

The Reading is from the Holy Gospel According to St. John (1:43-51; Heb. 11:24-26, 32-40).

+ In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit +

If we paid attention to the Gospel we just heard then we listened to a very interesting exchange between Christ and Nathanael. Christ says of Nathanael “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!” Christ’s word astonishes Nathaniel, and the disciple perceives Him to be the Son of God and the King of Israel.

Christ’s reply is very interesting. He says, “Do you believe I am the Son of God and King, because I foresaw you sitting under the fig tree? You will believe in me for greater reasons than that.” And here is the interesting part, Christ says, “I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.” What a strange thing to say. What does this mean? Heaven opened; ascending and descending upon the Son of Man?

Well, there was a time when the Patriarch Jacob, in the book of Genesisⁱ, had a dream. Jesus is recalling to us this dream in which there appeared to Jacob a ladder set up upon the earth and reaching to Heaven. On this ladder the angels of God were ascending and descending.

Christ, the Son of Man, the promised one, who fulfills the law of the Old Testament and ushers in the Kingdom of Heaven and the age to come, He is that ladder. Upon Christ *only* do we have access to Heaven, access to God. He is the mediator, He is the uniter of God and Man, indeed He is both God and Man, One Person, Jesus Christ, our Lord to the glory of God the Father, who unites in His very Person Heaven and earth, the created and the Uncreated. And that He is the unique and sole ladder of our salvation is one of two scandals of Christianity.

But there is more to Jacob’s dream. He wakes up, and when he does he says, “The Lord is in this place, and I did not know it.” So he was afraid and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God.” So he called the place Bethel, meaning the house of God.

And here’s the point: The ladder that unites Heaven and earth, Jesus Christ, is found in the House of God, the Bethel of God, the Church. And this is the second scandal of Christianity, that there is only one house of God where Christ is. And that is the Orthodox Church. Hence Metropolitan Hierotheos says, “...Orthodoxy cannot exist outside the Church; neither, of course, can the Church exist outside Orthodoxy.”ⁱⁱ

The Orthodox Church is the hospital par excellence for the healing of the human condition. Orthodoxy alone rightly diagnoses the human condition in general and our conditions specifically. And with a correct diagnosis the Church administers the correct treatment. That treatment, that medicine, for the healing of soul and body, are the teaching of the Church. Her

dogmas, doctrines, definitions that express the Divine revelationⁱⁱⁱ, are the treatments administered to us by the Physician Jesus Christ.

Now, if you change the treatment, if you change the hospital, your health will change. There are other hospitals out there. Some claim to have the True Physician, but give you a different diagnosis, and therefore different treatments, and therefore different results. Or here is another image: If you are traveling to the Outerbanks and change your direction, you will inevitably change your destination and end up in Raleigh.^{iv}

Today the Church proclaims the truth of who Jesus Christ is as she celebrates the Triumph of Orthodoxy. We, the Church, remember the restoration of our icons, our windows into heaven surrounding us as a great cloud of witnesses testifying of Jesus Christ. They are our great cloud of witnesses encouraging us to lay aside sin and all earthly care that we may receive the One who comes forth from the empty tomb like a bridegroom.

Our faith, reflected in the icons, affirms that Christ took on flesh, uniting Heaven and earth, corruption with Incorruption; that He sanctified and renewed the world, showing the material to be spiritual, showing it to be capable of participation in the very life and communion with God.

The Triumph of Orthodoxy affirms Christ as Messiah, Lord and God who became incarnate, sanctifying the material world and our bodies. We do not worship the material world, but rather we worship the Creator of the material world who became flesh that He might be our Lord and Mediator between God and man, our Ladder to Heaven.

The Triumph of Orthodoxy is more than affirming our use and veneration of icons. The Triumph of Orthodoxy is about affirming that Orthodoxy alone provides the correct diagnosis of our condition, provides the right treatment, for she alone is the House of God where the True Physician is at work.

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ⁱ Gen. 28:10-22

ⁱⁱ *Orthodox Spirituality*, Met. Hierotheos of Nafpaktos, trans. Effie Mavromichali, Birth of the Theotokos Monastery, Levadia, Greece, 1994 p. 22

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} Ibid.