

ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ ΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΙΚΟΣ ΠΛΗΡΩΜΑΤΟΣ
Apostolic Church of the Pleroma

Homily delivered by Tau Phosphoros
to the Parish of St. Ambelain
on Sunday, December 14th, 2014

YEAR B - THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Last week we talked briefly about the idea of theosis or deification. Our epistle this week, from First Thessalonians, is very closely related to this doctrine. In fact, many Orthodox theologians turn to the injunction of chapter 5, verse 17 to "pray unceasingly" as the basis for the Hesychastic goal of the Prayer of the Heart.

To "pray unceasingly" is not to merely recite repetitive prayers, such as the Jesus Prayer or some similar prayer. Although, the frequent meditative and contemplative recitation can indeed lead to this inner prayer. Neither is the Prayer of the Heart a mere emotional outpouring toward God. The Prayer of the Heart, or unceasing prayer, refers to a very specific state of mystical attunement wherein the nous, or noetic faculty is perfectly aligned with the Heart in a perpetual prayer that transcends the mere intellect and encompasses the whole being - Spirit, Soul, and Body, as indicated in verse 23.

And the way to this ceaseless prayer is through a perpetual watchfulness, called in the Greek, nepsis. How many times in the Scripture are we told, "Stay alert!" or "Keep awake!" or "Be sober!"? These are all commands to maintain that watchfulness that leads to unceasing prayer. Repetitive prayer is one of the means by which this watchfulness is exercised. The standard prayer of the Hesychasts is the so-called Jesus Prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." Another prayer is the one given by the early 5th century saint John Cassian: "O God, make speed to save me. O Lord, make haste to help me."

Whatever methods we use to achieve mystical attunement, it is important that we maintain that connection and that state of consciousness as consistently as possible. It is only through this ceaseless Prayer of the Heart that full illumination can be attained. And it is only through this illumination that we may receive the gift of spiritual discernment.

This brings us to another aspect of our Epistle reading, that we should not outright reject prophecy, but that we should test all things and hold fast to that which is good. This passage is of particular importance to us as Gnostics. We tend to be very sceptical of the prophets of the Old Testament since so many so-called "divine" prophecies are seen by us as prophecies of the Demiurge rather than coming from the True God of Light. But just as we cannot blindly accept prophecy, we are told here that neither should we blindly reject prophecy. But in order to properly test a prophecy, mere rational analysis will not suffice. We need to have developed spiritual discernment in order to separate the true from the false; the good from the evil.

Therefore, in the coming week my brothers and sisters, seek to cultivate that nepsis, that watchfulness that leads to the Prayer of the Heart. And in doing this be thankful to God always for giving us the means by which we may make such efforts.