

## **SERMON on the Sunday After Theophany, January 12, 2020, Ephesians 4:7-13**

Lately there has been a resurgence of interest in Mr. Rogers. One famous message that Mr. Rogers gave to children was when he would say "You are special." There is so much wisdom compressed in those three little words. All of us have a calling from God. All of us are granted special gifts from God. Are all gifts from God equal? No, they are not. Today the politically correct lie that is taught to our children is that they are all equal in their abilities and accomplishments. This is not what the Lord teaches, and it is simply not true. Some people will accomplish greater things than others. Some gifts that we receive from God will require greater and harder work than other gifts. Some gifts will grant greater authority to some and less authority to others. But like Mr. Rogers said, we are all special. And all gifts from God are given to us by God in His wisdom because He knows better than we do what is best for us for our salvation. We are all loved by God, cherished by God, and if we humbly discern and accept our gifts and our calling from God, then we are on the road to salvation. We should not be jealous of others and blame God that we do not have the same gifts of others. We should not say that we wish to be someone else, or live someplace else, or have lived in a different time or live or be with different people. We should not use these excuses and blame God for why we may not be the good Christians that we are called to be. We should accept what has been given to us and what we have and where we are and whom we are with. We should "blossom where we are planted." God gives us our gifts according to our own individual circumstances, characteristics, abilities and spiritual strength. God knows better than we do what we need. Therefore, our prayer should not be to get what we think we need or want, but to deny our self-will and instead discern and accept the will of God for us. Fr. Tom Hopko points out that "Jesus said that only those who are "faithful in little" inherit much and get set over much. Those who are not faithful in the little things of life, and thereby fail to accept and to use what God provides, end up losing the little that they have, or - as Jesus says in St. Luke's Gospel - the little that they think that they have, for even that "little" may exist only in their own deluded imaginations (Mt. 25:14-30; Lk. 19:11-27; 8:18)." There is a divine plan for everyone, and we must accept God's will and through this acceptance we will be saved. I think of St. Maria of Gatchina, who spent her life paralyzed in a bed, yet possessed great faith and trust in God, and actually had the gift to help others who struggled with depression. One would think that she would be depressed herself in her state of physical paralysis. Yet this gift from God did not hinder her but instead acted as a catalyst to bring her closer to God and to achieve greater spiritual heights. In the end the Communists brutally tortured her and she suffered a martyr's death. It is amazing that this paralyzed weak little nun was such a threat that the mighty Communists feared her and needed to kill her. Yet through it all she accepted God's calling for her. She must have been a woman of incredibly amazing spiritual strength. Some of us may be called to suffer with illness, or poverty, or hatred and disdain or abuse by others, yet we must all accept our cross and carry it with faith. The Lord said that many are called but few are chosen. As Fr. Tom points out, "Some are rejected not because they have no vocation from God, but because they refuse to accept their calling." How many of us flee from or reject any kind of suffering, even when it is the Lord Himself who is calling us to join Him and carry our cross as He carried His Cross? Believe me, no matter what cross we face and either reject or accept in life, it is nothing in comparison to the Cross that our Savior willingly carried on our behalf for our salvation. To reject our crosses, to reject the calling of the Lord to do our work for Him as He asks us according to the gifts that He gives us is to reject our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. There is no greater blasphemy or sin than this. In Fr. Tom's discussion on finding one's calling in life, he concludes by saying: "So the summary of the whole thing is this: We must labor to do the smallest good and to avoid the smallest sin in the smallest, seemingly most insignificant details of life. We must accept who we are, where we are, when we are and how we are, and struggle to sanctify our real state of existence by the grace of God; resisting the world, the flesh and the devil and gaining the Spirit of God through Christ in the Church. We must participate in the services and sacraments, be fed on the scriptures and imitate the

saints. We must seek out the help of the experienced, and heed their counsel and advice. And we must go to God Himself and say with a pure heart: Thy will be done! And He will see that we find our vocation and calling in life, and become the saints that He has willed us to be from the beginning."