

*"Be Wise and Skillful"* (1Cor 6:12-20)

\* Today we celebrate both *the Second Sunday after Epiphany and St. Peter as apostle, confessor, and martyr.* The text from John's Gospel draws our attention to the supreme testimonies regarding Christ, the Lord of all creation and about us to whom God entrusted his words. Significantly Peter's confession, his life and his death loudly declare the same things about Jesus and us.

\* Generally speaking the Church celebrates Epiphany in remembrance of the appearance of our Savior. But, additionally, there were other two appearances at the time when Jesus was baptized in the Jordan. The Scripture says, "... and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," (Mat 3:16-17). Theologians call the physical appearances of the Father as a voice, the Holy Spirit as a dove; and the Son as a man, a "Theophany." Inasmuch as "Epiphany" refers to the appearing of a deity it can be replace the word "Theophany".

\* Friends, let me introduce you another Greek word, "Parousia," that means "reappearance." This word stands for Christ's appearance to the world in the end of the ages. Therefore Parousia complements Epiphany giving us a new perspective, a new vision. The motive of God's appearing was not done to amuse or to scare people; but to address our sin and salvation. As it's written "so also, after Christ was offered once to *bear the sins of many*, to those who eagerly await him he will appear a second time, not to bear sin but to bring salvation." (Heb 9:28).

\* While we were learning Greek we determined two important things regarding Christ's appearing. He came to justify sinners and to save the believers who are eagerly waiting for him. Scripture says that Christ suffered and died for the sin of the entire world, providing the way for people to believe and be saved. He says, "I am the door. If anyone enters through me, he will be saved, and will come in and go out, and find pasture. .... I have come so that they may have life, and may have it abundantly," (Joh 10:9-10). Christ's work for us is the solid ground of our salvation because Christ fulfilled the Father's will perfectly and gave us the Holy Spirit. By believing Christ's words and trusting Him unconditionally people will never be ashamed now and the ages to come.

\* Once the voice from the Heaven was heard in Jesus' baptism and it was heard at the second time in the day of transfiguration. As it says, "He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him," (Mt 17:5). The importance of the message was verified by its duplication. No doubt, God wants us to take this message very seriously. Alas! Not everybody listens; like Jonah, for example. We know how God ordered Jonah to go to Nineveh to preach to the Assyrians about judgment and repentance. "But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD." It is not necessary to tell everything you know about Jonah's trial to make a point. The Bible provides some number of persons who refused to listen and obey God's words and effect was always same, painful. But if people felt sorrow for sins and repented, God showed them mercy.

\* As I said earlier, today is the day of commemoration of St. Peter. Let's remember several things about Peter. Upon receiving a call he immediately gave up his business and followed for Christ. (Mt 4:20). Like Jonah, Peter

went through great trial and distress. It shaped his character. Having been tested Peter received his commission, "Feed my lambs," "Tend my sheep," "Feed my sheep." The book of Acts, Epistles and tradition confirm that Peter never denied Jesus again. The Lord built his Church on the foundation of the apostles and prophets including Peter, as was promised, (Eph 2:19). According to tradition, Peter was condemned to death, and crucified at Rome. Hegesippus says that Nero pursued a matter against Peter to put him to death; but when it became known to the disciples they pleaded with Peter to leave Rome. When Peter decided to go he went through the gate where he had a vision of the Lord Christ coming to meet him. Worshipfully, he said, "Lord, where do you go?" and the Lord said, "I am come again to be crucified." By this, Peter understood the will of the Lord and returned into the city. Jerome says that he was crucified, his head being down and his feet upward, because he was (he said) unworthy to be crucified after the same form and manner as the Lord was. The Roman Church considers Peter's execution to have been in 67 AD. No doubt Peter was greatly gifted compared to us. God's grace grew in him proportionately to the wisdom he had learned from the Lord.

\* Now let's slightly switch the subject and listen what the Word of God says through St. Paul in 1Cor 6:12-20, today's Sunday reading. "All things are lawful for me," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be enslaved by anything. "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food"--and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. (1Co 6:12,13) This message teaches that Christ granted us freedom to live by the Spirit and freedom to use and enjoy anything that comes from God. But Christians should not abuse this freedom and hurt themselves or others. Drinking too much leads to alcoholism; gluttony leads to being overweight, flirting leads to adultery. Friends, we need to be wise with the things God has allowed to enjoy and not grow into bad habits that will control us.

\* I think all of us experienced trials because of refusing to listen to God's words, but like Jonah and Peter we asked forgiveness and the Lord showed us his mercy washing away our transgressions. When God disciplines his children it helps them to fear God more, love God more and it humbles them. Thanks be to God.

\* Friends, when a pilot manually flies an aircraft he constantly makes many errors in speed, altitude, direction, bank, time, engine's settings and so on. Do you know why a pilot makes many errors? Because keeping and handling all parameters together is far beyond our human capabilities. Some years ago I learned that a skillful pilot is not one who makes fewer mistakes but one who is able to notice and correct those mistakes. The aircraft accident involving 150 people above New York is still fresh in our memories. All were lucky because one guy among them was a skilful pilot; he made corrections fast and successfully landed his Boeing upon the water. Similarly Christians, living in a "hostile atmosphere," are not able to control their flesh perfectly but by Christ's power and grace they are able to prevent bad habits that threaten people's physical and spiritual life. Finally we conclude this sermon keeping these two things in mind, "Be Wise and Skillful." Thanks be to God. Amen.