

Notes from the Sunday Sermon of January 22, 2023:

“On Being Put Together with Light”

Scriptures:

1 Timothy 1:15-17 (<https://www.oca.org/readings/daily/2023/01/22/2>)

Luke 18:35-43 (<https://www.oca.org/readings/daily/2023/01/22/3>)

This past week I learned a new recipe. It only requires a few easily found ingredients, but they are all essential and the results can be an overwhelming abundance and celebration of life. All that is required besides the recipe and ingredients are patience and consistency.

First, one needs some good water; then carbon dioxide – easily found in the air; and finally the direct rays of sunshine. If it's done correctly then glucose will be produced that will lead to energy being circulated throughout the entire circulation system.

Of course, I'm describing **“photosynthesis.”** As a Greek word it means to **“put together with light”** and it describes the chemical process which uses light to bring together separate elements (water and carbon dioxide) to form **“a coherent whole”** which allows life to grow.

We might think that this relates only to plants which enables them to create their own food for growth. But I am interested in how the definition of being **“put together with light”** can relate to our liturgical experience, how we are supposed to grow, and what we are supposed to do to accomplish God's will – both as individuals and as a community.

1) **THE LITURGICAL PROCLAMATION OF CHRIST AS LIGHT:**

We are in the midst of celebrating **three Feasts of Light** that reveal or tell us more about Jesus who calls Himself – the **“light of the world”** (John 9:5). This is the primary theme of **Christmas** during which we sing of Him as – the **“Sun of righteousness”** (the date of December 25 was chosen to coincide with and yet transform the yearly celebration of the birth of a Roman sun god). **Epiphany** is also a feast of illumination at which time the Holy Trinity, the ministry of Jesus, and the healing nature of water and creation are all revealed. Finally, on February 2, we'll celebrate the **Meeting of the Lord** when on the 40th day following His birth Jesus was brought to the temple in fulfillment of the Jewish law and completed the expectations of Simeon and Anna. As part of this Feast, we bless candles, and proclaim in the main festal hymn, the troparion:

*Rejoice, O Virgin Theotokos, Full of Grace!
From you shone the Sun of Righteousness, Christ our God,
enlightening those who sat in darkness.*

In today's Gospel, we hear of Jesus's encounter with a blind man. Jesus asked him, **“What do you want Me to do for you?”** and the man replied, **“Lord, that I may receive my sight.”**

Then Jesus said to him, **“Receive your sight; your faith has made you well”** (Luke 18:41-42).

Next Sunday, we'll hear the first of the Gospel Stories – the encounter between Jesus and Zacchaeus – that will prepare us for Great Lent. During the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, offered on Wednesdays and Fridays of Great Lent, a lighted candle will be brought out during the Old Testament readings and the proclamation will be made that, “**The Light of Christ illumines all.**” In the middle of the Paschal Liturgy which takes place in the darkness of late night/early morning, we'll hear in the Gospel of St. John that, “**the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it**” (Jn 1:5).

At every evening Vespers Service we sing the hymn, “**O Gladsome Light**” (Phos Hilaron) and offer the words:

O Gladsome Light of the holy glory of the Immortal Father, heavenly, holy, blessed Jesus Christ. Now we have come to the setting of the sun and behold the light of evening. We praise God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For it is right at all times to worship You with voices of praise, O Son of God and Giver of Life, therefore all the world glorifies You.

Every Liturgy offers an example of the above synthesis – the putting together, the making whole of a community of different individuals through the person of Jesus, the light.

In being “put together” by and seeing ourselves better in the light of Christ, we come to know both Him and ourselves better.

2) **HOW TO KNOW WHAT TO DO – INDIVIDUALLY?**

But coming to know Christ and ourselves better brings us to the question of what to do next? How do we best fulfill God's will for our lives? In thinking about these questions over the weekend, I received the following text in an email blog:

The Best Preparation

What God may hereafter require of you, you must not give yourself the least trouble about. Everything he gives you to do, you must do as well as ever you can, and that is the best possible preparation for what he may want you to do next. If people would but do what they have to do, they would always find themselves ready for what comes next (George MacDonald).

The answer would seem to come by: doing to the best of our ability whatever God has placed in our lives at every moment (Note: those interested in more reflection on this response can look at Leo Tolstoy's story, “**The Three Questions**” (<https://www.plough.com/en/topics/culture/short-stories/the-three-questions>)).

3) **HOW DO WE KNOW WHAT TO DO – AS A COMMUNITY?**

This Sunday, January 22, has been designated by the Orthodox Church in America as “**Sanctity of Life Sunday.**” Our parish has sought to recognize the value of life at each stage – supporting organizations that provide aid for women who desire to maintain their pregnancies and also recognizing the needs of those struggling for existence at other levels – providing food, clothing, and additional means of support.

In his statement prepared in anticipation of this Sunday, His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon, wrote the following:

But we must never, ever allow ourselves to become focused solely on political, and much less partisan and ideological, pursuits. Instead, the defense and promotion of life must start and end with our personal commitment: in our hearts, in our families, in our parishes, in our communities, with alms of time and treasure and talent and effort. With whatever resources God may give us, we must promote true human flourishing, starting with the right to life for all people, at all stages of life. And we must do what we can to orient our life toward God through virtuous living, encouraging the same in our brethren and neighbors wherever and however it is possible. In so doing, we might hope to attain to the everlasting life and bountifulness of the heavenly kingdom, where Christ the Lord reigns with his Father and his All-holy and life-giving Spirit (his whole statement can be found here: <https://www.oca.org/news/headline-news/sanctity-of-life-sunday-for-2023-announced>)

4) CONCLUSION:

This sermon began with a recipe that utilized some simple ingredients “put together” by the sun as the means of life and growth.

Christ as the Sun, as Light, brings us together, enabling us as individuals and as a community to understand how we might see and do – to the best of our abilities – that which He has placed before us – as the means of preparation “for what comes next.”

If we are willing, this effort can have an unpredictable and immeasurable level of growth and “bountifulness.”

In seeking to do this, we are reminded in today’s Epistle from St. Paul of our hope that “Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience [in us] for an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life” (1 Timothy 1:16).



by Natalka Weismantel