

SERMON NOTES

Eighth Sunday of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross

Synaxis Gospel

Luke 8:17-21

WHO IS THE MOTHER OF JESUS? THE BLESSING OF OBEDIENCE

INTRODUCTION

Often Jesus taught the great crowds who gathered around Him by telling them stories that contained a hidden meaning. “The Parable of the Sower” was that kind of story in which Jesus told of a farmer who broadcast seeds on his land. The seeds landed in four different kinds of soil: the hard packed pathway, soil that was rocky, soil where thorns were growing, and good soil. Only those that fell on the good soil produced a harvest.

Jesus used this parable to illustrate the different ways His message was received. Some people are like the hard packed pathway; they hear his message but it makes no impression on them. Then the devil easily comes and steals away the message, like a bird that carries away the seed. The result for the hearer of the Word is that the message is immediately forgotten.

Some people are like the rocky soil; they quickly accept His teaching. But the message is not allowed to penetrate deep into their hearts. When persecution comes, like the burning sun on plants with shallow roots, they cannot endure, and so they fall away from the faith.

Other people are like the thorn infested soil. They receive the message and it begins to affect their lives until other interests take up all their time and thoughts. Like thorn bushes that choke out the young plants, the worries, and riches, and pleasures of this life take over. The words of God are never given the time to fully develop the person into a follower of Christ.

The focus of our reading for today is on the type of person represented by the good soil. It is good soil because it is receptive of the seed, the seed can develop deep roots, and the plant has room to grow and mature. The result is that the plant produces a bountiful harvest. The people who are like this soil are the ones who listen carefully to the words of God and treasure it. It takes priority in their lives with the result that God’s purpose for them is fulfilled. Persecution does not affect their witness to the Truth and God is able to use them to bring countless others to Himself.

In the verses just prior to our reading, Jesus had explained that such disciples are lamps in a dark world. They have been lit with the message of Christ and, as properly lit lamps, it is their purpose not to hide the light—the message delivered to them— but to lift it up for all to receive.

SYNTAXIS READING

Luke 8:17-21

“For nothing is hidden that shall not become evident, nor anything secret that shall not be known and come to light.

“Therefore take care how you listen; for whoever has, to him shall more be given; and whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has shall be taken away from him.”

And His mother and brothers came to Him, and they were unable to get to Him because of the crowd. And it was reported to Him, “Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, wishing to see You.”

But He answered and said to them, “My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it.”

NOTES

“For nothing is hidden that shall not become evident,

Things that are surrounded by darkness are hidden from sight. But when light is brought in, suddenly they are clearly seen. God has determined that the light of His Truth will expose the hidden things of people’s lives that could not be seen in the darkness of their hearts.

nor *anything* secret that shall not be known and come to light.

This is another way of saying the same thing as the preceding statement with more information. A secret is something deliberately hidden. The Light, the Word of God, strips away any ‘cover-up’ we may have devised, so that what we really are is revealed.

Therefore take care how you listen;

“Therefore”—because the hidden things *will* be exposed by the Light—Jesus gave this solemn warning to those who hear Him.

Referring back to the lesson of the seed and the soils, Jesus warns us to pay attention to the manner in which we receive God’s teachings. We can determine the type of ‘soil’ we will be. The Light will expose the results of that decision.

For whoever has, to him shall *more* be given;

If we are receptive of the word of God in the manner of the good soil, we will be given more opportunities to understand and develop into proper bearers of the Light.

And whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has shall be taken away from him.”

On the other hand, if we do not determine to be ‘good soil’ the consequences are that we will only *think* that we have received the Truth and understand it. We will be like one of the three

unproductive soils, and the possibility of our fulfilling God's purpose will disappear. This will happen because of our own decision to improperly receive the Word of God.

And His mother and brothers came to Him,

While the writer of the Gospel of Mark paints a negative picture of our Lord's family in his account of this visit,¹ Luke, does not. Luke included this incident of the visit of the relatives of our Lord not to make them an issue, but to report the example Jesus used of their physical relationship to Him.

and they were unable to get to Him because of the crowd.

This may be because Jesus was teaching in a crowded house, or because He was in the center of a huge crowd in the open air. The next description of the relatives being 'outside' suggests Jesus was in a house.

And it was reported to Him, "Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, wishing to see you."

This report implies that because of their physical relationship to Him, His mother's and brothers'² wish to see Him had a higher claim on Him than did the crowd of disciples' desire to hear Him continue to teach. If so, this was corrected by our Lord.

But He answered and said to them, "My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it."

Jesus had been addressing a crowd that contained people desirous of becoming true disciples. "These" refers to them.

The closest physical relationship is that between a parent and a child. However, it is not a physical relationship that makes someone near and dear to our Lord. The closest of relationships is accorded to those who hear God's word and obey Him.

APPLICATION

The disciples of Jesus Christ are expected to share the good news, the Gospel, with the world. This is not to be hidden. It is not to be kept privately to ourselves. It is not even to be kept within the confines of our Armenian Church or our Armenian community. It is the hope of the world, the light that can illuminate even its darkest corners.

The Gospel is a convicting and transforming power. It reveals our sin and convicts our conscience, but for those who receive it, the Gospel transforms sinners into the children of God. It has been freely given to us and we must lift high this light to all, so that all might come to know and love and worship our wonderful God.

In reflecting on our reading for today, two other points are prominent: 1) we are offered a stupendous blessing and 2) the blessing has a requirement. Let's begin with the blessing.

¹ Mark 3:20, 31: "And He came home (εἰς οἶκον, literally: into a house), and the multitude gathered again, to such an extent that they could not even eat a meal. And when His own people heard *of this*, they went out to take custody of Him; for they were saying, 'He has lost His senses.' " Their arrival is recorded in verse 31. Matthew, like Luke, has chosen not to include this negative reason for the visit of Jesus' relatives.

² For a discussion of the reference to the brothers of our Lord please see the Excursus.

We Armenians do not worship Mary, the blessed Mother of our Lord; we worship only our Triune God. Moreover, our first and most important example for our lives is Jesus Christ. Armenians *do* honor the holy Mother as *first* among all other saints. Her life and words as recorded in the Gospels, and the brief mention of her in the Acts of the Apostles have taught and inspired us. We see her life as a model example of one that pleases God. We cannot imagine anyone being as close to our Lord as she is. We think that His loving ear must always be attentive to *her* appeals and requests. It is for this reason that some of the ancient saints in our tradition have penned prayers requesting her intercession with our Lord.

Now, in our reading for today, we learn the astounding fact that the high position that Mary occupies in our Lord's heart is a *shared* position. Moreover, it can be shared by *us*. Jesus Christ Himself offers us this exalted position. He offers to consider us as His mother! All generations have called Mary "Blessed." Indeed, what greater blessing could anyone have than the tender relationship she had with the Son of God? And this blessing can be ours!

There's a catch however, which is our second point. This greatest of blessings has a requirement. Now we are quite familiar with this idea of good things requiring something from us. In a way it's the story of our lives.

We love the children in our families. We want them to excel. We want them to reach their greatest potential. Some of us have left our native lands so that our children might have a better life. We scrimp and save to educate them so that they can have an opportunity for a bright and successful future. We can provide opportunity; however, the children have to do the work. They have to study the books and apply themselves and learn the necessary information. Then, they have to put all that they have learned to good use. They have to work hard at their careers to achieve the success of their dreams.

God loves His children even more. He left Heaven for our sakes. As God Incarnate, He died on the Cross to pay the penalty for our sins so that we could be forever with Him. The Resurrection is proof that everything necessary was accomplished completely. That part He provided without any cost to us; we simply have to believe and trust Him that He did so.

However, God wants even more for us. He wants us to reach our highest potential. He wants us to have the same close relationship to Him as the Mother of our Lord enjoys. Unlike our salvation, this requires effort on our part. He has provided all we need to achieve His desire for us. He has given us the Bible, *The Breath of God*, and we need to study it carefully. We need to apply what we learn there, and we need to work our very best to do what He has commanded.

Even so, it is no more within our own power to fulfill what is required of us, than it was within the young Virgin's own power to conceive and bear the Savior. Our job is every bit as impossible as hers was. However, God has also provided the necessary power. Just as He empowered the blessed Mother, He has promised to empower us with His Holy Spirit to insure our success.

May we, who seek the highest material blessings for the children, seek even more this highest of spiritual blessings for them. May we teach them, and ourselves, to choose to be like the good soil and let His Word sink deep into our hearts, that it might grow and flourish and work its good work in us. May we be good listeners and doers of all that He has commanded — summed up in absolute love for Him and sacrificial love for others.

Then we can have confidence, based on His promise to us, that God will hear us and will look upon us in the very same way that He does the blessed Mother of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Could we, even in our wildest dreams, ask for anything better than this great blessing?

So come on, let's not be lazy or slackers! Let's not miss our high calling! In the power of the Holy Spirit Who strengthens us, we can do all things!