

July 1 – Thursday – Saints Cosmas & Damian of Rome
1 Corinthians 12:27-13:8

Sine Qua Non: 1 Corinthians 12:27-13:8, especially vs 3: “*And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.*” Saint Paul declares that he will show us “a more excellent way” (vs 31); then, in the three verses that follow, he thrice repeats an identical phrase “but have not love” (vss 1,2,3). Thus, he underscores the key issue for us: many fine activities, many notable efforts, many good works and many admirable deeds, if accomplished without love as their foundational motive (as the force impelling them), are truly a waste of energy. Accepting this truth leads us back to the Latin phrase at the beginning of this meditation, an expression the dictionary translates as: “[‘without which not’]: an absolutely indispensable or essential thing.” Take note: if we have not love, we have, in fact, abandoned that which is the essential and indispensable element of any action we might undertake as followers of Christ.

Most of us who call ourselves Christian assent to the idea that love is the ‘sine qua non’ of the life in Christ; yet, to use the Apostle Paul’s wording (vs 31), how often we come to confession (and repeatedly do so) having strayed again off the Lord’s narrow way “which leads to life” (Mt 7:14)? Love indeed is ‘the way’ (1 Cor 12:31). How ashamed I am to find myself so often among the Pharisees and Herodians with my actions saying to Jesus, “Teacher, we know that You are true, and teach the way of God in truth”(Mt 22:16). Unquestionably, the Lord Jesus Christ our God ‘is’ the Way; and so, dear fellow strugglers, let us remind ourselves that Thomas the Apostle is not the only one through the centuries whom Christ has had to remind, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me (Jn 14:6).

It is kindness on the part of the Apostle Paul to put love center-front before us. For the Lord Jesus is the way of love, the truth Who defines love, and the Life Who is the genuine, abundant life-Giver of love that we so desperately need in our struggle to be loving as we ought. How long He suffers with us and remains kind! Just to brush against His love is remarkable, for it comes with power to encourage us also to suffer long and to be kind and loving (1 Cor 13:4)!

We have a Master Who, in the hour of His Passion, did not envy; did not parade Himself; was not puffed up; did not behave rudely; did not seek His own; was not provoked; thought no evil; and, never once, rejoiced in iniquity. Indeed, as ever, He rejoices in the truth (see vss 4,5,6). Of course, as the eternal Model and Standard of love, He was perfect and blameless in every respect. Would we want less or accept less or settle for less? I think not! It is good to go to confession; it is right to admit that we do not live up to His unblemished example.

May we keep in mind that He bore all things and continues bearing all of our failures and sins. He never ceased to believe all of things that He told us from His Father, nor is He wavering from our salvation at this moment. Realize that He continues to hope for all things from us, in exactly the manner he endured all things on our behalf. “Love never fails” (vss 7,8). Do you remember? When He had accomplished life for us, He said, “Father, forgive them” (Lk 23:34).

Let us remember the warning of Saint Nektarios: the grace of God can abandon “the unrepentant person because this person has disregarded the wealth of God’s kindness, tolerance, and forbearance....Divine forbearance is transformed into indignation, tolerance into intolerance, and goodness into repulsion. This is why the chief of the Apostles also advises us not to be deceived. We should not regard God’s tolerance and forbearance as slowness, because He is not slow but forbears, not wishing anyone of us to perish, but for all of us to come to repentance.”

Hear us, O God; forgive and unite us to Thy holy Church through Christ our Savior.

July 2 – Friday of the Second Week after Pentecost
Romans 5:17-6:2

Reigning: Romans 5:17-6:2, especially vs. 21: “So that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Starting at Romans 5:14, Saint Paul contrasts life in Christ with a life lived apart from God. If we embrace God’s grace and His gift of righteousness, however, we “will reign in life through . . . Jesus Christ” (vs. 17).

Here we find the glorious alternative to the ubiquitous reign of sin and death which disrupted our original communion with God. Christ has destroyed sin’s power over us, revealing instead the coming of divine grace that leads to eternal life under the reign of Christ.

The apostle explains how these opposing “reigns” began. “Through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation” (vs. 18). The first Adam initiated the reign of sin and death by his transgression and fall.

Even so, Saint Paul continues, “through one Man’s righteous act, the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life” (vs. 18). The Lord Jesus is the new Adam who inaugurates the reign of grace and life.

Following Adam’s disobedience, death assumed universal power (vs. 12), but Christ now enables us to receive “abundance of grace and . . . the gift of righteousness,” so as “to reign in this life” (vs. 17). While death remains because of our sin, its power may be overcome through the free gift of God, resulting “in justification of life” (vs. 18) by which “many will be made righteous” (vs. 19).

How so? Grace and righteousness are gifts provided by Christ in this present existence, enabling men to “reign in life” (vs. 17), to grow in righteousness, and to attain “eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (vs. 21).

As the Apostle Paul contrasts the reign of death found among men with the reign of life found in Christ, he also addresses the relationship between the Mosaic Law and sin. First, he explains that the Law intensifies the sin already present in human beings. “Law entered that the offense might abound” (vs. 20).

Later in Romans Saint Paul returns to this issue, explaining that when we are confronted by the commandments, our human inclination to rebel against God produces by sin. Thus, we experience “all manner of evil desire” (vs. 7:8). By its very nature, sin prompts us to break rules that God has given for our own good (vs. 7:10).

In today’s passage, the apostle emphasizes that “where sin abounded, grace abounded much more” (vs. 5:20). Since the grace of God through Jesus Christ is so abundant, giving us the possibility of righteousness and eternal life, we may be tempted to ask, “Shall we continue to sin that grace may abound?” (vs. 6:1).

The apostle anticipates – and flatly rejects – this delusion, “Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?” (vs. 2). Although this stance may seem obvious to us, the early centuries of the Church were marked by a fierce struggle against Gnosticism. This heresy suggested that our physical acts are unimportant, for this world is passing away and the Law has been abolished by grace. Unfortunately, many so-called Christians still promote this idea today.

The Church Fathers warn us that sin is stubborn. Like Saint Paul, they call on us “who died to sin” (vs. 2) to reject every temptation to continue under sin. The reign of grace opens the door to begin living a pure life for God. Lord, O Lord, help us to do so!

If Thou see the way of iniquity in me, turn me aside and establish me in Thy truth. – Archimandrite Sophrony Sakharov

July 3 – Saturday of the Second Week of Pentecost
Romans 3:19-26

Righteousness: Romans 3:19-26, especially vs. 21: “But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets.” Three months after Israel’s exodus from Egypt, the ancient people of God “came into the Sinai Desert, and camped in the desert. . . . before the mountain” (Ex 19:2). The Lord called the Prophet Moses to the mountain and delivered this promise to His people: “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, you shall be a special people to Me above all nations; for all the earth is Mine” (vs. 19:5).

Moses then “came and called for the elders of the people and laid before them all these words the Lord commanded him” (Ex 24:7). To seal this covenant in blood, he “built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve stones according to the twelve tribes of Israel” (vs. 24:4).

The commands of this covenant, known as the Law (Torah), form a distinctive constitution from the days of Moses to the present. When the people of the Old Covenant keep the Law, God recognizes them as His people, holy and righteous. Apostates from Israel (and other peoples not blessed with the Law) are known as Gentiles, meaning “nations.” Traditional Jews deem such outsiders unrighteous, for they are not under the covenant with God.

The gift of the Law is a special sign of God’s grace and favor for Jews. Membership in this covenant people is considered essential. Among the special ritual practices that identify one as a member of Israel are circumcision, dietary laws, and honoring the Sabbath, which serve to provide a guarantee of righteousness.

In the present passage the Apostle Paul, a man raised under this very law, rejects the possibility of attaining righteousness merely by living according to ancient Israel’s covenant with God. Instead, he proclaims the great justification before God to be “the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ” (Rom 3:22).

Saint Paul asserts that the Law accomplishes righteousness for those who agree to live under it by silencing human opinion; it stops “every mouth” (vs. 19). As God’s law, it is the highest of all commandments, since there can be no higher legal authority than God. The Law indicts everyone – “all the world may become guilty before God” (vs. 19) – by detailing how all men should live.

Yet by comparing human behavior with the Law, sin is made evident in every man: “No flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin” (vs. 20). The truth is that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (vs. 23). Who among us can deny our sinfulness?

Having identified the ultimate nature of God’s law, the apostle then asserts the greater “righteousness of God apart from the law . . . even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ” (vss. 21-22). This righteousness is not limited to those who are physically born and raised “under the law” (vs. 19). Rather, it extends “to all and on all who believe” (vs. 22).

Saint Paul draws a number of parallels between the New Covenant of righteousness in Christ and the Old Covenant under the Law. Both are *of God* (vs. 22). However, the new righteousness provides a vital redemption from slavery (vs. 24) and admits being sealed by a true “propitiation by [Christ’s] blood” (vs. 25).

Best of all, righteousness from Christ provides a way of life that passes over “sins that were previously committed” (vs. 25). It reveals that God is both “just and the justifier,” giving life for all of us who put our trust in the Lord Jesus (vs. 26).

Blessed art Thou, O God, for in righteousness Thou didst give us the Law as an aid, and when the fullness of time was come, Thou didst speak unto us through Thy Son Himself.

July 4 – Second Sunday after Pentecost, Tone 1
Romans 2:10-16

Judgment by Christ: Romans 2:10-16, especially vs. 16: “God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ. . . .” The Nicene Creed states that Christ “shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead.” This doctrine has its basis in the verse quoted above, along with similar revelations in Scripture. The Bible assures us of the impending judgment of our thoughts, words, and deeds by Christ our God.

Saint Paul further declares the impartiality of God’s judgment, since the Lord’s standards are clearly stated in the Mosaic Law and written in every human heart, as demonstrated by the existence of a conscience in those who have never known the law (vs. 15). That God judges impartially is a familiar message to us, for in our services we often hear the Prophet David’s cry: “And enter not into judgment with Thy servant, for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified” (Ps 142:2).

In this life we also accept the decisions of human judges and rulers. And yet, looking ahead, “we believe, and are convinced without doubt, that everyone. . . . will be required to give account for the responsibility which he has been given by God” (Saint Justin Martyr, “First Apology,” *NPNF* First Series, vol. 1, p. 168).

Our ethnicity, religious affiliation, nationality, status, and other classifications are not among the measures God will use, “for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Cor 5:10).

When Christ our God judges what we have *done*, whether “good or bad,” the standards He will apply are to be found in the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:1-17; Dt 5:7-21). Saint Paul makes the point clearly in today’s passage from Romans, declaring that if we “have sinned without law [we] also [will] perish without law” (Rom 2:12) – assuming that we have violated its precepts and lived solely to satisfy our selfish desires and lusts.

What about the case of Jews and Christians, who have been raised knowing the commandments? The underlying standard is universal. As members of the people of God, we “will be judged by the law” that God gave of old (vs. 12). On the Day of Judgment, we may not enter a plea on the basis of ignorance.

The most powerful statement of the Apostle Paul in this passage applies to every human being who ever lived. As members of Christ, we need to read and re-read this declaration. The apostle states that “when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves” (vs. 14).

Let us pray that all who presently disdain the life in Christ might reflect upon and absorb Saint Paul’s message. But a greater point is also directed to us, as members of Christ. Since the term “Gentile” simply refers to any non-Jewish ethnic group, it encompasses us as Orthodox Christians as well.

When Saint Paul speaks of Gentiles, he is referring to all non-Jews throughout history – every last race and clan. Among the Gentiles are the vast majority of Christians. Let us note the point that when we non-Jews “show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also [bears] witness” (vs. 15). Our very “thoughts [accuse] or else [excuse]” us (vs. 15).

Let us never overlook the fact that Christ’s judgment will be directed toward “the secrets of men” (vs. 16). These *secrets* include our invisible and intangible thoughts, feelings, presuppositions, prejudices, and attitudes, as well our visible actions and audible words. When God considers what we have done, He will read our hearts and all they contain.

O Master, deliver us from all who seek after our souls. For unto Thee, O Lord, Lord, are our eyes, and in Thee have we hoped. Put us not to shame, O our God. – Daily Vespers

July 5 – Monday of the Third Week after Pentecost
Romans 7:1-14

The Law and Death: Romans 7:1-13, especially vs. 4: “Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another – to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God.” In a recent court case, the question arose as to whether an absentee ballot mailed while the voter was still alive should count in the final tally, given that the voter died before election day. Similarly, can a man receive a moving violation if he died while speeding to avoid arrest? Perhaps his estate might be sued, but he cannot be tried because “the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives” (vs. 1).

Under the commandments of God, any conscious choice to violate the divine will is tantamount to dying to God. As Saint Paul makes clear, our sins constitute a rejection of God and our relationship with Him. They become spiritual death for us because sin destroys our relationship with Christ, who is our life.

Our disobedience is the death-knell of our heart and soul. Physical death may not follow immediately. Yet when we disobey God’s law, spiritual death disrupts our relationship with Him and severs us from life’s source.

According to Saint Antony the Great, “Most men, being foolish in soul, have renounced that divine and immortal sonship, turning towards a deadly, disastrous, and short-lived kinship with the body. Concerning themselves, like animals . . . they separate themselves from God; and through their desires they drag down their soul from heaven to the abyss” (*Philokalia* vol. 1, p. 335). How chillingly familiar!

In today’s passage from Romans, the Apostle Paul awakens us to the life-giving Way and releases us from the Law “through the body of Christ” (vs. 4). He reminds us that we are “married to [Christ] . . . who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God” (vs. 4). Just as only living trees bear fruit, so only the true and life-giving relationship with God found in the body of Christ can bear fruit (Jn 15:5).

Some people assert that our faith calls for nothing more than the practice of good moral precepts. In other words, true Christians obey God’s law; indifferent Christians and non-Christians do not. But if we minimize the faith, over-simplifying it and defining it as obedience to the Law, then sin will seize the opportunity with us as it did with Saint Paul.

“By the commandment, [sin] produced in me all manner of evil desire,” the apostle says. “I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died” (Rom 7:8-9). God’s good and gracious laws do not bring about death. Rather, the Law simply reveals that sin necessarily *produces* death in us (vs. 13).

God yearns for us to turn to Him and love Him, rather than indulging the selfish satisfactions and desires which separate us from Him. When we turn toward God, according to Saint Diadochos, the love of God “reveals to the heart its presence there with a feeling which words cannot express . . . and . . . the fire of God’s grace spreads even to the heart’s more outward organs of perception, consciously burning up the tares in the field of the soul” (*Philokalia* vol. 1, p. 285).

“The law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good” (vs. 12) – and yet a living relationship with God is better still. When we are alive to God, we serve Him “in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter” of the law (vs. 6). Christ died for our sins that we might live to God in newness of life. Let us repent and be saved from the power of sin through our union with the living Body of Christ.

O Physician and Healer of my soul, O Merciful Savior, blot out all my sins, and grant unto me Thy grace that I may avoid all evil ways in Thy saving strength, O Almighty One. – Prayer after Confession

July 6 – Tuesday of the Third Week after Pentecost
Romans 7:14-8:2

Flesh: Romans 7:14-8:2, especially vs. 25: “I thank God – through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.” Saint Theophan the Recluse understands well the bitterness of the divided allegiance Saint Paul describes. He writes, “If you feel sometimes such a strong upsurging of sin that resistance to it will seem impossible and the very zeal to oppose it will appear exhausted, take care, brother, not to give up the struggle, but rouse yourself and stand firm. It is a subterfuge of the enemy” (*Unseen Warfare*, p. 108).

Saint Paul speaks of “the flesh” as that which leads us to serve the *law of sin* rather than the *law of God* (vs. 25). He frankly shares his personal inner agony with this spiritual struggle: “For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. . . . For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am!” (vss. 19, 22-24).

Saint John Chrysostom, in reviewing this passage, is quick to refute the Gnostic suggestion that evil exists because of our physical flesh. “On this text, those who find fault with the flesh, and contend it was no part of God’s creation, attack us. What are we to say then? Just what we did before, when discussing the Law: that as there [Saint Paul] makes sin answerable for everything, so here it is also. He does not say that the flesh worketh it, but just the contrary, ‘it is not I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me’ (vs. 17)” (“Homily 13 on Romans,” *NPNF First Series*, vol. 11, p. 428.)

Sin works in the soul and heart, but most terribly in the mind (vs. 1:28) or *nous*, which is the center or eye of the heart according to the Church Fathers. Sin corrupts and distorts the governing of our being at the very core so that our inward faculties become deranged. If we allow sin to rage freely, we risk become fully debased.

As this inward struggle unfolds, it leads us to physical acts of the flesh. Sin always begins inside us, within our interior life; only secondarily does it manifest as physical action. According to Saint John Chrysostom, “The flesh is not so great as the soul, and is inferior to it, yet not contrary, or opposed to it, or evil, but it is beneath the soul, as a harp beneath the harper”

To help clarify the meaning of “flesh,” let us apply the concept of orientation. When Saint Paul says, “For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin” (vs. 14), he is talking about how the orientation of our heart and soul turns away from God. The desires of the body and its cravings then become central.

We ignore God when our inner orientation tilts toward satisfying our wants – the flesh – rather than pleasing Him. It is of this orientation that Paul speaks: “For I know that in me [i.e., in my orientation to self-satisfaction] nothing good dwells” (vs. 18).

It is accurate to say that our wants and desires, inflamed by sin, war against our efforts to live as Christians. “Who will deliver me from this body of death?” Saint Paul asks (vs. 24), and then replies: “The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death” (vs. 8:2). “My heart rejoiced,” says Saint Peter, “[and] my flesh also will rest in hope” (Acts 2:26).

Let us sing the Bridegroom Hymn from deep in our heart: “Beware therefore, O my soul, do not be weighed down with sleep, lest you be given up to death and shut out from the Kingdom. But, rouse yourself crying, ‘Holy, Holy, Holy art Thou, O God, through the power of Thy Cross have mercy upon us.’”

Help us, O Savior, to put away the filth of the passions and strive for a steadfast heart. – Orthros of Great and Holy Monday

July 7 – Wednesday of the Third Week after Pentecost
Romans 8:1-13

The Indwelling Spirit: Romans 8:1-13, especially vs. 9: “*But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you.*” In the prayers we recite after holy communion, we implore God to make us worthy of the holy mysteries. Today’s epistle reading describes how “those who are in Christ Jesus” (vs. 1) become worthy: through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit frees us “from the law of sin and death” (vs. 2) as He passes “through all [our] body parts” and into the reins of our hearts, to use the words of Saint Simeon the Translator’s post-communion prayer. Then we “do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (vs. 4). The Spirit keeps us “from every soul-corrupting deed and word” as we hold firmly to Him, keeping our minds set on “the things of the Spirit” (vs. 5).

The Holy Spirit gives life to our mortal bodies to act and to fulfill the Law (vs. 11). He puts “to death the deeds of the body” (vs. 13) as He reveals that we are “in no wise the dwelling-place of sin” (Saint Simeon).

The Apostle Paul reminds us that the Spirit imparts to us that very freedom “from the law of sin and death” (vs. 2) which our Savior won for the human race. He makes clear that in order to actualize our freedom, we must embrace the gifts of the Spirit bestowed upon us.

According to Saint Ambrose of Milan, “The Lord Jesus first led captivity captive, that our affections being set free, He might pour forth the gift of divine grace” (“Of the Holy Spirit,” *NPNF* Second Series, vol. 10, p. 102). When we embrace that gift of divine grace, the Spirit of God liberates us from the compulsion to sin. However, we must surrender the *reins of our hearts*, i.e., our control, to Him.

When God gives us the Holy Spirit, who frees our hearts to fulfill “the righteous requirement of the law” (vs. 4), we are no longer under compulsion to sin. We may actually “walk . . . according to the Spirit” (vs. 4). We may say no to sin and “not walk according to the flesh” (vs. 4), as if we were slaves.

To do what pleases God is a wonderful gift, if we embrace the Spirit and strive with Him rightly. Saint Makarios the Great says of God’s grace: “Its aim is to cleanse the soul, and so enabling it to recover its original nature and to contemplate the glory of the true light with clear, unimpeded eyes” (*Philokalia* vol. 3, p. 318).

How will the indwelling Spirit set us free from sin and enable us to do the will of God? We must choose repeatedly to be “in the Spirit” (vs. 9) for purification, because He alone sets our minds on “the things of the Spirit” (vs. 5). He alone enables us to live according to His light. He can set our minds upon “life and peace” (vs. 6). He can establish Christ in us and quicken our bodies dead through sin.

Truly, “the Spirit is life” (vs. 10). “If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you” (vs. 11).

We note that the Spirit never forces us. Instead, He gives life to our bodies as Saint Simeon the Translator describes: “O my Creator . . . pass through all my body parts, into all my joints . . . burn Thou the thorns of my transgressions . . . hallow Thou my thoughts . . . enlighten as one my five senses. . . . Keep me from every soul-corrupting deed and word . . . that every evil deed and every passion may flee. . . .”

“By the Spirit [we] put to death the deeds of the body [and] live” (vs. 13). Let us fix our hearts on the things of God, cleave to the Holy Spirit as our hope for true life, and choose to crucify the desires of the flesh.

From my secret sins cleanse me, and from those of others spare Thy servant. – Psalm 18:12-13

July 8 – Thursday of the Third Week after Pentecost
Romans 8:22-27

The Spirit's Help: Romans 8:22-27, especially vs. 26: *"The Spirit also helps in our weaknesses."* Our Orthodox elders and teachers urge us to persist in our struggle to pray. "At times prayer seems over-slow in bringing results, and life is so short," observes Archimandrite Sophrony. "Instinctively we cry, 'Make haste unto me'" (*On Prayer*, p. 9). God does not always respond to our prayer immediately. Like fruit on a tree, our souls may be left to bake in the heat of the sun, to the freeze in icy winds, to parch with thirst or be drenched in rainstorms.

Prayer is not the only difficulty we encounter in our life in Christ. There are other tough, unending struggles such as keeping the commandments, overcoming the passions, acquiring virtue, and loving others as ourselves. Even if we make some tiny gain, the fiend of pride invariably sidles up to steal the victory.

We understand why Saint Paul cries, "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (vs. 7:24). Yet the apostle provides us with the vital information that we may find help from the Holy Spirit. His words bring great encouragement to us as we flounder and struggle, groaning "within . . . eagerly waiting for the adoption" (vs. 8:23).

First of all, the Apostle Paul tells us, "we . . . have the firstfruits of the Spirit" (vs. 23). *Firstfruits* are mentioned in the Old Testament in the commandments related to tithing (Ex 13:1-16; Lv 23:9-14). The firstborn of the flock and the first harvest from the vineyard or field were brought to the priests to be offered to the Lord, in recognition that "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof" (Ps 23:1).

When the apostle says that we have the *firstfruits of the Spirit*, we recall that the Lord Jesus speaks of the activity of the kingdom of God as a *harvest* in the field of men (Mt 9:37-38). We chose to unite ourselves to Christ and become part of God's harvest. Keeping this harvest in mind allows us follow the apostle's full meaning.

When we bowed down before Christ as King and God at our baptism, we received the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit then began intensive work within us, a work which He continues in our hearts, souls, and bodies. As we embrace His efforts, His gracious work will gradually achieve a total transformation of our being.

At present we know within ourselves only the first tiny increments of this future transformation. Every achievement of the Spirit is His *firstfruits*, bits of His work. These achievements substantiate our hope; we are "eagerly waiting for . . . adoption" and the "redemption of our body" wrought by "perseverance" (vss. 23-25).

Meanwhile, the apostle adds, "The Spirit also helps in our weaknesses" (vs. 26), whether moral, emotional, spiritual, mental, or physical. God seeks our total renewal! As Saint Paul teaches, we must take part in this ultimate restoration.

The Spirit of God is present to help, for He is our foremost helper. He calls us to prayer. The trouble, however, is "we do not know what we should pray for as we ought" (vs. 26). We are weakened as a result of sin. We do not grasp the goals of prayer, so we fail to approach it properly.

However, the Spirit "makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered" (vs. 26). God the Father searches our hearts and knows the mind of the Spirit with whom He is One. Despite our limitations, the Spirit "makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God" (vs. 27), unhampered by the spiritual static generated by our fallen state.

O Christ, show me as the abode of Thy Spirit only, and in nowise the abode of sin. – Post-communion Prayer of Saint Simeon the Translator

July 9 – Friday of the Third Week after Pentecost
Romans 9:6-19

The True Israel: *Romans 9:6-19, especially vs. 8:* “*Those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.*” In Chapters 9-11 of Romans, Saint Paul addresses a thorny puzzle that perplexed the early Church: Why did many of the people of Israel refuse to accept Jesus as the Messiah, despite the Lord God’s promises to send His anointed one?

Writing in AD 59, Saint Paul is well aware that the majority of “Israel after the flesh” (Rom 9:5; Acts 22) has rejected Jesus as the Christ, or Messiah. He is troubled by the reluctance of the Jews to accept Jesus as Lord (Rom 9:1-5), yet at the same time he is ushering a flood of Gentile converts into the Church. Today’s reading discloses God’s revelation to the apostle concerning the historical rejection of the Messiah by God’s chosen people.

Saint Paul begins his meditation on this bewildering rejection of Jesus with a series of assertions concerning God and His nature. His declarations parallel the ancient promises that God made to Abraham when He established His covenant with the patriarch and his descendants through all generations.

The scope of the promises is set forth in Genesis 17:7, but here the apostle focuses on one particular aspect. God’s covenant, he notes, will be extended through the lineage of the patriarch’s son by Sarah – “in Isaac shall thy seed be called” (Rom 9:7; Gn 21:12) – and not by his other offspring

From these promises the apostle draws three conclusions. First, the promises were not made to Abraham’s physical children, but to those for whom God intended to receive His promises. These “children of the promise” (Rom 9:8) are not Abraham’s descendants, by and large, but those whom God “counted as the seed” (vs. 8). God, of course, chooses whom He will.

In verses 6 and 7, Saint Paul holds up a second important conclusion. We can never say that God’s word is ineffectual merely because the majority of “Israel after the flesh” (Abraham’s physical seed) did not accept Jesus as the Messiah. Still, the apostle asserts that God by nature remains true to His word, as he has said earlier: “Let God be true, but every man a liar. As it is written” (vs. 3:4; Ps 50:6).

Saint Paul’s third conclusion is that the failure of the majority of Israel to accept Jesus as the Messiah does not suggest that “there is unrighteous with God” (Rom 9:14). Human effort is of no effect in the face of God’s actions (vs. 16). Events occur according to the mercy of God, whether or not they appear merciful to us (vss. 17-24).

Thus, the acceptance of Christ by the Gentiles, rather than by ethnic Israel, fulfills a divine prophecy: “‘I will call them My people, who were not My people, and her beloved, who was not beloved.’ ‘And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, “You are not My people,” there they shall be called sons of the living God”’ (vss. 25-26; Hos 1:10).

After reviewing these truths, the apostle speaks directly to the question of why God permits Israel’s rejection. Only a *remnant* of physical Israel is destined to be saved (Rom 9:27), because Israel pursued “the law of righteousness” (vs. 31) on the basis of a faulty theology, not “by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law” (vs. 32).

However, all who “have attained to righteousness” have done so by “the righteousness of faith” (vs. 30). As the Lord Jesus says, “He who does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (Jn 3:18).

Save us, O Son of God, who art risen from the dead, save us who sing unto Thee. – Second antiphon, Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom

July 10 – Saturday of the Third Week after Pentecost
Romans 3:28-4:3

Christian Faith: Romans 3:28-4:3, especially vs. 31: “Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.” The Orthodox Christian author Frederica Mathewes-Greene was once confronted on a talk show with a nebulous cliché in question form: “Aren’t all religious beliefs equally valid, all are fundamentally the same?” To this modern relativist view of faith, she offered a straightforward response and clarification: “Many faiths, not just ours, hold quite specific doctrines, and stand at firm disagreement with each other.”

In today’s passage, Saint Paul brooks no merger of religious faiths into some form of superficial pluralism. Rather, he proclaims our faith as centered solely on Jesus Christ (vs. 26). It brings those who affirm the Lord Jesus into a shared and right relationship with God (vss. 27-28), something that the Mosaic Law alone never achieved. Lastly, Christianity actually places the Mosaic Law on a solid foundation (vs. 31).

First and foremost, the apostle teaches a content-specific faith vested in the Lord Jesus as the Son of God, who alone is worthy of all devotion, worship, and commitment (vs. 26). Of course, there is more to Orthodox Christianity than a vague, sentimental belief about someone named Jesus. Recognizing the universal presence of sin (vs. 23), our faith declares the Lord Jesus’ death as a redemptive act of God’s grace by which we are freed from sin and death (vs. 24).

To affirm that Christ Jesus’ death was not an isolated event, the Apostle Paul establishes faith in Christ’s Passion as reliance that depends for forgiveness on the propitiatory sacrifice achieved by the shedding of the Lord’s blood (vs. 25). He holds up the redemptive death of the Lord as the prototype of all sacrifice for sin.

Under the Mosaic Law, sins were acknowledged with ritual sacrifices. These, St. Paul reveals, were foreshadowings of God’s forbearance in passing “over the sins that were previously committed” (vs. 25). Saint Paul asserts that faith in the death of Christ is faith in the righteousness of God, who Himself justifies “the one who has faith in Jesus” (vs. 26).

Additionally, Christian faith relies directly on the *law of faith* as the basis of our relationship with God (vs. 27). This law states that “a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law” (vs. 28). Faith affirms that justification is a divine act that sets aright the relationship between mankind and God, being clarified for all time by Christ’s propitiatory sacrifice.

Saint Paul repeatedly connects God’s action in the saving death of our Lord with human faith to emphasize that each Christian must accept the Lord’s death as a saving, personal gift. To accept the Lord’s death abrogates trust in our good deeds, since it is God who accomplishes our justification. God calls upon everyone to respond to Him in faith, to trust Him, love Him, and serve Him. Anyone may do this, whether he is a Jew or Gentile (vs. 29).

Finally, Saint Paul rejects any suggestion that the *law of faith* does away with the law under the Old Covenant. Rather, “we establish the law” (vs. 31). Praise and thanksgiving in response to God’s redemption are expressed in a growing struggle to keep God’s law in word and deed.

When we express heartfelt joy in what God has done in Christ Jesus, we set the Mosaic Law on its foundation of faith. Let us never trust in our works but in what God is doing, for faith converts the Law into a vehicle for loving God and all men.

Enlarge Thou my heart, O Master, then shall I run in the way of Thy commandments. – Ps 118:32

July 11 – Sunday – Saint Euphemia, Tone 2

2 Corinthians 6:1-10

Receiving Grace: 2 Corinthians 6:1-10, especially vs 1: “We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain.” Saint Gregory Palamas teaches that “the divine and uncreated grace and energy of God is indivisibly divided like the sun’s rays that warm, illumine, quicken, and bring increase.” He adds another note vital for the life in Christ: “since the divine and deifying illumination and grace is not the essence but the energy of God, for this reason it comes forth from God not only in the singular but in multiplicity as well. It is bestowed proportionately on those who participate in it, and corresponding to the capacity of those who receive it the deifying resplendence enters them to a greater or lesser degree.”

Now observe here that the Apostle pleads with us by means of a double negative (vs 1): “not to receive...in vain,” that is, to no purpose. Saint Paul is begging us to participate with God’s bestowed grace to the degree to which we are capable; for the energies of God received and ‘engaged’ quicken and increase the capacity for greater and greater work “together with Him” (vs 1). Instead of ‘in vain,’ may we open ourselves to receive God’s grace, so that we obtain ‘in abundance.’ God is certainly not limited! Thus, let us be pro-active in whatever circumstances (vss 4,5), by whatever means God’s grace unleashes within us (vss 6-9), and however we ourselves and others perceive the manifestations of grace in us (vss 9-10).

Saint Paul was obedient to the grace of God that came to him in the “heavenly vision” on the road to Damascus. He received “help from God [for] witnessing both to small and great...no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come” (Acts 26:19,22). Look at the circumstances and great demands into which God’s grace brought the Saint: “much patience, in tribulations...needs...distresses...stripes...imprisonments...tumults... labors...sleeplessness [and] fastings” (2 Cor 6:4-5). God is pouring out His manifold grace on a world hostile to Him, which also includes those who choose to embrace His energies. God knows we are not Apostles. We may be a grandmother, a doctor, a student, a prisoner, a parish Priest, a childcare worker, an attorney; but we all receive God’s grace in the circumstances in which He calls. How much patience is needed where we serve! Seek energy from God!

Since God’s grace comes “by the Holy Spirit,” it is totally open-ended and vast, being ready to increase purity, knowledge, longsuffering, kindness, and sincere love within us (vs 6). But we must draw on grace “by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left” (vs 7). This is not some magic ritual, but a way of life that requires working “together with Him” (vs 1). The issue is: do we choose respond and cooperate or not? In this world, the results of receiving grace need to be lived, whether “by honor or dishonor, by evil report or good report” (vs 8). God provides a balanced diet if and when we live for Him, despite the fact that some may perceive that we are deceivers, while others (and hopefully our own hearts) confirm that we are true (vs 8).

That is how it was with Saint Paul and how it may be for us as we learn to depend on the good energies of God: some will see us as unknown, dying, chastened, sorrowful, poor - in short, “as having nothing” (vss 9,10) that they find interesting, that is valuable, or that is worthy of respect. Later, the Apostle will say, “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers” (2 Cor 6:14). Well-being does not depend on good opinion. Those faithful to the Savior will know us as ‘alive in Him,’ not as those killed off by lies concerning us nor by worldly rebuke, but as those “always rejoicing...making many rich...[and]...possessing all things” (2 Cor 6:10).

As a drop of Thy grace fills all things with knowledge, O Lord, grant me Thy miracles!

July 12 – Monday of Fourth Week after Pentecost
Romans 9:18-33

The Rock: Romans 9:18-33, especially vs. 33: “As it is written: ‘Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, and whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.’” In Romans, Saint Paul questions why Israel does not accept the Messiah whom God has sent them. From the time that Christ first appeared until today, many of God’s people have stumbled on the idea of the Lord Jesus as Messiah, finding Him instead to be a “rock of offense” (vs. 33). No matter how many stumble at Christ, however, let us embrace Him without shame!

The Prophet Moses foresees the stumbling of Israel and warns the people long before Christ appears in the flesh. “Watch yourself, that you do not forget the Lord your God . . . who brought you from the land of Egypt . . . who led you through that great and fearful desert . . . who brought a spring of water for you out of the sharp-edged rock” (Dt 8:11, 14-15).

To this warning he adds: “You abandoned the God who begot you and forgot the God who nourished you. So, the Lord saw it, and was jealous; and He was provoked. . . . Then He said, ‘I will turn My face from them, and I will make known what their end will be; for they are a perverse generation, sons in whom is no faith’” (Dt 32:18-20).

Israel’s problem is a lack of faith – an inability to trust in the extraordinary acts manifested in Jesus. When faced with Christ’s cross, God’s people react as “sons in whom is no faith” (Dt 32:20). Yet “by the cross,” says Veselin Kesich, “all things are set aright. Sin is destroyed, death is overcome, and resurrection is bestowed. What Christ accomplished with death on the cross is made manifest in His Resurrection” (*The Passion of Christ*, p. 81).

This is exactly Saint Paul’s point: “Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but by the works of the law” (Rom 9:31-32). Indeed, they stumbled at the stone of Truth

The Lord Jesus will always offend those of us who believe we can achieve our own salvation by fulfilling certain works. Such a belief is delusional. Secularists assert that by their own efforts they can save themselves, at least within the bounds of this present life. We find examples of such failed and faithless “solutions” scattered in the dust of history, if we but examine the evidence. Every human achievement comes to an end, for new events overturn every work of mankind. But not so in Christ!

The Prophet Isaiah foresees that God will “lay for the foundations of Zion a costly stone, a chosen and precious cornerstone for its foundations” (Is 28:16). The Church, as the new Israel, comes to Christ Jesus “as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious” (1 Pt 2:4).

The Church of the apostles, as the true Zion, affirms His birth of the Virgin, His suffering on the Cross, and His defeat of death. She declares that “we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block. . . . But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:23-24).

Referring to the rock of offense, Saint Paul says, “Whoever believes on *Him*.” Here he is speaking of the Person of Christ, the true Rock, who while offending some is truly “a precious cornerstone,” so that “whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame” (Rom 9:33). There will be no shame before God for the faithful in Christ, no disgrace before the great throne of eternal Judgment.

Thou art our God, the God who showeth mercy and saveth; and unto Thee do we ascribe glory: to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. – Chrismation Prayer

July 13 – Tuesday of the Fourth Week after Pentecost

Romans 10:11-11:2

The Chosen People: Romans 10:11-11:2, especially vs. 11:2: “God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says . . . ?” In the present passage Saint Paul continues to explore a question that has perplexed Christians through the ages. Why did most of ancient Israel refuse to accept Jesus as the Messiah, given the prophets’ many predictions of the coming of God’s anointed one?

The apostle examines three possible explanations for Israel’s non-response. Perhaps they never heard the proclamation of Jesus as the Messiah (vs. 18) or did not understand their own tradition (vs. 19). Or perhaps God cast away His own chosen people (vs. 11:1). The apostle firmly rejects all three possibilities, carefully documenting his reasons.

Before refuting these explanations, Saint Paul lays a theological foundation for describing God’s ways with men. Let us pay careful attention to his reasoning, for God has a *modus operandi*, a basic manner of working with mankind. First, He proclaims; then He waits for a believing response; finally, He assists the people who believe and call on Him (see vs. 14).

In answer to the question of what God will do on the Day of Judgment with those who never heard the Gospel, the apostle confirms that those who “have not heard” (vs. 14) will be held to a different standard than those who were presented with God’s message. In this context, Saint Paul asserts that Israel did hear, for throughout the centuries their prophets brought “glad tidings of good things” (vs. 15).

However, the people of the Old Covenant had problems trusting what their own prophets proclaimed (vs. 16). Nevertheless they, along with all who hear the gospel, are put on notice: God’s high standards apply to them.

Given the rapid spread of mass communication, the Prophet David’s words are truer today than ever – even more so than in the first century when Saint Paul said of the apostles, “Their sound has gone out to all the earth” (vs. 18, from Ps 18:4). Neither the people of ancient Israel, nor any member of the Church today, can claim that they never heard the gospel. Indeed, Israel heard, and so have we (vs. 18).

What, then, is the problem? Did Israel fail to understand its heritage? This question is pertinent for us as Orthodox Christians, for often we encounter non-Orthodox who grasp the essence of the faith better than we do. Many people living outside the visible Church struggle to live God-honoring lives in gratitude for salvation in Christ. These good people believe in the glad tidings, although they lack the riches available to us within the Orthodox tradition. We ought to rejoice at the piety those who put us to shame!

God never ceases to provide for the proclamation of the gospel. The good news is embedded in holy Tradition, in our liturgical texts and icons. Of course, there is more than one way to hear; the Lord spoke “to [ancient Israel] in parables, because seeing they do not see; and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand” (Mt 13:13).

The Lord further identifies the reason: “For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed” (Mt 13:15). The possibility of resisting the truth always exists.

In the first century ancient Israel enjoyed every advantage, for “we have heard . . . we have seen with our eyes . . . we have looked upon, and our hands have handled . . . the Word of life” (1 Jn 1:1). The Lord continues to meet us in the mysteries, through the icons, and in the teachings of the Fathers. Therefore, let us not be “disobedient and contrary” (Rom 10:21).

O Lord, raise up me, a paralytic, rouse me who sleep, resurrect me deadened by sin! – Saint Ephraim the Syrian

July 14 – Wednesday of the Fourth Week after Pentecost
Romans 11:2-12

A Remnant: Romans 11:2-12, especially vs. 11: “*But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles.*” As we have seen, Saint Paul emphatically rejects the idea that God would utterly cast off Israel, His covenant people (vs. 11:1). Instead, he draws upon “remnant” theology to proclaim this doctrine: Since a portion of Israel-after-the-flesh still exists, it is clear that God does not completely reject the people whom He chose (see Ps 67:8-9).

Any theory which insists on divine rejection of Israel misses the obvious fact that the early disciples – including Saint Paul himself – were a *remnant* chosen by God to form the nascent Church. Accordingly, in the present selection from Romans, the apostle reviews the history of other remnants of God’s people as presented in Scripture. God has proven that He is faithful by consistently saving a remnant whenever His people turn apostate.

When most of Israel failed to accept Jesus as the Christ and their true Messiah, God saved a remnant of Israel who did accept Him. This kernel grew into the Church as we know her today. Thus, God graciously reveals His steadfast faithfulness to Israel.

Over the span of history, Israel learned that God would always save a remnant of His people, no matter how debased their lives and conditions might be. While such remnants became associated with the effects of God’s judgment, they also bespeak salvation.

During the age of the Prophet Ezekiel, for example, God declares judgment on Jerusalem and Judah because of the people’s evil ways. The prospect of a remnant thus comes as God’s qualification of divine retribution: “But even if I send upon Jerusalem My four evil punishments – sword, famine, wild animals, and death – to destroy from it both man and cattle; yet behold, the remnant in it, those of it who are saved, who bring out sons and daughters from it . . . shall go forth” (Ezk 14:21-22). This remnant of “sons and daughters” means that there are survivors.

The prophets also conveyed to Israel that God would save a glorious portion for the end of history. For instance, Isaiah says, “In that day, the Lord will shine in counsel and glory on the earth, to exalt and glorify those of Israel who remain. . . . The Lord shall wash away the filth of the sons and the daughters of Zion and shall purge the blood of Jerusalem from their midst by the Spirit of judgment and the Spirit of burning” (Is 4:2-4).

The remnant tradition enables the Apostle Paul to perceive the emergence of a new minority in his day (Rom 11:5). First, he points to himself as proof that God has not “cast away His people” (vs. 1). He refers to Elijah who, in his era, appeared to be a remnant of one (vs. 3), although God corrected that assumption by telling the prophet: “I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal” (vs. 4).

Following a classic line of Orthodox teaching, Saint Paul bases his theology of remnant on the nature of God. Today’s passage is a hymn of praise for God’s act of pure grace in choosing a small remnant for His purposes (vs. 5). The apostle further suggests that trust in their own works lies behind the stubborn refusal of Israel-after-the-flesh to accept the riches of salvation (vss. 6-7, 12).

While most of Israel stumbles, God’s chosen people do not fall entirely away from Him (vs. 11). Yes, God remains faithful! Indeed, He blesses all nations through Israel (Gn 12:3).

This is the marvel that Saint Paul sees and declares. The failure of Israel brings “riches for the world . . . riches for the Gentiles” – for every people and nation on earth (Rom 11:12). In the end, despite Israel’s resistance, God will rouse Israel to “salvation . . . to the Gentiles” (vs. 11) and the people as a whole will return to God. History remains open!

Thou, O God, hast spoken salvation by the mouths of Thy servants the prophets. – Divine Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great

July 15 – Thursday of the Fourth Week after Pentecost
Romans 11:13-24

Gentiles: Romans 11:13-24, especially vs. 13: “*I speak to you Gentiles. . . .*” When we examine Saint Paul’s teaching concerning Israel’s rejection of Jesus, and especially his point that this rejection brings “riches for the Gentiles” (vs. 12), the question arises: who are the Gentiles? The answer, in brief, is that they are the peoples of every nation on the earth, other than the Jews.

Our understanding of Hebrew ethnography begins in Chapter 10 of Genesis with an overview of Noah’s descendants. The focus of that chapter is on one family: the descendants of Shem, called the Semites. The Semitic peoples include the Arabs, the Arameans, and the Assyrians. Shem was the ancestor of Abram (Gn 11:10-26) “the friend of God” (2 Chr 20:7; Jam 2:23). Abraham’s grandson Jacob, later called Israel by God, fathered twelve sons. These sons were the progenitors of the twelve tribes who formed the nation of Israel (Gn 46:8-27).

The geographic area described in Genesis 10 extends from the Caucasus Mountains in the north to Ethiopia in the south, from the Aegean Sea in the west to the highlands of Iran in the east. Shem’s brother Japheth fathered the peoples known historically as Medes, Cypriots, Scythians, and Ionians, largely Indo-European peoples. Ham’s descendants – the Hamitic peoples – include the Egyptians, Ethiopians, and Canaanites, all living around the Red Sea.

In Genesis 10, the term nation or nations (*goy* and *goyim* in Hebrew) appears five times. In Greek, and throughout the Septuagint, these words are translated as *ethnos* (singular) and *ethne* (plural). Here we find the root of English words such as “ethnic” and “ethnography.”

When the Bible was translated into Latin, *gens* and *gentis* were used. The word Gentiles, referring to the non-Jewish nations, thus comes from Latin, via French. Among the Jews, a Gentile or *goy* is anyone who does not belong to the people of God’s covenant. The Gentiles are the peoples *not* chosen by God.

Israelite history is marked by that nation’s struggle to maintain separation from all other ethnic groups. These efforts to remain distinct and separate had a purpose: to ensure that the people avoided the temptations of idol worship and the immoral practices prevalent among the other nations (1 Kgs 14:24). These activities, according to God’s providence, always bring painful historical consequences.

Later, Israel broke into two small kingdoms (1 Kgs 12). The ten northern tribes retained the name Israel, but eventually were conquered by the Assyrians. They assimilated with other settlers on their land and became known as the Samaritans. The Babylonians eventually conquered the small southern kingdom of Judah. The Jews, however, were saved from assimilation when the Persians in turn conquered the Babylonians, for the former helped the Jews return to Judah.

From this point onward, the nation’s efforts to maintain Jewish separation intensified. An exclusivist attitude toward the Gentiles became widespread. According to the Roman historian Tacitus, “They [the Jews] regard the rest of mankind with all the hatred of enemies.” Countering such exclusiveness were prophetic promises that the Messiah would come “as a light to the Gentiles” (Is 42:6).

In today’s reading Saint Paul likens Israel to an olive tree with its branches – the majority of the Hebrew people – broken off. At the same time wild olive branches (the Gentiles) are being grafted in (Rom 11:6). The apostle warns the Church, Jew and Gentile alike, to “consider the goodness and the severity of God,” for we too may be “cut off” (vs. 22) – unless we remain grateful to God for His grace and goodness to us (vss. 20-24).

Let us extol all the patriarchs, Abraham the friend of God, Isaac born after the promise, Jacob with the twelve heads of the tribes, asking forgiveness of Christ, glorified in His saints.

July 16 – Friday of the Fourth Week after Pentecost
Romans 11:25-36

Mercy: Romans 11:25-36, especially vs. 32: “For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.” The present passage concludes our series of readings on the question of why Israel did not accept Christ as God’s Messiah. Saint Paul’s answer has two parts: first, that “their fall is riches for the world” (vs. 11:12) and second, that when “the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. . . . All Israel will be saved” (vss. 25-26). This teaching is a declaration of the mercy of God, whose judgments are unsearchable and “[whose] ways [are] past finding out!” (vs. 33).

We need only consider the action of God’s mercy in our own life. Regardless of whether one is Jew or Gentile, male or female, rich or poor, young or old, God’s mercy is indeed “for all” (vs. 32).

Mercy is a divine mystery (vs. 25). We know mercy in the Church as the Savior who “[turns] away ungodliness” (vs. 26) and “[takes] away [our] sins” (vs. 27). Mercy is God’s gift; we are free to seek or reject it. Like all His gifts, His offer of mercy is *irrevocable* (vs. 29).

Why does the Apostle Paul call the mercy of God a “mystery” (vs. 25)? It is because mercy flows from the mystery of God Himself. Note that the apostle quotes from the Prophet Isaiah, asking, “For who has known the mind of the Lord?” (vs. 34; Is 40:13). The great apostle exclaims, “How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!” (vs. 33).

Saint Paul also speaks of the mystery of God in other letters declaring that the mystery was “hidden from ages . . . but now has been revealed to His saints” (Col 1:26). Who hid the mystery and who revealed it? God, of course.

Now, in Romans, the apostle firmly establishes that God planned the salvation of all men. He tells us that Lord God “has committed . . . all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all” (Rom 11:32).

Without being told, we know that the “Deliverer” mentioned in verse 26 is our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ. Saint Paul once again quotes Isaiah, saying that the Lord, as Deliverer, “will come out of Zion” (vs. 26; Is 59:20-21). Does this mean that He will come physically to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem?

The Church Fathers understand Zion in this passage as a reference to the Church, to God’s people. In the Ninth Ode of the Paschal Canon, we sing, “Rejoice and exult now, O Zion.” We are exhorting ourselves as the Body of Christ, the Church, for by the mercy of God we are members of the people of God. In the Body of Christ, we *receive* the Body of Christ so that we may *become* the Body of Christ. What great mercy!

What does Christ our God and Savior accomplish through His Church? He comes to us and “turns away ungodliness” (vs. 26). He is present in the Church when the Scriptures are read and preached. He comes to us in the Divine Liturgy. He reveals Himself in the icons.

In the Church, Christ’s mysteries are received. We are encouraged to “complete the remaining time of our life in peace and repentance.” In Christ we find peace with God, for if we confess our sins, “He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 Jn 1:9).

God has acted irrevocably, once and for all, on behalf of all. He took our humanity on Himself forever, for He died once for us and broke the power of death. Now death has no more dominion over Him, nor over any of us who are united to Him. Such is the great mercy which our God is bestowing upon us! “To Him . . . be glory forever. Amen” (vs. 36)!

Let Thy mercy, O Lord, be upon us, even as we have put our hope in Thee. – Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom

July 17 – Saturday of the Fourth Week after Pentecost
Romans 6:11-17

Obedience: Romans 6:11-17, especially vs. 16: “Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?” In his letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul addresses the truths that undergird the mysteries of the faith: baptism, chrismation, and communion. Now, in chapter 6, he explores three aspects of Christ’s death and resurrection. In verses 3-11, he explains how we are made “alive to God in Christ Jesus” (vs. 11). We are now under the dominion of God, that we might obey Him and attain righteousness (vss. 11-17). Thus, we may hope to receive “the gift of God . . . eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord,” if we pray and practice asceticism (vs. 23).

Appropriately, the first segment of this chapter (vss. 3-11) is read in Church on Great and Holy Saturday, at the very beginning of our celebration of Pascha. Today and tomorrow, the Church gives us the balance of the chapter to read in order to deepen our grasp of Saint Paul’s challenge.

In today’s reading, Saint Paul warns us to heed Christ above every other demand of this life, and to obey Him as we are urged to do at our baptism and initiation into the mysteries. Since we are baptized, we have only to obey God’s promptings in the heart, and He will deliver us from the power of sin.

When God delivers us, we are no longer *slaves* to sin or victims of our passions, contrary to what pop psychology suggest. We are no longer compelled by a traumatic past, nor by our nature, nor by any force beyond our control, for we have given all to Christ.

The Apostle Paul explains that although we are dead to sin, we are *alive* in the Lord (vs. 11). He points to our participation in Christ as our being “in Christ Jesus” (vs. 11). On the basis of our being united with Christ, an entirely new circumstance functions within us. This changed condition makes it possible for us to defy sin, to say no to its promptings and enticements which run contrary to the will of God.

The foundation of our ability to resist sin lies in our union with Christ – our being “in Christ Jesus” (vs. 11). On our own, we lack sufficient power to resist, but when we are in Christ His power helps us to overcome every thought, impulse, and desire that leads us astray. We are no longer tossed about on nature’s waves like a tiny ship; we stand against temptation and win.

However, we must apply the power that God extends to us in Christ in order to be truly dead to sin. As with all authentic relationships, there is nothing magical about our oneness with God. He bestows this gift on us in baptism, chrismation, and communion. We must then use the gift to resist, reject, and oppose the reign of sin within us (vs. 12).

The apostle does not suggest that this resistance is easy, painless, or without struggle, only that it is possible. God makes the impossible possible that we may win the battle against our passions and lusts.

However, we will only be able to choose rightly if we guard our hearts, minds, and bodies. Prayer helps. Asceticism helps. Above all, we must refuse to present our members to sin. Instead, we present ourselves to God as instruments of righteousness (vs. 13).

The apostle encourages us, saying, “For sin shall not have dominion over you” (vs. 14). Rather, we embrace God’s dominion over us. We know that God reigns in any case, so let us choose the best Master to serve. If we follow God, we shall be free of sin; if we choose to follow sin we follow it to death, where it surely leads (vs. 16).

Thou didst raise us up, and not cease until Thou hadst brought us up to heaven. – Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom

July 18 – Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, Tone 3

Romans 6:18-23

Duties and Opportunities: Romans 6:18-23, especially vs. 19: “So now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.” The Apostle Paul uses the imagery of slavery in this passage, speaking “in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh” (vs. 19). He does not use sweet, pious language, but blunt words suited to our divinely bestowed condition as slaves of Christ.

Whenever we speak of renouncing Satan, of uniting ourselves to Christ, or of being anointed with the gift of the Holy Spirit, we underscore our dependence on acts of God. “Having been set free from sin, [we] became slaves of righteousness” (vs. 18). We have a master, Christ our King and God, who owns us.

With Christ comes an overseer, slave driver, or gang boss to whom we are to “present [our] members . . . for holiness” (vs. 19). Christ has turned us over to righteousness to shape us up and make us fit for “the gift of God . . . eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (vs. 23). If the Church is God’s boot camp, righteousness is our drill instructor.

The apostle tells us to “present your members as slaves of righteous for holiness” (vs. 19). Christ, however, shakes his head, knowing the changes we need to make. The hard work ahead is purification – for righteousness to clean us up, one by one.

“Nothing is more excellent than this teacher,” says Saint Augustine. “Yield not thy members instruments of iniquity unto sin. Lust riseth up, restrain thy members; what can it do now that it hath risen? . . .

“Restrain thy feet, that they go not after unlawful things. Lust hath risen up, restrain thy members; restrain thine hands from all wickedness; restrain the eyes, that they wander not astray; restrain the ears, that they hear not the words of lust with pleasure. . . . What can lust do? How to rise up, it knoweth. How to conquer, it knoweth not. By rising up constantly without effect, it learns not even to rise” (Royster, *Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Romans*, p. 162).

Over time, we hope to extinguish what is not pleasing to Christ in favor of “fruit to holiness” (vs. 22). Our immediate goal is to awaken shame within us, for “what fruit did [we] have then in the things of which [we] are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death” (vs. 21).

Shame is healthy when it allow us to see that we have produced no fruit in this life, only emptiness and death. All change comes with a certain degree of pain, discomfort, and bitterness. The accomplishments that gain us adulation and praise from friends and colleagues make us wince when we catch sight of our dark side, unseen by the majority. Because the Lord knows our hearts, “what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God” (Lk 16:15).

However, once we accept godly shame with equanimity, we can go beyond it to eradicate the habits and assumptions that allowed us moments “of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness” (Rom 6:19). Shame becomes our ally, mentor, and guide, warning us when danger approaches and urging us to turn to life once again. It reminds us that we are slaves of God and owe it to our Master to offer “fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life” (vs. 22).

“The whole process whereby we were made servants of God has been accomplished by God’s gift of grace, manifesting His love for us; our part is to accept the Lord’s grace and to obey Him of our own free will. We are not being forced. As the Apostle John has taught us, when the Word of God came into the world, ‘as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God (Jn 1:12)’” (Royster, p. 164).

Adorn me, teach and enlighten me. Show me to be a dwelling-place of Thy Spirit. – Postcommunion prayer of Saint Simeon the Translator

July 19 – Monday of the Fifth Week after Pentecost
Romans 12:4-5, 15-21

Applying the Truth – The Christian Mindset: Romans 12:4-5, 15-21, especially vs. 16: *“Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.”* At the end of his letters, the Apostle Paul often provides practical applications for his teachings. He follows this pattern in Romans; starting with chapter 12, he explains how to apply lessons from several previous chapters.

The first teaching Saint Paul explores is the necessity for us to cultivate a Christ-like mindset. Since we are members of the Body of Christ, our thinking and actions must be formed by the Head of the Body – that is, by Christ Himself.

A genuine Christian mindset develops when we embrace our incorporation in the Body of Christ (vss. 4-5). Acceptance of our membership in Christ – acknowledging that we belong to Him – is essential to the formation of a right mind within ourselves. A healthy Christian outlook arises from the experience of our union with Christ and with other members of the Church through the Holy Spirit.

The Lord Jesus emphasizes that all the faithful are part of a single living entity, like the branches of a vine (Jn 15:5). He also uses family imagery to express close connections, using terms such as father, mother, sister, and brother. Based on the experience of a vital fellowship, it is natural for us to “rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep” (Rom 12:15)!

When we affirm our unity in Christ, we grow into the shared mind of the Church as it exists throughout time. In this passage, the apostle urges us to “be of the same mind toward one another” (vs. 16). Speaking to the church at Corinth, he makes the same assertion: “We have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16).

We should strive to think with the mind of the Lord – to will as He wills, and choose as He chooses. Practiced over time, such thinking yields a Christian mindset. How do we recognize when we have acquired the mind of Christ? We do not yearn after *high things* – we refuse to waste our energy on ambition and status, nor do we seek to acquire what is popularly esteemed in the world (Rom 12:16).

We are given the power in Christ to manage our own thoughts so as not to be “haughty, but [to] fear” (vs. 11:20). Thus a right mindset means never being “wise in your own opinion,” but to “associate with the humble” (vs. 12:16). Christ is our prime example: we adopt His thinking, His approach to people and situations, His self-emptying and humility (Phil 2:8).

To etch the Christian mindset indelibly in our hearts, Saint Paul offers us a set of concise instructions. “Repay no one evil for evil,” but “have regard for good things in the sight of all men” (vs. 17). “Live peaceably with all men” (vs. 18) and “do not avenge yourselves” (vs. 19). Rather, let us leave room for divine retribution, for the Lord says, “Vengeance is Mine” (vs. 19).

Drawing on Proverbs 25:21, the apostle adds, “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink” (vs. 20). 8) We are not to “be overcome by evil,” but rather to “overcome evil with good” (vs. 21). Naturally, these commandments parallel the Sermon on the Mount and the Lord’s command to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt 22:39), for the Apostle Paul had the mind of Christ.

O Lord eternal, by the power of Thy blessing enable me at all times to speak and act to Thy glory with a . . . spirit [of] humility, patience, love, gentleness, peace, courage and wisdom: aware always of Thy presence. – Archimandrite Sophrony Sakharov

July 20 – Tuesday – Holy Prophet Elijah

James 5:10-20

Elijah's Example: James 5:10-20, especially vs 10: *“My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the Name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience.”* In this reading, the Apostle James admonishes us to follow the example of the holy Prophets by emulating men like Job and Elijah who exhibited patience in suffering, communicated honestly, and relied on prayer to sustain them. As we celebrate the Feast of Elijah, let us seek true spiritual profit by reflecting on the obedient life of this holy Prophet (3 Kg 17:1-4 Kg 2:15).

While the Apostle James commends all the Prophets as models of patience in suffering, naming Job in particular (Jam 5:10-11), still he especially recognizes Elijah for enduring bitter conflicts with great patience. God bestowed upon the Prophet a glorious departure from this life (vs 11), with a whirlwind and chariot of fire to receive him into heaven (4 Kg 2:11-12). Twice during his life, Elijah rebuked the sinful King Ahab concerning his indulgence in idolatry by speaking God's truth, but because of the king's ire, Elijah fled into the wilderness as a hunted man and suffered great privation (3 Kg 16:37-17:3 and 3 Kg 18:15-19:5).

Here in the contemporary world, our idolatry also embraces moral corruption, worships material pleasures, and involves even Orthodox Christians. Let us learn from Elijah to suffer shame and rejection for being truthful about the corrupt state of the world and society. Note what Saint Gregory of Sinai points out: that “the envy which the innocent provoke is for their benefit, while the Lord's schooling tests us so as to bring about our conversion, since it opens our ears when we are guilty.” To all of which the Saint even adds encouragement: “That is why the Lord has promised an eternal crown to those who endure in this manner.”

Saint James exhorts the faithful to speak plainly and directly, not swearing “either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No,’ lest you fall into judgment” (Jam 5:12). And he exhorts us further to confess even our “trespasses to one another and pray for one another that [we] may be healed” (vs 16).

Elijah was a man of such honest life and communication. When Queen Jezebel and King Ahab conspired to seize the vineyard of their neighbor, Naboth, Elijah did not spare the feelings of the monarchs. He told them directly the consequences God the Lord would bring upon the throne: the end of Ahab's dynasty and a violent end for his entire family (3 Kg 20:17-29). Let us not hold back plain truth, nor avoid searching into our own faults and sins before the Lord.

The Apostle also commends diligent prayer, reminding us that “The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (Jam 5:16). At this point in his Epistle, the holy Saint again directs us to the example of Elijah - one who “prayed earnestly” (Jam 5:17-18).

Honest prayer was the sure source of Elijah's patience, strength and faith during many trials and sufferings. He candidly submitted and depended solely upon God. His prayer when he challenged the priests of Baal is a classic example of trust (3 Kg 18:36-37). His prayer for rain reveals persistence (3 Kg 18:41-45). His prayer in the wilderness exhibits self-surrender to the will of God (3 Kg 19:4). On Mount Horeb he prayed in absolute obedience to God (3 Kg 19:11-18). May the Lord establish such a prayer life in us!

Archimandrite Ioannikios Kotsonis underscores this urgent need: “You cannot be called a Christian, if you do not pray often. All the saints prayed continually and with ardor. Therefore, become a practitioner of unceasing prayer. It will give enlightenment to your mind.”

O Prophet Elijah, who foresaw the great acts of God, who with a word didst stop the flow of rain, intercede thou for our sake with Him Who is the Lover of mankind.

July 21 – Wednesday of the Fifth Week after Pentecost
Romans 15:7-16

Applying the Truth, continued – Glorifying God: *Romans 15:7-16, especially vs. 7:* “*Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.*” The eternal aim of the Lord Jesus is a people who “receive one another . . . as Christ also received us” (vs. 7), who are filled with the Spirit, “singing and making melody in [their] heart to the Lord” (Eph 5:19), who strive day by day to act and live “to the glory of God” (Rom 15:7).

In today’s verses, Saint Paul teaches us four ways we may glorify God. We may receive one another (vs. 7), praise and laud God (vs. 11), keep our hope abundant in Him (vs. 13), and admonish one another (vs. 14). In urging these four actions, the apostle does not artificially divide liturgical action in the congregation from the praise of God. Such praise keeps our hope vibrant and purifies our daily efforts to receive and admonish one another.

What does it mean for us to *receive* one another? The verb in the original Greek means to “take into fellowship, associate with, welcome warmly, treat kindly.” We find the model for this in the Lord. We are to welcome fellow sinners as Christ does with us, for we are all sinners.

Christ took our flesh upon Himself, becoming man irrevocably, permanently, and eternally so as to associate with us. He did not hesitate to enter our fallen state of existence, but humbled Himself in love, calling us “friends” and dying for our sake. In verse 8, the apostle uses the word *diakonon* (servant) to describe the manner in which Christ acts when He *receives* us.

The concerns that the apostle addresses in his letter to the Romans arose from issues generated by the hybrid nature of the earliest Christian communities, with Jews and Gentiles forming one people. These fellowships were neither easy nor comfortable for their members.

Today some of our Orthodox parishes are homogeneous socially and culturally; other communities are quite diverse. And even in congregations where language and culture are shared, there are personality differences. Fallen human nature can make demands on us when it comes to receiving one another.

However, God’s purposes are at stake. He wills for the Church to be marked by unity, fellowship, and genuine caring among all members. In this fallen world, our Church members are not necessarily compatible socially or economically or culturally. We are the Body of Christ, however – a people committed to the praise of God (vs. 11).

Thus, it is urgent that we make care for one another the very context of our praise. If worship is to be worthy in the eyes of God, remember that before we offer our “gift before the altar . . . first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Mt 5:24). We glorify God, praising Him who has called us into communion with Him, by nurturing His people, our fellow members in Christ.

The Lord our God is glorified in His people when our hope in Him has neither bounds nor limits (Rom 15:12-13). Saint Paul calls the Lord “the God of hope” (vs. 13). Our gracious God and Savior always acts with ineffable compassion for us, never reneging on His promises, never wavering. It is right for us to call Him “our God and our hope,” for He brings joy and peace “by the power of the Holy Spirit” (vs. 13) to all His faithful ones.

To sum up, the effort required to be faithful does not allow us to approach our Christian faith as an enterprise isolated from life. We belong to a family, bound to one another in love. Thus, we admonish one another (vs. 14), for correction and calling each other back to the truth show that we care. When others run into difficulty, go astray or founder, we express our concern and remain present for them. Then our God is resoundingly glorified.

Love one another, that with one accord we may confess Father, Son and Holy Spirit. – Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom

July 22 – Thursday of the Fifth Week after Pentecost
Romans 15:17-29

Applying the Truth, continued – Christ Jesus: *Romans 15:17-29, especially vs. 17:* “*Therefore I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things which pertain to God.*” God accomplishes amazing things through His people. His activity is at once humbling and exhilarating. In today’s passage, the Apostle Paul repeatedly refers to the active presence of Christ Jesus in the labors for God in which he has recently been engaged. As we study the apostle’s experience of living in Christ, we find that he helps us understand how the Lord also works through us.

Today we rarely hear the word “glory” used to describe any labor on behalf of the Lord. In the original Greek, the word used for glory is *kauchesin* (vs. 17), which has a dual implication and may be positive or negative. In positive terms, *kauchesin* refers to finding pleasure in an accomplishment. Negatively, it may refer to sinful boasting for the purpose of enhancing one’s self-esteem.

The Apostle Paul, of course, is referring to his ministry in this passage, and specifically to what he has accomplished. The aim of Saint Paul’s work is “to make the Gentiles obedient” to the gospel of Christ (vs. 18). He describes what happened as he carried out the work: “mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God” (vs. 19).

He recounts how he laid a foundation (vs. 20) for the Church across the Anatolian peninsula, which encompasses present-day Turkey, and in the southern Balkans, called Illyricum in Roman times (vs. 19). Saint Paul indicates that the name of Christ Jesus has never before been spoken to the peoples of these regions. However, he emphasizes that the results “pertain to God” (vs. 17); thus in speaking of achievements, he gives credit wholly to the Lord (vss. 18-19).

The apostle knows that Christ Jesus infuses his words and deeds so as “to make the Gentiles obedient” (vs. 18). He is in awe of what the Lord accomplished and “will not dare to speak” of the outcomes as his own achievements. Instead, he carefully states that they are what the Lord Jesus “accomplished through me” (vs. 18), recognizing Christ as the sole source of the result.

Of course, the apostle has the privilege of announcing the Lord’s incarnation and speaking in the name of Jesus, which had never been heard there before. However, Christ is responsible for opening people’s eyes and enabling them to understand the words that Paul utters (vs. 21). The Lord Himself causes the peoples whom he meets to become obedient to the gospel; no credit belongs to His apostle.

Later in this passage, Saint Paul speaks of his plan to visit the Christians in Rome as something he has long desired to do (vs. 23). However, his immediate work for Christ Jesus delayed him in fulfilling this desire (vs. 22). He foresees that he will probably make the journey after delivering an offering “for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem” (vs. 26).

Let us not overlook his beautiful aside concerning the exchange of spiritual benefits for material goods (vs. 27). The outpouring of the Holy Spirit that began in Jerusalem at Pentecost now allows the Gentiles – the pagan peoples to whom Saint Paul ministers – to be “partakers of [the] spiritual things” of the saints in Jerusalem (vs. 27). Now, in a reversal of benefits, the converts gleaned from his ministry provide aid to the faithful at Jerusalem.

Reiterating that God is the source of all blessings, the apostle assures the Roman Christians that Christ Jesus will shower them with “the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ” (vs. 29) whenever he arrives. The Lord, by His nature, gives blessings.

Lord, I have fled unto Thee, teach me to do Thy will, for Thou art my God. For with Thee is the fountain of life, in Thy light shall we see light. – The Doxology

July 23 – Friday of the Fifth Week after Pentecost
Romans 16:1-16

Applying the Truth, continued – True Life: Romans 16:1-16, especially vs. 7: “Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.” Christ plainly declares, “Whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it” (Mt 16:25). Such a counterintuitive attitude is uniquely Christian, according to Christos Yannaras:

In contrast with every other code of ethics, the Church does not seek to safeguard the individual, either in isolation or collectively; she does not aim at individual security, either transient or eternal. She asks man to reject his individuality, to ‘lose’ his soul. For this loss is the salvation of man, the existential realization of true life, of personal distinctiveness and freedom (*Freedom of Morality*, p. 266-7).

“Losing one’s life” in this context is quite different from losing one’s life in an accident. We attain true life in a definite way. If we take a moment to study the small digressions made by the Apostle Paul as he greets his fellow Christians toward the end of his letter to the Romans, we may discern what it means to *lose* one’s life and to *find* it again.

Eight times in today’s verses, Saint Paul uses phrases such as “in Christ Jesus,” “in Christ,” or “in the Lord.” These phrases refer to our sharing in the Person and mission of the Lord Jesus Christ. The high importance placed by the apostle on being *in Christ* is manifested in other common expressions such as “worthy of the saints” (vs. 2), “who are of note among the apostles” (vs. 7), “my beloved” (vs. 8), and “labored much” (vs. 12). These phrases indicate the synergy of divine power and grace working with our human commitment and endeavors.

Saint Paul presents us with the elements that are required if we are to venture to speak of being *in Christ*. Among these are repentance – the active reordering our aims and actions to conform to Christ’s will – and asceticism, the mastering of our desire for comforts through fasting and a repudiation of consumerism. He asks us to undertake a disciplined rule of prayer and worship and, above all, to labor on behalf of others.

Let reflect on Saint Paul’s series of greetings to see what they reveal about earnest dedication, hard work, and disregard of self. As we come to understand the luminous implications of being *in Christ*, his words may even arouse in us a degree of shame and remorse.

The apostle’s remarks concerning “Phoebe our sister” (vss. 1-2), a deaconess from the church in Cenchrea, reveal the high value he places on humble servitude as a means for attaining fullness in the life in Christ. In the early Church, deaconesses were blessed to attend female catechumens as they prepared for and underwent baptism. Deaconesses also visited prisoners and the sick.

Saint Paul further describes Phoebe as a “helper,” or patroness, of the Church, identifying her as a woman of high social rank who supports “many” through material aid (vs. 2). Those she assisted include the apostle himself (vs. 2). He praises the same active labor in Priscilla and Aquila (vss. 3-5), Mary (vs. 6), Tryphena, Tryphosa and Persis (vs. 12).

Saint Paul also greets those who are ready to assume grave risk, including privation and loss of life, to foster the well-being of other Christians. Priscilla and Aquila “risked their own necks” for his life (vs. 4); Andronicus and Junia were his “fellow prisoners” (vs. 7), presumably in Ephesus. Saint Paul depicts a community willing to reject not only material comfort, but physical life itself, in order to attain true life. Such grace is offered to all of us who are in Christ.

May I live henceforth not unto myself, but unto Thee, O good Master and Benefactor. – Post-communion Prayer

July 24 – Saturday of the Fifth Week after Pentecost
Romans 8:14-21

Applying the Truth, continued – Led by the Spirit: Romans 8:14-21, especially vs. 14: “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.” Saint John Chrysostom offers this warning to the newly baptized: “If you are not willing to be ‘led by the Spirit’ . . . you lose the dignity bestowed upon you and the preeminence of your adoption. This is why [the apostle] does not say, ‘As many as have received the Spirit’” (“Homily 14 on Romans,” *NPNF* First Series, vol. 11, p. 441).

Indeed, it is up to us to choose to let the Holy Spirit lead us. We must decide to override our personal inclinations when the Spirit reveals God’s will. Only when this habit of following the Holy Spirit becomes firmly established is it possible for us to say, “[We] are led by the Spirit of God; [we] are sons of God” (vs. 14).

Perhaps we find it easier to talk about following the Spirit’s lead than to actually do so. We may find conflicting thoughts welling up within us. How do we know if what we think and feel comes from the Holy Spirit rather than from our own will and desires, or the suggestions of others?

The Apostle Paul suggests three tests to determine when the Spirit is leading us. First, we take note of the apostle’s declaration that “you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear” (vs. 15). When we experience coercion or compulsion before a decision or action, we should regard it as a sign of the need for caution. Such promptings are not of the Holy Spirit.

Feelings of duress and pressure are indeed signs of other spirits (1 Jn 4:1). We may experience the pressure of our passions (Ps 37:7); spiritual immaturity and confusion (Heb 5:11-14); or sin and darkening of our heart (Rom 1:21).

To distinguish between our own feelings and thoughts and the guidance of the Spirit requires regular prayer, long practice in discernment, and the counsel of a spiritual advisor and wise pastor. The Scriptures help us to prepare our hearts to hear the Spirit. But we must remember that He cannot lead if we simply rush to the Bible, grasping for a verse, or thumb through the writings of the Fathers in search of a word we want to hear.

Rather, we must develop a habit of reading and meditating on the great treasures of holy tradition so as to steep ourselves in the mind of Christ. If even Saint Paul says that “the love of Christ compels us” (2 Cor 5:14), then how can we be confident that we clearly distinguish between the prompting of the Spirit and the urging of our desires and cravings?

Only when we grow in our relationship with the Holy Spirit will we receive sure, quiet confidence from Him. Only then may we hope to respond correctly to His leading and His restraint. With time, we can learn to know if a caution comes from God, or from other sources.

A second sign is becoming alert to *fear* (vs. 15). What is true about bondage applies also to fearful emotion. Growth in the Spirit produces godly fear and joy in the heart. These gifts enable us to reject fears generated by other spirits, or prompted by the cautions of those who do not know the Lord, but strive to arouse us to faithlessness.

Finally, the Apostle Paul reveals a third way to know if we are children of God: “If indeed we suffer with [Christ]” (vs. 17). Resonance of our spirits with the Holy Spirit leads us to embrace suffering for the Lord’s sake, however it may come. When we are willing to endure discomfort or pain in our struggle to draw closer to God, we also gain in our capacity to be led unfailingly by the Spirit.

Cleanse my soul. Sanctify my mind. Enlighten my five senses. Establish me in Thy fear. – Post-communion prayer of Saint Simeon the Translator

July 25 – Sunday – Dormition of the Righteous Anna
Galatians 4:22-31

Spiritual Promise and Progress: Galatians 4:22-31, especially vs 28: “Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise.” Here in Galatians, Saint Paul explores an event from the age of the Patriarchs (Gn 15:1-8; 16:1-6; 18:9-14; 21:1-7). He says the two sons are symbolic of our condition (vs 24), and so we may say, “Rejoice, O barren...who do not bear...break forth and shout!” (see vs 27 from Isaiah 54:1). The Triune God, working through two mothers and their two sons, instructs our hearts which were desolate and barren in relationship with Him. Let the birth of Isaac and Ishmael, a bit of ancient history, encourage us to trust, be patient, and take care not to get ahead of God, but to rely on Divine promises and wait upon the Lord Who gives life.

Both convert and cradle Orthodox may become spiritually stale and discover that we are not getting anywhere in our prayer life, that the Liturgy has lost delight for us, that sermons are not moving us. We go to confession for the same old sins. We see no progress in getting free from them. We know what is going to happen at Church; so, when we pray, we just spin our wheels. There are times when, plainly, we are bored. We wonder what happened to the delight, the joy, the spiritual life we had. We are ashamed and disappointed.

The underlying account in Genesis is our story: Abraham was getting old. The first time God spoke to him, he jumped up, left home, and moved to the promised land. It was beautiful! God promised him children to inherit the land and to possess it. He moved around, prospered, but fathered no heirs. Would God’s promises be fulfilled? Sarah his wife understood. She suggested he have a child by her slave girl (at least he would have an heir). But after the girl bore Abraham a child, she scorned Sarah. This was not what God promised! The form was there. Ishmael was his flesh and blood son; but Abraham did not experience the wonder, delight, joy and life for which he long hoped. He was ashamed and disappointed. Is his story close to home? How easy to be impatient, bored, grow stale, and even make great efforts to rouse ourselves.

Saint Seraphim of Sarov has wise things to say about our spiritual efforts as disciples: “we must begin with a right faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Who came into the world to save sinners.” Now faith is right if and when we trust foremost in Christ to enliven our efforts and give us the grace of the Holy Spirit. For Christ our God “brings into our hearts the Kingdom of God and opens the way for us to win the blessings of the future life.” Thus, no matter how hard we try and how diligent we are, if we trust more in the efforts we put forth than we do in Christ, we simply will spin our wheels and become stale. Christ says, “the Son gives life to whom He will” (Jn 5:24), for “as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself (Jn 5:26). Foremost, we must trust in Christ!

Saint Seraphim makes a second point: he raises the question of how pious activities may affect our life in Christ. Although in Baptism we professed Christ, we may forget Whose we are and slip into supposing that “the Christian life consisted merely in doing good works.” No! There is a purpose for pious activities: to acquire thereby “the grace of God’s Spirit.” All activities in life based merely on doing good, without assuring that they bring the grace of the Spirit of God, are scorned by the Holy Fathers, as Solomon taught long ago: “There are ways that seem right to a man, however their ends look to the depths of Hades” (Pr 16:23).

Strictly human efforts lack faith in God. The Lord promised a son and heir to Abraham “by Sarah,” so the acts we think up will never bring the grace of God as promised, for we “are children of promise.” God’s grace and the Spirit are given to those who trust in Christ foremost.

Thou, O Christ, givest life to everything and rulest all: help me to trust in Thee above all.

July 26 – Monday of the Sixth Week after Pentecost
Romans 16:17-24

Applying the Truth for Right Outcomes: *Romans 16:17-24, especially vss. 19-20:* “*I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil. And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly.*” Our faith sets forth clear guidelines for us to follow if we wish God to “crush Satan under [our] feet.” The underlying principle of Saint Paul’s appeal is that wisdom and innocence must be cultivated in our hearts – not mindlessly, but with our attention focused on attaining true wisdom and true innocence. We have all heard the saying, “If you are going nowhere, you will certainly get there!” It offers a sharp reminder of the need for effective standards and clear objectives in the spiritual life.

The primary standard that the great Apostle Paul sets forth is Christ-centeredness, which means to *know* Him whom we serve. He begs us to remember the importance of identifying the source of our desires. If we grow wise in the methods and knowledge of secular society while remaining innocent of spiritual truth, we can be easily captured by errors that lead us into immorality.

Saint Paul has definite ideas concerning good and evil when he makes his appeal. If we hope to “crush Satan under [our] feet,” we must start from a sound understanding of the subject, applying ourselves to the apostle’s teachings.

When “a certain ruler asked [Jesus], saying, ‘Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’” Jesus replies, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God” (Lk 18:18-19). When we pursue wisdom, we aim to be *wise* in the good revealed by God. Our knowledge is based on Christ, the Wisdom of God, for He is the foundation of all true wisdom.

Communion with God is the greatest good we seek, for Christ is the source of all good. The priority he places on knowing God as the ground of wisdom leads Saint Paul to remind us of “the doctrine which you learned” (Rom 16:17). The doctrines and teachings to which he refers are the revealed truths of our faith: repentance from dead works, faith in God, baptism, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment (see Heb 6:1-2).

These basic doctrines, however, should lead us into the practice of the ascetic life and the spiritual disciplines. Doctrines are not mere collections of information about God. We cannot acquire knowledge of God unless we are purified by our struggles and aided by the Holy Spirit.

Purity is the foundation of theology and a true relationship with God. By contrast, “guile is a perversion of honesty, a deluded way of thinking . . . deceit that has become habit, conceit turned into nature, a foe to humility, a pretense of repentance, an estrangement from mourning. . . . Let us run from the precipice of hypocrisy!” (*Ladder of Divine Ascent* 24.20, p. 147).

As we gain wisdom concerning what is good, we also learn much about how to be *innocent* of evil. For example, we must be innocent and guileless concerning the cravings and demands of our “own belly” (Rom 16:18)! The Lord Jesus lists other desires of an impure heart: “adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness” (Mk 7:21-22).

Our Master reminds us that all evil comes “from within and [defiles] a man” (Mk 7:23). Acquiring purity must be our first step toward knowing God. At baptism, we drink from the fountain of the age to come. Thus, as Saint Herman of Alaska instructs us, “from this day, this hour, this very minute, we should try to love God above all else and carry out His teachings” (Oleksa, *Alaskan Missionary Spirituality*, p. 52).

O my Creator, cleanse my soul. Purify and control me. Teach and enlighten me. – Post-communion Prayer of Saint Simeon the Translator

July 27 – Tuesday – Great Martyr Panteleimon
2 Timothy 2:1-10

Be Strong in Grace: 2 Timothy 2:1-10, especially vs 1: “*You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.*” Be amazed at the strength of the Saints; they seem superhuman, being steadfast under suffering, unwavering in fidelity to the Lord, and utterly committed to obeying God’s commandments without compromise. Their ability to work unstintingly at whatever task God calls them is humbling. But the strength of the Saints comes from “the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (vs 1). The evidence from the records of the lives of the Saints clearly reveals Christ as the Source of the abundant grace that His faithful ones demonstrate.

And, Saint Paul is calling on us - just as he did on Timothy - to “endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (vs 3). The verb, ‘endure,’ from, *synkakopatheson*, means literally, ‘to suffer affliction with.’ The added ‘with’ alters the meaning, being derived from the prefix ‘syn.’ There are different ways to translate this verb. Some add the word ‘me,’ to read, “Suffer hardship with ‘me’ as a good soldier...” (ASV). The warrant for the *me* is the author, Saint Paul who wrote the letter as a prisoner (vss 9,10). Others apply suffering to all good soldiers of Christ, since suffering is generic for Christians, whether we view the struggles of disciples socially, spiritually, or physically (including especially the confessors and martyrs).

The Holy Fathers consistently underscore the necessity of spiritual suffering on the path to theosis: “genuine compunction is undistracted pain of soul” that gives no relief but hourly creates images of dissolution; yet like cool water “provides the comfort of God.” Tradition affirms that “pain of the heart is essential for salvation....he who is without pain bears no fruit.” As the Apostle says elsewhere: “For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ” (2 Cor 1:5). Suffering and grace always are conjoined.

The Apostle Paul also urgently advises us to resist submitting mindlessly to “the affairs of this life” (2 Ti 2:4). Fruitful effort in Christ depends on forcing the demands of this life to be subservient to our greater work in Christ. Avoid anything that disturbs union with the Lord. Tito Colliander puts it clearly: “We must free ourselves as much as possible from all fuss and flutter and ado over vain things.” Yes, as we serve the Lord, let us be not “troubled about many things,” but always keep in mind that “one thing is needed” (Lk 10:41).

In addition, Saint Paul is quick to prompt us to apply ourselves to observing the Lord’s commandments, for one is “not crowned unless he competes according to the rules” (2 Ti 2:5). On the one hand, may we never forget that we are in a competition having eternal outcomes. On the other hand, grace is given to us in Christ so that we may approach God’s eternal commandments in confidence and hope. Therefore, do not despair because “by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified” (Rom 3:20), for both grace and the law are given to us in Christ, “even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ” (Rom 3:21).

Yes, the path of the Saints that the Apostle Paul reveals is demanding and exacting, plainly a difficult work placed before us. Still, “the hard-working farmer must be first to partake of the crops” (2 Ti 2:6). See how Saint John Cassian encourages us, for “as a rule, someone who works is attacked and afflicted by but a single demon, while someone who does not work is taken prisoner by a thousand evil spirits.” Listless Christians face rebuke from the Master and may meet worse retribution (Mt 24:48-50). But do not despair; we have grace from God in Christ. “strive to subdue [listlessness] through patience, prayer, and manual labor.”

O God of our Fathers, Whoever dealest with us according to Thy meekness, remove not Thy mercy from me; but by their intercessions direct my life into the way of salvation.

July 28 – Wednesday of the Sixth Week after Pentecost

1 Corinthians 2:9-3:8

Growth in Christ, continued – Transformed by the Spirit: 1 Corinthians 2:9-3:8, especially vs. 13: “*These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.*” Saint Paul challenges us, as members of Christ, to look to ourselves. Do we capitulate to our “natural” human tendencies (vs. 14) and find ourselves “behaving like mere men” (vs. 3:3)? The Corinthians amply demonstrate such a natural condition by their behavior, which leads to “envy, strife, and divisions” (vs. 3).

Saint Paul asks us to acknowledge what is *natural* in us, asking, “Are you not carnal?” (vs. 3:4). Can we say we are free of envy and strife? Do we take sides or contribute to divisions in our parish communities? If we are to grow in Christ, such behavior cannot be. The apostle exposes the contradiction of yielding to these natural tendencies within us while at the same time claiming to be recipients of “the deep things of God” (vs. 2:10).

Saint Paul reminds us of the wondrous realities that “God has prepared for those who love Him” (vs. 2:9). He points out that we receive the Holy Spirit when we become Christians. Why does God give us the Spirit, other than so “that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God” through Christ (vs. 12)?

God not only gives us life in Christ, but He also gives us what is essential for living this new life: the power of the life-giving Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit we grow in Christ, having a Teacher within us whose guidance we heed. He may be inaccessible to the “natural man” (vs. 14), yet He gives us the possibility of personal transformation.

We need not continue acting like “the natural man [who] does not receive the things of the Spirit of God” (vs. 14). With the Holy Spirit to instruct us, we have access directly to “the mind of Christ” (vs. 16).

This possibility of transformation is bestowed on us when we receive the mystery of Christ at our baptism and chrismation. We renew that gift through repentance, the sacrament of confession, and reception of the Holy Gifts. In baptism we are joined to Christ, freely given the grace of His forgiveness. In chrismation we are sealed with the Holy Spirit, making us capable of spiritual discernment (vs. 14). The indwelling Spirit works in and through our spirits, illuminating our hearts and instructing us in the mind of Christ.

As the Holy Spirit discloses the things of God to us, we gain the ability to face life spiritually, “comparing spiritual things with spiritual” (vs. 13). Even if we still act carnally and behave “like mere men” (vs. 3:3), all is not lost. Through tears, confession, and repentance, we may re-enter and renew the mystery of Christ, being transformed by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

The apostle’s appeal in this passage requires us to return to “God who gives the increase” (vs. 3:7). With His help, we learn to resist every tendency to use “words which man’s wisdom teaches” (vs. 2:13). Instead, we yearn for and seek the transforming words of Christ, “which the Holy Spirit teaches” (vs. 13). even when everyone around us believes the Lord’s ways are “foolishness” (vs. 14).

The holy Orthodox faith is not milk intended for babes who want to satisfy their every natural inclination (vss. 3:1-2). Rather, we seek to receive the mature and solid food (vs. 2) that transforms us, guiding our words and actions by the mind of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Absolve me, O Lord, from all faults and bonds which proceed from the weakness of my mortal nature, that I might embrace the things freely given to me by the Holy Spirit. – Prayer of Absolution

July 29 – Thursday of the Sixth Week after Pentecost
1 Corinthians 3:18-23

Growth in Christ, continued – Attaining True Wisdom: 1 Corinthians 3:18-23, especially vs. 18: *“Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise.”* In this epistle, the Apostle Paul expresses deep concern about the spiritual state of the Corinthian Christians. He perceives that these disciples’ grasp of the gospel, the Church, and the mores of personal conduct is still immature.

The disciples at Corinth are under the delusion that they have attained true wisdom in Christ, but the apostle undercuts this false confidence, saying, “If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool” (vs. 18). He seeks to awaken them to the difference between their ideas about wisdom and the true wisdom taught by the Church to all believers.

We face a similar problem today, for we live in a culture that places priority on the technological acumen offered by our secular universities and colleges. The belief is widespread that education will solve all problems, since society’s maladies are the result of ignorance.

This dangerous notion does nothing to address mankind’s ills. Indeed, our belief in the “solution” of education blinds us, making the Apostle Paul’s message as pertinent to us today as it was during the first century.

Let us look carefully at Saint Paul’s alternative, for he reveals how growing in Christ helps us gain genuine wisdom. Beginning with the phrase “among you” in verse 18, Saint Paul contrasts the ethos, values, and orientation of the Church with that of the world. Problems arise when this contrast becomes blurred in our minds. The ethos of the Church is very different from that of human society, whether we are talking about Greco-Romans in the first century or our own secular culture.

Our Orthodox faith integrates every aspect of our existence. Its unique, inherent values encompass the spectrum of human behavior, whether we are concerned with marriage and family, art and music, or employment and recreation.

Contemporary culture, however, has lost touch with true spiritual life. We see increasing disorder in the conduct of business, community affairs, and personal morality. Indeed, there are many disturbing parallels with first-century Corinth.

How do we attain true wisdom in Christ? The Apostle Paul teaches us, first, about these two competing wisdoms. From him we learn the difference between them as manifested in thought and action. We may find it a struggle to gain this apostolic view of wisdom, discovering how thoroughly our lives are permeated by the wisdom of this disordered age. We require God-given insight if we are to turn away from the “good life” of this world. Truly, we must become fools “that [we] may become wise” (vs. 18).

Once we perceive the difference between true and false wisdom, then we can make true choices. “I set before you life and death, blessing and cursing. Therefore, choose life, that both you and your seed may live” (Dt 30:19). To become fools for Christ, we must submit to the Lord and allow him to reshape our attitudes, thoughts, and desires, as well as every facet of our behavior and activities.

Such apostolic perception, guided by true wisdom, helps us counter the appeal of worldly behavior (vs. 19). True wisdom allows us to abandon futile fantasies by exposing them to the light of Christ (vs. 20) and abandoning our human boasting and pride (vs. 21). Choosing on the basis of true wisdom is possible when we understand that we belong to the Lord, for we “are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s” (vs. 23).

I have no life, no light, no joy or wisdom, nor strength except in Thee, O Lord. – Archimandrite Sophrony Sakharov

July 30 – Friday of the Sixth Week after Pentecost
1 Corinthians 4:5-8

Growth in Christ, continued – Judging: 1 Corinthians 4:5-8, especially vss. 6-7: “Learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other. For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive?” We soon discover how sins are intertwined in our hearts. Three closely related ones (judging, conceit, and contentiousness) work together to our detriment, and are difficult to defeat on our own.

Speaking of conceit, Saint John Climacus says, “I am vainglorious when I fast; and when I relax the fast in order to be unnoticed, I am again vainglorious over my prudence. When well-dressed I am quite overcome by vainglory, and when I put on poor clothes, I am vainglorious again. When I talk I am defeated, and when I am silent I am again defeated by it. However, I throw this prickly pear, a spike stands upright” (*Ladder of Divine Ascent* 22.5, p. 54).

The Apostle Paul, who took delight in the law of God according to his inward man, admits frankly, “And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me” (2 Cor 12:7). We see God’s hand in the struggle!

Having confronted the intermingling of judging, conceit, and contentiousness, Saint Paul addresses these sins in one helpful passage. He has been alerted “by those of Chloe’s household, that there are contentions” within the Corinthian church (1 Cor 1:11). Realizing that his Corinthian disciples are in spiritual danger, he knows that they must defeat this sinister team of enemies if they are to grow in Christ.

Each one needs to stop judging the others, resist conceit, and diligently follow the apostles’ model of cooperation. Above all, God must be acknowledged as the sole source of every gift, ability, and capacity. Such an admission puts conceit to death.

Saint Paul first addresses the judgmentalism in the community: “Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes” (vs. 4:5). This admonition, like the Lord Jesus’ caution in Matthew 7:1, must be read in context. Of course, Christians make judgments concerning obvious wrongdoing. The world is rife with practices that are patently contrary to the teaching and will of God. We should never consider the lists of sins in the New Testament as antiquated problems limited to the first century. There is little novelty in sin, after all.

What the Lord and the apostles mean by *not judging* is that we should refrain from impugning the motives of other Christians on the basis of words and actions that differ from our own. We veer into the sins of judging, conceit, and contentiousness when we decide that what others think, say, or do arises from “the hidden things of darkness” and reveals the “counsels of [their] hearts” (1 Cor 4:5). We must take care not to see differences as a deviation from Church teachings or an indication of heresy, demonic influences, or evil motives.

Early in the epistle, Saint Paul offers himself and Apollos as models of what it means to work together despite differences (vss. 3:5-8). Now he refers back to those comments (vs. 4:6), urging the disciples to adopt a cooperative manner despite differences in style. He urges us to guard against superiority games such as telling ourselves that we are best or believing that “their approach is wrong.”

Above all, we avoid the dark inner tendency toward self-importance and conceit by immediately acknowledging that our every capacity and insight comes to us from God (vs. 7). Only Lord, through the Holy Spirit, equips the saints for ministry (Eph 4:12). Without Him, we are empty and impoverished (2 Cor 4:7)!

Grant me to see my own sins, and not to judge my brother, for Thou art blessed, O God. – Saint Ephraim the Syrian

July 31 – Saturday of the Sixth Week after Pentecost
Romans 9:1-5

Israel’s Legacy: Romans 9:1-5, especially vs. 3-5: “My countrymen according to the flesh . . . are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came. . . .” The tragedy of ancient Israel caused Saint Paul “great sorrow and continual grief in [his] heart” (vs. 2). Saint John Chrysostom observes, “They are now cast out and disgraced; and in their place are introduced men who had never known [God]” (“Homily 16 on Romans,” *NPNF* First Series, vol. 11, p. 4-5.)

We are those ones who have been introduced “in their place” – peoples from many nations who are now the Israel of God, constituted on the foundation of the Lord Jesus Christ from a remnant of older Israel. A few Jews did gather to the apostles as they proclaimed Christ risen from the dead and “exalted to the right hand of God” (Acts 2:33), but the sevenfold legacy of Israel has passed to us, as Saint Paul sets forth in today’s opening quote.

Adoption to sonship became ours in the mystery of baptism: we are grafted into the people of God through union with Christ (Rom 11:24). We cease to be children of the body, but rather “members and partakers of the death and Resurrection of Christ our God” and children of the heavenly kingdom. As the Apostle Paul says, “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus,” having “put on Christ” (Gal 3:27). We now “call upon . . . the heavenly God as Father, and say, ‘Our Father, who art in heaven’” (Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom).

The *glory* is ours as well, meaning the glory of the Lord. The theophanies by which God revealed Himself to Israel are now the legacy of every disciple of Christ. We are crowned by the most wondrous of divine revelations: the appearance of God in the flesh through the birthgiving of the Theotokos. Then, at the Lord Jesus’ baptism, God manifested His first complete theophany, revealing that He is one God in the three Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Saint Paul reminds us of the legacy of the *covenants* we receive through the old Israel. Foremost are the covenants made by God with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and with the patriarchs’ descendants at Mount Sinai. Because the Lord “remembered His mercy to Jacob, and His truth to the house of Israel” (Ps 97:4), He now offers His people the cup of “the new covenant in [His] blood” (Lk 22:20), shed for all who confess Him as Lord and Christ.

Israel received the law by which Christ guides us to “love [our] enemies, bless those who curse [us], do good to those who hate [us], and pray for those who spitefully use [us].” By so doing, we may prove ourselves “sons of [our] Father in heaven” (Mt 5:44-45).

In former times, the offering of bulls and goats was the type of atonement and forgiveness, yet those sacrifices could not “take away sins” (Heb 10:4). In the Lord Jesus true worship is our legacy, for “we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (vs. 10:10).

The *promises* are realized for us in Christ, for through Him “all the tribes of the earth shall be blessed” (Gn 12:3) with “an everlasting covenant” (vs. 17:19). He reigns forever over a kingdom of whose peace “there is no end” (Is 9:6).

That which began with the patriarchs is ours at the end of the ages, for Christ our “God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, [and] received up in glory” (1 Tim 3:16).

Shine, shine, O New Jerusalem; for the glory of the Lord hath risen upon thee. – Paschal Canon