

THE THIRTEENTH FLOWER: THEY ARE GOD'S WORDS AND DEEDS

“Truly, our only hope is in God’s mercy, and not in our works or merits, whatever they may be.”¹

All honor, worship and glory is due to Him the True God, my Savior. The focus of my life from now on is to be ready at all times with the Church and doing whatever honors and glorifies Him. My actions are in His name and for His name. I will be with the Church, in the Church, praying and worshipping Him when I am not ministering to others. I am always in need of direction and guidance for every step in whatever I do.

Many times I wondered about the inclusion of unfamiliar names and some unnecessary details in your Gospel, O Lord, until I realized that there is a meaning and a revelation behind each one of them. I realized, in the last chapter, that there is a lesson for me to learn and I did. I had not realized that I should expect a lesson behind each word. I realized too late that I should be attentive to your whispering voice and that I must always be in a state of grace.

I often judge people by the way they were brought up and identify them with their immediate family, relatives, and acquaintances. I label them without looking into their hearts, actions and dedication and I approach them or distance myself from them accordingly. I classify them as being “good” people or “bad” ones. But, as always, you reveal to me through simple messages a teaching that is different and above any teaching and you push me to transcend beyond the thinking of the society. And so, having recognized my attitude, I believe that the reason behind the inclusion of the names of “Manaen who had been brought up with Herod² the tetrarch and Saul”³ is to tell me to see the people in different perspective as God sees them.

Manaen was brought up with Herod. Each one chose a different way of life; Manaen accepted and followed God’s Grace meanwhile Herod refused it. Manaen was counted among the prophets and the teachers while Herod stayed outside the gates of repentance and ultimately, Salvation. Saul was also counted among the prophets and

¹ *The Diary of a Russian Priest*, Alexander Elchaninov, (SVS Press, New York, 1982), p. 112.

² Herod Antipas, he beheaded John the Baptist Luke, 3: 19, Matthew 14: & Mark 6: 7, for more information on Herod check http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herod_Antipas.

³ Acts 13: 1.

teachers regardless of his previous actions against the faithful. His acceptance of Christ as the Savior and his repentance surpassed all his previous actions.

These two persons, O Lord, who I was judging according to their upbringing, became, by your grace and their devotion in prayer and fasting, vessels of the Holy Spirit. Manaen laid hands on Barnabas with the Church and Saul became the preacher by excellence.⁴

Through your words and actions, O Lord, salvation is offered to every person. They are to heal every soul even though these words are very hard to understand and the actions are difficult to be imitated. Yes, some will see them as difficult to accept and to live by them. But I, knowing your compassionate love, and as one who has experienced and was lifted up by your tender mercy, am continuously learning through them lessons for life. I understand your words and actions as gifts of restoration, healing and salvation.

Paul was blinded in order to receive the true Light as the sorcerer who he met was blinded by “the Hands of God”⁵ for awhile so that he would repent and believe.⁶ This act of blindness made the proconsul Sergius Paulus believe⁷ because he was able to distinguish between the work of God and the work of evil. He was able to see the truth that was blinded by his ignorance for “the essence of spiritual blindness consists in the fact of not seeing the truth.”⁸

I am very fearful, O Lord, to hastily read your words. I am afraid of missing the meaning of your messages; the treasures that are covered between your inspired words and actions. I still want to rush and finish the readings but I feel something is delaying me. Discovering your treasures is my task now. I start to listen carefully and ask deep-routed questions. I begin to tremble and stand in wonder in front of each word asking your Spirit to guide me and reveal your wisdom to me. I am seeking your knowledge and not mine. My search and discovery are your gifts to me, and only through your Church, I will be exposed to your revelations. The writings of the Holy Fathers are other tools that provide help, consolation and support for the seeker. Even though I am fearful of my

⁴ Acts 13: 2-3.

⁵ Acts 13: 11.

⁶ “The hand of the Lord acts not to inflict punishment for punishment’s sake, but to bring repentance and conversion, which proves fruitful in this case for the Proconsul (Sergius Paulus).” *The Orthodox Bible Study*.

⁷ Acts 13: 12.

⁸ *The Diary of a Russian Priest*, Alexander Elchaninov, (SVS Press, New York, 1982), p. 123.

discoveries, I am assured that I am not deviating from your path because of my membership in your body, the Church, O Lord.

Your teachings are endless. The more I read and listen to your words, the more I learn. Where is Barnabas? Where was John the beloved? Why did they give way to Paul and Peter? Why did they not brag that they were first in preaching in Antioch (in the case of Barnabas) and in arriving first to the empty tomb (in the case of John)?

It is the Word of God and not my word that has to be delivered. It is the message of God that has to be preached and not mine. Barnabas, Paul, Peter and John are only the bearers and the preachers of what the Holy Spirit has bestowed on them and put in their mouth. This is one lesson that I learned along with humility and respect that are among other lessons.

Your grace and mercy widen my vision; they enlarge my mind and they enlighten my soul. They teach me how to become the most useful person for your ministry sometimes as a leader, or as a teacher, or as a listener and sometimes by giving the way to others. The goal is to reach out and bring people to you. I am unworthy of any merit. It is all your work, O Lord. I always ask you for forgiveness and guidance to walk in your Commandment of Love and to draw people to you.

My ministry sometimes will not bear fruit where I planted your seed. Sometimes my efforts will land on hard soil (soul), but the thirsty soil (soul) will reach out to the unabsorbed water and quench its thirst that it may bear fruit.⁹

⁹ Acts 13: 50.