

## HOMILY AT ST. MATTHEW ORTHODOX CHURCH

JUNE 5, 2022

JOHN 17: 1-13

### “SNEAKING OUT”

Back in the days of ships with sails, there was a coast side town in England where a farmer and a sailor on shore leave were sitting visiting in a pub one night. The farmer was trying to convince the sailor to quit going to sea---it was just too dangerous! The sailor loved his sailing life and didn't want to leave it behind. The farmer already knew a bit of the sailor's family history and decided to use it to make his argument. So he said to the sailor---“Where did your father die?” The sailor replied, “He died in a storm at sea.” The farmer said, “See what I mean about the dangers of sailing? And how did your grandfather die?” The sailor answered, “He also was lost at sea” The farmer said, “You see that the facts speak for themselves!” Then the sailor asked the farmer, “Where did your father die?” The farmer answered, “He died in bed at home.” The sailor's next question was, “And your grandfather?” The farmer replied, “My grandfather also died in bed at home.” The sailor ended the debate, “Well, it's obvious it's just as dangerous to lie in bed at home as it so sail the seven seas! I'll keep sailing!” (Metropolitan Anthony Bloom, “On Death” internet article)

No matter how reckless we are or how careful we are, we can't avoid death! It always comes to everyone---no exceptions! We can stay extremely healthy, avoid any dangerous situations, etc.---it doesn't matter. We will die.

That's the bad news! But there is good news, too! There is death.... But there is also eternal life. Our gospel reading today, John 17: 1-13, is part of Christ's long talk with the Disciples on Holy Thursday evening, the night before His own death on the cross. In this passage, Jesus talks about how He came to the world to give us eternal life. And He tells us, in a prayer to His Father, what eternal life is in verse 3----“This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”

Eternal life is knowing the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

A simple message in today's sermon----We cannot avoid dying. But we can live forever. How can that happen? As the Lord clearly states in our gospel reading----by knowing Jesus Christ.

Know Him now, live in Him and for Him now---and you then already have eternal life. It has already begun for you and doesn't only start after you die. You have it already and it will never end. It will go on after your physical death---and continue forever. In verse 3, Christ told us that eternal life consists in knowing Him. So the more fully we know Him *now*, the more fully we experience eternal life *here*, not just after death.

So hopefully we are pressing on to know Him better and have a deeper experience of eternal life in the here and now. St. Paul said that even he had to keep pressing on. He knew he was not yet perfect and needed to press on and on. As he wrote in Philippians 3: 12 & 14---“Not that I have already attained or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.....I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

And so like St. Paul we should press onward and upward. Does it seem slow and gradual? That's okay.....as long as we're headed in the right direction. Just make sure to not stall out or even start drifting backwards. Examine yourself---are you truly moving in the right direction? Is the arrow of your spiritual life pointing in the up direction? Are you living more and more fully for God?

If you are gradually moving closer and closer to the Lord, then you are growing in the eternal life you already have. Then when death comes (and it surely will come!) it can be just a stepping over to a new phase of the eternal life you already have.

A man went through a four year battle with cancer---lots of treatments, surgeries, operations. But it was a losing battle. And after four years of struggle his days were dwindling down. He was now at home and bed-ridden. His family were all there with him as death approached. They spent lots of time with him in his bedroom and he was hardly ever alone as his last hours ticked away. But one time they all happened to be out of the room at the same time for a few minutes. His little granddaughter went back into his room by herself---and she found that he had died in those few minutes he was alone. She ran out the next room where everyone else was and announced---“Guess what! When we were all out here, Grandpa sneaked out to heaven when we weren't looking!” (“Our Daily Bread” 2/27/13)

A good way to put it! Live for Jesus Christ now, experience eternal life now. And then when death comes, it can be just a “sneaking out” to go be with the Lord in a fuller way. A sneaking away from this world to live

forever with God. The start of a new and better phase of the eternal life you had already been partaking in here. Thanks be to our Lord Jesus Christ who gives us eternal life!