

SERMON on the Sunday of the Samaritan Woman, May 26, 2019, John 4:5-42

Christ is Risen! When the Samaritan woman was later baptized, she received the name 'Photini', ('Svetlana' in Russian), which means "the enlightened one," or "illuminated." In fact, we call those who have recently been baptized "newly illumined." Photini is amazed when the Lord reveals to her all the secrets of her heart and her life. The gift from God of self-knowledge, brothers and sisters, is offered to each and every one of us. If we read the Gospel with an open mind, then the Word of God will be for us like a mirror and we will see ourselves as we really are. The experience we will have is no different than the experience of Photini with our Savior at Jacob's well. Photini's life was unfulfilled. She felt empty and was lost. The Holy Fathers explain that the five husbands that Photini had in her lifetime symbolize the five senses. Photini tended to the physical needs of her life. In those days, without a man to protect you, a woman's life was perilous, to say the least. Photini was a Samaritan woman and was in schism from the temple in Jerusalem. The Samaritans had their own temple. The Lord tells her, "Salvation is of the Jews." Photini, therefore, did not truly and fully know God. The only true fulfillment, meaning and joy in life can be found only by uniting ourselves with God. Photini converses on one spectrum, on a totally different level than the level on which the Lord converses. How often do we in our lives run after physical water and material fulfillment? If we read the Gospel, the Lord speaks with us just as He spoke with Photini and He offers us words of "living water" that will quench the spiritual thirst of our hearts and lead us to the gift of eternal life. A very important lesson given to us in today's Gospel is that we should worship God "in Spirit and in truth." Fr. Alexander Schmemmann's spiritual father, Archimandrite Cyprian Kern, used to say that "Many people think that prayer is informing God what he already knows and then telling God what he ought to do about it." Fr. Tom called this type of prayer "naming it and claiming it." Liturgy, or *leitourgia* in Greek, means the common act of the people. Our worship in the Orthodox Church today is in complete continuity with the Scriptures, the worship of the Old Covenant, the worship of the tabernacle and the temple and the preaching and prophecies of the Bible. Our worship here in the Orthodox Church is also in complete and continuous identity, solidarity and unanimity with the worship of the first Christians. St. Anthony the Great tells us that the Holy Spirit puts the words in our mouths that we should use for prayer, namely the psalms, the Lord's Prayer, the trisagion, the "Holy, Holy, Holy" and all the prayers given to us in the Divine services. St. Benedict said, "When a Christian goes to church, we do not put our mouth where our mind is; we put our mind where our mouth is." In other words, when we assemble in the Church to worship God, the words are given to us and inscribed on our lips. When the Divine Liturgy is about to begin, just before intoning "Blessed is the Kingdom...", the priest uses the psalmic expression, "O Lord, open Thou my lips and my mouth shall show forth Thy praise." Fr. Tom says that "a person can definitely share with God what's on their mind. We can tell God what we think. We can tell God what we want. We can make known our needs and our anxieties and so on to God. But we do not go to the Divine Liturgy for that purpose. In fact, we go to the Divine Liturgy to learn what we not only ought to say to God when we talk to him, but we go to the Divine Liturgy and the Church's liturgy generally to learn how we ought to think, to learn what our mind should be really on, what our heart should really desire. In that sense, the Church's liturgy and **the Divine Liturgy par excellence is a school of prayer.** It's a communal act in which we go to be shaped and to be formed as human beings and as Christians in that community where God himself is acting, teaching, preaching, offering, consecrating, blessing, and giving himself to us for Holy Communion as we give ourselves to him for the sake of that very same Holy Communion..." And to take that one step further, even in the Liturgy, the psalms and prayers of the Church are the best expressions of the human predicament; our anxieties and spiritual yearnings. In the Liturgy we have the prayer of asking, we have the prayer of praising, we have the prayer of thanking, we have the prayers of interceding and praying for one another, we have the prayers of letting known our needs to God—but that is one aspect of the gathering. All of our prayers in the Divine Liturgy are centered on the greatest prayer of thanksgiving, the Eucharist, the

offering of the Body and Blood of the Lord. This is what is written on the pages of the New Testament and this is how the Christians worshipped from the earliest times. We understand now what the Lord meant when He told Photini that we should worship in Spirit. What did the Lord mean when He said that we must also worship Him in Truth? Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life." Therefore, it is through Christ Jesus that we encounter the Father. It is through Christ Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit, that we come to know the Father. Just like Photini, when we truly see the reality of the reflection of who we truly are deep within the recesses of our heart and soul, the Gospel does not leave us in that darkness. The Gospel further reveals to us all that we can become and the Word of God instructs us how to pray, how to live and what we must do to find true and complete and everlasting fulfillment, meaning and joy in our lives. Let me conclude this sermon with the words of Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh: "And so, let us emulate this woman, let us come to our senses, let us realize that all we have been wedded to was not our fulfillment; and let us then ask ourselves "Who am I, with regard to myself in the dimension of God's vision?" And then we can go to others and say: I have met someone who has held a mirror before my eyes, and I have seen myself as I am, He has told me about myself: come and see! Come — and listen to Him! And others will come, others will listen, and then they will turn to us and say: It is no longer your testimony that makes us believe — we have seen for ourselves, we have heard for ourselves, we know for ourselves. We believe. Amen."