

request the priests to bring the sacraments to each other. St. Paul wrote:

“encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called ‘Today,’ so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”
(Heb. 3:13)

St. James wrote:

“Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises. Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.”
(James 5:13-16)

The Church, other Christians, are necessary for spiritual growth, just as much as light is necessary for physical growth. If we avoid the light of other Christians we will eventually wither and die spiritually. Being a member of the Body of Christ, the Church, is not an option for Orthodox Christians, it is an absolute necessity. Our Holy Fathers and Mothers knew that attending church just on Sunday was the bare minimum to stay alive spiritually. But to really grow they needed the light much more often.

My vegetable garden at home is dying because I mistakenly placed it in an area that doesn't get enough sunlight. What my garden needs and what our holy fathers and mothers knew they needed is more light. What was true for them is still true for us today.

Conclusion

We need to listen to the words of our Lord and take them to heart (as the Fathers of ecumenical councils did):

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father Who is in heaven.” Amen!



The Light of the World

“Just as plants cannot grow without the light of the Sun, so Christians cannot grow without the light of Christ *and* the light of other Christians.”

Homily given at All Saints Orthodox Church
on the Sunday of the Holy Fathers
of the 4th Ecumenical Council, July 19, 2009
by Fr. Nicholas Sorensen

†Gospel: Matt. 5:14-19 (RSV)

“The Lord said to His Disciples: “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father Who is in heaven. Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them, but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.””

Introduction

Light is a wonderful creation of God. We still don't know exactly what it is, but we can describe what it does and how it acts. We know that light is necessary for growth of plants and animals. It allows us to see the beauty of God's creation—the stars, the trees, the clouds, the sky—and to identify each other and the creatures that God has made. The development of the laser has allowed us to use light in a myriad of creative and helpful ways. It is even being used to help heal, to diagnose, and to perform surgery. We know that without light we would die and that all life on this planet would die.

All these wonderful things we know about physical light—created light. Is it so hard to believe that the uncreated light of the world, our Lord Jesus Christ himself is at least similar? Might we not say the same things of Him as we just said about the physical light? Of course—and even more.

But our text even further extends this concept of light. Jesus who is the light of the world tells His disciples that they are also the light of the world. We should note here that Jesus is not referring to individuals as light but to the group or body of Christians i.e. the Church. What are the implications of this for us today? Let's briefly take a look.

Christians Are Light Only in a Reflective Sense

First, Jesus of course is the true Light of the World. There is no other light but what comes from Jesus. The Church is called light therefore only in a reflective sense. It is because the Church is the

Body of Christ and Christ is the light of the world that the Church is also the light of the World. The light that the Church has is not her own—it is the light of Christ. Like the moon, which reflects the sun's light, Christians reflect the light of Christ, the Son of God.

The Light of World Must Be Seen

Second, to paraphrase, Jesus said “Don't hide the light. Let it shine.” His instruction to the Church is to let the light shine in this world of darkness. The light of Christ is for everyone. It should not be kept only for a few to see. It should not be hidden away so that no one can see. It should be allowed to shine brightly into all the world, (as the Fathers of the 7 Ecumenical Councils did).

We must understand as the Church of Christ that anything we do to make the light of Christ hard to see is not fulfilling our Lord's command in our text. When we cover the light in a language that few understand, we are hiding the light. When we do not welcome people into our parish or reach out to our neighbors, then we are hiding the light. When we do not act like Christians while in the world (at our work place, at our school, in the mall etc.), we are hiding the light.

Christians as Light Are Necessary for Spiritual Growth of Other Christians

Third, just as plants cannot grow without the light of the Sun, so Christians cannot grow without the light of Christ and the light of other Christians. St. Paul wrote to the early Christians:

“Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”

(Heb. 10:24-25)

Coming together for instruction in the apostles' teaching, for prayer and reception of the Body and Blood of Christ was considered so essential by the early Christians that they gathered together every day of the week (not just on Sunday—see Acts 2:42).

“They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”

(Acts 2:42)

The Church, other Christians, are necessary to shine the light of encouragement on their brothers and sisters, they listen to each other and confess their sins to each other, they pray for each other and