

SERMON on the Sunday After Theophany, January 13, 2019, Matthew 4:12-17

The Old Testament quote that we heard today is from Isaiah 9:1. After the Exodus, the land known as "Israel" was given to Jacob's descendants. Zebulun and Naphtali were the descendants of two of Jacob's twelve sons. By the time our Savior comes, this region which was known as Zebulun and Naphtali is now called Galilee. Isaiah calls it a place of darkness, because by Isaiah's time it was populated primarily by pagans, and the few Jews remaining had difficulty holding onto their ancestral faith and tradition as a minority in a predominantly pagan society. Christians understand that the great light that has dawned on this dark region is our Savior Himself, bringing the Good News of salvation to mankind. The Lord begins his preaching with the same words of St. John the Baptist: "Repent! For the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!" All the words spoken by our Savior are important. Not one word is recorded in the Gospel without a significant reason. Even so, the opening words spoken by our Savior, the same words associated with the forerunner, deserve our serious attention, because they set the tone and the path to understanding everything else that is spoken and preached by our Lord. In the Greek "repent" means to change one's way of life, to change one's habits. Changing our way of life and changing our habits is the door and cornerstone by which we become the disciples of Christ and receive salvation. Therefore, there are things that have become familiar to us and things that we have gotten used to that we must change. For us it is familiar and everyday to judge others, it is familiar and everyday to get irritated, it is familiar and everyday to shorten or not say our prayers, it is familiar and everyday to be spiritually slack and rarely go to Confession, it is familiar and everyday to be late for church or to skip church entirely, it is familiar and everyday to gossip. In our lives we strive for God. In our lives we would like God to reveal Himself to us, to sanctify us, to help us and to be a mainstay in our lives. But what do we need, above all, to ensure that we are with God, and God is with us? Above all, we need that to which the Lord has called us: we need genuine repentance, real repentance. Without God, life is meaningless. God is the only authentic, sure and constant force in our lives. With God we can achieve peace and understanding in our lives. With God we receive the strength and comfort that is needed to face our daily trials and temptations. Only with God can authentic faith and love reign in our hearts. The Lord had all of this in mind when He began His preaching by saying, "Repent! For the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!" Let us ask our Savior for the gift of repentance. Let us ask Him that He would help us to change and leave behind the sinful way of life and to correct ourselves. The Holy Church gives us everything necessary for this. There is the Mystery of Repentance, in which we acknowledge our sins, disclose them before a priest at Confession, and they are forgiven by the Holy Spirit. Hand and hand with Confession is the Mystery of the Eucharist, in which we unite with our Lord Himself, Jesus Christ, in His Precious Body and Life-Giving Blood. Essentially, however, we need both, Confession and Holy Communion, because these Holy Mysteries work together and not separately. Jesus tells us this very plainly and clearly today. First we must repent, and only then can we dare to approach the other Holy Mysteries offered to us by the Lord. There is also the spirit of prayer, there is the life of the Church... the Lord has done everything for us. Let us make every effort to correct ourselves, repent, and to be with Him.

To Him be glory unto the ages of ages. Amen.