

## The Gospel of John – 3.a

**<sup>1</sup>Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.**

- ❖ Nicodemus was educated, a Pharisee, a member of a class of scribes (theologians) who studied the scriptures every day, a leader and member of the Sanhedrin (23 or 71 members of a Rabbinical Court)

**<sup>2</sup>This one came to Jesus by night, and said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one is able to do these signs which You do unless God be with him.” <sup>3</sup>Jesus answered and said to him, “Verily, verily (the double, *amen*, confirms what he is saying, Bp. Gerasimos), I say to you, except one should be born again, he is not able to see the kingdom of God.”**

Understanding is not so much a pre-requisite of Baptism but the fruit of having been baptized.

Saint Chrysostom: “That is to say, ‘Unless you are born again and receive the right doctrines, you are in error and wandering somewhere afar from the kingdom of the heavens.’ But He does not speak as plainly as this; but in order to make the saying less hard to bear, He speaks by generalizing, ‘Except one should be born again’ (ἐάν μή τις γεννηθῆ)...Now what He says is something like this: ‘If you are not born again, if you partake not of the Spirit which is through the washing of regeneration [cf. Tit. 3:5], you cannot have a right opinion about Me, for the opinion which you have is not spiritual, but carnal (un-inspired).’ But He did not speak thus, refusing to strike one who had brought such as he had, and who had spoken to the best of his ability. The word ‘again’ in this place, some understand to mean ‘from heaven,’ others ‘from the beginning.’ ‘It is impossible,’ says Christ, ‘for one not so born to see the kingdom of God,’ in this pointing to Himself and declaring that there is another beside the natural sight, and that we have need of other eyes to see Christ.”

“Born again” (γεννηθῆ ἄνωθεν). The word *anōthen* originally meant “from above” [cf. Jn. 3:31, 19:11], then “from the first or beginning” [cf. Lk. 1:2], then “again” [cf. Gal. 4:9], and even “from the top” [cf. Jn. 19:23; Mk. 15:38]. Nicodemus takes the meaning to be “again,” a second birth from the womb.

Gregory of Nazianzus: “And indeed from the Spirit comes our new birth, and from the new birth our new creation, and from our new creation our deeper knowledge of the dignity of Him from whom it is derived.”

Saint Symeon the New Theologian: “Those who have been born anew through the Spirit and by His gift have become the brothers of Christ and sons of God and gods by adoption, by grace abide in God and God in them [1 Jn. 4:12ff.]” [The Discourses, Ch. XV, § 3, p. 195.] “Those who have not yet been baptized in the Holy Spirit [Mt. 3:11] and have not been born from above, how shall they see the glory of those who have been born from above, those who have been begotten of God and have become children of God [Jn. 1:13, 12]?”

**<sup>4</sup>Nicodemus said to Him, “How is a man able to be born when he is old? He is not able to enter the womb of his mother a second *time*, and be born, is he?” <sup>5</sup>Jesus answered, “Verily,**

**verily, I say to you, unless one should be born of water and of *the* Spirit, he is not able to enter into the kingdom of God. <sup>6</sup>“That which has been born of the flesh is flesh; and that which has been born of the Spirit is spirit.**

“...what does it mean to *know* the Holy Spirit, to *have* Him, and to *be in* Him? ...No one can know Christ without having heard about Him and His teachings...but it is not an exaggeration to say that with the Holy Spirit this sequence – knowledge *about*, then knowledge *of*, and finally communion *with* is reversed. There is nothing we can merely know *about* the Holy Spirit. Even the testimony of those who truly knew Him...means nothing to us if we have not had the same experience...we know the Holy Spirit only by His presence in us, the presence manifested above all by ineffable joy, peace and fullness.” (Of Water and Spirit, Schmemmann).”

Theodoret of Cyr: “If the only meaning of baptism were remission of sins, why would we baptize newborn children who have not yet tasted of sin? ...It (baptism) is a promise of greater and more perfect gifts. It is the type of the future resurrection, a communion with the Master’s passion, a participation in His resurrection, a mantle of salvation, a tunic of gladness, a garment of light.”

Gregory of Nyssa: “We know too, that the flesh is subject to death because of sin, but the Spirit of God is both incorruptible and life-giving and beyond death. We learn that we should wean ourselves from this life in the flesh, which has an inevitable follower, death; and that we should search for a way of life that does not bring death along with it.”

<sup>7</sup>**“Do not begin to wonder that I said to you, ‘It is needful for you to be born again.’ <sup>8</sup>“The wind blows wheresoever it is naturally disposed, and you hear its sound, but you know not from what place it comes and where it goes; thus is everyone who has been born of the Spirit.” <sup>9</sup>Nicodemus answered and said to Him, “How can these things be?” <sup>10</sup>Jesus answered and said to him, “You are the teacher of Israel, and know not these things?**

Chrysostom: “Jesus never accuses Nicodemus of wickedness but only of simplicity and a lack of wisdom. What connection does this birth have with Jewish doctrines? The first man that was made, the woman that was made from his rib, the barren that bears (Hannah,, the mother of Samuel), the miracles that were worked by means of water, Elisha’s bring up the iron axe head from the river (2 Kings 6:6), the passage of the Red Sea, these were all types of the spiritual birth and purification that would take place in the future?

<sup>11</sup>**“Verily, verily, I say to you that We speak (“we” is a reference to John and his readers engaged in dialogue with the Jewish leaders : Beher) **that which We know, and We bear witness of that which We have seen; and you receive not Our testimony.** <sup>12</sup>**“If I told you earthly things and you believe not, how shall you believe if I tell you heavenly things?****

Cyril of Alexandria: “He advises Nicodemus to accept in simple faith what he cannot understand.”

The ‘Son of Man’ ascends to heaven on the Cross and in some sense descends returns to earth in the person of the Paraclete...the Holy Spirit makes Jesus present on earth as the Son of Man (the title used by John for the one who is exalted and glorified on the Cross). (Behr)