



LITURGICAL THEOLOGY

The Themes of the Lectionary

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ONE OF THE GREATEST ASSETS of the Church is the lectionary. This is not always self-evident, however. Day after day and week after week, the Church reads assigned portions of the Holy Scriptures known as lections. These lections cause us to experience the life of Our Lord, since they are the inspired words of divine revelation. They also make clear to us the dogmas and doctrines of Christ's most holy religion. Furthermore, the lectionary unites Christians one to another in a way that transcends both time and space; it does so by placing us in a linear tradition of common prayer and worship with the whole people of God.

The tradition of using an established lectionary for the public reading of the Scriptures is a very ancient practice, one that predates even Christianity itself. When we read from the lectionary, we follow in the steps of our forefathers. The use of the lectionary is so ancient that it

even links us to the worship practices of the faithful people of God who lived centuries before the Incarnation of Our Lord.

From the texts of Holy Scripture, we learn that the use of a lectionary was practiced in the synagogue and temple worship of the Jewish people. Jesus himself even read the Scriptures from a lectionary, as we are told in Luke 4:17, 20-21: "And there [in the synagogue] was delivered unto him [Jesus] the book of the prophet Esaias...And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, 'This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.'" In the above text from Saint Luke's Gospel, Jesus receives the appointed text to be read on that day of worship, reads it, and teaches the people through preaching on the same. This pattern is still followed today by our ministers who first discern which text is to be read from the lectionary, read the assigned text in the presence of the people, and then proceed to preach upon the teachings of the same.

all of which are based on the New Testament? Do we not remember and re-live His death and resurrection on each Sunday (Kyriake, that is, the Lord's Day) and in each Liturgy? Do we not continuously hear about Jesus' teachings, miracles and encounters with men and women from all walks of life? Even the Feasts of the Prophets, the Apostles, the Theotokos and the Saints, properly understood, point to the centrality of Christ, the Saviour and Lord of all.

This is the essential message of the Orthodox faith: Christ lives and desires to be one with us in a union of holy love. He is the Leader of our life and the Celebrant of the sacraments. He is the Good Shepherd who continues not only to seek out the lost but also to feed those who are already in His flock. Are we prepared to hear His call? Are we willing to open our hearts to Him? Do we seek Him as eagerly as He seeks us? I would like to end this preface with the image of Christ the Pursuer from the conclusion of St. John Chrysostom's 15th Homily on 1 Timothy, a passage to which George Florovsky has pointed. In the final part of this Homily,

St. John Chrysostom meditates on Christ's love for us and exhorts Christians to glorify Christ for His countless material and spiritual gifts — the same Christ that we often neglect and perhaps even secretly dislike for pursuing us and seeking to change our lives. Then St. John has Christ speaking to us in these words:

"But what shall I say? It is not in this way only that I have shown my love to you, but also by what I have suffered. For you I was spit upon, I was scourged. I emptied myself of glory, I left my Father and came to you, who hate me, and turn from me, and are loath to hear my name. I pursued you, I ran after you, that I might overtake you. I united and joined you to myself, "eat me, drink me," I said. In heaven above I hold you, and on earth below I embrace you. Is it not enough for you that I have your pledge of salvation in heaven? Does this not satisfy your desire? I again descended on earth (through the Eucharist): I not only am mingled with you, I am entwined in you. I am eaten, broken into tiny particles, that the fusion, intermingling, and union may be more complete. Things united remain yet (sometimes) in their own limits, but I am interwoven with you. I would have nothing separating us. I will that we both be one".