

I HAVE FOUGHT THE GOOD FIGHT, I HAVE COMPLETED THE COURSE
Sunday Before Theophany, January 16, 2000
By Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeyev)

The feast of the Nativity of Christ has ended and the feast of the Baptism of the Lord is approaching.

Finding ourselves at the crossroad between the two feasts, we hear the beginning of the Gospel of Mark, where it speaks about John the Baptist (Mark 1:1-8), and the end of the Second Epistle to Timothy, which was written by the Apostle Paul not long before his martyrdom (2 Timothy 4:1-8). What is the connection between these two readings? It is that both of them speak to us about faith in God as a path. Faith is a path by which we go to God and a path by which the Lord comes to us. The preaching of the Gospel began with the words of John the Baptist which were addressed to the people: *“Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight.”* The Apostle Paul says: *“For I am already on the point of being sacrificed; the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith”* (2 Timothy 4:6-7). The apostle is here using the image of a distance race in order to describe the achievement of his goal. In this way, we hear today about the beginning and the end of the path, as well as about the crown which is being prepared for each of us who does not stumble or sway from the race course of the spiritual life but achieves our goal. The goal is the Lord Himself.

The beginning of the Christian life is something that we must practice daily, which is repentance. The words of John the Forerunner: *“Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand”* (Matthew 3:2) is addressed to each of us. These words must be understood not in the sense that the Kingdom of God has approached chronologically, but in the sense that it is always ready to come and comes to us, the only question being whether or not we are prepared to enter into the Kingdom of God and to receive it within ourselves. You see, those who will remain outside of the Kingdom of God will not be those who God judges for their mistakes, but those who did not desire or did not find within themselves the strength to remain steadfast on this path to the end, to the doors of the Kingdom of God, those who stopped halfway. We must also remember that although we may be on the path, there is always the danger that we will not reach the end, that we will stumble and not make it to the end.

The Apostle Paul says: *“Always be steady, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry”* (2 Timothy 4:5). Each of us must be a preacher and bring to the world the Gospel of Christ, not only in word, but above all, by the example of our life ** and by that determination with which we must journey to meet God and to find God’s Kingdom.

Translated from the Russian by Archpriest Peter Olsen

Translator’s Note

** “Preach the Gospel at all times, and if necessary use words.” ~ attributed to St. Francis of Assisi