

The Unfruitful Fig Tree

On this Holy Monday, the Church holds three commemorations: 1) Joseph the Chaste; 2) The fig tree that was cursed by Christ for its unfruitfulness; and 3) His Second Glorious Coming.

There are two victorious comings of Christ. We celebrated His first glorious coming this Sunday morning, and it was His Entrance to Jerusalem. His Second Coming will happen on the day of Judgement. Between the First Coming that we celebrated this morning and the Second Coming that we remember today, the Holy Church turns to the story of the fig Tree. Being hungry and finding this tree without fruits, Christ cursed it. This tree truly deserves the cursing. Every person who does not use the grace of Christ's First Coming, and does not prepare for His Second Coming by being fruitful, will have the same fate.

The Jews perfectly understood the meaning of Christ's action toward the fig tree. They started arguing among themselves by what power Christ has done this. They refused His rebuke. Immediately Christ told them the Parable of the Husbandmen. God the Father as the owner of the vineyard put a fence around it and took care of it, then He gave it to some husbandmen to work in it.

Later He sent His servants to collect the fruits of the vineyard, and finally He sent His heir, His Son Jesus, whose fate was no different from the servants. Finally, the vineyard was taken away from those husbandmen. The kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.

The fruits are dues owed to God, and they are not personal virtues. As long as the plant that is sown and cultivated by God is good, than the fruits thereof are His possessions as well. The plant is the word of God and His teaching, as well as His Sacrifice, Death and Resurrection. This plant must yield fruits. Love, humility, charity... These are not characteristics or virtues that we add to our life, but are the fruits that are offered back to God who is the sower of these seeds in us. God will ask each and every one of us about these fruits. The time between the two Comings of Christ is the time of fruits and labor.

There are three scales by which the Christian weighs the fruit of the fig tree. And we always need to test ourselves by these measures in order not to fall into superficial belief, that is being like a tree with leafs but without fruits. What threatens worship is the habit, and what ruins Christianity is the superficiality, when commitment turns into just beliefs and life into just slogans that destroy inner piety and faith.

The first scale is the person of Christ. Let us ask ourselves everyday, who is Christ for me, and how much is my heart and life occupied by Him? Similarly, who am I for Christ? Am I one of His disciples? Do I speak to His ears, do I shout at Him seeing Him from far, or do I speak to Him from among a crowd without seeing Him

(as St. John of the Ladder says)? Am I fulfilling the mission that He gave me, to be the light of the world, the salt of the earth, and the apostle of His love? Very often we can test our relationship with God in prayer. Let us then pray, and prayer will show us this. Prayer builds in us this knowledge of the Lord; gives birth to and renews in us this mission.

The second scale is love, which is connected to my relationship to my fellow man. All my fasts, vigils, prayers, all my virtues and spiritual struggles have one goal: love. Love is not a virtue, but the fruit of virtues. The virtues are the leafs of the fig tree, and love is its fruit. Plenty of leafs but not fruit. Love is the true joy, and is the life of paradise. The one who does not know love, lives in hell. Therefore, if the keeping of the commandments and the achievement of virtues do not lead to love, and ultimately to joy, then they are futile. The virtues are futile without love, and the struggle without love is corrupt, and all hard work is in vain.

All the struggles of Christian life have one goal. This goal is for man to change his heart and purify it, making it loving to people (sacrificial), instead of loving to his self (selfish). If this is not achieved, then we resemble a fig tree with leafs but no fruit.

The third and final scale is the fruits of the Spirit.

The Christian who toils by his fasts and long vigils without feeling the comfort of the Spirit and the presence of Grace must rethink of and renew the ways of His struggle. St. Paul enumerated the fruits of the Spirit, which are peace, patience, and meekness...

The Prophet David says, "I was sad and you relieved my soul," even though the Lord did not remove the hardship from him. The relief came from the dew of Grace in the midst of hardship, pain, and temptations.

The Holy Week is the most important period of the year to re-examine our Christian life in the light of these three above measures. Let us truly know ourselves. Pascha is waiting for us so that we pass through it asking to have from the fig tree the fruit instead of the leaf. The pious prayers and the fasts prepare us to see the face of the Lord Jesus and to meet our neighbor with love, forgiveness, and reconciliation. This preparation also invokes in us the dew of Divine Spirit in the humble heart and broken soul.

Let us brethren fear the rebuke that befell the fig tree, which withered away because of its unfruitfulness, and let us bring forth fruits of repentance to Christ who bestows on us His great mercy.

Amen.