

## SUNDAY SERMON – 9<sup>TH</sup> MATTHEW –TEN COMMANDMENTS – 2015-08-02

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In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

This past week I had the blessing to serve with another six priests from our Metropolis at our Metropolis summer camp, at our Diakonia Center, St. Stephanos Church Summer Camp. This was the fifth session, all of which have been sold out, because so many of youth have discovered that they can have a great time and learn about their faith. While I was there I started reading a new book **WELCOME TO THE ORTHODOX CHURCH: An Introduction to Eastern Christianity** by Frederica Mathewes-Green. She and her family converted to the Orthodox Church. Both her husband and her son, Fr. Stephen Matthews, are priests. Her son was with us at St. Stephanos this past week and lead the music program. I just wanted to share one paragraph from the book with you all. I am hoping to use the book for our fall study and catechism class beginning in September.

*“The Eastern Christian Way includes the elements we’d associate with any spiritual path – prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and so forth – and they fit together organically, like the parts of a diet-and-exercise program. Somebody who doesn’t actually do the work or put it into practice won’t see any benefit (another way it’s like a diet-and-exercise program). But for those who do, transformation takes place. It happens in ways that are notable and recognizable, and even, in some cases, miraculous.” (p. 67)*

So Orthodoxy, she is making the point, is like a diet-and-exercise program. You can buy a gym membership or sign up for a diet program, but if you don’t actually do it, then you don’t get any of the benefit. Just joining a gym doesn’t get you into shape. Just signing on to a diet program doesn’t help you lose weight. It’s important for us really know what our faith is about, but then we have to actually try to live our faith. You have to actually do the work.

So today I am going to focus on the Ten Commandments. I am going to leave one out and talk about at the end. See if you figure out which one I left out.

YOU SHALL HAVE NO OTHER GODS BEFORE ME

Have you made God your first and top priority? Is your relationship with God more important than popularity, money, friends, sports or any other relationship that competes with God? Have you surrendered every part of your life to God – your time, your priorities, your values and your lifestyle?

### YOU SHALL NOT TAKE THE NAME OF THE LORD YOUR GOD IN VAIN

When you use the name of God, is it always with honor and respect, out of love and in thanksgiving for what it means, or do you use God's name either flippantly or, worse yet, to express anger or frustration?

### REMEMBER THE SABBATH DAY TO KEEP IT HOLY

Do set aside time regularly to be with God, to slow down and let God speak to you? Do you regularly and on a timely basis attend Sunday worship? Are you really attentive and prayerful when you come to the Divine Liturgy and other services?

### HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER

Do you respect and cherish your parents and, if you are a minor, recognize their authority over you as from God? Do try to make their responsibility easier for them? Do you tell them aloud how much you appreciate them and show that with your actions?

### YOU SHALL NOT KILL

Do you honor and respect all life (the unborn, animals, plants, etc.)? Do you share God's concern for the oppressed and persecuted people in the world?

### YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY

Do you recognize that a sexual relationship is to be exclusively engaged in by a man and women who have been married, ideally in the church? Sex is the exclusive sacred heart of marriage, not to be engaged in except in sacred marriage and only between the man and the woman who have contracted with God and with each other in that sacred marriage. Do you discipline your sexual desires, keeping yourself pure until you come together with the person God has prepared you for and has prepared for you to come together with in God's time in sacred marriage?

### YOU SHALL NOT STEAL

Have you taken something that does not belong to you? Do you work for what you get? Do you respect and protect the property of others? Do you refuse to go along with mischief that destroys the property of others?

### YOU SHALL NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS AGAINST YOUR NEIGHBOR

Do you always tell the truth? Do you reserve judgment against others until you know the facts? Do you engage in gossip? Do stand up for others when they are falsely blamed?

### YOU SHALL NOT COVET

Are content with what God has given you in possessions as well as talents and abilities? Can you affirm your own gifts and opportunities without feeling that someone else “got all the breaks”? Are you jealous of other people for having what you do not have in terms of popularity, possessions or achievements?

Okay, so which one did I leave out? (Pause) I left out the second commandment. Here's how it reads:

*“You shall not make yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or on the earth beneath, or that is in the water below. You shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God.”* (Exodus 20:3-5)

We did a priorities and values exercise with the kids about the burning house. They had five minutes to gather whatever they needed before evacuating their home with the possibility they would lose everything else. I shared with them that when we were living in San Diego, as with now on the West Coast, we had to evacuate our house because of fires. There were fires to the south of us. There were fires to the east of us. There were fires to the north of us...and guess which way the winds were blowing...toward the west. We were boxed in. We had to evacuate our house and take whatever we could gather in five minutes. We were blessed to stay at the condo of a friend on the beach, though even there it was difficult to breath because of the smoke. This exercise helped them what was really important to them. We then asked them, “How valuable would these things be in five or ten years? Will it be more or less important to you?” Ultimately we realized that beyond family and perhaps pets, our computer, important papers and cell phones, the most important thing was our relationship with God. If anything is more important than God, it has become a false

idol that we worship in place of God. It could be a person, thing, an idea or even our own image or reputation. God wants us to clearly identify Him as the only God in our life. Then everything else will find its proper place.

“But Father what about icons? Aren’t they idols?” Many Protestant Christians would accuse us of worshipping idols because we use icons in our worship. The Jewish Temple had Cherubim depicted on the curtain separating the Holy of Holies from the Court of the Faithful. The Ark of the Covenant itself had gold statues of the Cherubim and Seraphim depicted on it...and that was by God’s command. God, and only God, was worshipped in the Temple. God and only God is worshipped in an Orthodox Church.

Jesus, the Pre-Existing Logos and Word of God the Father, through Whom creation was spoken into existence, in the fullness of time took flesh from the Virgin Mary. Since He took on a physical existence, a physical nature, we can use physical means to depict Him.

Icons are “theology in color” and “windows into heaven”. They help us teach and explain our faith and remind us of the presence of God, His angels and the saints in our worship. Icons are stylized to depict a sanctified and spiritually perfected reality. As children of God, each of us has been created in God’s Image, though His likeness has been distorted through sin, both ancestral and personal sin, in a fallen world. Through living our faith, with physical and spiritual askesis (exercise) and in receiving the sacraments, we work with God and His Holy Church to restore God’s perfect likeness in ourselves and in others in a community of love.

That is what are doing here today. That is especially what we were doing during our week at St. Stephen’s Church camp. God has blessed us with the Diakonia Center in Salem, South Carolina. Our Metropolitan has set a goal of building a new church there in time for Pascha 2016. He has asked for our help in accomplishing this great goal. We worship God. We venerate, we show honor to and kiss the icons of the saints. We treat one another with the love and respect due to a living icon of Christ Jesus. Let us seek to love God by loving one another and together glorifying His Holy Name.

To God be the glory, now and forever, and to the ages of ages, Amen.

