

SERMON - Sunday, October 6, 2019 - Luke 7:11-16 & John 10:9-16

At our first Movie Night on Friday evening we watched the documentary “Becoming Truly Human.” A young man named Basil explores the question of why so many young people are disassociating themselves from their respective churches. For example, we heard from young people who grew up in the Roman Catholic, Baptist and Evangelical traditions. Among the reasons given was the disdain of moral rules imposed upon them and the image of a God who will punish them and send them to Hell if they do not obey the rules. One young lady said that she was told that if she prayed God would hear her prayers. Apparently her parents were having marital problems and she prayed for their reconciliation. She said that if there was a God, he did not hear her prayers. Many reasons were given. There was a consensus among those who viewed the film that all of these young people were grossly misinformed about true Christianity and very confused by the disinformation, partial truths and just plain falsehoods that they were taught. If the message of Orthodoxy and the Orthodox understanding of Christ could be brought to these people, it might change their minds about their faith if Christ is presented to them in the light of the eastern Fathers of the Church. Basil spoke about his own journey of faith. He came from a Lutheran background and was raised in a family that was well read and not afraid to ask and discuss the hard questions. Nothing was off the table. Everything was open for discussion and exploration. The problem, however, was that they read from the Western and post-reformation theological and philosophical writings and were totally ignorant of the Eastern Fathers of the Church. Somehow in his journey Basil came across the writings of St. Athanasius the Great on the incarnation. It was astounding and unheard of to Basil when he read that Athanasius taught that Jesus came into the world in order to bring life back to mankind. For Basil, this was a totally new and profound way of understanding the fall of Adam and Eve and the reason for the incarnation—and it resonated deep within Basil’s heart. Basil was further amazed when he discovered the continuity of the early Fathers still believed, taught, and practiced in the Orthodox Church today. In the reading today from the Gospel of John, Jesus says “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” I have often quoted to you John 3:13 where it says “God sent his Son **into the world** not to judge the **world**, but to **save the world**.” According to St. Athanasius, the Word (Jesus) saw our transgression and our sorry state and saw that we needed help. Out of the malice of the devil, man was tempted, and death and corruption entered into the world. Because of His love for us the Lord hastened to appear in order to help us. There were two things that our Savior did for us by becoming man. First, He dwelt among us for a while in the flesh, yet still fully Divine, so that in the most intimate way we would come to know God. Secondly, He died in the flesh on the Cross, a blameless innocent sacrifice for all of our transgressions, and in suffering and dying on the Cross He annihilated death and made death powerless over us. In His Divinity our Savior could not die. Therefore, He rose from the dead, and by doing so, he re-created fallen mankind and restored all of us to eternal life, that we too might die and rise with Jesus. St. Paul writes that we share in the death of the Lord when we descend into the baptismal font, and when we emerge from the baptismal font we share in the Resurrection and are re-created as a new creature of God. St. Athanasius concludes his treatise on the Incarnation by reminding us that it is impossible to understand the Holy Scriptures and the teachings of the saints unless we have a pure mind and are trying to imitate the lives of the saints. In order to understand the mind of the Holy Fathers, we must first cleanse our own minds and imitate the saints by copying their deeds. To quote St. Athanasius, “...united to them in the fellowship of life, we (he) will understand the things revealed to them by God”.....and “will receive that which is laid up for the saints in the kingdom of heaven.” “Eye has not seen nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, the things that God has prepared” (1 Cor. 2:9) for them that live a godly life and love God the Father in Christ Jesus our Lord, through Whom and with Whom be to the Father Himself, with the Son Himself, in the Holy Spirit, honor and might and glory unto ages of ages. Amen.