

9th Sunday after Pentecost 2006

A sermon by Rev. Fr. David G. Subu
Delivered on August 13, 2006

1 Corinthians 3:9-17 & Matthew 14:22-34

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

Brothers and sisters in Christ, today we consider the third gift of the Holy Spirit that St. Paul spoke of in Romans 12 teaching. Everyone today would probably agree that in the Church today we need more education: teaching the children, teaching the youth, teaching adults. But the question remains as to what kind of teaching? Is it a matter of finding the right things to teach? Certainly, everyone who consider themselves Christians should know certain things: the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes, the Creed, the "Our Father" and so on. At the same time, as we live in a society fed on sound bites, on 24-hour news channels, on internet and the information highway, we begin to see that there is a difference between information and knowledge. Information and knowledge. At the heart of any true Christian education must be the recognition that there is a difference between information and knowledge. While the Church has information to give us, what is most important, as the prayers of our liturgy state, is that we all come to the *knowledge of the truth*.

How can we understand the difference between information and knowledge? We find the key in today's Gospel reading: the Walking on Water. The story of Christ walking on the water is one of the stories that the modern, skeptical mind has to struggle with to accept. The information we are being given is hard to accept. It was hard to accept for the very disciples who witnessed it. They cried out when they saw Jesus walking on the water, "It is a ghost!" And Peter, who was their leader, wished to test the information his eyes, his senses were receiving, and said, "Lord, if

it is You, command me to come to You on the water." So Jesus said, "Come." The Lord is like this. Whenever a man comes to Him with an "If-then" proposition, usually as a test of the Lord, the Lord is patient and merciful and uses it as an opportunity to teach us the difference between doubt and faith, between information and knowledge. And so Peter took those first courageous steps, and in deed, did walk on water, and in doing so, he learned first hand the difference between knowledge and information.

Before he walked on water, Peter was like the rest of the disciples, he saw, but it was not yet real. He beheld, but he did not truly believe. He heard the voice of the Lord, but he did not yet know its power. Before he walked on water, he was just one of the rest sitting in the boat. But when he walked on water, he began to *know* the power of God. He began to know the weakness of his own faith, as he began to sink at the first sign of danger and fear. He began to know what having faith really means: fully relying on God, not just being learned in tenets of faith or educated in theology and tradition.

Brothers and sisters, we are faced with the same challenge as St. Peter. Each of us comes to Christ at first, sitting in the boat, hearing the word of God, seeing the beauty of Christ, holding the information which has been given unto us through the ages down from these very disciples themselves. But when walk out of the Church, and go back into the turbulent and chaotic world, our faith must have enough substance to buoy us, to support us, to keep us from drowning under the waves of troubles and tribulations. Our faith must be real, it must be tested, it must be filled with the knowledge of God, not just information about Him. Like St. Peter, we must be ready to walk the walk, not just talk the talk. And a faith based on true spiritual knowledge must be humble, for each of us knows that when we try to do walk the Christian walk that we do more

often than not sink, we do sin, we do feel overwhelmed by the troubles and the tribulations in this life.

So the root of knowledge is experience. The heart of Orthodox theology is paradoxical experience: direct yet mystical, personal yet communal, subjective yet connecting us with the absolute, the very human yet immeasurably divine experience of God, through prayer-- quiet, peaceful, inner prayer. This kind of inner stillness is unaffected by the waves and the wind, this kind of stillness can walk on water, the stillness that can only be found in Jesus Christ.

When we consider all of this, we find that teaching in the Church is something we all participate in, both as students and as teachers. We are constantly being taught (even if we aren't always learning) to rely on Christ in faith as we walk on the waters of this tempestuous life. We are constantly teaching those around us by our example, by showing them sometimes what to do and sometimes what not to do. We may instruct our children and learn ourselves the doctrine, history, and information of Christianity, and well we should. But what will be remembered first and will make the greatest impact on whether or not to accept that information for the sake of their salvation will be if we were transformed by it and bore witness to that salvation by our life. Were we just another lost soul, swept about by the wind and the waves, a sailor overboard and sinking quickly? Or were we by our very presence a harbor and a refuge from the storm? Were our faith and knowledge solid enough that we could provide answers to difficult questions without sounding defensive, argumentative, or intellectualizing but genuine, honest, and confident? Teaching and learning are together an essential element of the process of Christian life that never ends, not even in or after death. To be a good teacher one must first and foremost be a good student.

As we enjoy the last days of summer, and prepare for that season of learning to come this fall, let us entreat God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—to grant us the gift of teachers and students willing and desiring to grow in faith, knowledge, and spiritual understanding. Amen.