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The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church Faith and Order

The Fifth Sunday of Zemene Asterio (*The Season of Manifestation (Theophany)*)

Liturgical Readings:

1 Cor. 15:12-32; 2 Pet. 3: 10- end; Acts 20: 28 -end

Psalm 132:15-16;

Luke 12:32-43

The Anaphora of Saint Athanasius

“Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning.”

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, One God. Amen.

Beloved faithful in Christ, today the Holy Scriptures invite us to awaken our hearts to vigilance, to the ever-present expectation of our Lord’s coming, and to the holiness to which we are called. Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Gospel of Luke declares: “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord” (Luke 12:32-36). Here, the Saviour summons us to spiritual readiness. The “little flock” to whom He speaks are the faithful, those who trust not in the wealth and security of this world but in the promise of eternal life. To “gird our loins” is to prepare ourselves for service, as the servants of old girded themselves for labour, and to “keep our lights burning” is to maintain the radiance of faith, hope, and charity, illuminating the world with the witness of holiness.

Saint Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, reminds us that if Christ has not risen, our faith is in vain, and we are yet in our sins (1 Cor. 15:17). But Christ is indeed risen, the firstfruits of those who sleep, and through His resurrection, the faithful are assured of victory over death and the grave. Just as the patriarchs awaited the promises of God, so too are we called to wait with perseverance, girded in virtue, and burning with the light of faith, that we may share in the resurrection. It is a solemn reminder that our vigilance is not for earthly gain but for eternal inheritance. In the Old Testament, the psalmist declares: “I will abundantly bless her provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread. Her priests also will I clothe with salvation: and her saints shall shout aloud for joy” (Psalm 132:15-16). God’s blessing is prepared for those who serve Him with watchful hearts; His provision is spiritual and eternal.

The apostle Peter, speaking of the day of the Lord, reminds us that the heavens and the earth shall be dissolved with fervent heat, and that all holy living must be in expectation of that great and terrible day (2 Pet. 3:10-end). In this warning, we perceive the urgency of keeping our spiritual lamps burning, for none can know the hour of the Lord’s appearing. The servants who are ready, who watch and pray, will be rewarded, but the negligent and unprepared will face judgment. This echoes the words of our Lord in the parable of the ten virgins (Matt. 25), where the wise, whose lamps are trimmed and burning, enter with the bridegroom into the marriage feast, while the foolish are shut out.

In Acts, the holy apostle Paul exhorts the elders of the Church: “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the Church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock” (Acts 20:28- 30). Here is a call to watchfulness not only for our own souls but for the souls entrusted to our care,

to protect the Church as the Bride of Christ, to guide the flock with humility, vigilance, and fidelity. In this responsibility, our loins must be girded, and our lights ever burning, for the day of our Lord comes as a thief in the night, sudden and unforeseen.

We observe throughout the Scriptures the recurrent call to readiness. The patriarch Joseph, though in Egypt, kept himself faithful and vigilant, preserving the lives of many during the famine. Daniel, though exiled, prayed and remained faithful, his lamps of righteousness burning in the darkness of Babylon. The prophets, John the Baptist, and the apostles all exemplify the vigilance demanded of the faithful. Our Lord Himself warns: "Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not" (Luke 12:40). And as the parable continues, "Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing" (Luke 12:43). The blessing of readiness is eternal, for it aligns our will to God's will, transforms our deeds into light, and sustains our hope even in the shadows of this world.

Beloved, what do we learn from these holy words? First, that we must not rely on the fleeting securities of this life. Wealth, comfort, and human power decay like the grass and wither as the flower. Second, that our focus must always be on heavenly treasures, the fruits of obedience, mercy, and love, which no moth can consume, and no thief can steal. Third, that vigilance is both personal and communal: our own souls must be prepared, and we must watch over the flock, feeding them with the Word and guiding them with care. Finally, we learn that the Lord's coming may be sudden, yet His timing is perfect, and those who are ready shall inherit the joy of His kingdom.

Therefore, let us gird our loins with humility and virtue, let us keep our lamps burning with charity, patience, and prayer. Let our hearts be awake to the signs of His coming, our hands busy in service, our mouths proclaiming His praise, and our lives a testimony to His glory. Let us not grow weary, nor be lulled by the comforts of this world, for the night is short and the day of the Lord is at hand. Let us be as faithful servants, ready at every hour, that we may hear Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant... enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (Matt. 25:21).

Beloved faithful, gird your loins and keep your lights burning, for the Kingdom of God is near. Walk in holiness, pray without ceasing, love without measure, and give to the poor with generous hands. Be vigilant, as the saints of old were vigilant, and be bold in faith, for the Almighty God reigns and His promise endures forever. Glory to Him who was, and is, and is to come!

Glory to the Almighty God!
Amen.