

Date: September 24, 2022

September: 15th Sunday After the Pentecost

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

During the vigil service on Monday evening, Christ's cross is brought out to be elevated in Orthodox cathedrals. This is a wonderful and significant service, not to be missed! In parishes, the cross is brought out, but not elevated.

#### **MATTHEW 22: 35-46**

*Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law?*

*Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.*

*This is the first and great commandment.*

*And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*

*On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*

*While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them,*

*Saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The Son of David.*

*He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying,*

*The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool?*

*If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?*

*And no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions.*

This lawyer asked Jesus a question. Asking questions is generally a good thing to do. I may ask a question about something that I don't know about, hoping to learn about something new, something that can bring me benefit. I can ask a question about something that threatens me, for example, a medical question about my health. The answer might help me come up with a plan for my treatment. If the answer points to the treatment of a life-threatening condition, my question might even save my own life.

But a question may also be asked with nefarious intent. A questioner may frame his question in a way to entrap another person. A fraudster, for example, frames his conversation in such a way that when he asks a person, especially an elderly person, for his bank account number, the responder gives him this information freely, having been misled to think that the questioner wants to help him in some way.

What was the substance of the lawyer's question in this Gospel account? What was his motivation? It appears at first glance to be a good question, even an important one. But in reality, it was both an evil question and a foolish one. How do we know what the lawyer's motivation was? His motivation is revealed by the evangelist himself, who tells us directly that the lawyer was tempting Jesus.

Why was it a foolish question? Because he was trying to entrap the Savior into an answer which would be used to harm or even kill Him. Who was he trying to entrap? Isn't Jesus God? Isn't God all-knowing? Would He not immediately understand what the lawyer was attempting to do? Doesn't the lawyer know that Jesus is the Messiah? Yes, without doubt, he does. Therefore, we can say that what he was attempting to accomplish was a futile endeavour, thus a foolish one.

Well then, why was he attempting to do something that was futile and stupid? Because sin is so powerful, it can completely blind a person to do very foolish things, deluding him into thinking he could get away

with it. A powerful proof is given when we see the devil attempting to entice the Savior into accepting and submitting to his control over Him. This happened after the Savior fasted for forty days in the desert, before coming out to begin His mission.

Why was this also an evil question? Because if he had been successful in compromising Jesus, thus damaging or destroying His Mission, salvation for all humanity would be a lost cause. In addition to this, the question was both evil and foolish at the same time, because the lawyer knew the answer to his own question beforehand. The two major commandments that Jesus responded with were already found in Old Testament Scripture, something that the lawyer was an expert in.

The Savior's answer to this lawyer, on the other hand, was very subtle and holy. He responded to evil with good, teaching us how to respond ourselves when we are faced with a question or attack that has evil intentions. Usually, when we are attacked, we defend ourselves by attacking back in response. We fight evil with evil. But Jesus instructs us to turn "turn our cheek", in other words, to respond to evil with good. And this attack by the lawyer gives Jesus another opportunity to teach people about the nature of divine love.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, through this passage, we are taught several important lessons. We are warned to always to be careful in our dealings with people. Evil is foolish but still very persistent. As the saying goes, not everything that glitters is gold. And the Gospel warns us to be "wise as a serpent". We are even given a wonderful example of how to respond to a loaded and evil question. We should always respond to evil with good, contrary to what the world teaches us. We also see, through Jesus' example, that we should use all occasions in our lives as an opportunity to preach our faith. We are commanded by Jesus to love all people. What better way to show our love for all people than by using all opportunities to witness our faith to them? A simple, even subtle, witness can at times open a path leading to true faith and salvation. God gives these opportunities. Let us use them well.

With Much Love in Christ,  
Archpriest Serge Kotar