hometown of Nazareth. The majority of us have grown up in the embrace of the Armenian Orthodox Church. We've grown up around the gospels and feast days and incense and Holy Communion. Many of us have seen God working actively in our own lives and in the lives of those faithful Christians around us. And yet, we still find it so difficult to believe.

I think our problem is the same as the Jews from Nazareth. In many of our times of doubt, our primary reason for doubting is not that we don't have enough evidence that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Our problem with accepting the Gospel is that we don't *want* it to be true. We can get so comfortable in our lives. We get to a point where it seems that we have it all under control. We're relatively happy. We're able to pay our bills on time. We have a nice family, nice friends, we're happy with the community we're living in. And at that point, we enter the danger of thinking that God is just an extra burden added on top of our relatively happy lives. And then, out of nowhere, something changes. We lose our jobs, we get into a huge fight with a family member, someone close to us passes away unexpectedly. And suddenly, that sense of comfort and control that we once had, that we had maybe been building up for years, vanishes in an instant.



Most of the time, many of us, myself included, would much rather hang our hats on the fleeting moments of worldly comfort than on the everlasting good news of Jesus Christ. We tend to do this because we prefer the immediate, self-focused rewards of secular life to the call of self-sacrificial love in the gospels. Although we may see Christ right in front of us, many of us don't *want* to accept him. When we look at him, we realize that if God humbled himself by becoming man and dying on the cross for us, then we have no choice but to live a life dedicated to giving ourselves up to others in Christian love. And the difficulty of reframing our lives from focusing inward to focusing fully on others in the same love that Christ has for us, this difficulty, my brothers and sister, is what *really* prevents us all from constantly living as true Christians.

What we all tend to miss is that, if we truly *do* let the gospel transform us, what is built up in place of our old, reward-driven lives is so much more beautiful, rich, and fulfilling than we could ever imagine.

The peace of Christ that filled the apostles allowed them to sing praises to God even in the midst of being mercilessly martyred. And by contrast, we tend to allow even the most minor inconveniences to completely ruin our day. For most of us, our joy is circumstantial. True Christian joy goes beyond current circumstances, and exists all-the-more in times of conflict. The peace that Christ has come to offer will not offer wealth, nor will it offer notoriety, but it will allow us to be filled with joy and love even in the midst of our most challenging moments.

The Christian life is how we are hard-wired by our Creator to live. We see this in the moments when we *do* choose to live in that self-sacrificing love of Christ. When we show love to our children, siblings, neighbors, co-workers, or strangers that goes beyond our personal gain, (pause) when we show them love even when they don't deserve it, (pause) when we allow ourselves to see Christ living and working in those individuals, I think we can all sense how natural, right, joyful, and inherently human that love is. That love is the image of God imprinted within us; an image that we can become more and more each day, if we allow ourselves to be open to it.

Seek and we shall find.

Or do not seek and we will not find.

The choice is ours.

The conviction of the Church is that what we're saying yes to in opening ourselves fully to the Gospel is much greater than whatever may be holding us back from doing so.

Today is the day to let go of whatever is preventing us from fully embracing the Gospel. Today is the day to truly seek our Lord Jesus Christ. And indeed, if we seek him, we *will* find him.

And in so doing, we will offer praise and worship to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. այժմ էլ միշտ էլ յաւիտեանս յաւիտենից.  
ամէն: