

ICON NOT-MADE-BY-HANDS

One of the earliest Icons witnessed to by Church Tradition, is the Icon of the Savior Not-Made-By-Hands. According to Tradition, during the time of the earthly ministry of the Savior, Abgar ruled in the Syrian city of Edessa. He was afflicted with leprosy over his whole body. At this time report of the great miracles performed by the Lord extended throughout Syria (Matt. 4:24) and as far as Arabia. Although not having seen the Lord, Abgar believed in Him as the Son of God and wrote a letter requesting Him to come and heal him. With this letter he sent to Palestine his court-painter Ananias, entrusting him to paint an image of the Divine Teacher.

Ananias went to Jerusalem and saw the Lord surrounded by people. He was not able to go to Him because of the great throng of people listening to His preaching; so he stood on a huge rock and attempted to produce a painting of the image of the Lord Jesus Christ, unable, however, to succeed. The Savior Himself called him by name and gave for Abgar a beautiful letter in which, 'having glorified the faith of the ruler, He promised to send His disciple in order to heal him from the leprosy and instruct him in salvation.

After this, the Lord called for water and a towel. He wiped His face, rubbing with the towel, and on it was impressed His Divine Image. The towel and the letter the Savior sent with Ananias to Edessa. With thanksgiving Abgar received the sacred object and received healing, but a small portion, only a trace, remained of the terrible disease on his face until the arrival of the promised Disciple of the Lord.

The Apostle of the 70, Thaddeus, came to them and preached the Gospel, baptizing the believing Abgar and all living in Edessa. Having written on the Image Not-Made-By-Hands the words, Christ-God, everyone trusting in Thee will not be put to shame, Abgar adorned it and placed it in a niche over the city gates.

For many years the inhabitants preserved a pious custom of venerating the Image Not-Made-By-Hands whenever passing through the gates. But a great-

grandson of Abgar, ruling Edessa, fell into idolatry and resolved to take the Image away from the city walls. In a vision, the Lord ordered the Bishop of Edessa to

with which to save the city from the adversaries. Dismantling the niche, the Bishop found the Holy Image; before it burned the lampada and on the clay tablets, with which the niche had been enclosed, was a similar image. After preceding with the Cross and the Image Not-Made-By-Hands around the walls of the city, the Persian army miraculously departed.

In 630, Edessa was seized by the Arabs; but they did not impede veneration of the Image Not-Made-By-Hands, glory of which extended out into all the East. In 944 the Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus (912-59) requested that the Image be redeemed from the Emir the ruler of the city of Edessa and brought to the Capital of the Orthodox. With great honor the Image of the Savior Not-Made-By-Hands and the letter which He wrote to Abgar, were brought by the clergy to Constantinople. On Aug. 16 the Image of the Savior was placed in the Pharos Church of the Most-Holy Theotokos.

Concerning the subsequent fate of the Image Not-Made-By-Hands, there exists several traditions. According to one, it was carried away by Crusaders during the time of their dominion over Constantinople (1204-61), but the ship on which the Holy Objects had been taken, sank in the Sea of Marmora. According to another, the Image Not-Made-By-Hands was taken about 1362 to Genoa, where it was presented to and preserved in a monastery dedicated to the Apostle Bartholomew.

In the time of the iconoclastic heresy, the defenders of icon-veneration, shedding their blood for the Holy Icons, sang the Troparion to the Image Not-Made-By-Hands. The Image (the Holy Face) was put up as an emblem of the Russian

armies, defending them from the enemy; and in the Russian Orthodox Church there is a pious custom that before entering a church, the faithful read together the prayers and the Troparion to the Image Not-Made-By-Hands. The Feast of this Icon is celebrated on Aug. 16, during the Afterfeast period of the Feast of the Dormition, and is popularly called the Third Feast-of-the-Savior in August.



conceal His Image. The Bishop, coming at night with his clergy, lit before the Image a lampada and then blocked up the niche with clay tablets and bricks.

Many years passed by and the inhabitants forgot about the Holy Object. But then, when in 545 the Persian King Chroses I besieged Edessa, the position of the city seemed hopeless. But the Most-Holy Sovereign Lady manifested Herself to Bishop Eulavios and commanded him to get from the enclosed niche the Image

If we were to read all four Gospels in one go, which word would come to our minds to sum up all that we had read?

Perhaps it would be the word 'Love', perhaps the word 'Hope', but perhaps also the word 'Life'. For instance, in the Gospels Christ calls Himself 'the Bread of Life', 'Eternal Life', 'the Word of Life', and 'the Resurrection and the Life'. Also the divine Apostle John writes at the beginning of his Gospel that 'in Him there was life' and that 'those who come to Him have life'.

We can see this most clearly of all in the fact that the central and most important event in the life of Christ is of course His Resurrection from the dead, His overcoming of death. But also throughout the Gospels, there are countless miracles, both resurrections and healings which in the last few weeks have been recounted to us in the Sunday Gospels. And healings, like resurrections, are restorations to Life.

Christ was asked about the commandments, which are to love God and to love our neighbor, and we are told that if we fulfill these commandments, then we shall 'live'. Christ gives life. And this is also the theme of the parable in today's Gospel.

THE WORD OF LIFE

This parable is that of the Good Samaritan. We probably know it very well and we understand through it that God calls us to show love for every person whom He wills us to meet, whomever they may be, wherever and whenever we may meet them. However, there is also a spiritual understanding of this parable, which is, as follows.

A certain man goes down from Jerusalem to Jericho. A certain man means any man, any one of us. Jerusalem signifies heaven and Jericho signifies the earth. This is the destiny of us all, to be on earth, although our home is in heaven.

This man falls among thieves who strip him of his raiment, wounding him and leaving him half-dead. Here the thieves are the demons who attack us through our weaknesses and wound us, leaving us weak and spiritually dying, having lost grace and faith, in sorrow and despair.

A priest and then a Levite pass by. By them we understand those who, whatever their outward rank and duty, have hard hearts and show no love, for they

are hypocrites and 'pass by on the other side'.

However a Samaritan passes by and helps the man, showing compassion. Although the Samaritan does not share the fullness of the outward faith, his heart, as we would say, is in the right place and he shows compassion. This Samaritan, the Good Samaritan, represents Christ, Who was rejected by the Jews, but had the essential compassion which the Jews did not have.

The Samaritan, that is Christ, went to the man and bound up his wounds and poured in oil and wine and then set the man on his own beast. This is what Christ did for us: He came to us. In other words He took on our human nature, He became man, one of us. He then bound up our spiritual wounds with His words of Life and poured on us the Love and Hope of salvation, the oil and wine of our souls. Then he set us on his own beast, in other words he gave us Faith with which we are able to walk.

The Samaritan then took the man to an inn, cared for him and gave the innkeeper two pence to look after the man,

telling the innkeeper that if it cost more, he would repay him when he returned. By the inn, we would understand the Church, where men can receive Christ's healing and care. The innkeeper is in particular the priest, the dispenser or agent and channel of sacramental grace and healing. But it is true that all members of the Church are also innkeepers, dispensers of spiritual and other help to those in the world around us.

The two pence represent the two ways in which we are saved. First of all, we need to repent through prayer and fasting. That is the first penny. The second penny, however, is the grace of the sacraments that we receive from God in response to our repentance and prayer and fasting. These two pence together form a virtuous circle. And if we members of the Church of God, 'innkeepers', stretch ourselves and give more of ourselves, then Christ will reward us when He returns at the end of the world.

This then is the spiritual meaning of today's parable. Christ tells it to the lawyer who knows the commandments but, like some eternal intellectual, does not apply them. And Christ says to him: 'Go and do thou likewise'. And today Christ says to each one of us also: 'Go and do thou likewise'.

