

MAY 20, 2018

ST. MATTHEW ORTHODOX CHURCH

John 17: 1-13

“LIVING FOREVER”

We usually figure four-letter words are the bad words. But there are other words, too, that have quite negative connotations. One of them is “death”. A five letter word we often don’t like to hear or think about. Because death is something none of us can escape.

Metropolitan Anthony Bloom, our archdiocese’s leader for many years, liked to tell a story about a sailor and peasant who were visiting in a seaside tavern years back. The peasant was telling the sailor that he thought a life at sea was just too dangerous and too many sailors perished on the ocean. He knew a little about the sailor and so made

his point in this way. “Tell me,” he said to the sailor, “Where did your father die?” The sailor replied, “In a storm at sea.” The peasant continued, “And how about your grandfather?” “He died in a shipwreck on some hidden reefs,” answered the sailor. The peasant answered, “That proves my point--- your father and grandfather both died in ships at sea. That’s way too dangerous a life!” The sailor now asked, “Tell me, where did your father die?” “He died in bed at home”, answered the peasant. “And how about your grandfather?”, asked the sailor. The peasant replied, “Same thing. My grandfather died in bed in his house.” The sailor then said, “So you see-----it is just as dangerous to be in bed as it is to be in a ship on the ocean!” (via internet, source unknown)

Wherever we live, whatever kind of life we live-----death comes. No one escapes. That’s the bad news.

But there is good news, too-----there is eternal life. Eternal life, living forever in the

Kingdom of Heaven. Our gospel lesson for this Sunday in between Ascension and Pentecost is from John 17. On Holy Thursday evening, the night before His crucifixion, our Lord Jesus Christ prayed some long prayers and told a lot of things to His disciples. If you want to hear it all, just come to Holy Thursday evening service next year and you'll hear it-----the longest gospel reading of the year. Today's lesson was just one small part of that gigantic passage. And I wish to read for you now just the first three verses----John 17: 1-3----“Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven and said, ‘Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son may also glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.’”

In these verses, Jesus says that He came to the world to give us eternal life. And He

tells us what eternal life consists of in verse 3. Reading just verse 3 again---“And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”

Knowing God, knowing the Son of God, Jesus Christ----that is what eternal life is.

A very simple message today----We can't avoid death but we all want to live forever. How can that happen? By knowing Jesus Christ.

Know Him now, live in Him and for Him now, and you already have eternal life. And that eternal life will never end. It will go on after your physical death and eternally get better and better.

So if knowing Christ now gives us eternal life now....and if you really badly wish to live forever (as I think we all do), then you should, above all, make knowing Jesus Christ better and better the main focus of your life.

So every day, every hour, think about what you say, what you do---is it helping you to know Christ better or dragging you in the other direction? Because Christ said in today's gospel lesson that eternal life consists in knowing Him. And the more fully we come to know Him now, the more fully we experience eternal life now, not just after death.

And so, hopefully, we are pressing on to know Him better and to live for Him more fully. Even the great Apostle Paul said he had to keep pressing on in Christ, not just rest on his laurels. We tend to think of the apostles as perfect men. Paul knew he wasn't there yet---he had to press on and climb higher. As he wrote in Philippians 3: 12 and 14—"Not that I have already attained or am already perfected, but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.....I press toward the

goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

Our progress in this pressing on may be slow, maybe very gradual. Just be sure you're headed in the right direction and not slowly and gradually drifting backwards! Even if it's slow growth, examine yourself to make sure you're moving in the right direction: the direction of living forever through knowing Christ.

Pablo Casals is the most famous cellist of all time. No one has ever been better on the cello. He was known for every day spending hours and hours in practice. When he was 93 a visitor said to him, “I assume you don't bother much with practice any more?”. Casals answered, “Oh, no, that's not true at all. I am very strict about always practicing at least 3 hours per day.” The visitor was surprised and said, “But why? You're already the best there is!” Casals' reply was, “I don't want to stop practicing just because I'm 93 because lately, I'm finally noticing

some improvement.” (“The Plain Dealer”,
6/24/08)

Is your spiritual progress slow? Is your coming to know Christ better a very gradual thing? Maybe so, but just keep right on pressing on. Press on to know Christ better, for knowing Him means to live forever.

