

DOERS OF THE LAW
THE TWELVE ACCEPT APOSTLESHIP

June 18, 2023
2nd Sunday after Pentecost
Revision G

GOSPEL: Matthew 4:18-23
EPISTLE: Romans 2:10-16

In the weeks leading up to Pentecost, the Gospel and Epistle lessons have focused on the development of the Early Church. Last week was the Sunday of All Saints and introduced us to the Church Age, with a great cloud of witnesses among the Communion of Saints in the Kingdom of God. Today’s Gospel and Epistle lessons begin a series of practical teachings for the Church as the Kingdom of God.

In the West, today’s Gospel lesson is used for the third Sunday after Epiphany (in January). In some churches, the parallel account of the same events in Luke 5 is used on the fifth Sunday after Epiphany. In the Eastern Church, the parallel account from Luke 5 is used for the 18th Sunday after Pentecost (or the 1st Sunday of Luke). Today’s Epistle lesson is not so commonly used in the West. Where used, it appears on the second Sunday in Advent (December).

Today’s Gospel lesson is used here (rather than Luke 5) to connect the Twelve Apostles as the foundation of the Church (Revelation 21:14) to the Epistle lesson. The Twelve Apostles obeyed the Lord’s voice when He called them, thus “doing” the law as spoken in the Greatest Commandment, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and strength, and your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:36-40).

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Background for the Epistle to the Romans

Paul wrote Romans from Corinth toward the end of his Third Missionary Journey. While he was writing to a Church that he had never visited, he wrote about specific problems that they

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had. How did he know what was going on in Rome? He had already written 1 and 2 Corinthians on his way to Corinth. Although he had not visited the Church in Rome yet when he wrote this letter, the Apostle Peter had been there three times, and had just left. A number of the Seventy Apostles (Luke 10:1-20) were currently in Rome and had been sent there by Peter and Paul. For example, Priscilla and Aquila, whom Paul had met in Corinth on his Second Missionary Journey (Acts 18:1-2) and who Paul had left behind as Bishop of Ephesus (Acts 18:18-19), were now in Rome and the Church was meeting in their house (Romans 16:3-5). Others of the Seventy that were in Rome in about 55 AD are listed in Table 1. Many had worked with Paul on his previous missionary journeys. Some were even Paul's blood relatives. Others had worked with Peter, Andrew and Philip and we note the tight connection here between Paul and the Twelve. The fact that this many Apostles were in one place at the same time indicates that a major effort was underway.

TABLE 1
The 70 in Rome in 55 AD (from Romans 16)

Member of 70	Native to	With Paul on Missionary Journey	Later Bishop of	Comments
Rufus*	Cyrene	1, 2	Thebes	Martyred with Ignatius
Aristobulus	Cyprus	1	Britain	Barnabas' brother, Peter's father-in-law
Andronicus	Tarsus(?)	2	Pannonia	Paul's relative
Herodion	Tarsus(?)	2	NeoParthia & Patras	Paul's relative, traveled with Peter
Urbanus	?	2	Macedonia & Tarsus	Traveled with Andrew
Aquila & Priscilla	Pontus	2, 3, 4, 5	Ephesus	
Epaenetus	Achaia	2	Carthage & Spain	Traveled with Peter
Amplias	?	2	Lydda	Traveled with Andrew
Apelles	?	2	Heraklion in Bithynia	
Stachys	?	2	Byzantium	Traveled with Andrew
Hermas	Greece		Dalmatia	Wrote "The Shepherd" in Rome late 1 st Century
Asyncritus	?		Hyrkania	
Hermes	?		Philippopolis	
Narcissus	?		Athens	Ordained by Philip
Olympas	?		Philippi	Martyred with Peter
Patrobas	?		Neapolis	
Philologus & Julia	?		Synope	
Phlegon	?		Marathon	

*One of the founders of the Church in Antioch his father Simon of Cyrene.

The probable explanation for this gathering in Rome was combating the heresy and black magic of Simon Magus. Simon had tried to purchase the Holy Spirit from the Apostle Peter (Acts 8:18-23), and had a running battle with Peter for the rest of his life. In Rome, Simon was so influential with his illusions and magic that Emperor Claudius, along with the Roman Senate, erected a statue of Simon along the Tiber River with the inscription "To Simon, the Holy God".

This statue was still there in 155 AD when Justin Martyr wrote his First Apology¹ to Emperor Antoninus Pius, where Justin asked the emperor to destroy the statue.

Why would Paul write to a Church that he had never visited? There can be several reasons. First, he knew many of the people there and had sent them there himself. Second, Peter had just left Rome under threat of death from Nero². Peter may have even asked Paul to write to the Romans after he left in haste.

Paul addresses the Epistle to “all who are in Rome” (Romans 1:7); that is, both Jew and Gentile. In beginning the Epistle, Paul first addressed those outside the Mosaic Law saying that God is clearly visible in them and His invisible attributes are clearly seen (Romans 1:19-20). Refusing to acknowledge this, God gave them over to uncleanness of many kinds (Romans 1:24). John Chrysostom stated³ that Paul’s chief purpose was in opposing the Jews.

“He accused the Gentiles first, in whose behalf he is speaking; then without suspicion and with boldness of speech, he may attack the Jews”.

The section consisting of our Epistle lesson was addressed to some misguided Jews, where Paul called them hypocrites (Romans 2:17ff). From the way Paul greeted the members of the Seventy (and others) in Romans 16, it seems pretty obvious that they agreed with what Paul was writing. The misguided Jews probably didn’t. When Paul finally arrived in Rome in about 60-61 AD (Acts 28), he met with the Jewish leaders (Acts 28:17) and reasoned with them a long time (Acts 28:17-23). Some were persuaded; others weren’t (Acts 28:24). They had wanted to talk to Paul himself since the Christians “had been spoken against everywhere” (Acts 28:22), mostly by Jewish leaders and especially by Simon Magus. As a result of this face-to-face meeting with Paul, the Jewish leaders in Rome had a great dispute among themselves (Acts 28:29). Thus, the Epistle to the Romans began a process that brought some of the Jews in Rome to the Light while causing others to hate the Light because their deeds were evil (John 3:19-21).

From our viewpoint, we see Christians and Jews as distinct and separate groups. In 55 AD, the distinction was still very much blurred. Thus, on Paul’s missionary journeys, he often stopped in at the local synagogue first when he came to another city.

Paul’s Strategy: Undermine the Conceit of the Jewish Christians in Rome

As Paul began his Epistle, he began speaking about Gentiles, “all who are in Rome” (Romans 1:7), and “I often planned to come to you, that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles” (Romans 1:13). John Chrysostom noted⁴ that the Gentiles that Paul was speaking about, as examples throughout this Epistle, were generally the righteous Gentiles who lived before Christ.

“What Jew does he mean here? Or about what Gentiles is he speaking? It is of those Gentiles before Christ’s coming. For his discussion had not yet come to the times of grace, but he was still dwelling on the earlier times, breaking down and

¹ Justin Martyr, First Apology, XXVI.

² For details, see Mark Kern, The Apostle Peter, St Athanasius Press, 2004.

³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, V, v. 10.

⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, V, v. 10.

clearing away the separation between the Greek and the Jew. When he later did this in the matter of grace, he seems to continue the same viewpoint. For if there was no difference in the earlier times when this Grace had not shone forth in such greatness, when the estate of the Jews was solemn and renowned and glorious before all men, what could they say for themselves now after so great a display of grace? And this is why he established it with so great care. When the hearer has been informed that this held in the earlier times, much more will he receive it after receiving the Faith. By Greeks he does not mean those that worshipped idols, but those that adored God, that obeyed the Law of nature, that strictly kept all things, except the Jewish observances, which contribute to piety. Such were Melchizedek (Genesis 14:17-20), Job (Job 1:1, 8), the Ninevites (Jonah 3:5-10) and Cornelius (Acts 10:1-4). Here he is first breaking through the partition between the circumcision and the uncircumcision”.

Chrysostom stated⁵ that Paul based his argument on Moses’ words in the Law (Deuteronomy 10:17) that God is not a respecter of persons.

“Paul introduced his argument by saying, ‘For there is no respect of persons⁶ with God’ (Romans 2:11). In other words, the Jew as well as the Gentile is punished if he sins, and ‘glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek’ (Romans 2:10). There is no issue regarding the quality of persons, but a difference in actions that He inquires about”.

If the Jew and Gentile are on equal footing before God, the only difference has to do with the responsibility of the Jew for having received the Law. There are requirements in the Law for (1) keeping the Law, and (2) passing the Word of God on to the Gentiles. Chrysostom addressed⁷ the first aspect as follows:

“He shows not only the equality of the Jew and the Gentile, but that the Jew was burdened by the gift of the Law. For the Gentile is judged without Law. But this ‘without Law’ here expresses not the worse plight but the easier, that is, the Gentile doesn’t have the Law to accuse him. For ‘without Law’ (that is, without the condemnation arising from it), is he condemned solely from the reasoning of nature; but the Jew, ‘in the Law’, that is, with nature and the Law too to accuse him. For the greater the attention he enjoyed, the greater the punishment he will suffer. Notice how much greater is the necessity which he lays upon the Jews for a speedy path to grace! For in that they said that they didn’t need grace, being justified by the Law, he shows that they need it more than the Gentiles, considering they are liable to be punished more”.

But Chrysostom pointed out⁸ that the Jews and Gentiles were not actually on an equal footing, since the Jews had claimed to be saved by the Law.

⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, V, v. 11.

⁶ See also Deuteronomy 10:17, where the exact meaning is that God “does not lift up faces” (Hebrew) or “does not accept or admire faces” (Greek).

⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, V, v. 12.

⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, V, v. 13.

“For if it is by the Law you claim to be saved, in this respect, says Paul, the Gentile will stand before you, when seen to be a doer of what is written in the Law. And how is it possible, one may say, for one who has not heard to be a doer? Not only is it possible to be a doer without hearing, but even with hearing it is possible to be a violator of the Law. This he makes plainer later, when he says, ‘You that teach another, do you not teach yourself?’ (Romans 2:21) But here he is still making the former point”.

In all this, Paul was playing his cards carefully. He wanted to be sure that no one could claim that he was rejecting the Law. As Chrysostom pointed out⁹, the amazing aspect of this is that the Gentiles did what the Law said without having the Law.

“Paul was not rejecting the Law, but allowing for the justification of the Gentiles. He was undermining the conceit of Judaism, yet giving the Jews no handle against himself as seeming to vilify the Law. On the contrary, Paul was extolling the Law and showing how its greatness makes good his whole position”.

“Whenever Paul says ‘by nature’, he means by the reasoning of nature. He shows that others are better than the Jews, and what is amazing, that they have not received the Law. On this ground they are to be admired, because they didn’t require a Law; and yet they exhibited all the doings of the Law, having the works, not the letters, engraved upon their minds”.

Epistle: Romans 2:10-16

In addressing the Jewish faction in Rome (Romans 2:17-20), Paul said they:

- Are called Jews
- Rest on the Law
- Boast (to be) in God
- Know His will
- Approve the things that are excellent
- Are instructed out of the Law
- Are confident of being a guide to the blind
- Are confident of being a light to those in darkness
- Are an instructor of the ignorant
- Are a teacher of infants
- Have the appearance of knowledge and truth in the Law.

In writing to these Jewish Christians, Paul was addressing people who knew the Law. The same words apply to most people today in the USA, since most people have been exposed to Christianity at some level and know right from wrong. John Chrysostom stated¹⁰,

“But when he says, ‘a guide to the blind,’ etc., he is speaking their own pompous language. For they treated proselytes really badly, and these were the names they called them by.”

⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, V, v. 14.

¹⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, VI, v. 21.

Yet Paul, said, “do you ever teach yourself? Do you steal? Do you commit adultery? Do you rob temples devoted to idols?” (Romans 2:21-22) The implied answer was YES! Chrysostom noted¹¹,

“For it was strictly forbidden them to touch any of the treasures on the idols by reason of defilement (compare Joshua 6:18, 7:1). But the tyranny of avarice, he says, has persuaded you to trample this Law also under foot.”

Paul went on to say that the Name of God was blasphemed among the Gentiles because of their hypocrisy (Romans 2:24) and that a true Jew is one who is so inwardly (Romans 2:29). For Paul to speak about Gentiles receiving the Faith rubbed the Jews of his day the wrong way. The Jews felt that they were the exclusive recipients of the oracles of God. A few years after writing this Epistle (57-58 AD) when Paul presented his testimony before the High Priest and the Jewish leaders from Jerusalem following his Third Missionary Journey, they listened patiently until he came to the part about taking the Word of God to the Gentiles (Acts 22:21-22). Then they created a riot and tried to kill Paul (Acts 22:22-23, 23:12-24). It took 470 Roman soldiers to control this riot.

Man Didn't Lose the Knowledge of Good after the Fall

When we consider what Paul was saying to the Romans, it is good to look back to the beginning to see what things were like and how things developed. It is easy to see how Israel might get to see themselves in a special light since they were God's chosen people and the recipient of the Law. But how did the Gentiles retain knowledge of the Law? Abraham was an uncircumcised Gentile, along with everyone else in the world at his time. Yet Abraham knew the Law and was called “the Friend of God”.

Man has always known what is good, but often he inclines his free will in an opposite direction. John Cassian described¹² this in terms of Adam, our forefather and the Jewish leaders who crucified Christ.

“We should not say that God made man such that he can never be capable of what is good, or else He has not granted him a free will. And, in this case how will that first statement that the Lord made about men after the fall stand, ‘Behold, Adam has become as one of us, knowing good and evil?’ (Genesis 3:22) For we cannot think that before, man was ignorant of good. Otherwise we should have to admit that he was formed like some irrational beast, which is sufficiently absurd and is altogether alien from the Christian faith. Solomon says, ‘God made man upright’; i.e., always to enjoy the knowledge of good. ‘But they have sought out many imaginations’ (Ecclesiastes 7:29 LXX), for they came to know good and evil. Adam therefore, after the fall, conceived knowledge of evil, which he had not had previously, but he did not lose the knowledge of good, which he had before. Finally the Apostle's words very clearly show that mankind did not lose, after the fall of Adam, the knowledge of good. As he says, ‘For when the Gentiles, who don't have the Law, do by nature the things of the Law, these, though they don't have the Law, are a Law to themselves, as they show the work of the Law written in their hearts.’

¹¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, VI, v. 21.

¹² John Cassian, 3rd Conference of Abbot Chaeremon, XIII, 12.

Their conscience bears witness to these, and their thoughts within them either accuse or else excuse them, in the day in which God shall judge the secrets of men' (Romans 2:14-16). And with the same meaning the Lord rebukes the unnatural but freely chosen blindness of the Jews, which they by their obstinacy brought upon themselves. 'Hear you deaf, and you blind, behold that you may see. Who is blind but My servant? And who is deaf as My messenger *whom* I send?' (Isaiah 42:18-19) And that no one might ascribe this blindness of theirs to nature instead of to their own will, elsewhere He says, 'Bring forth the people that are blind and have eyes; that are deaf and have ears' (Isaiah 43:8). And again, 'having eyes, but you see not; and ears, but you hear not' (Jeremiah 5:21). The Lord also says, 'Because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, neither do they understand' (Matthew 13:13). And in them is fulfilled the prophecy, 'Hearing you shall hear and shall not understand: and seeing you shall see and shall not see'. For the heart of this people has grown fat, and their ears are dull of hearing; they have closed their eyes, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart, and be converted and I should heal them' (Isaiah 6:9-10). Finally in order to denote that the possibility of good was in them, in chiding the Pharisees, He said, 'But why of yourselves do you not judge what is right?' (Luke 12:57) And this he certainly would not have said to them, unless He knew that by their natural judgment they could discern what was fair. Wherefore we must take care not to refer all the merits of the saints to the Lord in such a way as to ascribe nothing but what is evil and perverse to human nature."

John Chrysostom, in contradicting some who taught that everyone was rescued from hades at Christ's descent into hades, stated¹³ that only those who were righteous during their life were rescued at His descent. This applied to both Jews and Gentiles: all who showed an excellent life shall enjoy all the blessings.

"If unbelievers are to be saved after death on their believing, no man shall ever perish. For everyone will then repent. And in proof that this is true, hear Paul saying, 'Every tongue shall confess, and every knee shall bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth' (Philippians 2:10-11). And, 'The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death' (1 Corinthians 15:26). But there is no advantage in that submission, for it does not come from a true choice, but from the necessity of things taking place."

"Let us not bring in such old wives' doctrines and Jewish fables any more. Hear what Paul said touching these things. 'As many as have sinned without law, shall also perish without law'; he is speaking of those who lived in the time before the Law. And, 'As many as have sinned in the Law, shall be judged by the Law' (Romans 2:12); he is speaking of the time after Moses. And, 'That the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness, and unrighteousness of men' (Romans 1:18) and, 'indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that works evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile' (Romans 2:8-9). And yet countless were the evils, which the Gentiles have suffered in this world, and this is declared alike by the histories of the heathen, and by the Scriptures that are in our hands. For who could recount the tragic calamities of the Babylonians,

¹³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXXVI, 3.

or those of the Egyptians? We can prove that they, who did not know Christ before His coming in the flesh, yet refrained from idolatry, worshipped God, and showed an excellent life shall enjoy all the blessings. Hear what is said: ‘But glory, and honor, and peace to everyone that works good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile’ (Romans 2:10). Do you see that for their good deeds there are many rewards, and chastisements and penalties for such as have done the contrary?”

The Effect of the Law on Jews and Gentiles

In the Epistle reading, Paul spoke of judgment on evil men as compared to glory, honor and peace to those who do good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek (Romans 2:9-10). Unfortunately, these were not the words the Jews wanted to hear. These same words also apply for us in the United States who have heard the Word of God all our lives, if we consider ourselves better than others. Paul continued to say that there is no partiality with God (i.e. Jew vs. Gentile). Chrysostom stated¹⁴,

“For it is upon works that punishment and reward depend, not upon circumcision and uncircumcision. See how much greater is the necessity which he lays on the Jews for a speedy recourse to Grace! For in that they said they did not need Grace, being justified by the Law, he shows that they need it more than the Gentiles, considering that they are liable to be punished more.”

Table 2 is a summary of part of the Epistle reading. As one can see, the crux of the Epistle lesson is that the results are the same for Jews and Gentiles (i.e. hearing and doing) and that God shows no partiality. The mechanisms are different, however. The Jews have the Law and are judged by it. The Gentiles have the same basic commandment, which is the Greatest Commandment: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and strength, and your neighbor as yourself” (Deuteronomy 6:5, Leviticus 19:18, Matthew 22:36-39, Mark 12:30-31, Luke 10:27). And the Gentiles are expected to follow their conscience and their thoughts to comply with these commandments¹⁵.

Everything in the Law and the Prophets hangs on the Greatest Commandment (Matthew 22:40) and not one iota of the Law will pass away until all is fulfilled (Matthew 5:18). This then forms a universal basis for God’s judgment with no partiality. Everyone is judged based on what he is given and on what he does about it.

For us, the implications are substantial. Most Americans know the Law and the Law has formed the foundation for the country’s legal system and ethical practices. Thus, we are like the Jews that Paul is addressing.

¹⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, V, v. 10-12.

¹⁵ This subject is taken up from different viewpoints at other times in the Orthodox lectionary. For a more detailed discussion on how the Law applies to everyone today in terms of the Greatest Commandment (Matthew 22:35-46), see the discussion for the Gospel lesson of the 15th Sunday after Pentecost. For more discussion on how the Church Fathers have “rightly divided” the Law and applied it, see the Gospel lesson discussion for the Special Feast Day of the Fathers of the First Six Ecumenical Councils in July.

There is also a trend in America for large sections of the population to be given over to uncleanness, lust, dishonoring and vile passions, where this is often given disproportionate and favorable coverage by the media. The implication is “everyone does it; you should too.” The antidote for this is to become doers of the law and not just hearers only.

TABLE 2
Effects of the Law

Aspect of the Law	Jews	Gentiles
Sin	Sin under the Law	Sin without Law
Judgment	Judged through the Law	Perish without Law
Who is justified?	Doers of the Law	Doers of the Law
How do they know Law?	Public reading of Law	Law written on hearts Conscience witnessing Thoughts accusing
Who is not justified?	Those who hear and don't do	Those who don't listen to their heart

John Chrysostom noted¹⁶ that the laws of all nations came from the laws that God gave to man at the beginning. This statement especially applies to the laws of the United States, which was founded by Christian men. Every nation possessed self-taught laws, and the arts were established from this knowledge base also.

“From the Law which God placed in man when He formed him from the beginning, laws were laid down, and arts discovered, and all other things. For the arts too were thus established, their originators having come to the knowledge of them in a self-taught manner.”

“So there came to be courts of justice, and so penalties were defined. Many of the Gentiles were ready to dispute this, ‘How will God judge mankind who lived before Moses? He did not send a lawgiver; He did not introduce a Law; He commissioned no prophet, apostle, evangelist; how then can He call these to account?’ Paul wished to prove that they possessed a self taught Law; and that they knew clearly what they ought to do. ‘For when the Gentiles, who don’t have the Law, do by nature the things contained in the Law, these not having the Law, are a Law to themselves; which shows the work of the Law written in their hearts’ (Romans 2:14-15). But how can this be without writing it down? ‘Their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing, or else excusing them, in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel’ (Romans 2:15-16). And again, ‘As many as have sinned without Law, shall perish without Law; and as many as have sinned in the Law, shall be judged by the Law’” (Romans 2:12).

“What does it mean, ‘They shall perish without Law?’ The Law does not accuse them, but their thoughts, and their conscience do; for if they didn’t have a Law of conscience, they shouldn’t perish through having done wrong. For how should it be so if they sinned without a Law? But when he says, ‘without a Law’,

¹⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Statues, XII, 12-14.

he does not assert that they had no Law, but that they had no written Law; they had the Law of nature. And again, ‘But glory, honor, and peace, to every man that works good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile’” (Romans 2:10).

“But these things he spoke in reference to the early times, before the coming of Christ. The Gentile he names here is not an idolater, but one who worshipped God only, unfettered by the necessity of Jewish observances, like Sabbaths, circumcision and diverse purifications, yet exhibiting all manner of wisdom and piety.”

God Needs No Proof to Judge Us

Paul concluded this section by saying that “God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ” (Romans 2:16). There is no hiding from His Judgment since we “show the work of the Law written in our hearts, our conscience also bearing witness” (Romans 2:15). Cyril of Jerusalem stated¹⁷ it this way:

“Let us dread lest God condemn us; He does not needs examination or proof to condemn. Do not say that you committed fornication, or engaged in sorcery, but no one witnessed it. Out of your own conscience shall you be judged, ‘your thoughts either accusing or else excusing you, in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men’ (Romans 2:15-16). The terrible countenance of the Judge will force you to speak the truth; or rather, even though you don’t speak at all, it will convict you. For you shall rise clothed with your own sins, or else with your righteous deeds. And this has the Judge Himself declared — for it is Christ who judges — ‘for neither does the Father judge any man, but he has given all judgment to the Son’ (John 5:22), not divesting Himself of His power, but judging through the Son. The Son therefore judges by the will of the Father; for the will of the Father and of the Son are not different, but one and the same. What then says the Judge, as to whether you shall bear your works? ‘And before Him shall they gather all nations, for in the presence of Christ every knee must bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth (Philippians 2:10). He shall separate them one from another, as the shepherd divides his sheep from the goats’ (Matthew 25:32). How does the shepherd make the separation? Does he examine out of a book which is a sheep and which a goat? Or does he distinguish by their evident marks? Does not the wool show the sheep, and the hairy and rough skin the goat? In like manner, if you have been just now cleansed from your sins, your deeds shall be as pure wool; and your robe shall remain unstained, and you shall say, ‘I have put off my coat, how shall I put it on?’ (Canticles 5:3 LXX) By your clothing, you shall be known as a sheep. But if you are found hairy, like Esau, who was rough with hair, and wicked in mind, who for food lost his birthright and sold his privilege, you shall be one of those on the left hand. But God forbid that any here present should be cast out from grace!”

¹⁷ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XV, 25.

THE TWELVE ACCEPT APOSTLESHIP

2nd Sunday after Pentecost
Revision G

Gospel: Matthew 4:18-23

The Calling of Peter, Andrew, James and John

Today's Gospel lesson is also found in Mark 1:16-20 and Luke 5:1-11. The subject, that is, the calling of Peter, Andrew, James and John, is also used in the Orthodox lectionary for the 18th Sunday after Pentecost (October) when the parallel account from Luke is used. This is a second call for them, calling them to something greater. But it's also a call for us to consider our role in the Kingdom of God.

In Luke's account, a miracle was associated with this calling. In this miracle, the four Apostles had worked all night with their trammel nets and caught nothing. With trammel nets they had to work at night so the fish didn't see the webbing¹⁸ of the nets. Jesus instructed them to launch out into the deep and let down their nets. This was contrary to their common practice since trammel nets aren't used in the daytime or in deep water but only in shallow water. When the nets were filled to the point of breaking and the boats were filled to the point of sinking, the four Apostles were so impressed that they left everything and followed Jesus.

This is significant in terms of recent scholarship: there were high prices and a high demand for fresh fish. These four Apostles may have been uneducated but they may not have been poor. The Roman government later had to institute price controls¹⁹ on fresh fish to prevent fishmongers from gouging people. The four Apostles evidently left a well-paying trade for no worldly return or benefit (Matthew 19:27).

From today's Gospel account (and the account from Mark), Jesus called the four shortly after the miracle. James and John were at work mending the trammel nets when Jesus called them (Matthew 4:20, Mark 1:18), while Peter and Andrew were finishing up with a bag net (Matthew 4:18-19, Mark 1:16-17). Common practice among fishermen on the Sea of Galilee was to work all night, then mend nets and hang them up to dry at daybreak before getting some sleep. These fishing methods remained unchanged until the mid-20th Century when invisible netting was invented to allow daytime fishing.

However, this was not the first contact the four Apostles had with Jesus. From Luke's account they wouldn't just go out into deep water and let down their nets for a stranger, especially being tired after fishing all night. From John 1:43-51 we get some insight into an

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¹⁸ See the Study for the 18th Sunday after Pentecost for detailed explanations of the various nets used in fishing on the Sea of Galilee.

¹⁹ Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "Fishes of Fish, Fishes of Men," Bible Review, June 1999.

earlier calling²⁰ of the four Apostles by Jesus; they left following John the Baptist to follow Jesus. But what had they been called to? Disciples or Apostles? At the first calling (John 1), they were still part-time fishermen. After the calling of today's Gospel lesson, they left everything (Matthew 4:20, 22) and were soon sent to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers and cast out demons by themselves (Matthew 10:1-8).

Beginning as Followers of John the Baptist

To see how Jesus' relationship with the four Apostles developed, we need to look back to their relationship to John the Baptist. All four of the Apostles in our Gospel lesson had been followers of John the Baptist. For example, two of John the Baptist's disciples were Andrew and the Apostle John (John 1:35-40). By implication, Peter and James were John's disciples also. When John the Baptist pointed out Jesus as "the Lamb of God" (John 1:29, 36), Andrew and John got their brothers and began following Jesus (John 1:37-41). At this point, they recognized Jesus as Messiah (John 1:41), but Jesus had not called them as Apostles yet. That didn't occur until today's Gospel lesson (Matthew 4:18-23), which was several months after they had left following John the Baptist.

At the time of Jesus' calling of the four Apostles, Herod had just put John the Baptist in prison (Matthew 4:12). John spent over a year in prison before being beheaded (Matthew 14:1-12; Mark 6:14-29; Luke 9:7-9). During John's imprisonment, Jesus' public ministry began to grow considerably and John even inquired about the details from prison (Matthew 11:2-6; Luke 7:18-23). John the Baptist's message, however, continued to spread due to his followers' zeal. For example, John the Baptist was imprisoned in 27 AD. Twenty-six years later (in 53 AD) at the beginning of Paul's Third Missionary Journey, Apollos came to Corinth preaching the baptism of John the Baptist (Acts 18:23-28). Paul came across twelve other followers of John in Ephesus (Acts 19:1-7). Apollos was one of the original Seventy sent out by the Lord (Luke 10:1-24). But he had apparently gone back home to Alexandria before Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was given. He hadn't yet heard of the Holy Spirit (along with the 12 others) in 53 AD when Paul, Aquila and Priscilla updated them. This indicates that John the Baptist's impact was substantial in order for his message to continue 25 years after his death. And it is out of this background that Jesus called the four Apostles to be fishers of men (Matthew 4:19).

John Chrysostom noted²¹ that Jesus did not begin to preach about the Kingdom of Heaven until Herod put John the Baptist in prison (Matthew 4:12-17; John 4:1). While the witness (i.e. John) of His works was proclaiming Him, He did not preach or work miracles so that the multitude would not be divided. For this reason, John did no miracles at all, so that he might give over the multitude to Jesus, His miracles drawing them to Him. The importance of this was to defuse the criticism of the Pharisees who said that Jesus bore witness only of Himself (John 8:13). This was not true; and there was also the witness of the Father and the Holy Spirit. John had borne witness to Him earlier (John 1:29, 36; 3:26-36). While John did not perform any miracles (John 10:41), Jesus did many, thus confirming John's words (John 5:36; 10:25; 10:38). Jesus began preaching

²⁰ The earlier calling (John 1:43-51) is used in the Orthodox lectionary for the First Sunday in Lent and focuses on the calling of Nathanael.

²¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XIV, 2.

good news (i.e. Gospel), not mentioning the ax and a tree cut down (Matthew 3:9-10), the sitting (Matthew 25:31), the threshing floor and unquenchable fire (Matthew 3:12) until later.

The Importance of Leaving Behind the Things of This World

About three years after the calling of the Twelve in the Gospel lesson, Christ addressed the Twelve, commending them for what they had done in leaving behind the things of this world.

“Then Peter said in reply, ‘We have left everything and followed you. What then shall we have?’ Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of man shall sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life. But many that are first will be last and the last first’” (Matthew 19:27-30).

There are two ways (at least) of looking at this. First, they will be witnesses in judgment against those of their generation who did not follow Christ similar to the men of Nineveh and the Queen of the South (Matthew 12:41-42). Secondly, they have established the foundation of the Church (Revelation 21:14) with Jesus Christ as the cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20; 1 Corinthians 3:10-17). Thus they have been judging the twelve tribes of the Israel of God now for about two millennia through those righteous men that they established.

Another aspect of the question the Twelve asked Jesus was suggested by the Monk Lev Gillet²²:

“When one hears a word spoken by Christ and takes some kind of risk to obey the word (the Twelve left their jobs!), one will obtain results quite out of proportion to anything he could have hoped for”.

When Jesus first called the four Apostles (John 1:42), Jesus prophesied that Peter would be called Cephas, meaning a rock or stone. Cephas is a name that comes from the Chaldean word “*kafē*” meaning rock; “*petra*” is the Greek counterpart meaning a (large) rock.

A little over a year after the four were called, following the death of John the Baptist, Jesus made His famous statement about the church and how the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18). This was in response to Peter’s confession (Matthew 16:17), which is the “rock” that Jesus had spoken of earlier. Jesus went on to say that He will give the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven to the Twelve. Whatever they bind on earth shall be, having been bound in heaven. And whatever they loose on earth shall be, having been loosed in heaven (Matthew 16:19). He repeated this again in the upper room after the Resurrection with regard to forgiveness of sins (John 20:23). The Church today is responsible before God to maintain the connection with the Twelve and the cornerstone in order that this just judgment may continue for our benefit. This theme occurs two other times in the Orthodox lectionary: The Feast of Saints Peter and Paul (June 29) and the remembrance of the Fathers of the First Six Ecumenical Councils (mid-July). In doing this, the Church helps us to focus on loving the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and strength,

²² Monk Lev Gillet, The Year of Grace of the Lord, St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, Crestwood NY, 1992, p. 16.

and our neighbor as our self. And by doing that, we will obtain a good defense before the dread judgment seat of Christ as we pray in the various services.

John Chrysostom noted²³ how the Twelve did not hesitate at all when Jesus called them. This was similar to Elisha's following of Elijah, and this was before they had seen many signs. This is also what Christ asks of us.

“Note both their faith and their obedience! For though they were in the middle of their work, when they heard His command, they did not delay, they did not procrastinate, they did not say, ‘Let us return home, and discuss this with our kinsfolk’, but ‘They left everything and followed Him’ (Matthew 4:20-22), even as Elisha did to Elijah (1 Kings 19:19-21). Such is the obedience, which Christ seeks of us, that we don't delay even a moment of time, though something absolutely most needful should vehemently press on us. When another person came to Him, and was asking permission to bury his own father, not even this did He permit him to do; this signified that before everything we ought to follow Him. But if you should say, ‘the promise was very great’; even for this I admire them. Even though they had not as yet seen many signs, they still believed in so great a reach of promise, and they accounted everything else second to attendance on Him. Because they believed the words by which they were caught, by the same they would be able to catch others also”.

Chrysostom also noted²⁴ that once the Twelve had accepted Christ's call and left everything, then they began to see miracles without number. The miracles were done as pledges of His power; similarly, miracles were done at the Creation, at the Flood, to Abraham and at the giving of the Law.

“When He had caught them, then He began to work miracles in their presence, by His deeds confirming the words of John concerning Him. He continually frequented their synagogues, by this instructing them that He was not a sort of adversary of God and a deceiver, but that He came in accordance with the Father.”

“And while frequenting the synagogues, He did not preach only, but also showed miracles. On every occasion, whenever anything is done strange and surprising, and any divine doctrine is introduced, God tends to work miracles as pledges of his power, which He shows to them that are to receive His laws. Thus, for instance, when He was about to make man, He created a whole world, and then gave him that Law, which he had in Paradise. And when He was to give Laws to Noah, He showed again great miracles. He reduced the whole creation to its elements; that fearful sea prevailed for a full year; and amid so great a tempest, He preserved that righteous man. In the time of Abraham, He granted many signs: his victory in the war, the plague upon Pharaoh, his deliverance from dangers. When He was about to legislate for the Jews, He showed those marvelous events on Mt. Sinai, and then gave the Law. Just so in this case also; being about to introduce a certain divine doctrine, and to tell them what they had never heard, by the display of the miracles He confirmed what He said.”

²³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XIV, 3.

²⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XIV, 4.

“Because the kingdom He was preaching did not appear physically, by the things that do appear, He makes the kingdom, though invisible, clear.”

Athanasius of Alexandria chronicled²⁵ the life history of Antony the Great, which also illustrates the reward in this life for strict devotion to God in faith. One aspect of Antony’s early life is his imitation of the Apostles in their leaving everything to follow Christ. Like the Apostles, Antony was rewarded for his efforts by being given the gift of great understanding.

“After the death of Antony’s father and mother, he was left alone with one little sister; his age was about eighteen or twenty, and on him the care both of home and sister rested. About six months after the death of his parents, as he went according to custom into the Lord’s House, he reflected as he walked how the Apostles left everything and followed the Savior (Matthew 4:20). He thought about how they sold their possessions and laid them at the Apostles’ feet for distribution to the needy (Acts 4:34-35), and what great a hope was laid up for them in heaven (Romans 8:24-25, Hebrews 6:18, Colossians 1:27). Pondering over these things he entered the church, and it happened the Gospel was being read; he heard the Lord saying to the rich man, ‘If you would be perfect, go and sell what you have and give to the poor; and come follow Me and you shall have treasure in heaven’ (Matthew 19:21). Antony, as though God had reminded him of the Saints, and as though the passage had been read on his account, went out immediately from the church, and gave the possessions of his forefathers to the villagers — they were three hundred acres, productive and very nice — that they should be no more a drag upon himself and his sister. And all the rest of his liquid assets he sold, and having got together much money he gave it to the poor, reserving a little for his sister’s sake.

Again a few days later, he went into the church, and heard the Lord say in the Gospel, ‘do not be anxious for tomorrow’ (Matthew 6:34). He could stay no longer, but went out and gave those things also to the poor. He committed his sister to known and faithful virgins, and put her into a convent to be brought up, then he devoted himself to discipline, and training himself with patience. For there were not yet so many monasteries in Egypt as there are now, and no monk at all knew of the distant desert; but all who wished practiced discipline in solitude near their own village.

Now there was then in the next village an old man who had lived the life of a hermit from his youth up. Antony, after he had seen this man, imitated him in piety. At first he began to live in places outside the village. If he heard of a good man anywhere, like the prudent bee, he went and sought him, not turning back to his own place until he had seen him. He returned, having got from the good man as it were supplies for his journey in the way of virtue. So dwelling there at first, he confirmed his purpose not to return to the abode of his fathers nor to the remembrance of his kinsfolk; but to keep all his desire and energy for perfecting his discipline. He worked with his hands, having heard, ‘he who is idle let him not eat’ (2 Thessalonians 3:10), and part he spent on bread and part he gave to the needy. He was constant in prayer, knowing that a man ought to pray in secret

²⁵ Athanasius of Alexandria, The Life of Antony, 2-3.

unceasingly (Matthew 6:7, 1 Thessalonians 5:17). For he had given such heed to what was read that none of the things that were written fell from him to the ground, but he remembered everything, and afterwards his memory served him for writing books.

Tertullian gave examples²⁶ of things that we consider the “necessities of life”, but are often just excuses for not taking up our Crosses.

“In vain do we flatter ourselves as to the necessities of human maintenance, if we say, ‘I have no means to live’. The Lord gave examples taking away all excuse. For what is it you say? ‘I shall be in need’. But the Lord calls the needy happy (Luke 6:20). ‘I shall have no food’. But ‘think not’, says He, ‘about food’ (Matthew 6:25, 31; Luke 12:22-24); and as an example of clothing we have the lilies (Matthew 6:28-29, Luke 12:27-28). One might say, ‘My work was my subsistence’. No, but ‘all things are to be sold, and divided to the needy’ (Matthew 19:21, Luke 18:22). One might say, ‘But provision must be made for children and posterity’. Yet, ‘No one, putting his hand on the plow, and looking back, is fit for work’ (Luke 9:62). One might say, ‘But I was under contract’. Yet, ‘No one can serve two masters’ (Matthew 6:24, Luke 16:13). If you wish to be the Lord’s disciple, it is necessary that you ‘take your cross, and follow²⁷ the Lord’. Your cross; that is, your own straits and tortures, or your body only, which is after the manner of a cross. Parents, wives, children, will have to be left behind²⁸, for God’s sake. Do you hesitate about arts, trades, and about professions, for the sake of children and parents? Even there was it demonstrated to us that both handicrafts and trades are to be left behind for the Lord’s sake. James and John, called by the Lord, left behind both father and ship²⁹. Matthew was roused up from the tollbooth³⁰; even burying a father was not a business for faith (Luke 9:59-60). None of them, whom the Lord chose, said to Him, ‘I have no means to live’. Faith does not fear famine. It knows, likewise, that hunger is to be despised no less, for God’s sake, than every kind of death. If one does not fear for one’s own life; why should one be concerned about adequate food?”

Ambrose spoke³¹ of Salome, the Lord’s stepsister, and her request that her sons sit on His Right and Left in His Kingdom. Her sons had left everything, including the care of her house, and she had followed them in following the Lord, and was included among the Myrrh-Bearing Women (Mark 15:40-16:1). Her request was for grace, even if her method is somewhat questionable.

“Think of her who, with and for her sons, makes this request. It is a mother, who in her anxiety for the honor of her sons, though somewhat unrestrained in the measure of her desires, may for all that yet find pardon. It is a mother, old in years, devout in her zeal, deprived of consolation. At that time, when she might have been

²⁶ Tertullian, *On Idolatry*, I, ii, 12.

²⁷ See Matthew 16:24, Mark 8:34, Luke 9:23, 14:27.

²⁸ See Matthew 19:27-30, Mark 10:29-30, Luke 14:26. For example, three of the Twelve were married and had young children when the Lord called them. In leaving everything for God’s sake, they didn’t abandon their wife and children, but just gave up the pleasures of the flesh, living as celibates.

²⁹ Matthew 4:21-22, Mark 1:19-20, Luke 5:10-11.

³⁰ Matthew 9:9, Mark 2:14, Luke 5:27-29.

³¹ Ambrose of Milan, *Exposition of the Christian Faith*, V, v, 55-56.

helped and supported by the aid of her able bodied offspring, she allowed her children to leave her, and preferred the reward that her sons should receive in following Christ to her own pleasure. For they, when called by the Lord, at the first word, left their nets and their father and followed Him.”

“She then, yielding to the devotion of a mother’s zeal, asked Jesus, saying, ‘Grant that my two sons may sit the one on Your right hand, the other on Your left in Your kingdom’ (Matthew 20:20-21). Although it was an error, it was an error of a mother’s affections; for a mother’s heart knows no patience. Though eager for the object of her desires, her longing was pardonable, for she was not greedy for money, but for grace. Her request was not shameless and self-centered, for she thought not of herself, but of her children.”

Beauty of the Soul

John Chrysostom spoke³² of a beauty of the soul and he compared it to physical beauty. Physical beauty is part of our nature, and it stays with us wherever we go. Beauty of the soul can be acquired through obedience and lost through disobedience. The fishermen acquired beauty of soul by their willingness to leave everything and follow Christ. Similarly Paul, the Thief on the Cross, the publican and Matthew the tax collector.

“What then is beauty of soul? These are temperance, mildness, almsgiving, love, brotherly kindness, tender affection, and obedience to God, the fulfillment of the Law, righteousness, and contrition of heart. These things are the beauty of the soul. These things are not the results of nature, but of moral disposition. And he who does not possess these things is able to receive them, and he who has them, if he becomes careless, loses them. In the case of the body, she who is ungraceful cannot become graceful; in the case of the soul, the graceless soul can become full of grace. For what was more graceless than the soul of Paul when he was a blasphemer and insulter; what was more full of grace when he said, ‘I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith’ (2 Timothy 4:7). What was more graceless than the soul of the robber? What was more full of grace when he heard the words, ‘Truly I say to you; today you shall be with me in Paradise?’ (Luke 23:43) What was more graceless than Zacchaeus the publican when he practiced extortion? But what was more full of grace when he declared his resolution (Luke 19:8-9). You cannot alter the grace of the body, for it is the result not of moral disposition, but of nature. But the grace of the soul is supplied out of our own moral choice”.

“You have now received the definition of beauty. The beauty of the soul proceeds from obedience to God. For if the graceless soul obeys God it puts off its lack of gracefulness, and becomes full of grace. When Paul obeyed Christ at his conversion (Acts 9:4-5), his obedience made the graceless soul full of grace. Again, Christ said to the publican, ‘Come follow me’ (Matthew 9:9), and the publican rose up and became an apostle; the graceless soul became full of grace. How? By obedience! Again He said to the fishermen, ‘Come follow me and I will make you to become fishers of men’ (Matthew 4:19); by their obedience their minds became full of grace.”

³² John Chrysostom, Two Homilies on Eutropius, II, 17.

“Let us see what kind of beauty He is speaking of here. ‘Listen O daughter and behold; forget your own people and your father’s house, and the king shall desire your beauty’ (Psalm 45:11). What kind of beauty will he desire? The spiritual kind! How so? She is to ‘listen and forget’. These are acts of moral choice. ‘Listen!’ he said, ‘an ungraceful one hears and her lack of gracefulness, being that of the body, remains unchanged’. To the sinful woman He has said ‘Listen’, and if she will obey she sees what manner of beauty is bestowed upon her. Since the lack of gracefulness of the bride was not physical, but moral, for she did not obey God but transgressed, therefore he leads her to another remedy. You became ungraceful then, not by nature, but by moral choice; and you became full of grace by obedience. That you may learn that he does not mean anything visible to sense, when you hear the word beauty, think not of eye, or nose, or mouth, or neck, but of piety, faith, love, things which are within, ‘for all the glory of the king’s daughter is from within’ (Psalm 45:13). Now for all these things let us offer thanks to God, the giver.”

Leo the Great marveled³³ at the beauty of soul of the Apostles after Pentecost. They may have absolutely nothing of the things of this world, but they were richer than anyone can imagine.

“Of this high-souled humility the Apostles first, after the Lord, have given us examples, leaving all that they had without difference at the voice of the heavenly Master. They were turned from the catching of fish to be fishers of men, and made many like themselves through the imitation of their faith. With those first-begotten sons of the Church, ‘the heart of all was one, and the spirit one, of those that believed’ (Acts 4:32). They put away all of their things and possessions, and enriched themselves with eternal goods, through the most devoted poverty. In accordance with the Apostles’ preaching, they rejoiced to have nothing of the world and possess all things with Christ. For this reason, the blessed Apostle Peter, when he was going up into the temple, and was asked for alms by the lame man, said, ‘Silver and gold is not mine, but what I have that I give you; in the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, arise and walk’ (Acts 3:6). What is more sublime than this humility? What is richer than this poverty? He does not have stores of money, but he has gifts of nature. He whom his mother had brought forth lame from the womb, was made whole by Peter with a word. He who gave not Caesar’s image in a coin, restored Christ’s image on the man. And by the riches of this treasure not this man only was aided, whose power of walking was restored, but 5,000 men also, who then believed at the Apostle’s exhortation on account of the wonder of this cure. And that poor man who had nothing to give to the one who asked, bestowed so great a bounty of Divine Grace. As he had set one man straight on his feet, so he healed these many thousands of believers in their hearts, and made them ‘leap like a deer’ (Isaiah 35:6) in Christ whom he had found limping in Jewish unbelief.”

³³ Leo the Great, Sermons, 95, 3.