



# KYPIAKH

## A BRIEF SERMON



«I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet» (Rev. 1:10)

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## Where is Christ?

**Y**ou heard the Gospel reading, my beloved. But it's not enough just to hear it. We don't read the Gospel in church simply to pass the time, like you turn on the radio to pass the time, or like you sit in cafés to talk. The Gospel reading we heard today will judge us in the next world. Why will it judge us? Because we need to do what it says. Men and women, young and old, we are all obliged to **do what it says**.

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What does today's Gospel reading say, that we don't do? It says that one day Christ took His twelve disciples and went out of the city. He went far away, very far away...

That time will come. Do you think that you'll always remain in your homes, that you'll always turn on the TV and radio, or that you'll always have a mirror to look into? There'll come a time —it's been prophecised— there'll come a day when you won't have time to grab a [spare] shirt, you won't take even one cent with you, just like during the Asia Minor genocide, they didn't have time to take anything, and they left with their hearts in their mouths. In the same way, **if we don't repent, a huge disaster will occur**; and whoever takes refuge in the mountains and valleys, in the caves and deserts with the wild animals, those people will perhaps be saved. Because homes, which should each be a little church, have now become places which will condemn us, with everything that goes on in them. When the husband blasphemes, the wife speaks audaciously, the children swear at their father and mother... there is no blessing there.

So Christ left the big houses and cities and went into the countryside. Why? Because it is there that a person is closer to God's light. In the big cities, he is closer to the devil. In the big cities, the devil does a lot of evil.

In the countryside, Christ found **suitable time to pray**. In the countryside, out in the fields, you wake up in the morning, watch the sunrise and say "Glory to Thee Who hadst shown forth the Light" (doxology); there you hear the nightingale chirping, all the birds chanting, the stream gurgling — everything hymns God. In the countryside a person **comes closer to God**.

Christ went into the countryside so as to pray to His Heavenly Father, to rest a little and so that His disciples

could also rest. But the people, who had lost Him, got upset. Where is Christ? the men asked. Where is Christ? the women wondered. Mum, where is Christ? asked the young, innocent children, whom the Lord loved — He would put His hand on their heads and would embrace them. They couldn't endure living without Him for even one day.

A person can live without a house, without money, without a wife or children, but without Christ, without God, a person can't live. A fish can't live without water, a bird can't live without air and a person can't live without God. Christ fills a person's soul, his heart feels something lofty.

So they sought Christ. And what happened? Something unheard of. The men left their work, the women left their houses, the children left their schools, and a whole group of people, 15,000 people, left and went far away! They climbed over the hills, walked through meadows, crossed rivers and gullies... whenever they were asked, "Who do you seek?" they answered, "We are searching for Christ."

Eventually they found Him in the countryside, and their joy was great. Their joy was equal to that of a thirsty person who finds fresh water, or to a poor person's joy when he finds a priceless treasure while digging in the earth. They were happy to see Christ. Then Christ started to teach them, and they listened to Him carefully. Their souls absorbed His words like a sponge absorbs water.

The hours passed, it became midday. Midday passed, it was now 3p.m., then 4p.m., then 5p.m. The sun started to set, and they were still there. The children didn't think of their games, nor the men their work; everyone was concentrated on listening to Christ's teachings. After that, Christ spread out His arms and healed the sick, and nobody moved from their places. But it was almost nightfall and they had to return to their homes; and of course they would have been hungry.

So what did Christ do? He took five loaves of barley bread and two fish and what did He do? The faithless may not believe this, it's their right — but **He blessed them**. And what happened because of that? Those five loaves of bread fed 5,000 men, double the amount of women and small children, and there were enough leftovers to fill twelve baskets!

What does this tell us? Something that people have forgotten. That Christ's blessing is something mighty, it is a very strong thing. People haven't understood this, but they

will. One crumb, a handful of flour, if blessed by Christ, is enough to feed a whole town. But if there isn't Christ's blessing: sow, reap, gather, fill your storerooms, it won't be enough to feed even one person. If Christ's blessing is there, a little is enough to feed many.

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This is what today's Gospel reading teaches us, my brethren – that all of them ran to Christ, and that we should also run to Christ.

But where is Christ? you'll say. If He was here on this earth, we'd also run to Him, we'd leave our jobs to go and see Him, and listen to Him, so He could make us well, so we could get His blessing. But now, where is He?

Faithless people, **Christ is here**, in church! If you have faith, Christ is here, undivided – His words, His body and blood are on the holy altar. He's here. It is here that He teaches, here that He blesses, here that He heals. Whoever approaches with faith can meet Him. In the middle of the Divine Liturgy we receive Him and hear the Cherubic Hymn: "Let us who mystically represent the Cherubim...that we may receive the King of All..." At that moment, my brethren, we don't touch this earth, we are like the angels, ready to receive Christ our King. With the eyes of our soul we see Him, we hear Him, we commune of Him.

So since Christ is here, what do we need to do? We need to run close to Him. As soon as the church bell is heard we should grow wings on our feet and everyone should **come to church**. Do we do this? No. Where does everyone go? You're asking me? On Sunday morning, take a look at the train stations, the main roads, the ports, to see where everyone goes in large groups! Others go to the beach, men and women all together; others head to the mountains for hiking, others to their hunting traps... everyone goes to some sort of enjoyment, and the churches on Sunday are empty. But if a movie is played in the village, or a gypsy comes with a bear, if there's a festival or dance, then even the lamest old woman will go and watch those unsightful things. Does the bell ring? "Knock on the door of a deaf person as much as you like..."<sup>1</sup> In Asia Minor they didn't have bells, the Turks wouldn't allow them, but even without bells, the churches were full; nobody was absent, only nursing mothers and the ill remained at home. Those were holy years. Now you, their grandchildren, have defiled our days, you've abandoned everything holy and blessed and those bells will judge us on Judgment Day. Back then, without bells, the churches were full; now, with loud, resonant bells, nobody goes to church.

That's why I said that those 5,000+ people will judge us. Even if there was only one church in the country, we should still travel kilometres to go there. If our body gets sick, if there is a pain in our heart or lungs or kidneys, we travel to the major cities or even overseas [to go to a specialist]. In Africa there is a [Greek] heart surgeon and recently someone from Thessalonica went there, to the edge of the

world, to see him and be made well. If our hide gets sick, we head to Switzerland, Sweden, Norway or America to be healed. But here? The church is next door to you. I remember in one village, there was someone who lived next-door to the church and for 50 years he didn't take even one step to go inside and venerate! Do it now, while you're still on your feet. Of course, he will also go to church one day, but four people will be carrying him in [in his coffin]. But then it will be too late.

So, today, those who walked kilometres to find Christ, will judge us.

All of you here came to church, and that's good. But where are the others? I warn you that whoever is absent from church worship without a good reason, will face the consequences. The teacher notes your absences and doesn't pass you; in the army the sergeant does a roll-call and if you don't call out 'present,' you are considered a deserter. Oh, so you go there, but don't come here? Church is Christ's school and army. Are you absent one, two, three times? You won't make progress, you'll be a lawbreaker. Ah, you couples who defile Sunday, ah, you villagers who go to the fields, ah, you children who play in the streets, ah, you people who are so apathetic! You'll pay for your absence. Whoever is absent from church three times without a good reason, excommunicates themselves. They are not excommunicated by me, but by God.

So, whoever wants to be well with themselves, with church and with God, should take care, each time that the bell rings, to be in church, so as to have the blessing of our Lord Jesus Christ now and until the ages, Amen.

*(†) Bishop Augoustinos*

1. A Greek saying implying that your efforts will be in vain.