

Dearly beloved: Christ is among us!

After the feast of the Cross of our Lord our gospel readings shift to Saint Luke and today is the first Sunday we read from Saint Luke's gospel in the new church year. We always hear on this Sunday Jesus commanding the fishermen to let down their nets again to catch some fish. And what a catch they make! Almost more than they can handle. This year the verse that stood out for me was this one, "When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!'" (Luke 5:8)

Simon Peter saw this miracle Jesus worked and he knew this was no ordinary man but a man of God, in time and by the Holy Spirit Peter would confess that Jesus is not Elijah nor John the Baptist but the Son of God Himself made flesh. But here Peter makes a confession about himself that puts on full display his humility and Jesus' very purpose for coming into the world. Peter confesses himself a sinner, unworthy to be in the presence of Jesus. So he asks Jesus to leave him, for Jesus to go find the righteous people, the learned scholars of the Scriptures, those who fast twice a week and tithe. Jesus does quite the opposite of what Peter asks. Jesus does not go away from him but tells him, "Do not be afraid." (Luke 5:10) Do not fear, Peter, your Lord is calling you, sinner that you are and Jesus will establish Peter not only as an apostle but as the chief of the apostles, the one who will strengthen the other disciples following Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection.

In this encounter between Jesus and Peter the Son of God tells us that He has come as a physician, as one not to punish but to heal. And who needs healing but sick people? Jesus comes to those who are sick, to call sinners to repentance that they may be healed through Him. So Jesus sat and ate with tax collectors and sinners. And the religious people of the day, they called Jesus a glutton and drunkard for doing so.

Each one of us is a sinner. We can say with Peter, "I am a sinful person." But what do we do from there? Our confession to our Divine Physician, Jesus Christ, must be followed up by repentance, not making excuses for our sins but confessing them and by God's grace working to turn from our sins, big and small, so that we may continue to be healed by Him Who is the physician of our souls and bodies. We come to Jesus in the Holy Mystery of Confession where we enumerate our sins to Him so that He can heal us. If we conceal our sins then we continue in our sickness, unhealed and unforgiven. As we do to our doctor, we tell our loving Lord where we hurt, where we are wounded, how we have sinned, with sorrow but without despair, simply and without excuses or talking about someone else, only our sins. And the Lord Jesus will wipe away our sins, give us a healing that no human can provide, a healing that comes only from God.

Let us end hearing these beautiful words of the author of our Liturgy, Saint John Chrysostom, "Did you commit sin? Enter the Church and repent for your sin; for here is the physician, not the judge; here one is not investigated, one receives remission of sins."