

# First Sunday of Lent: Sunday of Orthodoxy

---

## Sermon of Archbishop Andrei of Novo Deveyevo

“The day following, Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow Me” (Jn. 1:43). So the Holy Gospel begins this Sunday, recounting the calling of the Holy Apostles. Centuries have passed, and the same call is audible today, but now refers directly to us, “Follow Me.” And we ask the Lord, “Where?” And the Church answers us by the very name of this Sunday, “into Orthodoxy!”

Just be attentive. Tonight, when this week comes to a close and a new week of Great Lent begins, the Holy Church will say for our edification: “Lord, Thou hast given abundant gifts to those who fear Thee!” And we cannot say that we did not receive these gifts. We received the Sacrament of Confession, the Sacrament of the Eucharist — the Body and Blood of Christ, the Tree of Life. Yes, we undoubtedly received them. But do we have the state of mind which is expressed in the second part of the prayer: “Lord, Thou hast given abundant gifts to those who fear Thee.” The gifts have been given, but are we those who fear God? Yet the fear of God is not an ordinary fear as before someone or something. No. This is the fear of losing what the Lord has given to our heart.

And at the same time, the Holy Church, while telling us that we have received the Grace and Gifts of God, reveals to us through the Apostle reading the states of mind we should possess. These are the states which should be possessed by those who have achieved everything which Christ gives. We know what these achievers have gone through: sufferings, beatings, bonds, prison; they were stoned, sawn asunder, exiled, died by the sword, wandered in the mountains. Those of whom the whole world was not worthy hid in ravines, in caves — they all bore witness to their faith, but they did not receive what had been promised. And this is because God provided for them something better, something worthy of them (Heb. 11:37-40).

Yes, as we see, God calls: “Follow Me! I will give you everything.” But at the same time, such sufferings, such experiences, such horrible things! Look around you, at our walls which are painted with the pictures of saints. All of them are now in the heavenly dwellings, and yet all of them experienced, as every one of us experiences, the way of our earthly existence. Look, among them were archbishops, bishops, priests, monks; there were farmers, nobles and princes, workers of all kinds; there were laborers, people of simple background; there were great scholars, there were illiterate people. And all of them experienced on earth every kind of suffering, grief, and horror. But they kept that which the Church requires. When the Church says through the words of Christ, “Follow Me,” she is showing us where to go: into Orthodoxy. In the Russian language, Orthodoxy means the Right Word, that word which is true, which we should not betray; the word which we too have given and are again giving every year.

After the Nativity of Christ (on the day of Circumcision), when the circumcision of our heart is accomplished, then we say, “We belong to Christ, we are Christian. Our will is His Will. Christ is our Life; Christ is our Goal; Christ is our Way.” And this way leads us into the Church.

Bishop Theophan the Recluse shows us what to do in order to go the way of the Church. He addressed his flock (this was in the 1870's) with the following words: "We know what technology teaches us, what mechanics teaches us, law, economics. But the Church teaches us about the movement of our heart. Learn and keep in your heart everything the Holy Church teaches, and receiving Godly forces through the sacraments, and quickening them through the holy services and prayers of the Church, go unswervingly the Way of Christ's commandments under the guidance of lawful shepherds, and you will undoubtedly reach the Kingdom of Heaven and will be saved."

And so, being zealous for salvation, all our attention should be directed to our heart, to inscribe on it Christian feelings and dispositions. Bishop Theophan reveals to us that the most important thing is in our heart, dispositions, those feelings which appear in the heart. External things are needed, but only in so far as they bear the spirit which spiritualizes them. And social life will become true life only if into social relationships you bring spirit, which means heart, the heart of a true Christian. And family life will be true family life only if into all traditions of the external temporal family life we bring those relationships of the heart which God gives us in His Beatitudes: poverty of spirit, mourning, meekness, peaceableness — out of this will come real family life. And this way, and only this way, into all phases of our life will come the Triumph of Orthodoxy.