

October 1 – Friday of the Fifteenth Week after Pentecost
Galatians 4:8-21

Christ Formed Within Us: Galatians 4:8-21, especially vs. 19: “*My little children . . . I labor in birth again until Christ be formed in you . . .*” In Christ we receive the life-giving Spirit and no longer need to depend on our imperfect works according to the flesh (Rom 8:12-13). We have the sure promises of God in place of our confinement under sin (2 Cor 7:1). We are heirs of God by adoption, rather than slaves under the rule and custody of laws (Gal 3:24). Now, in today’s passage, the Apostle Paul provides us with yet another image of our life in Christ: we have Christ *formed* within us (vs. 4:19) instead of serving under spiritual powers that are “not gods” (vs. 8).

The Church’s ancient baptismal hymn derives from the epistle to the Galatians: “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (vs. 3:27). This hymn evokes the image of wearing Christ like a garment. Another verse from the baptismal service expresses a similar action: “Vouchsafe unto me a robe of light!”

These hymns remind us that we are to embrace the Lord Jesus’ words and actions completely – to literally fill our minds with His thoughts, words, and deeds. It is imperative for us to emulate the Lord: to desire what He desires and speak in a manner worthy of Him.

The Apostle Paul, by using the imagery of rebirth (vs. 4:19), directs us to consider what it means when Christ is “born in us.” Our emphasis shifts inward toward our spiritual formation and the interior growth that ultimately produces godly thoughts, actions, choices, and words.

How does this inner formation occur? To have Christ formed in us, we must enjoy day-to-day contact with Him and engage in regular personal interaction with the Lord. This Spirit-endowed relationship is very different from a mere rote obedience to a code of rules. Those who organize their lives around law or custom need only learn the rules and apply them as best they can.

Such legalism is essentially impersonal. It operates within the self, reinforced by the surrounding culture. Saint Paul calls such a “rule-based” life a form of servitude to the “the weak and beggarly elements” (vs. 9), which “by nature are not gods” (vs. 8). These *elements* are the external and worldly forces that affect us, such as social pressures, norms, sanctions, and various forms of social control. These, in turn, create a form of bondage within our personality that is the hallmark of legalism (vs. 9).

In Christ, by contrast, we have a relationship with the living God. He loves us, illumines us, stands with us, and forgives us as we struggle to have Him and His being formed within our hearts and souls.

These two distinct approaches impact every facet of life. The apostle is dismayed to see the Galatian Christians reverting to Old Covenant legalism, especially when they were not even born Jews. “You observe days and months and seasons and years. I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain” (vss. 10-11).

In other words, the Galatians have begun observing the holy days commanded under the Mosaic law while ignoring those based on the Gospels. Their Sabbath does not include the Lord’s Day, Passover lacks the risen Christ, and Pentecost celebrates the giving of the Law while ignoring the gifts of the Holy Spirit!

At first the Galatians were adaptable (vs. 12), compassionate (vs.-14), and self-sacrificing (vs. 15). Their lives exhibited what it means to have Christ formed within. Saint Paul wants them to be zealous, but only for the sake of Christ, the One who alone is worthy of zeal. May we live our faith as the apostle teaches and seek to have Christ formed within, to love God our Father, and to find strength from the Holy Spirit.

Come, let us worship and fall down before Christ. Save us, O Son of God, who art risen from the dead, who sing unto Thee. – Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom

October 2 – Saturday of the Fifteenth Week after Pentecost
1 Corinthians 4:17-5:5

Excommunicating Myself: 1 Corinthians 4:17-5:5, especially vs. 20: “For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power.” Saint John of Kronstadt recounts the story of “a young girl who was almost dying, [but] after the communion of the holy sacrament began to recover on the same day from her illness; began to eat, drink, and speak; whilst before this she was almost in a state of unconsciousness, violently tossed about, and could neither eat nor drink anything.” Having seen the power of life in holy communion, he exclaims: “Glory to Thy life-giving and terrible mysteries, O Lord” (*My Life in Christ*, p. 292).

What keeps any of us from partaking of the Holy Mysteries? Sickness did not hold back the girl in the story, even though she was near death. Evils such as pride, lust, or sloth may afflict us and alienate us from the Church, and yet the Prophet Joel encourages us: “Now says the Lord your God, ‘Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting and wailing and with mourning; rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for He is merciful and compassionate. He is longsuffering and plenteous in mercy’” (Joel 2:12-13).

Indeed, we may return to our Father even when we have “wasted our possessions with prodigal living” (Lk 15:13)! Christ’s teachings show us how to repent, while the Apostle Paul reminds us how to weed out the sins that constantly grow up in our hearts. Why do we continue to excommunicate ourselves? If we listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit, He will help us to repel the attractions of self-indulgence and excuse-making.

Saint Paul urges the Corinthians to welcome Saint Timothy, his “beloved and faithful son in the Lord” whom he has sent to remind them of his “ways in Christ” – that mode of living he teaches “everywhere and in every church” (Gal 4:17). We, likewise, are to seek the coming of “the beloved and faithful” Holy Spirit.

We are reminded that the Spirit comes, as Saint Timothy does in this passage, to recall us to the universal life in Christ found only in the Church. Unlike the Corinthians, we have a two-thousand-year tradition passed down to us from the Church Fathers. They, too, struggled for purification and illumination, and they speak to us as does Saint Paul: with the voice of the Lord.

When the Spirit of the Lord speaks, He directs us not to become “puffed up,” as Saint Paul warns the Corinthians (vs. 18). Let us never be so full of self as to forget that God “will come to [us] shortly” (vs. 19) – not merely “in word but in power” (vs. 20). If necessary, He comes with a rod (vs. 21, Heb 12:6) to correct us.

Perhaps the secularists believe that “what goes around, comes around.” God, however, is a personal participant in the course of this world. We ought never discount or underestimate His awareness of our thoughts and actions. We indeed reap what we sow.

Let us rather *mourn*, as the Apostle Paul suggests to the Corinthian disciples, so as not to “be taken away from” our share in the Mysteries of Christ (vs. 2). We are to avoid whispered excuses and the self-serving demands of our favorite indulgences. No matter that the world views those who sin as victims of social conditions or unfortunate circumstances; we are to hold ourselves accountable for our actions and choices.

In the manner of Saint Paul and “with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ” (vs. 4), let us choose to live in awe of the Holy Mysteries and strive consciously to be worthy of their greatness and life-giving properties, remembering that “a heart that is broken and humbled God will not despise” (Ps 50:17).

O Word whom we magnify, let us who enjoy the banquet of Thine immortal table . . . in the upper chamber, receive with uplifted minds Thine exalted words and ways. – Orthros for Great and Holy Thursday

October 3 – Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Tone 6

2 Corinthians 4:6-15

Enlightenment: 2 Corinthians 4:6-15, especially vs. 6: “God who commanded light to shine out of darkness . . . has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” Christ confronted Saint Paul when he was still known as Saul of Tarsus, and a staunch opponent of the faith. Saul was en route to Damascus when the Lord appeared as a “light . . . brighter than the sun” (Acts 26:13). This brilliance “shone around him from heaven” (Acts 9:3). In a moment, Saul was changed from a man who “persecuted the Church of God” (1 Cor 15:9) into an ambassador for Christ (2 Cor 4:6).

The original Greek words for “conversion” (*epistrépho, metanoéo*) used in the New Testament writings cited above emphasize that this experience literally “turned Saint Paul around.” At one time he was filled with “threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord” (Acts 9:1). Yet the experience of the light and glory of Christ Jesus impelled him to carry the Savior’s name to a host of nations across the Greco-Roman world (Acts 9:15).

In today’s passage, Saint Paul describes the three basic purposes for which Christ called him into His service. First, he is to enlighten the peoples of the world with the “glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (vs. 6); second, to *manifest* the Lord’s life through himself to many (vss. 9-11), and, ultimately, to “cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God” (vs. 15).

At the creation, God made light by His Word: “Let there be light” (Gn 1:3). Later, the Father sent the Son, His own Light and Word, to illumine human hearts and unite us to Christ. His Son calls us to His mission, exactly as He did with Saul. Hence the apostle declares it is the very “God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the *face* of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6).

Saint Paul uses the Greek word *prosōpon* for “face” to connote the personal nature of this encounter, for the word also means “person.” It reveals the wonder and majesty found within the human race in Jesus Christ, who can be touched and handled as a man (1 Jn 1:1) – as a human being His fellows can receive “in person.”

The very idea of “knowing” God is now entirely changed: we no longer know *about* Him we may actually *know* Him. God enlightens our hearts within their “earthen vessels” (2 Cor 4:7), “that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body” (vs. 9).

We may see a Christian pressed and troubled, but it is not possible to crush a true disciple to the point of despair (vs. 8). When the Roman authorities tried to strike down those who knew Jesus, the Christian martyrs prayed to God in the words of Saint Polycarp: “I bless [Thee] because [Thou] hast considered me worthy of this day and this hour” (“The Martyrdom of Polycarp” in Sparks, *The Apostolic Fathers*, p. 146).

In the faithful we see “the saints that are in His earth” (Ps 15:2) shining with the wonder of the Lord. Jesus Christ is “the light of the world” (Jn 8:12), transforming those who are united to Him so that they, too, may become “the light of the world” (Mt 5:14).

God the Father illumines our hearts to know Christ, so “that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh” (2 Cor 4:11), and His grace “spread through the many [and] cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God” (vs. 15).

The light of God shines through one human being and then spreads to another, and another, “through the many.” Christ, the Light of the world, enables those whom He enlightens to worship, praise, and give thanks for the renewal that saves mankind.

Illumine our hearts, O Master who loveth mankind, with the pure light of Thy divine knowledge and open the eyes of our minds to Thy gospel teaching. – Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom

October 4 – Monday of the Sixteenth Week after Pentecost
Galatians 4:28-5:10

Two Families: Galatians 4:28-5:10, especially vs. 1: “Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.” Why, during the first century, did certain Jewish Christians insist that male Gentile members of the Church in Galatia be circumcised? Their rhetoric asserted that godliness required keeping the sacred code of law that God gave to Moses, a moral godliness that also entailed upholding visible Mosaic practices such as adherence to the dietary food laws, continuation of the high holy days, and strict Sabbath observance. After all, they reasoned, a believer in Israel’s Messiah ought to do all that is required of every true child of Israel – surely a very simple logic.

However, the Apostle Paul objected to making the Gentile disciples embrace Mosaic practices and adhere to the visible rituals that marked one as a member of the Israel of God (vss. 4, 8). He knew there was a long-standing, deep-running ethnocentrism among the ancient people of God. To be a Jew meant looking and acting like one; to do otherwise was to show disdain for God and His people.

This rigorous ritualism originated in response to Israel’s historical tendency to drift into paganism and syncretism – the worship of false gods and idols. The problem was that this zealous care to protect the Law reduced it to a form of ethnocentrism. The conviction arose that only the physical descendants of the Patriarch Abraham through Isaac were God’s people and thus fully assured of His promises and blessings.

Because Jewish practices were so demanding, only a few proselytes from other nations ever adopted Judaism and became full converts. In the mind of the Jewish legalists, Israelite ethnicity and rituals were assurances of their superiority and helped to maintain a sharp distinction from other peoples (Dt 7:1-6).

Christ rejected this interpretation of the Way (Jn 8:31-48). Now, Saint Paul draws upon Genesis to explain that, because the Patriarch Abraham’s son Ishmael and his descendants were in the bloodline of Hagar, his slave mother, they therefore lived “under bondage” (Gal 4:22-23). Likewise, those bound to strictly adhere to the rituals of Judaism were slaves, like Ishmael, because they were required to live every detail of the Covenant given at Mount Sinai (vss. 21-27).

Hence, the Apostle Paul exhorts the faithful to “stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free” (vs. 5:1). We who are born by the Spirit in the baptismal mystery should “not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage” (vs. 1).

Very simply, we are to reject any form of Judaizing that reduces faith in Christ to a set of mere observances. Rituals, of course, have value: we fast, observe the feast days, wear a cross, make the sign of the cross, and enjoy traditional foods. However, if Orthodoxy means nothing more to us than these outward things, such a way “will profit [us] nothing” (vs. 2).

Likewise, our ethnic identity, whether we are Greek, Arab, Russian, Jewish, American, or any other nationality, means nothing before God. The early martyrs, when asked to identify themselves, said simply: “I am a Christian.” Although the trappings of ethnocentrism may appear pious, they are deadly to our spirits and opposed to true Christianity.

Let us hold fast to what it means to be “children of promise.” By faith in the Lord Jesus (vs. 4:28), we are members of one family united by God’s promises – people who work at their faith “through love” (vs. 5:6) and respond to everyone, no matter what his race or clan, because of the love we receive from Christ. May we never abandon these truths for the sake of strict adherence to a tidy set of rules (vs. 1).

Help us, O Lord, to be children of Thy Kingdom through Thy good will and grace. – Baptismal Prayer

October 5 – Tuesday of the Sixteenth Week after Pentecost
Galatians 5:11-21

Two Paths: Galatians 5:11-21, especially vs. 18: *“But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.”* Long before Christ was born of Mary in Bethlehem of Judah, the Prophet Solomon contrasted two opposing ways of life: “the paths of uprightness” and “the ways of darkness” (Prv 2:13). These two modes have existed from the dawn of history, when Cain and Abel brought sacrifices to the Lord, and “the Lord respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his sacrifices” (Gn 4:4-5).

The bitter impulse to murder overtook Cain’s heart not because he was irreligious, but because he was darkened by jealousy and pride. We see the first hint of this flaw in Cain’s angry sorrow and fallen countenance (vs. 5).

The Lord, in His long-suffering mercy, extends saving grace and counsel to Cain (vss. 6-7). Yet Cain continues to “walk in the ways of darkness” (Prv 2:13), until the sin lurking in his heart manifests itself in fratricide (Gn 4:8).

In today’s epistle passage, the Apostle Paul warns us against walking in the ways of darkness and encourages us instead to “walk in the Spirit” (Gal 5:16). He exposes the religious error of slavish obedience to rules, which goad them to do that which they do not wish to do (vs. 17) and render them incapable of restraining “the lust of the flesh” (vs. 16).

Rules constrict our relationship with God and others, negating the rule of trust and love. Saint Paul exposes the temptation to find self-satisfaction in legalism and asks: “And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision [a law], why do I still suffer persecution?” (vs. 11). Instead, he embraces the “offense of the Cross” (vs. 11), refusing to deny his liberty in Christ. He chooses to “walk in the Spirit” (vs. 16) and to serve, rather than to “bite and devour” (vs. 15).

These verses reveal the true threat to our liberty in Christ: a life of rules and scorekeeping. The apostle explains why we are attracted to “the works of the flesh” (vs. 19), i.e., living only by rules. He then reveals what enables us to fulfill the law and to love others (vs. 14).

It is noteworthy that adherents of both ways of life claim to oppose “the works of the flesh” (vss. 19-21). Both insist “that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God” (vs. 21), but these approaches are mutually exclusive.

It is no accident that what Solomon calls the “paths of uprightness” (Prv 2:13), Saint Paul identified as walking “in the Spirit” (vs. 16). Our relationship with the Holy Spirit is what separates these two ways of life. Thus the apostle links the Christian’s call to liberty with walking “in the Spirit,” for in Christ, by grace, we receive God’s call “to liberty” (vs. 13) and are empowered to “walk in the Spirit” (vs. 16). Further, we are strengthened against fulfilling “the lust of the flesh” (vs. 16) so long as we are “led by the Spirit” (vs. 18).

Although God’s sacred law tells us that certain acts are wrong, laws do not restrain us. Cain knew that murder was wrong, but knowledge did not prevent his action, for sin was raging in him. We can choose to be led by the Spirit, as Saint Paul teaches in a later verse (5:22-25), and the Spirit will help us “crucify the flesh with its passions and desires” (vs. 24).

Once we taste the “fruit of the Spirit” in our lives (vs. 22), even the Law may become useful, for it helps to reveal how the Spirit would have us walk. By trusting in the living God and sharing His love in the power of the Holy Spirit, it is possible to obey Christ and to serve others (vs. 13).

O Christ, may I ever be led by Thy good Spirit, until I behold Thine ineffable beauty. – Post-communion Prayer

October 6 – Wednesday of the Sixteenth Week after Pentecost
Galatians 6:2-10

Two Harvests: Galatians 6:2-10, especially vs. 8: *“For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.”* Earlier in Galatians (vss. 5:13-21), we were reminded of the two opposing directions in which we may walk in this present life: in the ways of darkness, or on the paths of uprightness. God’s wisdom (and our own experience) shows us that those who walk in darkness “fulfill the lust of the flesh” (vs. 5:16), for sooner or later they produce the “works of the flesh” (vs. 19).

Thanks be to God, we may choose to be led by the Spirit, to crucify our flesh and passions, to follow upright paths, and to yield the fruit of the Spirit (vss. 22-25). The two paths plainly “are contrary to one another” (vs. 17), yielding very different fruits, or harvests, according to the path and its destination.

Now, in the present reading, the Apostle Paul identifies these two harvests as “corruption” and “everlasting life” (vs. 6:8). His teaching is clear enough: we are meant to walk in the Spirit and to labor for the harvest of eternal life. To this end, the apostle presents seven habits that we should seek to adopt, for they yield the blessed harvest.

First, he admonishes us to “bear one another’s burdens” (vs. 2). This apostolic rule is contrary to our modern heresy of self-fulfillment. The indulgent cult of self-actualization ignores the faith and healing found in the Body of Christ, and instead promotes independence and doing our own thing. May we bear one another’s burdens in love, joy, and peace in the Church family (see vs. 4:28), for we are children of one Father and brethren of one another (vss. 3:28; 4:6)!

Second, “let each one examine his own work” and refuse to measure himself by others around him (vs. 6:4). Each of us is accountable to Christ and to God the Father, as the Holy Spirit reveals the Lord’s will to us. The Church, as our home, school, and hospital, seeks to unite us to one another in Christ.

Judging ourselves by others is a sin. Let us leave all final judgment to God and offer mutual support in the struggle set before us by the Lord: “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Mt 5:48). We each stand before our Master (Rom 14:4). Hence, we are presumptuous if we take on God’s role as judge, either of ourselves or of others.

Third, just as we each need self-examination, so also “each one shall bear his own load” (Gal 6:5). Let us avoid weighing down others, for the Master permits burdens in our life as means for growth. Our priests are prepared to help us face, resolve, and grow from our burdens.

Fourth, concerning those who serve the Church full-time – our pastors and teachers – the apostle directs: “Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches” (vs. 6). Simply put, those who feed their brethren the bread of the word full-time depend on the rest of us for their daily bread. The exchange is fair and just. Remember tithes and offerings!

Fifth, a godly harvest does not come if we fail to sow, cultivate, and labor. So, what if some workers come late in the day and are paid handsomely along with us (Mt 20:1-15)? We are to resist “[growing] weary while doing good,” for “if we do not lose heart” but persevere in the tasks assigned by the Master, God promises that “we shall reap” (Gal 6:9).

Sixth, “let us do good to all” (vs. 10). We are not held accountable to God for every need in this world. The parable of the Good Samaritan informs our understanding of the words “to all.” The one we are to help is the one we find in need on the road. He is my neighbor (Lk 10:29). Pray for guidance and wisdom concerning all appeals.

Finally, our primary kinship is with Christ, in the Church. Our first obligation, in giving aid, is to remember “those who are of the household of faith” (Gal 6:10).

O Lord, by Thy grace, may I not stand idle nor apart from the harvest while it is day.

October 7 – Thursday of the Sixteenth Week after Pentecost
Ephesians 1:1-9

Spiritual Blessings: *Ephesians 1:1-9, especially vs. 3:* “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.*” At the beginning of his epistle to the Ephesians, Saint Paul blesses God and describes the divine blessings brought by our Lord Jesus Christ. What a difference between the two blessings! When we human creatures bless God, we must resort to words, ever imperfect and imprecise. When God blesses us, that which did not exist comes to be: “Thou wilt send forth Thy Spirit, and they shall be created; and Thou shalt renew the face of the earth” (Ps 103:32).

Concerning blessings in the spiritual realm, Saint Paul says that we, the faithful, are showered with “every spiritual blessing” (vs. 3). Indeed, God lavishes blessings on the entire human race. In particular His own people – the Church – receive innumerable spiritual blessings, as well as material ones. In Christ we are given everything that mankind could ever desire!

Lest we take his remarks as hyperbole, the Apostle Paul names four of our spiritual blessings: union with Christ (vs. 4), adoption as God’s heirs (vs. 5), redemption from slavery to sin (vs. 7), and perception rich with wisdom and practical insights (vs. 8).

In the contests and games of our school days, the captains chose members for their teams. How exhilarating it felt to be chosen first, but how humiliating to be the last choice! Likewise, when we are searching for a job, there is nothing more exciting than a phone call bringing an offer. Yet how empty we feel when we hear not even a word about our application.

All of these are earthly situations, but the Apostle Paul reminds us that “[God] chose us [in Christ Jesus]” (vs. 4). When a priest receives a catechumen, he says: “I lay my hand upon Thy servant who hath been found worthy to flee unto Thy holy name.” We have been found worthy!

Each time we come before the icon of the Lord we look upon the face of the Savior. He has chosen us: in Him there is no humiliating dismissal, nor rejection, nor bitter silence, nor indifference or fading hope. The light of God’s choice beams brightly upon us.

We always remember that we are God’s “first choice,” honored and beloved, called to be members of the “Church of the firstborn” (Heb 12:23). God called us before the world existed, before time was calculated, before any human being existed (Eph 1:4). He chose to make us whole and holy, free of blame before Him as Adam was in the beginning. The operative word is “love” (vs. 4): God loves us!

For what are we chosen? Our blessing is “adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to [God] Himself” (vs. 5). All of us were born into this world, as Scripture says, not “of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (Jn 1:13). We are not accidents.

Consider the spiritual realm, where every action that begins and ends is eternal in essence, everlasting. In the heavens, we are among those who please God, those whom He chose to be His sons and daughters, those whom He brought into His household (Eph 1:5).

Perhaps we feel unworthy, but still, we can cry out, “according to Thy mercy remember me, for the sake of Thy goodness, O Lord” (Ps 24:7). God arranged “adoption as sons” (Eph 1:5) for us. In Christ “we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins” (vs. 7). Although we were slaves, He has set free. He gives us high standing, for we are His for eternity.

God has illumined our hearts and minds to understand all of these things. He reveals a *wisdom* that surpasses earthly knowledge – a *prudence* with eternal and practical consequences (vs. 8). God illumines us with the Holy Spirit so we may perceive the mystery of His eternal purpose for us (vs. 9).

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us (vs. 3).

October 8 – Friday of the Sixteenth Week after Pentecost
Ephesians 1:7-17

Christ's Saving Work: *Ephesians 1:7-17, especially vss. 16-17:* “[I] do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him....” Hymns to the saints often conclude with a request that they “intercede with Christ our God to save our souls.” We boldly ask for their intercessions since they, being glorified in heaven, have gained favor with Christ. However, what they ask of the Lord in their intercessions may not be known to us in our finite and fallen state.

We do know that their prayers include petitions similar to those Saint Paul cites above. Throughout this passage, as the apostle addresses the Lord's saving work, he also illumines several facets of the saints' prayers on our behalf, especially their praises for what God *has* accomplished, what He *is* achieving in us as our struggle to repent, and what He *will* complete in us for our ultimate salvation in the age to come.

The saints pray that Christ, who accomplished redemption for all mankind when He took on our flesh and suffered for us, may heal and grant us forgiveness “according to the riches of His grace” (vs. 7). Holy Scripture celebrates all that Christ achieved “in the fullness of time” (Gal 4:4). For this reason, readings from the gospel accounts and from the apostles' teachings predominate during the Liturgy of the Word.

During the Liturgy of the Faithful, however, Christ's achievements become eternally present as He gives Himself to us. Thus, we know the Lord Jesus' actions both as history and as an immediate, tangible, and saving presence in the Divine Liturgy.

We understand that Christ's saving acts are timeless, for during the liturgy we specifically “remember” the Lord's “saving commandment and all those things which have come to pass for us: the Cross, the Grave, the Resurrection on the Third day, the Ascension into heaven, the Session at the right hand and the second and glorious Advent.”

This particular prayer is known as the *anamnesis*, roughly equivalent to the English word “remembrance.” The latter term, however, does not convey how Christ's acts are immediately effective and redemptive. They are not merely past incidents to be called to mind, but the eternal God in action now. As a result, we participate in them directly. This explains why we say that we “remember” an event that, from an earthly perspective, still lies in the future: the second and glorious Advent, or Second Coming.

The saints understand that we are in bondage to time because of our sin. They pray for our freedom and our “redemption through His blood” (Eph 1:7). They seek forgiveness for us, joining their prayers to the forgiving Lord of the Cross (Lk 23:34).

The saints also pray that we may enter fully into “the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself” (Eph 1:9). The word “mystery” conveys the truth that God makes “abound toward us . . . all wisdom and prudence” (vs. 8), for as we meet Him within the Liturgy, we know God who is without limits, whose presence is inexhaustible and wondrous. This quality of our relationship with God continues to develop, ever expanding and deepening. The saints pray for this limitless growth to take place in us.

Because we have been granted the seal of “the Holy Spirit of promise” (vs. 13), the saints also pray that we may attain “the guarantee of our inheritance . . . to the praise of His glory” (vss. 13-14). At all times the apostles, the All-pure Theotokos, and the company of saints pray that we may receive a blessed rest when we leave this temporal world. Let us likewise cry out to Christ our God:

Remember me, O Lord, when Thou comest into Thy kingdom.

October 9 – Saturday of the Sixteenth Week after Pentecost
1 Corinthians 10:23-28

Charity and Everyday Caring: 1 Corinthians 10:23-28, especially vs. 24: “Let no one seek his own, but each one the other’s well-being.” Saint John Chrysostom, commenting on this verse, writes: “For since it is usual . . . for men to love those who are benefitted by them, and for those who receive benefits to be more kindly affected towards their benefactors, he made this law, constituting it a bond of friendship . . . And let us consider, if [this law] were everywhere in abundance, what great benefits would ensue: how there would be no need then of laws, or tribunals, or punishments, or avenging, or any other such things: since if all loved and were beloved, no man would injure another” (“Homily 32 on First Corinthians,” *NPNF First Series*, vol. 12, pp. 190-191).

Saint Paul reminds us in today’s passage that we are called to caring. Nor do we limit our caring to financial giving through philanthropies, charitable donations, and other sorts of altruism. We extend our charity to our every relationship and every encounter with others.

Note that the apostle does not link his counsel on pursuing “the other’s well-being” to the virtue of almsgiving. Instead, he speaks of kindness in our day-to-day contacts shopping at the market, having dinner with friends, or discussing religious practices (vss. 25-28).

Certainly, these everyday activities took a different form in the first century than they do today. Ancient culture was saturated with idolatry, which touched every facet of life. Today our food supply is secular, sold and handled by butchers, clerks, and other retail grocery and market staff without a particular religious affiliation. Not so in New Testament times: almost all food in the markets had been offered ceremonially to idols and then afterward made available for sale.

Perhaps we are unlikely to confront the moral issue of eating food “offered to idols” (vs. 28) or have occasion to worry about sending the wrong message to friends and neighbors who may be tempted by idolatry. Still, the need to care for others and to put their *well-being* first in every encounter remains unchanged.

Many people falsely associate charity with the notion of a saintly life requiring certain types of sacrifice in order to care for others – perhaps even a complete alteration of our manner of life. According to Saint Theophan the Recluse, “It is a great misconception to think . . . that one must undertake great, reverberating tasks. Not at all. It is necessary only to do everything according to the commandments of God . . . those things which present themselves to everyone in the circumstances of life.”

For example, the Samaritan on the road to Jericho did not pass “by on the other side” (Lk 10:31-32). “When he saw” the injured man, “he had compassion. So he went to him” (vss. 33-34). “Generalize this occurrence,” continues Saint Theophan, “and you will find that in every situation and in every encounter one must do what God wants him to do” (Manley, *The Bible and the Holy Fathers*, p. 516).

Such encounters will include our spouse, children, and neighbors, the checker at the market and the receptionist at a front desk. We are to extend our caring even in casual contacts.

What prevents us from following Saint Theophan’s advice and inclining ourselves to such everyday charity? We cannot “have selfless love, which is one of the goals of the spiritual life, when [we are] possessed by passions,” according to Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos (*Orthodox Psychotherapy*, p. 325).

Let us seek to rid ourselves of self-seeking, with God’s help, lest we short-change our relationships. Then, according to Saint John Chrysostom, we shall achieve “an excellence . . . born of love.” Yes, exactly what the Lord commands: seek the well-being of others!

O Lord, help me to fulfill Thy will toward every person whom Thou givest me this day.

October 10 – Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Tone 7

2 Corinthians 6:1-10

How Will It Be? 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.” May God help us to heed the apostle’s entreaty! If we listen to Saint Paul’s *pleading* and accept the grace of God without reservation, we will receive God’s favor. If not, we will falter and lose the gift of grace.

The choice before us involves three distinct parties: the Lord God, the apostles, and ourselves as their disciples. Saint Paul, the apostle of Christ, places the word of the Lord before us. His words represent the consensus of the apostolic band. The response, however, depends upon us.

The life-giving word of God, spoken through His prophet in Isaiah 49:8, is quoted by Saint Paul to summarize God’s case. The Lord has “heard” and has “helped” us (2 Cor 6:2). The second verb, translated here as “helped,” is actually a compound suggesting “to run to one who has cried for help.” According to Theodoret of Cyrus, our divine service – and God’s response – is not limited to the Temple: it must be given in every city, field, and mountain on earth.

The image of God responding to the cries of His people resonates with a recurring theme in the Book of Judges: “Then the sons of Israel did evil before the Lord and served the Baals. They forsook the Lord God of their fathers . . . They provoked the Lord to anger . . . as the Lord had sworn to them. He greatly distressed them. Nevertheless, the Lord raised up judges and the Lord saved them from the hand of those who plundered them” (Jgs 2:11-16).

The judges who delivered ancient Israel are types of the Incarnate Lord, for God the Son came in person upon hearing the cry of mankind. “Who is more utterly a captive than he who is bound by sin?” asks Saint Nikolai of Zicha. “Is there a greater darkness than the darkness of sin, death, and hell? Who can loose from sin? The One God” (*Prologue from Ochrid*, vol. 3, p. 240).

God has descended into the darkness of sin, death and hell to deliver the souls of the righteous. “Behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor 6:2). Shall we not respond to Him?

Saint Paul goes on to state the case for himself and all the apostles: “We give no offense in anything . . . But in all things, we commend ourselves as ministers of God” (vss. 3-4). As God has extended salvation to us, so too have the apostles, as His servants, extended salvation to us by proclaiming God’s “day of salvation” (vss. 2-3). They hold nothing back!

The Apostle Paul summarizes the apostles’ sacrifice on our behalf, the impetus that causes their hearts to reach out to us and share the blessings they have received. They entreat us to embrace these gifts and claim them for ourselves.

The apostles endured great afflictions and calamities for the sake of truth. They were beaten (Acts 5:40) and imprisoned (vss. 16:19-40). They barely survived riots (vs. 14:19). They traveled by foot across the eastern Mediterranean, teaching, praying, and working with congregations everywhere they went. They went without food, even fasting in seasons when sustenance was plentiful. They gave their all.

The apostles speak God’s truth from first-hand knowledge (2 Cor 6:6); their hearts are pure (Gal 1:20). They are patient (vs. 6:4) and submit to the strict direction of the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:28). They are men of love (Phil 1:8) and filled with the power of God (Acts 3:1-7).

In their deep commitment to the Lord Jesus’ commands, they embrace poverty, “as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing and yet possessing all things” (2 Cor 6:10). How rich a treasure they hold out to us! Here and now, these men appeal to us, saying, “Our heart is wide open” (vs. 11). What then will our response be?

Show me as the abode of Thy Spirit only, and in nowise as the abode of sin. – Post-communion Prayer

October 11 – Monday of the Seventeenth Week after Pentecost
Ephesians 1:22-2:3

The Church and Salvation – The Body of Christ: *Ephesians 1:22-2:3, especially vss. 22-23:* “*And He put all things under His feet and gave Him to be head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.*” Over the course of the two millennia that separate us from “those things which have come to pass for us: the Cross, the Grave, the Resurrection on the third day,” much has been said about the relationship between the Church and salvation. The Book of Ephesians, which dwells on salvation and the Church, is a fruitful point of study for exploring these spiritual truths and learning how to apply them in life. Over the next five days we will consider what Ephesians says concerning these mysteries.

In the present passage Saint Paul makes three statements concerning the action of God in Christ. The Lord “put all things under” Christ’s feet (vs. 22); He “gave Him to be head over all things” (vs. 22); and He “made [us] alive” (vs. 1). Here we have an overview of salvation that spans the exaltation of Christ, with His defeat of sin and death, and the creation of the Church – the Body of which Christ is the Head.

The Apostle Paul begins by speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ who bears the fullness of our humanity in His Person, and yet is seated as monarch over all creation, both the visible, tangible cosmos and the invisible, spiritual realms of the bodiless powers. Orthodox Christians often observe salvation in Christ reduced to a kind of individualistic deliverance by heterodox teachers of limited understanding. Yet God truly aims at the restoration of all mankind – the entire universe – in and through the Church.

We call the Lord Jesus “Pantocrator,” which means “almighty,” or “ruler of all.” In a traditional Orthodox church, the Pantocrator icon is placed in the central dome. What, then, is under our Lord’s feet? Everything – every achievement and empire of mankind, and even the evil demons who oppose God – is under the sway of the Ruler of all.

The limited capacity of nature’s powers is exposed by Christ’s exaltation. Death, life, the farthest stars and galaxies, are all beneath His feet. None may resist His reign eternally. For the moment, however, He is restraining the full exercise of His sovereignty, giving us the chance to turn to Him, to pledge our fidelity and love to Him, amending our lives and living not for ourselves but unto Him as Savior and God.

This Christ Pantocrator is not someone distant, removed, and unavailable. According to Saint Nikolai of Zicha, “Headless humanity is given a head in the Lord Jesus, risen from the dead. The body, severed from the head, begins to knit together with that head, bit by bit and part by part.

“All men are called, yet not all respond to be received under the Head. Some will not knit themselves into His Body, the Church,” even though incorporation into the Body of Christ is the path to our rebirth – to attaining purification and union with the exalted Christ (*Prologue from Ochrid* vol. 4, p. 165).

Belonging to Christ is what God requires of us when He gives us salvation. He *makes alive* those “who were dead in trespasses and sins” (vs. 1), for “as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal 3:27).

If we look back in time, we see how God’s hand covered us through the years of our life. Even now, He is offering us strength so that we complete our salvation, Truly, we “were dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1) and now we are alive. The “prince of the power of the air” (vs. 2) was our ruler, but now Christ is our King and God. We were once “children of wrath” (vs. 3), but now are children of God. May we not quit but stay with Christ to the end of life!

Grant us in this age, the knowledge of Thy truth, and in the age to come, life everlasting. – Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom

October 12 – Tuesday of the Seventeenth Week after Pentecost
Ephesians 2:19-3:7

The Church and Salvation, continued – The True Israel: *Ephesians 2:19-3:7, especially vss. 21-22:* “*The whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.*” Salvation, as experienced and lived in the Church, has everything to do with our personal identity. Church members “belong:” we are part of a family with an ancient history on earth. We have a rightful share in that household of which God is the Father. And we enjoy a unique basis for living on this planet, a membership that assures us that we are no longer are foreigners or aliens “getting by” on temporary residency permits.

Earlier in his letter to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul reminds the members of his flock that although they were once considered “Gentiles in the flesh” by those “called the Circumcision” (vs. 2:11), yet now they are full citizens of the true Israel of God, the people whom the Lord has chosen, accepted, and embraced as members of His family. Underscoring this point, he asserts, “But now . . . you who once were far off [from Israel] have been brought near” (vs. 13).

In today’s passage, he makes the very same point: in Christ we are full members of the household of God. We need never accept marginal, foreign, or alien status during life in this world. We belong.

This passage opens with the line: “Now, therefore you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” (vs. 19). Saint Paul’s “no longer” alludes to the Ephesians’ previous non-membership and to their present full membership in the *household of God*. He teaches that the Church is truly the people of God, founded on the Messiah and Lord.

The Church is the saving community whose members are heirs of God’s promises under the Old Covenant, which is now fulfilled in Christ. Saint Paul’s declaration signals that the Church offers the salvation promised to the people of Israel by the prophets. Thus, the legacy of Israel continues within the Church. Anyone, whether Jew or Gentile, who confesses Christ Jesus as Lord within the Body is a partaker of God’s “promise in Christ through the Gospel” (vs. 3:6).

The ministry of our Lord and His apostles ended certain expectations held by ancient Israel. It opened Israel’s membership to every people on earth. Those Jews – including the twelve apostles, Saint Paul, the Seventy, and others – who followed Christ as Messiah received the grace of God the Father through the Lord Jesus, by the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit.

As Jews who became members of Christ, they fought off every attempt to limit the faith to the strictures of Old Covenant ritualism. At the same time, they stoutly upheld the Church as the inheritor of God’s promises – as the true as Israel of the Old Covenant.

We who count ourselves as Christians today, centuries later, declare that we, too, are Israel. This is no mere feat of mental gymnastics. In fact, we are “fellow citizens with the saints” of old (vs. 2:19), including Abraham, Isaac, Israel, Moses, Joshua, David, Solomon, Elijah, and all the prophets. We truly are God’s chosen people.

What does this mean? Saint Paul reveals the Church to be a creation of the Holy Trinity: a new people founded on the Lord Jesus, fulfilling the will of God our Father through the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the Church offers salvation to all peoples. We receive full membership in Christ, becoming part of “a holy temple in the Lord . . . a dwelling place of God in the Spirit” (vss. 21-22).

Life-giving Spirit, grant to Thy people Thy perpetual mercy and lead all men to salvation. – Western Rite Orthodox Missal

October 13 – Wednesday of the Seventeenth Week after Pentecost
Ephesians 3:8-21

The Church and Salvation, continued – Fulfillment: *Ephesians 3:8-21, especially vss. 14, 16:* “*I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man.*” What are we seeking when we pray God to “have mercy on us and save us?” Does not the saving work of Christ lie at the heart of many prayers? Let us explore what we mean by “salvation” – the divine and human actions that *complete* us, for salvation surely includes the divine promise to fulfill and restore the pristine beauty that God intends for his creatures.

We find an excellent starting point in the lives of the saints, for they reveal the rich potential in the process we call deification, or theosis. In the present passage, Saint Paul identifies five gifts that God gives to us “according to the riches of His glory” (vs. 16), helping us to move forward in the divine-human struggle for salvation.

First of all, the apostle says that God grants the faithful “to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man” (vs. 16). One mark of the saints is their inward, Spirit-given strength – the power to stand up against the assaults of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

True *inner* strength is the work of the Holy Spirit. Saint Seraphim of Sarov likens the Spirit’s activity within us to the oil in the lamps of the wise virgins (Mt 25:4). The Spirit “changes souls from one state to another – that is, from corruption to incorruption, from spiritual death to spiritual life, from darkness to light, from the stable of our being (where the passions are tied up like dumb animals and wild beasts) into a temple of the divinity” (*Little Russian Philokalia*, vol. 1, p. 90).

The presence of the Holy Spirit, then, brings us into the presence of Christ “through faith” (Eph 3:17), as the Lord Jesus promises: “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him” (Jn 14:23).

According to Saint Hesychios, “He who with all diligence keeps his purity of heart will have Christ, establisher of that purity, as his teacher, and Christ will secretly communicate His will to him. ‘I will hear what God the Lord will speak in me,’ says David, giving expression to this” (*Philokalia* vol. 1, p. 195).

In turn, those who have Christ dwelling in them become “rooted and grounded in love” (Eph 3:17). Saint Nikolai of Zicha attests that “with the presence of Christ comes the presence of love and, with love, inexpressible good things” (*Prologue from Ochrid*, vol. 4, p. 206).

So it was that the risen Lord asked Peter three times, “Do you love Me?” (Jn 21:15-17). He thus awakened in the chief apostle the need to have the roots of his heart and soul grounded in Love – the incarnate Christ.

Experiencing the love of God enables us to comprehend “the width and length and depth and height” (Eph 3:18) of Christ’s nature and His life among us. These dimensions include the width of God’s love for all men; the length to which the Lord is willing to go for us, even to death on the Cross; the depth of God’s humility in Christ; and the height of His exaltation above “every name that is named” (vs. 1:21).

Finally, because the saints know “the love of Christ which passes knowledge,” they are “filled with all the fullness of God” (vs. 3:19). We ourselves are incomplete, unable to know the mind of God, powerless to see fully. And yet God, who is omniscient and unlimited, created us to become the dwelling place of His presence. He intends for us to receive the salvation He bestows: wisdom, power, insight, “the riches of His glory” (vs. 16).

O Lord Jesus, Thou goal of all our journeying: draw near to us and save us. – Saint Nikolai of Zicha

October 14 – Thursday of the Seventeenth Week after Pentecost
Ephesians 4:14-19

The Church and Salvation, continued – Working Out Salvation: *Ephesians 4:14-19, especially vss. 14-15:* “We should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried along with every wind of doctrine . . . but . . . grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ.” We have been reviewing the apostolic vision of salvation in relation to the Church and to creation. In both cases, Christ is the Source of salvation. The Lord Jesus’ saving work occurs principally within the life of the Church. Saint Paul’s vision for us, in our restored future state, reveals the glory of the age to come – if only we apply ourselves to the saving work which the apostle describes.

How do we “work out our salvation?” Saint Paul declares, “If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom 10:9). Now, he teaches us that a confessing heart must work cooperatively with God if we are to attain salvation. God gives us eternal life – and the will to strive for it – but it is up to us to labor with Him: “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me” (Mt 11:29).

Our first task in the process of salvation is “speaking the truth in love” (Eph 4:15). There are many ways to speak the truth: bluntly, with detachment, cruelly, haughtily, with love arising from our personal experience and thanksgiving. We may take any one of these approaches, all the while using nice manners and socially approved words. However, none of these models is the one that the Apostle Paul commends to us.

Only the Lord Jesus Christ speaks the truth perfectly, with full personal involvement and true concern for others’ illumination and well-being. The apostle follows in the Lord’s manner of speaking the truth. He speaks with Christ’s love – with that caring we associate with the Lord as Love Incarnate.

Saint Paul calls us to embrace the manner of loving and truthful speech exemplified by the Lord Jesus. The more Christ dwells in our hearts, the more we will find ourselves able to speak to others with the Lord’s life-giving love – and the more He will speak through us.

A second facet in the work of salvation is for us to share in the growth and upbuilding of the Body of Christ (vs. 16). While salvation is worked out in our relationships with everyone, we do so especially with our fellow disciples. We are not saved alone, apart from the Church.

To speak “the truth in love” (vs. 15) is Christ-like when we edify our brethren in the struggle for purity, repentance, receptivity to the Holy Spirit, transparent humility, genuine faith, and unqualified hope. With God’s help, we seek to nurture within ourselves true poverty of spirit, sorrow of heart, meekness, thirst for righteousness, mercy, peacemaking, and an acceptance of persecution for the sake of the kingdom of God (see Mt 5:3-10).

The third dimension of the labor for salvation is “giving [ourselves] over” to the life of God (vs. 19) and refusing the ways of this world. Let us avoid walking “in the futility of [our] mind” (vs. 17), as do those who live without Christ. Instead, let us follow the Way of the Savior, applying His mind day by day.

In suggesting this third aspect of the work of salvation, the apostle uses a series of negatives (vss. 17-19). Let us consider their opposites: to seek the Lord and His will, to search for His illumination, to respond to His love with love through personal purity, and to be generous in all that we think and do.

Why should God save us in this life, or in the age to come, if we give only lip service to the gospel, if we mainly serve our own passions and desires? Let us emulate the radiant Way of Jesus, which alone can heal “the blindness of [our] heart[s]” (vss. 18).

Illumine our hearts, O Master who loveth mankind, with the pure light of Thy gospel. – Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom

October 15 – Friday of the Seventeenth Week after Pentecost
Ephesians 4:17-25

The Church and Salvation, continued – Interior Work: *Ephesians 4:17-25, especially vs. 23:* “*Be renewed in the spirit of your mind.*” Saint Paul calls on the disciples at Ephesus to desist from living like their pagan neighbors in pursuit of a futile lifestyle alien to the truth “learned [in] Christ” (vss. 20). His call applies to us as well. Do we choose to live in and for Christ, steadfastly embracing the Lord’s will from the center of our heart? In Christ we are “created according to God” (vs. 24) so that we may live the one, true spiritual life.

The apostle’s vocabulary is important here. The word translated as “mind” in verses 17 and 23 is actually *nous* in the original Greek. Hence, in verse 17, the apostle says that majority of people in this world “walk, in the futility of their *nous*.” He urges us to pursue the inner work of the life in Christ earnestly, so that we may be “renewed in the spirit of [our] *nous*” (vs. 23).

The Church understands the *nous* to be the deep center of our inner life: the location of our fall and also our restoration in Christ. By God’s grace, the *nous* can become a Mount Tabor where the Lord reveals Himself as the everlasting Light, for within the *nous* Christ is transfigured “as far as [we can] bear it” (hymn of the Transfiguration).

Indeed, the interior work of salvation necessarily centers on the healing of our *nous* – our noetic restoration – so that we “no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles, in the futility of the *nous*” (vs. 17). According to Saint Maximos the Confessor, a “great battle . . . is waged by the demons to capture the *nous* and to attract it to impassioned thoughts.”

When our *nous* is defeated, Saint Maximos observes, the demons “lead it to sin in the mind [*dianoia*, the ‘rational faculties’] and, when this has been done, they induce it, captive as it is, to commit the sin in action” (Vlachos, *Orthodox Psychotherapy*, p. 133).

Saint Maximos echoes the apostle’s description of the peoples of this world who, “having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God . . . being past feeling, have given themselves over . . . to work all uncleanness with greediness” (vss. 18-19). Once the *nous* is captured and the heart corrupted, the behavioral aspects of sin follow.

Let us ever give “thanks . . . to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 15:57). As members of the Church, we are shown the way to salvation, learning how to “be renewed in the spirit of [our *nous*]” (Eph 4:23).

According to Saint Paul, we “have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus” (vs. 21). When we hear and learn from the Lord, He initiates the first (and most obvious) work of putting off our “former conduct,” for it can only lead to corruption and greater sharing in “deceitful lusts” (vs. 22).

Saint John Climacus, who understands how sinful action follows the darkening of the interior life, advises, “Control your impetuous *nous* in your distracted body . . . hold back your *nous*, so busy with its own concerns” (*Orthodox Psychotherapy*, p. 140).

Restraining or holding back the *nous* requires efforts related to *hearing* and *learning* from Christ Jesus as Lord. Principal among these are ascetical self-control (fasting and the other bodily disciplines); stilling the heart through watchfulness; praying, especially using the Jesus Prayer; expressing our love for God through worship; and constant remembrance of the Lord, the martyrs’ zeal, our departure from this life, the kingdom, and the Last Judgment.

The foremost goal of all of these activities, as the apostle notes, is the renewal of our *nous*. Guided by the Holy Spirit, we make a determined effort to unite our actions to the divine acts revealed to us in Christ for our noetic restoration.

O Christ our God, most gentle Love, enter Thou our hearts and receive us to Thyself. – Saint Nikolai of Zicha

October 16 – Saturday of the Seventeenth Week after Pentecost
1 Corinthians 14:20-25

Tongues and Prophecy: 1 Corinthians 14:20-25, especially vs. 22: “Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe.” Over the centuries, Orthodox Christians have often lived in heterogeneous environments whose morality is alien to the Spirit of God. Sadly, this opposing climate affects the Church in America today, and sometimes confuses and disturbs the hearts of the faithful. “Woe to those poor, unprepared innocents who do not expect to find the dark side of humanity trying to insinuate itself into Church life!” said the Russian priest Valentine Sventitsky in the 1920s. He observed that “a sin within the Church is not a sin of the Church, but against the Church” (Fudel, *Light in the Darkness*, p. 33).

In the present epistle reading, the Apostle Paul addresses problems caused by the exercise of spiritual gifts in the Corinthian church. Most of its members were converts who, until recently, had been “carried away to . . . dumb idols” (vs. 12:2). The experience of “charismata,” or spiritual gifts, was new to them. Many thought that members of the Church should practice all the gifts (vss. 12:27-30), which caused the community to divide into factions (vss. 13-18).

Saint Paul addresses these charismatic excesses in two ways: first, by calling the faithful to the evangelical truths of the gospel of self-denying love (vss. 12:31-14:1) and second, by directing the Corinthians toward the gift of prophecy and away from the less useful speaking in tongues.

In our Orthodox tradition, both of these spiritual gifts have been known and practiced to the present day. Today, just as in Saint Paul’s day, the Church continues to place high value on prophecy, but gives only hesitant attention to speaking in tongues.

In the contemporary world, however, we encounter certain sects that interpret the words and the practice of the apostles in an un-Orthodox manner. Some do exactly what the Apostle Paul warns against: they “major” in the minor gifts, such as speaking in tongues. Even some members of the Orthodox Church, troubled by these teachings, may wonder if something is missing in Orthodoxy.

To this fear we reply: not at all. Our emphasis continues to be on the faith “as the apostles have taught” and passed down to us.

Speaking in tongues is nothing more than “foreign speech or language,” as the word *heteroglossis*, in the original Greek, suggests. Typically, the speaker does not understand the language he speaks. The basis for tongue-speaking is a release of rational control over the speech organs. However, exposure to demonic influence becomes a serious danger when one surrenders the faculty of speech, since the practice is spiritual in nature.

Because of the dangers of demonic distortion, Saint Paul counsels us to seek the higher spiritual gifts, such as prophecy. History has verified his caution. For example, the Montanist heresy of the second century claimed that certain of tongue-speakers *were* the Holy Spirit. Hence, the practice has been stoutly resisted in the corporate Church, although never forbidden in private prayer.

Genuine prophecy – the God-given ability to understand what is in another’s heart without being told – is highly valued in the Church, although manifested only by the spiritually mature. Many great ascetics have convicted both unbelievers and the faithful by revealing the secrets of their hearts (vss. 14:24-25). Of course, deceivers and psychics also may “prophesy” but the Lord warns us against these false prophets: test them by their fruits (Mt 7:15-16).

O Lord, establish us in Thy sanctification, that we may meditate upon Thy righteousness. – Post-communion Prayer

October 17 – Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost, Tone 8
2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1

This Holy House: 2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1, especially vs. 7:1: “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” The Orthodox Church, understood rightly and embraced in faith, is truly “the temple of the living God” (vs. 6:16). This is no hyperbole, but a known and present reality, the very foundation of our congregational life. At the beginning of the Divine Liturgy, the clergy remind us of this reality by praying to the Lord “for this holy house, and for those who with faith, reverence, and fear of God enter therein.”

Of course, the priest is not praying for a mere building in this petition. From apostolic times to the present, these words mean the gathering – the assembly – of the faithful in Christ’s name. “The miracle of the church Assembly lies in that it is not the ‘sum’ of the sinful and unworthy people who comprise it,” says Father Alexander Schmemmann, “but [that it is] the body of Christ” (*The Eucharist*, p. 23).

Community is what Saint Paul wishes to impress upon us when he says: “For you are the temple of the living God” (vs. 16). We are the Body of Christ, the holy household wherein God, the Life-giving Trinity, dwells among us.

To awaken us to the Church as we experience it in our communal life, the apostle presents seven declarations from God, a series of definitions and promises concerning the miracle of the Church: “I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people . . . And I will receive you.” “I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters” (vss. 16-18).

What is God saying? He is telling us that He is in our midst: He does not come and go, but remains among us, involved in our relationships with one another as our loving Father who receives us. There is warmth, paternal affection, guidance, help, oversight, correction, and adoption laced together through these promises. They are stunning assurances!

As we reflect on these promises, we must bear in mind that the Apostle Paul places God’s gifts in the context of stringent conditions, for there is no “agreement [between] the temple of God [and] idols” (vs. 16). Twice, in this short passage filled with promises from God, the apostle introduces a conditional “therefore” into the text (vss. 6:17, 7:1).

If we do not wish to lose sight of what is ours as members of the Body of Christ, we must focus on the boundary between ourselves and the world, as if we are wearing a set of corrective lenses. “Come out,” “separate,” and “do not touch” are the parental words of our Father in Heaven. As little children, we thought our parents saw everything we did. God, however, *does* perceive all that we do and say.

The Lord our God cautions us in this way because He knows, far better than we do, how easily we are caught up in the worship of material things, and how stained our hands become from caressing and playing with idols. At the end, the Apostle Paul pleads with us to “cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit” (vs. 7:1) by means of prayer and fasting, through immersion in God’s word, through confession and worship.

The key to our *cleansing* and the *perfecting* of holiness surely lies “in the fear of God” (vs. 1). Let us never lose sight of His presence, never forget that He knows our heart, never stray from His side. 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).

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Thy presence, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me. – Psalm 50:10-11

**October 18 – Monday of the Eighteenth Week after Pentecost – Saint Luke the Evangelist
Colossians 4:5-11, 14-18**

The World: Colossians 4:5-11, 14-18, especially vs 5: *“Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time.”* The Apostle Paul’s letter to the Church at Colossae portrays the Christian life as deliverance from darkness into light (Col 1:12,13), shows Christ with God the Father as His Son, as Creator and Ruler over all things. He Who was crucified is risen (Col 1:13-20); He rebukes the philosophies of men that would cheat the faithful out of appearing with the Lord “in glory” (see Col 2:8-3:4). Saint Paul’s imagery also contrasts the former life of the Colossians (Col 3:5-9) with the manner he now begs them to exhibit “as the elect of God” (Col 3:12-17). Is this mere ancient religious talk? Indeed not! We err if we mute the life in Christ before the world; but let us so live for the Lord that we illumine existence around us.

Have we grown dull to the drama of the cross we wear around our neck? Do we notice the gulf between the life in Christ and living “outside” in the world (Col 4:5)? May the Apostle’s language startle us, help us see the peril of captivity to the mind of the flat world of inventions, gadgets, and routine and thereby lose “the reward of the inheritance” that is ours when we follow and serve “the Lord Christ” (Col 3:24). Indeed, let us give attention to the true wisdom that is ours, and redeem “the time” allotted to us (Col 4:5).

To be truly wise requires close attention to what we say and do as the Lord Jesus taught during the years before He dispatched the Apostles: “be wise as serpents and harmless as doves” (Mt 10:16). Saint Paul emphasizes the same: “Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one” (Col 4:6). Of late, the world is showing its distaste for the life, joy and hope in the wisdom of Christ. Learning to speak “with grace, seasoned with salt” must be done deliberately but simply. The Apostle reviews how “seasoned grace” will sound: stripped of “anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of [our] mouth” (Col 3:8), and surely, without any lying or cloaking (Col 3:9).

The Lord shows that our actions must be “renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created” us from nothing (Col 3:10). Hence, the Apostle pictures how the life of grace should be: we will be identified as Christ’s by showing “tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering.” We will bear with one another, and forgive one another, and if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave us, so we also must do. “But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection” (Col 3:12-14).

Finally, at the close of the Epistle and in the present passage, Saint Paul personally summarizes many of these gracious, Christ-like actions - deeds “not of this world.” He sends Tychicus to “comfort your hearts” (Col 4:8), accompanied by Onesimus whom he describes as “faithful” (vs 9). He calls on the Colossians to “welcome” Mark if he should be able to come to them (vs 10). Paul singles out Epaphras as one who visibly labors “fervently for you in prayers” (vs 12). He encourages mindfulness, by prompting Archippus to “Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it” (vs 17).

Saint John Chrysostom summarizes this counsel of the Apostle Paul, noting that he speaks of “the present time [which] is short. Paul says this because he did not want them [or us] to be crafty, nor hypocrites (for this is not part of wisdom, but of senselessness). What then? In matters where outsiders are not harming you, don’t give them an opportunity....If you are going to experience conflict with the outside world, Paul writes, let the conflict have its origin in your preaching - and not in any other source.” The Gospel requires *living* first, and *then* speaking.

O Christ, help us always to walk in wisdom toward those in the Church and in the world.

October 19 – Tuesday of the Eighteenth Week after Pentecost
Ephesians 5:20-25

The Seal of the Spirit, continued – Mutual Submission: *Ephesians 5:20-26, especially vs. 20-21*: “Submitting to one another in the fear of God.” When writing to the faithful at Ephesus, the Apostle Paul encourages them to be “filled with the Spirit” (vs. 18). He amplifies this teaching with a series of clauses: “speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,” “making melody in your heart to the Lord” (vs. 19); “giving thanks always” (vs. 20); and, finally, “submitting to one another in the fear of God” (vs. 21).

The placement of this last clause identifies *submission* as the primary theme of the entire passage. By insisting that we are to be “filled with the Spirit” (vs. 18) in the verses preceding today’s reading, the Apostle Paul shows us that our mutual submission to the Holy Spirit is the key to understanding the present teaching.

In other words, we are to understand our “infilling with the Spirit” as the prerequisite for true *submission*. Once we truly yield to the Holy Spirit, we will be able to avoid drunkenness and *dissipation* (vs. 18). We will speak to each other in “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs . . . to the Lord” (vs. 19) and make Eucharistic offerings “to God the Father” (vs. 20). Worship thus becomes the environment in which God’s grace comes to us – our chief means for gaining grace, and for submitting to the Holy Spirit and one another.

The turning point in the apostle’s presentation comes in verse 21, with its focus on mutual submission. As he continues his letter to the Ephesians, Saint Paul addresses a variety of relationships: husband and wife, parent and child, slave and master. He considers each one in terms of this theme of mutual submission.

Let us examine the verb “to submit” as expressed in the original Greek. The root word *istemi* implies “arranging” or “setting in order” persons, things, or plans in order to reduce confusion. But when the prefix *hypo*, meaning “under,” is added, it broadens the meaning of simple submission, conveying the reality that in every relationship we are “under” something or someone. Mutual *submission* in Christ involves all our relationships and at the same time honors God’s claim on us before all other claims.

The present reading focuses on the marital relationship in particular. In Christian marriage, the husband’s “headship” should reflect the kind of relationship Christ maintains with the Church: loving and self-giving (vs. 25). The role of the head does not imply domination, but rather deliverance. Oppression and tyranny are replaced by release and freedom.

The submission of wives requires working with, enhancing, and supporting the husband’s labor as protector of the marriage, for the burden is on husband. Men are to love their wives “as Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for her” (vs. 25) – a truly impossible task without the Holy Spirit!

Where do we find the supreme expression of the Lord’s love for the Church? It is in His Passion, of course, as He endures pain and death for the sake of mankind. The Cross thus has important significance for husbands in marriage: if a man’s headship is to resemble that of the Lord Jesus, it means total submission to the God-given needs of his wife (as opposed to everything she may *want*).

The clear image we are given is of the struggle to die to self, to releasing our wants and desires in favor of the other’s. Such love can never be tyrannous, or we seriously misrepresent the apostle. We follow the way of the Lord in self-sacrifice for the redemption of marriage and life.

Unite and bless, O Lord, all Thy married servants in peace and oneness of mind. – From the Betrothal Service

October 20 – Wednesday of the Eighteenth Week after Pentecost
Ephesians 5:25-33

The Seal of the Spirit, continued – The Defining Mystery: *Ephesians 5:25-33, especially vs. 32*: “*This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.*” Having declared mutual submission to be the foundation of Christian marriage (vss. 20-26), Saint Paul now reveals the marital union as a type of the great Mystery of Christ and the Church (vs. 32). In His self-emptying on the Cross (vs. 25), Christ unites Himself to humanity in the painful depths of our life experience, while His victorious Resurrection serves to unite Him to His Bride, the Church, through all eternity.

In and through His humanity, the Lord Jesus reveals truth, grace, and glory (Jn 1:14). Sent from God the Father, the Son of God offers Himself for us (Rom 8:3), humbling and emptying Himself (Phil 2:2-7) so that He might redeem us forever, although we are sinners. His humble self-effacement is our prototype for true self-denial (Mk 8:34) – the model for anyone who must shoulder a cross, including the partners in a Christian marriage.

The relationship of the Lord Jesus with His Bride defines the essential dynamic of every true marriage. Husbands should love their wives in such a way that their shared life daily reveals the truth, grace, and glory of God. Yes, the great union of Christ and the Church discloses the inner essence, vocation, and true work of marriage.

The Apostle Paul develops this type further by describing five ways that marital partners are to live out their union. We begin with self-giving (Eph 5:25) and dying to self (vs. 26); we glorify (vs. 27) and love the other (vss. 28-29) while functioning as one body and one flesh (vss. 30-32).

The Incarnation of the Word effected an eternal union between God and man. The Lord who walked on earth in the flesh now retains our human flesh as He sits at the right hand of the Father. He gave Himself to us so that we might give ourselves to Him.

We can find no better way for married persons to share in this mystery than to give themselves wholly to one another. A true Christian marriage is never a 50-50 proposition, but a matter of 100 percent self-giving for the sake of the other.

The sacrifice of Christ on the Cross to overcome death surely defines the task of husbands and wives in their relationship with one another (vs. 26). Just as we unite ourselves to Christ by “dying” in holy baptism, so also marriage partners must die daily in order to deepen their union with their spouse. Marriage becomes a school for learning how to die, with Christ as the teacher. As we learn to die from Him, His Resurrection is manifested in our marriages.

What glory the Lord has bestowed upon the Church, His Bride (vs. 27)! God brings us to the portal of the Bridal Chamber, where we call out to Him, “Make radiant the garment of my soul, O Thou Giver of Light and save me” (Bridegroom Orthros). Each married person must seek to remove the spots and wrinkles that distort marriage: then the blemishes may be mystically overcome, and we will manifest the glory of our loving and Life-giving God.

We seek a love that nourishes and cherishes (vs. 29) us, in the manner of the love we receive in Christ that “bears all things” (1 Cor 13:4-7). May we grow in His love and never behave in a puffed-up manner that rudely seeks its own.

Christ’s love is for every disciple, whether married or single. He calls each of us to extend our union in the Lord beyond ourselves to include spouse, friend, and loved ones. Let the married truly live as flesh of the other’s flesh and bone of the other’s bone (Eph 5:31), while the Mystery of Christ brings the living Spirit into every relationship to the glory of God!

O holy martyrs who fought the good fight, entreat the Lord to have mercy on our souls. – From the Marriage Service

October 21 – Thursday of the Eighteenth Week after Pentecost
Ephesians 5:33-6:9

The Seal of the Spirit, continued – Sincerity of Heart: *Ephesians 5:33-6:9, especially vss. 5- 6:* “*Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters . . . in sincerity of heart, as to Christ . . . doing the will of God from the heart. . .*” In the Epistle to the Ephesians, Saint Paul’s recurring theme is the importance of imparting grace to others – not just receiving God’s grace but sharing it.

As Saint Paul continues his emphasis on the sharing of grace, he directs our attention specifically to the relationship between parents and children, and that of slaves and masters. In the exhortation quoted above, he speaks of “sincerity of heart” (vs. 5). Although he mentions this gift in speaking of slaves and masters, it applies equally in his counsel to parents and children.

What blessings come with singleness of heart! How many parents struggle to help their children learn to practice gracious, glad obedience in the place of grudging compliance! It takes effort, discernment, and grace to teach glad obedience, for before a child can give joyous assent, there must be sincerity of heart between parent and child. Somehow, the child’s heart must be awakened and united to the parents’ hearts. Yet this goal proves maddeningly elusive at times.

As we review Saint Paul’s admonitions to children (vss. 6:1-3), his words are particularly helpful for understanding the relationship between the seal of the Holy Spirit and sincerity of heart. After all, why do parents baptize their children and have them sealed in holy chrismation? The baptismal mystery initiates us into the Christian life: it begins with a “turning away” followed by a “turning to,” in reverse of the order of fallen life.

Facing to the west (the outer door of the church), the candidate renounces “Satan, and all his angels, and all his works, and all his service, and all his pride.” Likewise, facing east (toward the Altar), the candidate unites himself to Christ as “King and God.” The candidate declares himself a Christian through these acts, and disconnects from every realm ruled by Satan: the world, the flesh, the passions, and their service. As a personal choice, he embraces the effort of a life joined to Christ as Lord.

To undertake this reverse orientation and remain ever true to Christ, our hearts must be committed to Christ first and foremost. In the original Greek text of verse 5, the word *aplótetí* (“sincerity”) connotes “singleness, simplicity, being uncompounded, pure, or even sound.” The Lord requires this of us, for “no one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (Mt 6:24).

Why, then, do we turn away from what is necessary for our life in Christ? We can readily see the futility of serving the evil one and his demands. Our heart yearns to serve Christ alone, to incarnate the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit, to become fruitful by rejecting darkness, lies, and death. Even if our heart is drowning in the raging sea of the passions, we grasp the hand of the Savior (Mt 14:30).

This sincerity of heart also applies to parents who desire glad obedience from their children. Thus, the Apostle Paul admonishes parents not to provoke their children to wrath, but rather to “bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (vs. 4) and “in sincerity of heart” (vs. 5).

When the apostle speaks to slaves and masters, he reminds us that we are all related to each other “according to the flesh” (vs. 5). He reframes the relations between worker and employer by introducing a third party into the relationship, the Lord Jesus Christ. We are to serve “as to Christ” Himself, with sincerity of heart (vs. 5), for the Master of *all* is Christ (vss. 7, 9).

O Christ, our God, may we ever prove ourselves single-hearted children of the Light.

October 22 – Friday of the Eighteenth Week after Pentecost
Ephesians 6:18-24

The Seal of the Spirit, continued – Pray Always: *Ephesians 6:18-24, especially vs. 18:* “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints . . .” As Saint Paul concludes his letter to the Ephesians, he continues with a theme found throughout the epistle: everything should be done “in the Spirit” in whom the faithful are sealed (vs. 18). Also evident is his desire to impart the grace he has received from the Lord, for he sends Tychicus “to comfort [the] hearts” of the Ephesians (vs. 22).

The apostle displays his readiness to submit to the will of God, even while suffering arrest and chains (vs. 20). He again mentions again “the mystery of the gospel” (vs. 19) and the need for “sincerity” or *aphtharsía* (vs. 24).

The noticeably new element in today’s passage is Saint Paul’s admonition to pray. Prayer is essential for all who are sealed in the Spirit, since it leads the way to sincerity of heart, the desire to impart grace to others, and the submission of our will to God.

The apostle admonishes us to “[pray] always” (vs. 18). Prayer is the constant of our life in Christ, for by its nature true prayer is “the converse and union of man with God,” as Saint John Climacus says (*Ladder of Divine Ascent* 28.1, p. 212).

Susceptible as we are to distraction, deception, and delusion, conversation and union with God are necessary if we would seek purity of heart. The aim of prayer is to concentrate our hearts on God until we are one: “I in them, and You in Me, that they may be made perfect in one” (Jn 17:23).

After all, who but God can purify us? “Until we have acquired genuine prayer, we are like people teaching children to begin to walk” (*Ladder* 28.16, p. 214). We need to be patient and persistent, ever alert and persevering (Eph 6:18), for prayer helps us discern those things which draw us away from God. Through the mighty aid of the Spirit, prayer helps us banish the thoughts that inevitably assail our efforts to remain united to the Lord.

These benefits of prayer led the Fathers to teach *monologia*, or “singleness of thought.” The Jesus Prayer is the best-known form of *monologia*. Regular use of the simple Jesus prayer reveals our scattered spiritual condition. But if we persist in the struggle to pray, we discover that “what is obtained by frequent and prolonged prayer is lasting” (*Ladder* 28.40, p. 217).

What do we obtain from constant prayer? First of all, it leads to singleness or sincerity of heart. Prayer in the Spirit discloses the confusion of our mixed motives and helps us distinguish between what comes from God and what comes from our passions, or demonic suggestion.

Persisting in prayer may be likened to clarifying butter: a slow, protracted heating causes the solids and impurities to rise to the surface, where they may be skimmed off. As we pray persistently, our soul warms and is gradually cleansed until the heart reaches *aphtharsía*: singleness and purity.

Prayer also nurtures a desire to impart grace to others. The consistent mark of one who is a vehicle of grace is a life saturated in prayer. Thus, the words and deeds of those who pray ceaselessly conform to the Lord’s will, and grace is imparted according to the need of those they meet.

Prayer also illumines us to perceive our place in the Body of Christ. We readily submit to others. As Saint John Climacus says, our good King may distribute His gifts Himself, yet often they come “through a friend, and sometimes through a slave” (*Ladder* 28.17, p. 214).

O Lord, direct my will; teach me to pray; pray Thou Thyself in me. – Saint Philaret of Moscow

October 23 – Saturday of the Eighteenth Week after Pentecost
1 Corinthians 15:39-45

The Spiritual Body: 1 Corinthians 15:39-45, especially vs. 44: *“There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.”* In the Nicene Creed, we recite the words, “I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.” What sort of statement is this? As a declaration in the Creed, it is considered dogma by the Church, and requires trust and commitment of us as disciples of the Lord. This divinely revealed truth should encourage us as we survey life and death, anticipating the corruption that will overtake our bodies in the grave, for “man is naked bones, food for the worms, and stench.”

To say, “I look for the resurrection of the dead,” is to speak with a confidence that contradicts the corruption and stench inside the tomb. Our affirmation in no way denies the grave and dissolution but looks beyond these toward “the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the age to come.”

Our present age offers the termination of life, but Christ offers eternal life. “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (Jn 14:6). “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me; and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him that sent Me. This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing but should raise it up at the last day” (Jn 6:37-39). The Master teaches us to look toward the resurrection and strive for life eternal.

Saint Paul, being firm in his faith, readily accepts the necessity of death for our present fleshly bodies: “Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies” (1 Cor 15:36). Corruption follows from our membership in the human race, for we are children of Adam and “in Adam all die” (vs. 22). Death is our heritage on account of our sin, which cut us off from life. We share in the temporal dishonor that befalls the whole human race (vs. 43). Our poor, mortal body is frail, for “it is sown in weakness” (vs. 43).

According to Archbishop Lazar Puhalo, “Death is the enemy of mankind, and a source of the utmost confusion and dread to a humanity deprived of true, Christian hope. The idea that death is a final end of all human existence is also a source of avarice, self-centeredness, the worship and exaltation of the passions and the desire to feed the sensual pleasures to the utmost in this life” (*The Soul, the Body, and Death*, p. 2).

This statement deepens the basis for the Nicene affirmation by exposing all societies as “cultures of death.” And yet we affirm, “I look for the resurrection of the dead.”

What encourages us to look for the life of the world to come? The future spiritual body and the resurrection are revealed and offered to us by the Lord Jesus (1 Jn 3:2). In His great mercy and compassion, He created us out of nothing – for this life, but ultimately for the “life to come.”

In other words, our expectation of this life to come is not based on a creedal statement, nor even an apostle’s declaration. First and foremost, we anticipate a resurrected body because Christ – the Lord we know, to whom we are united – “became a life-giving spirit” (vs. 45). He reveals this “spiritual body” to us in the eleven Resurrection gospels which the Church reads every Sunday at Orthros.

As Saint Ephraim the Syrian exclaims, “The body’s fettered feet will leap in Paradise. Its paralyzed hands will pluck the fruit, even all good things. Its blinded eyes will behold Him that enlightens all. Its silenced mouth will again be opened. Its sealed ears will hear the trumpet. And its corrupted flesh will glisten with glory. May both body and soul . . . chant hymns in Thy Paradise” (Puhalo, p. 114).

Blessed is the way in which thou shalt walk today; for a place of rest is prepared for thee. – Orthodox Funeral Service

October 24 – Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Tone 1

2 Corinthians 9:6-11

Seeds of the Kingdom: 2 Corinthians 9:6-11, especially vs. 6: “*He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.*” In using the imagery of planting in today’s passage, the Apostle Paul draws our imagination to germination, growth, fruition, and yield – the mystery of life as seen in field and garden. But to which field or garden does the Apostle refer?

While his main theme is generosity, good works, and aid to the poor (vss. 8-9, 11), nevertheless he also speaks of the yield that God gives to the sower and donor: love and blessings from God (vss. 7-8); an enduring righteousness, necessary resources, and even abundance (vss. 9-10). Saint Paul directs our attention to those who do good works and on what happens in the spiritual life of the generous and in the hearts of those who help others in need.

What is most important for us as we strive to live for Christ? As with field and garden, both scarcity and bounty are constant possibilities that affect our giving and helping. As the apostle says, we choose when we give. However, let us remember that God is concerned with our heart as we care for others.

Our actions cultivate either a loving heart or a stony one, blessings or sterility, spiritual riches or dullness, plenty or blight. The wise gardener and prudent farmer takes good seed in hand to sow for a bountiful harvest. Similarly, an obedient servant is careful to use the Lord’s select seed to sprout and mature under divine cultivation. Where do we find this quality seed that promises us abundant life in Christ?

What is the seed described in the Parable of the Sower (Mt 13: 3-9)? Christ Jesus calls it “the word of the kingdom” (vs. 19). He thus indicates how we are to live and offers His wisdom to His servants as we set out to sow His word.

For Christ “is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work” (2 Cor 9:8). The Lord Jesus begins His ministry by saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mt 4:17), and then immediately He adds: “Follow Me” (vs. 19).

In The Sermon on the Mount, we find an abundance of these “words of the kingdom.” These guides and commandments spell out how we are to follow Him. First, He tells us to “let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Mt 5:16).

Christ’s directives also uphold and expand God’s ancient commandments. “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder.’ . . . But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment” (Mt 5:21-22).

And, “if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave you gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Mt 5:23-24).

Just as Christ deepens our understanding of the Law in spiritual terms, so Saint Paul advises us to rid ourselves of all reluctance and compulsion. The freedom of our life in Christ arises from sowing the word of His kingdom in our hearts without sparing, so that our harvest may be bountiful in cheerfulness and giving love without stint (2 Cor 9:7).

The seeds of the kingdom make us satisfied with what we have (vs. 8): a lasting, inner peace because of the great gift of Christ Himself. We are “enriched in every way for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God” (vs. 11). May God help us to open our hearts to the Lord Jesus, and to sow His life richly within us and all around us.

O Life and sweet breath of mine, I was in darkness and Thy sweet voice awakened me. – Elder Joseph the Hesychast

October 25 – Monday of the Nineteenth Week after Pentecost
Philippians 1:1-7

A Martyr's Heart – Gratitude for Fellowship: *Philippians 1:1-7, especially vs. 7:* “*I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace.*” Today begins a series reading through the Epistle to the Philippians, a letter written by Saint Paul while enduring house arrest under supervision of the imperial guard at Rome. He was awaiting trial after appealing to the emperor's court as a Roman citizen (see Acts 26:32-27:1; 28:16-30).

Saint Paul expects that he will be released, yet the possibility of a death sentence cannot be ruled out. The Philippians have sent funds to the apostle via Epaphroditus, a member of the church at Philippi (Phil 2:25). The gift is for the apostle's personal support during his detention. Clearly, Philippians is Saint Paul's “thank you letter,” but it also provides great insight into the heart of the true Christian facing possible martyrdom.

The letter reveals the close bond between Saint Paul and the faithful at Philippi (vs. 1:1). As he declares, he knows that they are partakers with him of God's grace: both in his chains and in his defense of the gospel before the Roman court (vs. 7). He is blessed and joyful (vs. 4), even though his trial carries the potential for a sentence of death. Whatever the outcome, Saint Paul expresses gratitude for the bond of love he shares with the community at Philippi.

A mark of the Christian martyrs when facing death is the knowledge that he or she is not alone. Paul's heart is sustained by a caring fellowship even in dark, uncertain times fraught with the possibility of pain and death.

Let us consider the full impact of that fellowship on the apostle's heart. He begins, “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you” (vs. 3). In our parishes, when a family offers the holy bread for the Divine Liturgy, they provide the priest with the names of family members to be remembered during preparation of the Holy Gifts.

At the service of the *proskomedion* (preparation), the priest also remembers our Lord, the holy Theotokos, the great angelic hosts, the holy prophets, the glorious apostles, hierarchs, martyrs, ascetical fathers, wonder-working unmercenary healers, the bishop and clergy of the Church, along with the reposed brethren whom God has called to Himself.

How thankful we should be when our loved ones are remembered in the company of such a grace-filled fellowship! Every true Christian knows heartfelt gratitude to God for belonging to such a glorious, loving, and supportive communion of the saints.

Saint Paul remembers with gratitude the loving family in Philippi who cared for his material needs. He knows them as a caring community, for God had accomplished a great work in their hearts (vs. 6). They have turned from darkness to light, responding in faith and love to the truth, committing themselves to God for all eternity.

The apostle is confident that God “who [had] begun a good work in [them would] complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (vs. 6). Christians know that whatever God begins, He finishes. He remains at work through his worldwide fellowship until the Lord Jesus returns.

Finally, as Saint Paul remembers his Philippian family, he is filled with longing for their warm companionship. Such an attachment is natural in our mature Christian relationships, especially in the face of the extremity of martyrdom. Let us pray that our longing for the gracious fellowship of our brothers and sisters in Christ may always reflect the deep, abiding affection we receive from the Lord Himself (vs. 8) – the love that sustains us all.

O Thou Lover of souls, grant to the fellowship of Thy beloved ones, Thy rich mercy. – Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom

October 26 – Monday of the Nineteenth Week after Pentecost – Great Martyr Demetrios

2 Timothy 2:1-10

Being Strong: 2 Timothy 2:1-10, especially vs. 1: “*You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.*” There are many types and sources of strength. Before selecting, one must decide what strength he needs. The woman who wishes to bear a strong, healthy baby manages her diet, follows an appropriate regimen of exercise, and keeps her body in the best possible health. The commanding general of a Deployment Ready Task Force looks to the health, training and equipping of his troops, that they may be strong enough militarily to prevail over their nation’s enemies. The type of strength desired determines where one invests energy.

What about us who wish to “be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (vs. 1)? To what sources shall we turn? Consider what Saint Paul says following this verse quoted above, so that the Lord Jesus may “give you understanding in all things” (vs. 7).

Notice that the Apostle provides three analogies: the soldier (vs.s 3,4), the athlete (vs. 5), and the farmer (vs. 6). Committed Christians may be likened to these vocations except, of course, the faithful look to the grace that is in the Lord as the source for the strength they are seeking. But what light do the three analogies shine upon our efforts for gaining strength in the grace that is in the Lord Jesus?

We know from the Apostle (vs. 3), from Saint Theophan, and from many others that, as Christians, we are in spiritual warfare. By analogy from the armed forces, how are we spiritual soldiers to become strong in grace? Saint Paul warns about entanglement “with the affairs of this life” (vs. 4). He has us question our occupations and other activities. To what extent will we commit ourselves? Are we all to be monastics? Such is not the Apostle’s point. With respect to the mother with children at home, the office worker, the doctor making his rounds, the parish Priest at ministry or the salesman with his customers, these all are merely “assigned” to different sectors along a total war-front where the spiritual combat is being waged.

In all occupations, the prayer is the same: “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Mt 6:10). One must not think that his activities, duties, work and responsibilities are his sole or primary concern or are that which should preoccupy him foremost. Our Commander will hold us accountable for how we behave, think, feel, care, react and choose amidst our duties and work, as well as for how we meet our given responsibilities.

Consider: in the positions we occupy: are we consistently functioning as Christ’s hands, eyes, and mouth? Are we speaking His truth through our words? This is not a matter of acting piously, but of being faithful to the Lord. We are to apply the grace we have in daily life.

To “please him who enlisted” us as soldiers (2 Tim 2:4) requires communication with our Commander - which means prayer. Admittedly, our “two-way radios” of prayer may lack a great deal. But, wonder of wonders, if we use it, the static diminishes and grace comes! Use the little breaks between tasks to report in, call for support, ask for direction, and seek restoration.

As Christians, we are athletes running “the race that is set before us” (Heb 12:1). The primary way to success for athletes is training. Remember that the New Testament word for “disciple” literally means *trainee*. To run well, take good food from the Scriptures and the Holy Fathers. Train in prayer, through fasting, and receive the Bread that gives life (Jn 6:48).

Finally, as Christian “farmers,” let us water the seed planted in us at Baptism. The weeds that would choke the developing life within must be extracted carefully, using self-examination and confession. Let us work hard that we may “be first to partake of the crops” (2 Ti 2:6).

O Lord, keep us in Thy sanctification, confirm us in the Orthodox Faith, and deliver us.

October 27 – Wednesday of the Nineteenth Week after Pentecost
Philippians 1:12-20

A Martyr's Heart, continued – To Magnify Christ: *Philippians 1:12-20, especially vs. 20:* “*As always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.*” In his letter to the Philippians, Saint Paul speaks of the possibility of a death sentence in his forthcoming trial, thereby disclosing a martyr's heart. His words teach us the mark of a victor in Christ: not fearlessness so much as the firm belief that whatever trials one may experience, God will be glorified. “Whether by life or by death,” Saint Paul knows the outcome of his trial will magnify Christ (vs. 20).

The Church bids us embrace the apostle's conviction, which is why at Orthodox weddings we hear this prayer: “Ye holy martyrs, who fought the good fight and have received your crowns: entreat ye the Lord that He will have mercy on our souls.”

By his conviction of the efficacy of faith, the Apostle Paul remains confident that he will remain true to God, no matter what may befall him, and will use those events “for the furtherance of the gospel” (vs. 12). The underlying truth is that the Lord's Passion and Resurrection are the prototype of every trial of faith.

As disciples, we too will find our faith tried “in Christ” (vs. 13). We should remember that God overcomes defeat, as He did at the Cross, and triumphs over our enemy: “He has trampled down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life.”

In light of the Lord Jesus' Passion and Resurrection, we may embrace our own faith struggles, trusting in His greater victory. Even though the apostle is being held prisoner, he says, “It has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ” (vs. 13).

Naturally, Saint Paul's brothers in Christ became “more bold to speak the word without fear” (vs. 14). The power of God is so pervasive that even those who preach for selfish reasons actually further the proclamation of the Lord (vs. 18).

The conviction that “all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Rom 8:28) brings assurance of salvation for the faithful (Phil 1:19). Thus, Saint Paul may say confidently, “I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ” (vs. 19).

Still, the apostle has no illusions. With respect to his immediate situation – his trial before Caesar's court – he knows he may be condemned. Thus, in the very next verse, he adds, “Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death” (vs. 20). His belief arises out of a heart and soul undefiled before God; he begs the prayers of the Philippians, as well as the help of the Holy Spirit, to achieve this highest goal (vs. 19).

Saint Paul's reference to the Holy Spirit's support of the Church (vs. 19) further illustrates his desire to magnify Christ, “whether by life or by death” (vs. 20), and his complete dependence on God. In our trials, if we disdain the prayers of the faithful and forget the presence of the Holy Spirit, we “shall be ashamed” (vs. 20). Instead, let us remember the cry of the Prophet David: “Who will rise up for me against the evil-doers? Or who will stand up with me against the workers of iniquity?” (Ps 93:16).

“In times of need, we ask the Church to implore God on our behalf; we seek the Holy Spirit's guidance, affirm the conviction of efficacy, and believe that our afflictions will be used by the Lord Jesus to bear witness to the faith. Thus shall we be saved! Indeed, let us never forget the outcome of David's trials: “Thy mercy, O Lord, brought help unto me” (Ps 93:18).

Help us; save us; have mercy on us; and keep us, O God, by Thy grace. – Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom

October 28 – Thursday of the Nineteenth Week after Pentecost
Philippians 1:20-27

A Martyr's Heart, continued – The Joy of Faith: *Philippians 1:20-27, especially vs. 25:* “*And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith.*” The expression “joy of faith” (vs. 25) expresses the close connection between faith and joy, for both are gifts of God. Faith teaches that God acts graciously on our behalf, overcoming our captivity to sin so that our mouth may be “filled with joy, and our tongue with rejoicing” (Ps 125:2). By faith, if we “sow with tears” of repentance, we “shall reap with rejoicing” (vs. 6).

Note that in today's passage the Apostle Paul is sharing a personal confidence: he “shall remain” in the flesh (Phil 1:24). That is, he shall *continue* in this life after his trial and be able once again to minister to the Philippian congregation (vs. 25). Thus he admits to being confident of survival, despite a potential death sentence (vs. 21). In this way he encourages his beloved people to progress in their faith so that they, too, might realize deep and abiding joy (vs. 25).

As we explore the nature of a martyr's heart through Saint Paul's words in the first chapter of Philippians, we see that such a mature faith is the common heritage for all of us faithful. Should not the “joy of faith” also be the lot of Christ's people (vs. 25)?

If we are tempted to base our hope on the goods of this temporal life, then we ought to heed Solomon's warning: “Sorrow does not mingle with gladness, but in the end, this joy turns to sorrow” (Prv 14:13). Given God's enduring gifts to us – the Cross and the Resurrection, which provide a true foundation for joy – it is sad when we depend upon fluctuating circumstances as the source our happiness. Such dependence and instability in our faith runs contrary to God's will.

Instead, let us anchor ourselves to an abiding source of joy: the eternal God. In Him we need not fear the ups and downs of life: “Behold, God is my Savior and Lord. I will trust in Him and be saved by Him. I will not be afraid, for the Lord is my glory and my praise. He has become my salvation” (Is 12:2).

The Lord Jesus makes it abundantly clear that He has come to establish deep, abiding joy in His people. At the Last Supper, He says: “These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full” (Jn 15:11). He speaks of the joy that cannot be diminished by the instability of this present life.

Christ's parable tells us that “the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man hath found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field” (Mt 13:44). Let us invest our life and love and every treasure in the garden of the Kingdom! In the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Apostle Paul further encourages us: “Leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God” (Heb 6:1).

According to Saint Diadochos of Photiki, “Initiatory joy is one thing, the joy of perfection is another. The first is not exempt from fantasy, while the second has the strength of humility. Between the two joys comes a ‘godly sorrow’ (2 Cor 7:10) and active tears . . . In this manner, the soul is tested by divine rebuke as in a furnace, and through fervent remembrance of God it actively experiences the joy exempt from fantasy.” (*Philokalia* vol. 1, p. 271).

Here we find the true way to experience the “joy of faith.” We are to “lament and mourn and weep! Let [our] laughter be turned to mourning, and [our] joy to gloom . . . and [the Lord] will lift [us] up” (Jas 4:9-10).

Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation, and with Thy governing Spirit establish me. – Psalm 50:12

October 29 – Friday of the Nineteenth Week after Pentecost
Philippians 1:27-2:4

A Martyr's Heart, continued – Congruent Faith: *Philippians 1:27-2:4, especially vs. 27:* “Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ . . .” The Lord Jesus urges us to make every effort to regulate our behavior so that others will glorify God: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good work and glorify your Father in heaven” (Mt 5:16). In today's passage from Philippians, Saint Paul offers a similar message. He encourages us to embrace our faith deeply and strive together, heart and mind, so as to esteem each other with mercy and affection.

Orthodox Christianity requires our behavior to be congruent with the attitudes we hold, the inclinations of our hearts, and our manner of thinking. Every aspect of our being is to be in agreement, functioning with “one accord” (Phil 2:2). For this reason, both the Old and New Testament scriptures warn against hypocrisy, double talk, and acting in ways inconsistent with the gospel.

For Saint Paul, “conduct . . . worthy of the gospel” means that we Christians should “stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel” (vs. 1:27). He begs us to keep watch over our thoughts and actions, and cleanse ourselves of every taint of “selfish ambition or conceit” (vs. 2:3).

We are to treat others better than ourselves (vs. 3), never allowing our actions to run counter to our own attitudes or to the best interests of other Christians. How shall we answer to God if we esteem ourselves better than others? At the very least, let us strive to combat such attitudes within us, confessing our sin and seeking to change our thoughts as well as our words and deeds.

The Church Fathers are very sensitive to the ways in which good deeds undertaken for the Lord can be manipulated by the demons of ambition. Good works initially carried out for worthy, God-pleasing motives may be corrupted by our insidious conceit and pride. Hence, the inner work required to control and cleanse our hearts actually bears more fruit, in the long run, than the controls we place on our outward behaviors.

God judged the publican, who “would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven,” as worthy because he confessed he was a sinner. Conversely, our Lord refused to justify the Pharisee for his many good works, because his heart was conceited (see Lk 18:10-14).

In today's reading, the apostle also admonishes us not to allow ourselves to be “in any way terrified by your adversaries” (Phil 1:28). To be free of fear, our inner and outer efforts in the spiritual life must work together. When we are steadfast in the gospel, God signals “proof of perdition” for our opponents (vs. 28). But let us take care! Telling opponents that they are “going to hell” is not our prerogative. God alone judges men's souls. A consistent, unwavering stance for truth sends the clearest message. God will attend to those who ignore His word.

Saint Paul faces potential martyrdom as he writes. He calls us to look upon persecution, or even simple rejection “on behalf of Christ,” as a gift from God, if we understand that we “suffer for His sake” (vs. 29). Experiences of resistance or affliction may open us to “consolation in Christ . . . comfort of love . . . [and] fellowship of the Spirit” (vs. 2:1).

To receive our adversaries as gifts from the Lord, we need only reject self-pity and outrage and embrace a martyr's heart. The depth of discipleship set before us by the saints can be ours. “Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Mt 5:11-12).

O holy martyrs who won imperishable crowns and crushed Satan's power, pray for us!

October 30 – Saturday of the Nineteenth Week after Pentecost
1 Corinthians 15:58-16:3

Two Purposes for Money: 1 Corinthians 15:58-16:3, especially vs. 2: “On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.” In AD 46, an apostolic council at Jerusalem addressed two issues: how to receive Gentiles into Church membership (Acts 15:1-31), and how to answer the appeal of the Apostles James, Peter, and John to “remember the poor” of the Jerusalem Church (Gal 2:10). The Apostle Paul represented the church at Antioch. He especially welcomed the idea of a collection among his Gentile congregations to aid the Jerusalem Church (1 Cor 16:1-4).

Several of Saint Paul’s other letters refer to this “collection for the saints” (vs. 1). His various comments about the project reveal his conviction that the Gentiles are indebted to the original disciples, who received the faith and graciously passed it on to them. The apostle sees the collection serving a strategic purpose: it fosters unity among the Jewish and Gentile brethren by allowing the Gentiles to return thanks – by aiding their Jewish brethren “in material things” (Rom 15:27) – for the faith they have been given.

Of equal importance, in today’s reading Saint Paul teaches about two of God’s purposes for money. The apostle’s emphasis on sharing among the faithful (Rom 15:27) directs us to the first of God’s purposes for money: wealth should be used to strengthen fellowship among the brethren.

By His self-offering in Christ, God purified “for Himself His own special people zealous for good works” (Ti 2:14). Among those works, in particular, is “distributing to the needs of the saints” (Rom 12:13).

In this present fallen world, which is enmeshed in sin and greed, we find many cultural, ethnic, and social barriers separating peoples. However, all are loved by God in Christ, who impels us “to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace . . . just as [we are] called in one hope of [our] calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in . . . all” (Eph 4:3-6).

Any support we give to fellow disciples builds up the Body of Christ and “causes thanksgiving through us to God” (2 Cor 9:11). Mutual aid can tear down barriers through love. The ethnic gulf between first-century Jews and Gentiles echoes all through the New Testament – and no one worked harder than Saint Paul, as a Jew and apostle to the Gentiles, to overcome these divisions in the Church. Today, disparities in status and need still exist among Orthodox Christians, compelling us to share with our fellow Christians whatever God has given us.

God’s second purpose for money is an extension of first: to provide for the material needs of the faithful. Saint Paul knows that the collection for the saints will abound “through many thanksgivings to God,” causing those who receive help to “glorify God for the obedience of [others’] confession to the gospel of Christ” (2 Cor 9:12-13).

The money sent to Jerusalem was to relieve immediate material needs. We ought never pray mindlessly that God should “give us this day our daily bread” (Mt 6:11). All things come from Him and are to be shared with others in need.

Christ has drawn us into intimate union with our good and provident God. He desires that we respond gratefully to Him for what He supplies (Jn 15:5), never becoming anxious about “what [we] will eat or what [we] will drink; nor about [our] body, what [we] will put on” (Mt 6:25). Let us be “content with such things as [we] have” (Heb 13:5), in order that we also “may have something to give him who has need” (Eph 4:28).

O Lord, in mercy, grant the good estate of Thy holy churches and the union of all men. – Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom

October 31 – Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Tone 2
2 Corinthians 11:31-12:9

Strength in Weakness: 2 Corinthians 11:31-12:9, especially vs. 6: “For though I might desire to boast, I will not be a fool; for I will speak the truth. But I refrain, lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me to be or hears from me.” This part of Second Corinthians contains two puzzling references. First, Saint Paul reports being “caught up to the third heaven” (vss. 1-4), then mentions an unidentified “thorn in the flesh” (vs. 7). These references were likely familiar to Saint Paul and his readers, but not to us; we can only speculate as to their meaning.

We do not know what Saint Paul saw in his vision, aside from the fact that he was in “Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter” (vs. 4). As to his infirmity, scholarly conjecture includes persons who plagued him, epileptic seizures, poor eyesight, and other physical ailments. We are forced to fall back on his words: “God knows” (vs. 2)!

However, it is abundantly clear that the apostle is committed to embracing “infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (vs. 9). In the verse immediately preceding this passage, he sets the tone for this disclosure: “If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity” (vs. 11:30).

Following this declaration, he describes his escape from the city guards of Damascus, who were sent to arrest him by “the governor, under Aretas the king” (vs. 32). Here he does not portray a powerful Church leader but rather a vulnerable man who, under cover of darkness, bounces down the side of the wall in a basket and furtively slips away from his pursuers. We behold a very human man who depends solely upon the power of God and the support of his fellow Christians.

After this account, the apostle reports what seems to have been a vision and revelation, “whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows” (vs. 2). Next he discusses his “thorn in the flesh” (vs. 7), moving the narrative from humiliation to exaltation, then back again to humiliation. He perceives that everything he describes “was given” (vs. 7) from God: escape from arrest, visions and revelations, even a difficult affliction, painful enough that he begs God three times to withdraw it. All are gifts from God!

In reading the present passage, note that the Apostle Paul set these accounts in the context of “foolish boasting,” which he says is “not profitable” (vs. 1). His reason for boasting is plain: he is addressing a congregation which, although founded by him, is being lured away by the boasting of heretics.

The heretical Gnostics spoke of great visions and revelations and insisted that the Apostle Paul was only a weak, ordinary man of many infirmities. They raised the question of how such a one could truly be an apostle of Christ.

The apostle plays their game in order to show God’s people the foolishness of it all. He insists that true servants of God boast only of their weaknesses, because the Lord’s “strength is made perfect in weakness” (vs. 9).

Weakness is pervasive: we are kept from penury, illness, isolation, and loss by the most fragile of supports. Daily, we hear news of hurricanes, airline disasters, and random violence, reminding us of how vulnerable we truly are.

“Shall a man redeem? He shall not give to God a ransom for himself, nor the price of the redemption of his own soul, though he hath labored for ever” (Ps 48:7-8). Let us ever give glory to God that His strength rests upon us in our need, for His grace alone is our sufficiency.

O Lord Eternal, I have no life, no light, no joy or wisdom, no strength except in Thee. – Archimandrite Sophrony Sakharov