

SERMON: EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EXALTATION - BOSTON, 1992

In the Name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today's Scriptural reading from the Gospel of St. Luke, chapter 8, verses 17 to 21, includes an important message for us who call ourselves followers of Christ. Our Lord states, "nothing is hid that shall not be made manifest, nor anything secret that shall not be known and come to light." This statement is in reference to Christ's own teachings concerning the truth about the reality of God.

For the believer, God is not hidden and the reality of God is not a secret. An atheist would reject that reality and an agnostic deny it, arguing that he does not know. Christ likens the reality of God to a light on a stand, so that there is no way of missing it. One must either be blind not to see it or deny what he beholds.

God has in the course of history given us many opportunities to see the light. He manifested and still manifests Himself to us in more ways than one. He manifested Himself to the patriarches and through the prophets of the Old Testament, but mankind refused to see the light. In historical times he sent His Only Begotten Son in order to reconcile Himself with mankind, but men insulted and crucified Him.

Christ is the manifestation of God and is therefore the reality. This truth is so overwhelming that we must accept it without reservation. Rejection or denial will mean eternal damnation and death, since there is no escape from reality. If we deny or reject light, we will be left in darkness, which could be disastrous for us. A person who rejects or denies God lives in darkness and subjects himself or herself to all kinds of dangers, because he or she has no way of knowing what lies ahead in the darkness.

In our times it has become fashionable for people to divorce themselves from the reality of God. The result of this is social and moral decay. People who turn away from the light fall into all kinds of pitfalls on their way. And the pitfalls are many: greed and avarice which lead people to disaster, deceit and hypocrisy, immorality which destroys families, drugs and gambling and many other tribulations. Unlike the first generation of Armenians from the provincial towns and villages of Armenia, there are many in the present generation who have rejected Christ, so that various problems and even crimes are now on the rise in our communities. Yet there is a way of rectifying the decay not only in ours but also in all societies. The light on the stand, or the reality of God, is so

dazzling that when one beholds its brilliance, one is enraptured by its beauty and heads toward it, seeing clearly where he is going.

Once we see the light, we must also try to feel in our hearts what the reality of God is all about. The Lord states in today's reading to "take heed how you hear." This puts an obligation on us to exert some effort to learn and practice the teachings of our Lord. Jesus said, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it." Hearing the word of God and practicing it makes us brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. In other words, we become members of his corporate body, which is the Holy Church. We must make the Church a part of our lives. It is not enough to be baptized in the Armenian Church and attend services once in a big while. That does not guarantee our salvation. The Lord says, "to him who has will more be given, and from him who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away." This statement is not in reference to riches, but to understanding the reality of God, faith and to practicing the word of God. He who has invested the grace of the Holy Spirit received at the baptismal font will discover that interest and dividends have been added to the original capital or the gift from heaven. However, the person who makes no effort to increase his gains will even be deprived of the grace given by God. Being a practicing Christian is important; we must somehow manifest our understanding of the reality. If we understand but refuse to practice, we are really rejecting the truth about reality and are committing a sin.

The ancient and wonderful traditions of our Church, practices such as participation in the services as deacons, clerks or simply as praying faithful, doing penance, taking communion, fasting and devotional practices in general, all bring us closer to our Creator. These were all either instituted by our Lord or designed by the fathers of the Church in order to deepen our understanding. Instead these practices, we should enforce them in our daily lives and walk in the way of God so that we may not wonder away from the royal path that leads to eternity. Amen.