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ST. MATTHEW ORTHODOX CHURCH

“THE LORD’S PRAYER---PART 2, ‘HALLOWED BE THY NAME....”

This summer, as many summers, I am taking several Sundays to do a series of sermons on a particular topic so as to be able to dig deeper into something—more than can be done in one homily. This summer, starting last week, the series is on the Lord’s Prayer.

The Lord’s Prayer is the greatest and most perfect of all prayers. That’s to be expected, because remember who wrote the prayer---our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. So it’s well worth taking some time to look at closely.

Last Sunday, we looked at the opening words---“Our Father Who art in heaven... Today we move on to the second phrase of the prayer----“Hallowed be Thy name”.

“Hallowed” is old English for “holy”. So what we are praying here is that God’s name will be holy.

What does “hallowed” or “holy” mean? Many have written much about that question. To start with a basic answer, it means that God is both totally unique and totally good. We’ll glance at the first answer and then look more at the second answer.....

God is certainly unique, totally different from everyone and everything else. He is so different from all else that exists that we can’t get very far in understanding Him. Some writers refer to God as “wholly Other”---not “holy”, but “wholly”.....meaning that He is wholly, completely, different than all else. That is one aspect of God’s being holy.

The second aspect of God’s holiness, which we’ll look at for the rest of the sermon, is that God is totally and perfectly good. There are no flaws, no evil, no moral imperfections in God. He is absolutely and completely good in every way.

Now a question might be rising up in your mind at this point---if God is holy, hallowed, totally and perfectly good, then why do we pray “hallowed be Thy name”? If He is already hallowed, holy, then why pray that His name be hallowed, be holy? It could seem redundant.

St. Theophylact, back in the Middle Ages, clearly answers that question in his commentary on the Gospel of St. Matthew----“Hallowed be Thy name’ means ‘make us holy, so that Thou might be glorified through us.” (The Explanation by Blessed Theophylact of the Holy Gospel According to St. Matthew, Chrysostom Press, 1992, p. 58) When we pray, “hallowed be Thy name”, we are praying that God’s name will be glorified by us, that His reputation will be holy because of us.

There is an old saying---that someone “made a good name for himself”, meaning he has created for himself a good reputation. We are praying in the Lord’s Prayer that God might have “a good name”, a good reputation---and that is partly up to us. Of course, God is perfectly holy, perfectly hallowed. How we behave won’t change that. But how we, His people, behave may affect His reputation among other people.

Who often makes or breaks a father’s reputation? His children. We Christians, as the Father’s children, have a lot to do with what kind of reputation our Father has, what kind of name He has. Is His name hallowed? That depends partly on us.

So in this part of the Lord's Prayer, we are praying for ourselves—that we will live in such a way that people will think well of God—that His name will be good and holy and hallowed.

Therefore, if we live as hypocrites, as poor and non-consistent disciples of Jesus, we do damage to God's reputation. Maybe we talk beautifully about the Lord, but that's of little value if we don't live beautifully for Him. The American writer, Ralph Waldo Emerson, said about Christians in the 1800s----“What they *do* speaks so loud that what they *say* can't be heard.” (in The Supreme Task of the Church, J. T. Seamands, p. 74)

It's easy to talk the talk. But do we walk the walk?

Back in the 300s A.D. St. Gregory the Theologian said the following about his friend, St. Basil the Great----“His speech was like thunder because his life was like lightening.” (in The Christian Tradition, Volume 5, Jaroslav Pelikan, University of Chicago Press, p. 55) St. Basil's life was so full of light (like a flash of lightning) that people took it seriously when he spoke (like a clap of thunder).

If our lives are full of God's light, people will take our words more seriously. But if our actions have lots of darkness in them, people will not take very seriously anything we say. And so we will cause people to think badly of God because we, His people, are doing a poor job of shining forth His light. That causes His name to not be hallowed.

To make this idea very concrete.....You say you believe, you say you live for God, and you go to church. People notice that----and so their opinion of God will at least partially depend on their opinion of *you*.

If you're not living a very holy life, if there's not much of God's light shining through you, they will think---“God's people really aren't very good. I guess maybe He's not so great either.” But if your life and actions are holy, if God's light and love are evident in your life, they will think---“God's people seem good, so I guess God must be good.” And when that happens, you have hallowed the Father's name!

Our God is holy, And the world needs to know that and to glorify Him for being holy. They will learn that truth if we, God's people, are holy in our words and deeds.

A good example of a person who greatly manifested God's holiness, light, and love in his life is one of the Saints we venerate today on July 10—St. Joseph of Damascus. In closing today, let me briefly tell you his story.....

He was the leading priest at the Antiochian patriarchal cathedral in Damascus over 150 years ago. He began as a weaver and then when called by God, he became a very educated and scholarly man and was also ordained as a priest. He was a great preacher and the people then called him “the second Chrysostom”.

In July, 1860 horror came to the Christians in part of the Ottoman Empire. It started on Mt. Lebanon where the Druze and Muslims attacked and killed Christians. Then the violence spread to the Damascus area. As killing began there, many Christians were able to flee. But not all could get out of Damascus. Some couldn't that quickly arrange transportation or couldn't afford to run or had health conditions that made it impossible----or just thought it couldn't get too bad and they would end up alright. Father Joseph had a decision to make. He could certainly get out of town if he wished. And it is not wrong to flee persecution---Jesus Christ even recommends it at one place in the gospels. But he decided he couldn't abandon his flock. And so he decided to stay.

On July 10 the killing reached its climax. Muslim mobs were going through the city hunting down Christians and killing them. Many Christians died when the church they were taking refuge in was burned down around them. Father Joseph took upon himself the task of traveling around Damascus to visit all the Christian in their homes that he could—to bring them their last sacraments before death: Holy Confession and Holy Communion. It is said he did much of his moving around the city on the rooftops. Jumping from building to building and using roof entrances to get into the homes---this way the mobs didn't see him. He confessed and communed the folks who knew possible death was imminent and encouraged them to be faithful martyrs for Christ.

Sometimes the rooftop method didn't work and he would have to sneak through the streets as best as he could to get to the members of his flock. Finally, a mob saw him. They yelled out—"He is the leader of the Christians, get him!" He was cornered---as the mob approached, Father Joseph quickly consumed the reserved Body of Christ he was carrying so that it would not be desecrated by the attackers. They set upon him with axes and chopped the good priest into pieces. His martyrdom took place on July 10, 1860 A.D. It is estimated that about 2500 Christians died at that time in Damascus and more yet in other parts of the Turkish empire.

St. Joseph hallowed the name of God that day by showing the ultimate manifestation of God's love and light and holiness. And whenever we hear about him and others like him, we give glory to God, and God's name is hallowed.

Every time we pray the Lord's Prayer and get to that 2nd line---"Hallowed be Thy name"---may it remind us that God's reputation in the world depends a lot on us. On how we, His people, live.

Let us, like St. Joseph, live in such a way that it gives God the Father a good reputation in the world. Let us live in such a way that God's name is hallowed.

