

# AUGUST PASSAGES 2006

Day	Vespers / Kellia	E7pistle /Apostle	Gospel
1 Tue Procession of the Cross <i>Fast</i>	1 Sam/Kngs 17:41-511	Cor 10:5-12	Mt 16:6-12
2 Wed Proto-Martyr Stephen; Venerable Photeini <i>Fast</i>	1 Sam/Kngs 18:1-91	Cor 10:12-22	Mt 16:20-24
3 Thur Isaac, Dalmatos, & Faustus of Dalmaton <i>Fast</i>	1 Sam/Kngs 20:1-7, 10-151	Cor 10:28-11:7	Mt 16:24-28
4 Fri Seven Sleepers of Ephesus <i>Fast</i>	1 Sam/Kngs 20:24-421	Cor 11:8-22	Mt 17:10-18
5 Sat Martyr Eusignios of Antioch <i>Wine &amp; Oil</i>	Ex 24:12-18	Rom 13:1-10	Mt 12:30-37
<b>6 Sunday Transfiguration of Christ (7) Fish, Wine, &amp; Oil</b>	Ex 33:11-23; 34:4-6, 8	2 Pet 1:10-19	Mt 17:1-9
7 Mon Martyrs Dometios and Sozon <i>Fast</i>	1/3 Kngs 19:3-9, 11-13, 15-16	1 Cor 11:31-12:6	Mt 18:1-11
8 Tue Venerable Gregory of Sinai <i>Fast</i>	1 Mac 1:1-15	1 Cor 12:12-26	Mt 18:18-22; 19:1-2, 13-15
9 Wed Ven Herman of Alaska, Wonderworker <i>Fast</i>	1 Mac 1:16-28	1 Cor 13:4-14:5	Mt 20:1-16
10 Thu Martyr & Archdeacon Laurence of Rome <i>Fast</i>	1 Mac 1:41-53	1 Cor 14:6-19	Mt 20:17-28
11 Fri Martyr & Archdeacon of Euplus of Catania <i>Fast</i>	1 Mac 1:54-64	1 Cor 14:26-40	Mt 21:12-14, 17-20
12 Sat Martyrs Photios & Anikytos <i>Wine &amp; Oil</i>	1 Mac 2:1-14	Rom 14:6-9	Mt 15:32-39
<b>13 Sunday Maximos the Confessor (8) Wine &amp; Oil</b>	1 Mac 2:15-30	1 Cor 3:9-17	Mt 14:22-34
14 Mon The Holy Prophet Micah <i>Fast</i>	Gen 28:10-17	1 Cor 15:12-19	Mt 21:18-22
<b>15 Tue The Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos</b>	Ex 43:27-44:4	Phil 2:5-11	Lk 10:38-42; 11:27-28
16 Wed Icon Not Made with Hands at Edessa	Prov 9:1-11	1 Cor 16:4-12	Mt 21:28-32
17 Thu Venerable Martyr Myron of Kyzikos	1 Mac 3:25-41	2 Cor 1:1-7	Mt 21:43-46
18 Fri Martyrs Floros and Lauros of Illyria	1 Mac 3:42-60	2 Cor 1:12-20	Mt 22:23-33
19 Sat Martyr Andrew Stratelates & Companions	1 Mac 4:1-25	Rom 15:30-33	Mt 17:24-18:4
<b>20 Sunday The Holy Prophet Samuel (1)</b>	1 Mac 4:26-40	1 Cor 4:9-16	Mt 17:14-23
21 Mon Apostle Thaddeus of the Seventy	1 Mac 4:41-61	2 Cor 2:4-15	Mt 23:13-22
22 Tue Martyr Agathanikos & Companions	Ruth 1:1-14	2 Cor 2:14-3:3	Mt 23:23-28
23 Wed Hieromartyr Irenaios, Bishop of Lyons	Ruth 1:15-22	2 Cor 3:4-11	Mt 23:29-39
24 Thu New Hieromartyr Cosmas Aitolos, Isapostolos	Ruth 2:1-13	2 Cor 4:1-6	Mt 24:13-28
25 Fri Apostles Barnabas & Titos of the Seventy	Ruth 2:14-23	2 Cor 4:13-18	Mt 24:27-33, 42-51
26 Sat Martyrs Adrian & Natalia of Nicomedia	Ruth 3:1-18	1 Cor 1:3-9	Mt 19:3-12
<b>27 Sunday Venerable Confessor Hosios of Cordoba (2)</b>	Ruth 4:1-22	1 Cor 9:2-12	Mt 18:23-35
28 Mon Venerable Moses of Ethiopia	Isaiah Selections *	2 Cor 5:10-15	Mk 1:9-15
<b>29 Tue Beheading of the Forerunner John Strict Fast</b>	Malachi Selections **	Acts 13:25-33	Mk 6:14-30
30 Wed Alexander, Paul, & John Patriarchs	Wisdom Selections ***	2 Cor 6:11-16	Mk 1:23-28
31 Thu Placing of the Cincture of the Theotokos	Is 61:1-92	Cor 7:1-10	Mk 1:29-35

(#) Bracketed numbers on Sundays indicate the **Tone** for the week.

\* Isaiah Selections: 8/28 - 40:1-3, 9; 41:17-18; 45:8; 48:20-21; 54:1

\*\* Malachi Selections: 8/29 - 3:1-3, 5-7, 12, 18; 4:4-6

\*\*\* Wisdom Selections: 8/30 - 4:7, 16-17, 19-20; 5:1-7

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**Tuesday, August 1, 2006 *Dormition Fast Procession of the Life-Giving Cross of the Lord***  
**Kellia:** 1 Samuel/Kings 17:41-51 **Epistle:** 1 Corinthians 10:5-12 **Gospel:** St. Matthew 16:6-12

**Worship II ~ Pure Worship: 1 Corinthians 10:5-12, especially vs. 11:** “Now, all these things happened to them as examples; and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.” Dr. Constantine Cavarnos advises that “regular church attendance, our presence...at Orthros, Divine Liturgy, Vespers, and at other services...contributes greatly to our acquisition of a robust spiritual *phronema* (mind or mind set).” However, to realize this potential, “it is necessary to participate in these services with attention, piety, and contrition.” In the present passage from First Corinthians, St. Paul warns against four activities which surely destroy pure worship - the true adoration of God we desire - and will instead condemn us before God. Consider, therefore, how to defeat the pernicious enemies of a robust *phronema*.

1) “Do not become idolaters,” the Saint says (vs. 7). It is not accidental that the Great Ektenia is offered early in each service of the Church, with its bidding “for those who with faith, reverence, and fear of God enter therein.” What a blessed reminder! These words and the phrase in the Cherubic hymn, “lay aside all earthly care” tell us *why* we are worshipping.

Idolatry, as a contrary motion within the heart and mind, directs “faith, reverence, and fear” to persons or things - to creatures rather than the Creator. To help us resist the temptation of misplacement, Orthodox worship provides sacred readings, icons, texts, services, and prayers which are aids for us in overcoming the tendency to *wander* in heart and mind during worship.

To see, hear, and heed the tangible reminders of the Liturgy and do the “work of the People” - to “lay aside all earthly care,” “sing to the life-giving Trinity,” and “receive the King of all” - we best approach the Liturgy as a struggle against all stray thoughts that draw our minds and hearts away from our Blessed God and Savior Who “dwellest in the sanctuary,” the Praise of Israel (Ps. 22:3 LXX). Take care never to come to the Liturgy passively. Come ready to defeat every inclination that suggests, “There is no salvation for him in his God” (Ps. 3:2 LXX).

2) “Nor let us commit sexual immorality,” the Apostle adds (I Cor. 10:8). Beloved of the Lord, we live in a hedonistic culture which constantly pollutes the environment with perverse images and pours erotic entertainment over us through the media. In Dr. Cavarnos’ words, “crimes, robberies, murders, obscene and sinful acts of all kinds, impassioned and brazen words,” most of which are sexually provocative. Rather, let our minds, homes, and our cars be quiet havens of godly peace where we can honor St. Paul’s admonition to “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). Turn off the media! Nothing is more certain to corrupt purity than constant stimulation of the sexual passions. Let us join the holy Prophet Job when he declares, “I made a covenant with mine eyes; I will not think upon a virgin” (Job 31:1 LXX).

3) The Apostle continues: “nor let us tempt [test] Christ” (I Cor. 10:9). He speaks here of the sin of doing evil intentionally to see if or how God will react. Note: every sin tests God; but when we are proud of being Orthodox or are mindlessly confident of our piety, we veer directly into this brazen sin. Arrogance, vaunted self-assuredness, and self-esteem shrug off true worship, corrupt the praise of God, and make worship an abomination before the Lord. Pure worship is beautifully expressed in the Beatitudes - hearts and minds which are “poor in spirit,” mourn, are meek, and which “hunger and thirst after righteousness” (Mt. 5:3-6).

4) Finally, St. Paul speaks against “complaining” or “murmuring” (1 Cor. 10:10) - an easy snare. Let us pray with Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow: “Teach me to treat all that comes to me throughout the day with peace of soul, and with firm conviction that Thy will governs all.”

*Sanctify those who love the beauty of Thy house and glorify them by Thy divine power.*

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**Wednesday, August 2, 2006   *Dormition Fast*   **Proto-Martyr Stephen; Venerable Photini**  
**Kellia:** 1 Samuel/Kings 18:1-9   **Epistle:** 1 Corinthians 10:12-22   **Gospel:** St. Matthew 16:20-24**

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**Worship III ~ With Non-Orthodox?: 1 Corinthians 10:12-22, especially vs. 20:** “...the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons.” Earlier in First Corinthians - in a discussion of the issues related to eating meat sacrificed to idols (1 Cor. 8:8-9:2) - St. Paul warns against actions that might send wrong messages to fellow-Christians or to those outside the Church.

In the present passage, the Apostle focuses on a parallel danger - participating in non-Orthodox Christian worship or programs. Given our present, pluralistic culture, bear in mind that idolatry and false doctrines are active on all sides - both blatantly as well as in innocent-appearing programs of groups that hold genuine truths. Thus, St. Paul’s caution against other religious activities applies today: “let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (vs. 12).

Like the early Christians, we receive offers to participate in non-Orthodox religious programs, but the Apostle’s admonition holds - Do not think you are stronger than God (vs. 22) and need not worry about coping with spiritual error. True, God is faithful to help us cope with falsehood we cannot avoid: He “will not allow [us] to be tempted beyond what [we] are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that [we] may be able to bear it” (vs. 13).

While blatant pagan practices or ceremonies may not pose a great temptation, there are churches known officially as “schismatics and heretics” - Roman Catholics and Protestant Churches; but there are also many, well-known, militant sects having highly distorted teachings. Take care: in North America, there is a strong cultural bias opposing perceived intolerance or separatism. On the one hand, Orthodox Christians likely will be invited to activities of other faiths, yet, on the other hand, in refusing invitations, we may be viewed as separatists or elitists.

Be attentive: the Holy Canons of the Church aim to protect the Faithful against error - including subtle errors that may not be evident. These rules forbid “frequenting the meetings of heretics and schismatics.” What does this mean? When family, neighbors or colleagues invite us to weddings and funerals, is it wrong to be present at such services? Not usually. What is more, failure to attend may violate the commandment to love all men. In doubt, *ask your Pastor!*

On the other hand, if an acquaintance invites an Orthodox Christian to attend a Bible study at his church - a group that meets on a regular basis - then we confront “frequenting” in a situation where, inevitably, error will be presented. The same is true of evangelistic crusades, inquirers’ classes, and other outreach presentations, despite these being called informational.

Realize that participating in the teaching events of other Christian groups may expose an Orthodox believer to error subliminally. How easily one can embrace an unspoken assumption unconsciously, even though the presentation *sounded* true. Still, as a result, serious error and heresy may be assimilated unaware. Later, such implanted error may prompt questions about Orthodoxy and lead to rebellion or to painful and unnecessary spiritual struggles.

There are other avenues by which the present pluralistic culture assaults Orthodox Christians - literature, television programs, and educational experiences, all freely available in this information age. However, many of these interesting and attractive programs, magazines, or books carry messages laced with the *poisons* of secularism, humanism, hedonism, and spiritually alien teaching. Let each one consider the time he invests in the media versus the time devoted to growing in the True Faith. Let us cling fast to the true Light of our Holy Faith!

*O Lord, cleanse my soul. Sanctify my mind. Enlighten my five senses. Establish me wholly in fear of Thee. Ever cover and guard me from every word and deed that mars the soul.*

**Worship IV ~ In the Context of Life: 1 Corinthians 10:28-11:7, especially vs. 11:1:** *“Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.”* The prayers of the Church teach us to live and worship in the same manner as did the Lord Jesus with His disciples: “Behold, My beloved, let no fear separate you from Me; for though I suffer, it is for the sake of the world. Doubt Me not, therefore; for I came not to be served, but to serve and give Myself a Redemption for the world. If therefore, ye are My beloved, imitate Me; and he among you who wisheth to be first, let him be last, and the master be like the servant. Abide in Me, that ye may bear fruit; for I Am the Vine of life.” (From the “Now” of the Aposticha of the Orthros of Great and Holy Thursday).

Do you see? The Lord our God desires that our worship of Him always be connected intimately with the daily events of our lives, with mundane existence. Our participation in the Divine worship of the Church, therefore, never should be isolated from “ourselves, each other, and our whole life.” True Orthodox worship, like the finely woven cloth of a seamless robe, must not to be ‘torn away’ from our everyday occupations and the ongoing concerns of living.

In the present reading, St. Paul provides three rules for connecting life to worship as the Lord Jesus desires: 1) “do all to the glory of God (vs. 10:31), 2) [seek] the profit of many that they may be saved (vs. 10:33), and 3) keep the traditions...as I delivered them to you” (vs. 11:2).

The Apostle commands us to “do all to the glory of God” (vs. 31), for God is glorified by prayer that is according to His will. As St. Theophan the Recluse says, “...the most necessary [means] is prayer, by which we must implore the Holy Spirit to pour His divine light into our hearts.” And, let us commit our hearts to God, praying that He may be glorified in what we do.

St. John of the Ladder outlines a simple plan for prayers which may be readily applied: “Let your prayer be completely simple...let us list sincere thanksgiving first on the scroll of our prayer....Do not be over-sophisticated in the words you use....Do not try to be verbose when you pray....If you feel sweetness or compunction at some word of your prayer, dwell on it...approach with great humility....Listen to the cry of Paul regarding sinners: Of whom I am chief....Prepare yourself for your set times of prayer by unceasing prayer in your soul...He who is busy with something, and continues it when the hour of prayer comes, is deceived by the demons. Those thieves aim at stealing from us one hour after another.”

Next, the Apostle commands us to seek “the profit of many that they may be saved” (vs. 33), a directive concerning which we have a warning from St. Theophan: “You must indeed love your neighbor, but your love must not cause harm to your soul....The most important thing in these actions is assisting in the salvation of your neighbors....This thirst for the salvation of your neighbors you must always have; but it must arise from your love of God, and not from ill-judged zeal.” Balance is required in order not to offend through our zeal. Rather, let us set such a living example that others will be drawn to our worship, attracted by the love of God they meet in us.

Finally, St. Paul tells us “...keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you” (vs. 11:2). All our activities should be probed deeply, as St. Theophan says, “...in order to see clearly which of them are good and which are bad. We should judge them not as the world and the senses do, but as they are judged by right reason and the Holy Spirit, or by the word of the divinely inspired Scriptures, or that of the holy fathers and teachers of the Church.” Tradition is to impact not only the rituals of the Church, but every facet of each one’s daily living and relationships with others.

*O Master, tell us of the joy of Thy salvation, and confirm us in Thy love, that even unto our last breath we may offer Thee the sacrifice of truth, praise undefiled, and glory to Thy Name.*

**Worship V ~ Coming Together:** *1 Corinthians 11:8-22, especially vs. 18:* “For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it.” A cursory reading of this passage reveals St. Paul addressing two distinct questions within the Corinthian congregation both related to worship: 1) should women be veiled during worship, and 2) what constitutes a truly praiseworthy demeanor for all Church members during the Lord’s Supper? But let us note also that, for the Apostle, the two issues came down to a single concern - worship is no time for indulging in *contentions* and *divisions*.

Apparently, some women of the Corinthian congregation had concluded that it was quite acceptable to abandon the long-standing custom of veils for their hair during worship (1 Cor. 11:2-16). The Apostle’s point is that they were deviating from a tradition that was sensitive in the first century and questioned the teaching concerning the unity of all believers in Christ. St. Paul, however, is quick in this passage to maintain that their break with tradition was contrary to a universal custom of the age among “the churches of God” - women should be veiled for worship (vs. 16). He defends this from the created differences between male and female (vss. 8-9), “because of the angels” (vs.10), and on account of “nature itself” (vss. 14-15).

Note the Apostle’s logic: he did not hesitate to uphold the distinctions between men and women in the Church with respect to hair, veils, and roles in life, but mostly he was definite about an essential interdependence among men and women “in the Lord” (vs. 11). Thus, in this passage, he *steers a middle course*,” distinguishing between the roles of men and women on the one hand, yet all the while standing firm for a fundamental unity of all in Christ.

Earlier, in chapter eleven, he had praised the Corinthians for keeping “the traditions just as I delivered them to you” (1 Cor. 11:2). Thus, we can also believe that the Corinthian Christians had at least heard his teaching that “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28).

Why then did St. Paul uphold the use of veils for women? Principally because the use of veils was culturally sensitive for Jewish Christians. His aim was to encourage unity among all Christians - Jews and Gentiles alike (vs. 16). His primary distress was self-assertion among the members (vs.16). Therefore, he sharply rebuked the Corinthians for the crude divisions they were manifesting among themselves in coming together to “eat the Lord’s Supper” (vs. 20).

The Eucharistic Liturgies of the earliest Christian communities apparently were integrally woven into a shared common meal - a Love Feast - following the pattern of Jewish sacred meals such as the Seder. It was customary to include formal blessings of cups of wine before and after meals and the solemn breaking of bread as an opening blessing before meals. However, the general sharing of other foods during the Love Feast associated with the Lord’s Supper became corrupted in the Corinthian church. Some were taking their “own supper ahead of others,” which left their poorer brethren hungry, while some of the brethren were getting drunk (vs. 21).

St. Paul exploded angrily at such insensitivity to one another and at the disregard for the solemnity of their coming together as one body at worship for the Lord’s Supper. “Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you” (vs. 22). How could they “shame those who have nothing” (vs. 22)! It was a scandal that they were not expressing unity in worship. Worship is always to be offered with “one heart and mouth,” the inviolable norm of the Orthodox Christians in all ages.

*O Lord grant us with one accord to make our common supplications unto Thee, to receive the knowledge of Thy truth, and in the world to come, to obtain life everlasting.*

**The Dignity of Choice: Romans 13:1-10, especially vs. 8:** “Owe no one anything except to love one another....” When reading the Epistle to the Romans, one should remember that in the last portion, the Apostle Paul turns from a systematic presentation of the Gospel to issues of daily living. As he does so, he issues two commands which might appear contradictory: first he says “be not conformed to this world” (Rom. 12:2), but in this passage, he declares, “be subject to the governing authorities” (Rom. 13:1). Then, he even adds, “Pay all of them their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due” (vs. 7). The pious Christian, were he not to delve into the Apostle’s deep intentions, might wonder: how can a servant of the Lord be subject to the authorities of this world and not conform to the world and its governing authorities? How is this resolved?

Plainly, in this life, we make our way by decisions, choosing one way rather than another, taking action or waiting, entering or leaving situations, accepting or rejecting offers and opportunities. We are constantly moving from moment to moment on the basis of choice. Of all God’s earthly creatures, mankind alone has the dignity of choosing and shaping life.

The present passage provides Christians with three “ground rules” for decision-making: 1) be subject to the governing authorities (vs. 1), 2) be subject for conscience sake (vs. 5), and 3) “owe no one anything except to love one another” (vs. 8). Trace St. Paul’s godly logic and one will discover that these three rules function serially under the greater, overarching command of the Lord: “love your neighbor as yourself” (vs. 9; see Lev. 19:18 and Mt. 22:39).

Observe: there is a definite order to these three “ground rules,” each directive in turn possessing higher authority for one’s decisions than the one preceding it. First, when faced with a decision, one can choose to obey the obvious appointed authority. Stop at a red light, pay a tax bill, or report for jury duty, etc.

However, one must not make decisions unthinkingly. Rather, we should be ready to modify our actions whenever prompted by conscience. We have stopped at a red light, but an ambulance signals a need to move through the intersection. Conditions, conscience, and wisdom now urge one to ignore the authority of the traffic signal. If a tax bill appears to be inaccurate or unfair, a Christian rightly appeals the bill, for one should pay only what is “due” (vs. 7).

Let us continue one more step before we decide to follow the voice of our own conscience without question - let us consider also the requirements of love, the needs of others, remembering that the human conscience, like other aspects of our nature, is in need of healing and illumination. Therefore, let us consider actions that extend respect and justice in love.

Christ our God, as Creator of all, made us in His own image and dignified us with the gift of freedom to choose. Still, let us note that through choice it is easy to turn to self-seeking and disobey the truth (Rom. 2:8). Ironically, through wrong choices we lose our freedom and fall under bondage to sin (Rom. 7:19). However, by the Lord’s Death and the saving power of His Resurrection, God has reconciled us to Himself (Rom. 5:10) - but only if we choose Him for healing and life. We are free to seek God’s will, His freedom, and His best, for the three rules are not fixed. They illumine grace to show us how to make choices within God’s love. Taken in the context of the Gospel, the rules become life and “the fulfillment of the law” (Rom. 13:10).

*Direct us, O Lord our God, in all our doings with Thy most gracious favor, and further us with Thy continual help; that in all our works, begun, continued and ended in Thee, we may glorify Thy holy Name, and finally, by Thy mercy, attain unto everlasting life.*

**Apostolic Urgency: 2 Peter 1:10-19, especially vs. 13:** *“Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding you....”* This passage from Second Peter conveys an urgency in St. Peter as a result of his three years with the Lord Jesus (vss. 16-18). The Apostle wrote, urged on by the knowledge that his days for sharing the life-giving Gospel were coming to an end (vss. 14-15). Likewise, he knew that his readers’ eternal life hinges upon continuing in the Gospel truth upon which Christians are established (vs. 12). And, he knew there are influences that do draw us away from making our “call and election sure” (vs. 10).

St. Peter’s urgency grew out of an intimate association with God Incarnate. He walked and ate and talked with the Lord Jesus for three years. Thereby, he himself was transfigured from a simple Galilean fisherman into the chief of the Apostles. The force of the Person of Jesus of Nazareth initially impelled Simon to leave his livelihood and follow the new, itinerant teacher. Associating with the Lord Jesus, the Disciple Peter discerned that He was the promised Messiah. Peter saw the Lord Jesus receive “from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory” (vs. 17). Also, he witnessed Christ’s betrayal and death, encountered Him alive, and had his understanding opened so “that [he] might comprehend the Scriptures” even before he saw Him exalted into the heavens (Luke 24:45,51).

As St. Peter’s experiences of the Lord Jesus altered his life, so also they incontestably confirmed that what he beheld on Mount Tabor was God’s will for “as many as the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:39). That revelation filled the fisherman’s heart full with a burning desire that all people should be supplied abundantly with an entrance “into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:11). He learned that, in Christ Jesus, the hoped-for vision of the pious of the first century is truly open to all peoples and that “the excellence of the righteous will be greater than the angels,” as one early writer of that age expressed it.

May God inflame our hearts with the same urgency that impelled the Apostle! Beloved of the Lord, glance about you. See how many are deluded by the demanding agendas of the present world that, after all, are passing away. It is sad how many disdain the true Life available in the Person of the Lord Jesus, the One proclaimed to us by St. Peter and all the Apostles. We who are Orthodox Christians have answered the Apostolic call to embrace abundantly the eternal life of our Savior. Let us seek the intercession of St. Peter and all the Apostles that God will keep us from stumbling and failing to attain the heritage that is ours.

St. Peter speaks urgently to us who “know and are established in the present truth” (vs. 12). He was well aware how easy it is, under the incessant pounding of this world’s priorities, to become “negligent” concerning the power that comes from regularly receiving the Body and Blood of the Lord, constantly reading the life-giving words of Holy Scripture and the works of the Holy Fathers, and habitually praying and fasting. Would we be healed and renewed? Do not miss the message of the Transfiguration! Let us not lose the urgent desire to be transfigured!

St. John, who was on the Mount with St. Peter, reminds us that, “when the Lord Jesus is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 Jn. 3:2). Christian Faith is not “cunningly devised fables” but “the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:16), in and through His Body, the Holy Church of God. The voice of the Father speaks even now to the Faithful, saying to us His adopted children, “My beloved...in whom I Am well pleased” (vs. 17).

*O Thou Word, the Light of the unborn Father, by Thy light which hath shown today on Tabor, we have seen the Father’s light and the Spirit’s light, lighting the whole creation.*

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**Mon., Aug. 7, 2006    *Dormition Fast*    Martyrs Dometios of Persia & Sozon of Nicomedia**  
**3<sup>rd</sup> Vespers Transfiguration:** 1/3 Kings 19:3-9, 11-13, 15-16    **Gospel:** St. Matthew 18:1-11  
**Epistle:** 1 Corinthians 11:31-12:6

**The Body of Christ I ~ Uniting The Faithful: 1 Corinthians 11:31-12:6, especially vs. 6:** “...it is the same God Who works all in all.” Early in First Corinthians, St. Paul plainly states his primary purpose - that there be unity within the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 1:10). In the present passage, he returns to this abiding concern. While he still emphasizes the basic theme of unity, he does so here by addressing two divisive issues: 1) church members’ carelessness at the Lord’s Supper (vss. 11:31-34) and 2) their ignorance of the gifts of the Holy Spirit (vss. 12:1-6).

To awaken the Corinthians to a more profound unity, the Apostle repeatedly appeals to them as “we” (cf. vss. 31-34), and he calls them “brethren” (vss. 11:33; 12:1) - ever signaling Christian unity as a family. But at the same time, he teaches that unity is a gift from God, and he shows seven ways in which the Lord acts to achieve true unity. As St. Paul does this, he emphasizes the fact that, in relation to each of God’s acts, there is a necessary response for cooperating with the Lord’s gift of unity. Let us note that the Lord uses these responses as much today as He did in the first century - to up-build communion within His Church.

First, the Apostle reminds us that “if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged” by God (1 Cor. 11:31). Why? Because, when we judge ourselves honestly - with God’s help - we naturally confess our sins, and God then faithfully forgives us (1 Jn. 1:9). Then, we are not condemned. In addition, the net effect of such self-examination and self-judgment benefits our relations with our fellow Christians, breaking down barriers between us and unifying us.

Second, when we consider the judgment of God, we naturally are reminded that He also chastens. We ought, therefore, to rejoice at trials as gifts of love from the Lord, assuring us that we will “not be condemned with the world” (1 Cor. 11:32). “For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth” (Heb. 12:6). St. Isaac the Syrian notes that “a man who for God’s sake humbles himself, and thinks meanly of himself, is glorified by God.” And by God’s grace, the humble are drawn into communion with their fellow Christians.

Third, the Apostle reminds us that were it not for our Baptism we still would be slaves of dumb idols (1 Cor. 12:2), but, by the working of God the Holy Spirit, we are able to “say that Jesus is Lord” (vs. 3). Idolatry divides, but in Christ Jesus we are united and made one.

A fourth way God accomplishes unity is by bestowing gifts upon each member. Look over the Church and one sees the rich diversity of gifts (vs. 4). Some are pastors and teachers, some gifted preachers, some are able at evangelism (Eph. 4:11), some exhort others when they need direction, others have the means to give liberally, others manage well, some are merciful and others cheerful (Rom. 12:8). These abilities - truly gifts from God - make the Body whole.

Fifth, God works for unity by bestowing a variety of ministries (vs. 5). Priests have particular gifts to lead congregations in worship as a single Body. Our Bishops oversee the work of many pastors and parishes to assure unity among them and with Christ. Imagine the entire Body, and you will see the rich, seamless tapestry of God’s work spread across the whole world.

Sixth, as we glimpse the vision of the tapestry of the Church with its amazing variety of activities (vs. 6), we behold our good God managing the Body of His Christ with loving care, drawing us together in cords of love and welding us into an effective instrument of His will.

Finally, let us be reminded that although God works through individuals, it is for the Body as a whole on whose behalf He works (vs. 6) - and for the profit of all (vs. 7).

*May I ever live not unto myself, but unto Thee, our Master and our Benefactor.*



**The Body of Christ II: Caring Is Essential: 1 Corinthians 12:12-26, especially vs. 25:** *“that there should be no schism in the body, but...the members should have the same care for one another.”* The organic life of the Church as an interdependent community is absolutely essential in St. Paul’s belief, and continues as such today. Although addressing the interdependence of the members of the Church earlier in the Epistle (1 Cor. 11:31-12:8), he did not use the term, “the Body of Christ.” But, as he reaches the heart of his exhortation - concerned care for one another - he identifies the Church as the Body of Christ, underscoring the essential necessity of caring.

To awaken the Christians in Corinth - and everywhere - to a holy and mutual caring, the Apostle explores the analogy of the human body, “...the body is one,” yet it “has many members” (vs. 12). Here he emphasizes the necessity deep, heartfelt caring among Church members, and so he declares, “so also is Christ” (vs. 12). Because he is reasoning by analogy, one might expect him to say, “so also is the Church,” but rather, his appeal is to the mystery of the Church as the Body of Christ. The necessity of caring among members derives from being Christ’s Body.

St. Paul is not speaking from mere example or analogy. Rather, he is teaching from experienced reality - from sharing membership in Christ. Metropolitan John Zizioulas follows this thought when he says, “...it is possible to envisage a type of Christology in which Christ...cannot be conceived in Himself as an individual. When we make the assertion that He is the truth...we mean His relationship with His body, the Church, ourselves.... we mean a Person and not an individual; we mean a relational reality....Here the Holy Spirit is not One Who aids us in bridging the distance between Christ and ourselves, but He is the Person of the Trinity Who actually realizes in history that which we call Christ...Christ does not exist first as truth and then as communion; He is both at once.” What we say about Christ and what we say about the Church vanishes within the Church as an action of the Holy Spirit among us.

The experience of living, literal Communion in the Person of Christ Jesus is no longer known sequentially, first as One Who exists and then as many members, but He is known as One through the many members at the same time. From this experience, which was well known to St. Paul, comes his assertion that “...in fact the body is not one member but many” (vs. 14).

The Apostle makes no distinction whatsoever between a physical human body and the Body of Christ. His sayings apply equally to either one. Therefore, as he continues to speak about “the foot” or “the hand” or “the eye,” the Faithful know perfectly well that he is speaking about different members of the Church and not merely parts of an illustrative human body. All members are vitally important - *vitally* in the sense of life-bearing. When we start to think and treat persons who are members of the Church as individuals, apart from the “relational reality” of the Body of Christ, we dismember the Body and kill Life Himself in the Church. This is the message St. Paul is asserting so strongly in this passage.

Mutual caring is critically necessary (vs. 22), and needful (vs. 21). Every member of the Body, when seen in this light, deserves honor (vs. 23), no matter how “unpresentable” they may strike the limited, corrupted, tribunal of human opinion (vs. 23). Such is God’s view of each one (vs. 24). Thus, there may be no schism in Christ’s Body in which the Holy Spirit dwells! Of course, all “the members should have the same care for one another,” otherwise “where would the body be” (vs. 19)? Suffering or honor - every issue for any one affects all (vs. 26).

*O Holy Spirit Who hath been poured out on all flesh, beginning with the Apostles, extend the grace of Thy Communion to us believers that we may share in the mysteries they proclaimed.*

**The Body of Christ III ~ Pursues Love: 1 Corinthians 13:4-14:5, especially vss. 13:13, 14:1:**  
*“And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love. Pursue love....”*  
As the Apostle places love before us, he names it as the greatest among the virtues, the one that endures forever. Then, in the next breath, he commands us to “pursue love” (vs. 14:1).

What is the essence of this “love” we are to pursue? Since “God is love” (1 Jn. 4:8) we know love’s Source. Is the Apostle’s precept to “pursue love” different from the commandment to “love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might” (Deut. 6:5)? Not at all! St. Paul defines love tangibly as Love Incarnate - God made man. The same One Who challenges us: “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (Jn. 14:15).

Since what the Apostle commands us flows from the Lord Jesus, and is to be pursued out of love for “Him Who first loved us” (1 Jn. 4:19), then let us attend to these ten “Words concerning Love” remembering that they spring from Christ our God Himself. Then we may learn from Love how to love - loving Him and loving like Him before all else!

Turning to the Apostle’s ten “Words concerning love,” one notes immediately that St. Paul begins with a description, “Love suffers long” (1 Cor. 13:4). In other of his writings, he will turn this description into a command: “Put on as the elect of God, holy and beloved...long suffering” (Col. 3:12). Here, the Apostle’s point is not to be like the unforgiving servant who was extended long-suffering indulgence by his lord, but could not share it in-kind (Mt. 18:23-34)

2) “Love is kind” (1 Cor.13:4). In other words, “[add] to godliness, brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you and abound, they make you... [fruitful] ...in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:7-8). Let me be a child of the Most High, for “He is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful” (Lk. 6:35-36).

3) “Love does not envy” (1 Cor.13:4). The original word translated as “envy” is the root of our word “jealousy.” May we not be like Joseph’s brothers (Gen. 37:8,18-20), and indulge our desires in opposition to the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:17-21) but thankfully accept what we have.

4) Next, the Apostle describes love through a series of negative statements all of which are rooted in self-preoccupation. Rather than vaunt and arrogate the self, love is self-abasing.

5) Love will not be “rude” but kind, caring less for one’s own needs and wants and aiming rather to provide, as we are able, for the need of the other.

6) “Love is not provoked” (1 Cor. 13:5). One is angry when one believes that “rights” have been violated, but if one is wholly submitted to Christ Jesus, then all rights are turned over to Him. We have surrendered rights and self: “I bow down before the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” If I am struck on the right cheek, I will “turn the other to him also” (Mt. 5:39).

7) “Love thinks no evil” (vs. 5). May we not keep score! If you “bring your gift...and ...remember that your brother has something against you....first be reconciled.” (Mt. 5:23,24).

8) We are to rejoice in the truth and “not rejoice in iniquity” (1 Cor. 13:6). Since the Lord is the Truth (Jn. 14:6), our joy is to trust and follow His way of being and of speaking.

9) Let us receive and bear all that befalls us as from the Lord’s own hand, from Love Himself. Thus, we shall be able to endure (1 Cor. 13:7), by pursuing Love Who calls us to follow Him. We know this Lover Who has loved us in all our sin and still pursues us in love.

10) For Love never fails. Let us not fail Him (vs. 8)!

*I have no life, no light, no joy, no strength and no love except in Thee, O Lover of all.*

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**Thursday, August 10, 2006    *Dormition Fast*    *Martyr & Archdeacon Laurence of Rome***  
**Kellia:** 1 Maccabees 1:41-53    **Epistle:** 1 Corinthians 14:6-19    **Gospel:** St. Matthew 20:17-28

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**Body of Christ IV ~ Speaking In Tongues: 1 Corinthians 14:6-19, especially vs. 19:** “yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue.” The spiritual gift of speaking in tongues appeared among Christians in the earliest days of the Church, as both the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 10:46; 19:6) and St. Paul report (1 Corinthians 14:6-19). Not long after, tongue-speaking became the focus of the heretical Montanist sect in Phrygia, a group that flourished from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> century.

It should be noted that as a phenomenon tongues have not been limited to Christians - Orthodox or heterodox. Plato, among the pagan Greeks, and Virgil, among the ancient Latins, report tongue-speaking in various pagan rites. During the Middle Ages, tongues was practiced in Europe by mendicant friars, and later by Quakers and Methodists. The practice enjoyed a revival during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries among certain Evangelical Protestant congregations, such that whole denominations formed, emphasizing tongue speaking. Then, in the later 20<sup>th</sup> century, tongues spread among many *mainline* western Churches, e.g., Anglicans and Roman Catholics.

The Apostle Paul himself spoke in tongues, considering it a gift from God for which he gave thanks (1 Cor. 14:18). However, note carefully in today’s reading, that as St. Paul speaks about this practice one is able to discern his cautions concerning tongue speaking.

A reading through the passage immediately discloses the Apostle’s point of view that this vocal gift from the Holy Spirit (vss. 12,18) ought to be a matter of private prayer and be avoided in public, corporate worship (vss. 6,9,19). His reasoning is quite straightforward: there are “many kinds of languages in the world” (vs. 10), and if one does “not know the meaning of the language” he is made a foreigner simply because he cannot understand what he hears (vs. 11).

Also observe: the present passage rejects the opinion of those who relegate speaking in tongues to merely psychological causes. Such opinions disregard St. Paul’s manifest assumption that tongues can be a gift of the Holy Spirit (vss. 12,18). However, while God the Holy Spirit may give tongues, He also will give the “discernment of spirits” (1 Cor. 12:10). Note also, evidence from comparative religions suggests that not all speaking in tongues is of God. Some does indeed come from demonic sources and from darkened or immature human psyches.

As an Apostle, St. Paul was one sent by the Lord Jesus, a man under necessity to preach the Gospel and at grave spiritual risk for *refusing* to do so (1 Cor. 9:16). Today’s passage clearly shows the unceasing urgency in him to communicate the good news. Hence, St. Paul was mostly concerned for understanding among his hearers, a concern that included occasions when he prayed with other people, especially in worship with those new to the Faith (vss. 6,9,11,16).

Continually planting churches in communities where the Christian message never had been heard, St. Paul bore a responsibility for these congregations he brought into existence - as in the case of the church at Corinth. The present passage reveals his concern for such congregations - that they develop as communities wherein their members would grow in spiritual knowledge - again, that primary concern for edification (vss. 12,19) and he insists that tongues should remain a matter of private devotions, so as not to confuse congregations.

Following the Apostle’s concern that prayer, hymns, and blessings should be understood (vss. 15,16), the Orthodox Church continues to resist the introduction of tongues into corporate worship, fearing possible confusion in the understanding of the Faithful.

*Light is the Father; and Light the Son; Light is the Holy Spirit descending upon the Apostles through which the whole universe was illuminated to worship the Holy Trinity.*

**The Body of Christ V ~ Orderly Worship: 1 Corinthians 14:26-40, especially vs. 40:** “*Let all things be done decently and in order.*” St. John Chrysostom, in commenting on the present passage from First Corinthians, shares a pair of historical insights that highlight the enduring message in these verses, a message that has relevance for all congregations in every century.

First, standing closer in time to the practices of the earliest Christian congregations and their worship, and having a greater awareness of how things were in Apostolic times, St. John says, “For of old they used also to make psalms by a gift and to teach by a gift,” and then, amplifying the actual words of the text in order to clarify the Apostle’s exact meaning, he speaks as St. Paul: “...let all these look to one thing...the correction of their neighbor: let nothing be done at random. For if thou comest not to edify thy brother, why dost thou come here at all....One thing concerns me, one thing is my desire, to do all things unto edifying.”

In predominantly Gentile congregations, like the one in Corinth, members generally lacked experience in the type of worship typical of first-century Jewish synagogues. The Liturgy was mixed with instruction and conducted more spontaneously than it is today. St. John, recognizing an important element in this *less-structured* style of early worship says, “For in truth the Church was a heaven then, the Spirit governing all things, and moving each one of the rulers and making him inspired.” However, clearly, worship at Corinth was not staying under the governance of the Spirit as it should have been, and the Apostle was forced to lay down obvious rules for taking turns at speaking, listening, and keeping the focus on edification (vss. 27-31).

Second, St. John provides a contrastive insight into congregational worship during his own day in Antioch in the fourth century: “But now we retain only the symbols of those gifts. Wherefore when we begin to speak, the people respond, ‘with thy spirit,’ indicating that of old they thus used to speak, not of their own wisdom, but moved by the Spirit....but now not in one single soul can one see that unanimity, rather great is the warfare everywhere. ‘Peace,’ even now, ‘to all’ he that presides in the Church prays...but of this peace the name is frequent, but the reality no where....But here great is the tumult, great the confusion, and our assemblies differ in nothing from a vintner’s shop, so loud is the laughter, so great is the disturbance; as in the baths, as in markets, the cry and tumult is universal.”

The liturgical disorder to which St. John alludes can and does happen too often at present in Orthodox temples. We also know of inattention, disorder, even the need for the clergy to intervene among those in the altar, in the choir, at the chanter’s stand, or among the congregants. The Apostle’s principles still apply today even though present day worship is more structured.

St. Paul’s admonitions are for all Christians, past and present: “Let all things be done for edification....that all may learn and all may be encouraged” (vss. 26,31). Let each of us consider what we are doing at worship. Let our prayers and praises honor the Lord and above all, instruct and edify our brethren in the Faith. There is no place for self-glorification and self-indulgence.

The Apostle knew that truly spiritual people should always be in control of themselves - with the clergy and before God. “And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches...” (vss. 32,33).

Finally, St. Paul concludes with this all-inclusive exhortation, “Let all things be done decently and in order” (vs. 40). Let our physical eyes follow the eyes of our hearts so that our attention is focused on the Lord always, and upon that which will create a blessing for all present.

*Sanctify, O Lord, those who love the beauty of Thy house, and glorify them in all things.*

**To Be The Lord's: Romans 14:6-9, especially vs. 8:** *"For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's."* In the present era, we are told many lies about ourselves - some blatant and some subtle. The ideologues avow that we are mere citizens of the state, destined to fulfill the will of the People. Cultural pundits advise that we are self-directed individuals free to plot our own destiny. Coy advertisers seek to convince us that the flood of goods and services from the cornucopia of the earth is true life for us. The Apostle Paul declares that "we are the Lord's" (vs. 8). Is his another lie, a distortion? What does it mean to agree with this holy man and to say, "Yes, we are the Lord's!"?

To be "the Lord's," on the Apostle's terms, means to accept ourselves as persons created from nothing by the will of God. It is to choose to live openly with Him by Whom we were fashioned, to be counted among those who are committed to serving Him, and to say with the Prophet David, "Thou hast made [us] a little lower than the angels; with glory and honor hast Thou crowned [us], and Thou has set [us] over the works of Thy hands. All things hast Thou subjected under [our] feet, sheep, and all oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, the things that pass through the paths of the sea" (Ps. 8:5-7 LXX).

When we accept as given that we are persons who belong to God, we are compelled to face our Maker's expectations. What does He ask of us? "Increase and multiply; and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion...over the cattle and all the earth" (Gen. 1:28 LXX). Also He tells us, "And ye shall take heed to do as the Lord thy God commanded thee; ye shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left" (Deut. 5:32 LXX).

To be "the Lord's" means to confess our sins against our Father and Judge and to accept that we must toil "all the days of [our] life...and eat the herb of the field in the sweat of [our] face...until [we] return to the earth" (Gen. 3:18,19,20 LXX). It is to cry out with the Prophet David, "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin" (Ps. 50:2 LXX). But God, Who made us and directs history, has not abandoned us in our sin, for "Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living" (Rom. 14:9). To be "the Lord's" is to join our life and will with His, to accept being members of His Body.

Consider, Beloved in Christ, as we stand before God at this very moment: is it not well to be "the Lord's?" Do you not agree with the Apostle Peter, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Jn. 6:68,69)? To be the Lord's is to enjoy the privilege of giving thanks to Him in all and for all that we do (Rom. 14:6), and to admit that our life is not our own, "For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself" (vs. 7).

Accepting all these truths, let us cast aside a heap of popular delusions and lies that are offered to us constantly in this world. We may embrace the privilege of choosing to be "the Lord's." Let us say with Archimandrite Sophrony, "It was like that with me - I did not dare think that the infinitely great Creator of all things could heed my worthless, vile self. And I would cry, 'Oh, if only Thou couldst love me as I love Thee...Dost Thou not see how my heart thirsts for Thee day and night? Incline unto me. Show me Thy countenance. Make me such as Thou dost desire to see them that Thou has created - such as Thou, All-holy One, may receive and love....' I did not know what I said. I did not dare think that it was He Himself praying in me."

*Almighty Father, send down Thy Holy Spirit to establish us in the marvelous light of Thy will. Heal our every infirmity. Enfold our days in Thy care, even unto our last breath, we pray.*

**Edification: 1 Corinthians 3:9-17, especially vs. 17:** “If any one destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and that temple you are.” [RSV] One can name many influences that affect the quality of education in a Christian community: the degree of commitment to the Lord; training; the quality of managing and teaching; the spiritual state of supervisors, instructors, and learners; the curriculum and its goals, methods, and materials; the vitality of the community’s worship and devotional life; and the earnestness of the members in seeking edification. May St. Paul’s *construction analogy* (vss. 9-17) provoke us to assess ourselves personally with respect to our “edifying [in] the Body of Christ” (Eph. 4:12). After all, every member of our Orthodox communities is learning, being built up, and receiving nurture - **or** is stagnating, losing spiritual ground, and withering in the Faith.

At a minimum, there should be a plan for growth in the life in Christ for all members. Also, no adult should leave his growth solely to the clergy and the parish leaders. Regular personal prayer, Bible reading, and study of the Fathers using good Orthodox materials, must be ongoing and pursued with determination. Time is limited. Let each one ask himself, “What am I doing to be built up in the riches of the Faith?” Certainly the public media are not concerned about our Christian growth. If they are the only source of our education, we are losing ground!

St. Paul says “...no other foundation can anyone lay than...Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 3:11). Parish and personal upbuilding have to be rooted in a tangible commitment to our God and Savior, and the Apostles teach us to move on from “the elementary principles of Christ...to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God...of Baptism, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment” (Heb. 6:1-2). Thus, if the fundamentals are not well-established for you and for your community, then there is a need to go back to the basics of Orthodoxy. St. Paul is adamant - there can be “no other foundation” (1 Cor. 3:11). Let us avoid borrowing from or drawing upon the “wisdom” of other religions or spiritual practices - especially *not* from secular philosophies.

The quality of educational materials and experiences one uses for upbuilding self and other Christians is vitally important. The Apostle gives us fair warning: “each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test each one’s work” (1 Cor. 3:13). First, then, let us put prayer, devotions and Holy Scripture at the center of our curriculum, together with the Fathers, and the liturgical texts.

God’s judgment works today in personal life and history; no one has to wait *solely* for the Day of Judgment. One sees in persons and in parish communities the result of poor educational choices revealed in boredom, self-reliance, moral laxity, casualness in worship, and, saddest of all, immorality and apostasy. Never doubt that God is speaking to us *now*!

Edification in the Faith is meant to nurture all aspects of a Christian life: spiritual reasoning, growth in relationship with God, emotional life, decisions, creativity, ethics, relationships, marriage, family, child-raising, work, community activity - *everything*. The most important measure for St. Paul is the active presence of the Holy Spirit. As he asked the Corinthians: “Do you not know that you are the temple of God” (vs. 16)? Either the Spirit inhabits us, or He has withdrawn from our defilement (vs. 17). Let us labor in building up the People of God in hearts and minds, in holiness, so that together we are a worthy Temple for the Spirit (vs. 16). Then God will be honored, worshiped, and glorified among us and in each of us.

*Grant us grace to be temperate, diligent, devout, and charitable in love and fear of Thee.*

**Resurrection I ~ A Stunning Hope: 1 Corinthians 15:12-19, especially vs. 15:** “...we have testified of God that He raised up Christ....” How many today, exalted by technology, ride jubilantly upon a wave of products and devices - like surfers who have caught the proverbial “big one”! Of course, surfers know that waves move inexorably toward shore. The exhilarating ride moves toward the beach - a boundary that cannot be passed. There are limits in the physical realm which technology faces, and there is a finale in life when the “big one” crashes ashore.

We may draw a corollary from St. Paul: we have a hope, not for mere continuing existence, but to rise with Christ. Hence, we are of all men the most blessed (vs. 19). We do not depend for our hope upon that which may be concluded from repeated physical tests, but upon an unrepeatable event that did occur in this tangible world and provides a stunning hope that, as Christ is risen from the dead (vs. 12), so we expect resurrection from the dead.

Resurrection is the centerpiece of the Apostolic proclamation, an announcement rather than a message - a declaration of the incalculable. Christ is risen! This is the Faith of the Apostles, this is the Faith of the Fathers, this is the Faith which the Church celebrates with joy. Resurrection bridges this world and the great Kingdom of God beyond physical calculations. The Resurrection of the Lord Jesus connects the two realms forever, for as is said in the Orthros of the Feast of the Ascension, “our fallen nature hath been honored by sitting with the Father.”

Resurrection is the restoration of spirit and soul into a transformed physical body, an act of God superseding the “normal” expectations of the natural world (1 Cor. 15:52). Resurrection must not be confused with immortality of the soul - life apart from the body - nor is it reincarnation into another body, nor is it revivification of this mortal body that decays. God will restore body, soul, and spirit to that which He intended at the Creation - that is Resurrection. Christ took on our flesh, trampled down death by death, and will bestow Resurrection upon us.

St. Paul’s assertion is pertinent: “...if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen” (vs. 13). Most who deny the Resurrection accept the fact that Jesus was a man, but, observe: His Resurrection reflects back on His humanity, disclosing Incarnation, revealing that in Christ, God became man. In taking to Himself all that we are by nature, He forged the Divine gateway for entering into Hades to triumph over death. Earlier, the Apostle told the Corinthians, “...I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2); and this later assertion complements the Apostle’s earlier remark.

Materialist scoffers find the proclamation of the Apostles to be empty, pious delusion (vss. 14,15). Saint Paul says that to agree with them empties the Faith of its content (vs. 14), makes the Apostles liars, and throws away all hope for ourselves and all men. Instead of a stunning hope, we would face the drear prospect of a terminating physical existence (vs. 15-17).

Christ is risen! This is the testimony of faithful men, honest witnesses, observers who saw His death and “looked upon, and...handled...the Word of life” (1 Jn. 1:1) before His execution *and* after His Resurrection. Therefore, we have an ineffable hope of stunning import. “The dead shall arise, some to everlasting life, and some to reproach and everlasting shame” (Dan. 12:2 LXX). Sins are forgiven (1 Cor. 15:17). Our loved ones “who have fallen asleep in Christ” (vs. 18) are, as Dionysios the Areopagite says, “in comfort and unshaken hopes, as [they] attain the goal of the divine contests.” Let us reject all other momentary satisfactions (vs. 19).

*The body with all its senses shall, in its perfection, enter into Paradise. Deem us worthy, that in Thy Kingdom we should have an inheritance.* (Ephraim the Syrian, Hymn on Paradise.)

**The Mind of Christ: *Philippians 2:5-11, especially vs. 5:*** “*Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus.*” [ASV] A charge of Saint Herman of Alaska directs us to the starting point from which to gain the mind of Christ: “let us make a vow, at least that from this day, this hour, this very minute, we should try to love God above all else and carry out His teachings.” Let each one determine within his mind, heart, and will to say, “Yes!” to the command of St. Paul above. Also, let us acknowledge that at present we do not fully have the mind of the Lord. Further, to truly possess His consciousness would be the most worthwhile attainment we could hope to achieve, and, in Christ, this possibility is open to us. Desire must precede all else; nothing will so fan flickering interest into a flaming hunger for the mind of Christ as will love for God.

The bidding of St. Herman is worthy of the best within us. Furthermore, on this day we are reminded of the finest example of one endowed with the mind of Christ - Mary, the Virgin Theotokos. For this reason, on the Feast of her Dormition, the Church gives us an Epistle reading which contains the Apostle Paul’s counsel to spur us on to attain to the mind of Christ.

First, like our Lord (Phil. 2:7), the Theotokos accepted the words of the angel, conceived, and bore a child through the Holy Spirit while remaining a virgin at the risk of losing the esteem of Joseph and her reputation before men. The Faithful are ever reminded of this “shadow” cast over her illustrated in the icon of the Nativity. In one corner of the scene, Joseph, her betrothed, sits pondering the insinuations presented to him by the evil one. To gain the mind of Christ is to accept willingly the scorn of those who see anything beyond nature as superstition.

Second, the Theotokos “humbled” herself (vs. 8), for with great meekness of spirit before God, she accepted the unique role of a servant inherent in true motherhood. She served as a throne for her Royal son, as an entry door by which He might enter and share human life, and as a table for holding Him, the Bread of Life. She nursed and raised the Incarnate One to manhood. We, too, are called to serve humbly in His Kingdom for His glory, to serve the One Who came “not to be served but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many” (Mt. 20:28).

Third, to become the Birthgiver of God, the Virgin chose freely and without hesitation to accede obediently to the will of God (Phil. 2:8), dying to any other wants and desires in this earthly life. To gain the mind of Christ, we, too, must follow her as the Lord taught and ‘take up our cross and follow Him’ (Mt. 16:24).

Fourth, observe how God “highly exalted” the Virgin Maid, who, in like mind with her Son, humbly set aside all worldly reputation and obediently served her God and King (Phil. 2:9). As she herself sang, “For He...hath exalted the humble and meek” (Lk. 1:52). To have the mind of Christ, we must, as the Lord Jesus pointed out to His disciples James and John, give up all fantasies of being honored to sit on thrones at His left and right in His Kingdom (Mk. 10:40).

Fifth, notice that God gave her a name above all names (Phil. 2:9). We call her Theotokos; but think of the import of that title, the “One Who Gave Birth To God.” Beloved of the Lord, think of the name we bear: what could be greater than to be called Christian?

Sixth, we, the Faithful upon earth, in our Liturgies bow the knee to the Mother of Light with the Bodiless Powers (Phil. 2:10) and magnify her in song, exactly as Christ had in mind.

And Seventh, in confessing Jesus as Lord (Phil. 2:11), we, the Faithful, also call Mary blessed and cry out to her, “O Theotokos, since thou departest to the heavenly abodes of thy Son, thou shalt ever save thine inheritance.” Let us seek her prayers and attain Christ’s mind!

*O Theotokos, glorified one, after death thou art still alive and dost deliver thine heritage.*



**The Presence of the Lord: 1 Corinthians 16: 4-12, especially vs. 7:** *“For I do not wish to see you now in the way; but I hope to stay a while with you, if the Lord permits.”* Father Arseny was a Russian priest, prisoner, and spiritual father to many in a special Soviet camp for incorrigibles. Inmates were deliberately sent to such camps to die. There is an account of a fist and knife fight in the prison barracks which he miraculously stopped in God’s name. In the quiet after the clash, one of the prisoners, who earlier had threatened to kill Father Arseny, said to him, “Forgive me, Father Arseny. I doubted your God. I see now that He exists. It even scares me. A great power is given to one who believes in Him. Even I am frightened. Forgive me for making fun of you.”

Beloved, how sad it is that so often our dull, blinded sight hinders us from seeing the Lord present in the myriad relationships, activities, and places through which we pass every day. Wondrously it was not so with the Apostle Paul. In today’s reading - which is a personal closure written at the end of his First Corinthian Epistle - the Apostle shares some of the ways he saw and knew God in the everyday events of an incessantly itinerant life.

The first evidence of St. Paul’s sensitivity to the presence of God appears in his restraint concerning the future. “...if it is fitting that I go,” he says. He is referring tentatively to a forthcoming journey with those who would bear relief offerings to the Christians in Jerusalem (vs. 4). With similar caution, he mentions that “it may be that I will remain or even spend the winter with you” (vs. 6). In expressing his hope of staying a while with the Corinthians, he says, “if the Lord permits” (vs. 7). Concerning the travel of others, he says, “And if Timothy comes...” (vs. 10). The cumulative effect of these remarks demonstrates a wide openness to change coupled with a hesitancy to be absolute in planning. It is not that he does not think of the future, nor consider what would be best, nor have his own desires. Rather, he evinces that particular caution we expect in one whose life and activities are not in his own hands.

On the face of it, the Apostle’s hesitancy is surprising, given his obvious position of authority in the Church. Notice how forthright he can be: “For I do not wish to see you now on the way” (vs. 7). Also, he does not hesitate to issue orders: “...see that [Timothy] may be with you without fear,” and “let no one despise him” (vss. 10,11). He commands freely: “send him on his journey in peace.” Of course, the factor that holds St. Paul back - that which keeps him fluid in relation to his future - is his keen awareness of the Lord Jesus’ abiding presence.

The Lord intervenes actively in the Apostle’s plans. This is plain enough in the “aside” of verse 7, “if the Lord permits.” The remark reveals that God is in charge of the Saint’s life and plans. It reveals St. Paul submitting his decisions to the will of the Lord. Such “divine management” is possible only as one becomes immediately responsive to God’s presence.

When St. Paul says he will “tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost” (vs. 8), he explains the reason: “For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries” (vs. 9). A man who is sensitive to the presence of God in life sees all the opportunities and all the opposition that meet him as being within God’s design - in the words of Metropolitan Philaret’s prayer: “In unforeseen events let me not forget that all are sent by Thee.”

Let us set aside the world’s belief that we are in charge of life. Rather, let us embrace the Apostle’s mode of placing the details of life in God’s hands, seeking the Lord’s will, and doing all solely for His Kingdom. When we accept that God is present governing all things, then we know the joy of having the supreme Guide managing our thoughts, feelings, words, and choices.

*Guided always by Thy will, may we ascribe glory unto Thee, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.*

**Comfort: 2 Corinthians 1:1-7, especially vss. 3, 4:** *"...the Father of mercies and God of all comfort...comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted."* [RSV] The Apostle Paul repeats the word 'comfort' ten times in the seven verses of this passage. In these verses, he employs 'paraklesis' or 'comfort' to describe the nature of God, to connect comfort with suffering - especially the Lord Jesus' sufferings, and to encourage the giving of comfort among the Faithful. Let us read closely that we may receive comfort ourselves and provide it to others.

The Apostle uses 'comfort' to describe God. He is "the Father of mercies," a God Who is "the source of all comfort" and "comforts us in all our afflictions" (vss. 3,4). The nature of God the Father is to comfort, and comfort applies also to God the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and to God the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus reveals this in His last discourse: "...I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; Whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him: but ye know Him; for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you" (Jn. 14:15-17). In speaking of 'another' Comforter at this point, the Lord likewise identifies Himself as a Divine Comforter, One Who will be followed in turn by 'another' Comforter, the Holy Spirit.

What is this comfort that the God of all mercies gives? "I will come to you....ye see Me: because I live, ye shall live also. At that day ye shall know that I Am in My Father, and ye in Me, and I in you" (Jn.14:18-20). "I will come to you." He comforts by being present to us. His assertion is unqualified. Therefore, "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from [His] love" (Rom. 8:38-39).

Even in our sufferings and tribulations, He will be present to and for us. As St. John Chrysostom has us notice, our God is not One "'Who suffereth us not to come into affliction,' but, 'Who comforteth in affliction,'" Who addresses all affliction by trampling down deadly affliction by death. He is with us in all the death that befalls us in life: "ye shall live." The comforting presence of the Holy Trinity is mediated through the Holy Spirit Who illumines our hearts and minds to 'know' - to experience - a bond with God in suffering, a true comfort.

Observe in this Epistle reading that the Apostle Paul stresses the connection between comfort and sufferings. As St. John has indicated (above), so St. Paul asserts that comfort comes from God - especially in affliction (2 Cor. 1:4). Christ our God Who has suffered as man understands our sufferings, for He has suffered as we do, as a mortal man. This co-suffering is most important, for it is the great assurance to us that our sufferings are *not* meaningless.

We are united to the Lord Jesus, bonded to Him. Therefore, when we suffer for Him, "the sufferings of Christ abound in us" (vs. 5). As a result, "our comfort also abounds through Christ" (vs. 5). Herewith, the Apostle lays down the foundation of the special place occupied by the martyrs and confessors of the Church. Their sufferings also are for "our comfort and salvation" (vs. 6), and since we are united to them in Christ, their sufferings equip us to cope with suffering so that we also are enabled to endure "the same sufferings which [they] suffer" (vs. 6). How is this done? Principally we partake in Christ's suffering through ascetic discipline, worship, prayer, witnessing, and by doing all these things in a deliberate, Spirit-led, steadfast way so that we may also "partake of the comfort" that comes from Him (vs. 7).

*O Merciful God, may we walk in the way of the Cross to find Thy comfort, life and peace.*

**Christian Living: 2 Corinthians 1:12-20, especially vs. 12:** *"...we have conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, and more abundantly toward you."* In Second Corinthians the Apostle Paul seeks to resolve a troubled relationship between himself and the Corinthian congregation. Readers of this Epistle find the Saint repeatedly defending his manner of life, his personal integrity, and his Apostolic authority. For this reason, Second Corinthians becomes a sure guide for selecting the truest foundation upon which to build an authentic life that pleases God - one that centers choices and actions on the coming Day of the Lord and God's present grace. In addition, the Saint reveals the reliable measure for appraising one's efforts at living life in Christ.

The King James translation of the first phrase of verse 12 reads, "For our rejoicing is this...." Rejoicing is not what one finds in many current English translations: "For our boast [or boasting] is this...." The Greek original supports the meaning, "an act of rejoicing" rather than "boasting." Why is St. Paul rejoicing? It is "the day of the Lord Jesus" (vs. 14). The Lord's impending return serves as his reference point for living - a hope he shares with the Corinthians.

What happens when the great Day of the Lord becomes **the** reference point which guides and corrects the movement and course of one's life? To center life on the Lord's return teaches that for which the Divine Liturgy pleads: "a good defense before the dread Judgment Seat of Christ." Truly, Judgment Day and our appearance before the Lord are sure and certain, and a practicing disciple has cause to rejoice - as the Apostle did for himself and for the Corinthians.

The Apostle rejoices personally at the approaching Day of the Lord because his conscience assures him that he is conducting his life in "simplicity and godly sincerity." When he united himself to Christ, he repudiated myriad, false reference points urged on him by the purveyors of "fleshly wisdom." What a difference when one takes this Day as the single point for living, as the goal for striving! Let us look on the Day of the Lord as a blessing which provides very clear criteria for attaining it with a good hope. We know what pleases the Lord Jesus: "being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col. 1:10).

One may object that pleasing the Lord is not so simple, for it requires strength and resources beyond human capacity. That is true. However, notice what St. Paul says: "Our rejoicing is...by the grace of God" (vs. 12). The Apostle trusts in and depends upon the grace of God. He reveals the true source of rejoicing for anyone who lives, using the Day of the Lord Jesus as his reference point. What other source of strength and renewal can match "the grace of God" as a sure basis for daily choices - for taking action and developing plans?

It is one thing to know where one is headed in life. It is another matter to have the resources for reaching the goal. Beloved of the Lord, we have both. As the Apostle suggests, we have the means to measure our progress along the way until the Day of the Lord. Thus, St. Paul asks rhetorically: "when I was planning...did I do it lightly? Or the things I plan, do I plan according to the flesh?" (vs. 17). Note his negative answer: the Christian acts "soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith" (Rom. 12:3). Let us neither plan, choose, nor live according to the flesh, but according to illumination from the Holy Spirit through Holy Tradition, for there is "no condemnation to them which...walk *not* after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Rom. 8:1). Let us at all times "walk after the Spirit" and rejoice!

*Let all them be glad that hope in Thee; they shall ever rejoice, for Thou shalt dwell among them, and all shall glory in Thee that love Thy Name, for Thou shalt bless the righteous.*

**Appeal For Prayer: Romans 15:30-33, especially vs. 30:** *“Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me.”* St. Paul’s appeal for the prayers of the Christians in Rome was deeply earnest. He was not just ‘asking’ for prayer as a pious formality. The man was about to undertake a venture that would put him at high risk for death and for the unraveling of his whole life’s work. He had an aching need for spiritual support. He was ‘imploring’ his brethren in Rome on the basis of that love which the Holy Spirit prompts among the Faithful. Our clergy likewise appeal to us to “pray to the Lord” And they do so with a like earnestness, whether or not all of us realize the import of their bidding. May God illumine us through this passage today so that hereafter we shall pray fervently to Him for “ourselves and each other and all our life.”

Hear the Apostle: “...strive together with me...that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe” (vs. 31). St. Paul felt himself “bound in the Spirit” to go to Jerusalem, “not knowing the things that will happen to me there except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me” (Acts 20:22,23). For ten years, since the sudden death of the Jewish king, Herod Agrippa, in the Spring of 44 AD, the Romans had placed Judea under one incompetent Governor after another. As a result, the country was boiling toward a revolt that would come in 66 AD. Assassination of moderates and opponents had become commonplace, and St. Paul rightly understood that he was a likely target (Acts 23:12-13).

Only let us not relegate the Apostle’s appeal to the shelves of interesting history. Rather, let us take heed each time the clergy bid us to pray for “deliverance from all tribulation, wrath, danger, and necessity,” that “through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit” (Rom. 15:30), we might respond to the deep earnestness they are conveying to us in these words. Let us “strive together” with the Body of Christ “in prayers to God” (vs. 30). Right now we have brethren in churches throughout the world who are in imminent danger of violent death.

When St. Paul wrote asking, “that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints” (vs. 31), he was referring to a great sum of money he was taking to Judea for the relief of the poor and famine-plagued members of the churches there. He had just stated that he was “going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints” (Rom. 15:25), with donations from the churches in Macedonia and Achaia (Rom. 15:26). Understand, he was taking Gentile money to Jewish Christians at a time when the larger Jewish community had determined not to accept any foreign or Gentile aid for the Temple - out of intense nationalist loyalty to a purist Judaism.

Many first-century Jewish Christians firmly opposed the Apostle’s entire ministry to the Gentiles (Gal. 2:4, 5). If the gifts he was bringing from Gentile churches were to be rejected, it seemed possible that the entire world Christian community might fragment into separate, opposing factions, destroying everything St. Paul had labored for throughout his ministry.

In the present-day Church, with many who call themselves Christians already separated by schisms and heresies, the same dangers face us. Why do you think the Lord Himself prayed that “we all may be one” (Jn. 17:21)? Beloved of the Lord, let us respond earnestly when we are bidden to pray “for the good estate of the holy churches of God, and for the union of all men.”

As St. Paul desired to come to the Roman Christians by the will of God to “be refreshed together” (Rom. 15:32), so let us pray with heartfelt longing “for the peace from above” that all our brethren in our congregations and around the world may be refreshed in the Lord!

*Lord, we pray for mercy, life, peace, health, salvation and visitation for all Thy servants.*

**Imitation: 1 Corinthians 4:9-16, especially vs. 16:** *“Therefore I urge you, imitate me.”* St. John Chrysostom notes that the Apostle Paul urged one of his congregations to “be...imitators of God, as beloved children” (Eph. 5:1), whereas, to the congregation in Corinth, he only said, “imitate me.” St. John concludes that in Corinth, “since his discourse was addressed to weak persons,” he was offering himself - “a more subtle way of bringing them to imitate Christ.”

Look carefully at the one you choose to imitate. By inviting us to imitate himself, the Apostle Paul is directing us toward his model, the Lord Jesus. St. John Chrysostom notes that “he who copies the perfect impression of the seal copies the original model.” Thus, when St. Paul offers himself as a “spectacle to the world,” a person who endures material poverty and remains free from anger, he actually is describing the Lord Jesus perfectly, exactly.

To imitate is to “follow or endeavor to follow a model or example.” In theater productions imitation is used for learning a part. This involves knowing one’s cues and the right lines and actions. Further, imitation means becoming emotionally and behaviorally enrolled in the “persona” of the character, including inner feelings as well as outward demeanor. St. Paul actually refers to the theater when speaking of his own life: “We have been made a spectacle to the world” (vs. 9), for, in the original, the word “spectacle” literally means “theater.”

The character which the Apostle prompts the Corinthians to play or imitate is a foolish person, one who is weak, powerless, and dishonored. The Sadducees thought of Christ as a country bumpkin, a foolish and impotent teacher, until they challenged Him. The ‘*problem*’ they used to test Him mocked His intelligence, being highly facetious: a woman married seven times, to seven brothers one after another (Mt. 22:23-33). The tale was meant to denigrate Jesus as a teacher and to belittle the idea of resurrection, which they *knew* was ‘foolish superstition.’

St. Matthew observes that when the Lord Jesus answered them, they were “silenced” (Mt. 22:34). Today, Christian belief and devotion are regarded as foolish, weak, and lacking in honor. However, by imitating Christ, as we learn the lines faithfully, we can expect to be treated as fools, and yet we shall see the wise of this world silenced by our imitation of Christ.

To imitate Apostolic practice means shifting energy from the pursuit of position, money, property, power, and comforts toward the intentional acquisition of the riches of the Kingdom - spiritual strength, faith in God, and pure love. The Lord Jesus lived such a godly life, warning constantly against the dulling effects of power, riches, and creature-comforts (Lk. 16:19-26).

St. Paul, imitating the Lord fully, exemplifies the expression ‘living from hand to mouth.’ He worked with his hands at a trade in order to earn his own keep, never taking from the congregations he established or from the people he visited (1 Cor. 4:12). His personal clothing was “poor,” and he had no home to call his own (vs. 11). Let us heed the Apostle’s invitation to redirect our energies toward heavenly treasures rather than toward acquiring material goods.

Finally, St. Paul asks us to imitate him in being free from anger. St. John of the Ladder noted that, “Freedom from anger is an insatiable appetite for dishonor...an immovable state of soul which remains unaffected whether in evil report or in good report, in dishonor or in praise.” In this St. John matches the Apostle’s “Being reviled, we bless, being persecuted, we endure...” (vss. 12, 13), and perfectly describes the humiliated Christ enduring arrogance, “wishing to suffer and to save us, since [He is] the Lover of mankind.” Such are the models for us to imitate.

*O Holy Lord Jesus, grant us grace to take joyfully the sufferings of this present life in full assurance of the glory that shall be revealed in those who have sought to imitate Thee.*

**Pastoral Reflections I ~ Penitential Discipline: 2 Corinthians 2:4-15, especially vs. 6:** *“This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient....”* The readings through this week are taken from the first major section of Second Corinthians. They contain a series of pastoral reflections by the Apostle on various facets of his relationship with the Corinthian congregation. The readings provide valuable insights into the real-life burdens and compensations not only of St. Paul, but also of every Christian pastor. In the present passage, St. Paul discusses the restoration of a penitent to Communion, and provides us with the basic guidelines and purposes of penitential discipline, as well as its place in the larger setting of the Gospel.

St. John Chrysostom, in his comments on this passage, calls attention to the pastoral spirit of St. Paul: “What is more tenderly affectioned than this man’s spirit? for he sheweth himself to have been not less pained than they who had sinned, but even much more.” Let us learn from this that loving affection is the one true foundation upon which all penitential action is meant to be taken in the Church. See how the Apostle reveals loving affection as a pastor. The action of excommunicating an offender caused St. Paul “affliction and anguish of heart” (vs. 4). Further, since other members of the congregation were concerned about the man’s exclusion, the Apostle wanted them to know that he cared not only for the offender but for them all.

The Orthodox pastor acts in love for the entire Body and for each individual person. Like the Apostle Paul, pastors care for both the flock and the strays. Briefly, a pastor may “leave the ninety and nine, and [go] into the mountains, and [seek] that which is gone astray” (Mt. 18:12), yet as a good shepherd, like our Master, he “putteth forth his own sheep, [and] goeth before them” as a whole flock (Jn. 10:4). Such loving affection stems from the love a pastor knows and receives from God personally: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

The foundation of loving affection in Christ prepares all Christians to affirm penitential discipline within the Church. The true pastor metes out discipline to evoke sorrow, having the aim to produce correction of life and effect restoration within the Body of Christ. That purpose surely was demonstrated by St. Paul in this case within the Corinthian community. The inflicted punishment was “sufficient” for the particular penitent (2 Cor. 2:6). The man was sorrowing (vs. 7), and correction was in evidence. Forgiveness by all, comfort, and demonstrated love definitely were meant to follow (vss. 7,8), all of which St. Paul advanced.

Good pastors, in disciplining penitents and communities, seek these manifestations of the Gospel: forgiveness, comfort, and healing of relationships. In this case, the Apostle had written an earlier letter to the entire congregation to see whether they were “obedient in all things” (vs. 9), but now it was time to move on and to forgive. They should do so, for the Apostle had “forgiven” for their sakes “in the presence of Christ” (vs. 10), and so the restoration was official.

Having extended his forgiveness under the Lord’s authority, St. Paul finally comments about the necessity for loving affection on the part of all “lest Satan should take advantage of us” (vs. 11). The Apostle uses penitential discipline within the larger context of the Gospel. Sin and death are the goals of the Devil and his minions - as of old. However, let all rejoice when discipline in the Church achieves restoration, for then, with the Lord, we shall behold “Satan as lightning fall from heaven” and see God’s love defeat “the power of the enemy” (Lk. 10:18,19).

*O Lord, grant us all an image of repentance, forgiveness, and deliverance from the enemy.*

**Pastoral Reflections II ~ The Pastoral Relationship: 2 Corinthians 2:14-3:3, especially vss. 3:1, 2:** “...Or do we need...epistles of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you? You are our epistle written in our hearts, and known and read by all men.” Anyone who has participated very long in the Church knows that there can be great variety in the character and quality of the relationships between pastors and congregations. In today’s reading, as the Apostle Paul reflects on his own pastoral relationship with the church in Corinth, he provides an invaluable teaching concerning the basis of a pastoral relationship, the different ways that the relationships of pastors and congregations are experienced, and what lends authority to a pastor.

First, St. Paul gives thanks “to God Who always leads us in triumph in Christ” (vs. 14). The leadership role of a Pastor in a congregation must be founded on the authority of the risen and ascended Christ. The Apostle Peter indicates the same when he wrote to a scattering of congregations: “ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls” (1 Pet. 2:25). Our Bishops, in appointing Pastors to congregations, do so to promote the advancement of Christ’s victory among His people. At any given time, for a specific congregation, the Bishop will appoint a man he believes capable of leading that particular congregation to share in the Lord’s triumph. Many factors may influence the Bishop’s choice, but, in the final analysis, his desire is to see Pastors and congregations experience the Lord’s victory in their life together as the People of God in a specific place.

Of course when a pastor comes to a parish, there will be those who experience his ministry as a blessing, though some may not. St. Paul alludes to the varied reactions using the figure of fragrance from incense. Some members may find a pastor’s ministry to have an enhancing “aroma,” while others may find his pastoral relationship something of a “stench” (vss. 15,16). The Apostle views such reactions as going beyond mere like and dislike. As he points out, for some, a pastor’s presence and work gives off the aroma of death, while for others the same ministry works as an aroma that leads them deeper into true Life in Christ (vs. 16).

One might think that this difference in reactions would follow the line between those in the Church and those still outside in the world, but it does not seem always to divide neatly along such lines. We know that there are Pastors who fail, abuse, or even betray their people, and we know of congregations who have failed, abused, and betrayed their Priests. All of this is sad commentary on the reality of sin, and as the Apostle says earlier in Second Corinthians, Satan has “his devices” (2 Cor. 2:11). Many of those who oppose a Pastor inside the Church disclose their own captivity to death. Let those who find themselves in opposition to their Pastor be especially cautious! On the other hand, opposition or attraction to a Pastor by those outside the Church can have many reasons, some of which can lead them to life in the discovery of true Orthodox Faith.

Where does a Pastor’s true authority lie? In the Orthodox Church a Priest does not serve without appointment of his Bishop, the chief Pastor, who is the Pastor of every local community in his Diocese. But the Apostle directs us to another reality alongside ecclesiastical order: the power and authority that flows in a pastoral relationship is from the Holy Spirit. The movement of the Spirit in the heart of an assigning Bishop and in a Priest constitute a spiritual letter to a parish (vs. 3:3). When both “letters” are accepted by all parties in a pastoral relationship, the combination can be easily “read by all men” (vs. 2).

*O Lord, fill all Thy pastors with the gift of the Holy Spirit that they may worthily stand in innocency before Thine Altar to proclaim the Gospel of Thy kingdom and the word of true Life.*

**Pastoral Reflections III ~ Pastoral Authority: 2 Corinthians 3:4-11, especially vs. 8:** *“how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious?”* St. John Chrysostom, when referring to his own call to pastoral authority, drew an example from the secular world and expressed strong doubts about his own personal adequacy to bear the authority of a Pastor: “if anyone in charge of a full-sized merchant ship, full of rowers, and laden with a costly freight, were to station me at the helm and bid me cross the Aegean or the Tyrrhene seas, I should recoil from the proposal at once.” So far as the priesthood is concerned, St. John admits frankly, “I know my own soul, how feeble and puny it is; I know the magnitude of this ministry, and the great difficulty of the work: for more stormy billows vex the soul of the priest than the gales which disturb the sea.”

St. John’s assessment of the priestly ministry is fair. Who is equal to the sacred ministry of God? In today’s reading, St. Paul reveals the only possible basis by which any man can reasonably assume pastoral orders. However, what he teaches is pertinent to every Christian, for, being frail human beings, all who share in the life of the Church, ordained and lay alike, are far from equal to the demands which come with basic membership in the Body of Christ.

St. Paul was fully confident in his authority as an Apostle (vs .4). He knew he was no ‘pedlar of the word of God’ (2 Cor. 2:17) needing written “epistles of commendation” (2 Cor. 3:1) to secure his position. He pointed out to the Corinthians, “you are our epistle...written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God” (2 Cor. 3:2,3). Whence this confidence? “Through Christ toward God” (2 Cor. 3:4). The Lord Himself had confronted Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus, humbled him, brought him to repentance, and authorized him as His Apostle (Acts 9:3-15).

Every person who humbly unites himself to Christ and then extends love to the undeserving, speaks against fraud or injustice, refuses to lie, cheat or indulge his cravings, is acting on a similar “trust through Christ.” Every such act participates in the pastoral work of the Great Shepherd and bears in itself the full authority of God. Such is our powerful but humble position!

Despite having received his credentials for ministry directly from the Lord, the Apostle Paul remained modest: “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves...” (2 Cor. 3:5). He viewed himself as a mere recipient of the powers of an Apostle. Later in this Epistle, after describing an amazing array of achievements (2 Cor. 11:22-12:4), he says bluntly, “of my self I will not boast except in my infirmities” (2 Cor. 12:5).

How then could St. Paul function as an Apostle? “...our sufficiency is from God, Who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant” (2 Cor. 3:5). In what manner? by the working of the Spirit; “for...the Spirit gives life” (vs. 6). Whenever our Faith is challenged and we are called upon to stand up for the Gospel, we too can modestly anticipate that God will make us sufficient in and through the indwelling presence and action of the life-giving Holy Spirit.

St. Paul was confident because he knew that in Christ, his efforts would last. Looking back historically, who can say that he was not absolutely correct? What made him certain in that early period? He suggests: “...if the ministry...written and engraved on stones was glorious....how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious?” (vss. 7-8). There is no comparing the earlier, partial revelation of the Mosaic law with the Incarnation of the Lord and His gift of the Spirit. All other ministries are superseded in Christ (vss. 9,10). Christian Faith “is much more glorious,” for it endures into all eternity. No cup of water given in the Lord’s Name is wasted (Mt. 25:37-40). Let the Faith which we have received give us confidence before God.

*It is meet and right to worship Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the Trinity, one in Essence.*



**Pastoral Reflections IV ~ Obstacles And Temptations: 2 Corinthians 4:1-6, especially vs. 1:** *“Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart.”* In his reflections concerning pastoral authority (2 Cor. 3:4-11), St. Paul observes that every member of the Church is committed to sharing in the Lord Jesus’ work as the Pastor of the world. Christ our God expects not only ordained but also lay persons to engage in His ministry.

In the present passage, the Apostle discusses some common obstacles which could have subverted his ministry or tempted him away from carrying out his pastoral service. Let us examine these obstacles and temptations as serious, potential difficulties facing each one of us.

In the opening verse of this portion of the Epistle, St. Paul reveals that ministry and membership in Christ are intertwined, a fact that encouraged him (vs. 1). The same should be true for all the Faithful, for to become a Christian is to receive the mercy of God and a living share in Christ’s pastoral work. Awakening to membership in Christ moves us to repent and seek the Lord’s great mercy. In the exchange between man and God, our hearts awaken as they receive cleansing and healing. Cleansing is followed by a consciousness of God’s mandate to extend the mercy one has received. Thus, ministry is born, and caring and giving come alive. The needs of others are perceived in a new light. Let us heed St. Paul’s experience: “If God can love this most sinful man, then He loves all men, and so must I” (see vs. 2).

Beloved of the Lord, let us love others. God’s mercy is fuel; let it ignite our love for the unlovable, extend our care to the hateful, teach us to give when being used and to “go the second mile” (Mt. 5:41). God’s mercy makes these actions possible, helps us not to waver nor to become discouraged by abuse, but to allow Christ’s pastoral ministry to shine through us.

The primary obstacles to the pastoral ministry are the temptation to serve one’s self first and to resign to weariness and indifference. The call of the Lord is a call to struggle, to act as a Christian. Therefore, let us determine to say with St. Paul, “we do not lose heart!”

The mercy we have received leads the Faithful to renounce “the hidden things of shame” (2 Cor. 4:2). All adults who receive Baptism, Chrismation, and the Holy Gifts begin with confession. For those of us who grow up in the Faith, the need for confession comes more often as we mature. When the Apostle received God’s mercy, he walked no more “in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth” (vs. 2). Thereafter, he commended himself as a living example of what Christ can accomplish in anyone.

Yes, there are temptations to fall back into sinful ways, “As when a dog goes to his own vomit, and becomes abominable” (Prov. 26:11). St. Mark the Ascetic calls this “prepossession,” the potential to be occupied mentally again by that which held us previously. While there is an involuntary dimension to prepossession - as former sins are remembered, yet, as we seek to serve in the Lord’s pastoral work, we must resist temptation - even oppose the temptation to dwell on the sins already confessed - for going over sins will gravely mar our care for and giving to others.

There are other obstacles to pastoral ministry, principally the spiritual blindness of others. Darkness is everywhere, for the “god of this age has blinded” many minds and hearts (2 Cor. 4:4). As the Apostle commends himself “to every man’s conscience in the sight of God” (vs. 2), he becomes a shining light. Let us commend ourselves to others as the presence of Light to cut through the darkness: “God...commanded light to shine out of darkness...in the face of Jesus Christ” (vs. 6). May the Spirit in us shine in our hearts to reveal God’s mercy to others.

*O Christ, let Thy light shine within us, poor earthen vessels, that all may see Thy Light.*

**Renewal: 2 Corinthians 4:13-18, especially vss. 16, 17:** *“the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”* Ask yourself, Who or what is renewing the inward man? The answer is that God works together with those who are bearing the “light affliction.” These two verses (16,17) are the heart of this passage. Their central role may not be obvious on a first reading of this Epistle, especially when one does not begin with the preface that prepares one to understand the Apostle’s meaning (2 Cor. 4:7-12). Please read these verses.

Also, an essential reference may be passed over- that to which St. Paul alludes when he speaks of “what is written, ‘I believed and therefore I spoke’” (2 Cor. 4:13). He quotes Psalm 115:1 LXX (equivalent to Psalm 115:10 MT, but do read all of Psalms 114-115 LXX or 116 MT).

What is the point of diverting the reader to these other portions of Scripture, of asking you to explore the larger context? It is to reveal the mind of the Apostle in this passage. A simple summary of his consciousness might read like this: St. Paul speaks to the Corinthians as a suffering man, a man genuinely faced with death - one who is “always [being] delivered to death for Jesus’ sake” (2 Cor. 4:11). There is no hyperbole here. Therefore, the Apostle finds himself crying out to God in the same spiritual manner as the Psalmist, “The pangs of death have encompassed me, the perils of hades have found me...and I called upon the Name of the Lord (Ps. 114:3,4 LXX), but God “hath delivered my soul from death....I believed, wherefore I spake.” (Ps. 114:8; 115:1 LXX). St. Paul, in like suffering, knows the same Holy Spirit as the Psalmist.

God’s holy people suffer. Their children die at birth. Their jobs are abruptly terminated. They get cancer. They know the pains of aging. They are wrenched by marital infidelity. In the service of their country, they are blown up by roadside bombs and lose life and limb. We are no different than anyone else in this “vale of tears.” Our crises also are succeeded by difficulties.

However, by the grace of God, there may be something separating us from others who face life’s exigencies: a “spirit of faith...we also believe...knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus” (2 Cor. 4:13,14). If so, we are able to say to one another as the Apostle does here, “do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day” (vs. 16). Read that again - we are “being renewed day by day.” There can be a process going on inside as a result of being united to Christ - in our beaten, dilapidated, worn, and sinful hearts, we can truly undergo a wonderful change.

As we cooperate with God the Holy Spirit - if we will stop looking “at the things which are seen, but [look steadily] at the things which are not seen” (vs. 18), then “our light affliction, which is but for a moment” (vs. 17) actually becomes our secret advantage, “working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (vs. 17).

It becomes possible to say, “Yes the ‘outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day’” (vs. 16). Such is the renewing process we call the Life in Christ. Living in this spiritual manner is a delicate balancing act, trusting God within us as we struggle with extremities coming upon us from the outside. St. John Chrysostom asks of our inner man, “How is it renewed? By faith, by hope, by a forward will, finally, by braving these extremities. For...as the body suffers ten thousand things, in the like proportion hath the soul goodlier hopes and becometh brighter, like gold refined in the fire more and more.”

*Yea, Lord, I pray Thee, have pity on me. Spare me in mine affliction and my misery and hide not the way of salvation from me.* (Archimandrite Sophrony, On Prayer)

**The Fulfilling of Wisdom: 1 Corinthians 1:3-9, especially vs. 9:** *“God is faithful, by Whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”* In the first prayer of thanksgiving after the Holy Communion, we rejoice, thanking God that He has not rejected us as sinners but accounts us worthy to be communicants of His holy and ineffable Mysteries. Then, as if the Lord Jesus’ unspeakable Gift of Himself were not enough - along with dying for us and rising again - the prayer continues to ask God that His wisdom may be fulfilled in and through our lives. Thus, the prayer boldly asks the Lord to be present *within* us to heal our souls and bodies, that the eyes of our hearts may be enlightened, our spiritual powers at peace, our faith invincible, our love sincere, our obedience perfect in keeping His commandments, our growth still earnest in the grace which He has bestowed upon us, our journey through this life ever preserved in holiness, and our confidence yet hopeful that we may attain His Blessed Kingdom.

This extensive request of the post-Communion prayer is like the present passage - a prayer of thanksgiving. In the Epistle today, St. Paul offers thanks for the disciples at Corinth and for us as well (vss. 3-9). Like the prayer of thanksgiving after Holy Communion, the Apostle’s prayer yearns that we respond to the actions of God on our behalf. The Apostle notes that God the Father and the Lord Jesus have bestowed grace and peace upon us His people, enriched us in all speech and knowledge by Christ, and confirmed the Apostle’s testimony concerning the Lord Jesus’ coming among us (vss. 4-6). He notes that we are not deprived of any spiritual gift (vs. 7), and that God is faithfully standing ready to help us until the end of time.

What of us, Beloved of the Lord? How shall we respond to all that God has done for us? We know the basics of what God accomplished in Christ on our behalf. Who among us has not heard repeatedly the recitation of His wondrous, saving works offered up during the Divine Liturgy: “the Cross, the Grave, the Resurrection on the third day, the Ascension into heaven, the Sitting at the right hand, and the second and glorious Coming”? In so many ways, the Gospel has been opened before us. We have a framework for understanding, and surely we ought to be able to express these wonders for ourselves, borrowing from the familiar hymns and prayers!

Brethren, the question is this: have we continued growing in the knowledge of our Faith (vs. 5)? Have we meditated, read, thought, reflected, prayed and learned more and more concerning all that “Jesus began both to do and to teach” (Acts 1:1)? Do we speak of these marvelous things, sharing them with friends, acquaintances and family? How can we not?! What holds us back? It is a marvel that we are so quiet and repressed!

What does the Apostle mean when he says that “the testimony of Christ was confirmed in and among you,” or when he anticipates that God “will also confirm you to the end” (vss. 6,8)? Our hearts have said, “Yes!” We delight in the liturgies and worship that are available to us. We hear sermons and nod in agreement, knowing we are being told the Truth. We have found ourselves giving love, being kind, helping others, reaching out to the fearful, choosing to change our ways. Let us be in awe, for these movements of ours are from the Holy Spirit. They confirm the truth. They strengthen us in God’s gift of faithfulness. Let us not hold back in these things. We have “come short in no gift...waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ” (vs. 7).

Most of all, let us strive to be wholly “blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (vs. 8). Above all, let us not doubt God if we have not labored. He called us “into the fellowship of His Son”(vs. 9) and fulfilled all wisdom in us; let us, then, faithfully apply His wisdom.

*May we ever remember Thy grace, and henceforth live not unto ourselves, but unto Thee.*

**Rights: 1 Corinthians 9:2-12, especially vs. 12:** *“Nevertheless, we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the Gospel of Christ.”* What irony there is in this passage! The Apostle builds a case for exercising his right to receive support from his ministry (vss. 4-11), but then, foregoes all claims: “Nevertheless we do not claim this right.” One of the “foremost in the ranks of the Apostles” sets aside rights that are his due. His restraint is in marked contrast to so many people in contemporary society who seem obsessed with rights. His defense of his rights sounds familiar, but how intriguing that he declines to exercise what he could rightfully claim!

His example provides a sound Orthodox guide for stepping back from the contemporary social clamor for rights. Let us examine closely the Apostle’s understanding of rights. The word “right,” or “exousia,” as used throughout this passage, refers to authoritative power such as one would encounter in legal, political, social, or moral affairs. It contrasts with “dynamis,” which refers to the application of physical, spiritual, or natural powers or forces.

The Lord Jesus illustrates the difference between these words in the context of His ministry: “And He called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases....” (Lk. 9:1), “exousia” being translated as “authority”- as it often is in the New Testament. Still, it carries an implication of power to exercise claims and privileges. In St. Matthew 9:2-8, the Scribes take offense at the Lord Jesus for expressing the right (exousia) to forgive sins. As He heals a paralytic, He reveals both the “right” and the “power” to forgive.

In today’s reading, the Apostle states his right to enjoy the “perks” of an Apostle, identifying two well-known yet related sources: socially recognized practice (1 Cor. 9:4-7) and Divine sanction (vss. 8-10). Behind convention is Divine sanction (vs. 8). Tracing lawful social practice to the authority of God appears in other places in St. Paul’s writing (see Rom. 2:12-16).

What guidance can we glean from the Apostle’s approach for our own use in daily life? With St. Paul, we can agree that all *true* rights, whether they originate from accepted practice, explicit legal codes, or the warrant of Holy Scripture, derive ultimately from God. Claims to rights that are contrary to the will of God are sin and should not to be honored; but what does it look like when someone approaches their rights apostolically?

In a recent collection of memoirs concerning the Russian Priest-Prisoner, Father Arseny, we have a vivid example of a Saint who displayed a shining, apostolic response to every issue of rights that he encountered. While the degradation of the Soviet prison camps removed all rights from all prisoners, yet among the inmates (zecks) themselves, a code of rights existed.

It was the “criminals” who had control of inmate “rights” - robbing and killing at will. Fr. Arseny set such a profound example of apostolic laying down of rights, that many were changed by observing his example. One such was the hardened criminal, Sazikov: “I kept careful watch on you until I understood that you do not live for yourself, but for others - in the name of your God...You’ve touched my heart...with the example you set. I’ve decided to be done with my past. I know my life will end here, but I want to take your path, I want to believe.”

Here is St. Paul’s point lived by a humble prisoner, calling upon us to reshape what we say and do, so that our witness may not hinder the Gospel of Christ for others, but change the hearts of others. As we are united to the Lord, let us give Him all our rights, expecting nothing, receiving whatever He extends to us in His grace and love.

*O Master, we have put off the old man, and Thou hast renewed us unto life: Fill us with the power of Thy Spirit that we may no more be children of this world, but of Thy Kingdom only.*

**Life in Christ I ~ Live for Him: 2 Corinthians 5:10-15, especially vs. 15:** “...[Christ] died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him Who died for them and rose again.” Chapters Five through Seven of Second Corinthians contain four Apostolic commands that direct the Faithful to specific aspect of living in Christ - to live for Him, be reconciled to Him, be open to Him, and cleanse ourselves for Him. Each reading asks that we assess the quality and depth of our life in Christ and initiate the changes within ourselves required for receiving God’s healing and renewing grace.

The key commandment found in the present reading appears in the last verse (vs. 15), and is quoted above: “live for Him.” Notice how radically this command opposes life we meet all around us with its banal claims to be nice, normal, and polite. Contemporary culture encourages living to enjoy ourselves, while being pleasant to our neighbors. The media of this age do allow that we should contribute a “fair share” to humanity - to others’ welfare and the expectations of our employers, families, friends and society. The core of their message is self-satisfaction. Not so for the Apostle. He rejects such an approach to life. St. Paul straightforwardly urges us to “Live for Christ as Lord, God, and Savior.” What do these words actually mean, to “live for Christ?” How can we know if we are in fact living for the Lord? Let us listen to the Apostle.

First, St. Paul draws attention to the true, overlooked, and God-given context of this present life, showing the world unvarnished, for “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ” (vs. 10). Hence, the Divine Liturgy teaches us to prepare for “a Christian ending to our life...and a good defense before the fearful Judgment Seat of Christ.” Whatever anyone makes of his life, finally he will answer to God for all his choices and actions.

As we pray in “remembrance of the Second Appearance of Christ, Who shows no favors,” does it not seem strange how readily we fall into self-deception and act as if we shall live forever? How freely we believe the lie to “eat, drink and be merry” (Lk. 12:19), without regard for the fragility of our mortal existence and for our destiny which is eternal. Let us be humble before God, face our mortality, and seek to live the life in Christ worthily of the Master.

Having invited a sober assessment of our actual condition, St. Paul speaks for himself, “Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men” (vs. 11). Knowing we are ultimately accountable let us adopt his perspective of Godly terror. He calls us to wake up (Eph. 5:14) and come to our senses and reject any “boast in appearances and not in heart” (2 Cor. 5:12). Here is the crucial precondition that enables us to “live for Christ.” We must cast off all efforts “to look good.” That is the way of the world. Rather, let us strive to cleanse the thoughts of our hearts that we may hear the Lord speaking in us - in the depths of our being. Let us reach out to Christ recognizing our desperation, so that we may find grace to obey. Consider those who observed St. Paul’s words and actions and concluded that he was “beside himself...of an unsound mind” (vs. 13). No, quite definitely he heard the Lord in his heart and he obeyed.

Having taught us how to live for Christ, the Apostle concludes his teaching with that final, important determinant for all who would live for the Lord, love: “For the love of Christ compels us” (vs. 14). Yes, love is the measure of the true Christian and the genuinely natural response of those who hold the Lord in their hearts, for He evokes a “life and death” love in our hearts, actions, relationships, and words (1 Cor. 13:3,4). Love is the way of life in Christ.

*May I ever remember Thy grace, and live henceforth not unto myself but unto Thee.*

**Eternally Begotten: Acts 13:25-33, especially vs. 33:** *“God has fulfilled this [the sending of a Savior] for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the second Psalm: ‘Thou art My Son, Today I have begotten Thee.’”* The Third Kathisma of the Orthros of this Feast addresses the worthy Forerunner John thus: “Thou of everlasting memory...didst declare the splendor-bearing Sun shining forth, preaching the Creator to the people in the wilderness, the Lamb of God Who taketh away the sins of the world....” Here is a liturgical acclamation which acknowledges what God accomplished at the hand of the Baptizer and explains why the Church addresses John as the great “Prophet of Prophets.”

The Forerunner was the first person to announce the dawn of history’s greatest season - the days on earth of the promised One, the Savior of Israel (Acts 13:23). St. John recognized Jesus of Nazareth as the One, “the sandals of Whose feet I am not worthy to loose,” and as the “Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world” (vs. 25; Jn. 1:29). Further, the Blessed John was the first to witness the initial manifestation of the Trinity (vs. 33; Mt. 3:17; Jn. 1:32-34), the Theophany revealed at the Lord’s Baptism and at St. John’s hand - for the voice of the Father declared Jesus to be His beloved Son, and the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove.

The Lord God carefully prepared the way for the Incarnation of the Word among men. For centuries, He raised up Prophets who offered glimpses of the coming great King. They foretold the coming of One Who would rule all the nations, Who would reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, Who would establish and uphold God’s Kingdom in justice and righteousness forever (Is. 9:7), upon Whom the Spirit of the Lord would rest (Is. 11:2).

Historically, the revelation of the Person of Christ steadily expanded, beginning from the earliest prophets until the days of the Baptizer. Further, the Lord Himself revealed to His disciples and all who would receive His words that “no man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, Which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him” (Jn. 1:18). Further, Jesus declared the essential unity between Himself and God the Father: “I and My Father are One” (Jn. 10:30). In three years of preparation, Jesus’ disciples heard, saw, and handled “the Word of life,” and then they declared, “we have seen [Him], and bear witness, and shew...that eternal life, which was with the Father...was manifested unto us” (1 Jn. 1:1,2).

After Jesus’ Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Ascension, the Apostles sought to proclaim the Truth Whom they knew personally - God Himself Who had visited His people (Lk. 1:68). To communicate the Truth, they called the Lord Jesus by special names to express His unity with the Father: God’s Beloved Son (Lk. 3:22), the only Begotten of the Father (Jn. 1:14), God’s own Son (Rom. 8: 3,32), or as St. Paul preached when he quoted from the Prophet David, “Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee” (Psalm 2:7 LXX).

Through subsequent centuries, the Fathers of the Church, to defend this Apostolic message one phrase at a time, found precise language to refute all misinterpretations of the term “Begotten.” Against certain early gnostic teachers, who theorized that Jesus was God only in the guise of a man but not a genuine flesh-and-blood human, the Fathers declared that He was “Very God of Very God, Begotten, not made; of one essence with the Father.” The Church, with the Apostles, understands that the “Begetting” of God the Word occurs eternally from the Father, and that there never was a time when He was not, since He was “Begotten before all worlds.”

*From the Fatherly bosom Thou art inseparable, O sweet Jesus, Thou eternally-Begotten Son of God, and Deliverer of the world; Send Thy comforting Spirit to sanctify our souls.*

**Open-heartedness: 2 Corinthians 6:11-16, especially vs. 13:** *“Now in return for the same [open-heartedness] - I speak as to children - you also be open.”* St. John the Theologian says, “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God Whom he hath not seen?” (1 Jn. 4:20). Consider this corollary: if a man claims, ‘my heart is open to God,’ but has closed his heart to his brother, he is a liar: for he that is not openhearted to his brother whom he hath seen, how can he be open to God Whom he hath not seen? What of this corollary? St. Paul appeals to the Corinthians to open their hearts to him (2 Cor. 6:11,13), warning them that by restricting their affections toward him (vs. 12), they are in danger of becoming enmeshed with “unbelievers” and practicing “idolatry” (vss. 14-16), thereby severing their relationship with God.

Walling themselves off from the Apostle, they will inevitably also close themselves off from God. Where then will they go? back to the darkness of paganism, idolatry and the demons? St. John Chrysostom notes how much the Apostle functions here like a father with a wayward son, “What art thou doing, child? Dost thou despise thy father and prefer impure men filled with ten thousand vices? Knowest thou not how much better and more respectable thou art than they?”

If a tiny, new first-century congregation were to cut themselves off from relationship with the Apostle, they most surely would have been overtaken by the dominant pagan culture around them. Therefore, St. Paul posed five questions to them to expose the implication of their closed hearts. These questions are pertinent for all Christians tempted to close their hearts against their brethren. The alternatives of secularism, schism, heresy, paganism will soon swallow them.

*“For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness?”* (vs. 14). “Fellowship” in this question refers to “sharing” or “partnership.” The question reminds Christians that it is impossible to be isolated spiritually. One’s heart will inevitably be yoked to something or to someone. The alternatives to our Faith are fearsome. Where can one go? It is horrifying to consider throwing over the power of the Resurrection, the incredible Love of God, the door of repentance, the way to theosis, and the heavenly worship. For what? Emptiness!

*“And what communion has light with darkness?”* (vs. 14). The present day fascination with “Eastern” religions must hold no attraction for Orthodox Christians. Let anyone who contemplates abandoning the light of Faith in Christ the Life-Giver for the darkness of the life-denying hope offered by Eastern religions realize that he is in flight from God’s good creation.

*“And what accord has Christ with Belial?”* (vs. 15). There can be no agreement between Christ and paganism. Behind all idolatry and heresy is “Belial.” The word itself is borrowed from Hebrew and suggests “worthlessness” or “perdition.” It refers to Satan and specifically to joining Satan’s rebellion. Pray God that none of us ever harden ourselves against the Faith and thereby present ourselves to the devil.

*“...what part has a believer with an unbeliever?”* (vs. 15). St. Paul began this section with the image of being “yoked” (vs. 14). To be united to Christ is to be yoked with Love (Mt. 11:29). Hardening one’s heart against fellow Christians or the Lord leads to slavery and to being yoked with those who hate. The first steps may be imperceptible, but guard your great Treasure!

*“For what agreement has the temple of God with idols?”* (vs. 16). The Christian Church is the Temple of the living God. Christ is among us. Let us not sell our birthright for pottage!

*Let us love one another, that with one accord we may confess the Trinity, one in Essence.*

**Cleansing of the Self: 2 Corinthians 7:1-10, especially vs. 1:** *“Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”* In this quote, note that the Apostle is referring to a series of Divine promises he has just cited (2 Cor. 6:16-18), promises in which God says in effect: “Be a pure people separated to Me, and I will dwell among you as your God.” On the basis of these promises, the Apostle admonishes us to “cleanse ourselves” so that God may dwell among us. Still, the Prophet Job taught: “For who shall be pure from uncleanness? not even one” (Job 14:4 LXX). Since we are unclean, is the Apostle’s admonition a counsel of futility?

Were it not that the Lord bore our sins (Is. 52:4-6 LXX) and cleansed us in the washing of Holy Baptism (Eph. 5:26), these promises could only lead to despair. However, in urging us to “cleanse ourselves,” the Apostle reveals the great hope we have in Christ Jesus. The Lord achieved a foundation for a purity beyond our capacity in His death and Resurrection. Now, by aid of the Holy Spirit, we have hope of attaining that true purity of which St. Paul speaks, including the cleansing process or the steps we must take.

The purity that God seeks in us is moral. As the Apostle says, we are to “cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit” (vs. 1). “Flesh” is the term he uses to speak of human desires, thoughts, feelings, and actions that are alienated from God. Human life apart from God - when men have no fear of God - leads only to bitterness and filthiness of flesh and spirit. Therefore, the focus of Apostolic living first of all is directed toward heightened consciousness of one’s desires, thoughts, feelings, and actions.

If we would be cleansed, we must first find and identify the workings of the flesh within ourselves. Then with the aid of the Holy Spirit, we are enabled to expel “all filthiness of flesh and spirit.” We may do self-cleansing. On our part, the asceticism of prayer, fasting and worship is required so that the Holy Spirit may illumine our hearts and move us into cleansing action. However, as St. Gregory Palamas has observed: even when evil thoughts cease, the whole soul is not yet pure. Our entire inner life, including our spirit or heart, must be purified. “All the other powers of our soul” must be cleansed, requiring of us self-control, love, vigil, and vigilance.

St. Paul declares that we must work for moral cleansing by “perfecting holiness.” The word “perfecting” derives from “telos,” the word the Lord used when He said: “You must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt. 5:48). “Telos” refers to “an end attained.” Hence, cleansing is a process lived in the “fear of God,” its end being holiness. The purity to be attained is set by God, not standards proposed or qualified by men. God’s standards become the measure of all that must be expelled, or retained and developed within us.

Finally, the Apostle describes the steps which must be taken to reach the “telos,” the ultimate God-defined purity. We may cleanse ourselves when our hearts are open to the teachings of the Apostles (vs. 2), when we are filled with an “earnest desire” to be cleansed (vs. 7), when we mourn and grieve because of our uncleanness and sin (vs. 7), and when we zealously pursue cleansing (vs. 7).

Followed diligently as a program of cleansing, these steps naturally lead to repentance, to that “sacrifice” which is pleasing to God, to “a broken spirit, a heart that is broken and humbled” (Ps. 50:17 LXX). Such a heart God does not despise. Rather, He works with us and within us to create such a clean heart and to renew that right spirit within, which He desires (Ps. 50:10 LXX).

*Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great mercy and blot out my transgressions.*