

THE INNER FLAME

15/04/2012

Brothers and sisters, you should see what I am seeing! Here I am, standing across the road. Hundreds of you are looking out towards my direction with a dark golf course and Bellevue Hill in the background...

But you should see what I am seeing!

I see hundreds of people with hearts on fire! And no, I am not talking about jewellery(!). I am talking about that flame you are all holding tonight... close to your heart! The way the flames are playing in the darkness... the eyes of my soul are seeing the unique faces of hundreds people lit up by the flame of their heart. From where I am standing, you... this community we call the church, η εκκλησία... you, I say, are an awe-inspiring vision! Hundreds of you have gathered here at midnight to celebrate Easter... Orthodox Christian style. God-parents have diligently gone out and supplied their god-children with all sorts of beautifully decorated candles, we call *lambadhes*. Parents have dressed up their children in their best clothes and have brought them... way past their bedtime, to church.

A few moments ago the church was dark, all the lights were switched off... you could not see next to you. There was only one little flame of fire... in the sanctuary, in the *iero*. Then the flame was brought out, and as we spread the flame to each other's candles, we chanted:

*"Come and receive the light,
from the never-setting light
and glorify Christ who has risen from the dead."*

*"Δεύτε λάβετε φως,
εκ του ανεσπέρου φωτός
και δοξάσατε Χριστόν τον αναστάντα εκ νεκρών."*

Brothers and sisters, what I would like to talk to you about tonight... is the *inner flame*. The flame in our heart is like the flame you are holding tonight. It needs to be looked after. It needs to be shielded from the wind. Some of us will tonight carefully take the flame home and light up our oil-lamps *at home*, our *kantiles*. This is very symbolic. So is the fact that we distributed the flame to each other. The flame of faith is passed on from parent to child, from grand-parent to child and god-parent to child. Thus, if the flame of faith is not passed on to each new generation, the next generation may very well live without this flame... and we can see the results all the time.. a life without the light of the Spirit of God is a dark, crook, miserable and decaying existence.

Jesus Christ, who was the Word of God incarnate said it as clearly as you can get:

"I am the light of the world.

*Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness,
but will have the light of life."* (John 8:12)

And there it is, without light there is no life... and the same applies in a spiritual sense. If there is no light in our souls, then we cannot speak of life, but decay and emptiness and nothingness.

Writing one thousand six hundred years ago, St John, the Golden Mouth, Chrysostomos, had this to say:

"If someone pours water or dirt upon the flame of a lamp, it goes out, and this also happens if they simply pour all the oil out of it - in the same manner the gift of grace is extinguished. If you have filled your mind with earthly things, if you have given yourself up to the cares of daily business, you have already quenched the Spirit. The flame goes out when there is not enough oil, that is when we do not show charity. The Spirit came to you by God's mercy; and so if it does not find corresponding fruits of mercy in you, it will flee away from you. For the Spirit does not make its dwelling in the unmerciful soul."

In one of the Bible's more controversial passages, Jesus Christ said: *"I have come to bring fire on the earth..."* (Luke 12:49) And he goes on to describe how this may very well bring about division within families and within human relationships... and so we should expect that and be ready for that. But, the fire he is talking about is the fire of the Spirit, the fire of the love of God - *θείος έρως*. Someone in love with the divine, on fire in their heart for the Spirit of Good... may very well not be understood by other people, including their own family.

According to St Barsanouphios when we receive this fire within us... all our human faculties begin to burn within like a fireplace with burning logs... [the fire inside us] crackles and smokes until it is properly alight. But when all the logs *are* properly alight, they appear to be *permeated* with fire, and produce a pleasing light and warmth without smoke and crackling. So it is with human beings. Wrestling with the Spirit of faith is something which at the start is difficult, is a struggle, is troublesome. But that is the first stage, the stage of purification - *katharsis*. Once we move on to the stages of *photisis* and *theosis*, that is enlightenment and deification... then we are at peace and in communion with the Spirit.

Tonight, is the fourteenth and last instalment of a series of sermons I having been giving on various themes from the *Philokalia*, an anthology of Orthodox Christian spiritual writings from the 4th to the 15th centuries, compiled two hundred years ago and only published in English a few decades ago. The entire series is available for you to read on our Twitter page. [Simply search @stgeorgerosebay]

I will finish with an excellent quote from the early Christian writer Origenis:

*"When a saying of the Lord kindles
the imagination of a hearer of the Word
and makes them enamored of the Wisdom
that bursts into flames at the sight of any beauty,
then 'the fire of the Lord has come down upon them.'"*

So there it is. Beauty and goodness in one Greek word *kallos*... and *philokalia* refers to us falling in love with the beauty and goodness of God. That beauty in

creation is the way God talks to us. Beauty in life, beauty in people... not external beauty, but internal beauty... is what makes life good and godly.

Brothers and sisters, tonight's Easter message is simple...

keep the Christian flame alive!

Christos Anesti!