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Bible Study
Ephesians Chapters 1 & 2
Responding to the Call of Christ

Introduction: Hunter or Hunted?

Once during deer season, there appeared in a sporting magazine a picture of a hunter sitting on a log with his rifle across his knees, presumably waiting for a deer to come into the clearing. Approaching close behind him, unseen, was a black bear. The caption read: "Hunter or hunted?" We have developed a way of talking about man's search for God as if God were lost and not we, as if man were looking for God, not God for us. In today's lesson, the theme of our discussion will be "Responding to the Call of Christ."

Introduction to Saint Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians

1. Author
 - a. The Epistle claims to be written by Saint Paul (1:1) and the Church has recognized Saint Paul as the author, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit
2. Date
 - a. Saint Paul probably wrote Ephesians from Rome during his imprisonment in A.D. 61-63 as recorded in Acts 28:16-31
3. Major Theme
 - a. The Riches of Christ in the Church
 - i. The mystery of salvation in the Church, the body of Christ, is not only for all mankind, but for all creation affecting this age and the age to come. The body of Christ is the center and the life of all
 - b. Sub themes
 - i. The work of the Holy Trinity in our salvation
 - ii. The blessings of Christ to the Church
 - iii. Our response to God's grace
 - iv. God's strength for spiritual warfare
4. Background Information
 - a. To whom was this epistle written?
 - i. The early manuscripts do not mention Ephesus in verse 1
 - ii. It may have been a letter that was intended not just for the Ephesians, but for circulation among the churches of western Asia Minor which Saint Paul had founded from Ephesus during his third missionary journey
 1. There are no personal greetings, in a letter that is supposed to be addressed to Church where Saint Paul spent 2 ½ years
 - iii. It is possible that this letter is the "letter to the Laodiceans" mentioned in Colossians 4:16

- b. Who were the Ephesians and what happened with Saint Paul in Ephesus?
- i. Ephesus was a major cosmopolitan city in Asia Minor and the capital of the surrounding area. It was a busy port city, and was the market for many goods and services and a thoroughfare between East and West.
 - ii. Among its greatest architectural works was the great temple of the goddess Artemis (or Diana), a fertility goddess. This temple was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.
 - iii. We read about Saint Paul's mission to Ephesus starting with Acts 19
 1. First, Saint Paul found some Christian converts, who like their teacher Apollos only knew of the baptism of Saint John the Baptist. Saint Paul led them to the proper faith and baptized them in Christ
 2. Saint Paul then went to the synagogues, where his message was eventually rejected, so he withdrew with those who accepted his message and began renting quarters in the Lecture Hall of Tyrannus (a place where a school of philosophy and rhetoric met)
 3. From Ephesus the Christian message spread, and God granted Saint Paul great powers of healing, so that even the handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them (Acts 19:12).
 4. There is also the very interesting story of some Jewish exorcists who wanted to capitalize on the success of Saint Paul and attempted an exorcism "in the Name of Jesus whom Paul preaches." The demons responded, "Jesus I know and Paul I am acquainted with – but who are you?" and they leaped on these so-called exorcists. When word got out, fear fell upon all the Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus and they came confessing and telling their deeds, brought their magic books and burned them.
 5. Later there was a riot at Ephesus. With the spread of Christianity, people were turning away from the idols of the temple. There was one Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shins of Diana, and earned a living as such. In fear of losing his trade, we stirred up a riot against Saint Paul. Saint Paul wanted to go and speak to the crowd, but his disciples would not allow him. Eventually the city clerk came and quieted the crowd and no one got hurt.
 6. Finally, after spending about two years in Ephesus, Saint Paul made his farewell speech at the end of Acts 20, and the Ephesians bid him farewell, knowing they would never see him again.

Ephesians Chapters 1 & 2

1. Chapter 1:1-14

- a. Saint Paul opens with a standard greeting, not only giving thanks in his chains but offering a benediction to God. How does God bless in this life? Through sacramental union in Christ. As He is exalted, so we are exalted with him and co-sit with Him at the Father's right hand.
- b. God's plan is for His people to be Holy. It is not to acquire political change, or to change the state affairs, but it is a change of heart that our Lord is looking for (v. 5)
- c. The blood of Christ purchased our complete pardon. The Christian knows the peace of being fully forgiven and liberated from the past (v. 7).
- d. "Mystery of His will" (v. 9) - It is not something inexplicable. It's just that it was secret and long hidden from all, but now is revealed to the initiated Christian. Christ is the "mystery" of God.
- e. Verses 11-14 speak about how the Jews were the first witnesses to the coming of the Messiah, but in the fullness of times this was also revealed to the Gentiles.
- f. "Sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise" (v. 13) – this happened in the Sacrament of the Holy Chrism. The seal indicates "ownership." We become God's on the day of our Baptism and Chrismation. The Holy Spirit is given as a pledge of the coming Kingdom. It's like a down payment here on this earth to taste the Kingdom within us, and we will receive it payment in full in the age to come.

2. Chapter 1:15-23

- a. Here is Saint Paul praying for his children. Saint Paul gives thanks even from prison. It is not his circumstance, but the welfare of others that brings him joy. If they are well in the Lord, he is content.

3. Chapter 2:1-10

- a. We can only realize the power of the salvation that Christ effected in us and for us when we realize what a miserable state we were in (vv. 1-3).
- b. Despite this inner coldness and despite our rebellion, God is rich in mercy. He died for our sins, He rose from the dead and made us alive with Him, then He ascended into the heavenly places to prepare a place for us! (vv. 4-7)
- c. Saint Paul reminds us that our rescue is not due to any goodness in ourselves. God gave us the gift of Baptism and the Mysteries of the Church that we might become united with Him. God gave us the gift of His body and blood on the cross. Here is our purpose in verse 10, created for good works, to glorify God in all that we do. God's plan is for us to be conformed to the image of His Son, and that is an image of holiness and love, holy and blameless.

4. Chapter 2:11-22
 - a. Saint Paul gives a reminder of the former alienation of the Gentiles; the wall between Jew and Gentile now broken, so that all can be called together in Christ.
 - b. Our brokenness was two fold: man was separated from man (Jew and Gentile) and man was separated from God. But through His life-giving death and resurrection, Christ brought peace among men and peace between Man and God (vv. 13-18).
 - c. And how is humanity unified? In the Church built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets with Christ as the cornerstone.

5. Contemplation on our Call: How are we called?
 - a. Let us differentiate between three kinds of calls:
 - i. The general call for all humanity to come to God and to be saved. He created us in His image and likeness so He calls us to a holy and heavenly life
 - ii. There is the personal call for each of us as Christians, and we all have our personal experiences and our own unique and personal journey in Christ. Some for instance, come to Christ from their birth living righteously since their childhood (Ex. Saint Antony); there are others who come after deep repentance and a dramatic conversion (Ex. Saint Paul, Saint Augustine, Saint Moses the Strong).
 - iii. Lastly, there are those who called to a special service; we call this a “vocation”, like the call to be a servant, a priest, a monk, or a nun.
 - b. Let us focus on the second of these calls; the general call for all of us; there are three types of calls: the first from God, the second comes by way of man, and the third arises from necessity
 - i. The vocation comes from God whenever inspiration is sent into our sleepy hearts and stirs us with a longing for eternal life and salvation and to desire to cling to His commands
 1. For example, Saint Antony was called in this way when he heard the bible verse.
 2. So, no human advice or teaching calls us.
 - ii. The second is when through human agency and with the advice of some holy person, we are called to Salvation. We might be moved by the example of someone around us, or a sermon might fill us with zeal for a holier life.
 1. For example, the sons of Israel were freed from the bondage of Pharaoh through Moses
 - iii. The third arises from necessity
 1. We find ourselves imprisoned by the riches and pleasures of this world, and we find ourselves put to the test
 2. Or maybe the danger of death hovers over us, or we lose our health, or our property.
 3. Or maybe the death of those we love reduces us to sadness

4. So we find out of necessity our hearts longing for healing and longing for peace, so we turn to God. Perhaps we become afraid of eternal punishment and we desire to be saved.
6. How do we respond to the call?
- a. Here, I would like to focus on the Prayer of the Reconciliation and the Anaphora in the Liturgy of Saint Basil, for this prayer gives us the answer. Here is the progression of this prayer: 1) We first need to recall God's plan for salvation, contemplate on it, and be touched by it and realize that we need to do something to participate in it, 2) With this in mind, we need to put away all evil, 3) We need to sacrifice, 4) We need to rise above the cares of this world and enter a heavenly life.
 - b. Let's take each of these four points in turn
 - i. *"O God, the Great, the Eternal, who formed man in incorruption; and death, which entered into the world through the envy of the devil, You have destroyed by the life-giving manifestation of Your only-begotten Son, our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ. You have filled the earth with the heavenly peace by which the hosts of angels glorify You, saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, and good will towards men.'"*
 1. First, it is no accident that we feel the need to respond to the call, that we are reminded that God is Great and Eternal. For those who are living lives apart from God, they need to be reminded that God has set eternity in their hearts (Ecclesiastes 3:10), and that only He as an eternal being can satisfy the eternally-sized hole in our lives. Nothing temporary can do that for us.
 2. Second, we are reminded of the story of the fall of Man, and how Christ came to restore peace.
 3. When the acolyte instructs you to pray for perfect peace, love, and the holy apostolic kisses, actually do that! Perfect peace is the peace that Christ offers that surpasses all understanding (Philippians 4:7) and is different than anything that this world can offer. This peace is not a "warm, tingly feeling." This peace does not mean that our lives will be without struggle. Christ never promised us that. But He told us that the cost of discipleship is to be hated by others. The cost of discipleship is carrying the cross daily and following Him. The inner peace comes from knowing that no matter what, Christ is with me until the end, and has indeed overcome the world.
 4. We pray that we can offer love to God and to one another. We pray for this kiss that was delivered to us from the apostles, that we can offer it to one another in purity and holiness.

- ii. *“According to Your good will, O God, fill our hearts with Your peace. Cleanse us from all blemish, all guile, all hypocrisy, all malice, and the remembrance of evil entailing death.”*
 - 1. We ask the Lord to remove all our impurities.
 - 2. Guile → playing tricks on others
 - 3. Hypocrisy → insincerity; pretending to be something we’re not
 - 4. Malice → hatred and a desire for evil toward others
 - 5. Remembrance of Evil → remembering either our own past sins can lead us to despair and spiritual death, or remembering the evil of others toward us can be a great obstacle that prevents us from reconciling with God and one another
- iii. *“A mercy of peace, a sacrifice of praise”*
 - 1. These are really three sacrifices
 - a. The sacrifice of mercy is the sacrifice of almsgiving. It is giving something that God gave to us back to Him (the tithes) or to the poor of His children. We are sacrificing a portion of our riches in this world.
 - b. The sacrifice of peace is reconciliation. It is much easier to hold grudges, but it is truly a sacrifice to make peace with those who have done something against us.
 - c. The sacrifice of praise is the singing of hymns and a selfless prayer offered to God. We are sacrificing our own needs and simply glorifying God for who He is.
- iv. *“Lift up your Hearts. We have them with the Lord.”*
 - 1. Now, let us raise our minds and hearts toward heaven. The following prayer in the Liturgy gives us an amazing glimpse of heaven, as we stand with the angels, the archangels, and all the heavenly orders. We chant the hymn of “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of Hosts”, the same words chanted by the seraphim around God’s throne as seen in the vision of Isaiah the Prophet (chapter 6).
 - c. These are, again, the four keys to responding to the call of God: 1) Realizing what God has done for us, 2) Putting away all evil, 3) Living a life of Sacrifice, 4) Entering into Heaven while living on this earth

Conclusion

It is most distressing, as a servant (and not only as a servant as a member of the Church) to see other members distant and separated from our Lord Jesus Christ. It is most distressing to see ourselves fall into this also. Saint Paul writes to us clearly about our call and about how our Lord Jesus Christ purchased us with His blood and sacrificed Himself for us. Here is the Church offering her members the sweet honey that is Christ, but we often prefer to eat the mud of this world. Sin may taste nice for a while, but once revealed, we find out how disgusting it is because it separates us from the true peace and love offered by God. Let us first realize the call, be filled with love, and then overflow to others, that they may taste and see that the Lord is good.

Glory Be to God Forever. Amen.