

Notes from the Sunday Sermon on January 15, 2023:

“Receiving with Humility the Implanted Word”

Scriptures:

- 1 Timothy 1:15-17
- James 1:19-27
- Luke 18:18-27

As I entered a small local shop once while Christmas shopping, I was asked by a clerk if she could help me find something. I expressed my appreciation but told her that I wasn't looking for anything in particular – rather I felt that something in her store might be trying to “find me” – and I would know it, if that happened.

I believe that this is what can also happen to us during the Divine Liturgy and every time we come to worship: God is trying to reveal himself to us in words and images that can find a place in our hearts and return home with us, becoming a part of our lives.

1) In today's first epistle from St. Paul to Timothy, we heard the expression that is part of the **Prayer Before Receiving Holy Communion**: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom **I am first.**” We begin by realizing that we cannot change or save anyone else, we must begin with ourselves. During Great Lent we will offer the Prayer of St. Ephrem and state: “Help me to see my own sins and not judge my brother and sister.”

2) At the end of today's Gospel (which we read several times during the year), we heard how certain things that are **impossible** for men and women become **possible** with God. The Greek word for possible, “**dynamis,**” means “power” and so the implication is that God provides us with the power, the ability to do things that – on our own – we cannot. This Gospel and message have a particular significance for our community as it was the Sunday reading over 20 years ago when at a Special Parish Meeting we decided as a community to move ahead with our building program – believing that God would help us make the building effort possible. And He did!

3) Taking the above themes of **beginning with ourselves** and **believing that God can provide us with the ability to accomplish things otherwise impossible**, we explored the image presented in the Epistle of St. James which was read on the previous Thursday:

“receive with humility **the implanted word**, which is able to save your souls.”

God’s “implanted word” comes to us, can find a place, and grow within us in ways similar to that of any plant. Bulbs and plants can produce individual flowers, like our paper white narcissus recently did. Other times, the root systems will move in horizontal ways so that the plants can multiply and spread, growing in ways that cover a larger area. Good soil, nourishment, consistent care, and light are required and can make all this possible. Growing as individuals and coming together as a community are both essential.

We’ve just concluded the Feasts of Christmas and Epiphany which are celebrations of light and illumination. But sometimes, real darkness is also required for growth, both for plants and for us. Darkness can imply simplicity, the facing of reality, the putting aside of access, the delaying of expectation, the requirement of patience, and the belief that something more **is** and **can** be going on.

Here the words of the artist, Andrew Wyeth, can be helpful:

I prefer winter and fall, when you feel the bone structure in the landscape – the loneliness of it – the dead feeling of winter. Something waits beneath it – the whole story doesn’t show.

I think anything like that – which is contemplative, silent, shows a person alone – people always feel is sad.

Is it because we’ve lost **the art of being alone**?

Conclusion: The Divine Liturgy can provide us not just with certain answers or a kind of satisfaction, but with the experience of being “found” by God and receiving the gifts of having particular words and images “imbedded” within us. We can and must begin this experience individually and not in comparison or in judgment of others. But being found, formed, and guided by God personally we are given the power, the ability to learn, respond, and to do His will in ways that will surprise and illumine us.