

THE BLIND MAN

St. John Chrysostom wrote, “The Church is a hospital.” It is a community of believers who seek to be healed of spiritual sickness by the Great Physician. The Church, then, is not simply a place where people gather to affirm the truth of Jesus Christ as God, but rather a place where we come to be healed by the truth Himself, by Christ the God-Man. We gather *today* to receive the healing medicine of His body and blood, and it is this that gives us life, sustains us and unites us as a Christ centered community. It is for this reason that the Church is called Christ-o-centric, because its entire life and existence is based upon its union with Jesus Christ. We are in a very real sense His Body, as the scriptures say, and therefore one with each other as a result of our union with Him.

Throughout the Gospel we discover that this dynamic of the Church as a community receiving healing from Christ has been present since the beginning of Our Lord’s earthly ministry. We find accounts of Christ healing leprosy, issues of blood, demon possession, raising people from the dead, and of course – as we have just read – giving sight to the blind. And while these physical healings are great miracles in and of themselves and bear witness to the truth of God becoming Man, the greater healing – the healing that Christ seeks to give us most of all, takes place WITHIN those who have been touched by Christ. After all, the bodies of the lepers healed by Christ still died, the woman with the issue of blood – even though Christ healed her physical sickness – also died, and likewise the blind man’s physical sight lasted only as long as he lived and walked on earth. The true purpose of physical healing, therefore, is not simply to provide earthly comfort, but is given for the benefit of the soul. In other words, the opening of this blind man’s physical eyes was a miracle performed by God to facilitate the opening

of HIS spiritual eyes as well as the spiritual eyes of those who witnessed this great miracle. It is for this reason that Christ told his disciples that it wasn't because of sin that this man was blind, "but that the works of God should be revealed in him."

St. Nicephorus writes that the blind man received a "two-fold sight: physical sight, by means of which he saw the world around him; and spiritual sight, by which he recognized the Creator of the world." As St. Nicholai of Zicha writes, Christ gave him "the gift of inward sight, the sight of understanding."

The Church Fathers speak a great deal about this spiritual sight and about the faculty in man that is referred to as the eye of the soul – or the eye of the heart. Taken from the Greek word *Nous*, this faculty in man is the center of our being, or rather the highest faculty of our being by which we know God and experience His divine realities. When the eye of our soul is pure we see things as they really are and know God and live as humble servants who look toward him as our life. As Christ himself said, "blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." When the eye of our Soul is impure or filled with a passion for fulfilling only our self-centered desires, it becomes clouded and becomes a servant to the body, and is not receptive to experiencing these divine realities.

A second example of this type of spiritual healing, and one that perhaps gives us a better understanding of the nature of spiritual sight, is found in the life St. Paul, before his conversion, as he traveled on the road to Damascus with the intent of persecuting Christians. As you know St. Paul was first blinded by Christ, led to the disciple Ananias and then healed by him. Prior to the healing Ananias says, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Through these words we understand that there

was first the healing of his physical sight, followed the healing of his spiritual sight – the eye of his Soul – through the gift of Holy Spirit.

When we are baptized and chrismated into the Church we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and therefore the healing of our spiritual sight. The center of our being is renewed and becomes receptive to seeing not only God, but also ourselves as we really are. Over time, due to the clouding of the spiritual eye of our soul; through the distractions of the world that constantly work to pull us away from Christ, the eye of our soul becomes weighed down by sin, and consequently our sight becomes dim. Our sight can become so dim in fact that we loose sight of our own blindness, and even worse, lose sight of its cure.

And it is because of this that our Holy Orthodox Church so invaluable. It is for this reason that it is called the “Ark of Salvation,” and why as we said before St. John Chrysostom calls the Church a “Hospital”. Simply put, the purpose of the Church is to provide healing for our soul and to facilitate our growth in likeness to Christ. The sacraments and the services of the Church provide a means for both a healing of our union with Christ when wounded by sin, and towards growth in becoming more like Christ as we continue in our Christian lives. True heartfelt repentance and confession purify the eye of our soul, while the Body and Blood of Christ – when received in humility with knowledge of our unworthiness to receive God into our mortal bodies – unites us with Him.

It is true that when we as Christians begin to envision this spiritual reality that exists in the Church; as we begin to live it out in our lives, we become what the Church tells us our true purpose in life is, which is to become as God. As we see in the lives of

the Saints, to become like God is to be humble and filled with divine and self-emptying love. This reality is one that many of the saints have died for, and is as the Church says a reality that is sustained by the blood of the martyrs who have died to be witnesses to the truth of Jesus Christ.

This past week we commemorated St. Hermias. This holy martyr, who was an imperial soldier, was in his old age found to be a Christian and tortured by the authorities. After they had mutilated his body, threw him into the furnace and forced him to drink poison – none of which killed him – his torturers decided they would gouge out the eyes of this holy Saint. St. Hermias, without grieving over his loss, looked at his earthly judge and spoke these words, “Take for yourself these bodily eyes that gaze upon the vanity of the world. I have eyes in the heart, by which I clearly see the light of truth.”

As we approach the Ascension of Our Lord, followed by the feast of Pentecost we prepare to celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit as it was first given by Christ to His Apostles. Through this divine act Christ bestowed spiritual sight to the world. Since that time the Church has sought to give and protect this divine reality that we now behold and struggle to keep within ourselves. Let us all seek to be as the blind man who received spiritual sight through turning to Our Lord for healing, and as St. Hermias who, once he received this spiritual sight, was willing to give his life to keep it. By entering deeply into the Christian life, by following the healing commandments of our Lord and through receiving with a humble heart the Body and Blood of Christ, the Holy Spirit will come to us and grant us real and personal understanding of ourselves and of the God who created us. To Him be all Glory, Honor and Worship, to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. Amen. Christ is risen.