

Are We Seeking Christ? St. John of Kronstadt, 1899





October 19/ November 1, the feast of Saint John of Kronstadt

Are We Seeking Christ?

A sermon by St. John of Kronstadt on the Feast of the Holy Apostle Andrew the First-Called

The holy Apostle of Christ, Andrew the First-called, was originally a disciple of St. John the Baptist who prepared the people to receive the Messiah, When the Saviour came out of the wilderness, the Forerunner told the people: "Behold, the Lamb of God" (John 1:36). Immediately Andrew followed after Him. Turning round and seeing him together with John's other disciples, the Lord asked them: What do ye seek? They answered: Master, where dost Thou dwell? He said to them: Come and see. The disciples saw where He lived and spent the day there with Him. Soon after this the Lord called Andrew and his brother Peter to follow after Him and told them that they were to become fishers of men unto the salvation of many. From that time forth, they remained with Christ; they were faithful to Him to the end and gave their very lives out of love for Him.

Dear brothers and sisters on this day I would ask you the same question: What are

you seeking? Why did you come to church today? What are we all seeking in our lives? Are we seeking Christ, as He was first sought by the humble fishermen, among whom was the Apostle Andrew?

What is it that people seek in life: health, riches, success, acquaintances, friends, prestige, various worldly pleasures, vain knowledge... Only a few seek Christ the Saviour. Some may even think it strange to seek Christ. They say, we call ourselves Christians after Christ, we see His holy image both in our homes and at church; we pronounce His sweetest name and hear it in God's temple. It appears we have no need to seek for Christ. People seek that which they don't have, that which they need. But we seem to have Christ.

It's true, we have icons of Christ, but we do not have Christ Himself; we have His name, but only on our lips--not in our hearts; we know Him, but only in word – not in deed. Here, beloved, is a big difference; it is the same difference as between a shadow and the object which casts the shadow, It is, however, precisely with the heart that Christ is truly known, that is, in our inner man--in our soul; because Christ, as God, is Spirit, "Who is everywhere and filleth all things."

The kingdom of God is within You (Luke 17:21), says the Lord. The holy Apostle Paul earnestly desired that through faith Christ would dwell in the hearts of Christians. He wrote:

May God grant you according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith. (Eph. 3:16-17)

We have to admit that most of us do-not" have Christ in our hearts. Instead, our hearts are occupied with that which is opposed to Christ--our God and Saviour, that which is opposed to our own good, which hinders the salvation of our souls. And because of this we do not lead a genuine Christian life.

What is it that occupies our hearts? God alone, Who searcheth out the hearts and reins (Ps. 7:9) sees what is in our hearts, its attachments. If the Lord granted us to see the full depths of our hearts, we would turn our eyes away in horror from such an overwhelming accumulation of filth. Let each of us look into his heart and say before the witness of our conscience what it is that occupies our hearts most of all. Passions, sins voluntary and involuntary – are these not our heart's constant inhabitants?

But where does Christ dwell? --in pure hearts, hearts that are humble and contrite, there where He is not grieved by doubt or unbelief, by indifference towards Him Who is God and Saviour; there where men do not prefer the temporal sweetness of sin; where the idols of the passions have been chased out; where crude materiality is not preferred

to the Kingdom of God. where Christians often turn their thoughts to the heavenly, as those created for heaven, for eternity; there where they seek God's truth, where every day and every hour they are attentive to His commandments. Here is where Christ dwells. And what does He do there? If only we knew (some, of course, do know) what He does in souls worthy of His abiding presence--what rest, comfort and joy He imparts, what paradisaal bliss He gives them to experience while still on this earth...

Having once embraced Christ, the holy Apostle Andrew became entirely committed to Him, and no matter what difficulties, sorrows, misfortunes and persecutions--unavoidable in preaching the Gospel--came his way, he remained faithful to Christ, enduring everything out of love for Him, even crucifixion.

It is of utmost importance that we seek after Christ--and find Him. Without Christ, who will save us from our sins which ensnare us every day and hour, and from the eternal torments? Only the Son of God has power on earth to forgive sins; He alone has the keys to hell and death, the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven and life.

To find Christ is not difficult. He is everywhere, filling the world with Himself. God says to us through His prophet Jeremiah: "I am a God nigh at hand...and not a God afar off" (Jer. 23:23) As soon as He sees our hearts incline to receive His grace, He immediately enters, bringing with Him peace and comfort. I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me (Rev. 3:20), says the Lord. Oh, how often He converses with His faithful servants, as with true friends. Christ Himself is seeking you: if you but incline your heart toward Him, you will surely find Him.

But how are we to know if we have found Christ and are close to Him? Those close to Christ often turn to Him in prayer with faith and love; they often pronounce from their heart His sweetest name, often call upon Him for help; they often read or listen to His word with childlike simplicity and love; they seek frequent union with Him in His life-giving Mysteries; they are satisfied with whatever they have and accepting of what happens to them; they strive according to their strength to fulfill Christ's commandments... It happens that they also experience trials which are allowed by the loving Master--in order that their hearts be cleansed of every sinful impurity. Those who desire to be with Christ must not run away from trials, but even in times of joy, they must not forsake the carrying of their cross.

My dear brothers and sisters! Seek Jesus Christ with faith and love. Do not forget that He gave His life on the Cross for our sakes, to deliver us from sin and eternal torment, and to dwell in our hearts, that we might have great joy. Do not forget, we have all been bought with the price of His blood, and we should belong to Him, as to our Redeemer.

Our days are numbered. Every stroke of the clock reminds us to seek Him Who

created time and Himself stands above the measure of time. He alone is able to pluck us out from the ravaging torrent of time... Every stroke of the clock tells us: Be watchful! You now have one hour less until you must cross the threshold into life after death which knows neither days nor hours. Do not be seduced by the momentary sweetness of sin which vanishes like a dream, leaving the soul empty, ailing, anguishing; it steals away precious time and ruins it forever. Do not waste time in useless occupations or idleness. Every one of you has a God-given talent to put to use. Busy yourselves in acquiring incorruptible wealth in the Kingdom of Heaven. Take the example of the thousands who have gone before you, having attained eternal rest and joy through their ceaseless labors in this temporal life, through sweat and tears. Make haste to uproot from yourselves sin in all its various manifestations, through the help of Christ the Saviour. Remember, man sows what he reaps (Gal. 6:7), according to the immutable law of God's righteousness.

While there is still time, therefore, let us hasten to find Christ and in faith create for Him an abode in our hearts that we not fall prey to the fire of gehenna, as it is written: "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them and cast them into the fire, and they are burned" (John 15:6). Amen.

(Translated from Dushepolezny Sobesednik Mt. Athos, November, 1899)