

HOMILY AT ST. MATTHEW ORTHODOX CHURCH
OCTOBER 2, 2022

II CORINTHIANS 6

“THE AROMA OF TRUTH”

Last Sunday’s gospel lesson was from Luke 5---the story of how Jesus recruited some of His 12 Disciples while they were fishing. He called them to change from being fishers of fish to be fishers of men—to catch souls for the Kingdom of God. And I talked in the sermon last week about how God is calling all of us, and our parish, to also be fishers of men, catchers of souls.

I spoke about it using the idea of aromas----that parishes have various aromas (symbolically speaking) that come from them. The aromas of a particular parish can either attract people to God---or push them away. Last Sunday I looked at two of those types of aroma. Today, we will look at one more (just one! So a shorter sermon than last week..at least, a little shorter!)

The question today---does a parish give off an aroma of *truth*? Truth is important. St. Paul, in today’s epistle reading from II Corinthians 6, twice refers to truth. In verse 7, he writes about the importance of “truthful speech”. And in verse 8, he writes about how we need to stay true even if we are being accused of being false. Truth was important to the Holy Apostle Paul. And so it should be to us as a parish. Because an aroma of truth in a parish will attract people to the Lord. Some examples of that in a bit.....

But today in our land it seems there is more falsehood than truth. Many openly say there is no real truth. “Whatever you think is true is true for you.” This way leads to many falsehoods which are common now----

---There is no God....or if there is, He (or She) is very distant from us and doesn’t matter much.

---There is no real right and no real wrong.....you create your own right and wrong.

---All religions are pretty much the same.

---Gender is not real. You can pick what gender you wish to be.....Be more than one gender if you wish because there are dozens to pick from.

---Anything that was believed in the past (perhaps before a few decades ago) is no longer correct.

And on and on.....

When speaking about truth, many say there is no objective truth, no real truth. Whatever seems good to you is true....make your own truth. But St. Paul, in II Corinthians 6, said that truth matters!

As we saw last week, parishes give off aromas---aromas that either attract people to Christ or push them away. Today we will focus on the aroma of truth. It's in our name----“Orthodox” means true worship, true belief. So to be truly Orthodox we must believe what is true. True belief given by the Lord to the Apostles and handed down to us faithfully for 2000 years.

And that aroma of true belief brings people to God and His Church. So many churches don't hold to true beliefs----and, over all, they are declining in our country. Remember the years after our parish fire in 2017 when we had to meet in several different buildings until we finished our new building? During those years we had to find church buildings to use and could not stay the whole time in one place. Those that were on the Building Committee and Parish Council remember how it really wasn't tough finding places-----we had more than enough empty church buildings to check out and got to pick which empty church was best for us to rent! That is a sad commentary on society today—closed churches all over!

But churches with the aroma of real truth are growing. Now I am not going to say that this is a non-changeable thing in history---that churches of true faith always grow. Sometimes there are circumstances that prevent that. And it's correct historically that sometimes growth causes opposition, even violent opposition. We Orthodox know that very well! When that happens, then we just stick with truth and let the chips fall where they may----after all, God is on our side.

But generally speaking, in America today, an aroma of truth brings growth. I think our parish has been sticking to truth---and we certainly have had wonderful growth in recent years. But we are for sure not the only place for that! In the current issue of our archdiocese's “Word” magazine (if you don't get it by mail, you can read it on the archdiocese website) there is an article by Father Joseph Honeycutt about a long vacation he and his wife took recently to the Pacific Northwest---and, as priests commonly do, he visited a lot of churches on vacation! He worshipped in at least 4 of our Antiochian congregations in that area. And in the Northwest, generally considered one of the spiritually darkest areas of our nation, our churches (who all have that aroma of truth) are booming!

His 4 examples----

---our parish in Yakima, Washington pastored by Father Joseph Copeland:

wonderful growth in numbers.

---Our parish in Arlington, Washington, pastored by Father David Homik: new folks pouring in. I know Father David well and he told me recently that about half of his parishioners had moved out of state. I asked him what he was going to do with such a drastic problem. He said, “No worries! So many converts have joined that they have more than made up for those who moved away”. And they are expanding their building.

---St. George Church in Portland, Oregon (considered by many as perhaps the most non-Christian spot in our country). It is pastored by a man we know and love, Father George Saada. He is our parishioner Rim Alsaifi’s brother-in-law and he was here a few years back for one year learning English after coming from Syria. Such a beautiful fellow and wonderful priest. In his church in Portland, the Word article says, many Episcopalians are fleeing the heresy predominant in their denomination and fleeing to Orthodoxy.

---And our parish in Goldendale, Washington-- (I don’t know who that priest is). They are a rather new mission and had just a little building. Because of growth, they just finished an expansion project. Their growth became so rapid that by the time the project was over, the building was already too small! Father Honeycutt writes that when he visited there were about 150 in attendance, more than the new bigger church can hold. People were taking part in the liturgy as best they could standing outside with the church doors open! I assume they are busily forming another building expansion committee.

I personally know 3 of the 4 priests I just mentioned. I can assure you they aren’t growing their churches by giving into false beliefs or watering down the truth. They are all very traditional Orthodox fellows who stick to the truth and work at their parishes emitting the aroma of truth. And so they have to spend lots of time figuring out how to fit everyone in their buildings!

In conclusion---As individuals and as parishes, it is important for us to stay with the true Orthodox beliefs we have had for 2000 years. We should not change them, water them down, or downplay them because they are different than the ways of thinking predominant around us.

As we stay true to traditional and correct Orthodox beliefs, Christ will bless us. And God willing, we will continue to grow.

There is much darkness all around us. But in the darkness, light shines more brightly. When it is daytime and all the lights are on, you hardly notice the flames of the various candles in here. But walk in here with no lights on at 2 a.m.---and each candle will be a brilliant thing of beauty.

In the current spiritual darkness of our land, we need to shine brightly with the truth of God. May the aroma of truth waft from our parish to those around us to the glory of the ultimate truth---our Lord Jesus Christ.