

SERMON on Holy Theophany - Sunday, January 6, 2018

Water is one of the most essential components of human life. Most of the earth is made up of water, and all life, whether a human being, an animal, or even a plant, is made up mostly of water. In space exploration scientists as scientist search for the possibility of life on other planets, they are always searching for evidence of water, because life as we know it can only exist with water. Water is so important to us, that the enemy of the human race, Satan, once revealed to the Elder Ambrose of Optina, that Satan was planning to destroy human life by polluting all the waters of the earth. It is no secret that many formerly pristine lakes and rivers have become polluted because of industrial waste, and even the oceans themselves and the aquatic life in them suffer from human pollution and waste. Many formerly beautiful bodies of water in which one could swim, from which one could drink water and fish are now poisonous, filthy dark remnants of their former selves.

When the Hebrews fled from Egypt, it was the waters of the Red Sea that opened a path to them for their flight to freedom and the Promised Land. It was the same sea that prevented the Egyptian soldiers from pursuing the Hebrews when the sea's mighty waters closed up and swallowed the pursuing army. In Holy Scripture it is recorded that there once was a commander of the Syrian army named Naaman. He was a good man who had favor with God, but he suffered from leprosy. Naaman's wife had an Israelite servant who suggested that an Israelite prophet could heal Naaman. The prophet Elisha told Naaman to bathe seven times in the Jordan River. After the seventh time, Naaman is healed from his leprosy. When mankind became overwhelmingly sinful, God used water, a flood, to annihilate mankind and start fresh with one righteous man, Noah, and his family. Sin entered into the world again, but this time the Lord uses water to wash away our sins, to cleanse our souls, to bring the grace of the Holy Spirit to us to refresh us, sanctify us, and make a pathway to the Kingdom of Heaven. Just as Naaman was cleansed of his leprosy, the waters of baptism cleanse us and recreate us as we become members of the Church and are numbered among the people of God. Just as water nourishes us and gives us physical life, the waters of baptism spiritually nourish us and make it possible for us to receive eternal life. If biological life cannot exist without water, likewise spiritual life and eternal life cannot exist without the waters of baptism. Our Savior had no need to be baptized. The Lord, unlike mankind, is without sin and corruption. The Son of God does not need any kind of cleansing. When the Lord descends into the Jordan River, it is not the Jordan that cleanses our Savior. In fact, it is the opposite which occurs. When the Lord entered the waters of Jordan, through this act not only the Jordan, but all the waters, rivers, oceans, and lakes of the earth, as well as all creation is sanctified, recreated and again filled with the Spirit of God. A wonderful and beautiful miracle takes place when a woman gives birth to a child. Now, through Holy Baptism, another great and beautiful miracle occurs, because now we experience a second birth. Having first been born from a woman, now, through baptism, we are born again, as it says in the Gospel, "from above," *anothen*, in the original Greek. Baptism is the initiation, the foundation, the inauguration, the door by which all of the other Holy and saving Mysteries and blessings of the Church are granted unto us. Just as our Savior shows us the way by example and voluntarily descends into the Baptismal waters of the Jordan, everyone who would be a disciple of Christ must follow Him and likewise descend into the saving and cleansing waters of Holy Baptism in order to be able to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Let us give thanks to the Lord that He has shown us His love and mercy. Let us give thanks that instead of annihilating us as in the days of Noah, the Lord instead gives all of us the opportunity to repent and voluntarily be cleansed of our sins. May the Lord help us in our struggles as we walk the path of our lives to keep His commandments. May the Lord help us to keep pure and inviolate the white garment with which we were clothed at our baptism. Having resolutely struggled to stay the course and follow the narrow path of the Christian life,

may we, on that final day, reach the shore of refreshment and rejuvenation. At that time, may we receive the recompense for which we yearn and hear the sweet words of our Savior, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord" (Matthew 25). Amen.