

Dearly beloved: Christ is among us!

Today Jesus comes to Jericho, not far from Jerusalem, and there meets Zacchaeus, the tax collector who was so short he had to climb a tree to see Jesus. It quickly becomes clear that the people in Jericho like the people of Galilee in the far north, don't quite understand what Jesus is doing. Fourteen chapters prior to Jesus meeting Zacchaeus, the rulers in Galilee question why Jesus is eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners. They seem to think that the Messiah is to come only for the good people, the ones who keep the rules, follow the law God gave to Moses. Jesus tells them "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." (Luke 5:31-32) Today, fourteen chapters later and a long way away from Galilee, near to Jerusalem, the same thing happens. Jesus sees the Zacchaeus up in a tree and tells him that He, Jesus, will not only eat with him but stay in his house that very night. And so the crowd all turned to one another and not so silently said to each other "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." (Luke 19:7) They say this in surprise, not with approval. Jesus tells them, in words reminiscent of what He said earlier, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost." (Luke 19:9-10)

When we are sick we usually go to our doctor. There are times when we're healthy that we go, for checkups, to make sure we're not sick. We go to see our doctor in her or his office. This is reversed in the case of God and us humans. By the power of the Holy Spirit the Son of God the Father is incarnate of Mary to not only come to us but to come as one of us. Our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ is THE physician of our souls and bodies. The Son of God doesn't come only for the righteous, for those who are spiritually healthy. He comes as the Savior of all men. He comes as "the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe." (1 Timothy 4:10) Jesus Christ is able "to sympathize with our weaknesses, (He is) one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin." (Hebrews 4:15) There is no one, save God, who does not sin, as we hear at every Parastas. And the righteousness of each person born into the world is as filthy rags. So says the prophet Isaiah. (64:6) So what are we to do? We cannot heal ourselves of the sickness of sin. It is only by God taking up our human nature, a humanity that suffers, that endures sickness of soul and body, that we could be healed. God is not only our Physician but He also is our co-sufferer, Who does not deliver us from suffering so much as He is with us, enduring it with us. As Bishop Alexander spoke on Thursday evening at the Dormition Dinner, God comes to heal our suffering by taking it upon Himself, by placing Himself in the midst of it so that in our suffering we may not turn to sin which brings only passing pleasure but instead find God Himself in our suffering. The Son of God took up our suffering upon the cross where He hung for three hours. Bishop Alexander emphasized that to Jesus those three hours were eternity because God is beyond our watches and clocks. The Son of God's suffering for us was as infinite as His humanity was perfect. To find healing in Him who suffered for us requires our confessing our sins to God and repenting, turning away from those things we do, words we say, thoughts we delight in that are not of God and fight the good fight of prayer, fasting, almsgiving with love. Let us, as we tell our symptoms to a physician, admit our sins to God in confession that God, the Physician of our souls and bodies may touch us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life with Him. "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." (Hebrews 4:16)