

The Vision of God

Gospel: John 1:44-51 AV: *Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see. Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile! Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee. Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel. Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these. And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.*

Today's Gospel message tells us of the discussion that happened between Philip and Nathaneal. The subject and focus of this discussion was Christ. Philip tells Nathaneal that, " We have found Him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write..." He is Jesus.

What is the connection between today's passage and today's feast of the Restoration of the Holy Icons, also called the feast of Orthodoxy? If we exchange the subject of the discussion [We found the Messiah] with a word, or a verb, that occurs frequently in the passage [to

see], than we would realize how the church connects today's passage with today's feast. The verb most used in this passage is about seeing and looking. It is a Gospel passage that sanctifies the eyes! The verb "to see" and its derivatives are repeated seven times.

"No one has ever seen God" (1 Tim 6:16, 1:17; 1 John 4:12). But this desire to see God had always been the burning desire of the Old Testament man, but this desire was never fulfilled. The clearest revelation of God in the Old Testament was with Moses and Elijah. Upon the request of Moses to see the glory of God, God answered saying: "And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by ...my face shall not be seen" (Ex 33:18-23) As for Elijah, he heard just a voice (1 Kings 19:13). This is how God started to reveal Himself more and more in different ways, until the fullness of time arrived. At that time, a man like Philip was able to say to Nathaneal, "Come and see" Jesus. For this reason, Christ blessed the eyes of the disciples, who saw closely what "Many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things, and have not seen them." And Abraham saw that day. He saw that the human desire to see God was fulfilled, and he rejoiced (John 8:56).

In the Old testament, God did not appear to be seen by human eyes, but he was revealed to man by His actions , interventions, and guidance in the history of salvation. That's why the Ten Commandments prohibited the making of any statue or painting of God, fearing that man may become victim of idolatry. Idolatry is nothing but deifying the passions of men, who through their idols worship their passions and ideals. Paganism is the

worship of the man-made god. Sartre was right when he said that god is the greatest deception in the life of man. His words are not true about Christianity. For the God of the Holy Scripture is a God who reveals himself as He is, not as we desire Him or as we think He is. After the Incarnation of Christ, God bodily appeared to us, and it became possible to paint an icon of the Son. We have seen and found Him (John 1:45). In Orthodox painting, it is not preferred to paint the Father. As for the Holy Spirit, we paint Him only as a dove (from Baptism), or as tongues of fire (from Pentecost).

The icon is a medium, that is a tool linking us to God, whom we forget during most hours of the day. The icon puts us in the presence of God, and makes us remember his call, "I stand at the door, and knock" (Rev. 3:20). And the icon is put usually in the middle of our work, houses, rooms, etc. Wherever we look around, we will find the icon in the middle, and through this medium, God becomes slowly the center of our life.

This is the link between Orthodoxy and the Restoration of Holy Icons. Orthodoxy means "Right Opinion." Opinion here is not just about knowledge, but it is a stand, a position in life. So it is the right behavior in life, knowing the truth of what we seek in life.

The Orthodox Christian is orthodox in his stand and behavior in life. His stand is about one short phrase: "Desiring to see the face of Jesus."

Christ is the One we seek and desire to see. This is the objective of the Christian in life. When the icons of Christ and His saints were highly elevated and restored in the Seventh Council (824 AD), this objective was

highlighted. And the elevated icons in houses and Churches are great reminders of this objective.

Seeing the icon, and seeing Christ, has to be accompanied with "purity of heart," for it is written, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." On one hand, an undefiled and pure behavior clarifies our vision of the icon. On the other hand, seeing the icon educates and purifies our behavior. This is the true veneration of the icons.

To Thy holy icon O Good One, we bow down in worship, for "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Mat. 4:10).

Amen.