My Beloved Ones,

I greet you with love and joy in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

This Sunday, the Orthodox Church commemorates not a saint, or even an event, but an object. Now, we know as Christians that worship is due only to God, but our Church does have a long and rich tradition venerating objects which are holy. These of course include icons, relics of saints, and objects related to our Lord, such as the fragments of the True Cross. What is interesting about this Sunday’s observance, is that the object is neither an icon, a relic, neither does it concern our Lord’s earthly life. Instead, it is an object which came into contact with the early Church after our Lord’s Ascension: The Apostle Peter’s Precious Chains.

Some reading that might wonder why our Church would refer to such an object of punishment and humiliation as precious; but it is no different than when we refer to our Lord’s Precious and Life-giving Cross. We know, for example, of the story in the Gospel where the woman with the flow of blood was healed, only because she touched our Lord’s garments in a spirit of love and true faith.

In the same way, the chains with which King Herod Agrippa locked St. Peter into prison were to change from instruments of pain and torture to sacred objects. Now this King Herod was the grandson of the same named King who martyred the Holy Innocents, and like his namesake he had no love for the followers of the Messiah. He would begin by ordering the beheading of the Apostle James, but his great plan was to arrest St. Peter and other Christians, presenting them to the citizens of Jerusalem during the Passover, like our Lord on Great and Holy Friday.

It is in the Book of Acts that we read of what happened next: how in prison, “Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He tapped Peter on the side and woke him, saying, ‘Get up quickly.’ And the chains fell off his wrists” (Acts 12:7). Following his miraculous escape, some of the faithful kept these chains safe, and they were displayed to the faithful on January 16th in Constantinople. Though the chains were lost after the Fall of the City in 1453, we still hold fast to this commemoration, as a reminder that God has the ability to turn any situation from a negative into a positive. Though we no are no longer able to venerate these chains, this observance allows us to meditate on God’s mercy and his goodness, reflecting on our need to trust in Him to strengthen us, comfort us, and spiritual deliver us from the spiritual prison of negativity.

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